

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Eric L. Goldstein, *Book Review Editor*

2006

Volume 9



# Southern Jewish History

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Eric L. Goldstein, *Book Review Editor*

## Editorial Board

Elliott Ashkenazi    Phyllis Leffler

Canter Brown, Jr.    Martin Perlmutter

Eric L. Goldstein    Marc Lee Raphael

Cheryl Greenberg    Stuart Rockoff

Scott M. Langston    Bryan Edward Stone

George R. Wilkes

*Southern Jewish History* is a publication of the Southern Jewish Historical Society available by subscription and a benefit of membership in the Society. The opinions and statements expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the journal or of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

Southern Jewish Historical Society OFFICERS: Sumner Levine, *President*; Scott M. Langston, *President Elect*; Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Secretary*; Bernard Wax, *Treasurer*. BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Wendy Lowe Besmann, Eric L. Goldstein, Jacqueline G. Metzler, Phyllis Leffler, Stuart Rockoff, Dale Rosengarten, Jack Rosensweig, Jim Schuyler, Phil N. Steel, Jr., Stephen J. Whitfield. EX-OFFICIO: Minette Cooper, Jay Tanenbaum.

For authors' guidelines, contributions, and all editorial matters, write to the Editor, *Southern Jewish History*, 2517 Hartford Dr., Ellenwood, GA 30294; email: Markkbauman@aol.com. The journal is interested in unpublished articles pertaining to the Jewish experience in the American South. Publishers who wish to submit books for review should email Dana Greene at greenedm@appstate.edu. For journal subscriptions and advertising, write Rachel Heimovics Braun, managing editor, 954 Stonewood Lane, Maitland, FL 32751; email: journal@jewishsouth.org; or visit [www.jewishsouth.org](http://www.jewishsouth.org).

Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, *Index to Jewish Periodicals*, *Journal of American History*, and *Journal of Southern History*.

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

Copyright © 2006 by the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

ISSN 1521-4206

## PERMISSION STATEMENT

Consent by the Southern Jewish Historical Society is given for private use of articles and images that have appeared in *Southern Jewish History*. Copying or distributing any journal, article, image, or portion thereof, for any use other than private, is forbidden without the written permission of *Southern Jewish History*. To obtain that permission, contact the editor, Mark K. Bauman, at [MarkKBauman@aol.com](mailto:MarkKBauman@aol.com) or the managing editor, Bryan Edward Stone, at [bstone@delmar.edu](mailto:bstone@delmar.edu).



## Uptown and Traditional

by

Jessica Elfenbein

The religious experience of German Jews who arrived in the United States in the period before 1880 was not monolithic. Notable and important intra-group differences developed, especially in the area of religious practice. Not all German Jews quickly (or ever) embraced Reform.<sup>1</sup> An important minority in Baltimore and elsewhere rebuffed efforts at progressive change and continued to practice traditional Judaism. For example, of the six synagogues German Jews created by 1879 in Baltimore, two—Chizuk Amuno and Shearith Israel—were explicitly traditional in their religious practice.<sup>2</sup> Of the other four, only Har Sinai began as Reform. Those who chose to affiliate at the traditional synagogues consciously rejected Reform.<sup>3</sup> And, theoretically, if from 1879 on, two of six congregations (albeit smaller than their Reform brethren) were deliberately and purposefully traditional, then perhaps a quarter or so of Baltimore’s German-speaking Jews identified with Orthodoxy and followed its ritual to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>4</sup>

The reality of this group’s experience flies in the face of common historical treatment. The years from 1880 through 1920 are often, although erroneously, characterized as being comprised of two distinct Jewish communities: the Uptown Jews, those of German descent who are presented as “a homogeneous group sharing their Germanness [*sic*], their affluence, their Reform Judaism, and their striving for acceptance in America”; and the Downtown Jews, those of eastern European descent who were

outsiders to the American experience, spoke heavily accented English, and upheld religious tradition. Historians, the majority of whom descend from eastern European immigrants, describe this group as “more interesting, more Jewish, and more willing to confront and criticize the demands of mainstream American culture.”<sup>5</sup>

For a more nuanced and complete understanding of American Jewish history, it is instructive to study the experiences of specific families. Baltimore’s Eleanor Kohn, whose family founded Hochschild Kohn department store, and Lester Levy, whose family owned M. S. Levy and Company (one of the nation’s largest straw hat manufacturers), married in 1922. They both came from families who arrived as part of the German-speaking migration, yet their forebears’ experiences directly challenge the common wisdom regarding the religious practice of German Jews. Remarkably good records of their grandparents’ religious lives afford the opportunity to explore four different German Jewish families: the Strausses—Eleanor’s mother’s family; the Kohns—her father’s family; the Sterns—Lester’s mother’s family; and the Levys—Lester’s father’s family. All four families migrated to the United States from German-speaking places before 1870. The Sterns settled in Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup> The other three families became Baltimoreans. The Kohns and the Sterns affiliated with Reform congregations, while the Strausses and the Levys observed the Sabbath, kept kosher both in the home and outside, and otherwise remained traditional. And there was “intermarriage.” The Orthodox Clara Strauss married the ultra-Reform Benno Kohn; the Reform Beatrice Stern married the traditional William Levy. For both couples, traditional Judaism triumphed. Beatrice Stern and William Levy affiliated with the city’s traditional Chizuk Amuno congregation, where his family had been among the earliest members. Clara Strauss and Benno Kohn worshipped at Baltimore’s traditional Shearith Israel congregation, founded by her father.

Taken together, their stories provide a meaningful lens through which to reexamine the German Jewish experience. Two of the four families did not embrace Reform although they were economically successful and socially prominent. It would be easier

*Benno and Clara Kohn, c. 1895.*

*(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2004.13.67.)*

if the religious experience of the Levys and Strausses could be explained as anomalous and peculiar, but such an explanation would be incorrect. These families were part of a sizeable and important minority, the experience of which has, to date, been largely ignored.<sup>7</sup> While there were real and abiding differences in religious practice within the community of German Jews in Baltimore, they strained, but never ripped, the community's social fabric. Moreover, the differences were apparently far from insurmountable.

Despite the fact that within the Stern-Levy and Strauss-Kohn families each couple had a member raised as a Reform Jew, traditional Judaism triumphed in their homes and lives. In the case of the Levys, synagogue activities centered on Chizuk Amuno where, as with two generations before them, they assumed leadership roles. In the case of the Kohns, synagogue life was entirely focused on Shearith Israel, first in its downtown location and later in its Upper Park Heights satellite. Understanding the histories of these congregations in the context of these families is important to the largely overlooked story of German Jews in America who opted to remain traditional in their religious practices.

*The Levys and Chizuk Amuno*

Soon after arriving in Baltimore in 1866, Michael Simon (M. S.) and Betsy Jacobs Levy became members of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation on Lloyd Street, which then followed Orthodox ritual. As pious Jews who observed the Sabbath and holidays "with love and with understanding of the meaning and significance," the Levys kept kosher both in their home and outside, "where their observance entailed inconvenience or difficulty." A grandson wrote:

In act and thought, in form and spirit, Michael and Betsy Levy lived the ideal Jewish life. They did not, however, regard the Jewish life as something esoteric, which had to be reconciled with American life through compromise, but as the embodiment of living ideals, which they could make a part of their being without shutting themselves off from the world around them. For they were Americans, as well as Jews, and were thoroughly

imbued with all that was best in the culture of their adopted land.<sup>8</sup>

As “Jew and Jewess” and “loyal members of the house of Israel,” M. S. and Betsy Levy subscribed to the “religious doctrines of traditional Judaism, and their never wavering faith were [*sic*] supplemented by a scrupulous observance of Jewish law and custom.”<sup>9</sup>

Given that commitment, it is not surprising that M. S. Levy was part of the 1870 schism in which, in response to a proposal at Baltimore Hebrew for a mixed-gender choir (a notion that was anathema to those who favored traditional practice), a dozen men resigned and founded the traditional Chizuk Amuno congregation. Although not a founder, Levy joined in early 1872.<sup>10</sup>

