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Book Reviews

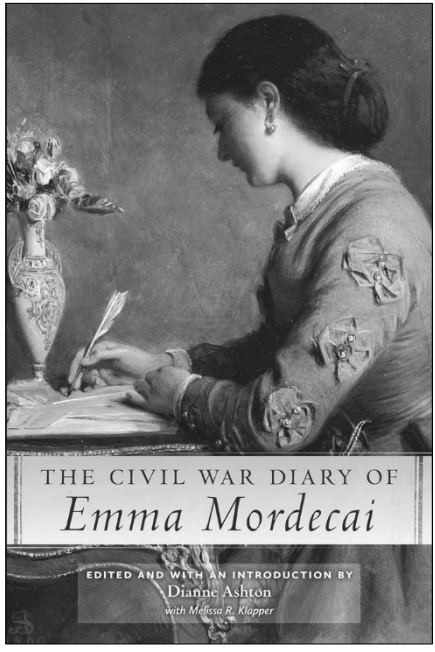
The Civil War Diary of Emma Mordecai. Edited by Dianne Ashton and Melissa R. Klapper. New York University Press, 2024. 222 pages.

Emma Mordecai's diary, written between April 1864 and May 1865, is a deeply personal and historically valuable account of the last year of the Civil War. A middle-aged Southern Jewish woman, Mordecai (pronounced Mor-de-KEY) was a staunch supporter of the Confederacy and a fervent believer in slavery as a benevolent institution. She viewed and described the war as a contest between the "noble, uncomplaining, all-enduring heroes" of the Confederate army and the ruthless invading Yankees, enemies who destroyed Southern homes, property, and "customs" (i.e. slavery) and left Southerners destitute and subjugated (105, 212).

American Jewish historian Dianne Ashton first discovered the wartime diary of Emma Mordecai in the late 1980s, when she and I were working on our coedited *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality* (1992). As one of Dianne's dissertation faculty advisors, I was impressed by her deep interest in and knowledge of Jewish women in the United States, including her plan to eventually write a book about educator Rebecca Gratz, which she did to critical acclaim in 1997. Our book, compiled and edited during the early years of Dianne's academic career, consisted of primary sources that we saw as expressions of Jewish women's spirituality. Given her scholarly interests, Dianne was already familiar and eager to work with texts written in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America including Emma Mordecai's diary. In keeping with the nature of our sourcebook, the two excerpts from the diary that Dianne chose to

include revealed Mordecai's religious observance and sense of Jewish identity during the years she wrote the diary.

Through the publication of the full diary (housed and digitized at the library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), readers learn that Mordecai's Jewish identity is one of several themes discussed in her writing. Dianne highlights this through the detailed, insightful introduction that she drafted before her untimely death in 2022, which was completed by American Jewish historian Melissa Klapper, her colleague at Rowan University. During the war, the Mordecai family were forced to leave their home in Richmond, Virginia, and Emma moved in with her sister-in-law Rosina (Rose), whose farm was five miles outside of Richmond. Emma and Rose were not particularly close, and since Rose was a Christian, Emma had to "modulate her [religious] behavior to preserve her welcome" and was unable to keep kosher or to affix a mezuzah to her bedroom door. Emma attended worship services in Richmond at Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and occasionally on Shabbat (43), but on most Saturday mornings, read from her prayer book and Bible in her room, using the diary as a "metaphorical home" where she could express her religious feelings and ease her great sense of displacement (21).



While home and displacement are central themes in Mordecai's diary, equally central is what would soon be known as the Lost Cause. Like its proponents, Mordecai firmly believed that the cause of the Confederacy was heroic, righteous, and more about states' rights and Northern economic aggression than slavery. Read today, Mordecai's diary is deeply troubling, as it is unabashedly racist and identifies enslaved people, including the Black men and women she owned, simply as "servants." I am grateful to Ashton and Klapper for the decision to

publish the diary in its entirety instead of omitting parts that are repugnant today. Had they done the latter, Mordecai would undoubtedly be a more sympathetic figure, yet the importance of her diary as an historical document would be minimized significantly.

