

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel B. Heimovics, *Managing Editor*

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From the Editor . . .

This first edition of Southern Jewish History clearly reflects the diversity of the field. Authors include a graduate student and an octogenarian, a nursing professor, a former English professor, the new executive director of the American Jewish Archives and an historian/program specialist for the Wisconsin Historical Society. In these pages the reader will travel across two centuries, and from Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee through Alabama to North Carolina and Virginia besides many points in between.

Gary Zola's revised dinner address delivered at the 1997 Hot Springs conference provides a fitting beginning to this journal as it describes important reasons for studying southern Jewish history. 1997 student essay contest winner Bryan Stone uses popular culture to explicate the issue of identity. Like all fine Young Turks, he very capably takes a senior historian (in this case, this editor) to task for not giving sufficient credit to imagery in the formation of people's perceptions of self. Leonard Rogoff emphasizes the impact of the small town experience on North Carolina congregational life. He suggests that this model of adjustment mechanisms and changing patterns may provide important lessons for policy makers today. Susan Mayer sheds light on the roles of women and how career choices could dramatically influence their lives.

The final articles reflect an editorial decision to include certain manuscripts that might not be found in "traditional scholarly" journals, but which should, nonetheless, appeal to lay readers while providing significant insights gleaned from primary sources of interest to professionals as well. Gertrude L. Samet revised an article she presented at the Hot Springs conference which illuminates the experiences of her uncle, an entrepreneur and community builder. Bobbie S. Malone uses case studies

derived from oral history interviews to illustrate divisions within the New Orleans Jewish society.

An undertaking such as this naturally becomes a group effort. Besides the members of the editorial board who gave unstintingly of their time, thought, and effort, I would like to thank Robert Cain, Jeffrey Gurock, Catherine Kahn, Rafael Medoff and Hollace Weiner for reviewing articles. All of the articles submitted were reviewed by two peer reviewers and myself. Fewer than half of those submitted were accepted for publication. Thanks also goes to Belinda Gergel and Patricia LaPointe who chaired the original committee which recommended that the Southern Jewish Historical Society sponsor this publication, and to the officers and members of the organization who have provided the support which made this publication possible.

Mark K. Bauman
Atlanta Metropolitan College

Why Study Southern Jewish History?*

by

Gary P. Zola

In her fine dissertation on Jewish life in the South, Carolyn Lipson-Walker cites a delightful yarn about three Jewish mothers from New York who were bragging about how successful their sons had become. The first lady said: "my son has been quite successful in his career. He travels all the time for his work."

"Where does he travel?" the other two ask.

"He always travels to the West Coast," she tells them.

Not to be outdone, the second lady spoke up: "Thank God, my son is doing quite well, too. He does consulting work all over the country."

"Where does he consult?" the other two ask.

"Typically, he is asked to consult on the West Coast."

Finally, the third mother chimes in: "Well, thank God, my son is doing very well, too," she exulted. "He is a scholar and he lectures all over the South!"

"Where is the South?" the two New York matrons ask.

"Oh, its somewhere on the West Coast, too!"¹

* * *

As it is with all satire, this spoof employs irony to expose folly. In this case, the sally's target is a certain brand of

* This paper is based on an address that was given to the plenum of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, which met in Hot Springs, Arkansas, November 15, 1997.

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parochialism that characterizes the way in which many northern Jews view the South in general and, particularly, Jewish life in the South. In and of itself northern disregard for the South is a long and interesting story. Many historians assert that it was the abolitionist movement that successfully promulgated the notion that southern life was essentially an immoral culture. Others contended that the roots of the South's "benightedness" may actually be traced back to the early colonial period when the South as a region was frequently criticized for being more primitive, more violent, and lazier than the other colonial regions.²

Like other southern citizens, southern Jews, too, have frequently been disparaged by their co-religionists in the North. In the aftermath of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, for example, northern Jews were inclined to stereotype their brothers and sisters in Dixie as "bigoted and unsophisticated" southern toadies who were "not real Jews." The moral imperiousness of northern Jews, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, set the teeth of many southern Jews on edge. One southern Jew expressed his annoyance by grumbling: "They [northern Jews] think the Jews of the South are nothing and automatically assume you are George Wallace and worse. . ." ³

Long before the advent of the civil rights era southern Jews discerned this hauteur from their northern co-religionists, and their expressions of resentment can be found in the annals of history. In 1879, a colorful rabbi, E. B. M. Browne (1844-1928), criticized the leadership of the nation's first congregational alliance, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), because of what he perceived to be its near total disregard for southern Jewry. Another southern Jewish critic from Canton, Mississippi, advised his congregation in the pages of the *Jewish South* not to join the UAHC (which he sneeringly labeled the "Union of Happy American Cacklers") "until they shall evidence by their works they have an interest in our section."⁴

One of the most prominent chroniclers of Jewish life in the South, Eli Evans, noted that "non-southerners are stunned to learn that the South ever had any Jews at all." The tendency to ignore or overlook Jews who live west of the Alleghenies and east of the

Rockies persists. A cursory glance at the tables of contents for three of the most popular national Jewish magazines, *Commentary*, *Moment*, and *Tikkun*, underscores the contemporary relevance of Evans's observation. The roster of the editorial board or the list of contributing essayists seldom includes a Jewish name from the South or Midwest. Over the past three years, for example, writers residing in the South and Midwest regions of the United States comprised approximately 12 percent of the essays published in these magazines despite the fact that southern and midwestern Jewry constitute nearly 25 percent of the entire Jewish population in the United States.⁵

Moment magazine, for instance, regularly features two or three guest contributors who write essay/commentaries that deal with a diverse array of contemporary Jewish concerns. Not one of these commentators, however, lives or works between the coasts. This phenomenon is certainly no conspiracy. After all, 75 percent of United States Jewry lives in the major population centers of the eastern and western seaboard. Yet the Jewish "minority" that lives between the Atlantic and Pacific is hardly insubstantial; Jewish life in the Midwest and South has a vitality and relevance all its own. It should come as no surprise to *Moment's* editorial staff (or the editorial staffs of other Jewish journals seeking a national Jewish following) that at least some southern and midwestern subscribers might be wondering why the capable Jewish leaders who live in cities like Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, or Memphis—a partial list of the southern metropolises with Jewish populations that have soared over the last two decades—rarely appear in the pages of their publications.⁶

Interestingly, this same habit manifests itself in the pages of *Reform Judaism*, the official publication of the UAHC, the umbrella organization of Reform Judaism in North America. Despite the fact that Reform Judaism constitutes the dominant expression of religious Judaism in the southern and midwestern regions of the United States, the magazine's roster of articles is written almost entirely by Reform Jewish leaders who live on either the eastern or western seaboard.⁷

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Assessing the significance of southern Jewry's overall contribution to the American Jewish experience remains a controversial topic to this day. Recently, Moses Rischin of San Francisco State University, published an essay reviewing four of Jacob Rader Marcus's (1896–1995) last publications. In it, Rischin labeled Marcus, the undisputed "father" of the field and "dean" of American Jewish historians, as the "historian-archivist of Jewish Middle America." This is a rather surprising moniker for an American Jewish historian like Marcus. After all, had not Marcus been the nonpareil student of American Jewry? His influence on the field has literally been immeasurable. By founding the American Jewish Archives on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, he established an invaluable academic center dedicated to the process of gathering and preserving the primary documents that comprise the heart of academic research relating to the study of the American Jewish experience. So why would Rischin dub Marcus the "historian-archivist of Jewish Middle America"?⁸

Rischin based his designation on one of Marcus's many colorful aphorisms that appeared in the Preface to his magnum opus, *United States Jewry*: "I am . . . committed to the thesis," Marcus wrote, "that the story of the Jew in this land, lies not in the vertical eminence of the few, but in the horizontal spread of the many."⁹

For Marcus, the science of history was not comparable to a physical science. It was "a record of human behavior and human experience." By extension then, Marcus saw American Jewish history as the *cumulative* record of the Jewish experience on American soil.¹⁰

As one scholar correctly noted: "American Jewish history is not New York City Jewish history writ large." In other words, to fully and accurately reconstruct an account of the Jewish experience in America, the skilled historian must not concentrate exclusively on the large urban Jewish centers wherein live the *eminent* Jews who have, unquestionably, influenced the course of Jewish history. Although the historian of the American Jewish experience must never minimize the weighty significance of the nation's major Jewish population centers, it is nevertheless vitally

important for scholars to look beyond Jewry's megalopolitan communities in order to examine the workings of small communities and individual Jews of all varieties who collectively contribute to the totality we call American Jewry. This is what Marcus meant when he committed himself to the thesis that a truthful story of the American Jew must emerge from "the horizontal spread of the many" and not from the "eminence of the few."¹¹

Once Marcus's methodological approach has been properly explicated, does it necessarily follow that the study of the southern Jewish experience epitomizes the "horizontal spread" of which Dr. Marcus wrote? Could it not be argued that Jewish existence in the South is so fundamentally divergent from so-called mainstream Jewish life in the United States that its history sheds little light on the story of United States Jewry? In his landmark study on southern life, W. J. Cash noted that both northerners and southerners agree that the South is "another land." For some, this *otherness* is not benign but rather contemptible. Historian Howard Zinn recognized that for some this so-called "southern exceptionalism" is un-American: "a sport, a freak, an inexplicable variant from the national norm[,] . . . a stranger to the nation."¹²

The same alien nature of the South as a region has also affected southern Jewry. Frequently, northern Jews take it for granted that the distinctive quality of Jewish life in the South is fundamentally an anomaly. Jewish life in the South has long had to subsist with an extraordinarily challenging demography; only in the South has so large a percentage of the overall Jewish population resided in small, relatively isolated towns and rural settings that Eli Evans has aptly described as "the provincials."¹³

Consider the following demographics: of the twelve states customarily included in the Land of Dixie, four—one third of the total—(Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina) do not contain even one Jewish urban center numbering more than 4,000 Jewish souls, and most are much smaller than even 4,000. In another four states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee), between 40 and 50 percent of the Jewish population live in communities that number less than 1,000 Jewish citizens. Only four of the twelve southern states (Kentucky, Flor-

ida, Texas, and Virginia) have more than 60 percent of their total Jewish community living in enclaves that number 4,000 Jews or more.¹⁴

With so large a percentage of southern Jews living as “provincials,” does it necessarily follow that the small-town essence of Jewish life in the South is that which informs this region’s distinctive Jewish identity? To be sure, the nature of Jewish life in a small-town America, regardless of the region, has many commonalities.¹⁵ There can be little doubt that a significant aspect of southern Jewry’s regional identity can be traced to the fact that such a large percentage of the region’s Jewry lives in a small-town milieu. Yet the character of Jewish life in the South is not shaped entirely by this reality. Southern Jewry has been, and remains to this day, distinctive because of how its Jewish residents have attuned themselves to the region’s unique history, culture and state-of-mind. As one historian noted, “because of the vast area that is the South . . . [southern] Jews are not a cohesive community in the traditional sense of a small ethnic group. It would be more apt to label [southern] Jews as ‘a temporary recurring community’ within a region.”¹⁶

Still, the history of southern Jewry may be a fetching topic as an oddity or an intriguing curiosity but not necessarily as a significant theme in the history of the Jew in America. Indeed, it is entirely appropriate for a student to inquire: what use is there in the study of southern Jewish history?

* * *

Let us consider four principle arguments that historians have used in responding to the more fundamental question: Why study history? These justifications provide a helpful framework in addressing our more specific query: Why study southern Jewish history?¹⁷

The first possible response to this query suggests that the story of events past can be put to good use in our own day and age. Some have called this rationale the *utilitarian justification*. Accordingly, the study of history enables us to identify repetitive patterns of human behavior. Once we have discerned these patterns, we can learn both from past successes as well as

from bygone failures. The “utilitarian justification” could certainly validate the study of southern Jewish history because southern Jewish history offers a useful paradigm for the preservation of Jewish life in the face of daunting societal challenges.

Irrespective of their region of domicile, many American Jews share a much discussed concern: will Jewish communal life survive in the United States? Whether they live in the North, the South, the Midwest, or the West, a considerable number of American Jews worry about the numerous sociological challenges that appear to threaten the future of Judaism's corporate viability in America. Jews in the United States are disaffiliating, intermarrying, converting out, assimilating, aging, and Jewishly unschooled. Yet southern Jews—especially those who lived in the Deep South—have long faced many of these same social challenges, and the history of what many consider to be a Jewishly disadvantaged region like the South may prove useful to those who are seeking ways to preserve the vibrancy of Jewish communal life in North America.

In order to maintain their Jewish identities in the deep South's most remote localities, southern Jews learned by experience that they must remain linked to a broader regional community. Jews in the South understood that unless they continually created their own Jewish community, the future of Jewish life in their region would be at risk. Thus we know that Jews from Kaplan, Franklin, and Morgan City, Louisiana, willingly commuted to New Iberia in order to attend Shabbat services. Similarly, the handful of Jewish families who lived in Dumas and Dermott, Arkansas, drove to McGehee in order to participate in a synagogue. By gathering within the provinces, southern Jews have managed to establish and sustain a remarkable number of synagogues. In fact, not too many years ago, one demographer noted that southern Jews maintained one synagogue for every 700 Jewish souls while in other regions of the country there was one congregation for every 3,000.¹⁸

Today the essential character of Jewish life in the South seems to be in the midst of a transformation; southern Jewish

baby boomers have abandoned their isolated rural hometowns in the South in favor of life in larger urban centers. Consequently, many of the Jewish small-town communities in the deep South have dried up. The Jewish populations of several large urban centers, on the other hand, have exploded. Still, the basic elements that have long typified Jewish life in the South prevail; it is a region that contains a small, thinly dispersed Jewish population that still tends to rely heavily on interregional collaboration in order to meet their Jewish needs. It is a Jewish lifestyle that differs, as one scholar observed, “both qualitatively and quantitatively from that of northern Jewry,” and it is a *modus vivendi* that Jews who live in the sprawling megalopolitan centers on the coasts find quite difficult to fathom.¹⁹

Yet it may well be that this distinctive mode of existence has enabled the Jews of the South to fulfill their self-assigned role as custodians of an ancient tradition in spite of the many inharmonious societal realities that have characterized that particular section of the nation. The maintenance of a communal identification—the dogged attempt to preserve a civic link with other Jews—functions as a critical element in realizing what has of late been called “Jewish continuity.” In reflecting on the nature of Jewish life in the United States, Jacob Marcus once observed that the story of the Jew in this land is not a series of unrelated histories. “The leitmotif of Jewish history in this country,” Marcus wrote, “is the constant attempt, the determination, to create and further a distinct community with its synagogues, its schools, its charities. It is as simple as that. In Jewry where there is no community there is no history.”²⁰

One purpose, then, to the study of southern Jewish history derives from the remarkable patterns of Jewish identification and systems of communal association that can be instructive to all of American Jewry as it seeks to address its own contemporary challenges:

First, the demographic realities noted above have typically fostered a high level of regional collaboration among southern Jews. In cities where large numbers of Jews reside, the need for Jewish communal cooperation is much less prevalent. The

panoply of communal agencies and institutions, so commonplace in the larger Jewish population centers, has become a familiar characteristic of Jewish life in North America. Jews living in large urban centers boasting thousands of Jewish residents created synagogues and organizations that served their religious or communal needs. If one synagogue failed to meet the religious needs of its Jewish citizens, competing institutions arose to fill the gap. In this sense, the larger the Jewish community, the more unnecessary it was for the Jewish residents to work collaboratively. Jewish demographics in the South, particularly in small-town Dixie, mitigated this natural tendency toward institutional proliferation. Consequently, southern Jews rarely enjoyed the luxury of a Jewish institutional smorgasbord to which the Jews living in the coastal megalopolises have become so accustomed.²¹

Second, southern Jews have long experienced the challenge presented to them by the reality of diminishing communal resources. Typically, the larger the Jewish community, the easier it is to attract Jewish teachers, preachers, communal workers as well as Jewish bookstores, kosher butchers, and the like. These Jewish amenities were rarely available to the Jews who lived in small, isolated towns throughout the South. Consequently, southern Jews tended to foster a regional community whenever the local community was unable to provide its Jews with the accouterments of day-to-day Jewish life.

There are many examples of how regional collaboration among southern Jews enabled them to access Jewish resources even if they were not close at hand. Many of these practices still await the scholarly attention of historians and social scientists. Newspapers that addressed the interests of the Jewish South like Isaac M. Wise's *Israelite*, E. B. M. Browne's *The Jewish South* and, later, the *Southern Israelite*, strengthened the regional ties that united the Jews of the South. Southern rabbis, too, collaborated on a regional basis. In 1884, five years prior to the establishment of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, southern rabbis decided to create a regional rabbinical association called the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations. This organization enabled them to collaborate on the development of curricula

for Jewish education and exchange views on a variety of contemporary communal issues they were facing in their own locale. In 1906, nearly two decades after the founding of the CCAR, the southern rabbis resurrected the idea of a regional rabbinical association under the name: Southern Rabbinical Conference. One of the conference organizers, Rabbi Henry Barnstein of Houston, justified the establishment of a regional rabbinical organization by suggesting that the CCAR did not fully meet the needs of southern colleagues.²²

Most southern Jews were compelled to rely on regional and not local experts. Replicating the practice of other religious denominations, southern Jews cultivated a system of *circuit-preaching* so that the Jewish needs of many isolated communities that were spread across a large geographical area could be served. In their functioning as *circuit-preachers*, the influence of local rabbis and scholars such as James Gutheim, Max Heller, Jacob Voorsanger, Henry Cohen, David Marx and Tobias Geffen, to name but a few, was felt throughout the South. In addition to the impact of the circuit-preachers, literally dozens of small-town synagogues throughout the South were able to maintain their own local Jewish presence over the course of many decades with help from the bi-weekly visits of rabbinical students from the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.²³

Southern Jews willingly traveled long distances in order to participate in a wide array of regional gatherings that brought Jewish families and friends into periodic contact with one another. Around the World War II era, southern Jews instituted the concept of regional *courtship weekends*. These events brought together Jewish teenagers from across the South in the hope of strengthening their bond with other Jews and with Jewish life. The city of Birmingham, Alabama, sponsored an event known as Jubilee; the Falcon Picnic was held in Montgomery, Alabama; the Ballyhoo took place in Atlanta; and the Hollydays was an annual tradition in Columbus, Georgia.²⁴

This same regional spirit influenced the way southern Jews conducted their business. The Alsatian Jews who settled the Lou-

isiana area, for example, came to the South after having lived and worked in a comparable regional commercial structure that was indigenous to rural Jewish life in the Alsace-Lorraine region of southwestern Germany. These Jews made good use of their experience and Jewish businessmen in the commercial sectors of New Orleans interacted repeatedly with co-religionists who lived all across rural Louisiana. In addition to these regional business interactions, southern Jews supported regional lodges and orphanages under the aegis of *B'nai B'rith* just as they contributed to regional fundraising projects for other philanthropic causes such as the establishment of regional Jewish hospitals. A young Jewish woman who grew up in the South expressed her perception of these regional bonds by noting: "It was like you didn't just live in the your own town. You lived in the entire South."²⁵

The distinctive relationship between Jews and non-Jews throughout the South constitutes a third example of southern Jewish history's instructional attributes. Jews living outside of the South tend to assume that all of Dixieland was awash with virulent anti-Semitism. When Joe Marks suggested that his family move from New York to Georgia, his wife informed him she had no interest in moving to a region of "savages" where all they did was "beat up Jews." Despite the fact that southern Jews living in the Bible Belt confronted periodic bouts of intense bigotry and religious prejudice, it is also true that special bonds of affection and cooperation linked southern Jews and their gentile neighbors. Southern rabbis, in particular, played a pivotal role in profiling their community to the non-Jewish society at-large. Some southern rabbis established high-profile friendships with prominent members of the Christian clergy, and these relationships became exemplars to the entire community.²⁶

No matter how southern a Jewish citizen may have become, however, his non-Jewish compatriots rarely allowed him to forget his Jewish roots. The highly regarded lawyer and community leader, Joseph M. Proskauer, grew up in Mobile, Alabama, believing that he "lived in a wonderful world where [he] could love and be loved and all was 'right as right could be.'" In the next breath, Proskauer recalled being beat up in high school for being a

“Christ killer.” This same dichotomy afflicted southern Jews who entered the realm of politics; David Yulee and Judah P. Benjamin earned the public’s confidence and respect as competent statesmen but, simultaneously, their compeers rarely allowed them to forget their Jewish pedigree.²⁷

Finally, the demographic decline of southern Jewry in numerous towns and hamlets that once boasted noteworthy Jewish communities has, paradoxically, become a stimulant for upholding the region’s future by the very act of preserving its past. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, established in 1989, serves today as a regional resource for rescuing and protecting artifacts from endangered Jewish communities throughout the South. Through the museum and its work, the history of now dormant Jewish communities will be written and conserved by Jews who live in other parts of the region.²⁸

The history of Jewish life in the South, then, teaches us a clearly discernable pattern of behavior that, when studied, may prove useful in helping contemporary American Jewry address many of its communal woes. Southern Jewish history demonstrates that a viable, committed, and resolute Jewry can indeed endure even in the face of ostensibly ominous societal conditions: assimilation, intermarriage, a shrinking demography and so forth. Even without the numerical advantages attendant to a large Jewish population base, and even without the communal benefits that derive from a propinquity of elaborate Jewish communal institutions, Jews persist in developing imaginative and enterprising modes of perseverance. As long as there is deep attachment to preserving the rudiments of a Jewish religious community, Jewish identity endures.

* * *

A second response to the question, *why study southern Jewish history?* has been called by some the *inspirational* rationale. According to this line of reasoning, knowledge of the past constitutes an essential element in a collective or a communal consciousness because the efforts and accomplishments of our forbears inspire us to face the challenges of our own day and age. American historian Allan Nevins observed that the study of

history functions as a source of inspiration “by giving peoples a sense of continuity in all of their efforts, and by chronicling immortal worth, it confers upon them both a consciousness of their unity, and a feeling of the importance of human achievement.”²⁹

By applying Nevins's insight, we see that, in addition to the many utilitarian functions noted above, the study of southern Jewish history can provide a sense of continuity with those Jews who preceded us, those who occupied our space before us. It provides us with an understanding of the past—an understanding that can make us appreciative and respectful of those who struggled to endure at a different time but in the same place. A compelling illustration of this aspect of Jewish life in the South comes to us from the letters of Charles Wessolowsky, an associate editor of the nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish South*, that was published first in Atlanta and later in New Orleans. In 1878 Wessolowsky traveled to Meridian, Mississippi, to attend the dedication of that city's new synagogue building. Twenty-two families, Wessolowsky wrote, had “erected a structure which [stood] with its majestic towers in grandeur and splendor, as an honor to our people and a pride to the citizens of Meridian.” Moved by the event, the correspondent effused “Indeed, here we are made to feel and understand the meaning of the prophet: 'a few will become a mighty nation' and here we have seen it clearly demonstrated that Judaism is not dead . . .”³⁰

Jacob Marcus observed that “Jews glory in their survival. They refuse to disappear.” Even in the enigmatic land of Dixie, the children of Abraham and Sarah will never succumb entirely. Southern Jews have experienced the ravages of intermarriage, Jewish attrition, and societal acculturation more keenly than Jews who reside in the more densely populated Jewish centers. Nonetheless, in one way or another, southern Jewish history constitutes moving testimony on the Jewish will to endure. “Don't misread Jewish history,” Marcus repeatedly admonished. “Today we are few not because we were murdered throughout the ages but because we seceded, acculturated, voluntarily. Forget about numbers. Numbers are a myth. We have always lived through a few, a saving remnant.” In the South, as elsewhere, there will al-

ways be a small, zealous core of men and women who refuse to forfeit their Jewish heritage. For all who, like Charles Wessolowsky long ago, marvel at the Jewish people's will to survive, the history of southern Jewry serves as the embodiment of the Jew's remarkable drive to survive.³¹

* * *

A third justification for historical learning has been termed the *pedagogical* rationale. According to this notion, the primary role of history is to assist us by teaching us more about our world, about society, and about ourselves. This postulate is based on an assumption, difficult though it may be to prove empirically, that when we possess knowledge of the past, we have improved ourselves as human beings. Knowledge of our past enhances the cultivation and enrichment of the human experience. As American historian R. G. Collingwood noted: "Knowing yourself means knowing what you can do; and since nobody knows what he can do until he tries, the only clue to what man can do is what man has done." The value of history, then, is that it shows us the extent of our potential by means of empirical lessons that emerge from the past.³²

This *pedagogical* argument, too, partially accounts for the impetus to study southern Jewish history. The study of southern Jewry inevitably widens the scope of our American Jewish weltanschauung, our conception of and perspective on the nature of American Jewry. The significance of this rationale vis-à-vis Jewish life in the deep South is compounded when we acknowledge the fact that this particular region's role in the shaping of American Jewish life has been routinely overlooked and undervalued by American Jewish historians. Consider the following illustrative items:

- A. It was in the South, in 1585, thirty-five years before the Pilgrim Fathers landed, that a mining expert named Joachim Gaunze, the first documented Jew in North America, stepped off the gangplank at Roanoke Island.

- B. It was in the South, only weeks after James Oglethorpe himself came ashore near Savannah in 1733, that a Prussian Jew named Benjamin Sheftall settled in the Georgia colony. Shortly thereafter, he was a co-founder of that city's first synagogue, perhaps the second oldest synagogue in North America, eventually known by the name Congregation Mickve Israel;³³
- C. It was in the South, in South Carolina, that Francis Salvador became the first professing Jew to serve in an American legislature. In fact, Salvador may have been the first unconverted Jew in history to be a member of a non-Jewish legislative body. It was this same Salvador who, fighting near Keowee, South Carolina, in 1776, lost his life and thereby memorialized himself as the first Jew to die for American independence;
- D. It was in Charleston, South Carolina, that the first organized attempt to reform Judaism and the first instance of Jewish prayer book reform in the "New World" occurred;
- E. It was the South that furnished American Jewry with its first munificent philanthropist, Judah Touro, who, upon his death at the age of 79 in 1854, bequeathed nearly \$500,000 to Jewish, Christian, and non-sectarian causes;
- F. It was in the South, in Charleston, S. C., that the female poet, Penina Moïse, published her volume *Fancy's Sketch Book* (1853) which is probably the first collection of poetry published by a Jewish woman in the United States;
- G. It was the South that sent the first two Jews to serve in the United States Senate: David Yulee of Florida in 1845 and Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana in 1852³⁴
- H. It was from six states in the South (Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas) that eleven southern congregations sent delegates to a con-

vention in Cincinnati, Ohio, on July 8, 1873, where the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the first Jewish congregational union whose purpose it was to create and sustain an American rabbinical seminary) was established;

- I. It was the South that produced the first truly regional rabbinical association: the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations;³⁵
- J. It was the South that spawned a remarkable number of merchant princes who cut their entrepreneurial teeth in Dixie's commercial milieu including Isidor and Nathan Straus (of R. H. Macy and Abraham & Straus fame), Adolph S. Ochs (publisher of the *New York Times*). Similarly, there were also a number of remarkable national leaders who were raised in the South and who were, at the same time, actively involved in Jewish communal affairs: Lewis N. Dembitz (a prominent Republican who was the uncle and beau idéal of Supreme Court Justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis, Dr. Simon Baruch, quite likely the first doctor to successfully diagnose and remove a ruptured appendix, and his son, Bernard, the well-known statesman; and . . .
- K. It was in the post-World War II South that an impressive number of still largely unsung rabbinic heroes risked their livelihood and, in some cases, their very lives in support of their religion's prophetic commitment to social justice. Men like Charles Mantinband of Hattiesburg, Perry Nussbaum of Jackson, Jacob Rothchild of Atlanta, Milton Schlager of Meridian, and Malcolm H. Stern of Norfolk merit special mention.³⁶

In short, there is much we can learn about the entirety of the American Jewish experience when we study the history of Jewish life in the South. Regrettably, there are still many aspects of Jewish life in the South that have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. In October of 1976, when Eli Evans addressed the scholarly conference on southern Jewry that reinvigorated the

Southern Jewish Historical Society, he identified a half dozen or so research topics that deserved more in-depth examination. Twenty-two years later, most of the items still await scholarly attention.³⁷ A few additional recommendations might serve as a helpful supplement to Evan's original listing:

- A. There is much more to learn about the many southern Jews who devoted themselves to the belle lettres—newspaper publishing, journalism, and the like—from the days of Isaac Harby and Mordecai Manuel Noah to Harry Golden and beyond;³⁸
- B. Many have made passing reference to the role Jews have played in the ongoing evolution of the South's commercial economy. Our understanding of this phenomenon would be enhanced significantly by a comprehensive and comparative study;
- C. The distinctive role of the rabbi in the South, although frequently noted, deserves more scholarly attention. How have southern rabbis functioned in matters such as Jewish education, interfaith relations and the civic life of their communities?

A critical examination of these and other topics will expand our understanding not only of southern history in general and southern Jewish history in specific, but ultimately our understanding of American Judaism in its totality. The story of southern Jewry is much more than the tale of an exotic relic; it is the embodiment of Jewish endurance and survival in an open, democratic society.

