

**SOUTHERN  
JEWISH  
HISTORY**

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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 . . .*

**T**o begin this issue, a literature, film, and ethnic studies professor, Terry Barr, offers insights into the rise and decline of the Bessemer, Alabama, Jewish community. His article illustrates the variety and nuances of the life cycle of small-town Jewry. Searching his personal history, Barr discloses the ironical roots and rootlessness of Jews in the South.

Richard Hawkins, an academic with affiliations in Great Britain and Bulgaria, continues what has become a transatlantic tradition for the journal. His case study traces the business and family lives of the Guggenheimers and Untermeyers from Bavaria to Virginia and illustrates that not all immigrants began as peddlers. By doing so, Hawkins also shows the importance of transcontinental and national networks as well as the movement of important Jewish families across the Mason and Dixon line.

Scott Langston, a professor and administrator at Southwest Baptist University, revised a presentation he made at the 1999 Richmond conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society concerning the interaction between important Protestant and Jewish clergy in New Orleans. The article breaks new ground in the field by illustrating the theological influences the men exerted on each other and how this reflected and influenced daily events.

Roughly one quarter of the articles submitted for consideration were accepted for publication. This reflects the high standards established by the fine editorial board and outside peer reviewers. Many thanks to the board as well as to Gary Laderman, Todd Savitt, Saul Viener, and Clive Webb for serving in the latter capacity. Bobbie Malone, Leonard Rogoff, Dale Rosengarten, Ellen

Umansky, and Lee Shai Weissbach are completing their three-year term on the board. Their hard work, dedication, and guidance have been truly commendable and greatly appreciated.

Mark K. Bauman  
Atlanta Metropolitan College

# A Shtetl Grew in Bessemer: Temple Beth-El and Jewish Life in Small-Town Alabama

by

Terry Barr

**O**n the corner of Seventeenth Street and Sixth Avenue in downtown Bessemer, Alabama, stands a structure that both marks and masks history. The evolution of this structure also metaphorically describes the evolution of Bessemer's Jewish community. Always the home of a religious body, the building is currently the venue for the Grace and Truth Apostolic Church's Sunday services. But for almost eighty years the building housed Temple Beth-El, the Judaic center of Bessemer.<sup>1</sup>

Like so many other small towns and cities in the modern South, Bessemer has seen its once-flourishing Jewish population dwindle first to a few families in the late 1960s, down to four people in 1999. At the time Temple Beth-El was sold in 1974, it was the second oldest synagogue in continuous use in Alabama.<sup>2</sup> Just as few today would recognize the nondescript Protestant church as the former temple, few too remember the once-vibrant Jewish presence in the city. The remaining temple members who sold the building hoped otherwise. They stipulated in the deed that the Hebrew letters that spelled Beth-El, inscribed in stone over the front door, can never be altered or removed.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the congregations that have owned the building since have placed a wooden board over the Beth-El legend, hiding any overt sign of the building's religious past. This blank board may hide but cannot negate or erase the history of Jewish Bessemer.

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Actually, the metaphor and reality of the hidden Hebrew legend of Bessemer's temple is not the only reminder of the town's Jewish history. Just outside the city limits on the road to the rival city of Hueytown is the site of Beth-El cemetery, the last refuge for many of Bessemer's Jews for almost one hundred years. Its gates are always unlocked and perpetual care is and will be maintained by virtue of two trusts set up in the 1960s and 1970s, the latter established out of the very sale of the temple itself.<sup>4</sup> A former temple with a hidden sign and a cemetery fixed between two towns are fitting symbols for the beginning, growth, and seeming end of a century of Jewish life in Bessemer, the "Marvel City."

As in such locations across America from the 1890s to the 1970s, Bessemer's Jewish citizens were completely integral to the economic, social, and civic life of the town. Over the first half of the twentieth century, anyone who observed the downtown business section of Bessemer, at the intersection of Nineteenth Street and Second Avenue, would find a preponderance of Jewish-owned businesses. If that same person closely examined the city's most prosperous residential area through the 1950s—stately Clarendon Avenue, whose eastern end was divided by a finely-landscaped median and bordered by Victorian and Italian-styled two-storied houses—he or she would also notice that living in the majority of these homes were the same Jewish families who owned the businesses in that same "garment district."<sup>5</sup> "I don't mean to say that there was a little ghetto in Bessemer," says former resident Charlotte Jospin Cohn, "but all of us living so close together, that's the way it felt."<sup>6</sup> As incongruous as it appears, Bessemer's prosperous Jewish ghetto was a reality. While Bessemer is experiencing an economic revitalization today with the opening of the VisionLand theme park and accompanying businesses, several notable, long-time city leaders believe that one major factor in the decline of Bessemer's economy and infrastructure over the past thirty-five years is the migration of Jewish businesses out of the city and into either neighboring Birmingham or the newer suburban enclaves including Vestavia, Hoover, and Riverchase.<sup>7</sup> The following is a case

*Old temple building at Seventeenth Street and Sixth Avenue.  
Present sign covers carved Hebrew letters, which can never be  
removed. (Photo by Terry Barr.)*

study of the rise and decline of this small-town southern community.

Traditionally historians have thought that it was primarily German Jews who left the major urban centers for the hinterlands of the American Midwest, West, and South. In the past few years, however, others have been reassessing the background of the Jewish immigrant who settled in smaller American towns and have discovered that a greater percentage of eastern European Jews journeyed this path than previously thought. Like their German Jewish brethren, the eastern European Jews were traveling peddlers who, after searching for the right opportunity, often began successful retail clothing businesses in the most unlikely of locales.<sup>8</sup> This newly recognized pattern holds true in part for the history of Bessemer.

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In Bessemer and other small towns across the American South, the migration of eastern European Jews had a vital impact on the life and longevity of the town. Often their migration sustained the Jewish life of these towns already begun by the earlier arrival of German Jews. In some cases the influx of eastern European Jews actually created new centers of Judaism where none had existed before. As historian Lee Shai Weissbach indicates, only "27 per cent of the triple-digit Southern Jewish communities of the late 1920s had substantial Jewish populations before the era of East European migration began," and "viable Jewish communities" in these towns could not have been launched without the immigrants from eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup> In Bessemer's case, while the origins of some of the earliest Jewish immigrants are unclear, both German and eastern European Jews arrived by the late 1880s and proceeded to work together to found Temple Beth-El and to sustain Jewish life in the city for eight decades. This cooperation and blurring of denominational boundaries illustrates new patterns just now appearing in the historiography.<sup>10</sup>

Jewish arrival and persistence in Bessemer were also affected by and predicated on their acceptance by the majority Christian society and the terms of assimilation that such acceptance necessitated. Thus, these immigrants also participated in the "defining experience" of all American Jewry: the need for acculturation on the one side and the desire to retain ethnic/religious identity on the other.<sup>11</sup> Bessemer's Jews performed this balancing act extremely well.

The reasons why Jewish immigrants settled in Bessemer are both logical and consistent with those of other southern Jewish populations. In the 1880s Bessemer was a boomtown. Although always in neighboring Birmingham's shadow, in the beginning there were plans for Bessemer that could have made it a major rival to the older city. Recognizing that the area surrounding Bessemer was rich in the three essential elements necessary to produce iron (iron ore, coal, and limestone), Henry DeBardeleben and David Roberts officially organized the Bessemer Land and Improvement Company on July 28, 1886. DeBardeleben projected

a company of thirteen with capital stock of two million dollars . . . [and to] build a city that will contain eight [coal-iron] furnaces within two years. We propose to extend two railroad lines touching at Tuscaloosa [approximately forty miles southwest of Bessemer] and another outlet to be determined on. We are going to build a city solid from the bottom and establish it on a rock financial basis.<sup>12</sup>

These early prophecies started on target. On April 12, 1887, the date most sources consider to be the actual founding of Bessemer, The Bessemer Land and Improvement Company sold the first lot of land to Birmingham millionaire Walter W. Davin. During that summer Bessemer's population rose to approximately 1,000.<sup>13</sup> By November 1887, that number had swelled to 2,441, and by April 1888, the population had reached 3,500.<sup>14</sup> This growth was infused by the wave of settlers who came to Bessemer to take advantage of employment in the newly-founded industries, to provide other essential goods for those workers, and to speculate on the boom in land value.<sup>15</sup> The latter multiplied from twenty-five dollars per acre in the fall of 1886 to eighteen thousand dollars per acre the following spring. On one day in the summer of 1887, 569 train tickets were sold to people whose destination was Bessemer.<sup>16</sup> By 1890, according to census bulletin #138, Bessemer's population, when it was just over a decade old, was the eighth largest in the state,<sup>17</sup> and the 1900 census numbered Bessemer's citizenry at ten thousand.<sup>18</sup>

Bessemer's early history is inextricably tied to the growth of its iron and steel industry. DeBardeleben inaugurated the blowing of his first two furnaces in 1888.<sup>19</sup> By 1891 five furnaces had been blown by three different companies, which were consolidated into the DeBardeleben Coal and Iron Company. In 1892 the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (TCI) acquired all of DeBardeleben's former coal-iron holdings. Many Bessemer leaders envisioned that TCI would build a steel plant in Bessemer, but this was not meant to be. When the plant was eventually built in nearby Ensley, Bessemer's "grandest dream" evaporated.<sup>20</sup>

Other early industries included the Bessemer Rolling Mill, which was actually the first to be developed in the town in 1888,<sup>21</sup>

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and the Howard-Harrison Pipe Company, which soon was absorbed by the United States Steel Pipe and Foundry, the largest pipe manufacturer in the world and producer of the first pipe in either Bessemer or Birmingham.<sup>22</sup> On Monday, November 14, 1887, a group of financiers including George Pullman took an "excursion" from Birmingham to Bessemer. Pullman did not forget his experience, for in 1929 he financed a plant in Bessemer that produced railroad cars for over five decades.<sup>23</sup>

From its inception, the city had other businesses, many of which were run by Jewish people. Jews came to Bessemer in response to the commercial opportunities and because of the timing of their migration. Describing a similar pattern in a West Virginia mining town, Deborah Weiner also asserts that "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."<sup>24</sup> Bessemer exhibited these same characteristics:

It is a new city; a growing and developing city. One with such resources awaiting utilization; such facilities for manufacture and conversion; such immense territory for market; such superb system of transportation and distribution; such a salubrious and attractive climate, and with such a grand and beautiful country in and surrounding it, that it presents unusual inducements to the immigrant. Here they are assured of employment and of opportunities of building homes and securing competencies. The field is not crowded. It is but sparsely occupied, and labor and opportunity are abundant, and years to come will not find the channels of industry overflowing nor the demand for its products diminished.<sup>25</sup>

A further inducement to settle in Bessemer was its central location between commercial centers. Bessemer is just above the center of the state, midway between Montgomery and Decatur,

between Meridian and Chattanooga, Mobile and Nashville, Savannah and Memphis, and New Orleans and Louisville. Even in 1888 its rail lines led “directly to Texas via Vicksburg and Shreveport and via New Orleans; to Gulf ports, directly to New Orleans, to Mobile and to Pensacola; to all of the Atlantic ports and to the North, Northwest and West.”<sup>26</sup> More specifically, Bessemer’s proximity to Birmingham, which by the turn of the century boasted three Jewish congregations, and to Tuscaloosa, home of the University of Alabama, made it attractive to the early Jewish pioneers. While economic reasons brought Jews to Bessemer, religion and social/cultural cohesion contributed to their continuity.

Finally, as many historians have noted,<sup>27</sup> Jewish immigrants, particularly from eastern Europe, were adept at filling the needs of a new town. Many were performing similar roles to those they performed in Russia or Poland. But while they were marginalized in the old country because their occupations were peripheral to the central agricultural economies, in small towns like Bessemer they fulfilled their own desires by making a comfortable living for themselves and their children. Concurrently, they met the needs of the then-mainly-mining community by their willingness and ability to launch complementary businesses, such as dry goods and retail clothing stores and even saloons. Because of their adaptability and willingness to participate in civic affairs, they achieved a great degree of acceptance as business leaders and thus even their Jewishness was tolerated, if not theologically, at least practically.

The earliest group of Jews to settle in Bessemer included many who contributed to the city’s growth. Samuel Stein was a “bright particular star” from “Bessemer’s earliest dawn.” According to *The Bessemer Weekly*, Stein was “among the first of our young businessmen to recognize the grand possibilities of the Marvel City and to cast his lot in with her.” An Alabama native, Stein founded the North Calera Land Company in 1886 and made a fortune from it. He moved to Bessemer in August 1887, where he “laid the foundation of his career,” and then apparently established a new occupation, for soon “the famous query ‘Who’s Your

Tailor' . . . [became] as common as the most favorite household words."<sup>28</sup> Stein's tailoring business was still thriving in 1906 as an ad in *The Bessemer Weekly* made clear: On Nineteenth Street, "Under the Grand Hotel," his store offered the "Finest Tailor-Made Clothing to Order."<sup>29</sup> Stein and his wife, Bessie Moses Stein, had a son, Jacob (Jake) Stein, "the first Jewish boy born in Bessemer," whose brit milah was "a gala day among businessmen here."<sup>30</sup>

Samuel Stein's history is probably unrelated to another Stein in early Bessemer history. This other Stein is listed in an 1886 issue of *The Bessemer Weekly* as one who "inaugurated . . . a very important line of business . . . in Bessemer . . . a first class bar. . . ."<sup>31</sup> This Stein was not Bessemer's only Jewish distributor of spirits. Jacob Marks, born in Prussia in 1847, established businesses in Mississippi and Georgia before moving to Bessemer in the late 1880s or early 1890s. Married to the former Rachel Silverstone of Memphis, Marks became the agent of the Bessemer Liquor Company, which sold "Whiskies, Wines, Gin, Rum, and Moerlein Beer" at an establishment on the "Twenty-first Street Adjoining Alley." In 1901, Marks "completed and moved into an elegant residence, the finest in the city. . . ."<sup>32</sup>

Another early Jewish resident was Jacob L. Adler, who owned a two-story business on the corner of Third Avenue and Twenty-first Street in 1887. In July of that same year Adler saw his business narrowly escape damage from a nearby fire that encompassed a hotel, three other businesses, and fourteen two-story dwellings.<sup>33</sup> Shortly after this traumatic event in the town's early life, the firm of Rosenbaum Brothers, general merchants, "rapidly erected" and opened their store on Fourth Avenue between Seventeenth Street and Eighteenth Street. Apparently in 1887 this location was far enough removed from downtown proper that it was described as being "way out in the woods, and the woods were so thick that not another building could then be seen." The Rosenbaums, the self-proclaimed "Merchants for the People," came to Bessemer from Meridian, Mississippi.<sup>34</sup> By 1893 they were "so well-known" that while advertising seemed "unnecessary," nevertheless, there might be some residents of Bessemer who still

had not heard of them. Accordingly, they informed the public that they had “two mammoth store buildings for its [business] accommodations,” and that no establishment in either the town or state “can afford to do better with their patrons than we do” by offering “Dry Goods, Suiting, Notions, Clothing, Gents’ Furnishings, HATS and SHOES, Staple and Fancy Groceries and Provisions.” By this point they were sufficiently prosperous to relocate to the more central business location of Second Avenue between Nineteenth and Twentieth streets.<sup>35</sup>

Other early Jewish Bessemerites included Julius Jaffe, the “watch inspector of the L&N railroad,”<sup>36</sup> and Mr. A. Forst who founded the Forst Mercantile Company located at 1905 Second Avenue.<sup>37</sup> Jaffe, whose jewelry shop was also under the Grand Hotel at 1909 Second Avenue, “passed nearly the whole of his life in Bessemer, coming here from New York in 1890.”<sup>38</sup>

Sam Lefkovits, a native of Hungary, immigrated to New York where he was a stevedore on the docks. Unable to speak or understand English, he was amazed when the police escorted him to and from work every day. “What a wonderful country this is,” he thought. Only later did he discover that the kindness afforded him was due to his being used as a strikebreaker by unscrupulous owners. Lefkovits next traveled to Ohio where he became a peddler and worked his way south. According to his grandson, Arnold,

The family story is that he walked selling goods, peddling with a big sack on his back, from farm to farm, house to house, and no doubt he had heard that Bessemer was a thriving young mining community, and so my guess is that sometime in the 1880s, he ended up in Bessemer.<sup>39</sup>

Shortly thereafter Lefkovits established a department store in partnership with another early Jewish resident, Samuel Erlick. Their store, Erlick-Lefkovits, originally located on Carolina Avenue, soon relocated to Second Avenue, the garment district. On the twentieth anniversary of the founding of their business, they presented each of their customers a commemorative plate:

“Erlick-Lefkovits 1889–1909.” Sam Lefkovits married into the Boshwitz family, which had come to Bessemer from Germany via Arkansas and Tennessee because they also had heard of the burgeoning Jewish life in Bessemer and hoped to find husbands for their daughters.<sup>40</sup>

The Schwabacher family also set early roots in Bessemer. Urias Schwabacher was the proprietor of the Famous Shoe Store on Nineteenth Street and Second Avenue. In 1893 Urias sold his interest in the Famous Shoe Store to his brother David who promised to be “better prepared than ever to meet all [the public’s] wants and tastes in his line . . . [and to] solicit a continuance of the kind patronage heretofore bestowed upon the house.”<sup>41</sup> David and his wife had earlier lived in New Jersey and Mississippi. They thus reflected the general pattern of Jewish mobility to places of greater economic opportunity, mixed with a desire for a Jewish community core.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to their other business interests, this mixture of German and eastern European Jewish immigrants was involved with Bessemer’s early financial institutions. Sam Rosenbaum and Julius Jaffe served on the Board of Directors of Bessemer’s Bank of Commerce whose capital in 1901 totaled fifty million dollars. Sam Lefkovits served in the same capacity at the Bessemer Savings Bank whose capital during the same period was one hundred thousand dollars.<sup>43</sup> The fact that these early Jewish residents of Bessemer were able to assume prominent roles in the economic makeup of the town undoubtedly contributed to Bessemer’s acceptance of Jewish citizens into the social fabric of the community at the same time that it reflected that very acceptance.<sup>44</sup> As their economic fortunes rose, Bessemer’s Jews felt the increasing need for a house of worship and were able to afford the resultant expenses. Not only would Temple Beth-El serve their spiritual and cultural needs, it would also illustrate their position in a church-oriented society.

The actual beginnings of Bessemer’s Temple Beth-El are debated.<sup>45</sup> An article in *The Jewish Monitor*, a monthly statewide periodical begun in 1948 by then Bessemer Rabbi Joseph Gallinger, dates the temple’s consecration to 1896.<sup>46</sup> Noting that the

congregation began in 1891, the article indicates that “of those present at that memorable occasion, only Mrs. H. Goldberg, the wife of one of the founders, is still living in Bessemer today. Mrs. Goldberg well remembers the thrill she experienced at that time, knowing that the young village of Bessemer, founded only three years previously [the city founding actually occurred four years earlier (1887)] was going to have its own Jewish congregation. The following year [1892], the small group of pioneer settlers secured a plot of land for a cemetery, and in 1894, Mrs. Goldberg remembers having been a member of a delegation, which secured from the Bessemer Land Company the site on which two years later the temple was built. The congregation grew slowly until in the 1920s it numbered more than 70 families.”<sup>47</sup> Department store owner Samuel Erlick was elected its first president.<sup>48</sup>

While the temple’s life span covered some seventy-eight years, for only ten of those did it sustain a regular rabbi, with Gallinger serving the bulk of those years from 1948 to 1957. Apparently a Rabbi Hirsch, who served from 1917 to 1918, may have been the first full-time rabbinical leader.<sup>49</sup>

Without a regular rabbi, services in Bessemer were confined mainly to the High Holidays and to irregular Friday nights. Temple Beth-El employed rabbinical students from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati to lead High Holiday services and for life cycle events during its early years.<sup>50</sup> Since Birmingham was a short distance away, rabbis from that city traveled to Bessemer at special occasions to officiate. Often, lay readers, like shoe store owner Urias Schwabacher, conducted services.<sup>51</sup>

In these early days Temple Beth-El’s members followed either Reform or Orthodox traditions. While most of the Jewish people interviewed for this project are either Reform or Conservative now, their memories of Temple Beth-El are of an institution that through the 1950s was either primarily Orthodox or whose services were mainly dominated by the Orthodox members. The denominational tendency reflected the eastern European background of a majority these congregants, a majority augmented by another influx of immigrants in 1899.<sup>52</sup> Arnold Lefkovits, whose Hungarian-born grandfather was one of the temple’s organizers,

remembers “a lot of Orthodox customs, the men sitting on the right, the women on the left, and the men wearing hats or yarmulkes.”<sup>53</sup> Charlotte Jospin Cohn’s reflections on the services are of “the whole service [conducted] . . . in Yiddish and Hebrew [and] . . . most of the men davening, but the ladies who sat on the other side, who were all mainly American-born, not understanding most of what was being said.”<sup>54</sup>

As has been well documented in American Jewish communities across the country, the tension between German and eastern European Jews was great, so much so that one Reform rabbi of German descent called the neighborhood of his eastern European co-religionists a “reeking pesthole.”<sup>55</sup> Temple Beth-El experienced its own version of this division. Milton Weinstein, born in Bessemer in 1907, maintains that there were philosophical and theological differences within the synagogue: “The Reform Congregation owned the temple in the beginning. The Orthodox rented an upstairs room in a building in downtown Bessemer and held services there. The Reform Jews either died or moved out of Bessemer, and the temple became the property of the Orthodox Congregation somewhere in the late 1920s.”<sup>56</sup>

*The Bessemer Story* offers a slightly different account. After Rabbi Hirsch’s one-year tenure ended in 1917, “a new Orthodox group developed within the Congregation and eventually broke away from the Reformed [*sic*] group which was never officially declared Reformed [*sic*]. The Orthodox group met for four or five years above some stores on Second Avenue. Charles Weinstein [Milton’s father] was their lay leader. After some five years of independence, the groups reunited.”<sup>57</sup>

*The Bessemer Story’s* account appears more credible because Milton Weinstein was just a boy at the time of the break and because of documented patterns of the development of Jewish congregations in other small cities. Generally, in towns where German Jewish communities were already established, eastern European Jews, who usually identified themselves as Orthodox, would establish separate “subcommunities” upon their arrival and would organize congregations “that functioned alongside preexisting assemblies,” mainly because they were uncomfortable

with the Reform practices of the German Jews. But in towns where the eastern Europeans were the organizers of Jewish life, single, Orthodox congregations were the rule.<sup>58</sup> Bessemer's Jewish life and temple seem to fall somewhere in the middle of these patterns. What is more important, however, is that Bessemer's Jews did reunify after a relatively short period of time. Again, while the reasons for the reunification might have been that Reformers left Bessemer, many remained. A city with a small Jewish population, where everyone knew each other and shared socio-economic position, simply could not support two congregations.<sup>59</sup> Bessemer's Jews, despite their differences, maintained a bond based on "economic links, kinship, and religion."<sup>60</sup>

The unity of religion, kinship, and friendship was directly reflected in the activities of Charles Weinstein who, after emigrating from Russia, took his place in the life of the Jewish community. As a boy Arnold Lefkovits viewed Weinstein as "a sort of rabbi" who conducted Passover seders for the Lefkovits and Weinstein families.<sup>61</sup> Weinstein's granddaughter, Estelle Seigel Silverstein, remembers that her family kept kosher out of respect for Charles, not an easy thing given that Charles himself was the only person in the town willing and able to perform the ritual slaughtering of the animals for meat and thus served as Jewish Bessemer's unofficial "shokhet." "On the holidays—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and often Passover—my grandfather would see everyone come to his house to have him kill the chickens and make them kosher. There was no kosher butcher in Bessemer. We used to drive to Birmingham to buy meats from Haimuvitz on Fourth Avenue. But during the holidays Papa would kill the chickens, slit their necks, and throw them down in the yard."<sup>62</sup> Marvin Cherner, later a Birmingham circuit judge, was a member of one of the families who took "live chickens to Mr. Weinstein to have them slaughtered," because, while his Russian-born grandparents lived with the Cherners, they did "observe the dietary laws."<sup>63</sup>

In an extended household that included Estelle Seigel Silverstein's parents, grandparents, aunt, uncle (Milton "Buddy"

Weinstein), and brother, Jerry, the Seigels supported each other in abiding by the prescribed rituals:

Mother kept kosher because my grandfather was very, very religious. Even during Passover he or my mother would bring my lunch to school so that I wouldn't have to eat in the cafeteria. And all the Jewish kids used to come to our car and he would bring extra, the cake or whatever. We did keep kosher on that score. My brother and I were very thin, emaciated, so mother kept what she'd call outlaw dishes for Jerry and me. We couldn't eat at the regular table, so we ate at a card table and she'd fix us red meat, whereas if it's kosher, all that [blood] is drained out of it.<sup>64</sup>

Silverstein also recalls staying home from school on Jewish holidays, again in deference to her grandfather. During these times there was occasionally a cultural clash of a most unusual sort:

Near the holidays the Chasidim would come through town and come to our house collecting money because they knew my grandfather was the most religious man in town. On one occasion when they came, my brother, who loved to play cowboys, was straddling the sofa—sitting astride his horse—with his cowboy hat on and guns firing. What an impression that made!<sup>65</sup>

Charles Weinstein's emphasis on maintaining Jewish rituals was further evidenced by his being the only Bessemer Jew remembered for employing a non-Jew to come to the house and light the coal stove on the Sabbath. Furthermore, he taught his grandson, Jerry, Hebrew lessons leading to the boy's bar mitzvah at Temple Beth-El, presumably sans cowboy gear.<sup>66</sup>

The Jewish residential patterns in Bessemer reflected the old-country shtetl desire and the necessity to live close to one another.<sup>67</sup> The Jews of Bessemer settled in just a few areas of town, mainly Clarendon Avenue, Berkley Avenue, and Sixth Avenue, near the temple. Such proximity facilitated the requirement to walk to the synagogue during holidays when riding was proscribed by Jewish law and reflected social interaction within the

group. The Seigel-Weinstein family lived just one-half of a block from Temple Beth-El, which gave Estelle a special vantage point from which to observe certain holiday rituals and which also made the Seigel home a center of holiday festivities:

During the holidays, since the temple was so close, the Jewish community would drive their cars on Rosh Hashanah night to the temple and walk home. Then they would walk back the next morning for temple and afterwards drive back home . . . just for the High Holidays they'd do that. For Sukkot, we had a sukkah in our backyard, and we ate out there rain or shine. And in later years, as things progressed, my grandfather had the roof in the back of our house raised up so that during Passover we could eat on the back porch. . . . We always had a long Passover service and went through the whole thing twice, first day and second day.<sup>68</sup>

Silverstein's memory of people walking to the synagogue was confirmed by Jack Becker, Marvin Cherner, and Arnold Lefkovits, all of whose families walked a mile each way, and by Jerry Cherner whose family traversed a three-quarter-mile journey.<sup>69</sup>

Lefkovits, who remembers the seders and the straw and fruit hanging from the roof of the sukkah hut at the Seigel home, focused on one other element of the High Holidays. When just a boy during the early 1930s, Arnold would sit in temple on Yom Kippur between his grandfather Sam Lefkovits and Samuel Erlick listening to them sharing memories of starting the temple forty years earlier and of all the times they had spent there. But then, during the break between services,

a lot of us would walk the half block up to the Seigel's house, and quite often the High Holidays fell during the World Series. A lot of men would go up there and listen to the ball game, and then walk back to temple, and continue going back and forth.<sup>70</sup>

Silverstein remembers these occasions, too, when the children would leave Yom Kippur services and run in and out of the Seigel home and when the men "snuck up to our house to listen to the World Series."<sup>71</sup>

As well as promoting religious cohesion, Temple Beth-El offered social, instructional, and civic outlets for Bessemer's Jews. The temple sisterhood, Sunday school, Hebrew lessons, a B'nai B'rith lodge, and civic programs promoted Jewish life.

As in so many communities, women played a major role in Jewish education. For many years Stella Marks, Jacob and Rachel's daughter, was "in charge . . . [of] Sunday school every Sabbath morning. . . ."72 In years to come the temple tradition was that mothers were actually their children's confirmation teachers. Elaine Becker Bercu's mother, Eva, Jack Green's mother, Beatrice, and Sam and Lenore Barr's mother, Mary, all prepared their children for this important life-cycle event.<sup>73</sup>

According to former Bessemer resident Sarah Lander Erdberg, Bessemer's Jewish teens formed a Young Judæa club, circa World War I, which consisted of ten to twelve members. They met every other week at different members' homes with the membership including Sarah, Celia Weinstein, Bernice Erlick, Gertrude Strauss, Adele Schwabacher, and twins Fannie and Sadie Cherner. The club sponsored bake sales and put on a show at neighboring St. Aloysius Catholic Church, selling tickets for twenty-five cents each. Local department stores like Erlick's would donate ten dollars to the club, all of the proceeds going to *The Birmingham News*-sponsored Milk and Ice Fund for underprivileged families. One night a month, the club also made sandwiches and gave them to soldiers traveling through the train depot.<sup>74</sup> These activities nurtured group identity and civil consciousness. They also reflected positive interaction with the broader community.

