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JEWISH  
HISTORY**

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WITH THE INDEX TO VOLUMES 1 THROUGH 5

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# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel B. Heimovics, *Managing Editor*

2002

Volume 5

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# Southern Jewish History

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## *From the Editor . . .*

**T**he first four issues of this journal were marked by variety. Three of the articles in this issue, in contrast, intertwine to offer a diverse view of the nineteenth century rabbinate. Like rabbis throughout the Atlantic world, these individuals struggled to define an appropriate role for the rabbinate, and interpretations of Judaism and Jewish practices that they and their congregants would find acceptable.

Janice Rothschild Blumberg, former society president and accomplished lay historian, treats the stormy Atlanta years of rabbi and journalist E. B. M. ("Alphabet") Browne. She depicts Browne as a maverick in an age when individuals strove to carve out niches within the rabbinate and in relation to often warring and independent congregations. Her research also sheds light on the changing dynamic between Browne and Isaac Mayer Wise, and thus on Wise's personality.

Archivist Irwin Lachoff provides a revision of the presentation that he gave at the society's Cincinnati conference (2000). Bernard Illowy encountered as much controversy in mid-nineteenth century New Orleans as Browne did later in Atlanta. Lachoff describes Illowy as a rabbi destined to failure in his rear-guard attempt to defend tradition. The New Orleans Jewish community far exceeded Atlanta's in population. Consequently, one of Illowy's problems was competition close at home with the charismatic James K. Gutheim. Although an opponent of Reform, Illowy, like Browne, accepted certain changes that broke with the past. Perhaps through both, as Blumberg suggests, one can trace the seeds of a latent Conservative movement.

Two years ago the society authorized a prize for the best article published in the first four volumes of the journal. Scott Langston received the first such award at the 2001 conference for his article, "Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in



Nineteenth Century New Orleans," published in volume 3 (2000). Langston now traces the interaction between New Orleans rabbis Gutheim, Isaac L. Leucht, Max Samfield, and Henry Berkowitz, and Presbyterian minister Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Here Langston illustrates cordiality, bridge building, and the negotiation of a pluralistic identity in contrast to the experiences of Illowy and Browne. A Reform leader and acculturationist, Gutheim achieved the prominence and acceptance the latter craved but never won, and, in so doing came to symbolize an idealized American Jew. By viewing Lachoff's and Langston's articles in tandem, the reader sees two sides to the New Orleans—and American—Jewish theological experience of the nineteenth century.

Chris Monaco continues his groundbreaking research into the life of Moses Elias Levy. A native Moroccan who traveled to the Caribbean and Florida, Levy developed what Monaco calls the "first Jewish agricultural experiment in America." While his Florida sugar plantation flourished, he gained repute as a progressive businessman and utopian visionary. By depicting Levy, Monaco adds to our knowledge of the varieties of economic and social experiences of nineteenth century Jewry. As managing editor Rachel Heimovics observes, readers will find an important link between Langston's premise concerning the influence of Victorian Protestant ideals and Monaco's treatment of the impact of evangelical Protestant culture on American Jews.

When Arlene Rotter received the outstanding graduate student essay award at the society conference last year, she described the way she became a sleuth to uncover the many mysteries of Annie T. Wise. With the publication of her article in volume 4 (2001), additional information was brought to her attention by Henry S. Marks of Huntsville, Alabama. In this journal's first letter to the editor, Rotter explicates the new findings.

Many thanks to the editorial board and to outside peer reviewers Cantor Brown, Jr., Sheldon Hanft, Cathy Kahn, Phyllis Leffler, Louis Schmier, and George Wilkes. Board members Robert Cain, Leonard Dinnerstein, Eric Mazur, Rafael Medoff, and Hol-lace Weiner, whose terms expire with this issue, deserve special

recognition for their sound advice and particularly for their arduous work last year in selecting the best article.

Finally, this issue includes the journal's first cumulative index. Special appreciation goes to Sol Breibart and Deb Weiner who proofread the index and to Bernie Wax who assisted in this endeavor and in countless other ways. The Gale Foundation provided two generous grants to underwrite the index. In this it joined the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, which has generously subsidized publication costs for several years.

Mark K. Bauman



## Rabbi Alphabet Browne: The Atlanta Years

by

Janice Rothschild Blumberg

“**T**he dedication of the Jewish Temple yesterday,” as reported in the *Atlanta Constitution*, “was one of the most impressive scenes that ever occurred in Atlanta.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed on Friday, August 31, 1877, the Moorish style brick and stone structure at the corner of Forsyth and Garnett streets was packed with a standing-room only crowd fully an hour before its scheduled opening at four o’clock. Clad in billowing academic robe, *tallit*, and mitered hat, the Reverend Dr. Edward Benjamin Morris Browne, the congregation’s new rabbi, led the processional with its president, Levi Cohen. When the long line of participants reached the *bimah*, the first of fifteen young girls dressed in white presented the key on a velvet cushion, the two elderly members who carried the Torah placed the scrolls in the ark, and the president gave a speech reviewing the congregation’s history. Then the rabbi delivered his sermon based on Jacob’s words when he awakened from his dream, “How awe inspiring is this place! This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

Although this introduction in the Gate City may have seemed like an opening in the gate of heaven on that day, it did not remain so very long. Both the thirty-two-year-old rabbi and his ten-year-old congregation struggled to determine their identity, the latter in deciding between tradition and reform, the former in establishing a firm base for his career and his growing family. The congregation did not reach its goal until the arrival of Rabbi David Marx in 1895.<sup>3</sup> Browne never succeeded in his,

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despite extraordinary skill and humanitarian purpose. An examination of their time together provides insights into the southern Jewish experience between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. It also illuminates a seminal period in the career of a most unusual rabbi whose outspoken opinions were far ahead of their time.

### *Early Life and Education*

In 1845 Browne was born to an affluent family in Eperies, Hungary.<sup>4</sup> The precocious only son of Jacob and Katje Sonnenschein Braun, he was trained in Talmud from childhood by private tutors and was often asked to display his knowledge (and ability to repeat verbatim anything after hearing it once) for charitable purposes. His father was a scholar and judge in the Jewish community.<sup>5</sup> A woman who had known young Browne from childhood recalled that he was always “beloved and respected by all the Jewish people in his native place as a hard student and a very kindhearted boy.”<sup>6</sup>

Browne’s motive in immigrating to America in 1866 can only be conjectured, but the influence of his secular education plus the movement toward progressive Judaism in Hungary during his youth probably convinced him that his future lay in American reform.<sup>7</sup> He brought with him a degree from Dr. I. H. Hirschfield and “Fuenfkirchen Theological Seminary” as well as testimonials from a “Government Scientific School,” all obtained before his twentieth birthday.<sup>8</sup> He spent a year in Cincinnati studying at Farmers College followed by a year teaching Hebrew at the Savannah Hebrew Collegiate Institute when he also studied medical ethics at the Savannah Medical College. Then he returned to Cincinnati where he lived as a member of the family of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, who in the next decade would establish the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) and its Hebrew Union College, the first surviving seminary in America for the training of rabbis. While Browne studied privately with Wise, he also earned a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Cincinnati College of Physicians and Surgeons,<sup>9</sup> and wrote a 267-page book of lyric poetry in English as a thank-you gift for the Wises.<sup>10</sup>

*E. B. M. "Alphabet" Browne in 1869.*

*The photograph was taken in Montgomery, Browne's first pulpit.*

*(From the collection of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

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### *Early Career*

According to Browne's daughter, Wise ordained Browne in 1869 and sent him to Montgomery, Alabama, where he served Congregation Kahl Montgomery (later called Temple Beth Or) for less than a year before going to Milwaukee as the first rabbi of Congregation Emanu-El.<sup>11</sup> After a few months there he was dismissed as "incapable of fulfilling any aspect of his job."<sup>12</sup> According to his version, he left because he discovered that they had no synagogue building. Next he moved to Madison and earned a law degree at the University of Wisconsin. "I was then writing 'Commentaries of Rabbinical Law,'" he explained years later. "It was my specialty. . . .To aid me in writing these Commentaries I . . . attended two courses and graduated receiving a diploma and was admitted as counselor at law. . . ." Thus, with degrees in law, arts, divinity, and medicine, he began signing his name E. B. M. Browne, LL.B. (later LL.D., thanks to an honorary degree from Temple College),<sup>13</sup> A.M., B.M.,D.D., M.D., which inspired his colleagues to call him "Alphabet."<sup>14</sup>

Fluency in English besides seven other languages gave Browne a great advantage in that there were few rabbis in America at that time who could preach in the common tongue. The older generation preferred sermons in German, but because they wanted their children to remain involved by hearing them in English, congregations such as Charleston's historic Beth Elohim, the first in America to declare itself Reform, sought rabbis who could do both. Thus they called on Browne to be their English preacher. On his way to Charleston he stopped in Evansville, Indiana, where he learned that a yellow fever epidemic was raging in South Carolina, and so he decided to remain where he was. He joined the faculty of the Evansville Medical College as Professor of Medical Jurisprudence and Diseases of the Mind and became rabbi of that city's Congregation B'nai Israel.<sup>15</sup> Briefly toward the end of his stay, he edited a newspaper, the *Jewish Independent*.<sup>16</sup> In Evansville he also met and subsequently married Sophie Weil, the talented sixteen-year-old daughter of a successful insurance executive who was a leading member of B'nai Israel.<sup>17</sup>

In 1874 Browne went to Congregation Anshai Emeth in Peoria, Illinois,<sup>18</sup> where his first child, daughter Lylah, was born in 1876.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately he was stricken with an eye disease that seriously threatened his vision. His ophthalmologist urged him to pursue work less taxing than the rabbinate, whereupon he resigned his position and sought an appointment as United States Consul to fill an opening in Latin America. Thanks to an endorsement from President Ulysses S. Grant, he was offered either Mexico or Argentina but ultimately declined both because of insufficient salaries.<sup>20</sup>

The question of how this thirty-year-old, unemployed, Jewish immigrant became known to the President of the United States can perhaps be answered by the fact that Browne began to be recognized as an orator in the early 1870s. He was recommended to Grant not only by Rabbi Wise but also by Illinois Senator Richard J. Oglesby, who presumably had heard the rabbi's address to the Illinois Senate in January 1874.<sup>21</sup> Springfield's *State Journal* reported that the latter "was one of the very best, wholly extempore, eloquent and interesting throughout."<sup>22</sup>

Browne did not consider himself to be a professional lecturer at that stage of his career. "It was only impending blindness (according to the conclusions of our great oculists) that has driven me from the pulpit," he wrote, "and for the want of other employment to support my family I had to lecture. As soon as Dr. Wolf, of Galveston, performed the miraculous operation on my eyes, restoring me to full sight, I concluded to return to the pulpit, in spite of the Eastern lecture bureaus, who had and still have me on their books."<sup>23</sup>

During this era Christians were beginning to meet Jews as colleagues in the cultural and civic life of their communities. Many were themselves recent immigrants from Europe, specifically from Germany, as were the vast majority of Jews. Thus they shared nostalgia for the culture left behind. The interaction, particularly for Bible Belt Protestants, aroused great curiosity about Jews, about their biblical history, and about their contemporary practices.



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Browne's eloquence in English and knowledge of Christianity as well as Judaism made him an excellent ambassador to the gentiles, a role perceived by most American Jews, fresh from the antisemitism of Europe, to be of utmost importance. There were hardly any Jewish religious functionaries in America qualified to do that in the years following the Civil War. Rabbinical duties were served primarily by knowledgeable laymen, readers who were granted the honorific title of rabbi or minister, which neither required nor implied the qualifications and performance of rabbis in Europe. Until 1840 there was no ordained rabbi in the entire United States and none in the South until the eve of the Civil War.<sup>24</sup> In 1872, according to an editorial in the *New York Herald*, there were only seven rabbis besides Browne in the entire country who could speak English well enough to do it publicly.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout his career Browne specialized in speaking to mostly Christian audiences on such subjects as "The Crucifixion of Christ, or Have the Jews Actually Crucified Jesus of Nazareth?" and "The Talmud: Its Ethics and Literary Beauties." He put this acumen to good use for philanthropic purposes as well as to supplement his earnings when he was underpaid or out of work. The *Chicago Tribune*, reviewing his lecture on the Talmud in 1874, noted that "The Rabbi is a lecturer of no mean attainments, and the subject he has chosen was one of unusual interest and beauty. The subject is treated with rare judgment and skill, and to this is added a good voice and excellent delivery."<sup>26</sup> The *Indianapolis Sentinel* reported, "In point of brilliant scholarship and fine liberal tone, [a lecture Browne delivered at the local YMCA was] the most remarkable one heard in this city . . . . He has no prejudices and expresses his view with the earnestness of an apostle and the liberality of a large-minded scholar. . . . In manner the Doctor is vivacious, clear and highly entertaining . . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Levi Cohen, president of the Atlanta congregation, and three other leading members may have first heard him at his lecture on the Christ's crucifixion at the Springer Opera House in Columbus, Georgia, in March 1877. They were so impressed that they offered to finance the completion of the synagogue building, which had been halted due to lack of funds, if the congregation would

employ Browne as its rabbi.<sup>28</sup> The *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* lauded the talk, reporting that the audience of 125 people including one “colored Baptist Minister” listened with “profound interest.” The reviewer apologized that because of its length — “about two hours and a half” — he could not give a “thorough synopsis.” Nonetheless he wrote, “His lecture was as able, systematic and forcibly [*sic*] as we have ever had the pleasure of listening to . . . . His power of illustration by analogizing is apt and wonderful, and through the whole ran a vein of almost imperceptible humor, which was as subtle as is possible to conceive—fine, rich and highly enjoyable, though accompanied with due reverence.”

The gist of the message as reported was the rabbi’s assertion that the Jews were not responsible for the crucifixion because the mode of the trial was contrary to Jewish laws. Moreover “scalawags” and Romans had carried out the trial and sentence. In a statement apparently intended to sustain his absolution of the Jews, Browne contended that the judges and officers had been bought and “Only two of the Judges . . . could read Hebrew.” He even managed to exonerate Judas, on the grounds that the supposed betrayer was really trying to save Jesus but was duped by the bad guys, and could have escaped with far more profit than the “thirty pieces of silver” if he had been so inclined. As for the true villain among the twelve disciples, Browne tapped Peter, but unfortunately the Columbus reporter failed to record the reason why.

The reviewer also noted that Browne “attributed to Jesus a much more dignified character than is credited to him by Christians . . . .” He concluded, “Dr. Browne was truly liberal throughout his discourse and expressed sentiments that are noble indeed and worthy of any man. He is a gentleman of high culture, of profound thought, backed by extended [*sic*] reading and possesses a true heart overflowing with generosity of sentiment. We wish that his entire lecture would be published that the people might read and study. He ought to be induced to repeat his effort.”

Actually, Browne did expect to have this and at least two other major lectures published, but no copies have been found.

The reason may be that, although he gave them advance publicity and thereby sold many subscriptions, their publication was aborted due to the same affair that resulted in his departure from Atlanta, as shall be discussed below.<sup>29</sup>

*Atlanta and the Temple*

In 1877 when Browne arrived in Atlanta the city had 35,000 inhabitants, 525 of whom were Jewish. Approximately half of the latter were members of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (Gemilath Chesed Kehillah Kodesh) that, on completion of its building, became known as the Temple.<sup>30</sup> With only one exception, the men of the congregation were foreign-born, mostly young newcomers, and at least six lived at what were then formidable distances from the city in such places as West Point, Georgia, and Dadesville, Alabama. There was only one lawyer in the group and as yet no physician. Most were engaged in various businesses, from dry goods, general stores, and manufacturing to banking, insurance, and real estate. Although one was native-born, one from France, and a few from Hungary, their language and culture was unquestionably German, as was that of many non-Jewish Atlantans. Thus a shared homeland-nostalgia accelerated and eased the entrance of Jews into the mainstream of civic life. Their abilities were recognized and solicited to help develop the city that, although not yet expressed as such, even then thought of itself as "the city too busy to hate."<sup>31</sup>

The congregation had seen three rabbis come and go in the decade preceding Browne's arrival, and two more followed him before stability was achieved under the fifty-one-year reign of Rabbi David Marx (1895-1946), an American-born and trained, consummate ambassador to the gentiles.<sup>32</sup> Lithuanian-born Rabbi Henry Gersoni, who immediately preceded Browne (1874 to 1876), was, like Browne, a linguist, orator, author, and editor of newspapers (in Chicago after leaving Atlanta) who pleased the congregation by his successful outreach to the non-Jewish public. He was believed to have temporarily converted to Christianity at one point, a dubious distinction that apparently had no adverse effect on the performance of his duties because the congregation

*The Temple, c. 1887, as it would have  
looked when Browne arrived in Atlanta in 1877.  
(Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.)*

duly appreciated his talent, learning, and “social qualities.” A glowing report sent by one of his Atlanta congregants to the *American Israelite* reveals those assets most valued by a Jewish community of that day. “This gentleman who came to us pretending to be ‘no chazan at all,’” it states, “proves to be a great attraction to the lovers of a sonorous and harmonious voice. The Hebrew becomes a living language, and the rhythm of our prayers strikes more melodiously the ear even of such who do not understand the sacred tongue . . . .”<sup>33</sup>

Besides Browne, two other early congregation spiritual leaders were noted for their erudition. The synagogue’s first rabbi, David Burgheim, who arrived in 1869, was also a scholar, linguist, and avid student of the New Testament. He opened a secular school, the English German Academy, which some authorities contend was the immediate predecessor of the Atlanta Public Schools that were established in 1870. When the private school became the English German Hebrew Academy, Burgheim departed, and left Rabbi Benjamin Aaron Bonnheim, whom he had engaged as principal of the school, to operate it as well as minister to the congregation.<sup>34</sup>

The succession of these first four rabbis in Atlanta would indicate a leaning of the congregation at that time toward spiritual leadership with a background of secular learning and outreach to the Christian community, qualities valued by Wise who had recommended them. With Browne’s departure this apparent leaning toward liberalism temporarily shifted in the opposite direction; the synagogue turned to the more conservative Rabbi Marcus Jastrow of Philadelphia for recommendations for its next two rabbis.<sup>35</sup> As congregations struggled to define themselves in regard to reform, such innovations as family seating, organ music, and confirmation reflected the fluctuation of opinions within a changing lay leadership as much as they affected their selection of rabbis. Typically rabbis and congregations were equally divided.

During this period all rabbis in America were foreign-born, often loners who had emigrated as individuals seeking freedom from the restrictions of Jewish life in Europe as well as pulpit opportunities that those inclined toward reform would have been

unlikely to find in the old country. Each tried to establish his own interpretation of reforms that would sustain Judaism in America with its relatively open society and few facilities to maintain tradition. Inevitably, lay leaders often disagreed with their rabbis and the rabbis with each other. Tempers were volatile, membership fluid, and financial support inadequate, all of which contributed to brief tenures for the rabbis. Minutes of the Temple board relate petty controversies over such matters as assignment of pews, assessment of dues,<sup>36</sup> decorum during services, and whether or not to permit the rabbi to leave town for a day or for two months, equal consideration being given to each. There was no record of discussion on matters of ideology. When the rabbis departed, either of their own volition or otherwise, newspaper accounts and synagogue records were worded with an eye to public relations, often obfuscating the true cause of the separation. This was the environment in which "Alphabet" Browne functioned.

After only three months in Atlanta, Browne announced his intention to make it his permanent home.<sup>37</sup> He had family connections that smoothed his settlement. His wife's uncle was Herman Haas, an esteemed pre-Civil War member of the community whose son Aaron had become one of Atlanta's most prominent citizens. An innovative business leader, Aaron had been a blockade runner for the Confederacy during the war, helped organize the Temple as well as several civic and cultural institutions immediately after the war, served as city alderman, and, in 1875, as Atlanta's first mayor *pro tempore*. In 1877 he was president of Gate City Lodge, B'nai B'rith,<sup>38</sup> in which Browne promptly enrolled.<sup>39</sup> Haas family members built homes close together on a block near the new synagogue, and the Brownes, who first lived at 46 East Hunter Street,<sup>40</sup> later joined them there at 182 Forsyth Street, presumably on a lot next door to the Temple that the congregation purchased for a parsonage.<sup>41</sup>

Because the congregation was able to pay its rabbi only \$1,500 per year, considerably less than Browne had earned elsewhere,<sup>42</sup> trustees suggested that he supplement this by operating a private school for boys on weekdays using the Temple's facilities. He abandoned the school after one year because of his inability to

collect tuition.<sup>43</sup> He did reorganize a Sunday school with four classes in which his wife Sophie and several other women served as teachers.<sup>44</sup> A religious school board administered both the Sabbath school, which met on Saturdays and Sundays, and the afternoon Hebrew school, which met four times a week for two-hour sessions. The rabbi usually conducted the latter as a private activity in order to supplement his salary. The congregation later operated the Hebrew school and financed it through special assessments.<sup>45</sup>

The Temple had been one of the earliest to join the UAHC when Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise organized it in 1873. Like its leanings back and forth between tradition and reform, however, it waffled in and out of the UAHC throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In 1878 and 1879 it did belong to the Union, however, and sent Browne as its representative to meetings in Milwaukee and New York respectively. He had previously attended each of its conferences as representative of other congregations, and he had given the closing prayer at the fourth one.<sup>46</sup> Browne was one of those who urged the Union to encourage circuit-rider rabbis to visit isolated Jewish communities, an activity especially needed in the South, and to implement religious education in congregations, an issue which although ignored at the time, became a signature service of the Union in the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup>

The gradual development of reform practices in Atlanta, as in other American cities, may be traced during these years. Organ music and a choir were introduced shortly after Browne's arrival, yet a motion to permit the removal of hats was tabled. Confirmation for girls as well as boys at age fourteen was also introduced, albeit without abandoning bar mitzvah, which was maintained for over a decade after Browne's departure.<sup>48</sup> He discarded such prohibitions as riding on the Sabbath but strongly opposed the movement to abandon the Jewish Sabbath in favor of conforming to Christian worship by meeting on Sundays. He advocated the dismissal of all "external additions" to the Decalogue that were "suited to the dark ages in which the lawgiver lived, but having existed through milleniums [*sic*] were at last outlived by growing civilization. . . ." <sup>49</sup>

The small but highly visible Jewish community of Atlanta drew a disproportionate share of positive public interest in the 1870s. This may be attributed to curiosity on the part of people who had never before known Jews as well as to the prominence of numerous Jews in the business and cultural life of the city. In 1870, long before the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation had a permanent home, the *Atlanta Constitution* devoted an entire editorial column to describing the High Holy Days, including high praise for those who observed them. "Among her most orderly, enterprising and public-spirited citizens," it declared, "the Israelites of Atlanta may be justly classed. Some of them are ranked among our oldest and most respected business men. In our cosmopolitan city, but little of that general prejudice against Jews is ever demonstrated."<sup>50</sup>

The editorial writer also advised that "The solemnity and good order which prevails during the worship in their synagogue is worthy of imitation by many of us Gentile Christians." He continued with an explanation that illustrated the mixture of continuity and change:

Their worship is, for the most part, conducted in the Hebrew language. A choir and organ discourse music which rivals in beauty and execution that of other houses of worship in the city.

The Israelites of Atlanta have never divided upon the question of orthodoxy and reformation. They are extremists on neither side. While many of the prayers and customs if not applicable to the present age, and the present conditions of the descendants of Jacob, are omitted by the members of their Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, they do not go as far in ignoring ancient traditional usages as do the extreme reformers in many other places. . . .<sup>51</sup>

In 1878 on Rosh Hashanah, the *Daily Constitution* not only announced the time of the morning service, reported that the evening services had been well attended, and Rabbi Browne's sermon "very appropriate . . . and a very able one," but also explained the custom of observing from sundown to sundown and noted that "The Orthodox Jews observe two days." It devoted



even more space and laudatory comment to Yom Kippur, referring to several books of the Bible that mention the holiday and praising Jewish businessmen for keeping their stores closed on that day. It described the tone of the observance as follows:

The sermons which are delivered by the Rabbis on this occasion teach the respective congregations to remember the poor, the needy, the widow, the orphan and the stranger, and give evidence that the charity practiced by the Hebrews in the days of yore still lives. . . . We can best admire the devotion of the Jews for their church and the fidelity with which they observe all the festivals. They set a noble example which Christians might follow with profit to themselves and to the liveliness of their faith.

The article also noted that the services were attended “not only by members of the Jewish church, but also by a number of Christian friends.”<sup>52</sup>

City and state officials recognized Browne’s ability during his first year in Atlanta and engaged him accordingly. The school board appointed him one of its six “examiners” for high schools in the newly formed public school system, and Governor Alfred Colquitt designated him Georgia’s representative at a “World Congress of Social Science” to be held the following summer in Stockholm. Also billed as the “International Conference for the Prevention and Suppression of Crime, Including Penal and Reformatory Treatment,” its president invited Browne to deliver there his lecture on “Jews, Temperance and Crime; or How the Chosen People Keep Sober and Out of Mischief.”<sup>53</sup> Browne was also scheduled to stop in Paris en route to attend a meeting of the Jewish Ecumenical Council sponsored by the Alliance Israelite Universelle. Unfortunately, Sophie suffered a severe illness, probably postpartum depression, after the birth of their son Jesse in June 1878, which required her husband to cancel his journey and remain home.<sup>54</sup>

Browne continued public lectures while in Atlanta, usually for the benefit of the congregation or for such worthy causes as the B’nai B’rith Orphans’ Fund for which contributions were being solicited in order to build the Hebrew Orphan’s Home in Atlanta.

In cases such as these he waived his customary fee of \$150.<sup>55</sup> Tickets usually cost twenty-five cents each, with free admission for clergy. He helped raise funds in this way for victims of the potato famine in Ireland and for sufferers in the severe yellow fever epidemic of 1878, twice touring the South on the latter's behalf. Among the many expressions of appreciation he received was a petition from the B'nai B'rith of Navasota, Texas, to name its lodge in his honor.<sup>56</sup>

Considering the difficulties of travel in those days it is surprising that this rabbi could find the time and energy to do as much of it as he did. In addition to his lectures for special causes, he was occasionally asked to speak at the dedication of a new synagogue in another city. The first such dedicatory occasion, in Selma, Alabama, threatened to be a problem. Selma was then an approximately twenty-four-hour journey from Atlanta by train, and Browne had a wedding planned for the same day and hour that the Selma-bound train was scheduled to depart. Nothing if not enterprising, "Alphabet" persuaded the stationmaster to delay the train's departure until after the hurried ceremony. Apparently all went well except for the fact that the happy couple received complaints from some of their guests for having been invited to an event of such short duration.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Jewish South*

Browne's major accomplishment in Atlanta was establishing the South's first Jewish newspaper. On October 14, 1877, barely two months after his arrival, the *Jewish South* made its debut. Although one might suppose that he was mainly motivated by the prospect of improving his financial condition, the cut-rate \$2 cost of subscription, as compared with \$4 or \$5 for other Jewish papers such as Wise's *American Israelite*, validates Browne's own statement that this was not the case.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore he had observed the success with which other rabbis, notably his mentor, Wise, influenced American Jewry through their newspapers, in Wise's case the *Israelite* in English and *Die Deborah* in German, so he understood the efficacy of using the printed word to promote

himself and his ideas. These now began to diverge from those of his teacher.

It would not have been difficult for a discerning reader to recognize that issues important to southern Jews were not being adequately addressed by other Jewish journals, which were largely based on the two coasts plus Cincinnati and Chicago, and targeted mostly local interests. Indeed, since the death of Rabbi Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia in 1868, and the subsequent changes in his once influential paper, the *Occident*, the field had been left virtually clear for Wise,<sup>59</sup> who, after Leeser, was the only rabbi to embrace the whole of American Jewry as his potential constituent.<sup>60</sup> As Browne wrote in his "Salutatory" inaugurating the *Jewish South*:

We are fully convinced that the Southern Israelites need an organ of their own. The Western and Eastern Jewish journals are scarcely known beyond the Atlantic and Pacific coasts respectively, being chiefly local in circulation and tendency.

The only journal in the Middle States [the *American Israelite*] has too large a territory to oversee, and affairs nearer home will naturally obtain preference over items from the far South. Hence we maintain the interests of Southern Judaism and the dignity of the South call loudly for a mouth piece worthy to represent them.<sup>61</sup>

Browne, having gained insights into Christian culture through his experience on the lecture circuit, was keenly aware of the desirability for Jews and Christians to know more about each other. This, he believed, was especially needed in the South and at a price that all could afford.<sup>62</sup>

He was not alone in this perception. Although he later wrote that he had started the *Jewish South* with personal funds, brothers J. R. and W. B. Seals, who were not Jewish, were listed as its initial publishers. In the introductory issue they wrote:

The necessity for an organ for the Israelites of the South has been made apparent to us by many of our Hebrew friends, and we—considering the matter purely as a business enterprise of

*The Jewish South, June 13, 1879, upper half of the front page.  
(Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio.)*

course—were anxious to undertake its publication some two years ago, but for the want of a competent editor. Having found a gentleman of that kind in Rabbi Browne, we cheerfully embarked with him as our Editor-in-Chief.

They assumed full responsibility for financial affairs and left all else to the rabbi.<sup>63</sup>

Proudly proclaiming “Independent and Fearless” on its masthead, Browne declared that the paper would be an educational instrument, a clearing house for news of Jewish interest in the South and, referring to the battle then raging over changes taking place in Jewish worship, that it would not get involved in “the combative liturgical and theological arguments” of American Jewry but would be a promoter of brotherhood among

Jews of all religious positions. He announced in its very first issue that the weekly would be a source of information about Jews for non-Jews in order "to drain the swamp of ignorance in which breed the diseases of hatred and bigotry," and entreated Christians to subscribe, gearing much of the contents toward their interests. Judging from correspondence to the editor, he succeeded in attracting them during the first year while the paper was being published in Atlanta.

In June 1878 the *Jewish South* was sold to Herman Jacobs of New Orleans, who represented a "stock association," and its business operations moved to that city. New Orleans had the largest Jewish population in the South and was central to the paper's area of circulation, which reached into Texas and Arkansas. Although Browne continued to edit and write from Atlanta, the paper's greater concentration on Jewish news and less "folksy" tone after its first year reflect a change of objective to suit a different majority readership.<sup>64</sup>

Advertising, at a cost of \$1.50 per inch for a single issue and \$30 for the year, was bought by local and regional, Jewish and non-Jewish businesses. Whole pages were purchased by railroads, showing maps of their routes and schedules.<sup>65</sup> Other advertisers included congregations seeking rabbis and the Southern Educational Institute for Boys, which offered Judaic studies as well as preparation for college at \$400 (a bargain rate compared with \$1,000 tuition at northern schools). Browne promoted his own lectures to benefit the Temple and the sale of his translation of *The Book Jashar*, considered a lost book of the Bible (420 pages, for the reduced rate of \$2.50).<sup>66</sup> Ads listed plantations in Florida from \$2,500 to \$15,000, while businesses as far away as New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis offered such items as tea, toupees, pianos, the study of French dentistry, and a brownstone in Manhattan.<sup>67</sup>

The paper's first reporters were Elias Haiman, of the Southern Agricultural Works in Atlanta, and Henry Powers, of Nashville, listed as "traveling correspondent."<sup>68</sup> Browne's primary assistance came from his associate editor, Charles Wessolowsky, a former state legislator and patriarch of the congregation in

Albany, Georgia. In early 1878 Joseph Menko became the local editor.<sup>69</sup> Wessolowsky then began traveling across the South contributing insights into the condition of Jews in dozens of small, isolated communities.<sup>70</sup>

The following year Wessolowsky visited sixty-two communities as far west as Fort Worth and as far north as St. Louis, encouraging individuals whom he met to become subscribers besides contributing their opinions and local news, reinforcing Browne's initially published invitation for them to do so. Such voluntary contributors were not unique to the *Jewish South*, but with their numbers they provided it with more widespread and personal coverage than was to be found in other contemporary Jewish newspapers.

