

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

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2013

Volume 16



# Southern Jewish History

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Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, *Index to Jewish Periodicals*, *Journal of American History*, *Journal of Southern History*, *RAMBI-National Library of Israel*, *Immigration and Ethnic Historical Society Newsletter*, and the *Berman Jewish Policy Archive* ([www.bjpa.org](http://www.bjpa.org)).

*Southern Jewish History* acknowledges with deep appreciation grants from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, New York, and the Gale Foundation, Beaumont, Texas.

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ISSN 1521-4206

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Resettlement of Holocaust Survivors in Alabama

by

Dan J. Puckett\*

**Allen Rankin, "The War is Over, But the Gates to Jewish DP Camps Closed," *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1947**

**United Jewish Fund, Birmingham Jewish Federation:  
Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 6, 1950;  
Financial Report on Displaced Persons [c. 1950];  
Report of Displaced Persons' Committee [1950]**

**United Service for New Americans:  
Field Report, April 26, 1948; Field Report, September 17–19, 1948;  
and Field Report, September 17, 1951**

**W**hile researching material on Alabama Jews, World War II, and the Holocaust at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, I found the reports of the United Service for New Americans (USNA) to be a treasure trove of information pertaining to the resettlement of Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in Alabama in the years after the war. The USNA Field Reports, written by USNA representatives who worked directly with local communities in Alabama, yield significant details about the dynamics within the various Alabama Jewish communities and how these communities organized themselves to assist in resettling DPs between 1948 and 1952.

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In many cases, the information contained within the USNA collection at YIVO provides more information and intimate detail about Alabama's Jews and Jewish communities in the postwar period than can be found within the various congregational and community/federation records in the state. While the papers of the United Jewish Fund in Birmingham and the Jewish Federation of Montgomery provide a broad sketch of activities surrounding DP resettlement, they provide little information about the obstacles associated with resettlement, and little to no insight into the tensions and relationships between subcommunities within the larger Jewish community. The USNA reports, on the other hand, are an intimate assessment of the interworkings of the various Jewish communities by an outside—and presumably unbiased—observer from the USNA. Moreover, these reports frequently confirm the allusions to conflict found in local records (or purposely omitted in those records altogether).<sup>1</sup> Combined, the local sources within Alabama and the USNA papers found at YIVO provide a more complete understanding of how Alabama's Jews contributed to the resettlement of Holocaust survivors in the postwar years.

At the end of the Second World War, millions of Europeans were left dispossessed and homeless. In response, the Allies quickly constructed camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy to shelter refugees who soon became known as displaced persons. Included in this number of DPs were European Jews who, unlike most victims of the war's destruction, had been uprooted, stripped of their possessions, imprisoned, and specifically targeted by the Nazis for extermination. By 1947, approximately 250,000 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust resided in the DP camps.<sup>2</sup> While some Jews were repatriated, many, primarily Polish Jews, did not have that option because of the violent antisemitism that remained. Instead, these survivors immigrated to Palestine, the United States, and other countries willing to accept them. Although the majority of Jewish Holocaust survivors—not all from the DP camps—ultimately immigrated to Palestine, approximately 140,000 ventured to the United States.

In order to address the impending influx of large numbers of Jewish immigrants, in August 1946 the National Refugee Service

(NRS)—an organization created in 1939 to facilitate resettlement of prewar Jewish refugees—merged with the National Council of Jewish Women’s Service for the Foreign Born to create the USNA, an organization devoted to assisting Jewish DPs. The Jewish DPs who resettled in the United States were not called “survivors” as they would be in the decades that followed. Instead, the USNA used the terms “DP” or “New Americans.” As historian Beth Cohen states in her examination of the postwar Jewish refugees, “While—intentionally—there was nothing about its name to suggest it, USNA was strictly a Jewish agency funded by the United Jewish Appeal. Its goal was to work with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Europe and with local cooperating Jewish communal agencies around the United States . . . to facilitate the refugees’ resettlement away from New York City.”<sup>3</sup> Like the prewar refugee crisis, Jews and Jewish organizations in New York worried that the immigrants would remain in the city, overwhelming their resources and creating undesirable Jewish ghettos. While most of the immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1948 and 1952 settled in New York City and the major urban areas in the Northeast and Midwest, Jewish agencies placed tremendous pressure on the USNA to resettle the newcomers in other areas of the country.<sup>4</sup>

Alabama’s Jews had participated in the resettlement efforts prior to the war and did so again in the postwar period. Prior to the war, numerous individuals had sponsored family members who fled Nazi persecution as early as 1933, but in 1938 Alabama’s Jewish communities began working with the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees Coming from Germany (NCC), and its successor the NRS, to assist in resettling refugees who had already arrived in New York City. Each community that accepted refugees formed a refugee committee to handle individual resettlement, while community leaders created a statewide coordinating committee to work with the NRS on how best to facilitate the resettlement process among the participating communities. Refugee resettlement ended in 1942 as the influx of refugees all but ceased. In the postwar period, Alabama had no statewide committee to coordinate resettlement efforts; instead, the USNA worked

directly with local Jewish communities to resettle the recently arrived DPs, encountering numerous problems in the process. Some of the problems mirrored those of the prewar efforts, while many were new, generated by the newcomers themselves who had been profoundly affected by their experiences in the Holocaust. The war and the revelations of the Holocaust also affected Alabama's Jewish communities, producing changes and controversies that lasted well into the postwar years.

The USNA, like the prewar NRS, sent representatives to cities and towns throughout the United States to assess the willingness of the various Jewish communities to accept newly arrived DPs and assist in the USNA's resettlement efforts. When the USNA first arrived in Alabama in 1948, it found many of the Jewish communities in turmoil, a result of long-standing cultural differences and disagreements over Zionism and the newly created state of Israel. In Montgomery, the USNA's Beatrice Behrman noted the "hard feelings" between the city's Reform congregation and eastern European Jews and Sephardim over Zionism. The leadership of the Montgomery Jewish Federation was dominated by members of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, and conflict between the Zionists and anti-Zionists caused Behrman to conclude that, "with all of this local feuding, there is the lack of cooperative spirit necessary to undertake our program of resettlement."<sup>5</sup> Such a conclusion could have been applied to Birmingham as well, since its Jews experienced similar discord.

Despite Behrman's opinion, Jews in Montgomery and Birmingham put aside their quarrels and agreed to participate in USNA's resettlement program. The local Jewish community organizations—Birmingham's United Jewish Fund and the Jewish Federation of Montgomery—directed their respective efforts and provided the funds to support the newly arrived immigrants until they could become self-supporting. In both cases, members from all three of Birmingham's and Montgomery's congregations actively participated in the resettlement efforts.<sup>6</sup>

With no statewide committee to coordinate resettlement efforts, organization was left to the individual communities, and each decided on how to receive the DPs. While the specifics dif-

ferred from community to community, each shared similar features, no doubt a result of their previous experience with prewar refugees and generous advice from the USNA. Each had employment committees to secure jobs for the newly arrived immigrants and case committees, which dealt with the immigrants' overall adjustment into the community. Other common committees dealt with housing, hospitality, and education. Birmingham, for instance, had specific committees that addressed clothing, furniture, medical needs, public relations, and transportation.<sup>7</sup> Such elaborate organization was all but impossible in smaller towns such as Selma which had far fewer resources to contribute to resettlement and relied on almost every member of the Jewish community for the program to function successfully.

The resettlement programs in Montgomery and Selma differed considerably from the program in Birmingham, and the success of resettlement depended greatly on the opportunities afforded the newly arrived immigrants. Edwin Rosenberg, the president of the USNA, said that because of their experiences in the Holocaust, the immigrants had little opportunity to learn a trade, spoke little English, and "their hardships have caused a variety of defects which require medical treatment. They are, therefore, not as readily employable and consequently a larger proportion requires help."<sup>8</sup> Located in the heavily agricultural Black Belt, Montgomery and Selma had little industry and small Jewish populations that, respectively, limited the available jobs and the help many of the newcomers required. In contrast, the industrial capacity of Birmingham and a Jewish population of 5,400 meant more employment opportunities and a social support network for newly arrived DPs that gave these immigrants a greater chance to become self-sufficient.

