

**SOUTHERN
JEWISH
HISTORY**

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Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Eric L. Goldstein, *Book Review Editor*

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This volume is dedicated
to the memory of
Saul Viener
(1921-2006)

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From the Editor . . .

Through serendipity, a few previous volumes of this journal have featured more than one article on a topic or place. This volume includes two such pairings. Janice Rothschild Blumberg and George Wilkes write on individuals closely tied to the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (the Temple) of Atlanta, a Reform congregation, and Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein and Jessica Elfenbein contribute to our knowledge of Baltimore's traditional Jewish community. The articles by Pearlstein, Elfenbein, and the fifth article, by Mary Stanton, are revisions of their presentations at the society's 2005 Baltimore conference, whereas Wilkes' article harks back to his remarks in Charleston (2004).

Sophie Weil Browne moved from place to place following her husband's rabbinic career but found her own niche as a Jewish clubwoman bending the boundaries of gender-defined roles and moving between Jewish and secular circles. Blumberg's story tells us much about the lives of middle class Reform Jewish women across regional, state, and occasionally even national borders during the transition from Victorian to modern America.

Although she identified with Columbus, Georgia, Browne spent several years in Atlanta. Her husband was part of a long line of peripatetic rabbis in and out of the Temple while it moved from tradition to Reform. With the arrival of David Marx, its push to Reform was solidified and Marx broke the previous pattern by serving the congregation for decades before reaching emeritus status. Marx partly consolidated his power, as did many of his contemporaries, by becoming an ethnic broker and an ambassador to the gentile community. Wilkes expands our knowledge of Marx in these overlapping roles. He asks and offers answers to the question, was Marx motivated to fit into the general community and thereby foster Jewish acceptance and overcome antisemitism, or

was his involvement in ecumenical and secular activities more the product of his philosophy of Reform social action?

Unlike Atlanta, Baltimore and Philadelphia were somewhat atypical because they housed Orthodox synagogues with congregants from the Germanic states and/or their descendents long after most German Jews had taken the path to Reform. Elfenbein brings this history alive by using intertwined families in a case study that crosses generations. Even when these traditionalists "intermarried" with Reform Jews and even as they moved into successive affluent suburbs, their paths did not deviate substantially until well into the inter-world-war years. With little differentiating them from their peers socially or economically, individual choice and identity appear to be the deciding factors for continuity besides the availability of appropriate institutions and historical conditions.

Because they remained Orthodox and even espoused Zionism in varying degrees, these Jews interacted more equitably and favorably with Jews who emigrated from eastern Europe and rose economically than did those who espoused Reform. Israel Fine exemplified the newcomers who benefited from their welcome. Whereas Pearlstein last appeared in this journal with an article on Conservative Judaism in Charleston, her current article treats a Hebrew poet and businessman who successfully mixed marketing, acculturation, and the maintenance of identity. Fine fit into the world of traditional Judaism depicted by Elfenbein in Baltimore even as he altered it.

One could flourish as a traditional Jew and an American. Yet maintaining values in a segregated, even violent society could compromise those bound to fit in and succeed. Stanton offers such a study for Montgomery's Jews in relation to white society and the African American civil rights struggle. Expanding on the work of Clive Webb and others, she finds a limited number of activists who struggled against the preponderant influence of segregationists. The latter became stronger as a result of the silence of those who failed to speak out because of fear.

The overarching and conjoined topics of these articles are interaction between Jews and Judaism and between Jews and the

host society. To what extent do Jews remain and/or become Jewish, American, and southern? How much do they influence the host society and how much are they influenced by it? The answers remain elusive because they vary from individual to individual, community to community, issue to issue, and era to era.

The journal's book review editor, Eric Goldstein, wrote a highly insightful and nuanced book that was published this year. To avoid any conflict of interest, I assumed control over the review of the book, which Ron Bayor graciously agreed to do in a review essay, the first in the journal since Volume 4 (2001).

Editorial board members Canter Brown, Jr., Scott Langston, Phyllis Leffler, Stuart Rockoff, Cheryl Greenberg, and George Wilkes are rotating off with this issue. Their work, with those who continue on the board, as peer reviewers and the advice and feedback they have provided on policy have been incalculably helpful. Ron Bayor, Janice Blumberg, Karla Goldman, Dana Greene, Adam Mendelsohn, Deb Weiner, Hollace Weiner, and Lee Shai Weissbach also provided excellent peer reviews. Special thanks also go to Scott Langston, Bryan Stone, Bernie Wax, and Hollace Weiner for their yeoman service as proofreaders.

When it was decided to dedicate Volume 8 (2005) of this journal to the memory and career achievements of Sam Proctor, I felt somewhat uncomfortable because the journal lacked even a necrology policy. Thus afterward I polled the editorial board for its input and devised a policy based on that. The policy emphasizes an individual's work as a scholar in the field of southern Jewish history but left the editor substantial flexibility. The dedication of this volume in recognition of Saul Viener's contributions to the institutional development and fostering of southern and American Jewish history is a product of the leeway the board allowed me. More fundamentally, it reflects the deep admiration and respect Saul clearly earned and I, Rachel, and so many others in the Southern and American Jewish Historical Societies, as well as the Richmond Jewish community and especially Congregation Beth Ahabah, shared for him. Saul was an absolute pleasure and, as Jonathan D. Sarna has written, "a Southern gentleman and a loyal friend."

As you will read in Bernie Wax's necrology, the Southern Jewish Historical Society was first created by Saul and others during the 1950s and then reborn in 1975 under Saul's guidance and inspiration. Saul presided over the SJHS as he had the AJHS. In terms of this journal Saul was an unsung inspiration from its inception. Through the years I received innumerable fan mail from Saul praising the authors and articles. Even as his health failed, he remained a dynamo for ideas always pushing people to new projects. This last year Rabbi Dr. David Geffen and I had lunch with Saul too few times but times I will never forget. With his impish smile and pointed figure, Saul shared with us his knowledge and insight into the institutional life of American Jewish history spanning over half a century. It is no accident that the American Jewish Historical Society named its award for the outstanding book in the field for Saul. With sadness and regret, but also profound gratitude and affection, this volume is dedicated to Saul Viener's lasting memory and legacy. Our thoughts, best wishes, and prayers go out to his wife Jackie and his family.

Sophie Weil Browne: From Rabbi's Wife to Clubwoman

by

Janice Rothschild Blumberg

The fact that Sophie Weil Browne (1854–1936) was married to a rabbi undoubtedly enhanced her ability to be a role model for the Jewish women of Columbus, Georgia. It did not define her role, however, because her leadership there had barely begun when her mercurial husband left Columbus to travel and serve briefly in numerous congregations elsewhere. While accompanying him in most cases, she continued as a doer and motivator for public issues from her home base in Georgia, leading and inspiring women whose grandchildren even today remember her as a legendary icon and speak of her with awe. Her experience, at a time when Jewish women were just beginning to venture outside their social milieu, offers a case study of the journey that many of the economically privileged took from “ladyhood,” that idealized state of feminine gentility, to personhood, a term implying independent action and identity. The journey was traveled largely through participation in women’s clubs, a movement that blossomed during Sophie’s lifetime.¹

Most nineteenth century Jewish women in the South differed little from their northern counterparts since few of them belonged to plantation society. Of German or French origin, many of these women or their mothers had come to America as brides eager to adapt to local mores without relinquishing their Judaism in the process. By the time Sophie came of age, most were middle class urbanites.

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Sophie Weil Browne in 1902.

(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)

Collective outlook and experience differed largely according to the size of the Jewish community, most of which in the South were comparatively small. As historian Beth Wenger points out, these conditions led to the development of women's secular organizations later in the South than in the North. Northerners also connected more rapidly with their non-Jewish counterparts. As a further result, when the Jewish club movement expanded from the synagogues' ladies benevolent societies, as the female auxiliaries were known, to broader secular and civic issues with the

formation of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in 1893, the same women constituted the membership of both organizations.²

As will be seen, Sophie's position as a rabbi's wife in many ways enabled and enhanced her ability to serve the community, because it placed expectations on her in the eyes of others. It also increased her awareness of societal needs while simultaneously providing important contacts to facilitate her actions in addressing them. In this respect her experiences paralleled those of other notable southern Jewish women of her day who began their careers of leadership as aides to their husbands. While this was generally true of rabbis' wives, those best known for extending their work outside synagogue-related activities, including Gussie Woolner Calisch of Richmond, Irma Bock Ehrenreich of Montgomery, Julia Feist Solomon of Savannah, Ruth Cohen Frisch of San Antonio, and Carrie Obendorfer Simon of Washington, were a generation younger than Sophie. The southern Jewish women among her contemporaries who are remembered as civic leaders, notably Nettie Davis Lasker and Elizabeth Seinsheimer Kempner of Galveston, were wives of successful businessmen who forged their own paths in the wake of their husbands' roles as philanthropists. With few exceptions, these leaders, like Sophie, were not southerners by birth. Transplanted south as adults, they had the advantage of a better education than that readily available in the smaller communities of the South as well as the broadening experience of having lived in other environments.³

In the Beginning

Sophie's parents, Moses and Clara Loewenthal Weil, were among many German Jews who immigrated to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, a substantial number of whom settled in the Midwest and the South. As a child in the 1840s, Clara came with her extended family to Indiana from the German duchy of Württemberg. Moses arrived from Bavaria in 1839 when he was twelve years old. He worked in the grocery business while studying law on his own and gained admission to the bar in 1869. Rather than practice law, he continued as a grocer, then opened

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the Indiana territory for the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company and established a major pottery company. A leader in both the Jewish and the general community, he helped establish Evansville's first Jewish congregation, B'nai Israel, in 1853, the same year that he married Clara.⁴

Clara gave birth to Sophie within the first year of her marriage and subsequently produced six more surviving children, two girls and four boys. All of them received a good education and prospered. Sophie attended a private school where she excelled at the piano and mastered French and German, reading the classics in those languages as well as in English. From her mother she learned the finer points of homemaking including Jewish ritual, which Clara taught with the aid of her prayer book for the home, written in English and published in America.⁵

One oft repeated recollection of Sophie's childhood in Evansville in the years preceding and during the Civil War gives rise to the possibility that her parents offered their home as a station on the Underground Railroad. She recalled an instruction given to her and her siblings that whenever they saw a dark-skinned person hurrying across the river from Kentucky, Indiana's slaveholding neighbor to the south, they should close their eyes and point to the basement of their home. They must not look until the stranger had time to get inside because they could expect a white man to come soon thereafter asking if they had seen where the escapee had gone, and they must be able to answer truthfully, "We didn't see."⁶

This would have indicated tremendous courage and dedication on the part of Moses and Clara Weil, since Evansville was unusually sympathetic to the slaveholders. No records were kept by those who tried to help the runaways because proslavery sentiment in the area was so strong as to have endangered the lives of anyone known to have assisted them.⁷

Sophie was well educated but only sixteen years old when the courtly, twenty-six-year-old, Hungarian-born rabbi, Dr. Edward Benjamin Morris Browne, visited Evansville, probably by prearranged scheme for the two to meet.⁸ He decided to stay.

With graduate degrees in law and medicine, he was appointed professor of medical jurisprudence and diseases of the mind at the local medical college, and rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel, known then as the Sixth Street Temple. He and Sophie became engaged on October 9, 1871, and were married six months later. His teacher and sponsor, Isaac Mayer Wise, traveled from Cincinnati to perform the ceremony. Wise's wife, Theresa, stood on the bimah as surrogate mother for the groom. It was a grand occasion. As the local newspaper reported, "There was not room enough in the Sixth Street Temple last evening for the people who came to see the Rev. Dr. E. B. M. Browne married to Miss Sophie, daughter of Moses Weil, Esq."⁹

The following year, the newlyweds moved to Peoria, Illinois, where Browne assumed the pulpit of Congregation Anshe Emeth. Sophie's social and musical accomplishments were quickly recognized, as indicated by her presentation at "The First Grand Entertainment" of the Standard Literary Association. After a series of miscarriages and stillbirths, she gave birth to their first child, Lylah, in 1876.¹⁰

The Early Years in Atlanta, New York, and Chicago

Unfortunately, Rabbi Browne developed a serious eye problem, making it necessary for him to resign his position. Since he had acquired a reputation as a public speaker, he supported his family during this interim by joining the lecture circuit, a popular form of contemporary entertainment. Speaking engagements kept him away from home a great deal, part of which time Sophie spent at her parents' home in Evansville.¹¹ By the end of summer 1877, the rabbi was well enough to accept a call from the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation of Atlanta, commonly known as the Temple, and the family moved to Georgia.¹²

While certain differences between southern mores and those with which Sophie was familiar must have occurred to her then, they probably did not disturb her first experience in Georgia. Atlanta was never a typical southern city. In the words of a contemporary local publicist, it was "a happy combination of North and South . . . a growing, wide-awake progressive, active

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American city.”¹³ Telephone service was established the year that the Brownes arrived.¹⁴ The congregation as well as other basic institutions had been established ten years before in the wake of the Civil War, prior to which only a few members of the Temple had resided in Atlanta.

If Sophie had misgivings about southern sentiments due to an abolitionist influence in her childhood, she would have been reassured by the diverse loyalties of the Jews she encountered in Atlanta. Few of them had been born in America and even fewer had been born in the South. Some, like her uncle Herman Haas, a founding member of the Atlanta congregation, had gone north temporarily to escape the war. His son Aaron, on the other hand, had served the Confederacy as a blockade runner. David Steinheimer, also a congregation founder, expressed his own feelings as well as those of many Jews when he said that they were grateful for the friendship shown them by their Christian neighbors and eager to show their loyalty to their new country, but uncertain as to what country that was after the South seceded. He was one of those who fled the South hoping (in his case, unsuccessfully) to remain neutral. Since few had vested interests in the issues being fought over, many like David Steinheimer became involved reluctantly if at all, divided as to where their patriotism belonged.¹⁵ Others including Aaron Haas and David Mayer, who served as the state’s chief commissary officer during the war, supported the Confederacy.¹⁶

During her years in Atlanta, Sophie taught in the congregation’s religious school which her husband headed, but otherwise she was apparently fully occupied with home and family. She gave birth to her second child and only son, Jesse, in June 1878, and suffered postpartum depression. The following winter her husband almost succumbed to typhoid fever. It must have been a great comfort to have her close cousins, the Haases and the Guthmans, nearby since, despite the difficulties, she liked living in Atlanta enough to want to remain. She and the rabbi began building a house and looked forward to making Atlanta their permanent residence.¹⁷

This was not to be. After only four years, a false rumor about the rabbi, which escalated into a libel fomented by some newspapers around the country, forced him to leave his pulpit. Subsequently his lectures and publication of his books were cancelled, as were a series of tentatively offered jobs. He later wrote that the situation caused Sophie to suffer a nervous breakdown. Finally, in autumn 1881, he obtained a position at Congregation Gates of Hope in New York City, and the family moved north.¹⁸

The year 1881 marked the beginning of the mass immigration of Jews from eastern Europe, and welfare organizations were inundated by the sudden flood of indigent newcomers. Browne immediately became involved in the effort to provide assistance. Sophie did likewise, serving as a fulltime volunteer throughout the remainder of the 1880s. She possibly did this as part of the ladies benevolent society of her husband's congregation. According to their daughter, Lylah Browne Goldberg, Sophie went each day to Castle Garden, the immigration processing center that was predecessor to Ellis Island, where she greeted newcomers as they disembarked. Since the rabbi found evidence that some Jewish girls had been sent to houses of prostitution under the guise of "settlement," his wife gave special attention to young women who were traveling alone, often bringing them home with her for temporary employment until a secure position could be found. Goldberg recalled that she never knew whom she would find in the kitchen when she came home from school each day.¹⁹

Sophie's commitment placed her in the mainstream of activism. Combating white slave trade extended the Jewish woman's nurturing and gender-defined, self-help role and led to the opening of additional doors to her on both sides of the Atlantic. Later, the rabbi commented upon his wife's dedication to this work in a letter to Theodor Herzl in which he offered the benefit of her services along with his own to the first Zionist Congress. He proudly referred to Sophie as ". . . a woman of energy, charity and piety who has given ten years of noble work to charity in New York. She will gladly join me to work with the poor women of the emigrant to Palestine. She speaks German elegantly and knows how to treat the poor and needy."²⁰

Sophie also encountered some of New York's rich and famous. There, as in Atlanta, she had close relatives among the Jewish elite, a mixed blessing that probably caused her embarrassment as her husband became a target of opprobrium from the German Jewish leadership due to his outspoken championship of unpopular causes. Publishing a Jewish newspaper in New York as he had done in Atlanta, he effectively advocated liberal legislation on the municipal, state, and national levels. He fought successfully for laws requiring public schools to excuse Jewish children on Yom Kippur (curiously, even some New York rabbis opposed this) and closing retail businesses on Saturday afternoon. He also lobbied Congress to pass the Blair Bill in support of temporary federal funding for public education in states unable to afford it. In 1884, he became the first Jew to offer the daily opening prayer in the United States Senate since his mentor Isaac M. Wise had done so in 1860. He and Sophie became acquainted with some of the city's and nation's best known public figures including President Ulysses S. Grant and his family.²¹

When Grant died, Rabbi Browne was invited to represent the Jewish people as an honorary pallbearer in the state funeral, which included a full military procession from City Hall to the site of the future tomb at Riverside Park. Since it took place on the Sabbath, he refused to ride the long route in a carriage (although as a Reform Jew, he did not ordinarily refrain from riding on that day). His presence as the lone "walker" received much publicity and was viewed favorably by the Jewish masses who had not yet found their public voice. The conformist Jewish establishment, on the other hand, voiced its opposition.²²

Sophie viewed the procession along with Lylah from prestigious grandstand seats at the Fifth Avenue Hotel reserved for families of participants and other celebrities. Lylah, a romantic nine-year-old, later recalled that they were seated "right behind Mrs. Potter Palmer," a celebrated Chicago socialite whose sister was married to Grant's son Fred. The Brownes became close friends with the Fred Grant family. When the Brownes subsequently moved to Chicago, Ida Grant wrote a note introducing Sophie to her famous sister.²³

The family's departure from New York was precipitated by Browne's *pro bono* defense of an elderly Jewish immigrant who had been falsely convicted of having murdered his wife. Browne's ultimately successful struggle to save the man from hanging fueled the wrath of his opponents and enabled them to oust him from Congregation Gates of Hope.²⁴ Consequently in 1889, the Brownes moved from New York to Toledo, where Lylah finished high school. The family seemed happily settled until Browne received an offer too good to refuse from Chicago's Emanuel Congregation.²⁵

In 1893, toward the end of the Brownes' stay in the Windy City, Bertha Palmer chaired the Women's Exhibit for the World's Columbian Exposition. In that capacity she approached leading Jewish women to participate. This motivated the convening of the Jewish Women's Congress that, in turn, led to the establishment of the NCJW. Given Sophie's record of activism, and since her rabbinical husband served as vice president of the United States Government Educational Congress in the Exposition, it is probable that she would have become acquainted with some of the women involved in these events. The NCJW ultimately became a major venue for Sophie's volunteerism.²⁶

The Return South and Emergence as the Clubwoman

With its harsh winter, Chicago did not prove to be the blessing that the rabbi had anticipated. Thus, when Temple Israel of Columbus, Georgia, beckoned, the family moved yet again. Browne initially attempted to serve both congregations, alternating between the north in the summer and the south in the winter. This did not work out, so soon after his 1893 investiture in Columbus, he relinquished the Chicago position, settling for Columbus as his sole pulpit and residence.²⁷

This time, Sophie found it more difficult adjusting to life in the South. Columbus bore little resemblance to Atlanta. It was the Deep South, and unlike Georgia's burgeoning state capital and railroad center 120 miles to the north, the older but smaller city must have seemed slow and provincial. Sophie later recalled her surprise at seeing unpaved streets and women wearing

sunbonnets. For much of the year, women's afternoon activities customarily consisted of sitting on verandas in rocking chairs, fanning themselves, and chatting amiably with each other and passersby who stopped to greet them.²⁸ As she soon learned, beneath this appearance of backwardness lay an appreciation for theater and music, with world-class artists performing at Columbus' Springer Opera House on their way from New York to New Orleans.²⁹

Thirty-nine years old and accustomed to sophisticated New York and Chicago, Sophie had to reinvent herself for life in Columbus. Her wardrobe, devoid of sunbonnets, included fashionable garments of French silks and serge, tucked lawn (a light cotton fabric), and laces, fabrics lovingly supplied by her brother who was in the import business. She was an accomplished musician and Shakespeare enthusiast, who spoke several languages and had become an expert social-service volunteer. It was inevitable that she would suffer culture shock upon moving to Columbus.³⁰

Nowhere would the regional contrast have been more obvious than in the operation of her home. In Georgia she did not find Jewish girls just off the boat from Europe to work in her kitchen, as there had been in the North. Here domestic workers were former slaves or their children, much different in temperament, training, and work habits from their northern counterparts. Although Sophie had employed at least one African American in Atlanta, a houseman who appeared to have some basic education, she never quite trusted the cleanliness of the domestics in Columbus.³¹ Consequently, she did not leave the cooking to servants as other Jewish housewives in the South customarily did. Hens hung from a back porch rafter waiting to be plucked under Sophie's close supervision, and whey dripped through cheesecloth bags to supply Sophie's family with cottage cheese. Her collection of handwritten recipes and her well-worn seventh edition of *Aunt Babette's Cook Book* provide further evidence of her predominance in the kitchen.³²

During her first few years in Columbus, Sophie's activities outside of home and family remained within the synagogue.

*Postcard view of Temple B'nai Israel, Columbus, Georgia, c. 1900.
The name was later changed to Temple Israel.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

Specifically she fulfilled her expected role as the rabbi's wife with the congregation's female auxiliary, the Jewish Ladies Aid Society (JLAS.) The society's records reveal that it benefited from her ideas about fundraising, which included her suggestion to hold coffees in the homes of members for a twenty-five cent admission.³³ She also reached out to a newly arrived group of Russian Jews by helping them learn English and adapt to local customs, thus echoing activities already in progress throughout the country where the need was often addressed by the new NCJW.³⁴ Whatever else she did during her husband's tenure at Temple Israel, she never neglected her duties as the rabbi's wife within its JLAS.

Word of Sophie's abilities spread to the larger community. On August 1, 1898, only weeks after the United States escalated hostilities in Cuba, she was asked on behalf of the Fourth Congressional District of Georgia to head the auxiliary of the Army

and Navy League for Muscogee County, with the responsibility of collecting funds for relief of American soldiers and sailors in the Spanish-American War. Her duties began with organizing the local group, which, in addition to soliciting contributions, was charged with assisting needy families of servicemen and promoting "the comfort and health of the Georgia State Volunteers in the Regimental Hospitals before they go to the front."³⁵

Heading a secular organization was a natural step taken by Jewish women during the 1890s that was partly opened up to them by the NCJW and the growing clubwomen network. It marked extension beyond sectarianism and gender-defined boundaries without neglecting those spheres. In Sophie's case, while broadening the scope of her activities by participation with non-Jewish groups, she steadily increased her activity in the Jewish sphere, largely motivated by NCJW programs. Her visibility as the rabbi's wife would have alerted civic leaders to her potential for heading a women's drive during the war emergency. This was merely a foretaste of the organizational activities that awaited her.

In 1896, while on a visit with her husband and their two teenage children to his family in Hungary, Sophie noticed something that would absorb much of her time and energy for the next few years and involve her in a business enterprise. Learning that a certain combination of box and bag for mail collection effectively prevented theft by mail carriers, a problem which then prevailed in America and Europe, she acquired the patent for the device and brought back a sample to show the United States Postal Service in hopes of selling it to them. She demonstrated to the postmaster how it worked, releasing mail from the box directly into the bag without being seen or handled by the collector. She explained how it would save the government money by enabling one employee to do the work of twenty, simultaneously obviating the need to hire inspectors to oversee them. Sophie left the sample in Washington so the postmaster could display it in his office and let others see how it worked.³⁶

The ultimate fate of the device is unknown, but documents suggest that a series of problems developed as Sophie and her family tried to market it. In October 1896, at the suggestion of

August W. Machen, superintendent of free delivery in Washington, they initiated the formation of a corporation called "The Combination Safety Mail Box and Bag Company." Its mission was to sell the system to the government for fifteen percent profit. The company letterhead lists Sophie as treasurer; her brother, Aaron M. Weil, as president; D. Winter as secretary; and M. G. Bloch of Toledo as attorney. Typical of the era, a woman would not have been given control, but it was highly unusual for a woman to be placed in charge of the money as treasurer. After several postponements of incorporation, Bloch and Machen maneuvered themselves into power, bypassing the Brownes.³⁷

Meanwhile, directed by Bloch, who claimed to be carrying out Machen's request, the Brownes ordered fifteen boxes to be manufactured in Europe and shipped to America for a test run. When the boxes arrived in New York, the Post Office Department claimed that Machen had no authority to give the order and, in fact, had not done so. The dispute continued with uncertain results. For several years Sophie and her family unsuccessfully attempted to stimulate action by the Post Office Department.³⁸ Machen was later convicted of defrauding the United States government and sentenced to two years in prison.³⁹

In 1906, after patent ownership was transferred from Sophie to her son-in-law, David S. Goldberg, he sold it for \$4,000 to a group of four men, one of whom was his father-in-law, the rabbi. For at least two more years Browne attempted to induce the postal service to buy it.⁴⁰

As her entrepreneurial career flared briefly and died, Sophie's enduring career as a clubwoman grew. In addition to her activities in the Jewish Ladies Aid Society, she now accepted new challenges. Jewish women, although long active in fundraising for the synagogue and other needs within the Jewish community, were slower than their Protestant counterparts to create organizations devoted to self improvement via cultural and civic paths.⁴¹ In Columbus, as in many other cities, they began with a study group or literary society.⁴²

When, in the late 1890s, some of Sophie's Columbus friends asked her to conduct a class in English literature, it marked the

true beginning of her career as a clubwoman. In 1900, the small, closely knit group of Jewish women motivated by an interest in learning evolved into an organization which, to honor the new century, called itself the Century Club.⁴³ Although its initial purpose was self improvement, which in the context of the times meant exposure to secular learning, when the need arose it responded to issues of Jewish and general concern.

Following the same pattern of subjects and format set down earlier by literary clubs elsewhere, club programs reflected the women's interest in cultural pursuits. Members researched and delivered papers on European classics and other subjects, and diversified each session with musical and dramatic performances.⁴⁴ For example, on May 23, 1900, the club's first program meeting featured four musical offerings, an "Introductory Speech" by the president, a talk on the life of Shakespeare, another on "The Stage," and discussions of *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, with recitations of best-known scenes and character studies. In the case of *The Merchant*, members delivered papers titled "Shakespeare's consistency of time throughout the Play," and "The one central scheme of the play and Shylock's redeeming traits." Such discussions were important during a time when that play was typically assigned as high school reading regardless of its antisemitic overtones.⁴⁵ The women studied Shakespeare for five years.

The twice-monthly meetings from October through May customarily closed with Sophie leading a discussion on current issues. In 1906, the club's focus moved to American history and literature. After several years the members studied English and then German history and literature. Unfortunately, no record exists for the period to indicate whether or not they spoke of such nearby tragedies as the Atlanta race riot of 1906, or the fact that Atlanta Rabbi David Marx was the only Jew among the eighteen men appointed to create a biracial plan aimed at preventing a repeat of that tragedy.⁴⁶ Perhaps it took years before the group studied subjects immediately related to their own lives.

In 1912, the Century Club affiliated with the Columbus Federation of Women's Clubs and, subsequently, the Georgia

*Sophie holding her baby granddaughter, Carolyn Goldberg.
Seated to her left is E. B. M; behind them, left to right, are
Jesse Browne, Lylah Browne Goldberg, and David S. Goldberg.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

Federation of Women's Clubs. According to the *Atlanta Constitution*, the Century Club women had served "conscientiously, harmoniously and without ostentation, nevertheless their work attracted attention, and spontaneous invitations were received to join the city and state federations. They modestly declined at first, but later felt it would be prudish to disregard the work undertaken by the Federated clubs."⁴⁷

Through affiliating with the Columbus federation, Sophie entered the arena of woman suffrage. It is not surprising that this city's association should have been especially active in woman suffrage because it was there that the statewide movement for women's rights first began.⁴⁸ The Civil War and Reconstruction had left many women widowed, impoverished, in need of navigating for themselves in what had always been a man's world. Denied the right to vote, they recognized that they were suffering

mandatory taxation without representation and made themselves heard as best they could by lobbying. In 1890, only three years before Sophie's arrival in Columbus, the struggle of a local woman to pay her taxes inspired her daughter, H. Augusta Howard, to organize the Georgia branch of the Woman Suffrage Association.⁴⁹

Although there is no evidence that the Century Club took part in the suffrage movement as an organization, it is evident that Sophie and other members did. The *Atlanta Constitution* described her as "one of the most interested workers in the Suffrage League," indicating that this was an activity fostered by the federation.⁵⁰ As elsewhere, Columbus women slowly moved from cultural improvement to political awareness, and ultimately into the realm of identity as agents for change. The study groups expanded their horizons with further education, providing them with experience that eventually translated into insistence upon the vote and women's rights.⁵¹

Evidence of Sophie's interest in national affairs is seen in the fact that she saved pieces of promotional literature from the Women's Peace Party in 1915. The Peace Movement, favored by the NCJW and openly advocated by Sophie's husband, called for America's neutrality in the European war, limitation of arms, and other measures aimed at insuring world peace. Specifically, it recommended a moratorium on further appropriations for the war; the elimination of private profit from arms manufacture; and creation of a joint committee to investigate the use of past appropriations, the possibility of aggression against the United States, and of lessening "the source of friction" by diplomacy or legislation. It also urged the government to convene a conference of neutral nations "in the interest of a just and early peace," to move quickly on convening a third Hague Conference for world peace, and to appoint a joint commission with China and Japan to study issues with the Pacific rim nations.⁵²

Considering the insecurity felt by Jews, painfully intensified in the South by the trial and 1915 lynching of Leo Frank in Atlanta, and the close ties that prominent Jews maintained with their relatives in Germany, it seems unlikely that a Jewish woman in the heavily Anglophilic South would have actively endorsed such

an organization. Yet this was a popular organization with many adherents. Peace was considered to be within the woman's sphere and its advocacy opened avenues into political lobbying. Sophie's interest again illustrates her participation in public issues and her cosmopolitan vantage point even from Columbus.

When the United States actually entered World War I, Sophie and her friends left no doubt about their loyalty. According to a lengthy article about Columbus clubs written in 1917,

(The) Century club decided to dispense with the yearly prospectus and donate that sum to welfare work, and . . . were the first to proffer their services to the Red Cross . . . the Century club decided that they could still find time for educational work and their program on the allied countries, their statesmen and leaders in the war. . . . While already ardently patriotic, these subjects only tend to increase their patriotism.

Praising Sophie further, the article continued,

Even in the heat of summer, the president and her committee worked ardently for the welfare fund, members also contribute most liberally to the war relief funds, first and second Liberty Bonds, Thrift and War Savings stamps, work at the Red Cross rooms and knitting clubs. Mrs. E. B. M. Browne has . . . never needed to use any eloquence or appeal to her members to act on committees, or for contribution, as they have always responded promptly, and very frequently unsolicited, on hearing of the victory community fund, towel fund, etc., each member donating ten or more towels to be sent with those of the other clubs. All are willing and ready to work for the sale of the Third Liberty Bonds.⁵³

In addition to her leadership of Century Club and federation efforts, Sophie presided over the board of Girls' Work for the Columbus War Camp Community Service, served on the executive committee of the Muscogee County Red Cross, and fulfilled an appointment as one of the public speakers for the National War Savings Committee in the campaign to sell Liberty Bonds. She delivered these four-minute talks at movie theaters between afternoon screenings, with an option of free admission to the movie as compensation.⁵⁴

The U.S. Treasury Department continued its pitch to buy Liberty Bonds after the war, launching a campaign for Thrift and Savings promoted through the federated women's clubs. Sophie, in her capacity as first vice president of the Columbus City Federation of Women's Clubs, made speeches teaching household economy and nutrition and encouraged women to train their children in this practice.⁵⁵ Such activities during and after World War I were typical of Jewish and gentile women, but the leadership and speaking positions resulted from Sophie's roles as club leader and rabbi's wife.

Sophie may have been acquainted with Maud Nathan and other feminists in New York through her volunteer work with the new immigrants and with Hannah Greenebaum Solomon of Chicago, founder of the NCJW. Having joined the NCJW at its inception or soon after, Sophie led the Century Club to become a de facto section of the Council, albeit without changing its name. She attended national conventions of the Council, serving on its board as president of the Columbus affiliate.⁵⁶ She remained in the chair as local NCJW president until 1922.⁵⁷

The natural segue for women from war work to voting rights evidenced itself in Sophie's activities representing the Federation of Women's Clubs for both Columbus and Georgia, the NCJW, and the National League of Women Voters, all organizations to which she was connected as president of the Century Club. In April 1922, she went to Washington for the Pan American Conference of Women as one of two delegates sent by the Georgia federation. The meeting featured addresses by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, the ambassadors of Great Britain and Chile, and Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. In conjunction with that conference, Sophie attended meetings of the National League of Women Voters in Baltimore as well as a ceremony in Washington commemorating the centennial anniversary of President Ulysses S. Grant's birth.⁵⁸

Lobbying was a tactic used by the NCJW and other women's organizations to enter the political arena. Sophie and other women of the era were bending gender boundaries by publicly

advocating issues associated with motherhood. One example was a letter that she wrote to Georgia Senator William J. Harris soliciting his support for the Sheppard-Towner bill on infant and maternity care. This was an issue on the agenda of the NCJW in spring, 1920, at least three months before passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.⁵⁹

In 1923, perhaps inspired by newly acquired suffrage, the Century Club turned attention to its home state of Georgia, studying not only state history and literature but also state laws. Subsequent programs drew upon a potpourri of themes including music, government, dance, interior decorating, art, social welfare, South America, China, American statesmen, and Joseph Conrad's novels. In 1928, members finally turned toward achievers of their own gender and devoted the year's study to famous women through the ages.⁶⁰

In January 1925, the Century Club celebrated its silver anniversary with Sophie, its founding president, still in the chair. Receiving members and guests with her at the gala celebration were her three friends and co-founders of the club, Stella Meyer, Eva Friedlander, and Ida Greentree. In addition, four other original members, the sisters-in-law Mathilde, Flora, and Mina Rothschild, and Adeline Banner, were still active and in attendance. When Sophie retired shortly thereafter due to failing health, she was elected honorary president for life.⁶¹

In covering the Century Club's anniversary celebration at which Sophie was honored, the local newspaper described her as "The cultured and revered woman who by her untiring interest, intellectual qualifications and good works has merited this honor . . ." and continued,

Mrs. Browne is one of the most beloved and civic-minded women in the community and with her Club has stood for the best in education, music and progress in all lines. She was one of the most interested workers in the Suffrage League, is an associate member of the Orpheus Club, and was the first president of the local Council of Jewish Women, an organization whose object is philanthropy, and that has a state and national organization.⁶²

*A montage of Century Club programs in the possession of the author.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

In 1933, the same group of women decided to disband as a section of NCJW and incorporate that organization's activities into the Jewish Ladies Aid Society. Apparently the Columbus women had little interest in the "symbolic statement" of being known as part of an "organization of women," not ladies, and one which bore the title of "club" rather than "society," as Hannah Solomon believed and fact bore out in other cities.⁶³

The Century Club and others like it attest to the role played by women's literary societies and study groups in preparing women to take their place in the public arena and strengthening family and religious ties from generation to generation. Especially among Jews and particularly in the smaller communities such as Columbus, Georgia, where the acculturated German Jewish women would have found assimilation into the Christian majority relatively easy, they acted as vehicles for continuity and identity.⁶⁴ Today, more than a century after its inception, the club still exists, albeit smaller and far less energetic than in its former years. It is now, as it was in the beginning, a literary society.⁶⁵

Although Rabbi Browne had reached a parting of the ways with his congregation in 1901, Sophie did not pull up roots and establish a real home elsewhere. With daughter Lylah married, settled in Columbus, and about to give birth, Sophie determined to make her permanent home there. Remarkably, despite recurring bouts of illness, more than a year of travel abroad, and temporary residence in various other cities where her husband briefly held pulpits, she managed to maintain her active leadership of the Century Club as well as the overall women's organizations with which it was affiliated. She had thoroughly identified with the South, and the Jewish women of Columbus would, for generations after her death, identify with her.⁶⁶

Travel Abroad as Insight into her Marriage and the Roles of Women

For one interlude in her life, Sophie left a written record, although it was one that expressed little of her feelings. It was mostly in the form of picture postcards to her family from places that she visited with her husband in 1902 and 1903 on a

fifteen-month journey through Europe and the Middle East.⁶⁷ Rabbi Browne had a twofold purpose for the trip related to unfinished projects begun during the previous decade in conjunction with the Chief Rabbi of France, Zadok Kahn, and the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. He and Kahn had been working on various schemes for relieving the suffering of Jews in eastern Europe, both before the first Zionist Congress in 1897, and afterward helping to implement the work of Theodor Herzl through Browne's felicitous relationship with the Ottoman government.⁶⁸ Browne was also engaged as head of the European Jewish Archaeological Commission. The purpose for studying excavations at the holy sites around Jerusalem was to gather evidence to negate virulent new antisemitic propaganda based upon supposed finds by Christian archaeologists working there.⁶⁹

The Brownes first toured Europe with Lylah and her husband and baby, stopping in Hungary to spend time with Browne's family. They spent the winter in Nice where Sophie enjoyed the beauty of her surroundings and especially their residence on the Avenue Mirabeau, but deplored the fact that everything was expensive.⁷⁰ In late March 1903, they sailed to Egypt, where their sightseeing included a camel ride. Many years later she described it to her great-granddaughter as exciting but uncomfortable and gave the child a carved olivewood camel inkwell purchased as a souvenir a few weeks later in Jerusalem.⁷¹

That Sophie did not comment on her husband's reported meeting in Cairo with Theodor Herzl and the Khedive of Egypt is hardly surprising since she addressed her correspondence to their children in Columbus. Zionism, if ever discussed within their circle, would have been the subject of opprobrium as it was among most Reform Jews in America at that time. Browne, while rabbi in Columbus, had been appointed a delegate to the first Zionist Congress but could not attend because the congregation refused him leave of absence. Subsequently, although Herzl did not respond to it, the rabbi offered to resign his position and, with Sophie at his side, devote his life to the Zionist cause, an offer which he would not have made if his wife had been averse to doing so. In their milieu, his feeling for Zionism, shared openly by

*Four generations showing Sophie seated, with daughter, standing behind, and her granddaughter and great-granddaughter, the author, seated to her right.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

few Reform rabbis of that time, would have been a source of embarrassment for their family. Had Herzl responded to Browne's offer, however, it is likely that Sophie would have welcomed the opportunity to assist in humanitarian work as she had done in New York and, situated far from the conventional environment of Columbus, she would not have been bothered by association with an unpopular cause.⁷²

The Brownes sailed from Port Said to Jaffa on April 10, continuing on to Jerusalem "with such a crowd of visitors, for the Passover of all the religions, that we could scarcely get a carriage to the hotel," Sophie wrote, then adding ecstatically "but to be in Jerusalem! Papa almost wept as we passed the mountains of Judea."

When they toured Bethlehem visiting the Church of the Nativity, and Hebron, returning after dark by way of Rachel's Tomb, which the keeper kindly opened for them and provided a light, Sophie noted her fatigue from riding all day in a carriage, where there were "neither railways, trams or gas." Discommoded as she was, however, she did not forget to buy souvenir rosaries in Bethlehem to bring home to her Christian friends.⁷³

The Brownes then proceeded from Beirut and Damascus to Constantinople, where they remained for two weeks, the rabbi using his previously established good relations with the Sultan to petition on behalf of Jewish refugees. According to a newspaper account, Abdul Hamid offered him land for Jewish settlement in Mesopotamia, and Sophie "received signal honors at the court . . . and by the leading Jews . . ." Among her souvenirs from the visit were high platform Turkish bath shoes of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl.⁷⁴

The same newspaper article mentioned that Sophie had also been well received by the leading Jews of Egypt and Rome, where "she was the guest of Mrs. Rosseli, lady-in-waiting to the queen and sister of Mayor Ernesto Nathan." While the social aspects of the journey undoubtedly pleased her, Sophie did not comment on them in her postcards home.⁷⁵

After an extended visit with the family in Hungary and sightseeing in Italy, where the rabbi continued his efforts to

*The home at 1315 Second Avenue, Columbus, Georgia, built in 1912,
where two generations of the family lived – the Brownes and the Goldbergs.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

implement the emigration of refugees, the Brownes sailed home from Naples on October 13, 1903.⁷⁶ Sophie remembered the sojourn as a highlight of her life. Certainly it broadened her view beyond that acquired on her two previous trips to Europe.

The prolonged travel, however, likely exacerbated pre-existing tensions between her and her husband. In a letter that she wrote to Lylah from shipboard, Sophie mentioned that she had been suffering with stomach pains and had therefore asked Browne to check that their steamer trunks had been loaded onto their ship from a previous stop, a task which she normally did herself. He refused, the trunks were not loaded, and she feared them lost. She noted, too, that she would probably stop off in New York to see her physician, whom she and Lylah customarily visited each year. She possibly suffered from nervous tension, a not unreasonable suspicion given her husband's temperament and the impact on her of his many pulpits and frequent public conflicts.

Even the normal expectations placed on rabbis' wives often contribute to anxiety.⁷⁷

This letter hints at another negative element in Sophie's marital relationship. Referring to the ship's anticipated day-long stop in the Azores, she wrote to her daughter, "Presume Papa will allow me to disembark, although he has already been there." Submissiveness of a wife to her husband was customary in her milieu, even more so in cases where the men like Browne were of European origin, and this is a further indication of difficulties that she faced in her journey from ladyhood to assertive personhood.⁷⁸

The Latter Years and an Overview

During the next decade, Rabbi Browne briefly served congregations in Cleveland, Toledo, New York, Norfolk, Boston, and Youngstown. While Sophie generally accompanied him and she taught the women's Bible class in Youngstown, as shown by a pair of elaborate silver candlesticks given her in appreciation, there is no indication that she extended herself beyond synagogue-related activities anywhere other than Columbus.⁷⁹

Newspapers occasionally hailed her arrival in a city with her husband. *The Boston Journal* evidenced knowledge of her accomplishments in its welcoming article, reporting that "Mrs. Browne is a real help to her husband. . . . She is easily one of the most learned Jewesses in America, having mastered French and German languages and literature, which are to her like her native English. She is a great organizer, a leader socially and in Bible and literary classes, and sincerely loved by all the ladies that meet her. . . . The Boston Jewish ladies rejoice at Mrs. Browne's return."⁸⁰

Sophie and her husband suffered tragedy in 1909, when Jesse, their beloved, recently married, thirty-one-year-old son, died suddenly of blood poisoning. It was a blow from which Sophie never fully recovered. She continued her public life almost without interruption, but in private she mourned, her days brightened only by the joy of watching her granddaughter mature, and later by the birth of her great-granddaughter. For the rest of her life, she would awaken in the night moaning for her son.⁸¹

In 1932, when she was seventy-eight years old, Sophie broke her hip and remained thereafter in a wheelchair. Even in these final years, friends remarked at her ability to discuss current topics. Although housebound in Columbus, in a city removed far from the centers of political, Jewish, or literary activity, she kept abreast of the news via *The New York Times*, delivered by railroad three days after publication. With her snow-white hair, Gibson Girl style, and her elongated face dominated by penetrating dark eyes, she spent most of her days clothed casually in what was known then as a "wrapper," a voluminous bath robe. When company was expected, however, she turned to the well-preserved French silks, smooth satins, and crisp taffetas of a former day, always in black since the death of her son. Her husband died in October 1929, and she lived until August 1936. Both are buried in Atlanta, the home of her granddaughter and subsequent generations of her family, now thoroughly established as southern Jews.⁸²

Sophie's adherence to Victorian propriety was legendary (when asked why a particular action should be taken, her answer would be "because everyone does it," and for refraining from an action "because nobody does it"), yet she found ways to circumvent such mores when higher goals inspired her to do so. It is possible that she absorbed some of the prejudice then characteristic of southerners, for her later distrust of the family's servants, all of whom were African American, hinted at racial bias. On the other hand, suspicion of domestics regardless of racial origin may be fairly common among the elderly.

Indirectly Sophie probably influenced her granddaughter's and great-granddaughter's attitude regarding racial equality since she, over the strong objections of her son-in-law, insisted on sending her granddaughter, his only child, to Smith College rather than to a girls' finishing school as preferred by most southern families. In New England, the southern "princess," Carolyn Goldberg Oettinger, acquired liberal ideas which she passed on to her own daughter. Likewise, her few contemporaries among southern Jewish women who attended Smith, Wellesley, and Radcliff (for example, Josephine Joel Heyman and Rebecca Mathis Gershon of Atlanta) became leaders of progressive women's organizations,

such as the NCJW and the League of Women Voters, in the first half of the twentieth century and were activists for racial justice in mid-century.⁸³

Was Sophie a southern lady? Of course, just as her Atlanta cousin, Lena Guthman Fox, the prototype for “Miss Daisy,” was a southern lady. Both were women of strength and integrity, concerned with the welfare of others, products of their class and environment, and possessors of character that permitted them to grow with changing times. Neither of them, however, approximated the popular romantic image of the southern lady portrayed in novels and film long before Margaret Mitchell immortalized them in *Gone with the Wind*.