Temple Beth-El's sisterhood sponsored many different events from Chanukah programs and parties to lectures on current Jewish events. One of the most cherished functions of the sisterhood was organizing the annual temple picnic at Pineview Beach or West Lake in Bessemer. Sarah Erdberg remembers that from her time in Bessemer, she, Ida Lefkovits, and Bertha Erlick helped plan and execute the picnic with the temple funding drinks, ice cream, and prizes for the various swimming races held.<sup>75</sup> Charlotte Jospin Cohn also recalls the early 1930s picnic's being the "big event of the year":

My mother used to dress me up. I had long dark curls and wore sun suits for the affair. Mr. Sam Lefkovits, who to me was a very imposing figure, would tell my mother that she shouldn't dress me like that in such a short outfit. . . . He just didn't think little girls should go like that.<sup>76</sup>

According to Cohn, the picnic was an all-day affair. The women made fried chicken and potato salad, and the Jews in the community gathered together to socialize. Estelle Seigel Silverstein can still see images of "the men playing pinochle, the kids renting boats and going swimming, and the grandmothers looking after us."<sup>77</sup>

In the early 1940s, Temple Beth-El continued observing the High Holidays and Passover with visiting rabbinical students conducting the services. Other traditions from a generation past were also maintained. Lynne Applebaum Waggoner, whose parents, Oscar and Evelyn Stein Applebaum, ran Guarantee Shoe Company on Second Avenue, remembers playing outside with other children during part of the services: "I really felt a sense of belonging because I knew everyone. Even though [the temple] was not supposed to be Orthodox then, the men and women sat on different sides. The women did a great deal of talking."<sup>78</sup> Elaine Becker Bercu ["Sister" Becker as she was known], a teenager during the forties, confirms Waggoner's memories and adds that when Friday night services were held, men from the congregation conducted them.<sup>79</sup> She adds that confirmation and Sunday-school classes were all held in the temple, at long tables in the rear of the sanctuary because at that time there were no separate classrooms.<sup>80</sup> Apparently confirmation was the more accepted ritual in the decades leading up to Rabbi Gallinger's tenure. During this period, Jerry Seigel, Charles Weinstein's grandson, underwent the bar mitzvah ritual. Although he was the only one of those interviewed to do so, this indicates that both Reform and Orthodox traditions coexisted in Bessemer's temple.

Elaine's brother, Jack Becker, along with Arnold Lefkovits, Estelle Seigel, Jack Green, Sam Kartus, and Marvin Cherner were confirmed at Temple Beth-El in the late 1930s with

Rabbi Myron Silverman from Birmingham's Temple Emanu-El officiating.<sup>81</sup> In 1944, Elaine Becker was confirmed by Rabbi Milton L. Grafman who had replaced Rabbi Silverman at Temple Emanu-El in 1941.<sup>82</sup> These examples reflect how proximity to a larger Jewish community could foster the maintenance of ritual.<sup>83</sup>

Bessemer's Jewish population was stable from 1907 through the 1940s.<sup>84</sup> From a total of 100 individuals in 1907, the number increased slightly to 111 in 1927<sup>85</sup>, out of the city's overall population of just over 20,000 in 1930.<sup>86</sup> By 1938 there were approximately forty-three Jewish families in Bessemer.<sup>87</sup> Shortly after the end of World War II, Bessemer's Jewish population again totaled 111 people.<sup>88</sup>

During the 1940s family ceremonies and observances regarding Jewish rituals varied. While most did not keep strictly kosher, neither did they eat the proscribed pork and shellfish. As Marvin Cherner indicated, after his grandparents passed away, while his family still observed the "special rules for Passover," they modified its eating strictures.<sup>89</sup> Elaine Becker has memories of her mother picking her up from school every day during Passover and driving her home for lunch "to observe the holiday. I can still taste the 'sweetness' of the Dr. Pepper that had apparently been blessed by the Rabbi."<sup>90</sup>

Alvin Barr, who with his parents came to Bessemer every Sunday to have lunch with his paternal grandparents, Martin and Jenny Barr, and his Aunt Dora, Uncle Harry, and cousins Elaine and Sylvia Ray Hart, can still visualize the ritual of those Sunday meals:

My grandparents did the cooking. We'd eat, and what I remember most about it was my grandmother would never sit down at the table with us. She would always stay in the kitchen and wouldn't eat until everyone else had eaten. I think that's a tradition from way back in Russia. . . . Often she'd cook tsimmes, a conglomeration of meat, potatoes, and prunes. I know a lot of people wouldn't include the prunes, but I enjoyed it. She'd have homemade pumpernickel bread too.<sup>91</sup>

*Martin Barr with grandson Alvin,  
the author's great-grandfather and father,  
in Bessemer. (From the collection of Terry Barr.)*

Arnold Lefkovits, who says his family was not particularly religious, described the “typical Jewish dinners” of chicken or “roast” and matzo-ball soup his family enjoyed on the holidays. Reflecting acculturation, he also remembers

one time at the house we had a cook and had a bunch of people over for dinner. And the cook brings in, I think, some turnip greens with a big piece of white meat right in the middle of it. . . . Another time my grandfather Sam—and in the old days lunch was the big meal—had some of his religious Jewish friends over for lunch. My grandmother Ida didn’t know much about kosher, so she brings out and puts in front of Grandpa to carve a big pork roast. And Grandpa looks down and sees that it’s a pork roast in the midst of his rather religious friends, picks the platter up, goes to the window, and throws it out.<sup>92</sup>

The Beckers were, next to the Charles Weinstens, perhaps the most religiously-observant Jewish family in town. Levi Becker,

who owned Pizitz Department store (a separate store from the older and larger Birmingham Pizitz) on Second Avenue, immigrated to the United States from Vladivostok, and, according to his son Jack, he “never forgot that this country afforded him opportunities that he didn’t have before.” Levi’s wife Eva was born and raised in Birmingham, and though neither Jack nor his sister, Elaine, remembers their family keeping kosher, they do recall other family rituals. Elaine has memories of her grandfather (“Pompa”) living with them and leading their Passover seders: “We were expected to sit, read, and observe for at least two to three hours.” She also vividly remembers her mother lighting the “short, white” Sabbath candles on Friday night, “A napkin over her head, her hands sweeping over the candles, then covering her eyes with her hands as she recited the prayers. And every morning she said a prayer welcoming the new day.”<sup>93</sup>

But as with Jewish people across America, there was at least some degree of internal conflict during the Chanukah/Christmas season for Bessemer’s Jewish citizens. These tensions were reflected in the compromises Bessemer’s Jews made both within their own families and with the greater community. Estelle Seigel Silverstein’s memories are representative:

when Christmas came along, my grandfather Charles who, like I said, was very religious, would celebrate Chanukah by giving us Gelt. We never lit the menorah; he always did it and said all the prayers, and then he’d give us a quarter or something like that. We’d save the money, and then my brother and I would go to the dime store and buy Christmas presents. Every Christmas, while we didn’t have a tree, we did have Santa Claus. And Papa would get up and watch us open presents. The Cherner’s had a furniture store [Jefferson Furniture], but also carried bicycles, and one year we went downtown on a day not long before Christmas. Daddy was talking to Mr. Cherner, and I was with Mother, when I saw a bicycle there. I got on it and then noticed that it had my name on it. Mother said, “Well, you know like in the shoe business they name shoes after people like the ‘Sarah’ . . . the same thing’s true for the bicycle business.” And like a jerk I

believed her. But it wouldn't bother my grandfather at all to watch us open our Christmas presents. The same thing was true of Passover and Easter. We'd dye eggs—not using the dye that gentiles would use; instead, Mother would use either coffee or tea, and so we'd have the ugliest eggs around. We'd also get Easter baskets with chocolate candy, but we couldn't eat the candy until after Passover.<sup>94</sup>

Many Jewish merchants offered Christmas light displays during the season in order to show good faith with gentile Bessemer friends and customers. But the greatest ironies were found at home. Arnold Lefkovits, whose family did have Christmas trees, recalls that his father Norman

used to decorate our yard with lights on the bushes and shrubbery. And one time Daddy won the award for prettiest Christmas decorations in Bessemer. That's hard to believe, but it happened. All blue lights he had on the shrubbery near the front of our house . . . Later on I thought of the irony of this. And though we had trees, there was no religious significance . . . we'd never have a star or any other religious decorations. . . . It was just the friendliness, good cheer, the joy of Santa Claus. And of course we'd all go to Temple Beth-El. I remember when I was little asking my Grandpa why we went to temple. He said, "It's the custom, the custom."<sup>95</sup>

In the early 1940s, Charles Weinstein was performing the duties of lay reader for temple services on a regular basis.<sup>96</sup> Soon after, however, reflecting a refusal to compromise his religious principles any longer in that Beth-El did not hold services regularly enough, Weinstein began driving to Birmingham to attend synagogue. He would spend the weekend with the Kindling or Mayer families, and after services he and Mr. Mayer discussed the Torah until Sunday afternoon when Weinstein returned to Bessemer.<sup>97</sup>

At this point, however, Levi Becker, along with other Jewish residents, decided that to promote greater religious as well as social unity, Temple Beth-El needed a full-time rabbi.<sup>98</sup> And so in 1948, Rabbi Joseph S. Gallinger was hired as the new religious

leader. Gallinger came to Bessemer from the Valdosta Hebrew Congregation in Valdosta, Georgia. Prior to that he and his family narrowly escaped the Holocaust. Gallinger and his wife, Ann, were natives of Germany. In 1938, with their six-month-old daughter, they had the good fortune to be “passengers on the last ship to carry a load of Nazism’s victims from Germany before Hitler started his wars of conquest in earnest.”<sup>99</sup> For the next nine years in Bessemer, Gallinger performed typical rabbinical duties while also starting *The Jewish Monitor*, Alabama’s first Jewish newspaper, primarily reflecting local, national, and international Jewish concerns. *The Jewish Monitor* provided information that brought together Alabama Jews for over three decades, often challenging them to consider their ties to their own communities but also advocating that they keep the state of Israel at the forefront of their consciousness. Gallinger served as president of Bessemer’s B’nai B’rith lodge and secretary of the Alabama State Association of B’nai B’rith for four terms.<sup>100</sup> Ann Gallinger, who initially handled all of the business details, edited the paper after her husband’s death in 1976.<sup>101</sup>

Members of the congregation regarded Gallinger as a positive, unifying force for the community. Lynne Applebaum Waggoner described him as “well-liked, respected, and supportive of the community,”<sup>102</sup> and Alvin Barr deemed him a “humble” man.<sup>103</sup> Jerry Cherner remembers well Gallinger’s presence:

His first bar mitzvah student was Sydney Sokol, Buddy Sokol’s brother. In about a six-month period, Rabbi Gallinger was able to train Sydney for his ceremony. Gallinger was someone who identified well with the young people of Bessemer. He taught us well and provided us with knowledge of the Hebrew language. Just as importantly, he taught us a great deal about life and gave us an appreciation for the important values of life, like community. I thought very highly of him.<sup>104</sup>

Not only were Gallinger’s years in Bessemer marked by regular temple ceremonies and rituals, they were also the occasions of educational and civic activity. Gallinger was dedicated to

making Bessemer's congregation a center of Jewish activity, while also affording Bessemer's Jews a view beyond their provincial, small-town world to a broader one in which they, as Jews, would be aware of anti-Semitism and persecution. For Gallinger, being Jewish was not a passive identity; it meant accepting a place in the world despite, or perhaps because of, adversity and intolerance.

One of the ways he sought to do this was by inviting Nathan Sokol to the temple to speak about his visit to Israel and his meeting with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.<sup>105</sup> Secondly, Gallinger also helped Bessemer secure the hosting of the 1956 meeting of the Alabama State Association of B'nai B'rith, which included a two-day program of executive, business, and workshop sessions, panel discussions, music, dancing, and a midnight breakfast on Saturday.<sup>106</sup> In another instance, because Bessemer's temple was "the only one in the state not affiliated with either of the three movements since it serves adherence [*sic*] of all three,"<sup>107</sup> the temple sisterhood sponsored a three-part series on the definitions and meaning of Jewish Orthodoxy, Conservatism, and Reform. Rabbi Gallinger presided over the meetings, the first of which, held at the Bessemer home of Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Ripko, produced a lively debate. Rabbi Tamarkin

on the basis of extensive experience and study in the Orthodox ministry, claimed that the term 'Orthodox' is wrongly applied when used in connection with the traditional form of Judaism. He categorically maintained that this movement represents the only true form of Judaism as such; that it is the form of Judaism revealed in its entirety by God to Moses, and handed down authoritatively from generation to generation. While Rabbi Tamarkin refused to voice his opinion on the merits of other Jewish religious practices, he nevertheless stated that it is they, which need a qualifying adjective, such as Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist, since it is they which deviate from the form established by the Divine Revelation.<sup>108</sup>

As evidenced by this program and the debate it fostered, Temple Beth-El's ability to overcome its earlier congregational split, its welcome to worshippers of all the branches of Judaism, and its

role as a center for the religious and social needs of all Bessemer's Jews not only made this congregation unique in Alabama, it also doubtlessly provided a sense of place, comfort, and security for a people who, despite the relative harmony with which they coexisted with Bessemer's non-Jewish white majority, nevertheless knew that they were different and apart.

In the early to mid-1950s, it appeared that Temple Beth-El would remain a stable congregation. The temple board recognized that a one-room facility did not adequately accommodate a congregation that required space for Sunday school and confirmation and bar mitzvah receptions. No one then could foresee that Bessemer's Jewish population had already reached its apex and that it would decline within two decades.<sup>109</sup> In September 1955 the temple board announced formal plans to enlarge Temple Beth-El, and in June 1956 construction began on the addition that would eventually double the space of the existing structure, "provide much-needed class rooms, a vestry, a kitchen and auxiliary facilities," and give the outer structure a new facade in order to "blend well with the building style used in the neighborhood." Air conditioning added a final touch. Architect J. J. Baird worked from "designs created by Rabbi J. S. Gallinger . . . with D. K. Price of the Alabama Associated Building and Improvement Co. as contractor." The building committee headed by Hyman Weinstein, included Oscar Applebaum, Levi Becker, Jake Cherner, Gallinger, Harry Wittenstein, and Leonard Zarovsky.<sup>110</sup> During the winter of 1956-1957 the remodeling project was completed, and Temple Beth-El's congregation began worshipping in a "structure of brick veneer with Permastone trim . . . [which] incorporat[ed] the stern, utilitarian pattern of the original building into a modern architectural design which gives the effect of functional beauty . . . [it also contained] a pillared portico lead[ing] into a spacious lobby." Other features included "silent swinging doors" leading from classrooms to the sanctuary, "western pine wood paneling," "modernistic lighting," and "swinging steel windows."<sup>111</sup>

"Liberal contributions from the membership of the congregation" made the enlargement possible, and Jacob Cherner, who

died in 1956, willed the temple a “sizable legacy” to aid in the endeavor. The project received other funds both in Cherner’s name and from “free will gifts from members of the Birmingham community.” Non-Jewish citizens of Bessemer contributed “unsolicited” money to the remodeling fund, a further sign of Jewish acceptance in the town.<sup>112</sup>

Dedication of Temple Beth-El’s additions and a rededication of the original sanctuary took place on Friday, February 15, and Sunday, February 17, 1957. This occasion also marked the sixtieth anniversary of the temple as well as the twentieth anniversary of Gallinger’s ordination.<sup>113</sup> The schedule of services for the February 15th ceremony, again reflecting the great degree of acceptance Bessemer’s Jews enjoyed, included opening prayers and responsive reading led by Gallinger; the reciting of Psalm 122 by the Rev. Noble R. Edwards, past president of the Bessemer Ministerial Association and pastor of Bessemer’s First Christian Church; and a scripture reading from 1 Chronicles 29 and 1 Kings 2 and 8 by the Rev. Robert M. Man, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Bessemer’s oldest church. A reception, sponsored by the Marvel City Lodge of B’nai B’rith in honor of Hyman Weinstein and Gallinger, followed in the new vestry.<sup>114</sup>

Thus Rabbi Gallinger saw Temple Beth-El through a prosperous era. Nonetheless, six months after the temple rededication, he accepted the pulpit of Tri-Cities Temple B’nai Israel serving Florence, Sheffield, and Tusculumbia, Alabama.<sup>115</sup> Temple member Buddy Sokol observed that Gallinger received a better offer from the Tri-Cities temple, and no doubt serving three communities appeared to him to be a more secure opportunity as well.<sup>116</sup> Ann Gallinger, in a recent interview, remembers the move as being taken in part because, in her view, Bessemer’s Jews were “not very devoted to or interested in Judaism. . . . In Bessemer you were more connected to non-Jews. . . .”<sup>117</sup> Still, leaving Bessemer at this time meant going from a Jewish community that numbered 130 residents to one that was not even listed in the *American Jewish Year Book* records.<sup>118</sup> This move marked the beginning of Temple Beth-El’s end. While High Holiday services went on as usual in September 1957, with lay leader Sam Meer officiating,<sup>119</sup> and while

other life cycle rituals continued, without the stability and inspiration of a regular rabbi and with the other social and economic factors that were adversely affecting Bessemer, the younger generation of Jews left in increasing numbers, thereby making it difficult for the remaining congregation to support the synagogue or pay a rabbi.<sup>120</sup> Temple Beth-El never again had a regular rabbi.

The exodus, however, had actually started prior to Gallinger's resignation. From the 1940s through the 1960s, many of Bessemer's Jewish youth left for college or enlisted in the military and never moved back.<sup>121</sup> Others, especially women, moved away when they married.<sup>122</sup> Still others moved from Bessemer to Birmingham for business and/or the allure of a larger and more diverse setting with a Jewish populace sufficient to support three congregations and a Jewish community center.<sup>123</sup> As Jerry Cherner put it, "Birmingham in the 1950s became more and more a place for socializing, for trying to meet people, and for participating in interaction with Jewish people of your same age."<sup>124</sup> Those who came of age in Bessemer in the 1920s and 1930s, who raised families there, and who thus chose to live the remainder of their lives there, like Buddy Sokol, witnessed the migration of their own children and felt the angst of watching Jewish life in Bessemer collapse:

When I came to Bessemer in 1933, there were about thirty-eight Jewish families. Our temple was successful; we were able to get our services on a regular basis. But as my family grew up, we slowly lost men through death, or moving out of town. As our kids grew up, Murray [his eldest son] went to The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in the mid-1960s, and we got to where in order to get a minyan we had to ask him and later our other son, Jerry, to come home from college to make the ten needed. And so things depreciated enough to where we had trouble even having a service. Today in the Conservative movement you can count women in your minyan, but then you couldn't. So both Murray and Bruce Weinstein [Hyman's son] would leave college on Friday afternoon to be home for services on Friday night. They didn't want to come, but because their fathers were so

active in the temple they came when we asked them to, so that we could have a minyan.<sup>125</sup>

It could be that in Bessemer, as in other communities across America, the younger generation did not share the same ties that the preceding generations had to tradition and place, especially if that place were a small town. However, another way of looking at their exodus is that this younger generation wanted to relive the experiences of the older generation that challenged them to explore and discover new areas of prosperity for themselves and their families-to-be. While certainly the Jews who came to Bessemer in the 1880s and 1890s were also establishing traditions in a new place, the suburbanization of America in the 1950s surely caught up this younger generation, who not only wanted their own space to establish their own traditions and family but who also wanted to be like other prosperous Americans. Thus, while increasing assimilation and intermarriage with non-Jews certainly affected some of Bessemer's younger Jews and caused Bessemer's Jewish population to dwindle, the lure of greater economic mobility and prosperity and of a stronger, more secure and established Jewish community motivated others to leave home.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, Bessemer itself was declining economically by this period. In the late 1940s, the mines in south Bessemer closed, and in the 1960s, the Rolling Mill shut down, and Pullman and nearby TCI began laying off workers. In the 1950s it was clear that unless you wanted to go into your father's business, there was little opportunity to enter a new business or profession outside of practicing law. And again, without a full-time rabbi, Bessemer's temple could hardly be as attractive as congregations with regular religious leaders.

Nonetheless a definite Jewish presence remained in Bessemer through the 1960s. In 1962 the city celebrated its diamond jubilee, and Jewish citizens served prominently on the jubilee committees. In 1966 Bennett Cherner served as the Jubilee Historical Book Business Manager and was assisted by Sam Picard and Sidney Sokol. The directors of the jubilee itself included Jack Kartus, son of Kartus Korner owner Harry Kartus, Frank Sachs whose family owned Sachs Furniture Store, and Ralph Sokol. The apogee of the

jubilee was the gala pageant held at Bessemer Stadium on the evenings of April 9 to 14, 1962, with Frank Sachs as head of wardrobe and makeup and Herbert S. Goldstein, Murray Sokol, and Carol Green as actors.<sup>127</sup>

Also acknowledged for the event were the Jewish-owned businesses placing ads in *The Bessemer Story*, the jubilee's commemorative magazine, including Picard's Clothing, Sokol's, I. Rosen, ("Fair and Square since 1916"), Sachs' Furniture, Guarantee Shoe, Jefferson Furniture, Kartus Korner, The Outlet Store owned by Jack Kartus, and Pizitz of Bessemer. Julian Erlick, son of pioneer Samuel Erlick, individually sponsored an ad.

Yet the jubilee marked the twilight of Jewish-owned stores in downtown. With the death of the early patriarchs and with no younger generation to take over, many Jewish-owned retail businesses, like I. Rosen, closed in the 1960s, while others, including Sokol's, tried to survive by opening locations in recently-constructed malls, either in Bessemer or in more-economically viable and prominent communities elsewhere. Still other Jewish residents, like Jerry Cherner, while continuing to own stores in Bessemer, moved to Birmingham to be better situated to join other synagogues and the Jewish community center. Additionally, as in other contemporary southern communities, Bessemer's businessmen had to cope with the civil rights issues that were finally becoming too heated to be ignored. This was a town that through the 1950s allowed the Ku Klux Klan to post a sign on at least one highway leading into the city welcoming everyone to Bessemer. Many of Bessemer's white-owned retail stores did business with both black and white clientele (heeding the philosophy of Neiman Marcus that "Anyone alive should be considered a prospect"<sup>128</sup>). Some white and Jewish-owned businesses catered primarily to one or the other race (Nat Wittenstein's State/Dixie Clothing being an example of a Jewish-owned business catering primarily to black clientele). However, all of these stores had segregated restrooms, drinking fountains, and lunch counters. With integration and subsequent boycotting of white-owned businesses in the mid-1960s, downtown Bessemer ultimately became a shopping district patronized primarily by black citizens, the more mobile whites

*Ida Rosen with daughters Sonia Faye (right) and Beverly (left).  
The family owned I. Rosen Clothing, a prominent Bessemer business.  
(From the collection of Terry Barr.)*

first shopping in and then moving to the newer, more-upscale suburban centers. By the mid-1970s, Bessemer's Jewish-dominated "garment district" had been reduced to Picard's, The Outlet Store, Jefferson Furniture, and Sokol's. When Sokol's opened its second location in Western Hills Mall in the 1970s (in nearby Midfield), the Western Hills area, according to Buddy Sokol, was 85 percent white and 15 percent black: "Bessemer was just the opposite. It was a matter of our having to carry two entirely different inventories. Not that what the blacks were wearing wasn't quality clothing, it just got to be too expensive to carry two types of clothing, so we closed the Bessemer store in 1976." The Western Hills store subsequently closed in 1981, when it became evident that none of the Sokol children wanted to step into the business.<sup>129</sup>

Relations between Bessemer's Jews and other racial/ethnic minorities was typical of other small southern towns and cities. Several of the Jewish residents employed black maids and cooks, including the Sokols, Beckers, and Barrs. As far back as 1923, the I. Rosen store employed black workers. In a photograph from that year, at least five black men are part of the group of employees seen posing with Mr. Rosen in front of the newly remodeled store. In the 1950s, according to Lynne Applebaum Waggoner, her father, Oscar, let the black janitor in their retail shoe business wait on black customers even though he knew that the KKK "might not like it."<sup>130</sup>

Lifelong Bessemer resident Jo Ann Terry Barr remembers well an outdoor barbecue in the early 1950s that she and her mother, Ellen (Mrs. G. C.) Terry, helped plan for Ida Rosen as "an engagement party that Ida was throwing for her daughter Beverly's best friend who was marrying a man from New York." The Rosens had one of the finest homes on Clarendon Avenue, and, for the event, Ida employed several black men from the I. Rosen store, hired other black servers, and together with their regular yard man and her regular maid Jessie, had them all dressed in white to cater to the seventy-five to eighty guests. But, according to Barr, everyone, black and white, participated in the cooking including Barr, her mother, and Ida. The outdoor affair was a complete mix of southern and Jewish.<sup>131</sup> For the Jewish guests, particularly those from New York, there was barbecue beef. For those southerners who know only one definition of barbecue, pork ribs were also turning on the grill. Shrimp cocktail, potato salad, and homemade peach ice cream complemented the main course.<sup>132</sup> Other interethnic mixing was evidenced by Estelle Seigel Silverstein, whose family lived less than one block from the temple and two blocks from St. Aloysius Catholic Church. Silverstein still visualizes her days of playing with her good friends and neighbors, the Schilleci children: "Imagine! Jewish and Italian Catholic kids playing together on the streets of Bessemer! But it happened. We were so close. We all went to their weddings at St. Aloysius."<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, Betty Beck Lipschitz did not feel that Bessemer was making racial progress:

When I graduated from college [The University of Alabama] I just made the decision that I did not want to stay in Alabama. By then I had become aware of the narrow-mindedness of a lot of the people and the thinking there, and I was just not comfortable with it. I wanted to go somewhere and find people who had more similar interests to me . . . [Social change in Bessemer] was all in the formative stage at that point. We were all not nearly as outspoken or as focused on what was right and what was wrong, but I knew things weren't right there [racially speaking]. I wanted a more liberal environment.<sup>134</sup>

Time and business can fade away, and for other Jewish congregations in small-town Alabama, this is becoming increasingly evident. Demopolis, for instance, at one time claimed 180 Jewish residents who came for many of the same reasons as Bessemer's Jews. Situated on the Tombigbee river, Demopolis offered a lively and prosperous economy until the 1970s, when the "Wal-Martization" of America occurred. Children grew up, moved to what they regarded as more vibrant locales; some intermarried and converted,<sup>135</sup> and by 1999 only one Jewish man lived in Demopolis. He travels sixty miles north to Tuscaloosa to attend temple services.<sup>136</sup> In Selma, scene of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous march to Montgomery in 1965, a Jewish population that numbered in the hundreds has now fallen to thirty-two. A reunion in 1997 brought back over three hundred Jews with Selma ties from as far away as California. Some of those returning reflected that in Selma, as in Bessemer, Jews and non-Jews had always enjoyed very close relations. Like Bessemer and Demopolis, the reasons so many left were because of the desire of younger Jews to pursue careers outside of the family business and the growth of chain stores that drove the family-owned shops out of business.<sup>137</sup>

For Bessemer's Temple Beth-El, the end came on October 24, 1974, when the following item appeared in *The Birmingham News* under the headline "Bessemer synagogue closes doors . . . Lack of Members":

Bessemer's Temple Beth-El has closed after more than three-quarters of a century serving the Jewish families of that city. The Bessemer Church of the Nazarene now worships in the building and Beth-El's remaining families have transferred to synagogues in Birmingham. A dwindling membership over the years reached the point that a quorum was difficult to maintain in order to open religious services. 'It's been years since we've had a bar mitzvah,' commented Mrs. Roland Seal, a former member, now attending Knesseth Israel Congregation. According to Rabbi Gallinger, Jewish families found Bessemer too far away to conveniently work in Birmingham, so they gradually moved away until the most recent membership crisis was reached. The ritual articles of the synagogue, including the Torah Scrolls and prayer books, have been distributed to other area synagogues.<sup>138</sup>

Still, the legacy of Bessemer's temple and its Jewish community lives on in very positive images for the vast majority of present and former Jewish residents. Those willing to be interviewed are of a generation born in the first half of this century and who remember Bessemer's unity and the sense of place and security they felt through businesses, the temple, and kinship with each other. They felt that they were generally recognized and accepted as being Jewish.