The very format of the *Jewish South* suggested a more popular appeal than that of the *American Israelite*. Both rabbi-editors promoted their own lectures, books, and Friday night services, and published entire texts of selected sermons by prominent rabbis. Browne frequently reprinted relevant sermons by Christian ministers as well. Both used serialized novels and other literary works including poetry, sometimes contributed by readers or translations of Hebrew poets such as Judah Halevy.<sup>71</sup> Unlike Wise's paper, however, the *Jewish South*, in its appeal to diversity, published chess columns, a column "All About Diamonds," familiar quotations by such authors as Jonathan Swift and Washington Irving, and a "Boys and Girls" department. Later issues carried a section called "Our Christian Brethren—what they are saying and doing for their religion—Know thy neighbors as thyself," with news of various denominations from across the United States and foreign countries. A category titled "All Sorts" included literary trivia, theater commentary, fashion notes, and humorous items such as "A few words to the ladies from a rooster-pecked wife."<sup>72</sup>

While other Jewish journals published social news from various major cities, the *Jewish South* proliferated in items from southern, often isolated, communities, giving readers in such places a feeling that they were part of the wider Jewish world. These included events like a bar mitzvah in Natchitoches,

Louisiana, the opening of a B'nai B'rith lodge in Hallettsville, Texas, activities of the Ladies' Aid Society in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and a 5 to 0 baseball victory of the Natchez Press Club over the Milwaukee Lager Beers. The informal style reached a height during the yellow fever epidemic when one Louisiana town reported succinctly, "Plasquimine yehudim all doing well."<sup>73</sup>

The *Jewish South* did not neglect news of national and international origin. Intriguing items included the establishment of a new congregation in South Africa, knighthood being conferred on seven Italian rabbis, construction of the railroad between Jaffa and Jerusalem, and the belief that the Zulu language is full of Hebrew idioms. In "The American Hebrew in Politics," Browne posed the question of why more Jews did not become involved in government in America as compared to Europe where a much greater number participated despite the virulent antisemitism in their countries.<sup>74</sup> A caption particularly captivating to a present-day reader asked, "Are We to Have Peace in Israel?" It referred to the "warfare" then being waged between the venerable Board of Delegates of American Israelites, an organization that had advocated Jewish interests worldwide since 1859, and the five-year-old, Cincinnati-based UAHC whose primary purpose was the promotion of American Judaism.<sup>75</sup> In December 1877, only a year before, the two had agreed to merge.<sup>76</sup>

Browne devoted ongoing attention to Jewish education. Having failed to get results from his 1878 appeal to the UAHC to provide circuit-riding rabbis and to strengthen religious instruction within the congregations, he continued to advocate these ideas through editorials, even personally attempting to foster the organization of Sunday schools by setting forth the procedures in the *Jewish South*.<sup>77</sup> He published prayers to open sessions of these schools, such as, ". . . Thy indispensable assistance for the labors of our teachers. May their instructions be received by willing hearts, so that the mind will easily accept what Israel confesses to be divine truth." His closing prayer gave thanks "for the privilege of having imparted Thy word and Thy will to the children of Israel."<sup>78</sup> In his "Jewish catechism", he posed a series of questions and answers under different headings. The first of these,

“Religion,” addressed the students’ understanding of the word itself and its interpretation within Judaism.<sup>79</sup> He followed that with a series of chapters on biblical history, beginning with a definition of the patriarchs which included such specifics on Noah and the flood as:

Q. How long did the waters prevail on the earth?

A. One hundred and fifty days, and the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat.

Q. Where are the mountains of Ararat?

A. In Armenia, a province of Asiatic Turkey.<sup>80</sup>

For the more advanced students he included a section, “Hebrew Poetry and Poets,” with an introduction to the Hebrew language.<sup>81</sup>

While Browne kept his promise of neutrality on the issue of orthodoxy versus reform, he did not hesitate to criticize those aspects of Jewish life in America that he considered detrimental to its progress. In a series, “The Iron Mask of the XIX Century: The American Jewish Pulpit—Its Shame and Its Glory,” he attacked both the rabid traditionalists, who responded to innovations with violence, and the extreme reformers, whose more subtle lack of constraint was still no less devastating to reconciliation, and he cried out for regulation, which he believed should be addressed by the UAHC.<sup>82</sup> In succeeding issues he discussed the relative treatment of Christian ministers and rabbis by their congregations as well as the relative expectations placed on them and their performance in regard to training and responsibilities. The following illustrates his lengthy and repeated views on the subject:

Presently our ministers are neither paid nor respected. Whose is the fault? Not the congregations. . . . Indeed, I am the last to charge them with guilt. . . . A congregation of average pretensions wants a minister. They advertise for one that has to be a teacher, a reader, a lecturer in German and English, a Shochet (and Mohel preferred) who shall also be able to instruct a choir, and besides, that man must be a “gentleman.” A Reverend Tom, Dick or Harry appears and secures the position. He is, of course, not what the congregation advertised for. He has just failed in



business, and having no other mode of making a living, he says to himself, "I can read Hebrew . . . ." <sup>83</sup>

Apparently the entire series was aimed at instigating an extensive examination of the UAHC's policies and needs for attracting qualified candidates as rabbinical students at its Hebrew Union College. To that effect Browne published the text, recorded in the *Chicago Times*, of a lengthy speech he had made at the 1874 meeting of the Union. In it he proposed resolutions calculated to improve the situation for rabbis as well as to weed out those who were unqualified to serve as such, for which he was ruled out of order.<sup>84</sup> The first of his proposed resolutions designated that the UAHC have jurisdiction over its constituent congregations and their rabbis, with a council to adjudicate problems arising between the two. The second called for the appointment of a committee (from which he excluded himself) to examine the credentials of those claiming to be rabbis, since few in America at that time could produce evidence of having received either *smicha* or a diploma from a qualified institution. The committee would be empowered to grant licenses and preclude the hiring of those unqualified. That resolution was finally adopted in June 1878 and duly applauded in the *Jewish South*.<sup>85</sup>

Although Browne's treatment of the subject did not appear to be an intentional slur upon the UAHC or its founder, this could have easily been construed as such by the lay and rabbinic leaders in question.

#### *Wise and the Gathering Storm*

Ostensibly, a social item triggered Browne's fall from grace with his mentor and former sponsor, I. M. Wise. In June 1878, Wise's daughter Helen eloped with James Malony, a non-Jewish friend of her brother Leo. Due to the father's fame and his outspoken opposition to intermarriage, this caused a scandal reported by major newspapers throughout the country. Browne, never known for tact or discretion, copied the story from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in the *Jewish South* of June 7.<sup>86</sup> He then dispatched an apology to Wise, "It scarcely occurred to me possible for you to pass by with silence an event of such notoriety. Had you stopped

me the matter would never have appeared in our columns." Continuing the letter in a familial tone, he asked for news about Wise's main interest, the Hebrew Union College, begun in 1875, for use in promoting the seminary in a forthcoming edition of the *Jewish South*.<sup>87</sup>

In the conclusion of this letter Browne hinted that a source of conflict between them already existed. "Our relations of late," he wrote, "especially since my having started this paper, have been made so cold and distant . . . that it is a matter of delicacy with me to inquire into matters which greatly interest me in connection with you and yours."

Evidence corroborates Browne's belief that Wise turned on him due to the potential competition posed by the *Jewish South*, which could have implied a challenge to the older rabbi's influence as arbiter of American Judaism. It was noticed by readers as early as January 1878, less than a month after the paper began its regular weekly publication in December. A letter writer from Bayou Sara, Louisiana, complained that Browne had not responded to Wise's "abuse" of him in the *Israelite*. "I must confess that the sense of propriety was shocked in many of our people," the author stated, "to see such rude treatment of the man whom Dr. Wise, for the last ten years, and even last winter, praised to the sky. Why even the ordinary journalistic civility was denied you, and the name of the editor was altogether ignored."<sup>88</sup>

Browne did not take up the gauntlet. He instead excused Wise on the grounds that the *Israelite* was then being edited in Wise's absence by his son Leo, and therefore the rabbi could not be held responsible.<sup>89</sup>

Several weeks afterward a reader from Florence, Alabama, commented on another instance of "rude treatment" in the *Israelite*. The writer declared, "It is a fabrication gotten up to injure your paper."<sup>90</sup> Again Browne declined comment.

Later Browne did publish letters that criticized the UAHC for ignoring the problems of small congregations, publication of which could certainly have been interpreted as encouraging the resignation of some congregations from Wise's Union.<sup>91</sup>

Although such respected historians as Bertram Korn and Steven Hertzberg have written of Browne in derisive tones, based primarily upon one letter and later sarcastic references to him by Wise and his followers, current research suggests that they may have reached erroneous conclusions.<sup>92</sup> Wise did recognize the shortcomings of his former student when in 1873 he chastised Browne for having had “four places in five years or so, and came away quarreling,”<sup>93</sup> but this did not signal the beginning of the hostility that subsequently developed between the two. Had the younger rabbi been persona non grata when Wise’s wife, Theresa Bloch Wise, died three years later, he would not have been asked to read from Psalms and deliver the prayer, which he did, while her casket was being removed from Wise’s home. Nor would he have been invited to join Wise’s contemporary and close friend, Rabbi Max Lienthal of Cincinnati’s Bene Israel congregation, in conducting her funeral, or to return to the Wise house as a member of the family afterward.<sup>94</sup> Nor would Wise that same year have praised Browne in the *Israelite* for a lecture that he had recently given in Indianapolis.<sup>95</sup>

Browne’s claim that he was considered the spokesman for Wise until 1878 is substantiated in the words of a New York rabbi, Israel P. Feigl, who did not even know Browne at the time of which he spoke having met him years later. In testimony that referred also to the then existing rivalry for power between Wise and the east coast rabbis led by David Einhorn, Feigl testified as to the common knowledge among rabbis that Browne was “Dr. Wise’s representative in all public questions there being two parties in Jewish pulpit. . . . The Western and Eastern ministers, who opposed one another with the bitterness of two political parties. Dr. Browne being with Dr. Wise the leaders of the Western party. . . .”<sup>96</sup>

Also attorney Adolph L. Sanger, a New York Jewish leader, referred to having worked with Browne on the committee calling on all Jewish organizations to commission a sculpture in honor of the American Centennial in 1876. In all likelihood Browne’s participation was as Wise’s deputy.<sup>97</sup>

Biographers portray Wise as intolerant of those he could not control, especially when their opinions differed from his or threatened the success of the institutions he was creating. It is therefore logical that his highly articulate protégé, established in a fast-growing community with his own regional weekly newspaper, might be seen as a potential threat to the master's leadership.<sup>98</sup>

Although Wise's own journals ranked ahead of all others of Jewish interest in the country, the *Jewish South* actually had shown signs of overtaking it. Even discounting Browne's claim to have "stolen" all of the *Israelite's* southern subscribers,<sup>99</sup> hyperbole typical of the time as well as of the man, the fact that the *Jewish South* received letters from readers in 177 towns across thirteen southern states indicates a readership the size and breadth of which represented a creditable challenge.<sup>100</sup> According to Browne, Wise conspired to remove the *Jewish South* from Browne's hands and ultimately shut it down.<sup>101</sup>

### *Losing the Jewish South*

Browne's account of how he lost the *Jewish South*, one-sided as it may be, provides some basic facts and raises pertinent although unanswered questions about the integrity of the rabbis with whom he dealt. According to Browne, he started the *Jewish South* in Atlanta with his own money, assisted by Herman Jacobs, editor of a paper in Charleston, South Carolina, and Charles Wessolowsky, the former state senator from Albany, Georgia. A year later he transferred its publication office to New Orleans with Jacobs, then a resident of that city, replacing the Seals brothers as financial manager. Despite Browne's belief that the paper was "well established" with its large and growing circulation, its fiscal condition may have precipitated the move.<sup>102</sup>

At some point within the next two years, perhaps encouraged by Jacobs anticipating his subsequent move away from New Orleans, Rabbi Joseph Hayyim Mendes Chumaceiro of that city's Touro Synagogue asked to buy a partnership in the newspaper. Browne agreed and drew up a contract designating Chumaceiro as managing editor responsible for business matters only but precluding him from writing or making editorial

decisions. Browne took the contract to New Orleans to be signed but had to leave before copies could be made for three absent signatories. Consequently, he signed both the contract at hand and three blank legal forms to be filled in for the others, leaving the copies with Chumaceiro. When he received his own copy a few days later, he filed it without checking the contents.<sup>103</sup>

After a few weeks of smooth operation, according to Browne, "all at once Chumaceiro began stealing articles from an old English book *The Festivals of the Lord*, which he printed as leading editorials in my name, ignoring all my instructions and protests." Jacobs reported a change in Chumaceiro's attitude. He had become domineering and had asserted that Browne was no longer in charge. One day Jacobs came into the office unexpectedly and noticed a blank sheet of paper with Browne's signature on it. Chumaceiro whisked it away, but not before his visitor saw what it was.<sup>104</sup>

When Browne learned of this he looked at his copy of the contract, noticed for the first time that it did not contain his signature, and realized that the text had been altered on the other copies to give Chumaceiro control.<sup>105</sup>

Consequently, Browne hastened to New Orleans to confront Chumaceiro, who then offered to buy him out. Realizing that he had little choice, Browne accepted the latter's bid of \$6,400, four hundred of which was in the form of a note and, according to Browne, "not worth a cent." It was less than a third of what Browne thought his *Jewish South* was worth.<sup>106</sup>

Still determined to publish, Browne arranged with his colleague in Houston, Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger, who, after emigrating from Amsterdam in 1872, had served several congregations in the east, to join him as co-editor of a new journal that he proposed, called the *Jewish American*. Voorsanger had contributed as a reporter to Wise's *Die Deborah* and presumably had obtained the Houston position in 1878 through Wise's influence.<sup>107</sup> Chumaceiro, too, had contributed articles to Wise and would likely have been indebted to him for his recommendation to Touro Synagogue.

*Advertisement in the Jewish South for Browne's lecture.  
The lecture was presented "under the auspices of the Jewish ladies."  
(Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio.)*

Browne bought a new printing office, "spending a little fortune simply because I had Voorsanger's help in New Orleans,"<sup>108</sup> and engaged the aid of distinguished friends in Cincinnati and New York as well as the prominent Civil War veteran Major Raphael J. Moses in Atlanta.<sup>109</sup> The *Jewish American* lasted for less than a year, due to Browne's departure from the South.<sup>110</sup>

The *Jewish South* continued for a short time. Its last known issue, August 5, 1881, contained the announcement that Chumaceiro and Voorsanger would henceforth be the editors. Voorsanger is believed to have edited it in Houston until 1883.<sup>111</sup>

Browne noted, no doubt with pleasure, that Chumaceiro and Voorsanger “did not remain long in friendship together. . . . Soon after they gave each other the lie and called one another the vilest names in the *Israelite*, and finally Wise bought the *Jewish South* and killed it.” Clearly, Browne believed that Wise was behind his loss of the paper, intending to kill it regardless of cost, and saw his opportunity when Chumaceiro came to New Orleans.<sup>112</sup>

#### *Departing Atlanta*

Browne’s next tale of woe related to his position as rabbi of the Temple. According to newspaper accounts<sup>113</sup> and Temple records, in January 1881 the committee for the annual reelection of the rabbi decided not to reelect him by a 4 to 3 vote. The reasons given were that the congregation had not made progress under his leadership and that he did not teach the children. The minority reported that these conditions were not entirely his fault.<sup>114</sup>

Omitted from the minutes of the meeting was the fact that two of the four negative voters, both newcomers to the board, were Jacob Elsas, owner of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills and reputedly the wealthiest man in the congregation, and wholesale merchant Max Franklin, who headed the reelection committee. Also unrecorded was the fact that during the meeting Elsas had stated publicly that he objected to having a minister who embezzled money. Challenged by members who did not believe such an allegation about Browne, Elsas replied that “two of the most honorable and responsible men in the city . . . [who] were ready to prove it,” told him that the rabbi had accepted money intended to cover the cost of printing and distributing a souvenir newspaper about an Atlantic crossing from fellow passengers on an excursion to Europe the preceding summer. The rumor contended that Browne had used the funds for his own purposes instead of printing the paper. Franklin said that he, too, had heard it.<sup>115</sup>

The meeting adjourned, postponing for two weeks the decision on whether to reelect the rabbi. The next day one of the leaders brought the news to Browne, who had been confined to his house with a broken foot, unhealed after many months of treatment. He immediately produced a copy of the paper in question, "and upon intercession of mutual friends promised to forgive Messrs. Elsas and Franklin provided they name the 'reliable source' . . . or else I should sue them for slander."<sup>116</sup> He thereupon sent the same message to Elsas in a letter. When, by January 14, he had received no response, he filed suit and sent his resignation to the congregation. His reason for suing, he explained, was to vindicate himself. By so doing he would no longer be able to remain as rabbi since "Elsas and Franklin and their relatives controlled the congregation, [and] I knew it was impossible for me to live in peace with a suit against them in the court."<sup>117</sup>

The letter was read at the congregational meeting two days hence. Elsas and Franklin admitted that they were wrong in believing the rabbi guilty of embezzlement, but they refused to reveal the source of the rumor. Apparently, knowing that Browne was committed to residing in Atlanta and even had invested in the construction of two houses there,<sup>118</sup> they assumed that he would back off from the lawsuits. His own attorney advised him to desist, citing the enormous expense involved and the likelihood that the court action would drag on for years. This did not stop the intrepid rabbi. He proceeded to sue Elsas and Franklin, the two most powerful businessmen in the congregation, for \$20,000 each, "publicly binding myself to give the money for charitable and religious purposes."<sup>119</sup>

Even then his situation might not have become desperate had it not been for Howard Williams, publisher of the *Sunday Gazette*, a local weekly, and his reporter, Smith Clayton, who were determined to publish the story with or without the facts. Clayton first asked the rabbi to disclose the nature of the trouble between him and his congregation, to which Browne replied that there was no trouble and he would explain the situation in the next issue of the paper. He sent Williams a letter stating:



Your reporter has just left me and I deem it judicious again to warn you against the publication of statements on the alleged dismissal of mine unless you can upon inquiry give the names of your informers to the public.

From the points your reporter gave me I judge that you have not seen men of both sides, such as Messrs. Aaron and Jacob Haas, A. Rosenfeld, Joseph Hirsch, Levy Cohen, Emanuel and Isaac Steinheimer, Menko Bros., and I think it proper for you to get the statements of those men also if you are resolved to publish the statements of those sent me by Mr. Clayton.<sup>120</sup>

Despite this warning, Williams published the story on January 23 under the headline, "BROTHER BROWNE RECEIVES HIS DISMISSAL FROM THE CONGREGATION, The Capers That Led To It, etc." After repeating the rumors, including one that said Browne had been faking a lame leg in order to receive insurance, at the bottom of a ten-inch column the article added, "This We Do Not Believe," an affirmation that the rabbi was known to have been "a sufferer for months, and is now scarcely able to walk without the aid of his crutches."<sup>121</sup>

Major newspapers from New York to Cincinnati repeated the story adapted according to their own views and in some instances lacking attribution. The *American Israelite* copied it from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, datelined Atlanta, as early as January 28, 1881.<sup>122</sup>

Browne went to New York to be treated for his broken foot, the infirmity that had caused the delay in printing the souvenir newspaper. He stopped in Washington on February 2 to speak at the Mount Vernon Place Methodist Episcopal Church at the invitation of its pastor, Dr. W. P. Harrison, who was also chaplain of the House of Representatives. Apparently unfettered by his problems in Atlanta, according to the *Washington Star*, he was "more humorous than Mark Twain," while the *National Republican* called his speech "a most interesting and eloquent exposition of the philosophical and literary gems of the Talmud, revealing beauties which gentile eyes have seldom gazed upon."<sup>123</sup>

After several weeks in New York, where he underwent treatment, Browne returned to Atlanta only to discover that the

libel about him had been published in the *New Orleans Democrat*. Friends in Canton and Columbus, Mississippi, as well as Brownsville and Austin, Texas, informed him that the news had reached Jewish communities throughout the South.<sup>124</sup>

Browne knew that the civil case would drag on for years and he needed to clear his name quickly in order to obtain another job. For that reason he brought his charges against Elsas and Franklin to the local B'nai B'rith, since one of the functions of B'nai B'rith in those days was arbitration of disputes between members, the findings then publicized and respected by Jews throughout the country.<sup>125</sup>

Atlanta's Gate City Lodge exerted pressure on Browne to drop the suits in court by threatening to expel him if he refused. He did refuse, whereupon the lodge expelled him for "misbehavior," acquitted Elsas and Franklin, and brought charges against Browne for swearing at the members and leaving the lodge without permission. Browne then appealed to higher courts of B'nai B'rith.<sup>126</sup>

On March 27, the board of trustees of the Temple, at the request of Elsas, adopted a resolution indicating that newspaper stories reporting that Browne was dismissed due to charges affecting his character were contrary to fact and that he had voluntarily withdrawn his candidacy.<sup>127</sup> They sent copies of the resolution to Browne and the *Atlanta Constitution*.<sup>128</sup>

Browne responded by returning the resolutions to the board with a letter stating:

(H)ad you rebuked the slander three months ago, you would have done justice to yourselves, to Judaism and to my family, saving this community at the time a good deal of disgrace; but now, after a delay of THREE LONG MONTHS, so far from disarming suspicion, your action only gives public opinion the assurance that the actions against me must have been true, or else you should not have required three long months of deliberation to refute them. In truth, your resolutions, at this late hour, have the appearance, and are actually looked upon by the public, as a WHITEWASH of the thinnest kind.

He continued with a sixteen point outline of his case, including the fact that his opponents, their relatives, and business partners were trustees of the Temple and their attorney, its president, which stacked the deck against him in any appeal he might make to the congregation. He also mentioned that he had been "charitable" to the two newspapers that consented to retract the libel and repeated his promise to give any money collected from the suits to charitable institutions. He furthermore announced his intention to take the case to the council of the UAHC at its next meeting.<sup>129</sup>

Browne's letter was published in the *American Israelite* on April 22, along with a disclaimer that it had "neither libeled Mr. Browne nor offered a retraction," but had merely copied the article in question from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. If the rabbi felt himself aggrieved, the editor expressed his willingness to "give him an opportunity to explain." This apparently was the genesis of a libel suit that Browne subsequently brought against the *American Israelite* and thus indirectly against his one-time father figure, I. M. Wise. Browne had already contacted a New York attorney about suing other offending newspapers mainly in the New York area.<sup>130</sup>

His lawsuits were appealed from one court to the other on demurrers to gain time and bring him to yield, but he would not budge. Finally he won in the highest B'nai B'rith court, which insured that the case would be tried. A compromise was proposed but still he rejected it. When he perceived that his lawyer had been bribed in favor of a settlement, he hired another lawyer. Ultimately he won his case in B'nai B'rith, the lodge reinstated him, and Elsas gave a written apology besides paying all court costs. Isaac Frisch, a relative who had lived temporarily with the Brownes in Atlanta, reported that the rabbi had accepted only to please his wife.<sup>131</sup>

Even after five years of litigation and untold expense, and having forgiven Elsas and Franklin, Browne still did not know the identity of the two "honorable" men who initiated the trouble by starting the rumor about him. Finally in 1889, through friends in New York, he learned who they were. One was identified as Dr.

Henry Back, a newcomer to Atlanta whom Browne had helped and used as his family physician. We do not know his motive, but it could have been resentment at Browne for having sought medical help elsewhere after Back had been unable to heal the rabbi's broken foot. The other informant was Samuel Weil, Atlanta's "Jewish lawyer" who was president of the congregation in 1881 at the time that the rumor was launched. Frisch noted that some Atlantans believed that Weil, married to an Irish Catholic, hated Browne for having preached against intermarriage. Also incriminated was Senator William Loewenstein, of Richmond, the lawyer who had been appointed by Aaron Haas as Browne's defender before the B'nai B'rith Grand Lodge, who was later dismissed for selling him out.<sup>132</sup>

As a result of the foregoing events, friends deserted the Brownes and Sophie suffered a mental breakdown. When the rabbi applied for vacant pulpits in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Portland, Oregon, his reputation had been so damaged that the congregations did not even bother to reply. The Atlanta & Piedmont Railroad hired him to edit its "Emigration" paper but reneged when the owners heard of the libel.<sup>133</sup>

Then Senator (former governor) Joseph E. Brown and Representative Alexander Stephens of Georgia and Senator John A. Logan of Illinois asked President James A. Garfield to appoint him to a diplomatic post. The president wrote him on March 26 that he could have the consulship in Jerusalem if it became available, otherwise he would be sent to Port Said or Alexandria. He informed Browne that his name would go to the Senate as soon as the current deadlock, presumably that of the "Half-Breeds" versus the "Stalwarts," rival factions of the Republican Party, was over. The deadlock lasted longer than expected, during which time someone showed President Garfield newspaper stories about the scandal. That ended the rabbi's prospects, but nonetheless he visited President Garfield in the White House on July 2, 1881, to plead his cause in person.<sup>134</sup>

Next Browne reported that the trustees of Baltimore's Lloyd Street Temple had invited him to be their rabbi, assuring him that ratification by the congregation at its next meeting would be a

mere formality and he should prepare to move his family to Baltimore. He complied, selling his houses at a loss, only to be turned back again when the Baltimore congregation saw newspaper articles charging him with dishonesty.<sup>135</sup>

By then in financial straits, he agreed to a debating tour on Judaism versus Christianity with a Christian minister, L. W. Scott of Texas, who had been soliciting him for the project for four years. As Browne recalled, it was "eagerly looked for by the Jews and Gentiles in Texas particularly." Browne said that he and the minister had invitations from throughout the state, but after everything was arranged, "even the opera house engaged in Texarkana . . . Rev. Scott wrote me that my reputation on account of the libel had become so bad that it is no honor for him to debate with me."<sup>136</sup>

The "cruellest blow of all" occurred when his publishers reneged on two books long advertised and already in the process of being printed. One was his *Encyclopedia of Jewish Beauties*, based on his lectures on the Talmud, for which "at least four hundred parties subscribed." Listed among them were "Henry W. Longfellow, Governor Alexander H. Stephens and Senator Brown of Georgia, Rev. Dr. W. P. Harrison, Rev. Dr. John P. Newman . . . Senator John A. Logan, and the late President Garfield. . . ." <sup>137</sup>

As a last resort, Browne accepted the pulpit at New York's Congregation Gates of Hope, "a broken-down little obscure congregation without even a house of worship of their own." <sup>138</sup> Although that description of his next congregation was accurate, Browne did not remain obscure either in New York or in any other of the numerous communities whose congregations he served. He immediately started another newspaper, the *Jewish Herald*, publicized abuses of immigrant aid, and fought successfully for the passage of laws on education, labor, and excused absences from public school for Jewish children on the High Holy Days.<sup>139</sup> In 1885, he attracted public notice for representing the Jewish people as a pallbearer in the state funeral of President Ulysses S. Grant. In 1887, he used his legal skills *pro bono* to save the life of an innocent Jewish immigrant convicted of murdering

*Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow's order for  
Browne's book.  
(Courtesy of the Jacob Rader  
Marcus Center,  
American Jewish Archives,  
Cincinnati, Ohio.)*

his wife. The following year he became an activist for the Republican Party and helped elect Benjamin Harrison as president so that he could persuade Harrison to appoint a Jew to his cabinet. In 1897 he befriended Theodore Herzl prior to the First Zionist Congress, advising him, "Should Palestine not be available to us, there is this beautiful Florida," and offering to help him introduce Zionism to America.<sup>140</sup> He also traveled widely in Palestine on missions to combat European antisemitism.<sup>141</sup>

While continuing to be admired by Christians and loved by the Jewish immigrants he championed, Browne became increasingly at odds with the Jewish establishment. New York business moguls condemned him because of his liberal leanings toward labor and anti-trust legislation, and their rabbis opposed him because he spoke out effectively against the assimilationist policies

that they championed.<sup>142</sup> When the trend considered today as excesses of Classical Reform accelerated, he grew more pessimistic in his outlook and more vehement in expressing it. In 1889, he said that the state of American Judaism

is getting worse still. Wait five years, ten years longer and the Jewish pulpit will be the seat of infidelity and atheism. You will have no Sabbath, no Yom Kippur, no Milah. The "Sochet" [shokhet] is already gone, the "mohel" is soon to follow. Your sons will 'mix' marriages or do worse by not marrying the "Shiksah" at all. The next decade will find only "Schweinefleisch Juden," for there will be only "Schweinefleisch Rabbis" . . .<sup>143</sup>

During the early twentieth century, while a few like-minded rabbis were engaged in developing Conservative Judaism, Browne served congregations committed to those views if not already openly identified with the movement. Had Reconstructionism been defined then, it is possible that Browne would have found it even more compatible with his beliefs.

Although his long and stormy career took Browne to eight or nine cities after his departure from Atlanta, including eight years of the turbulent 1880s in New York, and from 1893 to 1901 in Columbus, Georgia, he and his wife Sophie continued to consider Columbus their home. He died there in 1929, she in 1936. Both are buried in their family plot in Atlanta's Crestlawn Cemetery.

Who was Edward Benjamin Morris Browne? Was he only a charismatic egotist with a touch of paranoia as his family suspected? A growing body of evidence suggests that the paranoia may have been rooted in reality. His personality was a complex mixture of engaging charm, a keen sense of humor, and, alas, a contentious, stubborn pride that too often became his undoing.

In these and many additional ways he was typical of other nineteenth century American rabbis, immigrants who had acquired a secular as well as Jewish education in Europe. Although unusual in his numerous and diverse educational accomplishments, like several other rabbis he was a prolific writer, editor, and publisher; short tempered and long winded, given to hyperbole and self-aggrandizement, rarely remaining with one

*Browne at the author's home in Atlanta, 1927.  
(From the collection of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*



congregation for more than a few years. He, like they, conflicted with synagogue leaders over issues on which the laity itself was divided; issues often as petty and personal as they were substantive and serious. He was a maverick in an era when America attracted many mavericks, especially those who saw themselves as men of the cloth; an individualist, when outspoken Jewish individualists were often considered dangerous by other Jews. Browne, like other reformers, believed that the greatest promise of America was the freedom to participate fully both as citizens and as Jews, and he did not hesitate to put these precepts into practice. His years in Atlanta comprised a cardinal and formative stage in his professional life as well as in the development of the congregation and the community that he served.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, September 1, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> Janice O. Rothschild, *As But a Day to a Hundred and Twenty, 1867–1987* (Atlanta, 1987), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 44.

<sup>4</sup> The town is now Presov, Slovakia. It is near Kaschau, now called Kosice.

<sup>5</sup> Portion of book galley prepared as a tribute to Browne by the Hebrew American Republican League in 1889, 52, (hereafter cited as book galley), E. B. M. Browne Collection, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of American Jewish Archives (AJA), Cincinnati (hereafter cited as Browne Collection, AJA).

<sup>6</sup> Eva Glasberg deposition, Box 8, case files, *Browne, Edward B. M. v. Jones*, 1881–1883, Isaiah Thornton Williams Collection, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Williams Collection).

<sup>7</sup> Browne would have been at the impressionable age of seven when the outspoken reform rabbi David Einhorn, who headed a liberal synagogue in Budapest in 1852, had to leave two months later when the government closed his synagogue because it and he advocated reforms. For Reform in Hungary, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York, 1988), 157–163.