Did Sophie think of herself as a southerner? Probably not. Her experiences elsewhere ultimately shaped her thoughts and actions. The fact that she retained her presence and influence in the Century Club and other Columbus organizations throughout her numerous moves reflects a firm identity with that city as well as dedication to its institutions, but she was a cosmopolitan, educated woman, and activist. Like most Jewish women in the South today, she likely identified with her city, but thought of herself in the broader sense as an American Jewish woman whose home was Columbus, Georgia. Thus her movement from lady to club woman is more American and transatlantic than regional.

Sophie Browne’s legacy lives on materially as well as spiritually. Many of her elegant clothes were worn by her great-granddaughter and others in a 1950s historical pageant depicting American Jewish women. The pageant was presented by the sisterhood of the Atlanta Temple where Sophie had served as rabbi’s wife in the 1870s and where her great-granddaughter later served similarly as the spouse of Rabbi Jacob (Jack) Rothschild. The clothes were eventually donated to Atlanta’s High Museum of Art for its fashion collection.⁸⁴

Sophie’s legacy extends beyond these artifacts. Laurette Rothschild Rosenstrauch, daughter and granddaughter of prominent Columbus Jewish women who were Sophie’s friends, commented on this and the high degree of respect in which she was, and still is, held by the Jewish women of her city. According

to Rosenstrauch, who remembered Sophie personally from her childhood, one evidence of this was the fact that no one ever referred to "Mrs. Browne" as "Miss Sophie," the customary, polite southern way to address one's elders. Rosenstrauch revealed:

I never knew her name until I began to correspond with you. I often heard my mother . . . speak of the influence Mrs. Browne had on the cultural development of all in the congregation. . . . I am sure that Mrs. Browne's influence on others was more than just because she was the Rabbi's wife. . . . She was the role model for the ladies at the turn of the century who were just beginning to find their own identity. . . . The fact that Mrs. Browne is still remembered and quoted by current members of the organization she was so dominant a part in certainly says it all.⁸⁵

Rabbis' wives, then as now, exerted influence among the women of their husbands' congregations in varying degrees, depending on their own interests, circumstances, and abilities. They were expected to participate in synagogue-related activities, and were relied on as teachers in the religious schools of the Reform congregations. In her day, many if not most of the American-born wives of Reform rabbis, like Sophie, came from affluent families with traditions of community leadership, and were educated and groomed in ways that perfectly suited them for such a position. She differed, however, in that those who are remembered for their achievements were married to rabbis who remained in the same congregation throughout much of their careers, providing their wives with stability and a following that under-girded their community efforts. Sophie managed to overcome the disability of frequent moves.

She was one of those who grew beyond her assigned role in the sphere of female auxiliary to become a role model in the emerging world of gender equality. In the national vanguard, Sophie Weil Browne was nevertheless unique to Columbus, Georgia. She brought to the community knowledge and experience gained from having lived in the metropolitan cities of the North and the Midwest, as well as from foreign travel and marriage to a brilliant albeit difficult man, thereby making her achievements more extraordinary. Moreover, they exemplify the steps taken by Jewish

women to pave the road that their granddaughters would travel from their homes and synagogues to corporation board rooms and the halls of Congress.

NOTES

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¹ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist* (New York and London, 1980), 57.

² Mark K. Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22 (Spring 2003): 42–45; Beth Wenger, "Jewish Women of the Club: The Changing Public Role of Atlanta's Jewish Women (1870–1930)," *American Jewish History* 76 (March 1987): 312.

³ Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769–1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), 245, 263; Ruth Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews* (Austin, TX, 1990), 36–37.

⁴ Immigration records and family Bible in author's possession; "Highlights of Congregation B'nai Israel History" (Evansville, IN, n.d.); Congregation B'nai Israel Records, Evansville. A pair of elaborate stained glass windows given in their name for its first synagogue is displayed inside B'nai Israel's current building.

⁵ Music was so important to her that Sophie preserved her sheet music in leather-bound volumes that can still be used today. Music and prayer book in Browne family collection in the author's possession; *Boston Journal*, May 11, 1912; Weil family correspondence in author's possession.

⁶ Sophie Weil Browne (hereafter cited as SWB) conversations with author, 1930–1936 (hereafter cited as SWB conversations.)

⁷ Interview with Dale Phillips, Indiana Park Service, Underground Railroad, conducted by author, October 4, 2004; Wayne Crowe, Indiana Freedom Trails, "Underground Railroad – Local Sites and People," <http://www.usi.edu/ARTDEPT/artinindiana/Architecture/Downtown/UndergroundRailroad/localsites> (accessed by J. R. Blumberg, July 24, 2004.)

⁸ Networking between the Jewish communities to promote suitable marriages was customary in America. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, Browne's teacher and sponsor, knew the Weils and wanted his protégé Browne to be established through marriage into an influential family. Wise's influence may be seen in the marriages of other young rabbis as well.

⁹ Certificate from Evansville Medical College; clippings from an unidentified Evansville newspaper (n.d.), E. B. M. Browne Collection, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati (hereafter cited as Browne, AJA).

¹⁰ Program of Standard Literary Society, March 15, 1874, Browne, AJA; Lylah Browne Goldberg, conversations with author, 1940–1960 (hereafter cited as Goldberg conversations.)

¹¹ Dr. Joseph Aub to Browne, November 22, 1875, Browne, AJA; Browne to Hamilton Fish, October 30, 1875, July 25, 1876, Letters of Application and Recommendation for the Grant Administration, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹² *American Israelite*, October 17, 1873, February 19, 1875; *Illinois State Journal*, January 19, 1894; *Peoria Democrat*, January 1874, reprint in Browne, AJA; Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *As But a Day to A Hundred and Twenty, 1867-1987*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, 1987), 12.

¹³ Blumberg, *As But a Day*, 47.

¹⁴ Atlanta History Center Archives, <http://www.althist.org/archives/html/timeline.htm> (accessed by J. R. Blumberg, August 23, 2004.)

¹⁵ Blumberg, *As But a Day*, 27, 28. Cf. Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, SC, 2000).

¹⁶ Blumberg, *As But a Day*, 25; Mark K. Bauman, "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: German Jews from the Civil War through the Progressive Era," in *Politics and Religion in the White South*, ed. Glenn Feldman (Lexington, KY, 2005), 35-56.

¹⁷ Edward B. M. Browne deposition, *Browne v. Burke*, Browne, AJA.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Gerald A. Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore, MD 1992) 47-49; Goldberg recollection; E. B. M. Browne, portion of book galley, Browne, AJA; Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (Oxford, 1982).

²⁰ Browne to Zionist Congress, August 18, 1897, Theodor Herzl Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

²¹ Browne, galleys.

²² [New York] *Daily Graphic*, August 8, 1885, August 9, 1885; Goldberg conversations.

²³ Ida Honore Grant to Bertha Honore Palmer, December 15, 1891, Browne, AJA.

²⁴ Browne, galleys.

²⁵ Elaine S. Anderson, "A History of the Jews of Toledo, Ohio" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toledo, OH, n.d.), 262-266, Box 1635, Toledo Collection, AJA; *Chicago Herald*, March 10, 1892.

²⁶ June Sochen, "Jewish Women as Volunteer Activists," *American Jewish History* 70 (September 1980): 24; Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 44; undated newspaper clipping, Browne, AJA; Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1993).

²⁷ Temple Israel Records, Columbus, GA.

²⁸ SWB conversations.

²⁹ Laurette Rothschild Rosenstrauch interviews conducted by author, 2000-2003; see Clason Kyle, *Images: A Pictorial History of Columbus, Georgia* (Norfolk, VA, 1986).

³⁰ SWB conversations and Goldberg conversations.

³¹ Deposition of Asa B. Hawkins, Case files, E. B. M. Browne, Isaiah Thornton Williams Collection, New York Public Library; author's recollections from visits in home of Goldbergs and Brownes.

³² Author's recollections; recipes in author's possession; *Aunt Babette's Cook Book* (Cincinnati, OH, 1891). On the cookbook's wide scale use, see Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005), 150, 156.

³³ Jewish Ladies Aid Society Minutes, Temple Israel, Columbus, 1896, Columbus, Georgia Collection, Box X-85, AJA.

³⁴ Goldberg conversations; Laurette Rothschild Rosenstrauch to author, December 2, 2003.

³⁵ Augusta R. Crawford to SWB, August 1, 1898, and August 3, 1898, in author's possession.

³⁶ *New York Herald*, August 26, 1896.

³⁷ Draft of letter from E. B. M. Browne to Beckwith, January 30, 1897, Browne, AJA.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Pennsburg [PA] Town and Country*, Saturday, May 27, 1905.

⁴⁰ Charles Dick to Jesse Logan Browne (Sophie's son); copy of patent transfer by David S. Goldberg, both in family collection.

⁴¹ Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 139.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴³ Century Club programs, 1900–1927, in author's possession.

⁴⁴ Club programs; Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 57.

⁴⁵ Club program, 1900.

⁴⁶ Blumberg, *As But a Day*, 50.

⁴⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1917. See Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 46; program leaflet, *The Women's Peace Party*, in author's possession.

⁴⁸ Nancy Telfair, *A History of Columbus, Georgia, 1828–1928* (Columbus, GA, n.d.) 349–350.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1917.

⁵¹ Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 50.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 46; *The Women's Peace Party*.

⁵³ *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1917.

⁵⁴ National War Savings Committee to SWB, in author's possession.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Jean Kiralfy Kent, *Temple Israel of Columbus, Georgia*, (Columbus, GA, 2000), 38.

⁵⁸ *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, April 16, 1922; souvenir programs, badges, and other memorabilia in author's possession.

⁵⁹ Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 46; William J. Harris to SWB, June 5, 1920.

⁶⁰ Club programs, 1923–1927.

⁶¹ Club program, 1928.

⁶² *Columbus Ledger*, January 8, 1925.

⁶³ Kent, *Temple Israel of Columbus*, 38.

⁶⁴ On the survival mechanisms of Jewish women in small towns see Deborah Weiner, "Jewish Women in the Central Appalachian Coal Fields, 1890–1960: From Breadwinners to Community Builders," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 52 (2000): 10–33; Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America: A History* (New Haven, CT 2005); Karen Falk and Avi Dector, ed. *We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland's Small Towns* (Baltimore, 2002.) On a NCJW section in another southern town see Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Jewish Junior League: The Rise and Demise of the Fort Worth Council of Jewish Women, 1901–2002," (master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2004.)

⁶⁵ Rosenstrauch interviews.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

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- ⁶⁷ SWB to family, 1902–1903, Browne, AJA.
- ⁶⁸ *Albany* [NY] *Daily Press*, (1903?) referring to *New York Herald*, June 11, 1896; letter of introduction in *Toledo* [OH] *Blade*, (n.d.), Browne, AJA.
- ⁶⁹ *Chicago Times-Herald*, May 8, 1895.
- ⁷⁰ SWB to family, October 30, 1902, Browne, AJA.
- ⁷¹ SWB to family, April 10 –29, 1903, Browne, AJA; author’s recollection.
- ⁷² E. B. M. Browne to Zionist Congress, August 18, 1897, Theodor Herzl Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.
- ⁷³ SWB to family, April 17, 1903, Browne, AJA.
- ⁷⁴ *The Boston Journal*, May 11, 1912; *Toledo Blade*, (n.d.), Browne, AJA.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁶ Saloon List, *S.S. Cambroman*, October 13, 1903, Browne, AJA.
- ⁷⁷ SWB to Lylah Browne Goldberg, October 30, 1903, Browne, AJA.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ Objects in author’s possession.
- ⁸⁰ *The Boston Journal*, May 11, 1912.
- ⁸¹ Witnessed by author, 1930–1936.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*
- ⁸³ Mark K. Bauman, “The Youthful Musings of a Jewish Community Activist: Josephine Joel Heyman,” *Atlanta History* 39 (Summer 1995): 46–59.
- ⁸⁴ Author’s records.
- ⁸⁵ Rosenstrauch to author, December 2, 2003.

Rabbi Dr. David Marx and the Unity Club:
Organized Jewish-Christian Dialogue,
Liberalism, and Religious Diversity in
Early Twentieth-Century Atlanta

by

George R. Wilkes

In 1900 one of the earliest interreligious organizations promoting Jewish-Christian solidarity held its initial meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.¹ The Unity Club brought a number of Atlanta's most prominent Protestant ministers together with the city's Reform rabbi, David Marx (1872-1962). Over the next twenty-four years, the meetings organized by Marx and his associates made a significant impact on city politics and society and were the subject of regular comment in the Atlanta press.² Atlanta was beset by religious and racial tensions exemplified by the race riot of 1906, the Leo Frank trial and lynching in 1915, and the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. In this atmosphere, the existence of the Unity Club was a public symbol of the possibility of inter-communal understanding and cooperation, albeit on a segregated basis.

While the Unity Club's existence was a public, political development, the club's activities also reflected the distinctive private religious, social, and political perspectives of its participants. Marx and his Protestant counterparts deliberately favored mutual Jewish-Christian understanding and friendship while advocating recognition of the differences they saw between their respective religious traditions. The Unity Club focused on regular private exchanges concerning issues of personal faith while its public activities were tied to the willingness of Protestant ministers and their congregations to join in nondenominational prayers at Marx's Reform synagogue. The club's history provides a window into the distinctive religious visions of Marx's liberal

Protestant counterparts.³ As his private diaries make clear, Marx was a pivotal member who made his mark in the club through an idealistic religious dedication. As a consequence of his dedication, he expended far more personal energy than was necessary to maintain the club's high-profile activities.

Born in New Orleans, Marx was part of the first generation of American-born Reform rabbis educated at Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati. After graduating in 1894, Marx took his first pulpit at Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1895, he was welcomed by a crowd of Christians and Jews at his next pulpit, Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation. Marx soon became one of the state's leading Freemasons. His role in the creation of many social welfare programs in Atlanta also led him to intervene in Georgia politics. He remained at the Temple, as it was commonly known, after his formal retirement in 1946, occasionally leading services as an emeritus rabbi until his death in 1962.

Marx's extensive interfaith engagement owed much to a background that he shared with other Reform rabbis of his milieu. In Cincinnati, Marx was taught by many of the founding figures of what became known as Classical Reform, an optimistic nineteenth-century Jewish ideology that identified an ethical core to Jewish monotheism and rejected what was perceived as irrational ritual and ceremony. Classical Reform Judaism has, since its inception, been dismissed by its critics as both a misguided attempt to conform to American social norms and a misguided response to the lack of outright acceptance of Jews in American society.⁴ Nonetheless many among these two generations of American Reform rabbis—Marx's teachers and fellow students at HUC—believed that a reformed Judaism would appear the most rational religion for modern American society.⁵ This ebullient belief persisted well into the twentieth century after the optimism of previous generations of liberals had begun to fade. As late as 1921 one of Marx's closer collaborators, Rabbi M. P. Jacobson, delivered a sermon to Marx's congregation with the bold title "Judaism, the religion of the future."⁶ American Reform rabbis had publicly proclaimed as much in slightly more diplomatic language in their

Doctor David Marx.

*Rabbi of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, 1895 to 1946,
he was Rabbi Emeritus of the Temple from 1946 until his death in 1962.
(Courtesy of the Cuba Archives of The Breman Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.)*

1885 Pittsburgh Platform. While "Judaism presents the highest conception of the God idea," they asserted that there was also a basis for cooperation with non-Jews since the spirit of modernity and that of Christianity and Islam might provide allies for the Jewish mission to establish truth, justice, and peace on earth. The messages of the Pittsburgh Platform and Classical Reform imbued in Marx through his education and the examples of his peers thus included stress on social justice and ethics as opposed to ritual observance and return to a Jewish state.⁷

By 1900, the desire to demonstrate Jewish-Christian solidarity and goodwill led to the creation of a few public initiatives in the style of the Unity Club. Service clubs offered a precedent of sorts. Since the founding of the Republic, Masonic lodges and other organizations called upon their Jewish and Christian members to place unity and common humanity ahead of doctrinal differences. In Marx's day, commentators on the history of Jews in Georgia recalled how during the 1770s Jewish and Christian Masons in Savannah established a Union Society to agitate against British rule that, after independence, engaged in charitable activities.⁸ Religious liberals in the northeast had also established private associations by the 1890s, galvanized in particular by the experience of the interreligious assemblies at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. These comparatively *ad hoc* associations were Unitarian-led and focused on a common interest in a somewhat abstract, scientific, free, and liberal religion. The participation of some prominent Reform rabbis did not signal an attempt to discuss or encompass differences.⁹ In the northeast, Unitarians also formed unity clubs within their own congregations, and the choice of this title may at least partly reflect the role of Atlanta's Unitarian minister in the club's founding.¹⁰ By contrast with the initiatives of the Masons and Unitarians, however, from the onset Atlanta's Unity Club encompassed prominent mainstream Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians who attempted to demonstrate respect for differences of belief as well as to underline what Jews and Christians held in common.

The following examination of the conditions in which the club prospered and declined begins with the contribution that

Marx made to Jewish-Christian relations in Atlanta. It then turns to developments outside the Jewish community that made the Unity Club and its annual union Thanksgiving service possible and that finally helped to explain its demise.

Marx's Dedication to Building Ties with Local Churches

In the course of his fifty-two years as rabbi of the Atlanta temple, Marx spoke at over thirty of the city's churches as well as to churches and seminaries in at least seven other cities in Georgia and Alabama. Men's and women's groups, Sunday schools, church dedications, inaugurations of ministers, no venue was too marginal, small, or far to accept. Churches were convenient sites for large meetings, and Marx could rely on sympathetic clergy to arrange engagements. Marx went to the larger or mainstream Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian congregations and to the smaller Unitarian, Universalist, Congregationalist, and Disciples of Christ churches, and also, from 1923, to Catholic institutions in Atlanta.¹¹ Varying in intensity and nature, Marx's relationships with the ministers of these churches were strengthened by the work of the Unity Club.

Marx developed some of his closest relations with churches serving the middle-class congregations situated near the Temple, both at its second site on Pryor and Richardson streets and then at its third and present site at Peachtree Road and Spring Street. A series of symbolic events in the nineteenth century had already underlined the appreciative relationship between the Protestant and Jewish congregations of Atlanta's city center: the Jewish community was welcomed for worship in the Masonic Hall during the Civil War, and prominent Christians gave prayers and sermons at the synagogue in 1875, 1877, 1880, and 1884.¹² Marx made the most of opportunities to build relations with neighboring churches, extending relations far beyond occasional and symbolic gestures. In 1903, for instance, he offered the use of the Temple building to the First Methodist Episcopal Church while they built a new edifice nearby.¹³ Neighborly relations quickly extended into a wide range of aspects of congregational and liturgical life.¹⁴ By the 1920s, Marx was welcoming local Baptist,

Episcopalian, and Methodist ministers to his pulpit, the Sunday morning Open Forum, and the Temple's section of the National Council of Jewish Women. Generally in the form of a speaker meeting, the Open Forum was initiated at the turn of the century, interrupted during World War I, and then resumed. Themes were chosen to appeal to Christians including the relationship between Jewish and Christian beliefs and practices.¹⁵ In 1930, fellow Unity Club members from four churches laid the cornerstone for the new temple edifice.¹⁶

Marx's public prominence was cherished by Jews in his community, viewing their rabbi's successes, as other Reform congregations across the country did, as evidence that as Jews they were also accepted by leading non-Jewish circles. Enough of his congregation appears to have either approved of or accepted these efforts since they tolerated the distraction from his congregational work. He was thus appreciated as an "ethnic broker" and an "ambassador to the Gentiles" in the eyes of his community.¹⁷ In a city which grew from 21,789 in 1870 to 154,837 in 1910, Jews numbered approximately 4,000 at the turn of the century. The slightly over one thousand second, third, and fourth generation German Americans who constituted Atlanta's Reform community were often anxious about their social status, particularly in the face of the wave of poor Russian Jewish immigrants who outnumbered them by approximately two to one.¹⁸

*Achieving Acceptance and Combating Antisemitism
or Pursuing a Universalist Ideology*

To what extent did Marx's evident dedication to building ties with local ministers and churches serve as a means for Marx to consolidate his own position and that of Atlanta's Jews in the city, and in what respect were they a valuable part of Marx's conception of his broader religious mission? For Steven Hertzberg, Marx's response, and his congregants' approval of Marx's Christian connections, should be assessed in the context of the lack of social contact between Atlanta's leading Jews and their Christian neighbors. The city's Jews did face a huge challenge to gain full acceptance into the Atlanta establishment.¹⁹ Indeed, the same was

true of Reform congregations across the country with rabbis for whom building better relations with local Christians was a major priority. Examples include Morris Newfield in Birmingham, Alabama, Edmund Landau in Albany, Georgia, Morris Lazaron in Baltimore, Maryland, Isaac Landman in New York City, and Henry Cohen in Galveston, Texas.²⁰

It is evident that Marx's commitment to good relations with churches in the area could benefit his congregants in several secular respects, some less clearly indicative of anxiety about antisemitism, some potentially more so. At his congregation's annual meetings, Marx frequently reported on his outside speaking engagements, suggesting in 1922 that they were cause for communal confidence and that he considered himself the congregation's "representative" on these occasions.²¹ In his addresses to Christian audiences, Marx often dealt forthrightly with Jewish perceptions and interests and did not shrink from embracing the interests of Jews in eastern Europe in spite of a reputation for condescension towards the Orthodox eastern European Jews in America whom he viewed as insufficiently acculturated.²² In late 1917, for instance, Marx spoke of the need for relief for impoverished eastern European Jews to audiences across southern Georgia, including Baptist and Methodist churches in three cities. These and other topics raised the need for a tolerant embrace of Americans with differing backgrounds and perspectives. Marx argued that, in the context of their common values, petty prejudices might eventually be marginalized.²³ His sermons and prayers at government institutions and at some of Atlanta's more well-heeled congregations, including St Luke's Episcopal Church, could also betoken a desire to encourage the acceptance of Atlanta Jewry into the local elite, while engagements at middle-class churches across town and elsewhere in Georgia could build bridges beneficial to congregants.²⁴

Although Marx's surviving speeches betray anxiety about the rise of antisemitism, they do not suggest anxiety about the fraternal ties he relied on in Atlanta. Thus, in 1922, he justified his church engagements to his congregants as an exercise in Jewish self-assertion that would inspire respect: "I know of no better

method of combating misrepresentation and misunderstanding than by disabusing the minds of men thru mingling with them in such gatherings and taking part in matters of general concern, with out [*sic*] sacrifice of principle, concealment of religion or the fear of being one's self and therefore, different." In 1923, he again informed his congregation that his outside engagements underlined that "The whole world is not anti-semitic or averse to fraternal relationship."²⁵

The congregation's anxiety could not have diminished following the recrudescence of antisemitism in Atlanta during and after the trial and subsequent lynching of Leo Frank in front of a large crowd in nearby Marietta in 1915. Frank, a prominent member of Atlanta's Jewish community although a New York transplant, was falsely accused of murdering a young female employee. Marx became involved in extensive efforts to have Frank acquitted. Twenty years after the lynching, Marx traveled to Marietta and addressed the First Methodist Church.²⁶ Marx spoke before the Marietta Rotary Club in 1923 and 1929. On at least two other occasions he also declined requests for talks in the town. The sermon he gave in 1935 at the First Methodist Church on the twentieth anniversary of Frank's murder was most symbolic since many prominent members of the congregation had participated in the lynching.²⁷

Threatening and isolating the Jews of Atlanta, the trauma surrounding the Frank case has prompted Eli N. Evans and Steve Oney to conclude that Marx's pursuit of strong ties with the Christian community represented the depth to which his Reform ideology committed him to assimilation into Atlanta's elite.²⁸ Thus their interpretation is a variation of Hertzberg's analysis. Although this is one possible explanation, Marx repeatedly asserted that the ties reflected his faith that human contact and religious inspiration could change hearts. As evidence of Marx's claim, he placed clear limits on what he would sanction in response to the fear of antisemitism, persistently arguing that compromise on distinctive points of a modern, rationalist Jewish identity, belief, or practice made antisemitic prejudice more and not less likely.²⁹ But again, the very insistence with which Marx sought to substantiate

*Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation at its
second location, facing South Pryor Street at Richardson Street.
Dedicated in September 1902, the last service was held June 29, 1929.
(Courtesy of the Cuba Archives of The Breman Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.)*

such points could be understood both as showing that he believed in the power of Reform ideology to make a difference at a universal, human level and also as a response and tacit acceptance of the depth of prejudice that Jews faced in Atlanta and elsewhere in the United States.

Marx's engagement with Atlanta's African American church leaders provides further evidence of the tension between communal anxieties and the confident ideology of his fellow Reform rabbis. Marx was committed in principle to improved understanding between Atlanta's white and black communities, although within limits similar to those of his white Protestant colleagues. In 1906, after massive and violent demonstrations against blacks in

the city, Marx was appointed a founding member of the Civic League, a forum launched at a meeting held under the auspices of the Unity Club at the Temple. Designed to bring some of the city's more progressive white activists and dignitaries together with a black counterpart, the Negro League, the Civic League was founded by leading clergymen and political figures anxious that the rioting not lead to a permanent deterioration in interracial relations. Although Marx's public commitment in this area was as bold as the most outspoken of Atlanta's leading white ministerial supporters of interracial understanding, it was not more radical.³⁰ Between 1907 and 1943 he spoke at least five times at black churches, mostly in the Auburn Avenue area, whose ministers supported public dialogue with Atlanta's white liberals.³¹ A number of meetings at the Temple gave platforms for white civil rights activists from inside and outside the state, although not once does Marx's diary record a speaker from Atlanta's black community. When the Reverend Witherspoon Dodge, a prominent black colleague in the Civic League, invited the congregation to use his church during the building of a new sanctuary, the congregation declined on the ground that the church would not provide the conditions necessary for the Temple's normal Sabbath worship.³²

Marx's calendar was filled with engagements that were primarily Christian in nature. Marx was asked, for instance, to offer prayers at the Salvation Army meeting of April 20, 1921, and the Inter-Civic Council for Christmas meeting of December 18, 1921. While many of Marx's church addresses were focused on moral topics or aspects of the Jewish-Christian relationship that could have been directed at any congregation, Marx also addressed some of his audiences as Christian men and women with their own denominational history and identity. In 1906, addressing a neighboring Baptist church, he gave a sermon titled "Jew and Baptist," a topic to which he returned in 1930 when speaking to the Baptist World Alliance of the bond shared by the two communities based on support for freedom of worship and separation of church and state. Here, too, the nature of such engagements may be gauged both in terms of the religious messages which Marx presented and of the value of such appearances in strengthening

his associations with other prominent figures in the city, at the same time making an impression on their communities. Eli Evans notes that the warm receptions given by many southern churches to the charismatic rabbis who graduated from Hebrew Union College were cherished by those rabbis who thrived on the image of the thundering biblical prophet which so appealed to their Christian audiences. Marx's evident enthusiasm for cultivating his profile among Christian Atlantans was mistrusted by traditionalist critics in Atlanta's Jewish community and something of their critique persists in the comments reported by Evans. There were commonly occasions noted in Marx's diary at which he spoke at a church only to introduce a new Christian minister, or at which he was otherwise playing second fiddle to another speaker. Marx also did not limit himself to symbolic appearances designed to break through barriers to communities that were beyond the normal reach of members of the Jewish community. In fact, he led prayers at churches long after he had already established close relations with both the minister and the congregation, a pattern which seems to suggest less concern for symbolic means of forging better relations than a natural consequence of the friendship he shared with his Christian counterparts. In April 1928, for instance, he joined a prayer meeting at the First Baptist Church and in 1934 at the Second Baptist Church on Ponce de Leon Avenue. Participants in meetings of the nascent National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) had to avoid joint prayer and spiritual reflection in order to maintain the trust of the Christian and Jewish organizations that were affiliated with it.³³ Thus Marx's engagement with the Christians of his neighborhood owed less to this new national movement for organized Protestant-Catholic-Jewish dialogue and more to the determined religiosity demonstrated in the intercommunal prayers of many of his colleagues in the Reform rabbinate.³⁴

The time that Marx invested in church meetings can be partially explained as a product of the friendships he formed with ministers in the Unity Club. Marx continued to speak to these small church audiences throughout his career. With more time on his hands after retirement, he spoke to more church meetings than

previously. Thus Marx's ministerial associations outstripped straightforward calculation of utility to his own rabbinical career. The social convictions and sense of religious and social mission with which he approached his church activities therefore demand closer examination.

*Special Relationships and
Marx's Universalist Intellectual Sympathies*

Marx dedicated his most consistent energy to the small Unitarian and Universalist churches of Atlanta. It was with these churches that Marx shared the greatest degree of theological and philosophical empathy.

Growing ties between Reform Jews and Unitarians from the last quarter of the nineteenth century had already prompted local communities to undertake many of the religious activities that would be seen in the Unity Club. These were undertaken notably through pulpit exchanges as well as through discussions among clergy and scholars concerning a liberal religion embodying the essence of both faiths.³⁵ Nowhere was this approach more celebrated than in the New Orleans of Marx's youth, under the tutelage of his rabbi, James K. Gutheim.³⁶

Rapprochement between Reform Judaism and Unitarian Christianity, however, had fierce critics within both movements and was the subject of heated polemics between and within the communities throughout the early twentieth century. For the critics, it mattered little that the two communities theoretically shared a belief in a liberal ethical monotheism that both defined in universal terms and that many proponents equated with the Judaism of Jesus.³⁷

In Atlanta, Marx and his Unitarian and Universalist colleagues developed friendships as sustained as those anywhere at the time. Regular pulpit exchanges developed from the turn of the century between Marx and his Unitarian and Universalist colleagues, C. A. Langston and W. McGlaufflin, and the three became founder members of the Unity Club. For Marx, the justification for contributing to the activities of other denominations was clear. As he wrote in 1907 in light of the links between communities and in

spite of the historical developments which divided them, "After the claims of denominational security have been satisfied, there is still some little that can be given those outside of the peculiar phase of denomination to which we belong."³⁸

Marx's relationship with the Unitarians and Universalists strengthened even more after the demise of the Unity Club. The membership of the Unitarian Church dwindled. In 1918 it united with the Universalist Church and the congregation was renamed the Liberal Christian Church in 1927. By that stage its continuing weakness left it without a minister. In response, Marx increased the frequency with which he gave sermons to the church and conducted burials for its members. In September 1926, according to his later recollection, he was asked whether he would "become its minister as of January 1927." His day book compiled nearer the time noted, "Declined invitation to fill pulpit Liberal Church." The Liberal Church minutes make no reference to this, noting only that Clinton Scott was unanimously elected minister.³⁹ Nevertheless, in 1929 and in 1930, years in which the Liberal Christian community had no permanent minister, Marx addressed the church's Easter services, a practice he repeated in 1936. In few other cases did Reform rabbis serve Unitarian congregations, the best known being Solomon Sonnenschein in St. Louis.⁴⁰ Marx's role was derided by Orthodox critics as indicative of his inclination towards Christianity but accepted by his own congregation. In 1933, for instance, the Temple and Liberal Christian Church held a union service, a practice no longer common in Atlanta following the demise of the Unity Club.⁴¹

Marx's universalist inclinations were given broader outlet through his position as a chaplain and Grand Master in the Freemasons (Scottish Rite), and his other activities as a chaplain in Atlanta's other service and fraternal organizations including the Shriners, Lions, Rotary Club, Kiwanis, and Elks.⁴² Marx's association with the Masons brought far greater contact with the Christian community than the Liberal Christian Church could offer. Marx's congregation was particularly keen on his Masonic ties, insisting in April 1912 that he go to the Shrine convention in Los Angeles rather than stay for Shavuot services.⁴³ A number of

colleagues from the Unity Club were also Masons and Rotary Club members. They joined their clubs in visiting Temple services or collaborating with Marx in the rituals or prayers given at club meetings, or in performing funeral rites for fellow Masons.⁴⁴

Marx impressed his congregation with the notion that his liberal universalism was not a timid response to antisemitism, but rather an outgrowth of the ebullient, optimistic faith central to Judaism. Thus, in 1922 he exhorted his congregation to identify forcefully and openly with their Jewish faith:

The answer to anti-Semitism is not more free thought but more Jewishness. The better informed and more spiritually minded the Jew is, the higher his place amongst his fellow men . . . without sacrifice of principle, concealment of religion or the fear of being one's self and therefore, different.⁴⁵

Even the Holocaust did not shake him from this emphasis on what he saw as a spiritually-grounded Judaism as witnessed by his forceful annual report of 1945:

What preserved Israel through the centuries of ghetto confinement, persecution and execration, was its prayers; its faith in God that Israel was to be His witnesses – yea suffer if need be to fulfill that mission. Israel had the dignity, the character and the humility to NOT regard itself as blameless and the world outside the sole cause of its misfortunes. It felt itself part of that world and not an alien. So Israel prayed CHOTOSI [*sic*] – I have sinned. The greatest enemy of Israel is not anti-Semitism. It is the loss of that inner consciousness of God's presence – the seeking to know God and to come into alignment with the universal moral oneness that pervades His creation. Gradually there will return to us many of our men who have known hell in the horrors through which they lived and fought.⁴⁶

Reform Judaism and the Social Gospel

A further key to the cohesion of the Unity Club ministers is the social teachings which Marx shared with many of his Christian colleagues. The nineteenth-century liberal optimism of Isaac Mayer Wise and the founding generation of American Reform Judaism focused primarily on religious and intellectual

*The Temple in its third and current location, c. 1950,
on Peachtree Road and Spring Street, dedicated October 16-18, 1931.
(Courtesy of the Cuba Archives of The Breman Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.)*

development at an individual level. By the 1880s, attitudes to the social problems of America's growing cities were beginning to be seen as structural or too deep to be circumvented by simply exhorting individuals to improve their station in society through moral discipline. The final paragraph of the Pittsburgh Platform thus adjured Americans to face the "problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."⁴⁷ Many of the next generation of rabbis, Marx among the most active, recognized this to be a central part of the Jewish mission.

In Marx's day, students at Hebrew Union College were also registered for a degree at the University of Cincinnati. While there, Marx and his classmates were exposed to the new theological current, the Social Gospel, brought from northern seminaries

by Washington Gladden. Like Morris Newfield, a fellow student and lifelong friend who succeeded Marx at the pulpit in Birmingham, Alabama, Marx brought his civic commitments to his Christian colleagues almost as soon as he took up his position in Atlanta.⁴⁸

The impulse the two rabbis brought to the churches' social programming was evidently relished by some of the leading clergy of their communities. In Newfield's case, the scope for major reforming initiatives was somewhat limited by the realities of Birmingham and the businessmen who wielded influence within his congregation and similarly within the congregations of his closest Protestant acquaintances.⁴⁹ In Atlanta, Marx's social concern found a ready response from other members of the Unity Club.

The social teachings espoused by Marx and many of his fellow Unity Club members blended a moralistic opposition to political corruption, social degradation, and the stirring of tensions by racists with a consistent focus on social issues which commanded the attention of conservative moralists as well as liberals. During the Spanish-American War of 1898, Marx became a chaplain at nearby Fort McPherson, and he soon afterwards assumed the same position at the newly-built U.S. penitentiary in Atlanta. From 1899, Marx was involved in a number of child welfare initiatives as well as in municipal educational and health programs. This placed him in close and regular contact with some of the city's leading liberal Protestant ministers and, in particular, with the Reverend C. B. Wilmer, rector of St Luke's Episcopal Church, a prominent and controversial campaigner against political corruption in state government and racial strife and an ardent supporter of anti-poverty initiatives.⁵⁰ In 1904 and 1905, the Unity Club developed public interest in cooperation on social issues,⁵¹ and Wilmer and fellow Unity Club member and Unitarian minister C. A. Langston helped establish Atlanta's Associated Charities,⁵² movements with which the city's influential Evangelical Ministers' Association (EMA) refused to associate because they were insufficiently Christian.⁵³ In 1907, together with Marx and other club members, Wilmer and Langston established Ministers

for Associated Charities. The Unity Club's interventions into social affairs made it a natural partner for the mayor and governor when the city was rocked by anti-black rioting in 1906. The riots prompted the members of the Unity Club to focus attention on what one prominent Episcopalian member, C. T. Pise, called "Our Duty in the Present Crisis." Wilmer, Marx, and other club members were called upon for newspaper articles mixing social and religious commentary. Marx was thus invited to contribute a regular Sunday column to the *Atlanta Journal* in which he linked Jewish tradition with contemporary social analysis.⁵⁴ The Social Gospel gave a radical edge to the activities Marx undertook with his ministerial colleagues, although at the heart of Marx's commentary lay a stress on moderation, an approach appealing to a broad and even fairly conservative audience. In a column published in 1907, Marx summarized his view that the new social teachings underlined the insufficiency of old-fashioned moralizing: "Evils exist, crusading will not abolish them. Vices are regulated by law, not overcome. Morality is a matter of temperament, habit, training, education."⁵⁵

The responses to social and political problems soon also associated with the Civic League brought greater public attention to Marx and other Unity Club members. On the eve of World War I in Europe, Marx's group succeeded in forcing the repeal of the Bush Bill, designed to introduce Bible reading in Georgia's public schools.⁵⁶ During the war, Marx joined the executive board of the nascent Red Cross. When fire spread across Atlanta in 1917, he was placed in charge of civilian relief.

Marx's activist response to the social teachings of many liberal ministers in his day thus thrust him into the limelight, while placing him at the heart of a group of Christians who saw the need for a social liberalism that was at the same time a religious movement attempting to renew American society. The Unity Club did not make acceptance of social teaching a requirement of membership, but the charitable and political association of Marx, Wilmer, Langston, and other long-term members, dating to at least 1905–1906, made an impact on the public in the years preceding World War I and thereafter.

*The Unity Club and Motivations for Organizing
Jewish-Christian Interaction*

Marx's collaboration with Atlanta's leading Protestant clergy through the Unity Club is a clear sign of a mixture of ideological empathy, the natural development of neighborly relations, and an indication of the utility of cooperation between denominations in the flourishing, young cities of America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the members of the club were far from uniformly liberal either in theological or political terms. Moreover, such sympathies and ties existed in many cities and between many Jewish and Christian communities without leading to the establishment of a formally-organized club with a well-publicized program. In Birmingham, Alabama, Marx's colleague Rabbi Newfield created a less formal relationship with his Protestant colleagues that began as a group of friends desiring intellectual stimulation and subsequently galvanized cross-denominational support for Newfield's educational and social welfare projects.⁵⁷

The origins of the Unity Club in 1900 lay in a gathering of similar informality, with six ministers: Marx; the Unitarian and Universalist ministers, C. A. Langston and W. H. McGlauflin; one Episcopalian, C. B. Wilmer; H. Stiles Bradley of Trinity Methodist Church; A. E. Sedden, of the Christian (Disciples of Christ) church; and G. W. Bull, a Presbyterian.⁵⁸ Even as the club grew, its monthly meetings retained a social ambience, with members dining at each other's homes or marking member's departures to posts outside Atlanta with meetings held over dinner at leading Atlanta hotels. The club never sought to encompass a large number of ministers, but rather to select representatives of the mainline and more liberal denominations. Marx was always the only rabbi and the rabbis of the Orthodox congregations were excluded. In 1904 a journalist from the *Atlanta Constitution* construed the nature of the club in just such terms:

The club is composed of many of the most prominent ministers of the city, and was organized for the purpose of mutual benefits and the general good of religion. Meetings are held at regularly

appointed times at different homes in the city and interesting and instructive problems discussed.⁵⁹

Nonetheless the establishment of the Unity Club was a deliberate action since Atlanta already had the EMA. The latter also met monthly and originally encompassed ministers from the most conservative to the most liberal ends of the Protestant doctrinal spectrum. In April 1899, the EMA had changed its constitution to include a statement of Christian faith which the Unitarian and Universalist ministers felt unable to profess. Obviously the statement excluded Jews. Predictably, the Unity Club drew the opposition of the conservative members of the EMA because it included non-Christians as well as the most liberal Protestants.⁶⁰ The reestablishment of a ministerial forum including these religious liberals constituted a gesture of defiant pluralism on behalf of ministers from mainline denominations who, like Wilmer, also remained in the ministers' association. In light of this beginning, at the first meetings of the club, members delivered a series of papers elaborating on their basic beliefs and establishing the principle that each might differ in these, even while discussing their commonalities. A journalist picked up on the underlying tensions in an article written in 1902, asserting that the Unity Club "differs from the Evangelical Association of the city in that its members freely discuss church doctrines, thereby reaching a better understanding without yielding their individual views."⁶¹ The Unity Club's title, although it carried resonances of a liberal religious union that cannot have escaped its members and certainly did not escape its conservative Christian critics, was not intended to suggest doctrinal union but rather transdenominational respect and solidarity. A club which mixed dining and intellectual exchange established that respect and solidarity in a way that many other interreligious encounters could not. It implied a social acceptance that an address in a denominational forum might not. The sustained and intimate discussion promoted in the club carried with it a sense of equality as well, which symbolic appearances at churches and synagogues could not match. In an Atlanta dominated by well-to-do and middle-class Baptist and

Methodist churches, the club's Jewish and Unitarian members found many arenas in which they were seen as conspicuously different, or from which they were excluded altogether. The club thus served as both a symbol of acceptance and a refuge.

The club's most public innovation in the early years—joint Thanksgiving services, universally known at the time as “union services”—also reflected this combination of liberal religion and respect for pluralism. The concept of union services was already alive among Protestant congregations before the Civil War but with Union victory, unity and union took on new public meanings. Following President Lincoln's institution of an annual day of thanksgiving as the war ended, Protestant churches across the country began to join together for “union Thanksgiving services.” The first joint services for Protestant and Reform Jewish congregations were held in the North at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶² Atlanta's Universalist and Unitarian ministers conducted union Thanksgiving services for the first time in 1901, following their ejection from the Ministers' Association.⁶³ In 1902, the club announced its first such worship with the Temple, thanks to an invitation from Marx to conduct a joint Thanksgiving service in the congregation's new sanctuary. In a classic work on the southern Jewish experience, Eli Evans writes that this service was the achievement of which Rabbi Marx remained proudest throughout his life.⁶⁴

Club members announced to their congregations and the press that the services would be “entirely undenominational,” and that the ministers had approved of the service beforehand. Inclusiveness was a striking aspect of the union Thanksgiving services particularly since the Unity Club began in 1901 to boast fairly conservative Methodist and Baptist members. At each annual service the congregations came together to sing patriotic hymns and hear the ministers recite readings from the Scriptures that excluded the New Testament. The result, however, provided little succor to conservative critics of the club like prominent Baptist minister Dr. Len G. Broughton, who reportedly declared in a sermon after the 1903 service, “God looks with displeasure on any service which purposively leaves Christ out.”⁶⁵

*Dr. David Marx preaching from the bimah at the Temple.
The undated photograph is possibly from the early 1940s.
(Courtesy of the Cuba Archives of The Breman Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.)*

The dividing line between ministers willing and those unwilling to participate fully in club activities apparently turned around several issues besides such sectarian pluralism. Clearly, one was union with Jews and Unitarians. Members also took divergent positions on public evangelism. The scorn with which Wilmer treated instant revivals—what he considered flash-in-the-pan conversions at mass rallies—was well-known. His reaction was produced by the same social consciousness which led Marx to question the possibility of major change being affected by pure willpower.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, press reports recorded the club's involvement in Episcopal and Presbyterian-led revivals in 1903 and 1904, a period during which the inclusion of Unitarians and Universalists was still a matter of dispute. In June 1908, at the instigation of Universalist minister Dean Ellenwood, the Unity Club decided to hold its own nonsectarian "undenominational" public Sunday gospel services, or vespers, at the Casino on Ponce de Leon Avenue. How active Marx was in such affairs is unclear, although in 1917, he reportedly sat in the "Amen corner" at the revival meeting led by the well-known visiting evangelist Billy Sunday. Marx and the Unity Club also arranged public speaker meetings when the influential Unitarian Jenkin Lloyd Jones visited Atlanta in 1906.⁶⁷

The public, organized nature of club events partly reflected the position of Atlanta's clergy in the city's social and political life. The disproportionately large charitable contribution of Atlanta's Jewish community may have been a factor in the welcome received by Marx from Atlanta's Christian communities.⁶⁸ The Unity Club was not directly involved in charitable activities beyond collections for city charities associated with the Thanksgiving services.⁶⁹ However until World War I, conflict with conservatives in the EMA had implications with regard to the Associated Charities of Atlanta, which key club members supported. Broughton, the club's major critic, publicly underlined his willingness to cooperate with club members in philanthropy and good citizenship. In practice, this meant he would take money from its Unitarian and Jewish members, but the YMCA and the Tabernacle (Baptist) Infirmary, the hospital that Broughton sponsored, did not allow

Jewish, Unitarian, or Catholic board members as a provision of their constitutions.⁷⁰

The wider political significance of acts uniting Protestants and Jews was also unmistakable virtually from the beginning of the Unity Club. These activities initially only drew ministers and their congregants, but in 1904 this changed. In April, Governor Terrell gave a dinner for the club in which Mayor E. P. Howell also participated. That Thanksgiving, Terrell and Howell attended the union service at the Temple. In 1906, the year of the race riot, the Unity Club members were guests of another Democrat, Forrest Adair. Adair and the Unity Club coordinated their responses to the riot and laid groundwork for creation of the Civic League. The following month, the fifth annual Thanksgiving service drew the attendance of Terrell and Judge William Newman. In 1911, Marx gave a paper to a Unity Club dinner attended by New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson. Although most of its meetings were private, the club continued to invite prominent citizens to dinners as in 1913, when state Supreme Court Judge Lumpkin was invited.⁷¹

The Frank case and the war wrought change, and members struggled to continue Unity Club activities. A sense of isolation accompanying the Frank trial and lynching has been noted in much of the literature on Jewish life in Atlanta, and it is true that Marx's diary records few church appearances from then until 1921.⁷² Wilmer and other prominent Unity Club members joined Marx in his efforts to support Frank during Frank's imprisonment. The meetings of the Unity Club continued through the war, although Marx's war work in the Red Cross and civilian relief, in particular, led him in other directions. Closely associated with the religious department of the War Work Council at Camp Gordon, Marx saw that the Unity Club was publicly hosted at the camp in December 1917.⁷³

The end of the war might easily have breathed fresh life into the club's work. Across the country, the war gave military chaplains of different faiths daily experiences in cooperation, and the end of the war saw many of these ministers and rabbis return to their congregations prepared for more of the same. At precisely

the moment at which the brotherhood movement was becoming a byword for public association nationally, however, the Unity Club began to decline.