However, as in other Jewish communities in the South, unity and good feeling were not the only stories. A few incidents of anti-Semitism are also remembered. Betty Beck Lipschitz experienced some discomfort as a Jew in Bessemer. Historian of the high school National Honor Society and of the "A" Club, a member of Tri-Hi-Y, the Thespian Club, and both the newspaper and yearbook staffs, Betty was nonetheless ineligible for the Cotillion Club, which sponsored the Debutante Ball: "I remember some of my friends and my mother's friends apologizing for the fact that this club did not permit Jewish members. But I wasn't interested in being in it anyway."<sup>139</sup> For Betty, despite her accomplishments, growing up in Bessemer had its limitations.

Lynne Applebaum Waggoner believes it "was hard not to feel different in such a southern Christian community." When she

was in elementary school, a classmate once asked her why she didn't "live in Palestine. My mother told me to tell her that I was as American as she was." Her feelings of being different were further exacerbated by the daily prayer in high school that always ended with "In Jesus' name we pray." While she felt accepted as a Jew and knew that the Christian fundamentalist churches around her literally thought of her and other Jews as being God's chosen people, Waggoner also remembers seeing "hooded men walking to meetings at Roosevelt Park."<sup>140</sup>

Jerry Cherner, still a successful Bessemer businessman, also experienced a few rough spots as a Jew in the Marvel City. In the late 1940s, his father, Jacob Cherner, wanted to build a house in Bessemer's West Lake area. However, "it was suggested to him very strongly that it would be preferable if Jewish people did not build at West Lake." Jerry also recalls that when his brother Bennett ran for vice president of his high school class, all of his posters were "torn from the wall," and "Damn Jew" was written over some of them. While his family also had non-Jewish friends, Jerry believes that Bessemer's Jewish citizens "were perceived as different . . . and were tolerated," rather than being fully accepted.<sup>141</sup>

Finally, Arnold Lefkovits remembers a fight in high school where a "redneck boy" picked on a Jewish friend of his at a basketball game. This led to a behind-the-school, after-the-game fight where Arnold and his friend, badly outnumbered, were ultimately joined by Sammy Jospin, a very big, athletic, and Jewish member of the football team. At that point, the tide turned, and the fight soon ended.<sup>142</sup> Yet, Lefkovits' good memories of Bessemer, again, clearly outweigh the bad.

During the decline of Jewish Bessemer, the city showed its ability to appreciate and honor those in its midst who were of a minority faith. When Levi Becker passed away in 1967, the next edition of *The Bessemer News* included a two-column editorial celebrating his life. Noting that the Becker family arrived in America at the turn of the century from Poland, the editorialist asserted that Becker

was ever-ready to contribute his share of any community undertaking, especially when a contribution was to benefit the poor.

In those years, and in the years of his retirement, he worked tirelessly to make Bessemer a better place for us all, rich and poor alike, to live in. He had a true compassion for the betterment of his fellow man, and he spent his retirement splendidly striving toward that betterment.<sup>143</sup>

Becker, five-time chairperson of the Rotary club, tirelessly oversaw the renovation of the old post office and the subsequent moving of the Carnegie Library to a more spacious facility<sup>144</sup>

Still other Jewish residents, throughout the town's history, contributed to its civic welfare. In the 1890s Samuel Stein was a charter member and master of Bessemer's Masonic Lodge.<sup>145</sup> In 1962 the Bessemer Chamber of Commerce elected Sylvan Laufman, brother-in-law of Buddy Sokol, as president, with Bennett Cherner as vice-president of commercial activities. And in 1966, Bennett Cherner was elected to the Alabama legislature. Both Bennett Cherner and his father Jacob were very active in the Lions Club, while Jerry Cherner is still active in the Kiwanis Club.<sup>146</sup> Adolph Beck, father of Betty, became general superintendent of the Ore-Mine Division of Bessemer's TCI in the 1950s, while his wife, Rima, was president of the Arlington Grammar School PTA and of the Quest Club, a women's literary society. In 1974, Frank Sachs was named the Bessemer Area Chamber of Commerce's "Man of the Year." Sachs helped organize the Bessemer Jaycees in 1935, was a past master of Bessemer Masonic Lodge 458, organized "Teen Town," a "hang-out for students," in 1944, and in the same year helped reorganize the Chamber of Commerce. Sachs was "awarded a life membership" in the PTA and was "an early member of the YMCA . . . [and] helped design its steam bath facility."<sup>147</sup> Clearly, despite some of the problems noted above, Jewish people in Bessemer were part of every aspect of the town's life and livelihood.

Endings are difficult for most people. For Bessemer's Jewish history, the natural ending is Beth-El cemetery. The earliest

*Bessemer's Beth-El cemetery. Plaque on the left is dedicated to former caretaker, Maxine Seal. (Photo by Terry Barr.)*

marked grave in the cemetery is that of Marion Green who, four months old when she died, was buried on March 11, 1903. The earliest adult interment was Minnette Levy, born in Alsace and died July 2, 1906. In the 1960s and 1970s, Maxine Goldberg Seal oversaw the cemetery, caring for it "like it was her baby." At her death in 1983, a commemorative plaque was placed at the cemetery entrance citing her "everlasting love and devotion" to its care.<sup>148</sup> Maintenance for the cemetery next fell to Buddy Sokol who had already overseen the cemetery's future. When the temple was sold in 1974, Buddy, Roland Seal, Maxine's husband, and a few others decided to use the money to sustain the cemetery. They turned the Care for the Cemetery fund over to Arnold Lefkovits who was by then a Birmingham attorney. The use of the accrued interest from this fund eliminated the need for family assessments.<sup>149</sup>

Arnold Lefkovits detailed the events leading to the cemetery's perpetual care and solvency. Sometime in the 1920s his grandfather, Sam Lefkovits, helped establish a young cousin

of his, William Lefkovits, in Bessemer. Sam took William into his home, raised him as a son, and then started a business for him, William Lefkovits' Department Store, on the corner of Third Avenue and Nineteenth Street. William married Rebecca Odess of Birmingham, and they had one son, John, who was only two months older than his cousin Arnold. Arnold remembers that John was sick for most of his life with epilepsy: "They didn't send him to regular schools, but to a private school. He was as smart as he could be and a very nice guy." John never married or went to college, and eventually succumbed to his illness while in his late thirties. The entire family died within a little over a year, between 1960 and 1961. William died first and Rebecca second, both from cancer, with John following her only a week later. After John's death, "Everything that was centered in his estate was left to aunts and uncles. And they were good enough to come to me—I was a lawyer then—and say, 'Arnold, we want to give \$10,000 to the cemetery. First, we want a chain-link fence around it used from the money from John's estate. And then we want to take \$10,000 and want you to draw up a trust for the perpetual care of the cemetery.'" Thus was established the John A. Lefkovits Beth-El Cemetery Trust. By January 1997, the original \$10,000 trust had grown to \$28,000 and the original \$45,000 temple trust to \$120,000.<sup>150</sup> Expenditures are minimal today, and as Buddy Sokol says, "When we're all gone, there will be enough money to continue the cemetery's upkeep." The only person buried in the cemetery in the last five years was Norman Lefkovits, Arnold's distant relation from Columbiana, Alabama, in 1997. Sokol also acknowledged that a potential problem exists in that he is the only person now with knowledge of the procedures to follow when someone requires a plot.<sup>151</sup>

One of the strangest requests concerning the cemetery came from Harry and Esther Kartus whose graves are the first encountered upon entering the site. The Kartus plot is in the bottom left corner of the cemetery as the Kartuses desired. For decades Harry and Esther lived on the corner of Clarendon and Twenty-first Street in Bessemer, and of

course, his business from 1902 to his death in 1966 was The Kartus Korner.

The 1998 *American Jewish Year Book* lists only seven cities in Alabama with Jewish populations over 100 people, with 250 Jewish people categorized as living in “other places.”<sup>152</sup> In the following year only one Jewish-owned business remained in Bessemer: Torme Foods, run by Merv and Marvin Torme, who do not reside in the city.<sup>153</sup> In a town whose population as of 1999 is approximately thirty-five thousand, there are only four Jewish individuals. Their words offer a perspective on the fullness, irony, and sorrow of the life and death of Jewish Bessemer.

Nat Wittenstein, who came to Bessemer from Brooklyn, New York, in the late 1940s and ran a clothing business on First Avenue for over thirty years (variously known as Grand, State, and Dixie Clothing), was happy living in Bessemer: “I have no licks against Bessemer. If I did, I’d go live with my kids. No, Bessemer is fine. I’ve had no rough times here.”<sup>154</sup>

Alvin Barr, whose grandfather owned Barr Hatters and who moved to Bessemer in 1952, when he married Jo Ann Terry, grew to love the city. But before his move, while traveling back and forth in 1946 from his home in Birmingham to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, his Greyhound bus always stopped in Bessemer: “I remember the Bessemer bus station, and I also remember saying ‘Boy, this is one place I’ll never live’. . . . Bessemer looked like a little run-down town to me, compared to Birmingham. Of course, when you make statements like that you live to regret them.”<sup>155</sup>

As for Buddy Sokol (whose wife Polly is the fourth Jewish resident), the memories are bittersweet:

The only thing that bothers me is how the Jewish people have more or less migrated, because we had a viable Jewish community here and we were respected because we had the temple and kept it up. And to the end people admired the fact that only fifteen or so families could keep the temple going. I’m proud of our cemetery . . . proud of the fact that it will keep going when I’m

gone. . . . I really have enjoyed the time I've lived in Bessemer, and I think that the Jewish community in itself did a remarkable job of doing what they did do while we were there. When I moved here in 1933, there were about thirty-eight families. I can visualize the sixty-seventy families that we had at one time. But we have all remained close friends, even the ones who have moved away.<sup>156</sup>

That closeness is attested to by former Bessemerites who maintain ties, visit each other for high school reunions, hold monthly lunches, and make frequent phone calls. Perhaps Elaine Becker Bercu best captures the nostalgia for Jewish life in these disappearing small Jewish communities. She has lived in Shaker Heights, Ohio, since her marriage in 1953, and her parents, Levi and Eva, were integral to the community history. Bercu writes,

As you get older you begin to reflect. I live now in a much bigger home. I belong to *The Temple*. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and his son Rabbi Daniel Silver were our chief rabbis before their passing. But I must tell you, there isn't a time when I stand for the "She-Ma" that I don't think of our family in that little wooden temple in Bessemer, Alabama.<sup>157</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In a *Jewish Monitor* story from January 1957, the temple was referred to as Congregation Beth-El, perhaps its original name as remembered by Mrs. H. Goldberg, who at the time was the only person still living who was there at its founding in 1891. Otherwise, in this same article and in all other found sources, Beth-El is referred to as Temple Beth-El. "Bessemer Celebrates Anniversaries In State's Second Oldest Synagogue," *Jewish Monitor*, January 1957, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Jewish Monitor*, January 1957, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Albert (Buddy) Sokol interview conducted by Terry Barr, December 24, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Sokol to Terry Barr, July 16, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Charlotte Jospin Cohn interview conducted by Terry Barr, June 12, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> J. E. Mulkin interview conducted by Terry Barr, July 17, 1998. See below for additional reasons.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Edward Cohen, *The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi*, (Oxford, MS, 1999); Deborah R. Weiner, "The Jews of Keystone: Life in a Multicultural Boomtown," *Southern Jewish History* 2, (1999): 1-18; and Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262.

<sup>9</sup> Weissbach, "East European Immigrants," 236-237.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Leonard Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church; A Congregational History of North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43; Hollace A. Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station, 1999); and Gary P. Zola, "Why Study Southern Jewish History," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Sorin, *The Jewish People in America: A Time for Building, 1880-1920* (Baltimore, 1992), 160-161, 168.

<sup>12</sup> "From the Rough," *The Bessemer Story*, Diamond Jubilee 1887-1962, (Bessemer, 1962), 21-23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> *The Bessemer*, August 11, 1888, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Jews were not the only immigrants to choose Bessemer as a desirable site to work and live. In the late 1880s and 1890s, attracted by the booming industry and higher wages it paid, Italian immigrants came to Bessemer from Louisiana and formed their own parish with the first church structure built in 1897. "From the Rough," 65.

<sup>16</sup> *The Bessemer*, June 25, 1887, 1.

<sup>17</sup> "From the Rough," 31.

<sup>18</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, Special Illustrated Edition, May 18, 1901, (reprinted: Bessemer Hall of History, July 1977, 17).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> "From the Rough," 41, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Marilyn Davis Barefield, Compiler, *Bessemer, Yesterday and Today, 1887-1888*, (Birmingham, 1986), 55.

<sup>22</sup> "From the Rough," 43.

<sup>23</sup> *The Bessemer*, November 19, 1887, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Weiner, "Jews of Keystone," 7.

<sup>25</sup> Barefield, *Bessemer*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> See Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton, 1996); Weiner, "The Jews of Keystone," and Sorin, *Jewish People in America*.

<sup>28</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, May 18, 1901, 79.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, January 6, 1906, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1901, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Marilyn Watson, "In the Good Old Days of Saloons!" West Jefferson Historical Society *Journal of History* (Spring 1980): 12.

<sup>32</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, May 18, 1901, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Barefield, *Bessemer*, 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, May 18, 1901: 41.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., January 7, 1893, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Jay Howton, ed. "Bessemer's Earliest Merchants," West Jefferson Historical Society *Journal of History* (Winter 1987): 46.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold Lefkovits interview conducted by Terry Barr, June 13, 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Arnold Lefkovits currently has two of these plates in his possession; a third resides in Bessemer's Hall of History.

<sup>41</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, January 7, 1893, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., January 28, 1893, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., May 18, 1901, 35, 23.

<sup>44</sup> This reality was true of other small-town Jewish communities. See for example, Richard L. Zweigenhaft, "Two Cities in North Carolina: A Comparative Study of Jews in the Upper Class," *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979): 298.

<sup>45</sup> "From the Rough," *The Bessemer Story*, Diamond Jubilee 1887-1962, reports that "The Jewish population was small in the early days of the city. Provision for the building site of a temple was made in 1887 by the Bessemer Land and Improvement Company, when it set aside the lot located at Sixth Avenue at Seventeenth Street. However, there was not yet a Jewish congregation in Bessemer. By 1889 Jews were worshipping in private homes. The congregation was organized in 1892. No permanent rabbi was available; therefore, services were conducted by lay readers. The deed of the lot donated by the Town Company [the first name of the Land and Improvement Company] was received in 1894. During the interim between 1894 and 1904, plans were made for the construction of the temple. Temple Beth-El was completed and dedicated in 1906. The first worship was held in September of that year at the beginning of the Jewish New Year or Rosh Hashanah." There are a number of discrepancies in the information reported here, as will be discussed in the main text.

<sup>46</sup> *The Jewish Monitor*, January 1957, 7. The 60th Anniversary commemorative bulletin noted that the rededication ceremony took place July 7, 1956; Program, Temple Beth-El Dedication Worship and Community Reception, Rabbi Milton Grafman collection. This collection was graciously made available by Stephen Grafman.

<sup>47</sup> *The Jewish Monitor*, January 1957, 7.

<sup>48</sup> "Bessemer Pioneer Laid to Rest," *The Jewish Monitor* (June-July 1953), 7.

<sup>49</sup> "From the Rough," 65.

<sup>50</sup> *The Jewish Monitor*, September 1974, 3; Walter Bryant, "Bessemer synagogue closes doors," *The Birmingham News*, October 24, 1974.

<sup>51</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, May 18, 1901, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 17, and Mark H. Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience*. (University, Alabama, 1974), 58-59.

<sup>53</sup> Lefkovits interview.

<sup>54</sup> Cohn interview.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Sorin, *Jewish People in America*, 161-163.

<sup>56</sup> Milton Weinstein to Terry Barr, September 9, 1997. This account is corroborated in part by *The Jewish Monitor*, January 1957, 7, which states that services in the temple "were conducted according to the Reform Ritual" through Rabbi Hirsch's tenure.

<sup>57</sup> "From the Rough," 65. Rogoff describes a similar pattern of Orthodox/Reform interaction in "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 63.

<sup>58</sup> Weissbach, "Image of Jews," 243.

<sup>59</sup> This reality for small town Jewish congregations is corroborated by Weissbach, "Image of Jews," 251–252; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 43–81; Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas*.

<sup>60</sup> Weiner, "Jews of Keystone," 14.

<sup>61</sup> Lefkovits interview. For a similar story, see also Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas*, Chapter 7, "Perl of the Rio Grande: The Making of a Lay Rabbi *Sam Perl, Brownsville*," 120–139.

<sup>62</sup> Estelle Seigel Silverstein interview conducted by Terry Barr, September 27, 1997.

<sup>63</sup> Marvin Cherner to Terry Barr, August 21, 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Silverstein interview.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* Other Jewish families in Bessemer adopted a similar pattern to the Weinstein-Seigel's of observing kosher-Orthodox practices in deference to the older generation but seeing these practices erode over time and with the death of that older generation. Weissbach discusses this pattern as being typical to the experience of other small-town southern-Jewish families in "Image of Jews in Small-Town South," 244–245.

<sup>67</sup> Weissbach, "Image of Jews," 245.

<sup>68</sup> Silverstein interview.

<sup>69</sup> Jack Becker interview conducted by Terry Barr, December 23, 1996, and Lefkovits interview; Cherner; Jerry Cherner audiotape to Terry Barr, July 6, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Lefkovits interview.

<sup>71</sup> Silverstein interview.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>73</sup> Elaine Becker Bercu to Terry Barr, July 28, 1997; Jack Green to Terry Barr, October 29, 1997; Lefkovits interview.

<sup>74</sup> Sarah Lander Erdberg interview conducted by Terry Barr, July 5, 1997.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Cohn interview.

<sup>77</sup> Silverstein interview. One year at West Lake a friend of Estelle's, Jack Green she believes, dared her and some others to swim to the other side of the lake [roughly 300 yards]: "We tried to do it, but the lifeguards came and got us and we couldn't go back out there for a week."

<sup>78</sup> Lynne Applebaum Waggoner to Terry Barr, July 28, 1997.

<sup>79</sup> Bercu letter.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Becker interview.

<sup>82</sup> Bercu letter.

<sup>83</sup> This, too, was a recognized pattern for smaller Jewish communities throughout the United States. See Abraham D. Lavender, ed., *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States* (Westport, Conn., 1977), 8.

<sup>84</sup> This stability was no doubt maintained by both immigration and emigration patterns, a reality in other small Jewish communities. See Weissbach, "Stability and Mobility in the Small Jewish Community: Examples from Kentucky History," *American Jewish History* 79, (Spring 1990), 355–375.

<sup>85</sup> The *Jewish Monitor* story from January 1957 numbers the Jewish families in 1920s Bessemer at "more than 70."

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<sup>86</sup> *American Jewish Year Book* 9 (New York, 1907–1908), 123; *American Jewish Year Book* 30 (New York, 1928–1929), 180.

<sup>87</sup> *Polk's Bessemer City Directory* VII (Birmingham, 1938).

<sup>88</sup> Guy McConnell, "The Jews in Alabama," photocopied document, Grafman collection.

<sup>89</sup> Marvin Cherner letter.

<sup>90</sup> Bercu letter.

<sup>91</sup> Alvin R. Barr interview conducted by Terry Barr, June 15, 1997.

<sup>92</sup> Lefkovits interview.

<sup>93</sup> Bercu letter.

<sup>94</sup> Silverstein interview.

<sup>95</sup> Lefkovits interview.

<sup>96</sup> *The Jewish Monitor*, September 1974, 3.

<sup>97</sup> Silverstein interview.

<sup>98</sup> Becker interview.

<sup>99</sup> "The Jewish Monitor: In '48 an idea, in '53 big paper," source unknown, Grafman collection.

<sup>100</sup> *The Jewish Monitor*, August 1957, 1.

<sup>101</sup> A partial collection of *The Jewish Monitor* is available at The University of Alabama in Birmingham library, while the complete collection is housed at the library of The University of North Alabama in Florence.

<sup>102</sup> Waggoner letter.

<sup>103</sup> Barr interview.

<sup>104</sup> Jerry Cherner audiotape. See also telephone interview with Harvey Applebaum, September 23, 1997.

<sup>105</sup> "Nathan Sokol Speaks in Bessemer Temple," *The Jewish Monitor*, December 1953, 8.

<sup>106</sup> "Ala. state Ass'n of B'nai B'rith Meets in Bessemer," *The Jewish Monitor*, January 1956, 3.

<sup>107</sup> "Study of Religious Movements Presented By Birmingham Rabbis," *The Jewish Monitor*, February 1956, 14.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Albert (Buddy) Sokol telephone interview conducted by Terry Barr, December 23, 1999.

<sup>110</sup> "Bessemer To Enlarge Its Temple Soon," *The Jewish Monitor*, September 1955, 19; "Bessemer Builds Modern Edifice," *Ibid.*, June 1956, 22.

<sup>111</sup> "Bessemer Celebrates Anniversaries In State's Second Oldest Synagogue," *Ibid.*, January 1957, 7.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Official program, Temple Beth-El dedication service, Grafman collection.

<sup>115</sup> "Dr. Gallinger Called To Tri-Cities Temple," *The Jewish Monitor*, August 1957, 1.

<sup>116</sup> Albert (Buddy) Sokol, telephone interview conducted by Terry Barr, February 20, 2000.

<sup>117</sup> Ann Gallinger telephone interview conducted by Terry Barr, July 4, 1997.

<sup>118</sup> *American Jewish Year Book*, 59 (New York, 1957–1958), 18.

<sup>119</sup> *The Jewish Monitor*, September 1957, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Jerry Cherner audiotape.

<sup>121</sup> Among these were Jack Green, Janice Green, Betty and Billie Beck, Harvey and Lynne Applebaum.

<sup>122</sup> Elaine Becker, Charlotte Jospin, Lenore Barr, and Beverly Rosen, for instance.

<sup>123</sup> Jack Becker, Sam Kartus, and Jerry Cherner, for instance.

<sup>124</sup> Jerry Cherner audiotape.

<sup>125</sup> Sokol interview. He has been a member of Birmingham's Conservative Temple Beth-El since the early 1970s.

<sup>126</sup> Weissbach notes that for many second and third generation Jews in these small southern towns, traditional Judaism, quality Jewish education, and everything associated with the Old World were either not possible or desirable. See "Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," 256-258. Bessemer's overall population did not effectively change during this period, for even as Jews left, their declining numbers were counterbalanced by others, including a growing black community. By their exodus Jews proved to be more mobile than other white southerners. See Weissbach, "Stability and Mobility in the Small Jewish Community," for more detailed analysis. White Bessemerites also left the city, but their flight came over a decade later when the reality of school integration took hold.

<sup>127</sup> "From the Rough," 49.

<sup>128</sup> Sorin, *Jewish People in America*, 159.

<sup>129</sup> Sokol interview.

<sup>130</sup> Waggoner letter.

<sup>131</sup> See Marcie Cohen Ferris, "'From the Recipe File of Luba Cohen'; A Study of Southern Jewish Foodways and Cultural Identity," *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999), 129-164, for complementary discussion of black-Jewish cooking, and of the "communication of human values" that food produces between diverse cultures.

<sup>132</sup> Jo Ann Barr interview conducted by Terry Barr, June 13, 1997.

<sup>133</sup> Silverstein interview.

<sup>134</sup> Betty Beck Lipschitz, interview conducted by Terry Barr, January 7, 1998.

<sup>135</sup> A study undertaken in 1953 concluded that one of the "major disadvantages" of Jews living in smaller cities and towns were the perceived "fears of intermarriage and loss of Jewishness on part of children." Such fears remained through the 1970s for Jews in small towns throughout the country. See Lavender, ed., *A Coat of Many Colors*, 4, 28, 73-75. Certainly this was a perception in Bessemer, too, as many of those interviewed, such as Buddy Sokol and Betty Beck, affirmed that while they were not forbidden or did not forbid their own children to date gentiles, their parents' hope was that they would marry within the faith. Sokol interview; Betty Beck Lipschitz, interview conducted by Terry Barr, January 7, 1998.

<sup>136</sup> Tom Gordon, "Last Jew laments city's loss: Demopolis follows other towns losing Jewish population," *The Birmingham News*, February 22, 1999, 1, 3A; see also Jacob Koch, "A Special Heritage: The Demopolis Jewish Community," Jerry Elijah Brown, ed., *An Alabama Humanities Reader* (Macon, 1985), 137-145.

<sup>137</sup> E. Thomas Wood, "Jews Return to Selma, Underscoring Exodus," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1997, A8.

<sup>138</sup> Walter Bryant, *The Birmingham News*, October 24, 1974.

<sup>139</sup> Lipschitz interview.

<sup>140</sup> Waggoner letter.

<sup>141</sup> Jerry Cherner audiotape.

<sup>142</sup> Lefkovits interview.

<sup>143</sup> "Levi Becker," *The Bessemer News*, January 11, 1967, 6.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> *The Bessemer Weekly*, May 18, 1901, 79.

<sup>146</sup> Jerry Cherner audiotape.

<sup>147</sup> "Frank Sachs is man of year," *The Jewish Monitor*, February 1974, 17.

<sup>148</sup> Sokol interview; Cohn interview; and Lefkovits interview.

<sup>149</sup> Sokol interview.

<sup>150</sup> Lefkovits interview.

<sup>151</sup> Albert (Buddy) Sokol telephone interview conducted by Terry Barr, June 27, 1999.

<sup>152</sup> David Singer, ed., *American Jewish Year Book 99* (New York, 1998), 174.

<sup>153</sup> Kathy Kemp, "Torme Twins: 'Mel got talent,'" *The Birmingham News*, December 24, 1998, 1B.

<sup>154</sup> Nat Wittenstein telephone interview conducted by Terry Barr, July 4, 1997.

<sup>155</sup> Alvin Barr interview.

<sup>156</sup> Sokol interview.

<sup>157</sup> Bercu letter

# Lynchburg's Swabian Jewish Entrepreneurs in War and Peace<sup>1</sup>

by

Richard A. Hawkins

**D**uring the mid-nineteenth century a wave of German Jewish immigrants swept into the United States. Articles in Eric E. Hirshler's anthology suggest that this migration wave had a number of characteristics. It was especially heavy in the period 1840 to 1848, when only about one-twentieth of German immigrants were Christians.<sup>2</sup> During the same years the Jewish population in the United States is estimated to have increased from fifteen thousand to fifty thousand.<sup>3</sup> The newcomers were mostly poor,<sup>4</sup> and, although they had had some elementary education, they lacked knowledge of the English language on arrival. Probably two-thirds still did not understand English during the 1850s. Most, however, endeavored to acculturate and integrate in their new home. Their typical occupation after arrival was that of peddler. Surprisingly, given their lack of civil rights in their 'Heimat' [homeland] and the fact that many had preserved distinctive cultural traits, including the use of Judeo-German, many appear to have remained ardent German nationalists even after attaining American citizenship.<sup>5</sup> The immigrants displayed a pattern of chain migration not only from Germany to America but also within the United States. Extended family networks provided an indispensable support network for the migrants. Rather than being provincials,<sup>6</sup> these Jews were cosmopolitan. Southern Jews with German roots went on to lead northern and national Jewry in the same fashion

*Memorial to the former synagogue, Hürben, Krumbach, Bavaria.  
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that their northern brethren migrated southward to build families, congregations, and businesses.

The view that the typical German Jewish immigrant in the 1840s started out in the United States as a peddler is supported by the business historian Elliott Ashkenazi.<sup>7</sup> This article suggests that some of the German Jewish immigrants in the 1840s were fortunate enough to skip this step on their road to success. They arrived with sufficient capital to found businesses immediately or very soon after their arrival. To document this interpretation, the experiences of two of the leading Jewish families from 1840 to 1870, the Guggenheimers and Untermyers, will be traced from Swabia to Lynchburg, Virginia, and used as a case study.

