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From the Editor . . .

This issue features contributors who work as academics in American studies and religion departments, an archaeologist, archivists, and a librarian/curator. Geographically the articles traverse the South.

In a revision of her featured presentation given at the society’s Washington, D.C., conference, Dianne Ashton traces the modern transformation of the celebration of Hanukkah largely to the South and to Cincinnati, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. She continues the story of Americanization to the present. From a broader perspective, Ashton provides a case study of evolving identity and acculturation.

Few works deal with Jewish economic history in the South but serendipity brought two complementary manuscripts on the subject to my desk. Using archival and archaeological evidence and tracing one family across generations, Mary Kwas illustrates the geographic mobility of nineteenth century Jews in the South, and how that factor, coupled with family ties, hard work, and luck, translated into economic success. Kwas also illustrates how Jews in small towns interacted with Jews in larger centers like New Orleans and how intermarriage and conversion could result from immersion in largely Protestant environments.

Stephen J. Whitfield takes Kwas’s economic story from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas to Jacksonville, Florida, and from the earlier to the late nineteenth century and through the twentieth. Economic conditions gradually changed and, with them, avenues of opportunity expanded. Still Jews tended to follow specific trajectories and fill particular niches. Whitfield offers case studies that should lead future researchers toward classification of typical roads to success. In so doing, he directly and indirectly modifies perhaps the best-known dictum relating to southern Jews and generational economic change.
The Leo Frank case has been analyzed repeatedly since the pencil factory manager was wrongfully accused and convicted of murdering a young employee and then lynched in 1915. Now each time a new bit of evidence or interpretation surfaces, one would think it should be the last. Nonetheless Stephen Goldfarb inadvertently unearthed corroboration for the statements provided two decades ago by a former office boy in the factory that further undermines the credibility of Jim Conley, the factory janitor who probably perpetrated Mary Phagan’s murder. Conley’s testimony led directly to Frank’s conviction.

One of the special aspects of the society’s conferences is the opportunity to interact and stimulate each other’s thinking. At the Atlanta conference last year Phyllis Leffler suggested that the journal add an exhibit review section. When I raised the idea with the editorial board, the consensus was to proceed with caution. Leffler graciously agreed to serve as section editor. This feature begins herein with reviews of exhibits in Austin, Baltimore, and New York.

In the last issue of the journal, primary sources appeared on two Jewish weddings. When polled this year, the editorial board unanimously approved the addition of a primary source section as a regular feature. Sandra Berman graciously agreed to edit this new undertaking. The first documents, analyzed and introduced by Berman and Hollace A. Weiner, relate to protests in Fort Worth and Atlanta to the Kishinev massacre of 1903.

The members of the editorial board provided new directions for the journal through sound counsel besides acting as peer reviewers. Also greatly appreciated are the efforts of outside peer reviewers Dianne Ashton, Sandra Berman, Canter Brown, Jr., Catherine Kahn, Kirsten Fermaglich, Chris Monaco, Marc Lee Raphael, Ellen Rafshoon, Leonard Rogoff, and Clive Webb.

Many thanks are due Rachel Heimovics Braun as she continues her role as the backbone of the journal. In his seamless transition to SJHS treasurer, Les Bergen follows Bernie Wax’s ways of greatly facilitating Rachel’s and my job with the most pleasant interaction. We are very grateful for the assistance provided by Scott Langston, Bryan Stone, Bernie Wax, and Hollace
Weiner as diligent proofreaders and the Gale, Littauer, and Soref foundations for extending their financial support in these trying economic times.

Mark K. Bauman
Quick to the Party:  
The Americanization of Hanukkah and Southern Jewry

by

Dianne Ashton*

Observers commonly note that Hanukkah attained an importance among American Jews that it did not achieve for others except, perhaps, pre-state Zionists. In 1960 Hebrew Union College rabbinics professor Jakob Petuchowski noted the holiday’s “magnification” for readers of Commentary magazine.¹ Three decades later, historians began to assess its transformation. Jonathan Sarna explained that the late nineteenth-century effort by tradition-minded young Jews to revitalize Judaism included a Hanukkah pageant at New York’s Academy of Music in 1879.² Jenna Weissman Joselit judged that Hanukkah’s “success was tied to commercialization and a search for religious parity” with Christmas.³ She described its development in the early decades of the twentieth century, when the Jewish press encouraged Jews to “add the exchange of presents to the roster of Chanukah minhagim.”⁴ Andrew Heinze discovered “presents” to be one of the first English words to filter into the vocabulary of Yiddish-speaking immigrants who used it at Hanukkah.⁵ Looking over the twentieth century, Sarna concluded that Jews’ sense of belonging in American culture became most unstable each December, when ubiquitous signs of Christmas blanketed the national culture. In response, Jews grasped their own December holiday, Hanukkah, and molded it to resemble Christmas.⁶

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Joselit, Heinze, and Sarna (in his early work) arrived at their conclusions by studying Jews living in the urban North, especially New York City and its environs, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But if we look to the South, we find earlier evidence of Hanukkah “presents.” Writing to his sweetheart from Petersburg, Virginia, in December 1864 while serving in the Army of Northern Virginia, Edwin Kursheedt recalled enjoying the “Hanucka lights” and “presents” during his childhood in the 1840s. He hoped to provide similar happy experiences for his own children someday.7 By broadening our view to include Jews living earlier in the nineteenth century, and in the South, the Midwest, and in small towns, we find trends that suggest a new value for the old holiday, one that emerged in a nationwide movement.

Hanukkah gifts marked only one change among many that reshaped the holiday in an American mold. In those changes, the historic commemoration of God’s miraculous rescue of ancient Jews from Syrian rule via the Maccabean revolt became a vehicle for affirming Judaism’s relevance in the modern West, for promoting Jewish domestic and communal good feeling, and for indulging Jewish children while interesting them in the synagogue. Surprisingly, Hanukkah developed a public face as Jews used the holiday to engage their non-Jewish neighbors in conversation about their own religious lives.

This Hanukkah transformation was an American version of an ancient practice. Jews have reshaped elements from the surrounding gentile culture to enhance their own since the biblical era. Elements of Genesis creation tales and stories of Noah and the flood draw upon the Sumerian creation story Enumah Elish. Much of the Yiddish literature produced in medieval Europe aimed to “produce a suitable offset, and a possible substitute for the alien ‘fictitious’ adventure stories which had found their way to the mass Jewish public,” explained Hebrew University literature professor Chone Shmeruk.8 Historian Paul Kriwaczek commented that “Yiddish civilisation was always receptive to inspiration from outside.” He pointed out that the Sefer Chassidim, or Book of the Pious, a Hebrew text that provided “the basis of much Yiddish religious observance,” judged that “Jews generally adopt the
behaviour of the gentiles among whom they live. For example, if in a certain locality the gentiles are heedful to refrain from adultery, the Jews who live there will be equally scrupulous in that regard.” By looking closely at the ways American Jews reshaped Hanukkah we can deepen our understanding of their religious experience in the United States and their relationship to the surrounding gentile society.

**Gentiles in Hanukkah’s Guides**

Judaism’s guides for Hanukkah’s observance give no hint that this holiday would lend itself to good interreligious relations. Hanukkah focuses Jews’ attention on a moment in their past when they believed God had rescued them from oppressive gentiles, hardly an enticement to engage with non-Jews. Talmud tractate *Shabbat* 21b says Hanukkah commemorates the drop of pure oil, which miraculously burned for eight days until priests could prepare more after the Maccabean revolt retook the Jerusalem Temple from Syria’s Antiochus IV in 165 BCE. To carry out the rite, Jews kindle and bless the candles of a *hanukiyah* for eight evenings beginning on the twenty-fifth of the Hebrew winter month of Kislev. The Talmudic traditions, codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* by Joseph Caro in the sixteenth century and, with the *Mappah* of Moses Isserles, widely consulted as the guide to Jewish practice by Jews in Europe, reiterated that the rite for Hanukkah honored the oil through which God conveyed to Jews that divine intervention had carried them to victory. The early rabbis wrote after the Temple had been destroyed by Romans in 70 CE and did not construct a Hanukkah rite that praised the Maccabees’ military accomplishment. They molded Hanukkah worship so that Jews would not admire any military power—not even that of the Maccabees. The prayers they wrote, which became normative for Hanukkah, thank God for delivering the strong into the hands of the weak. By not admiring even their own military successes, rabbis discouraged Jews from envying the more powerful armies of foreign nations. Instead, Hanukkah’s rite suggests that power is in God’s hands. In order for Jews to be powerful, they must move God to act on their behalf through their faith.
Early rites for Hanukkah mixed interaction with separation from gentile society. Because the lighted hanukiyah commemorates a miracle, the rabbis instructed Jews to place it where passersby could see it. However, in times of danger or persecution it could be placed so that only the household could view it.

Hanukkah songs discouraged conversation with non-Jews. By the sixteenth century, Ashkenazi Jews customarily sang a hymn called “Maoz Tsur,” sometimes translated as “Sheltering Rock” immediately after lighting the Hanukkah candles. Sung to the tune of an old German folk tune, “Maoz Tsur” probably was composed three centuries earlier. Its six verses praise God and offer thanks for saving Jews at various occasions in the past. The song’s first and last verses beg God to speedily restore Jews to their former land and so escape the perils of living among non-Jews.11

The word Hanukkah means “dedication.” Sephardim customarily sang Psalm 30 at Hanukkah, noted in the Bible as a song “for the dedication of the house.” Its four stanzas begin, “I extol you, O Lord, for you have lifted me up, and not let my enemies rejoice over me.” It thanks God for being merciful and promises to praise God forever.12 Those two song traditions endured for centuries and continue to be popular.

American Changes

Despite those Hanukkah cautions against trusting gentiles, in America, Jews enhanced Hanukkah in ways that reflected a more complex interaction with gentile society. First, American Jews explained Hanukkah’s meaning to themselves in ways that included ideas of both Christianity and American civic values. Those explanations lent themselves to interreligious conversations and sometimes grew out of them. Second, in addition to Hanukkah’s domestic ritual involving the blessing and lighting of candles, usually by adults, American Jews organized communal children’s festivals in the synagogue or in other Jewish public venues. Concern for Jewish children growing up in a non-Jewish culture lent Hanukkah greater significance. Third, for that reason also, Hanukkah became the Jewish alternative to the most widely
celebrated religious holiday in the country, Christmas. As Christmas grew into a national celebration in the late nineteenth century, Jews elaborated upon Hanukkah’s traditional customs in ways that reshaped it to conform to the national festival. Serious concerns underlay the festive atmosphere.

Initial Americanization

The earliest changes to Hanukkah occurred in 1842 in Charleston, South Carolina, home to a relatively large, historic, and thriving Jewish community. When Congregation K. K. Beth Elohim introduced a new hymnal that year, it included a new song for Hanukkah that voiced a different approach to the holiday. Largely written by Penina Moïse, the hymnal blended Jewish and American religious viewpoints. Moïse enjoyed a national reputation as a poet and supplemented her small income with her writings. Nine years before the hymnal’s completion, she had published a widely praised volume of her original poetry and Charleston called her its poet laureate. At the time she penned her Hanukkah song, her congregation had reunited after a breakaway group called the Reformed Society of Israelites demanded the worship service be made more meaningful to congregants who did not understand Hebrew. Moïse was part of that group. About fifteen years later the congregation absorbed the splinter group, although significant tensions remained. Not long thereafter, the synagogue burned down, and the congregation determined to take the radical step of installing an organ to augment its worship in its new building. A new songbook in English, largely Moïse’s work, suited the new situation.

Moïse wrote a Hanukkah song that spoke to her American experience and modified the holiday’s historic perspective in two ways. First, unlike both Psalm 30 and “Maoz Tsur,” her song is intended specifically for Hanukkah, suggesting that her congregation felt the need to sing something special for that holiday. Borrowing her Protestant neighbors’ terminology for religious songs, she titled her work “Hanucca Hymn.” Yet, its opening line affirms her belief in Judaism’s God. It begins by addressing God directly: “Great arbiter of human fate! Whose glory ne’er decays,
To Thee alone we dedicate, the song and soul of praise.” In those words Moïse counters the evangelical assertion that Jesus is the deity to whom prayers ought to be offered. The rest of the hymn supports her opening assertion by briefly recounting the Hanukkah story by which God provided the “power . . . Which . . . to triumph led.”

Second, Moïse’s hymn mines the Hanukkah story for ways to describe an individual’s spiritual crisis. When Antiochus installed Greek worship in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, he deprived Jews of the best place to obtain forgiveness for their sins. Moïse’s hymn imagines the personal anguish of an ancient Jew whose sacred Temple had been desecrated, asserting “in bitterness of soul they wept.” After describing the Temple restored and the “priest of God his robe resumed,” she concludes by using the defiled Temple as a metaphor for a contemporary “blemished heart” needing cleansing. “Oh! Thus shall mercy’s hand delight, To cleanse the blemished heart; Rekindle virtue’s waning light, And peace and truth impart,” she wrote. The hymn addresses the inner turmoil that results from a spiritual crisis. It asks not for an end to exile, as does “Maoz Tsur,” but for a comforting personal salvation that soothes religious anguish. Jews might sing it during synagogue worship or at home during candle-lighting ceremonies. Although Moïse, like most rabbis in her century and earlier, believed that God guided the Maccabean victory, her hymn turned the familiar story in a different direction. Throughout, she elaborates the personal anguish of ancient Jews whose sacred Temple had been desecrated, and she assures readers that just as God ultimately purified that Temple, He could lead nineteenth century Jews to their own pure spiritual lives. Her poem gave Hanukkah a place in the emerging religious style of American culture that was dominated by the language of individualism and personal conscience derived from both Protestantism and the Enlightenment. However, neither the Talmud nor the Shulchan Aruch identifies Hanukkah as a special occasion to ask for the forgiveness of sins. Why is Moïse focusing on sin?

Moïse’s hymn shares a particular religious discourse that reigned in her area of the United States. Born in 1797 she lived in a
Penina Moïse.
Oil on canvas, attributed to her nephew, Theodore Sidney Moïse, ca. 1840.
(Collection of Anita Moïse Rosefield Rosenberg,
Special Collections, College of Charleston Library.)
South dominated by a Protestantism that emphasized the anguish suffered by individuals who were unsure of Jesus’s mercy. A half century before her birth, religious revivals erupted among Christians living up and down the East Coast in towns from Massachusetts to Georgia. Evangelicals spilled into the South from the Mid-Atlantic region and began transforming the established Anglican order. In the South especially, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists challenged the religious status quo by reaching out to women, workers, and slaves. After the American Revolution dismantled legal and tax support for the Anglican (now called Episcopalian) Church, evangelicals expanded their influence. By the time Moïse wrote, southern female evangelicals, now reinvigorated by the Second Great Awakening, helped their family, friends, and neighbors to find salvation in Jesus. In Petersburg, Virginia, Ellen Mordecai accepted the “Beacon light of heaven, the star of Bethlehem” proffered by the Christian women around her. Her sister Rachel, living in Wilmington, North Carolina, converted to Christianity after such remonstrances by her friend, Lucy Ann Lippitt. The procedure would be the same: convince neighbors of their deep unhappiness and fear because their sins would provoke God’s vengeance, then offer salvation through accepting Christ as savior. Moïse’s hymn suggests that she had heard those arguments. She offered American Jews a way to speak of their own personal religious confusions or turmoil using Jewish images and provided a well-formed Jewish plea for God’s reassurance at a particular time in the Jewish religious calendar, whether speaking to God, to other Jews, or to Christian neighbors. She provided an individual voice for prayer and an expression of an inner need for God, and tied those elements to Hanukkah’s story through the hymn’s imagery. Finally, by not mentioning exile, Moïse suggests that Jews are satisfied with life in America, an idea found in letters written by American Jews since the mid-1700s, an idea very alive in Charleston. In 1841 Rev. Gustavus Poznanski famously dedicated Beth Elohim’s new building by stating that “this synagogue is our temple, this city our Jerusalem, and this happy land our Palestine.” Moïse’s hymn proved so popular that it was reprinted many times, and as
Penina Moïse’s Hanukkah hymn.
(Union Hymnal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York 1957.)
recently as 1959, in hymnals and other publications used by both Reform and Conservative Jews. With Moïse, American Jews began reshaping Hanukkah to fit their American experience.

Moïse never married, and although she led her congregation’s Sunday school for many years, she aimed her original hymn at an adult rather than a children’s audience. Others soon voiced their special concern for Jewish children at Hanukkah. Four years after Moïse published her hymn, Rabbi Max Lilienthal sent the text of the Hanukkah sermon that he had delivered before his three congregations in New York City to the congregation in Augusta, Georgia. Translated from German into English by his brother, Samuel Lilienthal, this sermon may have reached the southern congregation as part of the rabbi’s effort to use his authority as head of a newly organized beth din in New York to promote the growth of small congregations nationwide. Lilienthal addressed his audience primarily as Jewish parents urging them to do everything for the “holy heirloom,” that is, Judaism. “Fathers and elders,” he said, “show by your life how Jewish faith ennobles you. You mothers—good and pious—prove . . . by the education of your little ones, that you too belong to the pious mothers in Israel.”

Lilienthal stands out among his peers for his attention to the needs of Jewish children. His early career focused on Jewish education. Born in Munich in 1815, he earned both rabbinical ordination and a degree from the university there. In 1840, with those credentials in hand, Lilienthal became the first principal for the newly established Jewish school in Riga. That school instructed its pupils in secular knowledge as well as a somewhat liberal approach to Judaism. Czar Nicholas I endorsed the school, and his support made Riga’s Jews even more suspicious of it than they were after hearing of its modern curriculum. The school failed. After a few years, Lilienthal left Europe and came to the U.S. to serve as chief rabbi of three New York congregations who formed what they called a united community. He preached every Sabbath, ran a Jewish school, and, as the best-educated rabbi in the country, presided over a short-lived rabbinical court. His liberal views on religion soon stirred conflict in his congregations. There-
fore Lilienthal resigned and, with his wife, ran a successful Jewish boarding school instead. When his friend Isaac M. Wise urged Lilienthal to join him in Cincinnati, Ohio, and take over a more congenial congregation in the Midwest, the Lilienthals relocated after a decade in New York. In Cincinnati he served as congregational rabbi, educator, and author until his death in 1882. Lilienthal was among the first to argue that American Jews ought to make Hanukkah into a more important holiday.²¹

In the 1840s, when Lilienthal and Moïse penned their Hanukkah works, Christmas was a widely disputed custom and not yet the widespread festival with decorated trees, Santa, and gifts known today. The Calvinist tradition disdained those practices as pagan, too Anglican, and too Roman Catholic. In the early nineteenth century, the influential Connecticut Congregational minister Lyman Beecher preached against the “unscriptural practice of keeping Christmas,”²² although his children received Christmas gifts from their Episcopalian grandmother.²³ In those days, American fathers typically gave small gifts to their children on New Year’s Day, not Christmas.²⁴ But when five million German immigrants added to an already substantial German American population over the course of the nineteenth century, their customs reshaped American standards.²⁵ The country’s most popular women’s magazine, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, whose circulation reached 150,000 at midcentury, featured illustrations of Queen Victoria’s family Christmas tree and made the custom fashionable in the U.S.²⁶ After the Civil War, politicians and social critics called for domestic holidays that could unite the nation and talked of Christmas as a national holiday.²⁷ In the heavily German settlement of Cincinnati, Lilienthal noticed that many American Jews, themselves immigrants from Germanic lands, also enjoyed the German Christmas customs. Between 1820 and 1870, almost 150,000 Jews from central Europe came to the U.S., and by 1860 Cincinnati’s Jewish population reached ten thousand.²⁸ Most of its Jews hailed from Bavaria, Bohemia, and environs, and they stamped the Jewish community with Germanic color.²⁹ Nonetheless, rabbis and editors of the Jewish press viewed the German Christmas customs as too Christian for Jews.³⁰ By 1870 Lilienthal
and Wise addressed what they saw as a religious problem for Jewish children with a new Hanukkah activity held in a synagogue.

**Children and Hanukkah**

Lilienthal proposed a plan for a new sort of Hanukkah celebration that suited the Jewish community he served. He was the first American rabbi to preach in Christian pulpits and that experience gave him an idea for Hanukkah. Observing the ways Christian churches cultivated interest in religion in their youngsters, he noted that festivities, religious socials, and gifts seemed to keep Christian children “in happy expectation” and sparked their interest in their church and in religion. Many Christian Sunday schools customarily held special Christmas festivals featuring hymns, decorations, and pageants. By contrast, he asked Jews “what are we doing? Nothing!! . . . [The] only ceremony which really arouses youngsters’ interest is Confirmation . . . [We] must do something too, to enliven our children. Our children shall have a grand and glorious Chanukah festival nicer than any Christmas festival.”

*Florette Visanska’s kindergarten class at the Temple, Atlanta, Hanukkah 1914.*
(Courtesy of the Cuba Archives of the Breman Museum, Atlanta.)
By 1870 he and fellow Reform rabbi Isaac M. Wise established special Hanukkah celebrations in which Cincinnati’s Jewish children enjoyed a Hanukkah festival where singing and instrumental solos, dramatics, and refreshments framed a holiday candle lighting ceremony. He explained, “Chanukah is entirely neglected in so many of our Jewish families . . . [but] we [should] celebrate it publicly in . . . every congregation. . . . [The] children . . . shall have it as a day of rejoicing [in] our religion.”33 In Lilienthal’s own Jewish magazine designed for children and families, he assured readers that “Hanukkah can be celebrated to delight young and old.”

One anthropologist who studied ritual in its many forms noted that because ritual “is good for conveying a message as if it were unquestionable, it is often used to communicate those things which are most often in doubt.”34 Elaborating on the Hanukkah ritual seemed to Lilienthal the ideal way to impress young Jews with its importance and to show youngsters that Judaism holds special appeal for them. Within his congregation, Lilienthal organized a festival attended by more than two hundred children who answered to the holiday blessings in a chorus and enjoyed ice cream and other sweets, all in a room festively decorated by the “ladies of the congregation” who had worked “with a will.”

Lilienthal and Wise described the first celebrations to their readers, beginning with Wise’s account in 1870. Lilienthal’s magazine for children, The Hebrew Sabbath School Visitor, founded in 1874, described parallel Hanukkah festivities for his readers.35 Held in the vestry rooms of the Mound Street Temple, where he served, Lilienthal read a prayer and lighted the holiday candles before members of the school committee delivered speeches, the choir offered musical selections, and gifts were given to the teachers from the children. Then the children were treated to “eatables” and sent home before an entertainment planned by the women of the congregation for adults “lasted into the night.” Wise arranged for similar celebrations for the children of his congregation and Jewish school, the Talmud Yelodim Institute, to be held at his synagogue. There, Wise spoke to a large audience that included 250 students. The cantor lit the candles and led the singing,
children said blessings over the food, ate sugary treats, and everyone went home at 10 PM. These communal Hanukkah celebrations designed to entertain, symbolically instruct, and treat children presented the new Hanukkah customs to American Jews.

Lilienthal also wrote didactic fiction for Hanukkah. One such piece depicted teachers in a Sunday school joining with women of the congregation and the rabbi to create a grand festival for the congregation’s children. In case anyone missed the point, the story ended with Lilienthal’s advice: “The Chanukah festival, as proposed by the Visitor, should be celebrated in every congregation; and the officers of our Sabbath schools throughout the land should take good care that it might be omitted nowhere” because “the children like it.”

Lilienthal and Wise did not invent the new celebration out of whole cloth. Like much of nineteenth century Jewish innovation, it drew upon three sources: customs remembered from Europe, Jewish religion, and practices learned from Christians in America. The Hanukkah dance for adults that lasted far into the night echoed the socializing likely to occur among Ashkenazi Jews in Europe during Hanukkah. In European Jewish communities as distant as Alsace and the Lithuanian shtetl of Eishyshok, families and neighbors enjoyed social visits on Hanukkah evenings. Parents who brought their children to synagogue events in Cincinnati recognized the familiar candle-lighting ceremony, even if they heard little mention of miracles.

Lilienthal worked closely with Isaac M. Wise, a Bohemian immigrant who led the Reform movement in American Judaism in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of his biographers claimed that Wise thought Hanukkah should be dropped from the Jewish holiday calendar, but, in fact, Wise only objected to the holiday’s association with miracles. Wise touted a religion of reason and omitted mention of miracles from the Hanukkah blessings and prayers in the prayer book he compiled in 1857. He found great contemporary importance in Hanukkah and retained the candle blessings and other prayers. Wise believed Hanukkah’s importance lay in its commemoration of a momentous event in human history, as he described it, the defeat of
“Greek superstition by revealed religion.” The Maccabean victory was “armed by the will of Providence,” he said, and without that victory, there would have been no Jesus and no Mohammad. Moreover, Wise believed that children needed to be taught to admire great men of the past and often expressed his thoughts in Hanukkah editorials in his periodical. It was “a radical error in our American system of education . . . [that children are] not taught to imitate the sublime virtues of classic men. Their pantheon is limited to the nineteenth century and to the narrow spots on which the history of the United States was enacted.” By contrast, Wise reminded readers, “Every feast in Israel admonished you: Remember the days of old, understand the years of past generations.” The McGuffey Readers that became the standardized
reading text for most schools across the United States during the mid to late nineteenth century sought to instill morality while polishing language ability. Written by a professor of “mental and moral philosophy,” the books contained poetry and Bible quotations, but spent little if any time on history. Wise and Lilienthal extended the line of heroes important to America back in time to the Maccabees.

Yet, they wove ancient Jewish history into the American present. Taking their cue from the libretto of the popular 1747 oratorio *Judas Maccabeus* by George Frideric Handel, Wise and Lilienthal often wrote that the Maccabees fought for liberty and freedom of religion, two values unheard of in the ancient world. Lilienthal, for example, told readers of the children’s magazine that he edited that Matathias, father of Judah the Maccabee, began the revolt against Antiochus with the battle cry, “Give me Liberty or Give me death!” In 1860 Wise serialized his own original romantic popular history of the Maccabean revolt for thirty-nine weeks. Lilienthal then ran a children’s version of that story in his own magazine. These accounts cast the Maccabees as progenitors of the American Revolution and fighters for its ideals.

Jews young and old who read those original works and attended those Hanukkah festivals learned that their own Jewish holiday celebrated American civic values. Those works and activities erased the cultural and religious boundary between the Jewish past on the one hand and the linked American and Christian world views touted in the *McGuffey Readers* on the other. Thus, the new synagogue celebration did more than provide Jewish children with the same sort of happy festivity enjoyed by their Christian friends in December. In prayers and recitations their festival commemorated values shared with their fellow Americans. The celebration of Hanukkah emphasized that Judaism was a modern religion.

Because their new explanation of Hanukkah claimed Judaism supported American values, Hanukkah also could safely further religious piety among American Jews. As rabbis, Wise and Lilienthal aimed their Hanukkah festivals at invigorating Jewish religious life in the United States. Both men touted the festival in
their periodicals. “I would recommend to teachers in our Jewish Sabbath school, that they would try and make the feast of Chanukah . . . a feast of joy for our children to which both teachers and children would look forward with longing and delight,” Wise wrote in the *Israelite.* Lilyenthal addressed his Hanukkah advice directly to children. “And the *Visitor,* my young readers . . . hopes you will . . . forever be as true to your God and your religion as the [Maccabees].” A joyous synagogue-based festival also furthered the Reformers’ goal of enhancing the synagogue’s importance in Jewish religious life.

Although Reformers led the drive to make Hanukkah as festive for Jewish children as Christmas was for their Christian playmates, tradition-minded Jews quickly joined the effort. New York’s anti-Reform editor, Rabbi Samuel M. Isaacs, complained that many American Jews neglected to light the holiday candles. If Jews did not light Hanukkah candles at home, then he too agreed that a synagogue-based Hanukkah festival that enchanted children and that included the candle-lighting ceremony ought to be organized by rabbis. He printed Henrietta Szold’s brief essay urging Jews to reshape Hanukkah in just that way in his Jewish periodical, the *Jewish Messenger,* in 1879, only nine years after news of Cincinnati’s synagogue-based Hanukkah festivals first reached Jews elsewhere. Szold obtained her Jewish education from her father, a somewhat tradition-minded rabbi in Baltimore. She went on to become a leading figure in twentieth century Jewish life by founding Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization. She added her voice to those urging greater attention to Hanukkah. “Christmas truly fulfills its mission of bringing peace and good will to men. All this and more, Chanukah should be to us,” she wrote. Although Szold did not entirely approve of the Reformers’ approach to Judaism, she too felt that Hanukkah ought to be reshaped along the lines of contemporary Christmas festivities that created such good feelings among coreligionists.