The Demise of the Unity Club

Marx last recorded that the Unity Club met in April 1924, although, according to his diary, the regular monthly meetings had been intermittent over the preceding years.⁷⁴ A number of factors brought about the end of the club and its sustained and organized approach to dialogue was not replicated in Atlanta for fifteen years.

The revival of the Ku Klux Klan changed the political environment in which Unity Club ministers met. The Klan's anti-Catholic agitation made symbolic interdenominational solidarity appear less relevant without Catholic participation, particularly when anti-Catholicism became a feature of the presidential campaigns of 1924 and 1928. In response to the latter, branches of NCCJ began to organize across the country. Often organized under the banner "Protestant-Catholic-Jew," these efforts sought to combat the prejudicial politics of the Klan and its sympathizers through demonstrations of solidarity between ministerial representatives of all three groups. One of the features of a dialogue encompassing Catholic representatives was the avoidance of joint prayer, criticized by Rome as a marker of religious "indifferentism." Although the impact of the Klan on the reluctance of ministers to organize against prejudice in Atlanta is not clear, the NCCJ model did not lead to the creation of a new forum in Atlanta until 1939. In that year the NCCJ launched a local Round Table of which Marx became a prominent member.⁷⁵

Marx did not take the lead in this new dialogue in the manner of Morris Lazaron and other Reform colleagues. Indeed his early dialogues with Catholics were more circumscribed. In December 1923, Marx first recorded an appearance at a Catholic function, an address at a banquet commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. The few entries in his diary noting engagements at Catholic venues were similarly lay functions. Atlanta's Protestant and Unitarian

communities remained Marx's key points of reference. There were, for instance, no Catholic priests involved in the ceremonies associated with the groundbreaking and opening of the new temple sanctuary in 1930 and 1931.⁷⁶

The rise of the Klan did not diminish the public nature of Marx's interwar ecumenical contacts. The dinner-and-discussion format of monthly club meetings had always competed with the other public activities of the Unity Club members, but the war and the postwar transformation of Atlanta's congregational and civic life placed new demands on their time. Some of the energies with which Marx and his colleagues approached the Unity Club were probably temporarily directed to the establishment of a Good-Will Council within the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce in 1921. Within a year, Marx became the chair of the council as well as a member of the Inter-Racial Commission appointed by the governor, activities which absorbed much of his time in the interwar years.⁷⁷

Marx's public recognition and activities provided many opportunities for interdenominational gestures of solidarity despite the lack of a fixed reference point. In 1929, for the first time, Marx was invited to address the Christian Council,⁷⁸ the successor of the EMA and a body which, particularly during the war, had gradually abandoned its earlier hostility to cooperation with non-Christian institutions and charities.⁷⁹ In 1945, marking the fiftieth year of Marx's career in Atlanta, the Christian Council provided a radio slot for Marx and held a luncheon in his honor.⁸⁰ The limitations of the EMA had spurred individuals to start the Unity Club. From wartime onward Christian Council opinions and actions had changed from those of the EMA, making the Unity Club members less distinctive. As the brotherhood movement became widely accepted across political and denominational lines on local and national levels, the moment passed in Atlanta when liberal idealism was a key factor in sustaining the will to hold organized dialogue.

Conclusions

The Unity Club was born at a time of rapid change in Atlanta. For the city's small Jewish community, the changes

exacerbated its social insecurity, an insecurity that dramatically increased with the public disturbances of 1906 and 1915. In such circumstances, the sympathy and support of Marx's congregation for the activities of the club were naturally colored by a concern to combat antisemitism and break down the community's social isolation. Without such support, Marx might well have focused entirely on less organized forms of dialogue with his Protestant counterparts, or, like other early Reform rabbis, on the Masons and other service clubs.

Many of Marx's Protestant colleagues turned to the Unity Club for equally utilitarian gains. Atlanta's Reform congregation was prominent in the city's social and charitable activities. The club gave ministers of the more liberal congregations opportunities to discuss social and political affairs in private and also provided an important vehicle for public demonstrations of solidarity against religious and political extremism. This instrumental dimension to the club's activities helps to explain the club's prominence in local political affairs as well as newspaper coverage. In the years during and after World War I, by contrast, Atlanta's main Protestant ministerial association reversed its opposition to cooperation with liberal and secular organizations, and Unity Club members began to find other outlets for social welfare work.

The Unity Club's responses to pressures from this social environment were also shaped by two diverging sets of liberal ideas without which the club's character and attraction can not be understood. The more radical of these clearly appealed to a narrower group of ministers. The club's religious and social activities provided members with opportunities to demonstrate forms of ecumenical solidarity and worship that embodied classic liberal understanding of public tolerance and moderation that were not supported by all opponents of political extremism in the city. The club's meetings were likewise trumpeted to the press as proof of the capacity to dialogue about differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Club discussions also revolved around shared liberal values which appear to have meant as much to Marx as the fact of social acceptance. For Marx and his Unitarian and Universalist colleagues, the club provided a forum for sharing

ideas of liberal religion that Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish conservatives rejected. This dimension of the discussions meant it was not considered a model that could encompass conservatives interested in demonstrating solidarity against intolerance. After 1918, rather than broaden the club to include Catholics or more conservative Protestants and Jews, leading members created other good-will forums and soon the Unity Club began to decline and then ceased to function.

With Unity Club members from less radically liberal congregations, Marx shared a broader understanding of the interconnection between religious, social, and political moderation, well expressed in his article of 1907 and in the alternatives to conservative religious revival meetings led by Wilmer and Ellenwood. In supporting these initiatives, Marx was choosing partners who would alienate as much as appeal to Atlanta's less tolerant social circles. While the Unity Club was consistent with an aspiration to promote acculturation and acceptance, it therefore also reflected a liberal agenda which Marx adopted without apology.

The private nature of the club also held an attraction for members, particularly since meetings were held every month for well over a decade, and in less regular and well-attended form for twice that. The paper-and-discussion format of meetings fostered in-depth and sophisticated exchanges, whereas public dialogue could provoke conflict and misunderstanding. Similar exchanges were also promoted by Marx's contemporary Reform colleagues in other cities as were the union Thanksgiving services which constituted a key feature of Unity Club cooperation. These archetypically liberal gatherings bore little relation to the focused campaigns for "brotherhood" which spread across the nation during the interwar years, although then, too, Marx and other exponents of Classical Reform constituted the leading supporters for these efforts within the Jewish community. The complex web of motivations which spurred Atlanta's Unity Club were undoubtedly particular to their times, although the optimistic liberalism guiding its broad range of intimate social activities exerted lasting impact. After 1945, Jewish-Christian joint services and study circles multiplied across the United States and Marx

was a widely-acknowledged inspiration to the initiators of these ventures. A different side of his local activities was preserved in the testimonies of Christian colleagues following the establishment of the Atlanta Roundtable of the NCCJ, when he was recurrently praised for the friendships he fostered while building bridges across the city's denominations. The Unity Club had been largely Marx's creation, and when it disappeared he built these friendships by other means.

Marx's commitment to good civic and interdenominational relations was a typical Classical Reform response to the opportunities available to Jews in his day. It was, to be sure, a response whose more radical ideological bases were soon widely criticized within the Reform Jewish community. At a practical level, however, the links built by Marx and his colleagues were recognized by succeeding generations as an achievement of continuing utility. Marx's bold approach to extending his community's social relationships has been seen as a marker of both naivety and artful leadership. The Unity Club's contribution to his early successes in this field suggests another dimension altogether. The club rose to prominence through encapsulating the common interests of a circle who shared many of his liberal ideas. It collapsed when these liberals were drawn into a wider pluralistic engagement which clashed with the universalist vision that had inspired Marx. A parallel shift convinced subsequent generations of Reform Jews that Marx's Classical Reform did not provide a sufficiently robust pluralism to combat antisemitism and thereby foster their security and broader social interests. Given this, while Marx was recognized as a path-maker he also quickly came to be seen as a man limited by his background and milieu.

 NOTES

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¹ "David Marx—Diary kept by Rabbi Marx in which he recorded conversions, funerals, weddings and other occasions at which he officiated, as well as lectures and speeches he delivered as a rabbinical student and rabbi, and other miscellaneous material, Birmingham, Ala., and Atlanta, Ga., 1887-1952" (hereafter cited as Marx diary), file SC-7862, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati (hereafter cited as AJA). According to Marx's diary entries for 1911, 1913, 1914, and 1922, the club had an executive committee. According to the *Atlanta Constitution* (January 19, 1922), Universalist minister John Rowlett was secretary of the club in 1922. No records from the club have survived in Atlanta's archives. The bound diaries of David Marx preserved at the AJA represent a re-typed version of an earlier, more detailed, manuscript compiled every year or every few years. The original diary covering 1921-1930 is at the Cuba Archives of The Breman Museum, Atlanta (hereafter cited as Cuba Archives).

² *Atlanta Constitution* in particular regularly published details of the Unity Club's public events and private meetings. See, for example, "Unity Club Met Yesterday," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1905 (hereafter "Unity Club Met Yesterday").

³ The chief sources of unpublished material from Christian churches used here, including the minutes of the Protestant ministerial association, are at the Atlanta History Center. The Unitarian and Universalist church records are at the Special Collections and Pitts Theological Library at Emory University, Atlanta.

⁴ See the recollection of Marx in Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South* (Macon, GA, 1985), 25.

⁵ See, for example, Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Cincinnati, 1988), 289.

⁶ "Calendar, 1921-30," entry for April 15-17, 1921, Container 15, Folder 15, Cuba Archives (hereafter cited as Calendar, 1921-30).

⁷ Pittsburgh Platform, paragraphs 1, 5, 6, in *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* (hereafter cited as CCAR Yearbook) 45 (New York, 1935): 198-200.

⁸ "A Page from Early American History," *Atlanta Journal*, May 5, 1907.

⁹ On the limited extent to which these encounters promoted a recognition of or respect for the faith and traditions of the other communities represented, see Egal Feldman, *Dual Destinies: The Jewish Encounter with Protestant America* (Urbana, IL, and Chicago, 1990).

¹⁰ Wayne B. Arnason, *Follow the Gleam: A History of the Liberal Religious Youth Movements* (Boston, 1980).

¹¹ Marx diary, December 12, 1923.

¹² "History—notes and recollections re the Temple, 1867–1935," Container 13, Folder 6, Atlanta Temple Records, Cuba Archives, and Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City: 1845–1915* (Philadelphia, 1978), 49, 70, 173.

¹³ Marx diary, 1903.

¹⁴ Marx and his ministerial colleagues often participated in each other's events, including cornerstone laying ceremonies and funerals. Jewish symbols also were introduced at this time on the altars of two local Disciples of Christ and Episcopal churches. Interview with Reverend Pete Dingledey at Peachtree Christian Church (opposite the Temple) conducted by author, October 22, 2004; Susan E. Leas, *Alive in Atlanta: A History of St. Luke's Church, 1864–1974* (Atlanta, 1976), 85.

¹⁵ Calendar, 1921–30, e.g. January 9, 16, March 27, November 27, December 4, 11, 1921.

¹⁶ Rabbi's Report to the Atlanta Temple Annual General Meeting, 1930, Atlanta Temple Records, Container 2, Folder 3 Annual Meetings, reports of rabbis, 1917–1949, Cuba Archives (hereafter cited as Rabbi's Report with date or year).

¹⁷ Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, "The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Spring 1983): 51–68; Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *As But a Day to A Hundred and Twenty, 1867–1986*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, 1987), 48. On the concept of ambassador to the gentiles see Malcolm H. Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi in the South," in *Turn to the South*, ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Waltham, MA, 1979), 21–32; Blumberg, *As But a Day*.

¹⁸ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71–72.

²⁰ Like Marx, a close colleague, Newfield supported the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism (ACJ). See Mark Cowett, *Birmingham's Rabbi: Morris Newfield and Alabama, 1895–1940* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1986). Newfield's papers are at the AJA. Rabbi Edmund R. Landau Papers are at the Cuba Archives. Lazaron was one of the founders of the National Conference of Christians and Jews as well as a leading voice in the American Council for Judaism. His papers are at AJA. See Andrew Heinze, "Morris Lazaron," in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, XIII (New York and Oxford, 1998), 309–310. Landman was also an ACJ supporter. See Lance J. Sussman, "Towards Better Understanding: The Rise of the Interfaith Movement in America and the Role of Rabbi Isaac Landman, 1880–1946," *American Jewish Archives* 34 (April 1982): 35–51. Cohen was another ACJ supporter. See Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and their Work* (College Station, TX, 1999), 58–79.

²¹ Rabbi's Report, 1922.

²² Numerous entries in Calendar, 1921–30; Bauman and Shankman, "Rabbi as Ethnic Broker," 58.

²³ Marx diary, October 31, November 1, November 7, 1917; Rabbi's Report, 1922.

²⁴ Marx diary, e.g. December 16, 1897, November 21, 1900, May 7, 1906, January 1, 1912.

²⁵ Rabbi's Report, October 9, 1923.

²⁶ Marx diary, 1935.

²⁷ Calendar, 1921–30. For a history of the congregation noting some of its leading families, see Lucretie M. Hammons and Betty Carr, *A Higher Obligation: The Story of the First United Methodist Church of Marietta, Georgia* (Marietta, GA, 1983). On Marietta citizens involved in the lynching, see Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York, 2003), 513–514, 608.

²⁸ Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1973), 242; Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, 12, and index referring to material on 613.

²⁹ Rabbi's Report, 1922.

³⁰ "Civic League Planned by Committee of Ten," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1906; David Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).

³¹ Marx diary, July 18, 1907, June 1939, 1940, 1943, and February 1926; Calendar, 1921–30. According to the diary, he also spoke at the February 7, 1932, Colored YMCA Rosenwald Memorial Services, and at a "Negro Forum" at Wheat Street Baptist Church on April 24, 1932. His records do not suggest that he spoke at the church of fellow Atlantan, Martin Luther King, Sr., father of Martin Luther King, Jr., nor do they note whether he met prominent Atlanta academic and civil rights activist W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt) DuBois.

³² The records concerning the rejection of the offer do not provide any additional information. Rabbi's Report, 1930.

³³ Calendar, 1921–30; Marx diary, May 5, 1906, August 1930, 1934; Evans, *Provincials*, 95. See William Simpson and Ruth Weyl, *The Story of the ICCJ* (Heppenheim, Germany, 1985), 14–17 and "Pioneers in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *SIDIC* 30:2 (1997): 5.

³⁴ For reports on some of the more prominent initiatives, see *New York Times*, June 7–8, 1897, July 1, 1901, November 27–28, 1902, April 25, 1910, November 21, 1910; Lawrence Charap, "'Accepting the Truth from Whomsoever Gives It': Jewish-Protestant Dialogue, Interfaith Alliances, and Pluralism, 1880–1910," *American Jewish History* 89 (September 2001): 261–277.

³⁵ See Benny Kraut, "Reform Judaism and the Unitarian Challenge," in *The American Jewish Experience*, ed. Jonathan Sarna (New York, 1986), 89–96.

³⁶ Scott M. Langston, "Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in Nineteenth Century New Orleans," *Southern Jewish History* 3 (2000): 83–124; Langston, "James K. Gutheim as Southern Reform Rabbi, Community Leader, and Symbol," *Southern Jewish History* 5 (2002): 69–102.

³⁷ The polemic in Reform sermons on Unitarianism is treated in Kraut, "Reform Judaism and the Unitarian Challenge," 92–96.

³⁸ David Marx, "Orphan's Day," *Atlanta Journal*, September 30, 1907.

³⁹ Marx diary, September 12, 1926; Calendar, 1921–30; board of trustees' minutes, Liberal Christian Church, September 16, 1926, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta Papers, RG 26, Folder 3, Pitts Theological Library, Emory University.

⁴⁰ Marx diary; Benny Kraut, "A Unitarian Rabbi? The Case of Solomon Sonnenschein," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd Endelman (Teaneck, NJ, 1987), 272–308;

Dana E. Kaplan, "Rabbi Samuel Freuder as a Christian Missionary: American Protestant Premillennialism and an Apostate Returner, 1891–1924," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 50 (1998): 70.

⁴¹ For comments by Orthodox critics, see Evans, *Provincials*, 243.

⁴² Notes on his engagements for these clubs are scattered throughout Marx's diaries. See, for example, diary entries for December 7, 1902, July 4, 1903, on multiple occasions in 1923 and 1941, and multiple entries for each of the years covered in the Calendar, 1921–1930.

⁴³ April 24, 1912, Atlanta Hebrew Benevolent Congregation records, "History—notes and recollections re the Temple, 1867–1935," Container 13, Folder 6, Cuba Archives.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Rabbi's Report, 1922.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Rabbi's Report, 1945.

⁴⁷ Pittsburgh Platform, paragraph 8, CCAR *Yearbook* 45 (1935): 198–200.

⁴⁸ For Gladden's impact on Jewish students, see Cowett, *Birmingham's Rabbi*, and Mark Cowett, "Rabbi Morris Newfield and the Social Gospel: Theology and Societal Reform in the South," *American Jewish Archives* 34 (April 1982): 52–54.

⁴⁹ For more on Newfield, see Kerry M. Olitzky, *The American Synagogue: A Historical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, CT, 1996), 29.

⁵⁰ Marx's social and political activities are briefly outlined in Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 71, and Arnold Shankman, "David Marx," in *Dictionary of Georgia Biography* ed. Kenneth Coleman and Charles S. Gurr, II (Athens, GA, 1983), 694–696; Susan E. Leas, *Alive in Atlanta: A History of St. Luke's Church, 1864–1974* (Atlanta, 1976), esp. 75–83.

⁵¹ See, for instance, "Unity Club Met Yesterday."

⁵² "Dr. Langston Episcopalian," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1905.

⁵³ Atlanta Evangelical Ministers' Association Minutes, March 6, 1905, MSS 686, Box 3, Folder 7, 161, Atlanta Historical Center. See also Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 166–167.

⁵⁴ Marx diary, September 18, 1907, "To Unity Club," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 13, 1906, *Atlanta Journal*, September 8 and 30, 1907.

⁵⁵ David Marx, "Moving On," *Atlanta Journal*, September 22, 1907.

⁵⁶ Notes by Marx on events of 1914, Container 13, Folder 6, Cuba Archives; Marx diary, July 14–15, 1913. See also Blumberg, *As But a Day*, 69.

⁵⁷ Olitzky, *American Synagogue*, 29.

⁵⁸ Marx diary, 1900.

⁵⁹ "Dinner Given To Unity Club," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1904.

⁶⁰ Evangelical Ministers' Association Minutes, April 3, 1899, MSS 686, Box 3, Folder 7, 53–54, Atlanta History Center; *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1903, March 14, 1904, January 29, 1905, and July 16, 1906.

⁶¹ "Short Items Concerning Men and Public Affairs," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 16, 1901; "Temple to See Union Meeting," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 18, 1902.

⁶² The first reports of joint services between Protestants and Reform Jews in the *New York Times* date from June 8, 1897, and July 1, 1901. The first reported union Thanksgiving service in the *New York Times* is from Detroit, dated November 28, 1902. The 1902 Atlanta service was not reported nationally and other such services may easily also have passed without notice.

⁶³ First Universalist Church, Board Minutes, December 4, 1901, Papers of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, Box 60, Folder 1, Pitts Theological Library, Emory University.

⁶⁴ Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Board Minutes, October 30, 1902, "History – notes and recollections re the Temple, 1867–1935," Container 13, Folder 6, Atlanta Temple Records, Cuba Archives; Evans, *Provincials*, 241, and compare also Blumberg, *As But a Day*, 59.

⁶⁵ Programs for the Thanksgiving services were commented on beforehand and recorded in detail afterwards in the *Atlanta Constitution*. See, for example, "Temple to See Union Meeting," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 18, 1902 (first quotation); "Unity Service Was Criticized," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1903 (second quotation).

⁶⁶ Leas, *Alive in Atlanta*, 55; *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1903 (for Broughton's comments); Marx's article "Moving On," *Atlanta Journal*.

⁶⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1904, January 29, 1905, May 28–June 1, 14, 21, 1908; *Atlanta Journal*, December 10, 1917, cited in Bauman and Shankman, "Rabbi as Ethnic Broker," 55; "Dr. Jones Lectures Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1906; Marx diary, March 16, 1906.

⁶⁸ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 136.

⁶⁹ "To Celebrate at the Temple," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 21, 1904.

⁷⁰ "Unity Service Was Criticized," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1903. On the active role of Broughton in the YMCA board's decision to exclude Jews, see Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 167.

⁷¹ "Dinner Given To Unity Club," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1904; "To Unity Club," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 13, 1906. Adair again welcomed the Unity Club to dinner at his house in 1910; "Social Items," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 14, 1910; "Unity Club Holds Services," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 29, 1906; "Unity Club Entertains Distinguished People," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 10, 1911; "Unity Club Dinner," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 16, 1913.

⁷² Marx diary; Bauman and Shankman, "Rabbi as Ethnic Broker," 57, 66 n. 22.

⁷³ C. B. Wilmer to Leo Frank, May 17, 1915, folder 2.95, and reply from Frank to Wilmer, May 18, 1915, folder 2.6, Correspondence of Leo Frank, Leo Frank Collection, Brandeis University Library, Special Collections, Waltham, MA; Leas, *Alive in Atlanta*, 75–76, 80–83. For general accounts of the Frank case noting Marx's prominent role, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York, 1968), and Olney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*. "Atlanta Unity Club At The Camp Tonight," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1917, 2.

⁷⁴ Calendar, 1921–30.

⁷⁵ Simpson and Weyl, *Story of the ICCJ*, 14–17, and *SIDIC*, 30.2 (1997): 5. On Protestant ministerial responses to the Klan in Atlanta, see Leas, *Alive in Atlanta*, 75–83; Will W. Alexander, *The Reminiscences of Will W. Alexander* (New York, 1972), 189–190; Marx diary, 1941.

⁷⁶ Marx diary, December 12, 1923; David Marx papers, Container 16, File 2, Cuba Archives.

⁷⁷ Marx diary; Calendar, 1921–30.

⁷⁸ Marx diary.

⁷⁹ See 1905, Evangelical Ministers' Association Minutes, MSS 686, Box 3, Folder 7, Atlanta History Center.

⁸⁰ *Southern Israelite*, September 20, 1945; *Atlanta Constitution*, September 20, 1945.

Uptown and Traditional

by

Jessica Elfenbein

The religious experience of German Jews who arrived in the United States in the period before 1880 was not monolithic. Notable and important intra-group differences developed, especially in the area of religious practice. Not all German Jews quickly (or ever) embraced Reform.¹ An important minority in Baltimore and elsewhere rebuffed efforts at progressive change and continued to practice traditional Judaism. For example, of the six synagogues German Jews created by 1879 in Baltimore, two—Chizuk Amuno and Shearith Israel—were explicitly traditional in their religious practice.² Of the other four, only Har Sinai began as Reform. Those who chose to affiliate at the traditional synagogues consciously rejected Reform.³ And, theoretically, if from 1879 on, two of six congregations (albeit smaller than their Reform brethren) were deliberately and purposefully traditional, then perhaps a quarter or so of Baltimore's German-speaking Jews identified with Orthodoxy and followed its ritual to a greater or lesser extent.⁴

The reality of this group's experience flies in the face of common historical treatment. The years from 1880 through 1920 are often, although erroneously, characterized as being comprised of two distinct Jewish communities: the Uptown Jews, those of German descent who are presented as "a homogeneous group sharing their Germanness [*sic*], their affluence, their Reform Judaism, and their striving for acceptance in America"; and the Downtown Jews, those of eastern European descent who were

outsiders to the American experience, spoke heavily accented English, and upheld religious tradition. Historians, the majority of whom descend from eastern European immigrants, describe this group as “more interesting, more Jewish, and more willing to confront and criticize the demands of mainstream American culture.”⁵

For a more nuanced and complete understanding of American Jewish history, it is instructive to study the experiences of specific families. Baltimore’s Eleanor Kohn, whose family founded Hochschild Kohn department store, and Lester Levy, whose family owned M. S. Levy and Company (one of the nation’s largest straw hat manufacturers), married in 1922. They both came from families who arrived as part of the German-speaking migration, yet their forebears’ experiences directly challenge the common wisdom regarding the religious practice of German Jews. Remarkably good records of their grandparents’ religious lives afford the opportunity to explore four different German Jewish families: the Strausses—Eleanor’s mother’s family; the Kohns—her father’s family; the Sterns—Lester’s mother’s family; and the Levys—Lester’s father’s family. All four families migrated to the United States from German-speaking places before 1870. The Sterns settled in Philadelphia.⁶ The other three families became Baltimoreans. The Kohns and the Sterns affiliated with Reform congregations, while the Strausses and the Levys observed the Sabbath, kept kosher both in the home and outside, and otherwise remained traditional. And there was “intermarriage.” The Orthodox Clara Strauss married the ultra-Reform Benno Kohn; the Reform Beatrice Stern married the traditional William Levy. For both couples, traditional Judaism triumphed. Beatrice Stern and William Levy affiliated with the city’s traditional Chizuk Amuno congregation, where his family had been among the earliest members. Clara Strauss and Benno Kohn worshipped at Baltimore’s traditional Shearith Israel congregation, founded by her father.

Taken together, their stories provide a meaningful lens through which to reexamine the German Jewish experience. Two of the four families did not embrace Reform although they were economically successful and socially prominent. It would be easier

Benno and Clara Kohn, c. 1895.

(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2004.13.67.)

if the religious experience of the Levys and Strausses could be explained as anomalous and peculiar, but such an explanation would be incorrect. These families were part of a sizeable and important minority, the experience of which has, to date, been largely ignored.⁷ While there were real and abiding differences in religious practice within the community of German Jews in Baltimore, they strained, but never ripped, the community's social fabric. Moreover, the differences were apparently far from insurmountable.

Despite the fact that within the Stern-Levy and Strauss-Kohn families each couple had a member raised as a Reform Jew, traditional Judaism triumphed in their homes and lives. In the case of the Levys, synagogue activities centered on Chizuk Amuno where, as with two generations before them, they assumed leadership roles. In the case of the Kohns, synagogue life was entirely focused on Shearith Israel, first in its downtown location and later in its Upper Park Heights satellite. Understanding the histories of these congregations in the context of these families is important to the largely overlooked story of German Jews in America who opted to remain traditional in their religious practices.

The Levys and Chizuk Amuno

Soon after arriving in Baltimore in 1866, Michael Simon (M. S.) and Betsy Jacobs Levy became members of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation on Lloyd Street, which then followed Orthodox ritual. As pious Jews who observed the Sabbath and holidays "with love and with understanding of the meaning and significance," the Levys kept kosher both in their home and outside, "where their observance entailed inconvenience or difficulty." A grandson wrote:

In act and thought, in form and spirit, Michael and Betsy Levy lived the ideal Jewish life. They did not, however, regard the Jewish life as something esoteric, which had to be reconciled with American life through compromise, but as the embodiment of living ideals, which they could make a part of their being without shutting themselves off from the world around them. For they were Americans, as well as Jews, and were thoroughly

imbued with all that was best in the culture of their adopted land.⁸

As “Jew and Jewess” and “loyal members of the house of Israel,” M. S. and Betsy Levy subscribed to the “religious doctrines of traditional Judaism, and their never wavering faith were [*sic*] supplemented by a scrupulous observance of Jewish law and custom.”⁹

Given that commitment, it is not surprising that M. S. Levy was part of the 1870 schism in which, in response to a proposal at Baltimore Hebrew for a mixed-gender choir (a notion that was anathema to those who favored traditional practice), a dozen men resigned and founded the traditional Chizuk Amuno congregation. Although not a founder, Levy joined in early 1872.¹⁰

For its first five years, the members of Chizuk Amuno worshipped in Exeter Hall near Fayette Street in East Baltimore. In the mid 1870s, the congregation built a building (today known as B’nai Israel) on Lloyd Street, down the block from Baltimore Hebrew. During these years, M. S. Levy began his service to the congregation, serving on the book and school committees where he butted heads with Rabbi Henry W. Schneeberger, the congregation’s first rabbi and “the first American born, university-trained, ordained rabbi in the United States,” on the issue of instruction in German.¹¹ The rabbi wanted Judaic studies given in Hebrew or English, an arrangement acceptable to the school commissioners. But, like every German immigrant congregation, the commissioners wanted German language instruction as well because German was also the first language of many members. Although this desire was common among German immigrant congregations, Rabbi Schneeberger “vehemently disagreed.” After a year’s postponement, German language instruction finally began in 1878. Ironically, interest in German soon waned. The language was dropped as a religious school requirement in 1886 and totally abandoned two years later.¹²

Schneeberger’s unwillingness to embrace German language instruction may have reflected the fact that Chizuk Amuno, more than the other congregations founded by German-speaking Jews, was relatively welcoming to newly arrived co-religionists from

eastern Europe. Chizuk Amuno members shared many characteristics with these immigrants. Like the newcomers, the Levys, the Friedenwalds (who had founded the congregation), and other Chizuk Amuno members kept kosher, prayed daily in Hebrew, established communal organizations, and had a strong sense of Jewish identity. Members of Chizuk Amuno may thus have been more willing to overlook class and language differences to focus on similarities and take "the lead in welcoming the Russian immigrants."¹³

By the 1880s, despite their welcome to these immigrant co-religionists settling in East Baltimore, many congregants of Chizuk Amuno, like members of the other congregations founded by German Jews, were moving to newer, more gracious homes far northwest of the Lloyd Street neighborhood in East Baltimore. Wanting to relocate the synagogue near many of its congregants, leaders of Chizuk Amuno began looking for a new site. In 1895, this congregation, like the other German congregations would do by 1903, built a new synagogue in the fashionable Eutaw Place neighborhood.¹⁴

M. S. Levy played a very significant role in the development of Chizuk Amuno's new building. He chaired the new building committee and headed the congregation's committee to sell the old Lloyd Street synagogue. Located at McCulloh and Mosher streets, the new synagogue was erected on land that was selected, bought (for \$9,000), and given to the congregation by Levy.¹⁵ He also commissioned Joseph Evans Sperry to be the architect and George A. Blake to be the builder.¹⁶ Levy served as Chizuk Amuno's vice president in 1894, and then, from 1902 (following the death of Aaron Friedenwald) until his own death nine years later, he was the congregation's president.¹⁷

Levy women also led Chizuk Amuno. When the congregation moved uptown in 1895, Betsy Levy, her daughter-in-law Bertha Arnold Levy, and Birdie Friedenwald, together with the Ladies' Auxiliary Society (which Betsy Levy led for six years), gave the new building a "perpetual light, two handsome candelabra, cushions, carpets, curtains for the shrine, decorations for the reading desk and two handsome platform chairs." These women's

*Former Chizuk Amuno synagogue, 1501 McCulloh Street,
now the New Metropolitan Baptist Church.
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #1998.124.20.)*

efforts on behalf of their synagogue were typical. According to historian Hasia Diner, the synagogue's holy objects—Torah covers, binders, curtains—were “either made by the wives of members or purchased with money the women raised.” Under Betsy Levy's leadership, the Ladies' Auxiliary Society not only decorated the new building, it maintained its own investment account. In 1902, Betsy Levy led this group to donate \$5,000 worth of railway bonds to the congregation to be cashed in and used to reduce the mortgage on the building.¹⁸

When Chizuk Amuno moved uptown, its membership was only thirty men, its lowest point in the two decades since its founding. It was in a precarious state both religiously and financially. The dearth of members forced the board to pay men to attend minyanim. Fortunately for the congregation, the growth of the Jewish population in the Eutaw Place neighborhood was rap-

id: one hundred new members joined Chizuk Amuno within its first decade there. Many of those who joined were eastern Europeans who had reached a stable level and moved uptown from the East Baltimore Jewish ghetto. Thus, the welcome extended to the immigrants reflected common religious practices and identity, but also the newcomers' improved financial position as well as other practical considerations.¹⁹

Although the Levys remained involved with Chizuk Amuno for generations, they were also engaged with other Jewish congregations both in and out of Baltimore. For years, when Jews were excluded from fashionable Saratoga Springs, M. S. and Betsy Levy summered at Sharon Springs, New York. There, in 1904, M. S. Levy helped found the congregation to which he gave generous gifts and for which he served as president from 1907 until his death in 1911, overlapping with his leadership of Chizuk Amuno. Like many Jewish Baltimoreans, the Levys also summered in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After Betsy Levy's death in 1906, her husband memorialized her with a perpetual light at Atlantic City's Congregation Rodef Shalom.²⁰

Betsy and M. S. Levy's ten children proved another impetus for congregational involvement and financial support. For example, when their son, Jacob, died in 1899, the Levys made a gift to South Baltimore's Rodfe Zadek congregation to purchase an eternal light in his memory. When their daughter Rachel moved to Richmond, Virginia, her father visited and attended services at Congregation Keneseth Israel to observe *yarzheit*. "Noticing that the tablets on which were inscribed the first words of the Ten Commandments were not so good as might be desired, he gave the congregation the money to purchase better ones."²¹ M. S. Levy was also responsible for preventing the foreclosure of Baltimore's Congregation Beth Yaakov's mortgage in 1908. This was a generous gesture to an eastern European Orthodox shul.²²

William Levy, the Levys' oldest son and one of the two who became principals in the straw hat business, married Beatrice Stern, a Philadelphia native.²³ Although raised a Reform Jew, once married and in Baltimore, she joined her husband and his family at Chizuk Amuno where she took an active role.²⁴ William and

*M. S. Levy and Sons factory, Paca and Lombard streets.
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2002.79.271.)*

Beatrice had two children. In 1909, their son, Lester, became a bar mitzvah at Chizuk Amuno. In honor of that event, his parents contributed ice cream and cakes to the children at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. A party at the Maryland Theater followed lunch for invited guests. There the children had reserved seats at the home of the "finest vaudeville acts in the city." After the show, the bar mitzvah party went to Doebreiner's, a renowned ice cream and cake shop that "formed a part of the Bar Mitzvah ritual for many years, almost as important as (some thought more important than) the religious ceremony itself." During their children's childhood years, the Levys lived at 2352 Eutaw Place, a mile walk from Chizuk Amuno's 1895 building.²⁵

William Levy, meantime, developed a national profile in Jewish life. A huge supporter of Jewish causes in Baltimore and around the world, William and his brother and business partner

Julius were key players in the amalgamation of Baltimore's German Jewish and eastern European charities into the Associated Jewish Charities in the early 1920s. Like his parents, William Levy (described by his son Lester, as "a religious man. People looked on him as an Orthodox Jew") was a member of Chizuk Amuno's Board of Directors and, with Harry Friedenwald, the noted ophthalmologist and son of Chizuk Amuno founder Aaron Friedenwald, represented the congregation at the organizing meeting of the United Synagogue of America, the organizational arm of Conservative Judaism.²⁶ In February 1913, Levy and Friedenwald, together with representatives of twenty-two other congregations from around the country, met "seeking a course between traditional practices and moderate innovations in congregational life."²⁷ Both men, together with their rabbi, were named to committees of the nascent United Synagogue of America.²⁸ At his death, an obituary in the *Forward* reported (in Yiddish), "William Levy was to Baltimore what Dr. L. K. Frankel was to New York Jewry."²⁹

Meantime, in the early 1920s Chizuk Amuno's leaders decided to move further uptown to a more fashionable address just south of Druid Hill Park. Betsy and M. S. Levy's daughter, Esther Levy Ephraim, headed the apron booth at a three-day fundraising event at Carlin's Hall at which women raised an impressive \$10,000 for the new building.³⁰ William Levy was the congregation's president when the decision to relocate was made. Like his father, William secured architect Joseph Evans Sperry to design the new building in a Romanesque-Byzantine style.³¹

From the beginning, plans for the Eutaw Place property featured a school building separated from the main synagogue. During William Levy's extended absence from the city, other congregational leaders determined that their financial resources were too meager for a separate structure and decided to integrate the classroom space into the synagogue building. Without consulting President Levy, the congregation sold half of the land. So great was Levy's disappointment in their decision that he resigned from the presidency at the end of a year!³²

*The Levy Family 1911, (L to R): Selma Levy Oppenheimer,
Lester Levy, William Levy, Beatrice Stern Levy.
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2002.79.338.)*

Despite disappointment with the sale of the lot, the Levy family did not disengage from Chizuk Amuno or from the issue of the school building. Shortly after the sale of the land, an effort to buy a second building at Linden and Chauncey avenues was tempered by the board's decision not to commit to a new building unless half of the money was in hand. Beatrice Stern Levy, sisterhood president before, during, and after the single year of her husband's congregational presidency, led her group in raising money for the new school. Her daughter, Selma Levy Oppenheimer, remembered: "Mama was the one who proposed starting a

building fund for the new school with moneys realized from card parties and bazaars."³³ William's brother, Julius Levy, meanwhile, offered to pay fifteen percent of the total cost of building a school center or the full expense of converting existing vestry rooms in the new building into additional classrooms. The board accepted the second option and two more classrooms were built.³⁴ The Sperry-designed building then featured seven classrooms and a sanctuary with seating for twelve hundred, evidence of the congregation's swift growth.

At its new home on Eutaw Place and Chauncey Avenue, Chizuk Amuno's membership numbered 200 male members, 325 sisterhood members, and a Young People's League of 300 members. The Hebrew school enrolled 260 pupils, with an additional 100 students enrolled on Sunday mornings only. In 1925 there were 67,500 Jews in Baltimore, about eight percent of the city's population. Of those, ten thousand or so adult men were members and seat holders of synagogues, a number which included some duplication, like Lester Levy, who was a member at Chizuk Amuno as well as a seat holder at Shearith Israel.³⁵

Difficulties selling the McCulloh Street building strained Chizuk Amuno's finances. Eventually, the synagogue was sold to the Metropolitan Baptist Church in a rocky transaction in which delinquent payments caused the congregation's board periodically to delay paying interest to holders of their 6% Gold Second Mortgage Bond coupons. Understanding the plight, some bond owners returned bonds to the congregation as gifts. Julius Levy made a major contribution when he gave the Chizuk Amuno \$6,000 worth of Gold Bonds in 1924.³⁶

Julius Levy's religious life was more complicated than that of his parents or siblings. Julius clearly supported Chizuk Amuno, but while the others went to synagogue regularly, on Saturdays he was often found eating oysters at the Rennert Hotel rather than at worship services. He never took a synagogue leadership role, but did chair the Maryland Jewish Relief Committee and worked to "rescue destitute people of Eastern and Southern Europe, without regard to sect, who suffered poverty and starvation during and

after" World War I.³⁷ He was also a founder of Baltimore Hebrew College. Levy collected Asian art which formed a base for the Baltimore Museum of Art's collection. His Judaica collection, including a Sephardic Torah scroll, he contributed to Chizuk Amuno. His charity "recognized no class, creed or race," something the congregation bulletin claims was made possible by "his very Jewishness."³⁸

Leslie Moses, a grandson of M. S. and Betsy Levy and a partner in M. S. Levy and Sons, was also involved in Chizuk Amuno's affairs during this period. In 1920, Moses traveled to New York City on behalf of the congregation to interview Abba Josef Weisgal for the position of hazan. He listened to the cantor sing for more than an hour and then brokered a deal with the cantor's brother that brought Weisgal to Baltimore where he served the congregation for more than fifty years. Moses also organized the congregation's brotherhood and in 1927 was elected its first president.³⁹ Moses's uncle, William Levy, worked to make Chizuk Amuno more accessible, suggesting in 1928 that more prayers be recited in English.⁴⁰

The Levy family's interest in Jewish education and support for the Jewish Theological Seminary was abiding. In 1923, for example, William Levy called a conference in Baltimore at the Phoenix Club⁴¹ "in the interest of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the general welfare of Judaism in this country." The goal of the meeting was to appoint committees and organize to raise Baltimore's quota of \$50,000 in a national campaign to create a \$1 million seminary endowment. William Levy invited delegates from all of the city's Jewish congregations. The "small but representative gathering of leaders" that attended "exhibited the most intense interest and enthusiasm."⁴² As the keynote speaker, William Levy discussed American Jews' indifference "to spiritualism and Jewish learning." He proclaimed that it was "'high time' that the Jews of America turn their attention to the task of keeping alive the interest in our faith." In addition to saving their brethren around the world from persecution, Levy believed that Jewish learning would also "cause our Gentile fellow citizens to appreciate our rights to full citizenship," thus

allowing the United States to set an example for the rest of the world.⁴³

Cyrus Adler, one of the most prominent Jewish communal leaders of his era, spoke after Levy.⁴⁴ He argued that, because the European centers of Jewish learning were being destroyed, “either by persecution or emigration of the Jews, or because of a tendency to drift into the study of other subjects,” if American Jews did not carry on Jewish learning, the future of world Jewry would be imperiled. Although Adler lauded American Jews for having supported “bodily and spiritually” the Jews of Europe, he was concerned that in the process they had “taken little care of their own spiritual needs.” The result was a need for American Jews “to do something for ourselves. Our rabbis must be our teachers and in order to equip our rabbis, we must have properly supported institutions and endowments.”⁴⁵

Julius Levy responded to the comments of Adler and his brother, William. He scolded American Jewry for its lack of interest in religion and Jewish learning, saying, “not interest in Judaism, but pride of race makes us the philanthropists for which we are accredited. The Jew of this country cares little for Judaism because of his lack of education in Judaism. It is not philanthropy to contribute. It is duty.”⁴⁶ Putting their own money where their mouths were, brothers Julius and William Levy each offered a \$1,000 match for every \$9,000 raised in Baltimore.⁴⁷

Supporting Jewish learning was important to generations of Levys as a means to sustain tradition. Betsy Levy left bequests to a range of Jewish charities including the Baltimore Talmud Torah Society and Chizuk Amuno.⁴⁸ M. S. Levy included in his generous bequest to Chizuk Amuno \$10,000 to endow a fund to support three scholars who studied Talmud daily.⁴⁹ Their son, Julius, generously supported Jewish education across denominational lines. At his death in 1926, he bequeathed \$25,000 to reduce Chizuk Amuno’s mortgage. In addition, he gave \$10,000 to each of five Jewish schools: Baltimore Talmud Torah Society, Baltimore Hebrew College (of which he was a founder), the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

(RIETS, a predecessor of Yeshiva University), and Hebrew University in Jerusalem.⁵⁰ William Levy, too, supported Jewish higher education, bequeathing \$20,000 to the Jewish Theological Seminary when he died in 1931.⁵¹

Beatrice Stern Levy was, like her mother-in-law, Betsy Jacobs Levy, a longtime Chizuk Amuno sisterhood president. She felt strongly about the role of women as transmitters of Judaism, asking fellow sisterhood members, "Do we make of our homes sanctuaries, where our children imbibe the ethics and ceremonies so dear to us as Mothers in Israel? Do we attend divine Services every Sabbath, so that by our presence in this beautiful House of God we inspire our children, that they, too, will feel it incumbent on them to worship with us?"⁵² After her husband's death, Beatrice Stern Levy continued to embrace Chizuk Amuno's traditional practices, yet her early training as a Reform Jew contributed to her progressive religious views. A believer in egalitarianism, she was disturbed that women did not sit on the congregation's board. She agitated for change, repeatedly requesting that two sisterhood members be appointed to the board. In 1943, after consulting with other Jewish experts, the rabbi allowed the sisterhood and brotherhood presidents to serve as ex-officio members, but decreed that women were to "abstain from voting, especially on all purely religious matters."⁵³ Beatrice Stern Levy was only partially satisfied. She wanted full voting rights for women.⁵⁴ She was also keenly interested in the work of the Jewish Theological Seminary. She raised money for the seminary's Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall for Women where in 1960 a room was designated the Beatrice Stern Levy Baltimore Women's Room.⁵⁵

Despite their interest in Jewish education and the fact that, in the twentieth century's early years, Chizuk Amuno was the center of Baltimore's Zionist efforts, the Levy family was not deeply involved in Zionism. Through their longstanding friendship with the Friedenwald family, the Levys were likely aware of some of the Baltimore community's Zionist activities.⁵⁶ Harry Friedenwald with his father, Aaron, was active in the Zionist Organization of America (previously the Federation of American Zionists) and

maintained correspondence with Zionist leaders including Chaim Weizmann, Louis Brandeis, and Judah Magnes. In 1935, Harry and his daughter, Julia Friedenwald Strauss (sister-in-law of Benno and Clara Strauss Kohn), traveled to Palestine and visited Henrietta Szold.⁵⁷

At the synagogue, Lester Levy met Harry Friedenwald's son, Jonas, "a boy who became [his] closest friend, one with whom [his] high school and college years were interwoven."⁵⁸ Perhaps as a result of that friendship, Lester Levy was more Zionist than his forebears. Like his parents and his uncle Julius, Lester Levy volunteered time to the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he served on the board. Unlike them, he also served on the board of the American Friends of Hebrew University.⁵⁹

Although the Levys did not embrace Zionism prior to World War II, they actively supported efforts to aid German refugees arriving in Baltimore. Eleanor Kohn Levy and her brother, department store executive Martin B. Kohn, were both deeply involved.⁶⁰ Martin Kohn organized the Jewish Welfare Fund to channel help overseas. From 1943 to 1945, "the most heartbreaking years of that decade," with "supreme faith and courage," Kohn served as president of Baltimore's Jewish Welfare Fund, an organization he had founded to channel help overseas. He continued on the board through the years of immigration to Palestine and the rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948.⁶¹

Chizuk Amuno, too, worked to support the refugees, welcoming refugee children for free as long as space permitted. During the High Holy Day services of 1938 "several additional rows of seats were placed in the synagogue to accommodate the needs of the refugees." Although the congregation's board by then disapproved of religious services with German overtones, they did permit Rabbi Adolph Coblenz to deliver lectures in German, the announcements of which were made in the *Jewish Times*. These well-attended lectures continued for several years.⁶²

Despite its affiliation with the United Synagogue of America, by 1947 Chizuk Amuno was one of only four (of approximately four hundred) similarly affiliated congregations that maintained separate seating for men and women, the "most commonly

accepted yardstick for differentiating Conservatism from Orthodoxy."⁶³ The founding that year of Baltimore's Beth El as a Conservative congregation with mixed seating that immediately affiliated with the United Synagogue of America spurred Chizuk Amuno to consider following suit, a major change from its seventy-five years as a traditional congregation. Although Chizuk Amuno had been intimately involved with the Conservative movement since the movement's inception, the congregation advertised itself as Orthodox, even as its board repeatedly rebuffed invitations from the Council of Orthodox Rabbis to join that association.