For its first five years, the members of Chizuk Amuno worshipped in Exeter Hall near Fayette Street in East Baltimore. In the mid 1870s, the congregation built a building (today known as B’nai Israel) on Lloyd Street, down the block from Baltimore Hebrew. During these years, M. S. Levy began his service to the congregation, serving on the book and school committees where he butted heads with Rabbi Henry W. Schneeberger, the congregation’s first rabbi and “the first American born, university-trained, ordained rabbi in the United States,” on the issue of instruction in German.<sup>11</sup> The rabbi wanted Judaic studies given in Hebrew or English, an arrangement acceptable to the school commissioners. But, like every German immigrant congregation, the commissioners wanted German language instruction as well because German was also the first language of many members. Although this desire was common among German immigrant congregations, Rabbi Schneeberger “vehemently disagreed.” After a year’s postponement, German language instruction finally began in 1878. Ironically, interest in German soon waned. The language was dropped as a religious school requirement in 1886 and totally abandoned two years later.<sup>12</sup>

Schneeberger’s unwillingness to embrace German language instruction may have reflected the fact that Chizuk Amuno, more than the other congregations founded by German-speaking Jews, was relatively welcoming to newly arrived co-religionists from

eastern Europe. Chizuk Amuno members shared many characteristics with these immigrants. Like the newcomers, the Levys, the Friedenwalds (who had founded the congregation), and other Chizuk Amuno members kept kosher, prayed daily in Hebrew, established communal organizations, and had a strong sense of Jewish identity. Members of Chizuk Amuno may thus have been more willing to overlook class and language differences to focus on similarities and take "the lead in welcoming the Russian immigrants."<sup>13</sup>

By the 1880s, despite their welcome to these immigrant co-religionists settling in East Baltimore, many congregants of Chizuk Amuno, like members of the other congregations founded by German Jews, were moving to newer, more gracious homes far northwest of the Lloyd Street neighborhood in East Baltimore. Wanting to relocate the synagogue near many of its congregants, leaders of Chizuk Amuno began looking for a new site. In 1895, this congregation, like the other German congregations would do by 1903, built a new synagogue in the fashionable Eutaw Place neighborhood.<sup>14</sup>

M. S. Levy played a very significant role in the development of Chizuk Amuno's new building. He chaired the new building committee and headed the congregation's committee to sell the old Lloyd Street synagogue. Located at McCulloh and Mosher streets, the new synagogue was erected on land that was selected, bought (for \$9,000), and given to the congregation by Levy.<sup>15</sup> He also commissioned Joseph Evans Sperry to be the architect and George A. Blake to be the builder.<sup>16</sup> Levy served as Chizuk Amuno's vice president in 1894, and then, from 1902 (following the death of Aaron Friedenwald) until his own death nine years later, he was the congregation's president.<sup>17</sup>

Levy women also led Chizuk Amuno. When the congregation moved uptown in 1895, Betsy Levy, her daughter-in-law Bertha Arnold Levy, and Birdie Friedenwald, together with the Ladies' Auxiliary Society (which Betsy Levy led for six years), gave the new building a "perpetual light, two handsome candelabra, cushions, carpets, curtains for the shrine, decorations for the reading desk and two handsome platform chairs." These women's

*Former Chizuk Amuno synagogue, 1501 McCulloh Street,  
now the New Metropolitan Baptist Church.  
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #1998.124.20.)*

efforts on behalf of their synagogue were typical. According to historian Hasia Diner, the synagogue's holy objects—Torah covers, binders, curtains—were “either made by the wives of members or purchased with money the women raised.” Under Betsy Levy's leadership, the Ladies' Auxiliary Society not only decorated the new building, it maintained its own investment account. In 1902, Betsy Levy led this group to donate \$5,000 worth of railway bonds to the congregation to be cashed in and used to reduce the mortgage on the building.<sup>18</sup>

When Chizuk Amuno moved uptown, its membership was only thirty men, its lowest point in the two decades since its founding. It was in a precarious state both religiously and financially. The dearth of members forced the board to pay men to attend minyanim. Fortunately for the congregation, the growth of the Jewish population in the Eutaw Place neighborhood was rap-

id: one hundred new members joined Chizuk Amuno within its first decade there. Many of those who joined were eastern Europeans who had reached a stable level and moved uptown from the East Baltimore Jewish ghetto. Thus, the welcome extended to the immigrants reflected common religious practices and identity, but also the newcomers' improved financial position as well as other practical considerations.<sup>19</sup>

Although the Levys remained involved with Chizuk Amuno for generations, they were also engaged with other Jewish congregations both in and out of Baltimore. For years, when Jews were excluded from fashionable Saratoga Springs, M. S. and Betsy Levy summered at Sharon Springs, New York. There, in 1904, M. S. Levy helped found the congregation to which he gave generous gifts and for which he served as president from 1907 until his death in 1911, overlapping with his leadership of Chizuk Amuno. Like many Jewish Baltimoreans, the Levys also summered in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After Betsy Levy's death in 1906, her husband memorialized her with a perpetual light at Atlantic City's Congregation Rodef Shalom.<sup>20</sup>

Betsy and M. S. Levy's ten children proved another impetus for congregational involvement and financial support. For example, when their son, Jacob, died in 1899, the Levys made a gift to South Baltimore's Rodfe Zadek congregation to purchase an eternal light in his memory. When their daughter Rachel moved to Richmond, Virginia, her father visited and attended services at Congregation Keneseth Israel to observe *yarzheit*. "Noticing that the tablets on which were inscribed the first words of the Ten Commandments were not so good as might be desired, he gave the congregation the money to purchase better ones."<sup>21</sup> M. S. Levy was also responsible for preventing the foreclosure of Baltimore's Congregation Beth Yaakov's mortgage in 1908. This was a generous gesture to an eastern European Orthodox shul.<sup>22</sup>

William Levy, the Levys' oldest son and one of the two who became principals in the straw hat business, married Beatrice Stern, a Philadelphia native.<sup>23</sup> Although raised a Reform Jew, once married and in Baltimore, she joined her husband and his family at Chizuk Amuno where she took an active role.<sup>24</sup> William and

*M. S. Levy and Sons factory, Paca and Lombard streets.  
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2002.79.271.)*

Beatrice had two children. In 1909, their son, Lester, became a bar mitzvah at Chizuk Amuno. In honor of that event, his parents contributed ice cream and cakes to the children at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. A party at the Maryland Theater followed lunch for invited guests. There the children had reserved seats at the home of the "finest vaudeville acts in the city." After the show, the bar mitzvah party went to Doebreiner's, a renowned ice cream and cake shop that "formed a part of the Bar Mitzvah ritual for many years, almost as important as (some thought more important than) the religious ceremony itself." During their children's childhood years, the Levys lived at 2352 Eutaw Place, a mile walk from Chizuk Amuno's 1895 building.<sup>25</sup>

William Levy, meantime, developed a national profile in Jewish life. A huge supporter of Jewish causes in Baltimore and around the world, William and his brother and business partner

Julius were key players in the amalgamation of Baltimore's German Jewish and eastern European charities into the Associated Jewish Charities in the early 1920s. Like his parents, William Levy (described by his son Lester, as "a religious man. People looked on him as an Orthodox Jew") was a member of Chizuk Amuno's Board of Directors and, with Harry Friedenwald, the noted ophthalmologist and son of Chizuk Amuno founder Aaron Friedenwald, represented the congregation at the organizing meeting of the United Synagogue of America, the organizational arm of Conservative Judaism.<sup>26</sup> In February 1913, Levy and Friedenwald, together with representatives of twenty-two other congregations from around the country, met "seeking a course between traditional practices and moderate innovations in congregational life."<sup>27</sup> Both men, together with their rabbi, were named to committees of the nascent United Synagogue of America.<sup>28</sup> At his death, an obituary in the *Forward* reported (in Yiddish), "William Levy was to Baltimore what Dr. L. K. Frankel was to New York Jewry."<sup>29</sup>