<sup>8</sup> E. B. M. Browne deposition, *Browne v. Jones*, 1881–1883, Williams Collection (hereafter cited as Browne deposition, NYPL).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Floral House Weeds*, Browne Collection, AJA.

<sup>11</sup> Conversations with Browne's daughter, Lylah Browne Goldberg, 1950–1960; Browne deposition, NYPL.

<sup>12</sup> Louis J. Swichkow and Lloyd P. Gardner, *History of the Jews of Milwaukee* (Philadelphia, 1963), 179.

<sup>13</sup> Browne deposition, NYPL.

<sup>14</sup> Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Case files, *Browne v. Jones*, Williams Collection; Browne deposition, NYPL.

<sup>16</sup> Wisconsin Jewish Archives, Bulletin of Wisconsin Society for Jewish Learning (May 1960).

<sup>17</sup> Browne Collection, AJA.

<sup>18</sup> Case files, Williams Collection; Browne deposition, NYPL.

<sup>19</sup> Goldberg, Conversations.

<sup>20</sup> Correspondence, Browne Collection, AJA; Record Group 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for the Grant Administration, National Archives, College Park, MD. Browne's friendship with Grant progressed sufficiently for him to be an honorary pallbearer in Grant's funeral and to maintain a lifelong friendship with the Grant family. His connection with the family was such that the president's granddaughter, returning to America in 1925 after many years in Europe as the wife of Prince Cantacuzene, wrote him a warm letter of reminiscence to say that she was pleased to discover that he was still alive and well. See Cantacuzene to Browne, December 4, 1927, Browne Collection, AJA.

<sup>21</sup> Record Group 59.

<sup>22</sup> [Springfield, Illinois] *State Journal*, January 19, 1874.

<sup>23</sup> Browne to Rev. L. W. Scott, February 3, 1878, in response to request to tour Texas with Scott in debates, copied in *Jewish South*, March 29, 1878.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm H. Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi in the South," in Nathan Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry*, (Charlottesville, VA, 1970), 21-32.

<sup>25</sup> *New York Herald*, July 22, 1872.

<sup>26</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, December 18, 1874 (from reprint in Browne collection, AJA).

<sup>27</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, January 17, 1876.

<sup>28</sup> Hebrew Benevolent Congregation board minutes, 1877, Joseph and Ida Pearl Cuba Archives, William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta (hereafter cited as Breman Museum); Browne deposition, *Browne v. Burke*, Browne Collection, AJA (hereafter cited as Browne deposition, AJA).

<sup>29</sup> *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, March 30, 1877; Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia, 1978), 231. A major tenet of Reform was to abandon the idea of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, hence Reform congregations throughout America referred to their places of worship as temples rather than as synagogues.

<sup>31</sup> Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 24-43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> There is no record of auctioning honors during services at the Temple.

<sup>37</sup> *Jewish South*, October 14, 1877.

<sup>38</sup> Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Application for B'nai B'rith membership, Browne collection, AJA; Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 31-33.

<sup>40</sup> *Atlanta City Directory*, 1878, 135.

<sup>41</sup> *Jewish South*, October 14, 1877, August 15, 1879.

- <sup>42</sup> His salary in Montgomery was \$2,500. Browne deposition, NYPL.
- <sup>43</sup> Case files, Williams Collection; Browne deposition, AJA.
- <sup>44</sup> Browne deposition, AJA.
- <sup>45</sup> Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 17.
- <sup>46</sup> Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, AJA.
- <sup>47</sup> *Jewish South*, March 21, 1879.
- <sup>48</sup> Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 18, 46.
- <sup>49</sup> Review of his sermon in Selma, AL, *Jewish South*, June 8, 1879.
- <sup>50</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1870.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, September 28, 1878, October 9, 1878.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, July 5, 1878; Browne deposition, NYPL.
- <sup>54</sup> *Jewish South*, July 5, 1878, September 20, 1878.
- <sup>55</sup> *Jewish South*, January 24, 1879. This fund was the forerunner of the Jewish Educational Loan Fund established in 1876 by B'nai B'rith District Lodge 5.
- <sup>56</sup> [New York] *Graphic*, August 8, 1885.
- <sup>57</sup> *Jewish South*, June 6, 1879.
- <sup>58</sup> *Jewish South*, October 14, 1877.
- <sup>59</sup> Kenneth Libo, *A People in Print: Jewish Journalism in America* (Philadelphia, 1987).
- <sup>60</sup> Sefton D. Temkin, *Isaac Mayer Wise: Shaping American Judaism* (New York and Oxford, 1992), 208.
- <sup>61</sup> *Jewish South*, October 14, 1877.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, October 14, 1877.
- <sup>66</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, December 7, 1877.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1878.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, October 14, 1877.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, February 22, 1878.
- <sup>70</sup> Louis Schmier, *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky 1878–1879* (Macon, 1982).
- <sup>71</sup> See, for example, *Jewish South*, June 18, 1879.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, October 14, 1877.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, September 27, 1878.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, February 22, 1878.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, December 7, 1877.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1878.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, March 21, 1879.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, May 9, 1879.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1879.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1879, June 8 1879.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, January 4, 1878.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, February 22, 1878.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, June 28, 1878.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, June 7, 1878; also *Atlanta Constitution*, July 23, 1878, reported by Cincinnati correspondent, *New York World*.

<sup>87</sup> Browne to Wise, June 9, 1878, Browne Collection, AJA.

<sup>88</sup> *Jewish South*, January 18, 1878.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, February 8, 1878. It was customary to send letters and articles under fanciful names. The *Israelite* published a lengthy sarcastic attack upon the *Jewish South* from someone signed "Mordechai" also from Florence, AL, on February 1, 1878. Presumably this was the "fabrication" referred to above.

<sup>91</sup> *Jewish South*, March 21, 1879.

<sup>92</sup> Bertram W. Korn, *Eventful Years and Experiences* (Philadelphia, 1954), 214-215; Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City*, 62-64.

<sup>93</sup> Wise to Browne, March 28, 1873, Browne Collection, AJA.

<sup>94</sup> Book galley.

<sup>95</sup> *Israelite*, February 11, 1876.

<sup>96</sup> Feigl deposition, case files, *E. B. M. Browne v. I. M. Wise*, Box 8, Williams Collection.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, Adolph Sanger to Committee (Hebrew Republican League, New York), January 14, 1889; book galley.

<sup>98</sup> Temkin, *Isaac Mayer Wise*, 284.

<sup>99</sup> Book galley, notes 163.

<sup>100</sup> Suzanne R. White, "Much Good In Small Places," appendix I, (Emory University honors paper, 1982).

<sup>101</sup> Book galley, see notes pages 164-165, Browne, AJA.

<sup>102</sup> *Jewish South*, September 13, 1878.

<sup>103</sup> Book galley, notes, 163-165.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, (London, 1901), s.v. "Voorsanger, Jacob"; Voorsanger File, I. M. Wise Collection, AJA. Voorsanger later went to San Francisco where he became a prominent spiritual leader, editor, and professor. It was customary for congregations then to obtain their rabbis through recommendation either by Wise or by the more traditional Rabbi Marcus Jastrow.

<sup>108</sup> Evidently Voorsanger had little difficulty traveling between Houston and New Orleans.

<sup>109</sup> Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, (London, 1901), s.v. "Voorsanger, Jacob"

<sup>112</sup> Book galley, 165.

<sup>113</sup> [Atlanta] *Sunday Gazette*, January 23, 1881; Temple records, 1881, Breman Museum.

<sup>114</sup> Rothschild, *As But a Day*, 18-19.

<sup>115</sup> Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Presumably he and Sophie had money of their own. Both came from wealthy families.

<sup>119</sup> Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>120</sup> Browne to H. Williams, January 21, 1881, exhibit B, case files, Browne collection, AJA.

<sup>121</sup> *Sunday Gazette*, January 23, 1881, copy in Exhibit D, Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Washington Star*, February 3, 1881; *National Republican*, February 3, 1881.

<sup>124</sup> Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Book galley, notes, 134; Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>127</sup> Temple Board Minutes, March 24, 1881 (copy in Browne case files, Williams Collection).

<sup>128</sup> Browne to Temple Board, April 6, 1881, published in *American Israelite*, April 22, 1881.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Browne to Williams, March 23, 1881, E. B. M. Browne correspondence, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

<sup>131</sup> Isaac Frisch deposition May 4, 1889, copy in book galley notes, 136.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Browne deposition, AJA.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Jewish Herald*, February 23, 1883–August 29, 1884, HUC microfilm.

<sup>140</sup> Browne to Herzl, August 29, 1897, Browne file, Herzl Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>141</sup> Browne collection, AJA; Browne Family Collection in the author's possession.

<sup>142</sup> Book galley.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

## Rabbi Bernard Illowy: Counter Reformer

by

Irwin Lachoff

**A**s an enlightened, assimilationist Judaism evolved in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, a handful of religious teachers fought to preserve orthodoxy in America. One such leader was Rabbi Bernard Illowy, who for almost twenty years published articles and preached from pulpits imploring the Jews of America to embrace tradition and reject reform. From 1861 until 1865 Illowy served as minister at Congregation Shanarai Chasset, or Gates of Mercy, in New Orleans, one of the least religious communities in the country. During his four-year ministry at Gates of Mercy Illowy not only failed to energize the congregation but also served as an unwitting catalyst for Reform Judaism in the city. With the end of the Civil War and the impending return to New Orleans of the city's most esteemed Jewish leader, the Reverend James Koppel Gutheim, Rabbi Illowy bowed to the inevitable and resigned his position. A review of Illowy's career illustrates the weaknesses of the rabbinate in relation to lay power and changing religious dynamics, the frustrations of religious indifference encountered by orthodox leaders in the United States, and the corresponding affinity for, if not the inevitability of, Reform Judaism in nineteenth century America.

*The Jewish Community of Antebellum New Orleans*

Antebellum New Orleans was a boomtown that, by the 1830s, had become one of the country's major seaports. As a transportation hub the city was home to a large transient popula-

tion. Everyone, including those who settled in New Orleans more permanently, sought fortune. Disease, primarily yellow fever, claimed many lives. Vice and violence were common. Meanwhile, an accommodating Catholic clergy succumbed to a nominal Catholicism. The members of other denominations joined with the Catholic majority in only an occasional foray with prayer.<sup>1</sup> In “this ungodly city,” where “the sanctions of law and religion” were often afterthoughts, men pursued more worldly concerns.<sup>2</sup>

In spring 1827 Jacob Solis, a New York businessman, arrived in New Orleans on an extended business trip. The day before Passover Solis attempted to purchase matzo to celebrate the exodus from Egypt. Failing to find any available, he baked his own. Infuriated by the lack of any Jewish communal organization, Solis decided to create a congregation himself, and, in fall 1827, Congregation Shanarai Chasset was organized.<sup>3</sup> Influenced by Solis’ Sephardic background, the new congregation adopted the Sephardic *minhag*, even though the majority of members were of German or Alsatian origin and followed Ashkenazic ritual.<sup>4</sup>

The constitution of the congregation acknowledged certain realities of the city’s Jewish community. Some three-quarters of the thirty-four charter members were married to gentile women. The constitution allowed these “strange” spouses to be buried in the congregational cemetery, albeit in a walled off section to the side. Even more contrary to Jewish law, the constitution allowed the children of these spouses to be considered members of the congregation and, therefore, Jewish.<sup>5</sup>

German migration to the United States flowed in earnest by the 1830s and continued into the 1850s. With a direct line from Bremen to New Orleans, the city became a major point of entry for Germans making their way up the Mississippi River to the Midwest. Immigrants from the west side of the Rhine River, in particular Alsace and Lorraine, were also drawn to the city because of the preponderance of the French language and culture.<sup>6</sup> New Jewish arrivals joined the only congregation in the city and in 1842 the now overwhelmingly Ashkenazic membership voted to exchange the old constitution with a new charter that replaced

*Rabbi Bernard Illowy*

*(From Henry Illoway's book about his father,  
Sefer Milchamot Elo-him, published in Berlin, in 1914.)*

the Sephardic ritual with the Ashkenazic rites. Albert I. "Roley" Marks, local actor and "poet laureate of the New Orleans Fire Department," served as the volunteer hazan of the congregation. During the High Holy Days that year, Marks, barely fluent in the Sephardic ritual or pronunciations but even less so in the Ashkenazic, lead the service in the Sephardic style he learned in his youth. Several Ashkenazic members, disturbed by Marks's use of



the recently revoked liturgy, protested loudly. Finally, Marks proclaimed for all to hear, "Jesus Christ, I have a right to pray!"<sup>7</sup>

Gershom Kursheedt, son of the New York Jewish community leader Israel Baer Kursheedt and associate of Isaac Leeser, publisher of *The Occident* and one of America's leading advocates of traditional Judaism, arrived in New Orleans in 1836 to enter business with his brother-in-law, Benjamin Florance. Upon his arrival he joined Gates of Mercy and quickly became a congregational leader. The first truly religious Jew in the city, Kursheedt led the fight to restrict membership to those married within the faith and to discontinue the burial of children of gentile mothers in the congregational cemetery. In 1845 Kursheedt spearheaded the organization of a Sephardic congregation, which he named Nefutzoth Yehudah, or Dispersed of Judah, in honor of one of the city's preeminent Jewish citizens, Judah Touro, and Touro's father, Isaac. The latter had served as hazan at Congregation Nefutzoth Yisroel, or Dispersed of Israel, in Newport, Rhode Island. Two years later Touro presented the new congregation with property he owned on the corner of Canal and Bourbon Streets, the former Christ Church, which was remodeled and finally dedicated on May 14, 1850, as the first synagogue in the city. Kursheedt and Touro selected the Reverend Moses N. Nathan to serve as minister.<sup>8</sup>

The members of Gates of Mercy, jealous of the upstart congregation, redoubled their efforts. Soon after the Touro donation to Dispersed of Judah, Gates of Mercy began to search for a hazan, a "gentleman of good moral character who can give a good English discourse, is well versed in the Holy Tongue and capable of giving instructions in the same." Consequently, in 1849 the congregation elected James Koppel Gutheim to the position.<sup>9</sup>

Gutheim was born in Menne, District of Warburg, Westphalia, in 1817. He studied at the Teachers' Seminary in Muenster and then with Rabbi Abraham Sutro, who granted Gutheim a diploma in Hebraic proficiency, but without rabbinical ordination. From 1838 to 1842 Gutheim served as preacher and teacher in Sedenhorst, Westphalia.<sup>10</sup> When he arrived in New York in 1843 he worked in his brother's counting room and taught Hebrew

school.<sup>11</sup> In 1846 he moved to Cincinnati to serve as lecturer and reader at Congregation Bene Israel and moved to Bene Jeshurun the following year.<sup>12</sup> In 1849 Gutheim announced to the Board at Bene Jeshurun that he had been in communication with the Portuguese congregation of New Orleans (Dispersed of Judah), that he intended to take up the position of minister there and therefore would not be a candidate for that position in the next election at Bene Jeshurun. Even with this announcement, Gutheim almost won reelection.<sup>13</sup> Within a year, however, he was in New Orleans, not as minister at the "Portuguese congregation," but at Gates of Mercy.

Meanwhile, Gutheim also had been nominated for the pulpit of Congregation Emanu El in San Francisco, which position he declined. Gutheim's popularity resulted from his being one of the few Jewish religious leaders in the country who could speak and write fluently in English.<sup>14</sup> Gutheim remained at Gates of Mercy for only three years before moving to Dispersed of Judah, whose members were socially prominent, wealthier, and able to offer a sizable salary increase.

On March 5, 1851, the members of Gates of Mercy dedicated their newly built synagogue in the five hundred block of North Rampart Street on the edge of the French Quarter. They had been meeting in a small building, with poor acoustics, in the same location. That building was demolished and the new synagogue replaced it.<sup>15</sup> After Gutheim departed in 1853 Dr. Hermann Kohlmeyer occasionally served as a temporary minister. Kohlmeyer was highly respected for his religious knowledge and had been appointed by Isaac Mayer Wise to serve as a member of the *beth din*, which was to examine Wise's proposed prayer book, *Minhag America*. Eventually Kohlmeyer decided to forgo a career in the ministry and instead pursued a career in education, teaching Hebrew and Oriental literature at the University of Louisiana (now Tulane University). As Rabbi Maximillian Heller of Temple Sinai later wrote, Kohlmeyer's "shrinking modesty and his retiring habits probably unfitted him for the responsibilities of the spiritual leader."<sup>16</sup>

*Bernard Illowy's Origins and Education*

Bernard Illowy first visited New Orleans in January 1856 to deliver a series of lectures at Gates of Mercy.<sup>17</sup> The leaders of the congregation were impressed with his knowledge, presence, and speaking ability. Illowy was without a pulpit at the time and some discussion took place about his becoming minister, but no official offer was tendered. The Reverend Solomon Jacobs was elected minister in 1859. After Jacobs's death the following year, congregational leaders were delighted to entice Illowy to New Orleans. The congregation quickly learned that Illowy suffered from neither "shrinking modesty" nor "retiring habits."

Illowy, born in Kolin, Bohemia, on April 14, 1814,<sup>18</sup> came from a long line of learned rabbis and teachers. His great-grandfather, Rabbi Phineas Illowy, was *haus* rabbi, or private chaplain, to the Oppenheim family of Moravia, the most influential Jewish family in the Austrian empire. Bernard's grandfather, Rabbi Jacob Illowy, moved the family to Kolin, where he headed the second largest congregation in the kingdom of Bohemia. Bernard's father, Rabbi Jacob Joseph, was in business and did not have a pulpit, but was renowned for his learning and attracted many students. In 1842 Bernard married Katherine Schiff, the daughter of Wolf Schiff, a prominent merchant of Raudnitz, Bohemia. Through his in-laws Illowy probably heard of, if not actually met, the young firebrand rabbi of Raudnitz, Isaac Mayer Wise.<sup>19</sup>

Illowy received *smicha* from Rabbi Moshe Sofer at the renowned yeshiva in Pressburg, Hungary, and a Ph.D. in Languages and Classics from the University of Budapest. He attended the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano, headed by Rabbi Samuel David Luzzatto, in Padua, Italy. This yeshiva, one of the first orthodox seminaries to combine secular with traditional Jewish learning, integrated a scientific approach to the study of traditional Jewish text.<sup>20</sup>

During his years of study Illowy encountered an environment infused with Western culture and increased religious freedom. While influenced by modernization, Illowy, unlike many

*maskilim*, refused to forsake orthodoxy. Illowy believed orthodoxy should, and could, be maintained in an enlightened world. His secular training allowed for change but without clearly defined limits.<sup>21</sup>

At the completion of his studies in Padua he returned to Kolin to teach. During the widespread revolts of 1848 Illowy spoke in the public square of Kolin in support of revolutionary forces as they marched through town on their way to Prague. Later, when returning from a trip to Paris, a cursory inspection of his belongings by border authorities revealed a stamp proclaiming "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité." These two incidents on his record marked Illowy as a subversive by the authorities. In 1850 he applied for the position of rabbi in Hesse, Germany. The local Jewish community voted their overwhelming approval, but the Minister of the Interior vetoed the appointment. Soon ever-increasing censorship, antisemitism, and police surveillance convinced Illowy it was time to immigrate to America.

#### *American Reform and the Counter Reformer*

In early 1852 he arrived in the United States where he found what Leon Jick has described as "a Jewry in a state of flux, lacking in direction or program but increasingly prosperous, full of energy, pursuing a variety of options."<sup>22</sup> Assimilated lay leaders, still nominally traditional, strictly controlled the clergy. By the mid-1850s all of the leading religious leaders, from Leeser in Philadelphia, Gustavus Poznanski in Charleston, Max Lilenthal and Leo Merzbacher in New York, Abraham Rice in Baltimore, and even Isaac Mayer Wise in Albany, had either lost their positions or been forced to resign. Meanwhile, as Marc Lee Raphael explains, "The liberal spirit of the land, the absence of a vigorous and traditional Jewry to oppose reforms, and the desire, once again, to articulate a Jewish ritual in the idiom of the times for those who found the ancient way no longer to their liking, combined to spur reform in the United States."<sup>23</sup>

Illowy hoped to fit into this milieu as a defender of traditional Judaism in the modern world. For Illowy, an enlightened, assimilationist Judaism in America had to be set within the

framework of the immutable halacha. Reformers, meanwhile, were attempting to alter the old ways, to modernize or Americanize what they considered a "medieval" religion. Illowy was soon drawn to defend the true faith to counter this Jewish Reformation. And just as was the case with the Catholics in Luther's Wittenberg, politics, together with a desire for religious modernization, would lead to Illowy's failure.

Already preeminent among the reformers at the time of Illowy's arrival was Isaac Mayer Wise. Wise's personality was perfectly attuned to America, which was, according to Michael Meyer, "a place where individuals could freely elaborate their own views and seek to convince others of their validity. Very little was fixed; most everything was being shaped. Religion was untrammelled by state control . . . but was only necessary to show that the ancestral faith was well suited to American values . . . consistency, moreover, was simply not his highest value."<sup>24</sup> Jick describes Wise as magnetic and flexible, progressive and traditional.<sup>25</sup> His primary goal, which he eventually achieved through the Reform movement, was an Americanized Judaism. Meyer explains, "But it must be emphasized that the precise ultimate course of Reform, whether moderate or radical, was not really Wise's basic concern. He was determined above all else to establish a stronger and united Judaism in America, and he was quite ready to be flexible in utilizing whatever organizational means or unifying philosophy could most effectively achieve that end."<sup>26</sup>

But flexibility and compromise had little place within Illowy's Judaism. For the next twenty years the two battled in the Jewish press: *Occident*, *Asmonian*, *Jewish Messenger*, and Wise's own, *American Israelite*, often with bitter, insulting, and sarcastic attacks; Wise, on the offensive, continually advancing the causes of reform and enlightenment, while Illowy fought a rear-guard defense of orthodoxy. Nonetheless, perhaps because of a relationship forged in Raudnitz through Illowy's in-laws, they were and remained personal friends. After Illowy moved to Cincinnati in 1865, the two met regularly to engage in friendly, spirited, and, no doubt, unyielding discussion.

Beginning with the Cleveland Conference in 1855, the Reform movement within American Judaism began to evolve into an autonomous denomination, free from orthodoxy. Yet Illowy was one of the signers of the original call for the conference. He hoped to establish a formal union of American synagogues, discuss the preparation of an American prayer book, and plan for the education of Jewish youth. Ultimately, however, he did not attend the meeting. Illowy suspected “that the conference agenda would be dominated by reformist thinkers,” a fear that proved all too correct.<sup>27</sup>

Just months after the Cleveland Conference, Temple Emanuel in New York, guided by its religious leader, the Reverend Leo Merzbacher, published the reform prayer book *Seder Tefilla: The Order of Prayer for Divine Service*, a fundamental revision of Jewish theology. Eager to delete religious beliefs deemed either irrelevant or offensive in modern life, Merzbacher shortened the service, altered prayers relating to the coming of the Messiah, and eliminated references to animal sacrifices and the restoration of the Temple.<sup>28</sup>

At the time Illowy was the minister at the United Hebrew Congregation in St. Louis. Asked by the leadership of the congregation whether the new prayer book could be incorporated, Illowy responded by issuing a public *cherum* on anyone using the book either in the synagogue or at home. Illowy wrote a sarcastic letter to the *Occident* in which he ascribed interest in the new prayer book due “partly, perhaps by the beauty of the binding and the fineness of the paper . . . and partly perhaps by the brevity of its contents.” He could not support the adoption of the book, he explained:

For this book regards the words of revelation, the sayings of the prophets and those sublime truths which made our fathers happy . . . those truths which upheld and sustained them amidst the incongruous mass of nations they were among . . . for which they encountered the most terrible death, and for which they shed their precious blood – as mere fiction.<sup>29</sup>

Two years later Wise published *Minhag America: The Daily Prayers*, his liturgy for America’s Jews. This was a further

pared-down prayer book, reflecting, in Wise's view, the temperament and beliefs of the Jews in modern America. Purged of excessive repetition, the service was less cumbersome, making it more meaningful and decorous. No more preoccupied with the mysticism of earlier ages, "Two thirds of American Israelites neither expect nor wish the coming of the Messiah King and the prayer book should be the common good for all," Wise explained in the *American Israelite*.<sup>30</sup>

The following year the most radical of the reformers, David Einhorn, published his prayer book, *Olat Tamid*. Einhorn excluded even more traditional prayers and what remained was almost entirely in German, not the sacred Hebrew. With this steadily increasing radicalism, Illowy wanted to caution the Jews of America concerning the reformers and their reforms. Signing as "A Jew of Syracuse," where he was then minister at Congregation Knesset Israel, he wrote a letter to the *Occident*, titled, "Whom Shall We Follow? A Letter to My Brothers in Israel," and attacked.<sup>31</sup>

Illowy complained, "Israelites of this country esteem nothing holy in their houses, nothing holy in their lives, and stand before the world without a God, without a faith." He cautioned his fellow Jews about their new religious leaders, "Do not allow yourselves to be misguided any longer by false teachers, by the faithless shepherds who lead God's flock on poisonous pastures. . . . Withdraw yourselves from the false prophets, who only desire to obtain paltry lucre—while, however, they do not mean to be honest, either toward you or God." He then explained that these men were simply salesmen who "deal with truth as with ordinary merchandise, laying aside what is no longer fashionable, and changing, for this reason, their views, from day to day, because, they must manufacture their principles anew, to have them always in accordance with the popular taste."<sup>32</sup>

Then he turned to Wise's *A History of the Israelitish Nation*, in which Wise, according to Illowy, rejected a belief in revelation and described himself as non-Jewish, nevertheless, as Illowy incredulously proclaimed, "continued still farther to follow the calling of a Jewish religious teacher." Illowy asked:

How can you, brothers, entrust you and your children's salvation unto such a man, who turns like a bulrush in the direction of every wind, and reels to and fro like an inebriate, and finds a firm footing nowhere? Will you be asked to be instructed by a man who plays his own game with sacred truth, who deals with so much levity with the holiest things, who has even no principle, and changes his position constantly?

*Illowy in New Orleans: "Where Rabbis Dare to Declare  
Oysters Kosher for Jews"*

When the Civil War erupted, Illowy was serving as minister of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. In his sermon given on January 4, 1861, the National Fast Day proclaimed by President Buchanan, Illowy, while not condoning slavery, fretted over the southerner's loss of rights. "Who can blame our brethren of the South for seceding from a society whose government cannot, or will not, protect the property, rights and privileges of a great part of the Union against the encroachments of a majority misguided by some influential, ambitious aspirants and selfish politicians."<sup>33</sup> A few months earlier the Reverend Jacobs of Gates of Mercy in New Orleans had passed away. In view of Illowy's apparent southern sympathies, the leaders of the congregation once again offered him the pulpit. This time he agreed, helped in large part by a tripling of his salary to three thousand dollars a year. In September 1861 he arrived in New Orleans just in time to celebrate the Jewish New Year.

Illowy was immediately faced with a question of halacha: was it permissible to have a choir? He ruled that as long as the members were Jewish males it was permissible, and in October 1861 a seven-member choir was organized by the hazan, S. Moses. Among the members was Frederick Hollander, a future president of the congregation, who would become one of Illowy's bitterest critics.<sup>34</sup>

In his decision about the choir and in other decisions described below, Illowy demonstrated an unwillingness to veer too far from tradition. But how much was *too far*? This was a key dilemma the rabbis faced. Change, adjustment, and compromise



seemed inevitable but only when minimizing the erosion of the essence and laws of the religion. During the nineteenth century rabbis drew their own end lines in different places, some of which they moved over time and under different circumstances. Yet each one believed that they had the correct marker, which meant that inevitably their rivals were not only wrong but that they jeopardized the very survival of Judaism.

Even though Illowy knew the Jews of New Orleans had a reputation for religious laxity, he was still appalled by their indifference and lack of religious knowledge. Many of the members did not even know their Hebrew names. In April 1862, because of this deficiency, Illowy agreed to the calling to the Torah by number rather than name.<sup>35</sup> This practice was instituted in other congregations and considered a reform, but again Illowy ruled it permissible not in the name of reform but in the interest of decorum and in the hope of involving more men in the service. Meanwhile, auctioning of *aliyot* continued. Several months later the board agreed to Illowy's suggestion that each potential bar mitzvah boy be required to pass a test, "to see if he can read the Hebrew correct."<sup>36</sup> The test would be administered by Illowy, who would then issue a certificate that would allow the boy to read from the Torah. Later that month, August 1862, the board felt impelled to remind Illowy that his contract called on him "to deliver a Lecture in the english Language [*sic*] once a month." At the same time he was also reminded that he was to attend "divine services at the Synagogue every Saturday." If he was not actually attending services, the disinterest displayed by the members so distressed him that perhaps he preferred to say his prayers at home.

On October 29, 1862, Rabbi Abraham Rice, the first ordained rabbi in the United States, passed away. Upon learning of Rice's death, Illowy, who had served with Rice at the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, gave a stirring eulogy in honor of his patron, a tribute in which he also attempted to warn the Jews of America away from their growing abandonment of true Judaism.<sup>37</sup> "O if there were many such teachers in Israel, how much better would it now be with the cause of our religion; we should not see so

*Gates of Mercy, 1851–1881.*

*Located on the 500 block of Rampart Street, the congregation remained here until it merged with Dispersed of Judah in 1881.*

*(From History of the Jews of Louisiana, c. 1905,*

*Courtesy of Touro Infirmary Archives,*

*New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

many sons and daughters in Israel led astray by false and erroneous doctrines and shallow principles." Illowy complained, "What good can we expect from a class of people who, like our younger generation, do not know more of their own history and religion than this, that their fathers were Jews and that they are born as such?" The problem, he claimed, was with their teachers. He asked: "Where lies the cause of this great evil? It lies in the great want of true and faithful ministers, who fear God more than the mighty ones in their congregations, who fear God more than the loss of material gain; who do not wish to please, but to teach; not to flatter, but to show the truth in the true light, color, and shape; and who care little for the fat, milk, and wool of the flock."

In July 1863, Samuel Friedlander, Illowy's closest ally and the three-term president of the congregation, resigned his position to

spend more time with his business. Illowy, upon threatening to resign over the naming of a new president, received veto power in the selection of Friedlander's successor. Lion Cahn, another Illowy ally, was ultimately elected.<sup>38</sup> In March 1864 both Illowy and Friedlander were presented with tokens of appreciation for their service to the congregation. That December Abraham Lehmann, still another Illowy confidant, was elected president. Beginning the following summer, however, Illowy's orthodoxy began to polarize the congregation and weaken his position.

As mentioned earlier, the original constitution allowed the children of "strange" spouses to be buried in the congregational cemetery. While the charter of 1842 had rescinded the practice, many members continued to marry gentile women. In early July 1864 the question of the burial of these spouses came before Illowy. In a compromise, he ruled that the burial could take place, but that the grave must be "eight yards distant from any others, the corpse must be laid in a position just contrary to others and a fence must be built around the grave, that it may thus have the form of a separate burying place." While his decision allowed the burial, Illowy's insistence upon separating the grave away from and opposite to others offended and estranged a sizable segment of the congregation.<sup>39</sup>

That same month Illowy withdrew certification from a local *shokhet*. Such certification of a kosher butcher frequently became a major issue in that the business was lucrative and competition often arose. The board reprimanded Illowy for his action, informing him "that in future, if he sees any thing wrong done by a butcher, to notify this Board thereof, instead of acting for himself."<sup>40</sup> As mentioned earlier, congregational lay leaders often invoked their authority over the professional clergy. This was the first time the board invoked its prerogative over Illowy, a clear sign that his religious leadership was beginning to be questioned.