Most of the young editors of a new, New York-based national weekly called the *American Hebrew* also opposed Reform, yet they, too, vigorously promoted communal Hanukkah festivals for Jewish children in the same way as Lilienthal and Wise, by
encouraging their readers to create those events for local young people. And like the Reform leaders, they printed reports of local Hanukkah festivals submitted by readers from around the country. “Practical illustrations such as these, of Israel’s feasts and festivals, are worth a thousand sermons,” the editors announced in 1880. “In our charitable institutions and in our Sunday Schools . . . the season has been marked by rejoicings and merrymakings.” In 1888 in Baltimore alone, six different Jewish institutions including congregations, Jewish charities, and a Sunday school celebrated Hanukkah with festivities similar to the one Lilienthal organized in Cincinnati.

The number of communal Hanukkah celebrations grew each year, in part due to a growing number of communal organizations sponsoring them. Jews in Louisville, Kentucky, organized a comparable festival in 1876. By late century, as immigration raised the number of American Jews to more than a half million, older organizations like congregations, fraternal associations, and women’s clubs planned new charitable efforts that provided expanded religious school activities. Industrial schools, penny lunches, orphan asylums, kindergartens, free libraries, mission schools, and settlement houses offered various services including medical aid to new Jewish immigrants and especially to their children. The new organizations often organized Hanukkah festivals. Yet, since the North counted the largest Jewish population and, therefore, most of the Jewish organizations, Hanukkah festivals most often appeared there. By 1890 the American Hebrew claimed that ten thousand people participated in these communal Hanukkah events in New York alone. Thus, American Jewish traditionalists, like Reformers, believed that carefully adapted Jewish customs might invigorate American Jewish life. The American Hebrew editors concluded, “The happy result was that Chanuka was this year properly celebrated in many a Jewish home where the pleasing rites had for many years lain in abeyance.” It is impossible to determine if the number of Jews who lit the Hanukkah candles in their homes increased. At least one Reform family began lighting the Hanukkah candles at home in this era, their only Jewish domestic rite. But it is clear that those who
promoted communal Hanukkah celebrations hoped to achieve that goal.

Reports of Hanukkah celebrations sent to the American Hebrew, to Lilienthal’s Sabbath School Visitor, and to Wise’s Israelite from Jewish readers around the country suggest the power of the national Jewish press to influence Jews nationwide. Correspondents to those magazines understood that they would be placing their congregations on a national stage. In 1898 the correspondent from Memphis, Tennessee, boasted to American Hebrew readers, “formal ceremonies are always observed [here] on this occasion and . . . the children take the leading part.” Yet the reports also show that Jews created Hanukkah ceremonies that expressed local differences in American values and expressive styles of their
regions. In 1898, at Boston’s YMHA, an organization begun as a literary society, its Sabbath school’s Hanukkah festival featured a number of speeches delivered by young women and men, including the story of Hanukkah, an original poem, an acrostic, and a valedictory address. One hundred children attended. Boston’s Jews filled the intellectual forms familiar to that university town with Hanukkah content. By contrast in Atlanta, Georgia, at a Hanukkah festival held in the Reform Temple, “the United States flag was wrapped around (the) sacred (Torah) scrolls in the ark and national airs were sung. . . . Rabbi Marx . . . told the children to do their duty to religion and country.” Atlanta’s congregation expressed its understanding of harmony between American and Jewish values by entwining their two different sacred objects. While both Boston and Atlanta integrated their Hanukkah celebrations into their local and institutional cultural styles, those styles differed markedly. One featured a secular location, lay leadership, and linguistic expression. The other took place in sacred space, enjoyed rabbinic leadership, and featured a material expression of values that may have reflected the patriotic emotions stirred by the Spanish American War that year. Because the new Hanukkah elaborations only supplemented the holiday’s rites, they were not confined to historic religious rules. Creativity was king.

By the turn of the new century, more reports about southern Hanukkah celebrations appeared in the national Jewish press. Richmond, Virginia’s Beth Ahabah offered a prize for the best Hanukkah composition written by a student and boasted of its annual Hanukkah “entertainment” by and for the children of the Sunday school. Yet, adults shaped these festivals to reassure parents that the religious schools were instilling Judaism in the next generation, in addition to eliciting smiles from youngsters. The reporter from Louisville, Kentucky, movingly described the “children of both Adas Israel and B’rith Sholom congregations “conducting “beautiful and impressive” ceremonies, and remarked, “It is always a most interesting sight to behold the little ones ascend the altar and like their ancestors of old, kindle the [Hanukkah] lights.” The correspondent from
Owensboro, Kentucky, reported a “pleasing” program “rendered . . . at the Temple . . . by the members of the Sabbath School.”

Women and Hanukkah

Whatever the differences or similarities in local programming, Hanukkah festivals depended on women for their success. Cincinnati’s Jewish women provided such crucial assistance in assuring that city’s festival’s success, that the board of the local Jewish school thanked them publicly with notices in two of the national Jewish newspapers published in Cincinnati, the English language Israelite and the German language Die Deborah, both edited by Isaac M. Wise. Lilienthal reported in his newspaper that women who assisted at communal Hanukkah festivals were “loudly praised and cheered for their good will and motherly love.” In some years women in Lilienthal’s congregation financed the festival. Women also sometimes shaped the Hanukkah festivals to answer other local needs they perceived. In Philadelphia, younger charitable women invited local Rabbi Marcus Jastrow to speak at their entertainment to benefit the local Jewish Foster Home. Charitable women who helped support an industrial school in New York instituted annual Hanukkah celebrations where they distributed garments, books, and various prizes to the children. In New Orleans Minnie Wexler led other local women in organizing a Hanukkah program that featured a performance of traditional melodies by a female choir for residents of the city’s Jewish Home for the Aged and Infirm. New Orleans Jews also arranged a celebration for children at the Jewish Orphans Home that featured the Orphans’ Band, the candle lighting ceremony, speeches, and charitable donations. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, women organized a Hanukkah festival designed to convince their community to support its Jewish Sunday school, an institution especially likely to rely upon female instructors. In many locales, Jews looked to Sabbath schools to create Hanukkah festivals. Such schools were a novelty in Jewish education and were first adapted to Jewish education by a group of Philadelphia Jewish women in 1838. The schools quickly spread to Charleston, Savannah, and other southern towns as they did elsewhere.
Parents seem to have been more willing to experiment with their daughters’ education than their sons’, and Jewish girls comprised the majority of Sunday school students. Girls did not become bar mitzvah, as boys might, and so they did not require education in reading Hebrew to prepare them for the rite. The largely female faculties of Sunday schools also may have marked them as best suited to girls. Young Jewish women and girls often took leading roles in Hanukkah entertainments. For example, girls’ performances dominated the 1887 Sabbath school Hanukkah entertainment in Detroit, where the program included a juvenile operetta based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood. In Quincy and Evansville, Illinois, too, girls performed most of the Hanukkah songs and orchestral pieces. As financiers or Sunday school teachers, in formal ladies auxiliaries or Sisterhoods, or informally as mothers of Sunday school children, women performed much of the labor to mount the Hanukkah celebrations.

Rabbis sought women’s assistance because the new Hanukkah festivals demanded a good deal of expertise in how to manage and please children. Any lack of specialized religious knowledge among the women was moot. The rabbis or cantors themselves could provide that. But, as Lilienthal suggested, Hanukkah celebrations focused on entertaining children while instructing them, aiming for a Hanukkah that would be as much fun for Jewish children as Christmas was for Christian children. These new celebrations that merged childcare with worship provided nineteenth-century Jewish women a concrete way to fulfill the enhanced religious responsibilities expected of them. As industry and commerce consumed men’s time, Victorians in Britain and the United States idealized women’s religious sensibility and expected so-called “true women” to interest themselves in religious rites and instruction. Among Protestants, women seemed to be the “backbone of the church” despite having little voice in church governance. Reform rabbis often noted that women dominated the pews during worship services as men seldom attended. Women of local congregations, as Sunday school teachers, mothers of students, or as members of Sisterhoods or ladies auxiliaries, heard the Hanukkah appeal for their help.
“Chanuka Dance,” 1952, at the Hotel Texas, Fort Worth.
(Courtesy of Max Kaye Collection, Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Fort Worth.)
Women often organized the events, managed the children, and provided the food and other items used in the celebrations, such as those organized in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1905 by the Bertha Feusterwald Kindergarten and Sewing Class. In New Orleans the Women’s League of the Touro Synagogue arranged a “very entertaining program” for their Sunday school children and organized the annual Hanukkah festivities. Nearby, members of the Gates of Prayer congregation judged their ladies auxiliary, a “noble band of workers,” and a “power for good.” Women’s free labor made the child-centered Hanukkah festivals possible even for small congregations in rural areas. Those voluntary responsibilities sometimes became annual duties.

When the Reform movement’s National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, under Carrie Simon of Washington, D.C., organized local female synagogue volunteers into a national network in 1913, its committee on religion marshaled national resources to promote these now familiar communal Hanukkah events as well as the traditional domestic Hanukkah rites. When the woman known to us only as Mrs. Leon Goodman of Louisville, Kentucky, chaired the organization’s committee on religion in the 1920s, she began instructing the local chapters in preparing for Hanukkah with her September letter and reminded members each month thereafter until January. In 1925 she wrote that “the Chanukah festival is one of the few instances . . . [when] the religious atmosphere may permeate the household.” The next year she explained, “it is especially our desire to overcome the practice of observing Christmas in Jewish homes.” She deemed more elaborate Hanukkah celebrations to be the strongest weapon in a Jewish mother’s arsenal against Christmas.

Urbanist Witold Rybczynski explained that the modern concept of “home” rests on changes in urban living that emerged first among the Dutch in the seventeenth century. There, in a country with neither much land nor landed gentry, where urban life became common, a domicile that allowed for familial privacy served as the foundation in the development of allied notions of comfort, intimacy, and domesticity. “Domestic comfort . . . begins in the
appreciation of the home as a setting for an . . . interior life,” Rybczynski wrote.80 One eleventh century report hints that among Europe’s Jews, architecture suggests that the sense of home privacy linking ideas about comfort with domesticity and interiority may have appeared much earlier than in Amsterdam. Some European Jewish homes exhibited a sharply defined distinction between public and private space six hundred years before that distinction developed among the Dutch. A 1008 description of the home of Samuel Belassar, a Jewish merchant in Regensburg, described the external view of the place resembling a “dark grey, moss-covered hideous pile of stones, provided with closely-barred windows of various sizes.” But once inside a “well protected door,” one “entered into an apartment cheerfully decorated with flowers, with costly and splendid furniture . . . Here, the walls panelled and decorated with polished wood, with many-coloured waving and winding hangings and artistic carved work, was the owner’s domestic temple, in which the Sabbath festival was celebrated.”81 This sense of the privacy of the home also is woven into Hanukkah’s different rules about the placement of the hanukiyah. Goodman’s ambition to keep Christmas out of Jewish homes and Hanukkah in them reflected her underlying concern for American Jews’ interior lives. Although this concern had old roots in Jewish culture, it would be expressed in modern rhetoric more often in the twentieth century, especially after World War II.

In the meantime, however, American Jews adapted another commercial Christmas custom to Hanukkah. In 1926 the Reform Sisterhoods embarked upon a new Hanukkah project, the sale of specially designed Hanukkah greeting cards. By then, commercial greeting cards for Christmas had been available to American shoppers for fifty years.82 Among Jews, local benefactors might occasionally provide souvenir cards with Hanukkah designs for children who attended synagogue Hanukkah festivals. But Jews typically did not exchange greeting cards at Hanukkah. Yet, because by 1926 America’s Jewish population numbered more than two million and because the Sisterhood’s national membership provided many potential customers for this new product, one manufacturer agreed to supply them with two simple cards. The
first, a modified version of a Christmas card, featured a single lit candle in a dish, with a trail of flowers in front. The second displayed a plain candle along with the first stanza of Emma Lazarus’s poem for Hanukkah, which began “Kindle the taper like a steadfast star.” The card instructed families in what to do (light the candles) and why they should do it (to be steadfast). It offered a famous, accomplished Jewish woman’s work to inspire other Jews’ pride in being Jewish. By exchanging Hanukkah cards, Jews underscored the Jewish identities of both the sender and the recipient. The cards provided American Jews with another way to participate in widespread activities associated with Christmas while performing a Jewish act. The Sisterhood’s national leadership urged members to sell cards at two for a nickel in their congregations to assure sales. Hanukkah cards became an annual feature of the Reform Sisterhood’s work and established a new Hanukkah custom. Ultimately, their success with Hanukkah cards convinced manufacturers and retailers of a new niche market for their holiday goods. By the 1970s, and earlier in some areas, Hanukkah cards could be purchased in stores alongside Christmas goods. Their blue and silver or white color scheme, reminiscent of both _tallesim_ and the Israeli flag, marked them as Jewish. In November 2007 Hallmark’s website offered seven different Hanukkah cards—all in that color scheme. Greeting cards gave Hanukkah a distinctive, recognizable place in American stores alongside the red and green Christmas goods.

In 1961, almost a century after Lilienthal and Wise created the synagogue Hanukkah festival in order to interest Jewish children in their religion, psychologist Samuel Markowitz urged Jewish parents to revitalize Hanukkah with parties in order to better “adjust the Jewish child to his world. . . . Plan to use the entire week . . . for education, stimulation, and reinspiration of our people with regard to Jewish ends and hopes,” he wrote. “Make . . . [Hanukkah] colorful and attractive . . . through symbol and ceremonial.” Dr. Markowitz explained further that he believed that “Jewish life can flourish in America only if Jews find pleasure in Jewish living.” Markowitz penned his thoughts about the importance of a festive Hanukkah only sixteen years after the end of
World War II. The emotional impact of the Holocaust remained palpable. “Jewishness has come to mean mainly negations,” he maintained. He believed contemporary American Jews had been “forced to rely altogether unreasonably on intellectualized appreciation of a past which we . . . transmit mainly as . . . a tale of martyrdom and privation.” That attitude would not help young Jews to embrace Jewish life. “Unless our life is built upon a positive basis,” he wrote, with “pleasurable experience lived through and embodied into our normal routine from childhood, we shall . . . meet in our children a growing resentment at Jewishness.” Therefore, “make festivals attractive . . . for the perpetuation of Judaism, [and] for the psychic welfare of the children.” His suggestions included household Hanukkah decorations, ice cream, candy, and cakes in the molds of images with religious meaning such as menorahs. “Give the children gifts every night,” he urged. “They need not be expensive. . . . Give books, unbreakable Chanuko records . . . [and] . . . modern Israeli products,” he advised. American Jews should not be timid about creating a visibly vibrant Hanukkah home, he suggested. After all, he added, “Difference is the essence of democracy.” He offered a list of books and party guides to help readers implement his advice. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods published his pamphlet and marketed it through its many local chapters.85

By the closing decades of the twentieth century some Jews used Hanukkah as an occasion to both elaborate upon their own Hanukkah customs and to instruct their gentile neighbors about Judaism. In 1978 the Women’s League Outlook, a magazine published by Conservative women, printed their local chapter reports on Hanukkah events. Amid many familiar activities for Jewish children conducted in homes and synagogues, one custom among New Orleans Jews stands out. In New Orleans, garden clubs encouraged their members to decorate the front doors of their homes during December, according to one of three thematic categories: religious, seasonal, or novelty. For several years some Jews participated in that local custom by using their front doors to educate their neighbors about Judaism, calling them “Hanukkah doors.” They used inexpensive, everyday materials: paint, bottle tops, egg
cartons, plastic spoons, sock hangers, Styrofoam cups, drinking straws, rice, beans, Mardi Gras beads, acorns, pine cones, popcorn, cardboard, typewriter spools, nuts, barley, cords, or flash cubes. Out of those humble objects they created Hanukkah menorahs, scenes of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the Western Wall, or the Eternal Light. To help their neighbors understand an image, each homeowner placed an explanation beside their door.86 Clearly, these Jewish families in New Orleans viewed Hanukkah as an opportunity to engage their neighbors in an educational conversation about Judaism. Far beyond simply advertising the miracle by displaying the hanukiyah in their windows, those Conservative Jewish women in New Orleans offered lessons in Judaism.

Jews in the South continued to use Hanukkah as a light-hearted occasion in which to point out their Jewish identities to their gentile neighbors while offering simple lessons about Judaism. In 2004 Floridian Marianne Zoll initiated a Chabad Hanukkah celebration in Lakewood Ranch, near Sarasota, Florida, a town which she judged to be only “15 percent Jewish.” Week-long festivities included street parties, a song concert, a Family Heritage Night hockey game at the St. Petersburg Times Forum, gifts, latkes, doughnuts, and balloons. “I just want to educate people and show them what fun we have,” Zoll explained to a reporter for the Sarasota Herald Tribune. Chabad had been organizing public Hanukkah festivals, often featuring the lighting of a gigantic menorah, since its first effort in Los Angeles in 1978.87 On Florida’s east coast, Jews who publicized other Hanukkah activities made sure to include a brief lesson about Judaism. In Pompano Beach, Florida, Sunday school teacher Melissa Mayersdorf coordinated a Hanukkah Tzedaka Art Contest where students raised money to purchase Hanukkah gifts and clothing for children served by the Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Options. In 2008 a volunteer for the JAFCO explained to a local news reporter that “charity . . . is part of the philosophy of Judaism.”88

Through varying efforts, Jews had made themselves and their Hanukkah holiday visible throughout the South. In 2008, Winn-Dixie Stores, headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida,
announced that “for the first time, all Winn-Dixie stores are stocked with top Hanukkah items like Hanukkah candles for the menorah, and kosher items such as potato pancake mix and chocolate coins.” Significantly, Winn-Dixie did not restrict its Hanukkah items to stores in areas with exceptionally large Jewish populations, like southeast Florida or Atlanta. Instead, all 521 retail grocery locations including those in Alabama and Mississippi were to offer Hanukkah goods. Moreover, the store announced its holiday season product lines by linking Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Hanukkah. “All three holidays share a common theme—celebrating with family and loved ones,” the supermarket’s spokesperson explained to Business Wire. “We want to help families continue these traditions . . . by having these items available.” Food suppliers recognize that American domestic celebrations typically feature special foods and customers extend their ordinary food budget to obtain them. Sarasota, Florida, caterer Maggie Glucklich specializes in home dinner parties and often caters Hanukkah dinners. “The heart of Hanukkah is getting together with friends and family,” she explained to a reporter for the Sarasota Herald Tribune. By the twenty-first century, newspapers in the South expected to run stories about Hanukkah in December, and Jews they interviewed explained it in ways that made its celebration similar to domestic Christmas festivities. Yet, at the same time, by being happy to celebrate Hanukkah, these southern Jews showed that they could be happy at Christmastime without becoming Christians.

Conclusion

Those six new Hanukkah ventures, Moïse’s 1842 Hanukkah hymn, the mid-nineteenth-century recasting of Hanukkah as a celebration of religious liberty by Lilienthal and Wise, the new communal Hanukkah children’s festival, Hanukkah cards in 1926, Hanukkah doors in 1978, and in 2007, eight-day Hanukkah street parties, demonstrate an early and continuing interest in Americanized Hanukkah activities among Jews in all parts of the country. In the South, in the 1840s, Reform-minded Jews found a new way to express a religious sentiment at Hanukkah that linked
that holiday to the religious mood of their region. In the booming, post-Civil War, midwestern city of Cincinnati, Reform-minded rabbis redefined the holiday to align with contemporary American political values and ideas of manliness linked to militarism. Amid the growing popularity of Christmas festivities, new communal Hanukkah festivals offered Jewish children celebrations comparable to those enjoyed by their Christian friends. Both Reform and traditionalist rabbis joined with women to enhance Hanukkah’s importance for Jewish children in big cities like New York and Philadelphia, mid-sized Richmond, Virginia, and even in small communities with few resources like Owensboro, Kentucky.

Among American Jews, the holiday commemorating both military success and divine rescue surprisingly also held new opportunities for women. Jewish women found in the children’s Hanukkah festival a way to promote the Jewish education of their children and sometimes worked closely with their rabbis in creating and executing the events. In the nineteenth century, before Jewish women counted as members in most congregations, their efforts in those events argued for their right to greater influence in their congregations. As late as the 1920s, just after women won the right to vote in United States elections, Deborah Melamed, a member of the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, urged more of her sisters in Conservative congregations to undertake this sort of synagogue activity if they hoped to gain more power in their congregations. Supported by their national federation, women’s associations linked to Reform congregations stirred marketplace innovations for Hanukkah comparable to those that had become commonplace for Christmas. Forty years later, women also funded and marketed a psychologist’s explanation of Hanukkah’s importance to post-Holocaust Jewish children living as minorities in the largely Christian United States. In 1961 Samuel Markowitz told Jewish mothers that Hanukkah parties contributed to the healthy psychological adjustment of American Jewish children. Seventeen years later, in New Orleans, Conservative Jewish women took unusual steps to explain their distinctive customs to their neighbors using commonplace objects to create
symbols of their faith. Those changes transformed Hanukkah from a commemoration of God’s rescue of pious, faithful Jews from the dangers inflicted by alien powers, to a celebration of civic virtue and piety that Jews shared with other virtuous Americans, even those of other faiths, and of God’s support of that virtue in ancient days. Southerners’ Hanukkah activities support Mark K. Bauman’s argument that southern Jewish life shared national models because southern Jews were not isolated. Jews arrived in the South from other parts of the country and often maintained those connections through business ties. Southern Jews traveled outside the South to visit Jewish family and friends.91

The national Jewish press further promoted commonalities in Jewish American culture by linking Jews around the country and encouraging activities and attitudes promoted by the various editors. By printing reports of local Hanukkah celebrations sent to them by Jews in distant towns, those magazines created a national conversation about Hanukkah’s importance and about the variations in ways Jews might appropriately commemorate an ancient event in the progress-minded nineteenth century. In the 1920s national Jewish women’s organizations, like the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, further linked widespread Jewish communities and urged them toward common activities. Local variations in the national trend are ultimately part of the overall movement of Hanukkah toward greater significance to American Jews and greater visibility for Judaism, albeit a Judaism reshaped in an American mold.

The effort to enhance Hanukkah emerged most energetically among Reformers, underscoring that movement’s sense of providing an alternative to assimilation, as Alan Silverstein phrased it.92 Jews selected and found elements within Judaism that corresponded to elements of Christianity in order to resist Christianity. Moïse’s hymn did this by assuring individual Jews of personal salvation. Lilienthal provided Jewish children with a fun Hanukkah that aimed to help them embrace Judaism. The new Hanukkah stories offered Jews helped them imagine their own ancient heroes with pride and pleasure. The National Federation
of Temple Sisterhoods initiated a December Jewish shopping experience that reminded Jews who sent and received Hanukkah cards of their Jewishness in the midst of the national Christmas fervor. At public Hanukkah parties, Jews invited their gentile neighbors to come and learn about Judaism, identify their Jewish neighbors, and have a good time. In each instance, new Hanukkah customs provided Jews with a way to explain their distinctive Jewish religious life to inquiring gentile neighbors while also referring to ideas and activities they held in common.

Jews in the South especially understood the contours of Christianity as it impacted their lives. Memoirs by southern Jews attest to their close everyday contact with their gentile neighbors. Moïse could point to her own hymn whenever confronted by an evangelically minded friend. More than a century later, the doors of New Orleans Jewish homes, with their homemade visual emblems of Jewish themes and figures, reflected the influence of Roman Catholicism, in which visual images explain divine mysteries. In 2004, week-long public Hanukkah festivities in Sarasota, a town known for its retirees and vacationers, provided local Jews with an occasion to explain their difference to their gentile neighbors while also showing them a good time.

Those American Hanukkah elaborations helped Jews feel part of a national celebration as Jews and to ease what Durham, North Carolina’s Eli Evans described as the “emotional reality of religious isolation [that] came crashing grimly into life during the Christmas season.” None of the new Hanukkah customs that I described voiced the Jewish fear of non-Jews suggested by the holiday’s traditional rite and its historic songs. Synagogue festivals, home parties with decorations, specialized foods, and nightly gifts, greeting cards, decorated doors, and public Hanukkah parties lent Jews’ engagement with the American Christmas season a light-hearted tone. Through those Hanukkah re-castings Jews provided themselves with a way to talk easily with their gentile neighbors about their own religious lives at any December party.
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9 Kriwaczek, Yiddish Civilization, 120.


18 Ibid., 155–157.


20 Max Lilienthal, “The Festival of Chanukah” (1841), translated for the Jewish congregation of Augusta, Georgia, by his brother, S. Lilienthal, MD, American Jewish Historical Society.


23 Ibid.


32 Lilienthal, “Let us have a Chanukah Festival!” 388.
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48 *Hebrew Sabbath School Visitor*, December 4, 1874, front page, 186.


50 *Jewish Messenger*, December 18, 1857, 100; *Jewish Messenger*, November 26, 1858, 113; *Jewish Messenger*, December 7, 1860, 172, quoted in White, “American Jewish Response,” 183.


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81 Israel Abrahams, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia, 1993); Kriwaczek, Yiddish Civilization, 85–89.


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Two Generations of the Abraham and Fanny Block Family: Internal Migration, Economics, Family, and the Jewish Frontier

by

Mary L. Kwas*

Much of the Jewish experience in the American South shares attributes with that of Jews in small towns throughout the Midwest and West, leading scholars to debate whether there is a distinctive character of southern Jewishness. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark Greenberg, however, note that while American Jews share a Jewish heritage, individuals are influenced by their social environment, what they term the “power of place.” To them, southern culture is expressed through racial attitudes, politics, food choices, and other shared regional expressions. Thus, historians have examined how Jews fit into southern society by exploring the problems of slaveholding, racism, southern politics, and antisemitism. Examining southern Jewish experience through biographical studies, such as that of the Sheftalls of Georgia or Eugenia Levy Phillips during the Civil War, acknowledges individual expression within that cultural context.¹

The Abraham and Fanny Block family are counted among the earliest Jewish families to settle in Arkansas, arriving in the early 1820s during the territorial period. Two generations of the Block family made Arkansas their home until the Civil War era, a span of four decades. The Blocks became prominent and wealthy merchants in the southwestern town of Washington in Hempstead County, Arkansas. Historic Washington State Park preserves and

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interprets their residence as one of its architectural properties. In fact, in 1959 the Block House was the first house restored and opened to visitors by the Pioneer Washington Restoration Foundation and, in 1982 to 1983, one of the first properties in town to undergo archaeological exploration.2

Despite the Blocks’ importance in Arkansas’s early history, little has been written concerning them. Carolyn LeMaster’s A Corner of the Tapestry, which broadly covers the Jewish experience in Arkansas, provides the most comprehensive treatment thus far, although it, too, is limited in scope. Abraham and Fanny Block also are mentioned in earlier works about the Jews in Virginia. None of these works, however, traces the two generations of the Block family from cradle to grave nor explores their lives beyond Arkansas. This essay traces the family from their beginnings in Virginia, through their time in Arkansas, and ends with their migrations out of the state. It also explores their lives as Jews within the context of southern and American society.3

In doing so, several themes emerge. First, Jews migrated within America from place to place for better economic opportunities rather than being rooted, as emphasized in one school of southern Jewish history. Family connections often influenced the choice of location. Richard C. Wade in The Urban Frontier argues that cities actually formed the vanguard of western expansion, as opposed to Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontiersmen and farmers. Jews conformed to Wade’s pattern, moving from eastern seaboard cities to new towns on transportation corridors in the West. The Blocks’ activities and experiences are illustrative: they traveled from Richmond, Virginia, to seek new opportunities in new and established towns in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas.4

Second, a typical image of the western movement of Jews is of a male peddler who started with a pack, saved for a wagon, and eventually opened a business in a small town of promise, bringing family members to serve as clerks and partners. However, not all started this way. Abraham Block married into a prestigious Jewish family and lived in eastern centers of Jewish life before deciding to go west. Thus, he had the finances to skip the peddler stage and enter quite early into a partnership with a
Arkansas Archeological Society members excavating the Block House.
Excavations took place during the summers of 1982 and 1983.
(Courtesy of Arkansas Archeological Survey, Fayetteville, Arkansas.)

gentile businessman and quickly rise into the wealthy merchant class. This business pattern continued with his sons as they transformed their resources into new opportunities in new places.