When a formal discussion of mixed or family seating was held, Beatrice Stern Levy and Isaac Potts (who married Julia Friedenwald Strauss after each had been widowed) spoke for the majority in favor of the change, which was ratified by a vote of 284 to 20. Beatrice Stern Levy "penned her own thought in a convincing argument and rose in the midst of the congregation to express her view urging that mixed pews shall henceforth be allowed."⁶⁴ According to Chizuk Amuno's Rabbi Israel M. Goldman, "[h]er presence and her message helped the congregation make this important step forward."⁶⁵ Her role was critical; she "helped to weight the sentiments of the members of the congregation" in what was called the "most acrimonious dispute in the history of the Congregation."⁶⁶ In light of the change, the congregation's board removed Chizuk Amuno from Orthodox listings and relocated it under the heading "Conservative." Liturgical changes soon followed. In 1949, nearly eighty years after the founding of Chizuk Amuno as a protest against the mixed choir at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, a mixed choir was begun at Chizuk Amuno. Three years later, bat mitzvah for girls were approved.⁶⁷

The Strausses and Shearith Israel

Eleanor Kohn Levy's parents, Benno Kohn and Clara Strauss, were an extreme "intermarriage." Her father was a Reform Jew whose family affiliated at Har Sinai Congregation, in 1842, the year of its founding. Har Sinai is the oldest Reform congregation

in the United States that was founded as Reform and where, for a short time, Sabbath (or weekly) services were held on Sundays, similar to Philadelphia's Keneseth Israel.⁶⁸ His parents, Bernhard Kohn and Mathilde Lauer, emigrated from the German states and remained in touch with family there.⁶⁹ Less is known about this family than the others in this study. Mathilde Lauer Kohn was institutionalized at the Mt. Hope asylum, a fact withheld from her grandchildren who thought she was dead.⁷⁰

Clara Strauss was a daughter of Moses and Caroline Strauss. Together with his Württemberg-born younger brothers, Abraham and Louis, Moses Strauss founded Strauss Brothers, an importing and jobbing dry goods firm, in Baltimore in 1855. Over the decades, the business grew from a humble enterprise into "one of the most ample stocks of dry goods to be found in Baltimore." By 1910, the firm occupied "two magnificent warehouses at the northwestern corner of Lombard and Paca Streets."⁷¹ Strauss Brothers sent traveling salesmen out throughout the south and southwest. In the second generation, six sons of the three founders took over the business.

The Strauss family was "very religious—orthodox and observant." A true indicator of their level of observance is the fact that Strauss Brothers was "one of the few business houses that remained closed on Saturdays." The sabbatarian closing of the business made employment there attractive to other observant Jews like Louis Levin who were unwilling to desecrate the Sabbath.⁷²

In 1879, Moses Strauss helped found Shearith Israel, the last of the six Baltimore German Jewish congregations, from the merger of two smaller congregations with the belief that "forming a stronger body . . . would be more able to resist the influences of Reform." Moses Strauss was the first president of the congregation, serving twenty-six years until his death in 1905.⁷³ During Strauss's tenure, Shearith Israel called the Zionist Schepsel Schaffer from Germany to be the congregation's first rabbi.⁷⁴ He arrived in 1893.

Louis Strauss's son, Emanuel, gained notoriety because of what he did for love. Like his male cousins, in the last decades of

*Clara Strauss Kohn and her siblings, c. 1890.
 (L to R) Meyer Strauss, Katy Strauss (Miller),
 Jane (Jennie) Strauss (Heineman), Sophie Strauss (Friedman),
 Clara Strauss (Kohn), Laser Strauss, Theresa Strauss (Hutzler).
 (Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2002.79.284.)*

the nineteenth century, Emanuel was learning to take over the reigns of the family business. There he met Lillie Williams who was in the firm's employ. The two fell in love—"a case of love at first sight." Their union was complicated by religious difference. She was a Methodist; he "belonged to one of the strictest of the orthodox [Jewish] families." The couple was not deterred:

[T]he young lady entered upon a long probation to become a convert to the Isrealitish [*sic*] religion. She studied Hebrew for six months. After the usual demands "The House of Judgment" admitted her to the faith. She then underwent the ceremony of

passing through the "Miboah" [*mikvah*] or bath, and her name was changed from Lillie to Rebecca. Then they were secretly married.⁷⁵

The couple finally announced their union in early April 1890. The families were not happy; indeed their parents "refused their blessings." Still Lillie/Rebecca and Emanuel soldiered on. They went on a bridal tour, arriving in Chicago, a fact known because their marriage was so noteworthy that the story was picked up by the *New York Times* in an article titled "Became a Hebrew for Love." The article noted that "[t]he Hebrew circles of this city are considerably agitated by the announcement of the marriage of Emanuel Strauss and Miss Williams." So unusual was this kind of intermarriage that the *Times* concluded: "It is the first case of its kind ever known in Baltimore."⁷⁶

While Emanuel's intermarriage was notable nationally, other "intermarriages" also occurred in the Strauss family. After two of Abraham Strauss's children married Jewish but nonobservant spouses, parental blessing for a marriage became dependent "on the groom's or bride's agreement to observe" the rules of traditional Judaism.⁷⁷

Moses and Caroline Strauss had six children: Sophie, Katy, Jennie, Theresa, Clara, and Meyer.⁷⁸ Although the daughters married Jews, not a single one married an observant man. In contrast, Meyer married the very observant Julia Friedenwald, the daughter of Harry and Birdie Friedenwald and granddaughter of Aaron Friedenwald, founders of Chizuk Amuno and major Baltimore Zionists. Despite the fact that the Strauss girls married less observant men, all but Theresa (who married Louis Hutzler and embraced Reform practice) "maintained orthodox households, more or less, until they died."⁷⁹ Moses Strauss, meanwhile, was devoted to Shearith Israel. There was "no sacrifice that it demanded of him which he did not willingly make."⁸⁰ Each morning and evening he attended services. He gave to "all the communal charities" and he answered the "many private calls [for money] that were constantly made upon him."⁸¹ Strauss witnessed the congregation's relocation to McCulloh Street near Bloom Street in 1903. Shearith Israel was the last of the city's five extant German

Shearith Israel on McCulloh & Bloom streets, Baltimore, 1969.

(Photograph by Milton Alpert, Courtesy of Milton Alpert, 1986, #1986.42.3.5.)

synagogues to relocate to the Eutaw Place neighborhood. The new building featured a *mikvah* and was part of a major demographic shift in which the new synagogues were “stately stone structures intended to be permanent fixtures in the new neighborhood.” Together, the five synagogues (including Shearith Israel and Chizuk Amuno) marked Eutaw Place as a Jewish neighborhood.⁸²

Shearith Israel remained central throughout Clara Strauss Kohn’s life, and she did not assume her husband’s religious identity as Beatrice Stern Levy had done. Instead Benno Kohn ratcheted up his religious involvement by embracing traditional Judaism. After his death, a commentator proclaimed: “His home exhaled a Jewish spirit that gained its finest beauty from the manner in which he yielded to and assisted the devout wife and mother in maintaining the religious spirit she desired.”⁸³ Clara Strauss Kohn was Orthodox when she married Benno Kohn and

“persisted in her observance.” With her husband’s “consent and support,” Clara “maintained a kosher house . . . observed the Sabbath, ate kosher outside as well as inside.” Clara and Benno Kohn’s children, Martin, Bernard, Eleanor, and Carrie, were raised “orthodox and observant.”⁸⁴

In 1909, the Kohn family moved to Mount Washington, a fashionable railroad suburb then outside the city limits. They were true Jewish pioneers in an area that was then bereft of any Jewish institutional life. To attend worship services, Clara walked four miles each way to Shearith Israel downtown. In 1924 Shearith Israel made plans to open a satellite site at Glen and Park Heights avenues. Delighted that the new facility halved her weekly walk to Sabbath services, Clara Strauss Kohn shifted her attention there; “in her white dress, she sat in the front row upstairs.”⁸⁵

By opening a branch at Glen and Park Heights avenues, Shearith Israel became the first (and for years, only) congregation to fill the void of organized Jewish life in the new northwest suburbs. That location became the Sabbath worship place of choice for increasing numbers of traditional Jews (including Chizuk Amuno stalwart Lester Levy) moving to northwest Baltimore. An early-1920s congregational document explains Shearith Israel’s intentions in opening its new building. Like many other congregations confronted by the realization that growing numbers of their congregants were moving to new streetcar suburbs, Shearith Israel considered a move to Forest Park. Unlike the rest, however, it decided on Upper Park Heights. By opening the new branch while continuing to operate the Eutaw Place building, Shearith Israel’s leadership determined that those who remained in town would “have the use and benefit of the Synagogue as heretofore.”⁸⁶ For those moving to the suburbs, the congregation wanted to

provide a house of worship for the number of loyal members and attendants (though [the latter were] not members but just as well appreciated) who are about to remove in the near future, and who deeply regret to sever their relations with the Congregation, and to whom, by the way, the Congregation owes something for their loyalty. These men may before long prove

the pioneers of a great Jewish development and may even prepare all religious comforts for many of us who may follow them.⁸⁷

In 1924, the congregation began holding services in the new neighborhood.⁸⁸ Initially Sabbath services were held at a congregant's home, but growing attendance necessitated the temporary use of a new, vacant cottage for the holidays in the autumn.⁸⁹ Not only did Shearith Israel want to accommodate its own suburban members, it also wanted to provide an antidote to what it considered negative tendencies in the area:

The locality in question, while rapidly growing almost entirely Jewish, unfortunately, possesses rather little Jewishness and whatever little is being done is in that direction of the modern kind, in which the proportion of Jewishness about equals the percentage of "kick" permitted under the Volsted laws. But this unfortunate condition is absolutely the result of ignorance and could be overcome by enlightenment, and therefore it is the duty of the Shearith Israel, the leader and example of Judaism, to place itself in the midst of the dark ignorance and banish it by the light of the Torah. The Shearith Israel should occupy the position of the lighthouse on the ocean, throwing out in the darkness of night brilliant lights, indicating to the sailing vessels the danger points and guiding them on safe lines.⁹⁰

Given the Jewish migration to the neighborhood, "the entire structure will satisfy the increasingly large community which has been moving to the Park Heights Section."⁹¹ It was the goal of the congregation that the "young branch" it planted "in the desert" would "grow into a vineyard and how appropriately will apply the words of the prophet, 'like grapes in the wilderness have I found Israel.'" ⁹²

Plans for the new stone building ("one of the simplest of structures, but . . . in delightful harmony with the surrounding country") included a "Talmud Torah and Community Center," from which "the blazing lights of the Torah will guide the young by affording them religious and educational training as well as social and modern activities." It featured "extremely commodious" school rooms to facilitate a Hebrew School with "attractive

playgrounds" on the large adjacent lot. To accommodate women, a meeting room was constructed, and an Assembly Hall was designed to serve as a "Jewish Centre." Smith and May designed the building and Thomas W. Hicks and Sons built it.⁹³

Shearith Israel's building decision is consistent with the popular synagogue-center movement that, by 1925, had "become the leading trend in modern Jewish life." The synagogue-center, "originally and quintessentially" American, was "the first synagogue type without precedent in the European past." Shearith Israel's goal, however, was "not modern Judaism (the danger point of our existence) but Judaized modernism."⁹⁴

Traditional Jews and Suburbanization

Lester Levy married Eleanor Kohn in 1922. Unlike their own parents, both sets of which featured one traditional Jew and one Reform Jew, in Lester and Eleanor's case the bride and groom both entered marriage as traditional Jews. Their issue was synagogue affiliation. Lester's family had long been members of Chizuk Amuno. Eleanor descended from the founder of Shearith Israel, where she had been raised. As traditional Jews, they observed the Sabbath and kept a kosher home. They maintained kashrut both in their home and, like their traditional forebears, outside of it as well. On their lengthy European honeymoon, Eleanor wrote to her parents that in Rome they "tried a good Kosher restaurant for lunch. Meat tasted quite good for a change and the food *looked* clean."⁹⁵

Despite having witnessed her father, Benno Kohn (the Reform Har Sinai congregant), adapt to and embrace her mother's Orthodox religious traditions through their long affiliation at Shearith Israel, Eleanor Kohn Levy claimed that in religious affairs, "a wife has to cling to her husband." Thus, Eleanor "went to the synagogue that Lester attended."⁹⁶ Here, though, there is irony. For the first two years of their marriage, Eleanor and Lester lived in a fashionable apartment near Druid Hill Park. Like the Levy forebears, Eleanor and Lester did, in fact, attend Chizuk Amuno. Then, expecting their first child, the Levys relocated to a rental house in Mount Washington, the railroad suburb to which

Eleanor's parents had moved fifteen years earlier. Once there, attending Chizuk Amuno became difficult.

Expanding residential zones and synagogue relocation altered the Levys' relationship to Chizuk Amuno. When Lester and Eleanor Levy moved to Mount Washington, they moved to an area that was largely bereft of any formal Jewish communal life. With the opening of the Glen Avenue branch of Shearith Israel in 1925, Lester began a decades-long tradition of worshipping there on Saturday mornings while retaining his membership at Chizuk Amuno, where he not only had deep and abiding family ties, but also a full membership. Shearith Israel allowed those who did not fully observe the Sabbath to be seat holders but not full members. Although Lester was Sabbath observant, the fact that his straw hat business operated on Saturday disqualified him as a Sabbath observer in the eyes of Shearith Israel and thus eliminated the possibility of his election to full membership. Lester Levy was not alone in that exclusion. It affected his cousin and business partner, Leslie Moses, and his brother-in-law, Martin Kohn, whose department store, Hochschild Kohn, was also open on Saturdays.⁹⁷ Thus Lester Levy publicly promoted himself as a "devoted member of Chizuk Amuno Congregation."⁹⁸ In 1946, on the occasion of Chizuk Amuno's seventy-fifth anniversary, Lester Levy acted as toastmaster.⁹⁹

Although the Levys did, in fact, maintain their affiliation at Chizuk Amuno, they attended Shearith Israel at Glen Avenue weekly until Chizuk Amuno finally began holding worship services in Pikesville during the 1950s, in anticipation of the congregation's relocation to nearby Stevenson in 1962.¹⁰⁰ A cousin remembered the role that Shearith Israel played for the Levy-Kohn family. "It was very reassuring to peer down from the balcony at Shearith Israel and see [Lester] in the bunch below with Pop [Leslie Moses] and Herbert [Moses] and to look forward to the walk back up Park Heights Avenue."¹⁰¹ Leslie Moses's Sabbath observance enhanced his relationship with his children. His daughter, Amelia, recalls, "we benefited enormously from the fact that Pop so meticulously kept Sabbath and the Jewish holidays Whereas other fathers worked on Saturdays or were on

*Hochschild Kohn & Co. building, c. 1930.
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #1987.226.009.)*

the golf course, Pop was with the family, at shul, at home, or at Gigi's [Alfred's mother, Rose Levy Moses]. He did not ride so we all walked together, a mile each way to Shearith Israel [Glen Avenue], a mile each way to Gigi's apartment."¹⁰² Worship was one of the many ties that bound the family just as conversely family bound its members to religious affiliation and practice.

Bucking the Trend: Traditional Jews of German Descent

The Levys and the Strausses bucked the trend. Although they descended from German-speaking Jews, they did not embrace Reform.¹⁰³ Rather, they affirmed and reaffirmed their commitment to traditional Jewish practice through their synagogue involvement,

private religious practice, active support of traditional Jewish education, outreach to eastern European Orthodox immigrants, and leadership of the larger Jewish community. What makes their journey even more amazing is that it took place along a suburban trajectory. As these families and others like them moved into new suburbs, their congregations, institutional life, and traditions migrated with them. Not until after World War II does sociologist Marshall Sklare's correlation between suburbanization and Conservative Judaism hold true.

As early as the 1850s, one historian notes, "there were few who were willing or able to break completely with the past; there were fewer yet who were able to adhere to it."¹⁰⁴ The Levys and Strausses were part of that minority. Relatively early business successes may have made it a little easier for them to hold fast to traditional practices, something that was undoubtedly more complicated for rank and file workers in the face of American business life, which often required laboring on the Sabbath or peddling in places where kosher food was not available. Still, if economic success portended traditional religious practice, then the wealthiest Jews would have been the torchbearers for traditional Judaism, something that did not often happen. So, what we are left with is that Jews like the Levys and the Strausses remained steadfast in their commitment to traditional Judaism because it was at the core of who and what they were. This was a choice made by succeeding generations and, as Marsha Rozenblit notes, one available to those in Baltimore, a city whose congregations repeatedly split and relocated but whose Jews lived and worked together beyond parochialism.¹⁰⁵ The brand of traditionalism practiced by the Levys and the Strausses also shatters the neat categories of German versus eastern European, Uptown versus Downtown. These were Jews who, while traditional in their own practice, welcomed other Jews. The evidence of their openness may be glimpsed in a number of ways from the "intermarriages" of Clara Strauss and Benno Kohn and Beatrice Stern and William Levy to the commitments which the Levys, Kohns, and others made to pan-Jewish causes—local, national, and international organizations that served any Jew. Like much good history, their religious lives as

traditional Jews adds subtlety to the patterns of American Jewish history and calls into question the adequacy and veracity of usual divides and distinctions between immigrant waves.

NOTES

¹ Scholars of American Jewish history have delineated the differences between the relatively few earlier arriving German Jews and the many later arriving eastern European Jews, portraying the former as quickly acculturated, economically successful, and religiously reformed. By focusing on the nineteenth century “as a time when Jews in their new American home eagerly shed the restraints of the past and rushed into innovation of both public rites and private codes of behavior,” historians have “worked on the assumption that *reform* (lower case) meant the same as *Reform* (upper case) and that change involved an all-or-nothing formula.” That flawed interpretation goes on to argue that had it not been for the eastern European influx after 1880, “normative Judaism would have disappeared from America.” The historians’ point of view combined with their choice of subjects — “the lives of Reform rabbis, the rise of Reform congregations and Reform’s institutional triumphs” — help to skew our understanding of the religious experience of German Jewry in America, such that experiences of traditional Jews have been largely overlooked. Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore, 1992), 119, 123.

² When Isaac Mayer Wise visited Baltimore in 1864, there were four synagogues: Baltimore Hebrew, Hebrew Friendship (Oheb Israel), Har Sinai, and Oheb Shalom. By 1879, two more had been added: Chizuk Amuno and Shearith Israel, both of which were founded as traditional. Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia, 1971), 108–110.

³ Of 533 Jewish congregations in existence in the United States in 1890, only 217 were Reform. The other 316 “adhered to the Orthodox service.” Many of the Orthodox congregations, however, were “small, poor, and transitory.” The Conservative movement only formally began with the creation of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1902 and the founding of United Synagogue of America in 1913. Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America: The Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present*, rev. ed (New York, 1981), 181–183.

⁴ It is difficult to find precise membership numbers for the six congregations in the period under study. Isaac Fein reports membership numbers for the 1860s (before the establishment of either Chizuk Amuno or Shearith Israel) as follows: Eden Street Shul, 180 members; Baltimore Hebrew, 150 members; Oheb Shalom, 105 members; Har Sinai, 85 members. They were likely larger than the traditional congregations. Fein says, “by 1880 the major congregations in the city were Reform. The newly established Chizuk Amuno . . . was the main Orthodox synagogue. There were several others, but only small ones.” In 1895, when Chizuk Amuno relocated uptown, its membership was 37. Fein, *Making of an*

American Jewish Community, 109–110, 117–118; Jan Bernhardt Schein, *On Three Pillars: The History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, 1871–1996* (Baltimore, 2000), 164.

⁵ Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 1–2.

⁶ The Sterns settled in Delaware before moving to Philadelphia.

⁷ Two notable exceptions regarding the Baltimore scene are Marsha L. Rozenblit, “Choosing a Synagogue: The Social Composition of Two German Congregations in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore,” in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Hanover, NH, 1987); and Nancy J. Ordway, “A History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation: An American Synagogue,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Baltimore Hebrew University, 1997). Another good source is Murray Friedman, ed., *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America* (Philadelphia, 1993), which includes eleven articles focused largely on the experience of mostly German Jews who stayed traditional even as the Reform movement was taking hold in many American cities.

⁸ Herbert Moses, *In Memoriam: Michael Simon Levy and Betsy Levy* (Baltimore, 1912), 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 29.

¹⁰ Chizuk Amuno had twenty-three founding members of which four were Friedenwalds (Jonas, Joseph, Isaac, and Moses). Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 9, 19; Moses, *In Memoriam*, 20. Congregations like Chizuk Amuno were, according to historian Leon Jick, part of the “handful of congregations in America in which substantial reforms had *not* been introduced and in which an accelerating program of radical revision was *not* in process” by 1870 [emphasis in original]. In Baltimore two of five congregations were thus constituted. Leon Jick, “Jews in the Synagogue—Americans Everywhere: The German-Jewish Immigration and the Emergence of the American Jewish Pattern, 1820–1870,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1973), 259.

¹¹ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47–49 (quotations), 94.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴ David Kaufman, *Cornerstones of Community: The Historic Synagogues of Maryland, 1845–1945* (Baltimore, 1999), 31.

¹⁵ Moses, *In Memoriam*, 20.

¹⁶ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 94–95.

¹⁷ Moses, *In Memoriam*, 20, 22; Isador Blum, *The Jews of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1910), 67.

¹⁸ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 95–96, 114 (first quotation); Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 120 (second quotation).

¹⁹ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 133, 164.

²⁰ Moses, *In Memoriam*, 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The Sterns and the Levys were twice related. William Levy married Beatrice Stern, and William’s sister, Debbie, married Beatrice’s brother Eugene. Alfred H. Moses, “My Father,” in (Amalie Moses Kass, Alfred H. Moses, and Claire Moses Lovett), *Memoir of Leslie William Moses, 1887–1979* (Portland, ME, 1988), 56.

²⁴ Beatrice Stern was the daughter of Morris Stern, who was born in Bavaria in 1831 and came to the United States after the German revolution of 1848. An early Jew in the state of Delaware, Morris Stern moved to Philadelphia in 1855 and was a charter member of Keneseth Israel, a Reform congregation. He married New Yorker Matilda Bamberger in 1856. Together they had eight children. Son Horace Stern was active in Jewish affairs. His contacts with the rabbinical leaders of the Reform movement were his greatest pleasure. In 1889, protesting the institution of Sunday services, he left Keneseth Israel and joined Rodeph Shalom. Undated, unattributed article in Levy Collection, Box 23, File 770, The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore (hereafter JMM).

Beatrice Stern Levy's brother, Horace Stern, became the first Jewish member of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, presiding as chief justice from 1952 to 1957. He continued to be a member of Congregation Keneseth Israel and was active in the American Jewish Committee. Murray Friedman, ed. *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940* (Philadelphia, 1983), 299; Friedman, *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, 13.

²⁵ Hebrew Orphan Asylum to Mr. and Mrs. Levy, October 31, 1909, Levy Collection, JMM; Lester Stern Levy, "Memoirs," October 5, 1983, Levy Collection, MS 127, Box 4, JMM; Avi Y. Decter and Karen L. Falk, ed., *Of Hats and Harmonies: The Recollections of Baltimore's Lester S. Levy* (Baltimore, 2006).

²⁶ In 1983 Lester wrote of his father, "by today's standards he would more likely have been dubbed a conservative." Levy, "Memoirs."

²⁷ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, p. 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

²⁹ *Forward*, August 2, 1931. Lee K. Frankel managed New York's United Hebrew Charities from 1899 to 1908. Frankel, a Philadelphia native, earned a Ph.D. in chemistry before turning his attention to public health and social welfare concerns. He then went on to an illustrious career with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and, until his death in 1931, directed the landmark health promotion and welfare work of that company. http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:5_YW_9E2n1AJ:www.casact.org/pubs/proceed/proceed31/31239.pdf+%22lee+k.+frankel%22&hl=en&ie=UTF-8 (accessed by J. Elfenbein, July 14, 2006).

³⁰ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 129, 147

³¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

³² Jewish Welfare Board, *Study of the Recreational, Social and Cultural Resources of the Jewish Community of Baltimore* (New York, June 1925), 38, Associated Collection, Box 10, 1995.98.50, JMM (hereafter cited as JWB, *Study*); Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 148. Milton Fleisher followed William Levy as president. As president of his family's successful Liberty Manufacturing Company (specializing in nightgowns), Fleisher served as congregation president for thirty-one years, earning him the title "Dean of Synagogue Presidents." Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 151-152.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁵ JWB, *Study*, 1. Leslie Moses's son, Alfred, also remembers Chizuk Amuno as "the family synagogue all of Dad's life. In the 1930s [before the Moseses moved to Bancroft Road in northwest Baltimore, in fall 1933] . . . there was an evident union between family and synagogue. Sitting in a long row to one side slightly elevated from the men's section were the 'aunts'—Gigi [Rose Levy Moses], her sisters and sisters-in-law joined by the second and third generation of family women. In an equally long row were the men of the family." Moses, "My Father," 54.

³⁶ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 164, 170. The Great Depression caused the congregation more financial uncertainty. A call for cash in May 1932 motivated Ralph L. Ephraim to give \$100, but he was the only Levy to respond.

³⁷ *Baltimore Sun*, November 23, 1926.

³⁸ *The Bulletin*, published by Chizuk Amuno's Young Peoples League, 6:3 (November 26, 1926), JMM.

³⁹ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 143–144, 161.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 166–167.

⁴¹ Established in 1866, the Phoenix Club was "the meeting place of Baltimore's wealthy Jews." Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 159.

⁴² Jewish Theological Seminary, Levy Collection, Box 21, File 709, 1, JMM.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Adler helped found and lead the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Historical Society, Jewish Publication Society, and Jewish Theological Seminary. Born in Arkansas in 1863, he moved to Philadelphia at age 6. He lived in Baltimore and Washington, DC, from 1883 to 1908. In Baltimore, he was a student at The Johns Hopkins University. In Washington, DC, he became assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. While in Baltimore he often visited the Friedenwalds, worshipping with them at Chizuk Amuno and eventually marrying Racie Friedenwald. He also spent a great deal of time at the home of Oheb Shalom's Rabbi Benjamin Szold. Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia, 1941); Ira Robinson, "Cyrus Adler, The Philadelphian," *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, ed., Friedman, 92–103.

⁴⁵ Jewish Theological Seminary, Levy Collection.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Baltimore American*, August 21, 1908. Betsy Levy's will left a total of \$3,250 to non-family members. Of this amount, \$1,000 went to Federated Jewish Charities; \$500 each to the Hebrew Children's Shelter and Protective Association, the Hebrew Friendly Inn and Aged Home, and Chizuk Amuno; and \$250 each to the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society, Baltimore Talmud Torah Society, and the Jewish Maternity Association of Philadelphia. After her death, Betsy Levy's husband and sons memorialized her by paying for a new facility for the Hebrew Sheltering Association, the first Jewish association in the city to care for neglected and dependent children who might not be orphans. The new building was named the Betsy Levy Memorial Home. The cornerstone was laid June 1, 1909, and the opening ceremony was held January 9, 1910.

⁴⁹ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 119.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 166; *Baltimore Sun*, December 15, 1926.

⁵¹ *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, December 10, 1931.

⁵² Beatrice Levy's reference to "Mothers in Israel" harks back to the Victorian era but her demand for voting rights and board representation places her in the twentieth century. Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 152-153.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

⁵⁵ Jewish Theological Seminary, Levy Collection.

⁵⁶ In the 1920s, Leslie Moses traveled to Egypt and Palestine. His experience persuaded him that "Jews and Arabs could live harmoniously together under the general protection of Great Britain and led him to oppose Zionist notions of a Jewish state until Hitlerism dispelled any illusions." He supported Hebrew University and Hadassah Hospital, but no explicitly Zionist organizations. In response to his wife's enthusiastic response to her own trip to Israel in the 1960s, Leslie Moses went to see for himself. Amalie Moses Kass, "Daddy," in *Memoir of Leslie William Moses*, 18-19.

⁵⁷ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 124, 174-175. In addition to her commitment to Zionism, Strauss was also interested in Szold's plan to save the children of Nazi Germany. Within a year of their trip, Julia and her husband, Meyer Strauss, adopted two teenage brothers from Chemnitz, Germany, named Siegfried and Manfred. More than forty years later, Sigi Strauss became Chizuk Amuno's fifteenth president.

⁵⁸ Levy, "Memoirs."

⁵⁹ "In Memoriam: Lester S. Levy," Associated Jewish Charities advertisement, *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 22, 1989.

⁶⁰ Martin Kohn and his wife, Rosa Rosenthal, were first cousins on the Strauss side. Their grandfathers, Moses and Abraham Strauss, were brothers and partners in a successful dry goods business on Hopkins Place that burned in the fire of 1904 and was rebuilt. Their grandfathers were also founders of Shearith Israel.

⁶¹ Board of Directors Meeting, The Associated, Memorial Tribute to Martin B. Kohn, January 28, 1992, Levy Collection, Box 26, File 866, JMM.

⁶² Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 176.

⁶³ Marshall Sklare quoted in Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 205-208.

⁶⁴ Eulogy by Rabbi Israel M. Goldman, August 3, 1966.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Chizuk Amuno Sisterhood newsletter, September 10, 1960, Levy Collection, MS 127, Box 3, Files 57 and 58; Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 205.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 212, 214, 234, 246.

⁶⁸ Eleanor Kohn Levy oral history, November 12, 1991, Associated Collection, Box 16, 1996.164, JMM; Martin Kohn, "Martin Kohn's Family Memories," distributed by Liz Moser, November 1992, Levy Collection, Box 26, File 783, JMM.

⁶⁹ Mathilde Lauer had a brother who remained in their German homeland with his two sons and a daughter. The daughter married a man whose last name was Baneman and had

five children. During the 1930s, the Kohns worked hard to bring the Baneman descendants to the United States, succeeding in helping seventeen of them. "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

⁷⁰ Her existence became known to her grandchildren only after Benno Kohn's death, when Frank Schuman, the family's chauffeur, told Martin Kohn that for years he had driven his father and uncle on alternate weeks to visit her. "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

⁷¹ Full page advertisement in Blum, *Jews of Baltimore*, 244.

⁷² Louis Levin worked as a bookkeeper at Strauss Brothers in the 1880s and 1890s. Although "the outrageously low" pay made him feel "trapped at Strauss's," he stayed on to become head bookkeeper and credit man because the business closed on the Sabbath. "Louis's parents had instilled in him a reverence for the Day of Rest" Alexandra Lee Levin, *Dare to be Different: A Biography of Louis H. Levin of Baltimore, A Pioneer in Jewish Social Service* (New York, 1972), 5, 23.

⁷³ Rev. Dr. S. Schaffer, "Sketch of the History of the Shearith Israel Congregation," in Blum, *Jews of Baltimore*, 62.

⁷⁴ Rabbi Schaffer's son married a Hutzler. Alfred Moses telephone interview by author, July 2004. In 1897, Schaffer was the only Baltimore delegate to the first Zionist Congress in Basel. His reports about the gathering attracted a great deal of notice contributing to Baltimore's Zion Association growing to be America's largest local Zionist group. Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 195.

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, April 14, 1890.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Another son, Laser (probably named for Eleazer, a brother of Moses) died at age twenty.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Jewish Comment*, (1905?), Moses Strauss biographical file, JMM.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Arnold Blumberg, "A History of Congregation Shearith Israel on the Threshold of a Century," (1969?), vertical file, JMM; *Notes on Cornerstones of Community: The Historic Synagogues of Maryland, 1845-1945* (Baltimore, 1999), 31 (quotation).

⁸³ Edward L. Israel, *Benno Kohn* (n.p., 1929), Levy Collection, Box 25, File 828, JMM.

⁸⁴ "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Among Shearith Israel members who, in 1924, had recently moved near the synagogue were the families of Mendel Waxman, J. Morganstein, Getzel Levinson, Nathan Adler, and Oscar Strauss. "Shearith Israel Congregation Suburban Synagogue," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 5, 1924.

⁸⁹ Blumberg, "History of Congregation Shearith Israel," 8; "Shearith Israel Congregation Suburban Synagogue."

⁹⁰ "The Volsted laws" is a reference to the national prohibition laws passed in 1919. Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

⁹¹ "Shearith Israel Congregation Suburban Synagogue"; "Dedication of New Synagogue," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, July 24, 1925.

⁹² Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue Center" in American Jewish History*, (Hanover, NH, 1999), 2; Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

⁹⁵ Eleanor Kohn Levy to her parents, December 24, 1922, Levy Collection, JMM.

⁹⁶ Eleanor Kohn Levy oral history, November 12, 1991, Associated Collection, Box 16, 1996.164, JMM.

⁹⁷ Blumberg, "History of Congregation Shearith Israel."

⁹⁸ "In Memoriam: Lester S. Levy." In 1930, on the occasion of the birth of his third child, Ruth Mathilde, Lester Levy gave a \$500 bond to Chizuk Amuno. There is no evidence to suggest he did anything at Shearith Israel though he had been worshipping there for five years. Chizuk Amuno to Lester S. Levy, August 3, 1930, Levy Collection, JMM.

⁹⁹ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 204.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 374.

¹⁰¹ Amalie M. Kass to Eleanor Levy, September 20, 1989, Levy Collection, JMM.

Another wrinkle involving Chizuk Amuno and the Levy family occurred in the years after 1961, when the congregation moved most of its activities to Stevenson from Eutaw Place. In the post World War II period, with suburbanization sweeping the nation, the board of Chizuk Amuno began to explore its options. In 1952 the board presented its first plan for relocation out of the city. Later that year suburban services were held under the congregation's auspices at the Pikesville Armory. Meanwhile, the congregation worked with the University of Baltimore to lease space for religious school on Enslow Road in Mount Washington. In 1956 the groundbreaking for Chizuk Amuno's new suburban synagogue center in Stevenson was held. Julia Friedenwald Strauss, the only member of the Friedenwald family still involved with the congregation, participated. Chizuk Amuno opened in Stevenson in 1961. Beatrice Stern Levy kindled the Ner Tamid. Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 249, 250, 258, 268.

The Levys were loyal to the old building as well as to the congregation. Not surprisingly, then, when the independent congregation, Beth Am, was created in the former Chizuk Amuno building at Chauncey Avenue and Eutaw Place, members of the Levy family joined it, too. Several are Beth Am congregants today.

¹⁰² Kass, "Daddy," 25.

¹⁰³ Leslie Moses's daughter remembers that her father "had no patience with those who watered down or denied their Judaism, being convinced non-Jews would respect those who were proud of themselves and their heritage." Kass, "Daddy," 30.

¹⁰⁴ Jick, "Jews in the Synagogue," 226.

¹⁰⁵ Rozenblit, "Choosing a Synagogue."

Israel Fine:
Baltimore Businessman
and Hebrew Poet

by

Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein

In 1991, Marjorie Rosenblatt chanced to see *From the Ends of the Earth*, an exhibit of Judaic treasures at the Library of Congress. She was startled to find a book on prominent display composed by her great-grandfather, Israel Fine (1847-1930). Published in 1907, this particular copy of *Neginoth ben-Yehudah* (Songs of the Son of Judah) was probably presented to President Theodore Roosevelt and later transferred from the White House to the Library of Congress. In addition to two poems in honor of Roosevelt, the book also contained memorials to President William McKinley and Secretary of State John Hay and tributes to Theodor Herzl and Rabbi Benjamin Szold, among others. What is also surprising was that the poems were not written in Yiddish, the common language of most Jewish immigrants, but in Hebrew. The leather-bound display volume was opened to the book's inside covers which featured two brightly colored major American symbols: the flag of the United States and its shield. Until then, little was known about Israel Fine. By coincidence, Dr. Michael Grunberger, at that time head of the Hebraic Section at the library, was in the exhibit area and Rosenblatt spoke with him. Subsequently, she and Fine's great-grandson, Dr. Earl L. Baker, provided information on the family to Grace Cohen Grossman, then curator of ethnographic Judaica at the Smithsonian Institution, a collection that contained Hebrew language artifacts donated by Fine.¹

Fine was a businessman, Zionist, and Hebrew poet, who moved to Baltimore, Maryland, soon after his arrival in the United

States about 1890 and lived there until his death in 1930. In a photograph taken shortly before 1908, he appears as a middle-aged, bearded, gentle looking man. Spectacles dangle from the lapel of his jacket. Beneath them hangs the medal he received as the only American delegate to the Fourth Zionist Congress which was held in London in 1900.²

In several ways, Fine was typical of other Hebrew poets like Gershon Rosenzweig (1861-1914), Menahem Mendel Dolitzki (1856-1931), and a later generation that included Benjamin Silkiner (1882-1933), Ephraim Lisitzky (1885-1962), and Israel Efros (1881-1981). All arrived in the United States in the decade before and the decade after the turn of the century. Like them, Fine was an eastern European immigrant. Yiddish was their mother tongue, the language of everyday discourse, and the language in which the immigrants comfortably expressed themselves in the newspapers, in the theater, and in literature. But this small, elite group was unusual because the members had received Hebrew educations more advanced than others, and they worked to revive Hebrew as a modern tongue.

However, Fine differed from these poets in several respects. Most of them were much younger than he and arrived in America penniless. Thus, they struggled to earn a living even as they worked to bring a Hebrew literary movement into existence. Fine, who had been a businessman in Russia, immigrated as a mature adult with a family. He then prospered as the owner of a men's clothing factory. Although an eastern European immigrant, he became a member of a German Jewish Orthodox congregation in Baltimore and had business and social relationships among members of that community, demonstrating that in this period there were already connections between Uptown and Downtown Jews. It is unknown whether Fine attempted to have his poetry published in the Hebrew journals of the day. He seems to have written for his personal enjoyment and to share his verse with family and close friends. He composed poems in response to world affairs, life-cycle events such as birthdays and anniversaries, challenges in leadership faced by presidents and other government officials, celebrations

Portrait of Israel Fine wearing his medal from the Fourth Zionist Congress.

The photo dates from before 1907, when it appeared in

Neginoth ben-Yehudah.

(Courtesy of Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein.)

of local Jewish community events and persons, and the plight of Jews abroad.

The Hebrew reading public in America was so small that poets and even prose writers turned to sponsors to underwrite publication of their books. For example, Philadelphia Judge Mayer Sulzberger, who was a well-known local and national Jewish leader and a knowledgeable Jew devoted to the Hebrew book, was one such sponsor.³ Fine, however, was sufficiently affluent to self-publish his two volumes of writings. A number of Fine's poems appeared with English translations alongside the Hebrew. The bilingual poems reflected an early adaptation to the surrounding Americanizing culture and opened his verse to others. It also attested to the existence of a group of individuals in the Baltimore Jewish community with proficiency in the Hebrew language who worked to sustain its place in Jewish culture within the broader American scene. This essay examines Israel Fine as an individual who made America and its values part of his life as a Jew while maintaining his commitment to Judaism and the Hebrew language. In so doing, it sheds substantial light on the history of the Baltimore Jewish community and aspects of Hebrew literature in the United States in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century.

Israel Fine Comes to Baltimore

The son of Judah (sometimes referred to as Lewin) and Mollie Fine, Israel Fine was born in 1847 in Pokroy (today, Pakruojis), Kovno (today, Kaunas), Lithuania. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, Kovno became a center of Jewish cultural activity, which included the establishment of several prominent yeshivot. Fine's father, Judah, was a learned scholar and his mother, Mollie, was the mainstay of the family's dry-goods store, a typical arrangement among such families at the time. At eighteen, Fine married Minnie Racusin after which he studied privately for several years. He then ran his own business and, probably from the 1870s until his immigration to America, served as a sales representative in Moscow.⁴

Antisemitism and pogroms throughout Russia mounted after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. During the reign of Alexander III, the government stepped up efforts to rid the country of its Jews. The increasingly hostile environment most likely led Fine to uproot his family and immigrate to the United States.

They came first to Philadelphia, perhaps to join Minna's Racusin relatives in the dry goods business. Minna and Israel had several children, Hyman (Shabbetai), Morris (Moses), Philip, Louis, Mary, Pauline, Mildred, and Mollie, some of whom were born in Russia. Hyman died in 1892 at twenty-seven; Moses died in 1903 at twenty-four. Fine lamented their deaths and memorialized the sons in poetry.⁵

According to city directory listings, Fine and Racusin left Philadelphia and relocated to Baltimore, probably for promising business opportunities and for personal reasons. The port city was well situated to distribute the goods it manufactured throughout the mid-Atlantic and southern states. There were also Jews in Baltimore who had arrived earlier from Pokroy, Fine's hometown. In 1877, these early immigrants established what they called the Pokroyer Shul. After fifteen years of holding services in rented rooms, the congregation erected a building on High Street in East Baltimore, approximately the time of Fine's arrival.⁶

Beginning in 1893, city directories provide a timeline of Fine's advancing prosperity as he moved from clerk in 1893 to storeowner in 1894 to clothing manufacturer in 1899. By 1906, the medium-sized firm was housed in a four-story structure known as the Fine building at 411 W. Baltimore Street in the heart of the garment district.

The company's economic growth is also traced in a business brochure published around 1915, the year that Baltimore manufacturers reached the height of their clothing production. The brochure was intended to promote "Fine Clothing" and its "College Cut Line" among business associates. It contains images of the firm's suits and coats, a drawing of the Fine building and its geographic location within the garment district, letters from satisfied wholesale merchants like Schwarzenbach & Son in Cumberland, Maryland, Loar & Hendrickson of Grafton, West

Virginia, and Joseph Mullen & Sons from Wilmington, Delaware, and photographs of Fine and his son, Louis.⁷

Published in the same year, a second, larger booklet, *Three Anniversaries in the Life of Mr. Israel Fine*, commemorates the fiftieth wedding anniversary of Israel and Minna Fine, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the business, and the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of "The Star-Spangled Banner." It gives additional information about the Fine firm and also served as another advertising tool.

In the latter booklet, the company asserted that the suits produced were the "finest custom-tailored garments made," because no cheap labor was used and only those designers, cutters, trimmers, and tailors at the top of their profession made the garments. Since all materials were bought for cash, it stated, the savings were passed along to the trade. Moreover in 1912, the firm was awarded a contract by Parker, Bridget & Co. to furnish eight hundred suits "to be worn by members of the Columbus Lodge on the occasion of the unveiling of the Columbus Statue at Washington, D.C."⁸

The pamphlets exemplify how Fine embraced modern sales methods to retain clientele and to seek new business. The publications indicate the measure of financial success Fine had achieved since his arrival in the United States. In a short time, he had gained parity with other local medium-sized manufacturers who were overwhelmingly of German Jewish origin. It is unknown, however, whether Fine began by supplying peddlers and other eastern European Jewish immigrants as did Jacob Epstein, the best-known of Baltimore's Jewish businessmen. Arriving penniless from Lithuania in 1882, Epstein started as a peddler and then opened a store and mail-order business, which "became the most important jobbing concern for the entire South. It employed a thousand people and generated a million dollars of income each month."⁹ Fine's business continued to grow too, permitting the poet-manufacturer to make donations to charitable institutions and to travel.