Among many topics, Mordecai discusses Confederate nationalism, race relations, gendered roles within the home, and religion during war time. Especially valuable are her entries detailing the final months of the war, which include the constant sounds of gun and cannon fire. Mordecai notes not only Lincoln's assassination and the firing of minute-guns during his funeral, but also the burning and evacuation of Richmond. At Rose's farm, she encountered Black Union soldiers who stole some of her valuables, white "Yankees" who tried to take their fowl, and wounded Confederate soldiers who passed by as they made their way home. To Mordecai's great consternation, "servants" left and Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant, which she describes as "agony piled on agony" (198). Some of the activities that Mordecai discusses are women's sewing, knitting, making clothes for Confederate soldiers, bringing food to hospitals, giving the patients water, wrapping bandages, and raising money for military hospitals, all of which she saw as women's contribution to the Confederacy. She herself was a hospital volunteer, often staying all day to visit and care for the wounded. That Mordecai chose not to continue writing in her diary after the war's end is significant. As is, the diary chronicles a singular, eyewitness account of the last, chaotic year of the Civil War.

Ashton and Klapper's introduction enhances the diary. Eighty-three pages in length, it is approximately one third as long as the diary itself. The introduction offers biographical details about the life of Mordecai and her family and critically examines the diary's many themes and topics. While it helps readers pay attention to details that are easy to overlook, so much of the diary is quoted in the introduction that by the time I read the diary, not much seemed new or surprising. Perhaps the introduction could have been divided into two parts, with the biographical material included before the diary, and the critical evaluation offered after. Alternately, the editors might have considered annotating the diary, not line by line, but through introductions to each of its sections.

Regardless, *The Civil War Diary of Emma Mordecai* greatly adds to our understanding of Southern Jews who, like Mordecai, saw no contradiction in being a religious Jew and a slaveholder. Several nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century Southern Jewish women also wrote diaries or memoirs (as did some Jewish men), a few of which have been published. A contemporary of Mordecai's who also lived in Richmond during the Civil War, Phoebe Yates Levy Pember, had her *Reminiscences of A Southern Hospital, by Its Matron* published in 1879. More than a hundred years later, previously unpublished works such as Clara Solomon's *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861–1862* (1995), Helen Jacobs's *Heart of a Wife: The Diary of a Southern Jewish Woman* (1998), and Clara Lowenberg Moses's *Memoirs of a Southern Jewish Woman* (2000) also appeared in print. Mordecai's diary is a highly readable addition to this literature, illuminating a contentious, significant period in both Southern Jewish history and the history of the United States.

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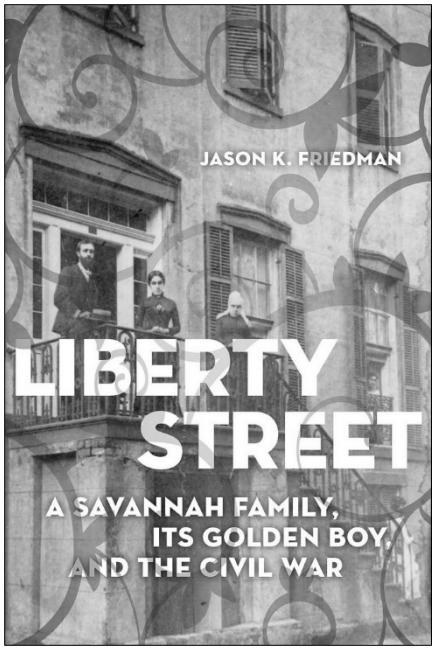
Liberty Street: A Savannah Family, Its Golden Boy, and the Civil War. By Jason K. Friedman. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2024. 270 pages.

Liberty Street is an elegantly written, engaging tale of one Jewish family in Savannah during the Civil War era. A combination of history, biography, and memoir, it is told by a Jewish man from Savannah who returned to the city with his husband after three decades in San Francisco. If nothing else, it is a wonderful counterpoint to Thomas Wolfe's famous claim, "You can't go home again." Jason Friedman not only went home but wrote a delightful book.

Friedman is not a historian, but he is a fine journalist and storyteller who did excellent research and could easily turn his book into an acceptable dissertation if he so desired. My biggest complaint about the book is that it lacks an index and citations, omissions that undermine its utility to readers and scholars. Since the University of South Carolina Press labeled and marketed this book as a "history," the publisher should have included an index and notes.