### *Montgomery*

The USNA, like the NRS previously, tracked the immigrants by family "units" that varied in size from a single individual to a family of five. Despite the tensions within the community, Montgomery's Jews agreed to begin accepting units for resettlement and ultimately accepted a quota of eighteen units.<sup>9</sup> According to Behr-

man, at the first meeting with members of the Montgomery Jewish Federation, it was agreed that

the composition of the committee will represent all three factions in the community, and CJW representation . . . . [and] that the men in the community represented through the Federation, would have to be responsible for the allocation of funds and employment. The CJW would be responsible for reception, housing, social adjustment and Americanization. The professionals in the community would be responsible for the casework planning for the families.<sup>10</sup>

When USNA representative Albert Meyers arrived in September 1949, he found the Montgomery resettlement effort struggling with a myriad of problems, some of their own making, others not. The two most vital problems were employment and adjustment—two central goals of any resettlement program—but the inability of the immigrants to become self-sufficient made adjustment into the community much more difficult. The lack of industry in Montgomery and in the Black Belt generally severely limited the types of jobs available to the newcomers. When they arrived in Montgomery, the employment committee interviewed them to determine what kind of work they desired, with the common answer being that they would “take any kind of work and that they wanted to start immediately.” As a result, the employment committee often pushed the immigrants “into a job as soon after they arrived as possible, regardless of the kind of job.” This led to frustration for both the immigrants and community. Meyers told members of the federation that

the newcomer’s eagerness was part of their desire to prove to themselves and to the community that they were capable, useful and a valuable addition to the community. . . . [The] newcomer would not want to declare openly his reservations about a job for fear of displeasing those whom he considers his friends and benefactors.

Typically the jobs consisted of unskilled manual labor at low-paying hourly wages, hardly enough to support a family. Such

jobs, Meyers noted, were "pointless and only mean having to look for still other jobs."<sup>11</sup>

In Meyers's September 1949 report, he noted that one newly arrived immigrant had been employed in a garage, "working 12 hours a day, 7 days per week. The employer refused to permit any time off, although the low salary paid the man came completely out of community funds." Meyers used this case to illustrate a dead-end job, the type the employment committee should try to avoid. Even if the immigrant improved his English or learned a skill, this type of job would still offer no future. This case also suggests, although Meyers did not explicitly address it, that some employers in Montgomery were willing to exploit the newly arrived DPs as a source of cheap labor, labor that would not complain about working conditions or the employers' demands.<sup>12</sup> Given the type of business involved, it is most likely that the business owner was not Jewish.

Employment problems magnified the difficulties associated with the newcomer's social adjustment. In response to the case above, members of the case committee pointed out that the work schedule "left no leisure time for the man, no time for studying English, and offered no chances of eventual financial independence."<sup>13</sup> The generally low wages offered for non-skilled workers made self-sufficiency difficult to achieve, especially for those immigrants with families to support. This lack of economic success directly hindered their adjustment into the community. While Montgomerians had warmly welcomed the newcomers, a substantial difference remained between the "costly social life" of Montgomery's Jews and what the newcomers could afford. The chairperson of the refugee committee, Bernard Lobman, noted that it became "discouraging to the people themselves who are unable to become self-supporting and live an ordinary, normal life."<sup>14</sup>

By mid-1950, Montgomery had received ten units, some twenty-one refugees. Lobman informed the USNA that Montgomery had been "unable to absorb into our community life and make self-supporting" those who had already arrived. Because of this, Lobman advised the USNA that the Jewish community could not

accept any more units for resettlement.<sup>15</sup> Montgomery lacked any social workers or professional casework agencies to help the newcomers adjust to their new life. Few of those working with the resettlement program spoke German or Yiddish to mitigate the newcomers' sense of isolation. Consequently, the USNA's Saul Travin observed that Montgomery "cannot deal too successfully with difficult cases, older immigrants or those who do not have some knowledge of English."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the Montgomery Jewish community could scarcely relate to or assist the newcomers in their adjustment.

The numerous problems associated with resettlement in Montgomery produced a powerful sense of social isolation for the newcomers, most of whom wanted to join family or friends elsewhere or to return to New York. Moreover, they did not have anyone to whom they could turn to discuss their problems, often insisting "that only other DPs can understand them," further increasing their social isolation.<sup>17</sup> A common theme among the USNA's field reports was newcomers' desire to leave Montgomery. As Travin noted in October 1950, Montgomery's Jews interpreted this as "an indication that they had failed."<sup>18</sup> As a result, the resettlement efforts began to wane. Edith Weil, a member of the NCJW, told the USNA that Montgomery's "interest in the resettlement program is being affected by the attitude of the New Americans, their unrest and discontent," and their desire to leave Montgomery. Weil noted that much time had been spent arranging jobs for the newcomers, a task made more difficult due to their

language limitations and lack of skill. After prospective employers are persuaded to take the newcomer and train him for a job, he remains just long enough to get to be useful and then decides to leave. The employment committee is losing sympathy and patience. The case committee feels that something is wrong somewhere. Either people are persuaded to come here against their will, or they are not briefed sufficiently to know what to expect of a small southern community as to job possibilities, salaries, and so forth. . . . The whole program seems to have bogged down and we are just about ready to throw up the sponge.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1949 and 1951, Montgomery resettled thirteen units, although by September 1951 only four units remained.<sup>20</sup>

### *Selma*

Jews in the nearby Black Belt town of Selma eagerly volunteered to help resettle DPs but faced the same social and economic difficulties found in Montgomery. When Beatrice Behrman came to Selma in February 1949 and presented the problems facing the hundreds of thousands of DPs remaining in Europe, "the deep and warm human interest of these people in the plight of the overseas Jews," she recounted, "was an experience to witness."<sup>21</sup> Behrman also found a community that had successfully resettled a number of refugees prior to the war. Peter Levinson, the rabbi of Mishkin Israel, Selma's only Jewish congregation, was a refugee as well. He came to the United States in 1939 through the NRS to study at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Levinson arrived in Selma in mid-1948 and quickly acclimated to the small, southern town, gaining the acceptance of both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. With Levinson taking a leading role on the refugee committee, Selma's Jews quickly accepted a quota of six family units.

Selma's program, however, dealt with another problem beyond economic and social hurdles: the psychological trauma of Holocaust survivors. In October 1949, Joseph and Clara Sznur, along with their two-year-old son, Marcus, arrived to a warm welcome. Despite the kindness shown to them by the community, the Sznurs had difficulty in adjusting to their new life due to their experiences during the war. Originally from Poland, the couple had escaped the camps but lived for years in hiding from the Nazis. By the time they arrived in Selma, Clara Sznur exhibited signs of mental illness. She was thoroughly convinced that her husband was having an affair with a "Polish-Christian blond woman" behind her back and insisted that her husband's affair with the woman began prior to the war, persisted throughout the conflict, continued on the boat to the United States, and was ongoing in Selma. Of course, no Polish woman such as this existed in Selma, but Clara Sznur had been seen "walking around the [boarding] house at

night in the nude looking for someone or something under beds, closets, etc., apparently . . . for this Polish woman." This "irrational jealousy," her husband explained, was caused by their experiences during the war. She "was physically run down and was nervous and over-wrought as a result of her terrible experience," something not uncommon in Holocaust survivors. Joseph Sznur wanted to send his wife to New York for medical and psychiatric treatment, something unavailable in Selma, and the loud quarrels between the two had become public knowledge and convinced some in the Jewish community that the Sznurs needed to be returned to New York. The couple's problems jeopardized the resettlement program.<sup>22</sup>

