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Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel B. Heimovics, *Managing Editor*

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Southern Jewish History

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From the Editor . . .

This volume mixes “traditional scholarship” with two “popular culture” essays. Earlier versions of two of the articles were given as presentations at the society’s 1998 Nashville conference. The authors include graduate students, college professors, and laypeople representing the fields of history, museum work, journalism, and sociology, all but one of whom are women. Further reflecting the vitality of the field and broad interest, two of the authors are from overseas.

In the first article, West Virginia University graduate student Deborah Weiner continues her contributions to the understanding of the experiences of Jews in the coal mining towns of Appalachia. The Jews of Keystone move from businesses associated with a red light district toward greater respectability while simultaneously closely interacting with the black community. Her Jews, as has become normative in the literature, filled critical economic and civic niches.

Sherry Blanton exposes the dedicated efforts of a small group of Jewish women who decide to raise the funds and build a sanctuary in Anniston, Alabama. Her study points to the need for more research in the pivotal role of women in Jewish institutional and communal life.

Revising a section of his Cambridge University doctoral dissertation, Clive Webb explores the intricate interaction between Jews and African Americans during an era of both rising anti-Semitism and racism.

With the United States as the receiving country, it has been easy and natural for Americans to think of emigration as a positive step for those who came from less desirable environments. Anny Bloch offers a new perspective in her study of Jews who

migrated to the Mississippi delta area from Alsace and Lorraine. Bloch makes the reader more aware that leaving one's homeland was, to some extent, an act of infidelity, although, when one's region changed hands from one country to another, departure can also be viewed as an act of fidelity.

Stacy Harris is deeply involved with the Nashville country music scene as a journalist. She organized and chaired a very successful session featuring participants at the society's 1998 Nashville conference. Her article documents the early and continuous activities of Jews in the genre, and the prejudices many of these individuals have faced.

Marcie Cohen Ferris uses southern Jewish "foodways" to provide insight into culture in an article reminiscent of anthropological studies. Ferris' women, like Blanton's, carve out a world of their own in which they maintain and redefine tradition and identity even as they interface with men.

Given a strenuous peer review process, only about one half of the articles submitted for consideration were accepted for publication. Besides the members of the editorial board, Cheryl Greenberg, Mark Greenberg, Melissa Faye Greene, Rachel Heimovics, Peter Hicks, Catherine C. Kahn, Deborah Lipstadt, Eric Mazur, Judith S. Neulander, Bryan Stone, Deborah Weiner, and Hollace Weiner are to be thanked for their substantial contributions as reviewers to the success of this journal. Several members of the editorial board are completing the second of their initial two year terms. The hard work, dedication, and good advice of Sol Breibart, Micah Greenstein, Patricia LaPointe, Jason Silverman, and Saul Viener have been greatly appreciated.

Only one error in accuracy concerning Volume 1 was brought to this editor's attention. Alas the error was my own! In this column I indicated that Bryan Stone had received the Southern Jewish Historical Society's Student Essay Award for his article which appeared in the volume. In fact, Michael Safra was the recipient of the 1997 prize for a fine article on Atlanta Jewish history. I hope both individuals will accept my apology.

Mark K. Bauman
Atlanta Metropolitan College

The Jews of Keystone: Life in a Multicultural Boomtown

by

Deborah R. Weiner

The general outlines of Jewish settlement and economic progress in America are well known. Following the colonial Sephardim, German Jews arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, dispersed throughout the country, started out in petty trade, and soon found varying degrees of success in commerce. East European Jews came around the turn of the twentieth century, concentrated in large northern cities and found opportunity as skilled workers, especially in the garment industry, before achieving economic mobility.¹ Although this overall trend cannot be denied, some historians have objected to the sweeping generalizations often made about American Jewish migration patterns, pointing out that up to 30 percent of immigrants from eastern Europe chose not to settle in major metropolitan areas. The economic history of these eastern European Jews more closely resembles that of the German Jews who preceded them: they started out as peddlers and small traders, and often became successful merchants in small cities and towns throughout America.²

The Russian Jews of the southern West Virginia coalfields certainly fit the peddler-to-merchant paradigm. Yet their story suggests that we need to do more than just allow some eastern Europeans into the German model if we want to fully capture the complexity of the American Jewish immigrant experience. The Keystone, West Virginia, Jewish community thrived from the

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1890s to the 1930s. Its first settlers did indeed come as peddlers, but they were fully prepared to take advantage of all the opportunities that Keystone provided. Although for some this meant opening small shops that later grew into department stores, for others it meant a somewhat less conventional course. The Keystone environment intertwined with the immigrants' old country background enabling Jews to create a considerably diverse ethnic economic niche. The town's distinctive socioeconomic development, in turn, shaped their relations with non-Jews and also influenced the development of Jewish communal life.

At first glance Keystone and its Jewish community present a seeming incongruity. Perhaps former resident Louis Zaltzman, son of Russian Jewish immigrants, who moved there with his parents in 1896 at the age of four, expressed this best when he recalled, "The community there was small and rough, no electric lights or water supply, dirt and unpaved streets and roads, and very little law. It was a frontier town with fourteen saloons and about fifteen Jewish families." It also was home to B'nai Israel, the first Jewish congregation in southern West Virginia, whose members built a strictly Orthodox synagogue in 1904 complete with a mikveh and balcony seating for women.³ But there was no incompatibility between the raucous boomtown and the group of pious Jews. As Zaltzman neglected to mention, many of the congregants made their living as saloon keepers. Jewish immigrants and their children were perfectly at home in Keystone as merchants and mechanics, as purveyors of liquor and vaudeville, as landlords and landladies, as politicians, policemen, and pool sharks, as bankers and volunteer fire fighters, and as respectable leading citizens of this less-than-respectable town.⁴

The creation of Keystone as a turn-of-the-century boomtown can be traced to two factors: the topography of southern West Virginia and the sudden development of its coal industry. Before the 1880s, the steep, mountainous terrain of central Appalachia, which encompasses southern West Virginia, southwestern Virginia, and southeastern Kentucky, had caused transportation networks to bypass most of the region despite its vast coal deposits. With limited access to outside markets, the local economy

revolved around self-sufficient farming by a small, scattered population. Very few merchants and towns were needed to service such an economy. McDowell County, where Keystone is located, had the smallest population in the state in 1880 with only three thousand residents. Ten years later it still lacked incorporated towns.⁵

Around that time, the urgent need for coal to fuel the nation's booming industrialization finally made profitable the expensive and arduous construction of railroad networks through the mountains. As soon as the trains arrived, the coal industry flourished. The coalfields' rapid industrial development was organized and controlled by capitalists from outside the region who acquired the land, built the railroads, and formed subsidiary coal companies or leased the land to coal entrepreneurs. They were supported by the small pre-existing local elite, mostly merchants and some landowners, who lacked the capital to bring about such a transformation themselves. Meanwhile, members of local farm families became the basis for a new coal mining labor force, both voluntarily and involuntarily, as conditions around them changed rapidly.⁶

The local population, however, was too small to satisfy the labor needs of the coal industry. Through recruitment and word-of-mouth, southern and eastern European immigrants poured into the region from northern port cities while African Americans arrived from the South. A disproportionate number of the new arrivals were young, single men. Most of the coal miners and their families (if they had them) moved into hastily constructed camps and villages built by the coal companies. These company towns, devoted to the sole purpose of extracting coal, remained a dominant feature of the landscape for decades.⁷

Yet local industrial growth generated demands for a variety of economic activities and services that could not be met either by company towns or by the few pre-existing villages and merchants. Keystone sprang up as the first independent town in McDowell County to meet these demands. In 1890 the town did not exist; a small hamlet named Cassville occupied its site. In 1892 the Norfolk & Western railroad opened a depot there and the

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Keystone Coal & Coke Company began operations, thus giving the town a new name and an impetus to grow. Within eight years Keystone had a population of slightly over one thousand, fully 10 percent of whom were Jewish.⁸

Jewish immigrants were among the town's very first inhabitants, arriving in 1892 on the same rail line that had just begun to ship the coal out. Most of the earliest Jews came as peddlers from Baltimore at the instigation of one particular wholesale firm, the Baltimore Bargain House, which supplied them with goods on credit. The firm's owner, Jacob Epstein, himself a former peddler, intentionally built his business around itinerants, who expanded markets by venturing into the under-served hinterlands. Epstein evidently recognized the emerging coalfield as a potentially lucrative territory and encouraged some of these men to try their luck along the new railroad line. When the peddlers found promising towns to settle in, they opened up businesses and sent for their families. In the 1890s Keystone was the most promising of all the towns along the N&W railroad, and by 1900 it had a young and growing Jewish community of fifty-four adults and fifty-six children in twenty-five households. According to the 1900 census, all but five of the adults were immigrants: forty-three from Russia, four from Austria-Hungary, and only two from Germany.⁹

The timing of Keystone's birth with the arrival of Russian Jews in America accounts for the East European character of the town's Jewish population; the young town offered ample opportunities for young and adventurous immigrants. Yet it is not entirely clear why these Russian Jews ventured beyond the eastern port cities while the vast majority of their fellow immigrants remained in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. In interviews, descendants of coalfield Jews report that their parents and grandparents sought opportunities for self-employment that were not as available in large cities. Historian Ewa Morawska has suggested that Russian Jews who migrated to smaller towns were more likely to have a background in rural petty trade than the majority, who originated in the increasingly urban and industrial cities and towns of the Jewish Pale. Preliminary research into the old-country origins of coalfield Jews tends to support this thesis;

of the 110 immigrants whose birthplaces have been ascertained, 50 percent came from towns with populations less than ten thousand while another 20 percent came from towns apparently so small that their populations are not listed in standard sources.¹⁰

In any case, once the first Jewish immigrants established themselves in the coalfields, they encouraged relatives to join them, causing a chain migration that allowed Jewish communities like the one in Keystone to arise. Whether an early peddler or a later clerk in a coalfield store owned by an already-established relative, Jews arrived with connections to ethnic-based networks that facilitated their entry into commerce although most started out with little or no capital. With the notable exception of immigrants from the Middle East, who also arrived as peddlers and filled a similar retail niche in the coalfield economy, this economic role set Jews apart from other immigrants to the region, who promptly entered the mines.¹¹

While their cultural background and networks launched Jews into commercial pursuits, it was the particular nature of Keystone that determined what kind of commerce they would pursue. As the first local hub in an area overflowing with young, single, male workers, Keystone immediately assumed the characteristics of a wide-open town. A West Virginia attorney general and other observers have contended that the local power structure, composed of the area's coal operators, enforced this outcome in order to attract and retain labor which was often in short supply. While other local towns and hamlets had their share of unruly activities, Keystone became especially notorious, known far and wide as the "Sodom and Gomorrah" of the coalfields. Its red-light district, Cinder Bottom, was referred to as "a revelation of human depravity." Take away the hyperbole of the moralistic commentary of the time, and what is left is a rowdy, often unrestrained boomtown where drinking, gambling, prostitution, and other forms of "commercial exploitation of human weakness" played a significant role in the economy.¹²

Not that such exploitation was the town's only function. As a commercial center, Keystone supplied all kinds of retail services. Merchants, a few coal mining officials, and a small

professional cohort provided civic leadership and acted as typical small town boosters, promoting downtown and residential development, infrastructure improvements, and public services. The bulk of the population consisted of coal miners, railroad workers, and their families. Even the town's most vociferous critics took pains to point out that decent people lived there, although according to a well-circulated anti-Keystone tract written by an anonymous "Virginia lad," "the percent of good ones is mighty low."¹³

The liquor business may not have offered the only retail opportunity in Keystone, but the occupational history of the town's Jewish entrepreneurs suggests that it was probably the earliest. Half of the ten Jewish business owners listed in an 1898 Keystone business directory operated saloons. Jews operated five out of the seventeen saloons listed, while saloons constituted 40 percent of all businesses in Keystone, according to the directory. With their involvement in the liquor trade, Keystone Jews participated in a customary Jewish occupation that extended for centuries into the East European countryside. The limited opportunities available to Jews in the old country, their traditional role as "middleman" between producers and consumers, and Judaism's moderate approach to the use of alcohol – which discouraged over-indulgence but included wine as an integral part of Jewish ritual and celebration – made tavern-keeping and alcohol distribution an important path to economic survival and advancement. The Jews of Keystone were hardly unique in continuing to pursue this trade in America, although little has been written on American Jewish involvement in the liquor industry.¹⁴

However, as Keystone grew, it could sustain more diverse enterprises, and both Jewish and non-Jewish merchants moved with the demand. The percentage of Jews engaged in the liquor business decreased steadily after 1898, as did the ratio of saloons to other commercial ventures in town. A telling statistic is the advancement of retail clothing. In 1898 Jews owned all three clothing establishments; in 1904 they owned all eight. They evidently had the wholesale connections and previous experience to

establish a monopoly in this area once the demand appeared, and by 1904 more Jews owned clothing stores than any other type of business.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Jewish enterprise from the 1890s through the 1920s exhibited notable diversity. While clothing and dry goods stores predominated and saloons remained an important source of income until prohibition became law in West Virginia in 1914, Jews worked as butchers, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, tailors, restaurant managers, theater operators, junk dealers, jewelers, and grocers. They were real estate developers, clerks, salesmen, and bartenders. In fact, they did just about everything, except participate in the industry that essentially controlled the local economy: the coal industry. Their almost total lack of involvement in the region's dominant activity reflects how their previously established networks and skills enabled them to forge a special niche in the economy, while the open nature of Keystone allowed Jews to fill a wide variety of different occupations within this niche.¹⁶

This openness extended to Jewish-gentile relations. In a milieu where newcomers from a variety of backgrounds gathered to advance themselves anyway they could, the social scene was fluid. The town conformed to a pattern evident from historical accounts of Jewish communities in places as far flung as Odessa, Russia, and Wichita, Kansas: "fledgling" cities, where entrepreneurial spirit runs high and the social hierarchy is not well-fixed, have been particularly welcoming to Jews. As in such other newly developing areas, the pre-existing commercial sector of the coalfields was quite small and its members needed the new arrivals to achieve the economic development they desperately sought. As one coalfield historian notes, "Longtime residents and newly established families could merge their interests and define an identity as local boosters." Also, Jews were only one of many different ethnic groups who flocked to the coalfields, and historians have noted a worldwide tendency that Jews are more accepted in heterogeneous places where their religion and culture do not provide as stark a contrast to accepted norms. Moreover, the

region soon developed a rigid social structure based on work hierarchies within the coal industry that overshadowed ethnicity and even race.¹⁷

Keystone's position as an integral yet singular part of the coalfield scene caused it both to share and diverge from emerging social patterns. The area's ubiquitous company towns quickly formed into stratified societies with coal company officials living along "Silk Stocking Rows" and coal miners, usually segregated by race and often also by ethnicity, relegated to less desirable locations. In the more economically diverse independent towns where coal companies had less complete control, ethnicity proved to be a less evident marker of social differentiation, and class divisions were not as sharp. Keystone, the most free-wheeling town of all, exhibited the most open social structure, although a broad distinction did exist between its large working class of coal miners and railroad workers and the much smaller yet occupationally varied group of merchants, professionals, lower-level white collar workers, and middle-to-upper level railroad and coal mining employees. The town completely lacked the uppermost level of coalfield society. Wealthy coal operators and the region's most prominent professionals, bankers, and political leaders resided in the millionaire town of Bramwell or in Welch, the nearby county seat.¹⁸

Jews played an active role in Keystone's social life. They developed close friendships with non-Jews, both black and white, who occupied their same socioeconomic position. They participated in fraternal clubs as members and leaders. A small town where everyone knew everyone else, Keystone was "a very close community . . . everybody was quite friendly," remembers one Jewish man who grew up there in the 1910s and 1920s. A non-Jewish woman who married a local Jewish man in the 1930s goes even further, recalling that, "In a little town like Keystone, the Jewish people and the other people loved each other. . . . We didn't think about [religion making people] any different — which we weren't."¹⁹

The fluid social dynamics in Keystone influenced racial interaction as well. Although the era's racial norms prohibited

anything approaching real equality, African Americans found the town relatively open to their advancement. Local black leaders referred to McDowell County as the "Free State of McDowell" and to Keystone as "the mecca of the coalfields." The town supported a small but vital black middle class of business people and professionals. For many decades, its only newspaper was the African American-owned *McDowell Times*, a typical small town newspaper promoting progress and development but also covering issues of national and local interest to African Americans.²⁰

McDowell County had the largest black population in the coalfields by the turn of the century, and Keystone had the largest black population of any town, a fact which added to its dubious reputation among the region's majority white population. Keystone was 40 percent black by 1900 and just over 50 percent by 1910. As a nominally southern town located less than twenty miles from the border with Jim Crow Virginia, Keystone was somewhat segregated residentially and socially, but, its critics charged, not nearly enough. These detractors seemed particularly agitated by the racial mingling that occurred in the brothels of Cinder Bottom, where white and black prostitutes served a mixed clientele. The town's critics probably overemphasized the degree of racial interaction in Keystone, since social life was for the most part racially segregated. Although whites and blacks maintained individual friendships, fraternal clubs were organized along racial lines and society columns show little evidence of black-white socializing. According to one former resident, the two races did not mix socially, but got along well nevertheless.²¹

As throughout the South, Jewish-black contact in Keystone could be found primarily in the economic realm. Historians of southern Jewry have described the close economic relationship that developed between Jews and African Americans in the post-Civil War era essentially as one of merchant and customer. The New South town of Durham, North Carolina proved an exception, as the rise of an African American middle class made interaction between the two groups more equal. Keystone resembled Durham in that the merchant-customer tie, though important, was not the only type of economic contact between the

two groups. Lacking a professional class of their own, Jews sometimes used African American attorneys for legal matters and were occasionally treated by black doctors. Jewish business people also worked with or contended against their African American counterparts in real estate and other transactions.²²

Articles in the *McDowell Times* indicate that Jews and blacks maintained generally good relations, although it should be noted that advertising revenue from Jewish merchants may have influenced the paper's coverage. A 1918 article praising leading Jewish businessman Wolf Bank stressed that there was "no discrimination between the races" at his café. Readers were urged to attend Israel Totz's theater because "Mr. Totz has on many occasions proven his friendship" to blacks. "Congenial" theater owner Louis Shore was hailed as "public spirited" after he invited a local black church to hold services in his theater free of charge until the church could rebuild after a disaster. Shore's Colonial Theater ads made a special pitch for black customers, telling readers that "poor, black or white, they treat you right," while one of Totz's Grand Theater ads in 1916 proclaimed that the pictures shown "do not tend to incite race hatred." The latter no doubt referred to the recently-released racist film *Birth of a Nation*, which sparked often-successful banning campaigns by African American groups throughout the state. Totz promised "courteous and impartial attention" at his theater, pointing out that "one man's money goes as far as the other."²³

Either intentionally or unintentionally, Totz's observation may have played on stereotypes of Jews that prevailed in the coalfields among non-Jews of both races. Jews were seen as overly interested in money, although this was not always viewed negatively. In discussing the impact of impending prohibition on the town's numerous multi-racial and multi-ethnic saloon owners, the *Times* singled out two Jews, snickering that "Hyman's and Hermanson's faces will look haggard and worn as if they had lost the last relative on earth." A glowing obituary of leading Jewish merchant Joseph Lopinsky of Welch proclaimed that "in the presence of his sunny generous disposition one forgot that he was a Jew." The newspaper often chided Jewish merchants for internal "jeal-

ousies" that got in the way of the town's economic interests, while the white-owned Welch newspaper was not averse to printing ethnic jokes targeted at Jews, blacks, Irish, and Italians. In the multicultural coalfields, every group received its share of derision. However, both newspapers were just as likely to praise Jewish merchants as self-made men who succeeded through their diligence and perspicacity.²⁴

Jews and blacks comprised enough of the population to be a force in Keystone's political life. They participated in the leadership of the local Republican Party, which dominated the county's political scene, and held elected and appointed offices. In fact, in 1912 the five-member Keystone City Council contained two Jews and two blacks. This rather remarkable configuration shows that Jews and blacks could translate their numbers into a certain amount of political strength. However, local newspapers reveal little of substantive political controversy, making it difficult to assess the actual influence of the two groups. They undoubtedly had an impact on issues of race and ethnicity, contributing to an atmosphere of tolerance that made Keystone unusual for its time. In addition, prohibition seems to have garnered little support in the "Free State of McDowell" despite making inroads in other parts of the region. Even towns such as nearby Pocahontas, Virginia, which also had a flourishing liquor trade, saw temperance marches and efforts to shut down its "vice" district. Nationally, Jews and blacks showed little enthusiasm for prohibition and some Jews had in fact voiced opposition; perhaps the participation of both groups in civic life impeded the movement locally. When it came to economic issues, however, the reigning coal elite of McDowell County did an excellent job of enforcing consensus; members of the middle and upper classes, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion, seemed firmly convinced that whatever was good for the coal industry was good for them. Moreover the county did not experience the labor unrest of nearby coal counties despite similar abuses.²⁵

Jews were involved in all aspects of the town's civic and municipal development. Merchant Charles Budnick was instrumental in starting the town's bank and master mechanic

Max Ofsa built the water tower. Jews and blacks helped to fight the chronic fires that were the bane of the town's existence; butcher Simon Ofsa served at least one term as fire marshal. Merchant S. L. Hermanson served on the police force and Isadore Katzen became a county prohibition officer whose exploits were eagerly chronicled in both the *Keystone* and *Welch* newspapers. Ironically, yet fittingly, Katzen had formerly worked for a liquor dealer.²⁶

Fittingly, because *Keystone's* respectable and less respectable sides existed in a symbiosis that often made it hard to differentiate the two. Leading Jews and non-Jews of both races engaged in the activities that made the town infamous. Between 1905 and 1909 at least two prominent Jewish merchants and real estate owners were convicted of renting buildings to women who ran "houses of ill fame." One of these men was cited on at least two separate occasions. The other, one of the town's wealthiest citizens, rented to a woman who ran "the cleanest and best-conducted house" in town according to the "Virginia lad," who noted, "This house is well patronized and I saw here merchants, clerks, railroad men and a few foreigners." The two landlords were fined twenty-five dollars for each occurrence. Jewish saloon owners frequently appeared in court to plead guilty to charges of selling liquor on Sunday or selling liquor to minors. Apparently court fines were considered part of the cost of doing business in *Keystone*. Sometimes the costs could be considerably higher: in 1901 Jewish saloon owner William Henry was shot in the leg while trying to eject an unruly coal miner from his establishment. The out-of-town newspaper reporting this incident characterized it as an example of *Keystone's* "usual payday pleasantries." Israel Totz kept a gun behind his saloon counter for just such emergencies.²⁷

It was common knowledge that the local brothels did not cater only to coal miners. A scandalous trial in 1915 involving an under-age black prostitute threatened to expose leading Jewish and non-Jewish white businessmen as clients of one well-connected African American madam. However, the only white patrons hauled in to testify were a Jewish bartender and a gentile coal company bookkeeper, and only blacks were convicted, in-

cluding the madam. The fact that the bartender stayed in town and later became a prominent coalfield pharmacist may say something about the forgiving climate of Keystone and its Jewish community.²⁸

That community was close-knit and active. Although Jews were full participants in the Keystone social scene, much of their social life revolved around their own communal activities. These activities were covered with approving interest by both the Keystone and Welch newspapers, which often informed readers when the Jews of the region were celebrating religious holidays. In 1911, for example, the Welch newspaper noted that Keystone's "Manhattan Social Club has announced its annual Purim Ball," and "all who attend are assured a most enjoyable time" at "the biggest dance of the year." The paper later reported that the event was "a decided success," with the spacious hall "crowded to the limit." Although the crowd was predominantly Jewish, some non-Jews also attended.²⁹

The existence of a "Manhattan Social Club" suggests a Jewish community that did not consider itself remote from the larger body of American Jewry. In fact, despite Keystone's location deep in the mountains of central Appalachia, the Jews who lived there were not isolated. The railroad carried them to and from Baltimore, where many had relatives and often stayed for extended periods, and it also brought their city relatives to the mountains to visit. Their businesses necessitated regular buying trips to New York, Baltimore, and Cincinnati. Some residents subscribed to Jewish publications. Through such means they retained their connection to the larger Jewish community, which undoubtedly helped them maintain a strong identity as Jews.³⁰

Not that they were in any danger of losing that identity, at least in the first generation. Paradoxically, rather than promoting assimilation, Keystone's wide open environment seemed to allow its Jewish immigrants to remain unselfconsciously Jewish. Their behavior does not match the descriptions of such noted chroniclers of small town Jewish life as Eli Evans in the South and Ewa Morawska in the North, who emphasize how small, insecure Jewish communities attempted to

fit into their surroundings by trying not to be too conspicuous. The Keystone synagogue, located along the main thoroughfare, was a highly visible statement of a Jewish presence (City Hall was later built next door). Jews conducted their business affairs in a mixture of Yiddish and English, suggesting that they were not in too much of a hurry to shed their old country ways.³¹

Although close-knit, the Jewish community was quite contentious and its members had no qualms about bringing their internal conflicts to the local courts. Mostly these cases involved business disputes, although other types of "dirty linen" were also aired, as when Sam Katzen sued Jake Shore for slander for spreading rumors that he was having an affair with Bessie Zaltzman, a married woman. Katzen eventually dropped the suit and paid all court costs, suggesting that the rumor had some truth behind it. Bessie Zaltzman subsequently divorced her apparently shiftless husband. She then carried on lengthy and heated court battles against her enemies, mostly members of the Totz and Shore families, in defense of her various real estate interests. Jews and non-Jews also tangled in the courts on a fairly regular basis, usually over business matters such as title disputes and debt payments.³²

Despite internal squabbles, three interwoven factors forged Jewish group cohesion: economic links, kinship, and religion. Since the founding of the community, established members provided jobs, loans, and other support to relatives or other Jews who had recently arrived. Many of the families were related by blood or marriage either before their arrival in the coalfields or after the first generation of children began to find mates within their own religious group. Weddings offered major opportunities for religious and communal celebration, with out-of-town Jewish guests from other parts of the coalfields and from Baltimore providing a larger Jewish collective presence. Such affairs were eagerly reported in the Welch newspaper, which commented on one occasion that "the impressiveness and solemnity of the Hebrew . . . ceremony was quite pretty."³³

Keystone Jews persevered in maintaining the rituals of traditional Judaism under difficult conditions. In the 1890s the then-small group rented a hall for the high holidays and merchant Kopel Hyman, a rabbi, led services. By 1904, when the synagogue was built, the community had grown large enough to hire a full-time rabbi. Although not everyone in the immigrant generation followed traditional practices, all actively supported the synagogue. Many families kept kosher at least through the 1930s. According to one man who grew up in the adjoining town of Northfork, "The rabbi was also a shochet and he would come around and take orders for meat during the week. He would kill chickens." The Northfork native also recalls that the Northfork Jewish contingent refused to ride the train on the high holidays, and would walk on the railroad tracks for one mile to the Keystone synagogue dressed in their holiday best. The women would wear sensible shoes for the trek, carrying their fancier shoes with them (a less-than-satisfactory solution on Yom Kippur, since Jewish law forbids carrying as well as train-riding).³⁴

Keystone's synagogue remained Orthodox throughout its existence and supported a full-time rabbi until around 1940, unlike other coalfield congregations, which gradually moved toward Reform Judaism and often relied on student rabbis from Hebrew Union College. Nonetheless the congregation's determination to maintain a traditional Jewish society in the midst of the Appalachian mountains was doomed to failure. For one thing, the younger generation began to fall away. One man who grew up in Keystone recalls that the synagogue was "too Orthodox for me" and he eventually stopped attending. Internal strains became evident in the 1920s, when some of the young people began to marry outside of the faith.³⁵

Despite the ease with which they had integrated into their surroundings, Keystone's Jewish immigrants found assimilation and intermarriage in the younger generation just as hard to accept as other first-generation American Jews. The first child in the Ofsa family to marry a Christian (around 1920) found herself banned from the family for some time, although younger siblings who followed in her footsteps did not have to undergo that ordeal. In

her will, Bessie Zaltzman left only a small monthly sum to her disaffiliated son Abe and donated the money he would have received to national Jewish charities. However, she instructed her other son Louis to make sure that Abe never lacked “the necessities of life” and to set up a kaddish fund so that Abe would be properly mourned after he died. The Orthodox Keystone congregation had no mechanism for accepting interfaith couples into their religious community, and it appears that most intermarriages resulted in the Jewish partner leaving the religion.³⁶

Yet it was the decline of Keystone itself that spelled the demise of its Jewish community. One basic fact about boomtowns is that they often go bust, and although Keystone never became a ghost town like those in the fabled West, it lost its original spark after the state prohibition law went into effect in July 1914. The following year, the *McDowell Times* reported that property values had deteriorated by half. Some saloon owners stayed in town and went into other, often less profitable, lines of business. Others moved their saloons and their homes across the state line to Pocahontas, Virginia. (Unfortunately for them, Virginia enacted prohibition less than two years later.) Although Keystone’s red-light district survived in somewhat reduced form, the decrease in activity had a ripple effect on the town’s economy. The Keystone Jewish population in 1910 reached a recorded peak of 147 and probably continued to rise for the next few years; by 1920 the number was halved to seventy-two while the town’s overall population dropped from two thousand to eighteen hundred. The Great Depression of the 1930s struck the coalfields hard, and Keystone did not rebound as well as other coalfield towns in the following decade.³⁷

However, most of the Jews who grew up in Keystone between 1900 and 1915 did not go very far away. Several moved to neighboring Northfork where they established their own families, and Jews in the two towns sustained the congregation into the 1940s. The synagogue building was finally sold to a church in 1952, when only two Jewish families remained in Keystone. Many other Keystone children grew up to become the founders and mainstays of Jewish communities in four nearby county seat

towns, which took over as leading coalfield centers. Eventually, the transformation of the coal economy in the 1950s led to the decline of these communities as well.³⁸

Since the advent of the “new social history,” immigration historians have observed that immigrants’ pre-migration skills and resources substantially determined their economic progress in America besides shaping their social and cultural adaptation. This has led scholars to emphasize the continuities between the old country and the new. Certainly Keystone differed dramatically from the shtetls of eastern Europe. However, this small town in the Appalachian mountains provided an environment where Jews could fill many of the same roles as in the Jewish Pale, not only as merchants, but as tavern keepers and artisans. The broad retail and service niche carved out by Jews outside of the region’s primary economic activity bears a striking resemblance to the Jews’ centuries-old niche in rural and semi-rural eastern Europe, where they also performed a wide variety of functions for an agricultural economy in which they had little direct involvement. But whereas the marginal nature of Jewish enterprise in eastern Europe contributed to their status as outsiders, the boomtown environment of Keystone created a fluid social structure that allowed the Jewish community inside, even though their religion and lack of involvement in the coal industry separated Jews from the majority of Keystone’s inhabitants.³⁹

Scholars in the field of Appalachian studies now question whether Appalachia was ever really a distinct region in social and cultural terms. Similarly, historian Mark Bauman questions how important “region” has been to the American Jewish experience. He suggests that other factors may be more pertinent, such as structural aspects of the particular local environment, background of the Jewish population, and demography. This study provides further reason to question assumptions about region and the ethnic experience. Keystone was hardly “typical” of the Appalachian South, much less the South as a whole. In many ways, it had more in common with boomtowns elsewhere in the world than with its immediate surroundings. Yet it served an important function in the industrialization of the region and therefore needs

to be seen as an integral part of the history of the Appalachian coalfields as well as the New South. Similarly, the Jews of Keystone do not quite match the prototype of the respectable small-town Jewish merchant. In some ways, their experience more closely suggests the rough-and-tumble life of New York's Lower East Side, where Jews often engaged in less-than-kosher activities to ensure their economic survival.⁴⁰

If neither Keystone nor its Jewish population seem to fit standard depictions of Appalachia or of American Jews, they seem to have fit each other very well. Although apocryphal, this story has the ring of truth: when Jake Shore stood before the judge at his citizenship hearing, he was asked, "in the event of war between Russia and America, which side would you fight for?" He did not hesitate to declare: "Keystone!"

NOTES

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¹ The standard histories on American Jewry all describe this pattern. For an example see the five-volume *The Jewish People in America*, edited by Henry Feingold (Baltimore, 1992). A short section of this excellent survey, however, does briefly note the existence of East European Jewish communities in smaller American cities and towns; see volume 3, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880–1920*, by Gerald Sorin, 153–169.

² Joel Perlmann points out the limitations of generalizing about Russian Jewish immigrants in "Beyond New York: The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I., and Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900–1915," *American Jewish History* 72 (March 1983): 384–394. Southern and western Jewish historians have been among the leaders in recounting the experience of smaller and non-metropolitan East European Jewish communities in America. See for example Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845–1915* (Philadelphia, 1978); Louis Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a

Lost Generation': Jewish Religious Life in a Rural Southern Town, 1900–1940," in *Cultural Perspectives on the American South*, 5, ed., Charles Reagan Wilson (New York, 1991); Leonard Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North

Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81; Hal Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon': Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865-1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83-104; Norton Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* (October 1982): 48-78; *Idem*, "The Major Role of Polish Jews in the Pioneer West," *Ibid.* (July 1976): 326-344. However, as Lee Shai Weissbach observes, much writing on southern Jewish history has focused on German Jews, thus obscuring the impact and experience of East European Jewish immigrants. See his "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262. Perhaps the most detailed study to date of East European Jews in small town America has been Ewa Morawska's *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton, 1996).

³ Louis Zaltzman letter, in Abraham Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia, 1963), 986; Milt Koslow, interview conducted by Deborah Weiner, Charleston, WV, May 13, 1998; Nancy Brant, phone interview conducted by Deborah Weiner, October 6, 1998.

⁴ Gail Bank phone interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, October 4, 1998; *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1898-1899, 1900-01, 1904-05, 1914-15* (Pittsburgh, 1898-1914); McDowell County, WV, Manuscript Census, 1900, 1910, 1920; *McDowell Times*, Keystone, WV, 1913-1918.

⁵ Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, 1982); Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight Billings, and Altina Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1995); *West Virginia Blue Book* (Charleston, WV, 1928).

⁶ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Pudup, Billings, and Waller, *Appalachia in the Making*. The acquisition of land by large holding companies was the first stage in the region's industrial development. These companies often used deceit, tricky legal maneuverings, and even force to wrest control of the land away from the local population. Deprived of an agricultural livelihood, many mountaineers had little choice but to enter the coal mines as part of the new industrial workforce. Eller provides a thorough description of this process.

⁷ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Mack Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field of Southern West Virginia, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972). Census figures indicate that Italians and Hungarians constituted the largest immigrant groups in the southern West Virginia coalfields, with Poles and other Slavic groups following. The vast majority of workers from these groups were coal miners, with a smattering of artisans and tradespeople. Manuscript Census, McDowell, Fayette, Logan, Mingo, and Raleigh counties, 1900, 1910, 1920.

⁸ Mary Beth Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 270-296; Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements"; Matthew S. Serel, "A Brief History of Keystone, West Virginia," 1988 (unpublished paper, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV); Mrs. Samuel Solins and Mrs. Paul W. Jones,

McDowell County History (Fort Worth, 1959); Manuscript Census, McDowell County, 1900.

The small city of Bluefield, West Virginia, located on the edge of the coalfield some twenty-five miles from Keystone, served as the region's primary economic center, while Keystone developed as the first sub-center within McDowell County's Elkhorn Valley, the heart of coal-mining territory. The first boomtown in the coalfields was actually across the state line in Pocahontas, Virginia. The railroad had reached Pocahontas in 1883, and Jewish merchants and saloon owners were also among the first citizens of this town, which like Keystone had a reputation for wildness. See Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia* (Lynchburg, VA, 1983).

⁹ Shinedling, *West Virginia History*, 986; Rose Marino, *Welch and Its People* (Marceline, MO, 1985), 40; Lester S. Levy, *Jacob Epstein* (Baltimore, 1978), 15–17; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900. Descendants of at least five Jewish immigrant peddlers to the coalfields recall their father's or grandfather's involvement with the Baltimore Bargain House. Ken Bank interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, Baltimore, November 6, 1998; Manuel Pickus interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, Charleston, WV, May 18, 1998; Sylvan Bank phone interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, March 4, 1998; Betty Gottlieb, interview conducted by Deborah Weiner, Parkersburg, WV, December 18, 1997; Gail Bank interview.

¹⁰ Bernard Gottlieb interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, Clarksburg, WV, November 5, 1996; Sam Weiner interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, Logan, WV, November 8, 1996; Jean Abrams Wein interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, Beckley, WV, October 13, 1996. Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 32, 36–37. To determine the origins of Jewish immigrants to the coalfields the following sources were used: Declaration of Intention and Petition for Naturalization records, McDowell, Fayette, Logan, Mingo, and Raleigh counties; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York, 1972); Nancy and Stuart Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities* (New York, 1991); Chester Cohen, *Shtetl Finder Gazetteer: Jewish Communities in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bowie, MD, 1989); *Rand McNally Indexed Atlas of the World* (Chicago, 1905).

¹¹ Interviews, manuscript census rolls, congregational records, and local histories confirm that chain migration was a key factor in the growth of Jewish coalfield communities. These sources also show the numerous economic interrelationships that existed within these communities. Information on Middle Eastern immigrants was derived from the census, where they are listed variously as "Syrian," "Assyrian," and "Turk-Asian." Manuscript Census, McDowell, Fayette, Logan, Mingo, and Raleigh counties, 1900, 1910, 1920.

¹² Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia* (Morgantown, WV, 1969); Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day, or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia* (n.p., 1912) (first quote, n.p.); Jean Battlo, "Cinder Bottom: A Coalfields Red-Light District," *Goldenseal* 20 (Summer 1994): 60–65 (second quote, 60).

¹³ *McDowell Times*, 1913–1918; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900, 1910, 1920; Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*.

¹⁴ *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1898–1899*; Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism: Poland and Its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, 1991), 9–12, 67–69, 140–152; Hannah Sprecher, "Let Them Drink and Forget Our Poverty: Orthodox Rabbis' Reactions to Prohibition," *American Jewish Archives* 43 (1991): 135–179; Mark Bauman, "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: The German Jews from the Civil

War

through the Progressive Era," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82 (Fall 1998): 533–558.

¹⁵ *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1898–1899, 1900–01, 1904–05, 1914–15*. For a more detailed analysis of the economic role of Jews in the region, see Deborah R. Weiner, "Middlemen of the Coalfields: The Role of Jews in the Economy of Southern West Virginia Coal Towns, 1890–1950," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 4 (Spring 1998): 29–56.

¹⁶ Once established as prosperous merchants, a handful of Jews did become passive investors in the coal industry, and one or two even launched small coal mining operations. However, they were not notably successful; most appeared to have lost money on these ventures. As one descendant put it, "They didn't know what they were doing." *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1898–1899, 1900–01, 1904–05, 1914–15*; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900, 1910, 1920; *McDowell Times*, 1913–1918; Gail Bank interview; Sylvan Bank interview; Ken Bank interview; McDowell County Deed Book 76, p. 41, and Deed Book 77, p. 271, McDowell County Courthouse, Welch, WV.