Third, among the strongest characteristics of the southern aspects of the Jewish experience are their support of the Confederacy and participation in slaveholding. Robert Rosen in *The Jewish Confederates* amply illustrates Jewish loyalty to the South through business expertise and military and political service. Numerous other studies documented widespread slaveholding among Jews. The Blocks’ identification with the South is demonstrated in each of these areas.⁵

Finally, family life patterns are extremely important for understanding how people lived, the roles they played, and the influences that impacted their lives. Jewish family networks linked communities even as family members dispersed. Patterns of births, marriages, and deaths are shared with the wider
community. Jews struggled over faith with individual family members embracing different levels of religious practice or assimilating into the Christian majority. The latter was commonly reflected through the choice of marriage partners. The actions of Block family members typified these patterns as well. Thus the Blocks provide an important case study illustrating numerous themes delineating the lives of Jews and their neighbors.

*The Ancestry and Early Years of Abraham Block*

Abraham (or Abram) Block was born on January 20, 1780, or 1781, in Schwihau, Bohemia, where the surname was originally spelled “Bloch.” Although his parents’ names are unknown, clues in the naming of his children suggest they might have been Simon and Rosina.

During the era of his birth and youth, most Bohemian Jews lived in small towns or villages in the central part of the country and spoke Czech and German as well as Yiddish. The large migrations of Jews from Bohemia did not begin until the 1820s. Small numbers did come to America earlier, however, including Abraham Block who immigrated around 1792 at the age of twelve. Although freedoms for Bohemian Jews improved in the 1780s after Emperor Joseph II issued the Edict of Toleration, harsh “family law” that limited legal Jewish marriages might have influenced Abraham’s family to send him to the New World. Even though some researchers have assigned the role of Block family pioneer to Abraham, this is rather a stretch for a twelve-year-old boy. Family connections, especially among Jews, provided the network to start boys and young men in business and served as the links to chain migration. Likely Abraham came with a group of older relatives or was sent to a relative already in America. If that relative was female, the relationship could be hidden by a different surname.

Earlier researchers associated Abraham with Simon and Jacob Block (probably father and son), and Jacob’s children, especially Eleazor and Louisa, but this appears to be based on time and space proximity, not on any direct evidence. Simon and Jacob resided in Virginia (Williamsburg and Richmond) and Maryland (Baltimore), from the 1790s through the 1820s, as did
Abraham Block portrait, artist unknown.
(Courtesy of Carolyn Gray LeMaster.)

Abraham. Although Malcolm Stern’s genealogies suggest Abraham was one of Jacob’s sons, Abraham was much older than Jacob’s other children. If they are related, Abraham more likely was a younger brother or cousin of Jacob. The Block family began life in America as merchants, and if Abraham was associated with them, even as a cousin, he probably learned the trade from them and lived with them before his marriage.11

Historian Isidor Bush considers the Block family (probably erroneously in terms of priority) the “first and most numerous
Jewish family” to settle west of the Mississippi River. Early family members lived in Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Ohio, and Texas, and many emigrated directly from Bohemia without settling first in the East. Eleazor Block, Jacob’s son and the first Jewish lawyer in St. Louis, Missouri, later settled in Cincinnati, Ohio.¹² He induced the immigration of many relatives to Missouri, and his extolling of business opportunities in the West may have influenced Abraham’s move to Arkansas.¹³ Eleazor’s sister, Louisa, married Abraham Jonas in Kentucky, and later the family moved to Illinois. Jonas was a friend and supporter of Abraham Lincoln, but his children had divided loyalties to the North and South. Some relocated to New Orleans where they distinguished themselves in business and served the Confederacy. Several intermarriages joined the Block and Jonas families, including Abraham’s son, Augustus, who married the Jonas’s daughter Lucia.¹⁴

Abraham’s arrival in America illustrates emerging patterns in American Jewish history. Jewish immigrants from the Ashkenazic German countries would flood into America in the middle 1800s and change the face of American Judaism, which had been dominated by Sephardic traditions. Connections through business and marriage, however, continued to provide opportunities to new Jewish settlers, as Abraham found in a new land. The Block and Jonas families also demonstrate that movement from Europe to America was but one step in the journey of dispersal through the United States.

The Ancestry and Early Years of Frances Isaacs

Unlike the shadowy beginnings of Abraham Block, Frances Isaiah Isaacs boasted a venerable American ancestry. Frances, or Fanny, was born February 27, 1796, in Richmond, Virginia, the daughter of Isaiah Isaacs and Esther “Hetty” Hays.¹⁵

Born about 1747, Isaiah Isaacs came to Virginia from Frankfort-am-Main before the Revolutionary War and became the first Jew to settle in Richmond.¹⁶ A silversmith by trade, he rose to success as a merchant and property owner, first under the name Isaiah Isaacs and Company and later in partnership with Jacob
Cohen as Cohen and Isaacs, a firm known throughout Virginia. In 1787 the partners opened the Bird in the Hand tavern at the foot of Church Hill, one of Richmond’s earliest hotels, if not the first. In 1788, Isaiah won election to Richmond’s Common Hall. In 1792 he and Cohen dissolved the partnership, and Isaiah continued on his own, eventually moving to Charlottesville. Isaiah embraced his faith and ethnicity. Prideful of his Hebraic learning, he signed his name on legal documents in Hebrew. He contributed to Philadelphia’s Mikveh Israel synagogue and helped found Richmond’s first synagogue, Beth Shalome. He also donated land for the city’s first Jewish cemetery.17

Frances Isaacs Block portrait, artist unknown.
(Courtesy of the Carolyn LeMaster Arkansas Jewish History Collection, Richard C. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System, Little Rock.)

Fanny’s mother, Hetty Hays, was Isaiah’s second wife. Isaiah’s rise in Virginia was equaled by Hetty’s lineage. Born about 1781 to David and Esther Etting Hays, Hetty was a descendant of prominent, early Sephardic families of New York and
Baltimore. Her father, a farmer, was the grandson of Solomon Hays who had come from Holland in the early 1700s with six sons who became patriots in the American Revolution. Hetty’s mother was the daughter of Asher Etting, a relative of the Ettings of Baltimore and Philadelphia who were distinguished in national and state affairs.18

These earliest American Jewish families intermarried regularly and maintained family and business ties up and down the East Coast. According to Myron Berman, the Cohens and Ettings of Baltimore, along with the Marxes and Mordecais of Richmond, numbered among the elite of Jewish families in the eastern trade centers. Their status was based on economic success and long residence in America. Separated by distances, family connections were kept alive through visits, letters, and intermarriages. In Richmond alone, Berman notes, “the Marxes, the Mordecais, the Hayses, and the Myers were all interrelated.” As Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten observe, “the Atlantic seaboard was a highway that connected Jewish communities and facilitated family and business alliances.”19

As noted above, David and Esther Hays and their siblings supported the American Revolution. When David and other local men traveled away from home with the Revolutionary army, Tories raided their home village of Bedford, in Westchester County, New York. According to family tradition, Esther demonstrated her patriotism under extreme duress:

Mrs. Hays was at the time of the British raid lying upon a sick bed with a new-born infant at her breast. Her husband and eldest son were with the army, and she with her daughters and her baby boy were attended by an old negro slave named Darby and his wife whom she had brought with her from Baltimore, her home prior to her marriage. Not British soldiers, but Tory neighbors, entered the house on that eleventh day of July, 1779, and demanded of the sick woman information she was supposed to possess concerning the patriotic plans. On her refusal to play traitor, the house was fired with a brand from its own hearthstone. The mother and children were conveyed by the faithful negroes to a shelter in the
woods and there cared for until succor came to them
and to the others who suffered from Tory malice.20

The majority of American Jews supported the cause of independence. Notwithstanding their family and business connections to England, the British imposition of duties on imports affected Jewish merchants and influenced their loyalties. Sephardic families especially, with their longer residence in the colonies and established trade networks, became strong patriots. For example, Philip Minis of Savannah, Georgia, lent money for salaries and provisions for Revolutionary troops. Some Jews, however, joined Tory ranks, such as David Franks, who interacted with the British forces in Philadelphia, but lost his fortune with American victory.21

Not surprisingly, the Hays family owned slaves. Slaveholding in New York during this period was a common practice, although holdings mainly consisted of but one or two slaves. Discussion of eventual abolition began around the time of the American Revolution, but full emancipation was not achieved in New York until 1827.22

Hetty Hays and Isaiah Isaacs were married on May 7, 1795, in Richmond, Virginia. Nine months later Fanny was born, followed at two-year intervals by three siblings: David, Patsy, and Hays (or Hayes). In 1799 or 1800, Isaiah and Hetty moved the family from Richmond to Charlottesville, where Isaiah expanded his business interests. Nonetheless Isaiah maintained his Richmond real estate: five pieces of property including houses, shops, and the former Bird in the Hand tavern, all of which provided rental income.23 Isaiah’s mix of mercantile business and real estate holdings from which he earned rents was a typical pattern of Jewish upward mobility. Success in one area of business provided capital to expand into another. As historian Lee Shai Weissbach notes, “some who rose into the upper levels of the middle class did so by acquiring buildings, city lots, or farmland against a background of activity in other enterprises.”24

Probably in 1803, when Fanny was only seven years old, Hetty passed away, possibly from complications from the birth of Hays. Hetty’s early death that left such young children likely
spurred Isaiah to write his will, which he entered in the Albemarle County court record in 1803. In it he specified how he wanted his children cared for. He directed that his real estate not be sold but rather managed so as not to lose value and that the estate was not to be divided among the children until the youngest reached the age of twenty-one. He also directed that his children be educated and placed among “the families of respectable Jews to the end that they may be brought up in the religion of their forefathers.” He did not specify which family members or friends he preferred because his death did not seem imminent. Unlike the covenant of Jacob Mordecai, written after his wife’s death, which outlined his and their children’s responsibilities to each other, Isaiah’s will dealt more specifically with the distribution of property, including slaves.25 Isaiah’s younger brother, David Isaacs, also a merchant, moved from Richmond to Charlottesville by 1804, perhaps to assist Isaiah after Hetty’s death.26

Isaiah’s foresight for the welfare of his children was well-timed because he died just three years later, on April 2, 1806, leaving Fanny orphaned at age ten. David Isaacs served as one of the executors of the estate and manager of Isaiah’s Richmond property. Although he acted as the children’s financial guardian, his own family life was complicated enough that it does not appear that Isaiah’s children lived with him. Instead, the children might have lived with Hays relatives in New York. Certainly, they were not forgotten by them, for when their grandfather David Hays died five years later, he cited the children in his will.27

Fanny was part of a notable family spread throughout the eastern seaboard that maintained close ties through business and family connections. Even wealthy and established families moved to take advantage of business opportunities, following the expanding American frontier. They still retained ties linking family members. These ties ensured that children left orphaned by their parents’ early death, not an uncommon occurrence in the nineteenth century, were not abandoned. The importance of Judaism in their lives also was expressed through their associations and by direct means like Isaiah’s will.
Marriage and Life in Virginia

Where Abraham Block and Fanny Isaacs lived and met between 1806 and 1811 is unknown. With Isaacs family business interests in Charlottesville and Richmond, Fanny could have been living in either city or in New York with her Hays relatives. One early source states that Abraham resided in Charlottesville before settling in Richmond, but he only appears in business in Richmond. One of his descendants suggests that Abraham spent time in New York preparing to be a rabbi. New York Congregation Shearith Israel lists him before 1820 as a member, whereas Richmond’s Beth Shalome does not. If Fanny lived with her Hays relatives, New York may have been the place she and Abraham met. Although the location of their meeting would add to our understanding of their lives, its specifics are not important, since as noted above, Jewish families up and down the East Coast knew each other well and intermarried regularly. From Virginia to New York, families visited, relocated, conducted business, and worshiped at the few Jewish congregations in the large cities. Almost inevitably their paths crossed.

Descendants of the colonial Sephardim, due to their long residency and success in America, tended to consider themselves of higher status than the Ashkenazim from the German states, especially after the overwhelming immigration of German Jews that began in the 1820s. Ashkenazim who arrived earlier, however, did find acceptance in Sephardic communities if they were willing to accept Sephardic customs. This acceptance extended to intermarriage, a notable example being that of Gershom Mendes Seixas’s daughter who married Israel Baer Kursheedt. Fanny was descended from Sephardic families on her mother’s side, but her father was Ashkenazic German. As a pre-Revolutionary War settler successful in business, he became acceptable as a marriage partner. Abraham Block did not arrive in America until the end of the eighteenth century, but his young age may have allowed him to easily adopt Sephardic customs, and his business prospects must have been promising enough for Fanny’s Sephardic relatives to approve the marriage.
On October 2, 1811, on the eve of the Festival of Tabernacles, Abraham Block and Fanny Isaacs exchanged marriage vows at New York’s Shearith Israel, America’s oldest congregation. Fanny was fifteen and Abraham twice that age. Such an age disparity was not unusual at the time among Jews or in the wider American population. After a marriage children arrived soon and frequently, and a man had to be reasonably well-established in order to provide for them. Men commonly spent their twenties getting established in business and delayed seeking wives until their early thirties, when they sought young and healthy women at the beginning of their childbearing years. Fanny’s family may have looked with favor on a match with a mature, established Jewish businessman expected to be a good provider. The marriage even may have been arranged.

After the wedding, Abraham and Fanny settled in Richmond, where Abraham may already have been established in business or went to manage the Isaacs’s properties his wife would eventually inherit. Beginning in 1814 Abraham began to appear in the public record, indicating his greater involvement in the Richmond community. He is mentioned in a gossipy family letter written March 22, 1814, by Hazan Gershom Mendes Seixas of New York to his daughter Sarah Kursheedt who lived in Richmond with her husband, Israel Baer Kursheedt, a merchant who was considered the most learned Jew in the United States by his contemporaries. Seixas’s letter discussed a wedding in New York that included some of Fanny’s relatives. Although the actual content of the letter is inconsequential, it does indicate that Abraham Block knew and socialized with important members of the Jewish communities of both Richmond and New York.

A number of Richmond’s Jews, including Abraham, actively participated in patriotic service by joining the Richmond Light Infantry Blues, one of the country’s oldest military companies. Jewish residents were counted among the founders of the Blues, and, during the War of 1812, Isaac Seixas, Manuel Judah, and Jacob Phillips, as well as Abraham Block, were on the payroll. Abraham served from August 25 to October 5, 1814, as a member of Captain William Murphy’s Company of Light Infantry Blues,
part of Randolph’s First Corps d’Elite. He never rose above the rank of private, but typical of southern tradition, the service earned him in later years the honorific “Captain Block.”

In 1815 Abraham joined his signature with that of sixteen other Jewish residents of Richmond, petitioning the General Assembly to incorporate a company to improve navigation on the James River, the lack of which, the petitioners contended, slowed the progress of Richmond’s commercial life. All of these associations demonstrate Abraham’s involvement not only with the Jewish community of Richmond, but also with the city’s commercial sector.

Also in 1815 the Blocks paid personal property taxes for the first time. In previous years, Abraham was not listed among the Richmond residents required to pay such taxes, apparently because he did not own the kinds of property then being taxed: slaves, horses, mules, or carriages. In 1815, however, in order to raise money to offset the costs of the War of 1812, certain items of furniture and luxury goods were added to the list of taxable property, and the Blocks paid their share. That year they owned, in addition to two slaves, one mahogany bureau, bookcase, or secretary desk; one wardrobe or clothespress of some kind of wood; one mahogany dining table; twelve mahogany dining chairs; two mahogany tea or card tables; three pictures, under twelve inches, in gilt frames; one silver teapot; one plated urn, coffee pot or teapot; four plated candlesticks, lamps, or lighting devices; one cut-glass bowl or pitcher; two single-case gold watches; and one set of window curtains of calico, dimity, or marseilles.

Mahogany furniture and silver teapots suggest the Blocks’ middle class status, although the Blocks did not own many other taxable items such as clocks, chests of drawers, sideboards, mahogany bedsteads, sofas, wall mirrors, large musical instruments, or carpets. Since this was only three and a half years after their marriage, many of these taxed items may represent wedding gifts. In the following years, taxable items returned to the pre-1815 list, and Abraham appears regularly, but not yearly, on the rolls, owning one to three slaves until 1826 when the family moved to Arkansas.
At this point in their history, Abraham and Fanny should be considered at the beginning, not only of their married life, but also of their economic life. Fanny’s family connections permitted an automatic bid into Jewish high society and provided material trappings—household items, property, and slaves—suitable to their social status, but their holdings were still modest, as indicated in part by the personal property list cited above. James Hagy notes that in Charleston about 83 percent of Jewish urban households had slaves, but most had no more than three, equal to the Blocks’ situation. Slaves as servants were often given as gifts, and, in the Blocks’ case, these slaves were most likely the remnants of Isaiah Isaacs’s estate, and thus only a temporary holding. Although the Blocks would inherit valuable business property in Richmond from Isaiah’s estate in 1823, it does not appear that Abraham Block owned any business property prior to that. Thus, the Blocks had a foundation of resources and contacts to set their course toward prosperity, but the work to make it happen lay before them.

While Abraham built a public presence in the Richmond business community, the couple also began to build their family.* As was typical for the time, the first child usually arrived near the first anniversary of the marriage, followed by additional children at regular, two-year intervals, which was a normal fertility pattern for lactating women. Children were especially at risk of early death, with about 15 percent dying before the age of one, and another 8 to 10 percent dying before maturity. Fanny gave birth to at least seven children in Virginia: Hester (September 1, 1813), Simon (January 6, 1815), Rosina (circa 1816), Isaac, or Isaacs, (November 12, 1817), Augustus (circa 1818), Henry (circa 1820), and David (February 12, 1823), and possibly two who died as infants. This spacing is more frequent than would be expected, suggesting that she had the services of a wet nurse, often a family slave. If she lost two additional children, that rate was also somewhat higher than normal, but amply offset by

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* See Appendix on pages 98 and 99 for a three-generational tree of Abraham and Fanny Block and their descendants.
Fanny’s fertility. In 1820 Abraham Block first appears in the Virginia census. Besides their large family, the household also contained a young adult male, perhaps Fanny’s brother Hays.

By 1822 Abraham took over management of the Isaacs’s property in Richmond from David Isaacs. Records of the Mutual Assurance Society, which provided fire insurance and required reevaluation of the property every seven years, show that Isaiah Isaacs owned five structures plus one lot on Main Street in Richmond. David Isaacs managed the property and continued the insurance of the estate for Isaiah’s children, being listed on the 1816 declaration as executor. By the next declaration in 1822, David is no longer listed, and only the names of the living heirs—Hays, Fanny and Abraham—appear. David did not die until 1837, but by 1822 Abraham was in his early forties. The transfer of the property management was likely a mutual business decision. In 1823, when Fanny’s brother reached adulthood, Hays Isaacs went to court to have the estate split between them. Abraham and Fanny received one house and two grocery/dwelling houses, one of which was the former Bird in the Hand tavern. Rented to various businesses and occupants, the properties provided steady income. The Blocks, therefore, did not sell them to finance their move to Arkansas. In fact, after moving to Arkansas, Abraham renewed the insurance on the properties in 1829 and 1836.

The property division was recorded on February 10, 1823, and two days later Fanny gave birth to David. Shortly thereafter Abraham left Richmond to reestablish himself in the West. The motivation for forty-two-year-old Abraham’s departure from an established business in Richmond and from his family with seven small children to move halfway across the country to the frontier is unclear. Perhaps competition in Richmond limited Abraham’s business prospects. The wave of new Jewish immigrants from Europe had begun, resulting in the doubling of the Jewish population in America during the next two decades. By 1820 the Jewish population of Richmond increased to thirty-two families from only six in the 1780s. Richmond also saw an increase in Jewish merchants from Europe, with at least thirty listed in the Richmond Directory in 1819. These new immigrants reinforced the Jewish
population of Richmond as children of the earlier generation moved to the North, but original families looked with condescension on the new arrivals. Abraham faced competitive pressure from these new merchants during the economic downturn following the War of 1812, which deepened into a depression by 1819, all of which may have affected Abraham’s business prospects. Indeed Abraham and Fanny mortgaged several of Isaiah’s Richmond properties from 1818 to 1821, suggesting that Abraham faced difficult financial times or had already decided on relocating. As bold as the move was, the frontier may well have presented the best opportunity for success. While the population as a whole expanded westward after the War of 1812, economic conditions slowed the movement until the 1830s. Thus, Abraham relocated ahead of the curve, again suggesting limited business success in Richmond but opportunity provided by Fanny’s inheritance.

Settlers in a Frontier Town

From 1823 to 1825 Abraham probably spent time in New Orleans establishing contacts with merchants and wholesalers, and determining the best location for resettlement. Most Jews resorted to peddling to establish themselves in business and explore new areas. Hasia Diner identifies peddling as an almost universal male Jewish experience in the nineteenth century that acted as a “powerful vehicle for fostering Jewish migrations out of more stable, but economically declining regions, to new lands . . . open for settlement and business.” While Abraham might have peddled for a brief period to reconnoiter, he was both older and more established than the typical peddler, with financial resources from the mortgages and rentals of the Richmond properties. Although looking for new opportunity, his money and experience likely enabled him to skip the peddling stage and quickly find a business partner.

Two years after leaving Virginia, Abraham arrived in Arkansas as a partner with John Johnson, the first merchant in the town of Washington. Arkansas seems a surprising choice for relocation and business opportunities. Richmond was a state capital, an industrial center, and, by 1820, the fourth largest center of American
Jewry. New Orleans served as the port for international trade serving the entire Mississippi River basin, thus seeming the more logical choice for relocation. Arkansas, on the other hand, had only become an independent territory in 1819 when split off from the Missouri Territory. As historian Charles Bolton notes, both Louisiana and Missouri had stronger natural advantages, and Arkansas “was simply off the beaten track.” This proved even truer for the western counties, distant from the Mississippi River transportation route and adjoining Indian Territory. Migration to Arkansas proceeded slowly in the 1820s and picked up in the 1830s, but the state remained underpopulated even into the 1850s with a population density of only four persons per square mile, by definition a frontier. In 1820 Hempstead County, in which Washington was located, was one of only seven large counties in the state. Its population of just 2,248 made it the second largest.54

When Abraham arrived, Washington was barely a settled village formed around a Methodist camp ground. About fifteen miles from the Red River, navigation remained blocked until 1838 by a great raft of clogged timber. Washington’s strongest advantage lay in its location along the Southwest Trail, a major corridor from St. Louis to Texas. Moreover, in 1824 Washington was selected as the Hempstead County seat. These factors positioned Washington as a business and government center for the southwestern part of the territory, serving outlying farmers and planters, as well as migrants traveling the Southwest Trail. Towns like Washington typically attracted Jews in the nineteenth century. As Lee Shai Weissbach notes, these market centers, located along routes of commerce, attracted concentrations of consumers, the basic requirement for merchants. Despite its small size and frontier setting, Washington was chosen as a prime location by Abraham Block, an ambitious merchant willing to take a chance.55

Family Life in Arkansas

The story of the Blocks thus far illustrates broader patterns of both southern and American Jewish life. Personally and economically, their stories reflect the typical life and death dramas of the time and place. Following Abraham, Fanny Block left her home in
Virginia in 1826 with seven youngsters in tow, to begin a new life in a nascent town on the Arkansas frontier. Although their family had already reached the average size for the time, they added five more babies after arriving in the west, following the trend of greater offspring in frontier settings. Virginius was born en route to Arkansas on May 1, 1827, in Opelousas, in south-central Louisiana. His birth was followed by Eugene (circa 1829), Juliet Pauline (September 1, 1830), Ellen (circa 1833), and Laura (September 20, 1835).

Washington must have seemed extremely remote to Fanny, who was accustomed to the bustle of Richmond. New Orleans, which served as a wholesale center for Abraham and a religious community for the Blocks, was far removed from Washington. Essentially, getting there from Washington involved crossing the entire state of Louisiana from the northwest to the southeast corner, covering some 450 miles (calculated by twenty-first century roads). Travel in the 1820s and 1830s was convoluted and difficult by horse-drawn vehicles over poor roads or by riverboat where available. Thus, trips to New Orleans for Fanny were probably few and far between.

Although the Blocks may have relied on New Orleans for occasional interaction with other Jews, they did not seem to grow such a community in Washington. Abraham and Fanny did not attract other family members or Jewish friends to settle near them, although such a pattern was common in the South, both among Jews and gentiles. Fanny’s brother, Hays, left Charlottesville, Virginia, about 1826 and followed them to Arkansas by 1840. Hays settled not in Washington, however, but halfway across the state in Conway County. Other Blocks settled elsewhere in Arkansas beginning in the 1840s, although no direct kinship can be ascertained. The closest relative to settle near the Blocks was the Bohemian-born physician Augustus E. Block, who opened his practice in nearby Fulton about 1845. In his will, he names as executor Abraham’s son David, whom he identifies as his cousin. Although other unidentified family relatives, hidden by female married surnames, may have settled nearby, the Blocks apparently did not attract
Jewish friends and relatives to build new lives in Hempstead County.⁶⁴

Moreover, the Blocks do not seem to have formed associations with Jewish families or communities in other larger towns in Arkansas. Little Rock, about 115 miles to the northeast, would have been a likely candidate, being the capital and located along the Southwest Trail, but there is no evidence of visits by the family. Even into the 1850s, Arkansas’s population was sparse, and the Jewish population before the Civil War even more so. Carolyn LeMaster notes that in 1850 Jews in Arkansas numbered about 400 out of a general population of about 210,000. The first Jewish congregations in the state were not organized until the end of the Civil War. Only Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Helena, and Camden formed congregations between 1866 and 1870, past the time of the Blocks’ key years in residence. Texarkana, about thirty-five miles to the southwest along the Southwest Trail, was not founded until the middle 1870s and by 1878 counted a Jewish population of only forty-four. By that same date, even Little Rock, the state’s largest city, boasted a Jewish population of only 655 out of over 13,000 residents. Thus the Blocks were isolated as Jews in Arkansas, with New Orleans serving as their religious community.⁶⁵

Such isolation was not unknown as Jewish families sought places where they could prosper. In Emily Bingham’s work on the Mordecais, for example, Jacob Mordecai brought his family to Warrenton, North Carolina, during the 1790s where, initially, he opened a store. Much like the Blocks’ situation in Washington, Warrenton was also a county-seat town serving a plantation area, and the Mordecais were its first Jewish settlers, just fifteen years after the town was founded. Stella Suberman provides another example in her memoir in which her family members were the first Jews to open a store in a small town in Tennessee as late as the 1920s.⁶⁶

In his first years in Washington, Abraham sold general merchandise in a two-story building large enough for a tavern and store that was owned by John Johnson and probably located at the corner of Franklin and Hamilton streets. The family likely lived over the store. An apocryphal story alleges that Fanny Block
refused to come to Arkansas until Abraham built her a house, which is considered to be their two-story residence on Conway Street, now the oldest two-story house in Washington. Abraham did not purchase the property until 1832, however, at least four years after the family arrived in Arkansas. Nonetheless, Fanny probably was pleased about moving into her new home. It boasted two large rooms downstairs to be used as a dining room and a combination sitting room/parents’ bedchamber. A smaller room at the back of the house may have served Abraham as an office. Upstairs the boys shared one large bedroom and the girls another. Wide hallways separated the rooms up and down and provided extra living space. The two-room kitchen, typical for the time and area, was a separate building set just behind the house. The Blocks already had furniture and household items to move into the new house, but perhaps Fanny selected a new dinner service, such as the purple floral pattern, called Water Lilly, that archeologists found in the house lot. She might also have chosen a new tea service, like the delicately hand-painted pieces of Cornflower with its stylized floral of green leaves, blue-dotted flowers, and black twining stems. The house became the center of Block family life and Abraham’s home for the remainder of his life. It also reflected the Blocks’ prosperity. Their federal-style house was one of the few two-story homes in the community at this early date, and the style is recognized as being associated with “economic success in an agricultural society.” In fact, the house stood above the one-story homes of many of the town’s other prosperous merchants, doctors, and lawyers.67

Although the new Block house must have seemed large and spacious to the family, living quarters were cramped by modern standards. Little private space existed with such large families. As if a dozen people in a house were not enough, families commonly took in boarders. The Block listing in the census of 1850, for example, shows thirteen people occupying the house including son David’s wife and first-born daughter and three students. There also would have been enslaved blacks attached to the household, some of whom likely slept in the hallways and the detached kitchen.
Women’s primary responsibility in this period centered on the family and household management, although Jewish women felt less constricted by the separate spheres of white Protestant marriages. They viewed themselves as equals in the marital partnership and often managed the family business when needed. While Fanny Block might have helped with the business in Virginia, her large and young family in the first years in Arkansas probably precluded much direct involvement. Nevertheless, the contributions and sacrifices that she and other women made in creating and maintaining a home life benefited their husbands and children.68

Fanny’s job of overseeing the daily needs of such a large household so that everything ran smoothly required management skills. Since rarely did all family members stay healthy, caring for the sick served as a major part of household work. With few effective ways to treat diseases, nursing care could be prolonged. Some people remained sickly for years or lingered for a long period before death took them. Infants were especially at risk and often did not survive their first year, but death took its toll at all ages.69
Within about a year of arriving in Washington, the Blocks lost their son Isaac, just two months shy of his eleventh birthday. His headstone is the second oldest in Washington’s Pioneer Cemetery. Four and a half years later, in 1833, the Blocks lost their oldest son, Simon, perhaps from cholera, which had reached New Orleans the previous fall. At eighteen, Simon likely had been working in his father’s store for a number of years and was poised to become a junior partner. The loss must have hit the family hard. Twenty years later their youngest daughter, eighteen-year-old Laura, passed away after suffering with an illness for a year. Her obituary in the Washington Telegraph described her last months: “Her health gradually and almost imperceptibly seemed to decline and baffle the skill of the best attendant physicians, until, at last, like the expiring taper, the feeble flame of life gently and quietly flickered for the last time on earth, and left its frail tenement alone to receive the tears of doting friends.”