In the early 1840s, Swabian Jews were subject to the notorious 'Matrikel' [literally, register or roll] paragraph of the Bavarian

Edict of June 10, 1813. The Matrikel regime was explicitly intended to reduce the number of Jews in Bavaria. Every Jew had to be a registered member of the local Matrikel. A Matrikel number, a separate residence, and a trade that was not what the authorities considered overcrowded were required to establish a lawful residence and a family. The only way to obtain a Matrikel number was when one became vacant, for example through the death of the previous holder. These restrictions remained in effect until 1861.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Bavarian Jewry actually increased in numbers from 53,200 to 61,000 between 1816/1817 and 1848, suggesting that the Matrikel system at least partly failed. However, it did result in the mass migration of Bavarian Jews, mainly to the United States.<sup>9</sup> Thus it is no coincidence that Bavaria was one of the principal centers of the first wave of German Jewish migration. Emigration of Jews from Bavaria was exceeded only by that from Prussian Posen. Between 1847 and 1867 in Bavaria, the relatively largest emigration occurred from Swabia, which lost 1,033 Jews, one-third of the region's Jewish community.<sup>10</sup>

Salomon and Nathaniel Guggenheimer were the first members of their family to immigrate to Lynchburg in Campbell County. Lynchburg was one of only five Jewish communities in the state in the 1840s.<sup>11</sup> That the Guggenheimer brothers chose the American South is probably explained by Ashkenazi's view that in the antebellum era its agrarian economic and social structure was similar to that of southwestern Germany.<sup>12</sup> They had been born in the Judendorfes Hürben,<sup>13</sup> which was effectively a ghetto outside the town of Krumbach. This was one of a number of eastern Swabian villages to which the Jewish population of Augsburg had been exiled after the expulsion of 1438.<sup>14</sup> They were the sons of Abraham Guggenheimer, a wealthy tradesman in leather.<sup>15</sup> Abraham, who had fifteen children, sent seven sons and two daughters to the United States because the Matrikel ordinances denied them equal opportunities in Bavaria.<sup>16</sup> Exactly when the Guggenheimers immigrated to the United States is unknown.<sup>17</sup>

Abraham's oldest son, Süsskind,\* emigrated in 1843. He had married Jetta (Henrietta) Obermayer of Kriegshaber, Bavaria, and they had nine children.<sup>18</sup> The first seven were born in Hürben. The seventh child, Carlyne, was born on July 22, 1843.<sup>19</sup> Genealogist Malcolm H. Stern wrote that Süsskind and his family arrived in Natural Bridge, Virginia, in 1844.<sup>20</sup> Natural Bridge is in the same county as Gilmore's Mill. Stern's statement is confirmed by the fact that Süsskind and Jetta's last two children were born in Natural Bridge, Jacob in 1845 and Flora in 1851.<sup>21</sup> Süsskind subsequently moved to Gilmore's Mill, where he died in 1856.<sup>22</sup>

Süsskind's two younger brothers, Salomon<sup>23</sup> and Nathaniel<sup>24</sup>, probably immigrated together with him to the United States. Salomon and Nathaniel established a retail business in Lynchburg, a Virginia town of six thousand inhabitants that had been incorporated in 1786. They were not the first Jewish residents. The Jewish presence in Lynchburg can be traced back to Samuel Saul who paid local taxes in 1790. Two other Jews are recorded in Lynchburg in 1808 and 1834, respectively.<sup>25</sup>

Salomon and Nathaniel founded a dry goods store in the spring of 1844. Ashkenazi argues that, as in their homeland, the Jewish immigrants in the antebellum South performed bourgeois mercantile and capitalist functions that the dominant local group, the landowners, considered to be distasteful or were unable to perform.<sup>26</sup> Both Salomon and Nathaniel joined the local Freemasons' Lodge.<sup>27</sup> The following advertisement appeared in the *Lynchburg Virginian* during 1844:<sup>28</sup>

#### NEW DRY GOODS STORE, On the Cash Principle

The Subscribers have the pleasure to announce to the citizens of Lynchburg, and vicinity, that they have opened a new DRY GOODS STORE on Main Street . . . The selection of Goods they

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\* There are difficulties in spelling from German to English, which are compounded by the family using different spellings for names from Europe to the United States. An effort has been made here to use the most common spelling. *Ed.*

*Jewish Cemetery Hürben, Krumbach, Bavaria.*  
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keep will give satisfaction, as to style, quality and price. Selling for cash, they will be satisfied with small profits, and receiving fresh GOODS from the Northern Cities during the season, they will always keep a select assortment. — A call is respectfully solicited.

S. GUGGENHEIMER & BROTHER.

April 25

From September 1845 Salomon and Nathaniel were able to advertise that they had received a "new and splendid stock of dry goods." They were now able to offer their customers a complete supply of both staple and fancy articles including hats, boots, and shoes. "All persons in want of Good Bargains, [were] invited to give [them] a call."<sup>29</sup>

The business appears to have thrived. Salomon and Nathaniel followed their earlier advertisement two years later:<sup>30</sup>

NEW SPRING AND SUMMER GOODS

APRIL, 6TH, 1846.

THE SUBSCRIBERS would inform their friend[s] and the public generally, that they are now in receipt of their stock of SPRING AND SUMMER GOODS, composing the latest style of Ladies' Dress Goods, and Gentlemen's Wear, Bonnets: Fur, Silk and Palm Hats: Boots & Shoes, and almost every article usually found in a Dry Goods Store. This store has been selected with great care, and the Subscribers flatter themselves will compare in point of cheapness, style and durability, with any other stock in the market. [*sic*] – They deem it unnecessary to follow the custom of giving an extended list of the many articles they offer – but would say to all in want of Goods, their assortment is nearly complete, and will be sold as low as the same Goods can be bought at any house in this place. The subscribers solicit a call from purchasers, feeling assured they will find it to their interest to give their stock an examination before purchasing elsewhere.

S. GUGGENHEIMER & BROTHER

In September 1846 Salomon and Nathaniel informed potential customers that the store would soon have an entire stock of fall and winter goods including woolens, domestics, hats, caps, boots, and shoes.<sup>31</sup> The following March they announced, in what amounted to seasonal campaign advertising, that they had just received a “handsome” stock of spring and summer goods from the North.<sup>32</sup>

The store was now successful enough so that Salomon could return to Hürben to marry Therese Landauer on July 28.<sup>33</sup> This appears to have been an unusual event. There was only one other known case of a Jewish emigrant returning to Hürben for the purpose of marriage during the period of the Matrikel, and, as will be shown below, he was Salomon's brother. Therese had been born on April 10, 1827,<sup>34</sup> the daughter of ironmonger Raphael Israel Landauer and Johanna Tolz Landauer. Salomon needed the permission of the Bavarian state to marry Therese. Usually this took months, but Salomon was able to obtain permission almost immediately<sup>35</sup> because Carl Obermayer,<sup>36</sup> the United States Consul in Augsburg, certified on June 28, 1847, that Salomon had been granted United States citizenship on April 23, 1846.<sup>37</sup>

Therese's brother-in-law, Bernhard Levinger, also helped to get the release. Therese's dowry was 2,100 Bavarian gulden, which was the equivalent of about \$860.<sup>38</sup> After their marriage Salomon and Therese settled in Lynchburg. On July 20, 1848, Therese gave birth to a son whom they named Randolph.<sup>39</sup> Therese and Salomon probably lived in a house in which other family members, such as Salomon's brother Nathaniel, were resident. Isidor Untermeyer, a cousin of the Guggenheimer brothers, also may have lived there, but it is not clear whether this was before or after Salomon's death. Such sharing of residences reflected extended family ties and a means of saving money when starting out.

When Salomon Guggenheimer died on October 17, 1848, his body was escorted by a group of Masons in a packet boat to Richmond where he was buried in the Hebrew Cemetery.<sup>40</sup> Both Salomon and Therese were observant Jews. Since there was no synagogue in Lynchburg, they were members of Congregation Beth Ahabah in Richmond, to which the cemetery belonged. Salomon left a will. In his business partnership with his brother Nathaniel, *S. Guggenheimer & Brother*, he had \$1,200 more invested than the latter. But he was willing to share with him as an equal because of expenses incurred in traveling, presumably to Bavaria to marry Therese. He wanted his share of the family business bequeathed to Therese and Randolph. Salomon also noted Therese had 11,000 gulden (the equivalent of about \$4,500) in simple, which he desired to remain her property, and also \$400 invested in the dry goods store which he wanted her to have.<sup>41</sup> Therese probably brought a substantial sum of money with her to America in addition to her dowry. Nathaniel was to hold Randolph's share. The dry goods store was renamed *N. Guggenheimer & Company*, of which the partners were Nathaniel, Therese, and Samuel Guggenheimer. Samuel was Nathaniel's younger brother who had immigrated to the United States in August 1846.<sup>42</sup>

On February 21, 1850, Salomon's estate was settled. *S. Guggenheimer & Brother* was valued at \$8,800 of which Therese was due \$400 in accordance with Salomon's will. The remaining \$8,400

was divided so that Nathaniel received \$4,200, and Therese and Randolph received \$2,100 each. Nathaniel was to hold Randolph's share because he had been appointed Randolph's guardian on February 4 with Isidor as security. Guggenheimer & Company was dissolved and a new partnership, Guggenheimer & Untermyer, was formed. The new partners were Nathaniel and Isidor. Nathaniel contributed \$4,200 as capitol, Isidor put in \$3,600, and he also gained control by marriage of Therese's legacy of \$2,100 from Salomon, making a total capital of \$9,900. The \$2,100 belonging to Randolph also remained in the business to be a debt due to him with interest.<sup>43</sup>

Nathaniel's new partner, Isidor Untermyer, was also a Swabian Jew. He had been born on May 8, 1811,<sup>44</sup> in the village of Kriegshaber. It was another of the villages to which the Jews of Augsburg had been exiled in the fifteenth century. The Kriegshaber rabbi from 1819, Aaron Joseph Guggenheimer, was a member of the Guggenheimer extended family.<sup>45</sup> Isidor was the son of Isaak Untermyer, who was a master butcher, and Jette Guggenheimer, an older sister of Abraham Guggenheimer.<sup>46</sup> Isidor's parents had died in 1839, and he had immigrated to the United States in 1844.<sup>47</sup>

Isidor's sister Adelheid<sup>48</sup> probably emigrated with her brother.<sup>49</sup> She remained in New York City where she married Nathan Mendelsohn, a Prussian-born Jewish merchant. By the 1860s Mendelsohn was the proprietor of a flour store.<sup>50</sup> Ashkenazi argues that it was not uncommon for Jewish families to be split between New York City and the South in the antebellum period, usually for business purposes,<sup>51</sup> although this does not seem to be the case for Isidor and Adelheid.

On February 24, 1850, the Rev. Maximilian Josef Michelbacher married Isidor to Therese at his synagogue in Richmond.<sup>52</sup> Michelbacher was the first minister of Beth Ahabah and, like Isidor and the Guggenheimer brothers, he was a Freemason. A fellow Swabian, he had been born in Oettingen, a Bavarian village a few miles to the northeast of Hürben, in 1810.<sup>53</sup> Given the existence of another branch of the Untermyer family in neighboring Steinhart, it is possible that Isidor and the minister were already

acquaintances. Isidor appears to have been a member of Congregation Beth Ahabah since at least October 1848.<sup>54</sup> His name also appears on the list of members certified by Michelbacher on March 10, 1851.<sup>55</sup>

Although by 1859 quite a number of Jews were reported to be residing in Lynchburg, indeed in the opinion of *The Occident*<sup>56</sup> sufficient to form a congregation, the city's first synagogue was not opened until 1897. However, a synagogue is not required for Jewish religious services, and services may have begun in fall 1852, when enough Jews had come to Lynchburg to form a minyan for the High Holy Days. Isidor is believed to have acted as a spiritual leader.<sup>57</sup> He was reputed to have "the character of being a correct, upright man."<sup>58</sup>

Isidor and Therese were to have at least seven children.<sup>59</sup> It is not clear what education if any the Untermeyer children received in Lynchburg. Samuel Untermeyer later claimed that, up to his bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen, he was destined to be a rabbi.<sup>60</sup> If this is true, he may have attended Michelbacher's private school.<sup>61</sup>

Although Nathaniel had been in Lynchburg longer than Isidor, the 1850 Census shows that the latter rather than the former replaced Salomon as head of a household. This was composed of Isidor, Therese, Randolph, Isidor and Therese's daughter, Iva, twelve year old M. Guggenheimer (possibly Meier, the eldest son of Nathaniel's brother Marx), Nathaniel Guggenheimer, Joachim and Henry (Heinrich) Guggenheimer, the younger sons of Nathaniel's brother Marx,<sup>62</sup> salesman William Goode, peddler Josef Bacharach<sup>63</sup>, who was the son of Isidor's sister, Vögele<sup>64</sup>, and Jacob Myers, also a peddler.<sup>65</sup> The peddlers probably sold Nathaniel and Isidor's merchandise in the countryside surrounding Lynchburg. Isidor also owned three female slaves.<sup>66</sup> It has been estimated that one-fourth of all Jews in the antebellum South had enough capital to own slaves, so Isidor is not untypical.<sup>67</sup> The spiritual leader of the Untermeyers and Guggenheimers, the Rev. Michelbacher, preached that slavery was ordained by God.<sup>68</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century Lynchburg was a prosperous community that received full urban status on August 27, 1852. The same year saw the Virginia and Tennessee railroad arrive. The

city's principal product was tobacco, and, in 1854, when the new South Side railroad to Richmond was connected to the city's first railroad, there were thirty-six tobacco factories. Another railroad, the Orange and Alexandria, was completed during the second half of the 1850s, connecting Lynchburg with northern Virginia. The James River and Kanawha canal, completed in 1840, also connected Lynchburg with Richmond. The population was expanding rapidly. For example, between 1848 and 1854, it increased from seventy-seven hundred to fourteen thousand inhabitants.<sup>69</sup>

In fall 1851 another Guggenheimer brother, Maxmillian, arrived in Lynchburg.<sup>70</sup> "Honest" Max Guggenheimer Sr. established a clothing store at 139 Main Street.<sup>71</sup> By 1860 he was married to fellow Bavarian, Fannie.<sup>72</sup> The Guggenheimer brothers' sister Karoline also joined them in Lynchburg sometime in the 1850s.<sup>73</sup> Another Guggenheimer brother, Simon, immigrated to the United States during the early 1850s and established a business, in Jackson, Tennessee.<sup>74</sup> Apparently Simon later moved to Richmond.<sup>75</sup>

On February 24, 1853, the partnership between Nathaniel and Isidor was dissolved. Ashkenazi argues that changing partnerships was common business practice in this period. Partnerships were often formed for specific, short-term purposes. The cash on hand, bad debts, and money due to creditors were divided equally. Isidor received about 40 percent of the collectable debts while Nathaniel received 60 percent. The two thousand dollars due at that time to Randolph was also divided equally between the partners. Isidor took responsibility for the four hundred dollars due Therese under the terms of Salomon's will and for five hundred dollars due Joseph and Myer Bacharach.<sup>76</sup> The dry goods store was renamed N. Guggenheimer & Company.<sup>77</sup>

In 1853 Nathaniel returned to Hürben to marry his cousin Cilli Guggenheimer on August 3.<sup>78</sup> Like Salomon, he had to obtain the permission of the Bavarian government and to get Carl Obermayer to certify his American citizenship to expedite matters.<sup>79</sup> Cilli's dowry was only 1,500 gulden (the equivalent of approximately \$615), about a third less than Therese's dowry.<sup>80</sup> The newly

*Former Kriegshaber Synagogue, Augsburg  
(Copyright © Richard Hawkins, 1999.)*

married couple was to establish their own household in Lynchburg. They had three daughters and two sons.<sup>81</sup> In 1860 Nathaniel's personal estate was valued at thirty thousand dollars which means that he was one of the wealthier men in Lynchburg, itself one of the wealthiest cities in the United States.<sup>82</sup> Nathaniel also owned three female slaves.<sup>83</sup> In June 1865 he dissolved his company and formed a partnership with Max Guggenheimer, Jr., Guggenheimer & Company, to revive the clothing store at 144 Main Street.<sup>84</sup> He died on January 16, 1866.<sup>85</sup> The business later became Guggenheimer's Department Store.

Isidor established his own business independent of the Guggenheimer brothers. In the 1860 Census he is described as a clothier with a personal estate of eight thousand dollars. This was less than one-third of the value of Nathaniel's personal estate. In addition to Ellen, Isaac, Samuel, and Morris, three salesmen resided in the clothing store, Marx<sup>86</sup> and George Myers from Wurttemberg and J. Diffinler from Bavaria. George Myers also

worked as Isidor's bookkeeper.<sup>87</sup> Isidor is listed in the 1860 Census as the owner of four female slaves.<sup>88</sup>

Randolph Guggenheimer, who would have been twelve years old, was not resident in the household. He later recalled that he had gone to New York City in 1859 as a poor boy, lived on Allen Street, and attended school on Chrystie Street.<sup>89</sup> Randolph's step-aunt, Adelheid Mendelsohn, lived on Allen Street on the Lower East Side.<sup>90</sup> His mother had sent him to New York to get an education not available to him in Lynchburg. It may be significant that the College of the City of New York, where he was to study law, has not charged tuition fees since it was established in 1847.<sup>91</sup> Hasia Diner has argued that education was a very low priority for most German Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth century.<sup>92</sup> If she is correct, then Therese Untermeyer's determination and success in seeing that all of her boys were educated to university level was extremely unusual.

In July 1861 the Untermeyers took in Max Siesfeld, a relative on sick leave from the Confederate Army. Siesfeld was the twenty-one year old nephew of Therese.<sup>93</sup> Siesfeld had enlisted in New Orleans in Company D of the 5th Regiment of the Louisiana Infantry as a private on May 10, 1861. On July 1 he was granted sick leave and went to Lynchburg. In August he was listed as absent without leave, his furlough having expired. He was discharged on August 10, 1861.<sup>94</sup> The following April he purchased a boardinghouse on Main Street, Lynchburg, from William W. Mosby for seven thousand dollars.<sup>95</sup> On January 1, 1863, Siesfeld transferred the property to Therese.<sup>96</sup> The boardinghouse was one of the first institutions of Jewish community life even before the congregation or cemetery. Unfortunately it is not known whether Therese ran the boardinghouse with a kosher kitchen. The deed states the property was transferred "in consideration of one dollar, and particularly of the natural love and affection which the said Max Siesfeld [bears] to the said Theresa Untermeyer his aunt. . . ."<sup>97</sup> However another interpretation is that he was assisting Therese, who was purchasing property through her nephew. In September 1863 Siesfeld purchased a commercial property on Main Street in Jonesborough,<sup>98</sup> Tennessee, from Max

L. Mayer for thirty thousand dollars.<sup>99</sup> It also may be no coincidence that Salomon's niece, Ellen Cone, lived in Jonesborough. Her husband Herman owned an adjacent property.<sup>100</sup> On January 12, Siesfeld sold this property to Isidor on behalf of Therese "for and in consideration of the natural love and affection which he entertains for his Aunt the said Theresa Untermeyer."<sup>101</sup> The deed states that Isidor "shall hold the said property its rents issues profits for the sole separate and exclusive use and benefit of the said Theresa Untermeyer and not to be liable for the contract debts or liabilities of her said husband. . . ." <sup>102</sup> Siesfeld's relationship with the Untermyers must have been very close. On January 15, 1868, he was married by the Rev. Michelbacher in Therese's house in Lynchburg to her daughter Ellen (Helen).<sup>103</sup>

If Therese were engaging in business on her own account with the assistance of her nephew, this would be very unusual. Her husband, Isidor, was still alive and also engaged in business. Suzanne Lebsock's study of women in a similar Virginia community, Petersburg, found that only a small minority of businesses were owned by women in this period, and most were on a much smaller scale than those owned by men. None of the women Lebsock writes about appear to have engaged in business separate from their husbands.<sup>104</sup>

By fall 1859 Isidor was the proprietor of a clothing store at 128 Main Street. In an advertisement in the *Lynchburg Virginian* he drew attention to his role as a clothing manufacturer:<sup>105</sup>

I would call particular attention to the fact that at least one-half of my extensive stock of Clothing is manufactured in this city [i.e. Lynchburg], under my supervision, thereby saving to my customers the Northern manufacturers profit, besides selling to them the best made Clothing to be had any where. Please bear in mind that I am never out of an assortment, even in the decline of a season, as I am continually replenishing my stock by my own manufacture . . . My stock of Youth's [*sic*] and Boy's Clothing [*sic*] is extensive, comprising every style to be desired, and mostly all of my own make.

Later in 1859 Isidor placed another advertisement aimed at the visitors to the Lynchburg Agricultural Fair and again sought to attract southern patriots:<sup>106</sup>

At least half of my extensive stock is manufactured in this city, it is unnecessary to tell the public, that by calling upon me, they will not only save Northern manufacturers profit, but get better made Clothing than can be had elsewhere.

By the end of the year Isidor was trading as the Lynchburg Clothing Manufactory.<sup>107</sup>

During the first three months of 1860, Isidor continued to advertise, using the growing tension between the North and the South as a selling point:<sup>108</sup>

It is a fact not generally known, that I established my CLOTHING FACTORY in this City twelve years ago, and that I have from that time continued to cut and make a very large proportion of my stock in Lynchburg, as hundreds of my customers will testify to, and having increased my forces from time to time, am now better prepared to furnish my own made clothing, and will guarantee TO SELL THEM AS LOW as they can be bought of Northern houses, and equal if not superior in style, material, and durability.

All those who wish to build up Southern manufactories patronize the old established houses first, and let them reap the reward they so justly merit, for past, present, and future exertions, on behalf of home manufacture.

This is no humbug, as I can prove by from 35 to 50 hands, now in my employ.

*∅ Patronize your Manufactories at home when you can do so without additional cost.*

From April 1860 until late fall Isidor placed shorter, similar advertisements.<sup>109</sup> In the summer he promoted “cassimere” clothing at “greatly reduced prices.”<sup>110</sup>

In 1861, after the beginning of the Civil War and the secession of Virginia from the Union, he stopped advertising his business as the Lynchburg Clothing Manufactory, perhaps

because he could no longer obtain supplies of cloth from the North as a result of the war. However, he continued to advertise as I. Untermeyer.<sup>111</sup> Between August 1862 and mid-1863, he placed the following advertisement:<sup>112</sup>

Just Received from Wilmington and Charleston  
 25 Gross the New Confederate Staff Buttons,  
 50 " New Style Infantry Buttons,  
 50 " Eagle Buttons,  
 400 Spools Gold Lace,  
 100 Spools Black Flax Thread,  
 100 great gross Pantaloon Buttons

All these goods were bought at the sale  
 of cargoes lately run the blockade.

Together with a large assortment of other  
 goods Military, to which I call the particular  
 attention of the public and dealers.

This was the last advertisement Isidor placed in the *Lynchburg Virginian* for his clothing business. But it should be noted that as the war progressed to its end, the newspaper stopped taking business advertising.

In April or May 1862, Isidor entered an equal partnership with Samuel W. Shelton to manufacture tobacco in a speculative venture.<sup>113</sup> Shelton was a forty-eight year old Virginia tobacco-nist<sup>114</sup> who had purchased considerable amounts of clothing from Isidor's store for many years.<sup>115</sup> Shelton had once been in the dry goods business himself. In the late 1840s he had been a partner in a boot, shoe, and hat store with J. A. Hatcher.<sup>116</sup> Shelton's latest partnership, a tobacco business, Shelton & Clay, had recently ceased trading. It had employed thirty slaves of whom he owned five. Shelton appears to have been quite wealthy. In 1860 his personal estate amounted to \$16,283 and his real estate was worth \$3,000.<sup>117</sup> It is not clear why he went into partnership with Isidor.

In June 1862 Shelton & Untermeyer purchased from Shelton & Clay factory fixtures for \$2,555.72. In the same month they purchased two African American slaves at an auction for \$1,020. In

August 1862 they purchased a lot for \$3,500 in Lynchburg from Harry J. Chandler on the corner of West and Fifth streets on which was located a tobacco factory. Unfortunately the factory had been requisitioned by the Confederate government and was being used as a hospital. As a result they rented another factory from Chandler in which to conduct their business. They produced tobacco in 1862 and 1863. Production ceased in November 1863, and the remaining tobacco was stored with Isidor.<sup>118</sup> In fact the whole tobacco manufacturing industry in Lynchburg ceased production for two years.<sup>119</sup> Isidor may have fallen back on what was left of his clothing store business. Shelton went to spend the winter south of Richmond. He became ill and found himself behind federal lines. He remained there until August 1864, when he was allowed through the lines by flag of truce and returned home. In the meantime the partnership had made a profit of \$99,315.42 of which \$200 came from rent collected by Isidor in February 1865 from the Confederate government for the use of Shelton & Untermeyer's West Street and Fifth Street factory as a hospital.<sup>120</sup>

Dianne Ashton has observed that the political views of Jews in this period tended to reflect those of the region in which they lived.<sup>121</sup> The Untermeyer family appears to have adhered to this pattern. In later life Samuel Untermeyer held banquets every June to celebrate his birthday at which he told stories about his childhood in Lynchburg.<sup>122</sup> Apparently his earliest recollection was as a boy of seven, running up and down in front of his home in Lynchburg, shouting "Hurrah for Jeff Davis" at the Union army which was entering the city. He also claimed that his father, Isidor Untermeyer, had developed tobacco lands in Virginia, eventually becoming the owner of twelve hundred slaves. In some versions of this story Isidor served as an officer in the Confederate Army. At the outbreak of the war he entered the Confederate Army and served throughout the war as a lieutenant. Meantime his plantation was despoiled, and he lost most of his property. Isidor had also invested heavily in Confederate bonds, a sign of his faith in the cause of the South. According to family legend he collapsed and died when he heard that General Robert E. Lee had surrendered. Samuel's mother guessed the future more accurately and

converted her personal property into gold. She went to New York City with ten thousand dollars at the end of the Civil War and opened a boardinghouse.<sup>123</sup>

At Samuel's banquets his sister, Helen Siesfeld, used to sit by his side. She would recollect one particularly memorable day during the Civil War. She was thirteen or fourteen and had beautiful black corkscrew curls. When she told this story, she always preened herself. She walked through the main street of Lynchburg and stopped in front of a shop to admire a window full of epaulettes. While there, a tall man came behind her, patted her black curls, and asked her "Are you a little Rebel?" She quickly replied "I would rather be a little Rebel than a debbil!" She looked around and saw that the man who had addressed her was not Moses descending from Mount Sinai with tablets of stone, but none other than General Robert E. Lee.<sup>124</sup> Helen also recalled that her family used to purchase forty pounds of corned beef and supply this along with very large cakes to a Confederate camp near Lynchburg. Although Helen recalled that this food was a gift,<sup>125</sup> it may have been a memory of another of Isidor's business activities.