¹⁷ Rothman, "Same Horse, New Wagon," 87; Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford, CA, 1985); Robert E. Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York, 1978); Earl Pomeroy, "On Becoming a Westerner," in *Jews of the American West*, ed., Moses Rischin and John Livingston (Detroit, 1991), 194–212; Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," 292 (quote). Gershon David Hundert notes that Poland's historical heterogeneity was a major factor enabling its Jewish community to thrive for centuries. See "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland," in *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin*, ed., Antony Polonsky (Washington, DC, 1993), 20–23. David Corbin discusses how class conflict in the coalfields submerged racial and ethnic divisions in *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880–1922* (Urbana, 1981).

¹⁸ Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements," 39–40; Charles Kenneth Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia* (New York, 1989); Martha Jane Williams Becker, *Bramwell: Diary of a Millionaire Town* (Chapmanville, WV, 1988); *McDowell Recorder*, Welch, WV, 1911–1922.

¹⁹ Milt Koslow interview; *McDowell Recorder*, 1911–1922; Marino, *Welch and its People*, 75; Ken Bank interview; Mary Marsh Ofsa phone interview, conducted by Deborah Weiner, March 26, 1999.

²⁰ Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915–1932* (Urbana, 1990); *McDowell Times*, 1913–1918.

²¹ McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900, 1910; Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*; Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*; *McDowell Times*, 1913–1918; *McDowell Recorder*, 1911–1922; Mary Ofsa interview.

²² Steven Hertzberg, "Southern Jews and Their Encounter with Blacks: Atlanta, 1850–1915," *Atlanta Historical Society Journal* (Fall 1979): 7–24; Louis Schmier, "'For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do Enough': A Jewish Peddler and His Black Customers Look at Each Other," *American Jewish History* 73 (1983): 40–56; Leonard Rogoff, "Divided Together: Jews and African Americans in Durham, North Carolina," in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed., Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tus-

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caloosa, 1997), 190–212; Milt Koslow interview; McDowell County Circuit Court and Criminal Court records, 1909, McDowell County Courthouse.

²³ *McDowell Times*, September 27, 1918; November 24, 1916; July 7, 1916; February 9,

1917; May 12, 1916.

²⁴ *McDowell Times*, May 15, 1914, January 23, 1914, August 25 1916; *McDowell Recorder*, January 3, 1913, March 3, 1916.

²⁵ *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1916–1934; Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*; cornerstone, Keystone City Hall; *McDowell Times*, 1913–1918; *McDowell Recorder*, 1911–1922; Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia*, 71, 76. On Jewish attitudes toward prohibition, see Sprecher, “Let Them Drink and Forget Our Poverty” and Bauman, “Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta.” On how the hegemony of the coal industry prevented substantive political issues from being addressed locally in central Appalachia, see John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana, 1980).

²⁶ Gail Bank interview; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 25, 75; *McDowell Times*, March 6, 1914; *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1920. The *McDowell Times* reported on Keystone fires in the following issues: September 26, 1913; June 26, 1914; December 31, 1915; July 21, 1916; December 8, 1916; April 20, 1917; May 4, 1917; January 11, 1918.

²⁷ McDowell County Criminal Court records, 1894–1918, McDowell County Courthouse; Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*; “Pay Day Pleasantries. Two Men Wounded and One in Jail at Keystone,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, February 2, 1901, 4; Nancy Brant interview.

²⁸ “Mamie Flood Is Convicted,” *McDowell Times*, November 26, 1915; State of West Virginia vs. Mamie Flood, 1915, McDowell County Criminal Court records, McDowell County Courthouse; Manuscript Census, McDowell County, 1920; Nancy Brant interview.

²⁹ Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 983–988; *McDowell Recorder*, February 24 and March 7, 1911; *McDowell Recorder*, 1911–1922; *McDowell Times*, 1913–1918.

³⁰ Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 77, 983; Nancy Brant interview. The society columns of the *McDowell Recorder* frequently noted Jewish travel to and from Baltimore and New York for both business and pleasure.

³¹ Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1997); Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; McDowell County Circuit Court records, McDowell County Courthouse. William Toll similarly found that for immigrant Jews in the American West social acceptance facilitated rather than undermined the maintenance of ethnic identity. See “Intermarriage and the Urban West: A Religious Context for Cultural Change,” *Jews of the American West*, 168–189.

³² Katzen vs. Shore, 1902, and Zaltzman vs. Totz, et al., 1909, McDowell County Circuit Court, McDowell County Courthouse; McDowell County Circuit Court Index, McDowell County Courthouse.

³³ McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900, 1910, 1920; Gail Bank interview; “Lipman-Leventhal,” *McDowell Recorder*, January 8, 1915; “Wagner-Totz Wedding Brilliant Affair,” *McDowell Recorder*, April 7, 1922.

³⁴ Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 984; Ken Bank interview; Milt Koslow interview; Mary Ofsa interview.

³⁵ Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 986; Ken Bank interview; Gail Bank interview. For the movement of coalfield congregations from Orthodox to Reform Judaism, see the records of the B'nai El Congregation of Logan, WV, the B'nai Israel Congregation of Williamson, WV, and Temple Emanuel of Welch, WV, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁶ Gail Bank interview; Mary Ofsa interview; McDowell County Will Book 6, 496,

McDowell County Courthouse (quote). Other Jewish congregations in the coalfields did manage to incorporate interfaith couples, and it was not unusual for intermarried gentiles (usually female) to become active participants in the congregation. See Deborah R. Weiner and Maryanne Reed, "Contradiction, Compromise, and Commitment: The Jews of Beckley, West Virginia," *Now & Then* 13 (Winter 1996): 3-6.

³⁷ *McDowell Times*, September 7, 1915, 2; Gail Bank interview; Sylvan Bank interview; *Polk's 1915-1916 Bluefield, W.Va., City Directory* (Pittsburgh, 1915) (includes Pocahontas, VA); Manuscript Census, McDowell County, 1900, 1910, 1920; Ken Bank interview.

³⁸ Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 984; McDowell County, Raleigh County, Mingo County, Logan County Manuscript Census, 1920; Marino, *Welch and its People*; records of the B'nai El Congregation of Logan, WV, the B'nai Israel Congregation of Williamson, WV, and Temple Emanuel of Welch, WV, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH. In the early 1960s Keystone had a Jewish mayor, Julian Budnick (*West Virginia Blue Book*, 1961 to 1963).

³⁹ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN, 1987); Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York, 1977); Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism*; Marc Zborowski and Elisabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York, 1952); Salo Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets* (New York, 1976).

⁴⁰ Pudup, Billings, and Waller, *Appalachia in the Making*; Mark Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style* (Cincinnati, 1996); Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976), 96-101; Robert Rockaway, *But - He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (New York, 1995).

Lives of Quiet Affirmation: The Jewish Women of Early Anniston, Alabama

by

Sherry Blanton

It took one hundred years for Temple Beth-El in Anniston, Alabama, to elect its first female president in 1989. Since the beginning, however, the women of this congregation worked diligently for the preservation of a Jewish way of life and a house of worship. Their initial endeavors were responsible for the very existence of a temple in their community as they actually purchased the lot, constructed the building, and presented it to the congregation debt free. These women, like other nineteenth century wives of Jewish immigrants, shared the tasks of organizing and maintaining Jewish communal life, as the men, no longer willing or able to carry out these efforts alone, adjusted socially and financially to their new circumstances. As historian Louis Schmier wrote, "The women usually were instrumental first in fundraising to purchase a cemetery or to construct a house of worship, and to assume the responsibility of its upkeep." For example, in 1878 the women in Donaldson, Louisiana, gave a "ball and a fair," raising six thousand dollars with "the money promptly being turned over for the building and outfitting of a synagogue." In Texas the women of the Alexandria congregation formed a ladies Hebrew benevolent society and "assisted greatly toward the accomplishment of the building of a temple."¹ In Anniston the monies raised by the women went directly into the treasury of their Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, which then decided how that money would be spent. Anniston's women

apparently did all the planning for the building including raising all the money, appointing the building committee (even dictating to it the terms under which a temple could be built), and, finally, naming the house of worship.²

As did so many others, Jews first settled in Anniston because of the town's early reputation for opportunity and prosperity. Before 1883 Anniston existed as a closed company town built around an iron furnace operation. With the arrival of the railroad, Anniston opened its doors, and newcomers crowded the city.³ Hearing of the rapid growth, Jews also came. Many of these first Jews were merchants, their stores dotting Noble (Main) Street. So many sold clothing that it could be said that they influenced the dress styles of the area's residents. Among the early Jewish residents to settle were Joseph Saks, Leon Ullman, and Anselm Sterne with Ullman and Sterne bringing wives and families.

Possibly Anniston's first Jew and one of its first merchants was Leon Ullman. In 1884 he moved to Anniston from Talladega, Alabama, a small town about thirty-five miles away, where he had been operating a dry goods and clothing store on the Court House Square. His Ullman Brothers carried "a line of general merchandise." Leon's four brothers, August, Abe, Leopold, and Solomon, at one time or another worked in the family's Anniston business. The enterprise, first located in the old Woodstock Commissary building, remained on Noble Street despite several changes of address (and a change of ownership in 1930 when Ullman died) until the 1970s. In a 1924 interview Leon Ullman, considered a "pioneer of the city," stated, "When we came here [to Anniston] there was no other dry goods store in the city. There was one clothing store . . . there was nothing above Tenth Street on Noble (where his store was located) except the Wikle Drug Store, a wooden hotel across the street from us and a mill." *The Anniston Star* thus referred to Ullman, who operated his store for forty-six years, as the "dean of the retail merchants of Anniston." Ullman was also involved in the civic activities as a member of the Exchange Club and the Chamber of Commerce. He served Temple Beth-El faithfully,

too, and was president when the sanctuary was dedicated in 1893.⁴

Another community builder, Joseph Saks, joined Ullman making Anniston his home in 1887. The Saks family, owners of the Saks Fifth Avenue Department Store, had sponsored the journey of Joseph, then ten years old, and his eleven-year old brother Sam to the United States in 1875. The family, cousins to the two brothers, educated them. They sent Sam to Washington to open a store and Joseph, first to Birmingham, and then to Anniston. In 1887 on Noble Street he opened The Famous (One Price Store) carrying men's and boys' clothing exclusively. After one move, when the business became known as Saks Clothing, the store remained on Noble Street until 1930, just three years before Joseph Saks' death. Saks was said to be so widely known that a letter mailed to him from New York City addressed to "Joseph Saks, Alabama" was promptly delivered.⁵ Saks was a prominent Anniston resident with a reputation for civic mindedness and generosity.

Saks also started a town located just outside Anniston. Since Jews of his native Germany were not allowed to purchase land, buying land in America was important to him. Little by little he accumulated 800 acres which Saks rented out to farmers. When they approached him about the need for a school for their children, he spoke with the school superintendent who promised him a teacher if Saks got a school built. Saks donated the land as well as the funds for the building. The parents did the actual construction. Thus the Saks school system got its start with a two room building where the teacher stood in the middle and taught two classes. The complex now includes an elementary, middle, and high school, as well as athletic fields. Joseph Saks later sold the land giving birth to a community called Saks.⁶

Deeply committed to Temple Beth-El, Saks served as president for over thirty years. On Friday afternoons he made the rounds of the Jewish businessmen reminding them that there were services that night.⁷ Known for his civic responsibility, Saks offered two prize ponies to finance a memorial for the soldiers in World War I. He was, furthermore, a 32nd Degree Mason, a

Shriner, a member of the Knights of Pythias, an Elk, and a charter member of the local Red Cross, the Rotary Club, and the Anniston Country Club.⁸ This early affiliation with the country club exemplifies the acceptance this family had in the community and its integration into Christian society. A bachelor when he became a resident here, Saks married Amelia Rice of Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1905. Although not a member in the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society's formative years, she soon became involved in the women's activities, chairing committees including the "shroud committee," euphemistically known later as "the sewing committee."⁹

One year after Saks arrived, Anselm Sterne moved with his wife and children from Albany, Georgia, to Anniston. He had emigrated from Germany to West Point, Georgia, leaving there to serve in the Confederate Army as a member of the West Point Guards. He saw battle, was taken prisoner by the Union Army, and wrote a sketch of his army life. After the war he settled in Albany, becoming a grocer and a prominent citizen of that city. He was an Ordinary for Doughherty County, Georgia, the equivalent of an Alabama probate judge. When a doctor advised Sterne to seek a drier climate for his wife, Henrietta, and seven children, Sterne, at the urging of a former Confederate comrade whom he met while en route to Birmingham, chose Anniston instead.¹⁰ Despite having little formal education, Sterne, like many of his peers in Anniston, became quite successful in his adopted community. He ran a grocery store selling "Fancy groceries, fruits, and confectionaries," until his son Leon bought it from him in 1900.¹¹ Choosing not to serve as president, he acted as a lay reader for the congregation for twenty-five years. In 1900 he was responsible for the hiring of a student from Hebrew Union College for the High Holy Days.¹² A 32nd Degree Mason, Sterne helped start a Masonic Lodge in Anniston. He also participated in the founding of the Pelham Camp of the United Confederate Veterans. His gravestone carries a Confederate insignia bearing testament to his respect for that cause.¹³

Joseph Saks, Anselm Stern, and Leon Ullman, all prosperous Anniston businessmen, were Germanic Jews from the Reform

*Amelia Rice Saks, photographed
for her wedding, April 5, 1905
(Courtesy of Andrew J. Saks)*

tradition who worked as driving forces in Temple Beth-El's formative years and remained involved in the small congregation until their deaths. The influence of these three men and their families was very strong. Saks and Ullman frequently served as officers of the congregation while the three were the regular lay readers for Sabbath services. German Jews like these men had been leaders in the Reform movement which facilitated assimilation into their new communities. The presence of many Reform Jews of importance in the early town and congregation probably left little question as to the worship practices which were to be adopted. Assimilation and acceptance were as important for Anniston's new families as for other newly immigrated Jews into the southern culture. Writing of a Sabbath meal in a southern home at the turn of the century, Eli Evans quotes a family member: "Oh it was memorable. First—and he lifted his hands up—Mama blessed the

lights, and then we settled down to our favorite Friday night meal—crawfish soup, fried chicken, baked ham, hoppin John (black-eyed peas and rice), and sweet potato pie.” Mervyn Sterne, Anselm and Henrietta Sterne’s son, was describing the Friday night at his home.¹⁴ Sterne’s descendants who remained congregants carried on the temple’s Reform practice. Services were in English, and yarmulkes were discouraged.

On April 1, 1888, Anniston’s twenty-four Jews founded a Reform Jewish congregation with the following purposes: “The worship of God in accordance with the usages and customs of our ancient religion; the preservation and perpetuation of the tenets and principles of Judaism, the fostering of communal life and the cementing of the bonds of religious fellowship.”¹⁵

About one month later the congregation purchased plots at Hillside Cemetery (Tenth Street Cemetery) in Anniston to establish what has been referred to as the “Hebrew section” of the cemetery. Since educating their children Jewishly was of great importance, Henrietta Sterne organized a religious school on June 16, 1889. “The school opened with a membership of twenty-eight children: ten in the infant class of Miss Lena Scheslinger, ten in the primary class of Miss Fanny Ascher, and eight in the bible class of Mr. Abe Ullman. The Hebrew teacher was Mr. Zach Katzenstein, the superintendent, Mr. J. Freisleben (from West Point Georgia).” Henrietta Sterne also organized an adult Bible class in September 1893 described by a member in *The American Israelite* as “entertaining, instructive and beneficial.”¹⁶

On December 10, 1890, Anselm and Henrietta Smith Sterne had a meeting at their home for a dozen women of the congregation to discuss the need for a women’s charitable organization in Anniston.¹⁷ Henrietta Sterne was well-prepared for her role as matriarch. From her parents she had extensive experience in initiating religious institutions. The first Jewish services in Albany were held in her home there, and her mother established the first Sabbath School. Henrietta attended Mrs. Wise’s School in New York City. Like her mother, Henrietta also ran the Sabbath School in Albany until 1878 when she turned it over to the congregation while remaining its superintendent.¹⁸ The previous year she

Henrietta Smith Sterne
(*Courtesy of Marx Sterne*)

founded a school, Mrs. A. Sterne's Institute for Young Ladies and Misses, and had classes for two years in her home. When the school outgrew her home she moved it to a bigger building in 1880 where there were classes for kindergarten through college, providing an education for some of Albany's "most prominent matrons." She even admitted males for a short while. Upon moving to Anniston she continued to teach French and German at the Noble Institute for Girls, an Episcopal private school.¹⁹ Like her husband she was also greatly devoted to the Confederate cause. In Anniston she helped found The William Henry Forney Chapter #468, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and served as president.²⁰

The December gathering marks the founding of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society. Partly because the Sternes were

influential citizens the women responded enthusiastically. Frances Ullman recalled the initial meeting in a 1917 program: "The invitation to the Sterne home was answered by all; not one had ever been in an organization before; the ladies responded to a stirring and emotional speech by the Sternes about the importance of a society: our object to promote Judaism in our midst and aid our co-religionists in distress. Our aim would be to build a temple—a Beth-El."²¹

According to historian Jenna Weissman Joselit, "American Jewish middle-class women began increasingly, toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, to participate in social and cultural activities outside of its sacred precincts [the home]. These women formed hundreds of voluntary associations between the 1870s and the new century." These women's groups, variously called Hebrew aid societies or ladies auxiliaries, existed in almost all communities of any size.²² In cities such as Anniston where the number of men was limited, the association of the women into a benevolence group became even more important.

Henrietta Sterne was elected president of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society at the organizational meeting, a position granted for life in 1907. She served until her death in 1915 when the women renamed their organization the Henrietta Sterne Sisterhood. In May 1913 the members of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society had become dues paying members of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and began calling their organization the Anniston Sisterhood, Temple Beth-El.²³

Elected with Henrietta Sterne in 1890 were Frances Kaiser Ullman, vice-president, and Henrietta Long Katzenstein, secretary treasurer.²⁴ Frances Ullman, a native of New York, married husband Leon there. Frances Ullman served the society faithfully, taking office throughout her lifetime.²⁵ Henrietta Long Katzenstein, Henrietta Sterne's niece, was the wife of Simon Katzenstein.²⁶

After the initial meeting the women drafted a constitution and articles. The preamble stated "for our mutual benefit, for the cultivation of the amenities of social life, for alleviating the sick, aiding the unfortunate and distressed, and to awaken an interest

in Judaism, the undersigned agree to form themselves into a benevolent society."²⁷ These purposes were fairly typical for such societies. "Although some of these women's groups met purely for social intercourse, nonetheless, the majority organized for the sake of "doing good," to perform acts of charity. Historian William Toll states, "The responsibilities undertaken by the benevolent societies were partly ritual – preparing a woman's body for burial, partly nurture – sitting up with sick women and caring for their children and partly economic – providing funds in emergencies." For example, in October 1904, a committee of three ladies from the Anniston society met the body of Mrs. William Kohn at the train and escorted her home.²⁸ The authors of *The Jewish Woman in America* describe the important role of charity:

Philanthropic concern, particularly on a personal level, was considered one of the few activities that might legitimately draw a middle-class woman—a lady—from her home. Charity was considered an extension of the home and family obligations that women bore, and it became another example of her religiosity and purity. While there had always existed special "women's societies" within the traditional Jewish community, especially for providing the necessary care for the female sick and dead, charity had always been a communal activity, controlled and executed by men. Now many synagogues and most cities and towns boasted a Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society. . . . Though small in scale the philanthropic societies established by women throughout the nineteenth century became the forerunners of the great American Jewish women's organizations of the twentieth century.²⁹

Jacob Rader Marcus wrote: "If no male Hebrew benevolent society had been established, then the female organization would serve as Jewry's social welfare arm." As a mutual aid society, the women helped local Jewish poor, especially the women, and as an auxiliary to the synagogue they gave money for upkeep and beautification. Marcus continues "It was also the social club for the

town's Jewish women; the associative importance of such organizations cannot be over stressed."³⁰

A detailed set of articles and bylaws clearly described how the Anniston group was to operate. The articles not only addressed issues such as a quorum and officers but policies to encourage attendance and enrich the treasury: The quorum was set at seven members. By-law II stated that "any member absent from a meeting shall pay a fine of twenty-five cents unless excused by the Society for good and sufficient reasons." (Rain was not considered an acceptable excuse.)³¹ Frances Ullman remembered that "Absences and tardiness were rare occurrences"; the members "all were so interested and came so eagerly." Article III stated that each member should "pay monthly dues of twenty-five cents." To be eligible to join the organization the head of the prospective member's family had to be a member in good standing of the temple, be nominated by a member, and receive two-thirds of the votes of those "members present at the time of balloting for applicant." If the head of the applicant's family did not meet the congregational requirements, a unanimous vote was required. An initiation fee of one dollar accompanied an application for membership and a woman became a member upon signing the preamble. These signatures eventually provided the only record of the early congregation.³²

The constitution established three committees: "visiting the sick," "entertainment," and "finances." The committee for the sick was "empowered to relieve cases of urgent necessity where such necessity exists." In 1891 the committee reported that "the care of Mrs. Balsom was finished" and that "the nurse's bill of three dollars, for the care of Mrs. Balsom be settled by the society." The entertainment committee provided "amusements" or "entertainment" and the finance committee "examined the books of the treasurer." The entertainment committee also offered a means for Anniston's Jews to socialize. However important in its own right, for the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society socializing also meant another way to raise money. Parties such as the Purim balls were a way to celebrate a Jewish holiday and enrich the treasury, however, in 1891 the first ball unfortunately cleared

only \$7.30. Some events were limited to the Jewish community but others open to the public.³³

Although the title and preamble clearly suggest a desire to help the unfortunate and distressed, the minutes reflect that the women's efforts to build a house of worship occupied virtually all their time, energy, and money. Only occasionally do references appear to an effort on behalf of "the suffering party."³⁴ Again this was far from unusual. As William Toll wrote:

In addition to charity, the women also saw their mission as including support of local synagogues. In Trinidad, Colorado, the ladies' annual Strawberry Festival and Halloween Fair virtually supported the synagogue. In larger cities like Portland or Galveston they supplemented the funds raised by men. When an elaborate temple was built in Portland in 1888, the women paid for the vestry room. When Galveston had to rebuild after the hurricane and flood of 1900 the women, as they had done before, contributed funds amounting to about one quarter of what was given by the men.³⁵

Once the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society was formally established, Anniston's steel magnolias began work toward their goal. The society's first fundraising venture, a New Year's Hop on December 31, 1890, raised \$85.35. The refreshment fund offered a continuous source of income. At each meeting "light refreshments were served for which a small sum—ten cents—was required." This money, plus an extra dollar given by each member, provided a needle-work fund to purchase supplies for handmade items to be sold. The subsequent "fancy work," was so valued that if a woman failed to bring her handiwork to a meeting, she was fined ten cents. The ladies were determined that the quality of the work be high because, according to Frances Ullman, "we wanted to achieve our exalted purpose" to build a house of worship.³⁶ The temple's stained glass windows, in fact, came from the refreshment/needlework fund. The society's most lucrative under-takings were a series of bazaars. To prepare for

their second such event in December 1891 the members worked "over a winter," planning an auction with an assortment of items donated from local and distant merchants as well as their fancy work. Henrietta Sterne urged the members to "enlist the outside support of our husbands and other members of the congregation in our work." The ladies asked their husbands to solicit assistance from firms with whom they did business. The response was generous: "merchandise and money amounting to one thousand dollars." The donated goods included oysters, cigars, smoked meats, sausages, flour, bananas, tea, coffee, a box of laces, and some gentlemen's ties. From New York came a gentleman's smoking jacket, half a dozen dress shirts, and two "suits of fine underwear." Items were replaced as soon as others sold. Dinner and supper were served to the public during the three day event, and a raffle and "other means of chance" generated additional revenue. Afterward the treasurer reported \$985.08 in the bank with only a few bills unpaid and more money due.³⁷

On May 28, 1891, a committee, appointed to purchase a lot "for the further good of the society," reported that one indeed had been purchased on the northeast corner of Quintard and 13th Streets for \$1,500. Colonel John M. McKleroy, the president of the Anniston Land Company from which the land was bought, donated twenty-five dollars to help meet the first payment. McKleroy had encouraged the group to write to the land company in New York for further assistance as the directors and controlling stockholders there were "co-religionists." The women wrote, but the officers offered only a pledge of moral support. The society placed \$300 down and paid the remainder in four installments of \$300. With McKleroy's donation, the first payment was \$275. The women paid the second payment six months early saving twelve dollars in interest with an additional twelve dollar donation from McKleroy. When the group made the third payment on March 8, 1893, McKleroy gave forty-eight dollars for the interest.³⁸ The remaining payment was made after the building was completed. Although the ladies did not solicit funds for the temple's construction outside the Jewish community, they did receive a donation from Alfred L. Tyler, Sr., and fifty dollars from

William Zinn, both prominent Anniston Christians. Tyler, one of the city's founders was married to Ann Scott for whom Anniston, or "Annie's Town," was named.³⁹ These contributions indicated the respect these early Jewish residents had achieved.

The treasury increased as the women planned and carried out additional fundraising activities. A strawberry and ice cream party or "strawberry festival" in May 1892 and an oyster supper on April 26, 1892, benefitted the building fund. The women voted "to appeal to congregations across the United States for one dollar donations," and contributions came from Chicago, Selma, Spokane, and Charleston among others. The idea for this appeal may have stemmed from a one dollar donation given in May 1892 by the society in response to a request of a congregation in West Virginia.⁴⁰ An article in *The American Israelite* stated that "every possible means had been resorted to, to raise the necessary funds . . . hard work had to be resorted to, what scheming and contriving to carry out the noble work planned by this little society." The membership diminished during the year before the actual opening of the temple, causing the women to raise the "tax" on their weekly refreshments, from the initial ten cents to fifteen, "thus the sum of seventy five cents was raised weekly, three dollars a month to swell their treasury."⁴¹ Although the women carried out numerous fundraising events, they also frequently asked the men of the congregation to make donations. A "tariff levied on all the gentlemen who attended High Holy Days services with the money to be used for the good of the society" added thirteen dollars as each man paid one dollar to the treasury in 1892. Henrietta Sterne reported that her March 19 and 20, 1893, "subscription among the Jewish gentlemen to the synagogue" raised \$409.⁴²

The construction of a temple was especially vital to Anniston's Jewish residents because there was no place of their own to gather. They worshiped frequently in the Knights of Pythias Hall or in each other's homes.⁴³ The officers for 1893, Henrietta Sterne, Frances Ullman, Rebecca Adler, and Sophie Markstein, would lead the society to the fruition of their dream, a permanent house of worship for Anniston's Jews. Rebecca Schlesinger Adler was born in Austria, came to this country in 1880, and settled in

Huntsville, Alabama. She married Adolph Adler in Atlanta, and the two settled in Anniston in 1885. Sophie Pake Markstein, the wife of Max Markstein, was born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1854, and was raised there.⁴⁴ In March 1893, the remaining society members (as many of the earlier members were no longer involved), were Henrietta Sterne, Frances Ullman, Henrietta Katzenstein, Rebecca Adler, Bertha Frank Levi (the wife of Isadore Levi), and, Sara Ullman (married to Solomon Ullman, Leon Ullman's brother). They appointed a building committee composed of the male leaders of the congregation to "erect a house of worship." The society "empowered the committee to use what means are on hand to erect the building." The group, however, "expressly stipulated that no debt be incurred."⁴⁵

The members of the building committee were almost all the husbands of the women: Anselm Sterne, Leon Ullman, Adolph Adler, Max Markstein, Isadore Levi, Julius Levy, Joseph Saks, and Isadore Katzenstein.⁴⁶ In addition to being the "leaders" of the congregation, these men were prominent Anniston businessmen. This very public responsibility was one still relegated to the men. Although the women had planned, budgeted, and worked for almost three years, none of them served on the building committee. Although the actions of these women indicated a sense of independence, their identity still relied on the men in their lives. The minutes only identified members by their married names and husband's first names, never by their first or given names. It was not until many decades later that this policy changed.

On April 12, 1893, the building committee informed the women that the contract was ready to sign and that the "Temple would be built for \$2,200." On June 7, 1893, the society members named their synagogue Beth-El or House of God.⁴⁷ The original building contained a lobby, a sanctuary, two bathrooms, and a small room to the rear of the sanctuary. Anniston architect George Parker described the architecture of the temple: "This small but handsomely proportioned single story building has a rather Byzantine design inspiration; and the arched relief of the facade

creates an exquisitely scaled composition well related to the narrow corner lot."⁴⁸

As of 1996, according to Mark Gordon, Temple Beth-El was one of ninety-six pre-1900 buildings in the United States originally built as a synagogue and still standing. It may be the oldest one in Alabama since the date for B'nai Jeshurun in Demopolis is listed as circa 1893. Today Temple Beth-El is one of approximately thirty-one nineteenth century houses of worship still being used for Jewish services.⁴⁹

The synagogue opened its doors for Rosh Hashanah in 1893, only a few months after the appointment of the building committee. The building was completed but not furnished. There were no pews, so chairs were used. An organ was purchased from the profits of a raffle for a painting by Miss Helen Markstein, Sophie and Max's daughter. The proceeds not only purchased the organ, but also carpeted the bimah. The year-end treasurer's report for 1893 reflected a disbursement of \$2,472.36 for "building the Temple."⁵⁰

In the light of the grim times that had settled on Anniston, the women's accomplishments seem even more remarkable. Anniston's initial boom during 1883 and 1884 was followed by slow growth for the next two years only to be replaced by another boom from 1887 to 1891. In 1891, however, a severe depression began that lasted through 1894. Local industries were at a standstill, real estate values dropped, and hundreds of people left town. A visitor in 1893 remarked that Anniston looked like a "plague-ridden city." (Fortunately Anniston experienced a partial recovery in 1895-1897.)⁵¹ Nonetheless, donations itemized in the society minutes verified the continued generosity of Anniston's Jews during the economic downturn.

In addition to the poor economy another obstacle to be overcome by these determined women was the loss of members. At the time of the founding of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1890 fifteen women signed the preamble, and the constitution mandated a seven member quorum. The constitution was revised on August 26, 1892, setting a quorum of five. In November 1893 the minutes recorded a reduction to three members.⁵² It is difficult

to know why the membership decreased, but several possible reasons may be suggested. The economic climate in Anniston made it more difficult for residents to earn a living.⁵³ Another possible reason may have been the high level of involvement required by this group; building the temple with so few was an intense undertaking. The minutes frequently recorded resignations without providing any reasons. The April 7, 1891, minutes do note that Mrs. R. (Regina) Lippman's resignation be accepted, "on account of removal from the city." When in December 1891 Mrs. Lippman (another otherwise unidentified Mrs. Lippman) resigned from the organization, the women formed a committee to "investigate" her resignation. They visited her home and, finding that she was not there, voted to accept her resignation.⁵⁴ Being a member of this society also required a financial commitment for dues and refreshments, and, without a good excuse, an absent member had to pay a fine. Not only were the women asked to donate but "tariffs" frequently were levied on their husbands as well.

None of this diminished the temple opening on December 8, 1893. Dr. Max Heller of New Orleans, "one of the most distinguished and erudite rabbis of the country," officiated at the dedication service. His sermon was described as "scholarly and masterful." A member of the congregation wrote, "Never in the lives of our Jewish people, nor of our Christian friends, has one ever appeared, who so completely won our hearts, as the noble, gifted and eloquent man who conducted the dedication services."⁵⁵

Frances Ullman described the emotions of the service:

That dedication was the most wonderful and inspiring scene imaginable. The carrying of the Torah around the Temple, led by the Rabbi, and then came the president, each carrying a Torah, and then other officers in the Temple following. I believed they walked around the Temple twice, the rabbi offering prayers. Then the handing over of the keys of the Temple by a child, the scholarly sermon of the Rabbi. Some of us wept—tears of joy—it was sublime. I cannot refrain from mentioning the music on that occasion—it was truly operatic. Mrs. Joseph Aderhold of our city

rendered a wonderful solo, "Consider the Lilies," with exquisite charm.⁵⁶

The previous Thursday evening Temple Beth-El hosted a lecture on Judaism by Heller. He also addressed the Sunday school and conducted the regular Sabbath morning services. Heller was "highly pleased with the interest taken in Judaism in this city." An unidentified Anniston Jew offered the following description in *The American Israelite*:

Nothing more beautiful or impressive has ever taken place in our city than the dedication services last Friday night at our little synagogue, the work of a small community of Israelites in this city. For many months had this work gone on, and smaller and smaller had grown the little band of workers, until at times one doubted whether the work would ever be completed . . . to day [sic] there stands as a monument to their zeal and interest in Judaism, the little temple of which they not only feel proud, but to which every citizen of the city of Anniston points with pride.⁵⁷

Thus the building of a house of worship and decorous ceremony reflected both the success and acceptance of Anniston's Jews, similar experiences to that of other Jews throughout America during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Upon his return to New Orleans Heller sent the congregation a Bible which still rests on the rabbi's pulpit. Society members embroidered and made lace for a linen centerpiece for Dr. Heller's wife, Ida. "To help pay for the building," a small fee, probably levied by the ladies, was charged for the Thursday night lecture.⁵⁸ *The [Anniston] Weekly Times* reported that "No higher compliment could be paid our Jewish citizens than the tribute of regard and interest that centered in this site and that had called together so many of the citizens of Anniston of all denominations."⁵⁹

After the dedication, pews, pulpit furniture, and chandeliers had to be purchased for the inside, and fencing, trees, and lawn had to be added to the exterior. Frances Ullman recalled, "Only the members of those days know the amount of money and work

it took to establish that lawn. It was a matter of just pride with us that our lawn should be in harmony with our Temple. It was the fruit of our handiwork." Minutes of the following years made clear their efforts to beautify the grounds. A fence around the temple lot was the first outside project, perhaps because in 1894 Temple Beth-El was the only building on the block. The fence of chicken wire and wood cost \$16.49. In 1908 the ladies removed the fence and sold the materials for \$2.75. Refreshment funds, fancy work, dues, and fines continued to augment the treasury.⁶⁰

Religious education remained important for this young congregation which held its first confirmation in June 1894. An anonymous American Israelite informant wrote, "One of the main incentives to the earnest work that led to the erection of our synagogue was the desire that the children of the community might be educated to become good Jews and Jewesses and the parents of the confirmants felt in a great measure repaid for their efforts when the children showed themselves so earnest and well-informed in the principles of Judaism." The class, an "unusually bright one," consisted of Marion Pearl Sterne, Maurie Levi, Albert Ullman, and Josie Markstein. Rev. Leo Reich of Atlanta conducted the service. Abe Ullman was the teacher for the class, and Hattie Lippman sang for the service. In June 1897 the confirmation class consisted of four boys, Niel Sterne, Nat Ullman, Walter Levi, and Walter Markstein. Another person reported to the American Israelite, "As our congregation consists of only about a dozen members we cannot afford a rabbi of our own and consequently were dependent on the kindness of Rev. David Marx of Atlanta for whose trouble in our behalf we are sincerely grateful. . . . The (members) of the class acquitted themselves splendidly, reflecting great credit upon themselves and upon their teacher, Mr. C. (Columbus) Smith."⁶¹ Apparently from the onset the congregation used the Classical Reform custom of confirmation as opposed to the traditional bar mitzvah and the later bat mitzvah. Unlike recent immigrants, Anniston's Jews arrived already acculturated.

By the early twentieth century the interior and the exterior of the building was completed, and financial donations especially to

national institutions increased. It appears that more effort was devoted to assisting others after 1904.⁶² The payment for clothing and laundry for a sick child in the hospital and a bus ticket for a sick child who needed to travel north are recorded in the minutes. In 1906 the women responded to the request of a Mrs. Pelman, for help "to open a business," voting to assist her "when called on." Anniston's women followed a pattern of organizational dynamics and giving that was typical of other women's groups. "By the 1900s," historian Toll contends, "the benevolent societies were undergoing an eclipse, as the concept of sisterly charity and informal cooperation with men's benevolent societies was becoming obsolete. For the women (as the men) the concept of general nurturant benevolence was being replaced by more specialized institutions. The dispensing of charity to regional institutions like the orphanages in Atlanta, New Orleans or Cleveland, or to the National Jewish Hospital in Denver became a matter of routine."⁶³ The minutes of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society reported donations to the Hebrew Consumptive Hospital and the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives. In the 1920s the Pennsylvania National Farm School, a Jewish institution to train Jewish males to be farmers, received regular donations of items, often sewn by the women themselves. Anniston's women were also generous to groups with no Jewish affiliation whereas some other Jewish women's groups often preferred to aid just their co-religionists. These actions may have been an effort to hasten acculturation into the Christian majority as well as an indicator of their interest in the welfare of others. By 1904 the society had become involved with the Free Kindergarten for disadvantaged students, providing refreshments as well as donations of time and money. The Free Kindergarten, one of Henrietta Sterne's favorite charities, was a cause that was popular with the upper-class women of Anniston.⁶⁴ Over the years the women hardly missed a chance to provide monetary gifts to Jew and gentile, young and old, sick and well. Still, the women maintained their intense dedication to Temple Beth-El. Even before they officially became a temple sisterhood they took the responsibilities of cleaning the building, maintaining the lawn, providing the altar cloth and flowers, and

preparing the building for High Holy Day services. They painted and did repairs as required, even paying for a cement sidewalk.

In 1906 the women voted that fines for absent and tardy members be abolished "leaving it optional with members to attend meetings." Thus, an old standby to make a little money and encourage attendance ended. The minutes provided no information as to why the women made this change. Membership had increased to twenty-four women who may have felt that relaxing this requirement might make belonging to the organization less burdensome.⁶⁵ Also with the new building extensive fundraising may have become a lower priority.

A milestone took place on September 25, 1907, when a "document" was recorded stating that "The Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society in consideration of one dollar paid to it by the congregation Beth-El 'granted, bargained and sold' the land on which the Temple sat and the Temple." For an unknown reason the last ninety feet of the lot, which the women donated several years later, was excluded. The deed, giving the temple to the congregation completely free of indebtedness, was signed by Henrietta Sterne, Frances Ullman, and Sallie Smith, appointed by the society as trustees.⁶⁶ The women, indeed, had played the major role in the birth and maturation of Temple Beth-El.