The booklets are unusual in that in addition to photographs of Israel Fine, his wife, and their son, Louis, and "a brief synopsis

Judah Fine, Israel's father, center, with S. (Hyman) Fine, left, and Morris A. Fine, right, sons of Israel Fine who predeceased their father. (As they appeared in Zemiroth Yisrael, courtesy of Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein.)

of Mr. I. Fine's literary work," they also include several poems in Hebrew and English translation, including one on the occasion of President Theodore Roosevelt's birthday and others with a Jewish theme. There are pages of bits of information about Baltimore "firsts" and New York City "firsts" and the "Greatness of the United States" in terms of size, transportation, ports, and other facts.

Fine used the pamphlets as venues to show that he was a knowledgeable Jew with a command of the Hebrew language and, equally important, that he was a patriotic citizen who was proud of his adopted country and its leaders. In the midst of a world war that would soon envelop the United States, Fine demonstrated that an eastern European immigrant could become a successful businessman and loyal American, yet simultaneously remain a committed Jew.

The Fine family gradually acculturated and became prosperous enough to move from the downtown immigrant enclave to

the northwest neighborhood of affluent German Jews. By the early twentieth century, Israel Fine and his son Louis lived on McCulloh Street. They affiliated with Shearith Israel when that congregation relocated from West Baltimore in 1903 and erected a building at McCulloh and Bloom streets.¹⁰ Later, Israel Fine moved to 814 Chauncey Avenue, a row house in a more fashionable area, one block from Druid Hill Park. This home was close to the now Conservative-affiliated Chizuk Amuno Congregation, which in 1921 had moved from McCulloh and Mosher streets to Chauncey Avenue and Eutaw Place. Fine joined the synagogue and when he died in 1930, Rabbi Adolph Coblenz officiated at the funeral.¹¹ Although founded by Orthodox German-speaking Jews, the congregation had welcomed eastern European immigrants into its fold. Both congregations supported Zionism and wanted to maintain traditional Judaism and the Hebrew language, shared interests that overrode language, cultural, and class differences.¹²

The prosperity Fine experienced also provided the means to travel and to support a variety of charitable causes. In 1900, as previously noted, Fine traveled to London to serve as a delegate to the Fourth Zionist Congress. According to his account, after the close of the Congress, he and his wife attended the *Exposition Universelle*, the Paris world's fair, where they met acquaintances and business friends from Europe and the United States. In 1909, Fine traveled extensively to several European cities and to Palestine and Egypt. In each community, he visited the rabbis and professors to whom he had sent his book, *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*.¹³ In 1926, Fine again visited Palestine. After his return, he celebrated his seventy-ninth birthday by announcing the "donation of a home in Palestine as the first unit of an agricultural school for girls" to be built on land he had donated several years earlier in Herzliyya in honor of Hadassah.¹⁴ Since this Zionist women's organization had been founded by Henrietta Szold, daughter of Baltimore's Rabbi Benjamin Szold, Fine probably also felt more keenly about contributing to its causes. As an immigrant and aware of the enactment of congressional legislation in 1921 and 1924 that restricted immigration into the United States, Fine eagerly supported Hadassah's efforts to provide a new life in Palestine

to adolescent young women who had been dislocated after World War I.¹⁵

Fine used the occasion of his birthday to give to other causes and institutions. For example, in 1922, he declined a banquet in honor of his seventy-fifth birthday and instead distributed ten checks of seventy-five dollars each to the United Charities, the Blind Orphanage, the Women's Insane Asylum, Hadassah, the Free Loan Association of Jerusalem, Maryland Institute for the Blind, General Hospital, Hebrew Parochial School of Baltimore (forerunner of the Orthodox Talmudical Academy of Baltimore), and the Home for Convalescent Children.¹⁶ While Fine never noted that he was an officer of any of these institutions and his name does not appear on organizational rosters, business acquaintances, friends, and family may have influenced these philanthropic choices. But the charities also represented a cross section of general and Jewish endeavors with which Fine would have likely identified anyway, since he was an immigrant himself and recognized the needs of those less fortunate, most often women and children.

Within the Jewish community, Fine moved in other overlapping circles. His personal relations with prominent individuals ran across a spectrum that included people affiliated with Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism, with Zionists and non-Zionists, and with eastern European and German Jews. These relationships reflected his positive standing within the community and the extent to which German and eastern Europeans put aside differing social backgrounds and religious practices in order to come together for common interests, especially that of fostering the Hebrew language.

For example, in 1902, Benjamin Szold, rabbi emeritus of Reform Oheb Shalom, presented Fine with a carved wooden cane, the handle of which was shaped like a snake's head. On a metal plate was the inscription, "Presented by Benj. Szold to Israel Fine 8 Kislev 5662." Carved in the wood below that is the phrase, "The Lord will send the staff of your strength from Zion," from Psalms 110.2. Szold was also the subject of praise in several Hebrew poems written by Fine. A longtime member of Orthodox Shearith

Israel, Fine wrote a Hebrew poem in 1918 to Rabbi Schepsel Schaffer as he completed twenty-five years of service in that pulpit.¹⁷ Also Rabbi William Rosenau, who had succeeded Rabbi Szold at Oheb Shalom, wrote an editorial for the *Jewish Times* when Fine died.¹⁸

Moreover, Fine's writings drew together other people. On March 17, 1908, Purim night, Fine was surprised by a group of Jewish leaders who gathered to honor him as the author of *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*. They presented the poet with a large portrait of Fine, framed on either side by a Hebrew poem composed by Rabbi Schaffer in acrostic form with the letters of Fine's name beginning each line. The poem praised Fine for the "clarity of his language, the honored Hebrew tongue."¹⁹ Other early Hebrew poets in America and admirers of the language also viewed Hebrew as an honored tongue.

Early Hebrew Poets and Poetry in America

From 1880 to 1920, over three million eastern European immigrants came to the United States fleeing poverty and pogroms. Almost all of them Yiddish-speaking, they brought little of monetary value with them beyond the skills that would hopefully enable them to advance their position in life. Sixty per cent of the immigrants—mostly Jews working for Jews—were employed in the garment industry.²⁰

Yiddish newspapers like the *Forverts* (Forward) served as agents of change by supporting the immigrants' adjustment to their new country and helping them unite in their efforts to organize labor unions. They also functioned as a primary source for maintaining culture by serializing Yiddish fiction and publishing translations from European and American literature. During World War I, about 600,000 people a day read the various Yiddish newspapers published in the United States.²¹

Even before the appearance of the dailies, early arrivals to these shores were writing poetry in Yiddish. Morris Rosenfeld (1862–1923), for example, was popular among the masses because he wrote in *mamaloschen* about the plight of those laboring in sweatshops. "Good Yiddish literature," the editorials, essays, and

Louis, son of Israel Fine, was in business with his father.

(From Neginoth ben-Yehudah, courtesy of Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein.)

novels written by erudite immigrants, however, appealed to a smaller, more educated audience.²²

Just as there were two Yiddish literary streams, “two Hebrews, the classical and the modern,” existed side by side in America and Europe. For rabbis and scholars, the Hebrew of the Bible, Talmud, and prayer book was the holy language, not

the language of everyday discourse. During the mid-eighteenth century age of modernization, the Enlightenment spread across Europe. A century later, this combined with the new force of nationalism. Enlightened Jews brought these two movements to the Jewish community, one outcome of which was the rebirth of Hebrew as a modern tongue. A number of these *maskilim* immigrated to the United States and infused Jewish culture in America with the fruits of their small Hebrew literary movement. While the masses of immigrants to this country gave way to the forces of Americanization, this little band of Hebraists, notes historian Alan Mintz, resisted acculturation striving instead to create a center for Hebrew literature in the United States.²³ For them, according to Mintz, "the Hebrew language was an object of veneration, a vessel of purity and even divinity; it was the language . . . also of poetry and philosophy."²⁴

As in Europe, the periodical became the primary medium of literary expression for poets. At least twenty Hebrew journals appeared in this country from the 1890s into the first decade of the next century, but most of them were short lived due to the lack of readers with sufficient knowledge of Hebrew and sufficient funds to purchase a subscription. For example, Samuel Benjamin Schwartzberg, the agent for the journal, *Ner Ma'arabi* (Light of the West), complained in 1898 that after four weeks of effort less than twenty-two copies of the monthly were sold in Pittsburgh and even less in Baltimore although thousands of Jews lived in these cities.²⁵

Many of these *maskilim* were also Zionists. They dreamed of building a *yishuv* in Palestine, a place where Hebrew would flower. As writers and educators, they were also inspired to advance Hebrew in this country. A cadre of such knowledgeable men and women developed in the United States through the pioneering efforts of Dr. Samson Benderly. The Safed-born and Johns Hopkins-trained physician became an innovative Jewish educator who developed the *Ivrit b'Ivrit* (Hebrew in Hebrew) method of teaching Hebrew in Talmud Torah afternoon religious schools and later in Jewish camps.²⁶

In his multi-volume *A History of Jewish Literature*, Rabbi Meyer Waxman noted that there were two periods of Hebrew literary creativity in the United States: from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until about 1905 and from that time forward. In the first period, the writers did not advance beyond “ornate writing” and they left little of lasting value. “Rather,” noted Waxman, “their contribution was to keep the flame of Hebrew literature and culture burning” for the next generation of Hebrew writers.²⁷ Fine knew some of these poets and they may have influenced each other although his relationship with others is unknown.

Gerson Rosenzweig, the single poet Waxman mentions from the early era, and one who was a dozen years younger than Fine, edited several of the short-lived American Hebrew periodicals. Known as the “sweet satirist of Israel,” and as an epigrammist, in 1898 he translated “America,” “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,” into Hebrew. Like Fine, he too showed his faith in America through his endorsement of its leaders. The successful conclusion of the Spanish-American War that year, led by then Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, saw Cuba on a gradual path to independence and the United States emerge as a world power. These events gave Americans a heightened sense of patriotism and pride in their country and later helped to catapult Roosevelt into the presidency.²⁸ Unlike Fine however, Rosenzweig also attacked what he saw as vulgar and backward in this country—the greenhorn and the peddler. And also unlike Fine, he viewed rabbis as being like other Americans whom he saw as mainly interested in wealth and honor.²⁹

Menahem Mendel Dolitzki was another poet from this early era. He wrote in Yiddish and in Hebrew. Born in Bialystok, he received a traditional Orthodox education as did Fine, but made his living as a Hebrew teacher. Dolitzki’s poetry had already been published in Europe when he was in his early twenties. It is possible that Fine knew him personally and had read his poetry, since Dolitzki lived in Moscow and Fine conducted business there. After witnessing the Russian pogroms in 1881, Dolitzki became a member of Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion), a Zionist movement that was widespread in eastern Europe before political Zionism

began with the First Zionist Congress in 1897. The Zionist poems he wrote have been described as “colorless and full of clichés but nevertheless exude warmth and innocent romanticism.” When Jews were expelled from Moscow in 1892, Dolitzki was welcomed to the United States by the small group of *maskilim* already in the country. Several volumes of his poetry were published in the dozen years after his arrival. In the preface to *Shire Menahem* (Poems of Menahem), a collection of Hebrew poems he had written while in Europe, he acknowledged Israel Fine’s assistance in bringing his work to the attention of Sigmund Sonneborn. A Baltimore German Jewish clothing manufacturer and Zionist supporter, Sonneborn underwrote the publication of this volume.³⁰

Fine was likely acquainted with his contemporary and landsman Isaac Rabinowitz (1846–1900), who had immigrated to the United States in 1891, about the same time as Fine. Rabinowitz published most of his Hebrew songs in Vilna in 1891 in a book called *Zemirot Yisrael* (Songs of Israel), a title which Fine later used for his own work. Fine wrote a poem in memory of Rabinowitz.³¹

Fine knew Yiddish and Hebrew writer and scholar George Selikovitch (1855 or 1863–1926), who was on the editorial staff of the Yiddish daily, *Tageblatt* (Daily Newspaper), for more than a quarter century. Fine was invited to the celebration of Selikovitch’s jubilee birthday and wrote a poem for the occasion.³²

Benjamin Nahum Silkiner was among the poets who were an entire generation younger than Fine. He is credited with attempting to modernize Hebrew writing in America and provide publishing venues for new writers. In 1910 he was part of a group of poets whose work appeared in *Senunit* (Swallow), the first anthology of Hebrew poetry to appear in the United States. In the same year, Silkiner published his epic poem, *Mul Ohel Timmurah* (Before the Tent of Timmurah) and became the first Hebrew poet to draw on a specific American theme when he wrote about the American Indians and their struggles with conquering Spaniards.³³

Israel and Minna Fine.

*(Courtesy of the National Museum of American History,
Smithsonian Institution.)*

Ephraim Lisitzky arrived in the United States at the turn of the century and, after living in other places, settled in New Orleans in 1918, where he served as director of the community Hebrew school. During his long career, he was a prolific author of several narrative poems with legends or episodes of American Jewish life. He sympathetically portrayed African Americans in his composition, *Be'ohalei Kush* (In the Tents of Kush), incorporating their spirituals and folksongs into his poetry. He, too, wrote about American Indians in an epic poem, *Medurot do'akhot* (Dying Campfires).³⁴

In 1919, rabbi, Jewish educator, and Johns Hopkins University professor Israel Efros, the youngest example of the "new generation" of Hebrew poets in Waxman's history, became founder and dean of Baltimore Hebrew College and Teachers

Training School. During this time, it is unknown if he and Fine had any relationship. He left the city in 1928 to teach elsewhere, and then became rector of Tel Aviv University in 1955. Efros, in an attempt to reflect a wholly American theme in his poetry, also wrote imaginatively about American Indian life in the Chesapeake region on the eastern shore of Maryland.³⁵

The small group of American Hebrew writers, many of whom were based in New York, clung like Israel Fine to a classical, lyrical mode of writing, suffused with biblical Hebrew. Unlike him, however, they are remembered for the imaginative verse they crafted, and each focused at one point on the theme of the American Indian. According to historian Michael Weingrad, their "interest in a 'vanished race' reflected a range of Jewish national concerns, from cultural assimilation to the possibility of genocide. . . . In the figure of the tragic Indian, these poets could express the individual immigrant's sense of impotence, loneliness and beleaguerment, as well as national outrage before the upheavals of modern history."³⁶

Jewish Baltimore

New York City, with its vast immigrant population, was indeed the great eye of the whirl of Yiddish writing and culture in the first decades of the twentieth century. It provided the milieu for the small group of Hebrew writers who strove to develop their own epicenter. Yet poets like Ephraim Lisitzky, Israel Efros, and Israel Fine lived elsewhere. The necessity of earning a livelihood or seeking to be with relatives and landsmen who had arrived earlier and settled in other cities often dictated immigrants' settlement patterns. In places like New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, these poets found Jewish communities with synagogues, Zionist groups, Yiddish newspapers, and others interested in Hebrew letters.

Looking southwest from Baltimore, the southern city with the largest Jewish population in the first decade of the twentieth century was New Orleans, where Lisitzky lived from 1918 until his death. In 1907, New Orleans had a general population of about 300,000 that included a community of 8,000 Jews of

predominantly German and Alsace-Lorrainian background and Reform affiliation.³⁷

In the same year, the estimated Jewish population of Philadelphia, just north of Baltimore, was 100,000 in a city with almost 1.5 million individuals. Thousands of eastern European immigrants found work there in the sweatshops and factories, many of which were owned by successful and acculturated German Jews.³⁸ Short-lived Yiddish newspapers and journals attempted to serve this population, but they were up against the established press of New York which issued local supplements that appealed to a range of religious sentiments and political ideologies. There were Hebraists and Zionists like Moshe Katz (1864-1941), David Bear Tierkel (1874-1948), and Henry Gersoni (1844-1897) among the immigrants too, but they also looked to New York as the center of their movement or relocated there.³⁹

In contrast, New York still lacked strong Jewish organizational leadership in this early period. Many of Philadelphia's exemplary German Jewish communal leaders stepped in and played major roles in founding or influencing a number of national Jewish organizations including the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Jewish Publication Society, and the American Jewish Committee, among others. And yet only one of the seven of this Philadelphia Group declared himself a Zionist.⁴⁰

Baltimore's Jewish population in 1907 was estimated to be about 40,000 in a city with a total population of about a half million.⁴¹ The four-fold increase in the number of Jews in Baltimore from 1880 onward was also the result of the massive immigration of eastern Europeans. They, too, found work in the city's burgeoning garment industry.

On the eve of this influx, there were six congregations in Baltimore that had been created by German and a smattering of Dutch Jews, who were the first to settle in the city. Baltimore Hebrew Congregation was started in 1829 as a traditional synagogue. In 1840, its members, who were primarily Bavarian Jews, engaged Bavarian-born Abraham Rice as the first ordained rabbi to occupy a pulpit in the United States. Several offshoot synagogues were

created by members who left the mother congregation. Har Sinai began in 1842 by those resentful of Rice's manner of enforcing tradition and who were interested in modernizing the service and making other changes that they would determine without rabbinic consent. A charter in 1847 established Hebrew Friendship (Oheb Israel). In 1853, Oheb Shalom was founded by young men for whom Baltimore Hebrew was too traditional and Har Sinai too liberal. These congregations were all part of the Reform camp by the end of the century. Shearith Israel, where Fine was listed as a member in 1910 and which remained Orthodox, was the fifth synagogue. It was formed in 1879 from a merger of two smaller congregations. As Baltimore Hebrew continued to introduce additional reforms, Jonas Friedenwald led a final breakaway group that created Chizuk Amuno Congregation in 1871. This congregation became Conservative in the second decade of the twentieth century and Fine affiliated there after its move uptown to a new building close to his home.⁴²

As noted above, as they gradually acculturated and became more affluent, the German Jews began to move away from East Baltimore into the northwest part of the city. "By 1900," noted Philip Kahn, "virtually the entire Baltimore German Jewish Community had moved uptown."⁴³ All but one of the German Jewish synagogues followed their upwardly mobile members to the northwest neighborhood and built large edifices in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The one exception was Oheb Israel whose congregational leaders refused to relocate. When its members moved away and joined the other synagogues in the northwest area, eastern European immigrants purchased the downtown building in 1901 and started their own congregation.⁴⁴

Prominent rabbis served in the German Jewish synagogues during this period and Israel Fine was a friend and admirer of several of them. Adolph Guttmacher was rabbi of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation from 1891 to 1915. Charles A. Rubinstein served Har Sinai Congregation as its spiritual leader from 1898 to 1920. Hungarian-born, German-speaking Benjamin Szold, the first rabbi of Oheb Shalom, served from 1859 to 1892. He was

succeeded by William Rosenau who remained in that pulpit until 1940. Shearith Israel was sometimes called “Rabbi Schepsel Schaffer’s shul” for the religious leader who led the congregation from 1893 to 1928. Chizuk Amuno’s first rabbi, Henry Schneeberger who served from 1876 to 1912, was also the first native-born American rabbi. In 1920, Riga-born Rabbi Adolph Coblenz and Russian-born Hazan Abba Weisgal were elected by the congregation. This signaled the ascendancy of eastern Europeans and staunch Zionists into important positions of religious leadership in Baltimore.⁴⁵

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the demand for ready-made clothing for a growing urban population stimulated the success of the German Jewish merchants. They were able to expand their retail and manufacturing businesses with the jobs they provided for the new immigrants who began to arrive in earnest during this same time. Department stores such as Hutzlers and Hochschild Kohn, and major clothiers like Henry Sonneborn & Company and Strouse & Brothers employed thousands of workers—most of them women—and many of them Russian Jews. Known as “the city that tries to suit everybody,” Baltimore, as previously mentioned, reached its peak during World War I as one of the top five centers in the country for clothing production. By 1915, almost three-quarters of the men’s garments produced in Baltimore came from Jewish-owned businesses while half of the city’s clothing workers were Jewish. In the large “inside shops,” as the factories were called, seven thousand men’s woolen suits could be manufactured per week.⁴⁶ Lithuanian-born Fine participated in this growth. The Fine Building on West Baltimore Street stood as a testament to his success as a clothing manufacturer.

While the Jewish immigrants in Baltimore worked hard to earn a living, they also drew sustenance from literary and cultural endeavors. They attended lectures by poets such as Morris Rosenfeld, readings by the likes of Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem, and eloquent and stirring lectures by rabbinic leaders including Judah Magnes and Stephen Wise. Yiddish theater brought actors and actresses to Baltimore to entertain. Local

*Double page spread with a play on the word "Fine"
from the 1915 business brochure of Israel Fine & Son.
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #1992.233.008a.)*

publications included the English weekly, *The Jewish Comment*, which began in 1895 for the more acculturated, and for the more recent arrivals, *Der Vegvayzer* (The Guide), which appeared from 1901 to 1910 and was the longest running of the Yiddish newspapers. *Ha-Pisgah* (Summit), a Hebrew journal, was published in the city between 1890 and 1892 before relocating to other cities.⁴⁷

In the late 1880s, the eastern European *maskilim* who arrived in the city formed a Hebrew Literary Society. They advocated replacing Yiddish with the language of the Bible. But they also recognized that English was the language of America. In 1889, the society joined with local German Jewish leaders to found the Russian Jewish Night School, which became the most important cultural institution in East Baltimore. Henrietta Szold, Rabbi Benjamin Szold's daughter, was the school superintendent from its

inception until 1893 when she moved to Philadelphia. A pioneer experiment in adult education, thousands of immigrants successfully learned to read and write English and studied geography and American history in order to become United States citizens.⁴⁸

Fine's involvement in these two organizations is unknown, but their existence along with Baltimore's Yiddish and Hebrew language publications offered the poet several venues for literary enrichment and interaction with others of the same interest.

Baltimore's Jews formed a rich Zionist network too, and this was especially important for Fine. The diverse religious and ideological views and the range in the socioeconomic distribution of the community led to a mixed network of societies that developed, each with its own perspective. The first organized group of Zionists, Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion), was formed as early as 1889. A second group, Hevrath Zion (Zion Association), had four hundred members by the time of the First Zionist Congress, held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. Until the Congress ignited the movement, interest in Zionism was largely local among American Jews. That may account for the fact that the only American delegate at the First Congress was Rabbi Schepsel Schaffer. On his return from Basel, thousands flocked to hear him speak at Carl [presumably Carlin] Hall.⁴⁹ Other groups like Kadima that were concerned with local problems as well as with the *yishuv*, Poale Zion, which advocated a worker's state in Palestine, Mizrahi, composed of religious Zionists, the Theodor Herzl Zionistischer Verein, the first German-speaking Zionist society in the United States, and Hadassah, the women's organization founded by Henrietta Szold, who had become exposed to Zionism through her work with the Russian Jewish Night School, all came into existence in the city before World War I. From 1904 to 1918, Dr. Harry Friedenwald, a member of the prominent Baltimore German Jewish family, served as president of the national Federation of American Zionists, precursor to the Zionist Organization of America. Aid to Jews overseas helped break down fences between Russian and German Jews in Baltimore after World War I. They banded together to help their brethren in the face of immigration restrictions at home and the destruction of Jewish areas abroad.⁵⁰

Opposition to the movement primarily came from Jewish leaders affiliated with classical Reform Judaism but also from some Orthodox leaders. The former viewed Judaism solely as a religion without nationalistic aspirations. Their acculturation into the general population made them fearful of being charged with dual loyalty. The latter did not see the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine as part of "God's will."⁵¹ In Baltimore, William Rosenau, successor to Rabbi Benjamin Szold at Oheb Shalom Congregation and also Fine's friend, initially supported Zionism but later joined other prominent German Jewish Reform rabbis who spoke out against the movement.⁵²

However, prior to the rise of Zionism and the catastrophes of war, the lines were already blurred between the Uptown and Downtown Jews. The acculturation of the newer immigrants, bonds of marriage between their children, shared traditional religious observances, and the business successes of the newcomers, which enabled them to move to the northwest quadrant of Baltimore, all contributed to the meshing of German and Russian Jews. Israel Fine was an example of an individual who bridged the two groups at several crossings, but especially through his poetry.

Fine's Poetry

While he was devoted to family, business, Zionism, and philanthropy, Fine was also devoted to Hebrew. He collected and published his poems in 1907 in *Neginoth ben-Yehudah* along with English translations of some verse. Mollie Baker, Fine's daughter, wrote that he "labored many years, devoting all the time he could spare from his rest at night and on his drumming trips to the work, writing on trains and in hotels and whenever an opportunity offered. The purpose of [his] book," she noted, "was not to offer it for sale, but to distribute it to all parts of the world, without cost to anyone." And that he did. He saved the acknowledgments he received from leaders such as Justice Louis D. Brandeis, James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, Lord Balfour, and the German Kaiser, none of whom could likely read the poems in the original.⁵³

*Example of Fine's bilingual poetry, appearing in Zemirot Yisrael.
Fine wrote this for the April 5, 1925, dedication of
the War Memorial Building in Baltimore.
(Courtesy of Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein.)*

In 1917 the Baltimore Relief Committee published Fine's *Megilat 'Ekha ha-hadashah* (The New Lamentations). He wrote the Hebrew and Yiddish texts while Dr. Tobias Salzman provided an English translation for the narrative dirge of the horrors which had befallen the Jewish community of Russia under the reign of the czars and World War I. As a trilingual publication, the pamphlet bridged all sectors of the community and enabled the new immigrants who spoke Yiddish, the *maskilim* and Zionists who, like Fine, revered the Hebrew language, as well as the acculturated German Jews and non-Jews, for whom English was their native language, to read and sympathize with the victims.⁵⁴

In 1930, *Zemiroth Yisrael*, a compilation of Fine's Hebrew poems with some English translations, appeared. Here Fine included a list of his poetic and literary publications, the majority of which appear in his 1907 book and the 1930 compilation. There are no entries listed for any Hebrew periodicals, so it is possible that his verse appeared only in his own books and in local publications such as the *Jewish Comment*.⁵⁵

Several themes run through Fine's poetry: family, Jewish personalities and institutions, world Jewish affairs including Zionism, local people and events in Baltimore, and unabashed patriotism for the United States and its leaders.

Fine memorialized his parents and his two sons who died. He lamented the death of a grandchild and celebrated the bar mitzvah of another. Fine responded with anguish to pogroms in Russia and with a cry for relief for Jewish war refugees in Europe. He paid tribute to Zionist visionary Theodor Herzl and to the Zionist effort to find a home for the Jewish people. He composed poems for prominent Baltimore Jewish communal leaders including Rabbi Szold, Rabbi Rosenau, Jacob Epstein, Harry Friedenwald, and on the deaths of Szold, Sigmund Sonneborn, Aaron Friedenwald, and others. Fine wrote poetry for the dedication of Shearith Israel's new building on McCulloh Street, the Orthodox Talmud Torah, Oheb Shalom's jubilee, the consecration of the Betsy Levy Memorial Orphan Home, and for the Hebrew Children's Sheltering and Protective Association, among others. Tributes to American political leaders and the centennial of "The

*President Theodore Roosevelt personally
autographed this photograph for Israel Fine.
(As it appears in Zemirov Yisrael, courtesy of Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein.)*

Star-Spangled Banner” represented Fine’s many patriotic expressions toward his newly adopted country and its icons.

Fine was typical of other Hebrew poets who also contributed patriotic verse to the corpus of Hebrew Americana in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century. Gershon Rosenzweig, in *Ha’Ivri* (The Hebrew), and Avraham ben Meir Lurya (1838–1918) in his book, *Ha-Pa’amon* (The Bell), wrote about the death of President McKinley. Menahem Mendel Dolitzki and Nahum Meir Sheikovich (1849–1905), whose penname was Shomer, wrote poems about Theodore Roosevelt, the popular successor to McKinley, in the Hebrew journal, *Ha-Leom* (The Nation). Lewis also wrote about the Spanish-American War in his book, *Hofshiyot Kyuba* (The Freedom of Cuba).⁵⁶

After McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo in 1901, Israel Fine penned a poem describing his murder. Fine alludes to presidents Lincoln and Garfield who had met with the same fate, and the poem describes them extending their hands to welcome McKinley into the afterlife. Fine praised the leader who “freed the Cuban brave” from Spain.⁵⁷ The recent Spanish-American War in which the United States routed Spain from Cuba had ignited pride in American citizens, Fine among them. In addition, he must have felt keenly the assassinations of righteous government leaders in contrast to those of czarist despots by Russian radicals.

In his poem dedicated to the memory of John Hay, Fine called the secretary of state a “prince of the country” and the “world’s counsellor,” references to the roles he played in the formation of several treaties and in negotiations over the construction of the Panama Canal. Using biblical imagery, Fine described Hay as “a cedar fallen from Lebanon’s heights.” Fine credited him with interceding on behalf of the Jews of Romania with his 1902 note to signatories of the 1878 Berlin Treaty, protesting Romania’s restrictions on Jews in violation of that treaty. Hay was rewarded in the afterworld, penned Fine, “To behold there the Lord, in His Temple to dwell.”⁵⁸

Theodore Roosevelt appears to have been Fine’s most beloved American statesman. When McKinley was assassinated in 1901, Roosevelt assumed the presidency of the United States, the

position to which he was elected of his own accord in 1904. One of Fine's poems about Roosevelt was written during the election campaign. On October 24 of that year, the poet organized a delegation of prominent Baltimoreans including Congressman Frank C. Wachter and Louis Weis, the immigration commissioner, who called on the White House to present Roosevelt with the Hebrew poem dedicated to the anniversary of his birth and translated into English by Fine's son, Louis.⁵⁹

In the poem, Fine urged readers to note the approaching election and to vote for the hero of San Juan Hill who routed the Spanish from Cuba during the Spanish-American War. The Republican was also well-known for instigating government intervention in labor and business affairs for the benefit of the workers and the public. Although a factory owner, Fine declared that both merchants and workers had profited from Roosevelt's leadership. He credited the president with imposing arbitration to settle a 1902 coal strike and complimented him for his speaking out against the Kishinev pogrom of 1903.

A second poem composed on October 27, 1907, Roosevelt's birthday, commemorated the conclusion of peace between Japan and Russia at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. Roosevelt received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906 for his efforts to resolve that conflict. Fine referred to him as the "Prince of Peace" who quelled "the thirst for war in nations" and brought peace to Manchuria. The president, he wrote, was a *matnat shamayim* (gift of God).⁶⁰

Fine's greatest show of patriotism celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of "The Star-Spangled Banner" in 1914 and coincided with his fiftieth wedding anniversary. He wrote a Hebrew poem and had it written on a parchment scroll to resemble a Torah.⁶¹ Fine was particularly inspired by love for his adopted country and appreciative that he had been fortunate to leave Russia and was not caught up in the world war that enveloped Europe and created numerous Jewish refugees. While President Wilson would soon strive to "make the world safe for democracy," Fine's poem refers back to the war between the United States and Britain that began in 1812, and in which Washington and Baltimore suffered serious foreign attack. The refrain that is

interspersed throughout the poem varies slightly between verses. One chorus reads: "It is a jubilee unto us from a foreign dominion. The almighty redeemed us. He proclaimed liberty to our nation to be remembered from generation to generation."⁶²

Fine's writing won praise and criticism. In "La-Mevakrim" (For the Critics), Fine wrote, "ke-tarnigolim bi-ashpah mevakrim, le-hapes biheruzai mikhsholim" (like chickens in the garbage they [critics] peck to find a missing letter or grammatical [error] in my rhymes.) Hebrew writer Ephraim Deinard (1846-1930), an acerbic polemicist who attacked Reform Judaism, Hasidism, and Christianity, played on the words of that poem. He caustically commented, "vekhool ruah ayn bahem" (there is no spirit in them.) On Fine's fears that others would find mistakes in his writing, Deinard commented, "mevakrim shotim khaeleh aynom ba-Amerika, hoi Pharoah!" (There is no one foolish enough in America to bother doing a close reading of his poems!)⁶³

On Fine's death, Reform Rabbi Rosenau wrote a memorial that appeared on the editorial page of the *Baltimore Jewish Times*. Besides eulogizing his character and charity, the rabbi commented on his writing:

Israel Fine attuned his lyre in harmony with the keynote sounded by the earlier Psalmists of antiquity and the poets of medieval times. His meter may not have been always in accord with classic standards, but nevertheless proved itself delightful in its newer forms. In alliteration, assonance and rhyme, his poems abounded. They demonstrated also his marked wealth of vocabulary and his exceptional acquaintance with Scriptures. . . . He lived in the hearts of people. He was just to all others, although they may have differed with him in their Jewish preachment and practice. The non-Jew's merit, too, he never failed to recognize.⁶⁴

The iconic symbol of the American flag on the inside cover of Fine's book and on the scroll cover for his "Star-Spangled Banner" poem likely stimulated the inclusion of the items in exhibits dealing with Jewish history and American patriotism. A byproduct has been this investigation into learning more about the life and writing of Israel Fine. What has emerged is an image of Fine as an example of an eastern European immigrant who adapted and ac-

cultured in a variety of ways in America yet retained his commitment to Judaism. He became prosperous, charitable, and accepted by his German Jewish business associates and coreligionists in Baltimore and thus serves as an early representative of the intertwining of the lives of German and eastern European Jews in that city. Baltimore also emerges as a community with a rich Jewish cultural life that sustained not only Fine, but others like him. Like a number of other American Hebrew poets, he was highly patriotic toward his newly adopted country and its government and grateful for the freedoms it bestowed on its citizens. This was entirely compatible with Fine's Jewish involvement, his support of Zionism, and the advancement of Hebrew through his writing. For him and other *maskilim*, the Hebrew language was indeed "an object of veneration, a vessel of purity and even divinity"⁶⁵ This Baltimore bard and businessman was both exemplary of and distinctive among those early Hebrew poets in America whose work did not advance beyond "ornate writing," but who nevertheless kept alive Hebrew culture in their newly adopted country.⁶⁶

NOTES

The transliterations of Hebrew titles were provided by the author and are based on the romanization used by the Library of Congress, except when not available; otherwise from other libraries and works, including the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Israel Fine used a variety of translations and transliterations even for the same work. For ease of identification and to avoid confusion, this article will use the author's preferred version, even when Fine's usage is within a quotation. The author also wishes to thank Michael Grunberger, Sharon Horowitz, and Avi Bieler for their assistance with translations from Hebrew into English. The author also acknowledges with appreciation Jessica Elfenbein for her insightful paper, "Uptown and Traditional: A New Take on Baltimore's German Jewish Community" and Mark K. Bauman for his, "The South to Center Stage: The Origins of Reform Ideology at Baltimore's Har Sinai and in America" presented June 6, 2006, at the 2006 Biennial Scholars' Conference on American Jewish History held at the College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

¹ *Neginoth ben-Yehudah* (Baltimore, 1907). The romanized title that appears in the book is *Ng'inash Ben-Jehudah: Selection of Poems and Memorials in Memory of his Parents, His Sons, and of Celebrated Men, Well-known Institutions, Houses of Worship, etc.* Ng'inash may be a typo for the Hebrew Neginot. On Israel Fine see "Fine, Israel," *Who's Who in American Jewry*, 2nd ed., (New York, 1928), 175–176; Earl L. Baker, "Israel Fine—A Brief Biography," (n.p., n.d.), Smithsonian Institution, Division of Politics and Reform. Written by Israel Fine's great-grandson, the five typescript pages may have been compiled after Grossman contacted Baker for information about Fine. Also included in the Smithsonian file are photocopies of some of Fine's poetry and articles about him that appeared in the Baltimore English-language press, tickets of admission to the Fourth Zionist Congress, and some correspondence. Grace Cohen Grossman, *Judaica at the Smithsonian: Cultural Politics as Cultural Model* (Washington, DC, 1997), 215–217; Abraham J. Karp, *From the Ends of the Earth: Judaic Treasures of the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC, 1991), 119–120. The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore, (hereafter JMM), housed additional material including two pamphlets, *Israel Fine and Son* [1915] and Mollie Baker, comp., *Three Anniversaries in the Life of Mr. Israel Fine* (n.p., [1915?]); Alfred Segal, grandson of Israel Fine, telephone interview conducted by author, May 21, 2006.

² This framed photograph is in the collections of the JMM. Other photographs of Fine, his wife, sons, and father appear in his volumes of poetry.

³ Maxwell Whiteman, "The Fiddlers Rejected: Jewish Immigrant Expression in Philadelphia," in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia 1830–1940*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia, 1983), 93.

⁴ "Fine, Israel," *Who's Who in American Jewry*, 175–176, lists Israel's father's name as Lewin. Other sources identify the father as Judah. *Who's Who in American Jewry* gives July 17, 1848, as Israel Fine's birth date. "Israel Fine Dies at 83; Was Noted Poet," *New York Times*, November 25, 1930, would have him born in 1847 in order to be eighty-three at the time of death. In Mollie Baker, *Three Anniversaries*, 26, Fine's wife is listed as Minna Racusin. In Earl L. Baker, "Israel Fine," 2, the great-grandson notes that according to his own father, Fine was "somewhat well-to-do on immigrating to America."

⁵ Racusin is sometimes spelled Rakusin. The 1890 *Philadelphia City Directory* lists two Philip Fines, but no Israel Fine. The 1891 *Philadelphia City Directory* does not list an Israel Fine. There is a listing in 1891 for the business of Isaac and Philip Fine and Jon Racusin, but Fine's Hebrew name was Yisrael. The *Philadelphia City Directory 1892* has business listings for Philip and Louis Fine, for Israel Fine, and for Israel & Heyman. There is no Israel Fine listed in either the 1891 or 1892 *Baltimore City Directory*. Israel Fine first appears in 1893 as a clerk, along with Louis. In 1894, the *Baltimore City Directory* has business listings for Racusin and Fine and for Fine and Son.

For daughters see Earl L. Baker, "Israel Fine." According to the obituary in the *New York Times*, November 28, 1930, the daughters are listed as Mrs. Mary Hoffman, Mrs. Alice Baker (not Pauline as noted by Baker), Mrs. M. Segal, and Mrs. Culman Baker. The obituary includes Louis as a survivor as well.

Information about the Fine family is either inconsistent or nonexistent in the U.S. federal censuses. For example, the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Baltimore City,

Maryland, states that Minnie Fine immigrated in 1895, yet the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Baltimore City, Maryland, states that Israel Fine immigrated in 1891. The Twelfth Census lists Mary's birth date as 1873 in Russia and Mollie's birth date as 1896 in Maryland. The Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Baltimore City, Maryland, lists Mary's birth date as 1867 in Russia. Her parents are listed as Israel and Mena Fine.

⁶ Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia, 1971), 142; Philip Kahn, *Uncommon Threads: Threads That Wove the Fabric of Baltimore Jewish Life* (Baltimore, 1996), 59, 217, 225. According to Kahn (who uses the spelling Pekroyer Shul), the congregation merged with Mikro Kodesh, founded in 1886, and again in 1963 with Beth Israel. Membership lists are not extant, so it is unknown if Fine was a member of the synagogue. Erin Titter, archivist, JMM, email to author, May 24, 2006.

⁷ *Israel Fine and Son, College Cut Clothing*, 1915, pamphlet collection, JMM. No similar business brochures are extant in the JMM for other clothing manufacturing businesses owned by German Jews, although they may exist elsewhere. Titter email.

⁸ Mollie Baker, *Three Anniversaries*, 6, 17. The booklet has 112 pages and ends with the translation by Abram Simon, of Washington, DC, of a Hebrew poem written by Fine at the installation of B'nai B'rith Monorah Lodge of Baltimore, June 14, 1915. Simon was the rabbi of the Reform Washington Hebrew Congregation.

⁹ Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 223.

¹⁰ Rev. Dr. S. Schaffer, "Sketch of the History of Shearith Israel Congregation," in Isidor Blum, *Jews of Baltimore: An Historical Summary of Their Progress and Status as Citizens of Baltimore from Early Days to the Year Nineteen Hundred and Ten* (Baltimore, 1910), 62. "Israel Fein" and "Louis Fein" are listed among those who joined the congregation at its new location. Each *Baltimore City Directory* beginning with 1893 provides addresses of the Fines as they relocated to choicer neighborhoods and streets. Earl L. Baker, "Israel Fine," 2.

¹¹ "Israel Fine Dies," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 28, 1930; Mrs. M. M. Blumberg, "Dedicated to Mr. Israel Fine in Honor of His Eightieth Birthday July 17, 1927," *Zemirot Yisrael* (Baltimore, 1930), 30, notes that Fine was a member of Chizuk Amuno. According to Alfred Segal, Fine's grandson, "When Israel Fine was clipped by a car and couldn't walk to shul, he established a shul in his attic where . . . the men congregated on Friday night and Saturday for services." Segal also explained that his grandmother, Minna Fine, was not involved in community affairs and that she only spoke Yiddish. Alfred Segal letter to author July 18, 2006.

¹² Jan Bernhardt Schein, *On Three Pillars: The History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, 1871–1996* (Baltimore, 2000), 70–71, 140–141; "Israel Fine Dies," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 28, 1930; Blumberg, "Dedicated to Mr. Israel Fine." The author's Russian-born, widowed grandmother and her four sons joined Chizuk Amuno around 1919 or 1920. She supported her family by taking in boarders. This demonstrates that the synagogue was welcoming to lower class eastern Europeans as well as successful ones like Fine.

¹³ Mollie Baker, *Three Anniversaries*, 26–27, 32.

¹⁴ "Israel Fine Dies," *Baltimore Sun*, November 24, 1930; (the identical obituary appears in the [Baltimore] *Jewish Comment*, November 28, 1930); "Israel Fine Dies at 83; Was Noted Poet," *New York Times*, November 25, 1930; William Rosenau, "In Memoriam—Israel Fine," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 28, 1930; Benzion Eisenstadt, "Fine, Yisrael ben Jehudah, in *Dorot ha-Aharonim* (New York, 1913–1915), 278–279.

¹⁵ "Israel Fine Endows Home," *New York Times*, July 20, 1926. Herzliyyah (also, Herzliyya, Hertselyyah), named for Theodor Herzl, had been founded as a moshav in 1924 on land acquired by the American Zion Commonwealth Corporation, a land purchasing agency founded in 1914 by Bernard Rosenblatt, honorary secretary of the Federation of American Zionists. On Herzliyyah see *Encyclopaedia Judaica* VIII (Jerusalem, 1972), 421–422. On the American Zion Commonwealth Corporation see *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel* I (New York, 1994), 70–71.

Hadassah did not act quickly enough to build and Fine grew impatient. He deeded the land to the Jewish Yemenite settlers of the moshav to construct housing and a synagogue. Apparently, Hadassah remained only as a street name in the worker's area. Although a street was also named "Nahalat Yisrael" in honor of Israel Fine, the area continued to be called the "Yemenite Settlement" and Israel Fine was not remembered. Shoshanah Migdal-Klein-Bindiger, *Hertselyyah: he-'asor ha-rishon: yisudah, hakamtah, u-veniyatah . . . 1924–1934* (*Herzliyah: The First Decade; Its Foundation, Establishment and Development 1924–1934*) (Hertselyyah, 2005), 116 and n. 23.

¹⁶ "Will Help the Poor Upon 75th Birthday," *Baltimore American*, July 4, 1922. On his eightieth birthday, Fine gave \$640 to eight unnamed Jewish charities, "Birthday Gift to Charity," *New York Times*, July 18, 1927.

¹⁷ Arnold Blumberg, *A History of Congregation Shearith Israel of Baltimore: On the Threshold of a Century* (n.p., 1970), 10. See also Israel Fine, *Rev. Dr. Schepschel [sic] Schaffer, Twenty-Five Years of Activity in the Cause of Orthodox Judaism 1893–1918* (Baltimore, 1918). Although JMM cites Fine as the author, his name appears only as the author of the Hebrew poem.

¹⁸ "In Memoriam—Israel Fine," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 28, 1930. See below.

¹⁹ Translation from the Hebrew by the author with the assistance of Avi Bieler. The committee consisted of Rabbi Schaffer and Manes Strauss of Shearith Israel, German Jewish manufacturer and Zionist Sigmund Sonneborn, Zionists Louis Lutzky and Dr. Harry Friedenwald, leader of Chizuk Amuno Congregation; Also, Michael Simon Levy, the German Jewish straw hat manufacturer who was president of Chizuk Amuno, a Zionist and a Jewish communal leader; Rabbi William Rosenau of Reform Oheb Shalom, Orthodox leader Tanhum Silverman, Rosa (Mrs. Goody) Rosenfeld, whose husband was president of the Purim Association and brother-in-law of Joseph Friedenwald, and Israel Levinstein. In addition to the signatures, the brief explanation at the bottom of the portrait noted that "Compliments were exchanged, and Mr. Fine was urged to continue to sing of Jehuda and Jerusalem." The portrait is at JMM. "A groyser tiger surprise" (A Grand Surprise), *Baltimor Amerikaner*, March 27, 1980.

²⁰ Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jew, 1585–1990: A History* (Brooklyn, 1995), 161, 171; “A Sanctuary in the Wilderness,” in Alan Mintz, ed., *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects* (Detroit, 1993), 31.

²¹ Marcus, *American Jew*, 204–205, 207.

²² *Ibid.*, 208.

²³ See Mintz, “Sanctuary,” 31; Alan Mintz, “Hebrew Literature in America,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 93; Eisig Silberschlag, *From Renaissance to Renaissance: Hebrew Literature from 1492–1970* (New York, 1973), Part One, 248–290; “Hebrew Literature, Modern,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* VIII, 209–214.

²⁴ Mintz, “Sanctuary,” 31–32.

²⁵ Myer Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature IV* (New York, 1960), 1049. Also called *Ner Ha-Ma’aravi*, the journal appeared 1895 to 1897. Schwartzberg made this complaint after the journal ceased publication.