Women’s lives encompassed the cycle of birth, childrearing, illness, and death. Bringing new life into the world provided joy but also fear, as infants and mothers endured increased risk of death. Complications of childbirth took many women’s lives. Even those who survived, such as Fanny, faced the pain and discomforts of frequent pregnancies. Fanny gave birth to her first child when she was about sixteen years old and her last at about thirty-nine. The children arrived at frequent intervals, usually less than two years apart. For some twenty-four years of her life, Fanny endured few days (except when Abraham left Virginia for Arkansas) when neither pregnant nor nursing an infant.

While Fanny survived her pregnancies, her daughter, Juliet Pauline, did not. She married Orville Jennings, a young lawyer, on October 8, 1851, in Washington, and gave birth to three boys and a girl before her death in childbirth with her fifth child in 1858, when she was just twenty-seven years old. Orville recorded the deaths in the family Bible:

Died, at Washington, Arkansas, on the 29th day of July, A.D. 1858, at 2 o’clock p.m., of the premature birth of a son, produced by severe attack of bilious fever, Juliet Pauline Jennings, wife of Orville Jennings. She has gone
to Heaven—My Angel Wife—May God bless her memory to my good—Her disconsolate husband, Orville.

Born, on Thursday, the 29th day of July A.D. 1858, at Washington, Arkansas, prematurely, of seven months gestation—a beautiful boy, whose birth caused his mother’s death and who survived her only two days, I named him Julius, for his mother, fifth child of Orville and Juliet P. Jennings.

And then, less than a year later:

Died, at Washington, Arkansas, on Wednesday night at 12 o’clock, the 11th day of May, A.D. 1859, of nervous fever and convulsions, after a sickness of 15 days, Laura Ida, third child and daughter of Orville and Juliet P. Jennings. She has gone to her mother.74

Virginius also lost his first wife prematurely. He married Lenora Tunstall in Dallas County, Arkansas, on July 5, 1860. They had a son in Arkansas and another in Texas before her death on May 17, 1866, about the time a third child might have been expected. Virginius brought Lenora’s body back to Arkansas for burial; members of both families were living there. Virginius then courted Lenora’s older sister, Sarah, and married her on September 3, 1868, in Washington. After the marriage, the family returned to Texas, where Sarah bore two children, both daughters.75

Childbirth, the inability to limit or lengthen the spacing of pregnancies, and child rearing took physical and mental tolls on women that are reflected in the lingering illnesses and early deaths on record. Women’s writing in letters and diaries also express their fear or exhaustion with the rigors of reproduction. Rachel Mordecai’s story, as told by Emily Bingham, provides an enlightening example. An accomplished teacher, Rachel married a widower with seven children when she was thirty-three and produced four additional children, the last when she was forty-one. Rachel wrote of her anger at her continuing pregnancies and her impatience with raising and educating more children. The
pregnancies, complicated by flare-ups of malaria and near-death crises, compromised her health until her father’s last illness brought her to her own death before the age of fifty.76

Although women experienced special risk with childbirth, men did not escape early deaths. Diseases and injuries took husbands and fathers, leaving widows to struggle with providing for young children. The Blocks’ second-oldest daughter, Rosina, lost her husband, Edwin Brittin, when her children were young. Brittin, probably the relative of another town merchant, and Rosina were married on February 14, 1838. He died between 1844 and 1850. Rosina and Edwin had three boys and two girls. Their oldest daughter was at most twelve years old at the time of
her father’s death. Rosina also lost three of her five children before they reached adulthood. In 1853 she relocated to New Orleans with her remaining children, which provided her son Abraham with the opportunity for a profession in his uncles’ business.\textsuperscript{77}

Despite illnesses and early deaths, the Block family expanded through marriages and the births of grandchildren. The Blocks’ oldest daughter, Hester, married Dr. Benjamin P. Jett, one of Washington’s earliest and most important physicians and a community leader, on February 21, 1833, shortly after the Blocks occupied their new home. Jett served several terms in the Arkansas General Assembly and won election as speaker of the state’s House of Representatives in 1852. He also served as registrar of the U.S. land office in Washington before the Civil War. Hester and Benjamin had thirteen children, three of whom died in infancy.\textsuperscript{78} Their first child, a boy named Edward, was Abraham and Fanny’s first grandchild. Because of the length of childbearing years, the oldest children in a family were sometimes a generation older than the youngest. Fanny and Abraham’s last child, Laura, was born within a year of Edward—aunt and nephew were the same age.

Rosina followed Hester in marriage in 1838. Next David married Almedia Trimble on March 16, 1848. Almedia’s uncle, Dr. Charles B. Mitchel, was selected by the Arkansas state legislature to be a U.S. senator just prior to secession. Almedia gave birth to five girls and two boys.\textsuperscript{79} Henry married a woman named Laura sometime around 1851 while he was living in Fulton, Arkansas. They had two girls and a boy, the first born in Arkansas and the other two in Louisiana.\textsuperscript{80} Henry’s sister Juliet married the same year. Virginius married last in 1860 and again in 1868. Eugene and Ellen never married.

In 1853, after his move to New Orleans, Augustus married into the Jonas family. Lucia Jonas, his spouse, was the daughter of Abraham Jonas and Louisa Block. As previously noted, Abraham Jonas was a close friend and strong supporter of Abraham Lincoln. Lucia’s brother, Benjamin Franklin Jonas, rose to prominence as a lawyer in New Orleans and a leader in the Democratic
Party, becoming the first practicing Jew elected to the United States Senate. Augustus and Lucia had three boys and three girls.81

Small-town life limited the availability of Jewish marriage partners, but even in cities with larger Jewish communities marriage to non-Jews was common. Mixed marriage did not necessarily mean the loss of Jewish identity, since in some marriages spouses retained their individual beliefs and did not convert. Children of these marriages often were lost to Judaism, nonetheless. In marrying outside the faith, however, Jews frequently married into socially and economically successful families, indicating their acceptance as desirable marriage partners.82

*Ties to Judaism*

As one of the earliest, if not the first, Jewish families to settle in Arkansas, questions arise about how or if the Blocks followed the tenets and practiced the rites of Judaism. They coped in a frontier community, separated from other Jews and without the ritual specialists a congregation could provide. While in Richmond the Blocks belonged to an established Jewish community where they could easily participate in ritual. It was another matter living on the Arkansas frontier. The Blocks must have been aware that it would be difficult to honor their faith as isolated Jews in their new home. Were they, even in Virginia, flexible in the practice of their faith and, therefore, not bothered by the problems isolation posed?

Descendents of colonial American Jews had begun to acculturate, in contrast with the more observant Jews arriving from Europe in the 1820s. Intermarriage, non-observance of dietary laws and other traditions prevailed among many older Jewish families including the Blocks. As Hasia Diner observes about this period, “The fact that individual men and women chose to migrate . . . far from the safety net of religious services, proved that they had no real concern for Jewish life. Had they been truly committed to living as Jews and observant of tradition, they would never have picked such places,
bereft as they were of the synagogue, circumciser, shokhet . . . and mikvah.”

Perhaps this is too harsh a judgment, since some Jews responded to their circumstances by choosing to blend tradition with the practices of American society, observing Jewish laws and rituals as they could and desired in their private lives. Some kept prayer books and refused to engage in business on the Sabbath and holidays. Some isolated Jews made use of itinerant mohels and tried to observe at least some elements of keeping a kosher table, usually avoiding the consumption of pork, or more closely following dietary laws during Passover. Many transported their dead to cities with Jewish cemeteries for burial.

The structure of society in America, however, was “conducive to religious heterodoxy,” according to Myron Berman. As an example, Berman discusses the marriage of Jacob Cohen of Richmond to a woman he was forbidden to marry by traditional law. Whereas in Europe religious authority would have been sanctioned by the enforced limits of Jewish communities, in America there were options for associating with specific congregations or communities. American freedom not only allowed Cohen to find a way to marry Esther Mordecai, but to continue his association with Judaism and even to rejoin the congregation that had earlier barred the marriage.

Examining the Blocks’ living situation, Jewish associations, and evidence from marriages and deaths provides a window into their religious practices and identity. Bertram Wallace Korn’s work on *The Early Jews of New Orleans* is especially helpful since New Orleans housed the community of Jews closest to the Blocks and the one in which they were documented participants. Abraham Block became a member of New Orleans’s first congregation, Shanarai-Chasset, incorporated in March 1828. The congregation was unusual, however. Because so many of the town’s Jewish men married non-Jewish women, the congregants made an exception contrary to Jewish law in order to include their wives and children. Korn states:

[When the founders] drew up the constitution and by-laws of the congregation they broke every Jewish law in their formula-
tion of rules and regulations which concerned [non-Jewish] wives and the children of intermarriages. To have forbidden intermarried men from joining the congregation or contributing to it, to have refused any recognition of Christian wives or unconverted children of Christian mothers, would have been tantamount to rejecting a large proportion of the Jews in town.87

As early as 1807, American Jews recognized that those who settled in New Orleans tended to neglect the duties required by their faith. A critical description of New Orleans Jewish life in 1842 reads: “in only four Jewish homes in town were forbidden foods avoided; in only two was the Sabbath strictly observed; two-thirds of the Jews did not have their sons circumcised; not even fifty of the Jewish boys could read Hebrew; the synagogue could accommodate only fifty persons, but was thinly attended even on the High Holy Days.”88 While this description cannot speak specifically for Abraham and Fanny, it nonetheless suggests that if they were lax in their religious practice, few of the Jews they associated with in New Orleans would have considered that a problem.

Another indication of the maintenance of their religious practice is their apparent nonobservance of Jewish dietary laws. Living apart from a Jewish community, if the Blocks had wished to keep a kosher household, they would have had to bear the responsibility for the entire process, with Abraham serving as his family’s shokhet. Archaeological excavations conducted at the Block house lot in Washington revealed a trash pit dating to the 1840s beneath the remnants of the detached kitchen. Because the trash pit was sealed by the construction of the kitchen, items found within can be confidently associated with the Block family. Among the animal bones—the remains of meals and food preparation—most were from cows (about 43 percent), followed by pig (about 12 percent), deer (about 9 percent), and fowl (chickens, turkeys, and ducks) (about 8 percent). Remnants of small game and fish, including non-kosher catfish, were also identified.89

Evidence of butchering indicated that the largest percentage of bones came from meaty portions, such as roasts and hams, which could serve a large family. Pigs’ feet and bones suitable for
soups and stews also were found. In addition, the butchering pattern and remains indicate that pigs were slaughtered on site but cows were not, suggesting the purchase of beef cuts in the market place or taken in trade, while raising pigs on site.\textsuperscript{90}

The Block trash pit contained meats forbidden by Jewish law. Although it is possible that the Blocks kept their own household kosher and fed the pork and catfish to their slaves, such a practice would have been difficult to maintain, especially as the slaves cooked the family meals, and the same kitchen served all. If the Blocks had wanted to maintain kashrut, it would have been more practical to train the slaves in Jewish practices than to follow two different and conflicting methods of food preparation. As Marcie Cohen Ferris discovered, southern Jews adapted and blended their traditional foodways with regional practices. Jewish families might avoid forbidden foods only on the Sabbath or holy days. Working alongside Jewish women, African American cooks learned to make Jewish specialties and blended traditions. According to Ferris, Jews also wanted to demonstrate their loyalty and solidarity with southern white society, and what better way than by eating the same foods as their neighbors. Therefore, by not following strict dietary prohibitions and by eating the same foods as their non-Jewish neighbors, the Blocks would have exhibited southern Jewish adaptability.\textsuperscript{91} Yet this pattern was as much national as regional. Jews from the same background living in similar circumstances throughout the country behaved much like the Blocks.

The marriages of the Block children indicate the extent to which the Blocks’ Jewish heritage eroded in the second generation. On an individual level, many factors went into the choice of a spouse. Men waited to marry until they were established in their careers, usually in their early thirties, and made the offer of marriage, but women could refuse based on issues of position, finances, future prospects, community respect, and family duty, all of which could be more important than romance or attraction. Jews had the additional choice of marriage within or outside of the faith as well as the choice of remaining single. As Malcolm Stern noted for the period 1776 to 1840, marriageable Jewish
women were in short supply even in the larger cities with Jewish population centers along the eastern seaboard, resulting in 28 percent of Jewish marriages being with non-Jews. Even having the choice of Jewish mates, however, did not preclude choosing a non-Jewish spouse when mutual attraction was strong. When Jews did marry Christians, however, spouses came from the middle and even upper classes, indicating the Jews’ status and acceptance as good marriage partners.92

Finding Jewish mates in frontier Arkansas proved problematic, and only after moving to New Orleans did Augustus marry Lucia Jonas, a woman from a well-known Jewish family. Except for Eugene and Ellen, who did not marry, the other Block children married Christians. Their marriage partners were from well-to-do families that included lawyers, businessmen, and medical professionals. Certainly if marriage within the faith had been a primary concern, other Block children could have looked to New Orleans for partners as well. The fact that they found spouses in Arkansas suggests otherwise.

While Eugene and Ellen may have chosen not to marry when unable to find Jewish spouses, there were many factors that affected the decision to remain single, not just the lack of or rejection of a proposal. Among Jewish women of that period, Rebecca Gratz provides the most renowned single role model. Gratz was held in high esteem for her supposed refusal to marry the man she loved because he was not Jewish, and instead she chose celibacy and a life of service. But, as revealed by her biographer, Dianne Ashton, the romantic story is probably a myth, as Rebecca’s decision to remain single appears based on her distrust of marriage and the freedom singleness provided to pursue her work. In fact, only half of the ten Gratz siblings who lived to adulthood married, and only three of those married Jews. Of the thirty-one in the next generation, twelve never married. Among Jacob Mordecai’s thirteen children, four remained unmarried even though siblings found both Jewish and Christian spouses. It was not unusual at the time for large families to have several single members. Eugene and Ellen’s burial locations in a non-Jewish cemetery, discussed below, indicate that the lack of
Jewish partners may not have been the determining factor in their single status.\textsuperscript{93}

For families like the Blocks who consciously moved far from Jewish population centers, finding Jewish marriage partners for their children may have been of minor concern. Korn provides a context from New Orleans:

The extent of intermarriage during the early years is yet another point of reference from which we can measure the distance of their drift away from Judaism. . . . Even after larger numbers of Jews, including whole families, arrived in New Orleans, a high degree of intermarriage continued, probably as much as 50 percent, well into the 1830s. While it is sometimes suggested that intermarriage leads to the disintegration of Jewish loyalties, it is more likely, at least in this New Orleans experience, that the decision to settle in Louisiana, and therefore to marry a Christian, stemmed from a weakening of consciousness of Jewish identity. These men had already, to some degree, abandoned their Jewish nature and become secularized. Practically all of the children of these intermarriages . . . were reared as Christians.\textsuperscript{94}

As illustrated by the Gratz and Mordecai families, it was not just New Orleans or the frontier that led to marriage with non-Jews. Even in cities where sizeable Jewish populations and congregations existed, and among highly traditional families, Jewish men and women chose spouses from the wider community. Similar patterns are seen in Kay Kole’s history of the Minis family of Georgia and in Kenneth Libo and Abigail Kursheedt Hoffman’s history of the Seixas-Kursheedt family of New York, Virginia, and New Orleans. In the context of the larger population in any community, there were relatively few suitable Jewish partners available for other Jews to marry. At the same time, Jews were now considered acceptable and desirable partners by Christians in equivalent socio-economic classes. Intermarriage with well-to-do Christians also expanded business opportunities and economic success.\textsuperscript{95}

Finally, the burial places of Abraham, Fanny, and their children provide a strong indication of the Blocks’ religious associations. Only three out of fourteen members of these two generations are buried in a Jewish cemetery. Abraham and Fanny
made little or no effort to transport the children who died young—Isaac, Simon, and Laura—from Washington to Jewish cemeteries in New Orleans or elsewhere, although this practice existed among Jews. Instead their children were laid to rest in the town’s common burial ground. Juliet, David, and Hester died as adults and also were buried in Washington. Juliet was buried beside her young siblings in Washington’s Pioneer Cemetery, but because she was married, the choice of burial location was her husband’s. The recording of the family’s births, marriages, and deaths in a family Bible, however, attests to her likely conversion. David and Hester were buried in Washington’s Presbyterian Cemetery, which replaced Pioneer Cemetery as the preferred burial location in Washington about the time of the Civil War.96 Supporting the case for their conversion, Hester’s obituary
specifically mentioned her “devout Christian faith,” while David’s wife, Almedia, organized the first Presbyterian church in Miller County, Arkansas, at the age of seventy after moving there to live with a daughter.97

Virginius died in Groesbeck, Texas, where he had business interests. Although his gravesite has not been located, it is probably in Groesbeck. Ellen, Eugene, Henry, and Augustus died in New Orleans, and although Rosina’s death and burial location have not been found, her last known residence was in New Orleans.98 Ellen, Eugene, and some of Rosina’s descendants were buried in New Orleans’s Protestant Girod Cemetery, suggesting conversion or apostasy. Because both the Jewish and non-Jewish members of the family remained connected, it is likely the individual’s choice of religious affiliation, and thus burial location, would have been honored. For example, Ellen’s funeral was held in Augustus’s house, and B. F. Jonas provided the record of her death to the official recorder, so if she had continued as a Jew they would certainly have known.99 Henry and Rosina’s burial locations have not been found, but they are not buried in the Dispersed of Judah Cemetery, where Augustus and their parents are interred.100 Supporting the burial indications, none of the obituaries or death notices, except for Abraham’s, makes any allusion to their Jewish faith, although neither did those of Fanny or Augustus.

Yet Abraham maintained his Jewish identity throughout his life. In January 1844 his name appeared on the Second List of Subscribers for The Occident and American Jewish Advocate. This traditionalist periodical was edited by Isaac Leeser who was associated with Richmond and then Philadelphia, two cities with which the Blocks had ties.101 When Abraham died unexpectedly on an annual visit to New Orleans in 1857, that periodical published an obituary spanning three pages. It noted: “[He] had time to pray to the God of Israel, and to invoke a blessing upon his children. He died as the good die: with him a moment of preparation was sufficient. He sleeps according to his cherished wish among his people, in the Portuguese Cemetery, on the Metairie Ridge, in this city.”102 The Dispersed of Judah (Nefutze Judah), a
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Sephardic-rite congregation, owned the cemetery located at Canal and North Anthony streets. The state-wide Arkansas Gazette, in its April 4 issue, also included an obituary that recognized Abraham’s faith: “Few men have lived to the age of Captain Block, who have left more lasting mementoes of a life better spent, with more friends or fewer enemies. His virtues, let us all try to emulate, none can ever hope to excel. The loss to his family and friends is indeed irreparable, but it is a consolation for them to feel, their loss, is his gain, for he has passed from earth to immortality. Truly, ‘A good man has fallen in Israel.’”

Apparently most of the adult Block children departed their Jewish faith. Of them all, only Augustus seems to have remained publicly Jewish. Without letters or diaries, it is impossible to know the process of apostasy or conversion that so many of the Block children clearly followed. Nor is it easy to understand how Abraham, who remained identified with Judaism to the end of his life, could bring his family to a place so far removed from others of his faith and lose most of his children away from Judaism.

Examining the experience of the North Carolina Mordecais offers much insight into what the Blocks may have experienced. During the years when his children were young, Jacob Mordecai had a lackadaisical attitude toward Judaism and a tolerant view of other faiths, including a flirtation with Christianity. This attitude permitted not only settlement in a town without other Jews, but also set the stage for his children’s exploration of faith. By the time Jacob recommitted to Judaism in his later years, a number of his adult children were finding spiritual resonance along different paths, leading to a range of beliefs: committed and nominal Judaism, agnosticism, and personal and evangelistic Christianity. This process in many ways tore the Mordecai family asunder with painful confrontations and battles over the souls and minds of children.

Perhaps Abraham Block, like Jacob Mordecai, was less committed to Judaism in the years he chose to leave Richmond and raise his family in Arkansas. Perhaps he too recommitted to his faith in later years. Abraham may have accepted the inevitability of his children’s apostasy and conversion among the marriage
Abraham Block’s gravestone, Dispersed of Judah Cemetery, New Orleans.
(Courtesy of Catherine C. Kahn, who photographed the Block tombstone for inclusion in this article.)
pool of Washington, Arkansas, but his Judaism was influential enough to retain at least one son to Judaism. The process of change for the Blocks might well have been turbulent as well.

Business and Politics

Jewish settlers moved from the eastern seaboard into the southern states and western territories typically as merchants to the small towns that were situated as market centers along routes of commerce. Many started as peddlers and others went directly into shopkeeping, but most had self-employment as their goal. All hoped to find a place to prosper. Abraham Block chose just such a town in Washington. As the county seat, it served as the market center for the surrounding county and was also situated on the Southwest Trail, the major route through Arkansas from St. Louis to Texas. The location proved an excellent choice. During the period of Block’s activity, the average number of people served by stores in Arkansas was 370, nearly double that of stores in the East.

Abraham began business in Washington in partnership with John Johnson, who owned mills, a cotton gin, distillery, and store. Abraham established his own mercantile store by 1832, the year Johnson died, and probably at least five years earlier. He conducted business in a fashion typical of frontier merchants, including Jews. Contemporary newspaper advertisements show that the Blocks offered clothing, fabrics and sewing supplies, dry goods, fancy goods, hardware, glassware and dishes, tinware, tools, and groceries. Besides selling directly for themselves, the Blocks also sold goods for others on a commission basis. They handled real estate, cattle, and slaves.

Once a year, usually around March, frontier merchants traveled to wholesale centers to select new merchandise for the coming year and reestablish business relations with wholesalers. Merchants in mid-America, which included Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa, favored the eastern centers, but Arkansas merchants preferred New Orleans as their wholesale market. Spring advertisements of new merchandise offered by the Blocks support this pattern. Their extant advertisements mention New Orleans
several times, but New York only once. Pieces of ceramics found during archaeological excavations at the Block house bear the printed mark of the New Orleans importers Henderson & Gaines.108

The plantation economy revolved around the agricultural cycle. Planters required a steady supply of tools, seeds, household goods, and other items throughout the year, but they could only pay for those items after the sale of their crops. Merchants typified by the Blocks extended credit for up to a year to their clientele, waiting until after harvest to be paid, customarily by January 1. The entire economy was based on the credit system, for as the Blocks extended credit to local planters, they also had to receive credit from their suppliers and wholesalers. Good businessmen could become prosperous, but a disruption to the system, as happened during the Civil War, could collapse the entire structure. The system also required the Blocks to maintain a close watch on the prosperity of their customers. If a planter failed, a sell-off of land, livestock, and slaves might be necessary to settle debts. If a planter died unexpectedly, the Blocks were required to file a claim on the estate to settle the account, and, in fact, their names appear frequently in the county’s probate records.109

As the town of Washington grew and prospered, so did the businesses of Abraham and his sons. The names of the businesses changed every few years as one Block son after the other joined the company. The sons learned to be successful merchants from their father starting as clerks in the family store. As they grew older, they often partnered with their father temporarily, and then set out on their own or in partnership with a brother, making room in Abraham’s store for the younger sons. This pattern of succession was common among Jewish families.

As Abraham’s sons gained experience and maturity, he expanded his business domain, opening the first satellite store in Paracifta, Sevier County, Arkansas, before 1836. In 1841 he went into partnership with Augustus for three years under the name A. Block and Son. At about the same time, Henry took over a shop at Centre Point in Howard County, Arkansas. Both Augustus and Henry eventually moved to Fulton down the road from
Washington on the Red River. Augustus may have arrived first, but by 1847 the two conducted business under the name of Block, Brother & Co. Business advertisements, which include the mention of warehouses, show that they served as commission, forwarding, and storage merchants in addition to offering general merchandise. Abraham continued in business in Washington under his own name until 1847, when he partnered with David and the business again became A. Block & Son. Soon after, Virginius joined the family firm. Such multiple partnerships, satellite stores, and sons moving into the family business then branching out in surrounding towns typified Jewish business conduct during this and later eras. Jews entered non-agricultural niches that nonetheless depended on the farm economy. Business considerations also encouraged geographic mobility and the spread of Jews and their businesses across the country.

Non-Jewish businessmen also shared family connections, but they tended to accumulate wealth in different ways. For example, James Walker and Ephraim Mirick, who maintained stores when first arriving in Hempstead County, turned their profits into land, slaves, and cotton. Eventually they left the mercantile trade and became successful planters.

The Blocks succeeded in business. Their prosperity is reflected in the value of their personal property as recorded in the county tax records. By 1841 Abraham owned three slaves, a saw mill, a tanyard, and three horses, as well as ten town lots worth $6,000. Eight years later as he entered retirement, he downsized the businesses but still owned five town lots worth $6,000, five slaves, one pleasure carriage, four horses, five head of cattle, gold watches, and jewelry. In 1853 David owned five town lots worth $1,800, one slave, five head of cattle, and gold watches and jewelry. By 1861 David added a pleasure carriage with horses and increased his slaveholdings to five. In addition the Blocks owned numerous real estate investments in Hempstead and nearby counties, taking advantage of one of Arkansas’s most lucrative ventures. Abraham’s landholdings grew in acreage as well as value, increasing from $120 in 1841 to $4,704 in 1854. Over the years, David (with Virginius, his
business partner) owned hundreds of acres, valued at $21,000 by 1860.¹¹²

While most Jewish businessmen did not invest in farm land, some southern Jews with the capital did pursue this lucrative venture, as did their non-Jewish counterparts, often maintaining town residences as well. The Rosengartens illustrate several examples of southern Jews who acquired landholdings and developed plantations. Nathan Nathans of Charleston owned about five hundred acres and thirty-five slaves. Other Charlestonians listed as planters in local records included rice-planters Mordecai Cohen and Isaiah Moses, as well as Myer Jacobs, Edward Levy, and Isaac Lyons.¹¹³

More typical of Jewish businessmen, however, was the practice of reinvesting capital in other businesses, such as Abraham’s sawmill and tanyard, or in town real estate that brought revenue through rentals, a pattern illustrated by Fanny’s father in Virginia.