* * *

Why study southern Jewish history? Ultimately, the answer to this question brings us to the fourth and certainly the most instinctive rationale for the urge to study history. Walter Raleigh once observed that history “has made us acquainted with our dead ancestors . . . [and] delivered us their memory and fame.” Put quite simply, the process of historical learning satisfies an innate human desire to find our ancestral roots: “Jews are eager to know

the history of their people; that is its own justification. Knowledge is identification, security."³⁹

During an 1878 political convention in Georgia, an anti-Jewish politician attacked Major Raphael J. Moses, a Confederate veteran. Moses, who was known throughout the South as a brilliant lawyer and gifted orator, responded to the bigot in an oft-quoted letter. As well as any ever spoken, the major's words capture both the pride and the promise that comes to one who has come to know the majesty and matchless nobility of Israel's past:

I feel it an honor to be one of a race whom persecution can not crush; whom prejudice has in vain endeavored to subdue; who, despite the powers of man and the antagonism of the combined governments of the world, protected by the hand of deity, have burst the temporal bonds with which prejudice would have bound them. . . Would you honor me? Call me a Jew.⁴⁰

Clearly, the major's knowledge of his Jewish heritage was, for him, a wellspring of pride. That same wellspring of pride becomes our own through the history of our forbears. History instructs us, inspires us, and makes us more self-aware. Yet, we know that, in the final analysis, we study southern Jewish history – indeed all history – because the past enchants and intrigues us. This is unquestionably what David Ben Gurion was thinking when he formulated that well-known phrase: “We Jews do not live in the past, but the past most certainly lives within us.”⁴¹

NOTES

1. The story is based on the version recorded in Richard M. Dorson, “More Jewish Dialect Stories,” *Midwest Folklore* 10 (1960): 132–133, as quoted in Carolyn Lipson-Walker, “Shalom Y’All: The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1986), 71–72.

2. Fred C. Hobson, “The Savage South” in Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cords eds., *Myth and Southern History*, II (Chicago, 1989), 133–147. See also, David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York, 1967).

3. Lipson-Walker, “Shalom Y’All,” 75.

4. For the quote mentioning George Wallace, see Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973), 59. For other references, see Leah Elizabeth Hagedorn, "The Southern Jewish Ethos: Jews, Gentiles and Interfaith Relations in the American South, 1877-1917" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1988), 99. The colorful Edward Benjamin Morris Browne, nicknamed "Alphabet" because of his initials and academic credentials (he claimed to have earned an M.D. and a LL.B.), was born in Kaschau, Hungary, in 1844. He came to the U.S. shortly after the Civil War. See Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia, 1978), and Louis E. Schmier, *Reflections of Southern Jewry* (Macon, Georgia, 1982), 17-18. Browne is also mentioned in Jacob Rader Marcus (ed.), *American Jewish Biography*. I, 80.

5. The Evans quote is in Lewis Lord, "Matzos and Magnolias: An Exhibit Explores a Lost World of Southern Judaism" in *U.S. News & World Report*, May 25, 1998, 53. For statistical information on Jewish population and demography in the United States, see Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984* (New York, 1990). The statistics relating to the journals were compiled by the author.

6. Dennis Prager (Los Angeles), Letty Cottin Pogrebin (New York), Francine Klagsbrun (New York), and Marshall Breger (Washington, D.C.) are regular contributors to *Moment*.

7. Cf., issues of *Reform Judaism* magazine from 1996 through November 1997.

8. Moses Rischin, "Jacob Rader Marcus: Historian-Archivist of Jewish Middle America," *American Jewish History* 85 (June 1997): 175-181.

9. Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, I, (Detroit, 1989), 19.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Mark K. Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style* (Cincinnati, 1996), 6; Jacob Rader Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, I (Detroit, 1970), xxiii; *idem.*, *US Jewry*, I, 16.

12. W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), vii-viii. Howard Zinn, *The Southern Mystique* (New York, 1964), 217.

13. Evans, *The Provincials*.

14. See Marcus, *To Count a People*.

15. A few studies on Jewish life in small-town America have recently appeared. See especially, Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1996), and Howard V. Epstein, *Jews in Small Towns: Legends and Legacies* (Santa Rosa, California, 1997). Hopefully, these studies will assist scholars in responding to Mark K. Bauman's insightful recommendation ". . . to begin associating the experiences of Jews in small towns of the South with their co-religionists in the small towns of Indiana and New England . . ." Bauman, *The Southerner as American*, 6.

16. For a case study that seeks to demonstrate how southern Jewish culture "differed markedly from their counterparts elsewhere in the United States," see Mark I. Greenberg, "Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-1870" *American Jewish History*, 86 (March 1998), 55-76. Similarly, Leonard Rogoff's article, "Is the Jew White?: The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in *American Jewish History*, 85 (September 1997), 195-230, documents how southern racism impacted the nature of Jewish identity in the South. For quote, see Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'All," 46.

17. The analytical structure employed herein regarding the use of history has been influenced greatly by Theodore S. Hamerow's essay "What is the Use of History," in *Reflections on History and Historians* (Madison, 1987), 205-243. See especially, 238-243.

18. For the data on the proportion of congregations to population, see Harry Golden, "Jew and Gentile in the New South: Segregation at Sundown," *Commentary* 18 (1955): 407. See also, Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'All," 45-52.

19. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1979), ix. On current demographic trends, see Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People*, and Lewis Lord, "Matzos and Magnolias," 53.

20. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, I, 16.

21. When, at the end of the nineteenth century, eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in small southern communities, they frequently established new synagogues. Most of the small towns were unable to maintain a Jewish population large enough to support competing institutions and, within a generation, most of the eastern European congregations had either dissolved or merged with the preexisting synagogue. See Lee Shai Weissbach, "Eastern European Immigrants and the Image of Jewish in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History*, 85 (September 1997): 231-262.

22. See Gary P. Zola, "Southern Rabbis and The Founding of the First National Association of Rabbis," *American Jewish History*, 85 (December 1997): 353-372.

23. On circuit-preaching, see Hagedorn, "The Southern Jewish Ethos," 88-109. See also, Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Mixers: The Role of Rabbis Deep in the Heart of Texas," *American Jewish History*, 85 (September 1997): 316-322. On Max Heller's circuit-preaching, see Bobbie Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860-1929* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1997), 70-72. Tobias Geffen was known as "the dean of the Orthodox rabbis of the South," see Joel Ziff, ed., *Lev Tuviah: On the Life and Work of Rabbi Tobias Geffen* (Newton, Massachusetts, 1988), 37.

24. For more on the courtship weekends and the practice of regional networking among Jews in the South, see Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'All," 98-102 and 329-341.

25. See Elliott Ashkenzai, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1988), 3-15. For quote, see Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'All," 98.

26. For quote, see Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'All," 75-76. On Jewish-Gentile relations in the South, see especially, Leah Hagedorn, "The Southern Jewish Ethos." See also, Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Mixers," 289-332.

27. For quote, see Harold U. Ribalow, ed., *Autobiographies of American Jews* (Philadelphia 1965), 133. For an excellent summary of the love/hate relationship that characterized the non-Jew's attitude toward the Jew in the South, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy At Home: Antisemitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York, 1987), 73-102. See also, idem., *Antisemitism in America* (New York, 1994), 175-196.

28. On the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, see Lord, "Matzos and Magnolias"; Peter Applebome, "Small-Town South Clings to Jewish History," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1991, 1 and 28; and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience's publication, "Keeping the Story Alive" (Utica, Mississippi, n.d.).

29. Allan Nevins in *The Gateway to History* (Garden City, New York, 1962) as quoted in Hamerow, "What Is the Use of History," 231.

30. As quoted in Hagedorn, "The Southern Jewish Ethos," 38-39. The Scriptural quote is from Isaiah 60: 22.

31. Jacob Rader Marcus, "Testament: A Personal Statement," as quoted in Randall M. Falk, *Bright Eminence - The Life and Thought of Jacob Rader Marcus: Scholar, Mentor, Counselor*,

for *Three Generations of Rabbis and Lay Leaders of American Jewry* (Malibu, California, 1994), 135-136.

32. R. G. (Robin George) Collingwood, *Idea of History* (New York, 1957), 10.

33. On Mickve (sometimes spelled Mickva) Israel and Savannah Jewry, see Saul Jacob Rubin, *Third to None: The Saga of Savannah Jewry, 1733-1983* (Savannah, 1983), and Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry*, I, 233-234.

34. Scholars differ on whether or not David Yulee had actually abandoned Judaism before becoming a senator. Jacob Rader Marcus claims that Yulee "lived as a Christian." See *idem.*, *United States Jewry*, I, 365; See also, Leon Hühner, "David L. Yulee, Florida's First Senator," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 25 (1917), and Samuel Proctor, "Pioneer Jewish Settlement in Florida, 1765-1900," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writing of Regional History in the South with Special Emphasis on Religious and Cultural Groups*, convened in Miami Beach on February 15, 1956 (offset printing, 1956). In addition, four of the six persons of Jewish origin who had been elected to the United States Congress by the outbreak of the Civil War hailed from the South. See Ira Rosenswawe, "The Jewish Population of the United States as Estimated from the Census of 1820" in Abraham J. Karp *The Jewish Experience in America* (New York, 1969). On Judah P. Benjamin, see Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York, 1987).

35. See Gary P. Zola, "Southern Rabbis and The Founding of the First National Association of Rabbis."

36. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1997).

37. Eli N. Evans, "Southern-Jewish History: Alive and Unfolding," in Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn to the South*, 161-164.

38. On Harby's journalistic career in Charleston, see Gary P. Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1994). On Noah's contributions, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Manuel Noah* (New York, 1981).

39. Walter Raleigh, *History of the World* (Philadelphia, 1971), ed. C. A. Patrides, 48. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, I, 19.

40. As quoted in Jacob Rader Marcus, *This I Believe: Documents of American Jewish Life* (Northvale, New Jersey, 1990), 122-123.

41. Cf. Rabbi Sidney Greenberg, *A Treasury of The Art of Living* (Hollywood, California, 1963), 246. The statistics relating to the journals were compiled by the author.

“Ride ‘Em, Jewboy”: Kinky Friedman and the Texas Mystique¹

by

Bryan Edward Stone

Kinky Friedman, the country singer-turned crime novelist, once described himself as “the bastard child of twin cultures.” “Both cowboys and Jewboys,” he explained, “wear their hats in the house.”² This is a typical Friedman throw-away line: clever, a bit crass, played strictly for laughs. But like many of the jokes that pepper his songs and novels, it hints at something much deeper. By calling himself a “bastard child,” Friedman implies that his two heritages, Texan and Jewish, are incompatible in some way, and that their marriage cannot produce a legitimate child. Simultaneously he calls them “twin” cultures, indicating that they do in fact have something in common, that however incompatible they appear they are still closely related. The joke unites the two groups, each with its distinctive headgear, while reminding us that Stetsons and yarmulkes are really not the same thing at all.

The paradox that Friedman touches on here lies at the heart of any understanding of Jewish life and assimilation in Texas: Jews are both part of and separated from the Texas mystique, the bundle of assumptions and icons that has come to define what it means to be Texan, at least in a mythic sense. Jews have lived in Texas since Anglo settlement began in the 1820s,³ and a few participated in the Texas war for independence from Mexico in 1836.⁴ Since then the state’s Jewish population has grown steadily and, as in other parts of the country, Jews have come to represent a significant portion of the state’s business and professional class.

Today the Jewish population exceeds 109,000, although Jews still represent a mere six-tenths of a percent of the state's total population. This relatively small representation may partially account for why, as Friedman implies, Jews seem somehow out of place in Texas.⁵

In addition to demographic factors Texas Jews have found themselves a step outside a Texas mystique which often runs counter to everything Jewish tradition demands of them, their perception of themselves as Jews and their historical sense of what it means to be Jewish. The mythic Texan is a person (usually a man) of the outdoors, of the rural wilderness, comfortable amid the state's great distances, strong and uncompromising, fiercely independent, willing to fight, and overtly anti-intellectual. These qualities define the most enduring figures in Texas folklore: the cowboy, the frontiersman, the outlaw, the wildcatter. The mythic modern Jew, on the other hand, is a person of civilization and cultivation, a professional or tradesman, not physically intimidating in the least, most at home in an urban setting, savvy in intellectual matters but not especially rugged. Such a person, it would seem, just does not belong in a place like Texas.

Texas Jews do exist and have learned to ascribe to themselves qualities that are recognizably Texan while still holding to a sense of Jewish continuity. By doing so they have assured their authenticity as Texans and as Jews. As Seth L. Wolitz has written, "the powerful myth of Texas—even if tongue in cheek and it is more than that—envelops the newcomer willingly and unconsciously, and his native-born descendant becomes the absolute imprimatur of authenticity by birthright. . . . They have created a Texan Jew which fits the dominant normative practice of Texas."⁶

Texas Jews express that authenticity in a variety of ways which exhibit a self-consciously blended identity that draws equally—or at least substantially—from both traditions. It is visible in synagogues like Brenham's B'nai Abraham, built in 1893, whose white clapboard exterior is indistinguishable from surrounding Baptist churches but which on the inside could be an eastern European Orthodox synagogue with its enclosed octagonal bimah and upstairs women's gallery. It is evident in the

rebelliousness of Texas Jewish leaders against their counterparts in the north, as when in 1912 the [Houston] *Jewish Herald* declared a "Jewish civil war" on the leaders of New York's Jewish community, charging that they were a "syndicate who for years has been in absolute control of the Jewish voice and without whose authority no man dare move."⁷ It is also in blended recipes like the matzo balls one Dallas family serves every Passover with crushed pecans in the batter.⁸

As a self-consciously emblematic image of the Texas Jew, Kinky Friedman exemplifies this mixture. He is not a typical Texas Jew any more than Lyndon Johnson was a typical Texan. But in creating a public image for himself, Friedman has drawn on familiar icons of both Texas and Jewish character, exaggerated them in typically Texas fashion, and combined them into a bigger-than-life and deeply resonant personality. While no one else in Texas is like Kinky Friedman and no other example of Texas-Jewish culture expresses this blended identity so broadly, it is possible, through a study of Friedman's presentation of himself in life, song and novel, to uncover an original and meaningful model of contemporary Jewish identity.

Kinky Friedman, who has today taken his place as "Bill Clinton's preferred mystery writer and Nelson Mandela's favorite country singer,"⁹ was born Richard Friedman in Chicago in 1945. While he was an infant his family moved to West University Place, a tony Houston suburb, where, at the age of eight, Richard refused to participate in his school's Christmas pageant, "the first recorded instance," according to one report, "of his wearing his Judaism on his sleeve."¹⁰ When he was nine the family moved to Austin where his father, Tom, was a psychology professor at the University of Texas. The family also owned a ranch, Echo Hill, in the Texas Hill Country near Kerrville. Summers at the ranch, which the family later operated as a children's camp, were perhaps the only times separating the young Kinky from a life of utter suburban normalcy.

As an honors student at the University of Texas, Friedman's life began to take a turn toward the unconventional. He formed a band, took his nickname—a reference to the frizzy hair he calls his

“moss”¹¹—and began writing some of the songs that later made him famous. During the two years after graduation he continued writing songs while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in a remote village in Borneo where, he has told several interviewers, his greatest achievement was teaching the Punan tribesmen how to throw a Frisbee.¹²

Returning to Austin, he formed the band that became the Texas Jewboys, not all of whom, incidentally, were Jewish. The group released three albums between 1973 and 1976,¹³ broke a song, “Sold American,” into the country Top Ten, and appeared on the Grand Ol’ Opry, a sure sign that they had achieved some level of fame and respectability in Nashville.¹⁴ Nonetheless they were hardly the typical country-western band. Friedman himself has described them as “avant-garde” and “a cult band,” and one early reviewer proclaimed them “the world’s first Jewish-longhaired country band.”¹⁵ Lester Bangs, a music critic for *Rolling Stone*, praised the group’s first record and hailed Kinky as “a stocky cigar-chomping Jew from Texas” who was “a true original, blessed with a distinctive wit and a manner of carrying himself both musically and personally that begins to resemble the mantle of a star.”¹⁶

As Bangs indicates, Kinky’s early success was largely built on his look and his supremely symbolic clothing. “His macho, cigar-chewing posturing is classic,” wrote a London *Melody Maker* magazine author in 1973. “Wearing . . . a 10-gallon hat, a pearl-buttoned velvet shirt with tinted glasses, and cowboy boots with . . . gold Stars of David embroidered; there’s no sight quite like it.”¹⁷ At a 1976 taping of the PBS music program *Austin City Limits*, which never aired, “Friedman was dressed to kill, sporting a large Star of David belt buckle, tinted glasses and a color-coordinated satin shirt and fake-fur guitar strap.”¹⁸

His outfits have mellowed somewhat over the years but remain distinctive. A 1995 article in the *New York Times* reported that “Mr. Friedman is resplendent in blue jeans, a turquoise polo shirt, a beaded-and-fringed brown suede vest and a belt studded with silver medallions, each with a Star of Texas entwined with a Star of David.”¹⁹ The style, which he has called “Texas-Jewish

flamboyance,"²⁰ accents Texas fashion accessories like hats, boots, and belt buckles with recognizably Jewish symbols, displaying his wish to be conspicuously Texan and Jewish at the same time. These outfits are designed to be outrageous while merging disparate elements into a single, identifiable look.

Fashion scholar Fred Davis concludes that clothing styles are often used to express identity, "our sense of who and what we are." Because clothing "comprises what is most closely attached to the corporeal self," it "acquires a special capacity to . . . 'say things' about the self," to serve "as a kind of visual metaphor for identity."²¹ Women entering the work force, for example, have encountered the assumption that work is a "male" role and so have chosen clothing that suggests masculinity. Kinky's deliberately chosen outfits show his ability to take control of a similar process: his outward appearance, on stage and in life, speaks volumes about who he believes himself to be and how he wants the world to perceive him.

Kinky's strategy for making himself physically recognizable as a "Texas Jew," moreover, also has precursors in the theater. As Harley Erdman has shown, the history of stage performance is filled with stock characters who, while often unidentified as Jews in the dialogue, were recognizable as such "outwardly through other signs." Audiences brought to the performance preconceived notions of how Jews looked, talked and acted, so actors could manifest a character's ethnicity through "grotesque gestures, intonations, and appendages [costume noses] that can only be inscribed through performance."²² Friedman's success at creating a meaningful presentation arises from his ability to suggest his Jewishness without overtly stating it and to present it as a seamless part of his performance by shrewdly relying on his audience's preconceptions. As such he has become a living caricature of the Jewish Texan—or at least what someone unfamiliar with their actual history might suppose a Jewish Texan should look like.

It was not only the look that made Kinky a true original, but also the musically innovative and socially relevant content of his songs. "He's had the moxie," wrote Lester Bangs in 1973, "to inject Nashville with a heavy strain of Jewish Consciousness."²³ In

a 1995 interview Friedman observed that the Texas Jewboys had been “a country band with a social conscience. . . . And looking back, it was a rather ludicrous notion.”²⁴ Friedman wrote songs for the group tinged with sarcasm and overt political commentary. “We Reserve the Right to Refuse Service to You,” for example, contains a sequence of stories about discrimination, and “Rapid City, South Dakota” was, according to Friedman, “the first and only pro-choice country song ever written.”²⁵

To be political is to be controversial and Friedman has always taken pleasure in courting controversy. “Kinky walks his own road,” wrote Lester Bangs, “and doesn’t give a damn who he offends as long as he gets the message across.”²⁶ In 1973 he was booed off the stage at the State University of New York at Buffalo after singing a song called “Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed,” a satirical diatribe against feminism in which he states that “uppity women” ought to “occupy the kitchen, liberate the sink.”²⁷ The next year the National Organization for Women named Friedman, Male Chauvinist Pig of the Year. “I have managed,” he bragged several years later in a *New York Times* interview, “to offend everyone at one time or another.”²⁸

That willingness to offend and challenge his audience’s assumptions about what is acceptable discourse places Kinky firmly in an American Jewish tradition of anti-authoritarian humor. Albert Goldman writes that this tradition, best represented by the Marx Brothers and Lenny Bruce, consists of “the anarchic mockery of conventions and values, which crumble to dust at the touch of a rudely irreverent jest.” Such subversive humor, Goldman maintains, arises from comics who “refuse to be trammled by the conventional pieties, delighting instead in demonstrating the fragility and preposterousness of much that passes as social law and order.”²⁹ In Friedman’s early career as an equal opportunity offender through songs and a stage presence that challenged conventional understandings about Jewish character and public image, he fit neatly into that comic tradition. It is no coincidence that Lester Bangs proclaimed him “the Lenny Bruce of country music,” a title that Friedman, who once named the aggressive,

anti-authoritarian Jewish comic as one of his primary influences, must have worn proudly.³⁰

As might be expected, not everyone found his persona humorous. When the Texas Jewboys first came to national attention, Friedman received complaints from Jewish organizations about his liberal and unabashed use of the word "Jewboy," a term that in almost any context is disparaging.³¹ Like the word "boy" when used to refer to African American men, it is a term of belittlement that charges Jewish men with childishness, simplicity, dependency and weakness. As it is frequently used it evokes the whole Jewish history of persecution and, in some measure, blames Jews for their own victimization: had they been more mature, more manly, perhaps they could have defended themselves more successfully. In the contexts in which Friedman uses it, however, particularly when he so frequently turns it on himself, it becomes less an insult than a deeply evocative and even empowering expression.

In calling his band Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys, Friedman made a pun on the name of the western swing band Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, a group that revolutionized Texas popular music in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Presumably anyone steeped in Texas culture will catch the joke, and the word "Jewboy" will recall the word "playboy" and borrow some of its meaning. Immediately, then, Friedman uses the anti-Semitic slur to suggest something more masculine, more adult, more aggressive than the term standing alone can do. These are not, after all, simply "Jewboys," whose whole sad history is too familiar; they are *Texas* Jewboys, a new breed, rougher and tougher than before. The term of belittlement still shocks, but through a deft pun Friedman turns it into its opposite, an expression, at least in a 1970s context, of masculine strength and sexual prowess. The pun suggests that assimilation into Texas culture has made the Jew manlier than before.

The idea that the Texas Jewboy, influenced by the Lone Star State's toughened culture, is an improvement on older Jewish images appears most notably in one of Friedman's most popular songs. "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" is a bold

statement of Jewish assertiveness and self-defense. It appeared in 1974 on Friedman's second album, has since been recorded and released several times, and is a favorite at the few concerts he still performs.³²

The song's narrator, a recognizably Kinky-like person, is sitting in a Texas beer hall listening to another drinker, a "redneck" as he calls him, spew out a barrage of anti-Semitic remarks. "You just want to doodle a Christian girl," the redneck says to the narrator, "and you killed God's only son." When the singer objects, suggesting that as far as Jews were concerned Christ was killed by Santa Claus, the drunken redneck answers with a stream of ethnic slurs directed at Jews, blacks, Catholics, Asian Americans, Greeks, Chicanos, and a handful of others. Civil words having failed him, the singer rises and "hits [the redneck] with everything I had right square between the eyes." The redneck falls defeated to the floor, and, with the cheers of everyone in the bar accompanying him, the Texas Jewish hero confidently strides out the door. The song's chorus summarizes its central message:

They ain't makin' Jews like Jesus anymore,
 We don't turn the other cheek the way we done before.
 You could hear that honky holler as he hit that hardwood
 floor,
 Lord, they ain't makin' Jews like Jesus anymore.³³

The song asserts that there is a new kind of Jew afoot, one who refuses to "turn the other cheek" as Jesus did or, by implication, as Jews have done throughout their history. This Jewish narrator stands tough in the face of an ethnic assault directed not only at himself but at virtually every American minority. He is a defender, even by violence, of his right to exist and to express his ethnic difference; he is an aggressive advocate of self-defense and civil rights.

This urbanized, modernized Texas Jew, who inhabits a beer hall rather than a shul, is a figure very much of his time. His stand against the redneck's racism shows that he has absorbed the liberal vocabulary of the day: "If there's one thing I can't abide," he tells the redneck, "it's an ethnocentric racist." He is a product of

the late civil rights era, of Black Power and *La Raza Unida*, and of a political culture that was learning to value pluralism and ethnic assertiveness. And his violent defense of himself as a Jew also recalls Israel's triumph in the Six Day War of 1967, a conflict that did much to transform the image of Jews and the Jewish self-image into one of toughness and assertiveness. When the singer lands his punch, it is a blow simultaneously to lingering southern racism and global anti-Semitism, and the blow is struck by an iconographic Jewish figure of a time after the Holocaust and after the establishment of Israel. Friedman's blending of Jewish and Texas imagery allows him to create a Jewish figure who is tougher than ever, tough even by Texas standards.

Friedman addresses this transformation more thoughtfully in another of his most popular songs, "Ride 'Em, Jewboy," a piece that served as the band's theme song and which Lester Bangs praised as "both an anthem of ethnic pride and a hauntingly evocative slice of classic American folksong."³⁴ Released in 1973 on Friedman's first album, it is a somber ballad to the victims of the Holocaust. The song is slow with a simple rhythm carried on an acoustic guitar, much in the style of cowboy campfire songs. Its mood and sound resemble "Home on the Range" as much as any more recent influence. The lyric draws a comparison between the persecuted Jew and the mythic cowboy of the Texas prairie: Friedman fuses the cowboy's rootless, solitary life into the Jews' history of oppression and forced migration.

Ride, ride 'em Jewboy,
 Ride 'em all around the old corral.
 I'm, I'm with you boy
 If I've got to ride six million miles.

Now the smoke from camps a' risin'
 See the helpless creatures on their way.
 Hey, old pal, ain't it surprisin'
 How far you can go before you stay.

Don't you let the morning blind ya
When on your sleeve you wore the yellor star.
Old memories still live behind ya,
Can't you see by your outfit who you are?

How long will you be driven relentless 'round the world,
The blood in the rhythm of the soul.

Wild ponies all your dreams were broken,
Rounded up and made to move along.
The loneliness which can't be spoken
Just swings a rope and rides inside a song.

Dead limbs play with ringless fingers
A melody which burns you deep inside.
Oh, how the song becomes the singers,
May peace be ever with you as you ride.

How long will you be driven relentless 'round the world,
The blood in the rhythm of the soul.

In the window candles glowing
Remind you that today you are a child,
Road ahead, forever rollin',
And anything worth cryin' can be smiled.

So ride, ride 'em Jewboy,
Ride 'em all around the old corral.
I'm, I'm with you boy
If I've got to ride six million miles.³⁵

On the surface this could be any one of a hundred western folk ballads in the "git along little dogie" tradition, songs sung by cowboys on the cattle drive or, more likely, by Gene Autry in the movies. Again Friedman adapts the word "Jewboy" to his own purposes, this time playing with the familiar cliché "ride 'em, cowboy." Again a pun makes the word far more than a term of disparagement. It tells the listener that this is a song with two con-

texts, Texan and Jewish, and allows double meanings to illuminate most of the song's images. Candles glowing in the window now evoke both the prairie tradition of lighting a candle to help the wanderer find his way home and the lights of Sabbath or Hanukkah; the "yeller star" (with that wonderful dialectical turn) recalls both the badge of a western lawman and the identification tag of Jews in Nazi Europe; the deliberate mention of "six million miles" recalls, of course, the six million Jewish Holocaust victims; and ominously the smoke rising from "camps" is both the comforting image of a campfire in the wilderness and the horrific one of Nazi smokestacks. The pun in the title permits us to visualize these double images and makes the piece indisputably a Holocaust memorial set in the tradition of American country-western music.

The juxtaposition of these two traditions, western campfire song and Holocaust commemoration, is a peculiar one which nonetheless works. Borrowing the traditional scene of the cattle drive, Friedman casts Jews as the cattle—"helpless creatures on their way" who are "driven relentless 'round the world" and ultimately to the slaughter—and in doing so he calls attention to the dehumanization they suffered during the Holocaust and throughout history. Later they are "wild ponies" whose "dreams were broken,/ Rounded up and made to move along." Friedman alludes to the whole Jewish history of abandonment and persecution culminating in the Holocaust, and his use of the word "Jewboy," a familiar expression of weakness, underscores Jewish victimization.

But even as the word reminds us of Jewish helplessness in the face of the Nazi threat, it makes a pun on "cowboy," a word weighted with very different meanings. When we see the figure the narrator addresses not as the cattle but as a fellow rider, the phrase "Ride 'em, Jewboy" suggests a position of strength and power atop a horse in charge of the drive. The word is recast, then, giving the impression not of a victimized Jew but of a Jewish cowboy, a product of the Jewish past but with a cowboy's toughness and control. Drawing on the mythic history of the American West as a place of boundless opportunity and limitless futures, the

narrator reminds the Jewish cowboy that he will always remember his tragic past ("old memories still live behind ya," he says), but that he should not "let the morning (with a pun on 'mourning') blind ya." With Texas optimism the singer insists that "the road ahead [is] forever rolling" and that "anything worth cryin' can be smiled."