²⁶ Marcus, *American Jew*, 200–204; Waxman, *History of Jewish Literature, IV*, 1052; Mintz, “Sanctuary,” 32–33. On Benderly see Nathan Winter, *Jewish Education in the Pluralist Society* (New York, 1966); “Benderly, Samson,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* IV, 477; Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 188–193. On Hebrew in America see Jacob Kabakoff, *Halutse ha-sifrut ha-’Ivrit ba-Amerikah: mekharim u-teudot* (Pioneers of American Hebrew literature), (Tel Aviv and Cleveland, 1966); Kabakoff, *Shoharim ve-ne’emanim: masot u-mekharim ‘al ha-sifrut veka-tarbut ha-’Ivrit ba-Amerikah* (Seekers and Stalwarts: Essays and Studies on American Hebrew Literature and Culture), (Jerusalem 1978); Gershon Shaked, “The Beginnings of Hebrew Literature in America,” trans. and ed. Evelyn Ben-Shim’on and Ruth Toket in *Identity and Ethos: A Festschrift for Sol Liptzin on the Occasion of His 85th Birthday*, ed. Mark Gelber (New York, 1986), 279–293; Ezra Spicehandler, “Ameriqa’iyut in American Hebrew Literature,” in *Hebrew in America*, ed. Alan Mintz, 68–104.

²⁷ Waxman, *History of Jewish Literature, IV*, 1050.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1050–1051; Silberschlag, *From Renaissance*, 269; “Rosenzweig, Gerson,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XIV, 303; Whiteman, “Fiddlers Rejected,” 93. The translations appear in Rosenzweig’s *Mi-zimrath ha-arez, American national songs in Hebrew* ([New York?], [1898]).

²⁹ Silberschlag, *From Renaissance*, 266–267.

³⁰ Whiteman, “Fiddlers Rejected,” 93 (quotation); Menahem Mendel Dolitzki, preface (in Hebrew), *Shire Menahem, hegyonot ve-hezyonot . . .* (New York, 1900).

³¹ “Rabinowitz, Isaac (Ish Kovno),” *Jewish Encyclopedia* X (New York, 1905), 303; “Shir Berakhah,” (Song [or Poem] of Blessing) in *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*, 36–37.

³² “Le-Yom huledet profesor zeh-li-kovets,” (For Professor Selikovitch’s Birthday [perhaps a play on words]), *Zemiroth Yisrael*, 85; “Selikovitch, George,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XIV, 1135.

³³ Waxman, *History of Jewish Literature, IV*, 1063; “Silkner, Benjamin Nahum,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XIV, 1540; Shaked, “Beginnings of Hebrew Literature,” 284–285; Jacob Kabakoff, “B. N. Silkner and His Circle: The Genesis of the New Hebrew Literature in America,” *Judaism* 39:1 (1990): 97–103; Mintz, “Hebrew Literature in America,” 100;

Michael Weingrad, "Lost Tribes: The Indian in American Hebrew Poetry," *Prooftexts* 24 (2004): 291-319.

³⁴ Mintz, "Hebrew Literature in America," 105-108; Waxman, *History of Jewish Literature*, IV, 1063-1065; "Lisitzky, Ephraim E.," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XI, 304-305.

³⁵ Mintz, "Hebrew Literature in America," 102-108; Weingrad, "Lost Tribes," 309-311; Waxman, *History of Jewish Literature*, IV, 1065-1067; "Efros, Israel Isaac," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* VI, 468-469.

³⁶ Weingrad, "Lost Tribes," 295.

³⁷ See "Table 4. Jewish Population in Selected American Cities, 1878, 1907, 1927," in Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration 1880-1920* (Baltimore, 1992), 137. This table is adapted from Lee Shai Weissbach, "The Jewish Communities of the United States on the Eve of Mass Migration," *American Jewish History* 78 (September 1988): 79-108; "Table 14. Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places 1910 Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census" Internet Release Date, June 15, 1998, <http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0027/tab14.txt> (accessed by P. K. Pearlstein, August 23, 2006.)

³⁸ Sorin, *Time for Building*, 137. Chicago also had a Jewish population of 100,000 in 1907, while New York boasted 600,000. Population estimates for all cities vary from source to source. For example, in Murray Friedman, ed., *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America* (Philadelphia, 1993), Philadelphia's Jewish population is placed at 76,000 in 1907. In his introduction (p. 7), Friedman indicates that by World War I, the Jewish population was 200,000. See also "Table 14. Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places 1910."

³⁹ Whiteman, "Fiddlers Rejected," 84-89. Gersoni is also spelled Gershoni.

⁴⁰ Maxwell Whiteman, "The Philadelphia Group," in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia*, ed. Friedman, 163-178.

⁴¹ Sorin, *Time for Building*, 137; Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 149-150. Estimates for Baltimore also vary from source to source. See also Blum, *Jews of Baltimore*; Abraham D. Glushakow, *Baltimore Bicentennial Jewish Book* (Baltimore, 1975); Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*; Gilbert Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore: A Family Album* (Baltimore, 2000); Sandler, *Small Town Baltimore* (Baltimore, 2002).

⁴² On the early history of these congregations see Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 47-68, 108-119, 177-182; Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*, 17-24, 55-61; Schein, *On Three Pillars*.

⁴³ Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*, 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 55-61. Chizuk Amuno had already sold its downtown building to B'nai Israel, the *Russische Shul*, in 1895. Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 141-142.

⁴⁵ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 70-71, 140-141.

⁴⁶ Jo Ann E. Argersinger, "The City That Tries to Suit Everybody: Baltimore's Clothing Industry," in *The Baltimore Book*, ed. Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, and Linda Zeidman (Philadelphia, 1991), 81, 86-87; Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 133-137. See also Philip Kahn, Jr., *A Stitch in Time: the Four Seasons of Baltimore's Needle Trades* (Baltimore, 1989).

⁴⁷ Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 172–174. *Ha-Pisgah* (1889–1899) was also published in New York, Boston, and Chicago.

⁴⁸ Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 173–174; Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*, 141–142.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 194, 196–198; David Panitz, *Sefer Zikhronot Tsiyon* (Book of Remembrances of Zion) (c. 1902–1903; reprint, Jerusalem, 1978 or 1979), 46, 54–55; S. Schaffer, “Zionism” and “Autobiography of Rev. Dr. S. Schaffer,” in Blum, *Jews of Baltimore*. Schaffer notes that he was president of the Hovevei Zion chapter in Baltimore and then president of the Council of Baltimore Zionist Associations. In 1901, he was one of fifteen delegates from the United States to the Fifth Congress. On Schaffer see also Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America: the Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present* rev. ed. (New York, 1981), 201. Carl Hall, which was the way Panitz wrote it, was perhaps part of Carlin’s Amusement Park, north of Druid Park Drive, between Park Circle and Liberty Heights Avenue. In October 1897, Schaffer was one of the speakers at a rally at then-Orthodox Keshet Israel synagogue in the Jewish quarter of Philadelphia. It was held by the newly formed Ohavei Zion chapter to review the proceedings of the recently held First Zionist Congress. Harry Boonin, *The Jewish Quarter of Philadelphia: A History and Guide 1881–1930* (Philadelphia, 1999), 80–81.

⁵⁰ Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 193–208.

⁵¹ Sorin, *Time for Building*, 223.

⁵² Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 198.

⁵³ Mollie Baker, *Three Anniversaries*, 27–29. One of Fine’s obituaries states that “much of his writing was done riding on street cars to and from work,” “Israel Fine Dies,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 28, 1930. Other Hebrew poets were engaged in earning a living as well and were also only able to compose in what spare time they had.

⁵⁴ The title page has the logo of the Central Jewish Relief Committee. The verso of the title page states that all of the proceeds from the sale were devoted to the relief of the “Jewish war sufferers.” In addition to Hebrew and English, there was also a Yiddish title page, *Di naye Megilas Ekhah*. The Central Relief Committee, organized by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, was formed to aid European Jews during World War I. *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* III (New York, 1941), 92–93. Translators of other poems were Fine’s sons, Louis and Philip, Cantor Tobias Salzman, Teresa Brafman Cohen, wife of Simon Cohen, founder of Oheb Shalom, Louis Michel, Benjamin Cohen, and Abram Simon.

⁵⁵ The Hebrew poem Fine wrote on the death of Rabbi Szold appears on the front page of *Jewish Comment*, August 8, 1902, in the issue immediately following Szold’s death.

⁵⁶ Kabakoff, *Shoharim ve-ne’emanim*, 250–258; Avraham ben Meir Lurya, *Hofshiyot Kyuba*, (New York, 1901). Lurya was also known as Abraham Lewis.

⁵⁷ “A Dream Phantasm,” and “Ahare Mot Makinli,” (After the Death of McKinley), in *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*, 21–22, 125–127; Kabakoff, *Shoharim ve-ne’emanim*, 253. Kabakoff notes that in order to maintain rhyme, Fine, in the fourth line of the poem, corrupts the grammar. Since his poems were shared among close family and friends and those who may not have been as well versed in Hebrew as perhaps poets and literary critics, he sacrificed correctness for the sound of the rhyme.

⁵⁸ "Hay, John Milton," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* VII, 1946; "John Hay," and "Le-zikaron Dzohn Hai" (In Memory of John Hay), in *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*, 20–22, 119–121. John Hay served as secretary of state under presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt from 1898 until his death in 1905. One outcome of the treaty was recognition of Romania as a separate kingdom. Another was the special legal status given to some religious groups. Hay interceded on behalf of the Jews who had been denied special status.

⁵⁹ "Shire tehilah u-vrakhah" (Songs [or Poems] of Praise and Blessing) and "President Roosevelt" in *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*, 1–4, 9–11; Kabakoff, *Shoharim ve-ne'emanim*, 253–258. Isaac and Manes Hamburger, Moses Pels, and Louis Baker were also in the delegation. The president presented Fine with an official autographed photograph which Fine included in his business brochure and in his 1907 book.

⁶⁰ "Le-yom huledet nesianu Teodor Roozvelt" (For the Birthday of Our President Theodore Roosevelt) and "A Poem" in *Neginoth ben-Yehudah*, 27–29, 49–50.

⁶¹ Grossman, *Judaica at the Smithsonian*, cover, 215. Cantor Tobias Salzman provided the English translation. The English and Hebrew poems were printed on white silk with a border of red, white, and blue ribbon. Each verse was alternately printed in blue or red ink. A portrait of George Washington with an eagle superimposed on an American flag above the president and a laurel wreath below with words, "The Father of his country," appears at the head of the scroll. At the end is a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Above the president is an American flag with the words, "E Pluribus Unum," and below his portrait is an eagle in flight with the words, "Emancipation Proclamation Abraham Lincoln" in the bird's claws. The scroll mantle cover contains an American flag with a ribbon inscribed "The Star-Spangled Banner." The Hebrew inscription is "The flag [of the tribe] of Judah," referring probably to Fine's father, Judah. The reverse side of the mantle has an American flag with the dates 1814–1914 and, in Hebrew, "Israel Levin Fine/Fromma Minna Fine/1865–1915/Baltimore," referring to their jubilee wedding anniversary. Grossman, *Judaica at the Smithsonian*, 215. "The Star-Spangled Banner," written by poet-lawyer Francis Scott Key, was inspired by the valiant American defense of Fort McHenry, Maryland, against the British in 1814. Thus it had local appeal for Fine. He donated the scroll to the Smithsonian Institution in 1921.

⁶² Mollie Baker, *Three Anniversaries*, "Shir ha-degel" (Song of the Flag), 50–51, and "The Star-Spangled Banner," 52–57. See also Kabakoff, *Shoharim ve-ne'emanim*, 261. The mantle cover for "The Star-Spangled Banner" scroll appeared in the exhibit, *From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America*, Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, November 2005–February 2006. The scroll cover moved to the exhibit, *For Which It Stands*, McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, Chicago, May 13–November 13, 2006. It will be included in Katy Kendrick and Marilyn Zoidis, *For Which It Stands: The American Flag in American Life*, (Washington, DC, forthcoming). Marilyn Zoidis, email to author, January 13, 2006.

According to an April 19, 2006, *Washington Post* interview of Brent Glass, director of the National Museum of American History, conducted by Philip Kennicott, the American flag has taken on "new narrative importance to the public since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. It is famous for its role in the War of 1812, which was the only other time Washington suffered

serious attack. . . . The flag is no longer simply an object, a symbol, but since 9/11 has become a 'holy relic' . . . that links us to defining moments of national injury."

⁶³ Ephraim Deinard, *Kohelet Amerikah* (A Catalogue of Hebrew Books Printed in America from 1735 to 1926), (St. Louis, 1926), 94–95; Deinard, *Sifrat Yisrael be-Amerikah* (The Hebrew Literature in America), (Jaffa and New York, 1930–1934), 67; "Deinard, Ephraim," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* V, 1462. Deinard was a traveler, bibliophile, publisher, founder of the early American Hebrew journal, *Ha-Leumi* (The National), and Hebrew author of fifty books and pamphlets. Born in 1846, in Kurland, today part of Latvia, he came to this country in 1888 and nine years later unsuccessfully attempted to establish a Jewish agricultural settlement in Nevada. An ardent Zionist, he moved to Palestine and lived there from 1913 to 1916, trapped by the outbreak of war, before returning to the United States. He spent his latter years in New Orleans at the home of his son-in-law, Reform Rabbi Mendel Silber. Translation from Hebrew by the author, with assistance from Dr. Michael Grunberger and Sharon Horowitz.

⁶⁴ William Rosenau, "In Memoriam-Israel Fine," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 28, 1930. In a brief three line notice, *Ha-Do'ar* (The Mail), the American Hebrew weekly, noted the death of the aged Hebrew poet, December 19, 1930.

⁶⁵ Mintz, "Sanctuary," 31–32.

⁶⁶ Waxman, *History of Jewish Literature*, IV, 1049.

At One with the Majority

by

Mary Stanton

For more than 150 years, Montgomery, Alabama's Jews have contributed to the city's civic, cultural, and financial health, yet when scholars explore "the Jews of the South," they generally cite the communities of Atlanta, Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, and Richmond. Montgomery's history is interwoven in a tapestry of civil rights and civil liberties struggles which produced the conditions that gave rise to the 1955/1956 bus boycott, a demonstration that paralyzed the city, divided families and friends, and challenged individual consciences. How the capital city's Jews dealt with these tensions is the story of their southern experience.

The literature concerning southern and even Montgomery Jews and black civil rights is extensive. During the 1960s when Allan Krause surveyed Reform rabbis in the region, few reported active participation. Like and because of their congregants, most were silenced by fear. The authors in an anthology edited by Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin found more outspoken rabbis, traced the activism backward in time, and related it to a broader social agenda. Clive Webb expanded on this framework. Like his predecessors, he recognized the limits intimidation placed on the actions of the majority. Deep South cities like Montgomery fostered further challenges. As Webb and others have demonstrated, some Jews did not require coercion to agree with southern racial mores. They and those who might be defined at the time as moderate and even liberal opposed the actions of national Jewish

organizations. Nonetheless a small number of Jews, particularly rabbis and women, did speak out, sometimes with dire personal consequences. This essay largely agrees with these earlier conclusions, brings together the materials on Montgomery over an extended timeframe, relates the events to the emergence and growth of congregational life, and adds detail to the analysis of the roles of the city's Jews during the modern civil rights era.¹

*Montgomery Jewish History:
From the Beginnings through the Civil War*

In the 1830s Jews began to arrive from Bavaria where they had been subjected to the *Matrikel*, a civil code requiring them to register in order to marry or work. Severely limiting the number who could marry or enter the work force, the *Matrikel* also regulated everything from how many Jews could settle in a town or village to how many children they could produce.²

In 1838 Henry and Josiah Weil emigrated and then supported themselves as dry goods peddlers while they learned English and saved towards establishing a business. It is no mystery why the brothers were anxious to assimilate in a country where hard work was rewarded, where Jews were permitted to own land and leave it to their children, speak their minds, vote, and even run for office. Their sentiments were reflected in Rabbi Gustav Posnanski's remarks at the 1841 dedication of K. K. Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina. "This country," he said, "is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem, this house of God our Temple."³

The Weils ultimately entered the cotton business. Alabama was the land of cotton in fact as well as in song, and Montgomery County produced nearly one fifth of the state's crop. The Weils ginned, bagged, and shipped cotton down the Alabama River to Mobile for sale, collected a broker's percentage, and provided cash advances at interest to the planters. By the turn of the century, J. & H. Weil Cotton Merchants was thriving.

As the economy expanded, more enterprising individuals, including immigrant Jews, were drawn to the city. By 1850, Emanuel and Meyer Lehman arrived from the German city of Rimpar to join their brother Henry who, like the Weils, had

*Lehman, Durr advertisement c. 1861.
(Courtesy of Mary Ann Neeley, Landmarks Commission,
Montgomery, Alabama.)*

peddled cloth, thread, needles, and notions for six years until he was able to rent a store on Commerce Street.⁴ Since many of his customers were cash-poor farmers, Henry was often paid in raw cotton. His ambitious younger brothers, intrigued by the Weils' success, encouraged him to learn the cotton business. Henry was happy to sell dry goods, but he dabbled in cotton brokering to please his brothers. By the time he died of yellow fever in 1855, his cotton business had outstripped his dry goods. In 1858 Emanuel opened a second office in New York City to establish a presence in the commodity trading capital of the nation. Most of the Lehman accounts came from New York, Chicago, Liverpool and London. To service the business, Meyer remained in Montgomery purchasing cotton, while Emanuel brokered it from New York. The arrangement worked well until the Civil War. In 1861 a northern

blockade cut the brothers off from each other, and Meyer suddenly needed warehouses to store his cotton. He entered into a partnership with gentile warehouseman John Wesley Durr, creating Lehman-Durr, one of Alabama's largest cotton factoring operations. It was unusual, but not unheard of, for Jews and gentiles to enter into business partnerships. A later successful example of this is Montgomery's insurance brokerage firm of N. B. Holt and Leopold Straus.

The stories of the Weils and Lehmans are exceptional because of their early arrival and success but also representative of the immigrant Jewish occupational path. Many German Jews entered Montgomery's merchant class which supported the plantation economy. They prospered as the planters prospered, and few were likely to criticize the practice of slavery, the labor system which fueled the cotton industry. Prosperity brought social mobility, and many of these Jewish merchants, like many gentile merchants, became slaveholders. This was not unique to Alabama's capital city. Historian Jacob Rader Marcus noted that as early as 1820 over 75 percent of Jewish families in Charleston, Richmond, and Savannah owned domestic slaves and almost 40 percent of all Jewish householders in the United States owned one or more slaves. In his study of the Jews of Charleston, James Hagy also found that Jews owned slaves in roughly the same proportion as their white, Christian, urban counterparts.⁵ While the majority of Montgomery's Jews did not own slaves, the prosperous Weils kept both household and field slaves, and by 1860 Meyer Lehman had purchased a total of seven domestic slaves.⁶

On November 17, 1846, Chevra Mevaker Cholim, a Jewish benevolent society designed to care for the sick, assist the poor, and provide traditional ritual burials for the dead, was organized. Two years later, Congregation Kahl Montgomery was chartered.⁷ Services were initially conducted at Lyceum Hall downtown and later above Meyer Uhlfelder's Dry Goods on North Court Street. Almost a century later, the Montgomery Fair Department Store, where Rosa Parks worked as a tailor's assistant, occupied the same site as Uhlfelder's.

*The former Kahl Montgomery synagogue at Church and Catoma streets.
This building was dedicated in 1861 and sold to the Church of Christ in 1900.
(Courtesy of Mary Stanton who photographed the building in 2006.)*

Sabbath services attracted curious Christians who wanted to experience “the ritual practices of the chosen people of God.”⁸ They were fascinated by these “Hebrews” who wrapped themselves in shawls and sat around a lectern listening to scripture read in a mysterious language, some rocking back and forth in concentrated prayer. The gentiles felt no compunction about attending what they considered public worship. Christian services, after all, were theoretically open to all who wanted to hear the word of God, even to African Americans who were relegated to sitting in balconies apart from the white congregants. And the city’s Jews made the gentiles feel welcome.

In 1854, New Orleans merchant Judah Touro bequeathed the new congregation two thousand dollars with which a parcel of land was purchased at Church and Catoma streets. Ground was broken for a sanctuary just before the Civil War began. For Alabama, the road to war started at the 1860 National Democratic

Convention in Charleston when state representative William L. Yancey challenged the party to “protect slavery or prepare for Southern secession.” After Abraham Lincoln’s election in November, a state convention was called. On January 11, 1861, the delegates voted sixty-one to thirty-nine to secede and created the Republic of Alabama. Representatives from South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana subsequently gathered in the capital city on February 4 to establish a Confederate congress and write a constitution. Former Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis was elected provisional president on February 9, and Montgomery became the capital of the Confederacy owing to its central location and access to water and rail transportation.

Within weeks, Davis ordered General Pierre G. T. Beauregard to remove the federal troops from Fort Sumter, South Carolina. On April 13, 1861, the fort was surrendered, and two days later Lincoln declared a state of insurrection. At that time, 125,000 Jews were living in the North with 25,000 below the Mason-Dixon Line, mostly in New Orleans, Charleston, and Atlanta. Montgomery’s Jewish population of roughly one thousand produced its share of military volunteers and dissenters.⁹

As the secession vote demonstrated, not all Alabamians were of one mind concerning the Confederacy. The Moses brothers, Alfred, Mordecai, and Henry, offered their services to Governor John Gill Shorter who appointed Alfred clerk of the Confederate District Court. Mordecai enlisted in the 46th Alabama under Captain James Powell and was later commissioned for diplomatic and fundraising service in the West Indies and Canada. Henry served in the infantry.¹⁰ Cotton merchant Emanuel Lehman accepted an ambassadorship to England and furthered his lucrative cotton contracts with Liverpool merchants. He managed to dovetail his business interests with raising funds for the Confederacy on trips back and forth across the ocean. Lehman made the highly irregular arrangement work and grew rich in the process. His brother Meyer raised funds for relief of Alabama’s prisoners of war until the merger with Durr when Meyer temporarily relocated to Union-occupied New Orleans in order to more easily fulfill the contracts that Emanuel was negotiating. The Lehmans’ rival,

Leopold Jacob (Jake) Weil, younger brother of Henry and Josiah, was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Fourth Alabama Regiment under Captain Jacob Greil, a Montgomery Jewish dry goods wholesaler. Jake Weil's ambivalence is evident in a letter he wrote to a fourth brother back in the Germanic states. "The enemy has provoked war by invading the South," he said, "[T]his land has been good to us all. . . . I shall fight to my last breath to defend that in which I believe."¹¹ Defending his adopted country was apparently what drove Weil, not chattel slavery. Before reporting for duty he freed all of his field slaves and retained the domestics to keep his household running in his absence.

On March 8, 1862, in the midst of the hostilities, James K. Gutheim, spiritual leader of Dispersed of Judah congregation in New Orleans, presided at Kahl Montgomery's dedication. During the invocation, Gutheim, a passionate supporter of the Confederacy, prayed "Bless, O Father, our efforts in a cause which we conceive to be just; the defense of our liberties and rights and independence under just and equitable laws. May harmony of sentiment and purity of motive, unfaltering courage, immovable trust in our leaders, both in national council and in the field, animate all the people of our beloved Confederate States, so as to be equal to all emergencies — ready for every sacrifice, until our cause can be vindicated."¹²

Lay leaders conducted services until September 1863 when Gutheim, by that time a refugee, agreed to serve as the congregation's first professional spiritual leader. When federal troops had occupied New Orleans in 1862, Yankee General Benjamin "the Beast" Butler required every citizen to take an oath of allegiance to the Union. Gutheim refused. In June 1863 the Jewish monthly journal *Occident* reported that "it is with deep regret that we announce the departure of our friend and former correspondent, the Reverend James K. Gutheim from New Orleans in obedience to a military order banishing those who will not or cannot take the oath of allegiance offered to the citizens of that place. We know the value of Mr. Gutheim as a Jewish minister, and fear that his leaving may result in the dismemberment of his flock during the prevalence of the fearful war now raging in the country."¹³

Dispersed of Judah need not have worried. Gutheim returned to New Orleans and that congregation as the war came to a close.¹⁴ In late 1864 he was succeeded at Kahl Montgomery by Rabbi M. H. Meyers, who had been trained in England and who was followed one year later by Rabbi G. L. Rosenberger. Rabbi Edward Benjamin Morris Browne, fondly known as “Alphabet Browne” because of all the academic degrees he had earned, occupied the pulpit for nine months beginning in 1869. Browne was a physician, lawyer and linguist as well as a rabbi. He subsequently served Atlanta’s Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (commonly known as The Temple) from 1877 to 1881, and become the first editor of *The Jewish South*.

This pattern of short-term spiritual leadership continued for the next seven years. Historian Janice Rothschild Blumberg, a great-granddaughter of Rabbi Alphabet Browne, notes:

[During] this period all rabbis in America were foreign born, often loners who had immigrated as individuals seeking freedom from the restrictions of Jewish life in Europe as well as pulpit opportunities that those inclined toward reform would have been unlikely to find in the old country. Each tried to establish his own interpretation of reforms that would sustain Judaism in America with its relatively open society and few facilities to maintain tradition. Inevitably, lay leaders often disagreed with their rabbis and the rabbis with each other. Tempers were volatile, membership fluid, and financial support inadequate, all of which contributed to brief tenures for the rabbis.¹⁵

The war dragged on through spring 1865, and three days after General Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, Virginia, Wilson’s Raiders, who had burned Selma, entered Montgomery. Before the Yankees arrived, however, resourceful Montgomerians tore down their warehouses and burned their provisions to keep the raiders from obtaining anything of value. Mayor Walter Coleman surrendered the city to General James Harrison Wilson on April 12, 1865. The city escaped Selma’s fate and recovery began early. By summer, although goods were still scarce and the government was barely functioning, Montgomery started to return to life. Alabama was under military rule, however, and former Confederates were

*Lehman, Durr & Co. headquarters, looking north on North Court Street, 1874.
The Oddfellows Hall, above Lehman, Durr, was the site of the first
High Holy Day services led by the Chevra Mevacher Cholim in 1846.
(Courtesy of Landmarks Commission, Montgomery.)*

denied the vote. The Republican Party of northerners, pro-Union southerners, and freed slaves quickly gained control of the municipal government.

Meyer Lehman returned from New Orleans late in 1865 to help John Wesley Durr rebuild the Lehman-Durr warehouses, and he and his brother were forgiven their unusual wartime living arrangements after loaning the state \$100,000 and investing heavily in rebuilding Alabama's railroads. In 1868, the brothers bought out John Wesley Durr's interest in the firm and Meyer joined Emanuel in New York City, leaving a brother-in-law to run the southern operation.¹⁶ Many such businesses illustrated Jewish

links across regions that helped ease the South's financial difficulties in the postbellum era and contributed to the creation of the infrastructure which fueled New South revitalization. The Lehman brothers continued to invest in the South although they never returned. They became so successful that when the New York Cotton Exchange was established in 1870, Meyer served on its first Board of Governors.¹⁷

Emanuel's son, Herbert, was elected Governor of New York in 1933 and later served in the U.S. Senate for a period that included the Montgomery bus boycott. Ironically, Herbert served on the national board of the NAACP when attorney Clifford Durr, grandson of John Wesley Durr, helped bail Rosa Parks out of jail after her arrest for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus. These activist descendants of one staunch defender of the Confederacy and two postwar financiers are emblematic of Montgomery's ongoing conflicted relationship with slavery, secession, and later segregation.

Reconstruction to the Early Civil Rights Era

The Civil War destroyed the South's planter aristocracy permitting a new generation of lawyers, farmers, and merchants to become leaders in Montgomery. They were determined to rescue the capital city from Reconstruction. In 1871, Mordecai Moses, who ran an insurance business, Roberts, Moses and Company, with his brothers, successfully ran for alderman. Four years later he was mayor. A "Redeemer," the *Montgomery Advertiser* endorsed Moses as "the candidate of the white men of Montgomery . . . both Jew and Gentile."¹⁸ He represented the Democratic Party's determination to nullify the political gains that "carpetbaggers," "scalawags," and ex-slaves had made during Reconstruction.

When a Republican took issue with Mayor Moses and used an antisemitic slur, *Montgomery Advertiser* editor Major William Wallace Screws defended his fellow Confederate veteran, "A Jew!"

What is there in that name that can be a reproach to any man, woman or child, now living on earth? MOSES, the wisest of law

givers, was a Jew. JOSHUA who commanded the sun to stand still . . . was a Jew. DAVID, 'a man after God's own heart,' was a Jew. SOLOMON . . . was a Jew. The prophet ELIJAH . . . was a Jew. JESUS CHRIST himself was a Jew! His mother was a Jewess. . . . In every age . . . the Jews have done their whole duty to the country in which they have resided. . . . Who has surpassed them in public spirit, in works of charity, and in devotion to principle? It is too late in the history of the world for any such illiberality to prevail as that a man does not deserve public confidence because he is a Jew."¹⁹

In 1881 Mordecai Moses retired from politics after serving three terms as mayor and became president of the Montgomery Gas and Electric Company. When his youngest sister Emily died in 1931, the *Advertiser* proclaimed that, "there was never a finer family who were more closely identified with the progress of this city than the Moses family. . . . They saw a great future and did wonderful things for Alabama."²⁰

By 1870, Kahl Montgomery was the city's center of Jewish life. Although Jews had easily assimilated into the business world, they remained subject to social exclusion. No matter how much money they had, Jews were not eligible for membership in the gentile men's exclusive enclaves, the Saxon, Magnolia, Joie de Vie, and Shooting clubs. In 1871, 150 Jewish men, many of whom were members of Kahl Montgomery, organized the Standard Club to meet socially and professionally and to demonstrate their standing in society. By the turn of the twentieth century it became a place where young Jewish women of prominent family background were introduced to Jewish men from the same class. Dances and cotillions, the equivalent of gentile southern balls, were routinely held during Falcon Picnic. Similar events were sponsored in Atlanta, New Orleans, Charleston, Savannah, Richmond, and Mobile, and weddings were celebrated among the southern Jewish gentry.²¹

Beginning with Gutheim, every spiritual leader who served Kahl Montgomery was a Reform rabbi. By the 1870s, keeping kosher was becoming optional, men and women were sitting together during services, English was used for some prayers, and organ music had become an integral part of worship. This made

the minority traditionalists uncomfortable. They agreed with Baltimore's Orthodox Rabbi Bernard Illowy who had written in 1858 that "Israelites of this country esteem nothing holy in their house, nothing holy in their lives, and stand before the world without a God, without a faith." Illowy accused reformers of "dealing with truth as with ordinary merchandise, laying aside what is no longer fashionable, and changing for this reason, their views, from day to day, because, they must manufacture their principles anew, to have them always in accordance with the popular taste."²² Although Kahl Montgomery remained united, as previously indicated, the dissension contributed to the coming and going of rabbis. This happened throughout the country as one faction or another gained influence. In 1874, the reforms were formally acknowledged when the membership voted to adopt the ritual used by Temple Emanu-El in New York City and to change its name to Temple Beth Or, the House of Light. These were majority but not unanimous decisions.²³

On December 3, 1876, Reform Rabbi Sigmund Hecht, the congregation's first long-term spiritual leader, arrived in a city of almost seventeen thousand including six hundred Jews. During his twelve-year tenure, a Sunday school was organized, the pulpit was moved from the center of the sanctuary to the front as in the Christian churches, and confirmation classes were introduced. The congregation was clearly moving its practices further along the route of Reform.

In 1885, Hecht worked with Gutheim to organize the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations. In December 1885, the conference adopted the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' principles of progressive Judaism as outlined in its Pittsburgh Platform of that year. The Southern Conference was headquartered in New Orleans and led by Gutheim, who is remembered as a father of Reform Judaism in the South. The conference was also a direct predecessor of and inspiration for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.²⁴

Rabbi E. K. Fisher succeeded Hecht in 1888, ushering in a second period of short-term professional spiritual leadership that continued through 1897 until tall, handsome Rabbi A. J. Messing,

*Temple Beth Or, Sayre and Clayton streets, dedicated June 6, 1902.
The congregation moved away in 1960 and the building was later demolished.
(Courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History.)*

Jr., was called. This blonde, blue-eyed bachelor wore a clerical collar and was widely recognized in the gentile community as the minister of the Jewish church. On November 30, 1899, Messing established a tradition of hosting a joint Thanksgiving service with Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Messing was unusually effective in his role as ambassador to the gentiles, a skill valued by his congregation since it reflected their desire to fit into the community and be accepted. This role was typical of other Reform rabbis of the era.²⁵

During Messing's tenure, Beth Or celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and plans were drawn up to construct a larger building to reflect the growing affluence of the membership. The Catoma Street temple was sold to the Church of Christ for \$7,500, and a parcel of land was purchased one block away at Sayre and Clayton streets. The cornerstone was laid there by Mayor E. B. Joseph

on January 1, 1901, and this building, which no longer stands, was dedicated on June 6, 1902. At this point the members who had never been comfortable with the Reform ritual withdrew to establish a second congregation in conjunction with a group of recently arrived eastern European Orthodox Jews.²⁶ The transition was accomplished without rancor, and the congregations remained close.

The sixteen-member Orthodox Congregation Agudath Israel, or Brothers of Israel, initially held services in the homes of members and celebrated the High Holy Days at the Oddfellows Hall on Court Square until Max Shulwolf, first congregation president, donated two rooms of his home for ongoing Sabbath worship. As the congregation grew, space was leased above stores and factories, and in 1910 Rabbi Henry Drexel filled the pulpit. Four years later a synagogue was built at 510 Monroe Street. Agudath Israel grew quickly as a steady stream of immigrants fleeing Russia, Austria-Hungary, Rumania, and elsewhere in eastern Europe, and, later, Poland arrived.

These immigrants were not anxious to assimilate. The men wore yarmulkes, spoke Yiddish, and fully intended to transplant their traditional practices to their new homeland. Many became grocers and dry goods vendors and lived in rooms behind or above the shops they rented in the Monroe Street business district where many of their customers were black. Monroe Street was the center of black activity in the downtown area with the Pekin Vaudeville Theater, Pekin Restaurant, and Pool Room, all located there. Blacks shopped in the Jewish stores and found that they were permitted to try on merchandise, make returns, and treated with a respect seldom extended to them on Dexter Avenue, the white shopping district. To the immigrant Jews struggling to make a living, a customer was a customer. They had yet to absorb the culture of white supremacy as many of the German Jews had, and their major concern was feeding their families.²⁷

In 1907, Beth Or's Rabbi Messing became the focus of a major scandal when it was discovered that he was involved with the wife of a prominent gentile.²⁸ The temple trustees quietly and quickly removed him. Rabbi Benjamin C. Ehrenreich, a

thirty-year-old progressive whose wife was distantly related to Josiah, Henry, and Jake Weil, was elected to succeed him.²⁹ At the time, David Weil, another distant cousin, served as president of the congregation. Although Ehrenreich had been trained at the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, he practiced Reform Judaism. Unlike most Reform Jews, however, he retained his zeal for Zionism. Introduced to the movement by Columbia University linguistics professor Richard J. H. Gottheil, a founder of the Federation of American Zionists, Ehrenreich became its first recording secretary. He did not subscribe to the notion that Reform Judaism and Zionism were irreconcilable.³⁰

In the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform of Reform Judaism, the rabbis had dismissed Zionism, explaining that “we consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine . . . nor restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State.” Some feared that advocacy for a Jewish homeland would subject Jews to allegations of split loyalties. Southern Jews were especially sensitive about this. These were, after all, the charges that the Klan would publicly level against Catholics for their allegiance to the Pope during the 1920s. Ehrenreich defended Zionism as a humanitarian effort on behalf of Jews who were not able to feel at home in the countries where they lived.

I am an ardent Zionist. Assimilation with the manners and customs of the people among whom we live is highly necessary and most important but the only trouble is that outside the United States and England it seems that nations of the world are unwilling to permit any such assimilation as much as the Jews of these countries may deny it.³¹

Although Ehrenreich broke with the Pittsburgh Platforms position on Zionism, he staunchly supported its advocacy of social reform. Shortly after the Ehrenreichs arrived in Montgomery, the rabbi preached a sermon calling for establishment of a juvenile court. Children were being sentenced for crimes as adults and Ehrenreich considered this a failure of the local justice system. His advocacy for reform and justice, of which support for social justice for African Americans was part, reflected his emphasis on

*Rabbi Bernard Ehrenreich with his first confirmation class at Beth Or, 1907.
(Courtesy of Temple Beth Or.)*

Prophetic Judaism throughout his tenure. He shared his passion with his wife, Irma Bock, a suffrage activist who later served as president of the Montgomery chapter of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Sensitive to prejudice, Ehrenreich was quick to defend Judaism. In 1908 he took issue with Dr. Lincoln Hulley of Florida's Stetson University who, while addressing the Alabama Educational Association's annual meeting in Montgomery, included several "Jew jokes" about Jewish merchants setting fire to their own businesses to collect the insurance. Ehrenreich called him to task the following day when he delivered his own presentation.³² Ehrenreich, like many Reform rabbis, felt the need to defend Judaism against prejudice. In the early twentieth century ethnic and religious jokes were staples of the vaudeville circuit and the old Jewish peddler had become a stock character on the stage,³³ but Ehrenreich considered such low humor inappropriate for a college

president. When several members of the Alabama Education Association and some Beth Or trustees criticized the rabbi's response as an over-reaction, Ehrenreich defended himself in a letter to the *Jewish American* on May 1, 1908.

The real harm was done because the address was delivered to many men and women who rarely if ever come in contact with the Jew and thus are led astray into believing that the words of the speaker and his jokes are based in fact. If one joke only had been told, he may have been pardoned, but to repeat and emphasize and particularly to point out that in connection with fire the Jews' name was always coupled is sinful as well as malicious.³⁴

Besides showing Ehrenreich as a defender against discrimination generally, this incident also illustrates early conflict between him and his congregants with them criticizing his outspokenness and he defending his actions. Civil rights would provide the main battlefield for such interaction.

In 1915, Ehrenreich invited philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Company and a man Ehrenreich greatly admired, to visit Beth Or. Rosenwald was a trustee of the nearby Tuskegee Institute and a friend of Booker T. Washington, the school's founder. Two years earlier he had established the first of his Rosenwald Schools in nearby Macon County. Between 1913 and his death in 1932, Rosenwald would provide matching funds to build six thousand schools for southern black children. In a lengthy obituary in *Crisis* magazine, the journal of the NAACP, Editor W. E. B. DuBois called Rosenwald "a subtle stinging critic of our racial democracy." DuBois wrote: "The South accepted his gift . . . and never grasped the failure of democracy which permitted an individual of a despised race to do for the sovereign states of a great nation that which they had neither the decency nor justice to do for themselves."³⁵

Rosenwald encouraged Ehrenreich to become involved in education reform and the congregation registered no strong objection. Given Washington's tacit acceptance of Jim Crow, support for Tuskegee and even for Rosenwald's separate black schools was not terribly controversial. The trustees did become concerned

a year later, however, when Ehrenreich expressed outrage after George Washington Carver was forced to use the freight elevator at Montgomery's Exchange Hotel. The Tuskegee scientist was trying to get to the ballroom for a presentation he had been asked to make to the United Peanut Growers' Association. Several trustees counseled Ehrenreich not to make an issue of it or to underestimate the gentile community's obsession with white supremacy. Criticizing southern white social policies that were belittling to blacks crossed the line of acceptable behavior.³⁶ The rabbi was deeply disturbed by the Carver incident. Like Max Heller of New Orleans, another southern Reform rabbi and Zionist, Ehrenreich frowned on the fact that the civil rights of black citizens could be so easily dismissed by a presumed democratic society. Both believed that this did not bode well for any minority and that black and Jewish acceptance in America were connected. Ehrenreich was also concerned with the reaction of his congregants.³⁷

Ehrenreich better understood his trustees' fears when on August 17, 1915, Leo Frank, the Jewish manager of an Atlanta pencil factory convicted of murdering "Little Mary Phagan," a thirteen-year-old employee, was kidnapped from a Georgia penitentiary.³⁸ Furious that Governor John Slaton had commuted Frank's death sentence to life in prison, twenty-five men, some leading citizens, broke him out of jail and drove him 175 miles to Marietta, the murdered girl's hometown, where they lynched him. Despite Frank's contradictory evidence, the jury had taken only four hours to convict him. "Let the Jew libertine take notice," ranted Tom Watson, controversial Populist politician and publisher, "Georgia is not for sale to rich criminals."³⁹ After the lynching, souvenir photographs of Frank's dangling body were sold throughout the city.

At the time of Phagan's murder, Georgia was the only state that allowed factory owners to employ ten-year-old children and work them eleven hours a day. In the industrial New South, rural children were increasingly being sent to the city to help support their families since their farms could no longer sustain them. A man like Frank, an outsider as a northerner and a Jew, and a member of Atlanta's business elite, seemed a perfect target for

resentful parents, disgruntled workers, and advocates for child labor laws. Strong evidence pointing to the factory's black janitor, Jim Conley, was discounted, and the prosecution actually called Conley as a witness against Frank. The Reverend L. O. Bricker, Mary Phagan's minister, observed soon after the lynching that it was as if the death of a black man [Conley] "would be a poor atonement for the life of this innocent little girl . . . but a 'Yankee Jew' would be a victim worthy to pay for the crime."⁴⁰

Many members of Montgomery's Temple Beth Or had friends and family living in Atlanta and the brutal murder terrified them. They entreated Ehrenreich to tread carefully since he represented them to the gentile community.

Why would an energetic progressive like Ehrenreich remain in such an environment? Historian Harold Wechsler speculates:

[In his early adult years, Ehrenreich] gained a reputation as an organizer and that talent served him in good stead for the rest of his life. Yet, as the years passed he gradually concluded that his real mission did not consist primarily of collective action, but in maintaining the dignity and sanctity of the individual through personal action. His move to Montgomery in 1906 may serve as a symbol of this shift in attitude."⁴¹

Ehrenreich remained in the capital city for almost fifteen years. After the Leo Frank lynching, however, he honored his trustees' wishes and focused his energies on the chaplaincy at nearby Camp Sheridan. During World War I, he offered his home at 906 South Perry Street as a clubhouse for Jewish officers and enlisted men. After the war, he helped found the Jewish Charities of Montgomery and also played an active role in civic affairs, serving as vice chair of the Chamber of Commerce, and joining the Masons, Elks, and Kiwanis. No record survives of any public pronouncements he may have made on behalf of black civil rights after 1915.

During Rabbi Ehrenreich's tenure, Ralph Cohen, a Ladino-speaking Jew, emigrated with ten of his countrymen from the island of Rhodes. They were fleeing the chronic economic instability under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. For centuries these Sephardim lived under Turkish rule and supported themselves as

shopkeepers, artisans, and civil servants. They established their Kalal synagogue in 1675, and the Jewish quarter was known as "La Piccola Gerusalemi," the Little Jerusalem.⁴² The Turks were in an almost constant state of warfare and as their empire crumbled, life became more difficult for the Jews who were treated like foreigners.

After his arrival in 1906, Cohen worked hard, learned English, and became a leader of Montgomery's vibrant Sephardic community that grew as Rhodes' political turmoil fueled Jewish emigration. On November 17, 1912, he married Sadie Toranto in Montgomery's first Sephardic wedding. The ceremony was conducted by Agudath Israel's Orthodox rabbi Henry Drexel.

Many of these new immigrants sold ice cream, fruits, soft drinks, and tobacco or repaired shoes in what became the Cottage Hill section of the city. Later, they established cafes, delicatessens, and supermarkets. David Varon, owner of the Daylight Café on Bibb Street, was said to have cashed more paychecks over his counter each week than many of Montgomery's banks.⁴³ Like their eastern European counterparts, many Sephardim did not work on the Sabbath, although some, even those who called themselves Orthodox, did.

In 1908, Sephardic Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services led by Cantor Simon Franco were conducted at the Agudath Israel synagogue on Monroe Street. The following spring, twenty more Rhodian immigrants arrived and Solomon (Sam) Benton assumed responsibility for organizing a benevolent society to assist these newcomers find work, care for the sick, and bury the dead in a dedicated area of Greenwood Cemetery. They also raised funds for the Behor Holim Society in Rhodes which assisted the poor. On July 27, 1912, fifty Rhodian Jews, with a bank account of two hundred dollars, established congregation Etz Ahayem, the Tree of Life, under the leadership of Solomon Rousso, Simon Franco, and Sam Beton. Rousso, who operated the Montgomery Delicatessen, served as president of what was Alabama's first Sephardic congregation.⁴⁴

Sephardic Orthodoxy differed from the somber eastern European tradition. The entire service was chanted in Ladino and

*Etz Ahayem, 450 Sayre Street, dedicated on May 19, 1927.
(Courtesy of Mary Stanton who photographed the building in 2006.)*

incorporated both sacred and folk music. During wedding ceremonies the father of the groom wrapped the couple in a prayer shawl. For them joyous feasting and dancing were integral parts of religious celebration. Had not King David danced in the streets when he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem?