After Abraham’s retirement in 1850, David and Virginius continued as merchants in Washington under the name D&V Block. David’s prominence in Hempstead County exceeded that of his father, and he became the most public of the Block sons in the town. He served as Hempstead County treasurer from 1848 to
1854 before winning election to the Arkansas House of Represen-
tatives for the Eleventh General Assembly from November 1856 to
January 1857. David ran on a Whig ticket in the largely Demo-
cratic state, but because of the Whigs economic activism, they
received more support in commercially-oriented towns and plan-
tation areas like Washington. In the large political picture in
Arkansas, however, the parties demonstrated scant differences,
and electoral success was accomplished more by community and
family connections than party affiliation or ideology. David’s
Whig alignment fits his business perspective, but his election also
indicates the esteem and popularity in which he was held within
his community. Clearly, David thrived in the same political circle
as some of his sisters’ non-Jewish husbands.114

Augustus and Henry, in business in Fulton, began looking
elsewhere for opportunity. In early 1850 Augustus left the part-
nership and the following year moved to New Orleans. Henry
continued the Fulton business under his own name and added
services as an agent for a river packet from Fulton to New Or-
leans. A few years later, he joined Augustus in New Orleans, and
the brothers again joined in a partnership that lasted through the
1850s. They became A&H Block, Wholesale Grocers, supplying,
among others, their brothers’ store in Washington, again a typical
Jewish family/business arrangement. New Orleans served as the
country’s premier center for wholesale groceries due to the farm-
ing economy in the Mississippi Valley and access to coffee, cocoa,
and sugar from Central and South America, making their business
choice logical. By 1860 New Orleans also was host to the largest
Jewish community in the South, a fact directly related to the eco-
nomics of the Gulf and Mississippi region.115

Moving from Fulton to New Orleans reflects a typical pattern
among Jewish businessmen who prospered in small towns. When
those towns failed to grow into big cities, they moved to estab-
lished cities with greater opportunity. Harris Kempner of Texas
provides another example of this pattern. Kempner began as a
peddler before opening a general store in Cold Springs, Texas. He
did well in the community, rising to a position of respect in which
he served as a banker for county funds. But after fifteen years,
Kempner relocated to Galveston to pursue better business prospects. Others, like the Sangers of Texas, advanced along the opening of small railroad towns until they reached Dallas.\textsuperscript{116}

In 1855 Virginius left the partnership with his brother David and put his house up for sale, suggesting a planned move from Washington. He may have been considering a move to Texas, where he later opened stores. During the 1850s construction of a railroad from Galveston Bay to the Red River began. Since the Red River also served Washington, this would have been an enticing development for the Blocks. Work progressed slowly, however, with the first section of the line going from Houston to Cypress in 1856 and finally reaching about eighty miles to Millican in 1860, where work stopped until after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{117} At about the same time, David spent a year in New Orleans, perhaps investigating other business options, while maintaining his business in Washington. Whatever Virginius or David had in mind apparently did not materialize, and they reorganized in Washington as D. Block & Brother in 1857. Eugene, the youngest brother, did not figure in the public scene in Washington during the 1850s. Still in his twenties, he probably worked as a clerk or junior partner in his brothers’ store. He did, however, serve as a justice of the peace, performing marriage ceremonies for several couples in 1851 and 1853. Although this minor position may have been offered by the Blocks as a form of customer service, it also could have served as a stepping stone into local politics. In 1858 Eugene made an unsuccessful run for the Arkansas House of Representatives on the Whig ticket, but unlike his brother David, this appears to have been his only political foray.\textsuperscript{118}

Within forty years of Abraham’s arrival in Arkansas, the Block men had achieved prominence as merchants and community leaders. They were respected and sought for public service to their community and state. As their wealth accumulated, their business interests grew beyond the town of Washington. The movement of Block sons to New Orleans was part of the internal migration pattern of the family, begun with Abraham’s move from Richmond to Arkansas. Like many other Jews, the Blocks followed along transportation corridors that gave them the best
opportunities for business success. In the years to come, this pattern continued.

*The Business of Slavery*

In his study of Jews and slavery in the South, Bertram Korn found little difference between southern Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. Later studies by Robert Rosen and James Hagy reinforce this view. Southern Jews were involved in all aspects of slaveholding, as buyers and sellers, owners and users of slave labor. The major distinctions between Jews and non-Jews were the willingness of Jewish shopkeepers to do business with blacks, unlike their non-Jewish counterparts, and the preponderance of Jews as urban slaveholders.\(^{119}\)

Slaveholding and views about slaveholding evolved. At the end of the 1700s in Charleston, for example, more than 80 percent of urban households owned at least a few slaves, but after 1850 slaveholding began to decline in the cities, and by 1860 only about one-fourth of all free southerners were slaveholders. The largest slaveholders were the plantation owners, while urban slaveholders usually owned fewer than five slaves. Jews, who generally did not own plantations, followed the pattern of their urban neighbors.\(^{120}\)

Beyond slave ownership, southern merchants often had little choice in whether or not to deal in slaves. As valuable property, slaves were used as collateral for loans, as the means to settle debts, and as the disposable part of estates on the death of the owners. Because of the economic system in practice in the region, which required merchants to extend credit to farmers and planters, slaves could be part of the settlement. Even more so, commission merchants, brokers, and auctioneers in the South were “expected by the public to deal in slaves as readily as in any other sort of merchandise.” Historian James Hagy notes that commission merchants rarely owned the human chattel they dealt in.\(^{121}\)

The Blocks, southerners from Virginia and then Arkansas, left a public record as both slave owners and slave sellers. The family’s history regarding slavery, however, seems to evolve from
one of ambivalence to mixed participation, mirroring the changing patterns in southern society, as well as individual expression.

Fanny’s mother’s family owned slaves in Maryland and New York as far back as the Revolutionary War. Her father, however, was a reluctant slave owner. Isaiah Isaacs, in partnership with Jacob Cohen, owned several slaves. When the partnership dissolved in 1792, Isaiah received five enslaved individuals, child siblings Jim and Rachel, as well as Hannah, Lucy, and Lucy’s child Polly. Seven years later, Isaacs granted Lucy her freedom.122

In 1803 when he wrote his will, Isaiah took steps to free his remaining slaves:

Being of opinion that all men are by nature equally free and being possessed of some of those beings who are unfortunate [sic] doomed to slavery, as to them I must enjoin upon my executors a strict observance of the following clause in my will. My slaves hereafter named are to be and they are hereby manumitted and made free so that after the different periods hereafter mentioned they shall enjoy all the privileges and immunities of freed people.123

He then outlined a detailed plan of emancipation specifying different dates, probably related to their ages, and even allowing for as yet unborn children. In addition, he directed that the slaves were not to be sold but remain the property of his children until freed, and when freed, to receive twenty dollars worth of clothing.

Of the slaves Isaiah received when the partnership split, Lucy had already been freed by the time of the will and Hannah was not mentioned, suggesting she might have died in the interim or been freed earlier. The will names siblings Jim and Rachel, Lucy’s daughter Polly, as well as Henry and William. An 1806 codicil to the will names Rachel’s children, Mary and Clement Washington.124

While Isaacs’s will indicates his general opposition to slavery, this did not stop him from benefiting from his slaves’ labor or from passing the human property to his children, suggesting that he may have looked on the arrangement as a form of indentured servitude. Isaiah Isaacs was not alone in his views, for a number
of his contemporaries including Thomas Jefferson supported individual manumission. Hagy notes that ten Jews in Charleston freed slaves during this period and that Virginia law did not specifically forbid freeing slaves until 1820.125

In 1823 when Isaiah’s will was settled and the property divided between Fanny and her brother Hays, only two slaves remained from Isaiah’s estate: Harriet, another daughter of Rachel, given to Hays; and Matilda, Polly’s daughter, given to Abraham and Fanny. In the Personal Property Tax records for Richmond, Abraham is listed as owning two slaves from 1815 to 1817 and three slaves in 1818. From 1824 he is listed with only one slave. This suggests that he had Harriet, Matilda, and possibly a child of one of their slaves in his household until the property split, and that the single slave in 1824 was Matilda. Matilda also appears in the public record in September 1826. Named as Matilda Drew and identified as a slave of Abraham Block, she was charged with the theft of some food from Grace Marx and subsequently acquitted. Since the Blocks most likely had left Virginia by this time, Matilda, slated to be freed at the age of thirty-one by Isaiah’s will, probably was left behind.126

Because Fanny was so young when Isaiah died, his opinions on slavery may have exerted little influence on her world view. Her uncle David, Isaiah’s brother, however, demonstrated a more intimate perspective on slavery of which Fanny must have been aware. While living in Charlottesville, David took a free mulatto woman, Nancy West, as his common-law wife. The residents of Charlottesville tolerated the relationship as long as they were discreet, but once they began to live openly as a family, members of the community objected. The Albemarle County grand jury indicted them for cohabitation, a charge later reduced to fornication. The court refused to convict them, however, instead recognizing their relationship as a common-law marriage, because to do otherwise would have publicly exposed the common but covert practice of interracial sex.127

David and Nancy’s relationship also illustrates the definition of race as a social construct. Nancy was of mixed race, likely no more than a quarter black, and light-complexioned. Unlike later
times when any trace of African ancestry defined a person as black, during this period sufficiently distant black ancestry did not preclude acceptance by the dominant white culture. Nancy’s brother was considered “white” enough that he legally married a white woman and their children were accepted as white. David and Nancy’s children, although known to be of mixed race, were educated with white children. Perhaps the Isaacs family simply accepted Nancy as white. Thus, it is difficult to know how Fanny might have perceived the actions of her father and uncle. While the Isaacs’s actions regarding race and slavery may not have been unusual for the times, they were certainly at one end of the spectrum. And whatever Fanny may have thought about slavery at this time, she had first cousins of mixed race. Nonetheless, the Blocks’ slaveholding during this period was limited by Isaiah’s directive and not necessarily reflective of their views.\textsuperscript{128}

A better indicator of the Blocks’ involvement in and attitudes toward slavery may be their actions during their years in Arkansas when they were mature enough and prosperous enough to make their own choices. In Arkansas some members of the family became slaveholders and others did not. Only Abraham, Fanny, and David personally owned more slaves than the typical urban dweller. In the Hempstead County tax records, Abraham is first shown owning a single slave in 1839. Through the 1840s, that number slowly increased to five until 1850, when the number jumped to eleven. According to the 1850 Slave Schedule, Abraham and Fanny owned thirteen slaves, six of whom were adults. Both Henry and David paid taxes on their first slaves in 1851. David’s slaves increased to five in 1856. A decade later and after Abraham’s death, Fanny owned six slaves, five of whom were eighteen or older; David owned seven slaves, two of whom were adults and two teenagers. Rosina owned a single slave in 1850, and Virginius did not own a personal slave until 1858. Neither Augustus nor Eugene appear ever to have owned slaves in Hempstead County, although in Eugene’s case this may have had less to do with ideology than finances.\textsuperscript{129}

In addition to their personal slaveholding, the Blocks also held slaves as a function of their mercantile activities. Linda
McDowell's study of slaves and freedmen in Hempstead County records twelve purchases but only one slave sold by the Blocks. All but one purchase was made by the Blocks in partnership, and, in fact, three are specifically identified as collateral for loans. Although the enslaved individuals were named in most of the transactions, it is not known if any (except one family) became Block personal property, reverted to the original owners upon payment of their debt, or were sold as part of the business. The Blocks did not advertise as slave dealers, however, and these limited transactions represented normal business as southern merchants. Only the firm of D&V Block seems to have exceeded the norm. The firm of David and Virginius began owning slaves by 1852 and, in 1856, advertised for sale a one thousand-acre plantation and thirty-two slaves, suggesting a direct involvement in cotton planting. They also retained eighteen slaves, perhaps as a crew of workmen. Historian Richard Wade notes that hiring out was a common practice in the urban setting and created a source of flexible labor. While Washington could hardly be considered urban, the need for extra hands for town projects and seasonal agricultural labor would have provided the Blocks with another source of income.

In Arkansas during the antebellum period of 1840 to 1860, only one in five taxpayers owned slaves, and 56 percent of those owned fewer than five. In 1850 only 9 percent of slaveholders owned twenty or more slaves and thus fit the definition of large planter. Both Donald McNeilly and Carolyn Earle Billingsley conclude, however, that the planter class was broader and deeper than only numbers of slaves would suggest, and included professional men and extended kin in the planter social network, even though individually they owned fewer slaves. While large numbers of slaves were needed for planting operations, fewer slaves were required for town-based businesses and professions. McNeilly subdivides slaveholders into “small planters” owning ten to nineteen slaves and “slaveholding yeomen” owning less than ten.

The fact that the Blocks owned slaves at all places them in the minority and indicates their status and prosperity. Abraham,
Fanny, and David Block owned more slaves than would be expected for townspeople, suggesting that some may have been shop workers in addition to domestic servants, but certainly indicative of the Blocks’ higher economic status and thus need for additional servants. The planter-status number of slaves owned by D&V Block suggests an expanded business venture, while the fewer slaves owned by other family members were probably personal servants. While those family members who did not own slaves may have been expressing personal views, this may instead simply reflect the beginnings of their careers and families when they had neither the resources nor need for slaves. Thus, the Blocks were little different from their southern, urban neighbors regarding slaveholding in the decades they lived in Arkansas prior to the Civil War. Their personal lives reflect a continued participation in the business of slavery, while their businesses directly involved them in the buying and selling of humans. They also relied on surrounding plantation owners as customers and thus depended on the well-being of the slave-based, agrarian economy.

Civil War and Reconstruction

Changes in the Block family beginning just prior to the Civil War reflect the upheavals in the South as well as the passing of generations. This included relocation for better opportunities in business and other aspects of life. As discussed above, although most of the Blocks remained in Washington during the 1850s, Augustus, Henry, and Rosina reestablished themselves in New Orleans early in that decade.

As the closing years of the 1850s brought the South closer to secession, personal loss came to the Block family with the death of patriarch Abraham Block. After Abraham’s retirement, he and Fanny made annual visits to New Orleans to visit family. On March 17, 1857, during one of those visits, Abraham died suddenly, probably of a heart attack. At seventy-six years of age, his death should not have been completely unexpected, but his family and friends were shocked nonetheless. With his passing, Abraham’s sons became the primary movers in Block business ventures. Washington and New Orleans continued to serve as
their bases of operation as the onset of the Civil War led to commercial disruption and eventually new directions.\textsuperscript{133}

The rumblings of discontent with the Union continued through the late 1850s until war finally broke out with the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1861. The next four years proved difficult for southerners, and certainly for southern businessmen like the Blocks, who operated on the credit system. Yet their actions during this period show that the Blocks used their expertise to support the Confederacy while also seeking new business opportunities.

Augustus and Henry apparently disbanded A&H Block, the wholesale grocery business, around the beginning of the Civil War, probably to pursue other business ventures and not because of pending hostilities. In 1861 Augustus joined in partnership with J. J. Jonas, likely a brother-in-law, as Block & Jonas, a tobacco agency. Henry partnered with James McCandlish in Block & Co., a grocery firm.\textsuperscript{134} When New Orleans fell to Union forces on April 25, 1862, however, the occupation and blockade disrupted normal commercial practices of shipping and trade. Residents who refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States were ordered to leave the city, and, as Robert Rosen notes, a mass exodus of the Jewish population followed. Augustus’s obituary reported that the war interrupted his business and that he lived with family in Arkansas and Texas. The birth of one of his children in Arkansas during that time supports the account. The war ended with Robert E. Lee’s surrender on April 9, 1865, and Augustus returned to New Orleans in time for the birth of a son that June. In an act of honor toward the Confederacy, and a bit of defiance, he named the boy after the beloved, defeated general.\textsuperscript{135}

After the war, Augustus quickly recovered in business, suggesting that despite the disruption the war caused, it did not destroy the trade relationships and networks he had forged. By 1866 he partnered with his nephew Abraham Brittin (Rosina’s son) as Block & Brittin, one of the leading wholesale grocers in New Orleans with a large building on Canal Street. The firm eventually became Block, Brittin & Co., adding partners Henry Block and James McCandlish. In 1871, only six years after the end of the
war, Augustus, then in his mid-fifties, was sufficiently established that he retired from the firm. He continued to pursue other community business ventures, serving as a stockholder in the Canal Bank, a promoter of the Crescent City Railroad Company, and a member of the Cotton Exchange.136

Jewish and Christian business people commonly followed this pattern of reinvestment to diversify, build profits, and develop a sounder foundation for economic success. Another example of this can be seen in Harold Hyman’s study of the Kempner family of Galveston, Texas. As Harris Kempner profited from his wholesale grocery business and cotton factoring, he reinvested in banks, railroads, steamships, a hotel, and various manufacturing firms, and also supported projects such as the Deep Water Committee to improve port facilities. By using profits from merchandising to invest in economic infrastructure, like banks and railroads, these businessmen encouraged the growth of their cities and improved their economic environment, which then led to even more financial success.137

Henry’s success in business paralleled that of Augustus, since they were partners through many years. Yet in 1870 Henry’s personal estate was valued at $45,000, which exceeded that of Augustus’s combined personal and real estate by three and half times. He likely pursued additional investments. Less is known about Henry, suggesting that he took a less public role than his brother. A similar pattern is seen among the Sanger Brothers who rose from dry goods merchants to department store moguls in Dallas after the Civil War. One brother became heavily involved in civic activities and promotion, while another excelled in behind-the-scenes, business management.138

In Washington, David built a successful niche, expanding business ventures into land holdings in his partnership with Virginius. The 1861 tax lists for Hempstead County showed the partnership owning over six thousand acres of land in ninety-three parcels.139 The town had grown, too. By 1861 there were a half-dozen dry-goods merchants, as well as those specializing in medicines, groceries, and liquors, and a tailor, watchmaker, harness maker, shoemaker, photographer, carpenters, and brick
Washington was far enough west to escape being the site of bloody battles during the Civil War, but residents rallied to the southern cause, contributing twenty companies and military leaders. The population swelled as refugees and soldiers escaped the battleground. Townspeople opened homes and outbuildings to provide shelter for civilians and officers, while soldiers bivouacked in surrounding fields. When Union troops captured Little Rock, the state capital, on September 10, 1863, the Arkansas government fled to Washington, bringing its records and officials. The Hempstead County courthouse served as the capitol building from then until the end of the war. This influx of people provided an additional financial opportunity for merchants like the Blocks as long as supply lines could be kept open. With New Orleans blockaded and the years of war deepening, however, supplies ran low.

David emerged as a community leader with his service in local and statewide offices. During the Civil War years, he combined his support for the Confederacy with his skills as a businessman. In 1862 Hempstead County voters encouraged him to run for both the Arkansas Senate and House, although he declined both. In March 1863 he was appointed Arkansas’s general agent of the Produce Loan to the Confederate States. In this capacity, he promoted the program to state planters, encouraging them with the potential profitability of selling their cotton to the Confederate government in exchange for bonds. In August of that year, as the program faced financial problems, he and Dr. Benjamin Jett, Hester’s husband, traveled to the Confederate capital of Richmond, likely to deal with his work as an agent. In September David was recommended for the position of vice president of the newly formed Hempstead County Confederate Association.

The Jetts also thrived in Washington and supported the Confederacy. Besides his profession as a physician, Benjamin Jett also owned a drug store and, like David, served a term in the Arkansas House of Representatives. Two of the Jetts’s sons, Edward and
Benjamin Jr., served the Confederacy in the Hempstead Rifles and the Seventeenth Arkansas Infantry. As demonstrated by the Blocks’ service and sentiment, they clearly displayed loyalty to the South. Southern Jews served the Confederacy in various capacities. Many joined military forces, such as Harris Kempner who joined the Twelfth Texas Cavalry Regiment, or Francis Minis Myers of Georgia who participated in a number of battles and was promoted to the rank of captain. Others, like David Block, offered their business skills to the Confederate cause. Solomon Solomon of New Orleans, who was in his forties at the outbreak of the war, served the Confederacy as a sutler, supplying clothing and equipment to troops in Virginia. His duties required him to travel with the troops and remain away from his New Orleans home. Several of the Jonas brothers of New Orleans joined as soldiers but filled positions as quartermaster and commissary, as did Raphael Moses of Georgia. This use of southern Jews’ commercial skills to support the Confederacy reflected their particular adaptation to southern life.

When the Civil War ended, many southern fortunes had vanished and the economy was disrupted if not destroyed. Planters had been unable to grow, harvest, or sell their crops. Many business people like the Blocks, dependent on a plantation economy, lost their fortunes, which were tied up in the business, in extending credit, and in land investments. A description of the reverses of David and Virginius’s firm following the war indicates the devastation of the southern economy and its reach into Washington:

For many years the house [of] A. Block & Son, and afterwards of D.&V. Block was one of the most extensive commercial establishments in the State. By industry, energy, and honesty, they built up a business and a name which will be remembered for long years to come. . . . They were distinguished for their generous liberality and were ever the kind friends of the poor and unfortunate. By the results of the war, the princely fortune which years of toil had accumulated, was swept away, and like all who took part with the South, [Virginius] was left poor and embarrassed with debt.
Like his brother Augustus in New Orleans, David’s business acumen and community and trade connections positioned him for a successful, even quick, recovery despite these setbacks. Unfortunately, fate intervened. On December 21, 1865, just eight months after the war ended, David Block died. Only forty-two years old, he left Almedia with seven children, the youngest of whom had barely turned one. As if that was not devastating enough, a week later Hester’s husband, Dr. Benjamin Jett, also died. Their youngest was just ten years old. This was a double tragedy not only for the Block family, but also for the town of Washington, which, not yet recovered from the war, now lost two of its most outstanding leaders. David, whose death was unexpected, had not prepared a will, leaving Almedia to settle his affairs and Virginius to close out the business. Much property had to be sold at a time when few had money to buy it. It took Almedia four years to settle the estate and discharge her duties as executrix.\textsuperscript{146}

It was not unusual in Hempstead County for women to be named as executrixes. Beginning in the records of the 1820s and continuing into the 1860s when David died, women were frequently named to settle the estates of their husbands, sometimes sharing the role with a male, but often as sole executrix. As mentioned above, Almedia later organized a Presbyterian church in Miller County, Arkansas, supporting evidence of her managerial skills.\textsuperscript{147}

Virginius had explored other business opportunities in the middle 1850s before rejoining David in Washington in 1857 as D. Block & Brother. In the early 1860s, they operated as D&V Block. After the Civil War broke out, Virginius expanded Block business ventures into Texas. Migrations to Texas along the Southwest Trail through Washington had begun as early as the 1820s with Stephen Austin and continued throughout the years. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the Texas population grew as Arkansas planters took their slaves and moved to Texas hoping to protect their property and escape the reach of the federal government. Where people settled, business opportunities followed, and Virginius joined the migration to Texas in 1863.
The Southwest Trail, from St. Louis southwest to Little Rock through Washington to Fulton, with some side routes indicated by other cities identified on the map. (Map by Leslie Walker, courtesy Arkansas Archeological Survey.)

The railroad that had begun in the 1850s (later, the Houston & Texas Central Railroad), linking Galveston Bay northward toward the Red River, stopped at Millican until the war ended. The terminus of the railroad was an extremely important business
Thousands of people moved to Millican within the first year of the railroad’s arrival, and the merchants’ reach extended into the interior of Texas via stage lines and ox-drawn wagons. By August 1867 the railroad pushed north of Millican to Bryan. From there the route expanded rapidly to Hearne (1868), Calvert (June 1869), Kosse (late 1869), Groesbeck (late 1870), and Corsicana (1871), until it reached Dallas in July 1872. The railroads were also important for outbound trade and the migration of settlers. By 1870 half of the state’s cotton crop left via Galveston Bay, and in 1872, 100,000 people arrived in Texas. The 1870s brought many Jewish settlers to the state as well; by 1872 1,500 Jews lived in Texas.148

Merchants who followed the railroad on its northern trek achieved tremendous success. Probably the best example, as Rose Biderman chronicles, was that of the Sanger Brothers, Jewish dry goods merchants who began along the H&TC line in Millican and rose to the level of “merchant princes” in Dallas. They pushed northward with the railroad, opening new stores at each terminus, while maintaining the earlier stores by bringing in siblings, in-laws, and cousins to manage the stores. When the railroad reached Dallas, the Sangers arrived with stock within days. But Dallas was different from the other towns, for it also attracted an east-west railroad, which allowed it to become a transportation hub and the mercantile capital for southwest Texas. Thus, merchants who came to Dallas found an ideal environment to grow their businesses in some cases, like the Sangers, into empires.149

Arriving in Texas in 1863, Virginius probably established a store in Millican, the H&TC terminus, much like the Sangers. His obituary places him in Bryan, which the railroad reached in 1867. By 1870 he was in Calvert in Robertson County and was joined by his brother Eugene. Six months after the railroad arrived, 104 businesses were located in the town, including Block Brothers & Co., wholesale and retail grocers. Their specialty linked them to New Orleans, the main supply hub for the Southwest, and to Augustus and Henry, who undoubtedly supplied them from their wholesale grocery firm out of the port city. Virginius was listed in the census for that year as a commission merchant and Eugene as
a hardware merchant, suggesting a further expansion of their business. From Calvert, Virginius pushed on to Kosse in Lime-
stone County, where in 1871 he was appointed alderman when the city government was organized. In the same year, Block
Brothers opened a store at the next terminus of Groesbeck, which grew to over fifteen thousand people in its first year. Days before
his planned move to Corsicana, Virginius died unexpectedly on October 17, 1871, just four months prior to his last child’s birth. He
was forty-four years old. Clearly, Virginius was following a business pattern that paralleled the Sangers. If not for his untimely
death, he almost certainly would have continued on to Dallas, where the expansion of business opportunities likely would have
brought him as much success as that of Augustus in New Or-
leans.150

Eugene never left much of an impact wherever he lived. As
the youngest brother, he followed the family into the Block busi-
nesses, but he may have been less ambitious than his siblings. He
left Washington for New Orleans at the end of the Civil War and
by 1870 joined Virginius in Calvert, Texas. Eugene remained in
Calvert as Virginius expanded the stores northward, and contin-
ued there after Virginius’s death. Never married, he lived in a
boarding house with other unmarried men. On a visit back to
New Orleans on March 2, 1875, he was stricken with a heart attack
on a street corner and passed away at the age of forty-six.151

The early deaths of David, Virginius, and Eugene—all of
whom died in their early to middle forties—may well be attrib-
uted to genetics in combination with the dietary habits of the
times. Meals were large, food was fried in butter or lard, and
vegetables were given little regard, all factors we understand to-
day that can lead to high cholesterol and heart disease.152
Whatever the cause, these were the brothers outside of New Or-
leans who would have expanded the Block businesses into a
regional network. David built on what Abraham started in Wash-
ington, while Virginius and Eugene continued their father’s
pattern of settling along a transportation corridor on the advanc-
ing frontier, in their case finding new business opportunities in
Texas along the railroad lines.
Other Jews who arrived in Texas followed similar patterns, setting up family members at distribution points and opening new areas. Although the Sangers were among the most successful, Natalie Ornish notes this was a typical pattern for Jewish families coming to Texas. Even smaller merchants built their businesses at good locations, such as Galveston, and through family connections. The pattern continued to the turn of the twentieth century, as indicated by historians Hollace Weiner and Kenneth Roseman, with the foundation of such firms as Zale Corporation, Neiman-Marcus, and the Levy Brothers. Indeed, if fate had not intervened, the Blocks may well have been on their way to creating their own mercantile dynasty.