By 1950, the "deep and warm human interest" toward DPs that Behrman had found in Selma had dissipated, and community leaders found it "impossible to accept any more quotas," citing the many difficulties they faced.<sup>23</sup> They did not mention the Sznurs, but it was obvious that Clara Sznur's trauma and inability to re-adjust contributed to the decision to discontinue the resettlement program. By that time, Mishkin Israel's Rabbi Levinson had departed, leaving the Jewish community without leadership. Seymore Cohn, the congregation's president, told the USNA that the various problems and lack of leadership meant that

responsibility or not—the Selma community is definitely not receptive towards accepting any additional displaced families. . . . I honestly feel that the Jewish community of Selma is hardly able to take care of any additional displaced persons and I know the feeling is that we do not *want anymore*.<sup>24</sup>

### *Birmingham*

Unlike Montgomery and Selma, Birmingham's Jews experienced a significant measure of success in resettling DPs as a result of greater economic opportunity and a viable social support network. Birmingham's primary Jewish organization, the United Jewish Fund (UJF), created a Displaced Persons Committee to coordinate resettlement. Dora Roth, the UJF executive secretary and an indefatigable force, had largely coordinated Birmingham's refugee resettlement program prior to the war. She filled the same

*Dora Roth and her husband Ben.*

*(Courtesy of Mary Kimerling, Birmingham, Alabama.)*

role in the resettlement of the DPs. Roth's coordination and involvement also helped to overcome the intercommunity turmoil over Zionism. Although a Zionist, Roth worked closely with many non-Zionists and did much to ensure the success of resettlement.

Numerous community members contributed to the resettlement program. Jerome "Buddy" Cooper, head of the employment committee, made it clear that "the task of job-finding and satisfactory placement is the responsibility of every Jewish person in the community."<sup>25</sup> Jewish physicians and dentists offered free medical treatment, the community provided a vigorous outreach and visitation program, and the fund granted assistance to newcomers who had yet to become self-supporting, a central goal for the DP committee. As the committee reported, "many of the problems that confront any community working with the resettlement of DPs

will begin to disappear once these men become self-sustaining economically, and do not feel the need and indignity of taking supplementation from the DP Committees."<sup>26</sup>

The fund used the press to raise awareness that Jews were still suffering in Europe. Birmingham's newspapers had long been a "friendly press" toward Jewish endeavors, encouraging inter-faith cooperation, publicizing Jewish community events, and supporting Jewish causes, including condemnation of Nazi persecution. It is not surprising, then, that the press publicized the United Jewish Appeal's fund-raising campaign to aid DPs in Europe. The *Birmingham News* published two articles in September 1947 that vividly described the suffering of Jews at the hands of the Nazis and the plight of the survivors still residing in DP camps. The articles recounted the experiences of two veterans from Birmingham who had witnessed the horrors of the Final Solution. David Levin, who had been one of the first Americans to enter Buchenwald, said freedom from the camps did not follow liberation. "Still, even now in 1947," he observed, "when the rest of the world has gone about its business, these same distraught people are still shut in camps—DP camps under UN supervision, but camps nonetheless." He thought it was Americans' duty to "make good the faith these people had in America and Americans when we came to the gates of Buchenwald" and to give them "their first real chance at freedom and a new life."<sup>27</sup> Not long after Levin's account appeared in the press, Tarrant's Joe Kanter explained in another article that "America has missed its big chance to see justice done for the displaced underdogs of Europe." Kanter had been in charge of DPs in the area of Selb, Germany, and believed that when Germans

saw America was not going to demand that Jews and other DPs get fair treatment, they began to feel that we were weak. There were cases of harsh treatment against DPs all over again. In one town a German official refused to give Jewish DPs any food at all. This official was a definite former Nazi. When the Germans found that we were going to round up DPs and put them in concentration camps, then they regained their old cockiness.

Kanter had little faith in the United Nations' administration of the DP problem, or that Jews could remain in Germany outside of DP camps. Nonetheless he urged the *News's* readers to contribute to the UJA campaign to assist "these unfortunate people in any case. Having failed to do more it is our duty to do this small thing."<sup>28</sup>

By 1950, Birmingham had resettled eleven units, numbering twenty-seven individuals. Chaim and Chana Schniper, for example, had escaped from Cherson work camp in the Ukraine in 1945. The Schnipers immigrated to the United States in 1950 through the auspices of the USNA and were sponsored by the United Jewish Fund upon their arrival in Birmingham. Originally from Poland, Chaim was well educated and spoke several languages, but like so many others who arrived after the war, his lack of English limited his opportunities. He had no driver's license or automobile and thus had to walk or take the bus to work, school, and the market. During the day, he worked at the Alabama Novelty House, while in the evening he took English courses at nearby Phillips High School. At home, Chaim taught what he had learned to Chana and their two sons, Jack and Abe. In 1955, the family became United States citizens. Like other DPs resettled in Birmingham, the Schnipers had been financially assisted by the fund until they could become self-supporting, eventually opening their own business, Schniper's Dry Goods. They remained in the city for the rest of their lives, serving as evidence of the vital work the community undertook to resettle Holocaust survivors.<sup>29</sup>

According to Karl Friedman, few DPs in Birmingham experienced maladjustment. He recalled that "some few who came were angry, belligerent, demanding and unpleasant, all conditions forgivable in light of what they had been subject to in their former homelands. Some never changed and lived out their lives in stress and loneliness." Despite these unfortunate and tragic cases, the resettlement efforts met with great success. Friedman noted that "about 30 families" settled in the city. No documentation exists to corroborate this number but Friedman's recollection is nevertheless a good estimate.<sup>30</sup>

*Chaim and Chana Schniper, with sons Abe and Jack.  
The photograph was taken in 1948 at the DP camp in Stuttgart.  
(Courtesy of Jack Schniper, Birmingham, Alabama.)*

*The DPs and Jim Crow*

The resettlement of DPs in Alabama and indeed throughout the South was made more difficult when these newcomers came face-to-face with Jim Crow segregation. Even in industrialized cities with well-paying jobs and larger Jewish populations, Jim Crow offered an uncomfortable reminder to the DPs of the racism responsible for their suffering at the hands of the Nazis. Although the unskilled newcomers often took low-paying manual jobs, they could not take jobs generally held by African Americans because it was considered “degrading to the [white] community.” This led some newcomers in Montgomery to believe “that they constitute a third class in the southern social structure, just a little higher than the Negro population.”<sup>31</sup>

Although the USNA field reports for Alabama do not dwell on racism or segregation, Jewish refugees who fled the Nazis prior to the war and those who survived the camps reacted in a similar fashion after being resettled in the segregated South. Some left the South, while others attempted to conform to southern society. Ben Hirsch, a Holocaust survivor who settled in Atlanta in the 1950s, remembered that on the train from New York to Atlanta "a good number" of survivors on the train "turned around in the train station in North Carolina and returned to New York City" after confronting Jim Crow for the first time.<sup>32</sup> As Lawrence Powell notes, those that remained in the South, whether they came prior to the war or after, often endured the discomfort as long as they were not persecuted.<sup>33</sup> Survivors in New Orleans or Atlanta differed little from survivors in Alabama cities in this regard.

By 1952, 137,450 Jewish refugees, including close to one hundred thousand DPs, had settled in the United States.<sup>34</sup> A large percentage of these remained in New York and other large cities in the Northeast and Midwest where they were surrounded by a vast cultural support network, numerous Jewish welfare agencies, and greater opportunities for employment and success. Small towns such as Selma, or nonindustrialized cities such as Montgomery, could provide few, if any, resources or support for the newcomers. Indeed, this pattern was also found throughout the Midwest and West where small Jewish communities, eager to help, lacked the resources or opportunities to assist in the acclimatization of the newcomers to American life.