On October 11, 1864, thirteen men, ten of whom were members of Gates of Mercy, who called themselves "A Committee of Israelites of New Orleans," issued a broadside titled "To the friends of Religious Reform."<sup>41</sup> The announcement called for the drafting of

a memorial for the purpose of setting forth their desire for a reformation in the rites and ceremonies of Jewish worship, such as has taken place in most of the principal cities of the world . . . It is not our purpose to entirely subvert the time honored customs of our ancestors . . . but as much as we revere those sacred rituals, we yet deem them far too orthodox for the present day, and consequently, inconsistent with the spirit of progress and enlightenment which is fast superseding those obsolete ideas. What we design will give to the coming generation a form of worship pure and sacred, one bereft of all superfluities and untrammelled by many ceremonies with which it is at present burdened.

Illowy did not immediately respond. Two weeks later, however, he interdicted the three local *mohelim* from performing circumcisions on children of Jewish fathers and gentile mothers.<sup>42</sup> He ruled that these children could not become Israelites by circumcision alone (emersion also would have been required) and believed that these children of unconverted mothers would not be educated as Jews. Whether or not his action was taken in a fit of pique with the potential reformers, the incident contributed to the growing alienation between the traditional and reform camps.

Two miles upriver in the suburb of Lafayette City was Congregation Shaarey Tefillah, or Gates of Prayer, the third Jewish congregation founded in the New Orleans area. After Illowy's interdiction Charles Goldenberg, the congregational *mohel*, claimed Illowy lacked authority over him or the responsibilities and titles conferred on him by Congregation Gates of Prayer, and therefore he would continue to perform circumcisions as he had in the past. Illowy's response was to declare Goldenberg "unfit for the holy office of mohel." In his letter of explanation to Gates of Prayer, he wrote:

We are . . . sufficiently convinced that of all of these non-Israelitish mothers in the city, who consented that their children be entered into the covenant of circumcision, there is not one who has done so from the pure motive, to see her child worship one day the One and only God of Israel, a religion which she herself denies. . . . Be sincere and say would it not be much better

for the poor children to let them be what their mothers are, Christians, then convert them for appearances sake into Jews, which they will never be, and enjoin upon them heavenly duties, which as you yourselves know, they will never fulfill.<sup>43</sup>

In the *Occident*, Isaac Leeser offered his view of the matter, one that vividly illustrated the orthodox rabbi's dilemma in the United States. Leeser argued:

Although the decision is undoubtedly strictly legal, we doubt whether it is wise for a Rabbi in this country to give an order, which he has every reason to believe will be disregarded. Dr. I's authority in New Orleans extended only to the Shaagaray Chassed; the Shaaray Tefillah, to which Mr. Goldenberg belongs, owed him no obligation, being a perfectly independent body of the author. If, then, he is ever so right, it is useless to issue an edict which will not be heeded.<sup>44</sup>

While the controversy raged a rumor was printed in the January 1865 issue of the *Jewish Messenger* that Illowy was "about to vacate his office." However, Leeser's *Occident* discounted the rumor, pointing out Illowy's commitment to the community, that he had purchased property in the city, and owned "some houses." Meanwhile, opposition to Illowy within the congregation mounted.<sup>45</sup>

In March 1865 a constitution was written for a proposed reform congregation, to be named "Temple Sinai."<sup>46</sup> Sponsored by the same committee that published "To the friends of Religious Reform" five months earlier, the new constitution was tabled. The dissidents felt confident they could reform Gates of Mercy from within.

On May 4, Gates of Mercy members elected a new board of directors.<sup>47</sup> The city, relatively unscathed by the ravages of the Civil War, had become a refuge for scalawag southerners and carpet-bagging northerners. Some twenty to twenty-five men, most of whom were recruited by the reformers, joined Gates of Mercy in the months before the election. The newcomers and the older members who either preferred reform, despised Illowy, or both, joined together to oust Illowy's orthodox associates from the board. The newly elected president, Frederick Hollander,

*Title page of the 1828 Constitution of Gates of Mercy.  
(American Jewish Historical Society, New York,  
New York, and Newton, Massachusetts.)*

immediately appointed a committee to “look for a minister,” since Illowy’s contract was scheduled for renewal later that summer.

Bad blood spilled throughout the congregation. Just two weeks after the election of the new board, Samuel Friedlander refused a “*mitzfa [sic]*” during the Sabbath morning service, stating that “he would accept none from the President.”<sup>48</sup> Similar disrespectful incidents occurred over the next several months as tempers flared and positions hardened.

In early June, with his reelection improbable, Illowy informed the board of his resignation. The Reverend Gutheim, highly respected, inclined toward reform, and expected to return to the city any day, was much preferred. Gutheim had left the city soon after the arrival of federal forces in April 1862. The following month the commanding General of the Army of the Gulf, Benjamin Butler, ordered all foreign nationals to take an oath of allegiance to the Union. Gutheim refused on two counts: first, his religious convictions would not allow him to swear an oath, and second, even if allowed to invoke an oath, he would not pledge his allegiance to the Union. Accordingly, he left the city and spent the remainder of the war in Montgomery, Alabama, and Columbus, Georgia.<sup>49</sup>

By the first week in August 1865 Illowy had left New Orleans for Congregation Shearith Israel in Isaac Wise’s stronghold of Cincinnati. Just days before his departure, thirty-five members presented Illowy with a proclamation in which they wished “to show our worthy Rabbi our appreciation of his firm religious character and unfeigned piety” and that “his memory and noble doctrines will forever abide in our hearts.”<sup>50</sup> No official appreciation came from the board of directors. On August 6, ten Illowy loyalists requested a special meeting of the entire congregation to air charges against the president for “acting contrary to our by-Laws,” and also charged the hazan, Solomon Mosche, with insulting the congregation and the “dignity of our Rabbi Dr. Illowy.” The board rejected the request.<sup>51</sup>

In the last week in August the Reverend Gutheim returned to New Orleans as minister of Dispersed of Judah. But Gutheim

preached in a virtually empty synagogue. Many members had left the city with Gutheim rather than take the oath of allegiance. Even more had become less observant, with many having married out of the faith. Gates of Mercy, the largest congregation in the city, called, and on September 3, 1865, after an absence of twelve years, Gutheim was once again elected minister. He remained at Dispersed of Judah through the High Holy Day season before returning to Gates of Mercy in late September.<sup>52</sup>

Shortly after Illowy's departure, the reform-minded board at Gates of Mercy unanimously resolved, contrary to Jewish tradition, to allow a "mixed" choir of men and women, "to be stationed at the most suitable place of the Synagogue," between the *bimah* and the ark. The congregation eagerly awaited the premier of the new choir, which was to occur on Rosh Hashanah. But the debut did not take place. Just as the choir and cantor were to begin, the sheriff burst into the synagogue, walked through the stunned worshippers, and handed President Hollander a summons ordering him to appear before the court the following Monday. After Hollander read the summons, he immediately ordered the women of the choir to remove themselves to the women's section. In a letter that appeared in *Der Israelite*, Illowy reported incorrectly, but with undisguised venom, that the president "is not very familiar with reading no matter what the kind of writing, especially when his secretary is not readily available, " and so he immediately obeyed, for he "could only suppose it was a court order directing him to silence the choir."<sup>53</sup>

Within the month a broadside, written in German, was delivered to the homes of every Gates of Mercy congregant. In this diatribe the author described the recent events within the congregation and then insulted four of the leaders of the orthodox party: Samuel Friedlander, the former president, Moritz Stiemel, a board member for ten years, Simon Newberger, the congregational secretary, and Jacob Dreyfus, an Illowy confidant. Mr. Friedlander, the assailant claimed, "in Europe held the office to clean the chamber-pot of one Madame Parnes" and called him "the very image of a Brazilian ape." Mr. Stiemel was referred to as "Cheap



John an infamous fool," who had "received discipline in a house of correction or Prison in Europe." He said of Simon Newberger, "about 6 months ago you begged of every member of the Society to vote for you, saying you had a house full of children, and no means to make a living, or earn the daily bread." Jacob Dreyfus, according to the author, exemplified "personified piety," but "in Europe enjoyed for a considerable time the pleasures and delights of a Prison house, and even here in this country he received the same honors, having been fitted with one years [*sic*] lodgings in the Penitentiary in Baton Rouge for committing the crime of larceny." The essay continued with a plea for the reformation of the congregation and asked the members "not to serve your God in a mysterious manner, as has been the case some time past, but that you will make your church a house of Progress. All nations shall unanimously declare that the Hebrew Church (Synagogue) [*sic*] is a house of pure devotion. All of this you can bring about if you proceed on the way accepted to purify and reform this society."<sup>54</sup> The references to "your church" and "Hebrew Church" were typical of the reformers' attempts at assimilation and Christian acceptance.

Detectives were hired to find those responsible for the publication. As Illowy wrote in a *Der Israelite* article, "Who is the monster responsible for bringing this wretched monstrosity into the world? Mr. Mosche, previously cantor in Speier, currently cantor in this new reform congregation in New Orleans." Mosche was sued for libel, and, although several witnesses testified that Mosche had not been in New Orleans long enough to gather such intimate knowledge of the community, he was nevertheless found guilty and sentenced to "ten days imprisonment in the Parish Prison, to pay cost of prosecution, and a fine of one hundred and fifty dollars."<sup>55</sup> Upon the petition of influential friends the governor commuted the sentence to the payment of the fine.<sup>56</sup>

Twice the traditional faction resorted to the civil courts for redress instead of calling for a *beth din* to hear their grievances. However, in August 1863 such a religious court had convened in New Orleans. Rabbi Illowy and his allies, Samuel Friedlander, Lion Cahn, and Abraham Lehmann, served as judges. The case

involved the widow Mrs. Lowenthal versus Mr. Meyer Goldman. When Mr. Lowenthal died his friend, Mr. Goldman, promised to help the widow and her three children. Goldman told Mrs. Lowenthal that friends had donated money to help the poor family meet its needs. Goldman sold what little Mr. Lowenthal had left and kept the proceeds in trust. Eighteen months later, after receiving money from Mr. Goldman each month, Mrs. Lowenthal asked Goldman for the money he had been holding from the sale of her late husband's goods. Goldman explained that that was the money he had been returning over the previous months and that the monies donated had run out some time back. Mrs. Lowenthal now appeared before the *beth din* seeking the money Goldman supposedly had been holding for her. Testimony revealed that Goldman had continued to receive donations for the Lowenthal family, and he was ordered to return the entire amount to Mrs. Lowenthal.

Now the traditional party was willing to go to court to air the Jewish community's dirty linen in public. This indicated both their confidence that the court would decide the case fairly as well as their feelings of security within the broader community. It also revealed the seriousness of the discord and their inability to work together within the congregation.

Illowy ended his article with a parting insult about his successor, James Gutheim. Illowy described Gutheim as originally a "journeyman furrier" whose "lovely voice aided him in finding the nobler if not better work as cantor." According to Illowy, throughout his career Gutheim had always proved agreeably pliant, exchanging the Ashkenazic ritual for the Sephardic, and then back again. Sarcastically, Illowy claimed:

to admire the greatness of our beautiful country . . . for the same Mr. Gutheim is no longer a furrier, no longer a cantor, but rather, a Rabbi and teacher of the law in a congregation of more than 300 members. . . . However, in a country where Rabbis dare to declare oysters kosher for Jews, while they themselves eat pastries from non-Jewish bakers, while here nothing is prepared without pork fat, . . . here ancient Talmudic principles are no longer observed.<sup>57</sup>

*Aftermath*

By fall 1865 Illowy was in Cincinnati and Gutheim had returned to Gates of Mercy. Reform was in the air. While the first attempt to liberalize Gates of Mercy had proven disastrous, the board was undeterred, and in April 1866 they asked Gutheim if it was permissible to install an organ. Gutheim ruled that “the case of an accompanying instrument does not conflict with the *Minhag Ashkenaz*, but is simply a matter of taste and expediency.”<sup>58</sup> An organ was installed soon thereafter. The reformation of Judaism in New Orleans now proceeded in earnest. Two years later Gates of Mercy declared itself the first Reform congregation in the city, and just two years after that Temple Sinai evolved out of Gates of Mercy.

Meanwhile, in Cincinnati, Illowy, his health beginning to fail, wrote vindictive, vicious articles as he attempted to vent his disaffection with the new Judaism flowering in New Orleans and throughout the United States. He died on June 21, 1871, from injuries sustained from a carriage accident the preceding day.<sup>59</sup> At his funeral his associates and opponents, rabbis Isaac Mayer Wise and Max Lienthal, eulogized him. The symbolism of this stalwart of an aging and seemingly dying orthodoxy being buried by these two leaders of the vigorous, forward-looking Reform movement could not have been lost on the mourners.

Illowy's movement from congregation to congregation, his conflicts over power and ritual with congregants and fellow rabbis, and his rearguard defense of a modified tradition were more typical than unique. Isaac Leeser's career followed a similar trajectory. He, too, fought for the independence of the rabbinate, opposed modifications that, to him, went too far, and stridently attacked more radical reformers. But unlike in New Orleans, in a more conservative, more religious Philadelphia, tradition enjoyed stronger staying power and continued after Leeser's death three years prior to Illowy's.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the city itself was more conservative, the inhabitants more religious. Be that as it may, the stories of Bernard Illowy, Isaac Leeser, and similar individuals tell us much about roads difficult to tread during the mid-nineteenth century, pathways that remain pitted with debate even today.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Timothy F. Reilly, "Parson Clapp of New Orleans: Antebellum Social Critic, Religious Radical, and Member of the Establishment," *Louisiana History* 16 (Spring 1975): 167-191, and, John Betterworth, "Protestant Beginnings in New Orleans," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 21 (1938): 823-845.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Parker, *A Journey to the West and Texas*, (Boston, 1836), 191.

<sup>3</sup> Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, (Waltham, MA, 1969), 193-194. The spelling of the name of the congregation has been a source of controversy. The spelling of "Shanarai" in the original constitution resulted from Solis misspelling the Sephardic word for "Gates." In the revised Charter of 1842 the name was spelled "Shanari." In the renewed Charter of 1852 the spelling of both names was changed to "Shangarai Chassed." This remained the official spelling until the name was changed to "Touro Synagogue" in the 1930s. On the early history of the Jews and synagogues in New Orleans, see also Leo Shpall, *The Jews of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1936); idem., "The First Jewish Synagogue in New Orleans," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 21 (April 1938): 518-531; Samuel Proctor, "Jewish Life in New Orleans, 1718-1860," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 40 (1957): 110-132; Bobbie S. Malone, "New Orleans' Uptown Jewish Immigrants: The Community of Congregation Gates of Prayer, 1850-1860," *Louisiana History* 32 (Summer 1991): 239-278.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>5</sup> *Acts of Louisiana*, 1828, 162-164, Louisiana Supreme Court, New Orleans.

<sup>6</sup> Anny Block, "Mercy on Rude Streams: Jewish Emigrants From Alsace-Lorraine to the Lower Mississippi Region and the Concept of Fidelity," *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 103-105; see also Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1988); idem., "Jewish Commercial Interests North and South: The Case of the Lehmans and Seligmans," *American Jewish Archives* 43 (Spring/Summer 1991): 24-39.

<sup>7</sup> M. Weiner, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 6, (Leipzig, 1841), 294; Korn, *Early Jews of New Orleans*, 240-245.

<sup>8</sup> Korn, *Early Jews of New Orleans*, 247-253.

<sup>9</sup> Max Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai, 1872-1922*, (New Orleans, 1922), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Gary P. Zola, "Gutheim, James Koppel," in John H. Garrity and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (New York, 1999), 736-738; see also Leo Shpall, "Rabbi James Koppel Gutheim," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (January 1939): 166-180.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 737.

<sup>12</sup> Karla Goldman, "In Search of an American Judaism: Rivalry and Reform in the Growth of Two Cincinnati Synagogues," in Jeffery S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael, eds., *An Inventory of Promises: Essays On American Jewish History In Honor Of Moses Rischin*, (Brooklyn, 1995), 140.

<sup>13</sup> Bene Jeshurun Minute Book, 1841-1849, July 8, 1849, and September 23, 1849, Congregation Bene Jeshurun (Isaac M. Wise Temple) Ms. Coll. #62, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>14</sup> Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir*, 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, 9, 1851.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>17</sup> Touro Synagogue Records, v. 56, January 28, 1856, 45–46, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Illoway, *Sefer Milchamot Elo-him; Being the Controversial Letters and the Casuistic Decisions of the Late Rabbi Issachar Ben Illoway* (Berlin, 1914), 11–15; Moshe D. Sherman, *Orthodox Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, CT, 1996), 101–103. There has been some confusion over the spelling of the family name. Bernard's son, Henry, changed the spelling of the family name, adding an "a."

<sup>19</sup> Moshe D. Sherman, "Bernard Illoway and Nineteenth Century American Orthodoxy," (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1991), 12–114.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York, 1971), 1433. The *maskilim* were the members of the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment. Begun in the mid-eighteenth century in Germany, the *Haskalah* called for the assimilation of Jews into modern life through the adoption of language and education. Over the next century the movement spread east into Russia. Illoway's split with the *maskilim* over the maintenance of religious traditions was a harbinger of his disagreements with the Reform movement in the United States.

<sup>22</sup> Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820–1870* (Hanover, NH, 1976), 132.

<sup>23</sup> Marc Lee Raphael, *Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Traditions In Historical Perspective* (San Francisco, 1984), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in American Judaism* (New York, 1988), 240.

<sup>25</sup> Jick, *Americanization of the Synagogue*, 154.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>27</sup> Sherman, "Bernard Illoway," 156.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–168.

<sup>29</sup> *Occident*, 8, November 1855.

<sup>30</sup> *American Israelite*, 4, July 21, 1857.

<sup>31</sup> *Occident*, 16, February 1859.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, January 24, 1861.

<sup>34</sup> Touro Synagogue Records, v. 56, October 13, 1861, 117.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, April 13, 1862, 128.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, August 21, 1862, 132.

<sup>37</sup> *Jewish Messenger*, 12, December 19, 1862, 187.

<sup>38</sup> *Occident*, 21, August 1863, 235. *Jewish Messenger*, 14, July 3, 1863, 6–7.

<sup>39</sup> Touro Synagogue Records, v. 56, July 11, 1864, 154.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, July 21, 1864, 155–156.

<sup>41</sup> Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir*, 135–137.

<sup>42</sup> Touro Synagogue Records, v. 56, October 25, 1864, 160.

<sup>43</sup> *Jewish Messenger*, 17, February 3, 1865, 35. For a more complete review of this controversy see David Ellenson, "A Jewish Legal Decision by Rabbi Bernard Illoway of New Orleans and Its Discussion in Nineteenth Century Europe," *American Jewish Archives* 69 (December 1979): 174–195.

<sup>44</sup> *Occident*, 23, December 1864, 429–430.

<sup>45</sup> *Jewish Messenger*, 17, January 13, 1865, 12; *Occident*, 22, January 1865, 480.

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<sup>46</sup> Temple Sinai Records, Box 1, Tulane University Special Collections.

<sup>47</sup> Touro Collection, v. 56, May 4, 1865, 175.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, May 28, 1865, 175.

<sup>49</sup> *History of the Jews of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1905), 29–31; see also William Warren Rogers, Jr., “In Defense of Our Sacred Cause: Rabbi James K. Gutheim in Confederate Montgomery,” *Journal of Confederate History* 7 (1991): 112–122.

<sup>50</sup> *Jewish Messenger*, 18, September 1, 1865, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Touro Collection, v. 56, August 6, 1865, 179.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, September 3, 1865, 183–184.

<sup>53</sup> *Der Israelite: A Central Organ for Orthodox Judaism*, 7, supplement, Mainz, January 31, 1866 (5626).

<sup>54</sup> *State of Louisiana v. S. Moshe*, First Judicial District Court of the State of Louisiana Records, December 11, 1866, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library. The original broadside was written in German. An English translation was made a part of the court record.

<sup>55</sup> [*New Orleans*] *Daily Picayune*, December 8, 1866, 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Der Israelite*, 7:5, supplement, January 31, 1866 (5626).

<sup>58</sup> Touro Collection, v. 56, May 3, 1866, 209–211.

<sup>59</sup> Sherman, “Bernard Illowy,” 271–273.

<sup>60</sup> Lance J. Susman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit, 1995); see also Joshua Stampher, *Pioneer Rabbi of the West: The Life and Times of Julius Eckman* (Portland, OR, 1988).



# James K. Gutheim as Southern Reform Rabbi, Community Leader, and Symbol

by

Scott M. Langston

In 1850 congregation Gates of Mercy, an Ashkenazic synagogue located in New Orleans, employed James K. Gutheim as its rabbi. Having never lived in the South, Gutheim possessed little firsthand knowledge about the region's customs and people. Nor was he well known to southerners. A relative newcomer to the United States, coming to its shores from the Prussian province of Westphalia in 1843, Gutheim spent a brief period in New York before moving to Cincinnati in the mid 1840s. There he served congregation Bene Yeshurun as lecturer.<sup>1</sup>

When he moved to the crescent city at the age of 33, he began a career that consumed the remainder of his life, except during his forced removal from New Orleans from 1862 to 1865 due to the federal occupation of the city and from 1868 to 1872 when he served New York City's Temple Emanu-El. By the time he died in 1886, Gutheim no longer was an anonymous figure in the South. During his life he became a leading advocate of Reform Judaism and a community leader, while also seeking to enhance understanding and relationships between Jews and Christians. These activities served as the foundation by which he was transformed into a symbol of an ideal person who successfully lived as a Jew in an American society imbued with Christianity.

*Advocate of Reform*

Well-known within the Jewish community, James K. Gutheim arguably had become the most important person in



southern Reform Judaism by the time of his death. His journey toward this distinction did not, however, take a direct path. During his childhood and education he was exposed to both traditional and non-traditional practices. His father worked as a Hebraist and Talmudic scholar and his grandfather served as a rabbinical authority in Westphalia's Warburg district. At the age of five, he entered a *Talmud Torah*, and by the time he was fourteen, he was sufficiently proficient in Hebrew to teach at Oberlistingen. He also studied classics with a Protestant minister. Two years later he moved to Munster, the capital of Westphalia where he studied under Abraham Sutro, the district's chief rabbi. Whether he studied individually with Sutro or simply attended a school under the rabbi's supervision is unclear. Sutro ardently opposed Reform and published a harsh critique, *Sefer Milhamot Adonai* (*Book of the Wars of the Lord*), while Gutheim was present in Munster. Although a strict adherent of traditional Judaism, Sutro did attempt some religious innovations by becoming one of the first rabbis to deliver sermons in German. Thus Gutheim received a traditional education that acknowledged at least some necessity for reform.<sup>2</sup>

When Gutheim came to the United States in 1843, his connection with Westphalian Judaism was not completely broken. While working as a bookkeeper in his brother's New York City business, he served as a correspondent for Isaac Leeser's *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, a monthly journal designed to educate and inspire devotion to Judaism and Jewish life. Launched in April 1843, it eventually became "the most important record of American Jewish life in the middle decades of the nineteenth century." Leeser, a proponent of Jewish orthodoxy and Gutheim's elder by eleven years, had grown up in Westphalia and also had studied under Rabbi Sutro. Gutheim thus remained connected to his orthodox background through his relationship with Leeser.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of these strong traditional influences, the seeds for his gradual development into a champion of moderate Reform also came with him from Westphalia. Westphalian Judaism attempted religious reforms during the years just prior to Gutheim's birth when its consistory, a Jewish community governing body,

*1873 portrait of James Koppel Gutheim.  
(From the Collections of the Louisiana State Museum,  
New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

called for sermons in the vernacular, order during worship services, changes to the liturgy, and the holding of confirmation ceremonies. While these innovations were not widely practiced at that time, the consistory at least established an environment receptive to some change. As Westphalian Jewry continued to struggle with these issues, Gutheim completed his education and began his career, serving as a preacher and teacher in Sedenhorst from 1838 to 1842. Thus his exposure to religious reforms came directly through Rabbi Sutro's willingness to entertain minor changes and indirectly from his larger environment.<sup>4</sup>

Gutheim seems also to have been influenced by the controversy regarding the status of Jews as Prussians. Although Prussian Jews possessed a high degree of civic equality, the government viewed Judaism as "nothing more than a tolerated private religious association." In an article published in *Leeser's Occident* in 1844, Gutheim reflected on a letter that he received from a friend shortly after he left his homeland. At the time of Gutheim's departure, the Prussian government was debating a law that would have placed more restrictions on Jews. Gutheim's friend informed him that proponents of the law invoked Jewish "antiquity and nationality" as justification for the restrictions. In other words, because Jews were an ancient nation, they were not true Prussians. Gutheim encouraged his friend to embrace Jewish antiquity and nationality in the same way that other groups residing in Prussia did their own heritage. Jewish antiquity did not mean that Jews and Judaism were antiquated. He noted that some Jews were happy when their Jewish features went unnoticed in public assemblies, and admitted that he too had once felt the same way. His views, however, had changed. He did not comment on what had brought about the change. Perhaps the prejudice against Jews in Prussia motivated Gutheim to find a way to modernize Judaism and to distinguish between an ancient heritage and an antiquated one. The struggle then became how to keep the ancient heritage living and relevant. As he traveled to America, the possibilities and dangers inherent in this enterprise multiplied, but he came determined to solve the problem.<sup>5</sup>

Gutheim quickly began working out a practical and relevant expression of Judaism. He encouraged his various congregations to undertake certain reforms. In March 1851, shortly after becoming rabbi at Gates of Mercy in New Orleans, the congregation completed renovations that included the installation of a new pipe organ. Gutheim's influence in this bold decision is unclear. What is certain is that he had no problem accepting it. Although he left Gates of Mercy in 1853 to become rabbi at Dispersed of Judah, New Orleans' Sephardic congregation, he returned in 1866. Replacing a strong proponent of tradition, Dr. Bernard Illowy, Gutheim counseled his congregation that purchasing an organ or melodeon did not violate Ashkenazic custom. He asserted that a custom "suitable and full of meaning to one age may become absurd and obsolete in another . . . The efficiency of customs for any specified purpose depends entirely upon time and place." Two years later, he recommended several sweeping changes including the adoption of the triennial reading of the Torah, reading of the Haftorah in English, adoption of the *Minhag America* prayer book, and the abolition of secondary holidays. Concerning the latter, Gutheim remarked, "You know that I am an advocate of judicious progress, a friend of wholesome reform. It is my ardent wish that my congregation take equal rank with the prominent enlightened congregations that flourish in the country. The time for action has come. The public mind is prepared." By this time, Gutheim was aggressively pursuing Reform principles to make Judaism relevant. Although he faced some opposition, most congregants approved of his direction and supported him. They expressed their dismay upon learning of Gutheim's desire to resign in order to move to New York City's Temple Emanu-El, one of the leading Reform congregations in the nation. Seeking to keep him in New Orleans, the board of Gates of Mercy requested that Temple Emanu-El release Gutheim from his commitment. The board gave credit to Gutheim for the majority, if not all, of their progress toward Reform, asserting that "we require and absolutely depend upon his local influence to *perfect our reform*." Temple Emanu-El, however, refused to relinquish its claim, and he left to become that congregation's English preacher and to serve alongside the senior

rabbi, radical reformer, Samuel Adler. Gutheim cited the possibility of a larger field of influence as reason for his departure, although the congregation's reluctance to accept a few of his proposals may also have contributed to his decision. His actions at Gates of Mercy had, however, gained the attention of a prominent congregation and his move to New York also indicated his rising prominence as a Reform rabbi.<sup>6</sup>

His New York sojourn did not last long. Gutheim returned to New Orleans four years later after individuals primarily from Gates of Mercy formed New Orleans' first Reform congregation, Temple Sinai. From this setting, he would become arguably the most influential Reform rabbi in the South. Why he left the New York congregation is unclear, but the opportunity to be the senior rabbi of an avowedly Reform congregation proved attractive. While at Temple Emanu-El, he had not lost touch with the Jewish community in New Orleans. In fact, the founders of Temple Sinai invited him to preach the sermon at the laying of the synagogue's cornerstone in November 1871. In this message, Gutheim praised the principles of Reform in general, but found particular satisfaction in the establishment of the new congregation. He reflected, "It affords me a holy satisfaction, to witness the substantial evidences on your part, that the seeds, which your former teacher and guide (i.e., Gutheim) has sown in singleness of purpose and purity of motive, have not fallen on barren soil." He used this new pulpit as a platform to advocate Reform principles within his congregation and throughout the South.<sup>7</sup>

During the last year of his life, his influence on behalf of Reform reached its pinnacle. In 1885, largely through Gutheim's efforts, the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations was formed. Calls for a national association of rabbis had been made for some time without success. Several months prior to the organization of the southern rabbis, a group of rabbis had met in New York City and formed a regional association often referred to as the Eastern Conference of Rabbis. This group held its second meeting at the same time the southern group organized. The significance, if any, of the simultaneous meetings is unclear. Since Gutheim was the one southerner known by most of the eastern

conference rabbis, perhaps the two groups hoped to cooperate in order to achieve national goals. At the inaugural meeting in New Orleans, fifteen rabbis from Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Arkansas brought the new southern organization into existence; four other rabbis (including one from South Carolina) could not attend, but asked to be enrolled as members. The group immediately elected Gutheim its president. During the conference, the members identified four objectives for the new organization: the exchange of ideas related to responsibilities of the rabbinic office, promotion of literature relating to Judaism and its history, promotion of fraternal feelings among the members, and the organization and administration of congregational religious schools "in accordance with approved methods." Although these goals did not explicitly reflect Reform ideas, the conference took a decided turn in this direction at its second meeting.<sup>8</sup>

That meeting was held in New Orleans in December 1885. In the president's report, Gutheim made several suggestions that were acted on by the collective body. A committee was formed to study whether and how uniformity in textbooks and prayer books could be achieved in synagogues and schools. The conference pledged its support to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Hebrew Union College. The rabbis also unanimously declared the principles enumerated in the Pittsburgh Platform to be "in harmony with the spirit of progressive Judaism and must be regarded as the inferences made by Jewish teachers from the oldest conceptions of our faith." In addition, they affirmed that Sabbath observance and circumcision were "as binding today upon Israel as they ever were." Additional committees were formed to study marriage, confirmation, and burial rituals, as well as school courses, and to gather all available material dealing with the history of Jews in the southern states. Reports were to be given at the next year's meeting, expected to be in Atlanta, Georgia. (However, it did not convene until November 1887, nearly two years later, and it took place in Montgomery, Alabama.)<sup>9</sup>

The conference voted to publish Gutheim's presidential address, "Cause, Development and Scope of Reform." In it he laid

the foundation for, aim of, and challenges confronting Reform. According to him, "[Reform's] great object is to vitalize Judaism, to gain for it the exalted position which it deserves, to vindicate its world-redeeming truths and principles, and constitute it a living agent of progressive culture." In order to accomplish this, the "whole religious structure" must function in harmony. This structure consisted of "temple and house, inward and outward life." By this he meant that "religion and actual life" must be reconciled.<sup>10</sup>

As its leading spokesperson and through his theological, oratorical, and organizational abilities, Gutheim had brought organization and the beginnings of cohesion to the Reform movement in the South. When he died in June 1886, the executive committee of the conference acknowledged his influence as the "impelling and controlling spirit of all its aims and activities" and credited "the advancement of the Jewish cause in the South" primarily to his efforts. When the conference convened again in November 1887, the new president, Rabbi Max Samfield, likened his succession of Gutheim to Joshua's replacement of Moses. Gutheim's successor at Temple Sinai, Max Heller, did not overestimate Gutheim's influence when in 1922 he called him "easily the dean of Southern rabbis."<sup>11</sup>

### *Community Leader*

Gutheim's significance was not confined to his Reform efforts. While in New Orleans, he was involved in a multitude of issues and organizations. He served as the secretary, treasurer, and first vice-president of the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans, and he held the position of first vice-president of Touro Infirmary from 1854 until his death. He was a member of the board and president of the Hebrew Benevolent Association and participated in the New Orleans Conference of Charities, the Auxiliary Sanitary Association, and the Louisiana Educational Society. He was also vice-president of the Rabbinical Literary Association, an organization founded by Max Lilienthal and designed to give rabbis a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas.