The Final Deaths

The lives of the surviving Blocks concluded in patterns typical of the times. Decisions to relocate were influenced by family concerns and aging, and deaths took them in ways shared by the larger population.

After the Civil War, Fanny Block and her two youngest and unmarried children, Eugene and Ellen, moved to New Orleans. Times were likely difficult in Washington immediately after the war as Reconstruction began. Nonetheless prosperity returned quickly enough so that by 1874 the county built a new courthouse. In 1866, however, Washington may have seemed a sad place to Fanny as family dispersed or died. She may have chosen New Orleans to join the cluster of her older children, provide better opportunities for Eugene and Ellen, and to return to a Jewish religious community.

While these Blocks undoubtedly hoped for a better future in New Orleans, the move unfortunately coincided with one of the city’s recurrent yellow fever epidemics. In 1867 the disease proved particularly severe, evidenced by the long lists of dead in the *Daily Picayune*’s daily mortuary report. In the September 21 issue, a short notice announced Ellen’s death, while a later notice in the *Arkansas Gazette* attributed it to yellow fever. She joined over three thousand people who succumbed to the epidemic in New Orleans that year.
Fanny lived for five years in New Orleans, boarding in the household of Rosina’s married daughter. This seventy-five-year-old family matriarch died November 17, 1871, exactly one month after Virginius’s death. Her long life had begun in Virginia, been nurtured in Arkansas, and ended in Louisiana. Her husband and nine of her fourteen children had preceded her in death. An obituary in the Washington Telegraph sang her praises, but the words were generic as fit the times, with nothing that distinguished her either as a Jewish woman or accomplished beyond that of a typical wife and mother.156

Only two families of the Block children—that of Hester, the Blocks’ oldest child, who had married Benjamin Jett, and David’s, now headed by his widow, Almedia—remained in Washington. Both had established families that were raised as Christians, and, by the close of the Civil War, their oldest children were young adults beginning lives of their own in Arkansas. Only when they were elderly did Hester and Almedia leave Washington to live with adult children, a common practice. Thus, Hester died in Little Rock on September 10 or 11, 1887, at the age of seventy-four. Her body was returned to Washington for burial beside her husband.157

In New Orleans, Henry and Augustus lived out the remainder of their lives. Henry suffered a stroke and died there on February 18, 1882, at the age of sixty-two.158 Augustus was the last of the Block siblings to die and the one who attained the oldest age. He died in his seventy-eighth year in a freak accident. On Thursday morning, February 6, 1896, Augustus walked into the Gallier Court building on Carondelet and, as the Daily Picayune reported:

He noticed the gate of the elevator shaft open and he walked in to wait for the elevator to come down. As he did he fell, and before he could regain his feet the elevator descended. He quickly saw the danger and cried out, but before it could be stopped the elevator descended on him, seriously injuring him about the head and body.159

He succumbed to his injuries the following day.160
Conclusion

This story of the Block family offers insights into the typical Jewish experience in America, as well as the more specific adaptation of Jews in the American South. While the Block’s individual decisions and experiences were personal, they fit within the context of the historical period and the cultures of Jewish and southern life.

The process of internal migration was characteristic of the Jewish experience. In the first generations, Jews moved up and down the eastern seaboard looking for business opportunities. As western states opened to settlement, descendants of those first families joined new immigrants from Europe who moved west to find opportunities, not on the wilderness frontier, but within new and promising towns. In most cases, the migration patterns were connected by family networks as relatives and friends followed the pioneers. Abraham Block came to America as an immigrant from Bohemia and settled in Richmond, where a Jewish community was already growing. Seeking better opportunities, he moved to the frontier of Arkansas, but chose a county seat situated on a transportation route that provided prime opportunities for success. One son continued that success in the Arkansas town Abraham had chosen, but other sons, in sibling partnerships, continued his pattern of internal migration, seeking new opportunities in the trade port of New Orleans or along the rail line reaching into interior Texas.

An almost universal male Jewish experience in the westward movement was that of the itinerant peddler. Through thrift and good business management, the peddler graduated to a shop in town and worked to grow his business. Because Abraham began his trek west from the foundation of his Richmond properties, he was able to skip the peddling stage and instead find a business partner to begin as a merchant in Arkansas. His sons also used their profits from businesses begun in Arkansas to expand, without peddling, into new areas. Also typical of successful Jewish entrepreneurs, the Blocks reinvested their profits into new businesses, such as mills and plantations, or supported civic
improvements, such as the Cotton Exchange in New Orleans. They represented the New South imagery decades before it became popular during the mid-1880s.

Southern Jews shared these business practices with Jews who settled in the small towns of the Midwest and far West. What distinguished southern Jews was their identification with southern culture, most noticeable in their adherence to the Confederacy and in slaveholding. Southern Jews demonstrated support for the Confederacy through service in the military, by election to government positions, and by applying their mercantile skills to the cause. Abraham’s son David served as Arkansas’s agent for the Confederate Produce Loan and as an officer in the local Confederate Association, following a stint as a state representative. Several of the Blocks owned slaves, using them as household servants and in their businesses, befitting their status as wealthy community members. In these ways they partially fit historians Ferris and Greenberg’s model of the “power of place,” otherwise belied by their willingness to up-root for economic opportunity.

Finally, through an examination of family life, the Blocks’ retention of their Jewish heritage or assimilation into the larger society is revealed. Choices of marriage partners, burial locations, and food items indicate that most—but not all—of the Block children abandoned their faith and assimilated into the Christian community. Such a pattern is typical of the American Jewish experience. Settling in a town without a Jewish community certainly contributed to assimilation, but as revealed, even in towns with large Jewish populations, Jewish families often were split by marriage outside the faith. When those marriages occurred, however, Jews found partners among high-status members of the community, as did the Blocks, whose daughters married doctors, lawyers, and merchants. Even with assimilation some members of Jewish families, as with the Blocks, strengthened their bonds with Judaism. Thus, through the historical record of families like the Blocks, we come to appreciate the individual choices and expressions of lives within the larger context of the American Jewish experience.
Appendix

Descendants of Abraham Block and Frances Isaacs Block

Abraham Block (c. 1780–1857) m. Frances Isaacs (1796–1871)

1 Infant son Block (c. 1812–before 1830)

2 Hester Block (1813–1887) m. Dr. Benjamin Pendleton Jett (1808–1865)
   2.1 Edward Davenport Jett (c. 1835–before 1911)
   2.2 Benjamin Pendleton Jett Jr. (c. 1837–1917)
   2.3 Rosena V. Jett (c. 1838–before 1911)
   2.4 Emma P. Jett (c. 1840–before 1911)
   2.5 Mary Jett (c. 1842–before 1911)
   2.6 William Augustus Jett (1846–1923)
   2.7 Almedia Jett (1850–1929)
   2.8 Sevier Jett (1852–1899)
   2.9 Eugene Block Jett (1853–after 1927)
   2.10 Charles H. Jett (1855–1920)
   2.11–2.13 Three infants

3 Simon Block (1815–1833)

4 Rosina Block (c. 1816–after 1870) m. Edwin Brittin (d. by 1850)
   4.1 Frances Brittin (1838–after 1850)
   4.2 Abraham Ludlow Brittin (1840–1840)
   4.3 Abraham Brittin (1841–1932)
   4.4 William Isaac Brittin (1844–1846)
   4.5 Flora Brittin (1845–1894)

5 Isaac (Isaacs) Block (1817–1828)

6 Augustus Block (1818–1896) m. Lucia Jonas (d. 1903)
   6.1 Bertha Block (1857–1918)
   6.2 Frederick Block (c. 1859–c. 1896)
   6.3 Theodora “Dora” J. Block (c. 1862–1928)
   6.4 Robert Lee Block (1865–1866)
   6.5 Louisa Block (1867–aft. 1913)
   6.6 Augustus Block Jr. (1870–after 1920)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Birth - Death</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Birth - Death</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Henry Block (1820–1882)</td>
<td>m. Laura—(b. c. 1834)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Juliet P. Block (c. 1851–1878)</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
<td>Abraham Block (c. 1852–1867)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Emma J. Block (b. c. 1856)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Infant son Block (c. 1821–before 1830)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>David Block (1823–1865)</td>
<td>m. Almedia Trimble (c. 1832–1909)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Rosina Block (c. 1848–1908)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Abraham Block (1851–1901)</td>
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<td>9.3</td>
<td>David Walter Trimble Block (c. 1854–1876)</td>
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<td>9.4</td>
<td>Frances Block (c. 1855–1916)</td>
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<td>9.5</td>
<td>Estelle Block (1859–1886)</td>
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<td>9.6</td>
<td>Ellen Block (b. c. 1861)</td>
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<td>9.7</td>
<td>Juliet Block (1864–1914)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Virginius Block (1827–1871)</td>
<td>m. (1) Lenora Tunstall (d. 1866)</td>
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<td>10.1</td>
<td>Tunstall Block (c. 1861–by 1880)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Virginius Block Jr. (1864–after 1920)</td>
<td>m. (2) Sarah Tunstall (d. after 1913)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Lenora Block (b. 1869)</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
<td>Cora Block (b. 1872)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Eugene Block (c. 1829–1875)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Juliet Pauline Block (1830–1858)</td>
<td>m. Orville Jennings (1825–1866)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Edwin Brittin Jennings (1853–1888)</td>
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<td>12.2</td>
<td>Ernest Jennings (1855–1882)</td>
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<td>12.3</td>
<td>Laura Ida Jennings (1856–1859)</td>
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<td>12.4</td>
<td>Chester Jennings (1857–1919)</td>
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<td>12.5</td>
<td>Julius Jennings (1858–1858)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Rosalie Ellen Block (c. 1833–1867)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Laura C. (or E.) Block (1835–1853)</td>
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NOTES
My thanks to Gail Martin, archivist at the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives, for her research assistance, and to Don Montgomery, former historian at Historic Washington State Park, for copying hundreds of references to the Blocks in the county records and local newspaper to produce his compilation. His work made my story of the Blocks so much more complete than it would have been otherwise. I am grateful to Mark Bauman, whose guidance and detailed suggestions greatly strengthened this paper and led me to additional excellent sources. Thanks also to Robert Mainfort for editorial suggestions. Research for this essay was supported, in part, by a grant from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council.


3 Carolyn Gray LeMaster, A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s-1990s (Fayetteville, AR, 1994).


6 Birth date is from Abraham’s tombstone (photo of tombstone graciously provided by Catherine C. Kahn), although a birth date of 1781 coincides better with his age given in the 1850 census and with his obituary in the Occident. Bobbie Jones McLane, Hempstead County, Arkansas, United States Census 1850 (Hot Springs National Park, AR, 1967), 8; Malcolm H. Stern, First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies, 1654–1988, 3rd rev. ed. (Baltimore, 1991), 25; The Occident and American Jewish Advocate (hereafter cited as Occident), April 1857,
106–108. Determining exact birth dates for the Block family proved notoriously difficult. Best dates have been chosen based on evidence from multiple sources.

7 Names from Fanny’s family appear among their children; for example, their first daughter was named Hester after Fanny’s mother and their second son, Isaac, after her father. The name of their second daughter, Rosina, may honor Abraham’s mother. The name, with slight variations, also appears among other Block descendants believed to be related to Abraham. By the same process, Abraham’s father may be remembered in the name of their first known son, Simon.


11 Only heads of households were named before the 1850 census, so he would not have appeared until he established an independent residence.

12 Bush, “The Jews in St. Louis,” 61. Although Blocks were early settlers west of the Mississippi, and definitely numerous, they were not necessarily the first. See Ehrlich, Zion in the Valley, 14–32, for the Philipson brothers of St. Louis. Ira Rosenwaike, “Eleazer Block—His Family and Career,” American Jewish Archives 31 (November, 1979): 142–144.

13 LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 5; I. Harold Sharfman, Jews on the Frontier (Chicago, 1977), 109, 179; Stern, First American Jewish Families, 136; Rosenwaike, “Eleazer Block,” 147; Donald Irving Makovsky, “Origin and Early History of the United Hebrew Congregation of St. Louis, 1841–1859: The First Jewish Congregation in St. Louis” (master’s thesis, Washington University, St. Louis, 1958), 128–138, 161–165, 191–193. LeMaster cites Sharfman for a letter from Eleazer Block to Abraham Block. In two places, Sharfman describes a letter, first from Ezekiel Block and then from Eleazor Block, to relatives back in Virginia and specifically to Abraham Block extolling the booming western trade. Sharfman’s source for this letter is unclear, but it appears he credits Makovsky’s thesis. Although Makovsky discusses in general terms the immigration of Blocks from Bohemia to the St. Louis area, and inducements to specific family members, he cites neither any surviving letter from any of the Blocks, nor any letter specifically to Abraham Block. Having found that Sharfman loosely
interprets other information on the Abraham Block family, I believe the purported letter was simply a literary device used by Sharfman to popularize his account and is not to be taken literally.

14 Rosen, Jewish Confederates, 149-153.

15 Obituary, Washington [AR] Telegraph, December 20, 1871; Stern, First American Jewish Families, 126. LeMaster gives Fanny’s birth place as Charlottesville, VA. LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 4. The age on her tombstone shows her a year older. [New Orleans] Hebrew Cemetery, Canal & N. Anthony Sts., card file, Louisiana State Museum Historical Center, New Orleans. However, the February 1796 birth date fits neatly with her parents’ marriage date of May 7, 1795.


19 Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 13, 27, 64; Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten, eds., A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life (Columbia, SC, 2002), 63.


23 Personal Property Tax Records, 1800-1813, Fredericksville Parish, Book B, Albemarle County, Virginia, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, Vi Reel R-100, Supplemental Reel A-2, #5145-d; Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, Declarations (hereafter cited as MAS Declarations) 1805, v. 63, nos. 420, 421, 422, 636, 637, University of Virginia
Library; Berman concludes that when Isaiah and Hetty moved to Charlottesville, “Fanny . . . remained in Richmond.” Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 4. Since Fanny was only four years old, this is unlikely. She undoubtedly moved to Charlottesville with her parents and returned to Richmond when she was older, most likely after her marriage.

24 Weissbach, Jewish Life in Small-Town America, 113.


26 Isaiah’s brother David and son David have been confused in different sources, such as Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 350, n. 11. The son did not live to inherit his share of Isaiah’s estate and was deceased by 1822, when the living heirs are named on Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia Declarations.


28 Berman and Ezekiel and Lichtenstein state that Abraham was from Charlottesville, the source for this seeming to be the marriage record published in PAJHS, 76 (see below), but that record only gives his residence as Virginia and does not specify a city. Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 350, n. 11; Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, History of the Jews of Richmond, 15. Carolyn Gray LeMaster found records in the Beth Ahabah Archives in Richmond that Abraham Block came to Richmond from Charlottesville. LeMaster, personal communication, 2006. However, the 1800–1822 records of Personal Property Tax for Albemarle County, where Charlottesville is located, do not list him.


“The socially uncouth, too, distressed his sensibilities. In anticipation of a wedding that he has to attend the next day he lists with dismay the persons who are likely to be present, and, after designating the Havroosa as an erev rav (‘mixed multitude’), he quickly and considerately adds ‘dont tell Abm Block any of this ludicrous narrative, for fear you may wound his feelings, as you know the parties are his wife’s connections.’” David de Sola Pool, “Gershom Mendes Seixas’ Letters, 1813-1815, To His Daughter Sarah (Seixas) Kursheedt and Son-In-Law Israel Baer Kursheedt,” PAJHS 35 (1939): 198.

Compiled Service Record, Abram Block, 1 Corps d’Elite (Randolph’s), Virginia Militia (War of 1812), Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Service; Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, History of the Jews of Richmond, 73; Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 93-97.

Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, History of the Jews of Richmond, 39.

Department of Taxation, Personal Property Tax Books, Richmond City, Virginia, 1799-1834, Library of Virginia, Reel 364.


Hempstead County Genealogical Society (hereafter cited as HCGS) Hempstead County, Arkansas, Cemeteries (hereafter cited as Hempstead County Cemeteries), Book 5, (Hope, AR, 2000), 22; Goodspeed, Southern Arkansas, 418-419.

HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 44. Stern shows the Blocks with a youngest child named “Solomon.” Stern, First American Jewish Families, 25. This information came from Rosa Mayer Grant, who lists in a typescript the names of the Block children she remembers. “Simon” is not listed, and the similar-sounding “Solomon” is substituted in error. There is no evidence that the Blocks had a child named “Solomon.” Rosa Mayer Grant, “History of the Abraham Block Family,” typescript, Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives, FH#012, “Block-Conway-Brittin Genealogy.”

According to the 1850 Hempstead County, Arkansas, Census, Rosina was born 1816 or 1817. Because of the solid birth dates of the two brothers who flank her, Rosina was most likely born in 1816.

HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 44.

Various sources list Augustus’s birth date as either 1816 or 1817, but considering the close spacing of births from Simon to Augustus, the best fit is that Augustus was born in 1818. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Bois D’Arc, Hempstead County, Arkansas (roll M432_26, p. 268, image 531); Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 10, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll M593_524, p. 166, image 28); Death notices; Hebrew Cemetery, Canal & N. Anthony Sts., card file.

Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Richmond City, Henrico County, Virginia (roll M33_131, p. 169, image 181); Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 1, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll M593_519, p. 169, image 339); Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll T9_458, Family History Film #1254458, p. 82.1000,
Block descendants claim that Abraham and Fanny had seven boys and two girls born in Virginia and that two of the boys, whose names are unknown, died young before coming to Arkansas (they are not enumerated in the 1820 or 1830 census). Considering the couple’s fertility and the spacing of the children’s births, this is likely true. See Grant, “History of the Abraham Block Family”; Carter and Morgan, “Block-Conway-Brittin Genealogy.”

Block descendants claim that Abraham and Fanny had seven boys and two girls born in Virginia and that two of the boys, whose names are unknown, died young before coming to Arkansas (they are not enumerated in the 1820 or 1830 census). Considering the couple’s fertility and the spacing of the children’s births, this is likely true.

MAS Declarations, 1805, v. 63, nos. 420, 421, 422, 636, 637; 1816, v. 72 nos. 2194, 2195, 2196, 2197, 2198; 1822, v. 81, nos. 4575, 4576, 4577, University of Virginia Library.

Judah’s adm. v. Block & al., Court of Hustings, City of Richmond, Va., September 19, 1855, 294–297. This suit, cited above, against Abraham and Fanny regarded mortgages on their inherited Isaacs property and was not filed until 1833, after their move to Arkansas. It appeared the mortgages were taken from 1818–1821. The suit made its way through the courts, with dates of 1838, 1841, and finally 1855, when it was recorded in the Court of Hustings. The resolution of the suit or its pertinence, if any, to the Blocks’ move to Arkansas remains unknown. The record of the 1823 split of the property between the Isaacs heirs (Fanny and Hays) is included in the Judah suit.

LeMaster suggests that Fanny’s inheritance precipitated the move to Arkansas. LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 5. It probably did, but not through the sale of the property. See MAS Declarations, 1829, v. 89, nos. 6803, 6804, 6805; 1836, v. 98, nos. 9576, 9577, 9578, University of Virginia Library.

Occident, April 1857, 107; Pauline Booker Carter to Mrs. Haynes, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 7. According to family tradition, Abraham left before David’s birth, but it seems more likely that he waited for the settlement of the estate, as well as to see that his wife was safely delivered of their son.

Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 96–97, 125.


LeMaster suggests that Abraham stayed with Jonas family relatives while in New Orleans. LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 5. However, the Jonases did not arrive in New Orleans until 1853, when Benjamin F. Jonas entered law school there. Goodspeed, Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana 1 (Chicago, 1892), 496; Diner, Time for Gathering,
54 Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 12; Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 97; Bolton, Arkansas 1800–1860, 10, 19.

55 Abraham’s name first appears in the public record in November 1825, when he filed suit to settle a debt and received a call to jury duty. Mary Medearis, ed., Sam Williams: Printer’s Devil (Hope, AR, 1979), 234; Mary Medearis, History on the Southwest Trail, 7–8; Bolton, Arkansas 1800–1860, 10, 50; Abraham Block v. John Hinmon, November 5, 1825, Hempstead County Tax Record Book, 1826–1832, Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives, V2-H7, MSF #057, 13; Court of Common Pleas and Circuit Court, Book C, Volume 1, 1824–1828, Hempstead Co., Arkansas Territory, (Hope, AR, 1993), 56; Weissbach, Jewish Life in Small-Town America, 38.

56 Larkin, Reshaping of Everyday Life, 67–72. Pauline Booker Carter repeats a story that David Block was four years old before Abraham saw him. Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 7. Although this appears to be exaggerated, the 2.5-year gap between his birth and Virginius’s conception corroborates that Abraham and Fanny were apart for an extended period. The supposition is that Abraham returned to Virginia and assisted the family with the move, but other than the pregnancy with Virginius, there is no specific proof. LeMaster states that the Blocks’ oldest daughter, Hester, lived in Arkansas with her father in 1825. LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 5. I believe this is a too-literal reading of the dates in the published record. Hester’s obituary, [Little Rock] Arkansas Gazette, September 13, 1887, notes her presence in Arkansas in 1825, while Fay Hempstead, in Historical Review of Arkansas 3 (Chicago, 1911): 1598, writes that she “came, with her parents, to Arkansas in 1826.” The evidence supports the family group coming in 1826, and no independent evidence suggests Hester’s earlier arrival.

57 Obituary, Washington Telegraph, November 8, 1871; Ninth Census of the United States 1870, Precinct 1, Calvert, Robertson County, Texas (roll M593_1602, p. 182, image 367); LeMaster incorrectly cites Virginius’s birth date and the date of the source. LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 5, 466, n. 22.

58 Arkansas Gazette, May 20, 1829, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 21–22, 73, comment after “Book G, p. 248”; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas (roll M432_26, p. 208, image 412); Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas (roll M653_42, p. 687, image 176); 1870 Census of the United States, Precinct 1, Calvert, Robertson County, Texas (roll M593_1602, p. 175, image 351); New Orleans death certificate, March 2, 1875.

59 HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 44.

60 Rosalie Ellen went by her middle name. The best date comes from the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas, where Ellen is listed in birth order with her siblings. In later sources, she skimmed a few years off her age.
HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 45; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas; Washington Telegraph, October 26, 1853, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 85.


Diner, Time for Gathering, 66; Mary Rawlings, ed., Early Charlottesville: Recollections of James Alexander, 1828–1874 (Charlottesville, VA, 1942), 71–72; Rothman, Notorious in the Neighborhood, 76, 268–269. According to Rothman, Hays Isaacs left Virginia to escape creditors and went to New Orleans before settling in Arkansas. According to the census data, Hays moved to Welborn Township, Conway County, Arkansas, where he was married to a woman named Jane from Ohio and engaged in farming. He apparently died without children before 1860. Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Wilborn [sic], Conway County, Arkansas (roll 17, p. 78) Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Welborn, Conway County, Arkansas (roll M432.25, p. 233, image 461); Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Welborn, Conway County, Arkansas (roll M653.39, p. 465, image 470).

LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 23, 44, 67, 75, 126, 159; Medearis, Sam Williams, 9–10; 1850 Census, Bois D’Arc, Hempstead Co., Arkansas; Hempstead County, Arkansas, Abstract of Wills, Intestate and Other Probate Records 1822–1917 (Hope, Ark, 2001), 25.


Snyder, “Queens of the Household,” 19, 24, 30.

Larkin, Reshaping of Everyday Life, 75–76.

HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 44. Isaac died September 28, 1828. Although the cause of Simon’s death on February 25, 1833, is unknown, it may have been from Asiatic cholera, which reached New Orleans in October 1832 and came to Arkansas on the riverboats from there. Simon was old enough at the time to be traveling to New Orleans for business. American Native Press Archive, http://www.apna.uaalr.edu/trail_of_tears/Indian_removal_project/health/cholera.htm (accessed November 10, 2005); New Orleans Pharmacy Museum, http://www.pharmacymuseum.org/funfact.htm (accessed November 10, 2005); LeMaster, Corner of the Tapestry, 7–8.

Laura died October 14 or 15, 1853. Washington Telegraph, October 26, 1853, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 85–86; HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 45.

Larkin, Reshaping of Everyday Life, 67, 94–98.

74 “Family Bible of Orville Jennings,” *Pulaski County Historical Review* 3 (December 1955): 63–64; handwritten Bible record, photocopy, collection FHF #303, Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives; HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 44.

75 Michelle Woodham, “Tunstall Descendants,” http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/~tunstall&id=I03445 (accessed February 27, 2004); HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 29; McLane and Glazner, *Hempstead County Marriage Records*, 15. Virginius Block and Lenora Tunstall’s children were Tunstall Block (male, b. 1861–1862, d. probably by 1880) and Virginius Block Jr. (b. September 6, 1864). Virginius Block and Sarah Tunstall’s children were Lenora Block (b. August 1869) and Cora Block (b. February 1871).

76 Bingham, *Mordecai*.

77 McLane and Glazner, *Hempstead County Marriage Records*, 20; Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 271; Henry E. Chambers, *A History of Louisiana* 2 (Chicago, 1925), 101–102. Rosina Block and Edwin Brittin’s children were Frances Brittin (b. 1838, d. aft 1850), Abraham Ludlow Brittin (b. January 1, 1840, d. October 22, 1840), Abraham Brittin (b. May 30, 1841, d. July 31, 1932), William Isaac Brittin (b. January 19, 1844, d. November 27, 1846), and Flora Brittin (b. April 9, 1845, d. March 10, 1894). Their last child was born in April 1845, and Edwin does not appear in the 1850 census. Rosina’s sister Juliet named her first child, born 1853, after Edwin. No death date or location has been found for Edwin Brittin.


Henry is not listed as married in the 1850 census. Henry and Laura’s first daughter, Juliet P., was born 1851–1852 in Arkansas (d. April 27, 1878). The family moved to New Orleans about 1852, where their second child, Abraham, was born in 1852–1853 (d. November 17, 1867). Their third child was Emma J., born 1856–1857. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Bois D’Arc, Hempstead County, Arkansas; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Ward 11, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll M653_420, p. 0, image 186); Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 1, Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

81 [New Orleans] Daily Picayune, February 9, 1896, part 2; Stern, First American Jewish Families, 136; Goodspeed, Louisiana 1:495–498; Rosen, Jewish Confederates, 344–346, 415. Lucia Jonas’s mother, Louisa Block, was the sister of Eliezer and Simon Block, who Stern and others have tentatively connected as siblings of Abraham Block. Stern, First American Jewish Families, 3rd ed., 25, 321. If so, that would make Augustus and Lucia first cousins. Augustus Block and Lucia Jonas’s children were Bertha Block (b. February 4, 1857, d. October 28, 1918), Frederick Block (b. 1859–1860, d. 1896?), Theodora “Dora” J. Block (b. 1862–1863, d. 1928), Robert Lee Block (b. June 30, 1865, d. August 8, 1866), Louisa Block (b. December 2, 1867, d. after 1913), and Augustus Block Jr. (b. February 15, 1870, d. after 1920).

82 Weissbach, Jewish Life in Small-Town America, 141–143.
83 Faber, Time for Planting, 92–93, 118, 122, 125; Diner, Time for Gathering, 88.
84 Faber, Time for Planting, 90; Diner, Time for Gathering, 93, 127–129.
85 Berman, Richmond’s Jewry, 6–7.
87 Korn, Early Jews of New Orleans, 215.
88 Ibid., 244.
90 Ibid., 102–103.
93 Bingham, Mordecai; Dianne Ashton, Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America (Detroit, 1997), 41, 89–90, 239–256.
96 HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 14–15.
97 Arkansas Gazette, September 13, 1887.
98 Rosina last appeared in the 1870 census, living in the household of her son-in-law and daughter Richard and Flora Gaines, along with her son, Abraham, and mother, Fanny. She
was about fifty-four years old. Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 10, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll M593_524, p. 377, image 451).

99 Girod Cemetery, Louisiana State Museum Records, LDS Microfilm #1,292,073; Daily Picayune, September 21, 1867.

100 Diner, Time for Gathering, 93; HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 22, 29; Girod Cemetery, Louisiana State Museum Records; Hebrew Cemetery, Canal and N. Anthony Sts., card file.