Liberty Street discusses an early and important Southern Jewish family. Its central figure is Solomon Cohen Jr., a wealthy, politically powerful



lawyer and businessman who lived in Savannah from the 1830s until his death during Reconstruction. Solomon's grandfather, London-born Moses Cohen, migrated to Charleston, where he died in 1763. His father, Solomon Cohen Sr., owned hundreds of slaves near Georgetown, South Carolina, setting Solomon Jr. on a road of slave owning and great wealth. In 1836, Solomon Cohen Jr. married Miriam Gratz Moses, the niece of Philadelphia's Jewish philanthropist Hyman Gratz and his sister Rebecca, the famous educator and social activist. In 1844, after several failed attempts, Miriam bore a son, Gratz Cohen, the first of their three children. Unlike his father, Solomon Jr. did not operate a plantation, but both he and his brother Octavus each owned twenty or more slaves, enough to call themselves "planters" if they had focused on agriculture.

Solomon Jr. was a major figure in Savannah and its Jewish community. He was a lawyer, landowner, real-estate developer, entrepreneur, and politician with business connections across the nation and beyond, even with the French branch of the Rothschild family. An "alderman, chairman of boards, administrator of estates, and agent of clients," Cohen served as secretary of the Bank of the State of Georgia and on Savannah's board of health (65). He was president of the Hebrew Benevolent Society and president of Congregation Mickve Israel twice, from 1856 to 1866 and from 1869 until his death in 1875.

Friedman gives a brief overview of Jewish slave ownership in the South, as well as New York rabbi Morris Raphall's rabbinical defense of it. Unfortunately, he does not consider the pushback against Raphall by Rabbi David Einhorn, who ironically left Baltimore on the eve of the Civil War for Philadelphia, the home of Cohen's wife. Friedman is shocked at the extent of Jewish slave owing, stating that "it was depressing news to

me that Jews enslaved other people . . . *Because we were slaves in Egypt*" (106). Simultaneously, he correctly observes that "Solomon Cohen, Savannah's largest Jewish enslaver, would have scoffed at my naivete" (106). Friedman's insight reflects the observation of Ohio's Senator Benjamin Wade, who described Senator Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana as "an Israelite with Egyptian principles." The same phrase surely applied to Cohen, the first Jew elected to the Georgia state senate.

Cohen was initially a lukewarm secessionist, probably because he realized that both disunion and a war might hurt his business interests. He advocated slavery and states' rights, however, and vigorously opposed Black rights until the day he died. Despite Lincoln's personal views that "if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong," the president had no ability to eliminate it from where it already existed, something Cohen probably understood. Slavery was protected by the Constitution, the Supreme Court, and a Senate majority of slaveowners and proslavery Northern "doughfaces." Some Southerners rejected secession, such as South Carolina's former attorney general, James L. Petigru, who remarked in 1860 that "South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum." But as the hotheads in South Carolina brought their state out of the Union, Solomon became an enthusiastic secessionist in Georgia and then a Confederate officeholder.

Secession led to a sad ending to Cohen's life. Solomon's pride and joy was his sixteen-year-old son Gratz, who was intellectually sensitive and physically weak, with a congenital disability (likely severely flat feet), which made it difficult for him to walk. Literate, numerate, and able to write well, Gratz initially served the Confederacy without a musket on a commander's staff, writing orders, managing supplies, and doing the many noncombatant roles necessary to keep an army in the field. The job fulfilled his desire to contribute to the war as a disabled soldier rather than being branded a shirker. Like his father, Gratz was an advocate of the South, slavery, and secession, but he expressed fascination and love for Louis, one of his father's enslaved workers, whom Gratz called his "ebony idol." Evidence for Friedman's belief that Gratz was gay is unclear, in part because Victorian-era language can often be confusing for modern readers. If Gratz did have erotic fantasies about Louis, he would have been like Thomas Jefferson, Vice President Richard M. Johnson, the Jewish Charlestonian Isaac Nunez Cardozo, and countless other Southern men who had

relationships with enslaved and free Blacks. Gratz's "love" for Louis did not lead to the enslaved man's freedom or save him from harsh punishment for a failed attempt to run away.