Meantime, in the early 1920s Chizuk Amuno's leaders decided to move further uptown to a more fashionable address just south of Druid Hill Park. Betsy and M. S. Levy's daughter, Esther Levy Ephraim, headed the apron booth at a three-day fundraising event at Carlin's Hall at which women raised an impressive \$10,000 for the new building.<sup>30</sup> William Levy was the congregation's president when the decision to relocate was made. Like his father, William secured architect Joseph Evans Sperry to design the new building in a Romanesque-Byzantine style.<sup>31</sup>

From the beginning, plans for the Eutaw Place property featured a school building separated from the main synagogue. During William Levy's extended absence from the city, other congregational leaders determined that their financial resources were too meager for a separate structure and decided to integrate the classroom space into the synagogue building. Without consulting President Levy, the congregation sold half of the land. So great was Levy's disappointment in their decision that he resigned from the presidency at the end of a year!<sup>32</sup>

*The Levy Family 1911, (L to R): Selma Levy Oppenheimer,  
Lester Levy, William Levy, Beatrice Stern Levy.  
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2002.79.338.)*

Despite disappointment with the sale of the lot, the Levy family did not disengage from Chizuk Amuno or from the issue of the school building. Shortly after the sale of the land, an effort to buy a second building at Linden and Chauncey avenues was tempered by the board's decision not to commit to a new building unless half of the money was in hand. Beatrice Stern Levy, sisterhood president before, during, and after the single year of her husband's congregational presidency, led her group in raising money for the new school. Her daughter, Selma Levy Oppenheimer, remembered: "Mama was the one who proposed starting a

building fund for the new school with moneys realized from card parties and bazaars."<sup>33</sup> William's brother, Julius Levy, meanwhile, offered to pay fifteen percent of the total cost of building a school center or the full expense of converting existing vestry rooms in the new building into additional classrooms. The board accepted the second option and two more classrooms were built.<sup>34</sup> The Sperry-designed building then featured seven classrooms and a sanctuary with seating for twelve hundred, evidence of the congregation's swift growth.

At its new home on Eutaw Place and Chauncey Avenue, Chizuk Amuno's membership numbered 200 male members, 325 sisterhood members, and a Young People's League of 300 members. The Hebrew school enrolled 260 pupils, with an additional 100 students enrolled on Sunday mornings only. In 1925 there were 67,500 Jews in Baltimore, about eight percent of the city's population. Of those, ten thousand or so adult men were members and seat holders of synagogues, a number which included some duplication, like Lester Levy, who was a member at Chizuk Amuno as well as a seat holder at Shearith Israel.<sup>35</sup>

Difficulties selling the McCulloh Street building strained Chizuk Amuno's finances. Eventually, the synagogue was sold to the Metropolitan Baptist Church in a rocky transaction in which delinquent payments caused the congregation's board periodically to delay paying interest to holders of their 6% Gold Second Mortgage Bond coupons. Understanding the plight, some bond owners returned bonds to the congregation as gifts. Julius Levy made a major contribution when he gave the Chizuk Amuno \$6,000 worth of Gold Bonds in 1924.<sup>36</sup>

Julius Levy's religious life was more complicated than that of his parents or siblings. Julius clearly supported Chizuk Amuno, but while the others went to synagogue regularly, on Saturdays he was often found eating oysters at the Rennert Hotel rather than at worship services. He never took a synagogue leadership role, but did chair the Maryland Jewish Relief Committee and worked to "rescue destitute people of Eastern and Southern Europe, without regard to sect, who suffered poverty and starvation during and

after" World War I.<sup>37</sup> He was also a founder of Baltimore Hebrew College. Levy collected Asian art which formed a base for the Baltimore Museum of Art's collection. His Judaica collection, including a Sephardic Torah scroll, he contributed to Chizuk Amuno. His charity "recognized no class, creed or race," something the congregation bulletin claims was made possible by "his very Jewishness."<sup>38</sup>

Leslie Moses, a grandson of M. S. and Betsy Levy and a partner in M. S. Levy and Sons, was also involved in Chizuk Amuno's affairs during this period. In 1920, Moses traveled to New York City on behalf of the congregation to interview Abba Josef Weisgal for the position of hazan. He listened to the cantor sing for more than an hour and then brokered a deal with the cantor's brother that brought Weisgal to Baltimore where he served the congregation for more than fifty years. Moses also organized the congregation's brotherhood and in 1927 was elected its first president.<sup>39</sup> Moses's uncle, William Levy, worked to make Chizuk Amuno more accessible, suggesting in 1928 that more prayers be recited in English.<sup>40</sup>

The Levy family's interest in Jewish education and support for the Jewish Theological Seminary was abiding. In 1923, for example, William Levy called a conference in Baltimore at the Phoenix Club<sup>41</sup> "in the interest of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the general welfare of Judaism in this country." The goal of the meeting was to appoint committees and organize to raise Baltimore's quota of \$50,000 in a national campaign to create a \$1 million seminary endowment. William Levy invited delegates from all of the city's Jewish congregations. The "small but representative gathering of leaders" that attended "exhibited the most intense interest and enthusiasm."<sup>42</sup> As the keynote speaker, William Levy discussed American Jews' indifference "to spiritualism and Jewish learning." He proclaimed that it was "'high time' that the Jews of America turn their attention to the task of keeping alive the interest in our faith." In addition to saving their brethren around the world from persecution, Levy believed that Jewish learning would also "cause our Gentile fellow citizens to appreciate our rights to full citizenship," thus

allowing the United States to set an example for the rest of the world.<sup>43</sup>

Cyrus Adler, one of the most prominent Jewish communal leaders of his era, spoke after Levy.<sup>44</sup> He argued that, because the European centers of Jewish learning were being destroyed, "either by persecution or emigration of the Jews, or because of a tendency to drift into the study of other subjects," if American Jews did not carry on Jewish learning, the future of world Jewry would be imperiled. Although Adler lauded American Jews for having supported "bodily and spiritually" the Jews of Europe, he was concerned that in the process they had "taken little care of their own spiritual needs." The result was a need for American Jews "to do something for ourselves. Our rabbis must be our teachers and in order to equip our rabbis, we must have properly supported institutions and endowments."<sup>45</sup>

Julius Levy responded to the comments of Adler and his brother, William. He scolded American Jewry for its lack of interest in religion and Jewish learning, saying, "not interest in Judaism, but pride of race makes us the philanthropists for which we are accredited. The Jew of this country cares little for Judaism because of his lack of education in Judaism. It is not philanthropy to contribute. It is duty."<sup>46</sup> Putting their own money where their mouths were, brothers Julius and William Levy each offered a \$1,000 match for every \$9,000 raised in Baltimore.<sup>47</sup>

Supporting Jewish learning was important to generations of Levys as a means to sustain tradition. Betsy Levy left bequests to a range of Jewish charities including the Baltimore Talmud Torah Society and Chizuk Amuno.<sup>48</sup> M. S. Levy included in his generous bequest to Chizuk Amuno \$10,000 to endow a fund to support three scholars who studied Talmud daily.<sup>49</sup> Their son, Julius, generously supported Jewish education across denominational lines. At his death in 1926, he bequeathed \$25,000 to reduce Chizuk Amuno's mortgage. In addition, he gave \$10,000 to each of five Jewish schools: Baltimore Talmud Torah Society, Baltimore Hebrew College (of which he was a founder), the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

(RIETS, a predecessor of Yeshiva University), and Hebrew University in Jerusalem.<sup>50</sup> William Levy, too, supported Jewish higher education, bequeathing \$20,000 to the Jewish Theological Seminary when he died in 1931.<sup>51</sup>