As has been shown, most of Samuel's stories about his father were untrue. Indeed given both the distaste of Max Siesfeld for military life, and, as will be shown, of Isidor's nephew Myer Bacharach as well, it could be argued that, notwithstanding Isidor's trade advertisements, Samuel and Helen's recollections of their family's degree of support for the Confederacy may have been exaggerated. However, both of them strongly identified with the image of southern gentlefolk, and, because they repeated these stories so often, they may well have forgotten the reality.<sup>126</sup> As Clement Eaton has observed, after the Civil War the antebellum romantic stereotype of the Old South was reinforced by the psychological need of compensation by southerners for bitter defeat and poverty.<sup>127</sup> In reality few southerners had had aristocratic lifestyles like, for example, Virginia planter John Randolph of Roanoke, after whom Randolph Guggenheimer was apparently named. Abraham J. Peck has also argued that southern Jewish families in the period before 1830 pursued the development of an

aristocratic myth in the hope that as “southern gentlemen” they would gain social acceptance.<sup>128</sup>

However, there is no doubt that during the Civil War, Isidor’s relatives, the Guggenheimers, were enthusiastic supporters of the Confederacy.<sup>129</sup> Nathaniel’s cousin, Max Guggenheimer Jr.,<sup>130</sup> and nephew, Henry Guggenheimer, were among the original members of the Lynchburg Home Guard when it was organized on November 8, 1859.<sup>131</sup> Nathaniel supplied undressed uniforms to the Confederate Army.<sup>132</sup> In 1860 he was one of the founders of the “Wise Troop,” but his already failing health prevented him from going into the field when that command was ordered there. Later he became commanding officer of a cavalry company for the home defense of Lynchburg. Nathaniel also helped care for sick and wounded Confederate soldiers in his home.<sup>133</sup> Lynchburg seems to have been free of the anti-Semitism that became commonplace in both the North and the South during the Civil War.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, on March 28, 1866, the new *Lynchburg Daily News* published an editorial entitled “The Jew,” which criticized William Shakespeare for his anti-Semitic “Merchant of Venice” and instead provided a sympathetic sketch of the Jewish character.<sup>135</sup>

As illustrated above, in later life Samuel Untermeyer claimed that his father was a Confederate army officer, but this was false. However, Isidor does appear in the Confederate Army records, because in 1863 he interceded on behalf of his nephew, Myer (Maier) Bacharach, the brother of Josef,<sup>136</sup> who had been conscripted into the “Wise Troop” in January of that year. Myer had been born in Illertissen, a small village a few miles northwest of Hürben, on August 3, 1826, and had emigrated in 1848. By 1852 he was living in Lynchburg.<sup>137</sup> In the 1860 Census he was listed as a tailor with a personal wealth of only two hundred dollars.<sup>138</sup> On January 16, Isidor is reported to have pleaded “in tones loud, but not sonorous, for the discharge of one Bachrack [*sic*] a conscript to whom military duty is more fearful than the rack.”<sup>139</sup> Isidor also submitted a written statement in which he testified that Myer

has been living with me in Lynchburg 10 years & that he always was of a feeble constitution or in sickly condition. In consideration of this, I humbly solicit an examination to proof [*sic*] & establish this facts [*sic*] & his disability to perform military duty. The conscript is a Taylor [*sic*] by trade, which he followed in my house and may be made useful in that capacity in the Government Tailoring [*sic*] Department.<sup>140</sup>

Although the 1860 Census suggests that Myer did not actually live with Isidor,<sup>141</sup> Isidor's intervention was successful. Myer was issued a Certificate of Disability for Discharge on February 28. It said Myer had been unfit for duty for forty-five days during the last two months and that he had a double renal hernia and rheumatoid arthritis. Myer collected \$20.53 back pay on March 4 in Richmond.<sup>142</sup> Myer clearly was in poor health, and he died the following May. Isidor paid \$50 for a coffin.<sup>143</sup> Ironically given Myer's distaste for military life, he was buried in the fifth row of the Soldier's Section of the Hebrew Cemetery in Richmond.<sup>144</sup>

Business conditions in postbellum Lynchburg were very bad, particularly for shopkeepers like Isidor. The city had one of the highest proportions of African American residents in the South. The freedmen had very little disposable income, and the planters no longer purchased clothes on their behalf from merchants. Furthermore the tobacco industry did not revive until 1866, since virtually no tobacco had been planted in 1865.<sup>145</sup>

When Isidor died on March 24, 1866,<sup>146</sup> a committee of Freemasons escorted his body to Richmond where he was buried in the Hebrew Cemetery alongside Salomon.<sup>147</sup> On June 4, 1866, with the approval of the Lynchburg court, Randolph, who was over fourteen, chose Therese to be his guardian together with Max Siesfeld as security.<sup>148</sup> Siesfeld also took over Isidor's clothing store.<sup>149</sup>

At the time of his death, Isidor's businesses were heavily in debt. The total estate was valued at \$543 (including \$6,000 in Confederate money valued at \$10). Debts against the estate amounted to \$22,274.25.<sup>150</sup> Among the creditors were merchants Isaac, Simon, and Herman Bernheimer trading as Bernheimer Brothers; Solomon, Mayer, and Daniel Gans and Lazarus L. Leberman

trading as Gans Leberman & Company; Arnold Nusbaum & Nerdlinger and Nathan Blum.<sup>151</sup> These debts were probably related to the clothing store rather than the tobacco factory. Bernheimer Brothers, for example, were wholesale clothiers.<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately debts due to Isidor incurred before the end of the Civil War were impossible to collect because of the acts passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, known as the Stay Laws of 1864, 1865, and 1866. These acts suspended the collection of debts for a limited period, the last until January 1, 1868.<sup>153</sup>

On March 12, 1867, Samuel H. Shelton and Max Siesfeld, through their partnership, S. W. Shelton & Company, agreed to take out a loan not exceeding twelve thousand dollars on behalf of Therese with Moses, Dohan, Carroll & Company of New York City. It seems probable that this was done to meet debts incurred by Isidor to his northern creditors because Therese, as a woman, could not borrow the money on her own account. As surety for the loan, she was required to deed to Moses, Dohan, Carroll Company's trustees, Charles L. Mosby and Edward S. Brown, the two properties which she owned in her own right: the boardinghouse on Main Street, Lynchburg, and the property on Main Street, Jonesborough, Tennessee.<sup>154</sup> Moses, Dohan, Carroll & Company advanced the money contemplated to S. W. Shelton & Company, and Therese repaid forty-eight hundred dollars on July 18, 1868. Moses, Dohan, Carroll & Company agreed to accept this in full payment and release the deed.<sup>155</sup> Exactly how Therese raised such a large sum of money is a mystery although she had possessed the equivalent of about forty-five hundred dollars in 1848. Perhaps she called in some debts on her own account rather than her late husband's account.

On July 12, 1867, Therese began a lawsuit in her role as administratrix for Randolph against Shelton, Max Siesfeld, Isidor's creditors, and five children.<sup>156</sup> The lawsuit involved Isidor's only major asset, his interest in Shelton & Untermyer, and was on behalf of Randolph, because Isidor had died indebted on his guardianship account.<sup>157</sup> Nathaniel's widow, Cilli, had paid twelve hundred dollars to Isidor in February 1866 in full settlement of her late husband's guardianship account for Randolph.<sup>158</sup>

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*Nathaniel Guggenheimer*

*(Courtesy The News & Advance of Lynchburg, Virginia.)*

Max Guggenheimer Jr., who had become proprietor of Nathaniel's store after his death,<sup>159</sup> later testified that he had paid the money to Isidor on behalf of Cilli but he did not know what Isidor had done with it.<sup>160</sup>

After the Civil War, S. W. Shelton & Company occupied and used the West Street and Fifth Street factory. In August 1868 United States Revenue officers seized and closed the factory. However, Shelton continued to individually occupy the factory.<sup>161</sup> The lot and factory were put up for sale in March 1870 and sold to John Robin McDaniel and S. W. Shelton for twelve hundred dollars in October 1871.<sup>162</sup>

Randolph returned to Lynchburg in 1867 and became the proprietor of Randolph Guggenheimer's Dry Goods Emporium on the ground floor of Therese's boardinghouse at 167 Main Street. Advertisements from the Lynchburg press suggest

that he ran the store from at least September 1867 to January 1868.<sup>163</sup>

In the summer of 1868, Therese apparently decided to leave Lynchburg and relocate to New York City. On August 29 she leased her boardinghouse at 167 Main Street, apart from the store-room occupied by Randolph, to Ino H. Bailey and Frank Spenser for one year for an annual rent of five hundred dollars.<sup>164</sup> The following year she sold her boardinghouse in Lynchburg to her relative Adolph Levinger for nine thousand dollars.<sup>165</sup> Siesfeld moved with Therese to New York City and helped her settle into her new residence.<sup>166</sup>

The *Untermeyer v. Shelton* Case was not settled until January 1885, when the court determined that Randolph was owed \$1,000 which with interest to September 1, 1884, amounted to \$2,060. It also determined that Therese's administration account on March 15, 1869, had amounted to \$237.57, which had included payment of taxes, funeral expenses, and charges of administration, which with interest amounted to \$462.92. However, only \$1,735.24 had been raised from Isidor's share in Shelton & Untermeyer. Randolph received only \$1,253.06 after Therese had been paid in full, and the unpaid costs of the suit had been met.<sup>167</sup>

This article shows that two of the leading Jewish families in Lynchburg were untypical of the German Jewish immigrants who came to the American South in the 1840s. Both the Guggenheimer brothers and Isidor Untermeyer appear to have arrived in the United States with enough capital to found a business without the need to become peddlers. It is significant that there is no tradition in either the Guggenheimer or Untermeyer families of the Guggenheimer brothers or Isidor Untermeyer starting out as peddlers. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the Guggenheimers of Hürben were quite wealthy. For example, Abraham Guggenheimer and his wife owned a pet dog, a luxury in the early nineteenth century. The Guggenheimers had a middle-class German lifestyle at odds with their rural surroundings. It is not clear that by immigrating to the United States the Guggenheimer brothers and Isidor Untermeyer improved their life chances. For example, their life expectancy declined significantly.

Life in Lynchburg was clearly less healthy than in Hürben and Kriegshaber. Indeed sanitation in southern cities left much to be desired.<sup>168</sup> Neither the Guggenheimers nor Isidor Untermyer appear to have sought entry to the professions on their own behalf or for their children. This raises the interesting question why these Swabian Jewish families provided the capital to their children and kinsfolk who immigrated to the United States. Perhaps Askhenazi's argument that the Matrikel system was not a strong push factor does not apply in this case.<sup>169</sup> Possibly the primary motive of these immigrants was not upward mobility but a desire to live in freedom.

However, not everything about the experience of the Guggenheimer brothers and Isidor Untermyer was atypical. They were part of a business network centered on the children and kinsfolk of Abraham Guggenheimer. This network stretched from Virginia to Tennessee, Louisiana, and New York. It corresponded to the antebellum Jewish business networks described by Ashkenazi<sup>170</sup> and resembled similar Jewish business networks in Middle Europe. The Guggenheimers and Untermyers were part of a southwest German Jewish business network.<sup>171</sup> Rudolf Glanz has observed that after the German Jewish immigrants had gained a foothold, they made arrangements for brothers and sisters to join them. Neighbors and relatives from other villages were encouraged to emigrate as well. This is a reflection of what historians of immigration call chain migrations. Normally the family and community allegiance of German Jewish immigrants remained strong. In this respect the Guggenheimer/Untermyer family experience was also normative.<sup>172</sup>

None of the first generation of Guggenheimers and Untermyers achieved significant upward mobility. However, their children did. Salomon's son Randolph became a wealthy New York City lawyer, philanthropist, Tammany Hall politician, president of the New York City Council, and acting mayor. Randolph founded the Guggenheimer & Untermyer law firm in 1882 that became one of the most prestigious in the United States. It was renamed Guggenheimer, Untermyer & Marshall after Louis Marshall became a member in 1894. As well as specializing in

commercial law, the firm was involved in the defense of Jewish rights, the Leo Frank Case being a good example. All of Isidor's sons joined the firm as did many relatives, Samuel Untermeyer being the most successful. As well as becoming one of the wealthiest lawyers in the country, he became a prominent advocate of economic and social reform. However, perhaps his greatest achievement was leadership of an anti-Nazi trade boycott organization in the 1930s. As early as 1934, Untermeyer correctly foresaw Hitler's intention to exterminate Germany's Jews. Nathaniel's children stayed in Lynchburg, and his son Charles was one of the founders of Lynchburg's prominent Guggenheimer's Department Store.<sup>173</sup>

Much has been made of southern linkages among Jewish families, something virtually stereotyped in Alfred Uhry's play, *Last Night at Ballyhoo*.<sup>174</sup> This article has provided a case study of this family connection mechanism of marriage, business associations, and travel, and extended it back to its European roots. Yet it has also illustrated how this was as much a national as a regional phenomenon.<sup>175</sup> Consequently for these Jewish families, the Civil War, although it could be celebrated in Lost Cause mythology,<sup>176</sup> did not stir bitter personal animosities and only interrupted trans-sectional interaction. It is arguable that the war and Reconstruction periods actually accelerated the dynamic. Jews continued trading and visiting whenever they could, and, in the postbellum era, many resettled across the Mason-Dixon line. As a result of these forces, from the mid to the late nineteenth century, an acculturating Jewish community prospered in unprecedented terms and leadership transcended regional divides.

## Appendix 1

### The Guggenheimer Family Tree

The children of Simon Guggenheimer were Jette, Joachim, Joseph, Fegela, and Abraham. They and some of their descendants are shown below. The descendants of Jette Guggenheimer and Isaak Untermayer are shown in Appendix 2.

Simon Guggenheimer (1743–1823)

- 1 Jette (1771–1839) m. Isaak Untermayer
  - 1.1 Max
  - 1.2 Vögele
  - 1.3 Adelheid
  - 1.4 Isidor
- 2 Joachim
  - 2.1 Cilli (1834–1873) m. Nathaniel Guggenheimer (1817–1866)
  - 2.2 Sara (Dreifuss)
  - 2.3 Karl
  - 2.4 Emilie
  - 2.5 Ignatz
  - 2.6 Elias
  - 2.7 Max (Jr.) (1842–1877)
  - 2.8 Simon
- 3 Joseph (1780–1852)
- 4 Fegela
- 5 Abraham (1779–1865) m. Dolze Bacharach (1785–1855)
  - 5.1 Helene m. Heymann
  - 5.2 Süsskind (1806–1856) m. Henrietta Obermayer
    - 5.2.1 Fred
    - 5.2.2 Maurice
    - 5.2.3 Helen (Ellen) (1838–1902) m. Hermann Kahn  
(Cone) (1828–1897)
    - 5.2.4 Henry

- 5.2.5 Isaac
- 5.2.6 Carlyne
- 5.2.7 Jacob
- 5.2.8 Flora
- 5.3 Marx
- 5.4 Hirschle
- 5.5 Seligmann
- 5.6 Vögele
- 5.7 Salomon (1814–1848) m. Therese Landauer (1827–1895)
  - 5.7.1 Randolph (1848–1907)
- 5.8 Nathaniel (1817–1866) m. Cilli Guggenheimer (1834–1873)
  - 5.8.1 Hortense
  - 5.8.2 Delia A.
  - 5.8.3 Pauline
  - 5.8.4 Sidney N.
  - 5.8.5 Charles Max (1860–1928)
- 5.9 Joachim
- 5.10 Mendel (Maxmillian Sr.)
- 5.11 Simon
- 5.12 Joseph
- 5.13 Samuel
- 5.14 Moses
- 5.15 Karoline

Sources:

Malcolm H. Stern, *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies: 1654–1988* (3rd ed.; Baltimore, 1991)

Herbert Auer, Krumbach, Bavaria, to Richard Hawkins, January 16, 1999.

## Appendix 2

### The Untermayer Family Tree

- 1 Jette Guggenheimer (1771–1839) m. Isaak Untermayer
  - 1.1 Max
  - 1.2 Vögele m. Bacharach
    - 1.2.1 Nathan
    - 1.2.2 Klara
    - 1.2.3 Myer
    - 1.2.4 Joseph
  - 1.3 Adelheid (c. 1816/1818–1876) m. Nathan Mendelsohn  
(1801–1864)
    - 1.3.1 Sophia m. Benedict Lowenstein
      - 1.3.1.1 Adelaide
      - 1.3.1.2 Leon
      - 1.3.1.3 Sarah (Sadie) m. Maurice Untermayer
      - 1.3.1.4 Florence (1873–1916) m. Louis Marshall  
(1856–1929)
      - 1.3.1.5 Elsie
      - 1.3.1.6 Beatrice (1881–1968) m. Judah Leon Mag-  
nes (1877–1948)
    - 1.3.2 Isaac
  - 1.4 Isidor Untermayer (1811–1866) m. Therese Landauer Guggenheimer (1827–1895)
    - 1.4.1 Iva
    - 1.4.2 Helen m. Max Siesfeld (1839–1920)
    - 1.4.3 Isaac
    - 1.4.4 Samuel (1858–1940)
    - 1.4.5 Maurice m. Sarah (Sadie) Lowenstein
    - 1.4.6 Adelaide

Sources:

Auer letter.

Lucinda Marshall, *The Marshall Family Tree* (Phoenix, c. 1979)

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Eric E. Hirshler, "Jews from Germany in the United States," in Eric E. Hirshler, (ed.), *Jews from Germany in the United States* (New York, 1955), 36–37, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Adolf Kober, "Aspects of the Influence of Jews from Germany on American Spiritual Life of the Nineteenth Century," in Hirshler, *Jews from Germany*, 130.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard D. Weinryb, "The German Jewish Immigrants in America (A Critical Evaluation)," in Hirshler, *Jews from Germany*, 116–118.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 115; Hirshler, "Jews from Germany," 36–37, 40, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Elliott Ashkenazi, "Jewish Commercial Interests Between North and South: The Case of the Lehmans and the Seligmans," *American Jewish Archives*, 43 (Spring/Summer 1991): 24–39.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Toury, "Jewish Manual Labour and Emigration: Records from Some Bavarian Districts (1830–1857)," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16 (1971): 48–49; Lisa Harries-Schumann, "Between Orthodoxy and Reform, Revolution and Reaction: The Jewish Community in Ichenhausen, 1813–1861," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 42 (1997): 33, 48; James F. Harris, *The People Speak!: Anti-Semitism and Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Bavaria* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ashkenazi argues that emigration was also influenced by a reduction in ship passage fees and by a change in inheritance laws during the Napoleonic Wars that reduced the incomes of the agrarian customers of Bavarian Jewish merchants. Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840–1875* (Tuscaloosa, 1987), 7–8.

<sup>10</sup> Avraham Barkai, "German-Jewish Migrations in the Nineteenth Century, 1830–1910," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 30 (1985): 309–310; Michael Brenner, Stefi Jersch-Wenzel and Michael A. Meyer, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: 2: Emancipation and Acceleration: 1780–1871* (New York, 1997), 59; Arno Herzig, *Jüdische Geschichte in Deutschland: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* [Jewish History in Germany from the Beginning to the Present] (Munich, 1997), 155. In 1849 the Bavarian lower house of Parliament passed a government bill for Jewish emancipation. The bill was never enacted because of popular protest. Harris, *The People Speak!*

<sup>11</sup> Isaac Leeser, "The Jews in the United States–1848," *American Jewish Archives* 7, (January 1955): 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> The term literally means the Jewish village Hürben, but this definition misses the negative connotation implied in the German. Gernot Römer, *Schwäbische Juden: Leben und*

*Leistungen aus zwei Jahrhunderten in Selbstzeugnissen Berichten und Bildern* [Swabian Jewry: Two Centuries of Life and Achievements Illustrated by Text and Pictures] (Augsburg, 1990), 53.

<sup>14</sup> Raphael Strauss, *Jewish Communities Series: Regensburg and Augsburg* (Philadelphia, 1939), 191–193. Both of these villages are among the nineteen mentioned in an Imperial German government document concerning Jews under the jurisdiction of the Imperial City of Augsburg dated 1603. Barbara Gebhardt and Manfred Hörner, eds., *Bayerisches Hauptsarchiv Reichskammergericht Band 1: Nr. 1–428 (Buchstabe A)* [Bavarian Central Archive, Imperial Chamber Court, 1: 1–428 (Letter A)] (Munich, 1994), 357.

<sup>15</sup> *Lynchburg News*, February 5, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; Guggenheimer Department Store Program, *Celebration of Seventy-Ninth Anniversary of the House of Guggenheimer*, (Lynchburg, 1921), 2; Malcolm H. Stern, *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies: 1654–1988* (3rd ed.; Baltimore, 1991), 89; Herbert Auer (local historian), Krumbach, Bavaria, to Richard Hawkins, January 16, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> According to an article published in the *Lynchburg News*, Abraham's eldest son, Süsskind, emigrated in the 1830s. He established a trading post in the Shenandoah Valley at Gilmore's Mill, Rockbridge County, Virginia, between Lexington and Buena Vista. He subsequently was joined by his brother Nathaniel in the late 1830s. After Nathaniel had learned English he moved to Lynchburg in 1840 where he founded a dry goods store with an Isidor Untermyer. However, this article is completely untrue. By his own account Isidor did not come to Virginia until 1847. *Lynchburg News*, February 5, 1962; *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Chancery Court and Law Order Book: Justices: February 1846–August 1849*, 469.

<sup>18</sup> [Http://www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) U.S. Census, 8 N District, Rockbridge County, State of Virginia, December 5, 1850; Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> [Http://www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>20</sup> Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 90.

<sup>21</sup> [Http://www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>22</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, December 30, 1856.

<sup>23</sup> Salomon was born in Hürben on December 27, 1814. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Nathaniel was born in Hürben on June 21, 1817. *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> *The Agudath Sholom Story: Breaking Apart and Coming Together: A Centennial History, 1897–1997/5658–5768* (Lynchburg, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, October 30, 1848; William Moseley Brown, *Marshall Lodge, No. 39, A .F. & A. M.: The Story of One of Virginia's Most Distinguished Lodges* (Staunton, 1953), 263. Myron Berman has suggested that it was not uncommon for Jews to be members of Masonic Lodges in this period. Berman, *The Last of the Jews?* (Lanham, 1998), 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, August 4, 1844. If Salomon and Nathaniel had just arrived in the United States, it is unclear how they had acquired such a proficiency in the English language. Perhaps a more established Bavarian Jewish immigrant wrote it for them or the printer may have turned the advertisement into good English. Rudolf Glanz argues that the most common form of German Jewish immigrant business was a partnership involving two or more brothers. Glanz, "The German Jewish Mass Emigration: 1820–1880," *American Jewish Archives* 22 (April 1970): 62–63.

<sup>29</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, February 16, 1846.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., June 15, 1846.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., September 24, 1846.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., April 12, 1847, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Staatsarchiv Augsburg Bezirksamt Krumbach 2829, *Acta des königl. Landgesgerichts Krumbach Betreff: Guggenheimer Salomon Kaufmann von Lynchburgh in Nordamerica, dessen Verehelichung mit Landauer Therese von Hürben 1847* [State Archive Augsburg, District Office Krumbach 2829, File of the Royal District Court Regarding: Salomon Guggenheimer, merchant of Lynchburg in North America, his marriage to Therese Landauer from Hürben], (hereafter cited as Augsburg Archives: Guggenheimer/Landauer marriage), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>35</sup> Auer letter.

<sup>36</sup> Carl Obermayer was a member of a prominent Augsburg Jewish bank. Römer, *Schwäbische Juden*, 243–244; Peter Fassl, *Konfession, Wirtschaft und Politik: Von der Reichstadt zur Industriestadt, Augsburg, 1750–1850* [Religion, Economy and Politics: From Imperial City to Industrial City, Augsburg, 1750–1850] (Sigmaringen, 1988), 214, 218, 227.

<sup>37</sup> Augsburg Archives: Guggenheimer/Landauer marriage, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2; Auer letter. The conversion from gulden into dollars is based on the following exchange rates: 1 gulden = FrF2.14; FrF25.45 = £1; £1 = \$4.8666. Wolfgang Knabe, *Aufbruch in die Ferne: Deutsche Auswanderungen nach Amerika, Afrika, Asien und Australien zwischen 1803 and 1814 am Beispiel Bayerisch-Schwaben* [Faraway Departure: German Emigration from Bavarian Swabia to America, Africa, Asia and Australia between 1803 and 1814] (Augsburg, 1990), 303; *The Economist*, June 19, 1847; Lawrence H. Officer, "Dollar-Sterling Mint Parity and Exchange Rates, 1791–1834," *Journal of Economic History* 43 (1983): 591–592.

<sup>39</sup> *Who's Who in New York City and State* (New York, 1904), 274.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, 1917), 293; *Lynchburg Virginian*, October 30, 1848. The Hebrew Cemetery was the only Jewish burial ground in Virginia for a long time. It was jointly maintained by congregations Beth Shalome and Beth Ahabah.

<sup>41</sup> *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Law Order Book No. 5, November 1848–September 1852*, 39.

<sup>42</sup> He was born on December 22, 1826. *Lynchburg Virginian*, December 7, 1848; *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Law Order Book No. 5, November 1848–September 1852*, 363. He later moved to Richmond where he became the proprietor of a liquor store. First Ward, Richmond City, Henrico County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, July 10, 1860.

<sup>43</sup> Phillip W. Rhodes, Research Librarian, Jones Memorial Library, to Frank Untermyer, great-grandson of Isidor Untermyer, September 21, 1990; "Tombstone," *Lynchburg Virginian*, April 4, 1850; *Lynchburg Corporation Court, Chancery File No. 452 (1867–1885)*, Untermyer v. Shelton Case, 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Chancery Court and Law Order Book: Justices: February 1846–August 1849*, May 4, 1847, 184.

<sup>45</sup> Aaron Joseph Guggenheimer was born in 1793 in the mid-Franconian village of Dittenheim near Weissenburg, some 70 km north of Augsburg. From 1819 until his death in 1860 he was rabbi for the Kriegshaber district.

<sup>46</sup> Auer letter.

<sup>47</sup> Rabbi Guggenheimer later certified that Jette died on April 6, 1839 at age 68. Isaak appears to have died in the same year. Under the Matrikel system a family business was

normally inherited by the eldest son. Younger sons were not normally permitted to establish their own business or to marry. Isidor's elder brother, Max, acquired the family business from his father on November 26, 1839. So there was no future for Isidor in Bavaria. Isidor immigrated to the United States in 1844. He probably lived first in New York City. After three years he moved to Virginia and became a United States citizen on May 7, 1849. Staatsarchiv Augsburg LGäO Krumbach, NA, Hürben Nr. 156, *Acta des königl. Landgerichts. Krumbach, Verlassenschaft des Handelsmannes Josef Guggenheimer zue Hürben 1852* [State Archives Augsburg, District Office Krumbach, NA Hürben no. 156, File of the Royal District Court: Krumbach Estate of the merchant Josef Guggenheimer of Hürben 1852], 23; Staatsarchiv Augsburg NA Augsburg LG 272/1874 (hereafter cited as Augsburg Archive: J. Guggenheimer estate); *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Chancery Court and Law Order Book: Justices: February 1846–August 1849*, 469.

<sup>48</sup> Adelheid was born in Kriegshaber between 1816 and 1818. Tenth Ward New York City, County of New York, State of New York, U.S. Census, May 2, 1850; Fourth District, Tenth Ward, County of New York, State of New York, U.S. Census, June 15, 1860.

<sup>49</sup> Augsburg Archive: J. Guggenheimer estate, 54, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Lucinda Marshall, *The Marshall Family Tree* (Phoenix, c. 1979); Fourth District, Tenth Ward, County of New York, State of New York, U.S. Census, June 15, 1860; H. Wilson (ed.), *Trow's New York City Directory, For The Year Ending May 1, 1862* (New York, 1862), 588.

<sup>51</sup> Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews*, 19; Ashkenazi, "Jewish Commercial Interests," 25–26.

<sup>52</sup> Entry No. 20: Marriage Register, Congregation Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Michelbacher had immigrated to Philadelphia in 1844 and was invited by Beth Ahabah to Richmond where he was elected their minister in 1846. He served as their unordained rabbi and schoolteacher for over thirty years. Richmond, Henrico County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, July 28, 1860; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 28, 1879; Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769–1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville, 1979), 139.

<sup>54</sup> Account Book, c. 1848–1855, Congregation Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives.

<sup>55</sup> List of Members as of 1851, Congregation Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives.

<sup>56</sup> *The Occident*, founded in 1843, was the first stable Jewish monthly journal in the United States. Morris U. Schappes, *A Pictorial History of the Jews in the United States* (rev. ed.: New York, 1965), 73–74. A history of the early *Occident* can be found in Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit, 1995), 136–149.

<sup>57</sup> *The Occident* 11 (May 1853): 123; *The Occident* 17 (March 31, 1859): 5–6; Robert D. Gardner, M.D., an historian of the Lynchburg Jewish community, to Richard Hawkins, April 23, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, March 27, 1866.

<sup>59</sup> Iva (born 1849); Ellen (Helen) (born 1852), Isaac (born June 23, 1853), Samuel (born 1858); Morris (Maurice) (born 1860) and Adelaide (Addie) (born 1866). Iva appears to have died in March 1855. The Diuguid Funeral Home accounts show that the Untermeyers buried another infant child in November 1861. This child must have been born after June 25, 1860, because it is not listed in the 1860 Census. *New York Times*, September 1, 1926 (for Isaac); *Account Books*, Diuguid Funeral Home, Lynchburg, Virginia, March 4, 1855 (for Iva); November 7, 1861; Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 27, 1860 (for unknown infant).

<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, October 2, 1921.

<sup>61</sup> Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 139, 141; D. J. Greenberg, *Through The Years* (Richmond, 1955), 22.

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich was born in Hürben on January 13, 1839 and Joachim in Hürben on April 9, 1840. Auer letter.

<sup>63</sup> Town of Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, September 23, 1850.

<sup>64</sup> He was born in Illertissen in 1825 and immigrated to the United States in 1848. *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Chancery and Law Order Book, Justices, August 1852–February 1855*, 292; Augsburg Archive: J. Guggenheimer estate, 62, 69.

<sup>65</sup> Town of Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, September 23, 1850.

<sup>66</sup> Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants, Town of Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, September 23, 1850.

<sup>67</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *The Jewish People in America, A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore, 1992), 81.

<sup>68</sup> Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (2nd ed.: Cleveland and New York, 1961), 29.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Edwards, ed., *Statistical Gazetteer of the State of Virginia*, (Richmond, 1855), 299.

<sup>70</sup> *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Chancery and Law Order Book, Justices, August 1852–February 1855*, 287.