Eventually Gratz faced combat and was killed, probably by friendly fire, a fate partly a result of his politically powerful father's secessionist activism. While Gratz's death left his parents emotionally broken, Solomon Cohen Jr. remained committed to Southern nationalism and White supremacy. In 1865, he won election to the U.S. Congress along with other secessionists, including the former Confederate vice president, Alexander H. Stephens. Congress, quite properly, refused to seat these unreconstructed and unapologetic Confederates. After the failure to enter Congress, Solomon and Miriam went on an extended grand tour of Europe, grieving the loss of Gratz, their enslaved workers, and at least some of their White privilege. By that time, Miriam had rejected her roots in Pennsylvania, which, in 1780 had been the world's first jurisdiction to pass legislation to end slavery. She became an unrepentant secessionist who, like her husband, denounced the end of slavery and blamed the North for the death of her son. Miriam may have been transformed by her husband's wealth and life in the South, but not all migrants to the South reacted as she did. For example, the scholar Francis Lieber, a Jewish immigrant from Germany, taught in South Carolina for many decades but left slavery and states' rights behind in the late 1850s. He became an advisor to the Lincoln administration, writing the nation's Code of War, which made enslavement a war crime and remains a basis of international law.

While the Cohen family gradually moved away from their Jewish heritage, they retained Solomon's Southern and racist views as well as Gratz's emotional commitment to military adventure. Frank O'Driscoll "Monk" Hunter, Solomon's great-grandson, became an ace during World War I and a major general in the Army Air Corps in World War II. Hunter insisted on strict segregation in his command and refused to allow Black officers to use the officers' club on their base. He had more than 160 Black officers of the Tuskegee Airmen arrested for attempting to drink beer with their White comrades.

This book tells us much about nineteenth-century Southern Jewish family life and the transition from Orthodox to Reform observance, but above all, it relays the tragedy of a wealthy, powerful, arrogant Jewish leader who aggressively supported slavery, racism, and secession. In the

end, Solomon and Miriam, who became a born-again Southern nationalist and an advocate of slavery, sent their son off to die in spring 1865 because of their ideology, greed, and deeply held racial beliefs. When reading about Gratz's death, I kept thinking of the lines by Country Joe and the Fish, in their classic song, "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" (1965):

> Come on mothers throughout the land
> Pack your boys off to Vietnam
> Come on fathers don't hesitate
> Send your sons off before it's too late
> Be the first one on your block
> To have your boy come home in a box

Unfortunately, Gratz needlessly came home in a box just as the Civil War was ending. It is a sad and tragic story.

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Dynamite Nashville: Unmasking the FBI, the KKK, and the Bombers Beyond Their Control. By Betsy T. Phillips. Nashville: Third Man Books, 2024. 339 pages.

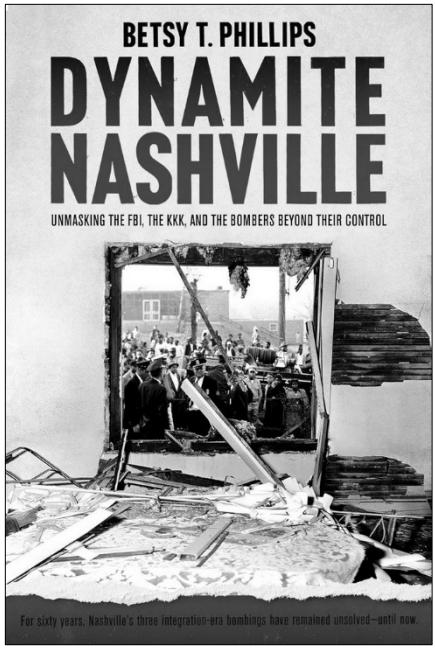
"Nashville Opens Inquiry Into Unsolved Bombings" ran the headline in the *New York Times* on July 28, 2024. On page twelve, Amanda Holpuch reported that the publication of *Dynamite Nashville* earlier that month spurred the reopening of three cold cases, which the city's police force vowed to investigate. In none of these instances was anyone killed. Yet "Nashville was the precursor to so much American tragedy in the 1960s," author Betsy T. Phillips asserts (244), where extremists, immune to arrest, learned to strike targets with impunity. This "book doesn't have all the answers," Mayor Freddie O'Connell acknowledged, "but it can be the beginning of new discovery and a new conversation."