Consequently, most of the Holocaust survivors who settled in Alabama did so many years after the war, making the adjustment to American life in places outside of the state. One might judge the USNA's attempted resettlement of DPs in Montgomery and Selma to be unsuccessful based on the number of DPs who departed for greener pastures. But this assessment overlooks the vital contribution that such small communities played in the lives of those seeking a new beginning. As the USNA's Julius Levin remarked, Montgomery "made a real positive contribution by permitting families to come to this country through its community assurances

and helping them in the most difficult period of initial adjustment to the American way of life.”<sup>35</sup>

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**Allen Rankin, “The War is Over, But the Gates to Jewish DP Camps Closed,” *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1947**

Three years ago a First Lieutenant with U.S. Third Army drove his truck up before the gates of Austria’s Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

Replete with bayoneted rifle and tin hat he was David Levin, now at 29, buyer for a 19th Street Clothing Store.

He was one of the first to arrive at the infamous Buchenwald torture chamber and killing pen for Jews.

“When the doors swung back,” he said, “I was horror stricken at what I saw. The German policy at Buchenwald had been to work Jewish men, women and children as slaves until they were of no further use—then to kill them, systematically.

“The people who had been saved by the arrival of our armies were lying in a stinking place called ‘the hospital’. Some were so starved, their bare bones were actually protruding.

“They had expected to die and it seemed they would rather have died even then. But miraculously, even though many were so weak they couldn’t move anything but their eyes, they still had the will to live and build a better world.

“BUT FOR THEIR RESCUE,” continued Mr. Levin, “these Jews would have been systematically murdered like millions of others. German killing methods were very systematic and economical.

“A series of iron bars juttred out from the walls just six and a half feet from the ground—just enough to pull a man up by the neck and hang him. There was no waste of rope. When a person’s toes were pulled just free of the ground, then he was beat to death with bludgeons.

“Next he was robbed of any metal in his teeth. He was given a hot bath so that his pores opened and made cremation easier so

*Allen Rankin's article in the Birmingham News, September 29, 1941.  
(Courtesy of Dan Puckett.)*

that his burning wasted no German gas. Then he was shoved into the crematorium."

David Levin's face went dark. "The suffering at Buchenwald can never be described or justified," he said. "The walls under the

hanging posts are solid concrete. But human hands and feet, fingernails and toe nails, scratched deep indentions in the stone."

YET, SAID LEVIN, the people he found in Buchenwald still wanted to live. "They thought, of course," he added, "that now that the Americans had arrived they would be set free, their life of being shut up in prison camps would be over. Still, even now in 1947 when the rest of the world has gone about its business, these same distraught people are still shut in camps—DP camps, under U.N. supervision, but camps nevertheless. They still have little to eat. They are still cold. They still have no home or no life of their own."

"It is our duty," Levin concluded[, "]to make good the faith these people had in America and Americans when we came to the gates of Buchenwald. It is our obligation to contribute to the United Jewish Fund, and after all this time, to give these people their first real chance at freedom and a new life."

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**United Jewish Fund, Birmingham Jewish Federation:  
Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 6, 1950;  
Financial Report on Displaced Persons [c. 1950];  
Report of Displaced Persons' Committee [1950]**

**Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 6, 1950**

PRESENT: Marvin Engel, William P. Engel, Jerome Cooper, Joe Goldstein, Mervyn H. Sterne, Abe Berkowitz, Hyman Miller, Morris Fisher, Mayer Newfield, Fred Nichols, Mrs. Leopold Friedman, Alex Rittenbaum, Sol Rittenbaum, Carl Hess, Max Hurvich, James L. Permutt, Harry Sokol, Eugene Zeidman, Ben Roth, Mrs. James L. Permutt, B. Harry Berman, M.H. Greenberg, and the Secretary.

Secretary read the Minutes of the previous meeting, and was instructed to make one correction, dealing with the Resolution offered concerning Secretary's work in the Fund. Mr. Sterne

stated that his original recommendation had read "we were profoundly grateful for the work done in the Fund by our Secretary in the past." The Minutes were then approved.

Secretary read the recommendations of the Nominating Committee for the Budget Committee for 1950, as follows:

FOR BUDGET COMMITTEE:

FOR RE-ELECTION:

Aland, Leon	Hurvich, Max
Allen, Jacob	Permutt, James L.
Cooper, Jerome	Pizitz, Isadore
Engel, William P.	Rittenbaum, Alex
Hess, Carl	Sokol, Harry
	Sterne, Mervyn H.

FOR ELECTION:

Feidelson, David T.	Miller, Hyman S.
Friend, E.M. Jr.	Monsky, Leroy
Hurvitch, Mrs. Max	Rittenbaum, Mrs. Sol

The nominations were approved as read, and accepted by the Board.

Secretary then read the report of the Nominating Committee recommending the Board of Directors for the year 1951. A motion was made that the nominations be approved as read, and that this recommended Board be submitted to a meeting of the general membership, which would be held immediately after the next Board meeting.

Mr. Newfield read a letter from the United Service for New Americans giving comparative quotas of Displaced Persons submitted to various communities in the United States, and the numbers accepted by these communities. He stated that it was the request of the United Service for New Americans that we in Birmingham assume the responsibility for 18 units for the year 1950-51. A motion was made by Mr. Newfield, and seconded by Mr. Sokol, that the United Jewish Fund give assurance that it will commit itself to eighteen (18) additional units to be spaced over a

period of not less than twelve (12) months beginning July 1st. Carried.

Mr. Cooper spoke on the serious problem of finding jobs. His own experiences had been that while a few co-operated fully and sincerely, that many of the those people who had been most insistent that we discharge our responsibility and take on Displaced Persons, had been most lax in either creating jobs or helping to find them. He asked for the full cooperation of all present in the matter of job finding.

It was moved, seconded, and carried that the officers of the United Jewish Fund be empowered to go to the bank and borrow \$25,000.00 for a period of 30 days.

The matter of collections was discussed. After considerable discussion, it was moved and seconded that the President appoint a Collection Committee to get to work immediately, and to send a wire at once to every delinquent 1949 contributor, and following up the telegram with personal calls from members of the Board.

The discussion concerning this particular phase of activity brought about comment from several members present that the fund was no longer a small and compact organization but one that needed constant interpretation to the Jewish Community as a whole so that its membership would be aware of the many activities covered by the United Jewish Fund. This would necessitate the establishment of a small but aggressive publicity committee, whose job it would be to disseminate regular, monthly bulletins carrying stories dealing with the Fund agencies. In this manner, more people would know what their money was being used for, and if intelligently applied, would be an instrument and means of better and more thorough collections. This discussion was finally resolved by the proposal of a motion, which was seconded and carried, that the President appoint a committee of three people who would go into this matter and begin an intelligent publicity program, working with the Collection Committee as well as the other committees within the framework of our organization.

There being no further business, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Dora Roth  
Secretary

### Financial Report on Displaced Persons [c. 1950]

Ajdelsberg, Towin- Single Man - 4/5/50	\$ 324.18
Fisch, Markus - Family of three - 7/18/50 Unemployed to date	1,026.30
Grunspan, Samuel - Family of four - 5/5/50 Unemployed at present	1,563.11
Lipsutz, Simon - Single Man - 10/11/49	355.77
Nagrodzki, Szymon - Family of three - 11/15/49	1,478.16
Nay, Leon - Single - 1/30/50 Unemployed	400.00
Schauder, Paul - Single Man - 6/4/50 Unemployed	181.05
Schniper, Chaim - Family of Four - 1/31/50	1,552.70
Wagner, Stefan - Family of Five - 5/10/50	2,257.84
Wilf, Josef - Family of Three - 7/12/50	233.20
Wormser, Eric - Single - 10/1949	<u>42.50</u>
Total	9,414.76

### Report of Displaced Persons' Committee [1950]

Birmingham has eleven displaced persons' units, consisting of twenty-seven (27) individuals. The oldest DP is 60 years of age—the youngest a male infant of three months. Each unit is housed, and only two men are unemployed. One of these unemployed has been in Birmingham since June 4th, and the other since July 18th. Neither of these men can speak any English, altho both are receiving individual instruction twice each week. Only one of

these two men is unemployable, due to physical handicaps. The other man, who has worked with lumber and wood for many years, is intelligent, diligent, and anxious to get a job.