<sup>71</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, May 16, 1866.

<sup>72</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 25, 1860.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, June 29, 1860.

<sup>74</sup> Augsburg Archive: J. Guggenheimer estate, 75.

<sup>75</sup> On January 14, 1863 he married Fredrica Lowenberg in Richmond. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 89; <http://www.familysearch.org>

<sup>76</sup> Phillip W. Rhodes, Research Librarian, Jones Memorial Library to Frank Untermyer, September 21, 1990; Untermyer v. Shelton, 9, 13; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews*, 74.

<sup>77</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, March 16, 1866.

<sup>78</sup> Staatsarchiv Augsburg KB25 Krumbach 66, Hürben Births, Marriages and Deaths Register, c. 1834–c. 1875. Cilli was the eldest child of Abraham Guggenheimer's nephew, Seligmann Guggenheimer, and Klara Landauer. Her brother Max later joined her in Lynchburg. Auer letter; Stern, *First American Jewish Families.*, 89.

<sup>79</sup> Staatsarchiv Augsburg Bezirksamt Krumbach 3317, *Acten des koeniglichen landgerichts Krumbach, Ein Auswanderung der minvorennen Zilli Guggenheimer zu Hürben und deren Verehelichung betr.* [State Archive Augsburg, District Office Krumbach 3317, File of the Royal District Court Krumbach, regarding the emigration of Miss Zilli Guggenheimer of Hürben and her marriage], 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> First Ward Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, July 5, 1870.

<sup>82</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 27, 1860; Steven Elliott Tripp, *Yankee Town, Southern City: Race and Class Relations in Civil War Lynchburg* (New York, 1997), 8.

<sup>83</sup> Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants, Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 18, 1860.

<sup>84</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, June 12, 1865.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, January 25, 1866; "Obituary," *Lynchburg News*, January 25, 1866.

<sup>86</sup> This may have been the same Marx Myers who died at Manassas fighting for the Confederacy. Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 202; Herbert T. Ezekiel, "The Jews of Richmond During the Civil War," *American Israelite*, June 17, 1915.

<sup>87</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 27, 1860.

<sup>88</sup> Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants, Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 18, 1860.

<sup>89</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 27, 1860; *New York Daily Tribune*, January 19, 1901.

<sup>90</sup> However, Randolph is also not listed in the 1860 Census as a member of the Mendelsohn household. Perhaps he lived first with Adolph Levinger, a New York City lawyer since the mid-1850s. Levinger was probably a relative of Bernhard Levinger, the husband of Therese's older sister, Friderike Landauer. Fourth District, Tenth Ward, County of New York, State of New York, U.S. Census, June 15, 1860; H. Wilson (ed.), *Trow's New York City Directory, For The Year Ending May 1, 1862* (New York, 1862) 588; Augsburg Staatsarchiv Neuburg/D Bezirksamt Krumbach No. 2759, Levinger 1826–1831; *Wilson's Business Directory of New York City* (New York, 1855), 235; *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 172.

<sup>91</sup> *London Times Higher Education Supplement*, January 21, 2000.

<sup>92</sup> Diner, *Jewish People* 65.

<sup>93</sup> Born on September 29, 1839, Siesfeld was the son of Lazarus and Eliza Siesfeld. Grave marker, Salem Fields, New York City, transcribed by Frank Untermeyer; Lynchburg, VA, Marriage Register No. 2 (1853–1881), 47.

<sup>94</sup> Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Louisiana, Co. D, 5 Louisiana Infantry. (*Confederate.*), 1810 Siesfeld Max.

<sup>95</sup> *Lynchburg Corporation Court, Deedbook W: December 1859 to January 1863*, 384.

<sup>96</sup> Diner, *Jewish People*, 89.

<sup>97</sup> *Lynchburg Corporation Court, Deedbook W: December 1859 to January 1863*, 479–480.

<sup>98</sup> The dropping of the 'ugh' from the end of Jonesboro began in the early 1860s. For a few years it was spelled sometimes Jonesborough and sometimes the modern Jonesboro. By the early 1870s the spelling Jonesboro had become uniform in documents and publications. Ned Irwin, East Tennessee State University Archivist, Johnson City, to Richard Hawkins, May 9, 2000.

<sup>99</sup> According to the Mormon web site, Max L. Mayer was born in Campbell County, Virginia, in 1838. Yet this may be the same Marx Myers identified in the 1860 census as residing at Isidor Untermeyer's clothing store along with George Myers both from Wurttemberg. The witness to the deed for the land sale to Max Siesfeld was I. George Mayer. <http://www.familysearch.org>. I greatly appreciate the research assistance of James Welsh in identifying this likely tie.

<sup>100</sup> One of Süsskind Guggenheimer's daughters, Ellen, married a merchant from Jonesborough, Tennessee, Herman Cone (Herrman Cohen/ Hermann Kahn), on September 25, 1856, and Isidor was one of the two witnesses. Herman was born in Altenstadt, Swabia, Bavaria, immigrated to Richmond in 1845, and subsequently settled in Jonesboro with his sister, Sophie, and her husband, Jakob Adler. From the 1840s the small community of Jonesborough was importing merchandise direct from Baltimore through the Lynchburg market. His sons later founded the Cone Mills in Asheville and the Proximity

Manufacturing Company in Greensboro. When they constructed their mill in Greensboro in 1895, it was the largest in the South at the time. *Ibid.*; Jonesboro District, Washington County, State of Tennessee, U.S. Census, August 15, 1860; *Entry No. 69, Marriage Register*, Congregation Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives; "A Letter from Bavaria: 1846," *American Jewish Archives* 15 (April 1963): 17; Römer, *Schwäbische Juden.*, 218; Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 198.

<sup>101</sup> *Washington County Deed Book*, 38: 572-573, Sherrod Library, East Tennessee State University, Johnston City.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

<sup>103</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, January 18, 1868; Lynchburg, VA, Marriage Register No. 2 (1853-1881), 47.

<sup>104</sup> Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York, 1984), 176-181, 247.

<sup>105</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, September 27, 1859. It is not clear when he had established his factory. In January 1860 he claimed he had established it in 1848 but in April of the same year he identified the date as 1845, although at that time he was not resident in Virginia. *Ibid.*, January 19, 1860, April 16, 1860.

<sup>106</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, November 3, 1859.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, December 3, 1859.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, January 19, 1860.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, April 16, 1860, May 11, 1860, June 15, 1860, October 4, 1860.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, June 25, 1860.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, August 24, 1861. This particular advertisement last appeared on December 7, 1862.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, December 9, 1862.

<sup>113</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*.

<sup>114</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, July 23, 1860.

<sup>115</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 168-171

<sup>116</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, October 25, 1847.

<sup>117</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, July 23, 1860; Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants, Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 18, 1860.

<sup>118</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 168-171.

<sup>119</sup> Tripp, *Yankee Town*, 165.

<sup>120</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 168-171.

<sup>121</sup> Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit, 1997), 202.

<sup>122</sup> Frank Untermeyer, great-grandson of Isidor, interview conducted by Richard Hawkins, March 12, 2000. These stories have also been published in various forms. See "Death of Maurice Untermeyer," *American Hebrew* 74 (January 1, 1909) 242; *New York Herald Tribune*, March 17, 1940; Henry F. Pringle, "Front Page Stuff," *American Mercury* (February 1927) 160.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Frank Untermeyer interview; Beatrice (Lowenstein) Magnes to Louise Frankel, December 14, 1965 [copy owned by Frank Untermeyer]. Beatrice Magnes was the

granddaughter of Adelheid Untermayer, and Louise Frankel was Samuel Untermayer's brother Maurice's granddaughter.

<sup>125</sup> Magnes letter.

<sup>126</sup> Frank Untermayer interview.

<sup>127</sup> Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South: The Emergence of a Reluctant Nation* (3rd ed.: New York, 1975), 389.

<sup>128</sup> Berman, *Last of the Jews?*, x.

<sup>129</sup> Given the fact that there was a significant community of Jews in Lynchburg, particularly in the realm of commerce, and that some of them owned slaves, it seems odd that Steven Elliott Tripp in a recent monograph about Civil War Lynchburg completely ignored them. Tripp, *Yankee Town*.

<sup>130</sup> Max Guggenheimer (born Hürben, May 19, 1842) was the son of Abraham Guggenheimer's nephew Seligmann. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 89; Auer letter.

<sup>131</sup> Charles M. Blackford, *Annals of the Lynchburg Home Guard* (Lynchburg, 1891), 14-15.

<sup>132</sup> W. A. Christian, *Lynchburg and Its People* (Lynchburg, 1900), 194.

<sup>133</sup> *Lynchburg News*, January 25, 1866.

<sup>134</sup> Gary L. Bunker and John Appel, "'Shoddy,' Anti-Semitism and the Civil War," *American Jewish History* 82 (1995): 43-71; Richard M. McMurray, "Rebels, Extortioners and Counterfeiters: A Note on Confederate Judaeophobia," *Atlanta Historical Journal* (Fall/Winter 1978): 45-52; Louis Schmier, "Notes and Documents on the Expulsion of the Jews from Thomasville, Georgia," *American Jewish Archives* 32 (April 1980): 9-22; Mark I. Greenberg, "Ambivalent Relations: Acceptance and Anti-Semitism in Confederate Thomasville," *ibid.*, 45 (Spring/Summer 1993): 13-29; Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 184-188; Korn, *Civil War*, 156-188.

<sup>135</sup> *Lynchburg Daily News*, March 28, 1866.

<sup>136</sup> Augsburg Archive: J. Guggenheimer estate, 62, 69.

<sup>137</sup> *Lynchburg (VA) Hustings Court, Chancery and Law Order Book, Justices, August 1852-February 1855*, 5, 155.

<sup>138</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 27, 1860.

<sup>139</sup> Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia, *59th Infantry (2d Regiment, Infantry, Wise Legion), A-Bi: 104-a Bacharach, Myer*.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Lynchburg, Campbell County, State of Virginia, U.S. Census, June 27, 1860, 343.

<sup>142</sup> Records of Confederate Soldiers, *Bacharach, Myer*.

<sup>143</sup> Diuguid Funeral Home, Lynchburg, Virginia, *Account Books*, May 8-9, 1864.

<sup>144</sup> The soldier's section was the first Jewish military cemetery in North America. Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *Jews of Richmond*, 194-195.

<sup>145</sup> Tripp, *Yankee Town*, 165-166.

<sup>146</sup> *Lynchburg News*, March 28, 1866.

<sup>147</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, March 27, 1866.

<sup>148</sup> *Lynchburg Hustings Court, Chancery and Law Order Book, January 1864-August 1866, June 4, 1866*, 290.

<sup>149</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, September 4, 1866.

<sup>150</sup> Rhodes letter.

<sup>151</sup> Untermayer v. Shelton, 1-2, 63.

<sup>152</sup> Glanz, *Mass Emigration*, 63.

<sup>153</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 209; "An Act staying the Collection of Debts for a Limited Period Passed December 19, 1865," in *State of Virginia, Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1865-1866, in the Eighty-Ninth Year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond, 1866), 179-180; "An Act to stay the Collection of Debts for a limited period Passed March 2, 1866," in *ibid.*, 180-184.

<sup>154</sup> *Lynchburg Corporation Court Deed Book Aug. 1866 to Jan. 1870*, 142.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>156</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 63.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-211.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-15.

<sup>159</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, March 16, 1866, 1.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-211.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 110, 122.

<sup>163</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, September 21, 1867, 2; *Lynchburg Virginian*, January 1, 1868, 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Lynchburg Corporation Court Deed Book Aug. 1866 to Jan. 1870*, 342. The obituary of Isaac Untermeyer notes that he moved to New York City in 1868. *New York Times*, September 1, 1926.

<sup>165</sup> *Lynchburg Corporation Court Deed Book Aug. 1866 to Jan. 1870*, 561-563.

<sup>166</sup> Siesfeld lived with her for about a year at 2 Livingston Place. He then disappeared. According to Untermeyer family tradition, he went to Texas to seek his fortune. He subsequently returned to New York City about 1883 and once again became a member of Therese Untermeyer's household. He established a cooper's business at a separate address about 1884. He died on February 20, 1920.

Frank Untermeyer, interview conducted by Richard Hawkins, September 30, 1999; H. Wilson (ed.), *Trow's New York City Directory, For The Year Ending May 1, 1870* (New York, 1870), 1015; *Trow's New York City Directory, For The Year Ending May 1, 1885* (New York, 1885), 1620; *Trow's New York City Directory, For The Year Ending May 1, 1886* (New York, 1886), 1772.

<sup>167</sup> *Untermeyer v. Shelton*, 202-208; U.S. Census, Ninth District Eighteenth Ward New York, New York, June 22, 1870.

<sup>168</sup> Eaton, *Old South*, 413.

<sup>169</sup> Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews*, 7-8.

<sup>170</sup> Ashkenazi, "Jewish Commercial Interests," 24-39.

<sup>171</sup> Mordechai Breuer and Michael Graetz, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: volume 1: Tradition and Enlightenment* (New York, 1996), 132-134.

<sup>172</sup> Glanz, *Mass Emigration*, 49-61.

<sup>173</sup> Guggenheimer Department Store Program, *Celebration of Seventy-Ninth Anniversary of the House of Guggenheimer*, (Lynchburg, 1921).

<sup>174</sup> Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'all: The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews," (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1986).

<sup>175</sup> See Berman, *Last of the Jews?*; Sussman, *Leeser*; Ashton, *Gratz*.

<sup>176</sup> For a discussion of Lost Cause mythology see for example the preface to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982), vii-xix.



# Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in Nineteenth Century New Orleans<sup>1</sup>

by

Scott Langston

**O**n June 11, 1886, James K. Gutheim, rabbi of Reform congregation Temple Sinai of New Orleans, Louisiana, died. His death provoked an outpouring of grief and sadness that enveloped the city as well as the state. Meeting *en banc* [in full court], the Civil District Court heard a eulogy by Judge Frank Adair Monroe and then canceled court and rescheduled cases. The Louisiana Senate adjourned as a symbol of honor and respect after hearing a eulogy and passing a number of resolutions offered by Senator Lawrence O'Donnell regarding Gutheim. Among other traits, the senator noted that the rabbi lived all his life by the Golden Rule. At his funeral, federal, state, and local officials as well as people from all classes and creeds gathered to pay their respects. The Rev. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, longtime pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans and a minister influential throughout the South, eulogized Gutheim during the funeral service. In the words of Palmer, Gutheim was:

the incarnation of virtue and religion, in whom these are embodied as a living personal agency to renew and bless mankind. This is a kind of gospel which men easily understand, for while they may fail to read the black letter of our different schools of philosophy, or even to interpret aright the dogmas of a religious creed, these are instantly comprehended when translated into

the daily actions of a pure and virtuous life. It is the printing in raised type which sets abstract principles in such relief before the eye that he who runs may read.<sup>2</sup>

Palmer had used the most Christian of terms—incarnation and gospel—to describe the rabbi and to emphasize how the actions of Gutheim had transcended religious creeds.

Sixteen years later, on May 28, 1902, Palmer died in New Orleans. Rabbi Max Heller, Gutheim's successor at Temple Sinai, extolled Palmer as one who represented the staunchest orthodoxy in his denomination and yet one who "swept away every barrier," and, therefore, "was the minister of all of us."<sup>3</sup> The Reform rabbi made an interesting choice of words by juxtaposing "orthodoxy" with the elimination of all barriers, a characteristic usually not associated with religious orthodoxy unless the barriers are swept away so as to produce uniform beliefs.

Several months after Palmer's death, two old friends of Palmer addressed the audience at his memorial service on November 16. The first was the Rev. Eugene Daniel of the Synod of Virginia and the second was Rabbi Isaac L. Leucht of Touro Synagogue, a Reform congregation in New Orleans. Leucht summarized his relationship with Palmer in the following words, "I have come [to speak] because I loved him and he was my friend for so many years, and because we together were seeking light. Although seeking it upon different paths, we met and never quarreled as to its source." He extolled Palmer's "broadmindedness and large-heartedness," as well as the tenacity with which he clung to his convictions. According to Leucht, Palmer was no bigot or zealot, but "rose to the level of forbearance and broad-mindedness rarely found, pardon me, among theologians."<sup>4</sup>

Were the expressions of Palmer, Leucht, and Heller mere platitudes spoken over the dead, or did they represent a more complex relationship between these Jewish and Christian leaders of New Orleans? Historian Leonard Dinnerstein argued that the understanding of the United States as a Christian-Protestant nation has been a dominant theme in American history but also "an

ominous portent for interfaith friction." Therefore Jews always were considered outsiders; the barrier of religion was too difficult to overcome. Leonard Rogoff, in discussing the racial status of the southern Jew, noted that, "In the American South after Reconstruction, a new social line between Jew and white gentile followed the disengagement of white and black." Furthermore, the Gilded Age in New Orleans saw an increase in what one scholar has called "an overt anti-Semitism."<sup>5</sup> Without disputing the validity of these generalizations as applied to the broader southern and national contexts, Jewish-Christian relations in New Orleans seem to offer an exception. As one examines this relationship more closely, it appears that religion helped at least a portion of New Orleanian society to cohere by both integrating and disintegrating religious and ethnic/racial boundaries. While Jews and Christians used religion to strengthen their respective self-identities, they also used it to broaden their conceptions of national identity. They did so by appropriating the religious language and concepts of both traditions, as well as American symbols, and by uniting to combat common threats. Such efforts resulted in redefined religious and national identities for Jews and Christians in New Orleans, and produced communities of faith that cooperated with each other.

*Appropriation of Religious Language and Concepts*

Benjamin Morgan Palmer was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1818. The son and nephew of Presbyterian ministers, he graduated from the University of Georgia in 1838 and the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1841. He served as pastor in Georgia and South Carolina and even taught briefly at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary before accepting the pastorate of New Orleans' First Presbyterian Church. In December 1856 he and his family moved to New Orleans and began his new ministry.

A few months prior to his move, Palmer published an article, "The Import of Hebrew History," in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, in which he reviewed *Post-Biblical History of the Jews* by New York rabbi, Dr. Morris J. Raphall. In essence, Palmer appropriated

the Jewish doctrine of monotheism to demonstrate the legitimacy of Christianity, in general, and Protestant Christianity, in particular. Palmer reasoned that “only because there is one God, can there be but one religion; and Judaism, by asserting the first, opened the way for the advent of the second in the Gospel of Christ.” By making monotheism crucial to God’s plan, Judaism then could be portrayed as preparing the way for Christianity, a monotheistic, but also trinitarian religion.<sup>6</sup> With no conception of coexisting expressions of truth in religion, Palmer saw a divine progression from Judaism to Christianity. Several years earlier, Palmer had argued that the Jewish nation “was only an envelope for the church; the mere shell or rind thrown around it for temporary protection, afterward to be thrown off by its development.”<sup>7</sup> Now he applied the same metaphor to describe the relationship between the Jewish religion and nation and concluded, “The Hebrew nation was but the envelope of the Hebrew Church. When the moment should arrive that this Church must be stripped of its exclusiveness and become truly Catholic, the Hebrew nationality must, like the bark or rind of certain fruits, burst open to emancipate the Church it so long enclosed.”<sup>8</sup>

In these comments, Palmer acknowledged the necessity of Judaism in God’s plan for the world. He also used Judaism’s status to demonstrate the supremacy of Protestantism. His reference to the Jewish religion as the “Hebrew Church,” while perhaps not uncommon in nineteenth century discourse, seemed to argue against both the supremacy of Roman Catholicism and of the United States government. Palmer explained the scattering of the Jewish nation as an effort to make it truly catholic. Clearly Palmer intended to emphasize the universal nature of the scattering, but implicitly he seemed to intimate that a truly catholic church existed in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church; that true church—Protestantism—would be the heir to Judaism.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he understood the disintegration of the “Hebrew nation” as a prerequisite for the dissemination of the true church. Organized according to self-governing tribes and united under one central government, the Hebrew monarchy, according to Palmer, did not exercise central control. Although unequal in

*Reverend Benjamin Morgan Palmer.  
After the Galveston Hurricane of 1900, when the relief efforts  
organized by the New Orleans B'nai B'rith were criticized  
as being too sectarian, Palmer publicly defended them.  
(With permission from the First Presbyterian Church,  
New Orleans, Louisiana. Photo by Fred Kahn.)*

wealth and population, all the tribes were equal in political dignity. Thus, Palmer considered the Hebrew form of government to be a constitutional monarchy, based on popular approval, with two legislative bodies, the Senate and "the body of the people." Furthermore, throughout history, the Jewish religious officials "stood together as conservators of popular rights against regal encroachments, for the stability of the constitution against the innovations of wicked rulers." Why then, asked Palmer, would such a marvelous form of government be destroyed? Divine providence led the people to dissolve the government so that it would not thwart its initial purpose, that is, the dissemination of divine truth. His interpretation gave Palmer a framework from which he could interpret current events and institutional relationships. Foreshadowing the coming Civil War, he surmised that "there are periods in history when secret forces are preparing, to burst out ere long with irrepressible power . . . and such an age is that upon which we are now entering." Concluding that the relationship of Christianity to Judaism argued for Christianity's legitimacy, he asked, "Can that system [Christianity] be false, whose deep foundations are thus laid in the distant past . . . and whose forerunner is this religious race?"<sup>10</sup>

By lashing Protestantism to Judaic notions of monotheism and government, Palmer made religious and political commentary. The truly catholic religion, Protestant Christianity, emerged under God's plan from Judaism. The Hebrew government, while originally intended to house and protect the Jewish religion, had to be destroyed by the people once it departed from its divine purpose. As an analog to the situation in the United States in the mid-1850s, Palmer emphasized the role of the Jewish religious leadership in advocating the rights of the people against the monarchy's efforts to exercise control. He saw southern Protestant ministers performing a similar role in relationship to the government as did the ancient Israelite religious leadership. As the United States government increasingly acted as an autocracy, southern Protestant Christianity stood against it as the legitimate interpreter of God's purposes. Thus, Palmer sought to authenticate southern Protestantism by associating it with Judaism.

Palmer maintained his belief in the vital connection between Judaism and Christianity throughout his life. In a sermon preached on the first day of 1900, he interpreted the progress of the United States in terms of the church of God being held "in the embrace of the ancient Hebrew people." Just as God judged the Canaanites and removed them from the land in order to make room for his chosen people,

when the Indians had, for countless centuries, neglected the soil, had no worship to offer to the true God, with scarcely any serious occupation but murderous inter-tribal wars, the time came at length when, as I view it, in the just judgment of a righteous and holy God, although it may have been worked out through the simple avarice and voracity of the race that subdued them, the Indian has been swept from the earth, and a great Christian nation, over 75,000,000 strong, rises up on this day . . . to give to him the honor which is his due.<sup>11</sup>

In his appropriation of Jewish concepts and his associating Judaism and Christianity, Palmer fashioned a boundary, as well as a pathway, between the religions. Just as one peels back the rind to eat the fruit, or opens the envelope to read the letter, so too could one understand the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Distinctions indeed existed between the two, and, in Palmer's mind, Christianity had superseded Judaism. He, however, conceived of the relationship as progressive or chronological. As a result, the two religions could not be God's chosen instrument at the same time. This understanding highlighted the connection between Judaism and Christianity. Just as the rind and the envelope were essential elements to the fruit and the letter, so too was Judaism essential to Christianity. For Palmer, Jews were not in the same category as Indians. Indians did not worship the true God, and, therefore, were subject to his judgment. Jews, on the other hand, played an essential role not only in the history of Christianity, but also in the history of the United States. This connection created in Palmer a respect for Jews and Judaism that allowed him to embrace Jews in tangible ways without sacrificing the distinctiveness of Christianity.

He, therefore, could refer to Gutheim as the incarnation and the gospel.

*Appropriation of American Symbols*

The embracing of Jews by a leading Protestant figure of New Orleanian and southern society assisted Jews in gaining acceptance and helped legitimate them in the eyes of Christians who misunderstood many Jewish customs and beliefs. This misunderstanding could inhibit Jewish attempts, especially those by Jewish immigrants, to be accepted and could also foster anti-Semitism. Men like Gutheim, Leucht, and Heller welcomed the association with individuals like Palmer. Thus, religion acted as an aid in overcoming ethnic or nationalistic boundaries. Jews could claim to be Americans in spite of their religious differences with the majority and could even find prominent members of that majority who embraced their claim. In so doing, religion fostered Jewish and Christian self-identities while simultaneously broadening American identity.

The use of civil and religious holidays by the three New Orleans rabbis illustrates this process. As a German immigrant, James K. Gutheim exhibited strong American sentiments. Born in 1817 in Westphalia, he immigrated to the United States in the early 1840s. He served Bene Yeshurun in Cincinnati from 1846 until he moved to New Orleans' Gates of Mercy in 1850. He remained there until 1853 when he became the rabbi of Dispersed of Judah, also located in New Orleans. After the Civil War, he returned to Gates of Mercy but soon left for Temple Emanu-El in New York in 1868. He returned to New Orleans in 1872 as the first rabbi of Temple Sinai where he served until his death in 1886.

Among his extant sermons are three that Gutheim preached on Thanksgiving in 1860, 1869, and 1870. In each he appealed to Jewish identity as Americans in order to overcome the religious boundaries between Jew and Christian. In the first he recognized that Thanksgiving originated with the "Pilgrim fathers" and had become a "sacred custom," but he understood the day to be a celebration "for the American people," and that Jews formed "an integral part of this body-politic [*sic*]." Jews, therefore, could claim

*Rabbi James K. Gutheim.*

*While in New Orleans, he served in various capacities  
that brought him into contact with Christians.*

*He was an important member of the  
New Orleans School Board from 1877 to 1882  
and worked in several charitable organizations.  
(Courtesy of Temple Sinai, New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

the founding fathers as their adopted fathers. Gutheim emphasized certain factors that bound together Jews with Americans of different creeds and nationalities, such as the mutual benefits received from liberty and the shared effects of national events. As a result, Jews had the duty to celebrate Thanksgiving with the rest of the nation. Unlike the situation in some other countries, Jews were allowed to participate in national celebrations. Gutheim could thus proclaim, "We are Israelites, but we are at the same time American citizens, in the purest and fullest sense of the word; our fate is bound up with that of our common country." Addressing the coming Civil War obliquely, the rabbi encouraged "every good citizen" to "exhibit a true and pure patriotism" by being ready to make all sacrifices for the right and just cause.<sup>12</sup> The religious boundary that existed between Jews and Christians, therefore, could be overcome by emphasizing their commonality as Americans. This commonality manifested itself apart from religious belief and would be demonstrated not only by the observance of Thanksgiving but also by participation in the imminent Civil War. In this case, shared experience superseded religion in developing American identity.

When New Orleans seceded from the Union, Gutheim continued to appeal to national identity, but, in this case, he meant Confederate identity. His actions on behalf of the Confederacy during the Civil War helped reduce religious barriers created by his Jewishness. Committed ardently to the cause of his nation (now defined as the Confederacy), he chose to leave federally occupied New Orleans in 1863 rather than sign an oath of allegiance to the United States.<sup>13</sup> On May 8, 1863, Gutheim wrote his friend, Isaac Leiser, informing him of his decision to leave the city. Gutheim's reference to President Abraham Lincoln as the "Dictator of Washington" made clear where his sentiments lay. He spent the rest of the war in Montgomery, Alabama, serving two congregations as rabbi.<sup>14</sup> While in Montgomery he delivered a prayer calling on God to bless the Confederacy in the just cause of "the defense of our liberties and rights and independence, under just and equitable laws." He characterized northerners as "those who have forced upon us this unholy and unnatural war—who hurl

against us their poisoned arrows steeped in ambition and revenge."<sup>15</sup> These actions won him wide acclaim in the South during and after the war.

As committed as he was to the Confederate cause, Gutheim, however, quickly worked for reconciliation after the war. In 1869, while serving Temple Emanu-El in New York City, Gutheim echoed some of the same sentiments from his Thanksgiving sermon of 1860. Religious law, ceremony, or rite did not command the observance of Thanksgiving nor did it commemorate any Jewish national event. They celebrated this day as Americans, not as Jews. He lauded the peace that had come over the nation, pointing out that material prosperity and civil and religious liberty had brought about such conditions. The prerequisite for peace— independence— was being achieved through the material prosperity of the country. He extolled the American republican system of government since it secured the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. Such results sprang from civil and religious liberty. Yet, in spite of these fundamental principles, "some fanatic sectarians" (unidentified by Gutheim) had been attempting to engraft upon the United States Constitution certain religious tenets. These efforts threatened the blessings of civil and religious liberty, which were largely responsible for the prosperity of the nation. "Every good citizen" had the duty to insure freedom.<sup>16</sup> Again, Gutheim had used American identity to combat religious barriers. By defining citizenship in terms of insuring religious liberty, he hoped to negotiate religious differences by appealing to the common American value of liberty. In his eyes, such a value was neither Jewish nor Christian and could be endorsed by all but the fanatical.