Phillips began writing *Dynamite Nashville* in 2017, close to the sixtieth anniversary of the first of the three bombings. "My focus is small," she conceded (xxviii), and her aim is simple: who committed these crimes and why were they never solved? At Hattie Cotton Elementary School, the

blast crushed the walls and knocked out every window, but at least no children were injured. This school was targeted even though most of the pupils were white. The less posh neighborhoods in the city tended to be racially mixed, which meant that Black parents who wanted their children to attend classes with whites wanted to desegregate what in fact were their neighborhood schools. Phillips rightly notes, but does not emphasize, the moderation with which Tennessee confronted the crisis of civil rights after the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. That fall Nashville's Catholic schools became the first in the state to desegregate, and two years later, when senators representing the South flaunted a manifesto that defied the Court's unanimous "Black Monday" decision, both senators from Tennessee—Albert Gore, Sr. and Estes Kefauver—exempted themselves from such mischievous bravado. (Only one other senator from the former Confederacy refused to sign the Southern Manifesto, Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas.) Violence came early to Tennessee because its commitment to Jim Crow was evidently more hesitant than elsewhere.

In 1958 Nashville's Jewish Community Center was next to face the furies. Its youth basketball team had hosted a Black squad shortly before a bomb tore into the front entrance of the JCC building. The windows in nearby houses were blown off, although again no one was injured. This time the culprits could be identified, because an organization calling itself the Confederate Underground claimed credit and warned that Rabbi William Silverman's synagogue would be next. Nevertheless, in his sermon at Congregation Ohabai Sholom Silverman vowed that "we shall continue to consecrate ourselves to human rights and civil liberties—we shall, with God's help, continue to dedicate ourselves to the cause of freedom and justice for all the children of man" (140). Although he advocated integration, he avoided a volatile term like "civil rights," and Phillips suspects very few of its champions could have been found among his congregants. She states that "Southern segregationists were not uniformly anti-Jewish" (136), although she undoubtedly means "extremists" since some Jews could be—and were—segregationists.

The author is quite sure that J. B. Stoner, a cofounder of the National States Rights Party, orchestrated the bombing of the JCC. Raised in Tennessee and based in Georgia (where he passed the bar in 1951), Stoner was later convicted of blowing up a Black church in Birmingham. He was an



outside agitator and violent and repugnant enough to merit two chapters in Clive Webb's *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* (2010).

Councilman Z. Alexander Looby, an attorney, was next. He had filed a lawsuit against the Nashville school system, leading to its desegregation one grade at a time, beginning with the first grade in 1957. Born in the British West Indies, a graduate of Howard University and New York University Law School, Looby was not at home on April 19, 1960, when a bomb missed the window of his house, landing instead on the ground and exploding at the foundation. A neighbor's home was badly hit, and the windows of the Meharry Medical School across the street shattered.

"This violence has to have a pattern," Phillips insists (213), and in Chattanooga, where the Klan maintained close ties with its counterpart in Nashville, three bombings aimed at similar targets. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover reported to President Dwight D. Eisenhower that in 1957–58 more than ninety bombings or attempted bombings occurred in the South, of which at least sixty-nine were aimed at "Negroes" and at least eight targeted "Jewish religious and educational facilities" (110). Among them was a Jewish center—actually a Conservative synagogue—in Jacksonville, after the Confederate Underground made threatening phone calls. These acts of violence were timed in such a way as to suggest coordination. The day after the Jacksonville Jewish Center bombing, a bomb attempt took place at Temple Beth-El in Birmingham. The day of the JCC bombing in Nashville, an Orthodox synagogue in Miami (also named Temple Beth-El) was hit.

Why did the police fail to apprehend the dangerous bigots responsible for these bombings? The task was complicated by the commonplace

ease with which hardware stores in Nashville sold dynamite (at a mere quarter per stick). To discern the pattern of the terrorist crimes was made harder by the notorious factionalism of the third Klan. Its members tended to be schismatics who provided an excuse for the failure of investigators to discern coordination. The author of *Nashville Dynamite* emphatically blames the FBI for consistently failing to help the local police and believes that the FBI slow-walked or shut down the investigations to hide the identity of informants, a concern that the bureau also showed during its battles against communists. "No one knew just how involved the FBI's informants were in the crimes and no one wanted to risk the informants testifying under oath to that involvement," Phillips claims (237).