Beatrice Stern Levy was, like her mother-in-law, Betsy Jacobs Levy, a longtime Chizuk Amuno sisterhood president. She felt strongly about the role of women as transmitters of Judaism, asking fellow sisterhood members, "Do we make of our homes sanctuaries, where our children imbibe the ethics and ceremonies so dear to us as Mothers in Israel? Do we attend divine Services every Sabbath, so that by our presence in this beautiful House of God we inspire our children, that they, too, will feel it incumbent on them to worship with us?"<sup>52</sup> After her husband's death, Beatrice Stern Levy continued to embrace Chizuk Amuno's traditional practices, yet her early training as a Reform Jew contributed to her progressive religious views. A believer in egalitarianism, she was disturbed that women did not sit on the congregation's board. She agitated for change, repeatedly requesting that two sisterhood members be appointed to the board. In 1943, after consulting with other Jewish experts, the rabbi allowed the sisterhood and brotherhood presidents to serve as ex-officio members, but decreed that women were to "abstain from voting, especially on all purely religious matters."<sup>53</sup> Beatrice Stern Levy was only partially satisfied. She wanted full voting rights for women.<sup>54</sup> She was also keenly interested in the work of the Jewish Theological Seminary. She raised money for the seminary's Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall for Women where in 1960 a room was designated the Beatrice Stern Levy Baltimore Women's Room.<sup>55</sup>

Despite their interest in Jewish education and the fact that, in the twentieth century's early years, Chizuk Amuno was the center of Baltimore's Zionist efforts, the Levy family was not deeply involved in Zionism. Through their longstanding friendship with the Friedenwald family, the Levys were likely aware of some of the Baltimore community's Zionist activities.<sup>56</sup> Harry Friedenwald with his father, Aaron, was active in the Zionist Organization of America (previously the Federation of American Zionists) and

maintained correspondence with Zionist leaders including Chaim Weizmann, Louis Brandeis, and Judah Magnes. In 1935, Harry and his daughter, Julia Friedenwald Strauss (sister-in-law of Benno and Clara Strauss Kohn), traveled to Palestine and visited Henrietta Szold.<sup>57</sup>

At the synagogue, Lester Levy met Harry Friedenwald's son, Jonas, "a boy who became [his] closest friend, one with whom [his] high school and college years were interwoven."<sup>58</sup> Perhaps as a result of that friendship, Lester Levy was more Zionist than his forebears. Like his parents and his uncle Julius, Lester Levy volunteered time to the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he served on the board. Unlike them, he also served on the board of the American Friends of Hebrew University.<sup>59</sup>

Although the Levys did not embrace Zionism prior to World War II, they actively supported efforts to aid German refugees arriving in Baltimore. Eleanor Kohn Levy and her brother, department store executive Martin B. Kohn, were both deeply involved.<sup>60</sup> Martin Kohn organized the Jewish Welfare Fund to channel help overseas. From 1943 to 1945, "the most heartbreaking years of that decade," with "supreme faith and courage," Kohn served as president of Baltimore's Jewish Welfare Fund, an organization he had founded to channel help overseas. He continued on the board through the years of immigration to Palestine and the rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948.<sup>61</sup>

Chizuk Amuno, too, worked to support the refugees, welcoming refugee children for free as long as space permitted. During the High Holy Day services of 1938 "several additional rows of seats were placed in the synagogue to accommodate the needs of the refugees." Although the congregation's board by then disapproved of religious services with German overtones, they did permit Rabbi Adolph Coblenz to deliver lectures in German, the announcements of which were made in the *Jewish Times*. These well-attended lectures continued for several years.<sup>62</sup>

Despite its affiliation with the United Synagogue of America, by 1947 Chizuk Amuno was one of only four (of approximately four hundred) similarly affiliated congregations that maintained separate seating for men and women, the "most commonly

accepted yardstick for differentiating Conservatism from Orthodoxy."<sup>63</sup> The founding that year of Baltimore's Beth El as a Conservative congregation with mixed seating that immediately affiliated with the United Synagogue of America spurred Chizuk Amuno to consider following suit, a major change from its seventy-five years as a traditional congregation. Although Chizuk Amuno had been intimately involved with the Conservative movement since the movement's inception, the congregation advertised itself as Orthodox, even as its board repeatedly rebuffed invitations from the Council of Orthodox Rabbis to join that association.

When a formal discussion of mixed or family seating was held, Beatrice Stern Levy and Isaac Potts (who married Julia Friedenwald Strauss after each had been widowed) spoke for the majority in favor of the change, which was ratified by a vote of 284 to 20. Beatrice Stern Levy "penned her own thought in a convincing argument and rose in the midst of the congregation to express her view urging that mixed pews shall henceforth be allowed."<sup>64</sup> According to Chizuk Amuno's Rabbi Israel M. Goldman, "[h]er presence and her message helped the congregation make this important step forward."<sup>65</sup> Her role was critical; she "helped to weight the sentiments of the members of the congregation" in what was called the "most acrimonious dispute in the history of the Congregation."<sup>66</sup> In light of the change, the congregation's board removed Chizuk Amuno from Orthodox listings and relocated it under the heading "Conservative." Liturgical changes soon followed. In 1949, nearly eighty years after the founding of Chizuk Amuno as a protest against the mixed choir at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, a mixed choir was begun at Chizuk Amuno. Three years later, bat mitzvah for girls were approved.<sup>67</sup>

#### *The Strausses and Shearith Israel*

Eleanor Kohn Levy's parents, Benno Kohn and Clara Strauss, were an extreme "intermarriage." Her father was a Reform Jew whose family affiliated at Har Sinai Congregation, in 1842, the year of its founding. Har Sinai is the oldest Reform congregation

in the United States that was founded as Reform and where, for a short time, Sabbath (or weekly) services were held on Sundays, similar to Philadelphia's Keneseth Israel.<sup>68</sup> His parents, Bernhard Kohn and Mathilde Lauer, emigrated from the German states and remained in touch with family there.<sup>69</sup> Less is known about this family than the others in this study. Mathilde Lauer Kohn was institutionalized at the Mt. Hope asylum, a fact withheld from her grandchildren who thought she was dead.<sup>70</sup>

Clara Strauss was a daughter of Moses and Caroline Strauss. Together with his Württemberg-born younger brothers, Abraham and Louis, Moses Strauss founded Strauss Brothers, an importing and jobbing dry goods firm, in Baltimore in 1855. Over the decades, the business grew from a humble enterprise into "one of the most ample stocks of dry goods to be found in Baltimore." By 1910, the firm occupied "two magnificent warehouses at the northwestern corner of Lombard and Paca Streets."<sup>71</sup> Strauss Brothers sent traveling salesmen out throughout the south and southwest. In the second generation, six sons of the three founders took over the business.

The Strauss family was "very religious—orthodox and observant." A true indicator of their level of observance is the fact that Strauss Brothers was "one of the few business houses that remained closed on Saturdays." The sabbatarian closing of the business made employment there attractive to other observant Jews like Louis Levin who were unwilling to desecrate the Sabbath.<sup>72</sup>

In 1879, Moses Strauss helped found Shearith Israel, the last of the six Baltimore German Jewish congregations, from the merger of two smaller congregations with the belief that "forming a stronger body . . . would be more able to resist the influences of Reform." Moses Strauss was the first president of the congregation, serving twenty-six years until his death in 1905.<sup>73</sup> During Strauss's tenure, Shearith Israel called the Zionist Schepsel Schaffer from Germany to be the congregation's first rabbi.<sup>74</sup> He arrived in 1893.