The following Thanksgiving Gutheim proclaimed, "All the differences of creed are this day merged into the one controlling sentiment, that the Almighty Creator of the universe is our Father and Protector, who causes the sun to shine and the earth to yield its fruits for the benefit of all His children." Again, he pointed to the material prosperity of the nation as evidence of God's blessing, but the greatest blessings came from the spiritual and moral realm and were ushered in through liberty and peace. Yet many

still suffered and were impoverished. Thanksgiving, therefore, called upon the materially blessed to share with those in need.<sup>17</sup> In this sermon, Gutheim merged religious and national identities. Thanksgiving, an American holiday, brought together the varied expressions of religion under two common religious beliefs, divine fatherhood and protection of the nation. Essentially the national identity managed the religious by providing opportunity for religious unity through national unity. This allowed Jews to demonstrate their common interests with Christians by acknowledging God's blessing on members of all creeds and by then seeking to pass on the material blessings not as Jews or Christians, but as Americans.

In his 1870 Thanksgiving sermon, he had observed that "the wounds struck by civil strife are gradually healing. Sectional differences and animosities are fast disappearing under the benign spirit of forbearance and fraternal sympathy."<sup>18</sup> Twelve years later he continued this theme in an address to the Southern Historical Society. He observed that the passions once dividing the nation were receding, and he foresaw the North and the South joining hands and forming a united republic. He then asked why a sectional institution such as the Southern Historical Society was necessary. Gutheim answered by recounting the biblical story of the two and a half Israelite tribes who, after helping the others conquer the Promised Land, decided to settle outside of the land on the east side of the Jordan River (Joshua 22). When the two and one-half tribes set up an altar, the remaining tribes took it as an act of unfaithfulness, threatened war, and demanded an explanation. The trans-Jordanian tribes explained that they had built the altar to remind future generations of their connection with the others. Gutheim then explained the mission of the Southern Historical Society as setting up a monument to the strength of the Union. He closed by asserting that the Civil War had obliterated the Mason-Dixon line and called for loyalty to the constitution, attachment to the Union, and zeal for establishing the fundamental rights of liberty. He was loudly applauded by the audience.<sup>19</sup>

These examples demonstrate Gutheim's use of both American and Confederate identity to navigate obstacles posed by his

Jewishness. To him, being an American depended more on one's support of civil and religious liberty than on adherence to a certain dogma. Such an identity was forged and expressed by sharing the fate of the nation and participating in national observances. As Americans, Jews and Christians shared the ravages of war and the blessings of prosperity. Both Jews and gentiles also shared the responsibility to participate in national events and to care for each other. By encouraging Jews to participate in Thanksgiving observances and to sacrifice for the good of the nation, Gutheim, therefore, advocated the active involvement of Jews in creating their American identity. Jews could not expect to live in isolation in the United States without sharing and participating in national events.

Like Gutheim, Rabbi Max Heller also used American identity to overcome barriers constructed by Christian notions of nationalism, but he also applied national identity to overcome barriers erected by Jewish notions. Born in Prague in 1860, Heller came to the United States in 1879. Ordained in 1884 he was a member of the second graduating class of Hebrew Union College. He then became the associate rabbi at Chicago's Zion Congregation. By 1887 he succeeded Gutheim at Temple Sinai. In a sermon given on January 1, 1897, Heller attempted to show how new circumstances often created the need for certain religious expressions, cast in temporary forms, to change. He argued that in the past ghetto life of the Jews, the gentiles had interposed religion as a barrier and a distinguishing factor. In the United States, however, this should not occur in the ordinary relations of life. Heller frankly and bluntly stated, "Jews shall assimilate." This, however, raised an important question concerning the Jewish Sabbath. Was the observance of it unpatriotic? He reasoned that it was not because Sunday had been made the civil day of rest on a humanitarian, rather than a theological, basis. America was not a Christian country. Otherwise, it would indeed be unpatriotic for Jews to observe their Sabbath as opposed to Sunday. Yet, in recognizing the need to assimilate, many Jews had become impatient with or indifferent to the Sabbath ceremony. Heller noted, "We dont [*sic*] know yet how to be loyal to [the] Jewish past without

offending."<sup>20</sup> In essence he had emphasized the dilemma facing American Jews. Living in a largely Christian environment, the Jewish Sabbath was not generally recognized by society. Instead, American society was structured around the Christian Sabbath while considering the Jewish Sabbath a day of work. Did being American mean that worship had to be conducted on Sunday while using Saturday as a day of work? By defining American identity in non-theological terms, Heller legitimated what he delineated as non-Christian practices of religion. In short, American identity did not depend on Christian identity. In fact, while he argued that religious barriers were at one time of gentile origin, America had sought to reduce such walls. Therefore, although religion indeed acted as a distinguishing agent, it should not bar Jews access to American society.

A few weeks later, three days before George Washington's birthday, Heller lectured on patriotism and took Washington's life as the focus of his comments. After asking, "Wherein does patriotism consist?", he answered that it consists "not in dying for one's country, but in living for it." He then showed how Washington, through hard work and thriftiness, overcame a childhood bereft of economic and educational advantages. Furthermore, the former president disdained partisanship in religion and politics.<sup>21</sup>

This last idea played an important role in Heller's thinking. By appealing to the example of George Washington, one of the great national icons, Heller attempted to overcome religious barriers to Jews living in a country with a Christian majority. By honoring Washington's birthday and life, Heller showed that being an American did not depend on one's religious affiliation. After all, Washington himself disdained distinctions based on one's religion. Instead, being an American meant rising above those things that divided the nation and working for the betterment of the country. Again, to the gentile, the message was that one's American identity did not depend on one's Christian identity.<sup>22</sup> To his Jewish audience, Heller used Washington to encourage a simplicity of life, consistent idealism, and the fulfillment of responsibilities. Rabbi Leucht expressed similar sentiments in a prayer he wrote for the one hundredth

*Rabbi Max Heller.*

*While rabbi at Temple Sinai, he invited the  
First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans  
to use the synagogue's facilities while their building  
was being refurbished. The church gladly accepted.  
(Courtesy of Temple Sinai, New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

anniversary of the celebration of Washington's birthday. He too extolled Washington's attributes, praying that these would bind the nation together and lift it to accomplish the highest aim. He entreated God that prejudices and doubt would not guide humans but that all would look to God for light and truth.<sup>23</sup>

The separating of one's religious beliefs from national identity also affected Jewish actions as Americans. Heller believed that Jews in general should not vote as a group when religion had nothing to do with an issue. In fact, to vote for a candidate based primarily on the candidate's like or dislike of the Jews was, in his words, narrow-minded and unpatriotic. Furthermore, to use hyphenated terms (such as German-American) to emphasize one's ethnicity harmed American society since it created divisions.<sup>24</sup> He, therefore, applied the separation of religion from American identity to Jews as well as Christians.

In addition to American history, Heller appropriated current events to oppose religious barriers. The United States had become involved in a war in Cuba and the Philippines toward the end of the nineteenth century. Amid concerns about the safety of American investments in Cuba, the United States went to war with Spain in 1898 in hopes of securing Cuban independence. In a brief war, the Americans defeated Spain and thus helped Cubans gain freedom and drove Spain from the Philippines. President William McKinley sought "to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them." These events provided the backdrop to a sermon delivered by Heller in January 1899.<sup>25</sup>

In response to a recommendation from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations that Jews devote a Sabbath to remember those in the military, Heller addressed his congregation concerning the Spanish-American War. Linking Judaism with liberty, Heller affirmed the pride of Jews in those who had died fighting for their country. Concerning monuments to commemorate the fallen soldiers, he emphasized the Jewish nature of monuments by turning to Jacob's experience recorded in Genesis 28. After his famous dream of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder extending from heaven, Jacob took the stone he had used for a pillow, set it up as a monument, and declared that "this

stone . . . shall be God's house." Heller observed that for a monument to become a house of God, it must commemorate a dream. He then concluded, "the spiritual & imperishable monument will be the liberty of Cuba & of the Philippines." In fact, he called this liberating action "a new flowering out of our traditions." By linking liberty with Judaism, he could conclude, "The U. S. [was] founded upon Jewish aspirations." As examples of this he cited the Puritans, the American Revolution, Abraham Lincoln, and the inspiration found in the biblical concept of the year of jubilee (probably a reference to the Liberty Bell, which was inscribed with a phrase from Leviticus 25:10).<sup>26</sup> Heller was not arguing that the country was a Jewish nation in the same manner that Christians often contended for the Christian nature of the United States. Since the late nineteenth century, Christianity and, more specifically, Protestantism had been linked increasingly with patriotism. Many Americans, especially Christian revivalists, felt the two were synonymous. To be anything other than a Christian, preferably a Protestant, was unpatriotic to many.<sup>27</sup> In a sense, Heller did an "end run" around this argument. Christians may have founded the nation, but the leading attribute of the United States—liberty—actually was a Jewish concept. While Rabbi Gutheim had considered liberty to be neither an exclusively Jewish or Christian value, Heller explicitly identified it as having Jewish roots.

What were the implications of such a view? Jews no longer would have to speak, as Gutheim had, of the founding fathers as their adopted fathers. The majority of the founding fathers may not have been Jewish literally, but they operated from a Jewish principle. Thus Judaism played a leading role in the founding of the nation in a spiritual sense. Furthermore, to support the spread of liberty to Cuba and the Philippines not only was an American ideal, it also was a Jewish ideal. Jews could cross any barrier imposed by religion and wholeheartedly support this national goal as Americans although President McKinley had identified the Christianizing of Filipinos as one objective of the war. Heller used religion to redefine or broaden American notions of identity to give Jews a significant part in the founding of the country. Like

Gutheim, Heller called for active participation by Jews in national events and in the creation of their American identity. He, however, went a step further in his appropriation of the concept of liberty. Liberty was indeed the quintessential expression of American identity. As a Jewish ideal, however, Americans had "borrowed" it. Jews were not merely "foreigners" living in the land. They were virtual founders of the nation.

Heller's redefinition of liberty and support of the Spanish-American War also reflected what Sidney E. Mead has called an amalgamation or syncretization of theology with American society. Accordingly, during the last half of the nineteenth century, the ideas and ideals of a democratic society with a "free-enterprise" system were generally accepted by Protestants. He explained that as "activistic American Protestants lost their sense of estrangement from the society, [they] began to argue that it (i.e., American society) was profoundly Christian, and to explain and vindicate it in a jargon strangely compounded out of the language of traditional Christian theology, the prevalent common-sense philosophy, and laissez-faire economics." Heller and other Jews confronted a society that was increasingly intertwined and identified with Protestant Christianity. Yet, through their efforts to redefine terms often understood in the context of Protestantism, Jews sought to fortify their status as Americans and to challenge Protestant notions.<sup>28</sup> This broadening of American identity nurtured cooperation between Jews and Christians of New Orleans in a variety of settings.

#### *Jewish-Christian Unity*

Palmer, Gutheim, Leucht, and Heller used religion to overcome barriers that might otherwise have inhibited intergroup dialogue. By doing so, they engaged in the redefinition of religious and national identities. Did, however, their words indicate what some scholars have called a "surface cordiality"? Did the actions of Gutheim, Leucht, and Heller represent protective measures designed to interpret Jewishness in manners acceptable to a gentile majority? Did Palmer join with Jews merely to advance Christian goals? While the role of southern rabbis has been

*Rabbi Isaac L. Leucht.*

*Among his many activities, he served on the Louisiana State Board of Education, helped with the New Orleans B'nai B'rith relief efforts after the Galveston Hurricane of 1900, and was a member of the Red Cross Society.*

*(Courtesy Touro Infirmary Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana)*

understood to be that of an interpreter or broker of Jewish values and culture to the gentiles,<sup>29</sup> Palmer also seemed to perform the same function on behalf of Christians. Furthermore, Gutheim, Leucht, and Heller transmitted images of Christians to their Jewish audiences. Palmer likewise transmitted Jewish images to Christians. All four sought to explain the other's faith within the framework of their respective religions.

Concerning the early religious environment of the United States, Sidney E. Mead has observed, "Because religious commitment is an all-or-nothing matter, each religious group tended to absolutize the particular tenets of its generally Christian theology and polity that distinguished it from all others. For in these its sense of peculiar and significant identity and its justification for separate existence were rooted." If this statement is true regarding the relationship between Christian denominations, it seems to be even more applicable regarding the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Mead argued further, "It is for this reason that every religious group tends to resist emphasis on the tenets it shares with all others." Accordingly, religious freedom caused each group to compete with the others for the uncommitted.<sup>30</sup> Mead's idea helps explain partially why Christian denominations maintained their distinctive doctrines; it was a matter of survival. Maintaining doctrinal distinctiveness paradoxically became all the more important as Jews and Christians in New Orleans began to find issues on which to unite. As the two groups began to explore ways of negotiating the traditional barriers between them, the respective assertions concerning the true or superior nature of their religions kept them from losing their distinctive identities.

All four ministers saw the value of maintaining religious particularism, and each, in fact, stressed the superiority of his denomination while recognizing the contributions of others. As previously noted, Palmer, like most Christians, believed that Christianity had superseded Judaism in God's plan as his instrument in the world. Thus in explaining why the central tenet of Christianity (the death and resurrection of Jesus) provoked Jewish opposition, he asserted that Jews did not disagree with Christians concerning the commonly shared doctrines of supernatural

revelation, mediation, redemption, sacrifice, atonement, and priesthood. Instead, "the trouble with the Jew is that all these are assumed by Christianity into itself, and thus Judaism is vacated; by which all his religious associations are offended, and he is led to reject the Cross." In simple terms, Christianity had assumed Judaism's earlier role.<sup>31</sup>

The belief in the superiority of one's religion, however, was not unique to Christians like Palmer. Gutheim manifested the same ideas, albeit applied to Judaism, and did not hesitate to chastise and confront Christianity. In 1849, for example, at the consecration of congregation Adath Israel of Louisville, Kentucky, he proclaimed the mission of Judaism "to be the bearer and guardian of the Revelation of God and of the Doctrine of the Unity of His Being for all times and to all nations."<sup>32</sup> In his inaugural sermon at Temple Emanu-El in New York, given on November 14, 1868, he referred to Christian stereotypes by asking, "Has not, for the last 1,800 years, our truthful religion been decried as an exploded system, and our faithful adherence to it been styled blinded stubbornness?" He then argued for the necessity of recognizing truth, comparing the spiritually blind with the physically blind. One who has been born blind can never see the light of day. So, too, one who is spiritually blind cannot "appreciate properly and truly the mysterious workings of Providence" because his "mental eye is overclouded and darkened by superstition and irreligion." Thus the "preacher in Israel" must impart truth and dispel "the clouds of error and prejudice." The following week he contended that gentile interest in Judaism came more from curiosity rather than from true appreciation. He challenged his congregation to spread "enlightened religious views . . . for the triumph of truth, light and love, in this great Western World."<sup>33</sup> Gutheim, therefore, sought to overcome prejudice and misunderstanding by dispelling erroneous notions of Judaism. He also hinted at the inferiority of Christianity by emphasizing the spiritual blindness that it had produced.

Yet, Gutheim could be even more direct. The idea of Israel's mission arose often in his preaching. He used this concept to orient Jews to their role as a people scattered among the nations

and without a homeland. In an undated sermon on Numbers 4:14–20, he illustrated the relationship of the Jews to the world by comparing it to the relationship of the biblical tribe of Levi, and especially the priests, to the rest of the biblical Israelites. The tribe of Levi acted as the divinely chosen tribe to perform religious duties. In the same way, “the people of Israel, were selected by the Most High, to be the guardians and conservators of his word, the ministers of the human race, the priests in the sanctuary.” This mission explained why Israel had been dispersed throughout the world. Jews were to be a blessing to all humanity so that all people, including “those who imagine to preach the highest truths enveloped in irreconcilable mysteries and forced human dogmas,” clearly a reference to Christians, would one day “learn the true Knowledge of God from Israel.”<sup>34</sup> Gutheim utterly rejected the notion of Christianity as the divine bearer of truth to the world. To him Judaism had not become bankrupt by the advent of Christianity. If anything, Christianity was based on empty claims and biblical misunderstanding.

Gutheim explicated the complete lack of basis for Christian claims in a sermon he delivered on March 18, 1854. Using Exodus 32:30–33 as his text, he argued for the individual’s responsibility for sin. He warned against efforts to obtain divine pardon and grace by “false means.” Each person individually possessed the power to restore his or her relation with God. Twice in his sermon manuscript, Gutheim underlined the sentence, “The Bible sanctions no vicarious atonement, no expiation of sin by proxy.” He concluded his message by asserting that, “The idea of a vicarious atonement as being necessary to the salvation of mankind, of a nation or of a single individual is, therefore, in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of the Bible.”<sup>35</sup> By attacking the idea of vicarious atonement, Gutheim struck at the heart of Christianity. Without the doctrine of the vicarious atoning death of Jesus, Christianity would not exist. Therefore, like Palmer, Gutheim held strong beliefs regarding the superiority of his religion.

Max Heller, on the other hand, presented a more ambiguous position toward Christianity. This may be explained, in part, by his view of religious truth. To him, rather than being singular, the

latter exhibited a variety of manifestations (unlike Palmer's idea of truth progressing from Judaism to Christianity). As a result, Judaism could never claim infallibility or a monopoly of truth.<sup>36</sup> True tolerance, therefore, was to "thank [our] brother for differing, instead of forgiving him."<sup>37</sup> He counseled his congregation to be tolerant toward other religions. Anticipating the question whether or not tolerance meant unfaithfulness to "our truth," he answered negatively because "there is no absolute truth; true is to each what makes him noble."<sup>38</sup>

With sentiments such as these, it would seem that Heller would hardly have a harsh word to say about other religions, especially Christianity. Yet, he did. Although he preached toleration, he also asserted that every religion answered a human need. What need did Judaism answer? To use Heller's words, it "suits most, fits highest intelligences, lifts them up & progresses with us."<sup>39</sup> He apparently conceived of Judaism to be among the highest of religions. While all religions had positive values and contained truth, most, if not all, fell short of Judaism. Heller cautioned against assuming that Judaism contained all truth, but he apparently believed it contained the most truth. Naturally rejecting Christianity's ultimate claims, he affirmed, "We can venerate the Christ-character, even though we cannot accept the Christ-faith; but even the latter we can honor and admire in others where it gives rise to childlike trust and elevated sentiment."<sup>40</sup> Admiration of Christian ideals, thus, did not prevent Heller from viewing it as inferior to Judaism.

Given Judaism's mission of living its faith in a world "brutally materialistic in its greed," Judaism was the antidote needed by everyone. Nonetheless the ideals and truths of Judaism had been preached by men "not of Israel's blood" and spread throughout the world with the use of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament). To Heller, although these truths had been preached, they had not been lived. From this necessity he found a mission for Jews because out of all "history's great teacher-nations," Israel alone had survived so that it could embody these truths. Christianity had failed in this effort. Heller juxtaposed the influence of Jesus with the mission of the Jews:

That sweet personality of the Christian savior, with all its purity and all its impossibility, has affected but imperceptibly the military and imperialistic barbarism of our age; the world's Messiah must be a whole people which will bring peace to the individual, as it will teach righteousness to the nations.

Israel is the world's divinely appointed Messiah.

Christianity had good points, but it had essentially failed. The world needed Judaism, the true messianic vehicle, to live the Jewish truths that Christians had appropriated but not lived. This would best be accomplished through Zionism. Ironically, Heller saw the need for a physical nation to aid Jews in accomplishing their divine mission. This idea was not far removed from Christians' efforts to use the United States to further their ideals.<sup>41</sup>

Each of the four ministers, therefore, transmitted to their audiences similar pictures of the other's religion. The two religions were connected, but their counterpart had departed from the divine mission either through spiritual blindness or error. In spite of strongly-held beliefs that their respective religion was the superior and divinely chosen creed of the modern era, Jews and Christians in New Orleans found common ground on which to unite. Furthermore, these religious ideas were not impenetrable barriers prohibiting the two groups from joining hands on religious issues. To the contrary, religion often provided the forum for cooperation.

Palmer and other Christians could unite with the Jews of New Orleans to denounce the persecutions of Jews in Russia. At a rally held on March 16, 1882, Palmer, along with Percy Roberts, a local lawyer, the Rev. Father O'Connor (probably John F. O'Connor, assistant pastor of Jesuits' College and Church of the Immaculate Conception), and T. J. Semmes, also a local lawyer and former Confederate senator, spoke to a large crowd. According to the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, this event attracted an unprecedented number of people. The mayor of New Orleans, Joseph A. Shakespeare, called the meeting to order and then called for the reading of a number of resolutions previously composed by a committee chaired by the Rev. Henry M. Smith, pastor of the

Third Presbyterian Church. Other notable local and state businessmen and politicians participated in various capacities. Members of the Jewish community served alongside Christians as vice presidents. Invoking humanity, justice, and Christianity, the resolutions denounced the treatment of Russian Jews, calling it unparalleled in modern history. They endorsed the policy of settling the refugees in agricultural colonies and the offer of Gov. Samuel D. McEnery to give homesteads to Russian Jews. The committee pointed to the Sicily Island agricultural colony for Russian Jews, located in Catahoula Parish, as a foreshadowing of future success. They encouraged the mayor to appoint a committee to receive and disburse contributions for the relief of Russian Jews. Finally, they requested Louisiana's congressional delegation in Washington to bring the city's sentiments before the president. All resolutions carried unanimously.<sup>42</sup>

Following the approval of the resolutions, the four speakers addressed the crowd. Roberts spoke first, describing the Jewish race as "the most remarkable people" and "God elected," "God ordained," and "God producing." He emphasized the Jewish support of Christian victims of persecution, specifically referring to a speech given by Rabbi Gutheim in New Orleans in 1851. According to Roberts, twenty thousand Christians had been "inhumanly slaughtered in Syria by their Mohammedan enemies." In reply to his question, concerning who led in crying out against such atrocities and in gathering relief for the victims, Roberts had C. F. Buck, the city attorney, read an excerpt from Gutheim's address. The excerpt included letters written by Moses Montefiore and the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain encouraging Jewish support of the suffering Christians, and in Montefiore's case, including a one thousand dollar contribution for relief. Roberts then resumed his argument for aid by developing the idea of the Christians' debt to the Jews. He observed, "We owe them all that we hold highest and dearest of our possessions." Among these things, he included "our" law, code of morals, religion, and "on his human side, our very God himself."

Father O'Connor next highlighted factors that united Jew, Protestant, and Catholic on this occasion. Among them, he

pointed to the common sentiment of human sympathy in the face of persecution, the assault on everyone's inalienable right to peace, prosperity, and life, and the outrages against Christian principles in a Christian country. The priest labeled the persecution of Russian Jews as attacks on human rights, the spirit of Christianity, and civilization. Semmes then noted how the previous speakers had fully explored the Christian point of view regarding the issue at hand. He would address the crowd not as a Christian, but as an American citizen. As such, he protested the Russian persecutions because they violated the great American principle espousing the right of all to express their opinions. When he encouraged the audience to register their protests as Americans against the attack on the Jews, he was met with loud and long cheering.

Palmer rose as the final speaker of the evening. He advocated the cessation of Russian persecutions and the reception of Russian Jewish immigrants by the United States. He borrowed Semmes' idea of speaking as an American when he asserted that the voice of protest must come from American soil. In order to be true to "the great sentiment engraved upon the cornerstone of our civil government," namely the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Americans must protest and offer refuge to the oppressed. He then addressed the religious aspect of the matter. Reflecting on the biblical history and associations with the Jews, he referred to the fact that Christianity had derived from Judaism. The sacred books of the Jews were the sacred books of Christians. Due to this connection, which he had long espoused, he would support Jews whenever necessary. In Palmer's words,

Whenever persecution burst upon the Jew there would I be at his side—an Hebrew of the Hebrews—to suffer and to do. If we cannot stay the hand of persecution abroad, let us welcome them to our homes and our bosoms here, and roll up such a sentiment in favor of civil and religious freedom on this new continent that it shall never be darkened with the stain which rests upon the old.<sup>43</sup>

After a long and loud applause, the meeting ended. Palmer's last words apparently struck a chord with some in the Jewish community, for at his death twenty years later, Rabbi Leucht paraphrased Palmer at his memorial service, "When a Hebrew suffers, I suffer with him . . . these words since then have been the bonds that linked us to him—even unto death."<sup>44</sup> Jews like Leucht regarded Palmer's statements as concrete evidence of his support of Jews and not as mere rhetoric.

All four speakers emphasized different connections with Jews. Percy Roberts highlighted the idea of Christian indebtedness to the Jews. Father O'Connor pointed to the Christian responsibility to respond to suffering. T. J. Semmes moved away from the religious aspects of the meeting and addressed an American reaction, and Palmer combined the religious and American responses. His speech accentuated how these two great influences, national and religious (in this case, Christian) ideals, worked simultaneously to overcome barriers that both, taken in isolation, often constructed. In terms of religion, Jews and Christians disagreed deeply over the nature of God and his work in the world, and their theological claims often contradicted one another. If one's American identity depended on one's Christian identity, then Jews and Christians could never be united as fellow citizens. In this case, American ideals of liberty helped overcome religious barriers by associating religious liberty with American identity. Being an American meant, at least theoretically, looking past distinctions raised by religion. In other words, Palmer's status as an American helped keep his claims of Christian superiority in check. This idea differed dramatically from other forms of American identity present since at least the 1870s. Evangelicalism, such as that represented by Dwight L. Moody and the home missionary movement, often equated Americanization with evangelization.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, religious identity also enabled Jews and Christians to find common ground. Christians in New Orleans protested the Jewish persecution precisely because they were linked to Jews based on religion.

The Jewish response to the mass meeting revealed several points of contact with the Christian expressions of support. Rabbi

Gutheim addressed his congregation at Temple Sinai on Saturday, the day after the mass meeting. Many gentiles attended the service, as well as a large number of Jews. Gutheim predicted that the outpouring of Christian support on behalf of the Jews would not be forgotten; "it was an era in the life of the Jewish people, and an event that time should not be able to efface." Furthermore, he hoped that "by our acts and liberality [we can] show that we are all of one blood." (This portrayal differed from Heller's later assertion that Christians were "not of Israel's blood.") The ideas of indebtedness and shared values had again arisen.<sup>46</sup>

Gutheim also addressed the source of the persecutions. He attributed it to "bigoted religionists" who sought "to force upon the world their peculiar tenets, and would gladly compel all men to follow their leaders." While in antiquity, nations worshipped their own gods and asserted their superiority, "now all nations recognize that there is only one true God." The Russian persecutions reflected a retrogression to the ancient days of polytheism. According to Gutheim, however, "our scriptures" encouraged a different response to religious pluralism, namely, "that we should love our neighbors as ourselves." He defined this idea as respect for the views and opinions of other citizens. The rabbi remarked, "Obedience to this divine principle does not necessitate an abandoning of our faith, not at all, but that we shall recognize the rights of the stranger."<sup>47</sup>

Gutheim's appropriation of the "love thy neighbor as thyself" principle must have struck a chord with Christians. This principle occurred in Leviticus 19:18, but according to Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus used it to help define the essence of the Law and the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible. According to the Matthew account, a Pharisee asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest. Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 which enjoined complete devotion to God. He also said that the second commandment was similar to the first; "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Christians undoubtedly knew this episode well because it represented a bare-bones expression of the foundational principles of their religion. When Gutheim identified this

ideal as Jewish, Christians certainly noticed the connections between the two religions. Gutheim had subtly shown that the agreement of Judaism and Christianity on two major core values could lead to cooperative action in the national arena. By defining love of one's neighbor in terms of respect for his or her views and opinions, Gutheim wedded religious ideas with civil liberty. Thus, the religious found expression in the civil by granting religious liberty. In essence when Jews and Christians practiced religious liberty, they were practicing a fundamental principle of their respective faiths and were not being unfaithful to their respective religions.