Friedman's creative use of the most familiar icons of both traditions and his clever manipulation of the imagery draw the two together in an unexpected and meaningful way. As presented here both the Jewish and the cowboy traditions involve wandering, restlessness, loneliness, regret, and loss. The cowboy and the Jewboy are both melancholy figures, haunted by the past, isolated from society and cut adrift from community. In the Jewish tradition this is, of course, a tragic experience, a reminder of ancient persecution. But by blending that interpretation with elements of the Texas mystique, Friedman presents a uniquely Texan Jew with a uniquely Texas Jewish memory: the tragic past is part of who he is, but as a Jewish cowboy rather than simply a "Jewboy," he need not be crippled by it.

After the Texas Jewboys broke up in 1976, Friedman toured solo for a while, including a stint as an opening act for Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue before settling into a weekly gig at New York City's Lone Star Cafe. He spent eight years there hovering in the limbo that only overlooked celebrities inhabit until 1986 when he resurfaced as the author of a series of crime novels. To date he has published ten books, roughly one a year, as well as several compilations for European publishers.³⁶ He travels extensively on book signing tours and still plays on stage occasionally, but he says that he generally limits himself now to performing at "bookstores, whorehouses, and bar mitzvahs."³⁷

The change of medium from country singer to novelist may seem strange on the surface but Friedman's persona, the character who does the singing and the storytelling, is consistent across both genres; the narrators of the songs and of the novels share an essential Kinky-ness. The singer is brash, often vulgar, politically conscious and funny with a hard-edged cynicism, although in several ballads and more traditional country songs he reveals a

side that is surprisingly sentimental. The detective narrator of the novels, presented as Kinky himself, is also hard-edged, hard-boiled and cynical, but he also shows an inner softness through ruminations about lost loves, good cigars, and old friends who have, as he says, "gone to Jesus."³⁸ It is this persona, a blending of Texas and Jewish influences, that unifies Friedman's work over the course of twenty-five years.

His career as a novelist, he has said, represents a "second act" in his life,³⁹ an opportunity that came only after returning home to his family's ranch in Texas and kicking a drug and alcohol habit he had acquired in New York. "I was feeling like Lenny Bruce and Judy Garland in their last days," he told one interviewer, and he credits his flight from New York with saving his life.⁴⁰ The man who emerged from the New York years was somewhat chastened and matured, still outrageous in his personal style and penchant for one-line witticisms, but less confrontational, less shocking, less spiritually and politically driven. The change is visible in the shift from country song to crime novel—more specifically from avant-garde country singer to marketable, best-selling writer. The older Kinky is calmer, more mainstream. Much of the anarchic humor that made his 1970s performances so shocking and so meaningful is gone from the novels.

The books are almost all set in Greenwich Village and are populated by characters based on people Friedman knew while living there. Kinky himself is the hero-detective, a reluctant amateur who, of course, always manages to solve the crime a step ahead of the local police. In the meantime he ponders the meaning of his rather dissolute life, enjoys the company of a series of women, and helps his recurring circle of friends, whom he calls the Village Irregulars, get out of one scrape after another.

In his new medium Friedman falls within a burgeoning genre of mysteries featuring Jewish detectives, but unlike other writers in the field he places relatively little emphasis on the Jewish aspect of his hero's character. In Harry Kemelman's series of mysteries, for example, his detective figure, Rabbi David Small, makes his Jewishness a basic part of his crime-solving process. "On the basis of inferential logic," Kemelman explained once to

the *Boston Globe*, “the mystery is solved. That's pretty much what Rabbi Small does. It's Talmudic, this determination of the meaning of one thing by virtue of a single word.”⁴¹ The stories of another Jewish writer, Faye Kellerman, feature the husband and wife team of Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus, “an attractive modern Orthodox Jewish couple” who solve crimes while struggling to maintain a traditionally religious home and family.⁴² For these characters Judaism is a deep part of who they are, what they think about, and how they approach their vocations.

In contrast Kinky's detective persona reveals almost nothing of a traditional Jewish consciousness. In fact, in one of the few passages in the novels dealing specifically with religious faith, he shows himself to be more ecumenical, even agnostic, than Jewish. “Let us pray,” he suggests to his cat in a moment of existential crisis, and the two bow their heads. “Dear God, Jesus, Buddha, or L. Ron Hubbard, please help us,” he prays, then explains that “I didn't really expect to hear from L. Ron Hubbard. And Buddha hadn't spoken to anyone in years. But I did hope that God or Jesus might be more forthcoming.” Receiving no response, he determined that “either they didn't exist, they didn't care, or they were both autistic.”⁴³ In a later moment he considers prayer again but opts against it. “I said to hell with it,” he explains. “Let the good Christians around the world pray for my eternal soul.”⁴⁴ As in the songs Friedman's sense of his Jewish identity really does not contain a genuinely religious component.

In a secular sense, however, the narrator does identify himself as a Jew, and self-consciously “Jewish” language pervades the novels. He describes one character, for example, dressed in “off-flox-colored slacks”; another is a partner at a New York law firm called “Schmeckel & Schmeckel”; and the family dog back home on the ranch is characterized as a “Jewish shepherd.”⁴⁵

On the other hand, by setting the novels in New York Friedman greatly diminishes the significance of his persona's Jewishness: in New York, where Jews are a large part of the population, it is not his Jewish background that sets him apart but his “Texanness.” There are several other Jews, in fact, among the Village Irregulars, and they often remark on the difference that arises

from their cowboy friend's place of origin. On setting off to investigate a lead, one, for instance, tells Kinky to "Head 'em up. Move 'em out. In the language of your people."⁴⁶ Kinky himself makes much of his blended personality, and the apparent incongruity of a Texas Jew provides the basis for many of his one-liners. When a friend asks him when he might play another concert at the Lone Star Cafe, Kinky replies, "probably on a cold day in Jerusalem, pal," adding that "I missed performing there like I missed having a mescal worm in my matzo-ball soup."⁴⁷ Descriptions like these show that the narrator thinks of himself as both a Texan and a Jew, but they never really confront either as a meaningful category of identity.

While in the songs of the 1970s Friedman put the Jewish cowboy persona to thoughtful thematic use, he does relatively little with it in the novels besides mine it for jokes. Detective fiction depends heavily on the appeal of its central figure and Friedman turns his dual heritage into little more than an odd character trait that helps guarantee he will be interesting enough to carry the story. What was in the songs a dynamic confrontation with issues of Jewish identity, assimilation, meaning, and memory is calcified in the novels into a quirky, wise-cracking character who, however funny and entertaining, has little of substance to say. Friedman has found the mainstream popularity that eluded him in the 1970s, but he has done so at the cost of the depth and anarchic spirit that made his career as a country-western singer and songwriter truly revolutionary.

Even if the irreverent persona he constructed for himself lost much of its potency in the transition to the mystery genre, it is still a meaningful and important creation. As Friedman presents a toughened, "Texified" Jewish figure, he suggests several ways of thinking about Jewish assimilation in America. First, he demonstrates that assimilation happens locally rather than nationally, that immigrants to the United States become not Americans so much as they become Texans, New Yorkers or Minnesotans. Friedman is thoroughly part of a particular place, and his blended

Jewishness is a product of a locally specific, rather than any kind of nationally American identity.

As Mark K. Bauman has argued, however, it is easy to make too much of regional or local differences. Writing about Jews in the American South, Bauman has concluded that they “were influenced by the regional subculture in a relatively marginal fashion.” In Bauman’s view, “ecological” influences—factors such as community size, demographics and economic bases—define the environment within which assimilation occurs and have a much greater impact on the development of Jewish identity than any specifically regional qualities. The experiences of southern Jews, then, “were far more similar to those of Jews in similar environments elsewhere in America than they were to those of white Protestants in the South.”⁴⁸

Bauman makes a very convincing case that regional differences are often superficial and ultimately less influential than the economic and social realities that daily affect people’s lives. Nevertheless he gives too little attention to an important part of the process that Kinky Friedman exemplifies: self-perception, what people *think* is unique about themselves and their local environment, can be just as powerful as the “real” forces affecting their lives. Whether or not there is a south that differs substantively from the north, whether or not there is anything that is actually unique about Texas, southerners and Texans *think* they are unique and believe that they are surrounded by a distinctive culture that belongs especially to them. They consciously embrace elements of that culture—dress, language, food, folk tales, even political values—as a way of experiencing and expressing their participation in it. As Jews have entered these local subcultures, many of them have chosen to adapt local peculiarities as a way of demonstrating their wish to belong—and, in fact, their success at having done so. As Bauman, with Bobbie Malone, has correctly noted, the decision to “serve fried rather than baked chicken on Friday nights or eat bagels alongside grits does not indicate complete acculturation to southern mores.”⁴⁹ But these choices do indicate a strong desire to be a part of what is perceived as a distinct local culture, and, regardless of the sociological realities that impinge on people’s lives,

it is these more folkloric qualities that help them understand and express who they think they are.

Kinky Friedman stands as a prime example of this process. He is wholly atypical, representative of no one but himself. But in the way he has built a personality out of elements that are distinctively Texan and Jewish—or, more precisely, that he and his audience think are distinctive—he embodies the assimilation process. No one else has become a Texas Jew in precisely the same way that Kinky has, but many others (perhaps all others) have followed a similar, if less flamboyant process of choosing which elements of the Texas mystique to adopt in order to express their own sense of being at home in Texas.

The specific character of the Texas Jew as Friedman inhabits it suggests, moreover, that there is, in fact, something special about Jewish assimilation in Texas, that the particular qualities of the Texas mystique offered Jews who migrated there an assimilation option that they may not have had anywhere else. In particular, Texas is a place where the mythology, to a greater degree than elsewhere in America, honors self-determination and independence, the freedom to live fully as oneself, to be different. The Texas mystique loves a maverick, the individual who stands up for him or herself *as* him or herself. When the narrator of "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" defends himself as a Jew against the redneck's prejudice, he shows himself to be a true Texan, ready to defend not only his honor and his pride, but his differences. The narrator fights back precisely because he is not of the mainstream, and, by defending his right to be different, he paradoxically shows himself to be more Texan than the redneck. As Jews have made Texas their home and have contributed to its myth and history, they have found that "Texanness" and Jewishness do not necessarily conflict. Rather they discovered that the more fully they lived their lives as Jews and the more strenuously they defended their singular heritage, the more Texan they became.

 NOTES

¹ This paper is derived from my dissertation, "Texas Jews: Assimilation and Identity in the Lone Star State." I am deeply grateful to Professors Robert H. Abzug and Seth L. Wolitz, both of the University of Texas at Austin, for their guidance as I have conceived and developed the ideas in this paper and in the larger work in progress. In particular, I wish to thank Professor Wolitz for sharing with me his unpublished paper, "Bi-focality in Jewish Identity in the Texan-Jewish Experience," which first awakened me to Kinky Friedman's importance as a cultural figure.

² Andrea Chambers, "It's elementary: shooting from the lip, cocky Kinky Friedman has a talent for music and mysteries," *People Weekly* 28 (November 9, 1987): 117.

³ Some scholars have suggested that the first Jews to set foot in what became Texas were Spanish *conversos*—forced converts to Christianity—who were members of exploratory missions into the region in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. To my mind, the evidence of their Jewish identity, most of which passed through the hands of the Inquisition and so has lost much of its reliability, is inconclusive. At any rate, they did not settle in Texas or form there anything that can rightly be called a community or a culture. Only with Anglo settlement in the mid-nineteenth century did a documented and active Jewish community begin in Texas. For the evidence that supports a *converso* presence in Texas, see the relevant sections of Natalie Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans* (Dallas, 1989), Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: Lives and Legends of Texas Jews* (Austin, 1990), and Martin A. Cohen, "The Autobiography of Luis De Carvajal, the Younger," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (March 1966): 277–318. For evidence suggesting Jewish roots in contemporary Chicano families, see Richard G. Santos, "Chicanos of Jewish Descent in Texas," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 15 (July 1983): 327–333, and Carlos Montalvo Larralde, *Chicano Jews In South Texas* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1978).

⁴ There is a substantial body of scholarship exploring Jewish involvement in the war for Texas independence. See, for example, relevant sections of Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1894): 139–156; Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans*; Winegarten and Schechter, *Deep in the Heart*; and I. Harold Sharfman, *Jews on the Frontier* (Chicago, 1977). Studies of individual Jewish participants or sympathizers include Saul Viener, "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy: Letters of a Texas Patriot," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 46:1 (September 1956): 101–113; Daniel N. Leeson, "In Search of the History of the Texas Patriot Moses A. Levy," *Western States Jewish History* 21 (July 1989): 291–306 and 22 (October 1989): 22–37; Gloria Frye, "Eva Catherine Rosine Ruff Sterne (1809–1897)," in *Women in Early Texas*, ed. Evelyn M. Carrington (Austin, 1975): 233–237; and Archie P. McDonald, "Introduction," *Hurrah for Texas! The Diary of Adolphus Sterne, 1838–1851* (Austin, 1986).

⁵ Compared to the higher proportion of Jews in the nation's other most populous states—New York (9 percent), California (3 percent), and Florida (nearly 5 percent)—Jews are in fact somewhat underrepresented in Texas. *American Jewish Yearbook* (1995): 186–187.

⁶ Seth L. Wolitz, "Bi-focality in Jewish Identity in the Texan-Jewish Experience" (unpublished paper, 1996).

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7. *Jewish Herald* (February 8, 1912; February 1, 1912).
8. Joan Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America* (New York, 1994): 113.
9. "Texas Talk: Ask Kinky," *Texas Monthly Online*, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/texas-talk/tmkinky/index.html>. This and other internet sources used herein were available at the indicated addresses as of February 8, 1998.
10. Evan Smith, "The Comeback Kink," *Texas Monthly* 21 (September 1993): 133.
11. Enid Nemy, "Married to the Wind," *New York Times*, (August 31, 1995): C1 (L).
12. See, for example, Chambers, "It's elementary," 117.
13. A complete Kinky Friedman discography is available online at <http://www.kinkyfriedman.com/kfdisks.htm>.
14. Bill Malone has noted that Friedman arrived in Nashville as part of a trend of "ethnic" acts challenging "country music's 'Anglo-Protestant' consensus." He was part of a new country-rock fusion that exhibited "a greater tolerance for beliefs and diverse lifestyles." *Country Music, USA* (Austin, 1985 [1968]): 311-312.
15. Alice Wightman, "Real Kinky," @Austin 1 (1997): 34; Bill Mann, "Are you ready for Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys?" *Melody Maker* (December 8, 1973), <http://www.kinkyfriedman.com/press1.htm>.
16. Lester Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, *Rolling Stone* 137 (June 21, 1973): 63.
17. Mann, "Are you ready."
18. Wightman, "Real Kinky," 34.
19. Nemy, "Married to the Wind," C10 (L).
20. Wightman, "Real Kinky," 36.
21. Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago, 1992): 24-25.
22. Harley Erdman, *Staging The Jew: The Performance Of An American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick, 1997): 2.
23. Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, 63.
24. Paul Cohen, "The Kinkster," *London Calling Internet* (June 1, 1995), <http://www.london-calling.co.uk/muskinky.html>.
25. Kinky Friedman, Liner Notes, *Kinky Friedman*, 1994 [1974].
26. Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, 63.
27. Kinky Friedman, "Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed," *Sold American* (Vanguard Records, 1973).
28. Nemy, "Married to the Wind," C1.
29. Albert Goldman, "Laughtermakers," in *Jewish Wry*, ed. Sarah Blacher Cohen (Bloomington, 1987): 82.
30. Bangs, Review of *Sold American*, 63. In a 1973 article in London's *Melody Maker*, Friedman named his four greatest influences as Lenny Bruce, Anne Frank, Mahatma Gandhi, and Hank Williams, a motley and calculated group to be sure.
31. Actual statements by Jewish organizations have proven difficult to locate, but in a 1989 interview with the Los Angeles Times Friedman recalled that "Many people never could get past . . . the name of the band. It got a lot of people's backs up." Sheldon Teitelbaum, "The Tale of a Kinky Cowboy Who Made Good," *Los Angeles Times* (October 15, 1989): E16. Also, in his 1973 review of *Sold American* in *Rolling Stone*, Lester Bangs suggested that Friedman's "wry racial persona" had made it hard for him to find supporters among "a good many tradition-bound Jewish factions in the recording industry itself," many of

whom "are still shuddering at the prospects of promoting an item called Kinky Friedman and His Texas Jewboys." Bangs, *Review of Sold American*, 63.

³² Seth L. Wolitz has written of one such concert: "This song was recently performed at the annual 4th of July Luckenbach Folk Festival 1996 in Texas where the song still brought cheers and at points boos from the Texan audience." Wolitz, "Bi-Focal Identity."

³³ Kinky Friedman, "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore," *Kinky Friedman* (ABC Dunhill Records, 1974). Transcribed by the author.

³⁴ Bangs, *Review of Sold American*, 63.

³⁵ Kinky Friedman, "Ride 'Em, Jewboy," *Old Testaments & New Revelations* (Fruit of the Tune Music, 1992), originally recorded 1973. Transcribed by the author.

³⁶ A complete Kinky Friedman bibliography is available online at <http://www.kinkyfriedman.com/biblio.htm>.

³⁷ Evan Smith, "The Comeback Kink," 134.

³⁸ As in, for example, *Armadillos and Old Lace* (New York, 1994): 3.

³⁹ Wightman, "Real Kinky," 32.

⁴⁰ John Barron, "Words of weirdness," *Chicago Sun-Times* (September 8, 1996):16; Diane Feischel, "Reinventing Kinky," *Chicago Tribune* (October 1, 1989).

⁴¹ Irene Sege, "Tuesday the 'Rabbi' made headlines," *Boston Globe* (May 21, 1996): 77.

⁴² Fritz Lanham, "Orthodoxy revisited," *Houston Chronicle* (November 24, 1996): Zest Section, 22.

⁴³ Kinky Friedman, *Elvis, Jesus and Coca-Cola* (London, 1993): 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁵ Kinky Friedman, *Greenwich Killing Time* (New York, 1986): 16; Kinky Friedman, *The Love Song of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York, 1996): 43; *Armadillos and Old Lace*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Elvis, Jesus and Coca-Cola*, 55.

⁴⁷ *Greenwich Killing Time*, 16.

⁴⁸ Mark K. Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style* (Cincinnati, 1996): 5.

⁴⁹ Mark K. Bauman and Bobbie Malone, "Introduction: Directions in Southern Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 192.

Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina

by

Leonard Rogoff

When a Jew in a small North Carolina town was asked if her synagogue was Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox, she responded, "Why yes." Whoever led prayers chose the service, she recalled, and the congregation owned prayer books that covered several bases.¹ Too small to factionalize, most North Carolina Jewish congregations accommodated a diversity that challenged denominational labels. To be sure, North Carolina's congregational histories reflect the modernizing trends that were transforming traditional Judaism, especially as the immigrants acculturated to America. The family and commercial links that connected the state's Jewish peddlers and merchants to urban centers kept these distant, isolated communities attuned to transatlantic developments in the Jewish world. Highly mobile, the immigrants brought their Jewish practices and ideologies with them. A small Jewish community likely contained Jews of motley ethnic and religious backgrounds. As they mediated their internal Jewish conflicts, they also adapted to their local situations as well as to a South given to fundamentalism, romantic religiosity, and high rates of church affiliation. The congregation was the agency of Jewish solidarity and survival, but it also functioned as a Jewish church which integrated Jews into southern society as citizens and neighbors.

Throughout its history North Carolina has been largely a Jewish terra incognita. Although a Jew appeared in the colony in 1585 and Jewish traders plied the coast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jews were sojourners and only rarely

settlers. While Georgia, Virginia, and South Carolina had Jewish communities with congregations by the late eighteenth century, North Carolina lacked a port or urban center sufficiently large to draw Jews in significant numbers. Swamp, farm, and forest offered few opportunities for an urban, mercantile people. In the mid nineteenth century a commercial economy began to develop. Small numbers of immigrant German Jews—most of whom had first settled in Baltimore, Charleston, Richmond, or Philadelphia—began peddling and opening stores in market towns that sprouted along newly built rail lines. Jewish population growth correlates with the rise of the New South as the textile and tobacco industries urbanized the state. The East European migration intensified these trends. Between 1878 and 1927 North Carolina's Jewish population grew from 820 to 8,252, and the number of congregations increased from one to 22.²

Emigrating from the self-governing Jewish communities of their European homelands, the immigrants made a first break with a traditional society. When they debarked in Richmond, Baltimore, and Charleston, they found Jewish communities with viable congregations. Moving into the agrarian hinterland, they made a second break from communal constraints and rabbinic authority. The "country Jew," Rabbi Edward Calisch of Richmond wrote in 1900, "is in measure cut off from the house of his brethren. . . like the limb of a tree that no longer draws nourishment from a life-giving trunk."³ Kosher food and a minyan were available in Baltimore or Richmond, but not reliably in New Bern or Rocky Mount. Jewish religious life in North Carolina organized slowly, as was the case generally in the South. In 1861 there were only 21 congregations in the region, and only Baltimore had a rabbi with verifiable credentials.⁴ Before the Civil War not one congregation existed in North Carolina.

Migrations constantly reshaped North Carolina Jewry. The second wave migration from 1820 to 1880 is commonly described as "German," but such a characterization conceals the considerable complexities of European Jewry. "Until the middle of the century, a fairly unified Jewish culture existed throughout much of Europe," Hasia Diner observes. In the nineteenth century

European Jews had been migratory with Poles and Russians flowing into Germany. The division of Poland by Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary obfuscated national identities. Lewis Lichtenstein of Tarboro declared that he was born in Poland when he naturalized in 1854, but his tombstone lists his birthplace as Prussia.⁵

Over the course of the nineteenth century forces of *haskalah*, German acculturation, and religious reform gradually and unevenly worked their way eastward through Jewish communities across Europe. Jews in Bavaria and southwestern Germany felt the emancipating influences of the Enlightenment and Napoleonic conquest. German culture served as a vehicle bringing Jews and Judaism into "modern spirituality."⁶ By mid-century "Reform-style congregations" could be found in Odessa, Warsaw, Lemberg, Riga, and Vilna. Polish rabbinical students wishing state certification flocked to German universities where they were exposed to Reform currents.⁷

The two most distinguished rabbis at predominantly German synagogues in North Carolina, Samuel Mendelsohn of Wilmington and Julius Mayerberg of Statesville and Goldsboro, were both born in East Europe. They had come under the influence of the "historical school" in their university studies, and they presided over congregations evolving toward Reform. Mendelsohn, a native of Kovno, had rabbinical training in both Vilna and Berlin before attending Maimonides College in Philadelphia. Through his teachers, the immigrant spiritual leaders Isaac Leeser, Marcus Jastrow, and Sabato Morais, Mendelsohn came to North Carolina familiar with the transatlantic polemics that were challenging traditional Judaism.⁸

Jews who emigrated to America tended to be poorer, more religiously devout village Jews less affected by urban, liberalizing currents. When Herman Cone, the founder of a prominent Greensboro family, emigrated to America from Altendstadt, Bavaria, in 1846, he carried a letter from his brother-in-law reminding him to pray "every evening and every morning," to "remember particularly the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," and "to learn your religion thoroughly."⁹ Prussian Jews in areas ceded from Poland

in 1795 remained loyal to their rabbinic roots in East European Orthodoxy. They maintained regimens of daily prayer, Sabbath observance, and kosher laws. The migration of Prussian Jews became more significant after the Civil War.

Whatever the immigrants' European level of acculturation, the open, democratic society of America encouraged an egalitarian, less traditional Judaism that minimized their religious differences with their largely Protestant neighbors. Former North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance in his famous Chataqua-circuit speech of 1874, "The Scattered Nation," distinguished between modern and "Oriental" Jews. Vance, a philo-Semite who had Jewish in-laws, noted that Central and West European Jews in America "have become simply Unitarians or Deists." Vance ranked these "most intelligent and civilized" Jews as superior to the less acculturated "Talmudical" East Europeans.¹⁰

The South's first-tier cities followed the typical American Jewish pattern of development as Jews factionalized into ethnic congregations according to country of origin. Richmond, the first American home for many early North Carolina Jews, offered a paradigm of Jewish congregational growth: The Sephardic-rite Beth Shalome was founded in 1789 followed by the Bavarians' Beth Ahabah in 1841, the Prussians' Polish-rite Keneseth Israel in 1856, and the Russians' Sir Moses Montefiore in 1880. All began as Orthodox although in nineteenth-century America that term encompassed a variety of worship practices. The Sephardic-rite Beth Shalome in Richmond contained a predominantly Ashkenazic membership that appreciated its refined, decorous ritual. Over time Reform-minded Prussians migrated from Keneseth Israel to the more liberal Beth Ahabah while some German traditionalists moved in the opposite direction.¹¹

Small-town Jewry lacked the numbers and resources to so divide. Of the three hundred North Carolina Jews identified in the 1870 census, 210 were born in Germany, Bavaria or Prussia. Only twenty-six were American-born, and only four were native North Carolinians. Eighteen listed Polish birth. A North Carolina town typically included Bavarians, Prussians, East Europeans and perhaps a few native-born descendants of colonial Ashkenazic and

Sephardic settlers. Among Tarboro's twenty-four Jews in 1877 were natives of Prussia, Poland, Bavaria, Alsace, Germany, and England.¹² In Durham the first Jewish family, who arrived in 1874, was Polish-born Orthodox. Other early settlers were of Prussian and Bavarian origin. The cemetery society president was a German-born, Orthodox Jew married to an American-born, Reform Jew of Bavarian descent. The society's secretary was Dutch. Starting in the 1880s, this small colony was overwhelmed by the arrival of several hundred new immigrants mostly from Ukraine, Latvia, and Lithuania, but also from Galicia, Poland, and Austria-Hungary.¹³

Constant migrations and few numbers rendered small-town Jewish communal life unstable. Southern Jews were highly mobile as local economies waxed and waned. Failure pushed and ambition pulled Jews to new territories. The Tarboro congregation had twenty-four members in 1877 and in 1884, but there had been nine departures and nine arrivals. Of the thirty-five Jews listed in an 1887 business directory in Durham only five remained by 1902, and by 1938 only three of the fifty Jewish families could trace local roots before 1900. Statesville was home to some twenty families in 1883 but only six in 1923.¹⁴

Prior to local institutional developments, small-town Jews maintained links to the synagogues of their places of origin. Jacob Mordecai, who settled in Warrenton in 1792, was a congregant of Richmond's Beth Shalome, which he served as president. Jews who settled in coastal Wilmington maintained membership in the Charleston synagogue. Early Durham Jews had family histories in Richmond's Beth Ahabah and Keneseth Israel. North Carolina Jews shipped their dead to consecrated burial grounds in Charleston, Norfolk, Petersburg, and Richmond.¹⁵

When North Carolina's Jewish communities organized, they tended to follow the talmudic injunction: first the cemetery, then the city. A burial or benevolent society formed, then a congregation was established, and finally a synagogue was built. The chevra kadisha was a traditional cemetery society transplanted from Europe. Its members ensured that the dead were buried in a ritually prescribed manner—the body washed, attended, and

shrouded—and assumed the expenses of those too poor to pay. These societies also took responsibility for religious services and social welfare. Fixing a congregation's actual date of formation is tendentious. Tarboro's B'nai Israel called itself a chevra for five years before it began using the title congregation. A state charter was a statement to the civic community, often motivated by a desire to purchase land for a synagogue, but in all towns worship services were organized before congregations developed. Charlotte's German Jews founded a cemetery society in 1867, a state-chartered Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1870, and a Ladies Benevolent Society in 1874. Although they held services in homes and rented halls, this group did not evolve into a congregation. In 1901 Jews in Monroe and Windsor held High Holiday services, but these towns never supported congregations.¹⁶

Wilmington, the state's oldest and largest Jewish community, illustrates the typical pattern of Jewish institutional development. Jews founded a burial society in 1852 and advertised in New York for a hazan, schochet, and mohel in 1860. In 1867 a congregation organized and nine years later Wilmington's Jews erected Temple of Israel, the state's first synagogue.¹⁷ Starting in the 1870s other North Carolina communities showed stirrings of organized Jewish life. In 1870 a cemetery society formed in Raleigh. Four years later Bavarian-born Michael Grausman, a tailor who had some rabbinic training, converted a room in his home for religious use. In 1885 Raleigh's Jews organized a congregation.¹⁸ Other societies or congregations formed in Tarboro (c.1872), Goldsboro (1880), New Bern (1881), Statesville (1883), Durham (1884), Winston-Salem (1888), Asheville (1891), and Charlotte (1893).

The Jews organized religious institutions about the time when Christian revivalism was sweeping the South. In the 1880s and 1890s as villages grew into towns, the South experienced a frenzy of church building. In organizing synagogues Jews were responding to their local environments. Southern Christians spoke respectfully of the synagogue as the "Jewish church." In erecting their edifices Jews and Christians alike were not just gathering to worship their God, but to stake out civic space. A synagogue de-

clared that Jews as a wandering people were neither aliens nor economic parasites but neighbors who were at home.