*Temple Sinai, New Orleans, Louisiana.*

*"This graceful and most imposing structure is situated on Carondelet between Delord and Calliope streets, and is, without doubt, the most beautiful edifice of the kind in the United States..."*

*{New Orleans Illustrated Visitor's Guide, 1880,  
Courtesy of Touro Infirmary Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana.}*

While his involvement in a number of organizations brought him into contact with a wide variety of people, his actions during the Civil War won him widespread acclaim. When federal troops occupied New Orleans in 1862, Gutheim refused to sign an oath of allegiance and was forced to leave the city. He spent the remainder of the war in Alabama and Georgia. Prior to his departure, Clara Solomon, a sixteen-year old Jewish girl living in New Orleans, noted in her diary entry for May 4, 1862, just days after the



Union capture of New Orleans, that he had “prayed earnestly for the S. Confederacy.” Perhaps that prayer was similar to one he gave on May 16 in Montgomery, Alabama, at the dedication of a Montgomery synagogue. There he entreated God to bestow his “abundant favor and benevolence (on) our beloved country, the Confederate States of America” and to “judge between us and our enemies, who have forced upon us this unholy and unnatural war.” He hoped that the Union would soon realize its error in waging war and therefore, “relinquish their cruel designs of subjugation, their lust of gain and dominion.” The South had engaged in a just and sacred cause, “the defense of our liberties and rights and independence, under just and equitable laws.” In defense of these actions, he hoped that the “unrighteous invaders” would be repulsed. Although Gutheim did not own slaves, he defended his adopted region and considered the actions of the North to be an unjust attack on the South.<sup>12</sup>

His ardent support of the South continued during Reconstruction. In 1866 he convened a meeting of many of New Orleans’ prominent Jews that resulted in the founding of the Hebrew Educational Society. This organization subsequently created a school for the teaching of religious and sacred subjects. The school functioned until 1881 and was attended primarily by Jewish children, but also by some gentiles. The society, however, may actually have been a reaction to efforts to desegregate the public schools in Louisiana. A few clues hint at this motive. When the cornerstone of the school was laid in 1868, Gutheim, as the founding father of the society, spoke at the public ceremony. Many items with symbolic significance were placed in the cornerstone. Among other things, it contained a collection of ancient and modern coins, including a United States coin from 1787, the year of the writing of the United States Constitution, with the mottos “Mind Your Own Business,” inscribed on one side, and “We Are One,” on the reverse, and a copy of the last edition of the *Daily Citizen*, a newspaper published at Vicksburg, Mississippi, before its surrender to Union forces. These items suggest resistance to federally imposed measures such as the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1866 that

forbade discrimination on the basis of race. The Louisiana legislature had refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. Since 1864 integration of Louisiana's public schools had been hotly debated especially in regard to the development of a new state constitution. The 1868 state constitution ultimately required desegregation. According to Joe Gray Taylor, "Education was probably the most strongly opposed section of the new constitution." The Hebrew Educational Society, therefore, represented both an effort to provide an education of Jewish children and likely a means to resist Reconstruction. Gutheim led in this resistance.<sup>13</sup>

Several years later, he and seven other political and religious leaders signed a public letter condemning the report of General Philip Sheridan regarding an attempted forcible takeover of the State House by Democratic politicians on January 4, 1875. While Sheridan concluded that "a spirit of defiance to all lawful authority" existed in the state, the letter also denounced "corrupt politicians" who endeavored to perpetuate their power over Louisiana. Two years later when Reconstruction ended in the state, Gutheim was placed on the New Orleans public school board, the first board in post-Reconstruction Louisiana. He served on the board until 1882, holding the position of vice-president, often leading meetings in the president's absence, and chairing influential committees. During his tenure, he voted with the majority to segregate the public schools, but also seconded a motion to lower the passing score required for African Americans on teacher exams to 60, ten points lower than that required for whites. On more than one occasion, he challenged policies and choices of textbooks that had decidedly Protestant or Christian biases. His actions opposing Reconstruction undoubtedly were well received in Louisiana and the South by most whites. Yet, he also challenged Christian ideas and still maintained widespread support. As an indicator of the esteem with which Gutheim was held by the general population, he was asked to address the Southern Historical Society during its annual meeting in New Orleans. He bluntly admitted that the Civil War had been lost by the Confederacy, but reflecting the more congenial atmosphere of the 1880s, he also

noted that “a better mutual understanding” was spreading between North and South. He encouraged and praised the efforts of the society to gather and preserve documents from the war that would enable an unbiased history to be written. Characterizing the obliteration of the Mason-Dixon line as “a great result” of the war, he hoped that “henceforward the only contention between the States be which shall excel the other in loyalty to the Constitution, attachment to the Union, and the zeal for establishing the fundamental rights of liberty.” While reflecting a more conciliatory tone, his address received loud applause probably due to his advocacy of the society’s aims.<sup>14</sup>

Rabbi Gutheim also led in the fostering of interfaith relations. Although he held strongly to the distinctions between Judaism and Christianity, he did not allow these differences to overshadow common points of contact. Indeed, he readily attacked prejudice and bias that favored Christianity and that were perpetrated by Christians. For example, in 1877 he protested an oration delivered in Lafayette Square and reprinted in a local paper that had characterized Jews involved in the crucifixion of Jesus as “heartless, cruel, and bloodthirsty.” Gutheim reasoned that had these sentiments been expressed in a Catholic church, he would not have protested. They, however, had been aired publicly, and this provoked his public response to the New Orleans *Times-Democrat*. He wrote:

as a Jew, who had no share in the killing of Jesus, I characterize them as an outburst of fanaticism calculated to resuscitate the blind prejudices and cruel hatred of the dark ages. I will not stop to inquire, what the spiritual status of McCaleb (the orator) and of his co-believers would be, if the killing of Jesus had *not* taken place, and why the reputed perpetrators of the deed should be held up to condemnation, when according to the Christian scheme of salvation the event was pre-ordained by God Himself; nor will I mull the proposition, that in view of the inestimable benefit bestowed upon the human race by that very event the Jews are entitled to the world’s everlasting gratitude, instead of the hatred and scorn to which they have been subjected.<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of this example, on the whole Gutheim was not combative with Christians, but rather sought common ground

from which to build positive relations. He demonstrated this characteristic when he participated in a largely Christian-led endeavor to establish a Sabbath observance league in New Orleans. Under the leadership of Benjamin Morgan Palmer, pastor of First Presbyterian Church and one of Gutheim's best friends among the Christian clergy, the league was formed after a series of meetings in March and April 1882. It aimed to encourage better Sabbath observance. Some within the group felt that the league should lobby for passage of a Sunday law that would close most businesses on the Christian Sabbath. Gutheim and others encouraged the league to use moral persuasion rather than legislative means to achieve better Sabbath observance. Gutheim, as well as Rabbi Isaac L. Leucht of Touro Synagogue, participated in and supported this essentially Christian movement, but did so as Jews with the hope of attaining better observance of the Jewish Sabbath.

Gutheim's activities in the community constantly involved him with Christians who came to appreciate his respect for Christianity, commitment to Judaism, and dedication to his country. The comments of Eva L. Rodenberg illustrate Christian attitudes toward him. Rodenberg taught for a missionary school administered by the Church Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, an Episcopalian organization. The school sought the conversion of Jews. In the annual report for 1885-1886, Rodenberg commented on Gutheim's death:

I lost a friend in Rabbi G. He was so kindly disposed, not only to my school and self, but to the Church. The respect our Bishop and clergy showed his memory, proved how much he was thought of. I find the Jews all more favorably disposed to Christianity than ever . . . I am constantly asked about the doctrines of the Church by parents of our scholars, and they are all impressed with Rabbi G.'s idea, that there is but one step between them and Christianity.

Gutheim did indeed believe that Judaism and Christianity were intimately related, but he also understood the differences between the religions. He chose to focus on the similarities and, in doing so, built strong relations with Christians. However thin the line he drew for his congregants, Gutheim's remarks may have facilitated

Rodenberg's efforts, and she undoubtedly used them to evangelize Jews.<sup>16</sup>

*Symbol of an Ideal*

Gutheim's actions outside the Jewish community endeared him to a vast number of people. His death, therefore, was not simply a Jewish event, but one that also touched the lives of non-Jews and invited their participation. He died somewhat suddenly, having been sick for only a week before passing away during the Sabbath evening of June 11, 1886. After embalming, his body was placed in his home on St. Charles Avenue, where many came to express their sympathies the next day, Saturday. On Sunday, his body lay in state at Temple Sinai, where he had served as rabbi since the congregation's establishment in 1872. There, in spite of rain, throngs of people expressed their grief and sympathy until his funeral service was held on Monday afternoon.<sup>17</sup>

The service commenced at 3 p.m. with a choir composed of some of the city's leading voices singing the portion of Alois Kaiser's *Requiem for the Day of Atonement* beginning with, "What is man?" The answering of this question dominated the remainder of the service. After readings from Psalm 19 and Psalm 91 as well as portions of Job, a prayer was offered, followed by an aria for alto soloist from Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*, titled, "O Rest in the Lord." Then four speakers eulogized Gutheim.<sup>18</sup>

The four reflected Gutheim's local and regional influence. Isaac L. Leucht, rabbi of Touro Synagogue and also a former co-worker with Gutheim, spoke first. He had been assigned the task of reviewing Gutheim's life. Rabbi Henry Berkowitz, of congregation Gates of Heaven (Sha'arai Shomayim) in Mobile, Alabama, followed Leucht. Gutheim's wife, Emilie Jones, hailed from Mobile where the two had married in 1858. At the time of Gutheim's death, Berkowitz served on the executive committee of the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations. In 1883, he had been a member of Hebrew Union College's first graduating class. Henceforth, he served as the rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia and was the first secretary of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR).<sup>19</sup> In his funeral oration, Berkowitz focused on Gutheim's charitable acts. Rabbi Max Sam-

field of congregation Children of Israel in Memphis, Tennessee, next addressed Gutheim's leadership in Reform Judaism. Samfield served as vice president of the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations and succeeded Gutheim as its second president. He too was a founding member of the CCAR. The final speaker, the Reverend Benjamin Morgan Palmer, pastor of New Orleans' First Presbyterian Church, was one of the most respected clergy in the South having arrived in New Orleans in December 1856. The New Orleans *Times-Democrat* characterized the participation of a Christian minister in a Jewish funeral service as unusual and unprecedented, as well as beautiful and appropriate. Palmer and Gutheim had been friends for a long time, had served together in various organizations, and had confronted such events as yellow fever epidemics, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the struggle to advance religion in the city. Palmer addressed Gutheim's relations with the non-Jewish community.

Each speaker paid tribute to the rabbi's life and career, while highlighting and exploring his humanity. Their funeral orations reflected characteristics of what these ministers, as well as many Americans, believed to be the image of an ideal person. In the midst of their efforts to comfort and memorialize, the traits they focused upon revealed their perceptions of this ideal. In the book, *The Sacred Remains*, Gary Laderman has noted the tremendous symbolic power of the dead. During the Civil War era, for example, John Brown's body became a symbol representing larger social conflicts. Similarly, the corpse of Abraham Lincoln came to symbolize national unity. A recent study of more than eight thousand newspaper obituaries, including those from the New Orleans *Picayune* from 1818 to 1930, concluded that, "Obituaries are powerful commemorations that focus on social values." They provide clues as to how individuals adhere to certain cultural norms. Furthermore, they "provide a truly intimate portrait of the 'ideal American' in any era," and reflect the values of the dominant culture.<sup>20</sup> The death of James K. Gutheim similarly provided potent symbolic power in expressing values regarding Jews and their relationship with American culture and society.

One might easily dismiss the rhetoric used by the funeral orators as Victorian sentimentality. They did resort to hyperbole in their praise of Gutheim. For example, they painted a picture of a man who never caused his wife “a sign of regret,” nor did he ever compromise. His zeal for helping the underprivileged never waned. Never did an emergency arise for which he was not prepared. Every act or word emanating from him reflected honesty, maturity, and strength. By using words such as “every,” “always,” and “never,” the eulogists did not necessarily mean that Gutheim never had a single instance where he violated these characteristics. Those who knew the rabbi could probably recall exceptions. One of the speakers, Rabbi Isaac L. Leucht, admitted that the living often showered the dead with platitudes and overlooked their faults. He stated that while alive, one often was subjected to criticism, but as soon as death came, “only our kind acts [and] benevolent deeds” were remembered. Leucht, however, noted that Gutheim “enjoyed the love and respect of all who knew him” even while alive. Indeed, Victorian sentimentalism pervaded the speeches, but the speakers expressed something more than grief and respect for the dead. Gutheim’s eulogists elevated traits of the rabbi they considered to be worthy of emulation by all Jews. This idealization of Gutheim, in turn, helped demonstrate to the gentile population that Jews could attain American standards of manhood and citizenship. In spite of religious differences, Jews were just as American as the Christian majority.<sup>21</sup>

In upholding Gutheim as an ideal, his eulogists focused on three aspects: domestic life, religion, and public life or citizenship. These corresponded to a triad of symbols used first by Protestants during the American Civil War to give meaning to death: Jesus, country, and home. While Jews in America did not constitute the dominant group, they reflected and embraced some of this group’s values. At the same time, the appropriation of these values demonstrated both their Jewish distinctiveness and their identification with values adopted by many Americans. Jews could potentially fulfill two of the three ideals, but the Christianity ideal precluded full acceptance. Those who eulogized Gutheim,

*Dedicated on November 13, 1872, two years after  
Temple Sinai was incorporated, the  
congregation remained here until 1928.  
The building was demolished in the late 1960s.  
(Courtesy of Temple Sinai, New Orleans, Louisiana.)*



however, employed these subjects to demonstrate how to be Jewish in America and to illustrate to gentiles the "Americanness" of Jews. They in essence presented a reconstruction of the ideals many associated with American culture and Jewish identity.<sup>22</sup>

*The Ideal Domestic Life*

As the eulogists sought to comfort the grieving and honor Rabbi Gutheim's life, they highlighted his roles as husband and father. While only Gutheim's wife and son directly experienced this aspect of the rabbi's life, it became an important point for all to consider. Here, the rabbi's private life was publicly displayed. Victorian-era Americans valued domestic life. As the nineteenth century progressed, the home became a sacred symbol, and domestic religion blossomed. Protestants and Catholics considered the Christian home to be the cornerstone of American society. Although differing over the nature of domestic religious rituals, Protestants and Catholics agreed on the necessity of these activities for creating a strong family, nation, and church.<sup>23</sup>

Eulogist Benjamin Morgan Palmer had written a treatise on the family in 1876. In it he argued that the family was "the original society from which the state emerges, and the church, and every other association known amongst men." In fact the state or the church could not exist without the family. The family constituted the "first stones in the social structure" and the "foundation of all government and law."<sup>24</sup>

Rabbi Gutheim's funeral reflected a similar attitude toward domestic life, but with a distinctively Jewish expression. Jewish domesticity also upheld the importance placed on the home by Christians while demonstrating that Jews could maintain their distinctiveness without threatening the stability of the home and therefore the nation. From a Jewish standpoint sharing with Christians a common domestic value did not mean surrendering one of the chief characteristics of Jewish identity, namely Jewish religious observance. Significantly, Rabbi Leucht began his explication of Gutheim's life with the domestic or private sphere, noting that "whenever we wish to fathom a man's character we must seek the

key to it in his own home," rather than in the person's public persona.<sup>25</sup>

Leucht portrayed a man who exuded love for his wife and child. He illustrated Gutheim's family life by describing the manner in which the deceased kept the Sabbath in the home. Surrounded by his wife, son, and friends, Gutheim appeared as "an old patriarch" greeting the Sabbath. Even in the last moments of his life, Gutheim joined with loved ones and admirers, and recited the Shema one last time. On that Sabbath evening, his wife noted that he had never caused her a moment of regret. Leucht interpreted this comment as "an epitaph of deep and endless conjugal affection."<sup>26</sup>

This portrayal of Gutheim's domestic life addressed two audiences. To Protestants who particularly valued family worship,<sup>27</sup> the picture of Gutheim welcoming the Sabbath with his wife and son demonstrated Jewish domestic values as well as the religious character of the Jewish home. In his treatise of 1876 Palmer had portrayed the family worshipping under the leadership of the pious father. In this state the family constituted a temple where God revealed his presence.<sup>28</sup> Leucht's depiction of Gutheim's family mirrored the ideal Christian family. Gutheim sat as "an old patriarch," surrounded by wife, child, and friends, leading his family in worship. Remarkably, Gutheim's funeral allowed Jews to demonstrate that the model home typically associated with Christianity was present among Jews. Here was Gutheim leading his family in domestic worship, just like the model Protestant father. The Jewish home in America, however, varied with its Christian counterpart in one important aspect. Leucht's recounting of Gutheim's final recitation of the Shema highlighted this difference. The Shema made clear that to Jews God was one being instead of the trinity asserted by Christian dogma. Yet this fundamental theological difference clearly did not harm the Jewish home. In fact it inspired Gutheim's wife to assert that he "has never caused me a sign of regret." This portrayal of the death scene linked Judaism with the American home, a picture not often considered by Christians. Christianity, therefore, could not claim exclusive ability to produce stable homes, an integral element of a

successful nation. Judaism could also contribute to the nation's success without being Christian. It did not degrade the home, but elevated it while nurturing the stability of American society. Leucht also asserted that Gutheim's public life was rooted in his private life. Just as the Christian home formed the foundation of society, so too did the love of home, wife, and child constitute the starting point for Gutheim's public activities. Jews, therefore, while differing with Christians theologically, could still affirm and participate in an important American institution, one that was not distinctively Christian.

Leucht's imagery delivered a different message to Jews. Portrayed as a "foremost reformer" within Judaism, Gutheim, however, continued "the old and beautiful custom of greeting the Sabbath-bride with prayer and a festive board." Gutheim's example upheld the need for Jews to observe the Sabbath. Neglect of the Sabbath had been a growing problem among Jews. In 1880 the *American Hebrew* lamented that Jewish youth ignored and were indifferent towards the practices of Judaism. It attributed much of this to the decline of the Jewish home and even asserted, "American Judaism has no Jewish home."<sup>29</sup>

This problem drew the attention of Kaufmann Kohler, rabbi of New York City's Temple Beth-El and a key Reform figure, during the rabbinical conference that produced the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform. Kohler asserted that, "Religion's fire has almost died out on the domestic altar." He attributed this largely to the antiquated customs observed in the home. Urging that domestic religion be reformed, Kohler proclaimed, "We need a system not of austere, but of joyous religious home training."<sup>30</sup> The population of New Orleans reflected this broader American neglect of the Sabbath as pointed out by the city's Sabbath observance league which Gutheim and Leucht had helped found in 1882. Thus, when Leucht wanted to illustrate Gutheim's character, he chose to do so by portraying him as a faithful Sabbath observer. This demonstrated his character and illustrated his love for his family thereby explicating the ideal domestic behavior of a Jew.

Leucht's portrayal of Gutheim's Sabbath observance is also significant in relation to the debates occurring within American

Judaism. Some Reformers including Kaufmann Kohler observed the Sabbath on Sunday. This provoked great dissension. The *American Hebrew* decried this move as “un-Jewish,” “destructive,” an adoption of “Christian methods,” and the “Christianization” of Judaism.<sup>31</sup>

In Kohler’s address at the 1885 Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference, he asserted that the overwhelming majority of Jews paid little attention to the rabbinical laws including the kindling of lights on the Sabbath. He encouraged Sunday services because many Jews had to work Monday through Saturday. As the rabbis discussed Sunday services, most believed they were justified for practical reasons. The rabbis ultimately passed a resolution asserting that nothing in the spirit of Judaism prevented Sunday services.<sup>32</sup> Leucht, however, portrayed Gutheim’s Sabbath observance in traditional terms. Juxtaposing Gutheim’s tremendous influence in establishing Reform Judaism throughout the South with his traditional Sabbath observance, Leucht depicted a more moderate Reform. He also showed that Reform Judaism remained firmly within the realm of Judaism. Reform was not a departure from or perversion of Judaism. On the contrary, it faithfully adhered to Judaism’s core values.

What then is the image constructed by Leucht? Gutheim reflected a Jew who mirrored the domestic values of Christian Americans without giving up Jewish distinctions. Jews did not have to relinquish their Sabbath in order to be Americans. Nor did Christian Americans have to be wary of Jewish practices as a threat to societal stability. Jews, instead, should embrace Sabbath observance and contribute to the building of American society by practicing domestic religion. In Gutheim’s funeral service, however, one is confronted with the ideal and the real. In reality most Jews did not keep their Sabbath because they lived in a society built around the Christian Sabbath and they had to conduct business on Saturday. Those who did observe the Jewish Sabbath often disagreed on how it should be kept. Furthermore, many Christian Americans considered Jewish ceremonies and beliefs as out-of-step or in opposition to American values. Leucht’s idealization of Gutheim pointed to a way to resolve these conflicts.

*The Ideal Religious Life*

Max Samfield accepted the task of describing Gutheim's activities on behalf of Reform Judaism, with Leucht and Henry Berkowitz adding to the portrait. All three indicated the important role played by Gutheim, and advocated the legitimacy of the Reform movement. Their portrayal of Gutheim's religiosity also paralleled the value placed on religion by Christian Americans. Christian Americans believed that Christianity produced the ideal person, but the image of Gutheim challenged such notions.

In a variety of metaphors, Gutheim appeared as both the father of southern Reform and the savior of Judaism in the South. Biblical metaphors provided Rabbi Leucht with the images with which to portray the struggle in American Judaism. Just as the biblical prophets contended for "right, truth, and justice," so too did Gutheim, turning his pulpit into a battlefield. A war of words and ideas raged between traditional and Reform Judaism, but Gutheim, like Moses, revealed God's true nature by stripping away those notions which had obscured it. While not specifically invoking Moses, Samfield subtly conjured such associations when he mentioned Gutheim's coming "among us" forty years ago. Taken literally, the forty years reference hearkened back to Gutheim's arrival in Cincinnati. Samfield, however, seemed to have had in mind Gutheim's arrival in the South because he next characterized the state of southern Judaism at that time. This would have been in 1850 when Gutheim came to New Orleans. Clearly Samfield was estimating, but the use of the number forty conjured up reminiscences of Moses. Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years (Deuteronomy 2:7; 29:5). When he received the Torah on Mount Sinai, Moses remained on the mountain for forty days and nights (Deuteronomy 9:9). Just as Moses came to the Israelites when their survival was threatened, Gutheim had come south under similar circumstances. Samfield described the situation in the following terms: "Chaos reigned supreme and religious indifference and apathy threatened to stifle the true religious sentiment in the hearts of the Jews in the South." Gutheim proceeded to lay "the foundations to that noble edifice of pure religion"; so too did Moses as he led the Israelites through

*Portrait of Rabbi James K. Gutheim, painted in 1883,  
three years before his death.  
(Courtesy of Temple Sinai, New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

the desert wilderness and gave them the Torah. Moses, however, was not allowed to see the Israelites take possession of the Promised Land and died on its brink. Gutheim, on the other hand, "was spared to see yet the strides made by his people towards the realization of his ideal conceptions." As Moses founded Israel and as the prophets restored it, so did Gutheim in the guise of southern Reform. The Mosaic and prophetic parallels thus lent credibility to the Reform movement.

Berkowitz carried the private domestic image of Gutheim into the public sphere by characterizing him as a "revered father" and a "grand old patriarch" of southern Reform. As such, he founded congregations, dedicated synagogues, and established the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations. As Gutheim aged, he gathered around him the younger rabbis in order to tutor them. Gutheim's death, therefore, had resulted in an "awful gap" around which Berkowitz called on the "priest-people of the Most High God" to rally. Accordingly, he urged, "Let the voice of strife be hushed in American Israel," a reference to the conflict between traditionalists and reformers. The death of Gutheim had given occasion for yet another rallying around the old patriarch and offered an opportunity for the Jewish family to unite under the banner of Reform Judaism thereby fulfilling its religious duty just as Gutheim's own family had gathered around him to observe the Sabbath.

The eulogists were not calling for Jews to gather around Gutheim as an individual as much as they were urging the embracing of the Reform principles he symbolized. Their portrayal of him as another Moses, a prophet, and a patriarch lent authority to their call. These images positioned Reform Judaism as the Judaism of the Bible. It was not simply another movement within Judaism; it represented authentic biblical religion. Leucht furthered this idea when he called attention to Gutheim's response to modern biblical scholars. Calling him a "disciple of the true old orthodox school," Leucht emphasized Gutheim's faithfulness to the Bible by contrasting Gutheim's ideas with those of Julius Wellhausen and Abraham Kuenen, two leading biblical critics. Kuenen, a Dutch scholar in agreement with much scholarship of the era, stressed

that Moses had not written all or part of the Torah. Attribution of the Torah's authorship to Moses, traditionally dated to the fifteenth century BCE was considered anachronistic. Kuenen contended that parts of the Torah were written as late as the post-exilic period of Israel's history, beginning during the sixth century BCE. Furthermore, these portions did not reflect "Mosaic" religious practices, but the practices of later periods. Wellhausen furthered these ideas when he portrayed the Torah as having been written in stages over a long period of time. Thus, the biblical portrayal of a Mosaic law that established ancient Israelite religious institutions gave way to a reconstruction of Israel's religious history along an evolutionary model. Instead of the Torah being Mosaic in origin, it was the product of centuries of development.

While critical scholars largely embraced this idea and still do with certain modifications, many within the synagogue and the church perceived it as an attack on the integrity and authority of the Bible. If the Bible's portrayal of the ancient Israelite religion was inaccurate, could it be trusted? Reform rabbis debated the benefits of biblical criticism, although several viewed it positively, and the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform expressed receptivity to it. Leucht's assertion that Gutheim knew well the works of Wellhausen and Kuenen, but "never preached Bible criticism," nor "used the text of the Bible to prove that the Bible was at fault," demonstrated Gutheim's faithfulness to the Bible. His moderate Reform principles could therefore be trusted as an accurate portrayal of biblical principles. Leucht furthered the Reform cause even more when he asserted that Gutheim knew the works of Wellhausen and Kuenen as well as those of the commentators of the Middle Ages. By coupling traditional and modern scholarship, Leucht subtly asserted the superiority of Reform Judaism and signaled that Jews, therefore, should embrace the principles of moderate Reform.<sup>33</sup>

The religious aspect of Gutheim's life also spoke to a second element of the triad used by American Christians to give meaning to death. The linking of death to Christianity reflected the importance placed on religion, at least as an ideal. While Christian Americans understood themselves and expressed their identity in



terms of God (Jesus), country, and home, the appeal to Christianity posed a problem for Jews. If ideal Americans embraced Christianity in some way, Jews could never be ideal Americans. Gutheim's eulogists presented a modified version of American identity by showing not only the religious aspects of the rabbi's life, but also the biblical nature of his religion. Gutheim's beliefs reflected the Bible. Just as many within the church perceived the ideas of Wellhausen and Kuenen as unbiblical, so too did Gutheim. The rabbi had defended the integrity of the Bible as a Jew. Not only had he defended it, but his religion was indeed biblical religion. While Christians might argue that Gutheim's religion was not completely biblical because it did not accept the New Testament, the eulogists sought to redefine the triad. Rather than focusing on Jesus, and therefore making an ideal American a Christian, Leucht, Samfield, and Berkowitz emphasized the biblical character of Judaism. In essence, their re-fashioned triad consisted of home, the Bible, and country. By defining an ideal American in these terms, Jews could achieve equal status.

The rabbis had offered a reconstruction of an ideal individual in terms of one who embraced the Bible. For Jews, this translated into the embracing of a biblical Reform Judaism. While Reform had made great strides, it still was attempting to gain a firmer footing among Jews. The Reform movement sought something that would bring unity to itself as well as to all American Judaism. Unity had been attempted previously. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been established in 1873 and, two years later, Hebrew Union College opened. Yet in 1883 when the school celebrated the ordination of its first graduates with the now famous "Trefa Banquet," hopes of unity were dashed. The 1885 Pittsburgh Platform marked another attempt to bring theological unity, but it too provoked dissension. Many felt liturgical unity also was necessary, but widespread agreement on a prayer book did not occur until the 1890s with the publication of the *Union Prayer Book*. The establishment of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1889 was yet another effort at unifying Reform.<sup>34</sup> The rabbis urged unity in the moderate Reform principles es-

poused by Gutheim, believing them to be principles that were true to the Bible and Judaism and that would allow them to build relationships with non-Jewish Americans while fulfilling "the majestic mission of Israel." Rabbi Berkowitz graphically portrayed the call for unity when he encouraged his audience to eagerly seize the Reform principles taught by Gutheim, and "let us bind his virtues as a sign upon our hands." Using the image of tefillin, an item associated with traditional practices, Berkowitz bound Reform with tradition in order to show Reform's legitimacy as an expression of Judaism and its necessity for functioning within the American environment.

Many Jews had difficulty rallying around moderate Reform. Many Christians would find it hard to think of an ideal person in any other than Christian terms. The situation was further complicated by the dominance of Protestant Christianity in America. Catholics, much less Jews, often were excluded from portrayals of ideal Americans. Gutheim's eulogists, however, offered the image of an American that could possibly unify Jews and foster acceptance by Christians.

#### *The Ideal Citizen*

The eulogists concluded that through his traits Gutheim embodied the ideal citizen. Palmer addressed this aspect the most, but the three rabbis also commented on it. They portrayed a man who held strong distinguishing beliefs, but who did not allow these beliefs to hinder his positive participation and contribution in the public arena.

Palmer praised Gutheim for overcoming those things that created divisions in society, while simultaneously holding ferociously to his distinctive beliefs. Describing the ideal person, or what Palmer called the "good man," he portrayed this type of individual as the "incarnation of virtue and religion" who then became an agent for the renewal and blessing of humanity. This was the kind of "gospel" that all could easily grasp while perhaps being unable to understand the creeds and dogmas of the various religious philosophies. He then proclaimed, "Such a man has fallen in our midst today; and it is not strange that a whole

community is drawn together here, under the pressure of a common sorrow." The secret of Gutheim's greatness was that, "He was a man, and thought nothing human foreign to himself." Palmer described this man as "honest in all his convictions, mature in all his judgments, and strong in all the force which belongs to character." Honesty, maturity, and strength combined to express themselves in a man who held strong convictions as a Jew, yet who did not allow these ideas to restrict or prejudice his actions. Palmer invoked two common Reform ideas, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity, to explain how a man could act in this way. In these two ideas, as Gutheim had demonstrated, all humanity could unify.

Leucht, Berkowitz, and Samfield knew this as well. Leucht attributed the fraternal feeling among the Jews and Christians of New Orleans largely to the efforts of Gutheim. Samfield characterized him as "the high priest of humanity." Berkowitz pointed to his charitable deeds dispensed to all humans, regardless of sect or creed.