A further glimpse of Anniston's Jewish women is provided in their organization's minutes. These contain not only the business of the group but also correspondence to members and their families, thereby chronicling their lives. The custom of sending and recording a letter of congratulations to a member on the birth of a new baby formally noted that happy event: "[we] . . . wish to tender this heartfelt congratulation upon the birth of your [Mrs. Gerson's] daughter and hope you may live to see her grow into woman hood having attended the teaching of her religion and love of her fond parents prefer [sic] to her." A letter was written in August 1893 to Mrs. Joe Magnus on the death of her baby "to express to you the deep and heartfelt sorrow we all feel for you and yours on your irreparable loss . . . we all sympathize with you and may the almighty who watches and cares for us all, console

you in your sad affliction." The secretary documented the deaths of the members: "Our little band has been visited by Death, the grim reaper—with sorrow we record the loss of Mrs. William Kohn (in Asheville, North Carolina)." As was customary, the resolutions of condolence were sent to the family, "spread over the minutes," and published in the daily paper. "She was tender, loving and true, and a faithful member of this Society and although not active in its duties, her presence will be missed." The following was written for Henrietta Sterne in 1915:

Whereas, she was a true Mother in Israel, teaching her children by precept and example the lessons that have made them helpful, useful, worthy members of society; leading them along the narrow path of rectitude and noble living and watching over them with a protecting heart of love. No sacrifice was too great, no labor too strenuous in behalf of her near ones. In sickness and in health she was ever ready with heart, hand and mind at their service; and

Whereas she was ever a true neighbor, a loyal friend and a helpful, useful member of the community. Wherever duty called her, she "stood not upon the order of going," wherever service demanded her thither she hastened without question, wherever friendship and love besought her there was she to be found.⁶⁷

In their memorial resolutions the Anniston women again showed their similarity to other Jewish women of the times. William Toll wrote that as the members of the ladies Hebrew benevolent societies composed these memorial tributes they were in fact agreeing with Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler's image of "instinctive motherhood . . . that women had a different nature than men, based on an instinctive sense of nurturing." Toll continued, "In their memorial tributes to departed members—admittedly stylized but for that reason the quintessence of their sense of achievement—they agreed that women by nature sacrificed themselves to the home and to the community's institu-

tions of nurture.”⁶⁸ The bonds of true womanhood would be stretched without breaking.

According to their mission statement the women had come together “to promote Judaism in our midst.” To further that cause, they provided a permanent place for their community to worship and maintained it so that future congregants would have an institution with which to identify and continue to use. They also helped raise funds to care for the cemetery so that the Jewish community would have a fitting place to bury the dead. Furthermore they taught in the religious school over the years to help insure that their children might grow up to be committed Jews. The men may have organized the communal institutions including the congregation and the cemetery but the women maintained them.

In new environments like Anniston, women extended their actions beyond the home and family. As William Toll commented: “Especially in smaller towns where self-conscious minorities were carefully observed, the public realm rested on the club life of women and men.”⁶⁹ Thus still another responsibility for the women was to help shape the opinions of their non-Jewish peers concerning themselves and Judaism. Hosting events to which the public was invited exemplified this. The temple choir has been exclusively composed of Christians. Miss Bessie Russell, a member of the Methodist church, served as organist for the congregation for a half century.⁷⁰ Over the years editorials in the local paper have pointed out the role Jewish individuals played in promoting religious harmony. The generosity with which Anniston’s Jewish women embraced Christian causes, such as the medical clinic run by St. Michael’s Episcopal Church beginning in the 1920s, further enhanced the bond across denominational lines. In Anniston Jews worked and lived with their Christian neighbors in unity. Even today congregants speak of only isolated incidents of anti-Semitism.

Scholars have pointed out the important role that Jewish women played “to nurture religious sentiment both within and

*Temple Beth-El, c. 1894**(Published by permission from the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce)*

without the home . . . It was up to the American Jewish woman to see to it that Sabbath and the dietary laws were observed, the children educated Jewishly, and that the family attended religious services and participated in all manner of Jewish communal activity." Obligations of the women at home were carried into their community. In the case of Anniston's Temple Beth-El these obligations were even more pronounced in that, although for most of its 110 year history it has had a student rabbi for high holy day services and/or monthly or biweekly visits, it has never employed a fulltime rabbi. It has been up to its women to sponsor congregational activities whether it be the oneg shabbat after the Friday night services, the preparation of the building for the High Holy Days, or teaching in the religious school. The women frequently made reference in the minutes to the importance of attending Sabbath services. In an effort to improve attendance at one point, they openly condemned activities that had been organized by a youth group for a Friday night. Over the years

Anniston's women taught in the religious school, an extension of their responsibility of teaching their own children. Of their organizations, Jacob Rader Marcus wrote, "It is no exaggeration to maintain that the 'ladies' society' was the most important women's organization in the Jewish community. Indeed, it was an essential part of the structure, of the very being, of the entire Jewish group in any town."⁷¹

The impact of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society and the Henrietta Sterne Sisterhood on the birth and development of Temple Beth-El is enormous. The society is responsible for its very life. As Samuel Johnson said, "Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance." The few women were committed to the continuity of a Jewish way of life. They have helped ensure that Judaism remains in "our midst." A student rabbi in the 1980s summarized their role: "Although the women are older and hesitant to come to the bimah, they run the congregation."⁷² Although groups whose activities revolved around a house of worship, as did the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, are often referred to as an auxiliary of the temple, it would appear from looking at their actions that they were, in fact, the leaders. The members of the society demonstrated through their unshakable faith, vision, shrewd fundraising abilities, management skills, and loving care of their temple, the qualities which earn them the distinction of being called women of valor.

NOTES

¹ Louis Schmier, ed., *The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, GA, 1982), 43, 130.

² Their reasons are not given in their detailed minutes, only the actions they approved (or disapproved), including the expenditure of all monies, but it appears from looking at records of other women's organizations that these women were far more involved in the planning and construction than their peers. The web site of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (<http://huc.edu/aja/women.htm>) lists its holdings of information from women's organizations around the country. Only the Ladies Hebrew

Association (Baton Rouge, LA) is described as “initially organized to help build a synagogue.” The majority described their mission as benevolence. (Web site information accurate as of February 28, 1999)

³ Grace Hooten Gates, *The Model City of the New South: Anniston, Alabama, 1872–1900* (Huntsville, AL, 1978), 56, 60.

⁴ *The Anniston (AL) Star*, March 5, 1924 (“His Ullman Brothers store carried ‘a line of general merchandise.’”); March 1, 1930 (“The enterprise, first located . . .”); March 5, 1924 (“In a 1924 interview . . .”); March 3, 1930 (“Ullman was involved . . .”); March 1, 1930; program from the dedication of the sanctuary, Temple Beth-El Archives.

⁵ Andrew Saks interview, conducted by Sherry Blanton, June 18, 1996; letter from Julien Saks, May 16, 1978, copy in the writer’s file.

⁶ Saks interview.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *The Anniston Star and Daily Hot Blast*, February 28, 1919; March 7, 1933, Saks interview.

⁹ Newspaper clipping, April 5, 1905, archives of Julien Saks; unnamed Birmingham newspaper, copy in writer’s file; Minutes, Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society (hereafter LHBS), May 27, July 29, 1914, Temple Beth-El Archives, Anniston, AL.

¹⁰ *The Anniston Star, 75th Anniversary Edition*, 1957; August 27, 1961.

¹¹ *The Anniston Star*, March 20, 1900.

¹² *Ibid.*, January 22, 1914, Mervyn Sterne Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, AL (hereafter, Dept. of Archives); *The American Israelite*, October 24, 1901. Temple Beth-El used a student rabbi for High Holy Days services until 1953 when a monthly and bimonthly visit became the practice. This continued until the hiring of Rabbi Fred Raskind as a visiting rabbi in 1988.

¹³ Sterne family history, Sterne Collection; Anselm Sterne’s tombstone, Temple Beth-El Cemetery, Anniston, AL.

¹⁴ Eli Evans, *The Lonely Days were Sundays* (Jackson, MS, 1993), 3.

¹⁵ By-laws of Temple Beth-El, Anniston, AL, April 1, 1888, copy in writer’s file; *The Anniston Times*, August 26, 1932. At it remains today, Anniston’s early Jewish population was a very small minority of the total population, estimated on October 10, 1887, in *The Anniston Hot Blast*, to be 7,000.

¹⁶ Newspaper clipping, *The Southern Israelite*, n.d., Saks Family archives, copy in writer’s file; *The American Israelite*, June 27, 1889; newspaper clipping, *The American Israelite*, n.d., copy in writer’s file.

¹⁷ Paper presented by Mrs. Leon Ullman at a meeting of the Henrietta Sterne Sisterhood, February 1917, Mervyn Sterne Collection, 1. This paper is also printed in Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (New York, 1981), 209.

¹⁸ Thronateeska Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, *History and Reminiscences of Dougherty County, Georgia* (Albany, GA, 1924), 199–200.

¹⁹ *The Anniston Star, 75th Anniversary Edition*, 1957.

²⁰ Sterne family history.

²¹ Ullman, 1.

²² Jenna Weissman Joselit, “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: The Synagogue Sisterhood,” in Jack Wertheimer, Ed., *the American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (New York, 1987), 208.

²³ Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890; January 30, 1907; May 27, 1913. Hundreds of synagogue sisterhoods had developed between the First and Second World Wars with virtually every house of worship having one. The members of these women's groups centered their efforts around service to the synagogue. In 1913 a coalition of Reform sisterhoods, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, was established. Within ten years it boasted 45,000 members. These umbrella organizations were founded to "Mobilize the forces of Jewish womanhood." Joselit, "Special Sphere," 209.

²⁴ Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890.

²⁵ United States Census, 1900, Calhoun County, AL, microfilm.

²⁶ Sterne family tree, Sterne Collection. Simon Katzenstein, of Baltimore, MD, worked at The Famous. He was a relative of Joseph Saks' cousin, Isadore Katzenstein, who had come to Anniston to help Saks open the store. Simon died in 1894, and Henrietta left Anniston shortly after his death. *Anniston City Directory*, 1887, 69; Letter from Julien Saks; *The American Israelite*, February 1, 1894; minutes, LHBS.

²⁷ Preamble, LHBS, December 19, 1890.

²⁸ Joselit, "Special Sphere," 208-209; William Toll, "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920," *American Jewish Archives* 41 (Spring/Summer 1989): 10; Minutes, LHBS, October 26, 1904.

²⁹ Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York, 1974), 30.

³⁰ Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 204.

³¹ Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890. The idea of assessing fines on members (probably to improve attendance) was not unique. These fines, however, did help build the temple. The Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society of Hartford, Connecticut, in 1880 not only fined members for "being absent without sufficient cause" but also fined members twenty-five cents for "not minding a call to order or not behaving properly." The Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society of Portsmouth, Ohio, in its 1891 constitution levied fines of twenty-five cents for absent officers and ten cents for absent members unless excused. Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 207, 213.

³² Ullman, 1; Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890.

³³ Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890; January 14, 1891; April 1, 1891.

³⁴ Minutes, October 7, 1891.

³⁵ Toll, "Quiet Revolution," 11-12.

³⁶ Ullman, 1; Minutes, LHBS, February 18, 1891.

³⁷ Ullman, 1; LHBS, November 23, 1891; December 30, 1891. Jacob Rader Marcus' publication of Mrs. Ullman's paper and its original copy states that the women turned the profits of the bazaar over to the congregation. This, however, was reported by Mrs. Ullman twenty-seven years after the event. The LHBS minutes for December 30 report: "The Society has in the bank at the present time \$985.08."

³⁸ Minutes, LHBS, May 28, 1891; Ullman, 2; Minutes, LHBS, March 8, 1893. Information as to whether the directors and controlling stockholders were, in fact, Jewish is not available. On the local level none of the officers were. According to Grace Gates, however, a group of New York investors had purchased a controlling interest in the Anniston Land Company in 1888, William Henry Woods becoming a director and vice-president. Gates, *Model City*, 99.

³⁹ Minutes, LHBS, April 12, 1893; February 15, 1893; Tee Morgan, *A Picture History of Anniston, Alabama 1880-1940* (Anniston, AL, 1990), 4.

⁴⁰ Minutes, LHBS, May 18, 1892; April 26, 1892; June 7, 1893.

⁴¹ *The American Israelite*, July 6, 1893.

⁴² Minutes, LHBS, October 12, 1892; April 5, 1893. Records are not available to indicate whether the group of thirteen men contributing this thirteen dollars constituted the entire male population of the congregation.

⁴³ Minutes, LHBS, September 30, 1891; Ullman, 1.

⁴⁴ Minutes, LHBS, December 28, 1892; February 15, 1893; *The Anniston Star*, July 20, 1941.

Max Markstein, Sophia's husband, was the co-owner and then sole owner of the Opera House Bar on Noble Street. The Marksteins moved to Anniston circa 1891 from Uniontown, AL. Max, a German emigrant, was a Confederate veteran and active congregant. The couple, married in Mobile and the parents of six children, left Anniston circa 1909. *Anniston City Directory*, 1896; United States Census, 1910; Henry Marks interview, conducted by Sherry Blanton, June, 1996. Adolph Adler, a Hungarian emigrant and "a pioneer settler of Anniston," was an Anniston resident by 1885. He and his wife, like many of their peers, were Noble Street merchants. They operated the Bee Hive Store, selling dry goods and produce. Eventually he became a dealer in hides exclusively. They remained in Anniston for

the remainder of their lives. United States Census, 1900, Calhoun County, microfilm; *The Anniston Star*, March 5, 1924; *Huntsville Independent*, November 19, 1885; *Anniston City Directories*, 1898, 1900, 1908, 1913.

⁴⁵ Minutes LHBS, March 1, 1893; United States Census, 1900, Calhoun County, microfilm. Isadore Levi, Bertha's husband, was of German descent. He owned I. Levi and Company Liquors, a wholesale shop and an adjacent saloon. From his stores in Anniston and Talladega he sold beer, wine, liquor, and tobacco. His obituary stated that "he had probably fewer enemies than any other citizen of this city." United States Census, 1910, Calhoun County, microfilm.; Morgan, *Annie's Town*, 49a; *The Anniston Star*, April 4, 1921.

⁴⁶ Minutes, LHBS, March 1, 1893. Julius Levy, an émigré from Carlsbad, Austria, came to Anniston from Baltimore, MD; Levy, a "pioneer merchant of Anniston," owned his own tailoring shop on Noble Street. He was a 32nd Degree Mason, a Shriner, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce and of B'nai B'rith. His wife, Lena, did not join the ladies society until 1896. *The Anniston Star*, September 24, 1935; minutes, LHBS, preamble.

⁴⁷ Minutes, LHBS, April 12, 1893; June 7, 1893.

⁴⁸ George Parker, *Architectural Highlights of Anniston* (Anniston, 1974).

⁴⁹ Mark Gordon, "Rediscovering Jewish Infrastructure: Update on United States Nineteenth Century Synagogues," *American Jewish History*, 84 (March 1996): 20-27.

⁵⁰ Newspaper clipping, from the archives of Marx Sterne, *The American Israelite*, n.d., copy in the writer's files; minutes, LHBS, February 7, 1894.

⁵¹ Gates, *Model City*, 126-127, 138.

⁵² Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890; August 26, 1892; November 8, 1893.

⁵³ During its first decade the membership of Temple Beth-El remained very small—a dozen members in 1897 and fifteen in 1901—one-third of whom were unmarried men. By 1905 there were twenty names on the roll of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society. Although the congregation grew over time, its membership has rarely exceeded fifty families.

⁵⁴ Minutes. LHBS, April 7, 1891; December 30, 1891. The Lippmans had a large, extended

family in early Anniston. Brothers Meyer and Marcus owned R. Lippman Dry Goods. Gabe Lippman was an Anniston resident, too. Hattie, Henrietta, Regina (widow of Leon), and Marion Scheslinger, Gabe's wife, were all members of the Lippman family living in Anniston during the temple's early years. *Anniston City Directory*, 1896, Minutes, LHBS, December 10, 1890.

⁵⁵ *The Anniston Star*, February 16, 1958; *The American Israelite*, December 14, 1893. Heller's presence at Temple Beth-El's dedication may have come from his belief in the importance of ministering to the needs of Jews in small southern towns who were "isolated from the Jewish mainstream." According to Bobbie Malone, "Heller became the first rabbi in the South who attempted to give people 'in small country places where no regular synagogues exist an opportunity of hearing the word of God occasionally.'" In 1895 Heller began to travel one week out of every seven months. Yet Heller was not the only rabbi of reputation and importance to visit Temple Beth-El in its early years. Other prominent rabbis from around the South were asked to officiate at confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Rabbi David Marx of Atlanta visited Anniston in April 1896 (the first time in nearly two years that services had been conducted by an "ordained minister") to conduct a weekday service. An article in *The American Israelite* reported that "His presence here was the result of an earnest desire on his part to promote the interests of Judaism as embodied in the plan of circuit preaching recommended by the last convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The Jews of Anniston are certainly indebted to Dr. Marx for the trouble taken in our behalf . . . Dr. Marx's visit produced much good by causing a renewed interest in Jewish affairs." This practice of circuit preaching was borrowed from the Christians. Morris Newfield of Birmingham, also officiated frequently for Anniston's Jewish congregation. Bobbie Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860-1929* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1997), 70; *The American Israelite*, April 30, 1896. On Newfield see Mark Cowett, *Birmingham's Rabbi: Morris Newfield and Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1986); For Marx and his outreach efforts see Mark Bauman and Arnold Shankman, "The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Spring 1983), 71-95; Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *As But a Day to a Hundred and Twenty, 1867-1987* (rev. ed., Atlanta, 1987); Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia, 1978).

⁵⁶ Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 211. Marcus points out that "The solo sung at the dedication, 'Consider the Lilies,' is a New Testament theme from Matthew 6:28. Music of Christian origin was frequently sung in Reform synagogues; for the most part, congregants were not aware of the provenance of the music that enraptured them." Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 205.

⁵⁷ *The (Anniston) Weekly Times*, November 30, 1893; *The American Israelite*, December 14, 1893.

⁵⁸ Ullman, 2; *The Weekly Times*, November 30, 1893.

⁵⁹ December 14, 1893. Temple Beth-El came into existence in the "City of Churches," as Anniston has often been called, shortly after the Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic churches were founded. By the 1890s there were twenty-five churches in Anniston. Gates, *Model City*, 201. Since many of Anniston's Jewish men were accepted and promi-

ment as “pioneer citizens” and “settlers” in the non-Jewish community, it is not surprising that

Anniston’s Christians would attend this religious event. Through the years there are frequent references in newspaper articles to the number of Christians attending funerals,

confirmations, and marriages at the temple.

⁶⁰ Ullman, 3; Minutes, LHBS, October 4, 1894; May 27, 1908.

⁶¹ *The American Israelite*, June 28, 1894; July 1, 1897. Columbus Smith was given his first name because he was born on Columbus Day. The family name for Henrietta and her brother, Columbus, had originally been Schmidt. As Marx Schmidt, their father, boarded the ship for the United States, the purser suggested that Schmidt “Anglicize his name”; the purser entered him as Marx Smith which became his official name. Even before the Smith family officially arrived on United States soil the process of Americanization began. Sterne family history, Sterne Collection.

⁶² The minutes from the years 1896–1903 are missing.

⁶³ Minutes, LHBS, July 26, 1906; Toll, “Quiet Revolution,” 12. It is highly possible that there was not in Anniston a population of indigent Jews requiring the care and concern of these Jewish women. Census records and phone directories indicate that this early Jewish population, including the Eastern European Jews, especially those who became permanent residents, was self sufficient.

⁶⁴ Toll, “Quiet Revolution,” 11; *The Anniston Star*, April 6, 1901. The Free Kindergarten was not a Jewish-sponsored or Jewish-run organization, nor was it for poor Jewish children. It catered to those who lived on the west side of Anniston.

⁶⁵ Minutes, LHBS, November 28, 1906. The membership of the congregation had increased as new families moved into town. Additionally, Joseph Saks and Columbus Smith had married and their new brides became society members. Two of Henrietta Sterne’s daughters were also now old enough to become dues paying members of the society.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1907. Sallie Smith was the wife of Henrietta Sterne’s brother, Columbus Smith, who worked with Anselm Sterne in his grocery. Sallie and Columbus did not marry until 1902 and Sallie was not involved with the initial society activities. United States Census, Calhoun County, 1910, microfilm.

⁶⁷ Minutes, LHBS, March 7, 1913; August 23, 1893. October 26, 1904; September 12, 1915.

⁶⁸ Toll, “Quiet Revolution,” 9.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁰ *Anniston Star*, November 3, 1957.

⁷¹ Joselit, “Special Sphere,” 208, 207; Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 204.

⁷² Letter, Rabbi Scott Gurdin archives, copy in writer’s file.

Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow

by

Clive Webb

In 1920 Aaron Bronson, a Russian Jewish immigrant, moved his family to a small town in western Tennessee with the intention of establishing a retail store. After his arrival in the United States, for a short time Bronson had worked in the employ of a Jewish merchant in Savannah. From this experience he had learned the two essential rules necessary for a Jew to operate a successful business in the American South. The first rule was that, unlike in his native homeland where Jewish stores “in observance of the Sabbath, were closed on Saturdays and open on Sundays, here it was the other way round.” The second rule concerned the treatment of African Americans. According to his employer, there was sufficient suspicion of Jews among the white Protestant majority without their stirring up trouble over the race issue. No matter what personal sympathies the merchant might have with African Americans, good business sense dictated public acceptance of the status quo. As he curtly informed Bronson: “I’m here for a living, not a crusade.” Bronson adhered strictly to these rules when he opened his own store. Although he held no prejudice towards African Americans, he refrained from any overt action that might risk retaliation from enraged whites. Instead he contented himself with small acts of kindness towards his black customers. As his daughter reflects, “What he did was keep quiet about it and do the best he could do.”¹

The story of Aaron Bronson is symptomatic of the experience of Jewish merchants operating in the small towns of the South during the Jim Crow era. Scholars have scrutinized in some detail the friction between Jewish merchants and African Americans in northern inner cities, especially Chicago and Harlem.² The relationship between Jewish retailers and African Americans in the southern states has, in contrast, received only passing reference from the occasional journalist or memoirist.³

Before the end of the nineteenth century, Jews had established an eminent position within the southern retail trade. As historian Stephen Whitfield asserts, "When we study the Southern Jewish past in particular, we really mean business."⁴ Further research needs to be done in order to assess accurately the scale of Jewish activity in all areas of retail. Anecdotal evidence does nonetheless suggest that Jews were a significant economic force from the immediate postbellum era onwards. Be it dry goods or groceries, clothing or kitchenware, Jews appeared to open their stores at almost every country crossroads and on almost every city street. Frances Butler Leigh, the daughter of a planter in Darien, Georgia, observed with obvious displeasure that "A good many Israelites have found their way to this remote district," each of them with "their tumble-down shanties and Cheap Jack goods." Such was the ubiquity of the Jewish storekeeper, observed sociologist John Dollard, that southerners were wont to remark: "If there is a Jewish holiday, you cannot buy a pair of socks in this whole country."⁵

It was through acts of commerce that African Americans and Jews in the South experienced their most regular points of contact. A study of these commercial transactions, therefore, serves as a prism through which to study the broader interaction between the two peoples. This article examines Jewish businessmen in both rural and urban contexts. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War Jewish peddlers roamed the southern countryside selling their assorted wares. Business success enabled them to establish their own stores which served as commercial centers in many rural areas. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Jewish merchants were also well established in southern cities.

The smaller of these stores traded exclusively with African Americans. The larger ranked among the most successful department stores in the region.

There are essentially two interpretations of the interrelationship between southern blacks and Jewish businessmen. The first is most commonly associated with contemporary observers, both black and white, who portrayed Jewish merchants as cunningly and mercilessly exploiting African Americans. Such an interpretation is rooted in the traditional stereotype of the "shrewd Hebrew" intent on amassing a personal fortune at the expense of others. Skilled in the art of small talk, the Jewish merchant duped unsuspecting African Americans into buying goods they did not need or receiving credit at a rate of interest they could not afford. As the German travel writer Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg wrote of the Jewish merchants he encountered on his travels through the Lower Mississippi in 1879-1880, "How wrong it would be to believe they have become more high-minded and merciful in the American South than they were in Russia or Poland."⁶ These accusations have in later years gained increasing currency among African American writers. According to Harold Cruse, "it was from the Jewish storekeeper and trader that the Southern Negro got his latent anti-Semitism."⁷

The second interpretation can most clearly be seen in the often sentimental recollections of Jews who grew up in the South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to this interpretation, Jewish merchants welcomed all customers without regard to their race. Historian Louis Schmier has, for instance, painted a particularly romantic portrait of the relationship between Jewish peddlers and their black customers. According to Schmier, the relationship was based on mutual benefit and trust. The peddler for his part offered African Americans fair prices and courteous treatment, which enabled them "to reclaim their dignity and afford a better life." In return, the black customer provided the peddler a regular income. As a result, the interaction between Jewish peddlers and black customers assumed more than a purely commercial character, binding them together through ties of loyalty and affection.⁸

The experience of Aaron Bronson suggests that the relationship between Jewish merchants and their black customers did not wholly comply with either interpretation, but was in truth fraught with ambiguity. Although many Jewish merchants endeavored to treat their black customers with greater dignity and respect than did other whites, their actions were constrained by broader social forces. Despite their religious differences, Jews enjoyed the fundamental rights and privileges of the white race. Their relationship with African Americans was shaped by the social and economic power which they exerted over them. This was true not only of the wealthy department store president but of the small businessmen who established their operations in the black section of town. The strains and tensions between African Americans and Jews can therefore at least partly be understood by the social and economic inequalities between the two peoples.⁹

The interaction began with those Jews at the lowest rung of the economic ladder, the peddlers. Peddling was surely not the easiest way of making a living. With between fifty to seventy pounds of goods stuffed into the pack on his back, and a further forty pounds strapped on in front, travelling must have been exhausting. Squeezed into each pack, or "pekl," was a variety of merchandise including cloth, curtains, laces, needles and thread, ribbons, tablecloths, and trinkets. With no horse or wagon to share his burden, the weary peddler walked the streets on the outskirts of a city, or trudged the deserted and dusty paths from one remote farmhouse to the next. When Abraham Goldstein of Milledgeville, Georgia, died, his children "noted that his right hand was stretched fully two inches longer than the left, due to the heavy burdens he carried for so many years." Trekking the tedious miles was dull and dispiriting. "We used to say that there was only one way to tell the summer from the winter out there," observed Louis Lazarus of his father, Henry, who peddled his wares in north Florida and south Georgia early this century. "In the summer, the trips were hot, monotonous, dusty, and slow; in the winter, they were cold, monotonous, dusty, and slow."¹⁰

It is commonly accepted that peddlers derived much of their income through their trade with impoverished rural blacks. What

is less certain is why they should have so openly and enthusiastically solicited African American customers. Three possibilities suggest themselves. The first is that, as a stranger to the South, at least initially the immigrant peddler did not share the region's racist notions. Secondly, the immigrants themselves had often experienced discrimination as a persecuted minority in their country of origin and could thus empathize with African Americans. While there may be substance to these assertions, the evidence is inconclusive and hard to pinpoint. Alternately, one might argue that the Jewish immigrant, struggling to sustain a regular income, was obliged to sell to any customer regardless of race. As Charles Rubin, a Polish Jew, stated, his father received "pitiful earnings" as a peddler on the outskirts of Atlanta. "A streetcar would take him to the end of the line," recalled Rubin. From there he walked with a pack on his back from shack to shack, farmhouse to farmhouse, selling his wares, mainly cheap items from novelty stores and dry goods houses. Most of his buyers were poor people, both white and black."¹¹ As this, one of many examples, illustrates, an enlightened self interest encouraged peddlers to trade openly with their black clientele. As Stephen Whitfield asserts, peddlers were "more interested in customers than in customs of racial discrimination."¹²

There is abundant anecdotal evidence that African Americans welcomed peddlers not only into their homes but into their hearts. David Cohn, for example, recalled the experiences of Tommy Ruben, a Lithuanian Jew who peddled his wares in the Mississippi Delta during the early twentieth century. Ruben was kindly and attentive towards his African American customers who, in return, referred to him affectionately as "Jew Mistuh Tommy."¹³

Stories such as this tend to sentimentalize the relationship between African Americans and Jews by implying a certain kinship between two peoples scraping an existence on the margins of southern society. The limitations of this picture are illustrated by an episode in Brunswick, Georgia, where African Americans boycotted a Jewish peddler whom they alleged had made some insulting racial remarks.¹⁴

Assaults and acts of petty thievery against peddlers and shopkeepers also were not unknown. For example, a report from the *Baton Rouge Gazette*, reprinted in *The Israelite* in May 1873, told of how early one morning three black men had allegedly clubbed an unsuspecting peddler to death and robbed him of his pack and money. The peddler's dead body was then dumped by the side of the road. It was eventually identified as that of Jacob Kriss, a Jew who had arrived in America only three months earlier and who had been attempting to save enough money to bring the rest of his family over from Germany. Outrage over the incident meant that the arrested assailants never made it to court but were "executed by the excited multitude." In November 1906 a young African American named Jesse Jones was hanged for the murder of Matthias Block, a store owner in Waco, Texas. And in Atlanta, Jacob Hirsowitz was murdered by a gang of blacks as they attempted to steal a revolver from his pawnshop. Anti-Semitism as a motivating factor can not be documented in any of these incidents. What they do illustrate is an area of difficulty in the lives of the Jewish businesspeople which could have contributed to divisiveness and negative feelings.¹⁵

Successful peddlers were eventually able to invest their earnings in the establishment of a wholesale or retail store. Jewish store owners in the rural South earned a bad reputation for their supposed mistreatment of black sharecroppers. The rates of interest which they charged for credit purchases were allegedly exorbitant. As Mark Twain observed, the Jewish merchants who established their businesses in the countryside after the Civil War "supplied all the Negro's share of the present crop and of part of his share of the next one. Before long, the whites detested the Jew and it is doubtful if the Negro loved him."¹⁶

It is uncertain whether or not the credit prices charged by Jewish merchants were exorbitant or justified by market risk. According to Herschel Feibelman, Jewish businessmen "would lend money, but they would also charge more than the larger groceries would charge." Since stores in poor rural areas operated on low profit and high risk it was inevitable that their owners should charge higher interest rates. Feibelman nonetheless insists that

greed also played its part. As he puts it, Jewish merchants “took advantage of the whole pattern of society that was designed to keep the black where he was.”¹⁷ This is not a statement of fact, but of opinion. What is needed is a quantitative study of the interest rates charged by Jewish merchants. Only then will we be able to determine if they deliberately exploited black sharecroppers. From another perspective, most black storeowners, undercapitalized and struggling to remain in business, were unable to extend credit to needy African Americans, and many white non-Jewish merchants were unwilling, worried as they were that the more sharecroppers purchased on credit, the less likely they were ever to pay the money back. By contrast, Jewish merchants earned a reputation for extending credit to African Americans whenever it was needed. This they did cautiously. As Harry Golden affirmed, the Jewish merchant sold to the sharecropper on credit “only on the same ledger sheet with the name of the farmer from whom the Negro was renting or for whom he was sharecropping. The ‘boss man,’ as the Negro called the white farmer, had to go surety on the credit sheet for the Negro’s supplies.” Credit on condition, however, was better than no credit at all. The system, as Sam Kallin suggested, worked to the mutual benefit of both the Jew and the African American. Of the credit extended to sharecroppers, “the white owners of the farm would stand good for it and we’d get paid for it next trip.”¹⁸

It was not in remote rural areas but rather the towns and cities of the South where Jewish merchants most commonly established their businesses. Peddlers who laid down their packs and set up permanent places of business could seldom at first afford rents for shop space in the more prestigious parts of town. Many settled on the other side of the railroad tracks, often opening stores sandwiched between streets of black-owned homes. With his family living above, behind or near the small wooden framed store, the East European Jew was one of the few whites to be seen in the black section. These Jewish establishments provided one of the most familiar points of contact between African Americans and Jews. Of his childhood in Atlanta, black educator Horace Mann Bond recalled: “the Jew was the man who kept the

pawnshop on Peter and Decatur Streets, where I sold papers on a Saturday; he was the man who operated the clothing store where my father took his five boys occasionally to lay in a stock of clothes." As such reminiscences suggest, Jewish merchants catered to every need of the African American community. Jewish names appeared above the doorways of dry goods stores, clothing outlets, groceries, pawnshops and saloons. Nowhere was this more obvious than on Beale Street in Memphis, commonly known as the black cultural capital of the South. Nearly all the bars, clubs, and gambling joints had Jewish proprietors. As George W. Lee remarked, Beale Street was "owned by Jews, policed by the whites, and enjoyed by the Negroes."¹⁹

Jewish merchants such as those on Beale Street earned a positive reputation for their willingness to provide services that other retailers refused to offer. The treatment which African Americans could expect from most white storeowners scarcely encouraged their business. Always last to be served and seldom allowed to try on clothes, black customers were allowed only to point at untried, ready-to-wear merchandise. It was only when the Depression left them desperate for business that the majority of white merchants began to adopt a more amenable attitude.²⁰

Jewish tradesmen, in contrast, placed a much greater emphasis on personal service. By treating African Americans with care and consideration, they accorded them a stronger sense of personal respect than other storeowners. The historian Bell Wiley observed that the Jewish owner of a dry goods store in his Tennessee hometown "got most of the black trade because he treated Negroes as human beings and was kindly to them, taking time to joke, inquire about their families and otherwise manifest interest in them." Unlike other white businessmen, Jews extended such courtesies in times of economic boom as well as bust. Jewish merchants therefore seemed more sincere in their respect for African Americans. The civil rights activist Aaron Henry recalled that the black community of Clarksdale, Mississippi preferred to trade with Jewish merchants precisely because "you would consider them the better of the white element that you had dealings with."²¹

The greater willingness of Jewish businessmen to attract black customers can also be seen through their use of advertising. Jewish merchants from the smallest storekeeper to the most successful department storeowner advertised extensively in the black press. In January 1907, for instance, readers of the *Nashville Globe* were met with an ominous message: "NOW IS THE APPOINTED TIME." Those who read past this dramatic headline discovered that this was less an announcement of Judgement Day, than an invitation to buy "heavy fleece underwear" and "Imported Fancy Sox" at "unheard of low prices." The establishment where such offers were to be discovered was "Nashville's Biggest Store! Hirshberg Bros." As the *Globe* later observed, Hirshberg Bros. was one of only two white stores in the entire city which advertised to its readers. It was small surprise that the paper continued to "heartily recommend" the store.²² Black newspapers across the South carried advertisements from other Jewish retailers, all encouraging African Americans that their money was as good as that of any white person. A study of the *Atlanta Independent* in 1907, for example, reveals a wide variety of Jewish advertisers, among them grocer P. Laubenstein, tailors Kalish and Schwartz & Berin, store owners Eiseman Bros., and credit loan company Cohen and Russ.²³

Another means by which Jews sought to attract African American customers was the employment of a black salesperson. This provided prospective shoppers with a double incentive, quality goods and more considerate service. As the *Savannah Tribune* observed, Jewish storekeepers on the city's west side employed black sales clerks because they saw them as "a great drawing card for Negro trade." Savannah was not the only southern city where Jews took the initiative in employing African Americans. Abe Goldstein, owner of a tire company in Atlanta, appreciated the potential profit to be made long before his competitors. His decision to hire O. B. Smith as a black salesman during the 1930s constituted a clear breach of conventional employment practice.²⁴

Several factors explain why Jews should have so assiduously courted black customers. The most important of these was pure

financial necessity. Eastern European Jews usually established their businesses on very little capital. As Jacob Allen asserted of the Jewish immigrants who arrived in Birmingham, Alabama at the turn of the century, many were "right on the verge of poverty, having just enough to get by for food and never quite enough for clothing."²⁵ Unable to compete with wealthier retailers, the Eastern Europeans turned instead to the relatively untapped trade with African Americans. A second factor stemmed from the historical experience of Jews in Eastern Europe. Russian Jews in particular had considerable experience in dealing with an impoverished peasant population, and were therefore temperamentally disposed to dealing with African Americans.²⁶

The commercial relationship thus established was reinforced by a certain sense of empathy between the two peoples. One should retain a certain degree of skepticism about the recollections of memoirists, sentimental and self-serving as they often are. The idea that Jews shared some kind of kinship with African Americans is nonetheless a common theme in such writings. Unlike the assimilated German Jews, many Eastern European immigrants remained on the margins of southern society, isolated by the strangeness both of their tongue and their dress. Mina Surasky Tropp, an artist from Aiken, South Carolina, maintained that her family was always conscious of its marginality. When the family first arrived in Aiken during the 1890s, their neighbors "offered my father \$2,000 profit if he would sell them the house because they did not want Jews on the block." Young Mina also had to endure the rocks and taunts hurled by other children as she walked to and from school. Rejected by the white community, the family reached instinctively to other outsiders. "My father never treated a Black customer differently than a white. Once my father told of hearing one Negro say to another, 'If it wasn't for the Jews, we would be considered the lowest people on earth.' Lie or joke, it amused papa." This apparent sensitivity towards another oppressed minority also influenced Benny Grusin, a Latvian Jew who opened a small retail business in Sipse, Alabama. Grusin "treated black customers like all customers, though he

probably had more empathy for the blacks, knowing full well what suffering and discrimination meant."²⁷

One should nonetheless caution against arguing that there was a special relationship between African Americans and Jews. Other marginalized immigrant groups including Greeks and Chinese also traded openly with African Americans. In July 1899 five Sicilian storekeepers were lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana. The murdered men had aroused the ire of the local community by trading with black and white customers on an equal basis. While more comparative research is needed, it would appear that the decision of white ethnic minorities to trade with African Americans was driven by two common factors: their minority status coupled with commercial exigencies.²⁸

Despite the determination of many Jewish merchants to treat their African American customers with decency and respect, their efforts were impeded by the pervasive forces of white racism. Jews offended the white community through their contravention of caste principles. Their actions risked economic reprisals, social opprobrium, and even violence. On August 15, 1868, S. A. Bierfield, a young Russian Jew, was seized by Klansmen and shot dead. Bierfield had caused offense to the white folk of Franklin, Tennessee, by fraternizing with the blacks who shopped at his store. Fourteen months later, Samuel Fleishman, a Jewish hardware merchant, was murdered in almost identical circumstances in Marianna, Florida.²⁹ Blame for the outbreak of the Atlanta race riot in September 1906 was leveled at the largely Jewish saloon owners who, it was alleged, had openly encouraged black drunkenness and debauchery. City authorities responded by closing many of these establishments.³⁰

Although Jewish merchants continued to trade with African Americans, they were therefore compelled to exercise a certain degree of caution. Jews were forced to tread a fine line, retaining their friendliness towards African Americans without risking overfamiliarity which might risk unpleasant repercussions from whites. While some Jewish merchants felt sufficiently secure to call their black customers "Mr." and "Mrs.," others, as John Dollard suggested, sought what they hoped would be a safe com-

promise, "such as by saying 'What can I do for you?' and letting it go at that." The situation was especially awkward in smaller towns where white racism and political conformism forced Jews onto the defensive. As one storekeeper recollected: "We took no chances. We did not even offer any of this ready-to-wear apparel to our white customers, so they could never say a Negro had tried it on. We made sure that there was never the slightest suspicion of this."³¹