Religious affiliation was especially important in a region given to church going and theological orthodoxy. North Carolina towns with the critical mass to support a congregation reported high rates of affiliation. As sociologist John Shelton Reed observes, "By being more Southern—that is, by participating in organized religious activities—Southern Jews are at the same time more Jewish."¹⁹ In 1883 a Statesville Jew reported that "every Jewish citizen in town" enrolled in Temple Emanuel. In 1900 in Durham thirty-one of the city's thirty-seven families were members. By contrast national estimates indicate that in 1900 only a minority of American Jews were synagogue members.²⁰

The synagogue was not merely an institution of ethnic solidarity and religious traditionalism, but also an agency of Americanization. When first naming their worship gatherings, immigrants in Gastonia, Raleigh, Durham, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem affixed their city's name to the dignified "Hebrew Congregation," asserting their civic loyalty. Similarly, Jewish women's organizations adopted the church name of Ladies Aid Society. In raising funds for distressed Jews in Russia and Palestine, the women were functioning much in the spirit of a Christian missionary agency.

Synagogue architecture attested to prosperity and respectability. The state's first synagogue, Temple Israel in Wilmington (1876), followed the Moorish style popularized by Cincinnati's Plum Street synagogue, a romantic evocation of Jewish Orientalism, but Goldsboro's Oheb Sholom (1886) and Statesville's Temple Emanuel (1892) were Romanesque Revival structures that borrowed from church aesthetics. Raleigh, Gastonia and Greensboro temples were neo-classical structures. In Asheville, Durham and Winston-Salem the first synagogues were converted churches.²¹

Just as Jews contributed to Christian churches, both black and white, so, too, did Christians donate to synagogue building. At the 1876 dedication of the Wilmington synagogue, Rabbi Mendelsohn spoke "feelingly of the Christians who had assisted his people in building their temple." In Statesville in 1895 local Prot-

estants attended “a musical and dramatic entertainment” hosted by the Hebrew Ladies Aid Society to raise funds to build a synagogue. Governor Max Gardner and Episcopal Bishop Joseph Cheshire contributed to the building of Raleigh’s Temple Beth Or while tobacco magnates Benjamin Duke and Julian Shakespeare Carr each donated \$500 to help erect Durham’s Beth El. At synagogue dedications the town’s civic and ministerial leaders typically made benedictions that extolled the Jews historically as a biblical people and locally as upstanding citizens.²²

Church going was a southern social duty, and Jews might also attend church services not from religious conviction, but to enjoy the preaching or simply to be sociable. In the early 1800s some Wilmington Jews subscribed to pews in the local St. James Episcopal Church while retaining membership in Charleston’s Beth Elohim synagogue. When a Methodist bishop spoke at a Goldsboro church, Henry Weil, a synagogue founder, went in anticipation of hearing “eloquent or flowing” preaching. Abe Oettinger, a Bavarian-born Jew who lived in Kinston, left a diary from 1886 to 1900 that records his occasional attendance at Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches. He sang in the Episcopal church choir. When the church burned in 1900, he was the first to contribute to its rebuilding although he was not a member. After attending a local Jewish wedding, Oettinger enjoyed taking his family to the Methodist church to hear Rev. Calisch, rabbi of Richmond’s Beth Ahabah, lecture on “The Wandering Jew.”²³ The ethos of a southern town embraced a hospitality that encouraged religious tolerance, and attending church, Jewish or Christian, was a sign of respectability.

Certainly in a town with few families and lacking a congregation Jewish life suffered attrition, even where there was not conversion. Rabbi Calisch expressed concern that “the country Jew [is] a religious derelict, rolling aimlessly on the sea of religious life.” Although Oettinger’s family, social and business circle consisted of German Jews like himself across eastern North Carolina, he writes little of religious observance. Shabbat, Passover, or Hanukkah receive no mention in his diary, but on the High Holidays he closed his store, kept his children home from school,

and retired to his home. The holidays were observed by parlor Bible readings or country rides. On Yom Kippur he fasted, as did his wife, who was an American-born, midwestern Jew of Alsatian descent. Only one of their four children to survive into adulthood married a Jew.²⁴

Oettinger apparently did not travel to the nearby Goldsboro synagogue where other Kinston Jews worshipped. A small-town congregation also served as a planet to satellite communities with few Jews. Rocky Mount was an offshoot of the Tarboro congregation, although in the twentieth century that relationship reversed itself. A similar dependency existed between Salisbury and Statesville. Although Charlotte's German Jews failed to organize a synagogue, in 1903 eight held "non-resident" membership in the Statesville congregation.²⁵ Durham's Beth El included Jews from a thirty mile radius including Graham, Chapel Hill, Oxford, and Henderson.

With the movement of Jews up and down the rail lines, the currents transforming American Jewry flowed across the state. The port city of Wilmington, the site of North Carolina's earliest and largest Jewish community, was a battleground between Reverend Isaac Leeser, the tireless advocate of traditional Judaism, and Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the organizing mentor of American Jewry, who favored moderate Reform. In 1855 Leeser, the former hazan of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, traveled to Wilmington to dedicate a cemetery, and he returned repeatedly into the next decade. In 1860 he chastised Wilmington's Jews in his newspaper *The Occident* for their failure to form a congregation and secure "a pious minister." In 1867, after yet another Leeser visit, a traditional congregation formed, but it failed after a year.²⁶

In 1873 Wise sought to unify a factionalized Jewry by convening a Union of American Hebrew Congregations [UAHC] in Cincinnati. Nearly half the delegates were southern, and representatives of Reform congregations dominated. The UAHC, although lacking an ideology at its founding, evolved into the governing body of the Reform movement. The decade after the mid 1870s witnessed an "irreversible tide" of Reform nationally as synagogues institutionalized change retaining, in varying degrees,

“vestiges of traditional practices.” In his *American Israelite* of November 8, 1872, Wise reported with “particular interest” that a “MINHAG AMERICA congregation” was established in Wilmington. It joined the UAHC in 1878. In 1885 some Reform Jewish leaders promulgated the Pittsburgh Platform that called for a rational, American Judaism. Jews constituted a religious community, the platform stated, not a nation; it rejected Zionist longings and messianic expectation. Dismissing Orthodoxy as “primitive,” the Reformers advocated an ethical, universalistic civil religion that befitted the Progressive Era.²⁷

North Carolina’s early congregations were attuned to the larger forces reshaping nineteenth-century Jewry. Typically these communities were colonial outposts of Richmond, Baltimore, Norfolk, Charleston, or Philadelphia, and religious ties intertwined with the family, landsleit, and commercial networks that linked city and country. Rural Jews, migrants from their cities of entry, maintained their urban links. Rev. Philip Hirshberg, the president of Richmond’s Keneseth Israel, traveled North Carolina both to conduct business and to perform weddings and circumcisions. In 1883 when Goldsboro’s Jews began a synagogue building fund, “every member going north to buy his spring stock was requested to obtain a letter with the congregational seal from the president to solicit subscriptions.”²⁸ In describing Baltimore’s Oheb Shalom as their “mother synagogue,” Goldsboro’s Jews defined the congregational relationship between urban centers and small towns. The town’s most prominent Jews, the Weil brothers, had family and business ties to Baltimore and had been married in Oheb Shalom. In 1883 Rev. Alois Kaiser, cantor of the Baltimore synagogue, was summoned to Goldsboro to organize the local congregation. Goldsboro’s Jews adopted the name and constitution of Oheb Shalom.²⁹ At its founding in the 1870s Tarboro’s B’nai Israel was a “colony” of Richmond’s Keneseth Israel and patterned its services on that congregation’s Polish Orthodox ritual. The founding president of B’nai Israel, Henry Morris, had been a member of Keneseth Israel as were his father and father-in-law.³⁰ “There were continuous links in the lifeline between Charleston and Wilmington,” a historian of the Temple of Israel observed. Wilmington’s

first spiritual leader, the Rev. E. M. Myers, was the brother of the "Charleston minister." In 1872 Wilmington Jews turned to Rabbi Marcus Jastrow of Rodeph Sholom in Philadelphia to advise them on the "gradual modification of the old Orthodox ritual." The congregants took Rabbi Jastrow's advice to hire Rabbi Charles Mendelsohn, who was currently serving in Norfolk. Jastrow's student and collaborator, Mendelsohn later became his nephew through marriage,³¹ which again demonstrated the typical linkage of family and business. In 1895 when East European Jews founded an Orthodox congregation in Charlotte, they imported a Torah and cantor from Richmond.³² Despite their distance and isolation, small-town Jews remained networked to the city where—in addition to wholesale merchandise—they found spouses, rabbis, and prayer books.

If Richmond or Baltimore were models of Reform for small towns in North Carolina, they offered examples that were inconsistent and schismatic. Although the South is often stereotyped as a bastion of Reform Judaism, its evolution from Orthodoxy, like that of Jewry generally, was slow and uneven. Incorporated in 1854, Baltimore's Oheb Shalom sought a middle road between Reform and Orthodoxy. Under the leadership of Rabbi Benjamin Szold, it had an organ and mixed-gender choir, omitted head coverings, and deleted rites pertaining to sacrifice, but it also resisted radical Reform innovations. Szold was outspoken against the Pittsburgh Platform. Edited with English emendations by Marcus Jastrow, Szold's prayer book offered a prototype of a conservative Judaism. But it, too, embraced an Americanizing, "denationalized Judaism" that eliminated calls for Zion's restoration and expressed a universal ethic that called upon Israel to be a light unto the nations.³³ By 1856 Jews at Richmond's Beth Ahabah worshipped with a mixed-gender choir, and eleven years later added an organ and family pews. They also abandoned such customs as the kissing of tzitzit and chanting of the Haftorah. In 1866 thirty-two dissidents, favoring Wise's *Minhag America*, broke away to form Congregation Beth Israel only to reunite with Beth Ahabah five years later. Beth Ahabah was still using the moderate Jastrow prayer book when Rabbi Calisch arrived in 1891. An ardent advo-

cate of the Pittsburgh Platform, he instituted still more reforms including the Classical Reform *Union Prayer Book*, which was first published in 1895. Richmond's Keneseth Israel retained gender segregation, a traditional ritual, and sabbath observance into the twentieth century, but new immigrants sustained its Orthodoxy as its original Prussian membership turned toward Reform and joined Beth Ahabah.³⁴

The process of Reform in North Carolina, too, worked unevenly within and across communities, and evidence suggests conflict and internal diversity. In 1877 a Jewish newspaper reported that in Wilmington "dissensions" were "disturbing seriously the attendance at services." In the Goldsboro synagogue Sol Weil sat defiantly hatless while his fellow worshippers covered their heads. In the long term the trend worked toward liberalization, but this process included substantial wavering and backsliding. An Ashevillean referred to Beth Ha-Tephila's "see-saw history. . .Our membership is an amalgamation. . .in one generation a 'Reform' group dominated; in another an 'Orthodox.'"³⁵

Relative to urban congregations, North Carolina congregations tended to adopt reforms cautiously. The constitution of Goldsboro's Oheb Sholom stated that religious practice was to be guided by "Biblical injunction, rather than by expediency." It called for Sabbath observance, but it also reduced the shiva from seven to three days. In 1883 Goldsboro used the conservative Szold-Jastrow prayer book. Built in 1886, the synagogue included an organ and family pews, but the congregants also rejected the use of English and insisted on Hebrew-language prayer services. A mixed-gender choir performed during services. Head coverings were still required although Baltimore's Oheb Shalom had abolished the practice in 1869. In 1890 Goldsboro joined the UAHC. Although the Baltimore "mother synagogue" adopted the *Union Prayer Book* in 1906, its Goldsboro namesake rejected it in 1904 and 1906. In 1913 as a compromise, the congregation bought six copies each of the Jastrow and Union prayer books. Not until 1920 was the *Union Prayer Book* adopted for the High Holidays, and not until 1924 did the revised *Union Prayer Book* become the ritual standard. The board then also requested that the rabbi introduce

more English into the service, particularly that he read the Haftorah in both Hebrew and English.³⁶

Although German persisted as the synagogue language in many urban, American Reform congregations into the late nineteenth century, North Carolina's Jews were committed to Americanizing. The state's German-Jewish settlement was too small, late and scattered to sustain its separate ethnicity. Moreover, the Jewish communities tended not to be ethnically cohesive. Services were conducted in English and Hebrew. Yet some effort was made to ensure the survival of German culture. The Goldsboro congregational school committee did make its reports in a "very handsomely written German," and in 1892 the thirty boys and girls in the religious school were instructed in Hebrew and German alternately six days a week. Tombstones also had German inscriptions.³⁷

In small towns "Jewish" was a sufficient qualification, and synagogue histories suggest little ideological coherence. The by-laws of Statesville's Temple Emanuel, founded in 1883, concerned business and governance only and made no reference to worship practice other than to require "perfect silence" when the "minister or choir" performed. The congregants wanted Protestant decorum that suggests Radical Reform. The by-laws did not require Sabbath observance although members were obliged to attend the "minyon" when the president summoned them. Seating was in family pews. The congregation hired a Reform rabbi and the town's most prominent Jewish family, the Wallaces, owned the radical Reform Einhorn prayer book. Yet, when Statesville's temple was dedicated in 1892, the rabbi invited to officiate was Benjamin Szold, the conservative critic of Radical Reform. In 1900 motions to remove hats and adopt the *Union Prayer Book* were defeated. Not until 1908 did the Trustees adopt the *Union Prayer Book* and allow members "who desire to remove their hats."³⁸

Tarboro's congregational history also suggests ideological wavering, if not confusion, although its overall course was toward Reform. Founded in the 1870s Chevra B'nai Israel initially adhered to the Polish-Orthodox minhag. In 1882 a committee of three was appointed to "see what can be done to adopt a reform

service," and two years later the congregation appointed a Committee on Revising Services. In 1884 they called upon Rev. Abram Harris of Richmond's Beth Ahabah, which was embarked on Reform, to consecrate their synagogue. The board also voted to write Isaac Mayer Wise at Hebrew Union College "with the view of sending a student. . .to lecture for us during the ensuing holidays." However, its constitution (c.1884) stated that "the form of worship shall be according to the Prayer Book of Dr. Szold." In 1897 Rabbi Calisch, who was an ardent advocate of the Pittsburgh Platform, dedicated their synagogue.³⁹

The conflicts over liturgy and ideology were aggravated by the perennial problem of finding competent rabbinic leadership. As early as 1878 Goldsboro published a warning about Benjamin Miller, an itinerant Hebrew teacher in Durham, whom they claimed was a fraud. The minutes of Statesville's congregation record debates on whether the congregation could afford a rabbi and futile attempts to find rabbis in Chicago, Atlanta, Baltimore, New York, and New Jersey. In Durham, Tarboro, and Rocky Mount, the prayer leaders were traditionalists who were the most Jewishly literate and observant members of their communities. Anyone who was "well versed" in Judaism was pressed into service, which might mean a storekeeper, a peddler, a rabbinical student or occasionally a visiting rabbi.⁴⁰

Rabbis in metropolitan areas expressed concern for the religious well being of rural Jews, and circuit riding rabbis from Baltimore and Richmond traveled the state leading services, starting religious schools, and performing marriages. "The country Jew," Rabbi Calisch wrote in 1900, "has been much discussed. . .and has loomed large. . .for his urban brother in faith." Calisch was the country's most ardent advocate of circuit riding. He served as founding secretary and later chairman of the Circuit Preaching Committee of the UAHC. Instituted in 1895 in New Orleans, the committee resolved to contact every rabbi in America "for the purpose of endeavoring to supply the opportunities for religious instruction to the Jewish families of smaller towns . . .whose numbers preclude the maintenance of communal institutions." With an annual budget of only fifty dollars the

committee had large ambitions to connect each small town "to the nearest large city in which a Rabbi was permanently located." In 1896 fifty-three towns in nineteen states had received visits.⁴¹

Throughout the 1890s, Rabbi Calisch traveled to North Carolina. In March, 1896, he visited Tarboro, Rocky Mount, Raleigh, and Henderson.⁴² He conducted weddings and funerals in Charlotte, Durham, and Statesville. Indeed, whatever success Reform Judaism enjoyed institutionally in the South can be explained in some measure by UAHC's missionary work as "the only organized body that has attempted systematically to solve" the problem of the small-town Jew. In 1896 the committee passed a resolution to the HUC trustees and faculty to "encourage graduates" to participate in circuit riding and two years later recommended that HUC "add one year of compulsory circuit work to its curriculum."⁴³ At a time when Orthodoxy was still factionalized and unorganized, and Conservatism was just coalescing into a movement, Reform Judaism had developed a national infrastructure. In 1908 alone Statesville and Asheville joined the UAHC, and a Reform congregation organized in Greensboro. HUC rabbinical students served Asheville, Statesville, and New Bern.

From a national perspective Rabbi Calisch repeatedly expressed disappointment with the interest of small-town Jews in his circuit riding projects. "There are complaints of the indifference of the country Jews, and lack of interest, and of the coldness of the receptions that are accorded to the Rabbis' overtures," but he added, "it may be interesting to note that the Jewish communities of the South took "more kindly to the movement than those of the North, for the reason doubtless that there is among them a greater percentage of native born Americans."⁴⁴

The East European migration changed the character of the state's Jewry as the North Carolina Jewish population grew tenfold in the forty years following 1878. These Jews were immersed in the Yiddishkeit of their native lands. They must have been well aware of the difficulties of sustaining Jewish religious life when they abandoned the ghettos of Baltimore, New York, or Philadelphia for the rural South. The immigrants' break with rabbinical Orthodox authority preceded their arrival in North

Carolina. Bernhard Goldgar, an immigrant from Kodna, Poland, who settled in Durham in the early 1880s, left a memoir that traced his religious genesis. He recalled the rabbis of his shtetl to be tyrants who deadened mind, body, and spirit. He became an "enlightened" Jew. Unable to afford a university education, he emigrated to New York, declaring his intention to be not just a "son of Israel," but a "citizen of the world." Yet, he brought to America his phylacteries and went hungry rather than eat non-kosher meat. He came to Durham as a committed socialist. Another North Carolinian described his Lithuanian-born father as a "Jew by nature" whose "religiosity fell off" and who merely went "through the motions" of prayer. Yet this "freethinker" attended services regularly and served seven terms as a synagogue president. Russian-born peddler Morris Witcowsky of Yanceyville recalled, "Quite frankly I was not very religious," but he observed the Sabbath and High Holidays and ate only eggs, fruits and vegetables on his travels. The Industrial Removal Office, which resettled East European immigrant Jews from 1901 to 1914, screened applicants as to their willingness to work on the Sabbath and to eat non-kosher food before sending them to areas of low Jewish population density.⁴⁵

What transpired religiously when greenhorn East European Jews arrived in small towns where second-generation, American Jews of German origin had established themselves? The attitude of acculturated southern Jews toward the newly arrived immigrants was complex and varied by community. A UAHC report in 1896 noted "the heterogeneity of the elements which make up even the smallest of Jewish communities. Where there are mayhap [sic] only a dozen or fifteen families the social barriers are strongly drawn, and national differences, accentuated by close contact, serve to prevent a union for religious purposes."⁴⁶ While some American Jews voiced complaints about Poles and Roumanians, others rhapsodized on the spiritual unity of Israel and expressed pride in the East Europeans' rapid advance. In 1882 Tarboro's Jews sent twenty dollars in congregational funds to Baltimore and Cincinnati "for the benefit of russian [sic] refugees." In 1900, in response to a B'nai B'rith plea to "get positions

for Roumainian Jews that are in New York," the Statesville synagogue board voted in business-like fashion to "place an order for three (3) of these men." When informed of pogroms against Russian Jews in 1905, the financially strapped congregation sent fifty dollars to Jacob Schiff in New York for a relief fund.⁴⁷

Whatever solidarity Americanized Germans felt toward their immigrant East European coreligionists abstractly, some wished to remain socially distant. Miriam Weil of Goldsboro wrote a letter to her niece that warned her against dating a Trinity College (now Duke University) student because "all of the Jewish people in Durham that I have ever heard of are of a very ordinary sort."⁴⁸ In Durham Russian Jews were well aware of the social divide between themselves and the "Deitchen," but, typical of a small town, they described local relations as cordial. Southern codes of hospitality reinforced the religious commandments obligating Jews to care for each other. As non-Jewish southerners tended to see all Jews—regardless of national origin—as belonging to one race, it was in the German Jews' self interest to acculturate the new immigrants and hasten their civic integration. Rabbi Calisch, for example, was dedicated to Americanizing the East Europeans, and his congregation maintained a relief committee.

In towns with existing congregations, the East Europeans confronted the choice of joining the Germans or forming their own congregations. In Wilmington, the state's largest city, East Europeans remained apart from the Reform Temple of Israel and organized the Orthodox B'nai Israel in 1906. But in most towns small numbers and resources forced union. In Raleigh, Asheville, and Greensboro, Germans and East Europeans, Reform and Orthodox at first "worshipped upon the same roof," as a Greensboro Jew put it.⁴⁹ These heterogeneous congregations existed for a decade or more before population and resources were sufficiently large for them to divide. In some cases these congregations survived through a syncretic Americanized Judaism as liberals and traditionalists tolerated or harmonized differences to maintain communal unity. In other cases the synagogue might house a bicameral congregation with the Reform and Orthodox holding separate services. These arrangements were dynamic, and bal-

ances shifted with changing demography. Lacking numbers to reinforce their divisions, small-town Jews more easily breached the ethnic and religious lines that divided urban communities.

Where numbers remained small Judaism was by necessity inclusive. The precarious financial status of small-town congregations doubtlessly was a factor. When Goldsboro's Oheb Sholom board observed in 1895 that "certain Israelites were holding services outside the Temple," they welcomed them to join. To appease traditionalists Statesville's temple board in the early 1900s repeatedly voted down or tabled motions to permit the removal of hats during worship. North Carolina's small-town congregations lagged behind their urban counterparts in adopting Reform, and their conservatism may be traced to their need to accommodate more traditional Jews.⁵⁰

In Durham and Charlotte East Europeans arrived in large enough numbers to meet in a synagogue while Reform Jews held services in their homes. The religious meeting ground for Reform and Orthodox Jews in Durham, Raleigh, and Charlotte was the Sunday School which, with its mixed-gender, English-language classes, tended to be more progressive. In Durham Lily Kronheimer, matron of the town's most prominent German-Reform family, served as a much beloved Sunday School teacher and principal at Beth El Synagogue, which was otherwise East European Orthodox. In the late 1920s Reform Rabbi F. I. Rypins of Greensboro established religious schools in East European communities in Henderson, Albermarle, Tarboro, and High Point.⁵¹ In several towns, acculturated German families, some of whom were intermarried, made token contributions to build local Orthodox synagogues although they were never members.

Syncretic congregations had difficulty sustaining unity, especially as numbers grew sufficient to divide. At its founding in 1891 by a mix of German, English and East European Jews, Asheville's Beth Ha-Tephila sought compromise. Initially it called itself "conservative"; among the congregation's first acts was to raise funds for both an organ and a cap and robe for the Torah reader. East European families arriving in the later 1890s "found the congregation insufficiently orthodox," and the synagogue leadership was

committed to Reform. In 1897 Orthodox members broke away to form Bikur Cholim. Seven years later Dr. Solomon Schechter, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, presided over a joint meeting of Bikur Cholim and Beth Ha-Tephila in an attempt to merge them into a single, Conservative congregation. His effort failed. In 1908 Beth Ha-Tephila joined the UAHC, adopted the *Union Prayer Book* and revised its by-laws to commit itself as a "Reformed Congregation." Yet, as late as 1918, its board debated and then rejected an amendment to become Conservative.⁵² Asheville Jews commonly maintained membership in both synagogues.

From 1885 to 1912 the Raleigh Hebrew Congregation, too, included both second-generation Reform Jews of German origin and first-generation East European Orthodox Jews. "Much of the early business was directed toward reconciling their religious viewpoints in an effort to remain a single congregation," a community historian noted. The split into the Reform Beth Or and the Orthodox Beth Jacob (now Beth Meyer) congregations came in 1912 after Orthodox parents insisted their children be taught in "the traditional fashion."⁵³ When given the choice, many East European Jews chose Reform.

Greensboro was both syncretic and bicameral. The Greensboro Reform Congregation, founded in 1908, changed its name a year later to the Greensboro Hebrew Congregation to welcome the Orthodox. A. Rossman, a congregational historian, explained, "Its platform rests not upon any one brand of Judaism but upon Judaism and membership in the household of Israel." Both Reform and Orthodox Jews worshipped together on the Sabbath and participated in a joint religious school but separated on High Holidays when the smaller number of Orthodox members hired an out-of-town cantor to perform the services. The congregational history boasted, "The community has ever escaped the pitfalls of sectarian strife and petty bickerings that unfortunately have not been avoided in other sections of the country." Congregant Leah Tannenbaum, from an old German family, recalled, "We got along so well." The compromises were largely on Reform terms. In 1923 the congregation voted in support of a "committee of ladies" to give women a "footing of equality with men." Two years later,

Rabbi David Marx of Atlanta, a Classical Reform advocate, dedicated the new synagogue. Rossman noted, "the community has always cherished a warm affection and high regard" for Rabbi Marx. When Conservative Jews left to form their own congregation, Tannenbaum noted that the spirit of cooperation transcended the schism, and "many people retained dual membership for many years."⁵⁴

New Bern was also inclusive. German Jews had settled in the town as early as the 1850s, founded a cemetery in 1880, and established Chester B'nai Scholem. By 1907 the congregation reported it no longer held services, but a year later it dedicated a synagogue. The East Europeans had attempted to establish an Orthodox congregation, but it quickly faded and its "members infiltrated into the reform congregation until now they dominate it," student rabbi Larry Josephson reported to Jacob Rader Marcus in 1935. The East Europeans took leadership as many Germans had assimilated or departed, mostly to Baltimore. Although the dozen families were socially aware of the differing origins of Germans and East Europeans, there was no "distinct cleavage" or "any actual friction." The reporter continued, "In religious practice there is little difference between them." The community maintained a *schochet*, but "none seem to keep strictly kosher though some few observe certain dietary laws." Elbert Lipman of New Bern recalled that his Lithuanian-born father, who had settled in town after the turn of the century, "accepted" Reform Judaism "by necessity as much as by choice" since no one was competent locally to conduct Orthodox services. HUC students served as rabbis.⁵⁵

In Durham and Tarboro German congregations became East European, and the established Reform Jews were institutionally disenfranchised. Tarboro's B'nai Israel, which had evolved from Orthodoxy to Reform, reversed its course. The newly arrived Lithuanians, whom one Tarboro resident remembered "as Orthodox as they come," conducted services entirely in Hebrew although they maintained mixed seating. With the arrival of hundreds of East Europeans to Durham and the departure of most German families in the late 1880s and 1890s, the Durham Hebrew Congregation, founded c.1886, evolved into an East European

shul although Myer Summerfield, a German-born Orthodox Jew, served as its first president.⁵⁶

From 1880 to 1922 in towns that previously lacked synagogues East Europeans established 10 congregations. These immigrant shuls arose in the rural eastern North Carolina towns of Weldon, Fayetteville, and Lumberton and the mountain community of Hendersonville as well as in the cities of Durham, Raleigh, Asheville, Charlotte, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem. The cities had the critical mass to sustain Orthodox communal life. Small Jewish neighborhoods, "ghettos without walls," sprouted with a kosher grocer and butcher. The immigrant shul was a landsleit group that offered an island of Yiddishkeit in a sea of African American and white gentiles. It was a place not merely to meet to pray but also to gossip and to conduct business. Although these congregations held services in Hebrew and Yiddish, they replicated the pattern of the older established German synagogues in also serving as agencies of American acculturation. They, too, often took the title of Hebrew Congregation, and the women's group was a Ladies Aid Society. Usually they began in second-floor, rented rooms over a store. With prosperity the congregants purchased an abandoned church or erected a wooden shul. In smaller communities these wood-framed structures served until the post World War II years. In the 1920s larger, more prosperous communities in Raleigh, Durham, Gastonia, Asheville, High Point, Fayetteville, and Greensboro built downtown, cathedral-style synagogues. Synagogues in Durham and Fayetteville included a mikvah and women's balcony.