Many Orthodox Jews, however, questioned if the Sephardim were Jews at all because their practices, language, culture, and even foodways were so different from their own. Yet divisions never rose to an issue separating the congregations in Montgomery. Perhaps because of their small numbers, one percent of the population, eastern European Orthodox, German Reform, and Sephardic Orthodox made a special effort to get along. In other

communities it was unusual for Reform and Orthodox rabbis to perform Sephardic weddings and funerals, but in Montgomery the rabbis helped out. Besides, finding Sephardic rabbis in the United States was difficult. Sephardic children also attended the Beth Or Hebrew School. *Montgomery is different* became a familiar refrain in the Jewish community. The three congregations might debate politics or religious practice, but they were united in spirit and shared efforts in the areas of religious education, philanthropy, and recreation. Many of the men were brothers in the city's B'nai B'rith and Masonic lodges. Many German Jewish women joined the Montgomery Council of Jewish women while eastern European and Sephardic women were more likely to associate themselves with Hadassah, although there was a good deal of cross over.

Relations with the gentile population were also generally good. Some Jews assimilated more readily than others, some intermarried, and most were cautiously optimistic. Most agreed that although random incidents of antisemitism were not unheard of, *Montgomery was different*.

On July 20, 1918, Congregation Etz Ahayem purchased a house at 450 Sayre Street to use as a synagogue. On the eve of the High Holy Days, Rabbi Ehrenreich presented the congregation with a Sefer Torah, the gift of Congregation Beth Or. Eight years later, Etz Ahayem razed the Sayre Street house and built a synagogue in its place. Mayor W. A. Gunter laid the cornerstone on May 19, 1927, and on Sunday afternoon, September 25, at the dedication, Circuit Court Judge Walter B. Jones observed:

[Every] good citizen of Montgomery, regardless of his denomination rejoices with the congregation of Etz Ahayem in [its] possession of this splendid Temple of Worship. . . . I know that church and synagogue can never be identical in forms, but they can become alike in purpose and spirit. I know that there are many and great differences between Judaism and Christianity, but I know, too, that there are many common ties and likenesses which unite us.⁴⁵

In January 1921, Rabbi Ehrenreich left Temple Beth Or on very good terms to become the full-time director of Camp

*"New Klan" recruitment parade on Dexter Avenue, 1925.
To the right is the entrance to Kress's Department Store.
(Courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History.)*

Kawanga for boys in Wisconsin, which he had founded in 1915. He was succeeded by Rabbi William Schwartz, who, like Rabbi Messing, was adept at maintaining good relations with the gentile community. This was an especially valuable skill, for during Schwartz's tenure, the Klan made its presence felt in Montgomery. In 1925 one-hundred robed, American flag-waving Klansmen, led by Birmingham's grand dragon, Horace Wilkinson, marched down Dexter Avenue to kick off a membership drive. Begun in Atlanta in 1915 this Klan defined itself as a fraternal organization like the Kiwanis or Rotary and sponsored family picnics, raised funds for charity, and strongly advocated "law and order." Men and women, disoriented by the rapid social changes that followed World War I, welcomed the Klan's promise to take action against the nation's immigration policy, immigrants, and Jazz Age immorality. Emissaries from this Invisible Empire visited local men and women whose morals or behavior violated the Klan's

definition of Christian sensibilities and frequently flogged them into repentance. In Birmingham they issued burning-cross warnings to keep blacks, Catholics, Jews, immigrants, union organizers, and communists "in their places," and provided financial support to politicians who demonstrated loyalty to "patriotic American values." Although no antisemitic incidents were reported in Montgomery, it was deemed dangerous to be too different, and the Beth Or congregation under Rabbi Schwartz's leadership tried hard not to be.

In 1928, Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein, a 1926 graduate of the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR), succeeded Schwartz. Given the trustees' discomfort with Ehrenreich's early activism and their appreciation of Schwartz's talents as an ambassador of goodwill, Goldstein seems an odd choice. He had been trained by Rabbi Stephen Wise, one of the nation's foremost Zionist spokespeople, founder of the JIR as well as the American Jewish Congress, and among the founders of the NAACP. Moreover at the 1905 dedication of New York's Free Synagogue Wise defined the rabbi's function as "not to represent the view of the congregation, but to proclaim the truth as he sees it." It is even more curious that Goldstein accepted the call after the search committee advised him that he was to "leave the Negro question alone."⁴⁶

Nonetheless, when in 1885 a group of Reform rabbis had gathered in Pittsburgh to write their Declaration of Principles, they maintained that Reform Judaism had a social mission. "We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission," they had written, "and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men." From their perspective, to deny the Torah's moral and ethical precepts was to deny the very essence of Judaism. It was inevitable that aspects of Reform Judaism would collide with the culture of white supremacy, just as aspects of Christian doctrine conflicted with it. The trustees of Beth Or recognized in Goldstein a rabbi who would challenge them, as Ehrenreich had, and yet they hoped that this charming young intellectual would also be able to maintain

the congregation's equilibrium in the racially polarized culture. This was a tall order.

Montgomery Jews and Early Civil Rights Struggles

Initially Goldstein was careful. Although he criticized the local planters for paying starvation wages to both black and white agricultural workers, when he spoke of human rights he usually used only the broadest language. Goldstein concentrated on intellectual enrichment for his congregation and introduced a Friday evening lecture series recruiting guest speakers, some on the caliber of philosopher Bertrand Russell.⁴⁷

In 1931, at the height of the Depression, Goldstein joined a Norman Thomas study group with half a dozen or so of Montgomery's white gentile socialists. Thomas, a gentile pacifist, was a leader in the American Socialist Party and the American Civil Liberties Union and a perennial candidate for the U.S. presidency. He is also remembered for his efforts to open up American immigration to Jewish victims of Nazi persecution in the 1930s. The members of the socialist study group were predominantly female: teachers, social workers, and some wives of affluent Beth Or members. Women generally were freer to pursue social concerns under the umbrella of clubs dedicated to civic and social improvement. They also used religious organizations, such as the United Church Women, as bases of operation that were difficult to attack because of their aura of respectability. But several in this group were associated with the more radical Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.⁴⁸ These included Professor Olive "Polly" Stone, a gentile sociology professor and dean of women at Montgomery's Women's College (later Huntingdon), Darlie Speed, whose grandfather had been president of the Mobile and Montgomery Railroad, her twenty-two-year-old daughter Jane Speed, and Bea Kaufman, an officer of the Montgomery Council of Jewish Women (whose husband Louis was a Beth Or trustee).⁴⁹

These local intellectuals considered themselves democratic socialists who advocated education, political, and social reform,

*Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein of Temple Beth Or
with his wife, Margaret, and their daughter Josie.
(Courtesy of Jo Goldstein Rogers.)*

including equal rights for women and blacks. They met alternately at Beth Or and the Women's College to discuss such works as Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*, the satirical plays of George Bernard Shaw, and the futuristic novels of H. G. Wells. Although some admired communist doctrine, most, like Norman Thomas, advocated incremental rather than revolutionary change. They were deeply concerned about the rise of European fascism which they equated with the ranting of white supremacy. One of their more popular and very controversial

guest speakers was Jeanette Rankin, former U.S. Representative from Montana, who in 1917 voted against President Woodrow Wilson's resolution to enter World War I and subsequently lost her bid for reelection.

In 1930, Professor Stone, whose family came from Dadeville in Tallapoosa County, began documenting the rise of a sharecropper movement there for her dissertation. She periodically invited union organizers to speak to her students and to the study group. Through Stone, Goldstein became acquainted with a number of black communists who were organizing the Tallapoosa sharecroppers and cotton pickers. The union fought for their right to market their own crops, earn a minimum wage of a dollar a day, and take a three hour midday break. Members of the study group collected food and clothing for the workers and several provided financial support.⁵⁰

Then, on March 25, 1931, nine black teenagers looking for work hitched a ride on a Southern Railway freight line and were arrested near Scottsboro in Alabama's northeast corner. Charged with raping two white women, they narrowly escaped lynching. In less than three weeks they were indicted, tried, convicted, and sentenced to die in the electric chair. White jurors were observed laughing outside the Scottsboro courthouse after only five minutes of deliberation. Although none of these innocent young men was executed, the last one was not released from prison until almost twenty years later.⁵¹

The study group raised funds for the Scottsboro Boys' defense, and Rabbi Goldstein was the only white clergyman to visit them on death row in Montgomery's Kilby prison. He subsequently joined the International Labor Defense's Scottsboro Defense Committee. The ILD was the legal arm of the American Communist Party. Bea and Louis Kaufman, who had become very close to Goldstein, offered their home to shelter visiting ILD attorneys and labor organizers during this difficult period.⁵²

Grover Hall, editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, believed that the Scottsboro Boys had received a fair trial. The communists who defended them were, in his mind, opportunists, "[b]uzzards

and carpet baggers who sought publicity and political power and cared little about justice."⁵³ While Hall did not attack Goldstein personally, his editorials did little to endear the activist rabbi to genteel Montgomery.

Few whites in the capital city defended the Scottsboro Boys, since such a position was considered radical. Moderates were those who believed that segregation could coexist with educational and economic reform for blacks. Free speech and eccentricity, however, as exemplified by the Norman Thomas Socialist Club, were grudgingly tolerated. Once the Red Menace was pressed into the service of protecting segregation, however, everything changed.

By the end of 1932, vigilantes had made several raids on the homes of the black Tallapoosa County sharecroppers, many of whom were beaten and jailed and several were murdered. Goldstein provided bail for those who were arrested, and the indicted organizers were defended pro bono by attorneys from the ILD. The rabbi and Darlie Speed unsuccessfully petitioned Governor Benjamin Meek Miller to investigate the murders. The governor's refusal to take action appears to have radicalized Speed.⁵⁴ She and Goldstein decided to investigate on their own, and they drove to Tallapoosa County to meet with the sharecroppers. When the rabbi returned, he invited local black ministers to his home and organized a food and clothing bank for the sharecroppers' families. This was a radical undertaking for the milieu that flew in the face of the strictly segregated society.⁵⁵

At this point, Beth Or's trustees resolved to take action against their rebellious rabbi. They ascribed their success to being unobtrusive, helpful, and adaptive, qualities their young rabbi clearly lacked. However, on March 26, 1933, before they had a chance to meet with Goldstein and against their wishes, he spoke at an ILD-sponsored fundraiser attended by five hundred blacks and fifty whites at a black church in Birmingham. On Yom Kippur he told his congregation that he believed the Scottsboro Boys were innocent. Goldstein was again warned to curtail his activism. But it was too late. He was deeply moved by the plights of the sharecroppers and the Scottsboro Boys, and he replied that it was

impossible to discuss social justice on Friday night and stand on the sidelines Monday morning.⁵⁶ Jewish heritage, he said, should never be used to sanctify existing institutions and practices because they need justification.⁵⁷

In spring 1933, during Scottsboro defendant Heywood Patterson's trial, prosecutor Wade Wright pointed to ILD lawyers Samuel Liebowitz and Joseph Brodsky and entreated the jury to convict Patterson in order to show the world that "Alabama justice cannot be bought and sold with Jew money from New York."⁵⁸ Patterson was speedily convicted and, on April 10, 1933, sentenced to death.

The co-opted jury terrified the Beth Or trustees who equated Wright's remarks with those of Tom Watson who had incited the Leo Frank mob twenty years earlier. Temple president Ernest Mayer delivered an ultimatum to Goldstein.⁵⁹ He was to sever his ties to the Scottsboro Boys, the ILD, the sharecroppers, and the local radicals or resign. The Ku Klux Klan was threatening to organize a boycott of Jewish businesses, and Mayor Gunter wanted Goldstein arrested for violating the city's criminal anarchy ordinance.⁶⁰ Older temple members took these threats seriously, recalling how some of Atlanta's Jewish businesses had been boycotted after Leo Frank's arrest and how flyers had been distributed throughout the city advising people to "buy American."

Businessman Charles Moritz led the charge against Goldstein, and only two trustees, Louis Kaufman, husband of socialist study group member Bea Kaufman, and Simon Wampold, defended him to the board.⁶¹ Goldstein resigned on April 12 and issued a statement which was published in the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* the following day: "My resignation resulted from my activities not only on behalf of the Scottsboro Negroes for whom I demanded a fair trial and a change of venue, but also on behalf of the Tallapoosa Negro share-croppers for whom last December I demanded fair treatment." On May 25, he told a *Montgomery Advertiser* reporter that anyone "who tries to take an impartial attitude toward the conduct of the Scottsboro case is immediately branded a communist and a nigger lover."

The trustees responded with their own press release repudiating outside interference in southern affairs and pledging their unequivocal support for segregation.⁶² A few members told a *Montgomery Advertiser* reporter that they privately agreed with Goldstein but that his outspokenness threatened the welfare of the city and of the Jews in particular.⁶³ Goldstein had testified that anyone who took an impartial attitude towards the Scottsboro case was sanctioned. In an interview that appeared in the same edition of the *Alabama Journal*, which carried the banner headline "Many Jews Deny Goldstein Statement," Colonel Leo M. Strassburger, a former Beth Or trustee, reported that he was "very much surprised to read the statement attributed to Rabbi Goldstein."

If he was quoted directly, he is absolutely wrong: there is not a word of truth in his charges, and his statements are not representative of the better element of Montgomery Jews. Rabbi Goldstein never became acclimated; he could not fit in with our scheme of life although he attained greatness in his own sphere as a scholar.⁶⁴

Darlie Speed, the socialist group's only admitted communist, also left Montgomery. She said that she had once been confident that the "good people of Alabama would come to the aid of the young black men [Scottsboro Boys]." But, as she told a reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*,

[You] cannot defend a black man in the South. The white man is always right, and nothing can shatter that class-conscious race-conscious belief. . . . We heard the best citizens of the South say, 'Oh, the Scottsboro boys are innocent, alright, but if we let Negroes get by with this case no white woman will be safe in the South.' It became apparent that the ILD was the only group in America that would defend a black. . . . The South pushed me right into the arms of the ILD and the revolutionary movement.⁶⁵

Polly Stone remained on the faculty at the Women's College only because President Walter Agnew believed in the Scottsboro Boys' innocence. Almost twenty years later, Agnew would address the biracial membership of the Montgomery Council on Human Relations during the bus boycott about the need to "dismantle the doctrine of white supremacy." He counseled

that race relations could never be “improved” in a caste system and that the only lasting solution to the boycott was ending segregation.⁶⁶

Montgomery, it seemed, tolerated free thinkers only up to the point of action. Rabbi Goldstein stepped over that line, and while Dr. Agnew protected Stone, she soon found it impossible to cope with the ostracism of her friends and colleagues. In 1934, she resigned and moved to Atlanta where she helped organize the Southern Committee for People’s Rights, a group committed to ending segregation through education.

After Goldstein’s resignation, he, his wife Margaret, and their two daughters moved to New York City. Because of his involvement with the ILD, the communist taint followed him, and by 1935, he was still without a pulpit. His notoriety brought him invitations for speaking engagements for the American League Against War and Fascism, and the American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, but no job offers. In 1937 he relocated his family to Los Angeles where he worked as a film distributor, a publicist for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, and a quality control manager for the Technicolor Corporation. In 1945, he divorced Margaret after eighteen years of marriage, and she took their daughters back to New York. He remarried and took his wife’s name, becoming Ben Lowell. Two years later, in April 1948, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld of B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations in New York City offered him a position as National Administrative Assistant. Two years later, however, Lelyveld asked for his resignation after Goldstein spoke at a June 19, 1950, Town Hall rally in support of the Hollywood Ten, the nine screenwriters and one director who refused to answer questions about their involvement in leftist organizations when called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Goldstein had become involved with the “freedom of thought movement” that their subsequent imprisonment provoked, and Lelyveld concluded that he could not afford such a polarizing presence on the Hillel staff. At this point, Goldstein’s second marriage broke up, and he accepted temporary pulpit assignments in Queens, New York, and Havana, Cuba.

Ultimately he made his way back to Los Angeles where he died of cancer in 1953 at the age of fifty-two.⁶⁷

Darlie Speed and her daughter Jane relocated to Puerto Rico after Jane's marriage to labor organizer Cesar Andreu Iglesias. They never lived in Montgomery again. Only Bea and Louis Kaufman remained in the capital city. In the late 1930s Bea was appointed legislative chair of the city's Federation of Women's Clubs, and she campaigned for a woman's right to serve on juries. From 1939 through 1945 Bea worked as a field organizer for the Council of Jewish Federations. In 1945, she became circulation manager of the *Southern Farmer*, a liberal journal published by labor activist and former New Deal administrator Aubrey Williams, who lived in Montgomery. Williams later became president of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), the only biracial anti-segregation organization in the South. Bea joined SCEF at its inception in 1946, and she and Louis remained active members of Montgomery's small, white, liberal circle. Louis Kaufman never lost his job as a salesman for Schloss and Kahn nor was he forced to resign his position on the Beth Or Board of Trustees. His conservative friends preferred to consider him "eccentric." It was acceptable for social activists to work towards "economic and educational reform for Negroes" if they remembered that segregation was sacred. Bea was not afraid to cross that line, but Louis was. She eventually left him and moved to Chicago where she pursued more radical activities.⁶⁸

Rabbi Eugene Blachschleger, who had been serving as an associate rabbi in Richmond, Virginia, replaced Goldstein on September 1, 1933. A graduate of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, he was a warm, witty, and seemingly light-hearted man. Montgomery would be his first and last pulpit. With the help of his wife, Bernice, he worked to improve educational and recreational programs for Jewish youth. He involved Beth Or in pulpit exchanges with Christian ministers and provided strong leadership for his congregation for thirty-two years. Blachschleger led Beth Or through the war years and extended spiritual care to members of the armed forces serving at nearby Maxwell Air Force Base. He ministered to both Beth Or and Etz Ahayem during the

revelation of the Holocaust, which caused many in both congregations to bitterly question God's justice. Many members of Beth Or lost family and friends to Hitler's madness. In July 1944, 1,673 Rhodian Jews were sent to Auschwitz and only 151 survived. Nearly every one of Montgomery's Rhodian Jews lost parents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, and cousins as well as friends and neighbors, and the grief at Etz Ahayem was overwhelming.

Blachschleger was the first rabbi in Montgomery invited to join the all-white Ministerial Association, and he worked hard to promote interfaith, if not interracial, brotherhood in the years before resistance to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision tore the veneer of civility off segregated Montgomery and exposed a very ugly underside.

Montgomery Jews and Desegregation

The 1954 Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which declared segregated public education unconstitutional, was received with horror in the former Confederate capital. Montgomery's collective response was led by those committed to maintaining white supremacy. Liberals and progressives remained silent, for the most part, as segregationists closed ranks and retaliated against both outside agitators and internal dissenters who disagreed with them.

Northern Jews largely applauded the *Brown* decision while southern Jews, like most southern moderates, said nothing. In later years many would explain that they had been waiting for the progressives and the clergy to pull together an opposing coalition. Some anticipated that the national tide of the decision would carry the South, while some Jews believed that anti-segregation leadership needed to come from the Christian community since they considered racial animosity a "Christian problem."⁶⁹ For whatever reason, grassroots support for *Brown* never materialized, despite the initial restraint of Alabama's elected officials.

While Mississippi Senator James Eastland told a cheering crowd in Senatobia that they were obliged to defy the Supreme Court because, "on May 17, 1954, the Constitution of the United States was destroyed," Alabama's Governor Gordon Persons

chose to wait and see. The governor resisted pressure to call a special legislative session to close the public schools to circumvent the ruling. Alabama's moderates simply waited too long for someone else to organize, and the White Citizens Council (WCC) rushed in to fill the vacuum. Founded in Mississippi by plantation manager "Tut" Patterson and circuit judge Tom Brady, the WCC offered a means to resist *Brown* without violence. It employed economic terrorism.⁷⁰ Those who supported school integration, or any form of integration, would suffer rent increases, evictions, foreclosures, intimidation of customers, and boycotts of their businesses. In an effort to strengthen the resistance, segregationists like Patterson aligned themselves with northern anti-communist activists.

"Integration represents darkness, regimentation, totalitarianism, communism and destruction," Patterson maintained. "There is no middle ground." Bankers, insurance agents, school officials, attorneys, and other community leaders signed on, so membership remained respectable. "Councilors" described themselves as law-abiding citizens who, while they challenged federal authority, always operated within state law. Unlike the Klan, whom they disdained, their meetings were open to the public. Recruitment drives were often conducted at civic organization meetings. A Mississippi WCC leader observed that "if you take the Farm Bureau, Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Club out of the Citizens' Council Movement you wouldn't have much left."⁷¹ In Mississippi, Rabbi Benjamin Schultz joined a host of Christian clergy in publicly endorsing the movement. In Montgomery, it was blessed by the Reverend Henry Edward "Jeb" Russell of Trinity Presbyterian, brother of the outspoken segregationist Senator Richard Russell of Georgia; Dr. G. Stanley Frazer of St. James Methodist Church; and the Reverend Henry Lyon of Highland Avenue Baptist Church. The majority of the city's clergy, however, including its rabbis, Eugene Blachschleger and Seymour Atlas of Agudath Israel, refrained from making statements.

That summer, a member of the Mississippi WCC who identified himself as a past president of the local B'nai B'rith lodge, published the pamphlet, *A Jewish View on Segregation*. In it he expressed deep resentment for the national Anti-Defamation

League's (ADL) endorsement of *Brown*. "Why the [ADL] should have become so saturated with its importance in this highly controversial matter [i.e., integration] is beyond the comprehension of thousands of American Jews who have not been consulted or given an opportunity to express their views on the merits of this policy," he wrote. "A small group of so-called leaders in the order, who are biased in favor of integration, are attempting to speak and act for thousands who do not support [those] views and resent reading in the press partisan criticisms on a matter that does not come within the purview or functions of the league."⁷² Many of Montgomery's Jews, just like this Mississippian, were anxious to distance themselves from the national social action organizations. When the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the ADL endorsed *Brown*, Montgomery's Jewish Federation threatened to withhold allocations.⁷³ "The White community in the South is generally opposed to desegregation," the federation leaders wrote, "[and the] Jewish community in the South is part of the White Community in the South."⁷⁴

Jews routinely served on the boards of the city's charitable and fraternal organizations, and several were associated with the political power structure. In 1952, Max Baum, director of the First Alabama Bank, and a trustee of St. Margaret's Hospital, presided over the Chamber of Commerce; Sidney Levy served as Chamber treasurer; Mortimer Cohen, an investment banker, led the Montgomery Kiwanis; and Rabbi Seymour Atlas served as master of the Scottish Rite Masonic Lodge. Ruben Hanan of Etz Ahayem was a key advisor to Governor James Folsom and later to Governor John Patterson. Despite this seeming acceptance, however, when Beth Or organized a combined banquet for its April 1952 centennial and Blachschleger's twentieth anniversary, the event could not be held at the Montgomery Country Club. Jews were still excluded and remained so until the early 1990s. For many this was a reminder that "separate but equal" extended beyond the ranks of black people in the white supremacy system.

While many continued to maintain that *Montgomery was different*, the feeling that there was something tentative about Jewish acceptance could not be completely discounted. Some Jews

admitted to each other that without the fear of miscegenation focused squarely on blacks, Jewish “otherness” could easily become an issue.⁷⁵ Desire for acceptance, fear of antisemitism, and civic participation, among other factors, created a difficult matrix within which to confront massive resistance.

In 1956 journalist David Halberstam observed, “Before the advent of the Councils a man who spoke up against Jim Crow merely ran the risk of being known as a radical; today he faces an organized network of groups consciously working to remove dissenters—his job and his family’s happiness may be at stake.”⁷⁶ WCC cofounder Tom Brady, in an effort to explain how the “separate but equal” doctrine had been overturned, identified communist and Jewish conspirators.

It is lamentable that attention should be called to the alarming increase of Jewish names in the ranks of communist front organizations. Of all the nations which have ever been on this earth, the United States of America has been the kindest to the Jew. Here he has suffered but little ostracism—and he has brought most of this upon himself.⁷⁷

As the communist-Jewish conspiracy theory became more respectable, the relative paradise that Jews believed they had found in the South and particularly in Montgomery began to unravel. Nearby Selma established Alabama’s first WCC in June 1955 and the capital city followed suit in October. Not an immediate success, the early meetings were held at St. James Methodist Church with the support of the Reverend Dr. G. Stanley Frazer and for two months the group struggled to attract membership. By the end of November there were only 160 members. Then, in early December the bus boycott began. That and the attempted integration of the University of Alabama caused the WCC to grow exponentially. By the beginning of the new year, almost five thousand white residents had signed up. Larger quarters were rented downtown on Perry Street. The organization subsequently launched a door-to-door membership drive and threatened to publish the names of residents who refused to join. Jews were expected to support the effort and most did. The WCC grew so powerful that within the first few months of 1955, Mayor W. A.

Gayle, Public Safety Commissioner Clyde Sellers, Commissioner of Public Works Frank Parks, and the entire City Council were members.⁷⁸

Gentiles maintained that they joined the WCC to keep apprized of what was going on and to keep it respectable. Some Jews joined for the same reasons, while others signed up to protect their financial interests and demonstrate that they would cooperate with the effort to maintain a segregated city. As retail tradesmen, Jews were especially vulnerable to economic terrorism. Although antisemitism was officially disavowed by the WCC,⁷⁹ a pamphlet circulating in 1956 threatened:

[Where] prominent Jewish leaders have enrolled as members and taken an active part in the duties of the Council, there is no chance of anti-Semitism creeping in. . . . [But] the Jew who attempts to be neutral is much like the ostrich. And he has no right to be surprised or amazed when the target he so readily presents is fired upon.⁸⁰

After joining the WCC, a nervous group of Montgomery's Jewish businessmen purchased an ad in the *Advertiser* to assure the city fathers that they were "at one with the majority viewpoint in the gentile community." When more progressive Jews criticized what they considered an overreaction, these merchants explained that they were merely trying to prevent an antisemitic backlash. But there appeared to be no need. Montgomery demonstrated that indeed it *was* different in this strange instance. When the North Alabama WCC insisted that its members "believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ," Montgomery's WCC under the direction of state Senator Sam Englehardt, formed an independent Association of Citizens Councils based in the capital city.⁸¹ The Englehardts were a successful cotton planter family that owned thousands of acres in nearby Macon County, with an 85 percent black population. Sam Englehardt had run for the state senate in 1950 on a promise to maintain white supremacy, and it behooved him as a planter to keep blacks out of the Macon County voting booths. The Englehardts, however, had done business with Jewish cotton factors for generations, and their interests were intertwined. The senator was not interested in alienating some of his most powerful supporters.

Victor Kerns, a science teacher at Lanier High School who was serving as spiritual leader of Etz Ahayem while that congregation was without a rabbi, experienced a more ominous side of this "white collar Klan."⁸² At a 1955 faculty meeting, he and his colleagues discussed a bill introduced into the state legislature by Senator Englehardt proposing suspension of public school teachers' tenure in order to permit local boards to fire educators who supported *Brown*. Leaders of the teachers association counseled the faculty to support the bill (against their own career interests) since resistance would be interpreted as a vote for integration. The tall, stocky young man, who had been raised in Brooklyn, and was not shy, could not bring himself to do it. In the first place, it seemed absurd to him for professionals to meekly surrender their rights to tenure, and, in the second place, he knew that he was not the only member of the faculty who questioned segregation. He and his wife, Ann, were members of the city's biracial Council on Human Relations, established shortly after the *Brown* decision, and he had discussed his strong feelings about racial justice with his colleagues before. That afternoon he assured them that he had no objection to teaching black students.⁸³ Kerns had lived in Montgomery for almost ten years, but he never fully internalized the degree to which white supremacy permeated the culture. After the faculty meeting, he was besieged with threatening phone calls and hate mail, and he was visited by two armed men who told him that if he did not stop his "nigger talk" something was going to happen to him. Neighbors and colleagues shunned him and old friends shunned not only him, but Ann and her widowed mother. Ann Rosenbaum Kerns had grown up in Montgomery. She had gone to school with, and was raising her own children among, the same people who apologetically explained that associating with her and Victor would bring "trouble" on themselves. One sentence spoken forthrightly among his colleagues had poisoned Kerns' life in Montgomery, a life that for the Rosenbaum family had gone back for generations. He had not meant to hurt anyone, but he had stepped outside the code, and he and his family were being punished. Ann could not bear the ostracism, and, although Kerns was neither fired, nor physically harmed, she

suffered an emotional breakdown. At the end of the semester, the Kerns, their two small children, and her widowed mother, moved to Auburn, Alabama, where he applied to the university to complete his doctoral studies.

It is little wonder then that Jewish businessmen dependent on the good will of their white and black customers chose not to draw attention to themselves. As in the gentile community, however, not every Jew remained silent out of fear. Some shared their neighbors' convictions about the inferiority of blacks. After living in the segregated South for generations some Jews felt more comfortable among southern Christians than among Jews from other parts of the country.

The WCC pressured merchants, retailers, private and public organizations, and ordinary citizens to fire their black employees. Members circulated a handbill in the downtown which warned, "If you continue to employ even ONE negro, you shall be labeled as a renegade white the rest of your life. Don't you realize that you are giving them money to be used against white people? THE LINE HAS BEEN DRAWN, GET ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER [capitals in original.]"

Jewish wholesalers and retailers, like many gentile businessmen, employed black men as stock boys, janitors, deliverymen, and truck drivers. Middle class Jewish homes, like middle class gentile homes, generally retained and depended on black cleaning women, black nannies, and black cooks. White landlords who rented to black tenants were not anxious to evict them. Money was money. Many, including Jews, quietly ignored the WCC demands. While they were not willing to grant blacks social equality, neither were they ready to refuse their dollars. The WCC had obviously underestimated the impact of black buying power.⁸⁴

As blacks became more assertive, however, Jewish businessmen found themselves increasingly singled out for criticism. The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, an activist friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., whose home was bombed after he attempted to register his three children at Birmingham's previously all-white schools, was interviewed in May 1957 by Ralph Friedman, a reporter for

the weekly *National Jewish Post and Opinion*. Shuttlesworth assured Friedman:

Jews not only control the wealth of America, but they control American cities. The basis of segregation is economics. If the Jews would give their money and support desegregation then the barriers would fall. . . . The Jews own the downtown stores. . . . Most of their customers are Negroes. . . . They could stop segregation just by taking down the signs.⁸⁵

"Why won't you speak up?" the thirty-five-year-old black minister challenged Friedman. "Why are you all so silent?" Shuttlesworth subscribed wholeheartedly to the fallacies that all Jews were rich and powerful, a conclusion he reached because of Jewish ownership of Birmingham's largest retail stores. Yet, the city's movers and shakers were the iron, steel, and coal magnates, not one of whom was Jewish. Ironically Jews would bear the brunt of animosity and prejudice from both sides.

In 1957, there were 4,000 Jews in Birmingham out of a total population of 600,000. If the Jewish retailers removed their "whites-only" signs, as Shuttlesworth demanded, whites would boycott them and the Jewish merchants would be driven into bankruptcy. But Shuttlesworth would not be mollified. He told Friedman that while African Americans were grateful for northern Jewish support, the battle was being waged in the South and southern blacks needed the help of southern Jews.⁸⁶

Southern Jews who relied on black and white customer good will felt pressure from all sides: northern Jewish liberals, southern segregationists, and disappointed black activists. It troubled some of them, but others, and this is a number impossible to determine, like the majority of their gentile neighbors, found the southern way of life satisfying and were willing to do whatever it took to maintain it.

In Montgomery, as in most Deep South cities, a chain was strung across the aisle of every city bus. Whites sat in front of it, and blacks behind. Montgomery was different only in that once all of the front, white seats were taken, municipal law permitted whites to move the chain back and claim additional black seats. Theoretically, if enough whites boarded the bus, all the blacks

would have to give up their seats. Legend has it that Rosa Parks was asked to move to the back of the bus. This is not true. She was sitting in the first row of the black section when the bus stopped at the Empire Movie Theater on Montgomery Street, and a large group of whites boarded. At this point, white patrons expected that the chain would be moved back to accommodate them. The driver, attempting to do that, demanded that Parks give her seat to a white man, and the rest is history.⁸⁷

If the *Brown* decision drove a wedge between Montgomery's progressives and its segregationists, between moderates and conservatives in each of its religious congregations, and between northern and southern Jews, the boycott completed the job. It paralyzed the city for an entire year and became the test case for extending *Brown* to municipal transportation. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), an umbrella organization created to coordinate it, was led by twenty-six-year-old Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Under his leadership, the MIA issued three demands: (1) a guarantee of courteous treatment of blacks on the buses, (2) seating of bus passengers on a first come, first served basis with whites starting from the front and blacks starting from the back (so that no one would have to surrender a seat or stand over an empty seat), and (3) employment of black bus drivers on predominantly black routes.⁸⁸ There was no demand to end segregation, nor would there be for two months. From the beginning, King insisted that the demonstration be conducted non-violently, and Montgomery's black community remained faithful to his vision. He set the tone with his first speech at a mass meeting on December 5, 1955, at the Holt Street Baptist Church.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that spitefully use you. If we fail to do this, our protest will end up as a meaningless drama on the stage of history and its memory will be shrouded with the ugly garments of shame. In spite of the mistreatment that we have confronted, we must not become bitter, and end up by hating our white brothers.⁸⁹

Montgomery's Jews confounded King by ignoring the boycott. He expected unilateral Jewish support since northern Jews

were his staunchest white allies. The black press had crowned him “Alabama’s Modern Moses,” and he often cited parallels between his oppressed people and the Hebrews whom God had delivered from Egyptian slavery. It shocked him to learn that many of Montgomery’s Jews actually *appreciated* the benefits of white supremacy. “The national Jewish bodies have been most helpful,” he admitted, “but the local Jewish leadership has been silent. Montgomery Jews want to bury their heads and repeat that it is not a Jewish problem, but it is a fight between the forces of justice and injustice and I want them to join with us on the side of justice.”⁹⁰

Several of Montgomery’s white religious congregations—Christian and Jewish alike—contained a small core of what is best described as “liberal segregationists.” These were whites who believed that economic and educational advancement for black people could coexist with segregation. They were far smaller in number than the conservative majority who were powerful enough to remove clergy whose ideas about white supremacy differed from their own. Clergymen who were removed as a result of supporting the *Brown* decision, the boycott or related incidents included Andrew Turnipseed of the Dexter Avenue Methodist Church, Tom Thrasher of the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Ray Whatley of St. Mark’s Methodist Church, and Seymour Atlas of Congregation Agudath Israel.

Soft-spoken twenty-five-year-old Atlas arrived in Montgomery in 1946 to replace Rabbi Sam Lehrer who had served the Orthodox congregation for two years. The son of Rabbi Elias Atlas, and a seventh-generation rabbi, he was born in Greenville, Mississippi, and raised there and in Shreveport, Louisiana. In 1932 during the Depression his family had lived in New York for a short period of time, and Atlas later returned to study at the *Mesivta Torah Vodaath* in Brooklyn and then received ordination from a rabbinical seminary. He and his wife Beverly, a Lithuanian immigrant, loved the capital city. They believed it was a good place to raise their three children. The rabbi’s younger brother also lived with them and attended Huntingdon College in Cloverdale. This born and bred southern rabbi would ultimately

come into conflict with a congregation board less than half of whom were from the South.⁹¹

Agudath Israel was not a rich congregation, and Seymour and Beverly Atlas assumed many of the teaching and administrative functions that would ordinarily have been the responsibility of an associate. The membership was predominantly first and second generation retailers and wholesalers who, although not poor, were frugal, traditional, and patriarchal.⁹² They worried that their children were losing their sense of themselves as Jews. The public schools, for example, began their day with prayer and New Testament scripture readings, and Jewish children heard their schoolmates, even those from Beth Or, talk about Christmas trees and Easter eggs, and asked why they could not have those things. The parents' concerns were not assuaged by their rabbi who some believed was too Americanized himself.

Atlas did, in fact, understand southern mores better than he understood his congregation. He had grown up accepting segregation, and it was only as a young seminarian that he began to feel differently, a change he attributes to religious conviction. He had always been comfortable with black people, however, and in 1955 he shared his love for philosophical debate with his neighbor down the block, Martin Luther King, Jr. King asked Atlas to tutor him in Hebrew, and they worked together until the minister was able to read the Old Testament haltingly. On several occasions Atlas was invited to address King's Dexter Avenue congregation in their social hall.⁹³

Ironically during the third week of February 1956, at the height of the boycott, Brotherhood Week was being observed in Montgomery. Atlas, who was known to many of the black clergy because of his friendship with King, agreed to participate in an interfaith clergy panel discussion sponsored by WRMA, a black radio station. His partners were the Reverend L. Roy Bennett, president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance and vice president of MIA, and Father Michael Caswell, a white Catholic priest who ran Our Lady of Mount Meigs mission and orphanage on the Atlanta Highway outside the city. Atlas was the only white clergyman from downtown Montgomery.

*Rabbi Seymour Atlas (r.) of Agudath Israel with (counterclockwise)
Reverend L. R. Bennett of Mount Zion A. M. E. Church and
Father Michael Caswell of Our Lady of Mount Meigs orphanage.
They are preparing to broadcast a discussion during
Brotherhood Week, 1956, on WRMA radio.
(Life, February 1, 1956. Courtesy of Time-Life Pictures.)*

Earlier that week a grand jury, invoking a little known and virtually never used state law against conspiracy, had indicted ninety of the boycott leaders, twenty-four of whom were ministers. Montgomery quickly filled with reporters from the national news media and the morning of the broadcast, Bennett was arrested. One of the journalists bailed him out, however, and delivered him to the WRMA station in time for the program. Although Bennett was rattled, he insisted that he felt no hatred for those who had arrested him. He pleaded with his overwhelmingly black radio audience to continue the protest in a dignified and non-violent fashion.

A *Life* magazine photographer snapped a picture of the three clergymen, Bennett, Caswell, and Atlas, sitting around the table in the studio, which ran on March 5, 1956, along with a picture of eighty of the indicted boycott leaders standing on the steps of the capitol.⁹⁴

Agudath Israel's president, Yale Friedlander, insisted that Atlas inform *Life's* editor that Brotherhood Week had nothing to do with the boycott and demand a retraction. The rabbi explained that he had not expressed support for the boycott and asked how he was supposed to retract a picture. The photograph of the three clergymen, he maintained, merely underlined their support of brotherhood.⁹⁵

During the following Sabbath service the rabbi "offered up a prayer for the success of the bus strike against racial segregation."⁹⁶ Subsequently he submitted his sermon title to the local papers as he normally did, and one of the typesetters called a synagogue trustee with a warning that his rabbi was planning to preach on "Social Integration."

On Sabbath morning all of the board members sat at the front of the synagogue waiting for the rabbi's message. This was an unusual occurrence since most opened their businesses on Saturday and did not attend regularly. According to the rabbi, "I was always outspoken against segregation." One of the board members had called him and begged him to change the topic since "all the KKK would be there and it would be bad for the Jews." Seeing the board present and knowing the reason for their attendance, Atlas "decided at the last minute to make a bunch of fools of them" and proceeded to talk about the social integration of the Jews and Arabs in Israel. International tensions had been building for weeks among the Egyptians, Israelis, British, and French over control of the Suez Canal. War appeared to be inevitable, and it came when Egypt nationalized the canal a few weeks later. But the lessons of modern history were lost on the trustees. Although the rabbi wrote, "They were quite taken by surprise and felt very little for having made such a commotion," the officers became even angrier because they felt he had purposely humiliated them. President Friedlander asked Atlas to submit the text of his sermons, articles,

and speeches not less than three days before they were to be delivered or published from that point forward. The rabbi refused.⁹⁷

Even as he resented the pressure that the officers were exerting on him, Atlas understood that they were fearful of being labeled "other," as the Jews of Europe had been and indeed African Americans were. White supremacy reminded them of the hated master race rhetoric of Nazism. Some responded with timidity, while others were determined to maintain their place in the community by becoming leaders of the WCC. Both Atlas and journalist Harry Golden, who wrote about the events immediately after they occurred, argued that the latter were under a delusion.

Journalist Pat Watters, who covered the civil rights movement for the *Atlanta Journal*, noted that, "one of the sadder phenomena across the South was the figure of the lonely fearful Jew who sought to out-bigot his white neighbors, not merely a member, but a leader, often, in the Citizen's Councils."⁹⁸ Retail executive Les Weinstein, a devout member of Agudath Israel, a tireless fundraiser for St. Jude's Children's Hospital, and a friend of Atlas, was an early WCC volunteer. He apparently experienced no conflict between any sense of religious morality and his conviction of black inferiority. Weinstein argued that states had a constitutional right to mandate segregated public education. Ultimately, he was appointed to the WCC Board of Directors.⁹⁹ This issue of racial segregation divided both the congregation and individual families. While prominent retailers like Bert Klein and Myer Sigal publicly defended segregated schools, Klein's sister, Ella Swartz, joined the biracial Fellowship of the Concerned, which worked to keep the public schools open.¹⁰⁰ Another trustee who had recently joined the WCC reminded Atlas that Rabbi Goldstein had ruined his career over the Scottsboro case and advised Atlas to restore his credibility by joining the organization.¹⁰¹ Dr. Irving London, the immediate past president who had been raised in Brooklyn and was close to Atlas, continued to counsel him to be reasonable. While it is true that many educated, influential, and even religious people were WCC members, Atlas refused to join. The boycott, he argued, was not the issue. He would not take any

side, particularly one that advocated supremacy over African Americans. At this point London became impatient with the rabbi's unwillingness to distance himself from the issue which many believed would hurt the entire congregation. Some of the officers determined to force him out. A rumor circulated that Atlas had accepted a position with the NAACP, and some argued that as a Hebrew teacher at Etz Ahayem, Beverly Atlas competed with him and his congregation and thus her position constituted a conflict of interest.¹⁰² Atlas requested that his future be put to a full congregational vote. He was sure that he had substantial support among the membership and would be affirmed.

During this period, Agudath Israel came to terms with the fact that it was an Orthodox congregation in name only. Members conducted business and drove their cars on the Sabbath, prayers were offered in English, and it was virtually impossible to keep a kosher kitchen in Montgomery. The congregation passed a resolution to formally adopt the Conservative ritual, and Golden identified the congregation as Conservative shortly after Atlas' departure. The man who replaced Atlas was a Conservative rabbi. Neither the rabbi nor his critics point to the change as a factor in the non-renewal of his contract or his departure. Despite the impending change, Atlas wanted to stay, and many members wanted him to continue although others recommended that he remain only as a Hebrew school-teacher.

Be that as it may, exercising its prerogative in executive session, the board voted twenty-seven to one against renewing his contract. The lone dissenter was London.¹⁰³ Later London maintained that the vote for non-renewal took place before the radio broadcast, that it had nothing to do with the rabbi's position on civil rights, and that the board's decision was ratified by the congregation. Atlas disagreed and believed that it was directly related to his outspoken stance. He wrote that he had been outspoken even before the boycott and that he "was on the side of justice and too outspoken in behalf of the Negro."¹⁰⁴ Regardless of the reasons for non-renewal, Atlas and the board negotiated a settlement for

the remainder of his contract after nine and one-half years of service clearly because of the civil rights incidents. Atlas left Montgomery with his wife, their seven- and five-year-old daughters, and two-year-old son. He went to Miami for a few weeks. While there, he was called to the pulpit of B'nai Shalom in Bristol, Virginia. The person who took Atlas' place on the pulpit entered into a "gentlemen's understanding" promising not "to force my position on them through the pulpit and in speeches to the community" although he opposed segregation.¹⁰⁵ From the Bristol pulpit Atlas went to Birmingham where his new congregants were warned by their Montgomery neighbors concerning the rabbi's "penchant for activism." The Birmingham community sent a committee to investigate and realized that what they had been told was erroneous.

Before the bus boycott, Atlas had been one of the most respected members of the city's Jewish community, and Gene Blachschleger of Temple Beth Or was one of his closest friends. Blachschleger was a gradualist on the subject of integration. He believed that justice would eventually come, but that provocations like the boycott only encouraged segregationist violence, and he was very fearful of violence. He assured his own board that "I make no public pronouncements on the subject of desegregation either from my pulpit or in the columns of our daily press. . . . [If] Martin Luther King passed me on the street I would not recognize him. . . . We have never spoken to each other."¹⁰⁶

Like many southern rabbis, Blachschleger was deeply concerned that endorsement of the *Brown* decision and the boycott by the national Jewish organizations were making southern Jews the targets of agitated segregationists. In spring 1956, he requested that the Commission on Social Action of the Union of Hebrew Congregations send a representative to Montgomery to study the situation and consider the damage that was being done. Albert Vorspan, executive secretary of the commission, accepted the invitation.

Vorspan spent several weeks visiting Deep South cities and speaking with rabbis, members of Jewish congregations, and businessmen. He was in Montgomery almost a week, and

on April 24 submitted a confidential report to the commission noting that

[In] the more embattled communities like Montgomery . . . there is genuine fear, sometimes based on hard realities, sometimes based on hysterical, almost paranoid, reaction. [They] do not talk of the dangerous anti-Semitic potential; they feel that they have already been harmed by the statements and actions of Jewish organizations nationally and locally. They believe that the Jewish leadership, by identifying the Jewish community with anti-segregation has coupled Jew and Negro in the public mind and thus are bringing down upon the Jewish community the fanatical and powerful hatreds of the communities as a whole. Many of these people are essentially assimilationist and are fully integrated into the business and civic life of the general community. They obviously feel deeply threatened when they are singled out and set against the deeply-held prevailing sentiments of the community.