The actions of the Jewish merchant were also impeded by another powerful ideological force, anti-Semitism. African Americans' attitudes towards Jews were shaped by the Protestant fundamentalist culture of the South. The conception of Jews as Christ killers, first learned by their forebears on the plantations of the Old South, continued to exert a powerful influence in the postbellum era. Not only had Jews rejected Jesus, but their every action was impelled by sinful impulses. In June 1927 the *Atlanta Independent* reported the story of a Jew named Cerf, who had been running an illegal movie show for African Americans in Sunset Park until it was broken up by the police. "It is well known that the Jews do not accept our Christian Sunday," seethed the paper, "but while they are entitled to serve God according to the dictates of their own consciences, they have no right to desecrate our Sabbath and insult our religion by conducting places of amusement that interfere with the sanctity of our Sabbath."³²

As this editorial would suggest, religious and secular stereotypes intersected in the minds of many African Americans to create the caricature of the immoral and avaricious Jewish merchant. Although African Americans did not entertain any ideas about Jews that were not commonly shared by whites, anti-Semitism was clearly widespread within the black community. "The Jews," asserted William Wells Brown, "are good only at driving a bargain and getting rich."³³

The black folklore of the time is full of tales about the unscrupulous Jew. North Carolina blacks told of Jim Johnson, who bought a suit at Mr. Rubenstein's store. The first time Johnson wore the suit, he found himself caught in the rain. So badly did

the suit shrink, that the trousers ended up around his knees, and the coat would not button. Enraged, Johnson returned to the store, where he asked the proprietor, "Mr. Rubenstein, does you remember me, Jim?" To which the Jew replied: "Sho, I remembers you," looking at the suit, "but my! how you has growed!" Similarly, the *Huntsville Gazette* ran a story concerning a shoe-store owner named Hoffenstein. In this tale, Hoffenstein attempts to sell a pair of shoes which he claims are made of the finest Prussian leather. When the customer tries them on, they are evidently too tight. "You don't vant to buy a pair uf shoes more as drie sizes too big," retorts Hoffenstein, "und go around de ladies mit your feet looking like a gouple of railroad scrapers." When the customer does agree to buy the shoes, he is appalled to learn that they cost six dollars. After much protest, Hoffenstein lowers the price to four dollars. Although the wholesale price for the shoes was a mere one dollar and fifty cents, Hoffenstein is aghast. "My g-r-r-acious," he exclaims, "dink how small de profit vas."³⁴

So strong a hold did these ethnic stereotypes have on the imaginations of African Americans that they often refused to accept even the kindest behavior of Jewish merchants on face value. The novelist Richard Wright recalled of his childhood in Mississippi and Arkansas that African Americans held an irrational hatred of Jewish merchants. Although the owner of one store had done nothing to exploit his African American customers, Wright and his friends would, whenever he walked past, sing: "A rotten egg/ Never fries/ A cheating dog/ Never thrives." Black sociologist St. Clair Drake remembered a similar episode which occurred as he walked past the house of a Jewish family who owned a chain of stores in Staunton, Virginia. The lady of the house invited Drake and his grandmother in for a glass of water, which they accepted. No sooner had Drake returned home, however, than his grandmother solemnly warned him: "They'll cheat you. You got to be careful."³⁵

Although in many respects African Americans distrusted and disliked Jewish merchants, they also admired their commercial acumen. During the early twentieth century African American leaders argued that the best means by which their own

people could enhance their economic fortunes was to emulate the business practices of Jews. Particularly in urban areas, African American retailers were able to earn a good income serving the needs of their own community. Nonetheless, it is largely true that black businesses blossomed only in those areas, such as undertaking and barber shops, where there was no direct competition from whites. The National Negro Business League, organized in Boston in August 1900, was supposed to serve as the instrument of change, stimulating the development of local black enterprise and advertising the achievements of black businessmen. Its accomplishments, however, were negligible. The Negro Cooperative League, founded by W. E. B. Dubois in 1918, was equally short lived.³⁶

The most persistent problem facing black businessmen was the desperate shortage of capital needed to invest in their operations. African Americans who sought to establish their own businesses were obliged to seek loans from white bankers who charged exorbitant interest rates. Consequently, the typical black businessman was able to invest no more than between \$500 and \$1,000 in a new enterprise.³⁷

The impact of this was that few black businesses were ever started and even fewer survived. Most remained small, shoestring operations. Without the ability to afford more than a narrow range of goods, black businessmen could never hope to compete with white storeowners. Many African Americans preferred to patronize white stores, where they could be sure of buying more for less. Appeals to "buy black" and help establish a self-sustaining economy within the African American community were largely ignored. As J. Harmon, Jr., put it, black consumers "could not be expected to give a man ten cents for an eight-cent pound of sugar and two cents for race pride." The *Atlanta Independent* agreed. "If there is a Jew store on the corner and a Negro store around the block, or vice-versa, and the Jew store sells for two or three cents less, the Negro will go to the Jew store because he can get the same thing for less money."³⁸

As this editorial suggests, there was initially a great deal of resentment that Jewish retailers had attained their success at the

expense of their African American rivals. This is certainly clear from an address delivered by Hattie G. Escridge at the Atlanta University Conference of 1899. In an impassioned speech on "The Need of Negro Merchants," Escridge asserted that Jews attained their wealth through the willful exploitation of others, none more so than African Americans. When the Jew first settled in a black community he was often as poor as the other residents. Yet soon, by selling unsuspecting blacks unwanted goods at grossly inflated prices, he "has a large brick building, a number of clerks, and he and his family ride in a fine carriage drawn by expensive horses." African Americans would be better off buying from black business establishments. Insisted Escridge, "I am sure what we might buy from the Negro could be no more inferior than some of the things we have bought from the Jew, and I suspect his recommendation of the article would be as truthful as that of the Jew."³⁹

During the early twentieth century this resentment appears to have given way to a genuine respect for the business acumen of Jews. African American commercial leaders began to argue that instead of begrudging Jews their business success, they should learn to emulate their example in order to bolster the economic strength of the black community. Telling comparisons were made between the supposed entrepreneurial skills of Jews, and the ignorance and incompetence of their African American competitors. Black merchants were, for instance, accused of dirtiness in their stores and discourtesy in their conduct. By contrast, Jews were commended for their presentation and politeness. According to a *Nashville Globe* article of 1910, when a black store opened, the best brands were stacked on the shelves, but very soon these were substituted with shoddier goods. "His customers complain," the paper exclaimed of the black merchant, "and he promises them that all defects will be remedied, but the promise is not kept." While the black merchant was busy putting himself out of business, his Jewish rival was "doing his best to please his customers . . . Goods are kept up to the standard, the store is neat and clean, fly specks are washed off the window, every employee is ordered to keep their clothes clean and well arranged, and he invites the public to come in and see how politely he can have

them served. Ask yourself the question, who will get the business?" The obvious answer was supplied by the South African author Maurice Evans. Writing in 1915, Evans observed that Jewish stores "were crammed with Negroes, full of importance, pricing and buying." By contrast, "The Negro stores were empty of customers."⁴⁰

Inspired by the resounding success of Jewish retailers, African American spokespersons urged that their methods be observed and imitated by black entrepreneurs. The recipe for Jewish success in the retail industry, black businesspeople were told, contained a number of special ingredients. Jews, for example, kept their overheads low and reinvested a large percentage of their profits in their businesses. "The Jewish race is no race of spend-thrifts," observed an anonymous author in the *Voice of the Negro*. "They believe in the strictest economy." With the Jew to guide them, black merchants would discover how to create as well as satisfy demand, how to keep their accounts straight, and their window displays sharp.⁴¹

Yet even as they extolled the example of the Jew, African Americans unwittingly betrayed their anti-Semitic prejudices. By playing upon the traditional stereotype of Jews as shrewd businessmen, African Americans were at best paying their rivals a backhanded compliment. "They wax fat and profiteer on Christian holidays," Kelly Miller informed readers of the *Richmond Planet*. "They violate their own Sabbath, gathering in shekels, to supply Christians with their requirements for Sunday." Jews were selfish, insistent, and ruthlessly single-minded. In short, the perfect role model. African Americans therefore adopted an inverted stereotype of the Jew, portraying his supposedly merciless instinct for money-making as a virtue rather than a vice. According to Henry Clay Bruce, a former slave then working as a federal government employee in Washington, Jews had amassed enormous individual and collective wealth in spite of persistent prejudice and discrimination. "By turning their attention entirely to trade, they have been enabled to command respect by reason of their money solely, so that to-day, especially in this country, they have a very high standing in the commercial business of the coun-

try, and are gradually increasing it each year, so that it is only a matter of time, when they will be able to control such business." As has already been suggested, African Americans resented what they believed to be their economic exploitation by Jewish merchants. Bruce shared the same conviction that Jews were essentially parasites, living off the producers of wealth. Although disliking Jews personally, he nonetheless admired them professionally.⁴²

That professional success was most dramatically illustrated by the scores of department stores operated by Jewish entrepreneurs across the South. Polish immigrant Louis Pizitz arrived in the United States in 1889. After peddling his wares across Georgia, Pizitz eventually opened a dry goods store in Birmingham. Such was the scale of his success that by 1937 the store was the largest of its kind in Alabama, employing some 750 people.⁴³

The experience of Louis Pizitz was characteristic of the striking business success achieved by Jewish retailers throughout the South. Upon arriving in Richmond in 1842, William Thalhimer opened a small dry goods store. Fifty years later Thalhimer Brothers was the largest department store in the city and boasted branches throughout Virginia and North Carolina.⁴⁴ The triumphs of Thalhimer and Pizitz were echoed elsewhere, with Jewish department stores to be found on the streets of almost every major southern city. In Atlanta there was Rich's; in Birmingham, Loveman, Joseph, & Loeb; and in Dallas, Sanger Bros. and Neiman-Marcus.⁴⁵

The atmosphere which African Americans encountered in department stores was utterly alien to that of the small independent retail establishment. When African Americans entered a Jewish store in their own neighborhood, they were encouraged to leave their second-class citizenship at the door. Department stores, in contrast, reinforced every idea of African American inferiority. Reliant upon white customers for a high percentage of their profit, Jewish department store owners were bound by local law and custom. Water fountains, restrooms, and restaurants were rigidly segregated. Such facilities were not just separate and

unequal, sometimes they did not exist at all. Dan Phillips, whose family operated the M. M. Cohen department store in Little Rock, Arkansas, testified that African American women even “had a problem buying foundations, because stores didn’t want them to try them on.” Where Jewish storeowners in black neighborhoods might employ black sales clerks, there was no such sign of them on the sales floors of southern department stores. “There were no black employees in selling,” admitted Richard Pizitz, son of Louis, “they were essentially in house keeping, restaurants and back functions.”⁴⁶

The discrimination suffered by African Americans unsettled those Jews who became actively involved in southern liberalism during the inter-war years. These activists found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the social activist teachings of their religion with the blatant segregationism of many Jewish businessmen. Evidence of this can be found in a caustic item of correspondence written by David Pearce, which appeared in a 1925 edition of *The Crisis*, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Pearce, himself a southern Jew, complained that Jewish merchants were so dependent upon the goodwill of their white customers that they did not dare to extend even basic courtesies to African Americans. The Jewish tradesman, he alleged, “is satisfied to accept the situation as he finds it. He must make money, he must be in the good graces of his gentile neighbors, and whatever personal inclination he may possess to combat Negro hatred must be suppressed in the more vital and immediate issue of earning a livelihood.” In April 1936, *The Crisis* printed a letter from Samuel Rosenberg of Hampton, Virginia, which blamed the exploitative practices of Jewish merchants for sinking African Americans deeper into the doldrums of the Depression. “One of the obstacles which helps to lower his standard of living is the retail merchant . . . Southern Jews from Rabbis to merchants regard the Negro as a second or third class being.”⁴⁷

During the early decades of the twentieth century, African Americans had little expectation that Jewish department store owners should be any more racially enlightened than their white

gentile rivals. Yet during the decade before the Second World War a new racial consciousness began to stir within the black community. African Americans perceived in the Nazi persecution of German Jews a startling parallel to their own suffering. In increasingly strident tones the black press called on the Jewish community to recognize its common status with African Americans and to unite in a struggle against the forces of racial and religious extremism. As Dr. R. H. Butler, an African American minister, asserted: "We want their sympathy, and it is their duty to give it. They should line up . . . always to lighten the burdens of the oppressed."⁴⁸

The belief that Jews had a responsibility to assist the black civil rights struggle became a recurrent theme not only in the press, but in literature, music, and fine art. Although it trades in ethnic stereotypes, the choral work *Wailing Woman*, written by composer William Grant Still in 1946, suggests an innate empathy between African Americans and Jews.

He said they shunned him because his skin was black,
Underneath I felt akin because my nose was hooked, my
folk despised.
Adonoy!⁴⁹

This optimistic rhetoric was contradicted by the economic reality of Jewish discrimination against African Americans. By the late 1930s black activists singled out Jewish department store owners for particular criticism, not because they were any worse than other whites, but because they were expected to know better. As Cheryl Greenberg has astutely observed, African Americans fostered a profound sense of betrayal.⁵⁰ Indicative of this, and of the incipient struggle against segregated facilities in department stores, were efforts made in 1938 by the Mobile, Alabama branch of the NAACP to negotiate with Berney L. Strauss, president of the L. Hammel Dry Goods Co., for the provision of rest room and comfort facilities for black women and children. Since African Americans accounted for a large percentage of his business, Strauss had no option but to appear sympathetic when he

met with a delegation of NAACP activists. However, he soon reneged on his initial commitment, stating in no uncertain terms that it was “not a custom of department stores in the South to have comfort facilities for colored shoppers.” Local NAACP leader J. L. LeFlore fired back a furious response. It was obscene, he stormed, that, far from standing together against their common foe, one oppressed ethnic minority should be inflicting suffering on another: “Thousands of thoughtful colored people throughout the United States have contributed efforts aimed to alleviate the plight of Jewry . . . We are bewildered that a member of one oppressed group, because of favorable geographic and other conditions, would be unsympathetic and recalcitrant in regard to the rights of another persecuted minority.” The NAACP would be issuing leaflets to black churches and fraternal organizations criticizing Strauss’s stance. As for LeFlore himself, he and his family would refuse to shop at the store in the future.⁵¹

The confrontation between Strauss and the NAACP anticipated the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s. It was no coincidence that when black demonstrators organized direct action protests against downtown department stores they deliberately targeted those owned by Jews. In 1959, for instance, the Miami chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality focused its sit-in campaign against one particular store precisely in order to “get the Jew first.”⁵² There was therefore an anti-Semitic undercurrent to some of the black student protests of the postwar era. The belief that Jews would take the initiative in integrating their own businesses gave way to a bitter disappointment. In this sense African Americans betrayed a certain naiveté about the constraints that Jim Crow imposed upon Jewish businessmen. Integration of the department stores during the war would have been economic suicide as well as illegal. Whatever the reality of the situation, it is clear that by the 1940s there were considerable tensions in the relationship between African Americans and Jews in the South. As an editorial in the black-owned *Carolina Times* of 1945 boldly asserted, “Jews and Negroes must get

together . . . those of the Jews that violate the racial bonds . . . must be publicly denounced and descried."⁵³

In 1943, the African American scholar L. D. Reddick published an article in which he asserted that black anti-Semitism was a phenomenon of the northern inner city.⁵⁴ It is true that the southern states did not witness direct conflict between African Americans and Jewish merchants on the same scale as in the ghettos of Chicago and New York. There was no repeat in the South of the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns which were organized in northern ghettos during the Great Depression.⁵⁵ On the contrary, Jews were widely considered as the only southern whites who commonly treated African Americans with compassion and respect. By the outbreak of the Second World War relations between black customers and Jewish merchants were nonetheless becoming increasingly fraught with tension. Pronounced class distinctions between the two peoples positioned Jews with the white community and undermined the potential for a closer relationship. Ultimately African Americans perceived Jews as an element of white oppression.⁵⁶

NOTES

¹ Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), 3, 25, 26, 61–63.

² See, for instance, Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York and Oxford, 1994), 202–207; St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton, *Black Metropolis* (New York, 1945); Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation & Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York, 1995), 87–96; and Roi Ottley, *"New World A-Coming": Inside Black America* (Boston, 1943).

³ The need for closer scholarly study of this subject is discussed in Hasia R. Diner, "Between Words and Deeds: Jews and Blacks in America, 1880–1935" in Cornel West and Jack Saltzman, eds., *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (New York and Oxford, 1997), 95

⁴ Stephen J. Whitfield, *Voices of Jacob, Hands of Esau: Jews in American Life and Thought* (Hamden, CT, 1984), 230.

⁵ Arnold Shankman, "Friend or Foe? Southern Blacks View the Jew, 1880–1935," in Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *"Turn to the South": Essays on Southern Jewry*

(Charlottesville, VA, 1979), 106; Edward King, *The Great South*, 2 vols. (New York, 1969 [1875]), I, 274; Frances Butler Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation Since The War* (London, 1883), 302; John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New Haven, 1937). See also Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York, 1968), 9.

⁶ King, *The Great South* 274; Frederic Trautmann, ed., *Travels on the Lower Mississippi 1879-1880: A Memoir by Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg* (Columbia and London, 1990), 74, 204; W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1989 [1903]), 138-139; Timothy Thomas Fortune, *Black and White: Land, Labor and Politics in the South* (New York, 1968 [1884]), 190-191.

⁷ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York, 1984 [1967]); Oscar R. Williams, "Historical Impressions of Black-Jewish Relations Prior to World War II," *Negro History Bulletin* 40 (July-August 1977), 728-731.

⁸ Louis Schmier, "'For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do Enough': A Jewish Peddler and His Black Customers Look at Each Other," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 73 (September 1983), 54. See also Harry L. Golden, *Forgotten Pioneer* (Cleveland, OH, and New York, 1963), 68; and Rudolf Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana* (New York, 1970), 59.

⁹ Diner, "Between Words and Deeds," 100-101.

¹⁰ James C. Cobb, ed., *The Mississippi Delta and the World: The Memoirs of David L. Cohn* (Baton Rouge and London, 1995), 89, 91; Leo E. Turitz and Evelyn Turitz, *Jews in Early Mississippi* (Jackson, MS, 1995), xvi; Ruth D. Scheinberg, "The Pekl: Folk Histories of Jewish Peddlers in the South, 1890-1914," (Unpublished MA thesis, Emory University, 1980), 49; Louis E. Schmier, "Hellooo! Peddlerman! Hellooo!" in Jerrell H. Shofner and Linda Ellsworth, eds., *Ethnic Minorities in Gulf Coast Society* (Pensacola, FL.: Gulf Coast Society and Humanities Conference, 1979), 75-88.

¹¹ Charles Rubin, *The Log of Rubin the Sailor* (New York, 1973), 13-14.

¹² Whitfield, *Voices of Jacob*, 241-242; Turitz and Turitz, *Jews in Early Mississippi*, xvii; Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973), 70; William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (New York, 1972 [1941]), 17; Kelly Miller, "The Negro and the Jew in Business," *Richmond Planet*, April 13, 1935.

¹³ David L. Cohn, *Where I Was Born and Raised* (Notre Dame and London, 1967), 218-219; Cobb, *Mississippi Delta*, 90-91.

¹⁴ Shankman, "Friend or Foe?" 114.

¹⁵ Shankman, "Friend or Foe?" 114; Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana*, 61; *The Israelite*, May 23, 1873; William Curry, *A History of Waco, With Illustrations to Six Shooter Junction* (Waco, 1968), 85-86; Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia, 1978), 188.

¹⁶ Golden, *Forgotten Pioneer*, 68; Mark Twain, "Concerning the Jews," *Harper's Magazine* 99 (September 1899), 530. See also Bradley G. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi 1830-1900* (Baton Rouge and London, 1995), 148-149; E. Merton Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (Baton Rouge and London, 1947), 202-203.

¹⁷ Schmier, "'For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do Enough,'" 79; Rachele Saltzman, "Shalom Y' All," *Southern Exposure* 11 (1983), 34.

¹⁸ Golden, *Forgotten Pioneer*, 68; Schmier, "'For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do

Enough,'" 79. Other qualities which Jewish merchants possessed, according to one source, were their "infinite patience in dealing with the simple people in small business affairs," and their willingness "to bargain over prices." Thomas D. Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 55 (June 1966), 430.

¹⁹ Thomas C. Parramore with Peter C. Stewart and Tommy L. Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville and London, 1994), 279; Horace Mann Bond, "Negro Attitudes Toward Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 27 (January 1965), 4; William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home: Or, The South and Its People* (New York, 1969 [1880]), 167; Jonathan Daniels, *A Southerner Discovers the South* (New York, 1938), 84; Hollis R. Lynch, *The Black Urban Condition: A Documentary History, 1866-1971* (New York, 1973), 212. An identical remark to that made by Lee was later used to describe West Ninth Street, the main black business district in Little Rock. Of Decatur Street in Atlanta, Jewish resident Louis Geffen recalled that it was cluttered with Jewish pawn and second hand clothing shops. "The black population," he also observed, "used that particular street as their main street." *State Press*, May 2, 1958; Louis Geffen interview, conducted by Cliff Kuhn, August 21, 1979. Living Atlanta Collection, Atlanta Historical Society; Jack Mazuir interview, conducted by Lila Beth Young, May 16, 1990, Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Jewish Community Archives, William Breman Jewish Museum, Atlanta Jewish Federation.

²⁰ Harry L. Golden, "Jew and Gentile in the New South: Segregation at Sundown," *Commentary* 20 (November 1955), 410; *Nashville Globe*, March 8, 1907; Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (London, 1908), 40; Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago and London, 1941), 457; Dollard, *Caste and Class*, 129-130.

²¹ Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," 430; Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, 14 vols., (Urbana, Chicago, and London, 1972-1984), VIII, 97; Jack Nusan Porter, "John Henry and Mr. Goldberg: The Relationship Between Blacks and Jews," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 7 (1979), 80; Eli Evans, *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of A Jewish Southerner* (Jackson, MS, 1993), 11; Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers* (Reading, MA, 1994), 204; William "Sonny" Walker interview, conducted by Clive Webb, December 9, 1993.

²² *Nashville Globe*, January 18, February 1, 1907. Other Jewish advertisers in the *Globe* included David J. Kuhn, whose name appeared regularly from March 22, 1907; Rosenheim Millinery Store, which first appeared on May 24, 1907; and tailor Abe Ulvavitz, who offered his services to readers from June 21, 1907.

²³ *Atlanta Independent*, March 30, 1907, May 11, 1907. Jewish businesses also advertised heavily in the *Savannah Tribune* and *Huntsville Gazette*. Jewish advertisers in the *Tribune* included B. H. Levy, Bros. Co., Louis Rubin's Grocery Store, and Shapiro's Cut Price Shoe Store; among those in the *Gazette* were P. J. Kaufman and Herstein & Lowenthal. *Savannah Tribune*, August 23, 1913, June 27, 1914, July 3, 1924; *Huntsville Gazette*, June 18 and October 15, 1881.

²⁴ *Savannah Tribune*, August 7, 1924; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 5, 1983.

²⁵ Mark H. Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (University, Alabama, 1974), 61–62.

²⁶ Diner, "Between Words and Deeds," 98; Steven Hertzberg, "Southern Jews and Their Encounter with Blacks: Atlanta, 1850–1915," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 23 (Fall 1979), 11.

²⁷ Mina Surasky Tropp, "Memoirs—Mostly about a South Carolina Childhood," *Jewish Currents* 24 (February 1980), 14, 29–30; Scheinberg, "The Pekl," 61. See also Hertzberg, "Southern Jews and Their Encounter with Blacks," 11–12; and Whitfield, *Voices of Jacob*, 243.

²⁸ Richard Gambino, *Blood of my Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans* (Garden City, NY, 1974), 118; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994 [1955]), 169; Jean Scarpaci, "A Tale of Selective Accommodation: Sicilians and Native Whites in Louisiana," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 5 (1977), 43.

²⁹ *New York Times*, August 19, 1868; Morris U. Schappes, ed., *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States 1654–1875* (New York, 1971), 515–517; Jessie Fortune, "Among the Children of the East Side Jews (1905)," *Jewish Currents* 29 (1975), 4–5.

³⁰ Davis, et al., *Deep South*, 459; Glenn Weddington Rainey, "The Race Riot of 1906 in Atlanta" (MA thesis, Emory University, 1929), 30–35. Jews who lost their licenses included P. Abelman, Clein Brothers, I. L. Clein, J. Cohen, Pete Cohen, Goldberg & Feen, L. Hersovitz, H. Jacobs, J. and L. Klein, Emile Heyman, M. Schurman, M. M. L. Shatzen, A. Spitz, and Steinberg & Abelson. *Atlanta Constitution*, October 5, 1906.

³¹ Dollard, *Caste and Class*, 129–130; Golden, *Forgotten Pioneer*, 73; Suberman, *The Jew Store*, 63; Saltzman, "Shalom Y'All," 35.

³² Rainey, "Race Riot," 33–34; *Atlanta Independent*, June 23, 1927.

³³ Brown, *My Southern Home*, 248.

³⁴ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), 305; *Huntsville Gazette*, August 27, 1881; Daryl Cumber Dance, *Shuckin' and Jivin': Folklore from Contemporary Black Americans* (Bloomington and London, 1978), 158; Walker interview; J. C. Fairley interview, conducted by Clive Webb, March 19, 1994.

³⁵ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York, 1978), 113; Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (Harlow, Essex, 1986 edn.), 52–53; Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York, 1988), 33–34.

³⁶ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865–1920* (Arlington Heights, IL, 1992), 59; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York and London, 1944), II, 815–816.

³⁷ J. H. Harmon, Jr., "The Negro as a Local Business Man," *Journal of Negro History* 14 (April 1929), 153.

³⁸ John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860–1880* (Chicago and London, 1973), 70–71; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana and Chicago, 1990), 191; Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, I, 304–305; Harmon, "The Negro as a Local Business Man," 131; *Atlanta Independent*, July 8, 1926; Davis, et al., *Deep South*, 473.

³⁹ W. E. B. Dubois, ed., *The Negro in Business: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University* (Atlanta, 1899), 61.

⁴⁰ Philip S. Foner, "Black-Jewish Relations in the Opening Years of the Twentieth Century," *Phylon* 36 (Winter 1975), 360-361; *Nashville Globe*, December 2, 1910; Maurice S. Evans, *Black and White in the Southern States: A Study of the Race Problem in the United States from a South African Point of View* (London, 1915), 105. See also Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 41.

⁴¹ Anonymous, "The Hebrew Race in America," *Voice of the Negro* 3 (December 1905), 20; "Taking Advantage of our Disadvantages," (1894) *Booker T. Washington Papers*, III, 408-409.

⁴² Miller, "The Negro and the Jew in Business"; H. C. Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-nine Years a Slave, Twenty-nine Years a Free Man* (Lincoln and London, 1996 [1895]), 143-144.

⁴³ Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 125-128; Richard Pizitz interview, conducted by Clive Webb, February 15, 1994.

⁴⁴ Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), 237.

⁴⁵ Leon Harris, *Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Families Who Built Great Department Stores* (New York, 1977); Robert G. Corley, *Paying "Civic Rent": The Jews of Emanu-El and the Birmingham Community* (Birmingham, AL, 1982); Nancy Faires Cohen and Nora Faires, "'Colored' and Catholic: The Lebanese in Birmingham, Alabama," in Eric J. Hooglund, ed., *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States Before 1840* (Washington, DC, and London, 1987), 72; Natalie Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans: Their Impact on Texas and American History for Four Hundred Years, 1590-1990* (Dallas, 1989), 150-155, 157-163; Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, GA, 1982), 115. On the growth of other Jewish department stores elsewhere in the South see, among others, Carolyn Gray LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s-1990s* (Fayetteville, 1994), 112-116; Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-1960s* (Macon, GA, 1998), 15-20, 84-85; Whitfield, *Voices of Jacob*, 233; Audrey Daniels Kariel, "The Jewish Story and Memories of Marshall, Texas," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 14 (1982), 195; and Burton Alan Boxerman, "The Edison Brothers, Shoe Merchants: Their Georgia Years," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57 (1973): 511-525.

⁴⁶ Dan Phillips interview, conducted by Clive Webb, June 15, 1994; Pizitz interview.

⁴⁷ David H. Pierce, "Is the Jew a Friend of the Negro?" *The Crisis* 30 (August 1925), 184; Samuel A. Rosenberg letter, *The Crisis* 43 (April 1936), 122.

⁴⁸ Winston C. McDowell, "Keeping Them 'In the Same Boat Together'? Sufu Abdul Hamid, African Americans, Jews, and the Harlem Job Boycotts," in V. P. Franklin, Nancy L. Grant, Harold M. Kletnick, and Genna Rae McNeil, eds., *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict* (Columbia and London, 1998), 217-218; Shankman, "Friend or Foe?," 118.

⁴⁹ *Wailing Woman*, music by William Grant Still, poem by Verna Arvey, William Grant Still Music, 1946. A sense of common suffering between African Americans and Jews also can be seen in the painting *Deliver Us From Evil* by John Wilson, reproduced in Jack Salzman with Adina Back and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews* (New York, 1992), 214. For a literary depiction of this same subject, see Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (New York, 1946).

⁵⁰ Cheryl Greenberg, "The Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights," in Franklin, et al., *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century*, 130–131.

⁵¹ J. L. LeFlore to Berney L. Strauss, October 12, 1938. Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913–1939. Series A: The South. Reel 4, Group 1, Series G: Mobile,

Alabama Branch.

⁵² Raymond A. Mohl, "'South of the South?' Jews, Blacks, and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945–1960," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18 (Winter 1999), 22.

⁵³ Greenberg, "Southern Jewish Community," 131–132.

⁵⁴ L. D. Reddick, "Anti-Semitism Among Negroes" in Salzman, et al., *Bridges and Boundaries*, 79–85.

⁵⁵ Ronald W. Bailey, ed., *Black Business Enterprise: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York and London, 1971), 80.

⁵⁶ Greenberg, "Southern Jewish Community," 128

Mercy on Rude Streams: Jewish Emigrants from Alsace-Lorraine to the Lower Mississippi Region and the Concept of Fidelity

by

Anny Bloch

Can an act of implied rejection actually be an act of affirmation? Is it possible to remain faithful to one's country by leaving it? In the mid to late nineteenth century, Jews left the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine in eastern France and emigrated to the American South, particularly to the area along the Mississippi river. At least one wave of emigration can be interpreted as rejecting the onslaught of encroaching German hegemony after 1871 rather than a repudiation of the French heritage of which they were proud.

This study attempts to identify how Jewish emigrants from Alsace-Lorraine to the United States perceived the notions of fidelity and infidelity; that is to say, the diverse ways of pledging allegiance to their new country as well as maintaining some ties to their native land. Instead of loyalty or disloyalty, the terms of "fidelity" and "infidelity" have been chosen because the former notions have political connotations associated with citizenship. Fidelity, too, may convey political associations, particularly loyalty to a country and to its laws, but it also connotes affiliations especially to values as well as cultural and religious traditions. Fidelity implies memory, an attitude toward the past that opts for continuity that remains a discrete element on the adjustment to a new environment in a new country. Thus it overlaps with the concept of the maintenance of tradition.

Typically associated with acculturation, the antonym infidelity is understood as leaving one's country, surrendering allegiance to the native land, and foregoing the regular practice of familiar language and cultural habits. The process entails various degrees of acculturation to the ultimate level of assimilation into the new society. While certainly such adaptation took place among the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine in the Mississippi region, because it is a theme historians have treated in depth it will only be discussed briefly here.

Viewing Jewish emigration from Alsace-Lorraine in relation to the poles of fidelity/infidelity modifies the perspective of the immigration historiography that finds "that the masses of immigrants brought no sense of nationality to America with them, only local identities and allegiances."¹ Although coming from two regions linked by history, the immigrants under discussion identified with the nation and culture of France. In this particular case, leaving one's country was in some cases a way of refusing to see the nationality of Alsace-Lorraine changing from French to German. Emigration may have provided a means for remaining loyal to one's national identity even while improving economic options. Because emigrants formed new Jewish communities, the fidelity/infidelity matrix also gave shape to the group's re-identification, a solidifying reconstruction of memories to serve the needs of belonging in the new environment. That is to say, fidelity to the image of a past culture and place of origin contributed to senses of unity and belonging among people from the same European place of origin in America.²

Although historians may consider the notions of fidelity/infidelity relevant to characterize the process of immigration, the distinction between the two in the minds of the immigrants themselves was fairly tenuous. Oscar Handlin perhaps emphasized the theme of a radical departure from the past most vigorously in the once commonly accepted but now controversial, *The Uprooted*. But the breakdown of the European experience did not solely define the immigrant perspective. Jewish immigrants were also fleeing poverty, cultural and political domination, the *numerus clausus*, mandatory military services, and French and

German anti-Semitism. Although all of these reasons for leaving were negative, they did not necessarily reflect a rejection of the original French nationality or identity.

The body of this work is the result of a series of interviews collected mainly from families living in Louisiana and Mississippi whose forbears hailed from Alsace-Lorraine, or from transfrontier marriages in Baden, Palatinate, or Bavaria. Even if family members live outside the South today, their origins in the United States fell in the area under consideration. Through their meetings and newsletters, the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience facilitated the research by providing opportunities to acquaint the author with these Alsace-Lorraine descendants. The responses of individuals to questions about their European roots gave meaning to exchanges and information ascertained from family memoirs.

When set against archival data, the interviews collected in the 1990s serve as a way to reconstruct the interviewee's own personal history even though some of that oral history may be apocryphal. Both the factual and the mythical are of interest in the questions raised about the uses of historical reinvention. As David Thelen analyzed, "People sometimes construct their personal life histories as a record of stability, continuity and consistency". The historical study of memory would be the study of how families, "searched for common memories to meet present times."³

Since the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots* in the 1960's, searching for identification with one's country of origin has become a central preoccupation for many Americans. The increasing enthusiasm for genealogical trees and the history of the family's descendants has followed. Current generations have undertaken the pilgrimage back to see their place of origin as a search for a kind of spiritual dual citizenship. These descendants have attempted to reconnect to the language and to any remaining family members left behind by an earlier generation.

The diaries and interviews show the ambiguity in perceptions as the emigrants consciously and unconsciously attempted to come to terms with the notions of fidelity and infidelity. Many tended to view the emigrant either as unfaithful to country and

family, or as independent and alert to opportunities for self-improvement.

*Citizenship: The French and German Legal
and Political Backgrounds*

Several flows of Jewish emigration to lower Mississippi communities from Alsace-Lorraine and the German states of Palatinate, Wurtemberg, and Bavaria occurred. The first emigrants arrived in the lower Mississippi region in the 1820s, choosing to settle in New Orleans and in a number of small towns including Port Gibson, Natchez, and Vicksburg in Mississippi; and Shreveport, Plaquemine, and Opelousas in Louisiana. Family genealogies provide evidence that in the 1840s Alsatian branches had bonds with southern Germany, in particular the towns of Landau, Kayserlautern, Speyer, Germersheim, Ingenheim, and Bade-Wurtemberg. These neighboring countries maintained ties that transcended political borders. This European background frames this record even as it somewhat blurs the boundaries of national loyalties.

From 1801 to the second Treaty of Paris in 1815, a few western German states came under the rule of the Napoleonic empire. In 1871, the situation reversed itself as Bismarck's victories and conquest reconnected Alsace-Lorraine with the Reichsland, a situation that remained until the end of World War I. But France, planning to regain control over its lost provinces, never accepted German claims. Caught between the two, Alsace and Lorraine share a specific identity because of their key locations, their double French-German history, their own dialect, and their common traditions.

Initiated in the 1850s and formalized in 1889, the French law to obtain citizenship known as 'jus soli' [the law of soil] has been enforced with some modifications. This law granted French citizenship to any foreigner born on French soil. This stood in opposition to the prior 'jus sanguinis', [the law of blood], which provided citizenship as a result of parentage. The 1804 Napoleonic code had given prominence to the jus sanguinis as the

founding principle of the French law. Ironically the *jus soli* provides a stronger social link with the country. According to historian Rogers Brubaker, the *jus soli* illustrates a nation deeply rooted, secure, and ready to assimilate its inhabitants. Some of the speakers in the 1889 legislative debate wanted to extend the *jus soli*. They emphasized the fact that children born in France from foreign parentage and who resided in France had French ways of thinking, French habits, and the natural ties felt for one's country of birth.⁴

The extension of citizenship to the second or third generation of immigrants was not due to demographic or military reasons, but was instead a response to ideological and political issues. The exemption from military service of foreigners living in France countered the Republican doctrine of the universal draft, and in the 1870s became a prominent issue in the border regions when Frenchmen were drafted while foreigners who were long settled in the same regions were exempt. The social resentment that intensified at that time became resolved in the 1880s when the definition of citizenship was broadened. The Republic's program of compulsory primary education coupled with the universal draft, reinforced and extended the *jus soli* and its implications for a committed citizenry.⁵

The process of assimilation raised a number of questions, especially the opportunity provided to be a productive citizen. When a citizen's own country shows itself incapable of providing a citizen work or the opportunity for economic advancement, then denigrates an individual's dignity through discrimination, does that not constitute a breach of the unwritten contract between the two? If so, when the citizen leaves his country, is he or she violating that contract, or is he or she justified in doing so?