East European immigrants in small towns especially showed a willingness to compromise their Orthodoxy. The Lumberton synagogue's mikvah was eventually boarded over, and the seating was mixed gender. Asheville's Bikur Cholim was "never truly Orthodox," congregant Joseph Schandler recalled, noting that they, too, always had mixed seating, and services were conducted in both Hebrew and English. Wilson's Jews were "confused conservative," reflected Dennis Barker, whose grandfather arrived in 1907. Hickory was "Orthodox with reservations," observed Elaine Zerden, whose father-in-law settled there in 1908. Congregant Sol

Schechter thought that Kinston was “conservative” at its founding by Lithuanian immigrants in 1903. Temple Emanuel of Gastonia, organized in 1906, conducted its services in English. Sol Mann, whose family came to Whiteville in 1922, noted that his Lithuanian-born father, who had cantorial training, “thought that Conservative would be better. We couldn’t keep kosher food here. . . You had to go Conservative to exist.” In leading services Mann “used a lot of English. . . to keep people happy.” The need to accommodate, to include everyone, led to compromise. “People were from all over,” recalled Dale Fuerst of Rocky Mount, “Germans, East Europeans, even had some Latin Americans.” Barker observed of Wilson, “In a small community where you have 15 families, you’re going to have a mixture of everything. We did our own services.”⁵⁷

East European congregations had to deal with the endemic disputes of clan, class, and personality typical of immigrant communities. Lithuanians and Ukrainians argued over liturgy and Hebrew pronunciation, while wealthy merchants and poorer storekeepers contended over synagogue honors, governance, and the apportioning of kosher meat. When Charlotte’s Jews wrote the “By Laws of the Hebrew United Brotherhood” in 1915, seven of the nine sections regulating synagogue practice concerned the slaughter and sale of poultry and meat.⁵⁸ Disputes between the rabbi and the *shochet* tore apart congregations in Durham and Raleigh. In 1901, the dissident B’nai Israel split from Durham Hebrew Congregation as a congregant and the president got into an altercation over ownership of both the Torah and the affections of the president’s wife. The case was settled in court. “Every time someone got mad, they started a new synagogue,” recalled one old timer.⁵⁹ Observant Orthodox Jews, who wanted daily prayer services and stronger Jewish communities for their children, especially as they reached marriageable age, did not persist in small towns. The out-migration of small-town Jews from the South after World War I can be explained, in part, by the desire of observant Jews to live and raise their children in urban centers where they could find larger, more resourceful Jewish communi-

ties. Baltimore especially was a magnet for small-town North Carolina Jews.

Small-town East European Jews struggled with the problem of rabbinic authority. When Abe and Fannie Goldstein of Durham sought a divorce in 1906, they traveled to Norfolk to find a Beth Din. In 1896 the UAHC Committee on Circuit Preaching reported that "in many of the smaller towns the dominant element in numbers is of the orthodox type, for whom reform rabbis and their ways have no appeal." The committee had earlier reported that these smaller communities preferred a mohel or a schochet.⁶⁰ In contrast to the ordained, college-educated Reform rabbis, immigrant "reverends" who lacked semicha served the East European shuls. The by-laws of Charlotte's Agudath Achim specified that the congregational leader was to be a "combination Rabbi Schochet and Teacher." As one Durhamite recalled, "He circumcised you, married you, buried you, and killed your chickens." The pay was low and the turnover tended to be high. These unordained "reverends" and "rebbees" supported themselves by operating kosher delicatessens and tutoring boys in preparation for the bar mitzvah. Unless the parents requested, girls received scant Jewish education. The Charlotte congregation stipulated that children should be taught "according to the orthodox way with English explanations if possible."⁶¹

Increasingly, the congregants wanted a rabbi who could speak English to their children and make a modern appearance to the gentile community. Unordained Polish-born reverends yielded to American-born, university-educated professionals, especially after the establishing of Yeshiva College in 1928. The Durham congregation hired as spiritual leader an unordained Lithuanian "reverend" in 1892, a Polish-born rabbi with semicha from a East European yeshiva in 1912, and an American-born graduate of Yeshiva College in 1937. Smaller towns like Whiteville or Salisbury could not afford rabbis, and, when they found prayer leaders, ideology was less significant than availability. Jewish Theological Seminary students led services in Lumberton. "You took what you could get," recalled Herbert Fuerst of Rocky Mount, explaining the community's lack of de-

nominal loyalty. In 1932 some Winston-Salem Jews split from the Orthodox shul intending to organize a Conservative congregation, but instead became Reform when a promising HUC graduate offered his services as rabbi.⁶²

As the immigrants Americanized and a native-born generation arose, prejudices against Reform rabbis abated. At several second-generation, East European weddings in Durham the Goldsboro Reform rabbi officiated jointly with the local Orthodox rabbi. After 1909 Abram Simon, a Reform rabbi from Washington, regularly visited Durham where he served on the board of trustees of the National Training School, the local African American college. Although the congregation retained an East European Orthodox ritual, Simon, ordained at HUC, was an honored congregational speaker and delivered the keynote address at the synagogue dedication in 1921. As a native southerner and political progressive, Rabbi Simon was precisely the kind of modern, American Jew that the immigrants wished to present as a Jewish ambassador to civic Durham. Similarly, another HUC graduate, Rabbi George Solomon of Savannah's Mickve Israel, delivered the dedicatory address at Charlotte's Orthodox Agudath Achim synagogue in 1916.⁶³

North Carolina Jews reflected national trends as changing demography loosened the bonds of Orthodoxy. A host of ethnic and Zionist organizations competed with, and for many replaced synagogue affiliation as a means of Jewish identification. The cathedral-style synagogues of the 1920s were often designed as "community centers." Inspired by innovators like Mordecai Kaplan, these synagogues contained a social hall for Scouts and Hadassah beside a prayer sanctuary. Even with the institution building, religious literacy and practice eroded. In 1921 the founders of the newly formed North Carolina Association of Jewish Women [NCAJW] noted "our parenthood is sadly deficient in the observance and teaching of Jewish home ceremonials and the religion which these embody."⁶⁴ With its men's auxiliary the NCAJW was but one example of efforts to strengthen Jewish ethnic association if not religious practice, and it pointedly sought to

incorporate both Germans and East Europeans in a single communal structure.

The process of religious accommodation reflected generational changes. In 1932 in Winston-Salem Moses Shapiro, whose immigrant father had founded the Orthodox Beth Jacob congregation, led a group of Jews interested in a "more liberal type of Judaism." Beth Jacob at first housed the dissidents who held Friday night services at 8 p.m. while the Orthodox conducted theirs at sundown. The schism did not come until two years later when one Sunday morning the newly arrived Reform rabbi was asked to leave while leading his first confirmation class. The liberals moved to rented rooms and founded Temple Emanuel.⁶⁵ When a Hillel Foundation opened in Chapel Hill in 1936, the college students held Reform as well as Orthodox services.

Even in those towns that remained East European enclaves, Orthodoxy was often a matter of nostalgia, personal identity, and institutional affiliation rather than of religious practice and behavior. This eroded Orthodoxy was typical of small midwestern and southern communities on the Jewish periphery, and the Orthodox Union enrolled congregations that had mixed seating.⁶⁶ Rabbi Israel Mowshowitz, who came to Beth El in Durham in 1937, observed,

The community was fairly Orthodox, Southern style. There was not really any Sabbath observance. Most Jews drove on the Sabbath, kept their stores open on the Sabbath, but they considered themselves an Orthodox congregation. Kashruth was observed by a large number of the congregants.

Rabbi Mowshowitz's orientation was Modern Orthodox. Six years after his departure, Beth El hired a Conservative rabbi.⁶⁷

Jewish mobility, a constant feature of small-town southern Jewry, changed the character of the communities in the 1940s, especially with the migration of northern Jews who were accustomed to liberal Judaism. In the postwar years "the casual friendly assimilation of the small town disappeared as newcomers introduced 'big city' styles of living," observed NCAJW historian Emma Edwards.⁶⁸ Jewish movement loyalties were renegotiated.

Edwards observed the changes taking place in Reform Judaism: "Old-timers took a back seat, . . . the Reform style of worship, which had not stood the test in Germany, was questioned; all agreed that the resumption of the older forms of worship would give strength to the faith." In 1941 Asheville Rabbi Robert Jacobs wrote that "the Reform group. . . has lost its early rigidity, and the 'Orthodox' group. . . has lost its scrupulous observance of the minutiae of Jewish law. . . . With our Temple, an American type of Judaism is a-borning."⁶⁹

Nationally, Conservatism had been making inroads among second-generation Jews since the 1920s, and the United Synagogue of America grew into Judaism's dominant branch in the postwar years. In North Carolina the real growth in Conservative Judaism occurred in the 1940s. Women, wanting a more egalitarian Judaism, pushed the movement toward Conservatism. In the 1940s they began joining synagogue boards. The Conservative Temple Israel of Salisbury, founded in 1939, evolved from the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women.

In several cases the Conservative Judaism emerged from Reform congregations. In 1942, with new migrations, dissident East European members of the Greensboro Reform congregation had the numbers to establish the Greensboro Conservative Hebrew Congregation, soon renamed Beth David Synagogue. Its members wanted "more emphasis on traditional and historical Judaism." Statesville's Emanuel, founded as a Reform congregation in 1883 and closed in the 1920s, reopened in 1954 as Conservative with the arrival of newcomers.

More typically, Conservative congregations evolved from East European Orthodox synagogues. Charlotte's Orthodox synagogue began holding two services on the High Holidays, adding a Conservative minyan, which appealed largely to younger members. In 1946 the congregation changed its name from Hebrew Union Brotherhood to B'nai Israel and joined the United Synagogue.⁷⁰ Formerly Orthodox congregations in Durham, High Point, Hendersonville, Lumberton, Fayetteville, and Asheville joined the United Synagogue in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

North Carolina which had approximately ten Orthodox congregations in 1910 had none in 1960 as all had either closed or turned Conservative. Frequently, this move coincided with the construction of a new, suburban Jewish community center. The postwar religious revival inspired a new wave of congregation forming and synagogue building. These suburban synagogue-centers were erected not just in cities like Durham, Charlotte, and Raleigh, but also in small agrarian towns like Weldon, Lumberton, Hickory, Wilson, Fayetteville, Whiteville, Jacksonville, Rocky Mount, Salisbury, and Kinston. The number of the state's congregations grew from sixteen in 1948 to twenty-seven in 1955. Responding to institutional growth, by the 1950s a North Carolina Association of Rabbis had formed.

The Reform movement was also a beneficiary of population growth and generational change beginning in the 1940s. In Charlotte East Europeans, augmented by remnants of the early German Jewish settlers, organized a Reform congregation in 1942.⁷¹ The Kinston East European congregation, "conservative" at its founding in 1903, turned Reform in 1948. Reform's climb to ascendancy among North Carolina Jews climaxed in the 1960s. When Judea Reform organized in Durham in 1961, the leadership consisted of second-generation East European Jews and émigrés from Nazi Europe. The elderly, highly assimilated remnants of the old German families did not affiliate. Weldon's Conservative congregation had problems satisfying the rabbi's need to obtain kosher food and to avoid driving on the sabbath, so it joined the Reform movement. Hendersonville's Agudas Achim evolved from Orthodoxy to Conservatism to Reform while High Point marched from Orthodoxy to Conservatism to Reconstructionism and then to Reform. Consistent with national trends in the Reform movement, the Classical Reform style evolved in the postwar years to a more traditional service with increasing use of Hebrew.⁷²

Smaller North Carolina congregations contended with denominational flux. When it came to denominations, a Rocky Mount congregant recalled, "people didn't know what they were." The impulse was "to please everyone." Men and women

sat together at prayer services. "We have seven or eight different sects," said Monroe Evans of Fayetteville's Beth Israel, "but everybody stays together. . .everybody has to give a little bit for their belief." Tarboro's services, which had been Orthodox, evolved into something "midway between Reform and Conservative," a congregant recalled. "Not everyone in the congregation could read Hebrew."⁷³ Elaine Zerden of Hickory remembered, "Whoever was at the bimah chose the service." The Hickory, Wilson, and Rocky Mount congregations owned several sets of prayer books to accommodate whatever worship the prayer leader requested. The Rocky Mount congregation purchased an organ, Herbert Fuerst recalled, "but some members screamed it was irreverent so we sold it to the Baptist church."⁷⁴

The century-old problem of serving country Jews persisted, and for isolated, smaller communities availability remained more significant than movement affiliation. In 1954 Charlotte philanthropist I. D. Blumenthal underwrote a Circuit Riding Rabbi Project to serve small towns unable to afford a rabbi. A bus was equipped with an eternal light, an ark and a Judaica library. Rabbi Harold Friedman traveled a semimonthly, fourteen-hundred mile circuit on back roads to nineteen small towns. The "synagogue on wheels" eventually brought religious services and Hebrew school to one thousand Jews in some thirty communities. One stop, Mount Gilead-Albemarle, had only four families. About 1972 Rabbi David Kraus of the Circuit Riding Rabbi Project organized local Jews into the multi-denominational Boone Jewish community.⁷⁵

Following demography, Jewish congregations in agrarian communities have struggled while those in the Sunbelt metropolitan areas have prospered. Places that did not make the transition from mill and market town status into the post-industrial economy saw their Jewish communities wither, especially as the second generation broke from the retail trades of their parents and sought professional opportunities in metropolitan areas. Tarboro Jewry, dating to the 1860s, had all but vanished as the few remaining families joined forces with struggling communities in Rocky Mount and Weldon. Their 1908 synagogue was rented to a Baptist

church before its roof caved in and it fell to a wrecker's ball in the 1970s. In the 1990s the Jacksonville and Lumberton synagogues were sold or rented to churches while the Wilson synagogue closed and was put up for sale. The Goldsboro congregation, with its 1886 Romanesque Revival synagogue, declined to a dozen families. Kinston reported a membership of thirty-two, nearly half of whom were estimated to be elderly widows. Whiteville, where a number of youth untypically remained in family businesses, sustained a congregation of fifteen or twenty highly dedicated members.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the Sunbelt metropolitan areas of Charlotte and the Research Triangle (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill) experienced rapid Jewish growth. If Jews had avoided the Benighted South of racism, poverty, and illiteracy, they flocked to a Sunbelt South hailed for its booming economy, temperate climate, and enviable lifestyle. Charlotte's Shalom Park, which opened in 1992, included new Reform and Conservative synagogues with combined memberships of over sixteen hundred households. Synagogues in Raleigh and Durham engaged in expensive capital campaigns as burgeoning memberships overtaxed their facilities. In 1983 a new Reform congregation formed in Cary, once a country town but now a booming high-tech center. Asheville, facing decline, saw its Jewish population grow as the mountain resort town drew families; Beth Israel's membership rose from seventy households in 1985 to over two hundred in 1997. The foothill furniture town of Hickory also saw a rising population of Jewish professionals and manufacturers.⁷⁷

Consistent with Jewish demographic trends, university towns also saw Jewish growth. While neighboring Jewish communities across eastern North Carolina declined and synagogues closed, Greenville's growing numbers of Jews founded Bayt Shalom, a Conservative congregation in 1976. This country town had grown into an academic center with the expansion of East Carolina University and the founding of its medical school. In the college towns of Boone and Chapel Hill Jews organized worship groups outside the framework of a formal congregation. The Jewish Renewal Movement spawned alternative forms of Jewish

association. In Fearington, a model community near Chapel Hill largely inhabited by retirees, a Havurah formed consisting of fifty households. In Durham-Chapel Hill, politically progressive Jews inspired by the Workmen's Circle founded the Triangle Shule, which served as a Hebrew School and informal congregation.

The growing popularity of North Carolina as a retirement center revived several congregations. Northern retirees buoyed the New Bern congregation, which was on the brink of folding in the 1980s. Floridians provided the core membership of Agudas Israel in Hendersonville and the Mountain Synagogue in Franklin, which was founded in 1979. The Mountain Synagogue, which held seasonal services, grew to 109 members with increasing numbers of younger families.⁷⁸

Reflecting global trends, Orthodoxy enjoyed a modest local revival in the 1980s and 1990s. Although a few native, elderly Jews joined these newly formed groups, Sunbelt migrants largely sustained them. Sha'are Israel, organized in Raleigh as Orthodox in 1979, was taken over by the Lubavitch Hasidim. In 1980 the Lubavitchers also founded a congregation in Charlotte, which grew to one hundred members. Durham supported two small Orthodox congregations: a Kehillah affiliated with the Orthodox Union which met at Beth El Synagogue and Ohr Torah, founded in 1995.

The history of North Carolina's congregations suggests that inner diversity, which historian Abraham Karp cites as a feature of the modern synagogue,⁷⁹ has existed for over a century and is thus not just a recent phenomenon. Religious balances evolved with new migrations as changing economies pushed and pulled populations. In smaller communities inner diversity and tolerance of difference were necessary for communal survival. In larger communities where congregations did divide along ethnic and religious lines, conflicts were short lived, and the impulse tended toward communal unity. As they did a century earlier, North Carolina Jews cite a lack of sectarian strife in their communities. Gastonia's Temple Emanuel, affiliated with the UAHC, describes its membership as comprising "a wide range of Jewish and inter-faith backgrounds." To welcome a diverse membership, the

"Mountain Synagogue has chosen to remain unaffiliated with any branch of Judaism." Sheldon Hanft of the Boone Jewish Community writes, "We have all come to learn to accept all of our fellow Jews, regardless of their denominational orientation." Rabbi Yosef Levanon of Fayetteville describes unaffiliated Beth Israel as an "umbrella congregation" that embraces Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox members. Durham's Beth El, led by a Reconstructionist rabbi, houses both a Conservative congregation and an Orthodox kehillah. Reform congregations adopted the *Gates of Prayer*, which offered the rabbi the choice of cobbling a service from liberal and traditional texts. Upon taking the pulpit of Judea Reform Congregation in Durham in 1980, Rabbi John Friedman expressed a common small-town sentiment when he wrote a message in the bulletin of the Conservative congregation: "After all, there are not so many Jews in our community that we can remain strangers for very long. . . The unusually congenial spirit which exists between our two congregations is most refreshing."⁸⁰ This tendency is characteristic of communities on the Jewish periphery regardless of region. In a statement for UAHC's Small Congregations Department, Mary Hofmann of Congregation Etz Chaim in Merced, California, noted "there aren't enough of us" to afford divisions, and that inner tolerance was necessary for survival.⁸¹

North Carolina's Jewish citizenry remains relatively small—the eleventh most populated state, it contained only twenty-five thousand Jews in 1997—but rapid population growth and changing demography have led to new alignments. In 1997 North Carolina contained sixteen congregations affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, five with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and seven that were independent. Three cities also contained new Orthodox congregations. In contrast to national numbers—the UAHC claimed 850 member congregations while the USCJ had nearly 800⁸²—North Carolina's congregations were disproportionately Reform. Furthermore the overall movement across the state was toward Reform, and in cities with two congregations the Reform temples were experiencing the greater growth. Small towns, concerned with survival, were especially drawn to a Reform movement which sought outreach

to mixed married couples and was less stringent in its ritual and educational demands. Reform was more amenable to small-town life where a minyan, kosher food, and rabbinic services were not readily available. The UAHC also had an organizational history of serving smaller congregations. In the 1990s Orthodox and Conservative synagogues were an urban phenomenon, and their presence correlates with the growth of the state's Sunbelt centers. In the South generally, Orthodox synagogues persisted in cities like Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans, but not in small towns.

Demographic trends suggest rapid Jewish growth in North Carolina as the national Jewish population shifts southward and the state's economy retains its high-tech luster. The South today welcomes the Jewish doctor, engineer, entrepreneur, and research scientist as it did the peddler and storekeeper in the postbellum years. The state's reputation as a retirement center is also encouraging Jewish population growth. Along with new congregational developments, Jewish community centers were built in Asheville, Raleigh, and Charlotte. Day schools arose in Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro, and Durham-Chapel Hill. Judaic studies programs flourished at Duke University and at the University of North Carolina campuses at Asheville and Chapel Hill. Over the course of nearly one hundred and fifty years of migration, North Carolina's Jews have created institutions to sustain community and to maintain their institutional links to world Jewry. Once on the Jewish periphery, North Carolina is now finding that the Jewish center is moving toward it.

Appendix

North Carolina Congregations

Name	Movement	Town	Date
Wilmington Congregation	O	Wilmington	1867-68
Temple of Israel (Mishkan Israel)	R	Wilmington	1872-
Congregation B'nai Israel	O/R/O /I	Tarboro	c.1875- c.1970s
Chester B'nai Scholem	R/O/R	New Bern	c.1881 or 1895
Oheb Sholom	R	Goldsboro	1883-
Congregation Emanuel	R/C	Statesville	1883- 1923, 1954-
Raleigh Hebrew Congregation	I	Raleigh	1885-1912
Beth El (Durham Hebrew Cong.)	O/C	Durham	c.1886-
Beth Jacob (W-S Hebrew Cong.)	O/C	Winston-Salem	c.1890- 1997
Temple Beth El	O/C	Lumberton	c. 1890s- 1990s
Beth Ha-Tephila	R	Asheville	1891-
Temple Israel (Agudath Aachim)	O/C	Charlotte	c.1895-
Beth Israel (Bikur Cholim)	O/C	Asheville	1899-
B'nai Israel	O	Durham	1901-1903
Temple Israel	C/R	Kinston	1903-
Temple Emanuel (Heb. Cong. of Gastonia)	R	Gastonia	1906-

Name	Movement	Town	Date
B'nai Israel	O/C/I	Wilmington	1906-
B'nai Israel (H. Pt. Hebrew Cong.)	O/C/ Re/R	High Point	1906-
Temple Beth Israel	O/C/I	Fayetteville	c.1908-
Temple Emanuel (G. Reform Heb. Cong.)	R	Greensboro	1908-
Temple Beth Or	R	Raleigh	1912-
Temple Emanu-El (Heb. Comm. Ctr.)	C/R	Weldon	1912-
Beth Meyer (Beth Jacob)	O/C	Raleigh	1913-
B'nai Jacob	O	Durham	1913-1914
Anshei Hasurun	O?	Asheville	1916-1921
Temple Beth El	C/R	Rocky Mount	1921-
Temple Beth El	C/I	Wilson	1921-1997
Agudas Israel	O/R	Hendersonville	1922
Temple Emanuel	R	Winston-Salem	1932-
Temple Israel	C/I	Salisbury	1939-
Temple Beth El	R	Charlotte	1942-
Beth David Congregation	C	Greensboro	1944-
Beth Shalom (Hickory Jewish Ctr.)	C/I	Hickory	1948-
Jacksonville Hebrew Congregation	C	Jacksonville	c.1950s- c.1992
Beth Israel Jewish Center	C/I	Whiteville	1959-
Judea Reform Congregation	R	Durham	1961-

Name	Movement	Town	Date
Temple Beth Shalom	R	Charlotte	1968-1987**
Boone Jewish Community	I	Boone	c.1972-
Bayt Shalom	C	Greenville	1976-
Sha'are Israel Lubavitch	O	Raleigh	1979-
Mountain Synagogue	I	Franklin	1979-
Lubavitch of Charlotte	O	Charlotte	1980-
Beth Shalom	R	Cary	1983-
Ohr Torah	O	Durham	1995-
Chapel Hill Kehillah	I	Chapel Hill	1996-

Note: Denominational code is O=Orthodox, C=Conservative, R=Reform, Re=Reconstructionist, I=Independent. These indicators do not imply formal membership in the Orthodox Union, United Synagogue, or UAHC. A major theme of this text is the internal diversity and mixed or syncretic character of North Carolina congregations. Such congregations are designated with an I. Also, dates of founding may vary especially as congregations commonly functioned as cemetery and benevolence societies and worship gatherings before incorporation. The original name of a congregation is placed in parenthesis.

*Merged with Beth David Congregation in Greensboro in 1997

**Merged with Beth El to form Beth El v'Shalom in 1987, later renamed Beth El.

NOTES

¹Interview with Dale Fuerst, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 9, 1997. I wish to thank Kathy Spray and Jennifer Geth of the American Jewish Archives for their assistance.

²For the history of the first Jew in a New World British colony, see Gary Grassel, "Gans, Joachim," ed. William Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 2 (Chapel Hill, 1986), 272-3; Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984* (Lanham, 1988), 165. *Statistics of the Jews of the United States*, Board of Delegates of American Israelites and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Cincinnati, 1880), 55; *American Jewish Yearbook*, 31 (Philadelphia, 1921) 302; Leonard Rogoff, *Migrations: A History of the Durham-Chapel Hill Jewish Community* (work in progress).

³Edward Calisch, "The Country Jew, and the Efforts Made to Reach Him," [Baltimore] *Jewish Comment* XI, 22 (September 14, 1900), 1.

⁴Malcolm Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi in the South," in *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Charlottesville, 1979), 24-25.

⁵Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration: 1820-1880* (Baltimore, 1992), 25-26. Herbert Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of Jews of Richmond from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, 1917), 95, 301.

⁶Michael Meyer, "German-Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century America," ed. Jonathan Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience* (New York, 1986), 47, 48.

⁷Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 22.

⁸David Goldberg, "Mendelsohn, Samuel" in William Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, IV (Chapel Hill, 1991), 60.

⁹Joseph Rosengart to Herman Cone, 16 April 1846. In possession of Cone Mills, Greensboro, NC.

¹⁰Morris Speizman, *The Jews of Charlotte, North Carolina* (Charlotte, 1978), 11; Maurice Weinstein, ed., *Zebulon B. Vance and "The Scattered Nation,"* (Charlotte, 1995), 80-81.

¹¹See Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry: Shabbat in Shockoe, 1769-1976* (Charlottesville, 1979), 41, 139-140, 206-7; Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond*, 301.

¹²Harry Golden, "The Jewish People of North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* XXXII,2 (April 1955), 211. Information on Tarboro Jewry comes from collating membership lists in Minutes, Congregation B'nai Israel, Tarboro, NC with cemetery lists published in Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *A History of the Jews of Richmond*.

¹³Rogoff, *Migrations*.

¹⁴Minutes, Congregation B'nai Israel, Tarboro, NC, American Jewish Archives; *Congregation Emanuel, 1883-1983* (Statesville, 1983), 7, 21.

¹⁵Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *Jews of Richmond*, 305; Martin Weitz, ed., *Bibliog...Temple of Israel, Wilmington* (Wilmington, 1976), 12; [Durham] *Morning Herald*, June 24, 1906.

¹⁶Golden, "Jewish People," 210-1; Roaslie Citron Ashendorf, "The First 75 Years" in *Temple Israel: 100 Anniversary Journal, 1895-1995* (Charlotte, 1995), n.p. Charlotte's first synagogue was founded by newly arrived East Europeans, not by the earlier German settlers.

¹⁷*The Occident*, XVIII, 50 (March 8, 1860); Weitz, *Bibliog...Temple of Israel, Wilmington*, 12-17.

¹⁸Charlotte Litwack, untitled typescript, August 17, 1987, 2.

¹⁹John Shelton Reed, "Shalom, Y'All," *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge, 1982), 111.

²⁰*American Jewish Yearbook, 1900-1901* (Philadelphia, 1900), 400; Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore, 1992), 175.

²¹*The Heritage of Lenoir County*, (Kinston, 1981), 330.

²²Weitz, *Bibliog...Temple of Israel, Wilmington*, 19; Gary Freeze, "Roots, Barks, Berries, and Jews: The Herb Trade in Gilded-Age North Carolina," in William Childs, ed., *Essays in Economic and Business History* (Columbus, 1995), 121; "History of Temple Beth Or" [Raleigh], n.p., n.d., 11; "Report of the Building Committee of the Beth-El Congregation upon the Completion of the Beth-El Synagogue," (Durham, 1922).

²³David Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738-1925," (Seminar of Dr. George Tindall, Spring, 1976, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 10-12; Moses Rountree, *Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe* (Philadelphia, 1969), 16; Abraham Oettinger Diary, July 15, 1896. Perkins Library, Duke University.

²⁴Oettinger Diary, September 19, 1886; September 7, 16, 17, 1896; September 16, 25, 26, 1898; September 14, 1899; October 2, 3, 1900. An "A. Oettinger" is later listed as a treasurer of the Goldsboro synagogue.

²⁵Ledger, Temple Emanuel, Statesville NC, 1903, American Jewish Archives.

²⁶Weitz, *Bibliog...Temple of Israel, Wilmington*, 12-17.

²⁷Leon Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover, 1992), 174: "The Pittsburgh Platform" in Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York, 1988), 387-88.

²⁸Digest of the Minutes of Oheb Sholom Congregation 1883-1958, p. 2. American Jewish Archives.

²⁹Rountree, *Strangers in the Land*, 59.

³⁰Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *Jews of Richmond*, 277.

³¹Quoted in Weitz, *Bibliog... Temple of Israel*, 17.

³²Ashendorf, "The First 75 Years," n.p.

³³Jick, *Americanization of the Synagogue*, 186.

³⁴Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *Jews of Richmond*, 277.

³⁵*The Jewish South* [Atlanta], October 14, 1877; Rountree, *Strangers in the Land*, 60; *The Golden Book of Memoirs: Fiftieth Anniversary of Congregation Beth Ha-Tephila* (Asheville, 1941), 7.

³⁶Digest of the Minutes of Oheb Sholom Congregation, 1883-1958, 3, 5, 6, 7. American Jewish Archives.

³⁷Rountree, *Strangers in the Land*, 62; Digest of the Minutes of Oheb Sholom Congregation, 6.

³⁸Minutes, Temple Emanuel, Statesville, NC August 5, 1900; May 6, 1900; May 2, 1902; September 6, 1908, American Jewish Archives.

³⁹[Tarboro] Congregation B'nai Israel Congregational Minutes, September 24, 1882; March 2, 16, 1884; July 6, 1884.

⁴⁰*The Jewish South*, July 12, 1878; Minutes, Temple Emanuel, Statesville NC, June 30, 1901; October 15, 1901; June 22, 1902; August 19, 1906; Dale Fuerst interview.