Mr. Jerome Cooper, Chairman of job finding for DP's, is out of the city, but he asks for co-operation from all members of the Board here tonight, stressing again the seriousness of a problem that will be getting more acute as more and more units come into the city. A small committee is not sufficient—the task of job-finding and satisfactory placement is the responsibility of every Jewish person in the community.

Under the supervision of Mrs. Jacob M. Solomon, adequate housing has been found for all units to date. Mrs. Amon Blumberg, Gernal [*sic*] Chairman of the Displaced Person's Committee, has reorganized and put into action a group of volunteers who are beginning to take over the active functioning of the Hospitality, Clothing, English, Educational, Furniture, Medical, Public Relations, and Transportation Committees. Each family unit is being visited by Mrs. Blumberg and Mrs. Kimerling, and budgets and expenditures worked out and discussed. Full cooperation has been given to all our Committees by Birmingham merchants, and all our doctors and dentists have been more than generous with their time and attention given completely free of charge.

The Displaced Persons' Committee has spent, to date, on its 11 units, \$8,995.00. Some of this represents a one time investment in furniture and household appliances. Many of the problems that confront any community working with the resettlement of DP's will begin to disappear once these men become self-sustaining economically, and do not feel the need and indignity of taking supplementation from the DP Committees.

That is why, in closing this report, I must stress once more the vital necessity of finding jobs that keep a man busy and happy, and assure him of a living wage for himself and his family.

Mayer Newfield  
Chairman,<sup>36</sup>  
Displaced Persons' Committee

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**United Service for New Americans:  
Field Report, April 26, 1948; Field Report, September 17-19, 1949;  
and Field Report, September 17, 1951**

**Field Report, April 26, 1948**

City and State — Montgomery, Alabama                      Field Representative  
Date of Visit — April 26, 1948  
Date Received — May 5, 1948                                      Beatrice Behrman

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<u>Persons Seen</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
<u>Name</u>		
Mr. Adolph Weil, Jr.	307 Montgomery St	President Jewish Federation
Mrs. Caroline Strass- burger	302 Glen Grattan	USNA Board Member
Mr. Lou Herman	102 Clayton St.	Chairman Information & Educa- tion Committee — Jewish Federation
Mrs. Sam Henle	1810 So. Perry St.	President — CJW
Miss Hannah J. Simon	102 Clayton St.	Executive Secretary Jewish Federation
Mr. Lucien Loeb	203 Gilmore	Former State Chair- man Emigre Committee
Mrs. Louis Kaufman		Member of Former Emigre Committee Chairman — Women's Division
Mrs. Edith Weil	106 Glen Grattan	Chairman — Emigre Committee

Mr. M. Rothschild	Commercial Building	Chairman Big Gifts Committee
Mrs. Hilliard Klein		Co-Chairman — Women's Division
Rabbi Blachschlager	Temple Beth-Or	Reformed Temple
Rabbi Seymour Atlas		Orthodox Temple
Mrs. Myron Lobman	706 Park Avenue	Council of Jewish Women

### Meetings Attended

Jewish Federation Open Meeting at Temple Beth-Or—  
Approximately 50 people.

### Follow-Up

### OBJECTIVES OF FIELD VISIT

This is the first field trip to Montgomery in five years, and was planned primarily for the purpose of obtaining a current picture of the community with particular reference to how it relates to the work of USNA. If indicated, the second purpose was to organize the community for participation in the resettlement program.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Montgomery is principally the shopping center for the surrounding farm and cattle country. There is no outstanding industry outside of agriculture. The only industrial source in the community is the railroads. The rest of the business consists of shopkeepers. The population of Montgomery ranges between 100,000 and 110,000. The current employment situation is very good, with little current unemployment.

*Page 1 from the Field Report, April 26, 1948.  
(Courtesy of YIVO, Institute for Jewish Research, New York.)*

### JEWISH COMMUNITY

This community composed of approximately 600 Jewish families, totaling about 1200 individuals, is split up into three separate factions. Approximately 50% belong to the reformed temple, about 30% to the orthodox-conservative temple, and the remaining group are sephardics. Last year the orthodox and the sephardic groups joined together to form a country club. This has helped immeasurably in making the group more cohesive. Aside from the Jewish Federation and the Council of Jewish Women, there are no other organized Jewish activities

in the community. Last year the goal for the community was \$235,000.00 of which only about \$136,000.00 was raised. The 1948 Spring campaign has not yet been organized, no quota has been set—no one has been willing to assume the chairmanship. There was great concern over this plus the difficulty in getting the campaign going, due to the split in the community over the Palestinian issue. The Jewish Federation, represented by both the President and the Chairman of the Information and Educational Committee, utilized the FR's [Field Reporter's] visit to give impetus to organizing the community for the drive.

#### JEWISH FEDERATION

The Executive Secretary of the Jewish Federation . . . has held this position for about two years. She is a very ineffectual person, who gives no leadership in communal affairs. No one in the community pays any attention to her, and they do their best to avoid working with her. Key people in the community recognize that to vitalize the Federation she should be replaced. However, since she is related to one of the outstanding families in the community, everyone accepts that she will continue in the job until she retires. There is no current relief case load. The only activity of any professional content carried by [the Executive Secretary] is relief given to transients.

#### COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

Mrs. Sam Henle is the newly elected President of the Council of Jewish Women. She has had very little experience in Council work. However, she is a person of intelligence, and has real leadership qualities. To her knowledge, there have been no current requests for migration service or location and search. Discussed at length, the contemplated Naturalization program. According to Mrs. Henle there are only three immigrant families in Montgomery, all of whom have become citizens. In her opinion, there would be no need for making any survey of the foreign born in their community, or to set up the kind of program

discussed. Mrs. Leon Kohn is no longer the chairman of Service to Foreign Born. Mrs. Henle is trying to induce Mrs. Edith Weil and Mrs. Myron Lobman to assume co-chairmanship of this committee, since they have the best background for this work. She asks that a copy of the Location Manual be sent to her for use of the new Chairman of Service to Foreign Born. She suggested that contact be made with the National Office of CJW to secure the correct listing of officers for our composite list. Mrs. Caroline Strassburger, who is a national officer of the CJW and a USNA Board member, is giving guidance and direction to the local Council, and is important in general Jewish community activity. The CJW has a local project for services to deaf children on a non-sectarian basis.

### RESETTLEMENT

All the people contacted by FR were extremely interested in the recent developments of the immigration picture, and readily recognized the need to further develop communities throughout the country for settlement for the displaced persons. There was unanimous agreement that their community would be willing to assume the responsibility for participating in a resettlement program. FR stressed all the necessary steps, namely—the formation of a Reception Committee, Housing Committee, Employment Committee, Casework Committee, Social Adjustment and Americanization Committee and Finance Committee. FR stressed the importance of trained professionals in the handling of this kind of program. Although Montgomery would not be in a position to hire a professional at this time, there are in the community three people who have had some social work training and experience who could undertake to give guidance and advice in this program. Mrs. Edith Weil, former Executive Secretary to the Federation, is a graduate with an M.S. in social work, and did carry the responsibility in the last immigration program. Accordingly, the President of Federation appointed her co-Chairman with Mr. Bernard Lobman. The composition of the committee will represent all three factions in the community, and

CJW representation. It was agreed that the men in the community represented through the Federation, would have to be responsible for allocation of funds and employment. The CJW would be responsible for reception, housing, social adjustment and Americanization. The professionals in the community would be responsible for the casework planning for the families. FR outlined this in writing for the President of the Federation, at his request, and he in turn said that he would get his committees working on this project and would let FR know when they were really organized and ready. He asked FR to send in writing figures on cost of program in communities of a similar size.