Rabbi Leucht also addressed his congregation at Touro Synagogue regarding the mass meeting. Leucht had been born in Darmstadt and immigrated to the United States in 1864. He served as the assistant rabbi to Rabbi Henry Hocheimer at the Fell's Point congregation in Baltimore before becoming Gutheim's assistant in 1868, first at Gates of Mercy and later at Temple Sinai. In 1879 he became the rabbi of Gates of Mercy, which merged with Dispersed of Judah in 1882 to form Touro Synagogue. In response to the mass meeting, Leucht chose to address his newly reconstituted congregation on the issue of Jews and agriculture. Pointing out that in antiquity Israel had been composed of agriculturists, Leucht contended that hundreds of years of persecution had forced Jews to switch to mercantile pursuits. He agreed that far too many Jews were working as merchants, and he encouraged Jewish parents to teach their children other trades, "and prove to the world we are willing to definitely solve the Jewish question." To Leucht, Jews bore the primary responsibility for ridding their gentile neighbors of prejudice against them. In this context he viewed the mass meeting as a symbol of the willingness of gentiles to assist Jews in this endeavor. He also understood it to be a sign that God would never forsake Israel. In reference to Palmer's address, Leucht said, "When that great and eloquent divine, with tears in his voice proclaimed, 'Whenever a Hebrew suffers I suffer with him,' it was to me as if that God who proclaimed himself to be the Father of all mankind had spoken with his eloquent tongue."<sup>48</sup>

Leucht's response reveals two aspects of the issue. First, Jews were not passive spectators watching Christians fight their battles for them. Leucht interpreted Christian efforts at the mass meeting as welcome assistance, but he placed the primary responsibility for resolving their plight at the feet of the Jewish people. Indeed the Jews of New Orleans had worked previously for the relief of Jews in Russia. Russian Jews had settled Sicily Island in 1881, the first Jewish agricultural colony in the United States. The New Orleans Agricultural Society lent assistance to this endeavor. The New Orleans Immigrant Aid Association also raised funds to assist the Russian Jews. Jews in Elizabethgrad wrote a letter to the society on March 10, thanking the association for its assistance. Unfortunately, the assistance proved inadequate. Located in a swamp some distance from New Orleans, the Sicily Island affair failed in less than a year.<sup>49</sup> In fact, while the mass meeting was going on, the Jews at Sicily Island were struggling with a devastating flood that eventually doomed their colony. Yet, the whole movement represented active participation on the part of Jews to address the suffering of Russian Jews. Second, Christian assistance arose from their common association with Jews in the realm of religion. Palmer had identified religious connections as the tie binding Jews and Christians together. Leucht affirmed it by acknowledging the act of the "Father of all mankind" in the words and actions of Palmer and others. Once again, religious identity allowed Jews and Christians to unite.

This identity expressed itself again a few weeks after the mass meeting. On March 27 many ministers of the city came together to explore the possibility of creating a league dedicated to the better observance of the Sabbath. Palmer played a leading role in convening the meeting. Sabbath movements were not uncommon in the United States and also internationally. In the 1820s and 1830s, the Christian Sabbatarian movement began in the United States as part of a social and religious reform effort. These efforts contributed to the creation of a six-day work week.<sup>50</sup> The New Orleans movement also identified religious, as well as social, reasons for agitating for the better observance of the Sabbath.

Palmer called the meeting to order and nominated Methodist Bishop J. C. Keener as president of the fledgling organization. After his election, the bishop remarked that Louisiana was the only state without a Sunday law, noting the failure of previous efforts to pass such an act. He indicated that an indirect impetus for the present meeting may have arisen after the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a local option Sabbath law that had been adopted by several parishes. He expressed confidence that the next legislature would deal with the constitutional objections if pressed by public opinion.<sup>51</sup>

After electing the Rev. J. W. Flinn, pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church, as secretary, the conference next heard an address by Palmer. In an effort to show the broad appeal of the movement, he read a note from the Roman Catholic Archbishop, J. N. Perche, expressing regret over his being unable to attend. Palmer noted that he had conferred with Gutheim about the meeting and that the rabbi was present. Palmer, therefore, demonstrated that the major religious groups of New Orleans—Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—had declared their interest in the Sabbath observance movement.<sup>52</sup> Palmer's inclusion of Judaism marked an important step in the recognition of Judaism by Christians as a legitimate religious expression.

Palmer hoped that consensus would arise from agreement on three broad principles. The first justified the movement's existence based on the desecration of the Sabbath. Not only did ministers want to see the desecration halted, but so did "men of the world." The second asserted that the Sabbath belonged to God. Due to the divine ownership of this day, it ought to be spent in worship, rest from work, and absence of worry. Palmer, however, acknowledged that in order to impress upon all people the need for Sabbath observance, not only would all the ministers need to address the issue from their pulpits, but the publicity from newspapers and journals would be necessary. The latter would help reach the non-religious segment of New Orleanian society. Lastly, he indicated that God had given the Sabbath to man. By affirming these three principles, Palmer believed that a platform broad enough for all shades of belief could be fashioned. He did

express concern over the issue of the relationship between the church and state. While believing that individuals could address the legislature concerning these issues, he expressed reticence over organized religious bodies doing so. He believed it best to leave out of the movement's platform any reference to organized legislative action. Although Palmer did not want to establish a Sabbath observance league that would lobby the Louisiana legislature, he hoped that the league would influence public opinion.<sup>53</sup>

After several other speakers expressed their opinions, Gutheim addressed the meeting. He began by saying that his presence might be "out of place," but Keener responded, "Not at all. We are glad to have you with us." According to the newspaper account, many others in the audience added, "We are glad to see you here." The rabbi affirmed the necessity and value of keeping the Sabbath to any religion. He cautioned, however, against relying on legislative action to further the cause of Sabbath observance. Instead, he encouraged the use of moral persuasion, noting that in his thirty-two years of residence in New Orleans, he had seen a gradual improvement in Sabbath observance. He concluded by stating that his "peculiar situation" prohibited him from voting on the resolutions. Others concurred with Gutheim's warning. In the end, Palmer's three resolutions were adopted unanimously, and the meeting adjourned until the next week.<sup>54</sup>

On March 31 Rabbi Leucht delivered a sermon to his congregation in support of the aims of the Sabbath Observance League. From his point of view, anything that raised the moral sentiment of the community as well as alleviated the burden on the poorer classes and freed them from "the bondage of their taskmasters" warranted discussion. Freedom and liberty played integral roles in Leucht's interpretation of the Sabbath. Extrapolating from the fourth commandment's historical context (Exodus 20:8-11), he argued that it served to show the recently freed Israelites that they indeed were free and now could choose to work, rather than be forced to do so.<sup>55</sup>

From the historical, Leucht proceeded to cultivate the Sabbath's value to modern society. The underlying principle of Sabbath celebration was the "moral elevation of man through

physical rest." Thus the Sabbath brought a great moral influence upon the Jews and was even responsible for the survival of the Jewish race. He reminded his congregation that the Sabbath they observed on foreign shores had not accompanied them to the United States. He attributed this primarily to the fact that "in the chase after gain we have had no time for its blessed comforts." Leucht, therefore, recognized the deleterious effects of materialism upon his congregation.<sup>56</sup>

Both Jew and Christian shared in the threat of materialism on moral and spiritual sensitivities of people. As a result, Leucht could proclaim, "I believe a better observance of Sunday by the Christian community will have the effect of inducing you to hallow and reverence your own Sabbath." In fact, he considered it the "sacred duty" of Jews to assist in the "noble undertaking" of the league. How could this be done? Governmental enforcement clearly was not a viable option. He reasoned that the religious denomination in the majority in the legislature would dictate how the Sabbath would be observed. Invariably, religious hatred and jealousy would take over and even threaten the survival of the republic. Furthermore, he found unacceptable the proposal that Jews should be allowed to close their businesses on Saturday and reopen them on Sunday. Jews did not want laws enacted, either positively or negatively, on their behalf based on their status as Jews. According to Leucht, "We are—and must be in the eyes of the law—nothing but citizens of the United States, with equal burdens and equal rights." For Leucht, a Sunday law dictating how the Sabbath should be observed was unacceptable and a violation of individual freedom. On the other hand, he would support a law declaring that no one could be forced to work on the Sabbath.<sup>57</sup>

Both Leucht and Gutheim agreed that people would best be incited to a better observance of the Sabbath only by appealing to morality and humanity. Leucht strongly urged members of his congregation to join the league, and he closed his sermon with one final appeal. By joining the league, "we will be able to repay that noble band of men who so eloquently and heartfully stood by the Jew when he was in want of sympathy, when persecuted by his

adversaries." In doing so they would exemplify the words found in Malachi 2:10: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why, then, should we deal treacherously, one against the other, to profane the covenant of our Father?" These closing words of Leucht are most interesting because they reveal a sense of debt on the part of some Jews toward Christians. Undoubtedly Leucht was referring to the efforts of the people of New Orleans, led by Christian ministers, to support the Russian Jews at the mass meeting held earlier in the month. Jews and Christians felt a strong sense of debt springing from actions motivated by religion. This joint indebtedness helped them overcome the exclusive claims of their respective religions. His use of Malachi 2:10 also is interesting. In its biblical context, these words addressed the faithlessness of Jews living in the post-exilic (post 539 B.C.E.) community of Judah to the covenant as demonstrated by their intermarriage with gentiles. Leucht now used this verse to illustrate the brotherhood of Jew and gentile.<sup>58</sup>

The Sabbath Observance League exemplified several aspects of Jewish-Christian relations. First, it showed the ability of Jews and Christians to unite voluntarily on religious issues. Sabbath observance was an integral part of both faiths, and both suffered from a general neglect of it by the populace. By joining forces they hoped to achieve mutual benefit. The league also demonstrated the ability of Jews to exert influence on Christians. Gutheim and Leucht helped persuade the league not to seek legislative action in order to achieve its goal. The effort by Christians to include Jews in the league further showed the growing importance of Jews to the religious community. Finally, the league represented the continuing dialogue about the meaning of religious liberty. Jewish opposition to Sabbath laws potentially put them in a dangerous situation. Besides the financial burden they would have to bear by not conducting business on Saturdays and Sundays, their patriotism might also be questioned. In 1885 the Rev. Wilbur F. Crafts wrote *The Sabbath for Man*, a book wherein he detailed the history of Sabbath observance. He supported Sabbath (Sunday) laws in the United States in light of the many benefits of such observance. He also linked it to the preservation of American society. Those

who opposed Sunday laws, therefore, threatened the very existence of the United States. Linking Sabbath observance to the founding of the country and noting that "Christianity is interwoven with the entire structure and history of the American government," Crafts questioned the patriotism of any who would oppose laws enforcing a quiet observance of the Christian Sabbath. He further argued that this opposition was based on false ideas of liberty, and he concluded that, "The first thing that emigrants of the baser sort need to learn on arrival in America is that American liberty includes obedience to the laws which protect the rights and liberties of all." Distinguishing between the "better class of Jews" and the "baser sort," Crafts believed that the latter needed to "take the scales of personal selfishness from their eyes" and rejoice in the benefits obtained by Sunday laws. The opposition voiced by Gutheim and Leucht to Sunday laws combined with their support of a Sabbath observance league challenged notions of Christian patriotism and liberty such as that expressed by Crafts. Remarkably, although the Sabbath Observance League was dominated by Christians, it refrained from pursuing the passage of Sunday laws. This was due, at least partially, to the efforts of Gutheim and Leucht. More importantly, the league's restraint in seeking legislation reflected more Jewish than typical Christian notions of liberty. Jewish presence and activity, therefore, helped broaden Christian concepts of religious liberty and American identity.<sup>59</sup>

William G. McLoughlin Jr. has noted that from 1875 to 1915 several forces caused a reconstruction of American life. One of those factors was the massive influx of immigrants with different cultural and religious values. This migration caused a redefinition of many of the traditions of American life.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the prominent presence of Jews among Christians in New Orleans forced the latter to reconceptualize their ideas of religious liberty. Some Christians began to grasp that religious liberty did not simply mean the freedom of Christian expressions of religion. It also included non-Christian expressions. Christians' understanding of American identity, so steeped in the idea of freedom, slowly began to expand beyond the criterion of adherence to Christian

dogma. Nineteenth century Christians, and especially Protestants, often tried to “Christianize” American culture to ensure that their values would prevail.<sup>61</sup> The inclusion of Jews in the Sabbath League represented at least a small change in Christians’ views of religious liberty. While they still attempted to “Christianize” society, they now included Jews in the efforts to change society through Sabbath observance.

One final area in which the Jews and Christians of New Orleans united arose from the confrontation with common enemies. Historian Bobbie Malone has aptly described Palmer as Heller’s mentor.<sup>62</sup> Both believed strongly in the supremacy of their respective faiths, yet they could work together on such issues as the Louisiana anti-lottery campaign as well as threats to religious awareness like materialism and pragmatism.

In 1892 electors had to decide whether to renew the charter of the Louisiana State Lottery. The daily, monthly, and semi-annual lottery drawings brought in large amounts of revenue for the state. While the lottery wielded great political and monetary power, citizens of Louisiana divided bitterly over the issue. The anti-lottery campaigners had been working in earnest for the past two years to defeat the charter renewal. The lottery, however, presented a formidable opponent, especially since the 1880s had been its most prosperous decade. Heller and Palmer played prominent roles in the opposition movement, as did Episcopal Bishop David Sessums, Catholic Archbishop Francis Janssens, and the Rev. Beverly Carradine, pastor of the Carondelet Street Methodist Church. According to one historian, Palmer delivered “the most stirring oratory in the antilottery campaign” at a rally held in New Orleans’ Grand Opera House on June 25, 1891.<sup>63</sup> Heller also delivered an influential speech on August 13, 1891, in Shreveport that helped in the eventual overwhelming rejection of the lottery amendment by the voters, although many in his congregation, including the congregation’s president, opposed Heller on this issue.<sup>64</sup>

The lottery represented to Palmer and Heller the encroachment of materialism and greed on society. This loomed as a serious threat to both religions. Rather than view each other

as enemies, Jews and Christians found allies in one another as they confronted mutual threats. Heller noted as much in "The Cowardice of Prosperity," a sermon given either in 1897 or 1898. He described the current generation as being one of "boundless wealth, inexhaustible opportunity and well-nigh riotous freedom; an age whose children are born to an intoxicating heritage of enjoyment and privilege." Consequently, "the sterner notes of religious duty are laughed into the wind" and "drowned out in spiritual chaos." This situation, however, was not confined to Judaism for even "the most orthodox and rigid of Christian denominations" complained "that prayer and worship are losing their hold upon the people, that the sermon becomes emasculated, a mere feature of attraction and entertainment."<sup>65</sup> Thus, some Jews and Christians formed alliances in their efforts to maintain their religions in the face of an encroaching materialism. Religion acted as a catalyst, rather than an obstacle, in bringing Jews and Christians together.

These actions by the four ministers seem to indicate genuine attempts to cross boundaries. The relationship of Jews and Christians in New Orleans as represented by Benjamin Morgan Palmer, James K. Gutheim, Isaac L. Leucht, and Max Heller reveals different notions of American and religious identity. While barriers erected on the basis of ethnic or religious associations existed, gateways were cut into the barriers, thereby allowing access between the two groups. At times, religion worked as a conduit through ethnic barriers, while at other times national and regional associations allowed religious boundaries to be negotiated. Ultimately these gateways allowed each group to maintain distinctive identities while forging a relationship that proved beneficial to both. Perhaps Rabbi Leucht summarized best the relationship between Jews and Christians in New Orleans as he closed his eulogy at Palmer's memorial service in 1902.

At the sacred shrine of his memory let me say that I believe that it is eminently due to the life and influence of Dr. Palmer that a

deep, religious peace reigns supreme in our midst. Thank God, we live in a community wherein all public endeavors, in all that tends toward the good of our people, we know of no separating walls. We never ask our neighbor: "What dost thou believe? But, what art thou willing to do for the best interests of our Commonwealth? We take each other by the hand, exclaiming: 'Let there be no strife between me and thee,' and together we help to build on that great structure where in time to come will be sung a hallelujah by a united mankind.<sup>66</sup>

Two years later Leucht stated in a newspaper article detailing the celebration of his sixtieth birthday and his twenty-fifth year as rabbi at Touro, "I am a Jew, and yet am a Protestant and also a Catholic, for I always protest against anything that opposes light and progress, and I am universal in my belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."<sup>67</sup> Leucht was not unaware of the theological and social issues dividing Jews and Christians, but he had identified how the two groups had forged a working relationship. They had emphasized mutual interests, springing from both religious and nationalistic sources, that bound them together. They had indeed become cooperating communities of faith even in the midst of anti-Semitism. In their working together, the leaders of these two communities redefined their identities as Jews, Christians, and Americans.

Jewish ideas of American identity included religious freedom as well as the duty of all Jews to participate in national observances and events. American identity had no room for distinctions based on religion. For Christians like Palmer, American identity was bound up with Christianity, but his understanding of Christianity allowed Jews to play an important role in God's efforts to establish Christianity and later, the United States. He even left the possibility open for Jews being used again in God's plan.<sup>68</sup> For Palmer and others like him, however, American identity moved away from Christian identity. For both groups, American liberty did not mean the absence of claims of religious superiority. Jews and Christians maintained belief in the supremacy of their respective religions, but they could cooperate

on many national and religious issues either as Americans or as people of God.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the Southern Jewish Historical Society held in Richmond, Virginia on November 5–7, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, June 15, 1886.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, May 31, 1902.

<sup>4</sup> *In Memory of Rev. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, D. D.*, n. d., 17; also see Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin M. Palmer* (Richmond, 1906; reprint, Great Britain, 1987), 645–650 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York, 1994), 13–14, 246; Leonard Rogoff, “Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew,” *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 195; Bobbie Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860–1929* (Tuscaloosa, 1997), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Morgan Palmer, “Import of Hebrew History,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 9 (April 1856): 591, 608.

<sup>7</sup> Palmer, “Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 1 (December 1847): 40.

<sup>8</sup> Palmer, “Import of Hebrew History,” 590.

<sup>9</sup> As an example of Palmer’s attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church, his statement in “Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews,” (p. 53) is helpful. In commenting on the negative effect that rabbinical studies had on the Hebrew mind, Palmer said, “The dialectics of the Talmudists produced a race of sophists precisely similar to those whom the dialectics of the schoolmen produced in the Romish Church.”

<sup>10</sup> Palmer, “Import of Hebrew History,” 598–601, 610.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Address of Rev. B. M. Palmer Delivered on the First Day of the New Year and Century*, January 1, 1900, 6, 10–11.

<sup>12</sup> James K. Gutheim sermon, November 29, 1860, James K. Gutheim Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter cited as Gutheim Papers).

<sup>13</sup> William Warren Rogers Jr., “‘In Defense of Our Sacred Cause’: Rabbi James K. Gutheim in Confederate Montgomery,” *Journal of Confederate History* 7 (1991): 115.

<sup>14</sup> Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1951), 47–51.

<sup>15</sup> Small collections, SC-4414, Miscellaneous, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>16</sup> Gutheim sermon, November 18, 1869, Gutheim Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Gutheim sermon, November 24, 1870, Gutheim Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Gutheim sermon, November 24, 1870, Gutheim Papers.

<sup>19</sup> James K. Gutheim, “Addresses of Rev. J. K. Gutheim and Rev. Dr. Palmer, at the Great Meeting in New Orleans,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 10 (June 1882): 250. Palmer spoke at the same meeting and used much of his time to rebut the idea of the Lost Cause.

<sup>20</sup> Max Heller sermon, January 1, 1897, Friday Lectures 1896–1897, Box 9, folder 1, Max Heller Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter cited as Heller Papers). The vast majority of the extant Heller sermons are sermon notes rather than manuscripts. Often only words or phrases are written, making it difficult on occasion to determine what Heller meant.

<sup>21</sup> Heller sermon, February 19, 1897, Friday Lectures 1896–1897, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers. In earlier sermon notes, Heller stated that Washington “deprecated partisanship.” Later Heller gave the following note from which I extrapolate his argument for Washington’s avoidance of partisanship: “Above part in religion & politics.”

<sup>22</sup> See also Heller sermon, March 30, 1894, Friday Lectures 1893–1894, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers. In this sermon, Heller argued that it was un-American to put religious beliefs into the Constitution.

<sup>23</sup> Box 2, folder 1, Rabbi Isaac L. Leucht Papers, Manuscript Collection 853, Manuscript Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>24</sup> Max Heller, *Jewish Ledger*, May 8, 1896; Heller sermon, May 17, 1895, Friday Lectures 1894–1895, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers.

<sup>25</sup> John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan H. Armitage, *Out of Many: A History of the American People*, 2d ed. (New Jersey, 1997), 640–641; President McKinley quoted in Samuel Flag Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York, 1955), 472.

<sup>26</sup> Heller sermon, January 27, 1899, Friday Lectures 1898–1899, Box 9, folder 2, Heller Papers; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989), 595–597. Leviticus 25:10 addresses the year of Jubilee wherein those who had been enslaved due to debt were freed and land sold for pressing economic reasons was restored. Inscribed on the Liberty Bell was the phrase, “Proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

<sup>27</sup> William G. McLoughlin Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, 1959), 444–445.

<sup>28</sup> Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, 1963), 138–139. Jon Butler has noted that between 1790 and 1860, Christianity in America changed from its colonial state-church pattern. As traditional church-state relations declined, the concern shifted from the relationship of government to the church to the relationship of the government to religion. While the post-revolutionary governments tended to support Christianity in general, the state’s authority in religious matters declined and denominational authority increased. As denominations proliferated, some Christians wanted governmental recognition of America’s Christian and Protestant identity. In response to indifference by some and to religious pluralism introduced by immigration, some Christians in the 1850s “evolved a myth of the American Christian past.” This myth “pressed new historical ‘facts’ on antebellum America as moral obligations.” See Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 257–264, 284–286 (quote).

<sup>29</sup> Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 177, 180; Malcolm H. Stern observed that, “A prime function of the Southern rabbi became interpreting the Jew to the non-Jewish community.” See Stern, “The Role of the Rabbi in the South,” in “*Turn to the South*”: *Essays on Southern Jewry*, ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Charlottesville, 1979), 27; Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, “The Rabbi as Ethnic

Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Spring 1983): 51-54.

<sup>30</sup> Sidney E. Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church* (New York, 1975), 37-38.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "Offence of the Cross, Unreasonable," in *A Weekly Publication Containing Sermons by Rev. B. M. Palmer* (New Orleans: November 19, 1876), 83. The text of this sermon came from 1 Corinthians 1:23: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness."

<sup>32</sup> James K. Gutheim, *Sermon Delivered at the Consecration of the Synagogue Adas Israel, at Louisville, KY, March 30, 1849*, 4. See also his sermon of December 1, 1853, where he defined Israel's peculiar destiny as, "Israel should be the people of religion among the nations of the earth." Gutheim Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Gutheim, *The Temple Pulpit* (New York: 1879), 19-20, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Gutheim undated sermon on Numbers 4:14-20, Gutheim Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Gutheim sermon, March 18, 1854, Gutheim Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Heller sermon, April 24, 1891, Friday Lectures 1890-1891, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Heller sermon, November 23, 1888, Friday Lectures 1887-1888, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Heller sermon, May 26, 1893, Friday Lectures 1893, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Heller sermon, March 25, 1887, Friday Lectures 1887-1888, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Heller, *Jewish Ledger*, January 3, 1896.

<sup>41</sup> Heller, *The American Hebrew*, May 8, 1903, 827-828. Gutheim would have agreed with this assessment. In a sermon preached in 1870, he proclaimed, "Israel, by its steady adhesion to this truth [humanity's creation in the image of God], has thus become the Messiah, the redeemer of mankind." He went on to show the superiority of Judaism to Islam and Christianity. The latter two religions sought conversions through force and brutality, but Judaism, the bearer of genuine religious truth, appealed to reason and waited patiently for the ultimate triumph of its cause. Gutheim, sermon dated 1870, "The episode recorded here . . ." Gutheim Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the account of the mass meeting comes from the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, March 17, 1882.

<sup>43</sup> A portion of Palmer's speech can also be found in Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin M. Palmer*, 487-490.

<sup>44</sup> *In Memory of Rev. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, D. D.*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 267.

<sup>46</sup> *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, March 18, 1882.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Southwestern Presbyterian*, March 23, 1882.

<sup>49</sup> Pearl W. Bartelt, "American Jewish Agricultural Colonies," in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: 1997), 358; *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, April 23 and May 21, 1882.

<sup>50</sup> Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, "The Jewish Sabbath Movement in the Early Twentieth Century," *American Jewish History* 69 (December 1979): 196-197.

<sup>51</sup> *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, March 28, 1882; *Southwestern Presbyterian*, March 30, 1882.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, April 3, 1882; *Southwestern Presbyterian*, April 6, 1882.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Wilbur F. Crafts, *The Sabbath for Man* (New York, 1885), 193, 251, 255–261.

<sup>60</sup> McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 168.

<sup>61</sup> Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *The Re-Forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism* (Louisville, 1992), 37–38.

<sup>62</sup> Malone, *Max Heller*, 50, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880–1896* (Baton Rouge, 1969), 115, 121, 129.

<sup>64</sup> Malone, *Max Heller*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> Max Heller, “The Cowardice of Prosperity,” Friday Lectures 1897–1898, Box 9, folder 1, Heller Papers.

<sup>66</sup> *In Memory of Rev. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, D. D.*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, January 24, 1904.

<sup>68</sup> Palmer, “Narrative of a Mission,” 54.

## *Glossary*

**bar mitzvah** ~ traditional coming-of-age ritual for Jewish males at age 13

**brit milah** ~ ritual circumcision performed on males eight days old; based on biblical mark of covenant

**davening** ~ praying

**gelt** ~ money

**kashrut** ~ the system of Jewish dietary laws

**kosher** ~ conforming to Jewish law, especially dietary law

**matzo** ~ unleavened bread eaten primarily during Passover

**minyan** ~ quorum of ten adult men traditionally required for public worship; some congregations now count adult women

**Passover** ~ spring holiday commemorating the deliverance of the ancient Hebrews from Egyptian bondage

**Rosh Hashanah** ~ literally "head of the year;" New Year on Hebrew calendar; one of holiest days of Jewish year

**seder** ~ ceremonial evening meal and service during Passover

**shokhet** ~ ritual slaughterer

**shtetl** ~ small town associated with Jews in eastern Europe

**sukkah** ~ temporary open-air structure used for the festival of Sukkot

**Sukkot** ~ fall holiday or Festival of Tabernacles commemorating the Hebrews' wanderings in the desert after the Exodus from Egyptian bondage

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

**Yiddish** ~ language of Ashkenazic Jews based on German and  
Hebrew

**Yom Kippur** ~ Day of Atonement; holiest day of Jewish year

## *Note on Authors*

**Terry Barr** is Professor of English at Presbyterian College, Clinton, South Carolina, where he specializes in twentieth century literature, ethnic studies, and film studies. Barr earned a Ph.D. in English and film studies from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He has published articles in *The Journal of Popular Film and TV*, *Studies in Popular Culture*, *American Literary Review*, *Studies in American Culture*, and *Elysian Fields Quarterly*, and contributed a chapter on Rabbi Milton Grafman and Birmingham to *Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights* (1997).

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## *Errata for Volume 2 (1999)*

The following are corrections for typographical errors found in *Southern Jewish History*, volume 2, 1999.

Table of Contents:

"The Jews of Kingston: Life in a Multicultural Boomtown" *should read* "The Jews of Keystone: Life in a Multicultural Boomtown."

Page 25, line 16:

"Donaldson, Louisiana" *should read* "Donaldsonville, Louisiana."

Page 25, line 20

"Texas" *should read* "Louisiana."

Page 115, paragraph 4, *should read*:

"With those credentials the Country Music Association could not justify denying Cohen membership in the Country Music Foundation's Hall of Fame. While most Hall of Fame inductees who were Cohen's contemporaries were inducted while they were alive, the CMA waited a full six years after Cohen's 1970 death before granting him that honor. Three decades later, as it strives to retain the Hall of Fame's exclusivity without slighting its growing number of deserving candidates, the CMA inducts its living and dead honorees in separate categories."

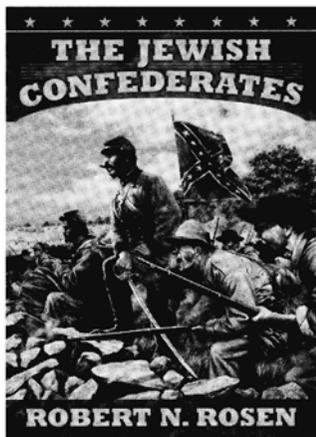
Page 116, last sentence, *should read*:

"Shaw's 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."

Page 126, note 34, line 2

"<http://www.wkm.com>" *should read* "<http://www.wkrn.com>."





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