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103 Arkansas Gazette, April 4, 1857.

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117 S. G. Reed, A History of the Texas Railroads (Houston, 1941), 65, 70–71.


121 Korn, “Jews and Negro Slavery,” 168; Hagy, This Happy Land, 96–97.


123 Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, History of the Jews of Richmond, 328.

124 Ibid., 328–329.

125 Hagy, This Happy Land, 99–100.

126 Judah’s adm. v. Block & al., Court of Hustings, City of Richmond, Va., September 19, 1855, 294–297; Personal Property Tax Records, Richmond City, Va., 1799–1834, Richmond: Library of Virginia, reel 364; Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, History of the Jews of Richmond, 90. Sharfman retells this story, citing Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, but gets it wrong, implying that
the Blocks were the victim of the theft, rather than Grace Marx. Sharfman, *Jews on the Frontier*, 180.


135 Augustus’s daughter Theodora Block was born in Arkansas in 1862 or 1863. His son Robert Lee Block was born in New Orleans on June 30, 1865. Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 10, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll M593_524, p. 166, image 28); Hebrew Cemetery, Canal & N. Anthony Sts., card file; *Daily Picayune*, February 9, 1896; Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*, 249.

136 *Daily Picayune*, February 8, 1896, February 9, 1896.
144 Benjamin Jett served in the Ninth General Assembly from November 1, 1852, to January 12, 1853.
145 *Washington Telegraph*, November 8, 1871.
149 Biderman, *They Came to Stay*, 11–30.
151 Death certificate, New Orleans, March 3, 1875; Girod Cemetery, Louisiana State Museum Records.
153 Biderman, *They Came to Stay*; Natalie Ornish, *Pioneer Jewish Texans: Their Impact on Texas and American History for Four Hundred Years, 1590–1990* (Dallas, 1989); Hollace Ava


157 Arkansas Gazette, September 13, 1887; HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 22. Almedia died in June 1909 and is buried in Washington Presbyterian Cemetery. Williams, The Old Town Speaks, 231–232; HCGS, Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5, 29; funeral notice, June 23, 1909, Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives, MSF #170E, VI-EE8.


159 Daily Picayune, February 7, 1896.

Commerce and Community:  
A Business History of Jacksonville Jewry

by

Stephen J. Whitfield*

The span of Jewish history in Jacksonville embraces roughly one and a half centuries, and its beginnings could not have inspired confidence in its vitality. In 1857, when a yellow fever epidemic left six Jews dead, half of the community was wiped out; and the first communal institution to be founded was not a synagogue, or even a B’nai B’rith lodge, but a cemetery.¹ Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, any rationale for boosterism would have been hard to sustain. When impoverished eastern European Jews began arriving roughly a century ago, they encountered conditions that were austere and even desperate. The community was no different from the you’re-on-your-own circumstances of the rest of the New World, about which the Revolutionary War financier Haym Salomon had written as early as 1783. He warned his relatives in Poland: “Your yichus is worth very little here.” Jews usually faced bleak and abject conditions upon moving to towns and cities like Jacksonville. Mosaic, the indispensable illustrated history of Florida Jewry, reproduces a photo showing “William Schemer, who came from Pusalotes, Lithuania, selling fish on a Jacksonville street in 1906.” Portrayed is a single unadorned cart (not even a painted name on the cart), and a single horse; and Schemer is holding up a single fish. The cart

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itself seems empty. The prosperity that would eventually characterize Jacksonville Jewry could scarcely have been anticipated.

The scope of this essay is not the community itself, but instead some of the businessmen associated with Jacksonville. Although all were Jews, “Commerce and Community” does not pretend to encompass religious life, even though further light may be shed on membership in this minority. This essay profiles individual businessmen who are attached to a particular city, the trajectories of their careers, and the impact they exerted. Even as a chronicle of business developments, however, this account makes no claim whatsoever to comprehensiveness. The focus is limited to those whose business success made them the easiest to trace.

The careers and companies of the less spectacular businessmen are less likely to produce a paper trail that might correct or contradict memories and oral histories. The unsuccessful tend to leave behind even fewer traces of their lack of accomplishment.
The thwarted dreams of the *luftmenschen* and the luckless tend to vanish, though they do occasionally show up in the credit reports of R. G. Dun. In 1870, for example, one M. Rosenberg came to Jacksonville from Little Rock, Arkansas, where under another name he is supposed to have failed in a business. A “transient Jew,” Rosenberg “was said to be selling goods below recommended prices” in his newly adopted city.³ Many other businessmen could not have eluded the nemesis of failure. But generally not even the moderately prosperous, or the solidly middle-class, ordinarily bequeathed a record for the historian to examine and excavate.

Moreover, until well into the second half of the twentieth century, a southern Jewish businesswoman was anomalous. To the rule of an all-male club, a tiny number of exceptions in Jacksonville are noted in the following pages; occasionally a widow would take over the operation of a company. But the exact contributions of mothers and wives and daughters to entrepreneurial achievement are elusive. Also in need of exploration is how the commitments of *homo economicus* affected his wife. Documentation is scarce. But clues can be found, for example, in the diary of Helen Jacobus Apte whose husband’s grandmother, Helena D. Williams, was the sister of Morris Dzialynski, whose career is discussed below. Day Apte’s quest for business opportunities took him and his wife from Atlanta, where they had been married in 1909, to Miami; she cherished both cities. But the couple also lived long in Tallahassee, where Helen Apte found the society to be “narrow and prejudiced and uninteresting.” Their last home was in Tampa, “a deadly dull town . . . narrow and provincial,” she complained.⁴ The poignancy of such private sentiments could hardly have been unique, but the haunting echoes of a little night music are, alas, mostly inaccessible to the historian. The psychic price that such cultivated women paid must have been high, and perhaps even exorbitant, but cannot be measured with any precision.

This essay is weighted heavily toward the first generation to become prosperous, with several exceptions. That first generation no longer felt itself bound by the ethics of the fathers, even as it
was often encouraged by the ambitions of the mothers. Because of the emphasis in the following pages on the creation of wealth, rather than its perpetuation and diffusion, a caveat is necessary. Over a century later, the business history of Jacksonville’s Jews is hardly over, and it is not running on empty. But generational change, and differentiations of wealth and status that upward mobility facilitated, have meant that a full-scale historical study of the community would have to be attentive to its divisions—of class, gender, and denomination. The duration of the residence in the United States or in Jacksonville mattered in calibrating status. So did family origins in western or eastern Europe or in the Levant, especially as the population grew. Such divisions, however subtle, rippled through the community, although it also must be acknowledged that Jews rarely need to live in huge municipalities in order to generate friction. To slice and dice one another is almost an independent variable in the equation of Jewish interaction. In the 1960s Irving Howe found himself unable to detect any “back-scratching” among his fellow New York intellectuals and critics. “Change the word ‘back’ to ‘eye,’” he suggested, “and maybe you’ve got something.” As of early 2005, for example, the last two Jews believed to be living in Afghanistan were feuding so fiercely with one another that they lived in quarters at opposite ends of the only synagogue in Kabul.5

In Jacksonville an ex-kosher butcher, the proprietor of Kosher Kuts, happened to go well beyond incivility. No merchant did more to expose the cleavage within the community. Harry Shapiro had attended the local Bolles School, later dropped out of Yeshiva University in New York, and twice failed at aliya. He became a right-wing extremist, who serves as perhaps the most striking proof that Jewry does not constitute a cohesive social unit. In 1997 the thirty-one-year-old Shapiro planted a bomb in the Conservative synagogue, the Jacksonville Jewish Center. The bomb was discovered before it could be detonated. He was given a ten-year prison sentence near Jacksonville for thus trying to disrupt a dovish speech by Shimon Peres, the Nobel laureate who was then Israel’s prime minister.6
Jacksonville Hebrew Cemetery, founded in 1857.
It is the oldest recorded Jewish communal institution in Florida.
(From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida,
originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)

So potentially lethal an episode was unique. Otherwise the saga of Jewish business in this city largely confirms what has long been evident in considering the mercantile pattern that has been prominent elsewhere in the region (and indeed in much of the rest of the nation). “Commerce and Community” is designed to consolidate what is broadly known of the record of such economic and social activity elsewhere and to encourage further research in communities that have not hitherto been considered central to the southern Jewish experience. The pattern described in this essay is unlikely to surprise students of southern Jewish enterprise, even though that subject has yet to stimulate a synthetic volume. The
annals of southern department stores and other mercantile establish-
ments Jews often owned consisted of innumerable transactions
across the counter and the good will Jews thereby hoped to gener-
ate.

Yet their way of life—call it their counter-life—has yet to be
distilled and analyzed in a single book. Probably the most broadly
conceived study remains Elliott Ashkenazi’s 1988 monograph. But
The Business of Jews in Louisiana is confined to merely a third of the
nineteenth century and to only one state. Studies of particular
families and companies exist, as do memoirs and novels and sec-
tions of books devoted to particular communities. In exploring the
southern Jewish past, we really mean business. Yet strangely no
serious volumes devoted to this theme are extant. “Few economic
works have appeared in print for the era spanning Reconstruction
into the twentieth century,” Mark K. Bauman has lamented in his
synoptic study of southern Jewish historiography. No scholar has
acted upon the claim of the University of Kentucky historian
Thomas D. Clark, who found it “impossible to consider Southern
economic and social history with any degree of thoroughness
without also considering” this particular minority. The southern
Jew as homo economicus remains to be fully portrayed. 7

The topic of Jacksonville Jewry has so far inspired only one
scholarly article, which James B. Crooks published in Northeast
Florida History in 1992. His piece runs slightly over seven pages of
text and covers only two decades. Also deserving mention is a
second article, in which Canter Brown, Jr., profiles a pair of broth-
ers, Morris and Philip Dzialynski (pronounced Duh-LIN-skee), the
former of whom was pivotal to the history of the city as well as to
Florida’s first United States Senator, David Levy Yulee,
ever lived in Jacksonville, although a town in Nassau County,
immediately north of Jacksonville’s Duval County, is named
for him. But even if Yulee studies are mentioned, that is a stretch.
Thus the conclusion is unmistakable: the extremely limited
historical scholarship devoted to Jacksonville Jewry is mostly bio-
ographical and is confined only to the nineteenth and very early
twentieth centuries. By now the arc from past to present is
surely long enough, however, to have elicited scholarly curiosity. And yet what happens in Jacksonville somehow stays in Jacksonville.

To be sure, many southern Jewish communities can claim to have been neglected, or understudied, and can vie for the honor of historical retrieval. But the case for Jacksonville is especially strong when considered from at least one angle: size matters. In 1967 the city and county voted for consolidation, to go into effect the following year. The new political system not only streamlined services but made previously fractious problems soluble, such as closing down the twenty-four lines that had poured sewage directly into the St. Johns River. “I have seen the Rhine of song and story,” Bertha Zadek Dzialynski, the daughter-in-law of Philip Dzialynski, wrote in 1944, “but except for the history associated with it and its ruined castles and interesting terraced banks, it does not compare in beauty with the St. Johns.” In 1968, when the city and county governments were incorporated to make the municipality and the county virtually synonymous, the population of Jacksonville suddenly encompassed 840 square miles. The boundaries enabled it to forge ahead of Atlanta and Miami. Consolidation made Jacksonville even bigger than Boston or San Francisco. Those four other cities, for example, loom much larger in Jewish history, and have inevitably attracted greater scholarly interest. But because the suburbs of other American metropolises have not been incorporated within city limits, Jacksonville currently ranks as high as twelfth in general population. The closest demographic competitor is Indianapolis, which has already been the subject of an entire book devoted to its Jewish past written by Judith Endelman and published in 1984.

Jacksonville Jewry itself has remained relatively tiny. The first communal census, taken in 1880, pegged the proportion of the city’s Jews at 1.6 percent. A century later the percentage had slipped to 1.2. The current estimate of barely above seven thousand souls happens to be smaller, for instance, than Wasilla, Alaska. The total number of Jacksonville’s Jews would be enough to fit comfortably in the pews of a handful of synagogues on Long Island. Or compare the total number of Jacksonville Jews to, say,
the Saddleback Church of Lake Forest, California. The membership of this mega-church recently topped twenty thousand. A more plausible explanation for academic indifference, however, is that Jacksonville can invoke no claim for uniqueness. Located in the northeastern part of the state, twenty miles upstream on the St. Johns River from the Atlantic Ocean, Jacksonville has marketed itself as the First Coast, the gateway to Florida. But the city has lacked what is so recognizable and alluring elsewhere—the bustling dynamism of Atlanta, the radiant glamour of Miami, the easygoing Old South charm of Richmond, or the decadent hedonism of New Orleans. Unlike sociologists, historians look for the particular factors that shape events and institutions and are drawn to what is distinctive, what is unrepeatable, what is peculiar. History is about what does not quite fit the laws and generalizations that social scientists are prone to formulate. In terms of the Jewish experience, Jacksonville forms an anagram of many a southern (and indeed American) community, which undoubtedly contributes to scholarly neglect.

Let an effort at rectification now begin.

In the Beginning: The Mayor

A mayor, who simultaneously served, starting in 1882, as the first president of the first synagogue, Congregation Ahavath Chesed, personified the genesis of the community. The synagogue began as Orthodox but soon turned Reform. To make Judaism less divergent from the religious norms of the region, organ music was introduced in 1885; and within a decade, men no longer wore hats at “the Temple.” Born in Posen, Prussia, in 1841, Morris A. Dzialynski came to Jacksonville in 1853 and was educated in the city’s public schools. He fought for the Confederate States of America at Perryville and Murphreesboro but was too wounded to continue, and returned to Jacksonville. In the postbellum era, Dzialynski prospered in a number of businesses that earned the respect of R. G. Dun & Co., which considered this “sharp, active man” an honest businessman of “good reputation.” Not even bankruptcy had sunk him for long. His businesses included auctioneering, dealing in dry goods, and selling carriages, buggies, and wagons.
Especially in the sale of such vehicles, Dzialynski achieved local renown. Those wheels of fortune enabled him to forge a political career as a Democrat. First elected mayor in 1881, soon after the census had listed 7,650 residents, Dzialynski served two terms in the era immediately prior to the disenfranchisement of black voters. The city established a white primary for the Democratic Party in 1899, and two years later the party created a white primary for all county and state offices as well.¹⁰

*Morris Dzialynski.*

*(From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida, originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)*
In 1895 Dzialynski was elected municipal judge and served in that position until his death. He helped organize Jacksonville’s first baseball club and served as its first president. He also served as one of the four governors running the Jacksonville Board of Trade, which was renamed the Chamber of Commerce in 1915. No wonder then that, upon Dzialynski’s death, in 1907, his body lay in state at city hall and all municipal offices were closed, with flags lowered to half-mast. He lies buried in the synagogue’s cemetery. Perhaps the only noteworthy hostility that Dzialynski attracted came from some of his fellow Jews, whose businesses were harmed because of the rigorous enforcement of the Sunday “blue” laws. Sabbatarians thanked the mayor with gifts of flowers. But one local Jew was inspired to write a poem, which was published in the *New York Sun*: “Morris, thy path is strewn in roses/Since thou hast turned thy back on Moses,/And offered incense at the shrine/And bowed the knee to Philistine.” A foreign-born Jewish businessman who flourished in a region that was heavily rural, overwhelmingly Protestant, and xenophobic as well as notorious for its difficulties with diversity, Dzialynski enjoyed the sort of dramatic political success that underscored how much greater southern religious tolerance was than racial tolerance. He embodied what was most pliant about Jacksonville. When the polls closed on that election day in 1881, and the city’s voters demonstrated their preference for mayor, the results marked, in effect, the night they drove old Dixie down.

*The Retailers: Cohen Brothers*

Jacksonville typified the cities and towns of the region (and indeed of the nation) because Jewish retailers played so conspicuous a role in the economy. Their general stores, dry goods stores, and clothing shops not infrequently dominated the historic downtowns of many a southern hamlet, where a boondocks Bon Marché might achieve a certain mercantile primacy. Cohen Brothers occupied that niche in Jacksonville. A dry goods store that became a major department store, Cohen Brothers was the counterpart to Godchaux in New Orleans, Thalhimer’s in Richmond, Goldsmith’s in Memphis, the Gus Blass Company in Little Rock,
Rich’s in Atlanta, Levy’s in Savannah, Pizitz’s in Birmingham, Neiman Marcus in Dallas, Sakowitz’s in Houston, the May Company in St. Louis, Hecht’s in Baltimore, and Garfinckel’s in Washington, D.C. In 1867, when two German-born brothers, Samuel and Morris Cohen, arrived in Jacksonville, fresh from working in their father’s firm in New York, the town was still under military occupation. The foolish Confederate gamble to secede from the Union had left the southern economy in utter ruin, and therefore the postbellum era seemed to constitute the least promising circumstances for merchants to start a business, create capital or find customers in a town of about four thousand residents. Already prostrate, they lacked the resources to shop till they dropped.

The year 1867 also marks when a Massachusetts-born, New York City-based son of a preacher man published a novel titled *Ragged Dick*. This was the first in an oeuvre of close to a hundred works of fiction by Horatio Alger, Jr., who is credited with injecting into American popular culture the credibility of economic ascent. His upwardly mobile young heroes show their aptitude for success by acquiring at the outset of their careers a pocket watch, the symbol of punctuality and reliability. Agriculture is governed by the rotation of the planet and by the natural rhythm of the seasons; industry instead requires the manufactured time-piece that permits scheduled precision. A pocket watch is among the objects shown in the Mosaic exhibit and its accompanying catalog. But the hours on the face of the watch are not in Roman or Arabic numerals but rather in Hebrew letters. Its owner was George Dziyalynski, who in 1857 was the first Jewish child born in Jacksonville. He was the son of Morris Dziyalynski’s elder brother, Philip Dziyalynski, who had come to the city in 1850 as a peddler. However apt this artifact is in suggesting the Jewish devotion to escaping from poverty, the typical Alger protagonist fails to strike it rich. He goes from “rags to respectability,” in the phrase of the cultural historian John Cawelti, who pointed out that Alger’s plots do not end in opulence. The hero instead succeeds by joining the rather unimposing ranks of middle management. Such heroes of fiction become neither entrepreneurs nor magnates, but often
rise no higher than a junior partnership in the sort of mercantile firm that the Cohen Brothers created and owned in Jacksonville. The Jews who are profiled in this essay differ from their moderately prosperous coreligionists, and therefore do not exemplify the fictional trajectory that Horatio Alger plotted. They easily surpass it.

The log cabin on muddy East Bay Street that the Cohen Brothers built for their store could scarcely have been more plebeian. A clerk served as their sole employee. Yet the firm managed to flourish. R. G. Dun & Co. noted that the store “had no transactions with anyone except selling their goods and mostly for cash. [The brothers] are Jews, have no property here but have made a good business and are well thought of.” The “prudent” and “well-meaning” Cohen Brothers seemed to reinvest whatever profits earned back in the business. Samuel Cohen in particular was described as a “shrewd . . . [and] cautious businessman.” The honesty of their “transactions has never been called in question” and they “give satisfaction to the community,” according to these specialists in evaluating credit-worthiness. Cohen Brothers soon became sufficiently successful to move to a larger building on West Bay Street and send for two more brothers. Julius died not long after reaching Jacksonville. Jacob Elias Cohen joined the family firm in 1875, when only thirteen years old. But his skills were impressive enough to enable Samuel to return to New York City a decade or so later to conduct the buying for the Jacksonville store. Morris Cohen, free to leave as well, tried his hand at lace manufacturing in England. In 1912 he would return to Jacksonville and help run the department store until his death little more than a decade later.15

Jacob Cohen exhibited an undeniable flair for enterprise. He may have been the first merchant in the South to put price tags on merchandise. Even if the claim was inflated or apocryphal, Cohen Brothers helped scuttle the barter system that had been quite customary before the twentieth century. The company thus activated transactions of trust between the customers and the sales force and helped to reduce the effectiveness of the unscrupulous, there’s-one-born-every-minute hucksters. Eventually, instead of
haggling and bargaining, came the assurance and the probity of “satisfaction guaranteed,” based on fixed prices and the right of customers to return what they had purchased and receive their money back. According to a 1905 guidebook, no other firm in the city could claim to make such an offer. Cohen also relentlessly promoted civic improvement, especially in modernizing transportation. He wanted the name of Cohen Brothers to be integral to the buying habits of the populace. Exactly three decades after this department store opened, it moved elsewhere on Bay Street, to the site of what passed for the city’s first skyscraper, the Gardner Building, six stories high. The civic growth that he promoted was becoming evident; the 1900 census revealed a population of 28,429. Jacksonville was the biggest city in Florida, well ahead of second-place Pensacola (17,747), although still
smaller than Savannah, Augusta, Charleston, Montgomery, and Mobile. But disaster struck Jacksonville, and Jacob Cohen showed true grit in the wake of the fire that devastated the city on May 3, 1901.16

The sparks that ignited a mattress factory and then spread to ravage 146 city blocks constituted the most momentous event in local history, an even more decisive episode than the ordeal of Union occupation during and after the Civil War. Every public building but one burned down, which meant that ninety percent of downtown Jacksonville lay in ashes. Among the two dozen houses of worship demolished was Congregation Ahavath Chesed, which the conflagration turned into a temple of doom. The congregation’s records, like those of the city, also went up in flames. (Here it should be added that, though a new building emerged from the ashes, another fire broke out on January 28, 1940 and destroyed many, though not all, of the records of the synagogue from 1901 through 1939. No wonder then that scholars have not hitherto been tempted to reconstruct a history of Jacksonville Jewry.) The fifteen-member Jacksonville Relief Association formed after the 1901 fire included municipal court judge Morris Dzialynski, who was serving a second term as president of the Temple when the flames destroyed it. Congregation Ahavath Chesed was the first house of worship to be rebuilt.17

Handed a lemon, Jacob Cohen opted to make lemonade. He was not alone, of course, in his faith in the First Coast. At the end of 1901, forty families were optimistic enough to establish the Hebrew Orthodox Congregation B’nai Israel. Six years later a synagogue was erected in the La Villa neighborhood, where newcomers from eastern Europe tended to settle, and thus they enjoyed an alternative to Reform Judaism. Immediately after the catastrophe, however, Cohen had reason to suspect that his department store was surrounded by the remains of hotels that would never be rebuilt. Jacksonville might cease to be what the travel industry later called a “leisure destination,” as tourists skipped the city and headed to hotels in Ormond Beach, Palm Beach, and even further south.
Cohen Brothers, the Big Store.

The new store opened in 1912 on the site of the old St. James Hotel.
(Courtesy Hazel Mack, Archivist, Congregation Ahavath Chesed.)

But he also saw in the empty lot of what had been the St. James Hotel an opportunity to construct an even more impressive edifice. Although the block bounded by Duval, Laura, Church, and Hogan streets was considered too far from the river for desirable municipal trade, Cohen bought the entire six acres in 1910. By then the population of the city had spurted to 57,699; and the idea of progress had become operational. His new St. James Building covered an entire block, even as a photograph from that era shows why Bay Street resembled so many southern (and American) communities in that era. The stores bore names like Jacobs Jewelers (founded by Lionel Jacobs in 1879, and then taken over by his son Victor), and Levy’s (founded by Benjamin S. Levy in 1910). These firms, in their solidity and their gravitas, were above all firm. But Cohen Brothers was not content to display its wares and its amenities alongside such neighbors (and coreligionists). After a mere eighteen months of construction, a new and dazzling “Big Store” within the St. James Building,
with its entrance facing Hemming Park, opened on October 21, 1912.

If you build it, goes the mantra, they will come. On that opening day, they did. Out of an urban population of about 80,000, about 28,000 people visited Cohen Brothers, where two orchestras added to the allure. Onlookers peered through plate-glass windows, a novelty for Jacksonville. Through the huge seventy-five-foot octagonal skylight, the sunshine lit up the interior. A fountain gushed in the middle of the rotunda. Twenty-foot marble columns supported the mezzanine, which could be reached by a majestic stairway. The second-floor parapet consisted of a decorative frieze marked by six-pointed stars, which reflected the owners’ pride in their religious heritage. The store covered the entire second floor and the center of the first floor of the four-story St. James Building. Cohen Brothers claimed to be the ninth largest department store in the nation and the largest in the South. In Jacksonville itself, only the railroad terminal and the warehouse for the Atlantic Coast Line and Florida East Coast railways occupied greater floor space. Cohen Brothers dramatically enlarged the notion of “dry goods” to include groceries, racks of sheet music, musical instruments, books, a pet shop, one-day service on personalized stationery, and a soda fountain (seating limited to whites only, of course). Jacob Cohen grasped the principle that the whole point of a department store was that it offered everything in one place. The first permanent electric streetlights to be installed in Jacksonville surrounded the St. James Building that harbored Cohen Brothers. The urban experience of Floridians could henceforth stimulate them to become more urbane.\textsuperscript{18}

Competitors felt compelled to raise the level of their own game, to become more modern, more stylish, and more sophisticated. All became more attuned to fashion, and served as conduits of cosmopolitanism. Sensitivity to the fluctuations of taste that reverberated from outside was what partly constituted the novelty of the New South, the phrase that Henry W. Grady, editor of the \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, made famous in 1886 in evangelizing for a region that would achieve postbellum prosperity
through capitalist enterprise. The downtown stores that Jacksonville’s Jews and those in other cities established helped weaken the parochialism of the South without entirely ridding it of xenophobia. A leading downtown men’s clothing store, Levy Brothers, proclaimed itself “a Fifth Avenue shop set down in the center of Jacksonville,” and expressed pride in selling Hart, Schaffner, and Marx suits. \(^{19}\) Consider the balance sheets on which these merchant princes depended as the death warrants of the old order. Such tradesmen helped their neighbors cultivate a taste for the products of the modern world, and thus altered the atmosphere that the residents of cities like Jacksonville inhaled.

The year 1922 marked a special moment of civic pride when the estimated population within the city limits topped one hundred thousand. That statistic vindicated Jacob Cohen’s faith in the viability of his adopted city, still the most populous in Florida.
With 171 churches, piety persisted even during the Jazz Age. During the 1920s Jacksonville remained the chief commercial and banking center of the state, and a rail and marine hub as well. In 1926 seven skyscrapers of ten stories of more were under construction. Over four hundred factories were also listed in the city, which was prosperous enough to attract a scion of one of the nation’s wealthiest families. In 1925, when Alfred I. duPont moved down from Delaware, the solid-stone buildings of Jacksonville’s banks impressed him, according to his biographer, in contrast to the vaguely Mediterranean-style pleasure domes that passed for financial institutions in Miami. If a city could be personified, the authors of a guidebook noted, Jacksonville would have been the “working son in the Florida family of playboys.” In 1927 Jacob Cohen died and his widow, Hattie Halle Cohen, took over as president of the company until her death in 1935. Her son Halle Cohen and her sons-in-law, Percy Zacharias (married to Rae Cohen) and Robert Seitner (married to Minna Cohen) continued to run Cohen Brothers as well as the St. James Corporation.

The fortunes of the Big Store can nevertheless partially confirm the historical generalization that Eli N. Evans famously propounded. At the heart of the southern Jewish experience, he wrote, are “the fathers who built their businesses for the sons who didn’t want them.” Evans has been the leading chronicler of southern Jewry, and no insight into its fate has been more resonant. But even apart from the gender-specificity of his generalization, it is problematic. The fathers often built businesses so that the sons could transcend them and escape from the confinements of small-town merchandising and life. The tragic element of generational difference that Evans noted has to be weighed against the wider horizons that the professions or maybe even the arts and sciences promised the sons (and later the daughters). Self-employment was very often the aspiration of Diaspora Jewry, because the precarious risks of such autonomy might seem less important than the option of avoiding an antisemitic boss as well as the radiant appeal of genuine security. In the South, where professional and academic and artistic alternatives were less apparent than in other regions, the building of family businesses
could be so intently pursued that “succession crises” could be deferred or finessed. The truly self-reliant do not easily foresee a future in which they have vanished. Amend Evans’s statement concerning business inheritance to “grandsons,” however, and that is what happened to Cohen Brothers. None of the grandsons (or granddaughters) of Jacob Cohen or Morris Cohen wanted to take charge of a department store.