The evening meeting sponsored by the Federation was the only open meeting ever undertaken by the Federation. They were pleased by the showing, since it represented people from every faction in the community.

#### RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARIES

FR talked with Rabbi Atlas concerning his advertisement in the Morning Journal. He said that he felt that his congregation could use a Hebrew teacher and shochet. However, this would have to be presented to the head of his Board, Dr. Harry Glazer. FR was unsuccessful in contacting Dr. Glazer, since he was out of town. It was agreed that FR would write to Dr. Glazer upon her return from the field, and outline the religious functionary program for presentation to the congregation.

#### CONCLUSION

Montgomery will offer limited resources, both in terms of employment and social resources for the adjustment of the immigrant. However, the community leaders are aware of these limitations and have an understanding of the problems involved in the adjustment of an immigrant to their type of community. If Montgomery should follow through and organize, FR believes that they would make a success of the program. The community

did rally to the needs of USNA, and to that extent the objectives of the field visit were accomplished.

FOLLOW-UP

1. Letter to be sent to Mr. Adolph Weil, Jr., on costs of program.
2. Letter to be sent to Dr. Glazer re religious functionary program.
3. Send new Location Manual to CJW and check with National CJW for correct Committee Chairman for composite list.

NOTE:

Of the ten units resettled in Montgomery during the previous resettlement program, only 3 families have remained in Montgomery. These 3 families have made a good social and economic adjustment. They own their own businesses.

BB:bl  
5/11/48

**Field Report, September 17-19, 1949**

City and State – Montgomery, Alabama	Field Representative
Date of Visit – September 17-19, 1949	
Date Received – September 26, 1949	Albert Meyers

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<u>PERSONS SEEN</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>AFFILIATION</u>
Mr. Bernard Lobman	904 Bell Building	Chairman – Refugee Committee
Mrs. Sigmund I. Weil	106 Glen Grattan Ave.	Co-Chairman – Refugee Committee
Mr. Leo Joseph Marshuetz	121 ½ Lee Street	President Jewish Federation of Montgomery

Mrs. Florian Strassburger	302 Glen Grat- tan Ave.	USNA Board Member and Housing Chair- man – Refugee Comm
Mrs. Hannah J. Simon	Temple Beth-Or	Secretary Jewish Federation of Montgomery
Rabbi Eugene Blachslager	102 Clayton Street	Temple Beth-Or
Mr. Aaron Aronov	4 Hubbard Street	Chairman – Employment Commit- tee
Mr. Charles H. Wampold	Bell Building	Co-Chairman – Employment Commit- tee

Meetings Attended

Refugee Committee meeting.  
Case Committee meeting.  
Employment Committee meeting.  
Education Committee meeting.  
General Community meeting.  
Personal interviews.

Follow-Up

OBJECTIVES OF FIELD VISIT

1. At community's invitation to assist them with problems of committee organization, community problems, and individual case situations.

STEPS TAKEN TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES

Refugee Committee Meeting: All of the Committee, except the Employment Chairman and Co-Chairman, attended the meeting.

They were interested in the Refugee Committee structure in other communities. They claimed that they had not developed a smooth working committee and a number of problems had arisen in the resettlement of their first five units. They were also disappointed by the desire of two of the units to move out of Montgomery in order to join relatives residing in other communities. The Committee felt that, perhaps, they had failed these two units and their desire to move was a result thereof.

The Chairman of the Hospitality Committee stated that they had played a minimum role with the newcomers, letting the Case Committee handle most of the work. They had been instructed to give the new arrivals ample opportunity to get their bearings before they entered the picture.

The Case Committee were at odds with the Employment Committee on the type of jobs being made available to the newcomers. The Employment Committee was inclined to push them into a job as soon after they arrived as possible, regardless of the kind of job. One new arrival had been given a job in a garage, working 12 hours a day, 7 days per week. The employer refused to permit any time off, although the low salary paid the man came completely out of community funds. The Case Committee pointed out that such a job left no leisure time for the man, no time for studying English, and offered no chances of eventual financial independence.

One portion of the community accused the Refugee Committee of pampering the new arrivals, at the same time that the other half protested that not enough was being done for them.

The Education Committee was employing the services of the principal of the Temple Hebrew School (a full-time teacher in the local public schools) and of another man, also a regular teacher. Classes were being conducted nightly at the Temple. The men were alternating with their wives in attending, thus permitting one of the parents to care for the children while the spouse attended classes. In addition to the five DP units brought

*Page 2 of the Field Report, September 17-19, 1949.  
(Courtesy of YIVO, Institute for Jewish Research, New York.)*

in by the community, there were three other families, brought in by relatives, who also attended these classes. Housing for the newcomers was being provided near the center of town and, therefore, near the Temple where they could attend English classes.

However, as more new arrivals came, the Housing Committee would be compelled to look for apartments on the outskirts of the city. As a matter of fact, they are considering moving the present five units to such quarters because of the undesirability of their housekeeping apartments in which they now reside. The remoteness of the contemplated housing has brought up questions in the minds of both the Education and the Case Committees. The former will either have to provide special transportation or develop a new teaching arrangement. The Case Committee was worried about the limited contact with the rest of the Jewish community which will result.

FR informed them that, organizationally, they had an excellent Committee. It appeared, however, that the various subcommittees could work together more closely with each other, through occasional joint meetings and re-evaluation of their respective roles in furnishing a comprehensive and coordinated service to the newcomers. That while it would not seem advisable for the Hospitality Committee to go hog-wild over the new arrivals, their activity could be more extended without interfering with the functioning of the Case Committee. That while the information obtained by the Case Committee from the newcomers on personal problems should be treated as confidential, pertinent facts which might be of help to the Employment and other committees should most certainly be shared with them.

That, employment which lacked any future, or was of such a nature as to hinder a newcomer's adjustment in the community was pointless and only added unnecessary difficulties to the resettlement process. That community criticism should not only be expected but also encouraged, with the Committee making a real

effort to report and interpret to the community on the progress and problems of the local resettlement program. That their English classes were exceptionally well handled. FR had had a personal opportunity to observe them in Montgomery. Moving to remote areas might necessitate the organization of a motor squad, by the Education Committee, to transport some of the new arrivals to and from classes. Finally, as to the committees [*sic*] aim to move the families to better and, incidentally, more expensive homes, FR pointed out that, in doing so, they should consider the head of the family's future earning capacity. The rental should not be so high that, no matter what those future prospects are, it could not reasonably be met by the man's earnings when the community withdraws its financial assistance.

As a result of the multiplicity of questions arising in this overall Committee meeting, FR was to meet separately with some of the sub-committees and then to address a community-wide meeting called by the local Federation.

Employment Committee Meeting: The same questions arose as in the general Committee meeting. The men on this Committee felt that the women on the other committees were unduly concerned. The newcomers were being interviewed by the Chairman of Employment Committee and asked what kind of work they wanted to do. To date, all the newcomers had said eagerly that they would take any kind of work and that they wanted to start immediately. He had given them whatever job first came to hand, planning to get them other jobs later.

FR discussed the limitations of such planning, pointing out that the newcomer's eagerness was part of the desire to prove to themselves and to the community that they are capable, useful and a valuable addition to the community. That this same healthy attitude, so necessary for his adjustment, could easily be harmed or frustrated by a too hasty or improper assignment to a job. That the newcomer would not want to declare openly his reservations about a job for fear of displeasing those whom he considers his friends and benefactors.