The Emigration Background

Dating to the twelfth century, the Jewish communities of Alsace and Lorraine flourished in a largely urban environment until the end of the fourteenth century when the great plague forced the people to scatter along the Rhine. By the sixteenth century on-

ly a hundred families remained in Alsace. Then during the eighteenth century Jewish communities reshaped themselves under the French monarchy that tolerated their presence for economic reasons, but confined them mainly to small towns.⁶

The monarchy made exceptions for rich Jewish families, particularly money lenders. Traditionally known as "Court Jews," these people were permitted to reside in the cities. The Cerf Berr family in Strasbourg, one of the "Syndics Généraux de la Nation juive," or representative of the Jewish nation in Alsace, typified the upper class Jewish family. The Berrs played key roles in the representation of Jews by introducing their requests and in supporting their emancipation in 1791. Still Alsatian Judaism remained rural up to the middle of the nineteenth century. According to historian Vicki Caron, "in 1851, only 24% Jews in Alsace-Lorraine lived in the capital cities of their districts. Between 1871-1872, 31% did so."⁷ Before the 1789 French Revolution the building of synagogues was officially forbidden. But as Gilbert Weill noted, "in 1784 half of the Lower-Rhine Jewish communities had their own synagogues." This was an indication that communities often made arrangements during the eighteenth century with local authorities. After the emancipation and First Empire, Jews erected nearly a hundred synagogues.⁸

In Lorraine, Jewish communities faced the same obstacles to development as in Alsace. They maintained a separate religious status from the Christian population, but the richest Jews, such as money lenders, grain merchants, and cattle dealers, maintained economic and financial relations with the Christian population. Only the city of Metz, capital of Lorraine, comparable to German cities such as Frankfurt or Mainz, remained an exception. A prominent Jewish community existed in Metz since the eighteenth century which had attained a population of fifteen hundred before the revolution. It had maintained a talmudic school since 1705, and in 1764 a Hebrew printing house was founded in the city. A vocational school for Jewish children trained one hundred students as craftsmen in 1824. Three years later, the rabbinic school for France was created there.⁹

Especially in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Jewish population doubled from five to ten thousand in Lorraine, Jews also began to scatter throughout rural communities. Poor, overcrowded, regularly plagued by famine, and without any economic future, this rural population provided the most important source of emigration to the United States.¹⁰ A famous example was Leon Godchaux, the Louisiana sugar planter whom some considered a "sugar king." He had left the small town to Herbeviller close to Lunéville in Lorraine in the 1840s to come to Louisiana.¹¹

Beginning in 1791, Jews could become citizens and integrate mainly because of an influential enlightened elite and the attitude of the successive government leaders despite an infamous decree. According to that decree, "no Jew can start any commerce, any trade, practice any exchange, without obtaining an allowance granted by the 'préfet' [administrative head] of the district and with the agreement from the town board certifying that the Jew did not practice any usury or unlawful trade."¹² Between 1808 and 1815, debts due to Jewish moneylenders were no longer enforceable or collectable. At the time of emancipation, 8,000 Jews lived in Lorraine, 20,000 in Alsace, 40,000 in the rest of France.

The elite, *préfets* as well as *Consistoires* [boards of administrations composed of laymen and rabbis who maintained Jewish cemeteries and synagogues], supported the creation of Jewish schools and the more prosperous ones helped to furnish them. An 1833 report on Alsatian Jewish schools, for example, listed fifty-two communal Jewish schools and an indefinite number of others. Nonetheless the report noted that the overriding problem of poverty crippled the teaching in the miserably maintained schools. Teachers received meager salaries and parents could not afford spending a lot for their children's education. These conditions prevailed even though the role of the Jewish teacher was of considerable importance, and school attendance was quite good.¹³ Most emigrants had gone through primary school until the age of fourteen and then possibly attended a year of secondary education. Jews spoke Judeo-Alsatian (a combination of Alsatian, Hebrew and German) and French. The vocational training school,

or "Ecole du Travail," provided the lower class the opportunity to obtain skills in numerous crafts including jewelry, engraving, printing, woodwork, tailoring, and upholstery. Some emigrants had earned a professional qualification at the Strasbourg School of Art and Trade. The latter was the path that Léon Cahn of Saverne followed. He was a tapestry-maker who mastered his trade as upholsterer and draper. He started his craft in Strasbourg in 1861 and left for New Orleans four years later with his wife and three children.¹⁴

An additional burden faced all male citizens in the form of the seven-year conscription, but this was even heavier for Jewish people. Napoleon's infamous "Article 17 of the Decree of March 17, 1808 compelled Jews to do military service without allowing them the right enjoyed by other citizens of finding somebody to replace them."¹⁵

In 1871 the Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian War resulted in German rule. Many started leaving the area for political reasons. Such departures were highly significant because anyone failing to complete his German military service was deprived of German citizenship. Generally the cultural definition of German citizenship explicated by philosophers and further developed by German historian Theodor Mommsen was based on the law of blood as opposed to the law of the land. German anti-Semites used ethnological, linguistical, and historical reasons to argue that the Jews were foreigners to the German nation and therefore did not deserve the same rights as other citizens.¹⁶

Whereas five thousand Jews chose to leave Alsace for France and an undetermined number went to the French colony of Algeria, a high proportion chose the United States as its destination.¹⁷ Vicki Caron calculated that between 1873 and 1914, "63 percent of all the district's Jewish emigrants to the United States came from towns with populations under two thousand inhabitants while Jews from towns between five thousand to ten thousand inhabitants were almost equally divided between the New World and France."¹⁸ According to census bureau statistics, in 1870, 40,938 Jews lived in Alsace and Lorraine. Forty years later, 30,483 were counted. Approximately one half (5,000) of the difference in the

population migrated to the United States. This figure may be low in that it does not account for children born during the period who may have migrated.¹⁹

This considerable departure to America in this contextual framework partly reflects fidelity to one's native France, a country which had afforded its Jewish citizens substantial rights and opportunities. The act of leaving may also have been a way of expressing an alternate form of fidelity – the fidelity to oneself, to one's thirst of adventure, and the need to experience other worlds particularly at a time of governmental change. This article is not arguing that economic and political factors did not play the major part in causation but rather that the issue of fidelity requires consideration as well.

Alsations emigrated to Hungary, Russia, and Poland during the first Empire (1799–1815) as well as to North America for various reasons, as the historians Pierre Leuilliot and Nicole Fouché note. Such movement increased from the end of the eighteenth through the end of the nineteenth centuries. One of the great waves of emigration from Alsace was caused by the succession of failed harvests between 1818 and 1827. The agricultural crisis persuaded a large number of people working in rural areas to leave. Approximately 10 percent of the population of northern Alsace and 3 percent of the Lower-Rhine population (about fourteen thousand people) chose to emigrate to America during these years. Between 1828 and 1831, the industrial sector experienced a similar situation with 14,365 emigrants leaving the Bas-Rhin for the United States.²⁰ The districts of Saverne and Wissembourg surrendered the largest number of emigrants. For the Upper-Rhine districts emigration occurred between 1838 and 1857. During these years of rural exodus, famine, epidemics, and overpopulation, 11,397 emigrants left. In 1866, out of 58,970 inhabitants of the Lower-Rhine, 23,116 left the "département," with 4,144 immigrating to America.²¹ But, as historian Jean Daltroff observed, "emigration between 1840 and 1880 was to get away from an uncertain future." With the economic and social upheavals, "the traditional professions of the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine such as money-lending, brokerage and peddling were

significantly affected."²² Banks sprang up and individual money lending began to wane. The growth of capitalist-inspired industry also contributed to the decline of the traditional trades, asserted historian Vicki Caron. The very act of emigration itself had a "snow ball," or "pull" effect for those who stayed behind. The German and Swiss emigrants crossing the Rhine to board ship at le Havre offered a model to the Alsatian population.²³

The French government legalized emigration in 1855 and set the price of the passport and the railway ticket. In 1866, after the government established emigration agencies, fifty-seven official recruiting agents were located in the Bas-Rhin. Some agents were Jewish, such as Felix Klein of Niederrodern (Bas-Rhin), who was extremely active between 1864 and 1869 organizing voyages for his fellow Jews to New Orleans. How many of these Jews came to the South is hard to determine. However, one indication is that approximately 10 to 18 percent of those graves identified along the Mississippi had left Alsace and Lorraine during the 1830s and 1840s.²⁴ German Jews, for their part, had to face greater administrative and social discrimination besides harder obstacles to emigration in the form of high taxes. The end of legal discrimination in the German states varied between 1860 and 1868. It was finally abolished in April 1871 by Reich law.

Many young conscripts, slightly more than 10 percent of a total of eleven hundred, left between 1874 and 1897 from the District of Mulhouse. These young men gave up their German citizenship to avoid enlistment under the law passed in 1874 and left for America. Of 118 people, eight said they were going to America, without being any more precise; seven reported for South America; and ten indicated they were headed for the southern United States or more precisely Texas or Louisiana. Most opted for New York and other northern or western states. None indicated they were leaving for California.²⁵

The Winds of Freedom, Modernity, and Emancipation for All

Apart from the economic and political problems, more specific cultural reasons encouraged emigration. Avraham Barkai,

who has analyzed German Jewish immigration to the United States, observes how often the decision to emigrate was a sign of embracing emancipation, the effect of the Age of Enlightenment, and the secularization of German society: "in a way, the decision to emigrate, to leave one's family ties, one's community, to leave one's obligations behind, was the first sign of this development and of its influence on young people, the least conservative and the most enterprising part of German Jewish society."²⁶

Philip Sartorius is a good example of this quest for emancipation in terms of independence and economic opportunity. He prepared himself to emigrate partly by learning French, which proved of great help during the crossing and later when he settled. Sartorius came from Germersheim, Palatinate, Bavaria. In 1910, he wrote an account in English for his daughter, after the death of his wife.²⁷

Emigrants often had to wait and minors had to obtain their parents' permission. Immigration formalities required a certificate of good conduct from the schoolmaster, and the court had to certify that the individual had no criminal record. The emigrant also had to be sure that a member of his or her family or a relation in the new country would be able to get him or her a job because, as Léon Geismar, who left in July 1909, said, "there is no future with the current state of affairs." "I mean to stay in America and get American nationality." He claimed to be able to join his uncle's trading business and become self supporting. "Please give me permission to leave," he begged.²⁸

Young women emigrating to America "had no future at home if they didn't bring with them a sizable dowry," wrote Max Meyer, who emigrated to New York from Wissembourg in 1890 and later became the founder of the sewing trades union and of the Fashion Institute of Technology. In America, a girl could become a nanny even at the age of 16.²⁹

Although the first emigrants wrote back urging people to come to a land of glamorous opportunity and a glittering future, emigration between 1871 and 1918 was largely the result of internal factors. Max Meyer's father, for example, had fought for the

French in the Franco-Prussian war and found it unbearable to see his son doing military service in the German army. As Max recalled, "My father trembled at the thought that his son would soon be enlisting in the German army. It would have been absolute torture for a French patriot." Max therefore left for New York at the age of fourteen with his entire family. Paradoxically, he was able to remain a French patriot when leaving Alsace for the United States and to retain contact with fellow French Jews.³⁰ His statements are emblematic of what the Alsatian-Lorrainian emigrants thought about their social environment, German domination, and the Franco-Prussian war. The Geismar family emigrated for similar reasons. "My grandmother Séraphine," explained Flo Geismar-Margolis, "did not want to bring [her son] up in a German environment."³¹

Rejecting German citizenship, these people were extremely proud to receive American citizenship. Max Meyer, who had to wait seven years for naturalization, wrote in his memoirs, "The day that I would finally swear allegiance to my country arrived. I left the Court of Justice as a proud and happy citizen." He added that he would use his citizenship generously "in the hope of playing an active role in making this city a better place to live in."³²

The Ritualized Departure

To be successful in one's departure and to be able to adjust to the new society required advanced preparation. To be accepted by his or her family and by his or her community, the emigrant's departure, in particular, had to be ritualized in various ways. Although leaving constituted a break, it was tolerated and authorized by families so long as it was generally carried out within what became cultural norms. Without such rituals, it could be considered as an infidelity to the family as well as national laws and practices. The ritual of separation is exemplified in Isaac Lévy's diary. On November 27, 1891, three days before his departure, he wrote that he had not been cast out of his social circle and that social links continued despite his leaving. "All day I've been having people visiting me, coming to say good-bye. It's

often said that it's when someone goes off on a voyage that he can see how well liked he is. Well, I can leave with my mind at rest, I don't think I've left a lot of enemies. People have been coming to see me from all over the region." He received a large number of presents. His mother was "mad with grief" but the separation trauma was at least somewhat alleviated.³³

In 1891, Edmond Uhry, son of a merchant in spices and notions, emigrated to New York from Ingwiller (Alsace) in 1891. In his memoirs of 1946 he noted, "Parents of this era wonder how those of that day could bring themselves to send to the four corners of the earth their teenage boys. Each mile of distance equaled ten of today. Ocean travel was slow and dangerous and the expectation of a *Wiedersehen* [return] more remote than now. And yet nearly every family in our town sent boys into the world. Wherever one from a town would settle, others from the same district would join him. New Orleans was the first point of destination for most of the early *émigrés* from our section." Uhry continued, "[I] vividly recall the gloom at the *Seder* table with the empty chair of the first born, and also the feeling of responsibility I shared through the importance of secrecy in this matter." About his family's reactions concerning his brother's journey, he wrote, "My brother Moïse came to New York in 1886. I still can feel the state of anxiety that hung over the family during the ten days of his crossing. Mother prayed throughout days and nights. When a cable announced his safe arrival in New York, I galloped through the streets to broadcast the good tidings."³⁴

As the youngest child, Philip Sartorius' positions in the family increased the trauma of leaving. Emigration meant leaving his aged parents alone, thus breaking a sort of filial commitment. His mother was extremely upset on the day of his departure but he, on the other hand, felt no regret at the fact he would never see his mother or father again; "just like a young boy, I thought of it like going on a picnic." Only sixty years later did he realize the meaning of what he had done and the suffering it meant for his parents. "I had no idea of how great a step I

was taking nor of the pain it would cause my family. I was the youngest."³⁵

The Geismar family lived in Grüssenheim (Haut-Rhin) but sent their son Léon to study in Reims, France. His uncle, Louis Benjamin Geismar, had arrived Louisiana in 1874 and become the owner of vast tracts of land around the hamlet of Geismar. Léon beseeched his uncle to take him to America. The young man's parents, Salomon and Séraphine, only allowed him to leave after a family council in which they listened to the uncle's dire warning, "What are you going to do? Keep him here? He'll be killed in the next war!" Written from 1886 to 1895, Isaac Lévy's diary describes his departure on December 13, 1892, at the age of 22, from Lembach (Bas-Rhin) for New York. He had delayed the event for a year because he feared that his mother would take to her bed for a second time, just as she had done when his brother left five years earlier. He filled out the necessary papers including his travel contract and passport, and waited until his family agreed to his departure.³⁶

As tragic as some of these partings appear, historian Avraham Barkai discusses ways in which the break was somewhat alleviated; "contact was continually kept up with friends and relations in Germany through letters and financial support. The young emigrants thought of themselves, as in fact they were, as in many ways the pioneering vanguard which was going to open up the way for the whole family, clan and even village to come on over."³⁷ Correspondence proved to be a partial, nonetheless fundamental, substitute for absence.

In later years books, diaries or journals were written by the immigrants.³⁸ The memoirist wrote to tell the story to the family, but the act of writing and the book or memoir itself was also as a sort of emblem, an inheritance, and a reference point linking the new family with the old. The immigrant or his spokesperson bridged two worlds, the land left behind and the new. The journals were attempts to translate the emigration experience for future generations and thus became an additional medium of fidelity.

*How to be Jewish, Alsatian, Lorrainian,
and Southern Simultaneously?*

Besides maintaining ties, the immigrants also adjusted readily to their new environment. As historian Lloyd P. Gartner writes, "There has been no American Jewish history without assimilation." "And by assimilation," observes historian Abraham J. Peck, "Gartner does not mean the end of the Jewish identity, nor its diffusion. On the contrary, he defines the term as a necessary process of socialization, that by which a minority acquires a number of values and practices from the majority group." What is lost and what is kept, or rather what does the emigrant eventually "find"? One's identity and allegiance is not something granted ipso facto but is acquired through a gradual cultural process.³⁹

Whether they settled in small towns or in cities, immigrants from Alsace-Lorraine carefully maintained their own Jewish traditions, collecting funds for temples in hamlets and towns along the Mississippi and elsewhere as soon as twenty to thirty families congregated. As in the early life of any typical Jewish community, the synagogue structurally and functionally represented the nucleus of the great majority of the activities that defined Jewish life.⁴⁰ Men and women believed that being active members of their congregation met their social needs and simultaneously demonstrated their allegiance in a manner similar to their Christian neighbors. The group had to remain coherent to buy land for the cemetery, raise funds to found a congregation or rent a house to use as a synagogue and religious school; in other words, to establish community institutions. Tzedakah was a guiding principle of the faith, an integral concept of Jewish ethics. By participating in the raising and dispensing of funds for the poor or sick, the immigrants expressed both their religious attachment and their sense of community. Moreover, being actively involved with the Jewish community allowed former Alsatians to mingle with those who hailed from places such as Germany, Poland, England, and Russia.

Congregations of Alsatian-Lorrainian and German origin began to be established in the 1820s after the earlier, albeit far

smaller, Sephardic emigration from the West Indies took place at the end of the of the eighteenth century. The rites “conformed to the customs of the German Israelites.”⁴¹ Port Gibson exemplified these trends. The town provided a nurturing environment for a vital community along the Mississippi consisting of Jews from Lorriane and Alsace, and later from East Europe. In 1859, twenty-two charter members formed Congregation Gemiluth Chassed (House of Kindness). Many congregants including the Klotz, Mayer Levy, Marx, Unger and Ullmann families were Alsatian or married to Alsatians. The congregation purchased land for a cemetery in 1871, and twenty years later held services in a newly-built Byzantine revival synagogue nestled securely on Church Street among the city’s Protestant houses of worship. Nearly 18 percent of the people buried in the Port Gibson cemetery were from Alsace-Lorraine.⁴² Alexandria, Louisiana’s congregation was founded in 1861, and Opelousas in 1877 where a few Jewish Alsatian families still remain. One of the most flourishing communities in late nineteenth century Louisiana was Donaldsonville. More than forty emigrants from Alsace-Lorraine descent were buried in Bikur Shalom cemetery, established there in 1868. Gaston Hirsch, who emigrated from Saverne, Alsace, to Donaldsonville in 1946, took care of the cemetery until his death in 1994 at the age of eighty-five. He was considered the keeper of the community’s Jewish history.⁴³

The booklet commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Congregation Gates of Prayer in New Orleans, as well as the minutes of the congregation, emphasized the essential emigrant paradox: remaining patriotic to France and being truthful to the religious customs and rites learned in the Alsace-Lorraine region, while adjusting to a new country. “The early constituent parts of the Minyan that led to the founding of the Congregation Gates of Prayer, were without a doubt, German and Alsatian Israelites, the latter while being patriot of the patriots, holding allegiance to France, were nevertheless more familiar with the language of the Rhine countries. They adhered tenaciously to the religious customs of the land of their birth. Each incoming ship brought accessions to their ranks—brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces etc.

and thus usages were perpetuated—customs and observances, inborn as they may be termed, observed to the letter.”⁴⁴ The constitution, by-laws, and records were kept in German until 1888. The congregation, also called the “old Lafayette Schule,” was traditional and obeyed the German ritual until the Reform forces prevailed. A school was established by the congregation in which the children were taught the Pentateuch, Hebrew, and German. Two Alsatians were presidents of that congregation, David Wolbrette in the 1880s and Leopold Levy in 1901⁴⁵

When the more assimilated members of the Jewish community founded the city’s first Reform congregation, Temple Sinai in 1871, a number of Alsatians and Germans joined, Salomon Marx among them. Born in Mainz in 1831, Marx was related to the Kahn family originally from Metz. Moving to Temple Sinai meant giving up the traditional Orthodox ritual. Before joining Temple Sinai, Alsatian born Abel Dreyfous belonged to a more traditional synagogue. “Reform Judaism was really ethics,” his nonagenarian granddaughter, Ruth Dreyfous asserted.⁴⁶

Did that mean that Reform Judaism was more easily adopted by professional, elite Jews because it was less conspicuous than Orthodox Judaism, and closer to the Protestant orderly worship? Is this more evidence of assimilation? Historian Arthur Herzberg explains, “Everywhere, the religious institutions themselves were rapidly being adjusted to the American scene.” “Congregations became affiliated with the Reform movement where ‘moderate’ reformers were creating respectable Judaism. In the American environment the new Reform congregation was far different from the immigrants first established which was at first a carbon copy of those they had left behind in the town or the village from which they had come.”⁴⁷

Such affiliations did not inhibit good relations between founding members of Temple Sinai and more traditional Jewish relatives and friends abroad. While in Europe, Salomon Kahn visited a relative with whom he corresponded for many years, Zadoc Kahn. Zadoc Kahn served as Grand Rabbin de France, or head of

the French Rabbinate, and ardently supported Captain Alfred Dreyfus.⁴⁸

From Religion to Social Actions: An Ethic for Responsibility

Many Alsace-Lorraine emigrants felt a responsibility to be actively involved in Jewish social organizations. David Wolbrette, born in Alsace in 1853, was a member of the Touro Infirmary board in New Orleans. Others in the city were members of the Widows' and Orphan's Home founded after the yellow fever epidemic of 1853. Salomon Marx was one of the most active. "During the terrible suffering and desolation incident to the several epidemics of yellow fever here in that period and notably of those of 1867 and 1878, Mr. Max was laboring conspicuously, fearlessly and consciously in the cause of Relief." In the 1890s at least two members of the Auxiliary Association of the Widows' and Orphans' Home were Alsatian emigrants. In 1921 the fidelity to social engagement was carried out by Jonas Hiller and Joseph Loeb, respectively first and second vice president of the Jewish Home. These men were representative of the second and third generation of emigrants from eastern France.⁴⁹

The numerous philanthropic and social societies were very popular among Jews from Alsace-Lorraine. They belonged to Jewish and non Jewish organizations including the Masonic lodges, Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, and the Harmony Club, which originated from the "Deutsche Company" and whose purpose was "to foster sociability, patronize science and art and promote fellowship." Successful professional men such as Lazare Levy (originally from Strasbourg), Felix Dreyfous (whose father, Abel, came from Belfort), and Solomon Marx joined or founded prestigious men's clubs in New Orleans as further proof of integration.⁵⁰

The process that led to involvement in charitable and social associations coincided with their commitment to public and political activism. These factors mixed with dedication to the place where Alsace-Lorraine Jews lived and their sense of values. Born in 1854 near Reichhoffen and emigrating in 1874, Solomon Klotz served as general postmaster and mayor of Napoleonville,

Louisiana. Léon Geismar, who was born in 1894 in Grüssenheim and who emigrated at the age of 15 to New River Landing, was elected member, then president, of the police jury for nearly forty years. Felix Dreyfous, a noted attorney in New Orleans, served two terms in both the state legislature (1888–1892) and city council (1896–1900). “The dinner table conversations were extremely important in shaping my perceptions and goals,” explained his daughter, Ruth, “because of my father’s interest in and dedication to the city of New Orleans. We always shared political talk, and it was from my father’s sense of responsibility – from his seeing a need for political reform – that we inherited his strong sense of values: that success comes from living honestly with integrity, not from making money . . . that’s why he fought against the scandalous state lottery when he served in the legislature.”⁵¹

Sometimes the values and ways of adjustment were not as one might accept today. Before the Civil War, as successful businesspeople in the South, some Alsatians and Lorrainians owned slaves like others of their social and economic circumstances. For example, according to the 1860 census and the slave schedule in New Orleans, Leon Godchaux owned four slaves. Gustave Bier, a Bavarian jeweler, married to Estelle Godchaux, from Reichhoffen, Alsace, owned five slaves. Philip Sartorius bought a slave. In 1850, only thirty-two Jews owned 113 slaves. A decade later two hundred slaves were owned by seventy-two Jews (17 percent) in New Orleans. This is far less than historian Bertram M. Korn’s 25 percent estimate for the same period but still substantial.⁵²

There were few Jews in the South before the Civil War and even fewer slave owners,” wrote Babette Wampold, who also mentioned that her great grandfather, Jacob Ullmann, who moved from Hechingen in Palatinate to Port Gibson, Mississippi in 1850, owned two slaves.⁵³ Even if a minority of Alsace-Lorraine emigrants owned slaves, others also profited from the system. Abel Dreyfous registered thirteen slave transactions in 1848 as a notary public. Between 1851–1852, he notarized fourteen slave sales. Among them, there were four Jewish slave owners. Even if some

Jewish professionals did not own slaves, they participated as members of a society that accepted slavery.

Participation in southern life involved support for the Civil War. Jews fought for the Confederacy to display their loyalty to their adopted region as well to protect their homes. With few exceptions, they became southern patriots. Philip Sartorius, among others, enlisted in the Confederate army in Natchez and, following the defeat in 1865, had to swear allegiance to the Union. Lucile Bennet's great grandfather, Alsatian born Salomon Hochstein, joined the Housa Guards in Louisiana at the age of 36. Another emigrant from Alsace, Isaac Hermann, born in 1838, came to New York in 1859, settled in Georgia, joined the Confederate army in 1862 even before he became a citizen, and later lived in Sander-ville. His *Memoirs of a Confederate Veteran* (1911) commemorated his activities during an era in which such memories were being glorified. When he enlisted, he took the place of his friend Mr. Smith, a rich planter who had adopted him. According to his biographer, Sallie Monica Lang, Hermann went up to the duty officer, declaring "a Frenchman wishes to fight like an American."⁵⁴ This example shows how the desire to integrate meant paying your debt to the person and place that welcomed you even as you identified also as a Frenchman. It also reflected dual fidelity.

The war was not easy. Philip Sartorius recorded in his diary the pitiful state of the boats and lack of preparation. He belonged to a troop of cavalry in which the soldiers had to supply their own equipment and food. The war destroyed many cotton and sugar plantations of families from Vicksburg, Jackson, and New Orleans. All of the Kahn's family wealth, wrapped up as bales of cotton in Jackson warehouses, was destroyed. Metz Kahn mentions his grandmother, Fanny Strauss Bloom from Mommenheim in the Bas-Rhin, who lost a child during the battle of Jackson in 1863. Southern families had to contend with having their homes ransacked by their own army, and sometimes owed their lives to swift intervention by neighbors. "To give you an idea what vandals our soldiers were, we had a fine safe when we left. We left the door open but they cut holes in it as soon we had gone." Phil-

ip Sartorius' wife continued, "We sacrificed everything to the Confederacy, my husband was wounded."⁵⁵

Economic Paths

Vocationally, many immigrants started as peddlers. Success often came rapidly for those who rose out of these ranks to form what Metz Kahn called, "peddler aristocracy." Others began by using their skills at intermediary trades. In a context that was both different and yet similar to the old world, they imitated their fathers and conducted business as merchants, a trade for which a need sorely existed in the mid-nineteenth century South. They supplied the cotton plantations in Mississippi and the sugar plantations along the river, sold cotton bales to ginning factories, participated in the different stages of cotton processing, and became commission brokers. Buying the merchandise on credit and paying after the harvest in the form of commissions or once they had made money, cotton factors lent money to the planters. Hermann Kohlmeyer, whose family came from Lembach, is a financier who continues his business today with many southern planters, and between the South and the English cotton-importing cities such as Liverpool. The individual might become a cotton or sugar plantation owner thanks to the customer's inability to sustain mortgaged lands. Some families became well-known for their plantations: the Kessler-Sternfels Cora sugar estate in Texas, Godchaux in Reserve, Susan Weil in Lavonia for cattle, and the Lemann's in Donaldsonville.

Somewhat different routes were followed by other Alsatian-Lorrainian emigrants. "They went around plantations as traveling merchants, while others used their savings to open up stores," Gaston Hirsch wrote in his letters.⁵⁶ Describing earlier Alsations, he explains the process of adjustment, "after a few years they would open up a general store, where all kinds of dry goods were sold to local inhabitants." Their children attended schools, and many had the opportunity to study law, business, and medicine. By the third generation some of the grandchildren of the

immigrants entered professions such as medicine, dentistry, law, real estate, and psychology.

Others started as store clerks and become managers of prosperous retail or wholesale department stores. Such families included the Sharffs from New Orleans, the Wolffs in Washington, the Lemanns in Donaldsonville, and the Fraenkels from Baton Rouge. Some of these and other families remained in business. Other careers started with buying a small store and mortgaged lands which became plantations. The Klotz, Geismar, and the Hirsch-Posner families illustrated this pattern with members of the third generation becoming professionals. Abraham Levy was born in 1854 in Duppigheim (Bas-Rhin). His descendants are split between Strasbourg and Paris, and New York and New Orleans. Levy went to school in Strasbourg and left for Baton Rouge in 1854 at the age of seventeen. He spent his first two years working as a peddler before joining with Max Fraenkel with whom he worked until 1881 when he left to work with Henry Feitel. He then opened up a small store in St. Rose in the Mississippi parish of St. Charles, and, thanks to his "ability to grasp what was required of his business, to react rapidly to the demand and by using good business practice, he became the owner of a large department store." The family moved to New Orleans in 1930 where it became part of the well-off society of the city. The great grandchildren are real estate investors and doctors. There are also examples especially in the cotton business where occupations have been transmitted across generations.

A third pattern is rare. It is the route followed by two or three families who became professionals in the first or the second generation, mainly in the legal arena. This occurred in cities like New Orleans. In 1888 Edgar Mayer Cahn became a lawyer in the second generation, as did Moïse Dennery in the 1930s, whose family owned a bakery supply business begun in the 1890s. An unusual example was Abel Dreyfous. Dreyfous emigrated in 1831 from Belfort to New York, where he learned English, and then went to New Orleans where, eleven years later, he became a notary public, first as a partner and then, after 1864, in his own right. He ran one of the biggest practices in the city with his son, attor-

ney Felix. Because Louisiana followed the French Napoleonic code, notaries play a prominent role alongside attorneys. Felix's daughter, Ruth, followed in her father's footsteps as an active member of New Orleans' civic culture. A founder of the League of Women Voters and member of the city's welfare board, she also served many worthy causes especially those devoted to civil rights.⁵⁷

Not all became rich. Poverty was not rare, but it was not often described with the sincerity of Albert Fraenkel who recalled the difficult days through which his family lived, with his father having somewhat modest means. What appears remarkable is not just the way the emigrants were able to adapt to a totally different world to the one they knew, but also the shakiness of the cotton, sugar, and corn businesses. Fortunes could also be wiped out by the Civil War, by the Mississippi floods of 1893 and 1927, or by the Depression of the 1930s. Each time they had to start all over with the same single-mindedness. Gaston Hirsch summed it up well in one of his letters: "The Alsatians, Lorrainians and Germans in Louisiana and Mississippi can be proud of their success in business, industry, medicine and especially proud of their success and their patience."⁵⁸

Adjustment Mechanisms

The choice between emigrating to large cities like New York, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago and San Francisco, or small towns like those along the Mississippi was made pragmatically.⁵⁹ An uncle, cousin or brother gave an individual a start. Such chains of migration were typical adjustment mechanisms for immigrants. However in Louisiana, the large population of French emigrants and German farmers may have also played its part in both attracting these Jews and easing adjustment. "The German Coast," also called "Allemands," included the parishes of St. John the Baptist, St. James, and St. Charles along the Mississippi. This association with German Christians is somewhat paradoxical when one recognizes that these emigrants were in some ways departing a region taken over by Germany.

A distinction was being made between rejection (infidelity) of the government and warm relations between people. They had been neighbors who interacted through commerce. Many of the German Americans already in Louisiana may have emigrated as a result of the failed revolution of 1848 and thus shared other things in common with the Alsatian-Lorrainians.

Furthermore it was not unusual for Alsatian-Lorrainians to intermarry with individuals from Palatinate and Baden-Wurtemberg. This tradition continued even after the families moved to the South. Such interaction and intermarriage was facilitated because the immigrants usually spoke German and French, and French was often spoken. This proved to be a pull for a number of emigrants in the 1840s. If English was the official language in business, trade, law, and in schools, official papers continued to be written in French until the end of the Civil War. French remained widely spoken into the 1930s, especially in the Cajun country in southwestern Louisiana. Their French background was very helpful, too, for the first emigrants who settled in the Louisiana territory because it had belonged to France and Louisiana was still influenced by the Napoleonic code with which they were familiar.

Examples of the language continuity abound. General Butler's Union troops had already occupied New Orleans in 1862. According to his recollections, Felix Dreyfous had to sing the national anthem at the public school. Although only seven, Dreyfous refused, was expelled, and attended different private French language schools instead. Through the years, he learned perfect French pronunciation. When he visited his family after World War I, "the European family could not believe that Felix's perfect French pronunciation could have been acquired out of France" according to his daughter, Ruth. She remembered the way her grandmother and she bid each other good night: "Bonsoir chère grand-mère, dormez bien", "dormez bien chers enfants, dormez bien." Ruth, who died in 1998, understood a lot of French but did not speak it well. She recalled that her father could not stand to hear her poor pronunciation. As a child she heard French spoken when her grandmother and her father were together even

though her mother was of German descent. But Ruth Dreyfous also claimed about her grandfather's house and family; "He was more French than he was Jewish. Only French was spoken in his house. The cooking and everything was French."⁶⁰

Eugene Franck, who had emigrated from Soultz sous Forits in 1870 at the age of fourteen, "spoke without any foreign accent but was very French in sentiment, often sang in French to his grandchildren, gathered Sunday morning at his bed side."⁶¹ Ruth Ferst, Abraham Levy's descendant, talked nostalgically of her grandfather's sweet French voice. "It was more than a language," stated attorney Moïse Dennery. Recounts Metz Kahn, "Not many people speak French now. Fifty or so years ago, a lot of people spoke French. Some of the store signs in New Orleans said 'Ici on parle français' [French spoken here]." Flo Geismar-Margolis lived in New River Landing-Geismar, along the Mississippi near Gonzales. Her father spoke German, Alsatian, English, French and Cajun, although she only speaks a little French herself. She remembers, "when I was at school, it was important for me to learn to read and write English to get into university."⁶² While French was the majority language in that part of Louisiana at the turn of the century, it lost its influence and became the language frequently spoken at home. Nonetheless French sentiment remained and thus served as a reflection of fidelity.

A French Mississippian Lifestyle

In many ways beyond language usage the immigrants maintained their French heritage even as they adjusted. Cooking combined French and southern modes. Many families compiled their own recipe books. Some became professional cooks and created a popular French cake in New Orleans, the multi-layered French Doberge adapted from Austrian Dobos Torta. In 1933, during the Depression, Beulah Ledner, Abraham Levy's daughter, opened a bakery which became very successful and served the socially prominent gentlemen's Boston Club where Jews were not admitted as either members or guests. The multicultural shop sign read, "Irish cream Doberge!, Kugelhopf, Chocolate delight et

beaucoup plus." Ledner's pastry was a mixture of French eclairs, mille-feuilles, brioche, Alsatian, and Creole cooking reflecting the diversity of the Louisiana culture, and the French and German branches of the Abraham Levy family. Starting as a typical French bakery, it became more eclectic later.⁶³

Furniture could be Napoleonic Empire or southern antebellum style. Many displayed China vases, and tea or coffee services from France. French clocks indicated the style and rhythm of the homes. These could still be found at the Dennery and Dreyfous homes at the end of the twentieth century, and were part of the French way of living.

Meals for the upper class were kept formal with everyone well dressed especially for the midday main dinner. Each dish was served separately just like in France. While cooking combined Louisianan, Creole and French traditional food, the way it was served more than the contents reflected French culture. For Friday night these Jewish families ate gumbo, clear soup, fish and dessert. Saturday morning meant a breakfast of grits, bacon, and oysters.⁶⁴ These formal meals are still evident for special celebrations in these Alsatian-Lorrainian upper class families.

Conclusion

In 1920, fourteen percent of French-born Americans were Alsatian or Lorrainian, with relatives having left their region while it was under German rule between 1871 and 1918. Today the descendants do not consider themselves an ethnic group. No doubt their departure from the same area influenced them during two or three generations. Although many of them have now blended into American life, traces of French allegiance remain. Some are looking for their roots in Alsace-Lorraine. They have retained contacts through correspondence, genealogical trees, ancestors' photos, furniture, an interest for history as well as for antiques, and the feeling of coming from a country with a past and culture even if it is mythically fancied as a traditional land where nations have never stopped fighting. Today, if differences can be made from other groups of immigrants it is mainly in subtle variations in the

ways of living, dressing, language, and a type of ethic and esthetic refinement reflected in interviews. These bonds of fidelity, however tenuous in the long run, should not be forgotten by historians as another measure of the immigrant experience.

NOTES

¹ Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozetta and Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (Fall, 1992): 9.

² David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989): 1117-1129.

³ *Ibid.*, 1119-1121.

⁴ Rogers Brubaker, "From Immigrant to Citizen: How Jus Soli Asserted Itself in France at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Actes de Recherches en Sciences Sociales* (September 1993): 3-25. The Historic New Orleans Collection, Tulane University Special Collections, the Touro Infirmary Archives (for patients of French origin), and American Jewish Archives collections provided valuable sources as did visits to Louisiana cemeteries and synagogues with descendants of Jews from Alsace and Lorraine.

⁵ Brubaker, "From Immigrant to Citizen."

⁶ Freddy Raphael and Robert Weyl, *Juifs en Alsace* (Toulouse, 1977).

⁷ Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany; the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871-1918* (California, 1988).

⁸ Gilbert Weill, *Connaitre et Gerer un Patrimoine Rural; Les Synagogues de Basse Alsace* (A.M.J.A.B., 1990), 1-6.

⁹ *Les Juifs Lorrains; Du Ghetto a la Nation, Exclusion, Integration, 1721-1871*, Catalogue d'exposition (Association Pour la Conservation du Patrimoine Juif, Metz, 1990), 114-132; Pierre-Andre Meyer, *La Communauté Juive de Metz au XVIIIe Siecle* (Nancy, 1993).

¹⁰ *Les Juifs Lorrains*, 107-108.

¹¹ Thomas D. Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55 (June 1966).

¹² Napoleon issued two degrees in 1808 to reorganize the religion and a third degree imposed limitations on civil rights for ten years. The "more judaico" oath had to be sworn when appearing in court and the obligatory enlistment continued. Whereas the Catholic Church was subsidized before 1830, Jewish organizations were not. This last measure was eliminated in 1848.

¹³ Jean Kahn, "500 Ans d'Histoire juive de Haguenau; La Citoyennete des Juifs d'Alsace Apres Napoleon," *Etudes Haguenawiennes* 18 (1992): 15-22; Raphael and Weyl, *Juifs en Alsace*, 354-359; Paula E. Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace; Acculturation and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1991), 98-116.

¹⁴ Leo Cahn Family Collection, Small Collection 1530, American Jewish Archives. (All personal and family collections are from this archive unless otherwise indicated.)

¹⁵ This decree was no longer enforced after the fall of the First Empire in 1815.

¹⁶ Paul Smith, "A la Recherche d'Une Identite nationale en Alsace, 1870-1918," *XX Siecle* (Avril-Juin, 1996): 23-35; N.D. Fustel de Coulanges, "Is Alsace German or French? Answer to Mommsen, Professor in Berlin (1870)," in Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme Francais, Anthologie, 1871-1914* (Paris, 1983), 64-65. Under the German Reich, being a civil servant or an army officer was difficult for Jews with the establishment of a quota, whereas French Jews were entering the political arena at the same time. See Pierre Birnbaum, *Les Fous de la Republique; Histoire Politique des Juifs d'Etat de Gambetta a Vichy* (Paris, 1992).

¹⁷ Michael Marrus, *Les Juifs de France l'Epoque de l'Affaire Drefus* (Calmann-Levy, 1972; reprinted Paris, 1985), 48. Raphael and Weyl estimate that Alsace lost over 25 percent of its Jewish population or about 9,230 people between 1871 and 1905. *Juifs en Alsace*, 486.

¹⁸ Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 86.