Historian Gail Bederman has demonstrated how American society from 1880 to 1917 constructed, defined, and used the concepts of manliness and civilization. While all men were male in gender, not all possessed intrinsically manly traits. In her words, "Manliness was a standard to live up to, an ideal of male perfectibility to be achieved." Manliness, in turn, was linked to civilization so that, "Just as manliness was the highest form of manhood, so civilization was the highest form of humanity. Manliness was the achievement of a perfect man, just as civilization was the achievement of a perfect race."<sup>35</sup> Read against this framework, the words of Palmer take on added significance:

After all, my friends, it is manhood that prevails in life: it is manhood that rules; and he is the mightiest monarch of us all, and sways the loftiest sceptre, who reigns through the honesty of his own nature and by the majesty of his superior will. It is the loss of such a king among men we are called now to mourn.

Palmer had crowned Gutheim with the highest title he could bestow, ultimate manhood. Leucht had showered similar praise on Gutheim, saying that, "Wherever he stood there stood a man in

*Tombstone of James K. Gutheim, Jewish Section, Metairie Cemetery.  
(Photograph by Fred Kahn, New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

the most beautiful and honest sense of the term." Yet, Palmer's praise was magnified by the fact that a leading southern Christian had conferred it on a Jew and had done so using such Christian terms as "gospel" and "incarnation."

Palmer characterized Gutheim as the ultimate man based on the rabbi's ability to maintain distinctive beliefs without allowing them to hinder his public service to the community. This description marked a value placed on those who could successfully combine the private and public. This success manifested itself in religious demonstrations in the public arena not through creed or dogma, but rather via human service. Although important, the former best remained in the private sphere. Thus, the eulogists demonstrated how Jews could participate in American society. Religion comprised a central part of their idea of the ideal person, but they did not predicate Americans being united through the abolition of religious differences.

Although Christian Americans continued to associate citizenship with Christianity, particularly as expressed in Protestantism, they liked to think that all Americans could or should be unified. The community of New Orleans was no exception. The day after Gutheim's funeral, a New Orleans *Times-Democrat* editorial writer stated that thousands of people "representing every creed and every nationality—people of every class of society—the high and the low, the aged and the young" assembled to honor Gutheim. Calling Gutheim the "model citizen," the editorialist noted that he had left an example "which men of every creed may well emulate." The death and funeral of James K. Gutheim gave the people of New Orleans an opportunity to illustrate what the ideal community might be. Gutheim was buried in Metairie Cemetery, the first Jew to be interred in these exclusive grounds. The resting place of many of New Orleans' social elite, Metairie was adorned with beautiful and expensive monuments. In 1884, members of Temple Sinai bought forty plots in the cemetery over the opposition of other congregants. Gutheim was given a plot for himself and his family.<sup>36</sup> His interment in what had been up to that point a gentile cemetery symbolized the unity New Orleans either desired or wanted to portray.<sup>37</sup> With the interior of Temple Sinai having

been heavily draped in black and “converted into a vast sepulchre [*sic*] for the temporary abode of a Prince of Israel,”<sup>38</sup> the Jewish community invited the gentile community to share its grief. At the end of the service, the gentile community then received Gutheim, the first representative of the Jewish community, into their most prestigious place of rest. As one final symbol of unity, words spoken by Palmer during the funeral service were placed on the monument adorning Gutheim’s grave. The Presbyterian minister’s words described Gutheim as “a man always to be found when wanted, always to be trusted when found.” The epitaph served as a reminder that Gutheim represented an ideal man, now reconstructed by the eulogists as one who embodied the value placed on family life, biblical religion, and citizenship.

Noting that death was the end of all humans, Rabbi Leucht pointed to its equalizing and unifying power. Perhaps more so in death than in life could the Jewish and Christian communities of New Orleans be united and an ideal American Jew be realized. The depiction of such an ideal highlighted the realities of life in New Orleans and the United States. New Orleans remained a divided community, particularly along racial lines. The fact that Jews and Christians participating together in the funeral was universally heralded indicated that religious divisions had created communal disunity. Had unity prevailed, it would not have been worthy of comment. American Jews continued to face many challenges within the Jewish community and American society. In dealing with these realities, the eulogists embraced Christian American ideals without accepting them wholesale. They even contested them at certain points, not by assaulting them, but by suggesting redefinitions. This strategy helped them simultaneously assert their “Americanness” and prompt reconsiderations of American identity. At the same time, they could address Jewishness within an American context. This was their answer to the question asked at the beginning of the funeral by Kaiser’s *Requiem*, “What is man?” Seen in this light, the funeral of James K. Gutheim reflected more than grief and admiration for one of the most important figures in southern Reform Judaism up to that time. For

both Christians and Jews, it reflected a reconstruction of the ideal American Jew.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Karla Goldman, "In Search of an American Judaism: Rivalry and Reform in the Growth of the Two Cincinnati Synagogues," in *American Society of Church History Papers* (1995): 3-4. Further biographical information on Gutheim can be found in Gary P. Zola, "Gutheim, James Koppel," in John H. Garrity and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (New York, 1999), 736-738.

<sup>2</sup> [New Orleans] *Daily Picayune*, June 12, 1886; Zola, "Gutheim," 736-738; Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit, 1995), 23-24; Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit, 1988), 28-43, 405, 420.

<sup>3</sup> Sussman, *Leeser*, 20-21, 139-140, 161-163.

<sup>4</sup> Zola, "Gutheim," 736-738.

<sup>5</sup> Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 109; James K. Gutheim, "Jewish Antiquity and Nationality," *Occident* 2 (February 1844).

<sup>6</sup> Touro Synagogue Collection 224, v. 56, Board of Officers of Shngarai Chassed Minutes, April 22 and May 6, 1866, May 6 and June 14, 1868, Special Collections, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana; Irwin Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," in Lester Sullivan, ed., *Jews of New Orleans: An Archival Guide* (New Orleans, 1988), 16-18.

<sup>7</sup> James K. Gutheim, "Address delivered at the Laying of the Corner-Stone of Temple Sinai in New Orleans, Nov. 19, 1871," in *The Temple Pulpit* (New York, 1872), 60.

<sup>8</sup> Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations, Minutes, April 14, 1885, small collections, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, (hereafter cited as AJA). See also, Gary P. Zola, "Southern Rabbis and the Founding of the First National Association of Rabbis," *American Jewish History* 85 (1998): 353-372.

<sup>9</sup> Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations, Minutes, December 29, 30, and 31, 1885, June 15, 1886, November 29, 1887.

<sup>10</sup> James K. Gutheim, *Cause, Development and Scope of Reform* (Cincinnati, 1886), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Max Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai, 1872-1922* (New Orleans, 1922), 48.

<sup>12</sup> [New Orleans] *Times-Democrat* and [New Orleans] *Daily Picayune*, June 12, 1886; Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, II (Detroit, 1992), 529-530; Elliott Ashkenazi, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon* (Baton Rouge, 1995), 350; James K. Gutheim, "Eloquent Prayer," small collections-miscellaneous (SC-4414), AJA. See also, Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1951), 47-51.

<sup>13</sup> [New Orleans] *Daily Picayune*, October 16 and December 4, 1866; *New Orleans Daily Bee* and [New Orleans] *Daily Picayune*, May 21, 1868; Scott Langston, "Race, Politics, Education, and Judaism: Rabbi James K. Gutheim and New Orleans," Louisiana Historical Society Annual Meeting, March 16, 2001; Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge, 1974), 154.

<sup>14</sup> *The Morning Star and Catholic Messenger*, January 10, 1875; Orleans Parish School Board Minutes, April 4, April 6, June 22, September 7, October 11, October 13, November 7,

1877, September 9, 1879, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans; *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, October 20, 1877; Gutheim, "Address of Rabbi J. K. Gutheim," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 10 (June 1882): 248–250.

<sup>15</sup> "James Gutheim," box 1, James K. Gutheim collection, AJA.

<sup>16</sup> For a fuller description of Jewish-Christian relations in New Orleans, see Scott Langston, "Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in Nineteenth Century New Orleans," *Southern Jewish History* 3 (2000): 83–124; *Eighth Annual Report of the Church Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, 1885–86*, Episcopal Church Archives, Austin, Texas. The school had been established in 1882. In the seventh annual report (1884–1885), Rodenberg noted, "One of the rabbis has been very kindly, and on one occasion he told an older scholar that there was but a step between Judaism and Christianity."

<sup>17</sup> [New Orleans] *Times-Democrat*, June 12, 13, 14, 1886.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Sefton D. Temkin, "Berkowitz, Henry," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 634–635.

<sup>20</sup> Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799–1833* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 91, 158, 169; Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Jackson, MS 2000), 151, 154.

<sup>21</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all accounts of Gutheim's funeral service come from the [New Orleans] *Times-Democrat*, June 15, 1886.

<sup>22</sup> Laderman, *Sacred Remains*, 134–135, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840–1900* (Bloomington, IN, 1986), 45–51, 77.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Family, in its Civil and Churchly Aspects* (n.p., 1876; reprint, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1991), 9–10, (page citations are from the reprint edition).

<sup>25</sup> [New Orleans] *Times-Democrat*, June 15, 1886.

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

<sup>27</sup> McDannell, *Christian Home*, 77–85.

<sup>28</sup> Palmer, *The Family*, 290.

<sup>29</sup> *American Hebrew*, September 3, 1880.

<sup>30</sup> Kaufmann Kohler, "Conference Paper of Dr. K. Kohler," in Walter Jacob, ed., *The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect*, (Pittsburgh, 1985), 102. Kohler had begun Sunday services in 1874 while at Congregation Sinai in Chicago. By the 1890s, however, he had changed his opinion and concluded that the move to Sunday services had been an error. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 290–291.

<sup>31</sup> *American Hebrew*, November 3, 1882.

<sup>32</sup> Kohler, "Conference Paper," 94–95, 115–119.

<sup>33</sup> Kuenen was best known for his two volume, *De Godsdiens van Israel*, published in 1869–1870 and translated into English in the three volume, *The Religion of Israel to the Fall of the Jewish State* (1874–1875). In 1878 Wellhausen wrote the exceedingly influential, *Geschichte Israel I (History of Israel I)*, revised and reprinted as *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1883), and then translated into English as *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1885). For further discussion of Kuenen and Wellhausen, see Ronald E. Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study* (rev. ed.: Guildford, Surrey, 1983) and Herbert F. Hahn, *The Old Testament in Modern Research* (Philadelphia, 1966); Naomi W. Cohen, "The Challenges of Darwinism and Biblical Criticism to American Judaism," *Modern Judaism* 4 (October 1984): 124–125.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 260–279.



<sup>35</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1995), 27.

<sup>36</sup> *History of the Jews of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1903), 65; Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir*, 71-72.

<sup>37</sup> James J. Farrell notes "sometimes social mobility occurred not only after death but also after burial." See his *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920* (Philadelphia, 1980), 125.

<sup>38</sup> [New Orleans] *Times-Democrat*, June 14, 1886.

# A Sugar Utopia on the Florida Frontier: Moses Elias Levy's Pilgrimage Plantation

by

Chris Monaco

*With a philanthropy superior to the selfish views of a mere land speculator, he is devoting his labour, to the laudable object of converting an uncultivated wilderness . . . into fields of plenty.<sup>1</sup>*

— M. E. Levy's introduction to John C. Calhoun, 1822

**O**n May 4, 1822, Moses Elias Levy arrived in St. Augustine on a schooner laden with Cuban sugarcane, "the first brought to the country," people declared. The cultivation of sugarcane, a minor crop during the Spanish and English periods, had dissipated to such an extent that many East Floridians believed that Levy, a prominent West Indies merchant-shipper, was responsible for its introduction.<sup>2</sup> Levy's status as an agricultural innovator was augmented by the "quantity of tropical fruits, roots, seeds" that he brought with him as well as his attempts to "cultivate the vine, the olive, and other products of the South of France."<sup>3</sup> By the time of the cession of Florida to the United States the previous year, the ambitious newcomer had already established himself as one of the region's largest landowners.

Leading citizens not only applauded his sense of industry but noted Levy's humanitarian impulses as well. His ultimate goal was to form a communitarian settlement as a refuge for the persecuted Jews of Europe in the sparsely inhabited interior. However the few white inhabitants as well as the native Indians caused Levy some trepidation. "I have embarked myself . . . in a wild

country," he admitted to a friend, "peopled with wolves instead of men."<sup>4</sup> Such apprehensions were not unwarranted. Levy's plantation on the Alachua frontier was eventually set fire during the onset of the Second Seminole War, a fate which also confronted numerous other East Florida planters who had followed Levy's lead in the manufacture of sugar.

Since his death in 1854 Moses Levy has been best remembered as the father of Senator David Levy Yulee, an important politician, sugar planter, and early railroad entrepreneur. By comparison, Moses Levy's legacy as a pioneer planter and utopian visionary has seldom been explored.<sup>5</sup> After sustaining staggering losses during the Second Seminole War and unable to sell his considerable land holdings until the courts eventually validated his claims, Levy was impoverished during most of the 1840s. Since the region steadily became aligned with Deep South conservatism, his earlier colonization efforts, if remembered at all, were often treated with disdain.<sup>6</sup> The antipathy of his prominent son coupled with the unease that most southerners felt toward any radical, communal scheme virtually assured relative obscurity after Levy passed from the scene. However newly uncovered records relating to Levy's colonization efforts reveal that a small group of Jews participated in his Alachua County sugar plantation, long thought devoid of Jewish settlers, as early as 1823.<sup>7</sup> This finding distinguishes Pilgrimage Plantation, located a few miles from the north Florida town of Micanopy, as the earliest Jewish agricultural settlement in the United States. His venture also brought much-needed settlers into the interior and contributed to the founding of Micanopy, the first distinct United States town in Florida. Furthermore the recent identification of Levy's antislavery tract, *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, written anonymously while on an extended stay in London in 1828, places this pioneer planter within the front ranks of social activists.<sup>8</sup>

Moses Levy has emerged as a progressive figure without parallel in territorial Florida. Of particular interest was his assumption that sugar profits would provide the economic foundation for Jewish communal settlements. Among the more than one hundred utopian enclaves that were founded in frontier

areas during the first half of the nineteenth century, there was a scarcity of Jewish settlements. In fact, Levy's Florida colony became the first Jewish venture.<sup>9</sup> Most communitarian experiments were located in the North and adhered either to Protestant religious values or secular ideals; very few relied on slave-dependent agriculture.<sup>10</sup> Levy, however, believed in the gradual rather than the immediate emancipation of slaves and was perfectly willing to utilize slave labor in the short term. His scheme was certainly far more accepting of chattel slavery than what would normally be expected from someone committed to an egalitarian standard. However his only experience as a planter was his previous ownership of sugar plantations in Cuba and Puerto Rico, and slave labor was universally judged to be indispensable in sugar production. Therefore his selection of the former Spanish province of East Florida, an extremely isolated region that provided a certain freedom for social experimentation during its early territorial years, becomes more understandable.

#### *Levy's Background*

Moses Levy's origins are as fascinating as his later accomplishments in Florida. Born in Morocco on July 10, 1782, Levy was first reared within the walls of the fortress-seaport of Mogador on the Atlantic coast.<sup>11</sup> He was the son of Jewish courtier and merchant, Eliahu Ha-Levi ibn Yuli. While not the vizier, as is often stated, Eliahu was clearly a man of wealth and influence. As was traditional in most Sephardic merchant families, young Levy acquired a proficiency in Spanish as well as Hebrew and Arabic.<sup>12</sup> In 1790 his privileged lifestyle ended abruptly after the death of the sultan precipitated a period of atrocities against the Jews. The family departed for the security of British Gibraltar where Moses Levy grew to young adulthood. The subsequent death of his father coincided with an encroaching yellow fever epidemic and compelled the remaining family members to seek a better life in the Danish West Indies. In 1800 Levy arrived at Charlotte Amalie, a major commercial port on the island of St. Thomas, and began employment in a lumber export firm. While on the island he discarded the Yuli surname.<sup>13</sup>

Levy considered his funds sufficiently adequate to start a family and in 1803 married Hannah Abendanone, a daughter of one of the prosperous merchants on the island. Shortly thereafter he established the mercantile firm of Levy & Benjamin, Brothers.<sup>14</sup> Levy eventually moved to Puerto Rico and later to Cuba where a close friendship and business relationship with Superintendent Alejandro Ramírez facilitated lucrative contracts with the Spanish military.<sup>15</sup> Through Ramírez's influence Levy was exempted from the laws of the Inquisition and was not only permitted residency, but soon acquired sugar estates on both Puerto Rico and Cuba as well. Levy amassed a considerable fortune and gained respect throughout the Caribbean and in South America, but a business career could not satisfy the deeply religious man. He grew increasingly uneasy with the rise of European antisemitism that surfaced after the Napoleonic Wars. Enmity toward Jews was most keenly felt in the German states and culminated in the infamous *Hep! Hep!* riots of 1819 in which, according to one contemporary, "[Jews were] murdered, their temples profaned and overthrown, their homes violated without exciting a single sympathetic glance."<sup>16</sup> The hostilities also spread to Eastern Europe and the Baltic. In response Levy decided that an "asylum" should be founded "for our fellow creatures who are denied a place of Rest in Europe."<sup>17</sup>

While on a business trip to England and the European continent in 1816, Levy fell under the spell of several social and religious movements that were gaining favor among enlightened circles. Impressed by Israel Jacobson's innovative efforts to reform Judaism in the German states, Levy expressed a desire to meet with this lay leader with the intention of joining forces in America.<sup>18</sup> While their meeting never materialized, evidently a result of Jacobson's declining health and Levy's hectic business schedule, Jacobson nevertheless became a major influence on Levy. While in England Levy also was exposed to the fervor of the antislavery crusade and, it appears, to the highly publicized activities and theories of Robert Owen, a successful textile mill owner turned utopian socialist. Owen envisioned a drastically re-ordered, egalitarian society composed of small cooperative villages based

*"On the coast of Florida."  
 As it may have appeared to Moses Elias Levy  
 when he arrived in 1821.  
 (From the Collections of the Library of Congress.)*

on agriculture. As a direct consequence of his journey, Levy attempted to merge the "true Spirit of our Holy and abused Religion" with "the liberal and enlightened Principles of the well educated portion of Society in the present times."<sup>19</sup> Based on Levy's plan for his intended settlements, one can conclude that he was influenced by a variety of ideologies and constructed his own distinct synthesis, one that best suited his particular religious notions.<sup>20</sup>

In the fall of 1816 Levy convinced Frederick Warburg, a member of the noted German Jewish banking family, of the necessity for founding colonies where long-suffering European Jews could find refuge. Then living in England, twenty-year-old Warburg agreed to become Levy's agent for enlisting potential settlers and eventually became a colonist himself. Satisfied that the United States offered the best prospects for such an endeavor, Levy visited the country in October 1818. While in Norfolk, twenty-eight-year-old Samuel Myers, a son of the prominent merchant, Moses

Myers, joined Levy's "Sacred Cause" and, as a demonstration of his commitment, assumed guardianship of Levy's young son David.<sup>21</sup> During the next two years Myers acted as Levy's proxy and contacted leading members of the Jewish community while Levy completed his obligations in the West Indies. Levy's plan for establishing a "*Chenuch*," which Levy defined as a school for Jewish youth that would incorporate non-religious courses in its curriculum and would educate both boys and girls from the various states, achieved significant support.<sup>22</sup> Mordecai Noah, journalist, playwright, and sheriff of New York City, was also attracted to Levy's idea of founding a Jewish refuge in America. Before Levy left for the Caribbean, he cautioned Myers to be circumspect about their more radical sentiments, especially their mutual antipathy toward orthodox Judaism. Levy decided that the Midwest held the most promise for the colony and school, and he instructed his Norfolk protégé to purchase former military lands on the Illinois frontier.<sup>23</sup> However the Panic of 1819, America's first economic depression, caused great misfortune, particularly for Moses Myers & Sons. Their subsequent bankruptcy resulted in the loss of the Illinois land.

*The Move to Florida and Plantation Building*

Undaunted, Levy took advantage of his situation in Cuba to purchase vast tracts of Florida land. On February 22, 1819, the United States had signed the Adams-Onís Treaty, a document that led to the acquisition of the Spanish colony. In 1820, Levy bought 52,900 acres from Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo, a Havana business colleague with major assets in East Florida.<sup>24</sup> In the process Levy switched his colonization focus from the Midwest to Florida where he intended to settle as soon as the United States assumed jurisdiction. He regarded America as a country where "prejudices [have] less scope" and was especially optimistic about Florida's prospects.<sup>25</sup> This remote region, however, did little to inspire confidence among Jewish leadership. Philadelphia's Rebecca Gratz, a prominent Jewish philanthropist, remarked to a friend: "Me thinks I would place foreigners in a more interior position, both for their own security, and that of our borders in case

of war."<sup>26</sup> Florida was regarded as a dangerous location, populated by Indians and runaway slaves, and prone to malaria, yellow fever, and unhealthy "miasmas." In contrast, Levy, long accustomed to the tropics, saw Florida as a fertile and untapped resource. Regardless of his optimism he was willing to sacrifice his entire investment if the Jewish community insisted that the settlement-school be located in what they regarded as a "healthy and central part of the Union."<sup>27</sup> For reasons that remain unclear, enthusiasm for Levy's project waned and Samuel Myers, who once proclaimed that he would "not pause or tremble at the task," withdrew his participation.<sup>28</sup> Both Samuel and Moses Myers were in debt to Levy for \$10,000.<sup>29</sup> The loss of the Illinois lands, indebtedness, and personal bankruptcy presented Samuel Myers with a humiliating scenario. No longer could he afford philanthropic gestures and, as an honor-bound southerner, he also could not accept Levy's continued generosity. In 1821 Myers left Virginia to pursue a legal career in Pensacola, West Florida. Despite their misfortunes Levy remained on friendly terms with the Myers family. Moses Myers assumed David Levy's guardianship and the boy continued to reside at the family's Norfolk mansion. Disappointed on many fronts, Levy nevertheless proceeded on his own, determined to succeed without the support of the American Jewish community.

Levy was a thirty-nine-year-old, divorced father of four when he first arrived in Florida on July 25, 1821.<sup>30</sup> Levy and his wife had lived in discord for many years, the result of highly incompatible temperaments.<sup>31</sup> Their divorce settlement left Hannah Levy in possession of the family home in St. Thomas as well as a substantial income. Before heading for Florida, Levy sent an agent on an expedition to the St. Johns River to report on the Arredondo land holdings.<sup>32</sup> The agent's favorable assessment reinforced Levy's desire to abandon his career and to embark on his worthy scheme. Determined to do something genuinely "elevated" and disconnected from personal monetary gain, he set in motion his plan to form a Jewish refuge. While sharing the idealism of other backwoods utopians in the United States, he lacked the complete naiveté that doomed many similarly minded social experiments in



the North. His former sugar mills, or *ingenios*, were enterprises that required large financial outlays for slaves, land, buildings, and mechanical equipment as well as the services of experienced managers. Furthermore the underdeveloped character of Florida shared a certain similarity to other Spanish colonial outposts, regions which frequently served as havens for bandits. Armed with both practical experience and an altruistic spirit, Levy was particularly qualified for undertaking his formidable task.

Throughout 1822 Moses Levy launched a full-scale effort at establishing a plantation infrastructure. Still awaiting settlers he built a modest plantation and planted sugarcane at Matanzas, a 1,200 acre estate located at the intersection of Moses Creek and the Matanzas River, about ten miles south of St. Augustine. Much further to the south, in the region of present-day Astor, he established the four thousand acre Hope Hill plantation and ordered his manager to oversee construction of buildings near the west bank of the St. Johns River. He also acquired additional acreage and started yet another enterprise named Pilgrimage.<sup>33</sup> This property, located a few miles from the inland settlement of Micanopy in Alachua County, eventually became the focus of Levy's attention despite its considerable distance from any navigable waterway.<sup>34</sup> Situated between present-day Levy and Ledwith Lakes, the plantation had an adequate supply of fresh water and benefited from fertile soil.<sup>35</sup> Levy proceeded with the arduous task of creating a viable plantation, complete with various dwelling houses, a sugar mill, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, and a forty-five mile road linking Pilgrimage to the uninhabited area of present-day Palatka. Palatka was strategically positioned along the St. Johns River and long-served as an entry point to the interior.<sup>36</sup> In February 1823 the first settlers arrived at the small hamlet of Micanopy.

Levy's rapid expansion and his heightened interest in the Alachua country caused him to reevaluate his priorities. In 1824 he sold his Matanzas estate to Achille Murat, a French émigré and nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>37</sup> However the fate of Hope Hill was more problematic. While in Havana Levy had contracted with Antonio Rutan, an experienced plantation manager, to leave

*Military map (detail or original), showing the site of Levy's plantation, approximately three miles west of Micanopy, Florida.  
(Map of Micanopy and Vicinity, 1835-1842, National Archives, Cartographic Division, College Park, Maryland.)*

Cuba and become his Florida superintendent. In January 1822 with a start-up budget of \$20,000 Rutan oversaw initial construction at Hope Hill.<sup>38</sup> Two shipments of Cuban sugarcane and "sundry other articles" were brought to the plantation by schooner, and \$2,000 worth of "utensils for the manufactory of sugar" were delivered from Savannah.<sup>39</sup> Shortly thereafter Levy's original enthusiasm for his "fertile and happily situated" estate on the St. Johns River turned to bitter frustration.<sup>40</sup>

Hope Hill was located directly opposite Volusia, the isolated residence of the Anglo-Spanish Indian trader, Horatio Dexter. Dexter was a literate man with gentlemanly airs who was quick to take offense and could be extremely vengeful. Levy's subsequent denunciation of the man as both an "assassin" and an "incendiary" appears to have been well-grounded.<sup>41</sup> Dexter held deep

animosity toward many of the Arredondo grant proprietors and his waning influence in the Indian territory undoubtedly contributed to his rancor. Furthermore, the new acting governor awarded Levy a coveted license to trade with the Indians, and stores were established at both Hope Hill and Pilgrimage. Competition for the Indian trade probably aggravated tensions.<sup>42</sup> While his exact motivations are unknown, Dexter, in conjunction with some Indian allies, planned to burn down the fledgling settlement of Micanopy in 1823, but Levy and others managed to dissuade the group.<sup>43</sup> Moreover a peculiar reference to Hope Hill, an "accident that has occurred to Mr. Rutan's houses," appears in Dexter's correspondence and suggests that he may have come under suspicion for foul play.<sup>44</sup> The circumstances must have been severe. Levy actually abandoned his Hope Hill operation in June 1822 because of "various and many unforeseen [troubles]." Thereafter Rutan's responsibilities were shifted to Pilgrimage, and farming implements and supplies were salvaged for use in the Alachua country.<sup>45</sup>

As this episode illustrates, the appearance of wealthy and intrepid individuals like Moses Levy presented a challenge to the old order and, in the process, the dynamics of the frontier were altered. As a single individual Levy's efforts were significantly hampered. Fortunately the massive expense of forging self-sustaining settlements in inaccessible and dangerous locations was greatly eased by Levy's decision to join a business consortium headquartered in New York City.

Levy's Pilgrimage lands were part of the original Spanish Arredondo grant of 1817, which encompassed much of present-day Alachua County. After Florida was ceded to the United States, Fernando Arredondo sought investors in his Alachua holdings, which amounted to over 289,000 acres. When in 1822 Levy exchanged other property for a one-eighth share of this grant, he became one of four major proprietors who were obligated to fulfill the original Spanish stipulations, the foremost being the settlement of two hundred families within three years.<sup>46</sup> Such an endeavor would have been unlikely during the declining days of the Spanish empire, but the United States offered substantial advantages, including the presence of capitalists who

*Ledwith Prairie, formerly "Levy's Pond,"  
as currently seen from the site of Pilgrimage Plantation.  
With the assistance of the Jewish Museum of Florida and  
Alachua County, efforts are underway to protect the tract  
from development and to preserve it as a historic site.  
(Photo courtesy of the Gainesville Sun, Gainesville, Florida.)*

were not adverse to high-risk undertakings. Levy's entry into the Arredondo partnership coincided with the formation of the Florida Association. This company was based in New York City, the residence of the largest investor, General Jasper Ward. Portions of the Arredondo grant were subdivided and sold to various persons in New York and New Jersey. The Florida Association assumed responsibility for colonization, and the newly established hamlet of Micanopy became the nucleus of the intended settlement. Levy took an active role, and on November 4, 1822, represented the Florida landholders' interests at a company meeting that he arranged at New York's Lewis Tavern.<sup>47</sup> In what was surely the earliest Florida development corporation, taxes were levied, town

lots divided, roads and mills planned, settlers recruited, and a generous allowance allocated for both a physician and a clergyman. Although Levy's main objective was Jewish colonization, he also had a vested interest in the town's success. Micanopy provided access to supplies, livestock, laborers, skilled carpenters, and a physician, all scarce commodities. Therefore it is significant that while Levy's initial efforts at sugar cultivation were short-lived, his Alachua plantation endured until the commencement of the Second Seminole War, a period of thirteen years.

After the Florida Association's Palatka road was completed in February 1823 the transportation of supplies and settlers proceeded more efficiently. Antonio Rutan originally supervised operations at Pilgrimage, but, exceedingly fearful of hostile Indians, he abruptly left the plantation and was replaced by Reuben Charles in fall 1823.<sup>48</sup> Charles was a Georgian who had settled in Florida several years earlier. According to William H. Simmons, physician, author, and chronicler of early territorial Florida, Levy's estate was rapidly undergoing transformation into a productive plantation as early as February 1822.<sup>49</sup> Simmons observed that most of the work was accomplished by slave labor and, of the thirty persons employed on the land that year, only eight or nine were white. It should be noted, however, that black laborers, in actuality Seminole "slaves," were often hired by Levy's agents in the early stages of the settlement and payment was in the form of Indian trade goods.<sup>50</sup> "There was a range of tenements," Simmons continued, "which would accommodate nearly all the persons there." In addition there were a corn house, a stable, and a blacksmith's shop as well as "a good crop of corn" that he judged sufficient for "the whole establishment for a year." Of Pilgrimage's 1,000 acres, 120 were immediately cleared for planting.<sup>51</sup> By 1829, despite setbacks and long absences abroad, Levy expected "60 to 80 acres of excellent sugar cane" that would yield one ton of sugar per acre.<sup>52</sup>

#### *The Utopian Settlement*

Among the first group of settlers who arrived in Micanopy under the auspices of the Florida Association of New York,

several were sponsored by Moses Levy, including Frederick Warburg,<sup>53</sup> the son of a prosperous banker from Altona, a Danish city adjacent to the German port of Hamburg.<sup>54</sup> From their initial meeting in London seven years earlier, Levy's colonization scheme held special appeal for Warburg. Apart from his participation previously noted, Warburg temporarily helped manage Pilgrimage.<sup>55</sup>

In 1824 Warburg testified that the majority of the intended colonists, "forty to fifty" persons, remained in Europe because of the lack of housing and "other necessaries to render them comfortable."<sup>56</sup> However some had already arrived in America and waited only for the best opportunity to travel. Although documentation regarding their final destination is lacking, Warburg did acknowledge his success in establishing "five heads of families on Mr. Levy's settlement," all of whom received land and accommodations.<sup>57</sup> In addition Levy wrote that there were "Jewish families on farms near me." These newcomers represented a broad economic spectrum but none had previous agricultural experience. Their urban background proved to be a significant handicap. "It is not easy," Levy complained, "to transform old clothes men [street peddlers] or stock brokers into practical farmers."<sup>58</sup> Levy's eldest son, Elias, who recently left his studies at Harvard College, joined the other neophyte farmers at Pilgrimage. Levy's financial difficulties, a result of his Hope Hill troubles and the legal quandaries involving the original Spanish grants, hampered his ability to accommodate more colonists. Therefore the total number of families probably never exceeded Warburg's initial figure. Ultimately the broad discrepancy between Levy's vision for a vast refuge for European Jews and the actual low turnout caused him to regard the entire effort as a failure.<sup>59</sup> In actuality, although Levy was never cognizant of its significance, he managed to form the earliest Jewish communal settlement in the United States. Pilgrimage's status as a humanitarian refuge adds to its importance. Levy's philanthropic gesture was an innovative response to centuries of Old World repression.