Her book is less a historical monograph than a police procedural and identifies one key suspect as Frank Houchin, a Klansman whose rap sheep included a string of robberies. *Nashville Dynamite* is written in a colloquial style, occasionally addressing the reader in the second person, and pays little attention to events beyond Nashville (except for Chattanooga). Readers who want to understand the context for the crimes of white supremacists in this era must continue to rely on Jack Nelson's *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (1993) and on Melissa Fay Greene's *The Temple Bombing* (1996), both of which deal with direct attacks on Southern Jewry. By pursuing the likely perpetrators in their sordid milieu of hate speech and hate crimes, Phillips emulates Webb's *Rabble Rousers* (though she fails to cite it). Her book reminds readers of the dangers that Blacks and Jews shared in the midcentury South, and the freshest material in *Nashville Dynamite* is the stench of official corruption. "Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown," private investigator J. J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson) is advised at the end of the film noir of that title. Don't try too hard to solve a crime. Too much complicity might be exposed that is best left concealed—and not only in Chinatown.

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Neither Fish nor Fowl: A Mercantile Jewish Family on the Rio Grande. By Morris S. Riskind. Edited by Bryan Edward Stone. Forward by Peter Riskind. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2024. 488 pages.

In *Neither Fish Nor Fowl*, Morris Riskind offers a deeply personal and historically rich portrait of life along the Texas-Mexico border. Part memoir, part historical study, the book paints a vivid picture of what it meant to grow up Jewish in Eagle Pass, a town perched precariously on the banks of the Rio Grande. Blending family memory with archival research, Riskind shows how questions of identity, belonging, and survival were never abstract concepts. They shaped everyday life in ways both subtle and profound.

Riskind's starting point is his childhood and family history. His relatives were part of a small group of Jewish merchants who established themselves in border towns in the early twentieth century, living as storekeepers, traders, and intermediaries between the predominantly Mexican population and the Anglo power structure that dominated the region. In Eagle Pass, Jewish families like the Riskinds not only built thriving businesses but also earned respect and assumed active roles in civic and social life. The town's political and social circles often welcomed Jewish residents, and Riskind served on the local school board. Rather than portraying the Jewish community as isolated, Riskind highlights the delicate balance his family and peers maintained, preserving their Jewish identity while becoming integral members of a diverse and evolving border society. His portrayal of this dynamic status—being proudly distinct and deeply embedded—gives the book emotional resonance and sharp historical insight.

The book's title—*Neither Fish nor Fowl*—captures this in-between status perfectly. Riskind uses it not just to describe his experience, but also to explore the broader condition of being Jewish in a place where racial, ethnic, and cultural categories were blurred but still deeply meaningful. He reminds readers that the US/Mexico borderlands were not a melting pot where differences disappeared, but rather a layered society where identities overlapped, conflicted, and constantly shifted depending on time, place, and circumstance.

His deep knowledge of his family's history and his blunt, unsentimental telling of it distinguishes Riskind's narrative. Drawing from

poignant primary sources, including letters from his maternal grandfather Chatzkel, his mother's youngest brother Isaac, and his mother's aunt Yehudith (none of whom survived the Holocaust), Riskind deftly weaves personal and global histories together. Particularly affecting are the accounts of his mother's desperate but unsuccessful attempts to persuade her relatives to immigrate to the United States before and during World War II. His historical method is careful but understated, allowing the raw human dimensions of memory to drive the narrative while anchoring them firmly within broader historical currents.

One of the most unusual and fascinating chapters recounts Riskind's stint as a farmer just outside Eagle Pass. Although brief, this experience offers a rare glimpse into an occupation uncommon for Jews at the time. Riskind explores his relationship to the land, the agricultural industry, and especially to the Mexican migrant workers (many of whom were undocumented), whom he employed. This section stands out for its frank discussion of labor, ethnicity, and power on the border, adding a critical layer to our understanding of Jewish life in rural settings.