They argue that they are not 'expendable' and they bitterly resent the fact that they are committed in this struggle by the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the ADL and other national Jewish bodies. Their claim that they are fully accepted and 'secure' in the community is of course refuted by the agonizing anxiety as to the loss of their status, prestige and business.¹⁰⁷

Vorspan clearly understood the problem and was able to recognize the seldom stated but long held fear that Jewish acceptance by Montgomery's gentiles had always been conditional. Despite Vorspan's report, however, on June 22, Dr. Maurice Eisendrath, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, praised the boycott in the *National Jewish Post* as "the most radiant example of religion in action," and charged that "hardly a single white Christian clergyman or rabbi in Montgomery dared to raise his voice on behalf of the sublimely courageous group led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."¹⁰⁸

On August 9 the Beth Or board resolved to contact Eisendrath and confront him about the "veiled remarks he cast against our rabbi." Myron Rothschild volunteered to write a letter on behalf of the congregation. Rothschild assured Eisendrath that "our

rabbi throughout has acted in good conscience and has certainly carried out the wishes and feelings of his congregation." There is no record of Eisendrath's response in the Beth Or archives. Given the circumstances, Blachschleger concluded painfully that he could not publicly support his friend, Seymour Atlas.

Leslie Dunbar, director of the Southern Regional Council from 1959 to 1965, has observed, "It is difficult to convey to persons who did not live in the South during [the 1950s] a feeling of how it was. The difficulty would be greater had not all the country experienced the ravages of McCarthyism. Imagine the emotional and political atmosphere of the McCarthy days intensified many times and compressed within a single region."¹⁰⁹

On February 1, 1956, Rosa Parks' NAACP attorney, twenty-five-year-old Fred Gray, petitioned the federal district court for a declaratory ruling on whether Montgomery's Jim Crow bus ordinances violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. After two months of unproductive negotiating, the MIA decided to go the distance and petition for full integration, something that had not been one of their original demands.

On June 5, 1956, on a special panel of judges appointed to hear the case, U.S. District Judges Frank Johnson and Seybourn Lynne, and Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Richard Rives, all native Alabamians, ruled on the petition. Although the Supreme Court had not considered the constitutionality of segregated local transportation, Judges Johnson and Rives, in an opinion written by Rives, who had lived in Montgomery his entire life, held that "the statutes requiring segregation of the white and colored races on a common carrier violate the due process and equal protection of the law clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment." Judge Lynne dissented, arguing that the Supreme Court never intended *Brown* to be applied outside public education. Segregationists were stunned. It was inconceivable to them that two native Alabama judges could deliver this ruling, which they immediately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. When the judges' decision was affirmed on November 13, 1956, rage was inflamed throughout the state.

In the end, how Jews reacted or failed to react to preserving segregation made little difference in how they were treated. Apoplectic segregationists, unable to break the back of the boycott, demanded scapegoats. Northern Jews, whom they had associated with communism since the Scottsboro days, filled the bill, and southern Jews became guilty by association. They suffered even in Montgomery where Jew and gentile had worked side by side for over 150 years.

The proud Deep South city could not accept the ramifications of the boycott's success when on December 21, 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ralph Abernathy boarded a bus for the first time in 381 days. Two years later, the MIA brought suit in federal court to desegregate the municipal parks. On January 1, 1959, the city commissioners responded by closing all fourteen of them. The Oak Park Zoo was shut down, the animals were sold, and the Bell Street swimming pool was filled with cement. That summer, Montgomery joined Tuscaloosa, Gadsden, and Selma in permitting the Ku Klux Klan to post welcome signs at its city limits. The local Klavern raised an eight-foot circular billboard on U.S. Route 31 featuring a line drawing of a white robed Klansman rearing up on a fully robed horse and waving a blazing cross in his right hand. "Capital City Klaverns Welcomes You" was printed underneath him. By that time in Montgomery, the Invisible Empire had displaced the WCC, which was in disgrace for its inability to break the boycott.

Bitter segregationists railed that blacks were too poor and too disorganized to have sustained a year-long boycott on their own and must have been organized and bankrolled by someone else. In July 1958, Dan Wakefield of the *Nation* interviewed South Carolina State Senator Edward McCue, a leader of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. "Of course we know this whole [integration] thing is being aided and abetted by the Communists and the Jews," McCue told him.

The Communists want to mongrelize the race—weaken and conquer; and the Jews, they're so clannish, they want it so that they will end up being the only pure white race left. . . . We don't

want any trouble down here, but boy, you haven't seen trouble compared to what there'll be if integration starts.¹¹⁰

Between November 1957 and October 1958, synagogues were bombed in Atlanta, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Birmingham, communities where school integration was being attempted.

In Montgomery, Rear Admiral (ret.) John Crommelin, an antisemitic zealot, active in both the WCC and the Klan, led the charge. A World War II naval air hero, Crommelin had been involved in the 1949 "revolt of the admirals" against unification of the armed forces under a civilian secretary of defense. After leaking confidential Navy memoranda to the press, he was charged with "faithlessness" and "insubordination" by the Navy and discharged on March 15, 1950. Unable to accept personal responsibility for the loss of his commission, he blamed Jews and communist subversives in the Truman administration.¹¹¹

"The biggest lie of all is the claim that the modern Jew is a white man," Crommelin wrote. He maintained that Jews were not entitled to white privilege because of their "race-mixing" tendencies and manipulation of black leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. The Jewish "master plan," he insisted, "[is] to create a mulatto race through integration, eliminate the privileged legal status of whites, and become the master race with headquarters in the state of Israel and in the United Nations."¹¹² He spilled his venom in the States Rights' Party newsletter, *The Thunderbolt: The White Man's Viewpoint*, via his monthly column, "Jews in the News." Crommelin maintained that blacks would have remained content with segregation if they had not been brainwashed by Jews. "The Negro is the malarial germ," he wrote, "but the Jew is the mosquito."¹¹³

In 1959, Harold Fleming, executive director of the Southern Regional Council, observed that "Montgomery represents an inflamed situation where racial tension has been accompanied by overt appeals to anti-Semitism; I gather that feelings of insecurity and anxiety in the Jewish community are accordingly greater there than in most Southern cities."¹¹⁴

Although the majority of Montgomery's moderate Jews and gentiles never resisted segregation in meaningful numbers, some made cash donations (since checks could be traced) to the MIA, the Negro Voters' League, and the local NAACP.¹¹⁵ These residents hoped against hope for a painless solution to a painful crisis. South Carolina journalist William D. Workman, Jr., assured them that they were chasing shadows.

The well intentioned peacemakers of the North and South who counsel 'moderation' embody a basic flaw in their reasoning: There is no basis for compromise for those, on both sides of the issue, who think in terms of principle alone. Philosophically, the matter of integration, like that of pregnancy leaves no middle ground. Segregation and integration are absolutes.¹¹⁶

In 1967, a near-distraught Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., pointed out that "there are Jews in the South who have not been anything like our allies in the civil rights struggle, and have gone out of their way to consort with the perpetrators of the status quo. I saw this both in Albany, Georgia, and in Montgomery, Alabama."¹¹⁷ Jews, it would seem, were to be held to a higher standard. Rabbi Charles Mantinband, who served a Florence, Alabama, Reform congregation from 1946 to 1952 and, later, Hattiesburg, Mississippi's Temple B'nai Israel, wrote wistfully:

[Life] can be very placid and gracious in this part of the country – if one runs with the herd. The South is turbulent and sullen and sometimes noisy, but there is a conspiracy of silence in respectable middle class society. Sensitive souls with vision and the courage of the Hebrew prophets are drowned out. Timid souls, complacent and indifferent seldom articulate their protests.¹¹⁸

In the end Montgomery, Alabama, had not proved to be very different after all. Although Jewish responses to segregation and racism ran the spectrum from heroic integrationists to ardent segregationists, the environment and choices people made contributed to the general pattern of silence and acquiescence.

NOTES

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²² Irwin Lachoff, "Rabbi Bernard Illowy: Counter Reformer," *Southern Jewish History* 5 (2002): 52.

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NECROLOGY

Saul Viener (1921-2006)

by

Bernard Wax

Meeting Saul Viener for the first time was usually an eye opening experience for someone unaware of the fact that Saul could exude boundless knowledge and culture almost without effort. In a quiet, modest manner he would engage the listener in a litany of information about a Richmond Jewish cemetery, a Civil War site, or the role of history and its effects on mankind. In his courtly manner Saul personified the ideal southern gentleman of the "Old School" but who, with a wink and a nod, admonished me to "dress British but think Yiddish."

I first heard about Saul after becoming director of the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) in 1966 and learned of his involvement in the 300th anniversary celebration of the 1654 arrival of the first group of Jews to settle in what became the United States. Of particular note was that he had stressed the importance of the role of the Jews of the South in the nation's development and had helped create a short-lived Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS) which faltered in the latter part of the 1950s.

His early interest in American Jewish history was demonstrated by the fact that his 1947 master's thesis dealt with the political career of Isidor Straus, who had roots in Georgia soil, and he subsequently wrote articles for the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* on Richmond Jewry. Although he did not pursue an academic career, his life was suffused with the study of history and the Jewish experience in its many aspects. It was not surprising to find Saul at meetings of many national Jewish

organizations, which he served in some important capacity at which matters of Jewish cultural concern were discussed and addressed. His knowledge of communal politics and personalities and his adroit maneuvering in the early 1970s helped create the Joint Cultural Appeal in which agencies such as AJHS were, for the first time, to be collectively given allotments of funds raised by the Jewish federations.

With the advent of the American Bicentennial celebrations Saul envisaged the revival of SJHS. Working with AJHS, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Richmond Jewish Community Council, and Virginia Commonwealth University, a joint effort which only he could accomplish, a conference on southern Jewish history was held in Richmond in 1976. The meeting proved to be a huge success with a large attendance, and a subsequent volume of the proceedings, *Turn to the South*, ensured the society's revival. Naturally, Saul was elected its first president.

From that point SJHS became one of his major concerns. Not only did he provide leadership but also, after his presidency, he offered sage advice to the society's officers and board. Often he would step in to help solve problems which inevitably arise with the formation and operation of a volunteer organization. At times he would be in almost constant contact by phone and mail offering suggestions, advising officers, and establishing contacts for the society. After he acquired a computer his emails were even more frequent and helpful. Rare was a person in the organized Jewish community whom Saul did not know, and he used these personal associations and friendships on the society's behalf. This "gift" was evidenced on several occasions when some difficulty arose in finding a host community for the society's annual conference. After contacting Saul, a location would be found and a host committee soon formed.

Simultaneously Saul became increasingly active with AJHS helping to develop membership and fundraising as well as promoting the establishment of local Jewish historical societies throughout the country. He proved to be the prime ambassador of good will for AJHS and ultimately became its president in 1979. It was during his tenure that the society created its award winning

exhibit "On Common Ground" which detailed the history of the Boston Jewish community from its roots to 1980. Saul proved crucial in securing financial support and publicizing this project nationally, again through his widespread personal contacts.

Little is known of his assistance in creating what is now known as The National Center for Jewish Film. Originally formed by AJHS as the Rutenberg-Everett Yiddish Film Collection, Saul took a leading role in securing and buttressing aid for this new endeavor which had been designed to ensure the collection and preservation of Yiddish films. He saw these as a form of historical manuscript shedding light on the experience of European and American Jewry in a personal and emotional fashion. No doubt he was privately driven by his affection and past use of the *mamaloshen* as the son of immigrant parents.

Saul had a particular interest in a program between AJHS and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The purpose of The America-Holy Land Project was to document the relationships which existed between America and pre-state Israel by locating and recording the existence of manuscripts, archives, books, and documents which reflected those ties. Ultimately several documentary guides were published and over sixty volumes relating to the subject were reprinted in cooperation with one of the divisions of the *New York Times*. Saul not only participated in an America-Holy Land scholarly conference at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., but also arranged for a similar session in Richmond and helped secure funding for both meetings.

Because of his respect for the role of academic historians in serving as guides and mentors to local and national communities Saul immersed himself both in cultivating their friendship and, ultimately, their involvement in Jewish historical study. His support was crucial in establishing the Academic Council of AJHS, an advisory body that helps to arrange professional meetings and raise the standards of the society's publications. Evidence of this is manifest in the contributions of Melvin I. Urofsky of Virginia Commonwealth University who was crucial to the formation of the 1976 conference, co-edited *Turn to the South* with the late Nathan Kaganoff of AJHS, served as a speaker at SJHS conferences,

and authored both an outstanding volume on the Levy family and its role in preserving Jefferson's Monticello and an exhibit catalog, *Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia*. Without Saul's diplomatic prodding and encouragement, Urof-sky's fruitful and insightful research might never have taken place.

Saul reveled in the history of the entire Richmond and Virginia communities and served on the board of the Virginia Historical Society and contributed to the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*. He was the ultimate tour guide for Richmond taking the visitor throughout the area and noting the significance of a particular building, cemetery, park, or neighborhood. His enthusiastic descriptions filled with details were evidence of his dedication to getting the facts "straight" and to making them both informative and fun. Aware of the need for collecting and preserving records of the Richmond Jewish community, Saul took a leading role in the establishment of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives at his home congregation where he was eventually honored by the establishment of the Saul Viener Fund for the Study of the American Jewish Experience in recognition of his service to the congregation, Richmond, Virginia, and the nation.

Finally, a personal note: although Saul invariably served as a friend, mentor, and instructor to me and many others, I found him to be a good listener, avid for new information and insights that I might provide. One of my lasting memories was observing his almost childish delight in visiting Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, absorbing information about its history and waxing enthusiastic over the nation's oldest surviving Jewish house of worship. He excitedly pointed out that the building was physical proof of the existence of the Jewish community in the colonial period. And then he noted that the building and congregation were associated with George Washington's letter declaring "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance" thereby demonstrating the integral importance of the Jewish community to the establishment of religious freedom in the United States. At the time I recalled Saul's admonition "to dress British and think Yiddish." I concluded then that it would be best "to think Viener."

REVIEW ESSAY

Jews, Whiteness, and Civil Rights

by

Ronald H. Bayor

Goldstein, Eric L., *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 307 pages.

Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 351 pages.

Eric Goldstein and Cheryl Greenberg on the surface have written very different books—one that concentrates on Jewish identity and the other on black-Jewish relations. Yet, the issue for both is twentieth-century Jewish acceptance as unambiguous whites and the impact of this recognition on their perception as “others” in the American ethnic/racial spectrum. Can Jews be an out minority if they are part of the white elite and can there be a natural affinity with blacks, the historic outsider group? Furthermore, if Jews try to maintain their identity as a distinct group, do they take the chance of losing their white acceptance and becoming classified like blacks as the racial other?

These are basic questions for America’s Jews and both books provide well-researched and trenchant answers. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Goldstein meticulously traces the way Jews described their place in America—from race to ethnicity to religion to a combination of religion and ethnic/tribe. It is clear from studies of German, Italian, and Irish newcomers to these shores that moving from in-between peoples to fully accepted whites was a strong desire. This shift, according to Goldstein, appeared more divisive for Jews than other European immigrants.

The desire to be part of general white society clashed with a need to be a distinct group. There was a cost to assimilation. As Goldstein also notes and Greenberg takes as the main theme of her book, this dualism was an important part of how Jews and blacks interacted. There was a continuing desire, especially among the Jewish leadership, to cast the group as a persecuted minority that must join with others who were outside mainstream America's approval. But Jews, as both authors relate, had also made it in America and increasingly blacks saw them, as in the Ocean Hill-Brownville controversy, as part of the oppressive white society. As Goldstein notes, trying to fit into America's black-white racial division presented Jews with contradictory feelings. Jewish navigation of this fissure became the most significant aspect of adjusting to U.S. culture. Most authors of whiteness studies relate the benefits of becoming fully white; Goldstein skillfully discusses the Jewish problems with this transition.

Some adjustment especially was needed when eastern European Jews became the dominant Jewish cohort in the United States. Fleeing European persecution, these immigrants had difficulty accepting the harsh racism of America's whites, but did not desire identification with blacks. Antisemitism, including the Leo Frank lynching in 1915, convinced some Jews that a secure future lay with stressing their whiteness and not interfering with the racial divide. Others, as Greenberg suggests, saw the Frank case as the reason to join with blacks to fight racism. Helping blacks, if possible, while always protecting Jewish interests and inclusion were the goals Jews generally sought. The waxing and waning of white antisemitism through the twentieth century pushed Jewish Americans toward assimilation into white society, but a desire for distinctiveness, although weakened, remained.

Goldstein provides the Jewish ideological and identity issues that placed Jews in a confusing state in contemporary society. Were they now too much part of the white majority? Were they losing their sense of difference and was that a positive or negative situation for the future of Jewish life in the United States? Jewish relations with blacks remained an important indicator of Jewish inclusion as unambiguous whites or exclusion as an out minority.

Greenberg moves beyond identity issues, although still considering them as key to her discussion, and cites Goldstein's book as a source. The books are actually complementary and should be read together. However, Greenberg's focus is on a rigorous and detailed analysis of black-Jewish relations. She considers class and gender as well as neighborhood versus leadership interaction but concentrates on the elite Jewish and black civil rights organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, ADL, NAACP, and National Urban League. It is a study that pulls no punches and delves thoroughly into Jewish racism and black antisemitism. It is true that the bigotry of the larger society drew them together but specific features of each and of U.S. life—class, structural racism, occupational roles in neighborhoods—pushed them apart.

This was a multifaceted alliance based on necessity, convenience, heritage, and common goals. At times blacks and Jews needed each other. At other times, this was an alliance of convenience—Jews maintained their minority connection and blacks their ties to an influential voice. The so-called "Golden Age" of black-Jewish relations was necessity, convenience, and other factors converging at that moment in time. The alliance existed but the individual aspirations of each as well as the societal structure limited it. In that sense, tensions would always be just beneath the surface, ready to appear.

Furthermore, racism and not antisemitism was a basic element in America. Jews were accepted into the white majority, were upwardly mobile, and did not face the debilitating discrimination of being black in a society that valued whiteness. Essentially Jews made it in America and blacks were held back. Affirmative action disputes illustrated the differences in how each perceived U.S. opportunity. The black-Jewish coalition and subsequent disaffection had a significant impact, as both authors ably note, on the shaping of liberalism, U.S. politics, the pace and tactics of the civil rights movement, and the development of multiculturalism.

Both books are essential reading for understanding ethnic/race relations and Jewish identity. Goldstein provides an excellent history of Jewish efforts to place themselves within the

American racial hierarchy, although there is some doubt, in my mind at least, that Jews are as accepted as he claims. White supremacist organizations still target Jews, not Irish or Italian Americans. Distinctiveness is still part of Jewish life. Acceptance as unambiguous whites is still not present. On her part, Greenberg offers the best study on black-Jewish relations and one that will stand as a classic in the field.

Book Reviews

Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South. By Marcie Cohen Ferris. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 327 pages.

The University of North Carolina Press and the cataloging division of the Library of Congress have rendered their judgments about the content and nature of Marcie Cohen Ferris's *Matzoh Ball Gumbo*. The former decided to list and market this book under its "cookbook" rubric, directing potential readers first and foremost to the recipes included within its pages. As to the latter, the ultimate arbiter of where books get placed in libraries, it decided to give these "Culinary Tales of the Jewish South" a "TX" call number. With that designation now emblazoned on the book's spine, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* will be accessed by students and other readers in the food sections of their libraries, amid other works containing recipes and cookery instructions. Neither the publisher of the book nor the Library of Congress's cataloging division considered this work as a piece of history or as a scholarly study of the Jews of the South.

All determinations of this kind have a certain arbitrariness to them. If we cared to, we could debate the designations of all books, arguing whether their goals, methodologies and intellectual accomplishments had been accurately represented in the descriptive material by which they are presented to the public or in the call numbers that have been assigned to them. What does it mean, particularly to students of American and southern Jewish history, that *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* has been classified primarily as a cookbook and, as such, has been removed from its scholarly mates, from the other works in these two fields? Is this a fair

categorization of what this book accomplishes? To what extent ought we to consider this a piece of scholarship and to what degree has the structure, tone, and content of the book pushed it towards the cookbook side of the equation?

Before describing the book and answering this question, I want to note that scholars who venture on to the terrain of food studies and food history enter into an academic mine field. They rightly understand that food matters greatly in history, that it reveals multiple issues of identity, class position, migration, and conflict, and that however much it involves pleasure and sensuality, it constitutes a serious subject. Yet the public, publishers, reviewers, writers of promotional material, as well as the authors themselves, at times fall into the trap of watering down the critical edge necessary for scholarship by employing words and themes that convey the lightness of the subject. Using "journey" as opposed to "study," "tales" instead of "histories," employing words such as "savor" and "delicious," among others, moves the work away from a more academic orientation. Likewise, much food writing, even when informed by scholarly considerations, tends to be written in a breezier style than most serious history writing. This, then, confirms the skepticism quite rampant among many scholars that studying food lacks gravitas and has little conceptual merit.

Matzoh Ball Gumbo's inclusion of recipes for each one of its chapters offers a case in point. While the recipes may in fact be excellent and well worth preparing, their inclusion detracts from the book as a somber historical project. Similarly, the decision to fill the footnotes with much of the contextual historical material nudges the book towards the cookbook genre and justifies its placement in both the library and the University of North Carolina's catalog.

So too the book's justification of the subject in terms of the personal food memories of the author, beautifully written, removes the book from the scholarly berth such a serious subject deserves. Long passages on the tastes, smells, and appearance of the foods, as experienced by the author both in her own childhood and on her journeys through the Jewish South in search of

"culinary tales," adds to the rightness of the designation of this as a cookbook and not a book of history.

A scholarly study of Jewish foodways in the American South had much potential and certainly deserved to be written. Marcie Cohen Ferris in this book offers a number of compelling points and they need to be taken seriously, including her charting of the multiple Jewish migrations into the region, the influence of the region's racial system upon the foodways of its Jews, the connections between Jewish entrepreneurship and food, and the role of food in building of Jewish community life. These, however, ultimately get short shrift as the book spends more time and energy recording memories and leading readers upon this "culinary tour led by a daughter of the Dixie diaspora" (23-24).

At the most basic level, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo's* goals of being a popular cookbook *and* a piece of scholarship fall short because these goals essentially contradict each other. Like many writers of food books, and particularly of those which seek to appeal to a wide audience, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* not only engages the senses as it tells of the various foodways of southern Jews, but it tends to romanticize the world of cooking and kitchen. Its insistence that certain dishes constituted Jewish food "traditions" or that certain foods operated as the "basic Jewish cuisine" avoids the fact that all food systems have long, complicated histories and evolved over time. "Knish, salami and corned beef" only became "basic" to Jewish food culture in America in the early twentieth century, but in this book they constitute the core of Jewish food life (144). Ferris seems comfortable listing "pound cake" as a traditional Jewish baked good, without speculating on how American or western foods folded into Jewish diets and came to seem, to some, to be traditional. Likewise, we learn that in Atlanta of the twenty-first century, "second- and third-generation Sephardic women still cook as their grandmothers did on the island of Rhodes and in Turkey" (170). While Ferris's informants may believe that to be the case, it is highly unlikely that their foremothers had access to refrigerators, gas stoves, and measuring cups, let alone all-purpose flour and tilapia. The book does not in fact interrogate with dispassion or analytic depth ideas about tradition and

innovation, the origins and functions of food memories and the purposes behind such fictive food tales.

Of all the conceptual themes laid out in this book, none is more constant or significant than the fact that the food culture constructed by southern Jews in the five culinarily distinctive zones delineated here—the Low Country of Savannah and Charleston, the Creole region of New Orleans and Natchez, Atlanta, the Mississippi Delta, and Memphis—involved eating non-kosher food. As Ferris notes, as a result of either the lack of facilities to obtain kosher food or their lusting after the “*most delectable dishes in the world,*” which happened to be “*among the most forbidden by Jewish standards,*” southern Jews ate outside the boundaries of Jewish law (7). This is an important point, and we are treated to numerous stories of Jews eating pork and shellfish.

Yet all the recipes included in *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* conform to the standards of kashrut, making it manifest that the book has sought to be first and foremost a cookbook, to be used by like-minded cooks, and not a work that needs to conform to the standards of scholarship. Likewise, since all the recipes have come from living informants, southern Jews still actively cooking, they also involve the use of ingredients, measurements, preparation processes, and pieces of technology available only in the contemporary world. These are not historic recipes but instead guides for making “Shirley’s Cup Custard,” “Corn-Fried Fish Fillets with Sephardic Vinagre Sauce,” or “Barbecued Black Pepper Beef Ribs” today.

Matzoh Ball Gumbo contains much historical material (although often flattened out), has a rich bibliography, and clearly has been informed by much of the contemporary American Jewish historical scholarship. From it students of American Jewish history could learn about the inner regional differences within the vast region of the South. From this book scholars of American Jewish history could gain some insights into the importance of small business and the purveying of foodstuffs as a key element in the American Jewish economy. But ultimately the book’s cookbook quality, its offering of tours, journeys, and tales instead of the stuff

of scholarship, renders it less significant to historians than it could have been. It may represent, in fact, a lost opportunity.

Hasia R. Diner

New York University

Voices of Savannah: Selections from the Oral History Collection of the Savannah Jewish Archives. Compiled by Valerie Frey, Kaye Kole, and Luciana Spracher. Savannah: Savannah Jewish Archives, 2004. 286 pages.

For the last dozen years, the Savannah Jewish Archives, housed at the Georgia Historical Society, has preserved and provided public access to the history of Savannah Jewry. More than 2,300 identified photographs, synagogue and organizational records, newspapers, family and business papers, a small number of artifacts, and now oral history interviews make up the important collection.

The Savannah Jewish Archives' oral history project began in 1997 to provide, according to the editors of *Savannah Voices*, "a rich supplement to print materials, filling in gaps of knowledge and complementing existing sources" (ix). By 2003, thirteen volunteers had conducted over one hundred oral history interviews, many now presented in this volume in ways that will appeal to the Jewish community, Savannah residents generally, "as well as anyone who had a special childhood game, a favorite grandfather, a first love, a family business, or who simply enjoys wandering down 'Memory Lane'" (ix). More than half of the completed interviews resulted from the hard work and dedication of local historian Harriet Meyerhoff. Other people helped transcribe and edit.

The volume's editors read all of the transcripts, chose chapter topics, and excerpted portions based upon their compatibility, quality, and format. They also selected accompanying photographs and included a helpful glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish

words, Jewish holidays and organizations, and a finding aid to the oral history collection.

Passages from the oral histories presented by the editors span much of the twentieth century and include a vast number of topics. The ten chapters include "The Old Country and Immigration" (covering the ocean passage, name changes, the language barrier, and settling in Savannah), "Making a Livelihood" (which addresses common Jewish economic niches), "Political and Social Relationships" (including antisemitism, race relations, and war), "Religion" (covering Savannah's three historic congregations, religious holidays and observances, and education), "The Jewish Educational Alliance" (Savannah's equivalent of a Jewish community center), "Their Early Years" (covering childhood, clubs, education, homes, playtime), "Entertainment" (consisting of music and dancing, theater and movies, nightclubs and restaurants, and the beaches), "Changes in Savannah" (including neighborhood expansion, culture and technology, transportation, people, tourism, and preservation), "Family Memories and Anecdotes" and "Love in Savannah" (focusing on falling in love, love for the city, and love for the Jewish community).

Readers familiar with major themes in American Jewish history will find much that is recognizable in these pages. The trials and tribulations associated with immigration, making a living, congregational schisms and acculturation receive ample expression by Savannah Jewry. Most American Jews clustered in the same occupations detailed in Savannah. Ethnicity and religiosity prompted the formation of new congregations, and tensions existed between assimilated and traditional Jews. Moreover, Jews in Savannah, like their coreligionists across the country, found time to enjoy and participate in life's many social and cultural opportunities. In fact, without scattered references to race relations and the importance of Tybee Island and other beach resorts, readers might forget that Savannah Jews lived in the South or along the Atlantic seaboard.

Whether or not readers find much distinctive in these oral history excerpts about Savannah or southern Jewry in general, they will surely enjoy the trip down "Memory Lane" offered by

Voices of Savannah. Valerie Frey, Kaye Kole, Luciana Spracher and their team of volunteers are to be commended for recording, transcribing, editing, compiling and publishing a work of enduring research value.

Mark I. Greenberg
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Off-White: A Memoir. By Laurie Gunst. New York: Soho Press, 2005. 314 pages.

Laurie Gunst, born in 1949 to Jewish parents in Richmond, Virginia, felt her greatest emotional connection to her African American nanny, Rhoda. “Part of me was white,” Laurie explains, “part was Jewish, and the part no one could even see was black. I was about as divided as any one person could be” (60). Rhoda had begun working for the family when Laurie’s grandmother was a young woman, and had developed deep and powerful ties with all three generations. Despite racial, class, religious, and age divides, and despite the fact that Rhoda was always a paid employee of the family, the relationship between Laurie and Rhoda shaped Laurie more profoundly than any other. In part this was due to the emotional distance her parents maintained, but it was due as well to Rhoda’s loving commitment to her charge and the enduring intensity of their bond.

Off-White is Laurie Gunst’s soul-searching exploration of that experience: of a white girl and a black woman, a Jewish girl and a Christian root-working woman, a wealthy girl and a working class woman, a charge and a nanny, who loved each other in the antisemitic, Jim Crow South. The book does not pretend to be a traditional historical text, but it is nonetheless permeated with the history of race, religious, and class relations that continue to shape southern experience. Given the impact of that history, the book is therefore also a reflection on Laurie’s abiding sense of feeling an outsider where she grew up: “Being *different* has always been the affront the South has the least tolerance for, and those who are

will never truly belong" (47). And while Laurie's narrative succeeds beautifully in expressing the poignant singularity of her experience, it also raises provocative, even profound questions for the rest of us about the layers of meaning embedded in American notions of religion, race, and identity.

The Gunsts are Jews who do not want to "look Jewish," who celebrate Christmas, eat pork and shellfish, belong to a synagogue but know no Hebrew, send their children to Christian schools and encourage Laurie's participation in Rhoda's black church, but who never lose their understanding of themselves as Jews. Certainly, they have little choice. Active antisemitism is a reality, and while it proves far less physically dangerous than the racism it so obviously resembles, it is both frightening and upsetting. As Laurie observes in retrospect, "Is it any wonder that I felt... not quite white?" (49).

But to Laurie's mother, and later to Laurie, being Jewish also means something more positive. It entails a leftist and egalitarian political outlook and an abiding hatred for racism and segregation. "What's the point of being a Jew if you don't stand up for other oppressed people?" her mother challenges her more traditionally minded father (94). It is this understanding of what it means to be a Jew, coupled with her devotion to Rhoda, that leads Laurie to identify so deeply with black people and the cultures created by them.

At the same time, Laurie is sensitive and intelligent enough to recognize her own family's culpability in black oppression. Her awareness of the paternalism and racism that black people so often hear when whites speak of their beloved black mammy, her sensitivity to her white privilege, her discomfort with deeply ingrained southern racial hierarchies, are constant undercurrents in the book. She feels the pain of slavery viscerally, having identified so completely with Rhoda; this intensifies her sense of guilt when she discovers first the exploitive racism and Confederate service of one great-grandfather, and then, horrifyingly, the organizing of a racial massacre in Wilmington, North Carolina, by the other.

Off-White traces Laurie's life through its many twists, from dysfunctional family life to satisfying marriage; from drug

addiction to her embrace of Jamaican culture; from failed attempts at college to completion of a Ph.D.; from the discovery of her family's racial past to the uncovering of Rhoda's history. At each step, she challenges herself to explore her reactions and understand her motivations as honestly and openly as she can. In doing so she takes the reader with her on an intense journey through interracial friendships and romances, through black and Jewish perspectives on slavery and history, through the range of black views about Jews and the range of Jewish views about blacks: the ambivalent and contradictory feelings that surround race, religion, class, and love in the American South.

Who is she, she needs to know, and what is the meaning to her of these multiple identities? Toward the end of the book, Laurie discovers the Jewish section of a Savannah graveyard and ponders her powerful emotional reaction to these unknown dead. Given her lack of religious feeling or knowledge, what is her tie to Judaism rooted in? "*Maybe this is a tribal thing, after all,*" she concludes (280).

And there is more to it. She suddenly realizes that in this cemetery, Jews and blacks have been buried on the same side of the fence, separated from the graves of white Christians. She reflects on her childhood rabbi's stern reminder that Jews were not a race. "But look at where we lay buried: on the other side of that chain-link fence from the other whites. Next to the 'Colored.' What is the difference, I ask myself, between a race and a tribe? . . . Was it strictly a matter of DNA? Was it hair, was it skin, was it noses?" There is no easy answer to this, as Laurie understands, "but I knew that in that divided graveyard, a fresh awareness of my braided origins had been bestowed on me" (280-81).

Off-White is a provocative, often moving exploration of such questions through the eyes of one deeply sensitive southern Jewish woman, Rhoda's "part-time, off-white stepchild, misbegotten daughter of the black and Jewish South" (142).

Cheryl Greenberg

Trinity College

Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer. By C. S. Monaco. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005. 240 pages.

The age of Jackson produced many colorful Jewish figures in American history: the New Orleans philanthropist Judah Touro; Uriah P. Levy, the first Jew to attain the rank of commodore in the U.S. Navy and, coincidentally, the officer responsible for the abolition of flogging in that navy; Rebecca Gratz, the dazzling beauty from Philadelphia credited with developing the concept of the Jewish Sunday school in America; and Mordecai Manuel Noah, ward-healing politician from New York, a sheriff who called for the assembly of all Jews at Ararat, the name he bestowed upon an island in the midst of the Niagara River.

And then there was David Yulee (born Levy) of Florida. The first person of Jewish ancestry to be elected to the U.S. Senate, Yulee married a Protestant woman. Estranged from his father, Moses Levy, he adopted the surname of his grandfather, Eliahu ibn Yuli, onetime minister to Sidi Muhammad of Morocco. Like Judah Benjamin of Louisiana, who also was born a Jew but did not practice the religion an adult, Yulee embraced the chattel slave system. In the process, abolitionist partisans wasted no opportunity attacking such leaders as "Israelites with Egyptian principles."

C. S. Monaco's biography of Moses Levy devotes less than two chapters to the relationship between Senator Yulee and his father. It is, however, a welcome addition to literature of the National period, offering insight into a complex figure and his plans to make Florida, not Buffalo, a new Zion in the age of road-building and canals. There is a "Zelig" quality to Moses Levy as Monaco tracks his many interests and travels in the first half of the nineteenth century. The family enjoyed some personal influence with the Sultan of Morocco, but, as Monaco correctly notes, Jews in North Africa generally suffered some of the most rigorous "ritualized humiliations" (physical segregation in housing, clothing codes, excessive taxation, massacres that led to confiscation and expulsion), which historians conveniently omit in citing the entente enjoyed by Arabs and Jews before the age of Herzl (13).

Moses Levy was one of those extraordinary men who lived through the many storms of idea and deed that transformed the world in the nineteenth century. His adventure began with a daring three mile walk to liberty from Moroccan territory to the British fortress/port of Gibraltar. A gifted linguist and merchant, he becomes a prominent planter in St. Thomas, Norfolk, Cuba and—after America acquired the territory from Spain in 1821—Florida. Monaco shares his enthusiasm for Florida, describing it as “an agricultural paradise that was ripe for immense rewards” (96). Levy became the greatest advocate of Florida and a recipient of one of the largest land grants in the territory. Even as he struggled to build plantations outside of St. Augustine, Levy had to deal with the many problems that existed in a “volatile, frontier environment”: arson and slander, malaria, yellow fever, and unhealthy “miasmas,” battles among runaway slaves, Seminole tribesmen, and American settlers from Georgia (86, 99).

A utopian socialist, not unlike Fourier or Saint Simon, Levy believed that the future of Florida lay in small agricultural cooperatives. No defender of slavery, he believed that the system should be phased out as quickly as possible. He favored manumission to those who were educated and championed miscegenation as a counterweight to historical racialism. He returned to Europe in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars to drum up support for his plan of development in the New World. Sometimes chided for boldly speaking out on behalf of his own people, he noted the level of antisemitism in London, where Jews constituted less than one per cent of the city’s population. He lamented how Jews within territories once liberated by Napoleon were subjected to the Pale of Settlement and pogroms.

As Jews from Bohemia to Charleston experienced stresses of modernization that would alter the practice of their faith, Levy—like Mordecai Manuel Noah and a contemporary gentile advocate of Jewish colonization, William Robinson—called upon them to create a center that would be the source of spiritual and economic rebirth. Levy’s contribution to the debate in Judaism was the concept of “triune love”—speaking the truth, abiding by the Levitical dictum to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” and making “the

will of GOD the *motive power* of action" (166-167). He called for the creation of a *chenuch*, a coeducational Hebrew school on a suitable piece of land in Pennsylvania that would train students in physical activity, arts and sciences, agriculture, and machine shop skills, and would lead to the creation of additional cells about the country.

Not surprisingly, in an age of royalist cynicism, bogus spiritualism, messianic expectation, patent medicines and temperance, Levy's many good proposals were lost. Monaco is to be congratulated for rediscovering this mercurial figure.

Saul S. Friedman

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Glossary

Bar mitzvah ~ traditional coming-of-age ritual for Jewish males usually reaching age of thirteen

Bat mitzvah ~ coming-of-age ritual for Jewish females usually at age twelve or thirteen, introduced in the twentieth century

Bimah ~ platform from which services are led in a synagogue

Chotosi ~ literal meaning: I have sinned; transliteration of Ashkenazi pronunciation for *Hatati* in Israeli Hebrew

Hazan ~ cantor; religious leader leading prayers/chants during religious services

High Holy Days ~ Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the two most important holidays on the Jewish calendar

Kashrut/kosher ~ Jewish laws governing food

Landsman ~ a fellow countryman; someone from the same area in Europe

Mamaloschen ~ mother language; Yiddish

Maskil/maskilim (pl.) ~ literal meaning: enlightened; followers of Haskalah, a movement begun by European Jews in the late eighteenth century advocating adoption of Enlightenment values, integration into European society, and increased secular education, study of Jewish history, and Hebrew

Mikvah ~ ritual bath

Minyan/minyanim (pl.) ~ quorum of ten adult males traditionally required for public worship; some congregations now count adult women

Moshav ~ a cooperative settlement of individual farms in Israel

Ner Tamid ~ eternal light used in synagogue

Sefer Torah ~ variant of Torah; first five books of the Bible

Sephardic ~ having to do with Jews and Judaism associated with Spain and Portugal

Shul ~ synagogue

Torah ~ Five Books of Moses; first five books of the Bible

Yarmulke ~ skull cap

Yarzheit ~ anniversary of a death observed by an immediate family member

Yeshivot (also **yeshivas**), pl. of **yeshiva** ~ schools for Jewish learning, rabbinical seminaries

Yiddish ~ mixture of German and Hebrew; traditional Ashkenazic language

Yishuv ~ a dwelling place or a settlement; refers especially to a Jewish settlement in historic Palestine

Note on Authors

Ronald H. Bayor is professor of history at Georgia Tech and president of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society. He has published a number of books on race and ethnicity including *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (1996). His latest books are the edited volumes *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History* (2003) and *The Columbia Documentary History of Race and Ethnicity in America* (2004).

Janice Rothschild Blumberg is an independent scholar whose articles have appeared in various publications including the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*. She is the author of two books on southern Jewish history, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South*, and *As But a Day: to a Hundred and Twenty*, the story of Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation; and co-author with Israel and Zelda Heller of a historical novel, *Deadly Truth*, about a South African Jewish family. An Atlanta native now living in Washington, D.C., she received a B.F.A. degree from the University of Georgia in 1942, and since that time has studied Jewish history while experiencing it, often at close range, as the wife—now widow—of two outspoken Jewish leaders. She has recently finished writing a biography of the multi-faceted and controversial Rabbi E. B. M. ("Alphabet") Browne, spouse of Sophie Browne, the subject of her article in this issue. The Brownes were Blumberg's great-grandparents and their daughter Lylah was her grandmother. Both her great-grandparents lived long enough for her to have known them, especially Sophie who survived throughout the author's childhood.

Hasia R. Diner is the Paul and Sylvia Steinberg Professor of American Jewish History and director of the Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History at New York University. She is the author of numerous books, most recently *The Jews of the*

United States, 1654-2000, published by the University of California Press (2004).

Jessica Elfenbein is associate professor of history and community studies at the University of Baltimore where she directs the Center for Regional and Baltimore Studies. A graduate of the Hagley Program at the University of Delaware, Elfenbein is working on a study of Baltimore's German Jewish community in collaboration with the Jewish Museum of Maryland. Her research interests are at the intersection of urban history, religious history, and the history of philanthropy. This is her first article on Jewish history. She has written *Civics, Commerce, and Community: The History of the Washington Board of Trade* (1989) and *The Making of a Modern City: Philanthropy, Civic Culture and the Baltimore YMCA* (2001). In addition, she edited the anthology *From Mobtown to Charm City: New Perspectives on Baltimore's Past* (2002).

Saul S. Friedman is professor emeritus of history at Youngstown State University, where he held the Clayman Professorship in Judaic and Holocaust Studies. He is the author of eleven books, three of which focus on the American Jewish experience: *No Haven for the Oppressed: Official American Policy Toward European Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945* (1973), *The Incident at Massena: The Blood Libel in America* (1978), and *Jews and the American Slave Trade* (1998).

Cheryl Greenberg teaches African American history, twentieth-century U.S. history, and race and ethnicity at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Her most recent book, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, was published by Princeton University Press (2006).

Mark I. Greenberg is director of the Special Collections Department and Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida Tampa Library. He is the co-editor, with Marcie Cohen Ferris, of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, published by Brandeis University Press (2006).

Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein is acting head of the Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress and the current president of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington. She received a B.A. from Queens College of the City University of New York, an

M.S. from Southern Connecticut State College, an M.A. from Baltimore Hebrew University, and a Ph.D. from George Washington University. Her doctoral dissertation focused on the Jewish Chautauqua Society. Her work has been published in scholarly journals and general audience publications such as *Jewish Political Studies Review*, *Avotaynu: The International Review of Jewish Genealogy*, and *Lifestyles Magazine*. Her article "Macey Kronsberg: Institution Builder of Conservative Judaism in Charleston, S.C., and the Southeast," appeared in Volume 8 of *Southern Jewish History*.

Mary Stanton has been chronicling white civil rights activism for ten years. Her biography of Viola Liuzzo, *From Selma to Sorrow* (1998), tells the story of a white Detroit housewife and mother who was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan during the 1965 voting rights march. *Freedom Walk: Mississippi or Bust* (2003) discloses white postman Bill Moore's attempt to walk from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, to deliver a plea for racial tolerance to Governor Ross Barnett. During 2006, the fiftieth anniversary year of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Stanton published *Journey Toward Justice* (University of Georgia Press), which documents a white Montgomery librarian's courage in supporting the boycott and reveals what it cost her; and *Hand of Esau* (River City Publishing), an examination of the Jewish community of Montgomery's ambivalent response to that historic event. Stanton has taught at the University of Idaho, New Jersey's College of Saint Elizabeth, and Rutgers University. Her articles have appeared in *Southern Exposure*, *Gulf South Historical Review*, and *Alabama Heritage*. She holds two master's degrees from City University of New York and has studied at New York's General Theological Seminary. She currently serves as a full time public administrator for the Town of Mamaroneck in Westchester County, New York.

Bernard Wax received bachelor and master degrees from the University of Chicago and did additional study at the University of Wisconsin. He is executive director emeritus of the American Jewish Historical Society and longtime treasurer of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. In 1976, Wax along with Saul Viener

and Melvin Urofsky facilitated a meeting that led to a rejuvenated Southern Jewish Historical Society.

George R. Wilkes (Ph.D., Cambridge University, 2003) is a fellow of St. Edmund's College, Cambridge University, where he teaches modern European and Jewish history, Jewish-Christian relations, and the history of Zionism. He is writing a monograph on Jewish-Christian relations since 1880. His recent publications include "Jewish Renewal," in *Modern Judaism* edited by Nicholas de Lange and Miri Freud-Kandel (2005); and "Jewish-Christian Relations" and "Joseph Soloveitchik" in *Encyclopedia of American Jewish History*, edited by Stephen Norwood and Eunice Pollack (2006).

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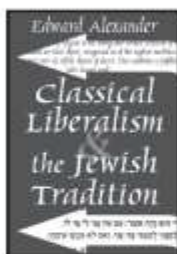
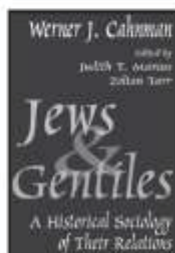
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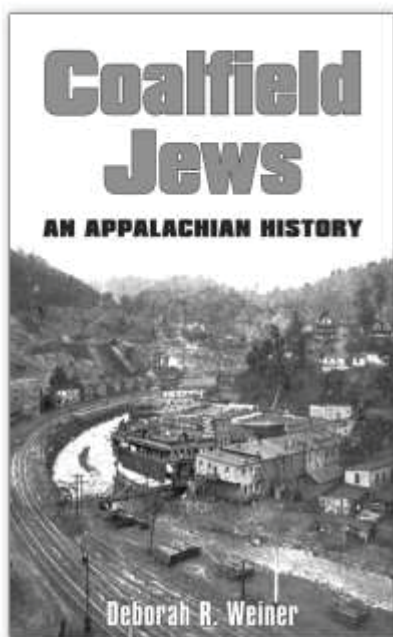
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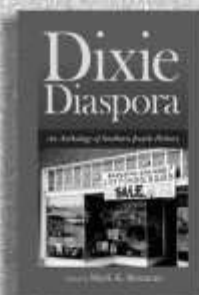
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