Louis Strauss's son, Emanuel, gained notoriety because of what he did for love. Like his male cousins, in the last decades of

*Clara Strauss Kohn and her siblings, c. 1890.*  
 (L to R) Meyer Strauss, Katy Strauss (Miller),  
 Jane (Jennie) Strauss (Heineman), Sophie Strauss (Friedman),  
 Clara Strauss (Kohn), Laser Strauss, Theresa Strauss (Hutzler).  
 (Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #2002.79.284.)

the nineteenth century, Emanuel was learning to take over the reigns of the family business. There he met Lillie Williams who was in the firm's employ. The two fell in love—"a case of love at first sight." Their union was complicated by religious difference. She was a Methodist; he "belonged to one of the strictest of the orthodox [Jewish] families." The couple was not deterred:

[T]he young lady entered upon a long probation to become a convert to the Isrealitish [*sic*] religion. She studied Hebrew for six months. After the usual demands "The House of Judgment" admitted her to the faith. She then underwent the ceremony of

passing through the "Miboah" [*mikvah*] or bath, and her name was changed from Lillie to Rebecca. Then they were secretly married.<sup>75</sup>

The couple finally announced their union in early April 1890. The families were not happy; indeed their parents "refused their blessings." Still Lillie/Rebecca and Emanuel soldiered on. They went on a bridal tour, arriving in Chicago, a fact known because their marriage was so noteworthy that the story was picked up by the *New York Times* in an article titled "Became a Hebrew for Love." The article noted that "[t]he Hebrew circles of this city are considerably agitated by the announcement of the marriage of Emanuel Strauss and Miss Williams." So unusual was this kind of intermarriage that the *Times* concluded: "It is the first case of its kind ever known in Baltimore."<sup>76</sup>

While Emanuel's intermarriage was notable nationally, other "intermarriages" also occurred in the Strauss family. After two of Abraham Strauss's children married Jewish but nonobservant spouses, parental blessing for a marriage became dependent "on the groom's or bride's agreement to observe" the rules of traditional Judaism.<sup>77</sup>

Moses and Caroline Strauss had six children: Sophie, Katy, Jennie, Theresa, Clara, and Meyer.<sup>78</sup> Although the daughters married Jews, not a single one married an observant man. In contrast, Meyer married the very observant Julia Friedenwald, the daughter of Harry and Birdie Friedenwald and granddaughter of Aaron Friedenwald, founders of Chizuk Amuno and major Baltimore Zionists. Despite the fact that the Strauss girls married less observant men, all but Theresa (who married Louis Hutzler and embraced Reform practice) "maintained orthodox households, more or less, until they died."<sup>79</sup> Moses Strauss, meanwhile, was devoted to Shearith Israel. There was "no sacrifice that it demanded of him which he did not willingly make."<sup>80</sup> Each morning and evening he attended services. He gave to "all the communal charities" and he answered the "many private calls [for money] that were constantly made upon him."<sup>81</sup> Strauss witnessed the congregation's relocation to McCulloh Street near Bloom Street in 1903. Shearith Israel was the last of the city's five extant German

*Shearith Israel on McCulloh & Bloom streets, Baltimore, 1969.*

*(Photograph by Milton Alpert, Courtesy of Milton Alpert, 1986, #1986.42.3.5.)*

synagogues to relocate to the Eutaw Place neighborhood. The new building featured a *mikvah* and was part of a major demographic shift in which the new synagogues were “stately stone structures intended to be permanent fixtures in the new neighborhood.” Together, the five synagogues (including Shearith Israel and Chizuk Amuno) marked Eutaw Place as a Jewish neighborhood.<sup>82</sup>

Shearith Israel remained central throughout Clara Strauss Kohn’s life, and she did not assume her husband’s religious identity as Beatrice Stern Levy had done. Instead Benno Kohn ratcheted up his religious involvement by embracing traditional Judaism. After his death, a commentator proclaimed: “His home exhaled a Jewish spirit that gained its finest beauty from the manner in which he yielded to and assisted the devout wife and mother in maintaining the religious spirit she desired.”<sup>83</sup> Clara Strauss Kohn was Orthodox when she married Benno Kohn and

“persisted in her observance.” With her husband’s “consent and support,” Clara “maintained a kosher house . . . observed the Sabbath, ate kosher outside as well as inside.” Clara and Benno Kohn’s children, Martin, Bernard, Eleanor, and Carrie, were raised “orthodox and observant.”<sup>84</sup>

In 1909, the Kohn family moved to Mount Washington, a fashionable railroad suburb then outside the city limits. They were true Jewish pioneers in an area that was then bereft of any Jewish institutional life. To attend worship services, Clara walked four miles each way to Shearith Israel downtown. In 1924 Shearith Israel made plans to open a satellite site at Glen and Park Heights avenues. Delighted that the new facility halved her weekly walk to Sabbath services, Clara Strauss Kohn shifted her attention there; “in her white dress, she sat in the front row upstairs.”<sup>85</sup>

By opening a branch at Glen and Park Heights avenues, Shearith Israel became the first (and for years, only) congregation to fill the void of organized Jewish life in the new northwest suburbs. That location became the Sabbath worship place of choice for increasing numbers of traditional Jews (including Chizuk Amuno stalwart Lester Levy) moving to northwest Baltimore. An early-1920s congregational document explains Shearith Israel’s intentions in opening its new building. Like many other congregations confronted by the realization that growing numbers of their congregants were moving to new streetcar suburbs, Shearith Israel considered a move to Forest Park. Unlike the rest, however, it decided on Upper Park Heights. By opening the new branch while continuing to operate the Eutaw Place building, Shearith Israel’s leadership determined that those who remained in town would “have the use and benefit of the Synagogue as heretofore.”<sup>86</sup> For those moving to the suburbs, the congregation wanted to

provide a house of worship for the number of loyal members and attendants (though [the latter were] not members but just as well appreciated) who are about to remove in the near future, and who deeply regret to sever their relations with the Congregation, and to whom, by the way, the Congregation owes something for their loyalty. These men may before long prove

the pioneers of a great Jewish development and may even prepare all religious comforts for many of us who may follow them.<sup>87</sup>

In 1924, the congregation began holding services in the new neighborhood.<sup>88</sup> Initially Sabbath services were held at a congregant's home, but growing attendance necessitated the temporary use of a new, vacant cottage for the holidays in the autumn.<sup>89</sup> Not only did Shearith Israel want to accommodate its own suburban members, it also wanted to provide an antidote to what it considered negative tendencies in the area:

The locality in question, while rapidly growing almost entirely Jewish, unfortunately, possesses rather little Jewishness and whatever little is being done is in that direction of the modern kind, in which the proportion of Jewishness about equals the percentage of "kick" permitted under the Volsted laws. But this unfortunate condition is absolutely the result of ignorance and could be overcome by enlightenment, and therefore it is the duty of the Shearith Israel, the leader and example of Judaism, to place itself in the midst of the dark ignorance and banish it by the light of the Torah. The Shearith Israel should occupy the position of the lighthouse on the ocean, throwing out in the darkness of night brilliant lights, indicating to the sailing vessels the danger points and guiding them on safe lines.<sup>90</sup>

Given the Jewish migration to the neighborhood, "the entire structure will satisfy the increasingly large community which has been moving to the Park Heights Section."<sup>91</sup> It was the goal of the congregation that the "young branch" it planted "in the desert" would "grow into a vineyard and how appropriately will apply the words of the prophet, 'like grapes in the wilderness have I found Israel.'" <sup>92</sup>

Plans for the new stone building ("one of the simplest of structures, but . . . in delightful harmony with the surrounding country") included a "Talmud Torah and Community Center," from which "the blazing lights of the Torah will guide the young by affording them religious and educational training as well as social and modern activities." It featured "extremely commodious" school rooms to facilitate a Hebrew School with "attractive

playgrounds” on the large adjacent lot. To accommodate women, a meeting room was constructed, and an Assembly Hall was designed to serve as a “Jewish Centre.” Smith and May designed the building and Thomas W. Hicks and Sons built it.<sup>93</sup>

Shearith Israel’s building decision is consistent with the popular synagogue-center movement that, by 1925, had “become the leading trend in modern Jewish life.” The synagogue-center, “originally and quintessentially” American, was “the first synagogue type without precedent in the European past.” Shearith Israel’s goal, however, was “not modern Judaism (the danger point of our existence) but Judaized modernism.”<sup>94</sup>

#### *Traditional Jews and Suburbanization*

Lester Levy married Eleanor Kohn in 1922. Unlike their own parents, both sets of which featured one traditional Jew and one Reform Jew, in Lester and Eleanor’s case the bride and groom both entered marriage as traditional Jews. Their issue was synagogue affiliation. Lester’s family had long been members of Chizuk Amuno. Eleanor descended from the founder of Shearith Israel, where she had been raised. As traditional Jews, they observed the Sabbath and kept a kosher home. They maintained kashrut both in their home and, like their traditional forebears, outside of it as well. On their lengthy European honeymoon, Eleanor wrote to her parents that in Rome they “tried a good Kosher restaurant for lunch. Meat tasted quite good for a change and the food *looked* clean.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite having witnessed her father, Benno Kohn (the Reform Har Sinai congregant), adapt to and embrace her mother’s Orthodox religious traditions through their long affiliation at Shearith Israel, Eleanor Kohn Levy claimed that in religious affairs, “a wife has to cling to her husband.” Thus, Eleanor “went to the synagogue that Lester attended.”<sup>96</sup> Here, though, there is irony. For the first two years of their marriage, Eleanor and Lester lived in a fashionable apartment near Druid Hill Park. Like the Levy forebears, Eleanor and Lester did, in fact, attend Chizuk Amuno. Then, expecting their first child, the Levys relocated to a rental house in Mount Washington, the railroad suburb to which

Eleanor's parents had moved fifteen years earlier. Once there, attending Chizuk Amuno became difficult.