⁴¹"Twenty-Second Annual Report, Proceedings of the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations," (December 1895), 3433; Twenty-Third Annual Report,

Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 5 (December 1896), 3654, 3655.

⁴²*The Jewish South*, March 13, 1896.

⁴³"Report of the Committee on Circuit Preaching," 3957.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 3851, 3656, 3956.

⁴⁵Carolyn LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas 1820s to 1990s* (Fayetteville, 1994), 78; Bernhard Goldgar, "Autobiographical Memoir," (unpublished typescript), 52; quoted in Harry Golden, *Forgotten Pioneer* (New York, 1966), 50. Goldgar later settled in Macon, Georgia, where he served as president of the East European Orthodox synagogue although he was criticized for not keeping kosher.

⁴⁶"Report of the Committee on Circuit Preaching," 3656.

⁴⁷B'nai Israel Minutes, September 10, 1892; Minutes, Temple Emanuel, Statesville, NC, September 8, 1900; August 12, 1905;

⁴⁸Letter from Miriam Weil, February, 1910; Weil Papers, North Carolina State Archives. This "ordinary" fellow, Louis Jaffe, later won a Pulitzer Prize as a journalist.

⁴⁹A. Rossman, "History of the Jewish Community of Greensboro," *American Jewish Times* (Supplement, 1932), 7.

⁵⁰Digest of the Minutes of Oheb Sholom Congregation, Goldsboro, 1883-1958, pp. 5-6; Minutes, Temple Emanuel, Statesville, August 5, 1900; May 2, 1902.

⁵¹North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, Condensed Minutes of the Seventh Annual Conference, Charlotte, March, 18, 19, 1928, n.p.

⁵²*Golden Book of Memoirs*, 21

⁵³"History of Temple Beth Or," (Raleigh, n.d.), 10.

⁵⁴Interview with Leah Tannenbaum, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, n.d.; A. Rossman, "History of the Jewish Community of Greensboro," 7.

⁵⁵*American Jewish Yearbook, 1907-08* (Philadelphia, 1907); Louis Josephson, "Student Survey 1936-1936," Manuscript Collection #5, American Jewish Archives.

⁵⁶Interview with Reba Adler Hurwitz, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 9, 1997.

⁵⁷Interview with Joseph Schandler, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, January 7, 1998; interview with Dennis Barker, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 10, 1997; interview with Sol Mann, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 17, 1997; Dale Fuerst, interview.

⁵⁸By-Laws United Brotherhood of Charlotte, N. C. (January 1, 1915)

⁵⁹Interview with Melvin Gladstein, conducted by Lynne Grossman, n.d.

⁶⁰"Report of Committee on Circuit Preaching," UAHC, (December 1896), 3656; Twenty Fifth Annual Report," (December 1898), 3956.

⁶¹[Durham] *Morning Herald*, February, 9, 1917; October, 9, 1906; By-Laws United Brotherhood of Charlotte, N.C., January 15, 1915; interview with Gibby Katz, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 23, 1986.

⁶²Interview with Herbert Fuest, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 9, 1997; Herbert Brenner, "A Jewish History of Winston Salem," 12.

⁶³[Durham] *Morning Herald*, September 9, 1908; September 1, October 6, 1909; Ashendorf, "The First 75 Years," n.p.

⁶⁴North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, Condensed Minutes, n.p.

⁶⁵Herbert Brenner, "A Jewish History of Winston-Salem and Temple Emanuel" (typescript, 1972), 1-13; Meeting of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, Minutes, 1921, 2.

⁶⁶Jeffrey Gurock, "The Orthodox Synagogue," Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Hanover, 1995), 62-63.

⁶⁷Taped self-interview by Israel Mowshowitz, March, 1987.

⁶⁸Emma R. Edwards, *History of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Women* (n.p., n.d.), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, n.p.; *The Golden Book of Memoirs*, 7.

⁷⁰*Celebrating the Fifty Years at Beth David Synagogue*, June 1, 1997, n.p.; Rosalie Ashendorf, "The First 75 Years," n.p.

⁷¹Renowned journalist Harry Golden helped write the constitution for Charlotte's Reform congregation.

⁷²Rabbi Fox interview, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 11, 1997; interview with Solomon Schechter, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 12, 1997; interview with Harry Kittner, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 8, 1997; Rogoff, *Migrations*.

⁷³Interview with Robert Raskin, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 11, 1999.

⁷⁴Interview with Elaine Zerden, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 10, 1997; *Fayetteville Observer-Times*, November 8, 1997; Herbert Fuerst interview.

⁷⁵*Congregation Emanuel, Centennial Celebration*, (Statesville, 1983), 27.

⁷⁶IRaskin interview; Hurwitz interview; Herbert and Dale Fuerst interview; Schechter interview; interview with Leon Margolis, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 21, 1997; Mann interview.

⁷⁷Schandler interview; Temple Beth El, Charlotte, <http://www.beth-el.com>.

⁷⁸Interview with Elbert Lipman, conducted by Leonard Rogoff, September 11, 1997; Avram Friedman, "Mountain Synagogue," kudzu@wcu.campus.mci.net, January 2, 1998;

⁷⁹Abraham Karp, "Overview: The Synagogue in America-A Historical Typology," Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue*, 28.

⁸⁰"Temple Emanuel, Gastonia, NC," <http://www.uahc.org/congs/nc/nc006/>; Avram Friedman, "Mountain Synagogue"; *Fayetteville Observer-Times*, November 8, 1997; Sheldon Hanft, "Overview of the Boone Jewish Community," HANFTS@conrad.appstate.edu, December 15, 1997; *Beth El Bulletin* (August 1980)

⁸¹<http://www.UAHC.ORG/SMALL>. Websites for congregations in Fairbanks, Alaska, and Fargo, North Dakota, contain mission statements that well describe the situation prevailing in small North Carolina congregations.

⁸²Information from UAHC and USCJ websites: <http://www.UAHC.ORG> and <http://www.USCJ.ORG>. UAHC data include the "United States, Canada, and the Virgin Islands" and the USCJ includes "North America."

Amelia Greenwald and Regina Kaplan: Jewish Nursing Pioneers

by

Susan Mayer

Early in the 20th century, *trained* nursing was not considered a suitable profession for a young, wealthy woman who had made her bow to society at a debutante ball. Yet, the young daughter of German-Jewish immigrants, who had settled in the South, listened “with wide eyes and bated breath” to the stories told by her ex-Confederate soldier father about the work performed by the nurses who had served the Confederacy during the Civil War.¹ At the conclusion of each story she would always say, “When I grow up I am going to be a trained nurse.”² Ultimately, the opportunity to train young Jewish women as nurses a continent away, thereby enabling them to become self-supporting, “became the greatest ambition of [her] life to accomplish.”³

“Woman of valor,” a phrase found in Proverbs 31:10-31, is a hymn to the perfect wife. Yet, those were the words chosen by Betty Kaplan Uzick to describe her adoptive mother, Regina Kaplan, who was for thirty-five years the superintendent and administrator of the Leo N. Levi Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Kaplan had wanted to become a doctor. However, the expenses and difficulties a woman faced who sought to enter medicine led Regina Kaplan to enter Mercy Hospital Training School for Nursing in Denver, Colorado.

This paper examines the lives and motivations of Amelia Greenwald and Regina Kaplan in historical context. What would motivate members of an ethnic group to enter a profession that, at least on the surface, seemed to embrace an incongruous belief sys-

tem? Although healing and nursing care are not antithetical to Judaic tradition, the history of nursing, with few exceptions, evolved in the Christian tradition.

Jews were and are an ethnic minority group. Few people are aware of the double discrimination that Jews faced in entering the nursing profession. First, they confronted quotas in being admitted to nursing schools, and second, they had to deal with outright discrimination in being hired by non-Jewish hospitals.⁴

Between 1881 and 1920, quotas for Jews in schools and for employment positions were usual.⁵ Ethnicity could be rapidly established with the requirement of a letter of recommendation from a clergyman. Amelia Greenwald and Regina Kaplan were leaders atypical of the norm. However, being atypical was the quality that permitted their successes in nursing.

Amelia Greenwald was born in Gainesville, Alabama, on March 1, 1881, the youngest of eight children of Joseph and Elisha (Elise Haas) Greenwald. The Greenwalds had been married in Memphis. Her siblings grew to adulthood, married and as typical of a Jewish commercial family of the era, spread out in surrounding towns and cities.

Greenwald's father emigrated from Rheinbelln, Prussia and settled in Gainesville, Alabama, where he became a grain and feed dealer. Joseph Greenwald was elected mayor of Gainesville and his family enjoyed the social status of his position. Amelia made her debut to society at the home of her aunt, Mrs. Sigmund Haas, in Mobile.

Because Amelia Greenwald had both education and family money, there was no expectation that she would seek employment. Over the objections of her family, Amelia Greenwald applied to become a member of the class of 1908 of the Touro Infirmary's Training School for Nurses (TISON) in New Orleans, Louisiana. Among her papers is a letter in which Amelia wrote that at the mention of seeking a nursing education, her father and brothers immediately indicated that women did not work.

Amelia Greenwald
(Touro Infirmary
Archives)

Lacking her family's approval, Amelia Greenwald broke with both ethnic and societal factors of blind obedience to her father and ran away from home to enter TISON. A brother was sent after Amelia to convince her to return home but she refused, stating that she was happy with her work.

The years between graduation in October 1908 and the outbreak of World War I were very busy for Amelia Greenwald. She helped organize the Pensacola Sanitarium in Pensacola, Florida, which had been organized by a group of nine physicians in 1909. The president of the corporation was Dr. Charles E. Hutchinson, a graduate of, and paid physician at Touro Infirmary. Dr. Hutchinson chose Miss DeWitt Dillard (TISON, class of 1907) as superintendent, along with six additional nurses from Touro who were to provide nursing services. As Dillard had not yet arrived, Amelia Greenwald filled her place "most efficiently. . .at least in the general work of arranging. . ."⁶

After a short period of work in a hospital in North Carolina, Greenwald did post-graduate work in psychiatric nursing at the

Phipps Clinic of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, in 1913–1914. While studying in Baltimore, Greenwald met Henrietta Szold who introduced her to Zionism and her Zionist friends, and talked to Greenwald about going to Palestine as a public health nurse.⁷ Instead, she moved to New York and attended Teachers College, Columbia University, taking classes in public health nursing.

According to some sources, Greenwald worked for Lillian Wald at the Henry Street Settlement.⁸ There was a severe polio epidemic in New York City that was taxing the limited staff of the Henry Street Visiting Nurse Service. A call went out for volunteers. It is entirely possible that Greenwald did work for Henry Street in some capacity.

In 1916 she became the director of the New Jersey Public Health Association at Long Branch, New Jersey. The slogan of the association was “no sick babies this summer.” The first efforts were directed at improvements in the milk and ice supply. With Greenwald’s efforts, a new milk ordinance was enacted and the association hired the first health officer in Long Branch.⁹

During World War I, Greenwald served with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) as chief nurse in several evacuation hospitals in France. Her American Red Cross pin number was 5532 when she enrolled in New York City on January 28, 1915. Initially, she enlisted in the First Psychiatric Unit, although according to Army Nurse Corps historian Constance J. Moore, there is no listing for such a separate organization. In her own words, she recalled the group being called the “shell shock unit.”¹⁰ Greenwald became acting chief nurse of the hospital on the front lines at Verdun, France. The site of one of the most famous battles of World War I, it was under constant artillery barrage while she served there. From Verdun, she was sent to Savoy to serve as Night Superintendent of the AEF hospital at that location. With the armistice signed, and before returning to New York, Greenwald accompanied the First Army of Occupation to Germany to establish its first hospital at Coblenz. Among her duties was aid to war brides prior to their coming to the United States.

In October 1919 the National Council of Jewish Women asked Greenwald to direct its program for farm women.¹¹ This program was organized in cooperation with the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIAS) of New York City.¹² The purpose of JAIAS was to encourage immigrants to settle away from urban areas.¹³

Greenwald began her work in the small village of Woodridge, New York. As she reported to the National Council for Jewish Women Convention (Denver) in 1920, she gave English lessons twice weekly, did public health nursing, and developed hygiene programs for the elementary public schools. She also assisted in the development of a library containing Yiddish, Russian and English books. Although her parents were German, Greenwald spoke no Yiddish. Consequently, she required a translator to assist her.¹⁴

Woodridge was not a successful project. The farm owners began to realize that providing summer accommodations for vacationers was more lucrative. Instead of relocating to another site, Greenwald requested a release from her obligations to the National Council of Jewish Women in 1923 to begin work in Poland.

Greenwald went to Warsaw, Poland at the insistence of Bernard Flexner, chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish-American international relief organization. Dr. Lee K. Frankel, social analyst and manager of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Welfare Division, and Herbert Hoover, head of the American Relief Administration, organized the distribution of food, clothing and medical supplies to refugees in eastern Europe. Hoover understood the urgent need to improve health conditions as a defense against economic and disease disasters devastating eastern Europe.

In 1921 the Warsaw School of Nursing directed by the American, Helen Bridge (Pohlman), a 1914 Teachers College graduate,¹⁵ had been established at the Polish Red Cross Society. It received assistance from the American Red Cross, the Polish Ministry of Health, the Magistrate of the City of Warsaw and Warsaw University. The Warsaw School of Nursing was cited as the "first school of nursing in Poland of the American type which had in

view to prepare the professional, trained nurse.” This new school prohibited Jewish students from attending.¹⁶ Therefore it was necessary to create a similar institution where Jewish girls could be trained. Dr. Jacob Schweitzer, chief physician of the Jewish Hospital in Warsaw, successfully negotiated with the government of Poland, the city of Warsaw and the Joint Distribution Committee to obtain necessary permission and funding for a school of nursing. The school would train young Jewish women for future service among their people. “Miss Amelia Greenwald, an American citizen, a woman of outstanding abilities and unusual energy”¹⁷ was recruited as the organizer.

Arriving in Warsaw in March 1923, Greenwald surveyed her domain: A little cluster of bare rooms on the top floor of an old administration building. She immediately remodeled the area, including breaking through the attic door with an ax. To continue in Greenwald’s own words:

On the subject of a nurses’ training school those doctors were simply naive. They didn’t expect to expand. Twenty nurses to help them in the hospital was as far as they had thought—and I was thinking of a service for public health training for all of Poland!¹⁸

Greenwald found one hundred applications already on hand from women in all parts of Poland. She was so impressed with those letters that she sent for fifty girls. They were serious-minded, intelligent and eager for training. Greenwald found that the medical staff expected her to begin educating students almost immediately. She had frequent discussions with the physicians over the control of the school and whether nursing was a “trade” or a profession.

The Jewish Nurses’ Training School in Warsaw was dedicated July 8, 1923, only four months after Greenwald’s arrival, and admitted twenty-two students. A new class was admitted every six months. Training lasted twenty-eight months. The school was affiliated with the twelve hundred bed Jewish Hospital in Warsaw.¹⁹ The students were generally nineteen to twenty years old. Many women either found work by that age or

emigrated. Greenwald designed the school pin, the pink gingham uniforms, and used her own TISON cap as model for the school cap.

The school followed American nursing education guidelines. The New York State University nursing curriculum was translated into Polish. Once again Greenwald had to use interpreters so that she could teach in English to Polish students who thought in Russian. The students had great difficulty in mastering Polish as they had studied in the Russian language while attending Gymnasium (high school). Classes had been conducted in Russian prior to the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I and which granted Poland independence. Nursing textbooks were non-existent. Students waded through Russian, German and French medical books to write permanent notes.

In exchange for their education, graduates of the Jewish Nurses Training School were required to continue to work for the Jewish Hospital for a period of five years. In November 1925 the first class of fifteen students graduated. Future teaching faculty were chosen from this first class and sent for post-graduate courses in Germany and England. On their return, they received additional training under the tutelage of Greenwald. According to her initial agreement, the task of maintaining the school was turned over to these capable women. Greenwald left Poland at the end of four years, the first woman licensed to drive in Poland. She also introduced iced tea to the Poles.

The school which Greenwald organized received accolades throughout Europe, including a Golden Medal at the International Exhibition of Hygiene and Sanitation in Warsaw. Participation at the International Convention of Nurses in Geneva earned the school a citation in *The British Journal of Nursing*. The Jewish School of Nursing was recognized for its high standards by the League of Nations Division of Public Health.

Amelia Greenwald was the first woman to be honored by Poland when President Ignatius Moscicki awarded the Polish Golden Cross of Merit, the nation's highest order, for her unique service to the welfare of Poland and its people. Greenwald's creative leadership had made a difference in the lives of many people.

Despite a personal invitation from President Moscicki to remain in Poland, she returned to the United States. The students and graduates of the School of Nursing of the Jewish Hospital in Warsaw exhibited ethnic pride and were credited with developing a new form of social service heretofore unknown in Poland. The school continued functioning, operating within the Warsaw ghetto, until 1943.²⁰

After Amelia Greenwald returned to the United States, she spent several months in Miami, Florida, "to look after some business interests".²¹ She returned to New York and was again active in public health work in that state until the early 1930s.

Greenwald's missions abroad, however, were not yet complete. She declined an invitation to return to Poland offered her by the Joint Distribution Committee because the United States was in the depths of the Great Depression. She did accept an invitation from Dr. Chaim Yassky, medical director of the Hadassah Medical Organization, to spend a year in Palestine.

Once again, Greenwald required the services of a translator as she was named the director of the Nurse's Training School of the Rothschild Hospital (Hadassah). She was in Palestine about eighteen months. She wrote lengthy reports to Dr. Yassky citing the lack of proper telephone service and the work that her nurses were required to do, as there was insufficient orderly help available. Dr. Yassky terminated her services in a letter dated November 9, 1933.²² It is only possible to speculate what occurred at Hadassah Hospital during that year. However, Greenwald never again was active in nursing.

Although Greenwald occasionally visited her family in the South, her brothers finally persuaded her to make her home there. She divided her time between her sister Carrie in Meridian, Mississippi, and her brothers Isaac and Julian in Winnsboro, Louisiana. Her oldest brother Isaac, according to Greenwald, advised her to open a ladies' ready-to-wear dress shop. She chose Eunice, Louisiana, because when they had passed through the town her brother had said that Eunice was "a fine town in which to live."²³ In 1936, she opened La Vogue Dress Shop.

Amelia Greenwald never married; however, in 1939 at age

58, she took on the challenges of motherhood. A distant cousin in Germany had been writing to Amelia's brothers, pleading for assistance in removing his children from the threat of Nazism. Understandably, Greenwald resisted motherhood. The question was debated within the family for several years until a deathbed wish by her brother Isaac convinced her to concede. In 1939 Amelia brought a 15-year old distant cousin, Liselotte Levy and her younger brother, Leo, to the United States. Leo was sent to live with Julian Greenwald and his wife. Liselotte Levy Weil²⁴ remembers that it was very difficult for both of them. One of Liselotte Levy's earliest memories is of cousin Amelia relating how she first was taught to prepare custard in nursing school.

Amelia Greenwald and Liselotte Levy Weil developed a close personal friendship and deep love. As Liselotte grew older, she ran the dress shop. Amelia preferred her antiques. Mrs. Weil and her husband remained in Eunice to care for Greenwald when she became ill with cancer. Weil informed this author that Greenwald had said to her that she, Mrs. Weil, "was her greatest blessing."

Amelia Greenwald died January 1, 1966 at the age of 85. She lies interred alongside other members of her family in the Beth Israel Cemetery in Meridian, Mississippi. Her gravestone bears the simple inscription: "Amelia Greenwald, Nurse, Army Nurse Corp, World War I."

Amelia Greenwald was an extraordinary nursing leader. She served as an example of an international public health nurse and globe trotting executive in the period between the two world wars.

Regina Kaplan, on the other hand, never left the United States. Kaplan was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on May 12, 1887. She was the third of five children born to Gershon and Adella (Hannah) Traube Kaplan, German-born immigrants. Her father had taught school in Germany prior to emigrating. Her oldest sister was Sally. Next came Belle. Her younger siblings were Louis G. and Dora.

Adella Kaplan had health problems, probably tuberculosis,²⁵ which led the family to move to Denver, a city whose Jewish

Regina Kaplan
(Leo Levi Hospital)

population numbered some four thousand.²⁶ The family moved before the last sibling, Dora, was born. There is a question as to whether the entire family moved to Denver. LeMaster²⁷ writes that Kaplan's father died when she was in grade school. Only subsequently did the remainder of the family relocate to Denver. In a conversation with Kaplan's daughter, Betty Uzick, she clearly stated that the entire family moved to Denver. Since she was adopted after Regina Kaplan was forty years old, she may not know for certain. The oldest daughter, Sally, raised the family after their mother's death.

As the cost of a medical education was not available to her, Regina Kaplan entered Mercy Hospital Training School for Nursing and became a member of the class of 1908. Kaplan was not necessarily a typical new student. She was only about seventeen although the most desirable age for candidates was from twenty to thirty years old. While physical exertion was often required, she was under five feet tall and weighed barely ninety pounds. Nonetheless she graduated at the head of her class of twelve: five

religious and seven lay nurses.²⁸ The Sisters of Mercy had additional training schools in Pittsburgh and Chicago which were considered reputable and effective in the training of nurses.²⁹

After graduation, Kaplan began work as a private duty nurse. This was typical employment for graduate nurses.

She had hoped to join the military and enrolled with the American Red Cross on January 14, 1915 in Denver, Colorado, as it appeared that the United States was going to enter the European conflict. Her badge number was 5482. However, she was not accepted because of her short stature. She was always sensitive about her height. Her son-in-law remembered³⁰ that after a few glasses of wine, he called her "Shorty." She walked into her kitchen, motioned her son-in-law to follow and said, "Son, I'm going to tell you something. I've always been short. But if you ever call me that again in front of my guests, I'll show you how big I really am!" Little else is known about her early years. Louis Uzick described his mother-in-law as "a very private person".³¹

She continued her private duty practice until relatives told her of the need for a superintendent at the Leo N. Levi Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas, approximately eight hundred miles away. Regina Kaplan's connection with the B'nai B'rith hospital was to last for thirty five years.

The Leo N. Levi Memorial Hospital Association was incorporated in Hot Springs in September 1910. The first patient was admitted on November 1, 1914. The local newspaper, *The Sentinel Record*, reported on the opening of the hospital for "the reception of such charity patients as might be qualified to enter." The hospital was formally dedicated on May 3, 1916. In the days before antibiotics, steroids, and salicylates, water therapies were among the few options available to treat persons afflicted with arthritis. Patient stays ranging from one month up to six months were not uncommon.

The first superintendent, Esther O'Quinn, served from November 1, 1914 until January 15, 1916, when she was replaced by Regina Kaplan. O'Quinn did not welcome Kaplan. In fact, she tried her best to discourage her. She herself had become disgruntled with the hospital board and encouraged Kaplan "to

quit, before it is too late.”³² In “My Story,” written on the occasion of her retirement from Levi, January 16, 1951, Regina Kaplan wrote,

I was an eager, starry-eyed girl with a dream in my heart when I boarded that Denver train on a crisp January day in 1916, bound for Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the post of Administrator of Leo N. Levi Memorial Hospital. On my lips was a prayer for guidance. When the wheels began to turn and settle down into a steady hum, they seemed to me to echo that chant whirling in my mind:

Levi Hospital, B'nai B'rith!

Levi serve hu-man-i-ty

. . .If G-D were willing, I would not fail the trust placed in me. With His help I would dedicate my life wholly to Levi and the service I hoped to build there.³³

This was the attitude that Regina Kaplan brought to Hot Springs. She was issued license number 515 by reciprocity by the Arkansas State Board of Nurse Examiners, October 24–25, 1916.³⁴

It appears that by 1917, Kaplan had already opened or was about to open, a Training School for Nurses. However, in a 1914 document entitled *First Survey of Schools of Nursing in Arkansas*, Myra Breckinridge Thompson states that the Leo N. Levi Hospital already had a training school with an enrollment of twenty-five pupil nurses and had applied to the State Board of Education for a charter. The superintendent of the hospital was a trained nurse named Emma N. Olinsey. As for Kaplan's plans, the Medical Director, Dr. Maurice F. Lautman, disagreed with her. However Kaplan and her medical board prevailed, as there seems to have been a shortage of registered nurses in Arkansas at the time. (State registration in Arkansas was required by 1913.) The Leo Levi Hospital School of Nursing was also the first training school in the South to admit men into the program.³⁵ Kaplan designed the nursing school pin, as well as a linen cap. Students received a blue star on admission. Later, they received the bib, apron, the red star and the black star. On graduation, they received the traditional black band on their cap.

Also in 1917 the Medical Staff suggested the opening of a dispensary for outpatients, with Kaplan serving as organizer and director.³⁶ All gifts and equipment donated were recorded and acknowledged. This forerunner of the modern emergency room was a success from the beginning and served all residents.

Regina Kaplan's public service included the organization of a local Red Cross chapter. She taught the nurse aide classes as well as home nursing and first aid classes for adults and high school students.

All the while the Training School for Nurses was growing in the number of students and in academic excellence. Kaplan appears to have taught many of the classes.³⁷ In a conversation with four of her students,³⁸ they indicated that Kaplan reserved teaching the ethics class for herself. Not remembering exactly what was covered in the ethics class, her students do remember that Kaplan "wanted us to know nursing. . .and to know the history of nursing. She always wanted you to be proud you were a nurse and proud you were a Levi Hospital graduate." She also always said, "Nurses were sisters under the skin." According to the *Circular of Information*³⁹ in addition to ethics, Kaplan also taught history and nursing procedures.

Her students all remembered that they sat upright in class without slouching. One student related that during one of these classes, the light fixture from the ceiling fell and hit her on top of her head, knocking her out of her seat. Although Kaplan became quite excited, the student was not dismissed from class. However at the end of class, Kaplan came over to her and said, "Well Miss Mary, you can be an hour late going on duty."

Her son-in-law, Louis Uzick stated, "She was interested in the work that she did. That was her life. She'd rather have a few good nurses than. . .have a big class of ones that didn't know what they were doing." There is no doubt that Regina Kaplan "looked so firm" and "was the authority."

Regina Kaplan recognized and convinced the Hot Springs community of the importance of school nursing supervision. Shortly after her arrival in Hot Springs, a measles epidemic raged in the schools. No provision had been made for the examination of

school children or the follow through on absences. Kaplan urged the president of the Rotary Club to help raise sufficient funds to employ a visiting nurse. With the sale of Red Cross seals, the necessary \$1,800 for the visiting nurse's salary was secured. The first nurse, a Miss Joyce, was employed in 1919 for one year. In the interim Kaplan trained a Levi graduate to take over the responsibilities. It was common practice for Red Cross nurses to be employed for short durations.⁴⁰

By the end of World War I, Regina Kaplan was encouraging the establishment of a free public health nursing program for the city of Hot Springs. This started with a cleanup of local dairies and led to the first organized meat and food inspections. The public health nursing program worked collaboratively with the Levi School of Nursing. Many home-bound elderly were the beneficiaries of this project.

Dr. Oliver Clarence Wenger, the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Officer and the organizational genius behind the USPHS "model federal venereal disease clinic,"⁴¹ befriended Regina Kaplan when he came to Hot Springs in 1919 to wage a national venereal disease fight.⁴² Wenger appears to be credited with giving Regina Kaplan her nickname, "Kappy."⁴³

During the 1920s, the patient load continued to grow, along with the need to expand out-patient services. Concurrently, it was necessary to make arrangements for housing staff nurses as well as nursing students. Colonel Fordyce was authorized to draw sketches for the proposed nurses' residence.

Regina Kaplan was invited to address the National Council of Jewish Women at their Southern Division Conference in Little Rock in 1921.⁴⁴ At the conclusion of this conference, Mrs. Yetta Schoenfeldt, representing the Southern Division, announced that the Nashville women pledged the \$40,000 necessary to build the nurses' residence. With this expansion of facilities, Kaplan chose new candidates for the School of Nursing, selecting, when possible, those with some college credits.⁴⁵ On two occasions, Kaplan also chose candidates with children because she believed these women needed to have a profession to provide for their children and themselves. Kaplan was tolerant of religious observance, al-

lowing Catholic students additional time to attend the services which were not as near as Protestant services.

In 1923, the Arkansas State Board of Nurse Examiners conducted a survey of the Training School for Nurses⁴⁶ and issued an unflattering report. Kaplan was cited for not being familiar with the Standard Curriculum and poor record keeping. Other problem areas included no bath facilities in the student nurses' living quarters and no library. The examiner found that "the pupils wore very short skirts, a good deal of rouge, and all sorts of shoes and stockings and that the discipline is lax." Specific mention was made that the hospital is non-sectarian and that the school "has no Jewish pupils." Although it was indicated that of the fourteen pupils, one came from Montreal, one from Kansas, and two from Oklahoma, their specific religions were not noted. One can only wonder why the examiner felt compelled to comment on the absence of Jewish students. It is possible to surmise that this survey was conducted in response to the landmark study, *Nursing and Nursing Education in the United States* published in the same year by Josephine Goldmark.⁴⁷ There is no record of Regina Kaplan responding to this report.