¹⁹ Statistisches Bureau des Kaiserlichen Ministeriums fur Elsass-Lothringen, *Statistisches Jahrbuch fur Elsass-Lothringen, 1913-1914*.

²⁰ Leuilliot and Fouché, *L'Emigration Alsacienne aux Etats-Unis, 1815-1870* (Paris, 1992), 57.

²¹ Jean-Baptiste Migneret, *Description du Departement de Bas-Rhin* (Strasbourg, 1871), 2.

²² Jean Daltroff, "L'Emigration en Amerique des Juifs d'Alsace Lorraine," *Liaisons* (Bulletin of the Israelite Consistory of the Moselle, 1994), 22-24.

²³ Caron, *Between France and Germany*; Fouché, *L'Emigration*, 58.

²⁴ In the Port Gibson, MS, cemetery there are 17 Alsatian tombs out of 133, or 12.6 percent of the total. (100th Anniversary Celebration, Gemiluth Chassed Synagogue, Port Gibson, MS, 1991). At the Opelousas, Louisiana, cemetery, there are twenty-four Alsatian tombs out of 169, or 13 percent. Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger* (New Haven, 1957). The figures for Donaldsonville are forty-two out of 192, or 18 percent (Gaston Hirsch list).

²⁵ D. Dreyer, "Liste des Haut-Rhinois ayant Émigré entre 1871 et 1918," MS 7, 14, Haut-Rhin Archives. The Reich law of May 2, 1874, stated that men who left German territory but who did not take a new nationality were obligated to do military service. A number of former residents gave up their nationality when visiting their families in Alsace-Lorraine to avoid enlistment.

²⁶ Barkai, *German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York and London, 1994), 1-14.

²⁷ See also Freddy Wahl, *Confession et Comportement dans les Campagnes d'Alsace et de Bade, 1781-1939* (Strasbourg, 1980).

²⁸ AD du Haut-Rhin, MS 714, liste des Haut-Rhinois ayant émigré en Amérique, établie par D. Dreyer, Léon Geismar, Collection 25266.

²⁹ Ruth Meyer Cherniss, "Introduction," in *Max Meyer, 1876-1953* (n.p., 1980). The author wishes to thank Ruth Meyer Cherniss, Max's daughter, for graciously providing a copy of this book.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Max Meyer is related to the Sartorius family on his mother's side as well as to Metz Kahn's family, all residents of the Mississippi Delta area. Max's mother, Pauline Strauss Meyer, was the sister of Joel Sartorius' great grandmother, Fanny Strauss Asher. Family members lived in Natchez and Jackson.

³¹ Flo Geismar-Margolis interview, conducted by Anny Bloch, New Orleans, September 8, 1992.

³² Cherniss, *Max Meyer*, 116.

³³ Isaac Lévy's *Diary*, translated from the German by Maurice Wolff, 1990. The original belongs to Ernest Levy, Isaac's son, and to his granddaughter, Lauren Levy.

³⁴ Edmund Uhry, "Galleries of Memory," typescript E, Leo Baeck Institute (New York, 1946), 146-147.

³⁵ *Recollections of Philip Sartorius*, 1910.

³⁶ Geismar-Margolis interview; Lévy diary.

³⁷ Barkai, *German Jewish Immigration*, 39.

³⁸ See for example, Abel Dreyfous' letters written in French and translated into English, 1849-1890; *Recollections of Sartorius*; Rosine Weil Cahn (1837-1909) "Recollections of the Weil and Cohen Families," 1906.

³⁹ Peck, "That Other 'Peculiar Institution': Jews and Judaism in the Nineteenth Century South," *Modern Judaism* 7 (May 1987): 199-214.

⁴⁰ "Communications," *Generations et Filiation* (Paris, 1994), 59.

⁴¹ Kaplan, *Eternal Stranger* 42, 62-63.

⁴² Marx Family Papers, flat file, cabinet 5, drawer 14, American Jewish Archives; Kenneth Hoffman, *The Jews of Port Gibson; A History of Temple Gemiluth Chassed* (Utica, MS, 1991).

⁴³ Hirsch cemetery list.

⁴⁴ Fiftieth Anniversary, Congregation Gates of Prayer; 130th Anniversary, Congregation Gates of Prayer, 1850-1980; and Gates of Prayer Congregation Minutes, Tulane University Special Collections. About two hundred Jews from northern Alsace who left in the late 1800s are buried in the largest Jewish cemetery in New Orleans according to the records of the Hebrew Rest Cemetery Association and this author's visit to the cemetery in 1998.

⁴⁵ Gates of Prayer Congregation Minutes, January 7, 1866.

⁴⁶ Ruth Dreyfous interview, conducted by Anny Bloch, September 23, 1992.

⁴⁷ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America; Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (New York, 1989), 116-117.

⁴⁸ "The Samuel World Family of Osyka, Mississippi," Abraham Metz Kahn Collection.

⁴⁹ "David Wolbrette," *The Book of Israelites of Louisiana; Their Religious, Civic, Charitable and Patriotic Life* (New Orleans, 1904), 127.

⁵⁰ Paula Hyman, "Des Juifs d'Alsace," in Pierre Birnbaum, *Histoire Politique des Juifs de France* (France, 1990), 35.

⁵¹ "F. J. Dreyfous was instrumental in persuading others to join the anti-lottery coalition

... As a freshman state legislator, his father wrote the anti-lottery bill for the House." F. J. Dreyfous opposed the Louisiana lottery because the lottery brought wealth to the private group of men while it took money out of the pockets of some of the state's most poorly educated and economically impoverished citizens." Ruth Dreyfous, "It Has Been Interesting My Life," (typescript, New Orleans, 1995) and idem. with Bobbie S. Malone, "The Life

of Felix

Jonathan Dreyfous, 1857–1946,” (typescript, New Orleans, 1995).

⁵² Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865* (Elkins Park, PA, 1961).

⁵³ Babette Wampold to Anny Bloch, Montgomery, AL, August 17, 1993.

⁵⁴ Letter dated June 26, 1926, American Jewish Archives.

⁵⁵ Recollections of Sartorius.

⁵⁶ Hirsch to Anny Bloch, August, 17, 1993

⁵⁷ Deeds of the practice are located at the Historic New Orleans Collection and the Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University. Dreyfous, “It Has Been Interesting My Life;” Dreyfous with Malone, “Integrity and Service.”

⁵⁸ Gaston Hirsch to Anny Bloch, August 17, 1993.

⁵⁹ Oscar Handlin, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, MA, 1980); Heinrich Neu, “Elsass-Lothringer als Ansiedler in Nord-Amerika,” *Elsass-Lothringesche Wissenschaft zu Strassburg* (Heidelberg, 1930).

⁶⁰ Dreyfous with Malone, “Integrity and Service.”

⁶¹ “The Samuel World Family of Osyka.”

⁶² Abraham Metz Kahn interview, conducted by Anny Bloch, September 8, 1992 (Kahn is a native of Baton Rouge whose family originated from Alsace and Germany); Flo Geismar-Margolis interview, conducted by Anny Bloch, September 8, 1992.

⁶³ Maxine Wolchansky, *Let's Bake with Beulah Ledner, A Legendary New Orleans Lady* (Duluth, GA, 1987).

⁶⁴ Interviews given by descendants Ruth Dreyfous, 1992, 1994, Catherine C. Kahn, 1997, Flo Geismar-Margolis, 1992, 1994, 1996, conducted by Anny Bloch.

Kosher Country: Success and Survival on Nashville's Music Row

by

Stacy Harris

During the last few years, Nashville's country music industry has been mourning a larger number of its citizens than usual. These losses included two, Norma Gerson ("makeup artist to the stars") and Rainbow Room owner/erstwhile "Hee Haw" bit-player David "Skull" Schulman ("the mayor of Printers' Alley"), that underscore the little-known range and diversity of roles Jews have played in Nashville and country-music history.

According to Karen B. Fine, Nashville's Jewish music industry population numbers "about 60 or 70."¹ Few would characterize this minority as a vocal one. Indeed, when *Life* staff writer Charles Hirshberg wrote about the relationship between Jews and country music in the *Forward*, he titled the article "Nashville's Jewish Newcomers Assert Themselves (Softly)."² Likening the reluctance of Jewish country-music industry participants to medieval Marranos who, Hirshberg believed, kept "their Jewishness private to protect their livelihoods," Hirshberg's observations of five years ago seem equally as dire in 1999.³

There would well be a justification for this. Country music's heritage is rooted in traditions of a Protestant-Christian America. Six years ago, this author wrote, "Most country artists have recorded at least one album of sacred songs; indeed it is almost expected."⁴

Nonetheless change may be imminent. With many more new artists and a younger listener base, this expectation no longer exists. While it still looks good for a country singer to have a press kit containing biographical information noting that the subject's earliest memories are of "hymns or more fervent gospel songs" and of his/her own performances in church, whether true or not, such references are increasingly less mandatory.

As country music continues to be infused with younger artists who reflect the multicultural nature of America's melting pot, they will sing songs reflecting their own experience. To the extent that these lyrics have religious application, the Christ-driven lyrics of earlier times give way to songs of more universal, spiritual themes. While you still can hear it sung on the Grand Ole Opry, mostly by older, evangelical artists who haven't had a hit in years, Christian country music is no longer played on country-formatted stations. Gospel music is now largely confined to "Contemporary Christian" formatted stations.

This article will explore these contrapuntal themes: the seemingly wide scale acceptance of Jews in Nashville country music and their substantial contributions to the genre, and the pervasive insensitivity if not outright anti-Semitism which confronts the participants. In so doing, this becomes a case study of how popular culture reflects as well as illuminates the broader themes of southern and American Jewish history.

A corollary to these themes emerges from a tentative comparison. While Nashville boasts a burgeoning Black Country Music Association (and emerging from the BCMA, the Minority Country Music Association), there has never been even a hint of interest expressed in establishing a Jewish Country Music Association. As a counterpoint, Music City was not ready for a 1970s song Tom T. Hall wrote, recorded, but never released called "I Was Born in a One Nigger Town."⁵ While Hall's lyrics satirically and scatologically reference stereotypes associated with African American males, the song's theme is unmistakably one of racial tolerance. Significantly, record companies that will not release a country song with the word "Nigger" in its title, realizing the epithet is both offensive and polarizing, do not hesitate about

releasing—and radio does not think twice about playing—a recording of Kinky Friedman and his Texas Jewboys called “Ride ‘em Jewboy.” These seemingly trivial illustrations suggest both important similarities and differences between the groups and their relation to the majority culture. Jews are relatively more tolerated and accepted than African Americans, and, partly because of this, they also have a greater desire to be accepted into the mainstream.

Given the level of Jewish involvement, a Jewish Classical Music Association may have been in order, however, during the early 1920s. Ninety-two year-old Nashville Jewish community matriarch Elizabeth Jacobs recalls that at that time, she, Dr. Bernard Weinstein, Eva Garfinkle, and Maurice Loveman were among radio performers who played their music for free from WSM Radio’s downtown studio. That studio became one of the Grand Ole Opry’s early homes.⁶ That so many Jews were involved then and now is somewhat amazing in that even today Nashville’s total Jewish population numbers only 6,000.⁷

Nashville itself really burgeoned as Music City beginning about 1950 when WSM Radio announcer David Cobb first dubbed Nashville “Music City, USA.” Music Row or Record Row, the nicknames are interchangeable, refers to Nashville’s music district and home to most of the record companies, talent agencies, recording studios, music trade associations, and music publishers that have called the area home since the late 1950s or early 1960s.

The industry might have flourished sooner. In 1931 Jewish songwriters including Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern established the New York City-based American Guild of Authors and Composers (AGAC). Later the guild expanded its headquarters to include Los Angeles, and by the 1930s, according to veteran country songwriter John D. Loudermilk, “tried to come to Nashville but, because they were Jews, couldn’t get in down here.”⁸

That left it to Loudermilk to establish the Songwriters Guild of America in Nashville. The SGA, which began as the Songwriters Protection Association, in the words of its mission statement, “protects your rights by providing you with the best songwriter’s

contact in the business . . . A Guild contract contains many benefits which may not be part of the so-called 'standard' songwriter's agreement."⁹

Jews have been actively involved in the country music business for over five decades. For example, Hill & Range, the New York music publishing company established in 1944 by Austrian-born Holocaust refugees Joachim Jean Aberbach and his brother, Julian, published most of the songs that became country hits from 1945 to 1955.¹⁰ Yet the anti-Semitic climate of Nashville's music industry that Loudermilk encountered during the early 1970s, when he and others tried to establish the Guild, was a factor in the inability to establish the SGA until 1983.

Not much had changed a decade later when the New York-based William Morris Agency (which now has a Nashville office) locked horns with Music Row's Buddy Lee Agency over the right to book Garth Brooks.¹¹ As Helen Farmer, at that time the Country Music Association's director of programs and special projects, told Hirshberg, the Nashville agents' feelings boiled over to the extent that their hostility "immediately reflected their stereotypes about New York Jews."¹² Farmer explained that those who did not know she was Jewish felt free to make remarks to her along the lines of "Hitler had the right idea" and "You think this is bad, you just wait. They all want the money and the stakes are sky high. We're gonna be inundated."¹³

Skull Schulman's protégé, a Jew from Pennsylvania named Sidney Kaminsky, sang in Printers' Alley. Downtown Nashville's nightclub district, the Alley was the center of Nashville's printing industry, circa 1915, when the area was home to ten printers and thirteen publishers. In 1970 the saloon singer wrote one of the earliest books about Music Row personalities.¹⁴ Kaminsky's parents were from Russia and Poland. They departed before the Holocaust, but most of their family members perished. Kaminsky even became a TNN program host, as he established himself as one of Nashville's best-known radio (WSM, WLAC, WKDA, and now, WAMB) and TV (channels 2 and 4) personalities.¹⁵ But not before he changed his name to the non-ethnic Teddy Bart.¹⁶

It has never been easy being both Jewish and associated with the country-music community. When Bill Monroe hired a Milburn, New Jersey, fiddler to work with him, perhaps Gene Lowinger bit his tongue when Monroe singled out Lowinger in introductions of Monroe's Bluegrass Boys as "the only Jewish bluegrass cowboy in the country."¹⁷ As the undisputed "Father of Bluegrass Music," Monroe certainly knew that just as traditional country music requires a steel guitar, without a fiddle there is no bluegrass music.

Gene Lowinger wasn't country music's only early Jewish fiddler. Maurice Blumen, known variously as "Mutt" or "Ripplin' Ruben," appeared with bands on the Grand Ole Opry from 1945 to 1952.¹⁸ Blumen, who turned eighty in April 1999, played with the Opry's Cousin Wilbur and His Tennessee Mountaineers. He played first fiddle with Howard "Howdy" Forrester, jammed backstage at the Opry with Roy Acuff and worked tent shows with Bill Monroe, Rod Brasfield, and comediennes Sarie and Sallie.¹⁹ Equally unceremoniously, during the late 1950s, Eric Weissberg, Ralph Rinzler, and Bob Yellin became members of The Greenbriar Boys, while John Cohen joined The New Lost City Ramblers.²⁰

If a Jew with an identifiably Jewish name was lucky enough to first ascend to a position of power outside of Nashville, as Paul Cohen did, that person would be grudgingly accepted, if never quite welcome, around what became Music Row. That is because power begot respect in Nashville music circles even before the formation of Record Row. When record producer/record company executive Cohen came from New York to WSM Radio's Studio B in 1945, he helped develop the careers of Kitty Wells, Patsy Cline, Webb Pierce, Brenda Lee, Bobby Helms, and others.²¹

With those credentials the Country Music Association could not justify denying Cohen membership in the Country Music Foundation's Hall of Fame. While most individuals are usually inducted during their lifetimes, the CMA waited a full six years following Cohen's 1970 death before granting him that honor.²²

If you want to be a Grand Ole Opry star, being multitalented and not advertising your Jewishness appears to be a good idea. It

certainly worked for Lew Childre. A singing comedian, buck dancer, and yodeler, Childre, who became an Opry member in 1945, also played Hawaiian guitar, trumpet, and trombone.²³

It is possible that the Alabama-born one-man-band's ethnic background was not known to his Opry bosses, given the experience of the country trio, Tompall and the Glaser Brothers some fifteen years later.

Nebraskan Catholics Tompall (née Thomas Paul), Chuck and Jim Glaser first appeared as guests on the Grand Ole Opry in 1960. While they became Opry members in 1962, Jim Glaser confirms that acceptance came only after the suspicion that the brothers with the Jewish-sounding surname were Jews proved spurious.²⁴

So how much have things changed since 1962? Richard Friedman and his band were not afforded the honor of appearing on the Grand Ole Opry's final performance at the Ryman Auditorium on March 15, 1974. But Kinky Friedman secured an invitation to appear on the Ryman stage with his Texas Jewboys on Reverend Jimmie Snow's post-Opry WSM Radio "Grand Ole Gospel Time" broadcast where, in ironic fashion, Friedman erroneously proclaimed himself to be the "first full-blooded Jew" to appear on the Ryman stage as he proceeded to announce his supposed conversion to Christianity.²⁵

When Charles Hirshberg broached the subject of Jews as country-music performers, he mentioned country songwriter Tom Meltzer, front man for a band known as the Five Chinese Brothers. Meltzer and his band could not interest Music Row despite their regional (New York) popularity and the glowing reviews they received from *Rolling Stone*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Billboard*. Though Meltzer landed a publishing deal with "a major music publisher," he could not get his songs cut in Nashville.²⁶

Another Jewish songwriter Hirshberg mentions, Victoria Shaw, has fared much better. Shaw, whose number one compositions for Garth Brooks, Doug Stone, and John Michael Montgomery secured her a recording contract with Warner/Reprise following one chart record on an independent label.

Nonetheless, her Warner/Reprise debut, *In Full View*, and a self-titled album failed to make *Billboard's* country album chart. Shaw left Warner/Reprise in 1997 and two years later launched her own record label, Taffeta Records.

Although influential and recognized Shaw has failed to emerge as "country music's next superstar" as Hirshberg surmised she might in 1994. A Garth Brooks protégé, she remains in the spotlight. Brooks' co-writer on "A Friend to Me,"²⁷ (featured on Brooks' *Sevens* CD), Shaw also has co-written "Love is a Gift"²⁸ with Olivia Newton-John and Earl Rose. Newton-John recorded the song, "This Is Our Moment,"²⁹ which is featured on *As The World Turns* and on TV's Soap Opera Awards. Shaw received Emmy nominations for the last two songs and won a Daytime Emmy for Best Original Song ("This is Our Moment") in May 1999. Shaw recently made a cameo appearance on *The Guiding Light* and executive-produced "One Heart At a Time," a single featuring the voices of Brooks, Newton-John, Michael McDonald, Neal McCoy, Faith Hill, Billy Dean, and Bryan White, with proceeds earmarked for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.³⁰ She has written the title track for Trisha Yearwood's album, *Where Your Road Leads*,³¹ and a song on Ty Herndon's *Big Hopes* CD.³²

Superstardom has also eluded two Jewish Grammy winners: Asleep at the Wheel's tattooed lead singer, Ray Benson (née Ray Benson Siefert)³³ and ace banjoist, Béla Fleck, late of New Grass Revival.³⁴ While not everyone achieves superstar status and these performers have obtained substantial success there may be another reason for their failure to reach the pinnacle. Country fans, who bestow their approval on those who are most open about their personal lives often including their spiritual beliefs, have received guarded responses from these Jewish favorites.

Shaw disputes both the premise that country fans care about entertainers' spiritual beliefs and that her responses are guarded.³⁵ Yet, Shaw told Hirshberg that when country music magazines do "roundup" stories (e.g., asking several country stars about their favorite Christmas memories as the basis for a holiday story), she responds with "my favorite *holiday* memory," without mentioning Christmas or Hanukkah: "If I make a big deal about

being Jewish, then I'm liable to become a novelty . . . It wouldn't be good for me, or the Jewish [community]."³⁶

Rabbi Bruce Adler, spiritual leader for Hamilton Ohio's Beth Israel Synagogue, a Conservative congregation in metropolitan Cincinnati, represents still another phenomenon. A fiddler whose "kosher kountry" songs have been recorded and performed by bluegrass, folk, and gospel groups throughout America, Adler believes that he is "the only rabbi in the United States, probably in any country, who does Jewish bluegrass," giving rise to his being dubbed "The Bluegrass Rabbi."³⁷

Rabbi Adler's unique form of musical expression is derived from the definition of "kosher" as meaning "fit or acceptable. My music is positive and clean and has similarities to Christian country but, since I'm Jewish, that wouldn't really be an accurate description. I've heard some people refer to it as Jewish gospel. As a rabbi, my songs are kosher—they express reverence for God, commitment to Torah and the need for responsible moral living."³⁸

Admittedly Adler's albums (*Walk Humbly With Thy G-d, If It Be Thy Will, I Choose Torah* and *Eternally Hopeful*) are not the type of material taking *Billboard's* country chart by storm.³⁹ Consider these lyrics from the title song of Adler's *I Choose Torah* CD:

Torah means all that's good and that's true.
It's doing all you know God wants you to do.
It's making sure our people lives tomorrow too.⁴⁰

Of course, depending on the evolution of the Americana format, the near future might bring more than limited market appeal for not only Adler's music, but for that of the Nashville duo Eighteen, modern Jewish rockers Mason Cooper and Dan Nichols who mix Torah with a rock beat. Nichols is a former cantorial soloist at Congregation Micah, one of Nashville's two Reform congregations. The liner notes to Eighteen's CD *Life* state, "Some of the songs on this album are directly inspired by Jewish liturgy. Others come from our perspectives and experiences living as Jews in a modern world. . . . L'Chaim! Mason and Dan." Among the

special thanks are those given to “our Rabbis, Cantors, and thanks go to our Jewish educators who have inspired us to express our spirituality in new and creative ways.” Two of the eleven songs on the CD have Hebrew titles and are recorded in Hebrew with English translations. Other songs use spiritual and/or biblical themes as do the following from “Babel,”

A tower went up
 And you knocked us down
 For letting our heads
 get too far off the ground

Paradise lost, reality found
 Arrogance tossed in a sea of sound
 We all babble on, babble on

These lyrics illustrate the potential for Jewish country.⁴¹

Country listeners – northerners among them – gravitate more toward songs of heritage such as the country group Alabama’s 1980 hit, “My Home’s In Alabama” with its lyrical references to pride in speaking “Southern English,” southern nativity and southern breeding.⁴² Signs of Jewish kinship within the country music community are subtler. One low-key example of such bonding occurred, according to Asylum Records President Evelyn Shriver, when the late Academy of Country Music (ACM) board member, Bill Boyd, teased industry friends, ranging from attorney Joel Katz to Asylum Records’ vice-president, A & R (artist and repertoire), Susan Nadler, by giving them gifts of custom-made ball caps bearing the initials JIC, for Jews in Country.⁴³ Such acronyms rooted in inside jokes underscore the glaring absence of Jewish visibility in country music culture and point to a time when Jews and Nashville’s country music community did not mix.

Although versions of the story differ, many of Nashville’s Jewish old-timers tell a tale that dates back to the 1940s – after the Ryman Auditorium became the Grand Ole Opry’s home in September 1943 and before 1948 when Sherith Israel moved away

from what is now the Central Parking lot next to the Ryman. Although the accounts may be apocryphal, they reflect the Jewish community's perception of the general lack of awareness and knowledge of Jews and Judaism among non-Jews living in the Nashville country music environment.

In one version of the story, in 1946, when the solemn Jewish Day of Atonement fell on the Jewish Sabbath, the late Saturday afternoon service also coincided with the lining up of ticket buyers awaiting a Grand Ole Opry performance at dusk.

A variation of this tale characterizes an Opry fan as being inebriated and staying for the entire service before realizing his error. Other versions suggest that there was a group of Opry ticket holders who mistook the Orthodox Sherith Israel for the Opry and innocently brought food and soft drinks into the sanctuary — some were supposedly throwing peanuts in the air and catching them in their mouths — to the amazement of the fasting congregants. The visitors then were invited in but were asked to leave their treats behind as the males among them were given yarmulkes with which to cover their heads.⁴⁴

A man dressed in overalls sauntered into the Sherith Israel sanctuary and took a seat beside Gerald Peiser and the other male congregants. While most of the other men present were dressed in their Sabbath best, it only became apparent to Peiser and the others that perhaps the stranger did not belong among them when he reached for one of the nearby spittoons and availed himself of it. This just was not done during the solemn Jewish observance that is marked by an all-day fast. Still nothing was said to the stranger who stayed for a few minutes of the service until he realized he was not attending an Opry performance.⁴⁵

At that point, according to Peiser, Sherith Israel's Cantor Aaron Abramson approached the newcomer, welcomed him and asked what he thought of the service.⁴⁶

The bewildered response?

"It was very nice, but I was expecting Roy Acuff!"⁴⁷

Because the Opry had yet to become a tourist attraction, its audience during the immediate post-war years was largely the backwoods variety. Before the advent of concession stands put

a stop to the practice, it was not unusual for Opry fans to bring picnic baskets from home as they began to gather either around the Grand Ole Opry or, if they mistook the building for that of the Opry, at Sherith Israel. Mistaking one edifice for another was understandable when one considers that the structure of Sherith Israel's facade was architecturally similar to that of the Mother Church of Country Music, and the two buildings shared a wall.

Today Jewish music in Nashville extends beyond such houses of worship. The Jewish Community Center is among more well-known Music City venues presenting songwriters' nights. According to event coordinator/adult contemporary rock songwriter Mark Wiederman, who bills himself as Mark Aaron James,⁴⁸ such Jewish songwriters as Jerry Holland ("Friends," recorded by John Michael Montgomery),⁴⁹ John Michaels ("Check, Please," recorded by Paul Jefferson),⁵⁰ and Steve Seskin ("Don't Laugh At Me," recorded by Mark Wills; "I Think About You," recorded by Collin Raye)⁵¹ have performed at the JCC writers' nights, although gentile writers participate as well.

The contemporary history of Nashville's Jews who have made names for themselves in country music includes not only songwriters Michael Kossler, Pam Belford, Sam Lorber, Stacy Beyer, Dennis Scott, Andie Jennings, Karen Taylor-Good, but also, to name a few, record producers Richard Landis, Steve Fishell, Cliff Goldmacher, publicist Ronna Rubin, booking agents like Rod Essig, record company executives Neal Spielberg, Tracy Gershon, Dan Einstein, Wayne Halper, music video directors such as Steve Goldmann, artist managers David Skepner, Gary Falcon, and the "world-famous" Bluebird Cafe night club operator, Amy Kurland, who gave Garth Brooks one of his earliest opportunities to perform in Nashville. Nashville boasts present-day and former Jewish entertainment journalists Rick Bolsom, David Ross, Nancy Sweid, Brad Schmitt, the late Bruce Honick, author Barry McCloud, and photographer Alan Mayor. Music City is also home to a Jewish CMA executive, senior director of international and new business development, Jeff Green; NARAS' senior executive direction, Nashville Operations, Nancy

Shapiro; and nationally-known medical examiner, Dr. Bruce Levy.⁵²

These are Jews who identify themselves in varying degrees as Jewish. All are of Jewish background. Some indicate they are non-practicing. Others who are probably Jewish (in that they have Jewish surnames or have been identified by others as being Jewish) were unavailable for comment.

This begs another question: if a sizable number of Music Row's Jews regard being publicly identified as Jewish as the equivalent of being "outed," then how common is Victoria Shaw's experience of not having experienced anti-Semitism?⁵³ Is Shaw unaware that Dolly Parton abandoned plans to create and star in a TV series on a country-turned-gospel singer because, as Parton explained to *Vogue* readers, "everybody's afraid to touch anything that's religious because most of the people out here [in Hollywood] are Jewish, and it's a frightening thing for them to promote Christianity."⁵⁴

Then again, there are varying degrees of what could be termed anti-Semitism. Mel Tillis spoke to this author for a *Country Song Roundup* interview about Walter Wager, the ghostwriter for his then-upcoming autobiography. Tillis complained that "Walter is Jewish and he wrote it with a certain New York way of talkin.' And I'm having to edit it again and write it the way that I would say things."⁵⁵

Not long thereafter one of Faron Young's longtime associates apologized for Young's inability to do a promised interview, explaining that "Faron's involved in a divorce, you know. His wife has hired some Jew lawyer." In fact, Hilda Young's attorney was not Jewish.⁵⁶

Another man, writing his country-music autobiography, deleted a reference to his supposedly unprejudiced father's routine use of the expression "Jew you down." The author omitted the remarks, but only after his literary agent, the William Morris Agency's Mel Berger, advised him that the phrase is an ethnic slur.⁵⁷ The vulgarity of that expression was brought home to this author when a Grand Ole Opry star's spouse, who had been known for twenty-five years to the author as a wonderful person,

used the phrase matter-of-factly twice within a five minute period.⁵⁸ Another Opry star, on learning that this author was Jewish, stated that he was brought up to believe that Jews had horns. He said he was very surprised to learn, on meeting a Jew for the first time, that this was not the case.⁵⁹ Then in all seriousness he asked if "Jews still practice blood sacrifices."⁶⁰ In another incident a singer/songwriter's office manager asked me if American Jews celebrate Thanksgiving!⁶¹ Several years ago, a Gospel Music Association official, addressing a crowd including this author, said matter-of-factly that Jews were only in the music business for the money.⁶²

Institutional anti-Semitism was noted in 1993 when, after having seen a rehearsal for the Opryland theme park stage production of "Easter in Song and Story," the disgusted viewer told Sally Levine of the Nashville chapter of the American Jewish Committee that she "had never seen anything so anti-Semitic in her life."⁶³ Levine and Ruth Tanner, then executive director of the Jewish Federation of Nashville, attended the final 1993 performance prepared to take notes.⁶⁴

When the women approached Bob Whittaker, then Opryland Production's Vice President and General Manager, with what Levine called a "good record of exactly what was said and why it was offensive," they received no response.⁶⁵ Levine and Tanner, acting on the endorsement of the Jewish Federation Board and its Community Relations Committee, built a twenty-six member interfaith coalition. Convened by Walter Harrelson, Dean Emeritus of Vanderbilt University's Divinity School, the group attended the final 1994 performance with notebooks in hand.⁶⁶

The consensus of opinion was that "Easter in Song and Story" was theologically inaccurate. It stereotyped Jews, depicted Jews as solely responsible for Jesus' death, and trivialized what Christians regard as a major historical event.⁶⁷ Reflecting on "the poor quality of the performance and the poor theology," Harrelson said the group "began to think it was not just the Jewish community that should be offended, but we in the Christian community should be offended. It told us how much more work we have to do to educate people. . ."⁶⁸

A letter signed by sixteen coalition members that protested several aspects of the 1994 production was sent to Whittaker. Whittaker finally met with the group in July 1994 and considered suggestions regarding ways offensive references could be eliminated without incurring additional costs.⁶⁹ The coalition wanted more. It was not until December 1994 that Opryland decided there would be no 1995 production of "Easter in Song and Story," while simultaneously refusing to offer assurances that the production would not resume at a later date.⁷⁰

The Nashville Network was similarly unresponsive to objections voiced by Judith Saks and this author to an anti-Semitic "joke" singer/songwriter Ray Stevens told on the September 28, 1998, edition of TNN's "Prime Time Country."⁷¹ Even the not-for-profit, cultural and educational Country Music Foundation, publisher of the *Journal of Country Music*, failed to understand the importance of Jewish participation in the genre. Although the journal takes great interest in the contributions and history of African Americans and, to a lesser extent, other ethnic minorities in country music highlighting such contributions in the pages of the JCM and in album releases on its own imprint, JCM editor Paul Kingsbury, while admitting he had not read it, declined to consider publishing an earlier version of this article, dismissing Jews' roles in country music as being "as significant as those of left-handers in country music."⁷² When this author indicated that she would not embarrass Kingsbury by quoting him, the JCM editor urged that she "go ahead. I don't mind."⁷³

While Nashville's music community has a long way to go in terms of sensitivity and awareness, there are signs of progress. The Country Music Association no longer holds its award shows on Jewish holidays, thanks in large measure to a calendar of Jewish observances developed by the Jewish Federation of Nashville and circulated on Music Row and throughout the school system. Another positive sign appeared when researching this article for names of those Jews who might otherwise not come to mind, colleagues often stated "I'll have to stop and think," or as one Grand Ole Opry staffer put it: "You know, people are just people to me. I don't think about them in those (differentiating) terms."⁷⁴

 NOTES

¹ Fine, Karen B. "They're Playing. . . (Writing. . . Singing. . . Producing) Our Songs," *The Observer*, 65, No. 13 (July 17, 1998), 14. This periodical is a bimonthly Jewish publication. According to Will Beasley, Director, Music Business Development for the Nashville Chamber of Commerce, the population of Davidson County, which includes Nashville and portions of suburbs where many in Nashville's music industry make their homes, is 530,000. Others in the music community live in nearby Brentwood, (divided by the county line separating Davidson and Williamson counties), Franklin (in Williamson County) and Hendersonville (in Sumner County).

² Hirshberg, "Nashville's Jewish Newcomers Assert Themselves (Softly)," *Forward* 99, 985 No. 30, (July 22, 1994), 9-10.

³ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴ Stacy Harris, *The Best of Country: The Essential CD Guide* (London, San Francisco, 1993), 16.

⁵ Nick Tosches, *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock 'n Roll* (New York, 1996), 217.

⁶ Elizabeth Jacobs interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, September 1997.

⁷ *American Jewish Yearbook* 98 (New York, 1998), 182.

⁸ John D. Loudermilk interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, May 14, 1996.

⁹ Songwriters Guild Association brochure.

¹⁰ Ronnie Pugh, "Hill & Range Songs, Inc.," Paul Kingsbury, et al, *The Encyclopedia of Country Music: The Ultimate Guide to the Music* (New York, 1998), 241.

¹¹ Hirshberg, *Forward*, 9-10.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Inside Music City, U.S.A.* (Nashville, 1970)

¹⁵ Teddy Bart interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, January 1998.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Harris, *The Best of Country: The Essential CD Guide*.

¹⁸ Maurice Blumen interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, September 14, 1998.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Hirshberg, *Forward*, 10.

²¹ Ronnie Pugh, "Paul Cohen," Kingsbury and contributing writers, *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 102.

²² Paul Cohen was president of the CMA three years before he died. The Country Music Foundation's encyclopedia indicates that when Cohen died, Music Row's offices closed in "an unprecedented gesture." However, of the twenty-five Country Music Hall of Fame inductees preceding Cohen, only one alive at the time of the first inductions was inducted posthumously. That individual, Jim Denny, the Grand Ole Opry manager who, following Elvis Presley's single Opry appearance, advised his fellow future Country Music Hall-of-Famer to "go back to driving your truck," was a controversial figure. Not only did he misjudge Presley's appeal, but he also had a perceived conflict of interest. The powerful Opry manager also headed the Grand Ole Opry Artists Service Bureau (booking agency) from

the late 1940s until he was fired from that position on September 24, 1956. Denny is blamed for the defection of many of the Opry's most popular artists.

²³ Charles Wolfe, "Lew Childre," Barry McCloud et al, *Definitive Country: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Country Music and Its Performers* (New York, 1995), 155.

²⁴ Jim Glaser interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, December 3, 1996.

²⁵ Ryman Opry show and post-Ryman show broadcast, March 15, 1974.

²⁶ Hirshberg, *Forward*, 10.

²⁷ Victoria Shaw and Garth Brooks, "A Friend to Me," *Sevens* (Minka Music/Maverick Music/WB Music Corp./Major Bob Music Co., Inc./No Fences Music, 1997).

²⁸ Victoria Shaw, Earl Rose, and Olivia Newton-John, "Love is a Gift," *Back With a Heart* (VLS Music, Inc., Amadeus Music Co. and Zargon Music, 1997).

²⁹ Victoria Shaw, Earl Rose, and Olivia Newton-John, "This is Our Moment," (VLS Music, Inc., Amadeus Music Co. and Zargon Music, 1997).

³⁰ Victoria Shaw, "One Heart at a Time," *One Heart at a Time* (VLS Music, 1998).

³¹ Victoria Shaw and Desmond Child, "Where Your Road Leads," *Where Your Road Leads* (BMG Songs, Inc./Manor House Music, 1995).

³² Victoria Shaw and Gary Burr, "Big Time Dreamers," *Big Hopes* (VLS Music/Gary Burr Music Inc./ MCA Music Publishing, 1998)

³³ Hirshberg, *Forward*, 9-10. The spelling of Seifert's name was questioned when his manager indicated that it is correctly spelled "Siefert." (Jeff Currier telephone conversation with the author, August 11, 1999.)

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10. In the course of his August 10, 1999, interview with the author, during an Internet chat at <<http://www.wkm.com>>, Fleck stated his feelings on being Jewish as follows "Stacy, my mother is Jewish, and therefore I have a lot of that influence. However I was not raised with the religious side of it, so I don't claim to be anything in particular."

³⁵ Victoria Shaw interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, February 12, 1998.

³⁶ Hirshberg, *Forward*, 10. During her February 12, 1998, interview with this author, Shaw indicated that Hirshberg misquoted her generally and specifically with reference to "the Jewish people." The singer/songwriter feels the quote attributed to her by Hirshberg appears presumptuous and that she most likely referred to "the Jewish community."

Shaw's mother, Carole, now an active member of Nashville's Jewish Community Center and the JCC's Cultural Arts Committee, once recorded for Capitol Records as did Garth Brooks' late mother, Colleen.

³⁷ Bluegrass and the Bimah, <<http://w3.one.net/~bruad/blueandbim.html>>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Rabbis Bruce and Donna Adler, "I Choose Torah," *I Choose Torah*, (Maplestaff Music, 1995).

⁴¹ Dan Nichols and Mason Cooper, "Babel," (Wafflegood Music and Mister Mason Music/Ken Ten Pub., Inc., 1996.)

⁴² Randy Owen and Teddy Gentry, "My Home's in Alabama," *My Home's in Alabama*, (Maypop Music, a division of Wildcountry, Inc.) 1980. Although substantial Jewish involvement in country music is easily documented, after extensive research, one has to conclude that few if any songs (those of Rabbis Bruce Adler and Donna Adler, and Kinky Friedman are exceptions) mention or embody Jewish themes.

⁴³ Evelyn Shriver interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, January 29, 1998.

⁴⁴ Interviews with Rabbi Zalman Posner, spiritual leader of Nashville's Sherith Israel, Ahron Lucas, Maxie Biener and Ernest Freudenthal, conducted by Stacy Harris, February 1998.

⁴⁵ Gerald Peiser interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, January 1998.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mark Wiederman interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, February 1998.

⁴⁹ Jerry Holland, "Friends," Greatest Hits (Mike Curb Music/That's A Smash Publishing, 1996).

⁵⁰ Jon Michaels and Paul Jefferson, "Check Please," Paul Jefferson (Check Please, Publishing/Irving Music, Inc./Mick James Music/Will Bacon Music, 1996).