The living arrangements at Pilgrimage reflected Levy's philosophical and religious standards. While Levy believed in the

divine origin of the Hebrew Bible, he rejected the Talmud and the authority of rabbis. Accordingly no plans were made to erect a traditional synagogue or to follow an orthodox lifestyle. In addition Levy's adherence to a communitarian standard required a middle-ground between what he regarded as the "Spartan" and the "civilized." The "considerate man," Levy asserted, should discard "imaginary wants" and "be content with simplicity & competence."<sup>60</sup> However unlike some utopians, such as the Shakers, Levy did not conceive that all colonists would share living quarters under one roof or hold property in common. While Pilgrimage had a very specific communal identity, each family had their own private accommodation and land.<sup>61</sup>

In distinct contrast to his affluent merchant friends elsewhere in the United States, Levy designed his Alachua dwellings to conform to what he considered a higher moral standard, one that shunned displays of luxury and privilege. Presumably the majority of settlers, certainly the former peddlers, did not share either Levy's or Warburg's wealthy background, so the simple accommodations were hardly a deprivation. Levy's own residence, however, offered an opportunity to implement an unpretentious lifestyle. Flanked by two corncribs, his two-story, wooden frame house had porches on both sides and a separate kitchen, and was of modest dimensions. While undoubtedly a dramatic step above the average log cabin in the Alachua country, it certainly did not constitute a mansion, as one historian has claimed.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless this six-room residence had eighteen windows and shutters, a gabled roof, two small hallways, and rose to a height of twenty feet. In comparison, Warburg's residence remains something of a mystery, although local Micanopy history eventually places him a few miles east of Pilgrimage on an estate near present Lake Wauburg.<sup>63</sup>

The recent appearance of the Reuben Charles papers as well as a thorough examination of archival documents have provided vital details regarding Pilgrimage. However much remains obscure, including the day-to-day operations of Levy's sugar mill. The only plantation inventories that have survived date to 1824, a year that evidently predates mill operations. Documents do show,

however, that Levy made substantial investments in a wide array of agricultural equipment and residential supplies, and kept an adequate number of horses, beef cattle, oxen, and hogs, the later apparently raised for slave consumption since Levy, and presumably other Jews at Pilgrimage, abstained from pork.<sup>64</sup> Nothing has surfaced which can shed light on Levy's experiments in vine and olive culture, other than his employment of Hipolite Chateanneuf, a French emigrant who had extensive experience in these specialties.<sup>65</sup> Quite unexpectedly Levy was involved with Chief Micanopy's band of Seminoles, located sixty-four miles to the south in present-day Sumter County. Although some Indians, primarily Miccosukees, lived in the immediate area of Micanopy, the original Alachua Seminoles had long departed for a safer and more remote locale. The naming of the company town after Micanopy was an early effort to appease the chief and to acknowledge his original authority over the land and was not an indication of his actual presence in the town itself. Therefore the trading relationship that developed between Pilgrimage and the chief's distant band, particularly his "slave" town of Pelaklikaha or "Abrahams Old Town," is significant.<sup>66</sup> Pelaklikaha was under the leadership of Abraham, a former slave and an advisor to Micanopy who latter attained distinction during the Second Seminole War. As a result of this association, Levy acquired much-needed livestock and occasionally hired black Seminoles as laborers. Although technically regarded as slaves by their Indian masters, blacks were permitted a great deal of personal liberty and were not bound into forced labor.<sup>67</sup>

The number of bona fide slaves at Pilgrimage fluctuated from a low of ten to a high of thirty-one, the total Levy held when he divested himself of all his slaves in 1839.<sup>68</sup> From an account in *Niles' Register*, the average number of slaves on three unidentified Alachua County sugar plantations in 1833 amounted to twenty-six, so Pilgrimage was certainly within the norm. While the identities of these planters are unknown, likely candidates include Colonel Duncan L. Clinch and Colonel John H. McIntosh, Jr., two prominent individuals who followed Levy's lead in establishing nearby sugar estates. The income generated by the average bond



servant in Alachua was rated at \$387. "A great deal more," the newspaper observed, "than the average product of free labor in the North." The largest of the plantations, with forty-seven slaves, produced 160 hogsheads of sugar, 14,000 gallons of molasses, 4,000 bushels of corn, and fodder, rice, beans, and peas valued at \$1,000.<sup>69</sup> Levy's operation probably had a similar range of crops, and its potential profit was high.

Quite distinct from all other Alachua planters, however, was Moses Levy's philosophical position vis-à-vis slavery. Freedom, Levy believed, should be given to the children of slaves at the age of twenty-one and only after they had completed both agricultural training and a basic education. In time, Levy concluded, technological advancements would enable non-slave-dependent agriculture to displace slavery. While a few southerners may have concluded that slave labor was inherently inefficient, Levy was motivated by a biblical standard of morality that was not concerned with classical economics or regional and state interests.<sup>70</sup> Although he did not adhere to immediate abolition and there is no indication that he actually implemented his plans, his ideas would certainly have been viewed as revolutionary in East Florida and could have placed his settlement in jeopardy. Irrational fears often led to the condemnation of any form of abolitionist sentiment.<sup>71</sup> While Levy felt free to lecture and write on these issues while in England, he was careful to frame his opinions within acceptable limits when residing in slaveholding countries.

Restrained from enacting his ideas, Levy nevertheless deliberately attempted to keep slave families intact and to provide a humane environment.<sup>72</sup> In Cuba he promoted basic Christian religious instruction among slaves as well as encouraged slave marriages. He probably did the same in Florida.<sup>73</sup> Levy believed that Christianity, at its best, upheld the spirit of divine revelation and would teach proper conduct and morality. While the practical advantages of marriages may be debated, it is noteworthy that abolitionists invoked the institution as one method of slave empowerment, of "righting the slave, restoring him to himself."<sup>74</sup> The impulse to retain the powerful bonds between husbands and wives, parents and children, and siblings was something that

Levy shared with very few slaveholders. "How can we expect that religion or civilization shall find its way among persons compelled to live as brutes?" he once asked a group of affluent slave owners in Cuba. When one considers that many Cuban planters believed that it was more cost effective to work slaves to death rather than to care for them and encourage reproduction, Levy's actions appear all the more benevolent.<sup>75</sup> Levy sincerely believed that it was "not only necessary to abandon the system of persecution and oppression hitherto pursued against the blacks, *but to turn that very system into an instrument of blessing.*"<sup>76</sup>

When Levy foresaw a world without slavery, he placed sugar manufacture at its core. For recently liberated and educated blacks, Levy envisioned small, cooperative, agricultural settlements where each family, "independent of their principal occupation or pursuit," would raise between "one to five acres of sugar cane." Neighbors would unite in harvesting the cane for processing in communal sugar mills. According to Levy, "each shall be entitled to his portion of sugar which is to be assessed by competent judges amongst themselves, not with a saccharometer in the hand, but with the spirit of neighbourly consideration." He likened this "festive season" to the spirit of cooperation that existed during the "vintage season in wine countries."<sup>77</sup> In this sugar utopia individual profit would be secondary to mutual respect and cooperation. Instead of viewing workers as pawns to be exploited, Levy assumed that an enlightened, collective will would replace individual avarice and mammonism.<sup>78</sup>

Moses Levy's agenda for his coreligionists revealed a similar desire for agrarian havens. Jews were God's chosen people and therefore they had to follow a life that was as close as possible to ancient Israel. According to Levy, centuries of oppression had created "the persecution of contempt."<sup>79</sup> "Barbary, Turkey, Poland, the wilds of Prussia," he once wrote, "[Jews] tried them all, and every where found an enemy in man."<sup>80</sup> Any possibility of returning to Israel, their ancient homeland, appeared closed, so the United States was "the only place that we can look for an asylum."<sup>81</sup> Levy boldly rejected rabbinical teaching and emphasized the Hebrew Bible instead. He envisioned a time when Jews would

forsake the cities to participate in a communal, agrarian lifestyle. By becoming cultivators of the soil his brethren would again follow in the path of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. His original plan called for each settler to own "5 acres of land from which he can't depart" and each community would be limited to five hundred families. Levy was convinced that "Children belong to the Community & not to their Parents." In the educational realm, both Hebrew and English would be taught to children of both sexes. His proposed curriculum for boys included: "Mathematics, Geography, Astronomy, Botany, & Chemistry – the exercise of the field Tillage, the use of arms only for defence." Girls would engage in similar instruction, excluding farming and arms training, as well as "indispensably to know how to cook, sew, spin & wash." Music and "the other fine arts" would complete the girls' course of study.<sup>82</sup> In Levy's view the "degenerated interpreters," or rabbis, had excluded women from full participation in religious affairs and placed "the man as sole agent & director" of the family. The subsequent loss of dignity and status relegated women to being "merely m[a]chines & conveniences."<sup>83</sup> Therefore he advocated a more egalitarian role for women. Other than the Bible and instructional texts, all books by classical and contemporary authors would be prohibited. Levy's reductionist theology regarded sin as "injuring God in His fellow creatures." The only acceptable penance was to engage in reform.

Privately Levy concluded that full and immediate revelation of his plans would let loose a "light . . . too strong to bear." Therefore he opted for "shewing it little by little as they do to the blind man when first they remove the cataract from the Eyes."<sup>84</sup> Levy's aversion to publicity makes any study of his activities especially difficult. Although he shared his most radical intentions with very few others, nonetheless news of the unconventional arrangements at Pilgrimage did reach public notice. In a particularly biting 1841 newspaper editorial, a result of David Levy's entry into national politics, Moses Levy was cast as "a man of eccentric ideas" whose earlier efforts to "establish colonies of 'Harmonites' upon utopian principles, in Alachua county" led to ruin.<sup>85</sup> Two decades earlier, however, Levy's character had been perceived quite favorably.

*St. Augustine town center (detail of panoramic), 1855.  
Public slave auctions were held in the plaza,  
most certainly a familiar site to Levy.  
(From the Collections of the Library of Congress.)*

His arrival was deemed an event of major importance to the region, and he maintained close and cordial relations with the St. Augustine gentry. Alexander Hamilton, Jr., the founding father's son and, in his own right, newly appointed U.S. attorney for East Florida, considered Levy a "gentleman of much respectability" and acted as his lawyer for a time.<sup>86</sup> Another New Yorker, Colonel James G. Forbes, U.S. marshal for Florida and mayor of St. Augustine, became an investor in the Florida Association, served with Levy on the company's "Florida Committee," and acted as Levy's agent during his absence.<sup>87</sup> Acting Governor William G. D. Worthington, recently arrived from Maryland, pronounced Levy "one of the most useful settlers in this Province" and allowed him the rare privilege of trading directly with the Indians.<sup>88</sup> Worthington was a strong advocate of Jewish civil liberties and took pride in his subsequent support of Maryland's so-called "Jew Bill," which fully enfranchised the state's Jewish residents, when he returned to his home state.<sup>89</sup>

*Social Activism in England*

By the summer of 1824 it became painfully evident that Moses Levy's dream of the "regeneration" of his brethren was not going to materialize, at least not on the scale that he had intended. The low number of settlers thwarted his ability to execute the most important aspect of his "Sacred Cause," the founding of a Jewish homeland. Prevented from selling any of his Florida land until proper surveys were drawn and the validity of the Spanish grants confirmed, Levy left Pilgrimage for Europe and arrived in England in 1825.<sup>90</sup> He immediately appealed to leading members of the Jewish community for support and, while in London and Paris, mortgaged large portions of his nearly 100,000 acres of Florida land.<sup>91</sup>

Levy's transatlantic journey of 1825 coincided with the much-publicized efforts of Mordecai Noah to found a rival settlement in upstate New York. As mentioned previously, Noah supported Levy's initial plans for a Jewish settlement and school. In a few years he also became an investor in the Florida Association.<sup>92</sup> After Levy's difficulties became apparent, Noah announced his intentions to found his own colony, called Ararat, on Grand Island, New York. Unlike Levy, however, Noah never shunned the limelight. His extensive publicity campaign, in which he arrogantly appointed himself "Judge of Israel," caused a torrent of criticism.<sup>93</sup> Noah's intemperate move not only resulted in the abandonment of his plan but hampered Levy's mission as well.

Moses Levy condemned Noah's scheme, but the debacle predisposed philanthropic Jews against any form of colonization. Rather than return immediately to Florida, however, Levy made an unprecedented move. Between 1827 and 1828 he embarked on a brief but notable career as a social activist in London. An accomplished orator and writer, he gave numerous public lectures, and published articles on provocative subjects such as antisemitism, Jewish-Christian relations, universal education, and the abolition of slavery. Liberal Protestants lavished praise on Levy and compared his "unbounded philanthropy" to the famed British abolitionist William Wilberforce.<sup>94</sup> Levy's *Plan for the Abolition*

*"Old Clothes to Sell," c. 1820.*

*This caricature depicting the prejudicial views of England was typical of the negative stereotypes that fueled Levy's attempts to alleviate the sufferings of the Jews of Europe.*

*(Courtesy of the Jewish Studies Library, University College London.)*

of *Slavery*, written anonymously in 1828, also received favorable notice.

Levy's pamphlet represented a synthesis between pragmatic gradualism and radical social experimentation. Convinced that the character of slaves had been corrupted by human bondage, Levy proposed that only the succeeding generation be granted freedom. A free, basic education for children figured prominently in his strategy. Additionally Levy theorized that intermarriage between whites and blacks would reduce racial conflict. Therefore he devised a scheme in which British convicts would be transported to the West Indies rather than New South Wales, not only for punishment but also for the ultimate goal of miscegenation. He assumed that other countries would inevitably follow Britain's example. The establishment of private agricultural companies comprised another vital component of his plan. These commercial-philanthropic enterprises would implement Levy's ideas as they engaged in the development of non-slave-dependent agriculture. Furthermore he proposed that a "United Association" of countries would stop the importation of African slaves through a network of specially designed sailing vessels. Universal emancipation would result in "50 or 100 years."<sup>95</sup>

Shortly after its release a new antislavery society was formed in an effort to implement Levy's main tenets.<sup>96</sup> Although his racial strategy was held to be quite reasonable, his call for a supranational "United Association" was the only aspect of the plan not included in the organization's charter. The London *Literary Chronicle*, swayed by the author's reasoned exposition and his gradualist approach to abolition, recommended the tract "to the serious attention of the legislature and the public."<sup>97</sup> Such recognition was rare indeed for any outsider, let alone a Jewish citizen of Florida. While his pamphlet was published anonymously, Levy was well known in enlightened circles. English Jews lacked full rights of citizenship and were even barred from attending universities.<sup>98</sup> Therefore it was a distinct achievement when "Moses E. Levy of Florida," as he was sometimes known, attained notoriety in the metropolis and earned high praise from prominent evangelicals, an elite group that had long dominated the abolitionist

crusade. His pamphlet is now regarded as the earliest and most important antislavery publication by an American Jew.<sup>99</sup>

While many English Jews did not wish to deviate from their self-image as "a harmless, unmeddling people" and criticized Levy for his "sanguine interference," Levy nevertheless played a significant role in the emergence of Jewish social activism.<sup>100</sup> In 1827 he led an unprecedented campaign in London against a Russian *ukase*, or edict, against the Jews. He advocated Sabbath schools, circulated biblical tracts, partook in open debates between Jews and Christians, and promoted organizations for women.<sup>101</sup> Levy became the only Jewish voice during the British antislavery crusade, a period which was dominated by the evangelical movement of the Church of England and such dissenters as Methodists, Quakers, and Baptists. His activities were intended to reassert the moral tenets of Judaism and to refute the implicit and explicit notions of Christian reformers that only the New Testament offered a "religion of love."<sup>102</sup> Some Jews, unaware of Levy's more radical sentiments, were extremely impressed with his actions. Rabbi Joseph Crooll, an instructor of Hebrew at Cambridge University, remarked in a London newspaper: "We have of late observed a man by the name of Moses Elias Levi [*sic*], who endeavors to bring in motion the Jews, that they might rise and shew themselves men; that they might find favour in the sight of God and men."<sup>103</sup> In the words of another admirer, Levy was determined to "exhibit Judaism in its true light, and to convince the world, that its tendency is not selfish or antisocial."<sup>104</sup>

#### *Return to Difficulties in Florida*

Moses Levy gained considerable notice abroad, but he returned to the United States heavily in debt and still without the expected financial contributions from fellow Jews. In January 1829 he was at Pilgrimage once more, desperate to increase the plantation's yield of sugar and to turn it into a profitable enterprise.<sup>105</sup> The sugar mill had become Levy's last hope to avert economic catastrophe. His children's welfare also figured prominently during this time. While Levy was in London, his youngest son David abandoned his apprenticeship in Norfolk, Virginia, headed for his



mother's home in St. Thomas, and ultimately joined his brother Elias in Florida, all without his father's knowledge or permission.<sup>106</sup> Elias too caused considerable distress after he left Harvard without completing his degree, a "mad & disobedient act," Levy wrote, "[that] disqualified him for every situation by which he could earn a living."<sup>107</sup> Reared for most of their lives in either traditional boarding schools or in the homes of wealthy friends, Levy's sons had very little contact with their father. They certainly did not share his enthusiasm for unconventional and progressive causes, and, by young adulthood, they disassociated themselves from Judaism. After a short period, Elias and David left Pilgrimage to pursue independent paths.

There is little indication of the plantation's progress during the 1830s, other than the fact that Levy was doing sufficiently well to accept the mantle of social reform once more, albeit on a limited scale. He served on a legislative committee that sought to establish a seminary or institute of higher learning and played a role in founding the territory's first free public school in St. Augustine.<sup>108</sup> Whenever he deemed the cause appropriate, Levy was forthcoming in voicing his opinions, primarily as a contributor to the St. Augustine newspapers. In time, however, he became much less visible. Misfortunes continued and, despite an increase in the number of slaves, Levy insisted that the plantation never turned a profit until 1835 at which time "the war of the Indians took place."<sup>109</sup> In December 1835 Levy joined a long and tragic roster of planters whose fortunes collapsed during the Second Seminole War. On January 23, 1836, the Tallahassee *Floridian*, unaware of the plantation's visionary purpose and of Levy's role in helping to launch the sugar boom, reported the event as follows:

From the west we are informed by Mr. Rose, who left Micanopy on the 28th ult. that . . . The sugar works of Moses E. Levy, Esq. whose plantation is situated 2 miles N.W. of Micanopy were destroyed on the 23rd. Ult.

Mr. Rose, who was manufacturing sugar at Mr. Levy's plantation near Micanopy, arrived at this place on Saturday last. This gentleman gives the following account: "That on Wednesday,

the 23d. at 2 A.M. a cry of fire was heard and on getting up the flames were observed just rising, but by the time he could go out, the whole building was on fire; he directly rode to Micanopy for help. At the day dawn, many persons went to the plantation, but saw no Indians, but they traced 2 tracks from the sugar house, to an oak tree in the woods, near the place in a westerly direction, where the persons appeared to have rested, with the dent of a gun next to the footsteps."<sup>110</sup>

Away during the attack, Levy brought in appraisers who valued his losses at \$25,000.<sup>111</sup> Fortunately none of the residents or slaves was harmed. It has been estimated that more than one thousand slaves took advantage of the disruption in East Florida and fled for freedom.<sup>112</sup> The slaves at Pilgrimage, however, did not escape. Although the precise reasons are unknown, the plantation's humane environment was probably a leading factor. Levy and his plantation manager, Mr. Verhain, were thus spared from an even greater catastrophe. Verhain salvaged some equipment and transported it to Micanopy for safekeeping. Subsequently, the town was barricaded and turned into a fort, but Micanopy's fate also ended in calamity after the U.S. Army elected to abandon the area. On August 24, 1836, rather than allow anything of value to benefit the enemy, the settlement was burned to the ground, thus compounding Moses Levy's losses.<sup>113</sup> After fourteen years of persistent struggle, nothing remained of his utopia other than vast tracks of land that he could not sell and from which settlers fled in terror.

Banking failures during the Panic of 1837 further reduced Levy's assets. Aside from a few years in New York City, Moses Levy resided in St. Augustine where he managed to survive on a paltry sum. Still one of the largest landowners in Florida, he was \$50,000 in debt and suffered bouts of depression.<sup>114</sup> While his fortunes declined, his son David's political ambitions soared. Elected as Florida's sole delegate to Congress, he championed both statehood and the emerging railroad industry. As a U.S. senator and the leader of the state Democratic party, David Levy added the original family surname of "Yulee" and became one of the most powerful figures in antebellum Florida. Ironically, his forceful

pro-slavery and states rights advocacy was the antithesis of his father's communal egalitarianism. While David Yulee's stay at Pilgrimage apparently did nothing to alter his conservative views, the commercial potential of sugar manufacture became firmly inculcated. While a senator, Yulee promoted the sugar industry by exhibiting a sample of Florida cane "between ten and eleven feet long" inside the U.S. Capitol.<sup>115</sup> Before and during the Civil War, Yulee's \$100,000 Margarita Plantation in Homosassa became an efficient steam-powered operation, capable of producing 185,000 pounds of sugar annually.<sup>116</sup>

*Evaluation and Closure of a Remarkable Life*

As a vigorous financial model, Pilgrimage pales in relation to Margarita. However the impetus behind each of these endeavors was so vastly different that it makes any such comparison especially difficult. According to social historians, such as Robert S. Fogarty, the importance of backwoods utopias, communities that existed largely on "the periphery of American history and society," should not be based solely on such conventional standards as size, profitability, or longevity.<sup>117</sup> These measures, while perfectly appropriate elsewhere, do not incorporate the philosophical reasoning that motivated such high-risk ventures. For instance, other utopian experiments, like New York's Oneida Community, evolved into long-term, lucrative operations but were terribly flawed and oppressive in their treatment of members. Conversely Robert Owen's New Harmony settlement in Indiana lasted only a few years, but Owen's stature and influence as a humanitarian innovator were considerable. Therefore the intellectual concepts that formed the core of communities such as Pilgrimage as well as the effect these beliefs had on others also should be reckoned in any assessment and should be accorded major significance.<sup>118</sup>

Moses Levy's publication of *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery* as well as his other activities in England should not be judged in isolation from his Florida venture. After all, the very reason he was abroad was to assure the survival of Pilgrimage. Furthermore, as a result of Levy's decision to implement his "Sacred Cause" in Florida, other issues also appeared imminently feasible.

*Title page from the 1999 reprint edition of Moses Elias Levy's  
A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery (London, 1828).  
{Wacahoota Press, Micanopy, Florida.}*

Educational reform, abolitionism, a radical restructuring of Judaism, women's rights, and protests against antisemitism came to the forefront during Levy's Pilgrimage endeavor. After the plantation's destruction and the loss of his considerable fortune, however, Levy drew inward. He began to doubt the practicality of his convictions and suspected that human nature was incapable of fulfilling the dictates of the Bible. After a court ruling cleared Levy's land titles, a portion of his former wealth was finally restored in his later years, but this did little to diminish his profound disillusionment. His ambitions for utopian building were not rekindled, a stance that coincided with a general decline in the communitarian movement during the 1850s.<sup>119</sup> Instead many radical reformers and progressives sought new and exotic beliefs, including spiritualism, mesmerism, phrenology, and water cures. Levy shared a similar fascination with these "sciences."<sup>120</sup> Ultimately, however, and despite his best efforts, there was still no Jewish nation and no Promised Land.

On September 7, 1854, Moses Levy died quietly while taking the water cure with a group of friends at the acclaimed White Sulphur Springs resort in Virginia (present West Virginia). Contrary to his fears he did not die alone and, according to one companion, Colonel John M. Hanson of St. Augustine, "the funeral was attended by a large number of persons."<sup>121</sup> However neither Senator Yulee nor any other family member traveled to Virginia for the services. Unlike his more flamboyant contemporary, the controversial Mordecai Noah, prominent Jewish publications did not eulogize Levy or even note his demise. His reluctance to engage in personal publicity resulted in a degree of anonymity and he passed from the scene relatively unnoticed.<sup>122</sup>

Despite Levy's own presumption of failure in regard to Pilgrimage, a more objective view reveals substantial accomplishments. Levy may be easily dismissed as a "Paradise Planter," to use a term coined by another nineteenth-century utopian, but not all of his notions lacked practical merit, particularly his importation of Cuban sugarcane.<sup>123</sup> At a time when "all agriculture in Florida was [considered] experimental," Levy's large expenditures in establishing his sugar operations were duly noted and

soon imitated.<sup>124</sup> Presumably his vine and olive venture did not meet expectations. Therefore Pilgrimage became a social and agricultural experiment in progress. In England sugar itself was stigmatized and boycotted by many abolitionists as being the unsavory product of brutal West Indian slave regimes. In the minds of these activists, sugar was literally made with blood and people who consumed this commodity became "partakers of other men's sins."<sup>125</sup> Therefore Levy's placement of sugar manufacture at the economic center of his utopian settlement was a rather revolutionary idea and certainly went against the prevailing mood among English abolitionists. In a broad sense the Pilgrimage community became the embodiment of Levy's peculiar social and religious notions. Based on the strength of his convictions and his powers of persuasion many of these ideas reached far beyond the confines of his operation on the East Florida frontier.

How Jewish settlers actually participated in Levy's plans is not fully understood, but the very existence of a Jewish communitarian settlement in the antebellum South contradicts most historical assumptions and certainly merits further note.<sup>126</sup> Levy's beliefs were anathema in a region where non-conformists and reformers were generally viewed with disdain and the perception of order rested upon a rigid social hierarchy.<sup>127</sup> Therefore Pilgrimage's existence can best be explained in terms of the atypical nature of early territorial Florida. Immense and under-populated, the former Spanish borderland was physically and culturally isolated from the rest of the South. Moreover there was an influx of new citizens from both north and south, as well as an exodus of Spanish inhabitants. In fact "Yankees" constituted a distinct and often contentious faction in East Florida and were often appointed to high office.<sup>128</sup> Overall the region still lacked a rigid plantation caste system, and after years of Catholic monopoly, residents began to experience a newfound sense of religious freedom.<sup>129</sup> Within this transitional milieu, Levy's dual status as a foreigner and Jewish visionary did not provoke a high degree of suspicion or hostility, as would be expected within more typical areas of the South. To the contrary, as we have seen, leading members of society actually aided his early efforts.

Levy's communal-utopian impulses also contradict traditional assumptions about Jews of the early nineteenth century. On this subject historian Jacob R. Marcus is especially adamant: "Jews were quite content to remain loyal to their own collective ethos and tradition. Gentile communitarianism, with its centrifugality, left them untouched. All Jewry constituted a 'community.'"<sup>130</sup> In Marcus's view Jews enacted their differences, even in the most extreme cases, merely by the formation of splinter congregations. He never imagined they would share in the same notions that compelled many Christians to join backwoods enclaves, at least not during this early period. Marcus may have ignored the liberality and idealism of some Jews, as well as underestimated the influence of Protestant culture, particularly the religious revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. As the case of Mordecai Noah illustrates, Levy was certainly not the only Jew who harbored utopian ambitions. The motivations of individual settlers may have been far more pragmatic; the allure of free land, transportation, and housing would have been powerful incentives to immigrants.

Remarkably, even after East Florida adopted cultural standards that were more typical of the Deep South, Levy was never completely shunned from society. Most would have regarded his ideas as eccentric, to say the least, and David Yulee's Whig opponents often publicly ridiculed the elder Levy for partisan advantage. In general, however, especially among the older inhabitants of St. Augustine, Levy was afforded a degree of respect and acceptance in the community. As one local newspaper editorialist noted: "Few of the settlers who came to Florida after the cession brought more wealth, talent, or energy with them and few have comported themselves more usefully or honorably in their general transactions."<sup>131</sup> From the southern perspective, as long as Levy kept his radical ideas to himself, his days as a Paradise Planter could be overlooked, and, in time, mercifully forgotten.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> P[eter] Pelham to John C. Calhoun, September 26, 1822, in W. Edwin Hemphill, ed., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, VII (Columbia, SC., 1959–1986), 283.

<sup>2</sup> “Moses E. Levy,” [St. Augustine] *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, December 31, 1841.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* For a first-hand report concerning Levy’s supposed introduction of sugarcane see deposition of Bartolo Masters, November 16, 1841, in House Report 450, 27th Congress, 2nd session, 1842, 99.

<sup>4</sup> M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (St. Augustine), September 29, 1823, Myers Papers, Jean Outland Chrysler Museum Library (hereafter cited as JOC), Norfolk, VA.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief discussion of Levy’s utopianism see Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776–1985*, I (Detroit, 1989–1993), 364–367.

<sup>6</sup> “The Case of David Levy,” [St. Augustine] *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, December 3, 1841.

<sup>7</sup> Levy’s correspondence, particularly M. E. Levy to Rachel [Levy Henriques], September 1, 1853, box 40, David Levy Yulee Papers (hereafter cited as Yulee Papers), P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (hereafter cited as PKY) and the newly acquired Reuben Charles Papers at PKY which consist of documents from Pilgrimage Plantation and refute the accepted position that no Jewish settlers arrived at Levy’s settlement. For examples of this negative view see Joseph Gary Adler, “Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida,” in Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society*, (Macon, GA, 1984), 26; Malcolm H. Stern, “The 1820s: American Jewry Comes of Age,” in Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *The American Jewish Experience*, 2nd ed., (New York, 1997), 36.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Monaco, Introduction, *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery, Consistently with the Interests of All Parties Concerned*, by Moses E. Levy (1828; reprint, Micanopy, FL, 1999), v–xxii.

<sup>9</sup> In 1837 Moses Cohen founded Shalom, a short-lived agricultural colony located in Ulster County, New York. After the Civil War, among such efforts were the 1881 Sicily Island colony in Louisiana and Alliance farm, founded in 1882 in New Jersey, one of five Jewish agrarian colonies that operated in that state until 1920. See Pearl W. Bartelt, “American Jewish Agricultural Colonies,” in Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America’s Communal Utopias*, (Chapel Hill, 1997), 352–362. Unfortunately Bartelt fails to consider the work of Jonathan Sarna and others and mistakenly concludes that M. M. Noah’s Ararat was the “first Jewish agricultural colony in the United States.” See Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York, 1981), 73–75. For further background on Alliance farm see Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in New Jersey, 1882–1920* (Syracuse, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *A Socialist Utopia in the New South: The Ruskin Colonies in Tennessee and Georgia* (Urbana and Chicago, 1996), 6, 206, n. 29, n. 35; see also Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., “Patent Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships between Social Reform and Westward Expansion,” *American Historical Review* 58 (April 1953): 506–507.

<sup>11</sup> For Levy’s birth date see M. E. Levy to Mr. and Mrs. [David] Yulee, October 1, 1852, box 40, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>12</sup> Levy to [Henriques], September 1, 1853, Yulee Papers, PKY.



<sup>13</sup> Chris Monaco, Introduction, "A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery, Consistently with the Interests of All Parties Concerned," by Moses Elias Levy (London, 1828), *American Jewish Archives Journal* 51 (1999): 111. See also Leon Huhner, "Moses Elias Levy, An Early Florida Pioneer and the Father of Florida's First Senator," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 19 (April 1941): 320; David Corcos, *Studies in the History of the Jews of Morocco* (Jerusalem, 1976), 119.