In the Wagoner history of the Leo Levi Hospital, the author writes that the minutes duly report the "comings and departures of key staff members" for their vacations. The minutes for June 19, 1921 record that Regina Kaplan was scheduled to be on vacation for the month of August. In her absence, a temporary *housekeeper*, Mrs. D. Hogaboom has been engaged. Why, Wagoner questions, "of all the hats this versatile lady wore, was a housekeeper hired for the month of her absence?"⁴⁸ Perhaps the answer can be found in the previously mentioned 1923 Survey Report wherein it states,

The Superintendent does the housekeeping and buying, makes rounds with the doctors, administers the pauper oath to each patient treated in the clinic, so that it seems reasonably sure that she can not do all the teaching she thinks she does.

Expansion of the Leo Levi Hospital was contingent on the granting of government lands. At the time the Public Health Cen-

ter was built, the government also granted land to the Levi Hospital.⁴⁹ On January 28, 1924, after rounding up registered nurses as well as nursing students, Regina Kaplan turned the first shovel of dirt for the three-story expansion plan for the nurses' home. She credited her dedicated board for turning her dream into reality. Further she used the opportunity to announce several other future projects.

Regina Kaplan ran her hospital with a firm hand and great love for her patients. Initially having signed a contract as superintendent, she was also made the administrator. She tried to decorate the facility and make it as pleasant and home-like as she could.⁵⁰ The hospital acquired the reputation of being "the hospital with a heart." Kaplan was angry when the hospital board insisted that she discharge her patients early and felt this meant discharging patients one-tenth to one-half cured.⁵¹

Kappy always said that she learned acts of chesed from her parents. Somehow she had also found time to become a licensed midwife. In 1927 she attended the birth of a baby girl, who was to be adopted. Although marriage, motherhood and being a homemaker illustrated the American dream of young women during this period, Regina Kaplan accomplished a most unusual feat for the time. She convinced Judge Sam Gerritt to grant her, a single woman, forty years old, adoption of the baby, whom she named Betty Jean. She also arranged that the natural mother not contact the child as long as Regina was alive.

Regina could cook holiday specialty foods. Her son-in-law remembers the gefilte fish she prepared for Rosh Hashanah. When they arrived at her home, Regina was found holding her nose and saying, "Only for you would I mess around with this kind of stuff." After Betty, too, became a parent, and Regina started "fussing" at her, Betty kissed Regina, put her arms around her and said, "You don't have to pretend [to be stern] anymore." Today Betty Jean Uzick remembers Regina as a wonderful mother, "a true saint of the Jewish people," although she used to be scared of her too!

Betty grew up around the hospital and was the darling of all the students in the nurses' house. She remembers popping into

students' rooms at odd hours. Betty remembered,⁵² that one day her bicycle was missing. She spent some time looking for it. When she walked into the pool area, there was her bicycle, in the middle of the pool, put there by Regina Kaplan to help crippled patients do their exercises.

The next years were busy for Regina Kaplan, raising and educating her daughter, as well as finding sufficient monies for the hospital. At one point, Kaplan lent the hospital one thousand dollars from her personal funds.⁵³ "Tag Days" were one fundraising activity. This is probably an activity she learned from her alumnae association which makes mention of such an event. Tag Day netted four thousand dollars in 1910.⁵⁴

Kaplan did not want Betty Jean to marry; rather she wanted her to go to college to become a doctor or a nurse. Contrary to her mother's wish, Betty and Louis Uzick eloped in 1944, had a son, Marty, and today have several grandchildren.

Kaplan was an early advocate of nutritious food and saw that her patients received good diets. The kitchen always remained kosher, although only thirty per cent of the patients were Jewish. In order to contain costs, meatless meals were served two days per week.

As the patient load increased and more space was necessary for wards and administrative support areas, Kaplan and her daughter moved into a private home at 421 Dell Street. Prior to this, they occupied an apartment in the hospital.

At Regina Kaplan's urging, a formal program of arthritis studies was initiated by the hospital in 1936. Regina attended a special institute for hospital administrators at Purdue University in 1940.⁵⁵ In the spring of 1944, Regina Kaplan was honored by Eleanor Roosevelt with a special brunch at the White House.⁵⁶

Regina continued to maintain her association with the Garland County Red Cross, serving as executive secretary. She also belonged to the American Hospital Association, an important influence in her effort to get Levi Hospital to participate in the new hospitalization insurance plan, Blue Cross.

During World War II, Hot Springs was declared a defense area.⁵⁷ In addition to more hospital beds, Kaplan was able to get

her much sought-after pool. The therapy pool was built through contact made with the Civic Works Administration (CWA) in Little Rock. The CWA was one of the early programs generated by the Roosevelt administration to help alleviate the social and economic difficulties of the Depression era. The hospital qualified for federal assistance under the Defense Public Works Program. With the help of Lanham Act funds, a thirty four foot by eighteen foot pool was built in 1943. The Hon. W.F. Norrell of Arkansas read a thank you from Regina Kaplan into the Congressional Record⁵⁸. The School of Nursing also participated in the U.S. Cadet Nursing Corps Program.

Because of war-time shortages, Kaplan did her part to conserve supplies. As one of her students said, whenever supplies were needed, Kaplan would say, "Don't you know there's a war on?" During this time the students had to be in bed by nine o'clock. One evening four of them were taking a bath together, "just having a ball," when they were found by the house mother, Miss Tilsey. The house mother reported that the girls were indecent. The next morning they had to report to Kaplan who asked if they had anything to say. One of the students said, "Well, we were conserving water. Don't you know there's a war on?" Kaplan, according to the students, "came unglued. She jumped up off that floor two feet high and said, 'Well, that is just the worst thing I have ever heard of in my life.'"

Kaplan never mentioned a love interest. She was also very concerned that her girls always behave properly. Until World War II, it was also not permissible to date soldiers. During the war it became popular to entertain the military, and Kaplan, according to the Uzicks, entertained them royally.

Regina Kaplan was vice-president of the American Hospital Association from 1945 to 1946. In 1945 she also attended a special hospital administrator's institute at Colorado University. Kaplan felt so positively about Blue Cross that she became a member of the Board of Trustees of the Arkansas Blue Cross, Blue Shield. She served as president of the Arkansas Hospital Association from 1947 to 1948 and was a member of the Mid-West Hospital Association from 1948 to 1949. From 1949 to 1953, Kaplan was a

member of the advisory consultant board, hospitals for Arkansas, State Board of Health.⁵⁹

The professional activities of Regina Kaplan are staggering. In addition to those already mentioned, she served as executive secretary of the Red Cross chapter, Garland County, Arkansas, from 1917 to 1945. She was a member of the American Nurses Association from 1918 onward. In 1928, Kaplan was named chairperson of the National Rehabilitation Association of the State Hospitals.⁶⁰ She founded the Lakewood Convalescent Home for "old age indigents" of Garland County and served as its president from 1946 to 1953. Additionally, she was a member of the Arkansas Nurses Association, the Colorado State Nurses Association, and the American College of Hospital Administrators.⁶¹

Regina Kaplan indicated that she was a contributor to professional journals and that she read papers before sectional meetings of the American College of Surgeons. However, these papers have not been located.

Regina Kaplan's leisure time activities were equally staggering. She apparently had a lovely soprano voice and served as director as well as sang in the Temple Beth Israel choir, and served as chairman of its choir committee.⁶² She served on its board of directors as well. Kaplan's wide-ranging interests included service on the board of directors of the Community Concert Association, the presidency of the Federation of Church Women from 1943 to 1945, and the secretaryship of the Hot Springs Community Council. She was a member of Eastern Star, Hadassah, and B'nai B'rith. Her club associations were Dale Carnegie, Business and Professional Women, and Explorers⁶³.

In October 1950 Jay Robinson of San Pedro, California, became president of the Leo Levi Hospital Board. According to Louis Uzick,⁶⁴ Kaplan and Robinson had differing views as to the future of the hospital. Fund raising was difficult at this time because Jewish philanthropy was directed towards the new state of Israel. Exactly thirty-five years to the day after she had arrived, January 16, 1951, Regina Kaplan chose to retire. She remained as a consultant to the hospital after her retirement.⁶⁵

The week that she retired was declared "Regina Kaplan Week" by proclamation of Hot Springs mayor Floyd A. Housley. It was Housley who called her the "Sister Kenny" of Arkansas and the "Florence Nightingale" of Hot Springs.⁶⁶ The spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Israel, Rabbi Martin M. Weitz, was chosen as chairman of retirement activities. Congratulatory letters came from Senators Fulbright and McClellan, among others. It is a tribute to Regina Kaplan that Congregation Beth Israel even today sets aside a Saturday in May to celebrate "Florence Nightingale Sabbath."

Regina Kaplan picked her successor, a 1926 graduate of the School of Nursing, Mrs. Fannie Benedikt McLaughlin. The school, which closed in September 1952, had graduated 250 registered nurses during its existence.⁶⁷ The last students were transferred elsewhere to finish their program. Geraldine Harp⁶⁸ and her friends stated that the reputation of the graduates was so high that doctors would say, "Get me a Levi nurse." A Levi graduate, Wilma Fae Rowe Booker, helped deliver President Bill Clinton.

Regina Kaplan had boundless energy. She began her day at five each morning, even after leaving her position at Levi Hospital. Her daily plans usually kept her occupied until five in the afternoon. When she became ill, the Uzicks attempted to run her errands for her. After two weeks, they both said it proved impossible for them to maintain that schedule. Regina had engaged in charitable works unknown to her family. Betty and Louis learned of this after Regina Kaplan's death.

Regina Kaplan's retirement from the Leo Levi Hospital was a busy one. She remained in nursing by becoming the Director of Central Supply at St. Joseph's Hospital, Hot Springs, in 1953. She held that position until 1957.⁶⁹ While working at St. Joseph's, Regina organized and was a charter member of the St. Joseph's Hospital Guild. One of her graduates recalled how she was accepted by Kaplan as a fellow employee while they both worked at St. Joseph's. This former student was still frightened to see Kaplan in Central Supply when it was necessary to obtain something from that area. In retrospect, the graduates inter-

viewed, as well as her daughter, think that Kaplan's bark was worse than her bite.

Regina Kaplan, dying from cancer, left Hot Springs to return to Denver on September 25, 1957. Two students still cried when they talked to this author in 1995 about helping Kaplan close her office at St. Joseph's Hospital and pack her belongings. Kaplan knew they were "her girls", and she was glad that "her girls" were there to help her. Regina H. Kaplan entered the Jewish Hospital in Denver where she died on October 8, 1957, her daughter at her side. One of "her girls," Bonnie Valerie Turner, took care of her although she still made her own bed when she had the strength. Kaplan is buried within sight of the mountains she loved as a child.

Amelia Greenwald and Regina Kaplan became active in their career when nursing was achieving professional status. Both of these women came from middle-class German-Jewish families. They were not raised in the crowded tenements of inner cities or in squalid conditions. Rather they were reared and educated in pleasant surroundings.

These two leaders were atypical of the norm. However being atypical was the quality that directed their successes. Their lives stand as testimony to the accomplishments of professional women, and especially Jewish women, in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In the United States there was segregation and discrimination for African Americans in education and employment in all sections of the country. Black codes were legally promulgated by states in the South and maintained in northern states by custom.⁷⁰ Discrimination extended beyond the African American community to the Jewish community, distinguishable not by skin tone, but by accent, food, dress, and lack of American schooling. The same institutions that developed sanctioned programs of nursing education were the same institutions that developed criteria to deny admission to both African Americans and Jews.

Entry into the professions was the dream of Jewish sons and daughters. Discrimination against Jews denied them that privilege. This early discrimination in nursing dates back to the

New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston, Massachusetts, which stated in its charter that one Negro and one Jew could be admitted to each class.⁷¹

Examination of the historical literature indicates that nursing, during this time, was regarded as an occupation and not a profession. Although it permitted economic independence, the apprentice relationship to organized medicine led to employment with relatively poor compensation, working conditions, and usually low status.⁷² Although the emphasis for women was a shift into white-collar work, there were individual women that made particular choices.⁷³

Although nursing was organizing, it had little control over its own practice. Therefore conditions for students during training, which is what nursing education was called at that time, varied widely. In reality nursing students were generally considered a cheap source of labor for facilities that called themselves hospitals. Working for others was shunned by upper class Jewish women. Entering a long period of training was not acceptable to Jewish women. Amelia Greenwald was driven by a dream from childhood. Regina Kaplan was probably motivated by her inability to go to medical school, though still desiring a career in health care.

In early 20th century American society, tradition offered women two choices: to proclaim themselves as women and therefore be less of an achieving individual or become achieving individuals, thus being less of a woman. Nursing permitted women to have it both ways.⁷⁴ The character and spirit of independence of these two women permitted them to stay within the confines of the authoritarian system and yet carve out a maternal role in the world outside the home.

The male-dominated American society offered few options for single women. They were supposed to live at home until married. Unless working in the family business, working was a temporary affair lasting only until marriage. In America, children were supposed to go on to colleges and universities where young women prepared to become teachers and social workers. They did not prepare as nurses because nursing was still an occupation, a calling: training which was embarked upon for altruistic reasons.

Repeatedly Jewish women were discouraged from applying to nursing schools, northern and southern. Regina Kaplan may have faced discrimination in applying to the Colorado Training School or St. Lukes Training School, the other nursing schools in the Denver area. A character reference from a clergyman was usually required. A character reference from a rabbi immediately indicated the religion of the bearer.

There were still carefully preserved quotas during the era of the United States Cadet Nursing Corps, established in 1942. In Lowell, Massachusetts, girls were always told that the quota for Jews was filled at the Lowell General Hospital School of Nursing.⁷⁵ Myra Levine had the same experience in trying to gain admission to the Michael Reese Hospital School of Nursing in Chicago in 1940.⁷⁶

Graduation speeches frequently noted the fine *Christian* profession of nursing that graduates were about to enter. Anti-Semitism was in the press, in housing opportunities, in employment advertising and in private colleges and universities. It permeated the nursing school as well. Superintendents of nursing, even those associated with Jewish hospitals, were not Jewish. They were employed for their abilities as educators and administrators. They brought with them the prejudice of society.

This researcher does not believe that Amelia Greenwald or Regina Kaplan thought that they were breaking barriers for Jewish women when they entered professional nursing programs. They have been described as very private persons. Both women were intensely proud of their career choice.

Both of these leaders were risk takers in their own way. Amelia Greenwald held several different administrative positions around the world. Regina Kaplan left the city in which she was educated, after doing the usual private duty nursing. She took a position as superintendent of nursing in a distant city, without career moves within the hospital setting. Their career choice permitted regulated adventure, travel and an income, and therefore self-support. Their friendships included presidents and many notable names from early 20th century nursing leaders to charitable people who could help fund their dreams of helping others.

The Jewish experience in American nursing included anti-Semitism, a system of quotas, and little regard for Orthodox Jewish practice. Amelia Greenwald and Regina Kaplan were driven to achieve and to accomplish much in their lifetimes. These women followed the Nightingale dictum of being trained to train. The lasting legacy of these women is the nurses they helped to educate and the people they unselfishly served.

NOTES

¹ M. C. McCarroll, "Father's Stories of Civil War Nurses Determined Amelia Greenwald's Career," *New York Evening Post*, May 28, 1930, 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Amelia Greenwald, "Nursing Education in Poland," (Unpublished manuscript, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1925, microfiche 396, Nutting Collection), 73.

⁴ Carl Rheins, to Dr. Jacqueline Rose Hott, January 3, 1990.

⁵ John Appel and Selma Appel, "Anti-Semitism in American Caricature," *Society* 24 (January 1986): 78-83; S. Klitz, *The Jews: Their Origin in America, in Connecticut* (Storrs, CT, 1980).

⁶ *Pensacola Journal*, January 15, 1909.

⁷ Leon Sokoloff, "Amelia Greenwald (1881-1966), Pioneer American Jewish Nurse," *Korot* 10 (1993-1994): 92-101.

⁸ Leo Turitz, "Amelia Greenwald (1881-1966)," *American Jewish Archives*, 37:2 (November 1985): 291-292; Sokoloff, "Amelia Greenwald."

⁹ Susan Magyar, Executive Director, Greater Monmouth Visiting Nurse Association, to author.

¹⁰ D. Stewart, "Local Resident was Member of First American Legion," *Eunice News*, March 21, 1961

¹¹ Sokoloff, "Amelia Greenwald," 94.

¹² Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa, 1993).

¹³ *Ibid.*; Sokoloff, "Amelia Greenwald," 94; Sanford J. Rikoon, ed., *Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*, (Bloomington, 1995).

¹⁴ Sokoloff, "Amelia Greenwald," 94; Amelia Greenwald, to Sam Greenwald, June 24, 1914.

¹⁵ A. Knapik, "Nursing Education in Poland, 1918-1928: A Cooperative Venture of Polish and American Nurses," *Journal of Nursing History* 1 (November 1985), 38-55.

¹⁶ *Prospectus*, (1923-1928), School of Nursing at the Jewish Hospital in Warsaw, Poland, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ D. Brown, "How the Jewish Training School in Warsaw was Established," *News*, 1927, 2-3.

¹⁹ "Communique from Jews of New Poland to America," *The American Hebrew*, June 25, 1926, 198.

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21. Amelia Greenwald, Unpublished letter addressed "Dear Miss Binham," to Florida State Board of Nursing requesting registration in Florida, Jacksonville, December 6, 1927.

22. Sokoloff, "Amelia Greenwald," 97.

23. After returning from Europe at the conclusion of World War I, Greenwald joined the American Legion. She always maintained her membership and joined the Turner-Mornhinveg Post when she first settled in Eunice.

24. Interview with Liselotte Levy Weil, conducted by Susan Mayer, several occasions since June 1973.

25. Leon Sokoloff, "A History of Jewish Attitudes Towards Nursing," *New York State Journal of Medicine* 92 (December 1992): 529-536.

26. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 4th ed., IV, s.v. "Colorado," 179.

27. Carolyn LeMaster, "Regina Kaplan: Arkansas's 'Lady With the Lamp,'" (Unpublished Manuscript, Susie Pryor Award in Arkansas Women's History, February 1987), 2.

28. Untitled Documents, 1909-1913, 231ff. Courtesy of Sister Rita Connell, Archivist, Institute of Religious Sisters of Mercy Archives, Omaha Regional Community, Omaha.

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30. Interview with Louie Uzick, conducted by Susan Mayer, September 28, 1995.

31. *Ibid.*

32. LeMaster, "Regina Kaplan," 3.

33. Regina Kaplan, "My Story," Speech delivered by Kaplan on the occasion of her retirement from Leo Levi Hospital. [Contained in a document given to author by Betty and Louis Uzick.]

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38. Interview with Lovenia Burch, conducted by Susan Mayer, September, 28, 1995; Interview with Corriene Guerin, conducted by Susan Mayer, September, 28, 1995; Interview with Gardine Harp, conducted by Susan Mayer, September 28, 1995; Interview with Christine Rowe, conducted by Susan Mayer, September, 28, 1995.

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42. Paul De Kruif, *Life Among the Doctors* (New York, 1949), 253.

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44. Wagoner, *Levi Arthritis Hospital*, 14.
45. LeMaster, "Regina Kaplan," 11.
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51. *Ibid.*, 12.
52. Interview with Betty Jean Kaplan Uzick, conducted by Susan Mayer, September 28, 1995.
53. Wagoner, *Levi Arthritis Hospital*, 19.
54. *Ibid.*; Untitled Documents, Courtesy Sr. Rita Connell, 233.
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57. *Ibid.*, 12.
58. *Congressional Record*, 89, no. 130, A3892.
59. *Who's Who in World Jewry*.
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62. LeMaster, "Regina Kaplan," 16.
63. *Who's Who in World Jewry*.
64. Interview with Louis Uzick, conducted by Susan Mayer, September 28, 1995.
65. LeMaster, "Regina Kaplan," 20.
66. *Ibid.*, 17-18.
67. Wagoner, *Levi Arthritis Hospital*, 46-47; Harp Interview.
68. Harp Interview.
69. LeMaster, "Regina Kaplan," 20; *Who's Who in World Jewry*.
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PERSONALITY PROFILE

Harry Reyner: Individualism and Community
in Newport News, Virginia

by

Gertrude L. Samet

My uncle, Harry Reyner, who was born in Newport News, Virginia, in 1889, was eulogized in 1978 at the time of his death. The editor of the [Newport News] *Times Herald* wrote:

“Harry Reyner was so closely allied with the expanding city of Newport News that it is difficult to identify a single milestone in the city’s commercial and industrial progress not positively influenced by his sharp, incisive mind.”¹

On September 8, 1997, the city of Newport News, the Virginia War Museum and the United Jewish Community of the Virginia Peninsula dedicated a permanent memorial to him in the form of a stage, garden, and plaque next to that city’s Holocaust Living Monument.²

The three sponsors of this dedication reflect the three areas of his extraordinary service to Newport News, service that helped that city grow tenfold from twenty thousand to the approximately two hundred thousand residents in the thriving metropolis of today.³ Appreciation of his legacy of long civic service, patriotism, and war service, and active participation in the Jewish community reflect the ideals of the present community and explain why his life and its inspiration were so honored nineteen years after his death.

Consideration of the life and times of Harry Reyner offer insight into one individual’s considerable accomplishments in the South, the factors that influenced him, the coalitions he formed

and our knowledge and appreciation of southern Jewish history. Although some qualities that served to make him so long remembered were uniquely his—good looks, charm, refined speech, impeccable grooming—many were truly representative of those Jewish men and women who settled in Newport News in the late 1800's and thus have a wider significance than the consideration of a single life. ⁴

Harry Reyner's parents, my grandparents, came to this country from Germany and Austria, met and married in Baltimore. Their older daughters, Lotta and Celia, were born there (Celia, my mother, in 1884). Joseph Reyner worked his way down the Eastern Shore with his family. Another daughter, Bessie, was born in Dover, Delaware. He used his skills in farming and in the preparation of food, working at times as a butcher, a grocer or a farmer.

The life of a farmer, even with his own property, was not to the liking of his educated Austrian wife, Sarah. Attracted by the possibilities of the port and harbor, the business opportunities offered by the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad's Newport News terminus and word of the ship repair business started by Collis P. Huntington, ⁵ Joseph and Sarah Reyner arrived in Newport News with their three daughters in 1887. Harry Reyner was born shortly thereafter, a much cherished and favored only son.

Joseph Reyner opened a grocery store. His love for growing plants became only a lifelong hobby, evidenced by the flower pots on the roof garden of the Reyner's home above the grocery store and later the grape arbor, the fig trees, the crepe myrtles, the wisteria plants, and the rose garden that were part of their second residence in Newport News, 3207 West Avenue.

In the first years in Newport News, Joseph Reyner was making a more humble living than he and his wife had anticipated, though pictures of that roof garden of their home above the store and their personal attire look quite nice. He was ambitious and to improve his prospects he hired a black man to row him out into the deeper waters of Chesapeake Bay where large ships lay at anchor, and he sold food and supplies to the ships' officers and men. From this small beginning his firm, J. Reyner &

Joseph Reyner

Son, grew into one of the largest ship chandler businesses in the world with offices in Belgium and London in addition to the large grocery business on Washington Avenue and 25th Street in Newport News. A publication of the Chamber of Commerce in Newport News in 1921 shows nine photographs of the J. Reyner & Son's facilities with four pages of text attesting to the modern and sanitary aspects of that operation. Additionally, a photograph of the Reyner home is pictured, showing the affluence achieved.⁶

Joseph Reyner's profits provided a great life style for a number of years – maids, chauffeurs, travel – but the firm did go out of business in time. Refrigeration came in. Ships no longer had to buy supplies in Newport News; they could load up in New York. That transformation led to the firm's closing in the late 1920's.

Despite the Reyners being one of few Jewish families, Joseph Reyner achieved substance and respectability in the emerging

port city and served on the first city council when the town was incorporated in 1896. Two of the lasting accomplishments during his tenure were the purchase of the small boat harbor (a plaque with his name on it was located on that ground for many years) and the beginning of the city farm where prisoners could farm instead of remaining entirely in their cells. Harry Reyner's long history of public service was a family legacy. Considering it a great honor to be selected for public office, Joseph Reyner served without salary. Harry was paid at most two thousand dollars annually and was careful never to profit financially otherwise from his civic role. In frequent conversations he referred to opportunities he had rejected.

Early on other Jewish immigrants arrived in Newport News from Russia, Poland, England, and Austria. By 1893 a small Orthodox synagogue was formed, Adath Jeshurun. Boys like Harry were taught Hebrew, but there was no Sabbath school for boys or girls. Joseph and Sarah Reyner sent their children to the Episcopal Church for Sunday School. Sarah Reyner told the church authorities, "The children were Jewish but they were to have some moral training. They were not, however, to be mixed up." There is a family picture of the four Reyner children at an Episcopal Sunday school picnic by the old church in Jamestown, Virginia. This was an adjustment mechanism for people in a small Jewish community.

Joseph Reyner later served as president of that Orthodox congregation, Adath Jeshurun, where both he and Harry retained life memberships. In 1913 a more liberal Conservative congregation, Rodef Sholom, was formed.⁷ Joseph Reyner consequently became honorary president of this synagogue. Joint congregation memberships and service in Orthodox and Conservative institutions illustrated transition patterns of acculturation for first and second generation immigrants. In a ceremony on October 5, 1969, Harry Reyner was honored by Rodef Sholom congregation at a Simchat Torah service for his:

Role in the growth of Rodef Sholom from his chairmanship of the Finance fund for the first Temple on 32nd Street, to chairman of the Building Committee for the present structure. He has

served as Vice president for several terms and is a life member of the Board of Directors and one of the three trustees of our Temple. For a full and dedicated life to his Temple and to his fellow man, Rodef Sholom is proud to honor Harry Reyner.⁸

Both congregations thrive today. Active synagogue participation on the part of prominent individuals has continued. Jane Susan Frank, wife of the present mayor of Newport News, was Rodef Sholom's president.

The Reyner life was one of privilege and sociability. Harry attended local public schools and later the private high school, Newport News Academy. At nineteen there are pictures of Harry on a trip to Cuba—this at a time when immigrants were arriving by steerage, not for years to take a pleasure trip at sea. There are photos of Harry with sisters and friends on his father's small boats, launches, each named for a family member. At twenty Harry went to Europe with his mother for a *grand tour*. Sarah Reyner made thirteen crossings. Living the life of the affluent, she never cooked except for matzo balls like marbles. She never cleaned, marketed nor worked in a store. She had exquisite taste and was, according to family stories, the first woman in the area to trade in the stock market as well as the first to fly in an airplane.

Harry was employed with his father in the ship chandler business with handsome office, male assistant and secretary, and the title of vice president and general manager. Joseph Reyner went to work at 5 a.m. coming home to his elegant residence for the heavy noon meal and a nap. Harry was a late riser who enjoyed many privileges of affluence.

My second husband, L. Reyner Samet, the son of Lotta Reyner Samet and also my first cousin, wrote a novella entitled "Ida and Her Family." Ida was the black woman who worked for the Reyner family for sixty-five years. Ida's family in the novella is the Reyner family. The story recounts the morning routine of Ida and Harry. Harry's breakfast came upstairs on a tray by way of the dumbwaiter leading from the kitchen to his upstairs bedroom. Ida could neither read nor write. In order to get his three minute eggs to his taste, Harry would call down when ready for breakfast, "Two choruses now, honey." Ida then sang two

choruses of “Onward Christian Soldiers” to time the boiling eggs exactly.⁹

On April 6, 1917 the United States entered World War I. Harry tried to enlist, but the government believed the ship chandler business, which supplied the Navy, and had done so in the Spanish American War, was in the national interest. The effective management of J. Reyner & Son would be more important than the enlistment of that son. Harry found a black unit with a lieutenant colonel in command. Authorized at the time to accept recruits, he registered Harry’s enlistment. His choice of a black unit appears to have been a matter of expediency; however throughout the Reyner story there appears reliance upon African Americans as employees and customers and even in the paternalistic relationships, some kindness and caring. This was scarcely the norm when as late as the 1921 publication by the Chamber of Commerce, *The Harbor of a Thousand Ships*, only white residences of the city were listed.¹⁰

Harry became a buck private in the U.S. Army. The army in its wisdom found a better use for Henry Reyner. He was rapidly made a captain and sent from the Port Utility Headquarters in Newport News to the port of embarkation in New York where he was made assistant to the port utility officer in charge of purchases of supplies. He lived through the war at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in a tailored Brooks Brothers uniform, serving well but with elegance.

When Harry first ran for the city council in Newport News, he was young, considered something of a playboy with his Stutz Bearcat sportscar, and running against well established incumbent opponents. The Ku Klux Klan distributed leaflets on white doorsteps warning of the dire results if the Jew-Reyner were elected. The electorate in Virginia then as now appears to retreat from extreme rhetoric. Harry won and won election repeatedly. According to *Newport News: A Centennial History*, “In 1922 he was first elected to the city council and set a record for being re-elected six consecutive terms, serving a total of 31 years. Known as the ‘Depression Mayor,’ Reyner served as mayor of Newport News

Captain Harry Reyner, 1917, World War One

from 1930–1932, served four terms as vice mayor, and filled an unexpired term of three years.”