Expanding residential zones and synagogue relocation altered the Levys' relationship to Chizuk Amuno. When Lester and Eleanor Levy moved to Mount Washington, they moved to an area that was largely bereft of any formal Jewish communal life. With the opening of the Glen Avenue branch of Shearith Israel in 1925, Lester began a decades-long tradition of worshipping there on Saturday mornings while retaining his membership at Chizuk Amuno, where he not only had deep and abiding family ties, but also a full membership. Shearith Israel allowed those who did not fully observe the Sabbath to be seat holders but not full members. Although Lester was Sabbath observant, the fact that his straw hat business operated on Saturday disqualified him as a Sabbath observer in the eyes of Shearith Israel and thus eliminated the possibility of his election to full membership. Lester Levy was not alone in that exclusion. It affected his cousin and business partner, Leslie Moses, and his brother-in-law, Martin Kohn, whose department store, Hochschild Kohn, was also open on Saturdays.<sup>97</sup> Thus Lester Levy publicly promoted himself as a "devoted member of Chizuk Amuno Congregation."<sup>98</sup> In 1946, on the occasion of Chizuk Amuno's seventy-fifth anniversary, Lester Levy acted as toastmaster.<sup>99</sup>

Although the Levys did, in fact, maintain their affiliation at Chizuk Amuno, they attended Shearith Israel at Glen Avenue weekly until Chizuk Amuno finally began holding worship services in Pikesville during the 1950s, in anticipation of the congregation's relocation to nearby Stevenson in 1962.<sup>100</sup> A cousin remembered the role that Shearith Israel played for the Levy-Kohn family. "It was very reassuring to peer down from the balcony at Shearith Israel and see [Lester] in the bunch below with Pop [Leslie Moses] and Herbert [Moses] and to look forward to the walk back up Park Heights Avenue."<sup>101</sup> Leslie Moses's Sabbath observance enhanced his relationship with his children. His daughter, Amelia, recalls, "we benefited enormously from the fact that Pop so meticulously kept Sabbath and the Jewish holidays . . . . Whereas other fathers worked on Saturdays or were on

*Hochschild Kohn & Co. building, c. 1930.  
(Courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Maryland, #1987.226.009.)*

the golf course, Pop was with the family, at shul, at home, or at Gigi's [Alfred's mother, Rose Levy Moses]. He did not ride so we all walked together, a mile each way to Shearith Israel [Glen Avenue], a mile each way to Gigi's apartment."<sup>102</sup> Worship was one of the many ties that bound the family just as conversely family bound its members to religious affiliation and practice.

*Bucking the Trend: Traditional Jews of German Descent*

The Levys and the Strausses bucked the trend. Although they descended from German-speaking Jews, they did not embrace Reform.<sup>103</sup> Rather, they affirmed and reaffirmed their commitment to traditional Jewish practice through their synagogue involvement,

private religious practice, active support of traditional Jewish education, outreach to eastern European Orthodox immigrants, and leadership of the larger Jewish community. What makes their journey even more amazing is that it took place along a suburban trajectory. As these families and others like them moved into new suburbs, their congregations, institutional life, and traditions migrated with them. Not until after World War II does sociologist Marshall Sklare's correlation between suburbanization and Conservative Judaism hold true.

As early as the 1850s, one historian notes, "there were few who were willing or able to break completely with the past; there were fewer yet who were able to adhere to it."<sup>104</sup> The Levys and Strausses were part of that minority. Relatively early business successes may have made it a little easier for them to hold fast to traditional practices, something that was undoubtedly more complicated for rank and file workers in the face of American business life, which often required laboring on the Sabbath or peddling in places where kosher food was not available. Still, if economic success portended traditional religious practice, then the wealthiest Jews would have been the torchbearers for traditional Judaism, something that did not often happen. So, what we are left with is that Jews like the Levys and the Strausses remained steadfast in their commitment to traditional Judaism because it was at the core of who and what they were. This was a choice made by succeeding generations and, as Marsha Rozenblit notes, one available to those in Baltimore, a city whose congregations repeatedly split and relocated but whose Jews lived and worked together beyond parochialism.<sup>105</sup> The brand of traditionalism practiced by the Levys and the Strausses also shatters the neat categories of German versus eastern European, Uptown versus Downtown. These were Jews who, while traditional in their own practice, welcomed other Jews. The evidence of their openness may be glimpsed in a number of ways from the "intermarriages" of Clara Strauss and Benno Kohn and Beatrice Stern and William Levy to the commitments which the Levys, Kohns, and others made to pan-Jewish causes—local, national, and international organizations that served any Jew. Like much good history, their religious lives as

traditional Jews adds subtlety to the patterns of American Jewish history and calls into question the adequacy and veracity of usual divides and distinctions between immigrant waves.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Scholars of American Jewish history have delineated the differences between the relatively few earlier arriving German Jews and the many later arriving eastern European Jews, portraying the former as quickly acculturated, economically successful, and religiously reformed. By focusing on the nineteenth century “as a time when Jews in their new American home eagerly shed the restraints of the past and rushed into innovation of both public rites and private codes of behavior,” historians have “worked on the assumption that *reform* (lower case) meant the same as *Reform* (upper case) and that change involved an all-or-nothing formula.” That flawed interpretation goes on to argue that had it not been for the eastern European influx after 1880, “normative Judaism would have disappeared from America.” The historians’ point of view combined with their choice of subjects — “the lives of Reform rabbis, the rise of Reform congregations and Reform’s institutional triumphs” — help to skew our understanding of the religious experience of German Jewry in America, such that experiences of traditional Jews have been largely overlooked. Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore, 1992), 119, 123.

<sup>2</sup> When Isaac Mayer Wise visited Baltimore in 1864, there were four synagogues: Baltimore Hebrew, Hebrew Friendship (Oheb Israel), Har Sinai, and Oheb Shalom. By 1879, two more had been added: Chizuk Amuno and Shearith Israel, both of which were founded as traditional. Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia, 1971), 108–110.

<sup>3</sup> Of 533 Jewish congregations in existence in the United States in 1890, only 217 were Reform. The other 316 “adhered to the Orthodox service.” Many of the Orthodox congregations, however, were “small, poor, and transitory.” The Conservative movement only formally began with the creation of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1902 and the founding of United Synagogue of America in 1913. Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America: The Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present*, rev. ed (New York, 1981), 181–183.

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to find precise membership numbers for the six congregations in the period under study. Isaac Fein reports membership numbers for the 1860s (before the establishment of either Chizuk Amuno or Shearith Israel) as follows: Eden Street Shul, 180 members; Baltimore Hebrew, 150 members; Oheb Shalom, 105 members; Har Sinai, 85 members. They were likely larger than the traditional congregations. Fein says, “by 1880 the major congregations in the city were Reform. The newly established Chizuk Amuno . . . was the main Orthodox synagogue. There were several others, but only small ones.” In 1895, when Chizuk Amuno relocated uptown, its membership was 37. Fein, *Making of an*

*American Jewish Community*, 109–110, 117–118; Jan Bernhardt Schein, *On Three Pillars: The History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, 1871–1996* (Baltimore, 2000), 164.