It would seem better to go slow on planning employment. Regardless of his eagerness, the man should be given an opportunity to go home and discuss the various job openings with his wife. The final decision should contain their mutual approval. A low-paying job, which neither the development of greater job skill and better English speaking, will not add to the salary earned, can mean an indefinitely, prolonged financial responsibility to the community. Providing such jobs are pointless and only means having to look for still other jobs. It might also be financially practical, over the long haul, for the community to develop apprenticeships for the newcomers, with the community providing partial or complete sustenance during the training period. The Committee's reaction was very favorable. They recognized the advantages of more cautious progress and planning which considered both the future and the immediate needs of the newcomers.

Education Committee: They are doing an excellent job of teaching English to the newcomers. Nevertheless, they asked for suggestions to improve their work. FR could add little to what they are already doing other than to recommend social activities in connection with the classes. They seemed to be having such an enjoyable time during classes that it elicited their teacher's remark that the group afforded them the only opportunity to feel at ease with others. While Montgomery has been quite friendly to them, yet there is a wide difference in their economic levels and between the costly social life of the general Jewish community and the modest one which newcomers can afford.

Having the mixed class indulge in little socials after class (facilities are available for serving tea and coffee in the Temple building) would also help with their English speaking, if that is made part of the festivities. They, eventually, could prepare and arrange a small reception of their own for the Refugee Committee, giving themselves that opportunity to repay their social obligations in a very modest way.

Case Committee Meeting: The Case Committee's main complaint was about the unrealistic attitudes and demands of newcomers.

FR suggested that shortly after their arrival, they should have individual, personal discussions with the case worker handling the particular case as to how far the community was prepared or able to do for them and what the community, in turn, expected from them.

The Case Committee was happy to hear that the members of the Employment Committee were now seeing the advisability of working with the Case Committee and the necessity of considering job placement as an integral part of the adjustment process.

The matter of budgets came in for quite a bit of discussion. They had adopted the budget figures of our former Family Service Division in toto, without any changes. FR explained that the figures should be adjusted with local prices and local foods and according to the size and make-up of the individual families. They had been using flat budget figures per DP unit, regardless of size. The Committee was recommended to discuss the preparation of the budgets with the families concerned. Their initial participation would eliminate a lot of subsequent misunderstandings—such initial participation to include all the adult members of the family.

As to the two families who want to move to Cincinnati and New York City, respectively, to join relatives there, the Committee felt badly and wished to know about their responsibility. FR explained that if the local families insisted on moving and the proper agencies in the other cities were willing to accept them, the local Committee could only outline the conditions existing in the other communities, leaving it up to the clients to make the final decision. The Case Committee has the understanding that for every such unit moving out of the community, they will be sent a replacement by USNA, thus going beyond their initial commitment of 12 units.

General Community Meeting: Announcement of the meeting were sent to the entire community. Between 45–50 persons attended, including the President of the Federation and most of the Federation Board. FR spoke for about 15 minutes, bringing the community up-to-date on the latest developments in DP immigra-

tion and resettlement. Mr. Lobman followed with a short resume of the local Committee's activities. This was followed by a short question and answer session. The audience indicated a sympathetic attitude towards the whole program

Regional Conference: Mrs. Strassburger and Mrs. Weil were personally approached regarding participation in the Conference. Mrs. Weil stated that she would try to do so. Mrs. Strassburger claimed that she could do so only if USNA paid her expenses. FR pointed out that she was being invited as a representative from her community and if anyone should bear the cost, it should be up to Montgomery. She later said that she could not possibly make it as she was leaving on a trip with her husband on that week-end. There will undoubtedly be representation from Montgomery but it will probably not include Mrs. Strassburger.

#### EXTENT TO WHICH OBJECTIVES WERE ACHIEVED

The Committee and the Federation President all declared that they had been greatly helped by our visit.

#### EVALUATION OF FIELD VISIT

Besides assisting the community with their local problems, real and imaginary, there was definitely developed a greater good-will between the community and our agency. Our interest in them served to build up their courage in the knowing that they were working in the right direction and that they had someone to lean upon in emergencies.

AM:bl  
10/26/49

#### **Field Report, September 17, 1951**

City & State	Montgomery, Alabama	Field Representative
Date of Visit	September 17, 1951	
Date Submitted	September 17, 1951	Julius Levine

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<u>PERSONS SEEN</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>AFFILIATION</u>
1. Joseph Marshuetz	121 ½ Lee St. (Business)	President, J. F.
2. Mrs. Simon	Temple Beth Or, 109 Clayton St.	Secretary, J. F.
3. Bernard Lobman	514 Hill Bldg.	Co-Chairman, Committee for New Americans
4. Mrs. Sigmund Weil	1078 Glen Grattan Ave.	Co-Chairman, Committee for New Americans
5. Mrs. Joe Levin	21 S. Lawrence	President, NCJW
6. Mrs. Edward Edwards	3032 Norman Bridge Rd.	Chairman, S. F. B.
7. Mrs. Edwin Wise	327 Felder Ave.	Chairman, Case Committee
8. Mrs. Florian Strassburger	322 Glen Grattan Ave.	USNA Board
9. Aaron Aronov (Phone)	101 Bell (Business)	Co-Chairman, Emp. Comm.

MEETINGS ATTENDED:

Committee for New Americans – 15 persons

FOLLOW-UP: (handled by B. Behrman 9/20/51)

Note change of address for Lobman and Mrs. S. Weil. The latter states she has not received any of our material since spring. Send Mrs. S. Weil current budget material from NYANA and a number of southern communities.

Migration & Settlement Consultant: Note community qualifications for referral of additional units.

Purposes of Visit:

- 1) To become acquainted with the present community program for newcomers since there has been no field visit for one year.
- 2) To discuss with the community leadership the latest developments in the migration picture and relate it specifically to Montgomery.
- 3) To offer requested information and services.

The following information was secured through individual conferences and the meeting with the Committee for New Americans:

Jewish Federation Welfare Fund:

It is significant to note that no two persons gave the same figures for the present Jewish population. It ranged from 1200 to 2000 persons. A census conducted in 1948 showed an actual count of 1200 persons. Growth of the community has been small and present Jewish Population is definitely less than 1500.

In 1950 the sum of \$93,300 was raised. This year's spring campaign did not get started until the summer and \$78,000 has been raised with several special gifts outstanding. It is not expected to raise as much as last year. No Israeli Bond drive as yet.

Budget-Services-Adjustment of Newcomers:

With a quota of 18 units, Montgomery has received 13 units. Only one unit has been received in 1951. There is no special budget allocation for the newcomers. The Jewish Federation sets aside each year a sum for local needs. Funds required for newcomers are made available as needed.

Four of the units still remain, two unattached men and two families. One family unit of four including 2 minor children receives monthly supplementation of \$50-\$60 since the man's take-home pay is \$28 a week. He is employed as stock clerk and porter and has prospects of advancing to salesclerk at a higher salary as soon as his command of English is adequate. The other units are self-

supporting. According to present trends, less than \$1,000 will be spent for newcomers in 1951.

There is some concern in the community that few of the units remain, even some that had made a satisfactory economic and social adjustment. The drive to leave this southern community for larger cities where there are relatives and friends has been irresistible. FR's interpretation that the community had made a real positive contribution by permitting families to come to this country through its community assurances and helping them in the most difficult period of initial adjustment to the American way of life was generally accepted.

Originally it was thought that in the un-industrialized community with its low wage scale for the unskilled, unattached units would be preferable. They could become self-supporting more quickly. But experience has shown that single persons find the social adjustment too difficult. The community is prepared to accept additional units, but would prefer small family units of younger-aged adults with some knowledge of English. A skilled tailor could be placed readily. FR discussed the limitations in complying with these preferences, but agreed that for the few units yet to come consideration would be given to selecting small family units with not too old adult members.