While in public office Harry Reyner sponsored the city’s pension system, initiated the city’s purchase of the waterworks, acted as prime mover in the city’s first port authority, wrote the first zoning ordinances, created the sinking fund for retirement of city bonds, established the Newport News traffic squad, marshaled the purchase of the Casino Park and the city’s first housing project (essential for employees of the growing Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company), started the city’s first street-widening program, and began health inspections. He authorized ordinances to establish the radio communications division, to put the municipal boat harbor on a commercial basis, and to call for state drivers’ tests. ¹¹

Harry Reyner and his Stutz Bearcat

In 1935 he and his mother left Newport News for New York City. The Atlantic and Pacific food company desired to open a ship-supply company in New York and hired Harry to head this enterprise. Joseph Reyner had died in 1933 after two years of blindness, and J. Reyner & Son had been closed for four years. Harry and his mother sold the West Avenue residence, Harry resigned from the city council and they moved to New York. Anti-trust measures prevented the A&P from bringing this enterprise into existence. Harry was temporarily a successful broker on Wall Street, but was never happy away from the Virginia peninsula. He shortly returned to Newport News, entered the insurance business, and was returned to the city council.

In addition to this position, he was appointed to and served for two six-year terms on the Virginia State Port Authority during years when the Norfolk and Western Railroad merchandising pier in Norfolk was built. He was a strong supporter and personal friend of the long-time governor and political power

Harry Reyner and Governor Harry F. Byrd

Harry F. Byrd and worked within that conservative fiscal establishment. He served as consul for the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Guatemala for both Newport News and Norfolk.

Completely accepted socially by both Christian and Jewish groups, he was a charter member and one of two Jewish members of the James River Country Club. Harry never worked to get other Jews into his country club nor into the Propeller Club, although my first husband, Ellis Conn, then an electrical engineer in the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, could not get admitted. Harry cemented social, political and business relationships in arenas denied to all but the two Jews. It took the next generation to see greater light, sit in the lunch counters, integrate the schools and library, and let the sound of "Hatikva" sound in the James River Country Club.

During his years of community service he was:

Vice President of the Hampton Roads Maritime Exchange, chairman of the United National Clothing Drive, president of the Newport News-Warwick Community Chest, chairman of the United Palestine Appeal, member of the Finance committee of the Yorktown Sesqui-Centennial, member of the boards of the Newport News Public Library, Newport News TB Association,

Traveler's Aid and Lower Peninsula Planning Committee. He was Exalted Ruler of the Newport News Elks, Chef-de-Gare of the 40 & 8, American Legion, chairman of the Tenth World Trade Conference at Old Point Comfort and of the memorial gift committee at Riverside Hospital.¹²

In 1976, two years before his death, the Bicentennial Commission honored him and noted that he:

Organized the charity that preceded the United Fund, was a life trustee of the War Memorial Museum, board member of Rodef Sholom congregation and chairman of the Newport News-Warwick Chapter of the Red Cross. A bachelor who was described by a local journalist as having "probably contributed as much to the community as any individual," Reyner dismissed his achievements with the comment, "A bachelor has to keep busy."¹³

He may have remained a bachelor partly as the result of his being so socially integrated into the Christian and Jewish social worlds, yet he lived in a time when intermarriage was less well accepted. Family members told of his love affairs with a Julia Robinson and others. He lived always with women who nurtured him—his mother, in later years my mother, then widowed, and always with fine black, caring women, Ida Davis Thomas for sixty-five years, Thelma Venable and Grace Fulgham thereafter.

Harry Reyner was an inspirational figure to the family as well as a source of pride while he showed the use of political positions for empowerment to the Jewish community. His legacy of unselfish public service continues in his family and in the city he served.

On September 8, 1997, at the dedication of the stage, garden, and plaque by the City of Newport News, the Virginia War Museum and the United Jewish Community of the Virginia Peninsula to Harry Reyner, it was evident that the inspiration of his life extended beyond family and affected positively southern Jewish history not only of his time but in its rich life of today.

Newport News has once again a Jewish mayor, Joe S. Frank, who spoke at that dedication. In 1978 when Harry Reyner died the same Joe Frank, then president of the Jewish Federation, wrote of the Reyner legacy:

His leadership in both Jewish and non-Jewish communities has set an example for many generations of the importance of interfaith involvement and cooperation. I've known Mr. Reyner since I was a little boy. I remember him as a person who was very much in love with the city of Newport News. He was highly respected by all who knew him as a political figure, a community leader and a human being.¹⁴

The life and times of Harry Reyner, part of southern Jewish history, contributed greatly to the thriving Virginia peninsula of today.

NOTES

¹ [Newport News] *Times Herald*, (August 2, 1978) Editorial.

² City of Newport News, Virginia War Museum and United Jewish Community of the Virginia Peninsula, (September 8, 1997), Program.

³ John V. Quarstein and Parke S. Rouse, Jr., *Newport News: A Centennial History* (Newport News, VA, 1996): 250.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶ *The Harbor of A Thousand Ships* (Newport News, VA, 1921);: 168-176. All pictures are in possession of the author unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Quarstein and Rouse, Jr., *Newport News*, 125.

⁸ Rodef Sholom Temple, Newport News, VA., Simchat Torah Services, October 5, 1969, Program.

⁹ L. Reyner Samet, "Ida and Her Family" (Unpublished manuscript, 1953): 43-48.

¹⁰ *The Harbor of a Thousand Ships*, 180-191.

¹¹ [Newport News] *Daily Press*, August 3, 1978, Editorial.

¹² Council of the City of Newport News: Resolution, "In Memoriam Harry Reyner", August 14, 1978.

¹³ [Newport News] *Times Herald*, (July 2, 1976): 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, (August 1, 1978): 1.

AS TOLD TO MEMOIRS

Ruth and Rosalie:
Two Tales of Jewish New Orleans

by

Bobbie Malone

Since I began research in southern Jewish history a decade ago, Ruth Dreyfous, now 97, and Rosalie Cohen at 88, have served as my chief informants. For many years I had known and admired these remarkable women from afar, but through conversations and interviews throughout the 1990s, they became two of my dearest friends. Both native New Orleanians—their homes not a mile apart—they grew up in two totally different Jewish worlds. Together Ruth and Rosalie provide insights into twentieth century Jewish New Orleans, really the story of two communities that have only begun to come together in the last thirty years. Both the secular, assimilated Reform Jewish community and the more traditional Orthodox sector, however, shared certain attributes and aspirations—an emphasis on mitzvot, philanthropy and education. Ruth and Rosalie have lived full, public-oriented lives that reflect these concerns.

Although Jews began moving to New Orleans at the end of the eighteenth century, the New Orleans Jewish community as an organized entity with its own institutions actually dates from the 1820s when a Jewish cemetery was established and the first synagogue founded. The city's first Jews were single males who came from the Caribbean islands and had Sephardic roots. Most assimilated completely when they found Catholic wives and allowed their children to be brought up in the Church. After the War of 1812 as the cotton frontier moved west, more Sephardic Jews began moving from earlier settlements in South Carolina as

well as from the Caribbean. German Jews, part of the first wave of the German migration, traveled directly to New Orleans from Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, and other sections of southwestern Germany. These two early arriving groups assimilated easily and made up New Orleans' Jewish elite.¹

At the turn of the century, the major wave of the less-assimilable eastern European Jewish immigrants completely reshaped the American Jewish community by forcing it to accommodate large numbers of more traditional Jews. But because of its periodically devastating yellow fever epidemics and economic problems in the mid-1890s, New Orleans attracted relatively few eastern Europeans. The city thereby retained its German Jewish character, remaining one of the few American urban centers not thoroughly transformed by this third Jewish immigrant wave.²

Ruth Dreyfous' paternal grandfather, Abel, was one of those who hailed from Alsace; the parents of his New Orleans' born wife were from Germany. At the Abel Dreyfous home, French was spoken, and like many Creoles, Ruth's father grew up completely bilingual. When Abel established himself as a notary, the Dreyfous family became members of prosperous antebellum Jewish New Orleans. By the time Ruth was born in 1901, her father, Felix, had emerged as one of the city's leading notaries and attorneys, a civic-minded Progressive reformer who had served a stint in the first "reform" state legislature after Reconstruction. There he fought the Louisiana Lottery, established the New Orleans police department and founded the levee board which began building the famous levee system to protect the city from flood devastation. As Ruth consistently reminds me, "The most important influence in my life was Father." She is equally proud of her prominent relatives and says, "It's interesting to look back and realize how fortunate I've been." The family lived in a stately three-story home on Jackson Avenue in the heart of the city's lovely Garden District.

The massive wave of eastern European Jewish immigrants reached its peak about 1907, the year Rosalie Cohen's parents immigrated to New Orleans from Bialystok, then Poland, now

*Rosalie Cohen
in the 1950s*

Russia. Bialystok according to Rosalie, was “a seat of Jewish learning, [and]. . . economically, it was a prosperous place” which benefited from the textile industry introduced by Jews into Poland years before. Rosalie’s parents were well-educated. Her father, a chemist, experimented with textile dyes, and her mother graduated from a secular gymnasium, the equivalent to an excellent preparatory school. Distantly related, they married after their arrival in New Orleans, and Rosalie was born just three years later.

Rosalie’s mother was one of six siblings all brought to America by her mother’s oldest brother, Jacob Brener. Having arrived first, Brener had entered the furniture business on Dryades Street, the “bustling” center of the uptown Jewish business district and the commercial headquarters of the Orthodox Jewish community. The furniture business in the city is still dominated by the same turn-of-the-century families of eastern European Jews. Rosalie’s father, Leon Palter, traveled from Poland with her uncle, one of three brothers who married three sisters.

Rosalie's maternal grandparents also immigrated to New Orleans. Although her grandmother died shortly after arriving, Rosalie's grandfather lived until she was about six years old, and she remembers him "very distinctly." Rosalie learned to speak Yiddish because of him, although not as her first language; her parents spoke English at home. Rosalie's father, a talmudic scholar, also was completely literate in Hebrew. While English dominated their daily lives, Yiddish was the *mamaloschen* of their family reunions. Rosalie is "very thankful" for the experience of being a child while her grandfather was still alive since "the Yiddish that I learned then I still remember." Her parents spoke Russian fluently, the language used "when they didn't want me to understand," something Rosalie still resents because she feels that "children should be encouraged to speak second languages."

While Ruth's and Rosalie's parents occupied separate social and religious orbits, their main social contacts were Jewish. Ruth's father, for example, was an active member and long-time president of the Harmony Club, an elite Jewish men's organization which not only provided elegant rooms for card-playing and billiards but presented Jewish debutantes—Ruth's mother, Julia, among them. The Harmony Club gave "fancy balls" with programs and souvenirs, and Ruth recalls her parents' returning home from these affairs and placing "all the little souvenirs on our beds." A prominent non-Jewish associate had "insisted on Father joining the [New Orleans] Yacht Club" which included only a handful of Jews. Although her parents became members, when her brothers were old enough to apply, they were turned down. "Father resigned. It's just queer . . . he was begged to belong, but then we got to the point where they weren't wanted." In spite of this kind of social discrimination, Ruth and Rosalie claim that neither has experienced any overt anti-Semitism. Perhaps this denial stems from their stressing personal altruistic commitments above all else, and their refusal to admit to social anti-Semitism is a function of their devaluing it as a stumbling block to their own accomplishments.

Rosalie spoke of the exceptionality of growing up where the Reform community was the overwhelming majority, the self-appointed maintainers of secular Jewish organizational leadership which centered in an early forerunner of the New Orleans Jewish Federation, the major funding agency.³ Reform Jews continue to dominate local federation leadership, but such dominance was more pronounced in the early years of the twentieth century, when, as Rosalie put it, "You might say my father was the token Orthodox."

By the time Rosalie had assumed a leadership role in federation in the 1950s, many of those who grew up in the Orthodox community now held dual memberships in both the congregations of their youth and in the Reform congregations where they often sent their children for religious education. As Rosalie recalls with a tone more descriptive than her words, "the socializing was not especially close, shall we say. People had their own friends—in both communities." Ruth also recognizes the problems she witnessed "in Orthodoxy not mixing." Rosalie and her husband, Dr. Joseph Cohen, were the first Orthodox couple she met, and by then, Ruth was a young woman, and Joe had become a family friend and her brother's physician. It was easier for Orthodox Jews, like Joe Cohen, who were well-respected for their professional affiliation, to gain acceptance among the Reform Jewish elite than it was for non-professionals.

Ruth remarked that while non-Jews dominated her father's legal practice, he also had many Orthodox clients. As Ruth puts it, "when one Orthodox Jew comes to America, he finds somebody . . . [to] trust; that's the first thing." Her father knew a great deal about property and advised his clients on real estate investments in addition to legal matters. "Father called them the 'mechula crowd' because they . . . came over here with nothing" and then prospered from his advice.

The youngest of four children, Ruth is proud of her family heritage, proud that her paternal family did not have a merchant past. She, too, was deeply influenced by a grandparent, her father's mother, who lived with the family and whose bedroom was next door to Ruth's. Highly acculturated, the family nevertheless

*Ruth Dreyfous in the late
1980s*

maintained an active membership in the prestigious, Classically Reform Temple Sinai, and her first specifically Jewish memory is attending Sabbath services in the old temple with her grandma, who liked to “go every Saturday to temple in the morning, until she couldn’t make the steps” any longer. Afterward, she remained home on Saturday mornings, “in her rocking chair . . . reading the service to herself.” When her grandmother died in 1914, Ruth recalls that the family had a minyan come to the house for prayers, a ritual more traditional than the family normally would have practiced. Her grandmother’s devotion to prayer impressed Ruth, but her devotion to Ruth’s well-being is an especially dear memory, “When I was sick. . . she’d come in and sit by my bed all day. She was wonderful, and. . . she was always home.”

Ruth claims that while her father “never was much of a church-goer,” her own value system was nonetheless shaped by her Jewishness. In recognizing the primacy of education in the panoply of Jewish culture, she claims that “Jews have survived. . .

because education was . . . the most important thing in life, really." All four Dreyfous children obtained advanced degrees—the older three in architecture, law, and psychology. After Ruth's undergraduate degree from Newcomb College, she obtained a master's degree from Columbia University in Child Development. She never married and, from 1938 to 1965, pioneered in child development at her alma mater and the city's finest preparatory school, Isidore Newman,⁴ where she established the first remedial reading program in the city and initiated psychological testing and counseling. Ruth remained active as a volunteer, especially in organizations concerned with civic, racial, and political affairs like the American Civil Liberties Union, the Urban League and the League of Women Voters, which Ruth helped organize locally. Again, she consciously "tried . . . to follow Father in his interest in people and in doing things for them." After leaving Newman, Ruth worked for the local poverty program by initiating Head Start classes in the predominantly black Lower Ninth Ward and in a large public housing project in Algiers. Ruth worked as a professional, but she never took a paycheck home. Her father's sound advice and investments provided the financial security she needed, and she donated her salary to Newman and, later, to Total Community Action, the local program funded during the War Against Poverty era of the Johnson administration.

Although Rosalie's father, Leon Palter, his brothers and brothers-in-law started what became a large moderately-priced furniture business, Palter was more interested in the richness of Jewish learning than in material wealth as an end in itself. The Palters lived on the corner of Baronne and Euterpe Streets, within walking distance of her father's store and, more importantly, a few short blocks from the city's largest Orthodox congregation, Beth Israel. The web of marriages which bound three of her mother's brothers to three sisters enlarged an already sizable family. Each of those three families had seven or eight children, so that "there were innumerable cousins." In the morning they "would troop to [public] school," walking uptown, "girls going to the Magnolia School on the left, and boys going to McDonogh #10

School on the right." In the afternoon, they reversed their route as they headed for Communal Hebrew School, a community-managed, rather than a congregational-based, institution. After World War I, Rosalie's father and a "minyan of householders" brought Ephraim Lisitzky to New Orleans from Milwaukee where he had taught Hebrew to Golda Meir, later prime minister of Israel, by inducing him to head the nascent school in an effort to bring traditional Jewish culture to the Crescent City—a task that attracted few Reform Jews. Lisitzky, Rosalie rhapsodizes, was "one of the important Hebrew poets of that period." He remained in New Orleans forty years. Rosalie's childhood coincided with the adolescent years of political Zionism, heightened by the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 that promised a Jewish homeland in Palestine, years that ushered in a "renaissance" of the Hebrew language as it entered into the modern world of daily discourse after centuries of being reserved as a sacred tongue. Lisitzky's poetry made him a key figure in this reawakening,⁵ although most secularly well-educated Reform Jews in the city knew nothing of his significance—if they were aware of his existence at all.

Unlike most Orthodox Jewish males in the early years of the twentieth century, Rosalie's father took an enlightened view of women's education. Rosalie grew up believing that women were in no way "inferior to men or had less of a responsibility to be educated." She became, first, a Hebrew scholar, star pupil of Communal Hebrew School under Lisitzky's direction, then a journalism and English major at Tulane, and later a Zionist and Jewish communal leader in organizations like Hadassah and the New Orleans Jewish Federation. In 1959, Rosalie became the first woman to be elected president of the federation, a post she held during a prolific three years of intense community institution-building under her persistent guidance. During her presidency, she established a young leadership cadre within federation and worked to build a bridge between Orthodox and Reform contingents to found a Jewish home for the elderly. She never considered the mantle of leadership "remarkable," however, just something "right. . . something that should have happened."

Still facile in her language skills, Rosalie bemoans the present when “over 90 percent of Jews in America have no knowledge of Hebrew.” Many of those “who read it, don’t understand it,” she laments, a sad commentary on “the people of the Book [who] can’t understand the Book in the original, and what they know about Jewish life, they know only in translation.” She feels strongly that “you can’t really understand a culture if you don’t understand the language” and recognizes “the great good fortune of being brought up in a family in which Yiddish was an important language, and which Hebrew. . . was important because it was the language of our people. . . the language of the Torah.” Rosalie credits this firm foundation in enabling her “to understand the Torah as I do. . . understand my Jewish people as I do. . . Judaism as I do.” Even though she rarely has the opportunity to speak in Hebrew in New Orleans, she reads the Torah’s weekly parashah and relishes her Hebrew conversations in Israel. As she says, “I have had the rare opportunity—in a place so far removed from the mainstream of Jewish life as New Orleans is—to have been able to grow up in this environment.” Like Lisitzky, Rosalie was nurtured by the closely-knit Orthodox community that lived, studied, worked and prayed in the Dryades Street area, almost directly across St. Charles Avenue from the Garden District where Ruth lived.

Ruth never attended Hebrew school and learned few Hebrew words in Temple Sinai’s religious school, even in her training for confirmation, a Reform ritual originally designed to replace the more traditional bar mitzvah. Ruth remembers well her confirmation class under Rabbi Max Heller, Sinai’s first liberal and progressive rabbi. Heller was a leading Reform Zionist at the time when most Reform Jews, including most of his congregation, were bitterly opposed to Zionism. Ruth and her parents were among them, and she has never given money to Zionist programs. She insists that while Heller was a good teacher, “I didn’t believe I was learning history; I was learning myths, and we learned things by heart. . . Judaism should be taught as a very living thing, and it wasn’t.” The problem of communicating Jewish culture without complete reliance on the language, rituals, and traditional texts

was a major dilemma of the Reform movement of her generation. Like many secularized Jews, Ruth feels little that binds her to the specific obligations of Jewish belief, although Jewish ethical values have shaped her worldview.

Rosalie's social world was home-centered, and she remembers it as "a wonderful place" where her father used to bring home from the shul "a Jew from any community, any part of the world" who happened to be visiting the city. Her father's welcome and her mother's gracious hospitality brought Rosalie's future husband into her life. While he was a young student from New York attending Tulane Medical School, her father saw him in shul and invited him home for dinner. Because he was fifteen years her senior, Rosalie says that he had to return for several years to give her time to grow up so that they could marry, having "decided early on that I was for him, which I knew nothing about." For Rosalie, the Palter home was particularly radiant on a Shabbat night when friends and family visited. While most of the children played outdoors, Rosalie liked to stay with the adults who brought the various Yiddish newspapers to which they subscribed and short stories by famous Yiddish authors which they read aloud as they sat around the table. She recalls her fascination: "I just drank it all in, and I felt this was a world! This was a world! The secular world outside was a different kind of world, but here I was living in two worlds." Even though she was too young "to fully analyze what was happening," she recognized that "this world had its values and its importance . . . just as important as anything I was going to do or find out there." She had found a literal shield of David to protect her from social affronts as she championed causes on behalf of her people.

Less observant, the Dreyfous family lit no candles on Friday night and ate no traditional Shabbat meal, but Ruth does remember Passover as the one annual occasion when the entire extended family gathered at their home, "and Father would read the services. . . I was the youngest for a long time, and I'd ask the [Four] Questions. . . We had a good time; Father would cut it short, and then we'd have fun singing songs and hiding things. . . I

remember [it] vividly every year. . . a very charming holiday, . . . the one holiday I think of now."

Growing up, Ruth had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. "We didn't start with mostly Jewish friends until adolescence when they started having clubs and parties. [But] as you were growing up, you went to everything." The shift came "about the second or third year of high school. . . [when] you weren't included in their big social things." Ruth's involvement after graduation, mostly in civic affairs beyond the Jewish community, placed her in more contact with non-Jews. Today her closest friends are the few remaining elite Jews with whom she grew up and those, Jewish and gentile, she met through her civic and philanthropic endeavors. Ruth maintains she feels "very loyal to Judaism. . . [although] I don't really practice."

Rosalie, on the other hand, places no emphasis on her social life. "I didn't have too much time for fooling around. I was always involved, and to me, this seemed like a very satisfactory way of life. If I was missing anything, I wasn't aware of it . . . I really had no sense of losses . . . because I was in a rich environment. . . in addition to which, because of Lisitzky's importance, there was a trail of celebrities of the day—the great teachers, the great writers, the important personalities who would come to New Orleans to visit with him. These were all so absorbing! . . . So that you see, my life was so interesting that I wouldn't have wanted anything different from what I had." Throughout her life, Rosalie says, she has gained her "greatest satisfaction" in "the personalities that I was able to meet as a result of the interests that I had."

Ruth, too, feels privileged to have known outstanding personalities, including the many prominent attorneys and jurists in her large and well-connected family, and those she has met through her work and travels. Like Rosalie, Ruth is an active Democrat, and both follow the news with passion, completely devoted to the issues of civic improvement—for Rosalie, mainly the international Jewish community, for Ruth, mainly the local secular community—and social justice which knows no boundaries. Zionism remains the heart and soul of Rosalie's devotion, while Ruth still resists supporting Israel. Both, from their separate

vantage points, are anxious for any sign of Middle Eastern peace. Only issues of health and aging inhibit their involvement.

Even though only those born in New Orleans—or some would say, who are second- or third-generation—can ever claim “insider” status, more than thirty years of living as an active member of the local Jewish community informs my perspective and appreciation of Ruth Dreyfous and Rosalie Cohen. Someone less familiar with the historic tensions in this environment might miss the subtle nuances of their lives which, in defining two divergent traditions, illustrate the strangely bifurcated Jewish community that originally stimulated my interest in southern Jewish history. Because Ruth and Rosalie still champion positions forged in the first decades of the twentieth century, they offer memorable snapshots of intense intra-ethnic tensions that have slowly defused since the 1967 Israeli Six Day War. That watershed event stimulated support of Israel among younger members of the Classical Reform community and led many to embrace more traditional religious observances than their parents did. At the same time, younger members of the Orthodox community have moved into Reform or Conservative congregations. In their lifelong commitments and concerns, Ruth and Rosalie therefore dramatize the unfolding of twentieth-century New Orleans Jewish history as few other women in the community could.

NOTES

¹ Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans* (Waltham, Massachusetts, 1969).

² Bobbie Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860–1929* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1997).

³ The New Orleans Jewish Federation is a much more recent organization. When the WPA compiled an Inventory of the Church and Synagogue Archives of Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1941), researchers noted a Central Council of Jewish Organizations that existed briefly in 1939 and left no records. The Jewish communal organization to which Rosalie refers dates to the pre-World War I era.

⁴ Isidore Newman was a local turn-of-the-century Jewish philanthropist who originally established Isidore Newman Manual Training School as an institution to educate the children

from the nearby Jewish Children's Home, but from the beginning, the school's excellent academic department attracted students from wealthy families, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

5 Born in Minsk in 1885, Ephraim Lisitzky immigrated to the United States after World War I. After living in various northern, Canadian, and midwestern cities, he spent the remainder of his career in New Orleans as an educator and poet. He demonstrated his interest in the culture of his adopted region and sympathy with its oppressed African American population in poetry that celebrated black folk culture and music. Interview with Annette Brown, Lisitzky's daughter, New Orleans, 1993; interview with modern Hebrew literature scholar, Yair Mazor, Madison, Wisconsin, 1998; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 304ñ305.

Glossary

Ashkenazic ~ having to do with the Jews and Judaism associated with central Europe

Ashkenazim ~ Jewish individuals and/or their descendants originating in central Europe

bar mitzvah ~ coming of age ritual for Jewish males traditionally at age 13

bat mitzvah ~ coming of age ritual for Jewish females traditionally at age 13

beth din ~ rabbinical court

bimah ~ platform which serves as the center of services in a synagogue

chesed ~ loving kindness

chevra kadisha ~ "holy brotherhood"; Jewish cemetery society

Haftorah ~ portion of the Prophets read after and in conjunction with the Torah in certain religious services

haskalah ~ Jewish enlightenment

hazan ~ cantor; religious leader leading prayers/chants during religious services

Ladino ~ mixture of Spanish and Hebrew; traditional Sephardic language

landsleit ~ group of people from the same town or area

mamaloschen ~ mother language

mechula ~ bankrupt

mikveh ~ ritual bath

minyan ~ quorum of ten men (now sometimes women) required by tradition to conduct religious services

mitzvot ~ good works or deeds

mohel ~ a person for performs ritual circumcision

parashah ~ portion of the Torah read at the weekly Sabbath service

phylacteries ~ see tefillin

tefillin ~ phylacteries; two small boxes enclosing Jewish prayers attached to forehead and forearm with leather straps in a prescribed manner for certain prayer services

rebbe ~ rabbi

schohet ~ ritual slaughterer; individual who slaughters animals in accordance with kosher ritual and laws

semicha ~ rabbinical ordination

Sephardic ~ having to do with the Jews and Judaism associated with Spain and Portugal

Sephardim ~ Jewish individuals and/or their descendants originating in Spain or Portugal

Shabbat ~ Jewish Sabbath; Friday night to Saturday night at the appearance of the first stars

shiva ~ traditional seven days of mourning after a death; to sit shiva

shtetl ~ small town associated with Jews in central Europe

shul ~ synagogue

Torah ~ Five Books of Moses; first five books of the Bible

tzitzit ~ fringes on a tallith or prayer shawl

yarmulke ~ skull cap

Yiddish ~ mixture of German and Hebrew; traditional Ashkenazic language

Yiddishkeit ~ Yiddish culture

Note on Authors

Bobbie Malone directs the Office of School Services at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin where she produces publications and workshops on Wisconsin history for K-12 classrooms. A former elementary school teacher in New Orleans and East Texas, she holds a Ph.D. in American history from Tulane University, where she specialized in Southern Jewish history. Last year, the University of Alabama Press published her biography, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860-1929*. Malone and Mark K. Bauman co-edited the special fall and winter, 1997 issues of *American Jewish History* that focused on Southern Jewish history. In 1989 as a graduate student, she received the B. H. Levy Essay Award, for the Best Student Paper in Southern Jewish History from the Southern Jewish Historical Society for her study, "New Orleans Uptown Immigrants: The Community of Congregation Gates of Prayer, 1850-1860," later published in *Louisiana History* (Summer, 1991).

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Dr. **Leonard Rogoff** taught at North Carolina Central University as Associate Professor of English and tutored University of North Carolina athletes from Bob McAdoo to James Worthy and Michael Jordan. His essays have appeared in *Jewish-American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, *Contemporary Jewish-American Novelists*, *American Jewish History*, and *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights*. He is completing *Migrations: A Social History of the Durham-Chapel Hill Jewish Community* and serves as research director of an up-coming exhibit, *Migrations: Jewish Settlers of Eastern North Carolina*.

A resident of New York City, **Gertrude L. Samet** was born in Norfolk, Virginia, and resided in the Newport News and Hampton areas until 1976. A member of the Virginia Peninsula Historical Society, her first published work, *Younger Poets*, was an anthology which appeared in 1932 and was dedicated to "The Creators of the Future." She has written a booklet, "Welcome to East End Avenue" and is currently researching her family's history. In 1992 Samet received a "Citation as an Outstanding Citizen" from New York's city council for her volunteer efforts. In 1993 Virginia's Longwood College, where she serves on the board of the Center for the Visual Arts, presented her its "Distinguished Alumni Award for Community Service" in Virginia and New York.

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