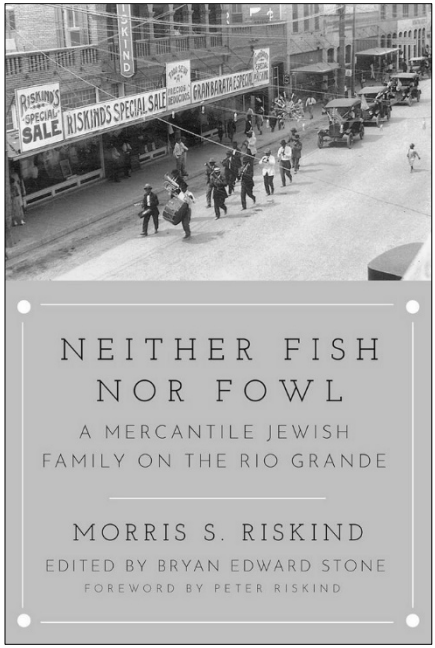
Riskind is at his most evocative when describing the physical remoteness and roughness of life on the border. Stories of driving muddy, unmarked roads, getting lost in the brush, and struggling through the sheer isolation of Eagle Pass remind readers how far removed this community was both geographically and psychologically from the centers of American Jewish life.

Riskind was a man deeply connected to his Judaism, but also pragmatic and modern in outlook. His Jewish identity was essential to him, yet it was not the only facet of his being. Throughout the memoir, Riskind's Jewishness is less about formal religious practice—Eagle Pass lacked formalized Jewish institutions—and more about communal bonds and cultural resilience. Maintaining Jewish identity was largely left to individual families, often reinforced through economic partnerships and social ties rather than through regimented religious observance.

The memoir also serves as an astute observation of changing business practices over the twentieth century. Riskind traces the evolution of his family's enterprise from the arrival of his father, Michael Riskind, in 1910, through the challenges of the Great Depression and World War II, and into his stewardship during the 1950s to 1980s. He vividly recalls a time when traveling salesmen came through Eagle Pass and were wined

and dined by his parents before a single piece of merchandise was even unloaded from their wagons. In contrast, post–World War II buying shifted to stressful, exhausting trips to Dallas, where competition for the best merchandise and deals was fierce. These personal recollections of the Riskind store mirror broader economic changes that Riskind witnessed throughout the region. He observed a parallel transformation in agricultural and cattle ranching life, where the rugged, independent men who had once worked the land gradually gave way to a new class of absentee ranchers, disconnected from both the people and the land, concerned only with collecting profits. Through these intertwined experiences, Riskind captures not just the evolution of his livelihood, but the wider shifts that reshaped rural commerce and community life along the Texas-Mexico border.

Bryan Edward Stone's careful editing of *Neither Fish nor Fowl* strengthens the book's historical impact. Stone supplements Riskind's personal memories with rich contextual material at the end of the volume, giving readers a fuller understanding of the Jewish border experience and anchoring Riskind's recollections in documented history. This dual structure of memory intertwined with scholarly clarity makes the book valuable to both general readers and historians.



Crucially, Riskind's memoir emphasizes that there was no singular Jewish border experience, just as there was no singular border experience at all. Jewish life in Eagle Pass was bound up with the wider community, including Mexican neighbors across the river in Piedras Negras. Morris and his wife, Ruth, both fluent Spanish speakers, often found more social and cultural comfort with Spanish-speaking communities than with the local Anglo elites. The sheer variety of people Riskind encountered—vaqueros, lawyers,

and eccentric figures like Wilbert Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, the future Texas governor who once lived above the Riskind store—brings Eagle Pass vividly to life.

Ultimately, *Neither Fish nor Fowl* succeeds because it captures the complicated, messy realities of life in the borderlands. Riskind does not offer neat answers about identity, loyalty, or belonging. Instead, he shows what it looked like—and more importantly, what it *felt* like—to live in the spaces between. His memoir is a reminder that history happens not only in grand cities or famous movements but in the small towns, dusty roads, and quiet, enduring relationships that knit people together across boundaries of culture, class, and nation.

For historians, memoirists, and general readers alike, *Neither Fish nor Fowl* is a richly textured, unforgettable portrait of a time, a place, and a people navigating the ever-shifting terrain of identity, community, and change along the Rio Grande.

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