<sup>5</sup> Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> The Sterns settled in Delaware before moving to Philadelphia.

<sup>7</sup> Two notable exceptions regarding the Baltimore scene are Marsha L. Rozenblit, “Choosing a Synagogue: The Social Composition of Two German Congregations in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore,” in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Hanover, NH, 1987); and Nancy J. Ordway, “A History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation: An American Synagogue,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Baltimore Hebrew University, 1997). Another good source is Murray Friedman, ed., *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America* (Philadelphia, 1993), which includes eleven articles focused largely on the experience of mostly German Jews who stayed traditional even as the Reform movement was taking hold in many American cities.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Moses, *In Memoriam: Michael Simon Levy and Betsy Levy* (Baltimore, 1912), 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Chizuk Amuno had twenty-three founding members of which four were Friedenwalds (Jonas, Joseph, Isaac, and Moses). Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 9, 19; Moses, *In Memoriam*, 20. Congregations like Chizuk Amuno were, according to historian Leon Jick, part of the “handful of congregations in America in which substantial reforms had *not* been introduced and in which an accelerating program of radical revision was *not* in process” by 1870 [emphasis in original]. In Baltimore two of five congregations were thus constituted. Leon Jick, “Jews in the Synagogue—Americans Everywhere: The German-Jewish Immigration and the Emergence of the American Jewish Pattern, 1820–1870,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1973), 259.

<sup>11</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–49 (quotations), 94.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>14</sup> David Kaufman, *Cornerstones of Community: The Historic Synagogues of Maryland, 1845–1945* (Baltimore, 1999), 31.

<sup>15</sup> Moses, *In Memoriam*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 94–95.

<sup>17</sup> Moses, *In Memoriam*, 20, 22; Isador Blum, *The Jews of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1910), 67.

<sup>18</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 95–96, 114 (first quotation); Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 120 (second quotation).

<sup>19</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 133, 164.

<sup>20</sup> Moses, *In Memoriam*, 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> The Sterns and the Levys were twice related. William Levy married Beatrice Stern, and William’s sister, Debbie, married Beatrice’s brother Eugene. Alfred H. Moses, “My Father,” in (Amalie Moses Kass, Alfred H. Moses, and Claire Moses Lovett), *Memoir of Leslie William Moses, 1887–1979* (Portland, ME, 1988), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Beatrice Stern was the daughter of Morris Stern, who was born in Bavaria in 1831 and came to the United States after the German revolution of 1848. An early Jew in the state of Delaware, Morris Stern moved to Philadelphia in 1855 and was a charter member of Keneseth Israel, a Reform congregation. He married New Yorker Matilda Bamberger in 1856. Together they had eight children. Son Horace Stern was active in Jewish affairs. His contacts with the rabbinical leaders of the Reform movement were his greatest pleasure. In 1889, protesting the institution of Sunday services, he left Keneseth Israel and joined Rodeph Shalom. Undated, unattributed article in Levy Collection, Box 23, File 770, The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore (hereafter JMM).

Beatrice Stern Levy's brother, Horace Stern, became the first Jewish member of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, presiding as chief justice from 1952 to 1957. He continued to be a member of Congregation Keneseth Israel and was active in the American Jewish Committee. Murray Friedman, ed. *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940* (Philadelphia, 1983), 299; Friedman, *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Hebrew Orphan Asylum to Mr. and Mrs. Levy, October 31, 1909, Levy Collection, JMM; Lester Stern Levy, "Memoirs," October 5, 1983, Levy Collection, MS 127, Box 4, JMM; Avi Y. Decter and Karen L. Falk, ed., *Of Hats and Harmonies: The Recollections of Baltimore's Lester S. Levy* (Baltimore, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> In 1983 Lester wrote of his father, "by today's standards he would more likely have been dubbed a conservative." Levy, "Memoirs."

<sup>27</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, p. 123.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

<sup>29</sup> *Forward*, August 2, 1931. Lee K. Frankel managed New York's United Hebrew Charities from 1899 to 1908. Frankel, a Philadelphia native, earned a Ph.D. in chemistry before turning his attention to public health and social welfare concerns. He then went on to an illustrious career with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and, until his death in 1931, directed the landmark health promotion and welfare work of that company. [http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:5\\_YW\\_9E2n1AJ:www.casact.org/pubs/proceed/proceed31/31239.pdf+%22lee+k.+frankel%22&hl=en&ie=UTF-8](http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:5_YW_9E2n1AJ:www.casact.org/pubs/proceed/proceed31/31239.pdf+%22lee+k.+frankel%22&hl=en&ie=UTF-8) (accessed by J. Elfenbein, July 14, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 129, 147

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>32</sup> Jewish Welfare Board, *Study of the Recreational, Social and Cultural Resources of the Jewish Community of Baltimore* (New York, June 1925), 38, Associated Collection, Box 10, 1995.98.50, JMM (hereafter cited as JWB, *Study*); Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 148. Milton Fleisher followed William Levy as president. As president of his family's successful Liberty Manufacturing Company (specializing in nightgowns), Fleisher served as congregation president for thirty-one years, earning him the title "Dean of Synagogue Presidents." Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 151-152.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> JWB, *Study*, 1. Leslie Moses's son, Alfred, also remembers Chizuk Amuno as "the family synagogue all of Dad's life. In the 1930s [before the Moseses moved to Bancroft Road in northwest Baltimore, in fall 1933] . . . there was an evident union between family and synagogue. Sitting in a long row to one side slightly elevated from the men's section were the 'aunts'—Gigi [Rose Levy Moses], her sisters and sisters-in-law joined by the second and third generation of family women. In an equally long row were the men of the family." Moses, "My Father," 54.

<sup>36</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 164, 170. The Great Depression caused the congregation more financial uncertainty. A call for cash in May 1932 motivated Ralph L. Ephraim to give \$100, but he was the only Levy to respond.

<sup>37</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, November 23, 1926.

<sup>38</sup> *The Bulletin*, published by Chizuk Amuno's Young Peoples League, 6:3 (November 26, 1926), JMM.

<sup>39</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 143–144, 161.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–167.

<sup>41</sup> Established in 1866, the Phoenix Club was "the meeting place of Baltimore's wealthy Jews." Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 159.

<sup>42</sup> Jewish Theological Seminary, Levy Collection, Box 21, File 709, 1, JMM.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Adler helped found and lead the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Historical Society, Jewish Publication Society, and Jewish Theological Seminary. Born in Arkansas in 1863, he moved to Philadelphia at age 6. He lived in Baltimore and Washington, DC, from 1883 to 1908. In Baltimore, he was a student at The Johns Hopkins University. In Washington, DC, he became assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. While in Baltimore he often visited the Friedenwalds, worshipping with them at Chizuk Amuno and eventually marrying Racie Friedenwald. He also spent a great deal of time at the home of Oheb Shalom's Rabbi Benjamin Szold. Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia, 1941); Ira Robinson, "Cyrus Adler, The Philadelphian," *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, ed., Friedman, 92–103.

<sup>45</sup> Jewish Theological Seminary, Levy Collection.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>48</sup> *Baltimore American*, August 21, 1908. Betsy Levy's will left a total of \$3,250 to non-family members. Of this amount, \$1,000 went to Federated Jewish Charities; \$500 each to the Hebrew Children's Shelter and Protective Association, the Hebrew Friendly Inn and Aged Home, and Chizuk Amuno; and \$250 each to the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society, Baltimore Talmud Torah Society, and the Jewish Maternity Association of Philadelphia. After her death, Betsy Levy's husband and sons memorialized her by paying for a new facility for the Hebrew Sheltering Association, the first Jewish association in the city to care for neglected and dependent children who might not be orphans. The new building was named the Betsy Levy Memorial Home. The cornerstone was laid June 1, 1909, and the opening ceremony was held January 9, 1910.

<sup>49</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 166; *Baltimore Sun*, December 15, 1926.

<sup>51</sup> *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, December 10, 1931.