#### Committee for New Americans Meeting:

Although this meeting was called on short notice by Mrs. Weil on the very day of FR visit, there was a good attendance of 15 women. The lively discussion indicated clearly that the group is interested and willing to continue to function. It is a well-organized committee which has benefited and grown in understanding as a result of its work with newcomers.

After FR presented the latest immigration picture as a background for questions and discussion, the following points were covered:

- a) The number of additional units which the community may expect to receive and the type of units they would prefer

to get before the end of the program. FR indicated that an additional 2-3 units may be referred.

- b) When does the responsibility of the Committee for a new-comer unit stop? This was discussed in terms broader than economic self-sufficiency, but with emphasis on permitting newcomers to live their own lives and make their own decisions. As strangers in the local community setting, they may be confronted with problems for which they need help and counsel and should have the knowledge and feeling of inner security that they can turn to some member of the community.
- c) When the migration phase of the DP program is over, what national agency will continue to service local communities on the adjustment problems of recently settled newcomers? In other words, will USNA continue to function? FR indicated that the problem will undoubtedly be discussed at the coming annual meeting.
- d) The problem of the job placement for unskilled workers at minimum wages. This is a two-fold problem—the attitude of certain elements in the community that Jewish newcomers should not be placed in jobs usually held by Negroes since it is degrading to the community; the attitude of some newcomers that they constitute a third class in the southern social structure, just a little higher than the Negro population. Tendency of most newcomers to insist that only other DP's can understand them makes the problem of social integration most difficult. To some extent this problem could be handled if newcomers had sufficient knowledge of English to be placed in more responsible jobs. FR discussed it in terms of an accelerated English-teaching program and the need for upgrading at regular intervals.
- e) Budget material now used is out-dated and the Committee requested latest budget standards of NYAHA as a guide

*Page 3 of the Field Report, September 17, 1951.  
(Courtesy of YIVO, Institute for Jewish Research, New York.)*

to their local budgetary practices. FR stated this would be sent.

- f) The Committee was highly critical of the problems created in the community in August when notified that a family was coming only to be notified by wire on the scheduled date of arrival that the unit had been diverted to another community where they had relatives. No question as to the soundness of the diversion, but why didn't USNA have this information in advance? An apartment had been rented for the family and other plans made for their reception. It was a frustrating experience for the Committee. FR explained in some detail the migration operation, citing recent personal pier experiences. He stressed the fact that we are dealing with human beings, and in a program of this size there are bound to be last minute developments.

The group understood the explanation, but didn't accept it too willingly.

FR expressed appreciation for the good job Montgomery has done to date and the assurance of the Committee for New Americans that we can count on their continued cooperation until the end of the DP program.

Summation of Visit:

Montgomery still has a well-organized, functioning committee which is prepared to accept additional units within its quota. In view of the reality factors in this un-industrialized southern community, every possible effort should be made to select units in accordance with the Committee's expressed preferences.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The National Refugee Service (NRS, prewar) and its successor USNA were not the only national Jewish organizations to send field agents into Alabama's Jewish communities. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) also sent representatives into Alabama to promote and encourage the formation of AJC chapters. While the AJC representatives were not involved with DP resettlement, their detailed assessments corroborate the findings and narratives of the USNA reports.

<sup>2</sup> "Postwar Refugee Crisis And The Establishment Of The State Of Israel," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 27, 2011, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005459>. Approximately one-fifth were survivors of the camps. See Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999), 67-68. One of the best accounts is Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Beth B. Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (Brunswick, NJ, 2007), 18-23.

<sup>4</sup> By 1952, 78 percent of the DPs had settled in the major cities of the Northeast and Midwest, as well as California. Thirty-one percent settled in New York State alone. See Table A.13 in Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 287.

<sup>5</sup> Beatrice Behrman, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, April 26, 1948; Beatrice Behrman to Milton Krochmal, June 24, 1948, MKM24.27.612, USNA collection, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, (hereafter cited as USNA collection.)

<sup>6</sup> Birmingham had three congregations: the Reform Temple Emanu-El, the Conservative Temple Beth-El, and the Orthodox K'nesseth Israel. Montgomery's three congregations were the Reform Temple Beth-Or, the Conservative Agudath Israel, and the Sephardic Etz Ahayem. Selma had only one congregation, the Reform Mishkin Israel.

<sup>7</sup> "Report of Displaced Persons' Committee," n.d. [1950], folder "1947-1950"; "Minutes of Board Meeting," July 6, 1950, folder "1947-1950," Birmingham Jewish Federation Papers (hereafter cited as BJF).

<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg quoted in Cohen, *Case Closed*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> In October 1950 Saul Travin noted that Montgomery had a quota of eighteen units, but at the time had only received ten units. Saul Travin, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, October 6, 1950, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>10</sup> Behrman, "Field Report," April 26, 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Meyers, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, September 17-19, 1949, MKM24.27-613, USNA collection.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Lobman to Walter H. Bieringer, July 11, 1950, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See also Mrs. Sigmund Weil to Lillian Collins, September 8, 1950, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection. In March 1951, Joseph Marshuetz, the president of the Jewish Federation of Montgomery, told the USNA that "it is our intention, and desire, to receive additional units whenever possible." It is unclear how many units arrived after 1951. Joseph Marshuetz to Arthur Greenleigh, March 30, 1951, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>16</sup> Travin, "Field Report," October 6, 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Julius Levins, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, September 17, 1951, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>18</sup> Travin, "Field Report," October 6, 1950.

<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Sigmund Weil to Lillian Collins, September 8, 1950.

<sup>20</sup> Travin, "Field Report," October 6, 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Beatrice Behrman, "Field Report," Selma, AL, February 2-3, 1949, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, no record of what happened to the Sznurs appears in the USNA files. Morton R. Adall, "Field Report," Selma, AL, October 27, 1949, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>23</sup> Seymore L. Cohn to USNA, May 26, 1949, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>24</sup> Seymore L. Cohn to USNA, June 12, 1950, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>25</sup> "Report of Displaced Persons' Committee," n.d. [1950], folder "1947-1950"; "Minutes of Board Meeting," July 6, 1950, folder "1947-1950," BJJF.

<sup>26</sup> "Report of Displaced Persons' Committee," n.d. [1950], folder "1947-1950," BJJF.

<sup>27</sup> Allen Rankin, "The War is Over, But the Gates to Jewish DP Camps Closed," *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1947.

<sup>28</sup> Allen Rankin, "Veteran Charges U.S. Failed Handling DPs in Germany," *Birmingham News*, September 26, 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Schniper, telephone interview by author, April 12, 2011; "Darkness Into Life," Birmingham Holocaust Education Center, accessed May 1, 2011, <http://www.bhamholocausteducation.org/bio-schniper.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Friedman, "Memories," *Deep South Jewish Voice*, September 1999, 28. Friedman was writing about the Nagrodski family, one of the first to be resettled in Birmingham. Szymon Nagrodski became a successful tailor in the city.

<sup>31</sup> Levins, "Field Report," September 17, 1951.

<sup>32</sup> Ben Hirsch, telephone interview by author, December 4, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence N. Powell, *Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, The Holocaust, and David Duke's Louisiana* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 370-371. William B. Helmreich noted, "in general, survivors seemed to have more problems in the Deep South than in other regions." William B.

Helmreich, *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* (New York, 1992), 101.

<sup>34</sup> "United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1941-1952," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed January 26, 2013, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007094>.

<sup>35</sup> Levins, "Field Report," September 17, 1951.

<sup>36</sup> Mayer Newfield was the son of Temple Emanu-El rabbi Morris Newfield.