<sup>14</sup> His partner, Philip Benjamin, was the father of Judah P. Benjamin, United States Senator and Confederate Secretary of State. For Levy's partnership with both Philip and his brother Emanuel Benjamin see *St. Croix Gazette*, July 18, 1808, January 2, 1809. Philip eventually left the concern to work for his father in *St. Croix*. Their partnership did not last long and the company was dissolved a year later. See *ibid.*, June 1, 1810.

<sup>15</sup> For a history of Levy's relationship with the Ramirez family see M. E. Levy, letter to the editor, [St. Augustine] *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, February 1, 1843, January 23, 1843.

<sup>16</sup> "Philanthropy," letter to the editor, [Curacao] *De Curacaosche Courant*, November 27, 1819. See also *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1st ed., s.v. "Hep! Hep!"

<sup>17</sup> M. E. Levy to Samuel Myers (Havana), March 1, 1820, Myers Papers, JOC.

<sup>18</sup> Levy to Myers (New York), November 1, 1818, Myers Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter cited as AJA), Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>19</sup> Levy to Myers, March 1, 1820, JOC.

<sup>20</sup> For Levy's utopian plan see Levy to Myers, November 1, 1818, AJA.

<sup>21</sup> Levy to Myers, August 6, 1819, JOC.

<sup>22</sup> Monaco, Introduction, *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, xii.

<sup>23</sup> Levy to Myers (New York), October 30, 1818, AJA.

<sup>24</sup> "Item No. 3—Messrs. Hernandez & Cheavitean in account with Fernando M. Arredondo," August 3, 1820 (Havana), in H. Rept. 450, 135. Almost half of the purchase price of \$35,875 was bartered in the form of 15,000 pounds of copper kettles. Hernandez and Cheavitean (alternately spelled Cheaviteau) were Levy's agents in the transaction.

<sup>25</sup> M. E. Levy to Isaac L. Goldsmid, November 25, 1825, in Jacob Toury, "M. E. Levy's Plan for a Jewish Colony: 1825," in Lloyd P. Gartner, ed., *Michael, On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*, (Tel-Aviv, 1975), 33.

<sup>26</sup> Rebecca Gratz to Mrs. Hoffman, c. 1820-1822, cited in Adler, "Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida," 29.

<sup>27</sup> Monaco, Introduction, *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, xii.

<sup>28</sup> M. E. Levy to Samuel Myers (New York), October 30, 1818, AJA.

<sup>29</sup> M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (Pilgrimage Plantation), January 2, 1829, JOC.

<sup>30</sup> "Marine News," [St. Augustine] *Florida Gazette*, July 28, 1821; deposition of J. R. Evertson, April 25, 1842, in H. Rept. 450, appendix, 3.

<sup>31</sup> M. E. Levy and Hannah Levy, Divorce Petition, May 12, 1815, in J. O. Bro-Jorgensen to Mary MacRae (Copenhagen), January 15, 1950, box 1, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>32</sup> M. E. Levy to Samuel Myers (Havana), October 20, 1820, Myers Papers, JOC.

<sup>33</sup> The very name Pilgrimage was perfectly in keeping with the utopian mindset. By traveling from the mundane and imperfect world to a place of new beginnings pilgrims would partake in a sacred, inner-transformation. See Robert S. Fogarty, Introduction, "Paradise Planters," *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History* (Westport, CT, 1980), xix-xx.

<sup>34</sup> This location is in reference to present-day Alachua County. Originally the county extended from the Georgia border to far south of Tampa Bay.

<sup>35</sup> The area of Pilgrimage is located three miles west of the present town of Micanopy, Florida, between Levy and Ledwith Lakes. See Caroline Barr Watkins, *The Story of Historic Micanopy* (Gainesville, FL, 1976), 29; "Topographical survey of military section No. 7 by Lieutenant George C. Thomas" and "Map of Square No. 7--Micanopy and Vicinity by Captain G. I. Raines," 1835-1842, L. 247 Portfolio, Chief of Engineers Civil Works Map File, RG 77, Cartographic Division, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>36</sup> For Levy's activities in Matanzas see deposition of J. M. Hernandez, September 1, 1841, H. Rept. 450, 136-137. Levy's Hope Hill and Pilgrimage plantations are discussed in Leon Huhner, "Moses Elias Levy, Florida Pioneer," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 19 (April 1941): 330-332. For specific reference to Palatka as the beginning of the road see Deposition of Moses E. Levy, July 22, 1844, folder 6, box 215, St. Johns Circuit Court Records, St. Augustine Historical Society Library, St. Augustine, FL (hereafter cited as SAHS); copy of a statement written by Julia Edwards, 1885, box 51, Manuscripts Collection, PKY.

<sup>37</sup> A. J. Hanna, *A Prince in their Midst: The Adventurous Life of Achille Murat on the American Frontier* (Norman, OK, 1946), 73, 86.

<sup>38</sup> M. E. Levy and A. A. Rutan, Exhibit A, Articles of Agreement, June 21, 1822, *Rutan v. Levy*, folder 35, box 155, St. Johns Circuit Court Records, SAHS; deposition of Harmon H. Holli[m]on, November 24, 1832, in "Notes Re: Arredondo Family," typescript, 33-34, PKY; Deposition of Charles Robion, November 15, 1841, H. Report 450, 95-96.

<sup>39</sup> Exhibit B, Hope Hill Establishment, 1822, *Rutan v. Levy*, SAHS.

<sup>40</sup> Levy quote from extract of a letter from Moses E. Levy to F. S. Warburg, August 6, 1821, in H. Report 450, 59.

<sup>41</sup> *Horatio Dexter v. Moses Levy* [1824], folder 31, box 134, Civil Cases St. Johns County, SAHS.

<sup>42</sup> For reference to Governor Worthington's award to Levy see W[illiam] G. D. Worthington to John C. Calhoun, March 9, 1822, in Hemphill, ed., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, VII: 735. For the presence of trading stores at both establishments see Deposition of Francis P. Sanchez, October 28, 1823, *Rutan v. Levy*, folder 35, box 155, St. Johns Circuit Court Records, SAHS.

<sup>43</sup> Chris Monaco, "Fort Mitchell and the Settlement of the Alachua Country," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79 (Summer 2000): 24.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Murphy to Horatio Dexter, April 25, 1822, in James David Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records of East and Middle Florida," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1930), 122. The style and content of this letter suggest that Dexter rather than Murphy was the correspondent.

<sup>45</sup> Levy and Rutan, Articles of Agreement, SAHS.

<sup>46</sup> M. E. Levy, "To the Honourable the Commissioners appointed to ascertain Claims and Titles in East Florida," August 14, 1823, file A-28, box 2, series 990, RG 599, Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, FL (hereafter cited as FSA).

<sup>47</sup> For Levy's investment in the Arredondo Grant see Indenture between F. M. Arredondo, Sr., agent and attorney-in-fact for Arredondo & Son, and Moses E. Levy, January 1, 1822, in "Notes Re: Arredondo Family," [n.d.], typescript, 42-43, PKY. For Levy's participation in the company see "A meeting of the owners of lands in East Florida known by the

name of the Alachua tract, at Lewis tavern, New York," November 4, 1822, Florida Association of New York File, box 1, James Glunt Papers, PKY; Deposition of Moses E. Levy, July 22, 1844, folder 6, box 215, St. Johns Circuit Court Records, SAHS

<sup>48</sup> M. E. Levy and Reuben Charles, [letter of agreement], September 23, 1823, Reuben Charles Papers, PKY. For reference to Antonio Rutan's abandonment of his duties at Pilgrimage see Deposition of Alexander Hamilton, September 22, 1823, and Deposition of Francis P. Sanchez, September 20, 1823, *Rutan v. Levy*, SAHS.

<sup>49</sup> "Dr. William Simmons sworn, and examined by claimants attorney," [n.d.], in Walter Lowie, ed., *American State Papers: Documents, legislative and executive, of the Congress of the United States, in relation to the public lands, from the first session of the first Congress to the first session of the twenty-third Congress: March 4, 1789, to June 15, 1834*, III (Washington, DC, 1834), 728, cited by Joe Knetsch, "The Big Arredondo Grant: A Study in Confusion" (paper presented to the Micanopy Historical Society, September 13, 1991), 9, PKY.

<sup>50</sup> Reference to the practice of "paying Indian negroes" for their labor is made in the Deposition of William Canuet, October 21, 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> The total acreage of Pilgrimage is noted in Levy and Rutan, Articles of Agreement, *Rutan v. Levy*, SAHS. For the area cleared for planting c. 1823 see testimony of Hipolite Chateannuef, [n.d.], Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, FSA.

<sup>52</sup> M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (Pilgrimage Plantation), January 2, 1829, JOC.

<sup>53</sup> Examination of Frederick S. Warburg, January 7, 1824, and F. S. Warburg, Amendment of Error in case of Moses E. Levy, [n.d.], Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, FSA.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. Klaus Richter, e-mail message to author (concerning "Frederik" Warburg), May 18, 2001. Richter cites information in *Stamm- und Nachfahrtafeln der Familie Warburg* (Hamburg, 1937). For further information regarding the family of Frederick Warburg, see Gertrud Wenzel, *Broken Star: The Warburgs of Altona, Their Life in Germany and Their Death in the Holocaust* (Smithtown, NY, 1981). Wenzel does not mention Frederick Warburg.

<sup>55</sup> F. Warburg, "List of Articles delivered to me on the Pilgrimage Plantation which is under my charge," [n.d.], Charles Papers, PKY. In "Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida," (p. 20) Joseph Adler asserts that Warburg was an agent "for a group of Jewish and Christian settlers" but he does not give a source for this conclusion. Documents only confirm that Warburg acted as Levy's agent in procuring Jewish settlers.

<sup>56</sup> Examination of Frederick S. Warburg, January 7, 1824, Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, FSA.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Quotation from Levy to [Henriques], September 1, 1853, Yulee Papers, PKY. Certain likely names, such as Jacob Bradenburg and a Mr. Rose, have surfaced but it is still not possible to confirm if they were indeed part of the group of Jewish families. According to Levy's agent, Francis P. Sanchez, most of Levy's settlers arrived sometime after the initial group of February 1823. While the names of the first arrivals are well-known, the identities of subsequent settlers were seldom recorded; Deposition of Francisco P. Sanchez, October 2, 1824, Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, FSA.

<sup>59</sup> Levy to [Henriques], September 1, 1853, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>60</sup> M. E. Levy to Samuel Myers, August 6, 1819, JOC.

<sup>61</sup> Separate housing even extended to his son, Elias. See M. E. Levy to Reuben Charles, August 12, 1824, Charles Papers, PKY.

<sup>62</sup> A few historians have mistakenly attributed a grand life style to Levy. For reference to Levy's Alachua "mansion" see Huhner, "Moses Elias Levy," 331. Levy's modest Matanzas house has been deemed "a magnificent home" in Bertram Wallace Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865* (Elkins Park, PA, 1961), 14. For heretofore unknown documents relating to Levy's actual Pilgrimage home see M. E. Levy to Reuben Charles, April 26, 1824, July 30, 1824, and agreement between Mr. Moses Elias Levy, planter, and Mr. James Edwards, April 17, 1824, Reuben Charles Papers, PKY.

<sup>63</sup> Wauburg is a corruption of the original spelling. See Watkins, *The Story of Historic Micanopy*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> While Levy may have avoided pork, he did not adhere to kosher dietary rules. For a list of livestock as well as an inventory of Pilgrimage see F. Warburg, "List of Articles delivered to me on the Pilgrimage Plantation which is under my charge," (c. 1824), and E[lias] Levy, "A List of articles found in the Store & delivered to Mr. Charles," October 1, 1824, Charles Papers, PKY.

<sup>65</sup> Testimony of Hipolite Chateannuef, [n.d.], Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, FSA.

<sup>66</sup> M. E. Levy to Reuben Charles, July 30, 1824, Charles Papers, PKY. Pelaklikaha is also noted in Warburg, "List of Articles," PKY.

<sup>67</sup> Brent R. Weisman, "The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole Indians and Black Seminoles during the Colonial Era," in Jane G. Landers, ed., *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida*, (Gainesville, 2000), 142.

<sup>68</sup> Bill of Sale, Moses E. Levy, 4 December 1839, Deed Book N, 572-573, St. Johns County Records, St. Augustine, FL (copy in possession of the author). For Levy's reference to ten slaves at Pilgrimage see M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (Pilgrimage Plantation), January 2, 1829, JOC.

<sup>69</sup> "Sugar Planting," *Nile's Register*, June 15, 1833.

<sup>70</sup> This aspect of Levy's thinking is very much in evidence in M. E. Levy to Samuel Myers, 6 August 1819, JOC. Invoking a biblical economic standard was thoroughly in keeping with abolitionist thought. See James L. Huston, "Abolitionists, Political Economists, and Capitalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Fall 2000): 488-489.

<sup>71</sup> Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville, 2000), 225.

<sup>72</sup> For Levy's specific request for "field negroes in families" see Levy to Myers, January 2, 1829, JOC.

<sup>73</sup> Levy, *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, 19-20.

<sup>74</sup> Quotation from Amy Dru Stanley, "The Right to Possess All the Faculties That God Has Given: Possessive Individualism, Slave Women, and Abolitionist Thought," in Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry, eds., *Moral Problems in American Life*, (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 130, n. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Franklin F. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, 1970), 75-76.

<sup>76</sup> Levy, *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>78</sup> Levy's views are very similar to evangelical thought. See Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), 120.

<sup>79</sup> M. E. Levy, letter to the editor, [London] *The World*, June 20, 1827.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, June 6, 1827.

<sup>81</sup> Levy quotation from M. E. Levy to Samuel Myers, March 1, 1820 (Havana), Myers Papers, JOC. Additional reasons behind his American settlement can be found in M. E. Levy to Isaac L. Goldsmid, November 25, 1825, in Toury, "M. E. Levy's Plan for a Jewish Colony," 33.

<sup>82</sup> Levy to Myers, November 1, 1818, AJA.

<sup>83</sup> Levy to Myers, June 8, 1819, JOC.

<sup>84</sup> Levy to Myers, November 1, 1818, AJA.

<sup>85</sup> "The Case of David Levy," [St. Augustine] *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, December 3, 1841. Apparently "Harmonite" was either a reference to Robert Owen's short-lived New Harmony experiment in Indiana or the original Harmony Society founded by the radical German pietist Johann Georg Rapp. Both adhered to a communitarian lifestyle, although Owen was a committed secularist. In any case, the intended usage of "Harmonite" was certainly one of derision.

<sup>86</sup> Alexander Hamilton to John C. Calhoun, July 20, 1822, in Hemphill, ed., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, VII, 218. Hamilton's status as the son of Alexander Hamilton is not generally known among Florida historians. Regarding confirmation of Hamilton's lineage see Larry Hamilton Sr., e-mail message to author, (concerning Alexander Hamilton, Jr.) April 18, 2001. Larry Hamilton, president of the Hamilton National Genealogical Society, cites information held in the society's files.

<sup>87</sup> "A meeting of the owners of lands in East Florida," November 4, 1822, Glunt Papers, PKY. For Forbes's agent status see Huhner, "Moses Elias Levy," 326.

<sup>88</sup> W[illiam] G. D. Worthington to John C. Calhoun, March 9, 1822, in *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, VII, 735.

<sup>89</sup> "Speech of Col. J. W. D. Worthington, Delivered in the House of Delegates of Maryland, 1824, on the Jew Bill," in H. M. Brackenridge, *Speeches on the Jew Bill, in the House of delegates of Maryland, by H. M. Brackenridge, Col. W. G. D. Worthington, and John S. Tyson, Esquire. Together with an argument on the chancery powers, and an eulogy on Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, &c.* (Philadelphia, 1829), 136; see also Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 500-505; Benjamin H. Hartogensis, "Unequal Religious Rights in Maryland Since 1776," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 25 (1917), 93-107.

<sup>90</sup> Levy departed New York harbor on the ship "Crisis" on May 20, 1825. This vessel was bound for London. See M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (New York), May 19, 1825, Myers Papers, JOC.

<sup>91</sup> Levy borrowed a total of 150,000 francs while living in Paris in 1826 and during the following year he mortgaged land to obtain an additional 2,110 pounds in London. See Agreement between Moses Elias Levy and Joseph Delevante, March 15, 1827, Deed Book A, Alachua County Ancient Records, Records Office, Alachua County Court House, Gainesville, FL.

<sup>92</sup> For Noah's involvement in the Florida Association see, "A meeting of the owners of lands in East Florida," November 4, 1822, Glunt Papers, PKY.

<sup>93</sup> Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 66.

<sup>94</sup> [London] *The World*, May 19 and July 9, 1828.

<sup>95</sup> Levy, *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, 12-16

<sup>96</sup> "Abolition of Slavery," [London] *The World*, September 10, 1828.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, August 20, 1828.

<sup>98</sup> Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties: A Study of the Efforts to Convert the Jews in Britain, up to the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 1978), 91, 129.

<sup>99</sup> Monaco, Introduction, "A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery," 109.

<sup>100</sup> Quotation from "A True Israelite," in "A Few Remarks. On a Letter which appeared in the World Newspaper of the Month of June, 1828, disclaiming a certain Petition to Parliament concerning the Jews," (c. 1828), De Sola Pamphlets 2, Special Collections, University College London.

<sup>101</sup> [London] *The World*, August 6, 1828; Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 368.

<sup>102</sup> Rev. D. Wilson, *Thoughts on British Colonial Slavery* (London, 1828), 1.

<sup>103</sup> [Joseph] Crooll, letter to the editor, [London] *The World*, July 2, 1828.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, Samuel Levy Keyzer, letter to the editor, July 30, 1828.

<sup>105</sup> M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (Pilgrimage Plantation), January 2, 1829, JOC.

<sup>106</sup> David Levy's abrupt departure from Norfolk has often been misrepresented; see Charles Wickliffe Yulee, *Senator Yulee of Florida: A Biographical Sketch* (Jacksonville, FL, 1909), 5. This account, which is full of fanciful errors, asserts that Moses Levy arbitrarily withdrew all support of his son, David. Letters from both father and son contradict this assumption. For a more accurate view see David Levy's farewell letter to his guardian Moses Myers; David Levy to Moses Myers (Norfolk), April 17, 1827, Myers Papers, JOC. For Moses Levy's reaction to David's departure see M. E. Levy to Moses Myers (London), July 26, 1827, *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> M. E. Levy to Mr. [Jonathan Mendes] Dacosta, September 18, 1845, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel Proctor, "Pioneer Jewish Settlement in Florida; 1765–1900," in *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writing of Regional History in the South with Special Emphasis on Religious and Cultural Groups* (Miami Beach, 1956), 89.

<sup>109</sup> Levy to [Henriques], September 1, 1853, Yulee Papers, PKY. If the experience of both the McIntosh and Clinch plantations is any indication, the fertility of the soil at Pilgrimage may have been seriously depleted. Land at the former plantations was reported to have been "exhausted at the time they were abandoned," by the time of the Second Seminole War. See *DeBows Review* 4 (October 1847), 248.

<sup>110</sup> As quoted by Dr. Joe Knetsch, "The Land Grants of Moses E. Levy and the Development of Central Florida: The Practical Side" (paper presented to the Micanopy Historical Society, January 10, 1998), 1, PKY.

<sup>111</sup> Levy to [Henriques], September 1, 1853, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>112</sup> Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 148–149.

<sup>113</sup> "Moses E. Levy," January 26, 1839, H. Report 236, 3rd Session, 25th Congress, facsimile in Watkins, *Story of Historic Micanopy*.

<sup>114</sup> Monaco, Introduction, *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, xxi.

<sup>115</sup> "Products of Florida—Sugar," *DeBows Review* 5 (April 1848), 367.

<sup>116</sup> Robin L. Denson, Gary D. Ellis, and Russell Dorsey, *Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins: The Archaeological and Historical Study of the State Historic Site* (Crystal River, FL, 1997), 24.

For Yulee's valuation of Margarita see D. L. Yulee, memo, (c. 1865), box 30, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>117</sup> Quotation from Fogarty, "Paradise Planters," xv.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv–xv.

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<sup>119</sup> John L. Thomas, "Antislavery and Utopia," in Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists*, (Princeton, NJ, 1965), 266–267.

<sup>120</sup> Levy's views on spiritualism, mesmerism, and phrenology are interspersed throughout "Notes of manuscript writings of M. E. Levy deceased," [n.d.], box 1, Yulee Papers, PKY. For a discussion of the role of spiritualism in the lives of nineteenth-century social activists see Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York, 1996), 143–148.

<sup>121</sup> Hanson quoted by David Yulee in D. L. Yulee to Rahma [Levy] DaCosta, October 11, 1854, box 3, Yulee Papers, PKY.

<sup>122</sup> Noah's abortive plans for a Jewish colony garnered notice even after his death. See "A Funeral Panegyric," *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, 9 (May 1851), 98.

<sup>123</sup> Fogarty, "Paradise Planters," xiv.

<sup>124</sup> Quotation from [St. Augustine] *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, December 31, 1841.

<sup>125</sup> "What Does Your Sugar Cost?" *A Cottage Conversation on the subject of British Negro Slavery* (Birmingham, Eng., 1828), 6.

<sup>126</sup> Brundage, *Socialist Utopia in the New South*, 14.

<sup>127</sup> Brian J. L. Berry, *America's Utopian Experiments: Communal Havens from Long-Wave Crises* (Hanover, NH, 1992), 6–9; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989), 855.

<sup>128</sup> Herbert J. Doherty, Jr., "Political Factions in Territorial Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 28 (October 1949): 133.

<sup>129</sup> Daniel L. Schafer, "'A Class of People Neither Freemen nor Slaves': From Spanish to American Race Relations in Florida, 1821 to 1861," *Journal of Social History* 26 (Spring 1993): 587–602.

<sup>130</sup> Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 286.

<sup>131</sup> [St. Augustine] *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, December 10, 1841.

*LETTER TO THE EDITOR*

Revisiting Annie T. Wise

by

Arlene G. Rotter

In investigating the life and career of Annie Wise for my article, "Climbing the Crystal Stair: Annie T. Wise's Success as an Immigrant in Atlanta's Public School System (1872-1925)," *Southern Jewish History* 4 (2001), I found many voids in information. Fortunately Henry S. Marks of Huntsville, Alabama, has graciously brought additional documents to my attention, the contents of which I would like to share with the readers.

*Wise's Personal Life*

Marks uncovered information regarding Annie Teitlebaum's marriage to Sam Wise and about their son, Leonard. Annie's engagement to Sam Wise of Tuscaloosa was announced in the *American Israelite* on February 21, 1889. They married later the same year. Sam Wise appeared in the Tuscaloosa registry for 1889. However, Wise's name is listed neither in the Alabama Soundex nor in the Georgia Soundex for 1900, 1910, or 1920.<sup>1</sup> Even with this new documentation, Annie and Sam Wise's relationship remains virtually a mystery. It is unclear where they resided as husband and wife. However, Marks discovered an obituary for Annie T. Wise, stating that she moved to Birmingham after the death of her husband in Atlanta.<sup>2</sup> This information leads me to the assumption that Annie and Sam remained married until his death and may have been living with Annie's parents in Atlanta.<sup>3</sup>

The data Marks uncovered provide a fairly lucid timeline of Leonard Wise's life, that corroborates in part some of my



assumptions regarding Annie's disappearance from the Atlanta Public School system between 1889 and 1891, but does not clear up the reasons for her absence between 1887 and 1888. Shortly after Leonard's birth in Georgia in May 1891, Annie returned to work as an assistant at Atlanta's Night School.<sup>4</sup> Leonard resided in Atlanta with his maternal grandparents, Morris and Mary Teitlebaum, at least until 1900; however, his name is not listed in the 1910 or 1920 Georgia Soundex.<sup>5</sup> Leonard Wise appears to have had a long career in pharmaceuticals in Alabama. In 1923 he was employed as a clerk in his Uncle Eugene Jacobs's drug store in Birmingham. A year later Leonard became a manager and continued in this position until his aunt Ethel died in 1934. During the 1940s Wise was a pharmacist in Birmingham for Leo's Cut Rate Drug Store and an assistant manager of Walgreen's Drug Store. Leonard Wise had connections with the Birmingham Jewish community as a member of Temple Emanu-El in the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Marks notes that by 1946 Leonard Wise retired, but the circumstances of his death remain a mystery.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Annie Wise's Involvement in Jewish Organizations*

I previously wrote that Annie Wise appeared to have been more active in secular rather than in Jewish organizations. However, Henry Marks's new information refutes this assumption. Annie is listed as the eleventh president of the National Council of Jewish Women in Birmingham during the 1920s, following the presidency of Dora Heyman (Mrs. Mervyn) Sterne. The *Jewish Ledger* lists Annie Wise as past president of the Birmingham branch in 1928.<sup>8</sup> She did not neglect her Jewish connections.

#### *The Elusive Annie T. Wise*

I would like to thank Henry Marks for clearing up some of the mysteries surrounding Annie T. Wise's life. He has revealed important information demonstrating Wise's leadership role and active involvement in Jewish organizations. I am encouraged to believe that Annie T. Wise, a Jewish immigrant from Eperies, Hungary, successfully climbed the crystal stair

that led her from Girls' High School to a prominent career in both the secular and Jewish communities of Atlanta and Birmingham.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Notes of Henry S. Marks, Huntsville, AL, who researched the 1900, 1910, and 1920 registries for Alabama and Georgia; *American Israelite*, February 21, 1889, and May 1891.

<sup>2</sup> "Rites for Mrs. Wise," *Birmingham News*, May 14, 1929 (hereafter cited as "Rites").

<sup>3</sup> Marks notes, "Son Leonard . . . was enumerated with Annie's father and mother in Atlanta in 1900. At that time, her parents resided on Pulliam Street in Atlanta." 1900 Georgia Soundex, Fulton County, GA.

<sup>4</sup> Rotter, "Climbing the Crystal Stair," 54.

<sup>5</sup> "Rites."

<sup>6</sup> Temple Emanu-El Ledger Books, 1932, Birmingham Public Library.

<sup>7</sup> Marks found that Leonard Wise was not listed in the 1947, 1948, 1949, 1952, 1956, or 1970 Birmingham Certificate of Deaths. He also was not listed in the Atlanta Death Indexes from 1945-1959.

<sup>8</sup> Council Roster, 1973; *Jewish Ledger*, September 7, 1928.



## *Glossary*

**aliya** (plural: **aliyot**) ~ the act of going up to the bimah for an honor, such as reading from the Torah during religious services

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

**bar mitzvah** ~ traditional coming-of-age ritual for Jewish males usually reaching age of thirteen

**beth din** ~ rabbinical court

**bimah** ~ platform from which services are led in a synagogue

**cherum** ~ excommunication

**Haftorah** ~ portion of the Prophets read after and in conjunction with the Torah at Sabbath and holiday synagogue services

**halacha** ~ Jewish law

**hazan** (also: **chazan**) ~ cantor; leads chants and prayers during religious services

**High Holy Days** ~ Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the two most important holidays on the Jewish calendar

**kashrut** ~ kosher laws; Jewish laws governing food

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

**milah** (also: **brit milah**) ~ ritual circumcision performed on Jewish males eight days old; based on biblical mark of covenant

**minhag** ~ form of Jewish ritual

**Minhag Ashkenaz** ~ Jewish ritual according to Ashkenazic tradition

**Minhag Sephardi** ~ Jewish ritual according to Sephardic tradition

**mitzva** (plural: **mitzvot**) ~ commandment; good works or deeds

**mohel** (plural: **mohelim**) ~ person who performs ritual circumcision

**Rosh Hashanah** ~ literally, *head of the year*; new year on Hebrew calendar; one of holiest days of Jewish year

**Schweinefleisch Juden** and **Schweinefleisch Rabbis** ~ literally, *pig flesh Jews* and *pig flesh rabbis*, used pejoratively

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

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

**shema** ~ Jewish confession of faith in the oneness of God, frequently recited during religious services

**shiksah** ~ non-Jewish woman; often used pejoratively

**shokhet** (also: **shochet**) ~ ritual slaughterer

**smicha** ~ rabbinic ordination

**tallit** ~prayer shawl

**talmud torah** ~ Jewish religious day school

**tefillin** ~ phylacteries; small boxes enclosing Jewish prayers attached with leather straps to forehead and forearm in a prescribed manner

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

**trefa** ~ not kosher

**yehudim** ~ Jews

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

## *Note on Authors*

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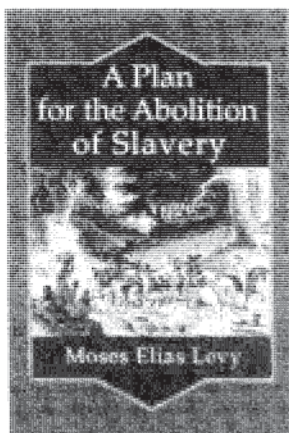
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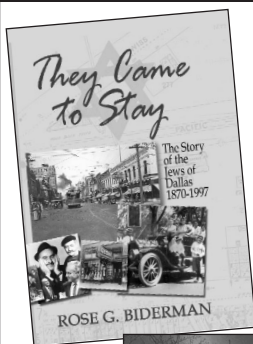
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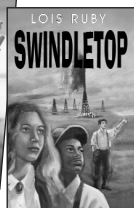


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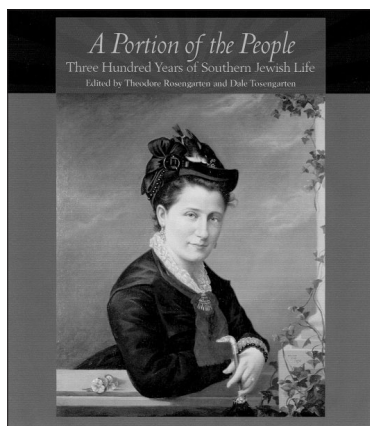
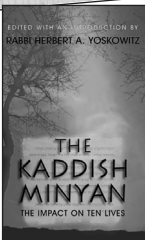
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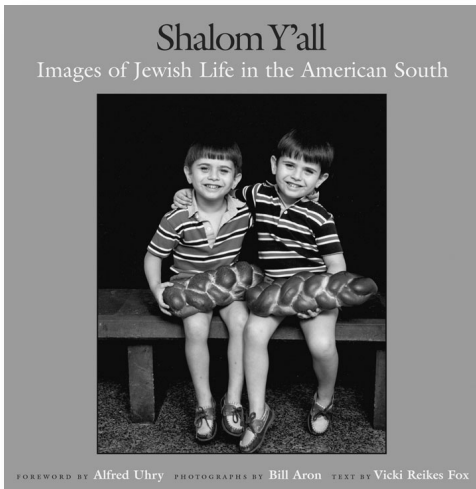
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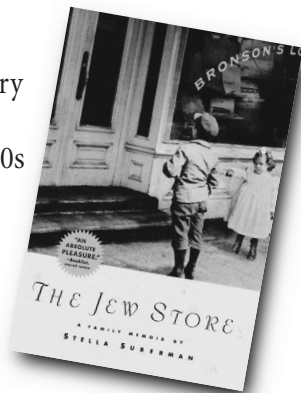
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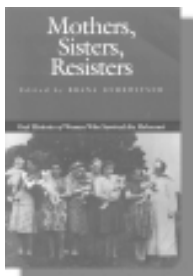
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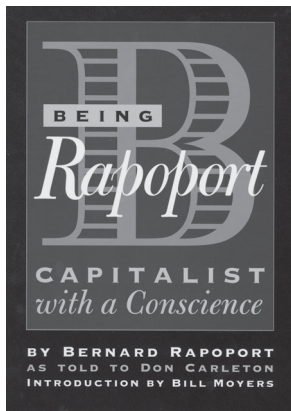
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