⁵¹ Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin, "Don't Laugh At Me," Wish You Were Here (Sony/ATV Tunes LLC/David Aaron Music/Built on Rock, 1998). Steve Seskin and Don Schlitz, "I Think About You," Direct Hits and I Think About You (Sony/ATV Tunes/New Hayes Music/New Dawn Songs, 1996).

⁵² Most Jews who have played a part in Nashville's country music scene, like Dr. Levy, are fairly new to Music City. A New Yorker, Levy, who was featured on the February 19, 1999, edition of ABC Television's 20/20 regarding his initial refusal to autopsy Tammy Wynette, told this writer during a February 25, 1999, interview that, as of that date, he had lived in Nashville "less than two years." Levy eventually did the autopsy.

⁵³ Shaw interview.

⁵⁴ Vogue, January 1994, "Dolly Parton Apologizes To ADL For Anti-Semitic Comments," (Anti-Defamation League news release) and Stewart Ain, "Dolly Makes Nice," *New York Jewish Week*, February 25, 1994. When Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League wrote Parton pointing out that "there is no evidence of any Jewish hostility toward Christian themes in films," Parton replied, in part, by indicating that "I sincerely apologize for my statement."

⁵⁵ Stacy Harris, "Mel Tillis: You Don't Hurry Your Life," Country Song Roundup, October 1984, 12.

⁵⁶ Faron Young's associate interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, circa 1980.

⁵⁷ Author's book signing, Davis-Kidd Booksellers, Nashville, Tennessee, June 29, 1993.

⁵⁸ Grand Ole Opry star's husband and manager interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, circa 1997.

⁵⁹ Grand Ole Opry star interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, circa 1983.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Office manager interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, November 1995.

⁶² Former GMA official addressing monthly meeting of the Nashville-based National Entertainment Journalists Association (NEJA) circa 1978.

⁶³ Judith A. Saks, "Coalition Pleased with End to Opryland Easter Program," *The Observer*, 61, No. 23

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Whittaker was later promoted to the position of President of the Grand Ole Opry Group, where his responsibilities included managing the Grand Ole Opry prior to his retirement in 1998. Under Whittaker's aegis the Opry began to feature an increased number of

guest appearances by gospel music artists. Among these were a gospel bluegrass family act, The Isaacs. The quintet includes a husband and wife, their son, two daughters, and the daughters' husbands. The extended musical family's matriarch, Lily Fishman Isaacs, was born in a French army camp in Germany; the daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors, Lily Fishman Isaacs has converted to Christianity. Deborah Evans-Price, "The Isaacs' Have A New Album Of Bluegrass-Gospel on the Horizon," *Billboard*, 110, No. 44 (October 31, 1998), 31.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Production never resumed and became a moot issue when the Opryland theme park closed in 1998.

⁷¹ Ironically, Stevens, whose 1970 recording of "Everything Is Beautiful (In Its Own Way)" espoused brotherhood, found humor in "joking" to program host/Christian music singer Gary Chapman that Stevens' presumably gentile friend wanted to become a "Jewish lawyer, because (Jews) make a lot of money and they can buy things wholesale." Chapman did not indicate any discomfort with Stevens' humor.

⁷² Paul Kingsbury interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, November 13, 1998. Interview with Christina Fernandez, assistant to Country Music Foundation Director Kyle Young on March 4, 1999.

⁷³ Kingsbury interview.

⁷⁴ Grand Ole Opry staff member interview, conducted by Stacy Harris, September 14, 1998.

“From the Recipe File of Luba Cohen”: A Study of Southern Jewish Foodways and Cultural Identity

by

Marcie Cohen Ferris

Luba Tooter traveled from Odessa to America in September 1912. Hers is a tale familiar to scores of other Jewish immigrants who made similar journeys from Europe between 1881 and 1924 in the wake of Russian and Polish pogroms. Less familiar but equally important is Luba’s life in Arkansas and the letters and recipes she left behind which reveal a compelling, significant network of women’s friendships. These friendships surface in recipes, letters, and cookbooks where they reveal how foodways shaped networks of community, family, and sisterhood.¹

With their parents Harry and Mollie Tooter, Luba and her brothers, Milton, Maurice, Edward, Joseph, Albert, and George, traveled in a horse-drawn wagon for over two months. Claiming that they were going to a family wedding, the Tooters packed just enough baggage to appear that they were leaving for vacation, rather than making a permanent exodus from Russia. After an arduous journey to Rotterdam that required an illegal crossing of the Austro-Hungarian border, the family boarded the *America*, and squeezed into small steerage compartments for their ten-day journey to New York. At the age of ninety-two, Luba’s youngest brother Joe still remembers a small cubicle on the ship where Jewish passengers gathered to observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.² Their cousin, Minnie Issacson, met the family after they were cleared through Ellis Island and took them to an apartment

she had rented in Brooklyn.³ Luba was fifteen years old when her family arrived in New York. Eight years later she married Samuel Joseph Cohen, a Russian Jew who had emigrated from Minsk in 1912. They soon moved from New York to Blytheville, Arkansas.⁴

When Luba died in 1985 at the age of eighty-eight, she left in her Arkansas home a wooden recipe box and the rolling pin with which she made noodle dough as her mother had done in Odessa. Stuffed into the box was a disorderly collection of recipes written on scraps of paper, note pads from her husband's construction company, stationery from the Statler Hotel in New York and the Peabody in Memphis, bits of wallpaper, backs of envelopes, recipes clipped from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, and her personal cards with the inscription "from the recipe file of Luba Cohen" printed across the top.

When Luba arrived in Arkansas in 1920 as a young bride, she brought both recipes of her native Russian foods and those of American dishes she discovered during her seven years in New York City. She soon blended these recipes with southern recipes in Blytheville where she quickly developed friendships with her predominantly non-Jewish neighbors. Their cards for "Mrs. Thornton Scott's cocoon cookies," "Julia's jam cake," and "May Dixon's 'Cook While You Sleep' cookies" filled her recipe box, along with cut-out newspaper recipes for peach jam, pecan tarts, "Brer' Rabbit" molasses cookies, crabapple jelly, grasshopper pie, and "Mother's Best Hush Puppies" removed from the back of a corn meal package. Luba's recipes for food favorites from the 1950s such as tutti-fruitti rolls, "perfect tuna casserole," Chinese egg rolls, veal scallopini, and gelatin molds suggest how she acculturated by incorporating popular American dishes and entertaining styles.

Luba also had recipe cards from her Jewish friends who lived in Blytheville and nearby small towns in northeastern Arkansas and the "boot heel" of Missouri, where their husbands were merchants, doctors, engineers, and manufacturers. By 1947, these families had raised funds to build Temple Israel in Blytheville. Because her husband, Samuel Joseph Cohen, known as "Jimmy," had little interest in the temple and Jewish life, Luba remained on

the edge of the Jewish community. A constant exchange of recipes with her "temple friends" for dishes like "Fanny Weinstein's matzoh balls," "Lillian's strudel," "Lena's mandelbrodt," "Minnie's honey cake," unconsciously preserved her cultural identity in a place where there were few connections to distant family and Jewish memory.* After 1946, recipes from Huddy Horowitz and her mother, Lena, appear in Luba's box. Huddy married Luba and Jimmy's son, Jerry, in 1946 and moved with him to Blytheville. Reared in an active, traditional Jewish community in New London, Connecticut, Huddy embraced the small Jewish community at Temple Israel in Blytheville, where deep friendships developed through temple activities and the preparation of food for holiday meals and special events. Huddy explained that "The Temple was our connection to our close friendships, our place of worship and identity. It held us all together and the support was enormous."⁵

One well-used recipe in Luba's box was "Chicken Chop Suey or Chow Mein," the dish she prepared when entertaining her family. Why did she cook a dish so "un-Jewish," so foreign to her Russian roots? Chow mein was a dish she had discovered in New York. Living in Brooklyn from 1912 to 1920, she and many other eastern European Jews first encountered Chinese restaurants where they enjoyed this inexpensive food that did not mix milk and meat, as proscribed by kosher law. And pork, a forbidden food for Jews who kept kosher, was minced too small to recognize. Chinese cuisine featured garlic, celery, onion, overcooked vegetables, chicken dishes, eggs, sweet and sour dishes, and hot tea, tastes that an eastern European palate appreciated.⁶ While Chinese people called their noodle dumplings won tons, Jews looked into the same steaming bowls of chicken broth and saw kreplach.

On Luba's kitchen shelves was *Tried and True Recipes*, a guidebook to southern cooking published in 1922 by the Alabama Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. There was also the small, spiral-bound *Art of Chinese Cooking*, published in

* For a description of foods, see Appendix on pages 158-159. Certain spelling variations may occur.

1956. Luba's recipes, cookbooks, and Russian rolling pin reveal her experiences as a Russian child, a New York immigrant, and finally a southern housewife.

Luba Cohen's life suggests how southern Jewish foodways reveal a cultural history. We are what we eat, and the foods people enjoy as well as those they avoid reveal their cultural identity. Charged with the preparation of their family's meals, southern Jewish women shaped their cultural identity through food.⁷ Their history survives in non-traditional sources such as recipes, menus, letters, journals, and cookbooks. Consider the letter written by a friend to Luba Cohen on Peabody Hotel stationery: "Dear Luba, Received the chocolate nut cookie recipe from Rebecca today. Meant to bring this copy to you tonite. She said to pass the recipe on to you and Florence. I'm afraid I'll misplace same if I don't copy this tonight. I'm not too sleepy—here goes."⁸ While it is unclear whether the friend was Jewish, whether the recipe was for every day use or for a Jewish holiday, the letter reveals a powerful connection between four women, separated by distance, who communicated through foodways. Recipes must be read carefully to understand how women relate to family, friends, community, and their creation of cultural identity. This essay explores these recipes and how they reveal southern Jewish identity, foodways patterns, acculturation, women's networks, and the interaction between African American and southern Jewish women. The essay concludes with a brief case study of Natchez, Mississippi, and a 1998 survey of southern Jewish foodways.⁹

Don Yoder is the first folklorist who noted the connection between food and cultural identity. In 1972 Yoder introduced the term "folk cookery."¹⁰ This phrase, subsequently replaced by the term "foodways," embraced the study of food, its preparation and preservation, social and psychological functions of food, and its connections to other aspects of folk culture.¹¹ Yoder views regional and national cuisine as "a culinary hybrid, with an elaborate stratification of diverse historical layers."¹² Charles Camp later argues that food shapes culture because "ordinary people understand and employ the symbolic and cultural dimensions of food in their everyday affairs."¹³ Food, explains Camp, "is one of

the most, if not the single most, visible badges of identity."¹⁴ People turn to traditional foodways when their culture is at risk because food communicates human values that are both publicly and privately held.¹⁵ Theodore and Lin Humphrey define foodways as communication between people, the "way that people express themselves."¹⁶ And Susan Kalishik views foodways as performance, "in which statements of identity can be made—in preparing, eating, serving, forbidding, and talking about food."¹⁷

Examples of these theories abound in southern Jewish foodways. Sally Wolff King was born in Dumas, Arkansas, in 1954, and remembers a recipe for "Romanian Eggplant Salad" that she inherited from her Romanian grandmother. "The recipe reminds me of our roots in the old country and the power of tradition. Whenever I make this dish, I think about my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents."¹⁸ D. D. Rudner Eisenberg (b. 1947) was raised in Memphis, Tennessee, and recalls "rolling matzah balls with my Mom. This was my mother's mother's recipe. The kids would visit and roll matzah balls with my mother. Every trip to Memphis, my mother makes this soup for me and for my children."¹⁹ Gerry Barkovitz of Hayti, Missouri, (b. 1923) described her grandmother's house, where "Eastern Europe was absolutely palpable." Both of her grandmothers passed on their recipes, but "Neither of them ever measured anything. Grandma, how do you make this? Well, you shick arein a bissel dis and a bissel dos [Yiddish for 'put in a little of this and a little of that'], and you taste."²⁰ Gerry's daughter, Ellen Barkovitz O'Kelley (b. 1949) wrote "In our family, food is such an important thing that it is really the underpinnings of our traditions. Most of my memories of my grandmother are related to food."²¹ In Tyler, Texas, Maurine Genevov Muntz (b. 1927) remembers "black-eyed peas, turnip greens and cornbread, fried chicken, barley and beans cooked with short ribs on Friday nights [Shabbat]. Also, we had okra fried with tomatoes and fried or candied yams."²² Leslie Koock Silver (b. 1942) who grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, explains that foodway "traditions are my threads that came across the Atlantic Ocean to Ellis Island and are now settled in Vicksburg, Mississippi."²³

For folklorists, these foodways stories are expressions of cultural history and identity, communication, and performance. Foodways clearly show how the southern Jewish community chose to address its diverse cultural roots. Evocative tastes and smells link southern Jews to past experiences, to far away places, and to people distantly remembered.²⁴ Living in small communities where there were so few Jews, in many cases only a single family, Jewish southerners from the early nineteenth century to the present developed networks with one another that sustained them both socially and spiritually. This networking is common among southern Jews who use the term, “Jewish Geography,” to refer to conversations that focus on regional name-swapping and the familiar question, “do you know . . . ?” Leanne Lipnick Silverblatt (b. 1949) of Indianola, Mississippi, describes a gathering of Jewish friends and family at the Delta Jewish Supper Club, begun in the 1970s, which continues this tradition of Jewish socializing:

We meet sporadically in different towns all over the Delta. Of course, the biggest “Jew Meet” is the Delta Jewish Open Golf Tournament. [An annual benefit in Greenville, MS for the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, MS.] My parents belonged to the YJPL (the Young Jewish People’s League, [c. 1940s]). They met every month or so to eat – Jewish couples from all over the Delta belonged. Our family enjoyed all Jewish holidays with extended family and friends in Greenwood, Grenada, and Ruleville, Mississippi.²⁵

Jewish women’s emphasis on food preparation and shared recipes remembered from mothers and grandmothers who had died or lived far from the South remains vital to maintaining Jewish identity. Foodways sustain networks between Jewish southerners, and, to understand their community today and the evolution of its foodways, one must understand its roots in the colonial South.

From the mid-eighteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century, Jews in the South encountered Anglo-Ameri-

cans and African Americans with their respective roots in the British Isles and Africa. They lived together in the most isolated, predominantly Protestant region in the country.²⁶ Southern Jews discovered a creolization of foodways, as black southerners combined African okra and yams with the cornbread and pies of the white South. How to respect Jewish dietary laws in the earliest years of settlement in a region that consumed bacon, ham, pork shoulder, lard, head meat, chitterlings, pig feet, salt pork, fat back, side meat, white meat, pot likker, pig ears, and "even the squeal" at every meal was a challenge.²⁷ Joe Gray Taylor noted, "So long as he had pork, the Southerner ate it everyday and at nearly every meal."²⁸

During the colonial period Jewish immigrants to the South who tried to keep kosher had to either learn to slaughter their animals in the ritual manner or go hungry.²⁹ Joan Nathan notes a letter sent to Mordecai Sheftall of Georgia from his Christian friend, John Wreat, in 1788, that counsels "Don't forget to bring your sharp knife with you. And then you shall not fast here unless 'tis your own fault, as I am putting up some sheep to fatten."³⁰ By the eighteenth century, Sephardic Jews sought religious tolerance as well as economic opportunity in the newly developing markets of the coastal South. Many settled in Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, where they were joined by a smaller number of Ashkenazic Jews.³¹ Their Sephardic cuisine was shaped by Mediterranean traditional foods such as almonds, olive oil, dates, chickpeas, fava beans, grapes, and pomegranates.³² Stewed fish and fish fried in olive oil, beef and bean stews, almond puddings, and egg custards are among the Sephardic foods that were eaten in colonial America.³³

Although their foodways differed from those of other southerners, Jewish immigrants and their descendants in the South found much that was familiar to their own tastes. They appreciated the nineteenth-century southern table where "big eating" included fried and boiled meats, overcooked vegetables, pickled vegetables and fruits, sweets and hot breads.³⁴ Both Jewish immigrants and native southerners viewed food as a way to celebrate

daily life and to share with others. Jews also embraced the southern notion of hospitality. According to John Egerton, "serving large quantities of good things to eat to large numbers of hungry people, of sharing food and drink with family and friends and strangers, proved to be a durable tradition in the South, outliving war and depression and hunger."³⁵ Such hospitality was a concept with which Jewish people strongly identified.

Between 1820 and 1880 a second wave of Jewish immigration to America occurred and Ashkenazic Jews from central and western Europe, including the Germanic states, France, Hungary, and Poland came south.³⁶ Single Jewish men sought economic opportunity and political rights, and women came for similar reasons and to "make a good match." Jews who had been peddlers and traders in their countries of origin sought similar work in the South. To keep kosher while on the road, a peddler carried food supplies for his journey. Cherokee Indians referred to Jewish peddlers as "egg eaters" because they kept hard-boiled eggs in their pockets and ate them with either dried beef sausages or pickled herring that they roasted in newspaper over an open fire.³⁷ As they prospered and expanded their operations, peddlers purchased wagons and eventually settled in towns and cities. German Jews built stores throughout the South and became integral members of their communities. Merchants wrote home to family in Germany requesting suitable brides. These Jewish women brought their foodways with them as a welcome taste of home for their husbands. Chicken and vegetable soups, roasted goose, duck, and chicken, stewed and baked fish dishes, sweet and sour tongue, kugels, cakes, breads, and tortes were basic foodstuffs in the German and Alsace-Lorraine Jewish kitchen.³⁸

These Jews gathered for religious services in temporary locations like a merchant's store or a Masonic Hall. Once enough Jewish families settled in a town, a familiar pattern of Jewish community development followed. They created a chevra kadisha and a chevra nashim. Benevolent societies were organized to administer Jewish community philanthropy, and permanent places of worship were constructed.

Gradually these Jews shaped an identity that focused on ethical principles more than Jewish ritual and ceremonial practices. It was important to fit into the larger society and in many homes, Jewish dietary laws were dropped because of the community's small numbers and the difficulty of obtaining kosher foods.³⁹

The foodways of twentieth century descendants of central European immigrants reveal the evolution of their cultural identity.⁴⁰ Kathryn Loeb Wiener (b. 1929), a native of Montgomery, Alabama, described "Matzah charlotte at Passover and matzah balls. The rest was strictly assimilated southern."⁴¹ Bettye Lamensdorf Kline (b. 1939) of Vicksburg, Mississippi, remembers "Almost no Jewish food was prepared in my home. I only remember matzah balls at my grandmother's. I did not eat Jewish food until I was married."⁴² Also from Vicksburg, Minette Switzer Cooper (b. 1937) recalls "only matzahs; we were not into 'Jewish.' Holiday food for us was usually fried chicken, rice and gravy, string beans, salad, and ice cream. We [now] celebrate Passover here at the house. I make up my own charoses [sic]* – pecans, apples, apricots, sweet wine, and honey."⁴³ Cathy Samuel Wolf (b. 1944) grew up in New Orleans where her family "had no Jewish traditions or experiences . . . Sometimes we ate Aunt Maud's matzah balls, swimming in butter, on Wednesday nights when our family ate at my Grandmother Samuel's, who lived with Aunt Maud."⁴⁴ Suzanne Schwarz Rosenzweig (b. 1925) was raised in Wheeling, West Virginia, where her "southern grandmother observed the Sabbath by not eating bacon."⁴⁵ Amelie Banov Burgunder of Baltimore, Maryland, (b. 1927) explained that

Our family was fairly traditional about holidays. Meals with relatives and lots of cooking. Strudel, kuchen, and lots of foods made with only cream and butter. The tradition was more German, than southern. No root vegetables – too peasanty [sic]. I, of course, love them. Passover foods included matzah dumplings with lemon sauce, prunes and chestnuts, and flourless sponge

*See "haroses" in the Appendix.

cakes. One of my aunts made schnecken (sticky buns) so great that she sold them locally.⁴⁶

Southern Jews effectively adapted their religious practices, while holding on to the tenets of their faith. They could think and believe Jewish thoughts while they dressed and acted like southerners. English was substituted for Hebrew, choirs and organs were introduced into the service, mixed seating was allowed, the rabbi preached much like the Protestant clergy, the yarmulke and tallit disappeared, and a quiet, dignified decorum was encouraged during worship.⁴⁷ Even the architecture of the new synagogues was modeled after churches, de-emphasizing the Jew's Old World roots in a country increasingly resentful of outsiders.⁴⁸ Southern Protestants strongly related to the piety and Old Testament traditions of Jews in their communities.

Central European Jews had barely transformed themselves into Americans when they were followed by a massive immigration of Jews from Russia, Romania, Galicia, Silesia, Czechoslovakia, and Russian-held Poland.⁴⁹ As a direct result of the flood of immigrants to America in the late nineteenth century, both German Jews and the newly arrived eastern European Jews faced a growing anti-Semitism. Jews who were already settled saw themselves as vulnerable, and believed it was in the best interest of all Jews to quickly assimilate the newly-arrived immigrants and direct attention from their "foreign-ness." Tensions quickly developed between these new immigrants and the already established Jews due in part to significant differences in worship styles. Eastern European Jews created separate sub-communities in small towns where German Jews already lived.⁵⁰ In larger cities, eastern European Jews built their own synagogues and followed Orthodox religious practices.

Unlike the German Jews before them, many eastern European Jews clung tightly to kashrut and the traditional foodways they had known in their countries of origin, such as bagels, borscht, chicken soup, stuffed cabbage, cholent, tsimmes, herring, kreplach, and tongue. Rosa Poliakoff, who was born in Union, South Carolina, in 1914, describes her family's commitment to

keeping kosher in the South and how the Jewish community helped to make it possible:

There was this place in Atlanta called S. J. Gold and they shipped kosher meat all over the South. When I went to college in Atlanta, my mother wrote to 'em and told them I was coming. She didn't want me to eat any chometz on Passover. . . . They were so busy shipping Passover orders all over the southeast, they stayed up all night the night before Passover to be sure everybody got their [orders]. They would drive out to Agnes Scott College to get me every night to eat supper at their house, so I could keep Pesachdicke.⁵¹

Oscar Fendler (b. 1909), whose mother and father came to Manila, Arkansas, from Cracow, Poland, via New York in 1908, remembers:

Dad would take me for high holidays to the synagogues in Little Rock, Memphis, or St. Louis. They could not keep kosher in a town such as Manila, but they did their best. We never had pork in our home during all the time Dad and Mother lived. We never had any catfish in our home. That food was not considered proper. We had lots of crappie, perch, buffalo, and carp. Some of the best tasting crappie was fried in animal fat. It was a delicacy for breakfast and was served with hot biscuits. At times, when we had been to Memphis, Dad would buy herring at a delicatessen.⁵²

Like the Fendlers, eastern European and other Jewish families made frequent trips to cities with larger Jewish populations to purchase both kosher and kosher-style ['Jewish,' but not kosher] foods. Most American delicatessens were run by non-Jewish Germans and Alsatians until the late nineteenth century, when Jews came into the businesses.⁵³ At the delicatessen, defined as the American "Jewish eating experience," one could grocery shop for kosher foods, fresh meats, salads, fish, bread, pickles, knishes, and other "Jewish" products, or sit at the counter or tables to en-

joy a gargantuan corn beef sandwich or piece of cheesecake.⁵⁴ Although centered in New York where there were over five thousand delis by the mid-1930s, these institutions quickly spread across the United States.⁵⁵ For many years Irving and Judy Feldman, owners of the Old Tyme Delicatessen, which opened in Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1960s, were the only source of kosher meat in Mississippi. They sent frequent shipments to Jewish customers throughout the region. In Hot Springs, Arkansas, the Forshberg family has operated Mollie's Restaurant since 1955, serving delicatessen fare to the small number of Jews in town, the Jewish tourists that once came to enjoy the area's curative waters, and now a non-Jewish clientele that has learned to love kreplach and corned beef. Atlanta, Georgia, had many delicatessens, including those owned by members of the Sephardic community such as Nace Amato's The Roxy and Victor Papouchado's Victor's, both located on Peachtree Street in the 1920s. An Atlanta newspaper reporter described Victor's: "There is no place in New York or Washington that surpasses Victor's Delicatessen in beauty of appointments or great variety of good things to eat."⁵⁶

Examples of southern Jewish delicatessen memories abound. Bess Seligman, who grew up in Shaw, a small town in the Mississippi Delta, remembers getting supplies for Passover: "I was the delivery boy. I went to Memphis and took everybody's order and brought back the meats and the perishable foods. The matzah, the flour, the potato starch, and all that, we would ship by bus or by train, because we couldn't put it all in a car. Don't you remember the wonderful smoked goose legs that we got from Cincinnati!"⁵⁷ Eli Evans (b. 1936) explains that in Durham, North Carolina, the shochet also performed as the cantor and mohel. "He ran a small deli with a few tables, where he served corn beef sandwiches, brisket, etc."⁵⁸ Joan Levy (b. 1942) of Savannah recalls that "Gottlieb's Deli and Gottlieb's Bakery were very popular from the 1930s."⁵⁹ Roberta Schandler Grossman's (b. 1943) father "had the Pickle Barrell in Asheville, North Carolina, until his death. Before him, grandpa had kosher meats and groceries."⁶⁰ Helene Markstein Tucker (b. 1943) and other Birmingham natives enjoyed

"Brody's Delicatessen in Mountain Brook, Alabama, a family-run grocery store that was the only place to buy food on Sunday."⁶¹

In downtown Savannah, Jane Guthman Kahn (b. 1933) wrote "my husband's aunts ran Hirsch's Delicatessen during the 1930s and early 1940s. It always smelled of pickles. My husband would attend afternoon Hebrew School, then walk over there for a free over-sized corned beef sandwich."⁶² Mary Lynn Allmont (b. 1943) of Memphis described Halpern's Delicatessen, which advertised "Say it with food." She remembers "going there with my mother and grandmother, buying bread, smoked whitefish and herring."⁶³ In Columbia, South Carolina, the "Five Points Delicatessen was a regular stop after Sunday school classes" for Jack Bass (b. 1934) and his family.⁶⁴

Another reliable source for Jewish foods was the northern relative who frequently traveled to the South beginning in the 1940s and 1950s laden with Jewish supplies. Vicki Reikes Fox (b. 1952) of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, recalls how her "grandparents visited yearly from New York and they always brought bags full of lox, bagels, whitefish, rye bread, and farmer's cheese from the city. When they arrived, no matter what time, we always sat down to enjoy a meal of this New York deli food."⁶⁵

Following the eastern European immigration, a second wave of Sephardic Jews came to the South early in the twentieth century. Jews from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes settled in Montgomery, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, where they found jobs as fruit peddlers, butchers, storekeepers, grocers, tailors, haters, and shoemakers. Like eastern European Jews before them, they settled where synagogues were established and by the 1920s built their own places of worship, Congregation Or VeShalom in Atlanta and Congregation Etz Ahayem in Montgomery. Social functions, organizational affiliations, cultural events, the Ladino language and Mediterranean foodways characterize these Sephardim. Miriam Cohen, a long-time member of the Montgomery Sephardic community, reflected on her food traditions from the 1920s to the 1990s: "You know, when I cook pink rice, my son says, 'This is Jewish soul food!' It is, you know."⁶⁶ Regina Piha Capilouto (b. 1920), who was born in Montgomery, and whose

parents and grandparents came from the Isle of Rhodes, remembers childhood dishes of “baked noodles, spinach, and cheese, stuffed grape leaves, rice with tomato sauce, rojalde, and boyos. For Passover dishes: fried chicken, turnip greens, fish with Creole sauce, sweet potatoes with brown sugar and butter, and baklava.”⁶⁷ Congregation Or VeShalom’s sisterhood is famous for its annual Sephardic food bazaar, which inspired the sisterhood to publish a cookbook, *The Sephardic Cooks*, now in its fourth edition.⁶⁸ While the cookbook is filled with traditional Sephardic recipes for dishes like arroz con pollo, albondigas, dolmas de calvasa, and pastelles, the congregation’s southern sense of place intermingled with Ashkenazic tastes, as seen in recipes for fried chicken, black-eyed peas, macaroni and cheese, pecan balls, matzo balls, brisket, kugel, and mandel bread.

In *Jewish Cooking in America*, Joan Nathan explains that Jews always carry the foodways of their home countries with them and adapt these traditions to those of the local culture.⁶⁹ Southern Jews brought with them foodways from their countries of origin: from Germany, kuchsens, strudels, breads, roasted goose, matzo balls, and gefilte fish; from the Mediterranean, feta, olive oil, fish, rice dishes, and filo dough pastries; from eastern Europe, chopped liver, kishke, stuffed cabbage, roasted chicken, kreplach, and herring; from Alsace and Lorraine, tortes, kuchsens, pastries, breads, onions and garlic, cheeses, baked and stewed fish dishes.⁷⁰ Recipes were copied into journals, written on cards, and brought by memory to the South. Jewish women continued to cook the foods remembered from their Old World homes and modified the ingredients, methods, and occasions for eating these foods as a result of southern influences. The informal communication network between Jewish women allowed the recipes to pass within and between families and friends, changing as each person made the particular dish their own. For second and third generation southern Jews, the foods of everyday meals in the Old World became special foods for holidays.⁷¹ Chopped liver, gefilte fish, salami, and rye bread are known as “Jewish” foods because they are so closely tied to the Old World that the foods became a symbol of the group itself.⁷²

As their southern Jewish identities evolved from the eighteenth century throughout the early twentieth century, some women kept their southern and Jewish dishes separate, while others chose to blend the cuisines by adding pecans, fresh tomatoes, okra, butter beans, and sweet potatoes to their holiday menus, and substituting regional specialties such as fried chicken, gumbo, and beef ribs for the traditional roasted chicken at Friday evening Sabbath suppers. In present day southern kitchens, Jewish women effectively blend and distinguish southern and Jewish foods in ways that celebrate the distinctive foodways of both the region and their Jewish culture. Miriam Graeber Cohn (b. 1925) describes her "food guides": "My mother came from Austria; my husband's grandmother came from France; an aunt from Cajun Country; and my mother-in-law from Port Gibson, Mississippi. Some recipes came from our beloved servants, relatives and friends."⁷³ Bert Fischel (b. 1940), grew up in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where his grandmother, Mama Stella, "lived with us, as was the custom for most families at the time. It was Mama Stella's kitchen, not my mother's, because Mama Stella had a passion for the kitchen, where she spent hours each day directing Mamie, our cook."⁷⁴ Mama Stella's Alsatian roots were reflected in her rich cakes and meringues, her love for strong cheese, sauerkraut, white asparagus, and her predilection for ham. In Lexington, Mississippi, Phyllis Berkower Stern (b. 1924) blends southern and Jewish foodways in her Rosh Hashanah dinner as she prepares her mother-in-law's "Big Momma's" kreplach, brisket, butter beans from her garden, squash casserole, rice and gravy, and turnip greens.⁷⁵ Paula Ross Hoffman (b. 1939) of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, explains how her husband, Harvey, and daughter, Julie, make the gefilte fish for Passover using sea trout and "goo," an abbreviation of gasper goo: "Pike and whitefish aren't available around here. We call matzo brei 'lost matzo' after the New Orleans term for French toast, 'lost bread,' or 'pain perdu'; Eating hamantaschen and wearing the costume I had worn for Mardi Gras are my memories of Purim."⁷⁶ Ann Zerlin Streiffer (b. 1954) of New Orleans makes jambalaya by substituting kosher chicken and kosher sausage for the customary ham and shrimp.⁷⁷

Leanne Lipnick Silverblatt (b. 1949) of Indianola, Mississippi, explained that “Southern foods were always a part of our holiday meals. We often had fried or barbequed chicken on Jewish holidays. Pecan pie, lemon meringue pie, and peach cobbler were favorite desserts for holiday meals.”⁷⁸ Judith Weil Shanks (b. 1941) of Montgomery, Alabama, also remembers holiday foods, including “Pickled shrimp, smoked turkey, ham, always biscuits, fried chicken, ‘chopped’ chicken liver, like a mousse. The Jewish country club (mainly German Reform) had [an] Easter egg hunt, Fourth of July with pork barbeque.”⁷⁹ Bobbie Scharlack Malone (b. 1944), who was raised in San Antonio, Texas, says, “We tend to eat southern *or* Jewish, but not at the same meal. That’s how we ate growing up, too—fried chicken and biscuits at one meal; challah and baked chicken at another.”⁸⁰ Suzanne Ginsberg Kantziper (b. 1936) grew up in Savannah, Georgia, where “My parents’ home was kosher, so we had traditional foods for the holidays. We also ate okra and tomatoes, grits and fried chicken, black-eyed peas, zipper peas, squash, collard greens, turnips, but that was for everyday fare.”⁸¹ Shirley Ettinger Orlansky (b. 1931), raised in Alexandria, Louisiana, has made “cornbread oyster dressing with smaltz [sic]” for the past eighteen family Thanksgivings.⁸² Some southern Jewish families serve Old World recipes, such as German lebkuchen, at Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday celebrations. Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein (b. 1942) remembers how “Friday night dinners were always dairy. My father hated chicken; growing up on Tilghman’s Island on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, it was hard to obtain kosher meat and the family ate chicken, and more chicken. My paternal grandmother made sweet potato pies for each of her sons’ families for Friday night dinner. Sunday brunch was grits, kippers, fried tomatoes, and fried corn.”⁸³

Shulameth Reich Elster (b. 1939) of Norfolk, Virginia, recalls, “Southern fried chicken—cold for Shabbat summer [dinners] and always watermelon for dessert.”⁸⁴ Jack Bass (b. 1934) grew up in North, South Carolina, and remembers fried salt herring served

*See “schmaltz” in the Appendix.

with grits for breakfast, and on holidays, sweet potatoes substituted for the carrots in tsimmes.⁸⁵ Carolyn Lipson-Walker (b. 1951) describes Mississippi recipes for gefilte fish that use non-kosher catfish and a Texas Jewish family that barbeques matzo balls on the grill.⁸⁶ Marion Wiener Weiss (b. 1936) of Shreveport, Louisiana, remembers: "Pecans in haroses, smothered chicken and/or beef tongue. For Shabbat, southern food. Always home-made soup first. Sunday brunch: smothered chicken livers and biscuits. Sometimes during Passover, we had matzah pancakes for breakfast with mayhaw jelly or matzah fritters with apples and raisins and lemon sauce."⁸⁷

From the 1930s to the early 1950s, many eastern European and German Jewish families in the South vacationed at inns and small resorts in the mountains of North Carolina and at coastal beaches that catered to Jews and to their taste for traditional Jewish foods. Esther Rosenbaum Buchsbaum (b. 1936) remembers a Jewish resort, the Lake Osceola Inn, in Hendersonville, North Carolina, where "I first tasted potato knishes to die for."⁸⁸ Also in Hendersonville, the Jack Bass family stayed at the "Horowitz Kosher Inn—southern Catskills with lots of eating and rocking chair activity."⁸⁹ Eli Evans' family met at the Cavalier Hotel at Virginia Beach, Virginia, and the Maison Sur Mer Condominium in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: "the nick-name for Maison Sur Mer was 'the Kibbutz.'"⁹⁰ Joan Levy (b. 1942) describes a beach club at Tybee, a resort on the Atlantic Coast, where the Reform Jews of Savannah vacationed.⁹¹

Reva Schneider Hart (b. 1924) of Winona, Mississippi, writes about the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi: "It's not a resort, but close to it!"⁹² Although a center for Jewish youth in the summers, the Henry S. Jacobs Camp has provided year-round adult education for Jewish families from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Alabama since June 1970. Fried chicken and biscuits is a Friday night Shabbat tradition at the camp.

While Jewish camps like Henry S. Jacobs, delicatessens, summer resorts, and northern urban families were sources

for Jewish food outside the home, most Jewish foods were prepared in the home by mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and the cooks they supervised. Although most southern Jewish women used recipes passed to them from mothers and grandmothers, they were equally dependent on nationally popular sources such as the *Settlement Cook Book* and “*Aunt Babette’s*”

Cook Book, Foreign and Domestic Receipts for the Household. In 1901, Lizzie Black Kander, founder of the Milwaukee Jewish Mission, published the *Settlement Cook Book* as a fundraiser to benefit the organization. Based on the mission’s cooking school curriculum, the cookbook offered basic information on household and kitchen management and one hundred non-kosher American and German Jewish recipes.⁹³ One of the most successful cookbooks ever published, forty editions have sold over 1.5 million copies.⁹⁴

The *Settlement Cook Book* remains a classic in southern Jewish women’s kitchens. Its mix of American classics like waffles and brownies with decidedly non-kosher delicacies like shrimp a la Creole, fried oysters, and creamed crabmeat particularly appealed to southern Jewish women. Anne Bower suggests that women authors like Lizzie Kander asserted themselves as upper middle-class, assimilated Americans, “comfortable acknowledging the German aspect of their German Jewish background, but worried that their Jewishness . . . could undo their secure lives,” because of growing anti-Semitism at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹⁵ The large number of non-kosher recipes reflected the Americanizing mission of the *Settlement Cook Book*. Kander saw no place for kosher dietary laws in the modern Jewish home, and her recipes and cooking classes emphasized American tastes, although she did include several recipes for traditional German dishes such as kugels, kuchens, tortes, and “filled fish” or gefilte fish. She taught her readers to eat and entertain like middle-class Americans with non-kosher meat and potatoes, salads, seafood, and German-style desserts fed to Jewish and non-Jewish guests alike. “In the Cohn family,” writes Miriam Graeber Cohn of Vicksburg, Mississippi, “the only cookbook I saw was the *Settlement Cook Book*.”⁹⁶

Another favorite in American Jewish kitchens, *"Aunt Babette's" Cook Book, Foreign and Domestic Receipts for the Household*, was published in 1889 by the Bloch Publishing and Printing Company in Cincinnati, "the oldest Jewish printing company in the United States."⁹⁷ *"Aunt Babette's"* was passed down through generations of American Jewish women, southerners included, who turned to this quietly Jewish cookbook more for its charlotte russe and escalloped oysters, than for its matzo balls. Janice Rothschild Blumberg's (b. 1924) 1891 edition was originally owned by her great-grandmother, Sophia Weil Browne, who lived in Columbus and Atlanta, Georgia, and was married to Rabbi Edward Benjamin Morris Brown, who officiated at Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation between 1877 and 1881. Mrs. Browne appreciated the cookbook's many German recipes, as well as its lenient view of kashrut.⁹⁸ "Aunt Babette," the pseudonym of Mrs. Bertha F. Kramer, wrote "nothing is trefa [sic]* that is healthy and clean."⁹⁹ A section of Passover recipes was titled "Easter Dishes, Cakes, Puddings, Wines, Etc., How to Set the Table for the Service of the Sedar [sic] on the Eve of Pesach or Passover." Menus and instructions for "Kaffee klatch," "Pink Teas" [a novelty party at which everything was pink], "Thanksgiving Dinner," "Plain Sunday Dinner," "Lunch Parties," and "Portable Luncheons" gave southern Jewish women the tools they needed to shape an acceptable Jewish identity in their predominantly Christian community. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that "Treyf cookbooks like that of 'Aunt Babette's' reveal how Jewish identity was constructed in the kitchen and at the table through the conspicuous rejection of the dietary laws and enthusiastic acceptance of culinary eclecticism."¹⁰⁰

From the early 1900s to the 1950s, American Jewish women were encouraged to blend food, interior design, religious practice, and daily values to create the model Jewish home, "a bond in sanctity" between Jewish religion and family life.¹⁰¹ Jenna Weissmann Joselit describes this phase of American Jewish domestic culture as a time concerned with the spiritual and

*See "Treyfadicke" in the Glossary.

emotional properties of the home that differed from an earlier era where domestic reformers like Lizzie Kander focused on hygiene, contagious disease, and Americanization.¹⁰² This new form of Jewish identity, known as “domestic Judaism,” became a way for Jews to “recapture and revivify a sense of connection.”¹⁰³ Temple sisterhoods reinforced this ideology with congregational cookbooks that equated food preparation with making a Jewish home. To raise funds, virtually every synagogue in the country published a cookbook that mixed its members’ regional specialties and their family’s heirloom Jewish recipes. Some popular southern examples include Savannah, Georgia’s Congregation Mickve Israel’s *Shalom Y’all Cookbook*; Atlanta, Georgia’s Congregation Or VeShalom’s *The Sephardic Cooks*; New Orleans, Louisiana’s Gates of Prayer’s *Everyday and Challah Day Cooking*; Dallas, Texas’ Temple Emanu-El’s *Five Thousand Years in the Kitchen*; Baton Rouge, Louisiana’s Liberal Synagogue’s *Matzo Ball Gumbo*; and cookbooks published by southern chapters of Hadassah, B’nai B’rith Women, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

The influence of African American cooks and domestics is central to the lives of southern Jewish families. Like their white Protestant neighbors, Jews were intimately associated with black nannies, cooks, housekeepers, drivers, gardeners, and workers who cared for them from cradle to grave. Eli Evans recalls how he “was raised Southern-style – by the maid.”¹⁰⁴ Having “black help” was common, and Jews who did not hire black domestics were in the minority. In a recent survey of southern Jewish foodways, more than half of the 117 respondents mentioned black female domestic workers who either did all the cooking or provided part-time assistance in their childhood homes. The generational differences between Jewish women who hired black cooks and those who did their own cooking suggests that acculturation and class influenced the increased hiring of black domestics. In many southern Jewish house-holds, grandmothers who lived with their grown children oversaw the kitchen and black cooks, while their daughters and daughters-in-laws

*Betty Green, a professional caterer at Temple Israel, Little Rock, Arkansas,
learned to "cook Jewish" in the homes of her Jewish employers.*

(By permission of Bill Aron, © Bill Aron Photography)

participated in Jewish organizational activities outside the home.