<sup>52</sup> Beatrice Levy's reference to "Mothers in Israel" harks back to the Victorian era but her demand for voting rights and board representation places her in the twentieth century. Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 152-153.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

<sup>55</sup> Jewish Theological Seminary, Levy Collection.

<sup>56</sup> In the 1920s, Leslie Moses traveled to Egypt and Palestine. His experience persuaded him that "Jews and Arabs could live harmoniously together under the general protection of Great Britain and led him to oppose Zionist notions of a Jewish state until Hitlerism dispelled any illusions." He supported Hebrew University and Hadassah Hospital, but no explicitly Zionist organizations. In response to his wife's enthusiastic response to her own trip to Israel in the 1960s, Leslie Moses went to see for himself. Amalie Moses Kass, "Daddy," in *Memoir of Leslie William Moses*, 18-19.

<sup>57</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 124, 174-175. In addition to her commitment to Zionism, Strauss was also interested in Szold's plan to save the children of Nazi Germany. Within a year of their trip, Julia and her husband, Meyer Strauss, adopted two teenage brothers from Chemnitz, Germany, named Siegfried and Manfred. More than forty years later, Sigi Strauss became Chizuk Amuno's fifteenth president.

<sup>58</sup> Levy, "Memoirs."

<sup>59</sup> "In Memoriam: Lester S. Levy," Associated Jewish Charities advertisement, *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 22, 1989.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Kohn and his wife, Rosa Rosenthal, were first cousins on the Strauss side. Their grandfathers, Moses and Abraham Strauss, were brothers and partners in a successful dry goods business on Hopkins Place that burned in the fire of 1904 and was rebuilt. Their grandfathers were also founders of Shearith Israel.

<sup>61</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, The Associated, Memorial Tribute to Martin B. Kohn, January 28, 1992, Levy Collection, Box 26, File 866, JMM.

<sup>62</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 176.

<sup>63</sup> Marshall Sklare quoted in Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 205-208.

<sup>64</sup> Eulogy by Rabbi Israel M. Goldman, August 3, 1966.

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

<sup>66</sup> Chizuk Amuno Sisterhood newsletter, September 10, 1960, Levy Collection, MS 127, Box 3, Files 57 and 58; Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 205.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 212, 214, 234, 246.

<sup>68</sup> Eleanor Kohn Levy oral history, November 12, 1991, Associated Collection, Box 16, 1996.164, JMM; Martin Kohn, "Martin Kohn's Family Memories," distributed by Liz Moser, November 1992, Levy Collection, Box 26, File 783, JMM.

<sup>69</sup> Mathilde Lauer had a brother who remained in their German homeland with his two sons and a daughter. The daughter married a man whose last name was Baneman and had

five children. During the 1930s, the Kohns worked hard to bring the Baneman descendants to the United States, succeeding in helping seventeen of them. "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

<sup>70</sup> Her existence became known to her grandchildren only after Benno Kohn's death, when Frank Schuman, the family's chauffeur, told Martin Kohn that for years he had driven his father and uncle on alternate weeks to visit her. "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

<sup>71</sup> Full page advertisement in Blum, *Jews of Baltimore*, 244.

<sup>72</sup> Louis Levin worked as a bookkeeper at Strauss Brothers in the 1880s and 1890s. Although "the outrageously low" pay made him feel "trapped at Strauss's," he stayed on to become head bookkeeper and credit man because the business closed on the Sabbath. "Louis's parents had instilled in him a reverence for the Day of Rest" Alexandra Lee Levin, *Dare to be Different: A Biography of Louis H. Levin of Baltimore, A Pioneer in Jewish Social Service* (New York, 1972), 5, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Rev. Dr. S. Schaffer, "Sketch of the History of the Shearith Israel Congregation," in Blum, *Jews of Baltimore*, 62.

<sup>74</sup> Rabbi Schaffer's son married a Hutzler. Alfred Moses telephone interview by author, July 2004. In 1897, Schaffer was the only Baltimore delegate to the first Zionist Congress in Basel. His reports about the gathering attracted a great deal of notice contributing to Baltimore's Zion Association growing to be America's largest local Zionist group. Fein, *Making of an American Jewish Community*, 195.

<sup>75</sup> *New York Times*, April 14, 1890.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Another son, Laser (probably named for Eleazer, a brother of Moses) died at age twenty.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> *Jewish Comment*, (1905?), Moses Strauss biographical file, JMM.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Arnold Blumberg, "A History of Congregation Shearith Israel on the Threshold of a Century," (1969?), vertical file, JMM; *Notes on Cornerstones of Community: The Historic Synagogues of Maryland, 1845-1945* (Baltimore, 1999), 31 (quotation).

<sup>83</sup> Edward L. Israel, *Benno Kohn* (n.p., 1929), Levy Collection, Box 25, File 828, JMM.

<sup>84</sup> "Martin Kohn's Family Memories."

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Among Shearith Israel members who, in 1924, had recently moved near the synagogue were the families of Mendel Waxman, J. Morganstein, Getzel Levinson, Nathan Adler, and Oscar Strauss. "Shearith Israel Congregation Suburban Synagogue," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 5, 1924.

<sup>89</sup> Blumberg, "History of Congregation Shearith Israel," 8; "Shearith Israel Congregation Suburban Synagogue."

<sup>90</sup> "The Volsted laws" is a reference to the national prohibition laws passed in 1919. Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

<sup>91</sup> "Shearith Israel Congregation Suburban Synagogue"; "Dedication of New Synagogue," *Baltimore Jewish Times*, July 24, 1925.

<sup>92</sup> Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue Center" in American Jewish History*, (Hanover, NH, 1999), 2; Unattributed, undated (c. 1923) document in JMM's Shearith Israel file, 5-6.

<sup>95</sup> Eleanor Kohn Levy to her parents, December 24, 1922, Levy Collection, JMM.

<sup>96</sup> Eleanor Kohn Levy oral history, November 12, 1991, Associated Collection, Box 16, 1996.164, JMM.

<sup>97</sup> Blumberg, "History of Congregation Shearith Israel."

<sup>98</sup> "In Memoriam: Lester S. Levy." In 1930, on the occasion of the birth of his third child, Ruth Mathilde, Lester Levy gave a \$500 bond to Chizuk Amuno. There is no evidence to suggest he did anything at Shearith Israel though he had been worshipping there for five years. Chizuk Amuno to Lester S. Levy, August 3, 1930, Levy Collection, JMM.

<sup>99</sup> Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 204.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 374.

<sup>101</sup> Amalie M. Kass to Eleanor Levy, September 20, 1989, Levy Collection, JMM.

Another wrinkle involving Chizuk Amuno and the Levy family occurred in the years after 1961, when the congregation moved most of its activities to Stevenson from Eutaw Place. In the post World War II period, with suburbanization sweeping the nation, the board of Chizuk Amuno began to explore its options. In 1952 the board presented its first plan for relocation out of the city. Later that year suburban services were held under the congregation's auspices at the Pikesville Armory. Meanwhile, the congregation worked with the University of Baltimore to lease space for religious school on Enslow Road in Mount Washington. In 1956 the groundbreaking for Chizuk Amuno's new suburban synagogue center in Stevenson was held. Julia Friedenwald Strauss, the only member of the Friedenwald family still involved with the congregation, participated. Chizuk Amuno opened in Stevenson in 1961. Beatrice Stern Levy kindled the Ner Tamid. Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 249, 250, 258, 268.

The Levys were loyal to the old building as well as to the congregation. Not surprisingly, then, when the independent congregation, Beth Am, was created in the former Chizuk Amuno building at Chauncey Avenue and Eutaw Place, members of the Levy family joined it, too. Several are Beth Am congregants today.

<sup>102</sup> Kass, "Daddy," 25.

<sup>103</sup> Leslie Moses's daughter remembers that her father "had no patience with those who watered down or denied their Judaism, being convinced non-Jews would respect those who were proud of themselves and their heritage." Kass, "Daddy," 30.

<sup>104</sup> Jick, "Jews in the Synagogue," 226.

<sup>105</sup> Rozenblit, "Choosing a Synagogue."