Today many African Americans still work for Jewish families. Members of southern synagogues have lifelong relationships with black southerners who open their buildings and who turn out the lights after services. In Natchez, Mississippi, Eula Mae Demby, a long-time employee of Temple B'nai Israel, visits the synagogue almost every day and has given as many tours of the building as its Jewish members. Jewish southerners frequently mention relationships with black men and women who cooked for them, served family meals, catered parties, and cleaned their houses. Jane Guthman Kahn (b. 1933), who grew up in Savannah,

recalled a black woman who cooked for her aunt for more than forty years: "Her recipes are the ones I remember most fondly."¹⁰⁵

Cultural traditions and foodways passed back and forth between black women cooks and their Jewish employers. Black women brought sweet potato pies and biscuits to their Jewish "families," and went home at the end of the day with chopped liver and corned beef. Dale Grundfest Ronnel (b. 1939) grew up in the Mississippi Delta and recalls Georgella Green, a black cook who worked for her grandmother from age seventeen to retirement. Mrs. Green learned to cook from Ronnel's grandmother and "cooked Jewish-style even in her own home."¹⁰⁶ Anne Grundfest Gerache (b. 1933) of Vicksburg, Mississippi, recalled that "Black women were good cooks who grew up preparing traditional southern food. They could improvise and adapt, and Jewish food was just one more facet of their experience."¹⁰⁷ This ability was seen in many southern households where black women learned how to "cook Jewish" on Friday nights and on Jewish holidays. Eli Evans explains that once black women had learned to cook for a Jewish family, they were assured of constant and secure employment in the Jewish community.¹⁰⁸ Nan Dattel Borod (b. 1943) of Rosedale, Mississippi, experienced this in her own family: "We had a cook, Geneva Jones, who worked for our family for forty years and cooked every meal. My maternal grandmother, who lived with us, taught her how to cook."¹⁰⁹

Kathryn Loeb Wiener (b. 1929) remembered that her German grandparents took their black housekeeper with them on a visit to Germany in 1903: "Eula went to Germany to visit my great-grandparents, and she learned German and the cooking at their home."¹¹⁰ This story suggests how important it was for the older generation to maintain their German foodways and language, so much so that they brought Eula to learn from German cooks, the most direct and knowledgeable source. Ethel Hargraves, Eli Evans' family's black cook, sometimes found a southern inspiration for her "Jewish" recipes. Evans described the "Atlanta Brisket" made by Hargraves and explained her secret recipe was to marinate the brisket in Coca Cola overnight.¹¹¹ Dorothy Goldner Levy (b. 1912) of Birmingham, Alabama, recalls that "our maid picked

the feathers off the fresh killed chickens, grated the fresh horse-radish, scraped the scales off the fresh fish, fried the 'gribbenes'."¹¹² Saul Krawcheck was born in 1926 in Charleston and spoke of the interbraided Jewish and Low Country cuisines that were shaped by his family's black cook:

Our home was kosher, presided over by a colored woman named Agnes Jenkins, who came from the country and only had one job in her life and that was being my mother's cook . . . One day you'd get a typical southern dinner of fried chicken and rice and okra gumbo—and the next day, the appetizer would be pickled smoked salmon and then a bowl of lentil soup and then potato latkes or potato kugel or tsimmes.¹¹³

In some homes the Jewish wife oversaw a division of labor in which she prepared the Jewish foods for special occasions, and the black cook took charge of southern food that was eaten every day, while in others black cooks prepared all the food. Miriam Graeber Cohn of Vicksburg, Mississippi, recalls that "Our maid cooked the regular food—fried chicken and all southern foods, but mother liked to have the holiday meal just perfect. They did prepare our meals, but nothing Jewish, which Mother did."¹¹⁴ In New Orleans, Judith Page (b. 1951) described the black housekeeper who worked for her grandparents. When Page's grandparents died, the housekeeper came to work for Judith's family: "The housekeeper knew how to cook all Jewish foods, even though she cooked soul food and Creole at home."¹¹⁵ Esther Rosenbaum Buchsbaum (b. 1936) of Atlanta, Georgia, explained, "My mother's parents worked in their grocery store. They always had a black maid who made corn bread, cooked with collards, turnip greens, and other vegetables from the store, but kosher, not with meat as usual southern-style dictates."¹¹⁶ Jill Reikes Bauman (b. 1954) and Vicki Reikes Fox (b. 1952) grew up in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and have strong memories of Willie Mae Boucher. Vicki recalls, "She was a wonderful southern cook and she became a real Jewish cook. She called herself 'the only black Jew!'" Jill remembered that "she cooked mostly 'southern,' but also

cooked 'Jewish,' according to Mom's recipes and directions."¹¹⁷ In Blytheville, Arkansas, Richie Lee King was the black housekeeper who worked for the Cohen family from 1955 to the early 1980s. Huddy Horowitz Cohen (b. 1926) prepared the Jewish dishes and Richie handled southern specialties like fried chicken for Shabbat, cornbread, vegetable stew, and sweet potato pie. Richie helped at the annual Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur dinners at the Cohen home, greeting the visiting student rabbi with a big hug and a 'Good Yontuf, Rabbi.'" Southern black and Jewish worlds mixed and merged, shaped by shared personal relationships, sense of place, and family connections.

Black southerners also worked for Jews in food-related businesses such as Robert Zalkin's (b. 1925) grandfather's kosher butcher shop in Charleston, South Carolina. Sam Coaxum, a black man who worked at the butcher shop, learned Yiddish so he could speak with eastern European Jewish women that traded there. Zalkin would join Coaxum on his delivery rounds, often stopping at the black man's home, where the Jewish child intimately absorbed southern black life.¹¹⁸

The Jewish community of Natchez, Mississippi, exemplifies small town southern Jewish life and the ways in which ethnic foodways and southern traditions intertwine in the South. Elaine Ullman Lehmann's German great-grandfather, Samuel Ullman, was a founding member of Natchez's Temple B'nai Israel which was dedicated in 1872. Temple records describe how Ullman's fellow congregant, Isaac Lowenburg, went home to Germany in the summer of 1870 and came back with a Torah given by the Jewish community at Hechingen. In 1994 Elaine Lehmann helped plan the Natchez Jewish Homecoming, a seminar sponsored by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience that celebrated the history of Temple B'nai Israel.¹¹⁹ The weekend attracted hundreds of people with ties to the Natchez Jewish community as well as scholars, rabbinic leaders, and the president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The food for the event symbolized Natchez's culinary expertise, the community's noted hospitality, and above all, the heritage of the Jewish community of Natchez.

Choosing the menu for the weekend meals was complicated by the age-old questions of Jewish ritual observance versus the celebration of southern traditions. How could you have an event in Natchez without serving the city's famed "ham biscuits," tiny buttery biscuits filled with thin slices of salty ham? But how could you serve ham biscuits with Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the leader of the American Reform movement, at the front of the buffet line? The compromise was to serve plain biscuits at one end of the table and ham biscuits at the other. The temple sisterhood made hundreds of petit fours and Eula Mae Demby, the temple's black housekeeper, oversaw the silver tray logistics. At lunch, seminar participants had a choice of non-kosher catfish or, for the more observant participants, fried chicken, while all were entertained by the New Orleans Klezmer All-Star Band.

The Natchez Jewish Homecoming was rich with stories about family history and Jewish acculturation in the South. Although Elaine Lehmann and her Vicksburg-born mother Mildred Ullman Ehrman (b. 1896) employed cooks for their households, Lehmann remembered the cooking skills of earlier generations. Elaine's grandmother, Sara Gross Ehrman, and Sara's sister, Mamie Gross Loeb, were born in Canton, Mississippi, in the mid-nineteenth century. Their families came from Alsace and both were excellent cooks. Elaine's family saved Mamie's personal cookbook journals which are filled with recipes from family, friends, and African American cooks.¹²⁰ Like Luba Cohen, Mamie Loeb stuffed her cookbooks with loose recipes written on scraps of paper and stationery from the Mississippi State Senate and the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans. Handwritten names—Cousin Carrie, Bertha Loeb, Tilly, Alma, Hatty, Mrs. Marx, Pauline, Neva, Mrs. Jeffers, Lizzie—and places—New Orleans, Louisiana, Portsmouth, Virginia, Uniontown, Alabama, Canton, Mississippi—reveal Mamie's foodways. Part of a letter from Elaine's mother, Mildred Ehrman, describes a recipe for "Delmonico Pudding." Penciled on the back, she wrote "How are Bud and Lillian? Hope they are both improving. Mamma feels fairly well, nothing to brag on. I didn't know a thing about Memphis when you wrote, but received a letter from their Sisterhood President."¹²¹ The

cookbook journals reflect the dual southern and Alsatian Jewish identities of Mamie and Sara Gross, who collected recipes for forty cakes, three kinds of barbeque, four versions of biscuits, bourbon balls, five types of cheese straws, matzo griddle cakes, matzo ball soup, matzo meal cake, matzo charlotte, mint juleps, non-kosher deviled crabs—*nine versions*—Oysters Rockefeller, Shrimp Creole, shrimp mousse, cream curry shrimp, ham soufflé, and five types of lebkuchen, including “Mama’s.”¹²² Mamie and Sara’s lives clearly revolved around family meals, Jewish holidays, and frequent entertaining.

The preparation of traditional Jewish foods, as well as blended southern and Jewish fare, is still one of the most important ways that southern Jewish women create Jewish homes. This pattern is evident in responses to a questionnaire on southern Jewish foodways conducted in the fall of 1998, which provided extensive information on the history of family foodways, contemporary traditions, recipes, holiday menus, and meal memories. Responses came from 111 women and 6 men from fourteen different states. Sixty-seven of the respondents had eastern European roots, twenty-six had German and Alsatian roots, two had Sephardic roots, and twenty-two had both eastern and western European roots. Most of the respondents were born between 1918 and 1949.¹²³

When asked to list Jewish foods they remembered from their childhoods, those with eastern European roots listed the largest numbers of food items: 103; those with German/Alsatian roots listed 30; those with mixed eastern and western European roots listed 39 foods. From the eastern European list, the most frequently mentioned in order of popularity were: gefilte fish, chopped liver, matzo ball soup, potato latkes, noodle kugel, kreplach, stuffed cabbage, borscht, brisket, strudel, and tsimmes. More than 50 percent of the participants wrote that black cooks assisted in the preparation of Jewish foods in their childhood homes.

The respondents continue to prepare ‘Jewish’ foods in their kitchens today. Examples include Ann Grundfest Gerache’s “Mamaw’s Slip and Slide Cake” [a Passover meringue torte filled

*Jeannette Cohen Capouya, (Montgomery, AL), a participant in the survey,
is shown with her home-baked Sephardic pastries.*

(By permission of Bill Aron, © Bill Aron Photography)

with strawberries, ice cream, and whipped cream], Suzanne Schwarz Rosenzweig's mandelbrodt with pecans, Joan Levy's Alsatian lemon stew fish and pflauman kuchen, Amelie Banov Burgunder's brod torte, Riki Saltzman's Hungarian coffeecake, Dale Grundfest Ronnel's "Birdie Tenenbaum's Shaum Torte," Elaine Ullman Lehmann's lebkuchen, Huddy Horowitz Cohen's apple noodle kugel, Regina Piha Capilouto's boyos, and Deborah Lamensdorf Jacob's Passover Brownies. These recipes recall foodways traditions from Germany, Alsace-Lorraine, eastern Europe, Turkey, and the Isle of Rhodes, as well as the influence of American-style dishes and ingredients.

The survey confirms that preparing, eating, and remembering traditional Jewish foods remains one of the most compelling ways that women create Jewish homes and maintain Jewish family identity within the American South. Barbara Antis Levingston's (b. 1948) meal memory from Cleveland, Mississippi, illustrates the intricate web of family relationships tied to food and cultural identity:

Rosh Hashanah is the only holiday I host. We used to have my husband's parents and relatives, the Jerry Sklars and Ron Sklars [from] Memphis, Uncle Ben Sklar [from] Ruleville, Mississippi, Aunt Sylvia Sklar, Jerry and Ron's mother, and Ben's wife, who died ten years ago. For years, she had all of the family to her home in Ruleville for the holidays—Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, and Passover. She was the matriarch of the Levingston family. After her death, Jerry and his wife, Louise, took over Chanukah; Ron and Linda took over Passover; my mother-in-law, Vivian Levingston, took over Rosh Hashanah. I started doing it 6 years ago.¹²⁴

This memory evokes the essence of Jewish life in a small southern town, of the Jewish home filled with memory, ritual, extended family, congregational friendships, holiday celebrations, traditional foods, and hospitality.

In southern Jewish homes from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, women were responsible for maintaining traditional foodways, and as a result, controlled one arena of the family's acculturation to the South. Husbands and children might express their wishes about ritual practice and food tastes, but it was women who decided whether or not their kitchens were kosher as they prepared holiday food and incorporated traditional foodways into the family's weekly menus. Women defined this world for themselves and for their families. Their experiences suggest the importance of studying southern Jewish women and the influence of foodways in shaping cultural identity, community, and sisterhood. It is equally important to study the relationships between southern Jewish and

black women, and the dynamic of race and class that surrounds housework and the preparation of food.

Luba Tooter Cohen's journey from Odessa to New York to Blytheville is evoked by the foods she prepared. As she and other southern Jewish women shared their recipes and cookbooks, they created complex networks that extended across the South. Their foodways allow us to chart a map of the southern Jewish experience and its rich history of acculturation. Sephardic, central European, and eastern European Jews each brought their foodways to the South, and each generation hence has adapted these traditions to reflect their steadily evolving southern Jewish identity. Their country of origin, their date of immigration, the communities where they settled, and their attitudes toward assimilation are all reflected in what they eat. While food has nurtured southern Jews, it has also linked them to Jewish heritage, to southern places, and to their northern brethren as well. Carolyn Lipson-Walker, a folklorist who grew up in Alabama in the 1950s and 1960s, captures this dynamic in the emotions she felt when she received a gift of warm sugared pecans in honor of her son's bar mitzvah in September 1998:

The Sunday afternoon before the bar mitzvah an older woman from Vincennes delivered the pecans to use for the Oneg Shabbat and hospitality room. The smell of those pecans brought back so many emotions. I remember I was alone in the house and I put them on the counter and wept—not because I was sad, but I was so grateful for the gift that called up so many childhood memories . . . The pecans brought back memories of sitting on my grandmother's back porch in Marks [Mississippi] and shelling pecans from their trees.¹²⁵

The gift between two Jewish women of southern food for a Jewish rite of passage recalled memories of Carolyn's grandmother in Marks, Mississippi. Southern networks, recipes, memories and identity all bond through food. Together they communicate the southern Jewish experience, who they are today, their pasts, and the people they hope to become.

Appendix

Description of Foods

- albondigas* – meat balls
arroz con pollo – chicken with rice
bagel – boiled and baked roll with a hole
baklava – filo pastry layered with honey and nuts
blintz – thin pancakes filled with cheese or potato
borscht – beet soup
boyos – spinach and cheese pie
brisket – cut of beef from the front quarters of the steer
brod torte – cake made with bread crumbs and grated nuts, instead of flour
buffalo – a southern, freshwater fish
challah – braided egg bread
charlotte russe – sponge cake filled with whipped cream, garnished with fresh fruit
chitterling – pig intestines
cholent – Sabbath luncheon stew, made with beans, onions, garlic, and meat
chopped liver – pate of chopped chicken livers, chicken fat, and eggs
collards – southern greens
crappie – a southern, freshwater fish
dolmas de calvosa – stuffed yellow squash
fat back – pig fat
gasper goo – a southern, freshwater fish
gefilte fish – poached, minced fish ball (usually whitefish, pike or carp) with filler of bread crumbs or matzo meal
gribenes – “cracklings” or fried bits of chicken fat
hamantaschen – triangular-shaped butter cookie dough with prune or poppy seed filling, associated with holiday of Purim
haroses – traditional Passover dish made from fruits and nuts
jambalaya – Creole tomato-based stew made with ham and shrimp
kippers – salted or smoked herring
kreplach – noodle dough with meat filling
kuchen – coffee cake

kugel – noodle or potato baked dish; noodle kugels often enriched with sour cream, cottage cheese, apples, jam, raisins, and cinnamon

latkes – fried, grated potato pancakes

lebkuchen – iced gingerbread

lox – smoked and salted salmon

mandelbrot – twice baked almond cookies

matzo – unleavened bread eaten during Passover

matzo ball – a dumpling made of matzo meal, usually served in chicken broth or soup

matzo brie – matzo soaked in milk and egg batter and fried in butter

matzo charlotte – baked dessert of matzos, egg whites, sugar; can include apples, raisins

mayhaw – southern berry

pastelles – meat pies

pink rice – rice simmered in tomato sauce, Sephardic-style

pflaumen kuchen – plum coffee cake

pot likker – liquid from vegetables cooked with bacon or salt pork

rojaldes – filo turnovers

schmaltz – rendered chicken fat

schnecken – sweet rolls or sticky buns

shaum torte – meringue cake made with egg whites and sugar

tsimmes – baked dish of carrots, prunes, apricots, root vegetables; can include short ribs

NOTES

¹ Recipe collections like these, plus community cookbooks and women's compiled cookbooks, are the subject of study in *Recipes for Readings: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*, edited by Anne L. Bower (Amherst, 1997). This collection of essays by scholars from a variety of disciplines examines how community cookbooks and recipes, described as "nonliterary print documents," reveal the stories of women and their networks of friendship. Because the authors were unknown women, positioned in the private, domestic sphere, these fragmentary historical sources have been trivialized and considered unworthy of serious study by traditional scholars. Recently, feminist scholars in English literature, history, and women's studies have noted the value of non-traditional texts as examples of

women's self-expression, social interaction, and evidence of how they shape the communities around them. The author would like to thank Bill Ferris, Leah Hagedorn, John Vlach, and Joan Nathan for their time and thoughtful advice regarding earlier drafts of this article. Additionally, the author is grateful to the staff of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience for their assistance with the Southern Jewish Foodways Survey.

² Luba Tooter Cohen interview, conducted by Joseph Tudor, Washington, DC, April 9, 1978, 17. Luba Tooter Cohen was born in Odessa, Russia in 1897 and was the author's grandmother.

³ Joseph Tudor interview, conducted by Marcie C. Ferris, Washington, DC, September 11, 1998, 11.

⁴ Jerry Cohen telephone interview, conducted by Marcie C. Ferris, March 17, 1999.

⁵ Huddy Cohen, New London, CT/Blytheville, AR, Southern Jewish Food Survey (SJFS), November 1998.

⁶ Gaye Tuchman and Harry Gene Levine, "New York Jews and Chinese Food: The Social Construction of an Ethnic Pattern," *The Taste of Place in America: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Foods*, eds., Barbara G. Shortridge and James R. Shortridge (Lanham, MD, 1998) 171-172.

⁷ In a recent article on Savannah, Georgia's Jewish women from 1830 to 1900, historian Mark Greenberg writes about the ways wives and mothers, who fostered Jewish identity through their control over the kitchen where they maintained a kosher kitchen, created the ritual foods that accompanied Jewish holidays and observed the Sabbath and Jewish festivals. Miriam Moses Cohen's nineteenth century recipe book contained recipes for Passover "soup dumplings" and "koogles." In the 1860s and 1870s, Lavinia Florence Minis baked "Haman's ears" for her family's Purim celebrations and sent Passover matzos to her son, Jacob, when he was away attending a university. Mark I. Greenberg, "Savannah's Jewish Women and the Shaping of Ethnic and Gender Identity, 1830-1900," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 4, (Winter 1998) 760.

⁸ Unsigned letter to Luba Tooter Cohen, n.d., possession of author.

⁹ For the purposes of this study, the South is defined as a cultural area, rather than a geographical region based on the eleven states of the former Confederacy (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia). Because southern foodways patterns bleed into neighboring regions and are equally shaped by those regions and the movement of people, the boundaries for a foodways study are not sharply defined. I have used the definition from the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (eds., Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, Chapel Hill, NC, 1989, xv): "The South is found wherever southern culture is found. . .," and thus includes states such as Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware.

¹⁰ Don Yoder, "Folk Cookery," *Folklore and Folklife*, ed., Richard Dorson (Chicago, 1972) 325.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹² *Ibid.*, 334.

¹³ Charles Camp, *American Foodways: What, When, Why, and How We Eat in America*, American Folklore Series (Little Rock, 1989) 23, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Theodore C. Humphrey, Sue Samuelson, Lin T. Humphrey, "Introduction: Food and Festivity in American Life," *"We Gather Together: Food and Festivity in American Life"* (Ann Arbor, 1988) 5.

¹⁷ Susan Kalich, "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*, eds., Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (Knoxville, 1984) 54.

¹⁸ Sally Wolff King, Dumas, AR/Atlanta, GA, Southern Jewish Foodways Survey (SJFS), November 1998.

¹⁹ D. D. Rudner Eisenberg, Memphis, TN/Washington, DC, SJFS, November 1998.

²⁰ Gerry Barkovitz, St. Louis, MO/Hayti, MO, SJFS, November 1998.

²¹ Ellen Barkovitz O'Kelley, Hayti, MO/Overland Park, KS, SJFS, November 1998.

²² Maurine Muntz, Tyler, TX, SJFS, November 1998.

²³ Leslie Kooch Silver, Birmingham, AL/Vicksburg, MS, SJFS, November 1998.

²⁴ Kalich, "Ethnic Foodways in America," 49.

²⁵ Leanne Silverblatt, Indianola, MS, SJFS, November 1998. The Delta Jewish Open Golf Tournament celebrated its twelfth year in October 1999.

²⁶ James R. Curtis, "Ethnic Geography," *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, eds., Wilson and Ferris, 541.

²⁷ John Egerton, *Southern Food* (New York, 1987) 21.

²⁸ Joe Gray Taylor, "Foodways," *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, eds., Wilson and Ferris, 614.

²⁹ Joan Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America* (New York, 1994) 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 42. Organized in 1735, Savannah's Congregation Mickve Israel was officially chartered by Governor Edward Telfair in 1790. (Congregation Mickve Israel, *Shalom Y'all Cookbook*, eds., Arlene Belzer, Becky Civjan, Elaine Erlich, Diane Kuhr, Joan Levy, Margie Levy, and Sue Ruby, (Savannah, 1995) intro. In 1697, Charleston, South Carolina had only four Jewish settlers. By 1775, its congregation had grown to more than fifty families. Construction for a permanent place of worship began in 1792, and Beth Elohim was dedicated in 1794. In both Charleston and Savannah the first Jewish settlers were merchants who were connected to an extensive network of trade up and down the east coast and across the Atlantic. (Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820, The Jewish People in America*, 1, [Baltimore, 1992] 41-42.)

³² Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 10-11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴ Taylor, "Foodways," *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 614.

³⁵ Egerton, *Southern Food*, 38.

³⁶ Hasia Diner, "German Immigrant Period," *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds., Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore (New York, 1997) 502.

³⁷ Bobbie Malone, "A History of Jews in the South," Mississippi Humanities Council and Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience Lecture, Meridian, MS, 1993, and Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 12.

³⁸ Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 13.

³⁹ Isaac Mayer Wise, the organizing leader of the Reform movement in America, encouraged his brethren to reconsider the relevance of ritual. This heated discussion

culminated at

the July 11, 1883, "Treyfa Banquet," a graduation dinner for the first class of American rabbis in Cincinnati and their two hundred guests, who were served non-kosher little neck clams, soft-shell crabs, shrimp salad, and frogs' legs with cream. Several shocked guests left the room, insulted by the absence of respect for the Jewish dietary laws. This episode, plus the long history of dissension regarding ritual within the movement, led to a permanent split within American Jewry. At the 1885 Pittsburgh conference a platform was defined that emphasized the Classical Reform principles that distinguished the movement from other Jewish groups. That a food-centered issue should cause such turmoil suggests the powerful connection between food, cultural identity, and the basis of Jewish religious practice. (Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 15, and Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920*, 3, [Baltimore, 1992] 172.)

⁴⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kitchen Judaism," *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1889-1950*, eds., Susan L. Braunstein and Jenna Weissman Joselit (New York, 1990) 80.

⁴¹ Kathryn Loeb Wiener, Montgomery, AL/Jackson, MS, SJFS, November 1998.

⁴² Bettye Lamensdorf Klein, Vicksburg, MS, SJFS, November 1998.

⁴³ Minette Switzer Cooper, Vicksburg, MS/Norfolk, VA, SJFS, November 1998.

⁴⁴ Cathy Samuel Wolf, New Orleans, LA/Washington, DC, SJFS, November 1998.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Schwarz Rosenzweig, Wheeling, WV/Hot Springs, AR, SJFS, November 1998.

⁴⁶ Amelie Banov Burgunder, Baltimore, MD/Bethesda, MD, SJFS, November 1998.

⁴⁷ Louis E. Schmier, "Jewish Religious Life," *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, eds., Wilson and Ferris, 1290.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Sorin, *A Time for Building*, 1, 2, 12.

⁵⁰ Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History*, 85, (September 1997) 242.

⁵¹ Rosa From Poliakoff interview, May 1, 1995, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC (hereinafter cited as Jewish Heritage Collection).

⁵² Oscar Fendler, Blytheville, AR, SJFS, November 1998.

⁵³ Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 185.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (New York, 1994) 203.

⁵⁶ Sol Beton, ed., *Sephardim and A History of Congregation Or VeShalom* (Atlanta, 1981) 229-230.

⁵⁷ Bess Seligman interview, conducted by Marcie C. Ferris, Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, Jackson, MS, 1993.

⁵⁸ Eli N. Evans, Durham, NC/New York, NY, SJFS, November 1998.

⁵⁹ Joan Levy, Savannah, GA, SJFS, November 1998.

⁶⁰ Roberta Schandler Grossman, Asheville, NC/Johnson City, TN, SJFS, November 1998.

⁶¹ Helene Markstein Tucker, Birmingham, AL/Chevy Chase, MD, SJFS, November 1998.

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- ⁶² Jane Guthman Kahn, Savannah, GA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁶³ Mary Lynn Alltmont, Memphis, TN/La Place, LA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Jack Bass, North, SC/Atlanta, GA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Vicki Reikes Fox, Hattiesburg, MS/Los Angeles, CA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Miriam Cohen interview, conducted by Marcie C. Ferris, Montgomery, AL, Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, Jackson, MS, November 1994.
- ⁶⁷ Regina Piha Capilouto, Rhodes, Greece/Montgomery, AL, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁶⁸ Congregation Or VeShalom Sisterhood, *The Sephardic Cooks*, eds., Emily Amato, Blanchette Ichay, Marcy Franco (Atlanta, GA, 1992), and Beton, *Sephardim*, 210.
- ⁶⁹ Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 3.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ Miriam Graeber Cohn, Port Gibson, MS/Shreveport, LA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Bert Fischel, Vicksburg, MS/Dallas, TX, SJFS, June 1999.
- ⁷⁵ Phyllis Berkower Stern, Tottenville, NY/Lexington, MS, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁷⁶ Paula Ross Hoffman, Baton Rouge, LA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁷⁷ Ann Zerlin Streiffer, New Orleans, LA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁷⁸ Leanne Lipnick Silverblatt, SJFS.
- ⁷⁹ Judith Weil Shanks, Montgomery, AL/Washington, DC, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸⁰ Bobbie Scharlack Malone, San Antonio, TX/Madison, WI, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸¹ Suzanne Ginsberg Kantziper, Savannah, GA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸² Shirley Ettinger Orlansky, Alexandria, LA/Greenville, MS, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸³ Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein, Charleston, SC/Silver Spring, MD, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸⁴ Shulameth Reich Elster, Norfolk, VA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸⁵ Jack Bass, SJFS.
- ⁸⁶ Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'all': The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews," diss. Indiana University, 1986, 286-287.
- ⁸⁷ Marion Wiener Weiss, Shreveport, LA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸⁸ Esther Rosenbaum Buchsbaum, Atlanta, GA/Tybee Island, GA, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁸⁹ Jack Bass, SJFS.
- ⁹⁰ Eli Evans, SJFS.
- ⁹¹ Joan Levy, SJFS.
- ⁹² Reva Hart, Winona, MS, SJFS, November 1998.
- ⁹³ Joan Nathan, "Food," *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds., Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore (New York, 1997) 460.
- ⁹⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kitchen Judaism," 96.
- ⁹⁵ Anne L. Bower, "Bound Together: Recipes, Lives, Stories, and Readings," *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*, ed., Anne L. Bower (Amherst, 1997) 3.
- ⁹⁶ Miriam Graeber Cohn, SJFS.
- ⁹⁷ Mrs. Bertha F. Kramer, "Aunt Babette's" *Cookbook, Foreign and Domestic Receipts for the Household* (Cincinnati, 1891) back page.
- ⁹⁸ Janice Rothschild Blumberg interview, conducted by Marcie C. Ferris, Washington, DC, November 2, 1998, 17.

⁹⁹ Kramer, 452.

¹⁰⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kitchen Judaism," 80.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰² Joselit, "A Set Table": Jewish Domestic Culture in the New World, 1880–1950," 45.

¹⁰³ Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950*

(New York, 1994) 171.

¹⁰⁴ Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973) 255.

¹⁰⁵ Jane Guthman Kahn, SJFS.

¹⁰⁶ Dale Grundfest Ronnel, Cary, MS/Little Rock, AR, SJFS, November 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Anne Grundfest Gerache, Cary, MS/Vicksburg, MS, SJFS, November 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Evans, *The Provincials*, 256.

¹⁰⁹ Nan Dattel Borod, Rosedale, MS/Boston, Massachusetts, SJFS, November 1998.

¹¹⁰ Kathryn Loeb Wiener, SJFS.

¹¹¹ Eli N. Evans, SJFS.

¹¹² Dorothy Goldner Levy, Birmingham, AL, SJFS, November 1998.

¹¹³ Saul Krawcheck interview, July 6, 1995, Jewish Heritage Collection.

¹¹⁴ Miriam Graeber Cohn, SJFS.

¹¹⁵ Judith Page, New Orleans, LA/Jackson, MS, SJFS, November 1998.

¹¹⁶ Esther Rosenbaum Buchsbaum, SJFS.

¹¹⁷ Vicki Reikes Fox, SJFS, and Jill Reikes Bauman, Hattiesburg, MS/Little Rock, AR, SJFS, November 1998.

¹¹⁸ Robert Zalkin interview, July 14, 1995, Jewish Heritage Collection.

¹¹⁹ The Natchez Jewish Homecoming, sponsored by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience and Temple B'nai Israel, Natchez, MS, May 1994.

¹²⁰ Camp, *American Foodways*, 99. Charles Camp describes the importance and poignancy of compiled cookbooks like these, "A cook's records are the records of how regularly social worlds—special occasions, friends, family—and the world of food—recipes, instructions, mementoes—converge, and how much the records of one world stand for the other." He speaks of the "wholeness" of these collections, the overlap of holiday recipes and souvenirs, recipes from people and the local newspaper, and the juxtaposition of private and public worlds.

¹²¹ Mrs. Max Ullman, letter, n.d., Natchez, MS, property of Elaine Ullman Lehmann.

¹²² Cookbook journals, v. 1, 2, property of Elaine Ullman Lehmann.

¹²³ The survey was primarily sent to female Jewish southerners, but several male Jewish southerners also responded, or were given copies of the survey by a family member or friend.

¹²⁴ Barbara Antis Levingston, Cleveland, MS, SJFS, November 1998.

¹²⁵ Carolyn Lipson-Walker, Tuscaloosa, AL/Bloomington, IN, SJFS, November 1998.

Glossary

- Ashkenazic** ~ having to do with Ashkenazim and their practices
- Ashkenazim** ~ Jewish individuals and their descendants originating in central and eastern Europe
- bar mitzvah** ~ traditional coming of age ritual for Jewish males at age 13
- bat mitzvah** ~ coming of age ritual for Jewish females at age 12 or 13 introduced in the twentieth century
- bimah** ~ platform from which services are lead in a synagogue
- chevra kadisha** ~ Jewish men's cemetery society
- chevra nashim** ~ Jewish women's cemetery society
- chometz** ~ food not kosher for Passover
- Haftorah** ~ portion from the Prophets read after the reading from the Torah at Sabbath and holiday synagogue services
- haskalah** ~ Jewish Enlightenment
- hazan** ~ cantor; leader of prayers during a religious service
- kaddish** ~ mourner's prayer
- kashrut/kosher** ~ Jewish laws governing food
- Ladino** ~ language of Sephardic Jews based on Spanish and Hebrew
- landsleit** ~ group of people from the same town or area
- mamaloschen** ~ mother tongue or language
- Marranos** ~ term denoting Spanish and Portuguese Jews who practiced their religion secretly to avoid the Inquisition; derogatory in original meaning; crypto-Jews
- mechula** ~ bankrupt
- mikveh** ~ ritual bath
- minyan** ~ quorum of ten adult men traditionally required for public worship; some congregations now count adult women
- mitzvot** ~ "commandments"; sometimes good deeds
- mohel** ~ a person who performs ritual circumcision
- numerus clausus** ~ legal clause limiting the number of Jews in specified endeavors; quotas for marriage licenses or college entrance

oneg shabbat ~ reception after Sabbath services

parashah ~ portion of the Torah read at the Sabbath service

Pesachdicke ~ kosher for Passover

phylacteries ~ see tefillin

pogrom ~ organized violent attack against Jews

Rosh Hashanah ~ literally “head of the year;” new year on Hebrew calendar; one of holiest days of Jewish year

Sephardic ~ having to do with Sephardim and their practices

Sephardim ~ Jewish individuals and/or their descendants originating in the Mediterranean region, especially Spain and Portugal

Shabbat ~ Jewish Sabbath; Friday evening to Saturday evening

shekel ~ unit of money used in ancient and modern Israel; sometimes used as generic term for money

shiva ~ traditional seven days of mourning after a death

shochet ~ ritual slaughterer

shtetl ~ small town associated with Jews in eastern Europe

shul ~ synagogue

tallit ~ prayer shawl

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

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

treyfadicke (also **treyf** or **treyfa**) ~ not kosher

tzedakah ~ righteous giving; charity

tzitzit ~ fringes on a tallit

yarmulke ~ skull cap

Yiddish ~ language of Ashkenazic Jews based on German and Hebrew

Yiddishkeit ~ Yiddish culture

Yom Kippur ~ Day of Atonement; holiest day of the Jewish year

yontuf ~ Yiddish for holidays

Note on Authors

Sherry Blanton has a bachelors degree in psychology from the University of South Carolina and a Masters degree in Psychology from Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama. She was the exhibit coordinator for a photographic display entitled "Lives of Quiet Affirmation: The Jews of Calhoun County" exhibited in the Public Library of Anniston Calhoun County in the spring of 1999. Her research project into the history of the Anniston Jewish community continues.

Anny Bloch, a sociologist, is a member of the French CNRS (National Scientific Research Center) and teaches at Marc Bloch University in Strasbourg. Bloch edits a journal of social sciences and is the author of articles about Jewish emigration from Alsace-Lorraine to the Unites States which have appeared in *Cultures et Sociétés*, *Revue des Sciences Sociales de la France de l'Est*, and *Archives Juives*. She is presently completing a book about the topic. Bloch participated in the preparation of the exhibit "From Alsace to America" organized by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (June 1998-August 1998).

Marcie Cohen Ferris lives in Washington, DC. She has worked in the field of museum public program development and interpretation for over fifteen years at the Norlands Living History Center in Livermore, Maine, Plimouth Plantation in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Elderhostel in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Utica, Mississippi. Ferris is currently working on her Ph.D. in American studies at George Washington University.

Stacy Harris received her BA degree in radio-television from the University of Maryland. A veteran print and broadcast journalist, Harris has covered the Nashville entertainment scene for scores of regional and national country music trade and fan magazines as well as for *Newsweek* and ABC Radio News. Harris is the author of *Comedians of Country Music* (1978), *The Carter*

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Clive Webb is a lecturer in American history at the University of Reading in England. He has published a number of articles on the role of southern Jews in the desegregation crisis of the 1950s and 1960s, and he is currently revising a book length study of the subject.

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