That store, however, continued to be integral to the social life of the city at least through the 1950s. One piece of evidence of that status comes from a recent memoir. Born in Jacksonville in 1949 into a naval family that moved around to many postings, Mary Elizabeth Anania could record only a few fleeting memories of a hometown girlhood. But among them were Hemming Park and the store that faced it. The future Elizabeth Edwards, wife of former Senator John Edwards of North Carolina, does recall how much, when she was seven, the Christmas decorations in the Cohen Brothers windows “delighted me.”22 The memoirist does not mention the evident effect of such baubles on the character of the holiday itself. But when Jacob Goldsmith originated the “Spirit of Christmas” parade in Memphis, and when over a hundred thousand Atlantans regularly attended the lighting of the great Christmas tree at Rich’s,23 something happened to the piety and the exclusivity of a holiday commemorating the birth of the Christian Savior. Cohen Brothers and its counterparts thus helped to desacralize the cultural climate of what was historically the most thoroughly Protestant section of the Western Hemisphere.

In any case the thrills to which the Edwards memoir attests were becoming rarer to stimulate, as customers increasingly preferred to patronize outlying shopping malls. They served pedestrians within an enclosed space, unlike shopping centers, and were generally anchored by a department store rather than, say, a grocery store. Shopping malls were the postwar invention of architect Victor Gruen, a Viennese Jew who had disguised himself as a Storm Trooper to escape from Austria in 1938 and who utterly transformed the habits of his adopted land. In 1959 ownership of Jacksonville’s Big Store was transferred to the May Company, the chain that a Bavarian-born Jew, David May, had
founded in Colorado a little less than a century earlier. May had bought stock in Cohen Brothers after the fire to enable his friend Jacob Cohen to expand into the St. James Building, and sold the shares back once the Big Store enjoyed boom years again. The cachet remained high enough, the cultivation of lifelong allegiance and patronage had been effective enough, for David May’s grandson to name the department store May-Cohen’s. Invoking the legacy did no good, however, even when the St. James Building became a National Register Site. Downtown was dying. Even after Maison Blanche took over the Big Store, it shut down forever in the summer of 1987, a conspicuous victim of suburbanization. The era of Jacksonville’s downtown shopping, of which Cohen Brothers was once the diadem, is no more.24

The Retailers: Furchgott’s

The great downtown mercantile rival to Cohen Brothers was Furchgott’s, which opened in 1868 as a dry goods store on Bay Street.25

The major figure in the history of this firm was born in Hungary in 1852. Leopold Furchgott was only sixteen years old when he reached Charleston, South Carolina, where two older brothers, Herman and Max, were already working in the dry goods business on the corner of King and Calhoun streets. However, almost immediately the siblings split up. One elder brother ventured west to Colorado; and Max’s son, Arthur, eventually built a department store in Orangeburg, South Carolina. (Ultimately Arthur’s son Robert Furchgott opted out of the family business and in 1998 traveled to Stockholm to accept a Nobel Prize in physiology.) Soon after the Civil War, Leopold moved south to Jacksonville, where his dry goods store, in partnership with Charles Benedict and Morris Kohn, opened on September 28, 1868. “They have a good stock of fancy dry goods—the best and largest in this town,” R. G. Dun & Company reported. “Their business is entirely cash and they have no debts here.” Despite his youthfulness, Leopold Furchgott declined to hover in the shadow of Jacob Cohen, and quickly emerged as a leading businessman in the city. Furchgott became a director of the Barnett National Bank
of Jacksonville, a charter member of the Jacksonville Board of Trade, and for several terms served as its first vice president.26

By 1880 his firm flaunted a telephone when the Jacksonville Telephone Exchange directory listed only thirty-four names. Furchgott’s sold corsets and carpets, damask and doilies. It also “sold” the city itself, most strikingly during the era of the Great War. During the winter season Jacksonville and its immediate vicinity attracted about a hundred film companies. Furchgott’s may have been the first department store anywhere in the nation to open a movie department. Its aim was to enable producers and directors to learn about the attractions of Jacksonville, although soon after the war California drained any remaining interest in shooting films in northeast Florida. The nation’s most successful
mail-order house, circulating its famous catalog, did not directly compete with stores like Furchgott’s, which attracted urbanites rather than farmers. Not until the decade of the 1920s did Sears, Roebuck commit itself to developing retail stores. Until 1928, when the company opened a store on Main Street, Jacksonville customers who wanted Sears, Roebuck items had to order them by mail.

Leopold and Julie Furchgott had one daughter, Claire, who married a New Yorker, Paul Lowinger, in an era when women, perhaps especially southern women, could rarely be imagined as competent enough to own or manage such stores. Not even those formidable females known as steel magnolias were presumed to be canny enough to read a balance sheet. Leopold Furchgott, a member of the Reform synagogue, sought a successor in Fred A. Meyerheim. A former member of the sales force, Meyerheim had joined the firm in 1888, when deliveries were still made by horse and buggy. He assumed an increasingly important role after the 1901 fire. Despite the name, which means “fear of God” in German, Furchgott’s burned down, and Leopold’s wife did not want to remain in Jacksonville. The couple moved to New York, where he ran the buying office. Meyerheim remained to mind the store on Main and Bay streets. Even as the Furchgotts uprooted themselves from Jacksonville, Meyerheim tapped into the deepest roots of its Jewry. In 1894 he had married into a family that had founded Congregation Ahavath Chesed, the Slagers. The Slagers owned a jewelry store on the corner of Main and Bay streets, and for decades served as watch inspectors for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. Julius Slager, who served as president of the Temple, had been a business partner of Philip Dzialynski, whose brother Morris had married Rosa Slager. She was the niece of Julius Slager, whose own daughter, Cordelia (Dedie) Slager Meyerheim, later became president of the synagogue’s sisterhood.27

In 1922, as president of the Kohn-Furchgott Company, Leopold Furchgott returned to the city for a lavish seventieth birthday party held at the Seminole Hotel. The store that he had co-founded had been in business for fifty-four years. Later that year, on Main and Forsyth streets, he opened an annex that
dramatically enlarged the department store’s floor space.²⁸ When Leopold Furchgott died at the end of the decade, Meyerheim became president. In 1941 he moved the store to its final downtown location, 130 West Adams Street. His son Harold, who had been confirmed at Congregation Ahavath Chesed in 1906, during an era when Reform Judaism ignored the bar mitzvah ceremony, succeeded him in 1945.

In 1968, Furchgott’s reached another milestone by celebrating the centennial of its founding. In that year the consolidation of city and county government was achieved. The chairman of the board of Furchgott’s, Harold Meyerheim, was one of an inner circle of twenty-three businessmen who had signed the manifesto that first called for such a civic transformation. Harold Meyerheim was seventy-four years old, but loyal older customers and employees
sometimes still called him “the young Mr. Meyerheim,” lest he be mistaken for his late father. By then Furchgott’s had expanded to stores in Regency Square and Roosevelt Mall.

The evolution of such an enterprise requires contextualization beyond the parameters of real estate. Furchgott’s exemplified the sorts of connections between sales personnel and customers that marked the emergence of consumerism as a way of life. The transformation from rural continuities to the uncertainties of urban and suburban encounters, as occupations and gender roles became more diversified and as strangers jostled with one another, required the calibration of infinitely nuanced interpersonal relations. (Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography is an early text that registers his own receptivity to such signals.) The anonymity of the metropolis became commonplace. Identity became fabricated and dramatized as the boundaries of the economy and society overlapped and became reconfigured. No scholar of these efforts to convert personality into performance was more astute, original, or influential than Erving Goffman, the Benjamin Franklin Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. He depicted the stabilization of a whole series of social conventions through the techniques of “impression management.” Such gestures, by which the participants of modern societies connect to one another, were especially crucial to effective salesmanship. Personnel had to sell themselves and not merely their products.29

Goffman’s brother-in-law, the Canadian-born Charles Bay, was among the retailers obliged to be sensitive to such enactments of modern social space. Having earned an M.B.A. from Harvard, Bay had been an executive at Bonwit Teller in New York City and then at Filene’s in Boston before coming to Jacksonville in 1968, the year Furchgott’s celebrated its centenary. He became the first chief executive officer of the company who was kin neither to its founder nor to the Meyerheims. By then the difficulties of entwining commerce and consanguinity were becoming more apparent. As president and general manager, Bay played a decisive role in redefining Furchgott’s as a specialty store, emphasizing apparel and fashion accessories, rather than as a department store,
although the firm also sold linens, stereos, and televisions. The aim, Bay announced, was to appeal to customers in the middle- to upper- range of purchasing power: “Our future does not lie with the least affluent.” Their destiny was presumably among the discounter. Other downtown stores were sinking, getting swallowed up, or struggling to find the right niche market. Bay’s approach managed to keep the company alive even as downtown Jacksonville was becoming moribund.30

Department stores like Cohen Brothers as well as specialty stores like Furchgott’s encouraged a consumerist ethos that contributed to the eventual burial of the agrarian tradition that had so decisively shaped the mind of the South. Few cities were in greater need of cosmopolitanism. In 1920, when the U.S. census revealed that a majority of Americans for the first time lived in urban and suburban areas, 97 percent of the residents of Jacksonville had been born there. Politically its representatives aligned themselves not with a “magic city” like Miami but instead with the agrarian, backward Panhandle.31 Yet the natural setting that was once so prized did gradually, though not entirely, yield to the social forces that human beings set in motion. The indigenous gave way to the artificial, and traditionalism had to yield to capitalism, though not without a fight. In 1910 an editorial in the Florida Times-Union conceded that “as a financier the Jew is unexcelled . . . but he does not shine as builder, as inventor, as explorer, as civilizer, or as conqueror.” Without any disparagement directed at a particular ethnic group, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist from nearby Alachua County lamented the loss of an intimate attachment to the land. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings believed that “something is shriveled in a man’s heart when he turns away from . . . [the soil] and concerns himself only with the affairs of men.”32 But those very affairs constituted the radical change in consciousness and experience that the Cohen brothers, Leopold Furchgott, and their compatriots helped to instigate. In effect they undermined the assumption that human plenitude had to be autochthonous.

They also accelerated the process of secularization, and, however unknowingly, facilitated what Max Weber, the greatest
social scientist of the last century, called the disenchantment of the world. Historians of Jewry have added another dimension to this process. For such mercantile enterprises also underscored the inexorable forces of assimilation, which corroded the authority of normative Judaism. This process was encouraged in towns and cities where a religious minority like the Jews proved to be too small to provide a niche market. To compete, Jewish merchants were not only obliged to remain open for business on Saturdays, but had to rely upon the patronage of non-Jews. Despite their paeans to the land and despite their ideology of agrarianism, few white southerners were morally opposed to making money. Even the moniker of “Dixie” may have stemmed from the bank notes worth ten dollars (dix in French) printed in antebellum Louisiana. The notes were nicknamed “dixes” or “dixies.” The region was not inhospitable to Jewish tradesmen, however much they seemed to exemplify a devotion to commercial aspiration. Though hardly enjoying the high status of, say, plantation owners or military officers, such businessmen were hardly disreputable. But they had to fathom the habits and preferences of their customers. Merchants had to adapt to survive, had to respond quickly to fluctuating tastes and styles, and therefore needed the sort of alertness, agility, and timing that might have won the professional envy of the acrobats of Cirque du Soleil.

The Clothiers

Retailing is a risky business. Just ask Ulysses S. Grant, who failed in running a general store, or the luckless haberdasher Harry S. Truman. Both of them had to pursue other lines of work (like running the country). Merchants had to cultivate the virtues of fortitude and perseverance, tenacity and pluck. Such qualities marked the operations of some of the clothing stores that Jews owned in Jacksonville.

Frank Rosenblum arrived in Jacksonville from Key West in 1896 and borrowed a horse, a buggy, and some sheets to become a peddler. He managed to save enough to buy a clothing store just before the terrible fire that broke out five years later. Three relocations later, in 1934, Rosenblum’s was firmly established at Adams
and Hogan streets. Frank Rosenblum had built a high-end business that his three sons, John, Sheldon, and Herman, did indeed want to enter. Among their patrons was Fuller Warren, who served as governor from 1949 to 1953. Three other stores—at Regency Square, at Roosevelt Mall, and in Lakewood—followed the customers to the suburbs. By 1981 such was the loyalty to Rosenblum’s that some of its patronage could be tracked across four generations. But by then, Herman lamented, “the middle-aged, middle-income family today is so strapped paying off a home mortgage, taxes, and charge card bills, not to mention keeping the lights turned on, that there is little left over for high-quality clothes.” That year, after forty-seven years, the downtown store closed, leaving only the Lakewood location and the memories of the brothers’ combined adulthoods—111 years—of minding the store. That two of Sheldon’s three sons, Robert and Richard, were poised and ready to run Rosenblum’s Clothiers, however, suggests that Eli Evans’s crisp generalization was never intended to have universal applicability. “This is in our blood,” Robert asserted. Richard did acknowledge, however, that an independent specialty store “is an anachronism, much less a family business.” However long the odds of survival the brothers dared to open a second store on Jacksonville Beach in 2003.

The experience of the first generation of another family in the clothing business belongs in a recent book by a Soviet-born anthropologist. According to Professor Yuri Slezkine of the University of California at Berkeley, the proclivity for trade is not distinctively Jewish. Such habits are shared with other “service nomads.” The overseas Chinese and the overseas Lebanese, the Parsis, the Jains, and the Armenians have also lived in diasporas on several continents, and have figured out “how to cultivate people and symbols, not fields or herds.” Slezkine has discerned in the adaptable, flexible, transactional status of such groups an overwhelming preference for family enterprises, and a capacity to provide financial and mercantile services for the surrounding rural population. One monograph on immigrants to Jacksonville early in the twentieth century illustrates Slezkine’s generalization. Both the 1910 U.S. census and the 1920 city directory showed that
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Romanian Jewish immigrants were so concentrated in small businesses than none worked as laborers or domestics, and even salesmen and clerks were employed either by relatives or by other Jewish tradesmen. Slezkine’s “service nomadism,” adept at negotiating exchanges among strangers, also collides rather directly with the rootedness in which white southerners have been invested. The Jews who inevitably came from elsewhere were more likely to pick up stakes than their gentile neighbors.

Nomadism does characterize the early life of Salim Mizrahi. He was born in 1874 under the Ottomans, in Tripoli, Lebanon, the son of a physician. His mother tongue was Arabic, and he entered the clothing business in Smyrna, Turkey, where he met his wife. In 1901, fearing a rise in antisemitism, the couple and their daughters, Rachel and Rebecca, reached New York, where Salim became a peddler of fine laces. Three more children were born there and in Atlantic City. In 1911 the Mizrahis moved to Jacksonville where their youngest child, Joseph, was born, and where the first French Novelty shop opened that year at 325 Laura Street. The store’s ready-to-wear clothes, the fabrics, the handmade blouses, and the linens were all imported from francophone Europe: France, Belgium, and Switzerland. By the mid-1920s, when the French Novelty Shop was relocated to West Adams Street, the Mizrahis had earned a reputation for excellent children’s wear and for fine linens. Rachel and Rebecca worked in the store. Salim retired in 1942. Ralph joined the firm four years later and became chairman of S. Mizrahi Sons. Joseph joined in 1952; and when an Ashkenazi outsider, Raymond Winterfield, came on board to run a ladies’ sportswear store, it was named “Fields.” A third generation arrived in the form of Ralph and Evelyn Mizrahi’s son Charles.

To survive, the company had to move to the suburbs. Fields became Strawberry Fields in 1978. Its head was Jack Mizrahi, the son of Joseph and Dorothy, who became a buyer for French Novelty Country Shops. Many of the employees have been Arab-Americans, a hiring practice that amplifies the “service nomadism” of S. Mizrahi Sons, Inc. Its officers are Ralph S. Mizrahi, chairman; Charles Mizrahi, president; Jack Mizrahi, vice president; Joseph Mizrahi, secretary-treasurer. It is as though all hands
were still needed on deck. Both Ralph and his son Charles have held the presidency of the Jacksonville Jewish Center, a Conservative synagogue. By 1981 the annual estimated sales had risen to over $5 million in volume, from French Novelty Country Shops (twelve stores) and Strawberry Fields (eighteen stores). Rooted in Jacksonville, the family was no longer nomadic. Its cohesiveness so integral to success was reflected in Ralph’s insistence: “We didn’t want to be ‘and Sons.’ We are the ‘S. Mizrahi Sons.’” That raises the question: what about the daughters of S. Mizrahi and other entrepreneurs? Whether due to prejudice or to inclination, to unquestioned barriers, or to personal demeanor, women seemed to assert very little direct or formal impact upon commerce, though they loomed far larger in the community. Ralph Mizrahi’s wife Evelyn, for instance, joined the board of the auxiliary of River
Garden Hebrew Home for the Aged when it opened in Riverside in 1946, and remained an active member half a century later.38

Salim Mizrahi inside his store, 1919.
(Courtesy Hazel Mack, Archivist, Congregation Ahavath Chased.)

The career of Ben Friedman could exemplify a dictum in one of the very few books explicitly devoted to the business acumen of this model minority. “It was the Jewish acceptance of risk,” Gerald Krefetz has written, “that enabled them not only to succeed but to thrive.” Born in Chicago in 1914, Friedman began his retailing career at Lerner Shops and then Mangel’s, a women’s ready-to-wear chain that in 1949 sent him to open a store in Jacksonville. His assignment hardly made the newcomer freakish. According to a community survey conducted in the immediate postwar era, retail trade employed half of Jacksonville’s Jews. (Another 13 percent could be found in wholesale trade, 10 percent in the professions, and 3 percent in finance.) Only a year after Friedman had arrived in Jacksonville, he and his wife Lillian decided to strike out on
their own, thereby applying Krefetz’s generalization. The Friedmans poured $2,800 of their savings into a Vogue Shop on Edgewood Avenue. Exactly four decades later it was fair to conclude that the gamble had paid off. Vogue Shops had become the largest privately owned apparel company in the state of Florida, with over a hundred stores in the Southeast. In the 1970s the Friedmans also inaugurated a chain of stores aimed at younger women: the Body Shops of America (not to be confused with The Body Shop International). Friedman might be considered a kind of successor to Dzialynski, who had served as a governor of what became the Chamber of Commerce. Friedman served on the board of governors of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce. Dzialynski had served as founding president of Congregation Ahavath Chesed. Friedman served as founding president of the city’s second Conservative synagogue, Beth Shalom Congregation, in the Mandarin section. He died in 2002.39

A final example of such success also has its origins elsewhere. Sam Stein, who arrived at Ellis Island in 1905 with forty-three dollars, began his business career in America as a peddler. That sum does not seem like much. But it made him, if one government report can be believed, about five times wealthier than the average newcomer from the Old World shtetlach of a century ago.40 By comparison to that average, Stein could almost be ranked as a venture capitalist. Starting out in Greenville, Mississippi, Stein wandered through the Delta selling jewelry and, once, getting robbed and shot. (The risks were not only financial.) But he made his base in Greenville, reputed to be the most tolerant of the towns of the Delta, dubbed “the most Southern place on earth.” He married another Jewish immigrant. But he died suddenly in 1933, as the Great Depression wrought havoc with the prospect of financial security that had propelled Sam Stein a third of a century earlier from Lithuania.

His son Jake nevertheless converted the store, named Sam Stein’s and then Stein’s Self Service Store, and finally Stein Mart, into the biggest emporium in the Delta. Covering an entire city block, the store promised mouth-watering discounts on discards from chic Manhattan operations like Saks Fifth Avenue.41
Formerly a star tackle on the high school football team, Jake Stein became the very archetype of the booster, heading the Chamber of Commerce, serving as a city councilman, and presiding over the Hebrew Union Temple. Seven days a week he could usually be found in the store, a place that he evidently preferred to home in the company of his wife, the former Freda Grundfest, and one son, whose maturation was marked by considerable filial conflict.42 American men are apt to join just about everything but their own families, Will Rogers once remarked. For the Steins, the consequences might have been predictable, if the axiom that Eli Evans had famously formulated held true.

But this story had a twist. Born in 1945, Jay Stein not only exhibited a flair for retailing but also an ambition far vaster than the boundaries of the Greenville where he was born and raised. He devoted himself to expanding the mercantile enterprise that his grandfather began. Defying Eli Evans’s generalization about the conflict of generations, Jay Stein made Stein Mart into a powerhouse of upscale clothing and other items that were generally found in department stores but were offered at prices common to discount houses. The growth of Stein Mart was spectacular, especially after Stein moved corporate headquarters to Jacksonville in 1984. He had graduated from Bolles, then a Jacksonville military school, in 1963; but the corporate decision to switch from Greenville to Jacksonville was hardly swathed in sentimentality. Air transportation, economic promise, and educational facilities were superior to Mississippi, even if Jacksonville was located far to the east of the Stein Mart stores that were clustered in the Delta and immediate vicinity. But Stein was also determined to expand the company that his grandfather and father had built. Sometimes a new store opened in some community (usually but not always in the South) every three weeks. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, Stein Mart was racking up $1.2 billion in net sales, overwhelmingly in clothing and accessories, earned in 260 stores. Its historian concluded that “the company had positioned itself as a distinctive off-price retailer,” offering high-quality merchandise. “But, when compared to department stores,” Stein Mart “sold this merchandise at prices 20 to 60 percent lower.” One of the
company advertising slogans was therefore especially enticing: “You could pay more. But you’ll have to go somewhere else.” By 2001 business was reassuring enough for Stein, while continuing to serve as chairman of the board, to transfer the CEO position to his closest associate, who became the first head of Stein Mart who was not a Stein.43

The saga of this company is therefore in part a local story, as Stein and his company take their place in the line that started in Jacksonville a century earlier. Stein Mart is also a regional story, reflecting the considerable impact of Jewish merchandising in the South, and is in part proof of the economist Joseph Schumpeter’s theory of the gales of destructive creativity that punctuate the capitalist system and keep it vibrant and renewed (and volatile). Such a system does not allow any city to be insulated for long from the rest of the state, region, or country. One other paradigm should be underscored as well. Central European Jews built Cohen Brothers and Furchgott’s; Sephardim ran French Novelty; and descendants of eastern European Jews were responsible for the Vogue Shops and Stein Mart. The vocational pattern therefore helps confirm the generalization of the social historian Lee Shai Weissbach that, even when the influx of Russian and Polish and Romanian Jewish immigrants dwarfed the small communities that German Jews had established, “the basic Jewish occupational structure . . . did not change appreciably.” From the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries “a certain constancy” in economic choices that Weissbach discerned in small-town Jewry was true of Jacksonville as well.44

**Mobility: Upward and Outward**

That 1910 editorial in the *Florida Times-Union*, which acknowledged the Jew’s adroitness in finance but insisted that “he does not shine as builder,” had not envisioned Lonnie Wurn. Wurn was born in 1911 in Lvov, Poland, a city that had been called Lemberg when it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (Lvov is now part of the western Ukraine.) In 1921 his parents brought him to Jacksonville, when the family name was Wurm. Adolph Wurm’s wife, the former Clara Morgenstern, had
a brother, Isaac Morgenstern, who had already relocated to Jacksonville. Morgenstern bought a wooden shack for the Wurms in Riverside on St. Johns Avenue that they operated as a modest grocery store. The customers were mostly black. If the prototypical politician of the nineteenth century was born in a log cabin, the upwardly mobile Jewish businessman often started out above the store where the family lived. Working hours were harsh. The store stayed open for business from seven in the morning until eleven at night, seven days a week. For a decade Adolph and his wife Clara could neither take a vacation nor send their son to summer camp, but they saved enough to purchase a horse and wagon for deliveries.45

Lonnie Wurn.
(Courtesy Hazel Mack, Archivist, Congregation Ahavath Chesed.)
Because they eventually managed to succeed in business while really trying, the family validated the theory of Max Weber that capitalist accumulation requires “worldly asceticism.” Duty trumped desire. The Wurms also verified the claim of Sol Nazer-man, the Holocaust survivor and protagonist of The Pawnbroker, that the secret of Jewish wealth consisted of deferring gratification. “You obtain a small piece of cloth—wool, silk, cotton—it doesn’t matter,” Nazerman explains. “You take this cloth and you cut it in two and sell the two pieces for a penny or two more than you paid for the one. With this money then you buy a slightly larger piece of cloth,” he tells his young Puerto Rican assistant. But “you must never succumb” to luxury, never be distracted from the duty of self-abnegation, and never stray from the compulsion to buy more and more cloth, all for the sake of parnossah. And then, after many centuries, “you have a mercantile heritage” and a reputation for “secret resources” that happen to arouse envy and hostility.46

In 1932 the Wurms’ son Lonnie became salutatorian of his graduating class at Lee High School, and then raced through his courses at the University of Florida in Gainesville to earn a law degree only four years later. In the mid-1930s, when the devastation of the Great Depression spared few families, less than 150 Jews could be found in the student body at the University of Florida. (Six decades later Gainesville had 5,500 Jewish undergraduates, a larger number than any other institution of higher learning in the nation.)47 Marriage to Emily Bloom brought financial consequences. The groom’s new father-in-law, Herman Bloom, was the half-brother of Hannah Setzer, the wife of Ben Setzer. For half a century, Lonnie Wurn (who changed his surname in 1945 because of the taunts to which his elder daughter Jackie was subjected in school) served as the Setzers’ lawyer. He figured out, by setting up fifteen different trusts for members of the family, that Ben Setzer, who had built up a chain of grocery stores bearing the family name, could legally avoid paying millions of dollars in income and estate taxes. One reward for shielding Ben Setzer’s income was that his attorney had earned enough by the end of the 1940s to get into the home construction
business, joining his father and his brother-in-law, Harold Bloom. Building thousands of homes, they helped develop Jacksonville’s Southside in particular, where Jewish newcomers and especially wealthier Jews tended to live in neighborhoods like Granada, South Granada, and Old Grove Manor. Wurn’s autobiography claims that he was the first developer in northeast Florida to subdivide estates in a way that included such amenities as playgrounds, recreation buildings, and swimming pools.48 Think of his legacy as an update of the biblical praise in Numbers 24:5: “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwelling places, O Israel.”

The suburbanization that eventually led to consolidation, the expansion that made Jacksonville bigger (at least in geography) than Atlanta or Boston, were due to the construction of single dwellings on previously empty land. In creating subdivisions, Wurn built as though there were no limits to the conquest of nature. But he was hardly alone, especially in the development of Arlington and Southside. The authoritative history of consolidation mentions two Jacksonville developers in particular. Martin Stein “began building a major regional enclosed shopping center at Regency Square,” completed in 1967; and, also on the Southside, Ira Koger built Boulevard Center, which “became one of the first suburban office parks in the nation. As a result, suburban homeowners began to shift their working and shopping patterns to nearby malls and office parks at the expense of downtown.”49 Such growth is hardly without its downside, however, because the overdevelopment of the state of Florida has now become a cliché of social criticism, as the remorseless pressure of a growing population on resources harms the quality of life for residents, snowbirds, and tourists alike. Rarely have the higher living standards that suburbanization entailed produced such ambiguous consequences.

As Wurn himself grew wealthier, he built adjoining houses for his parents and immediate family. In 1987 he and his wife moved to Epping Forest, the former estate of the duPonts, the family that had been entrenched at what was undoubtedly the social and economic pinnacle of the city. An agnostic who
nevertheless funded the library (dedicated in 1981) of Congregation Ahavath Chesed, he found his chief recreational pleasure in his later years in his yachts, the sixty-foot *Emilon* and the forty-three-foot *Mishigas*, on which he and Emily Wurn enjoyed taking guests sailing up and down the St. Johns River. As they did so, he might well have contemplated the fate that brought him as a ten-year-old to Jacksonville (or so the historian might be permitted to speculate). Wurn’s autobiography does not formally contrast the Polish city, located on the Poltva River, which he left behind, with the Jacksonville that he helped to shape. Nor does he explicitly imagine how different his fate might have been. But to consider what would have happened to him is not difficult. The year that his family arrived at Ellis Island, the U.S. Congress first imposed immigration restrictions on eastern and southern Europeans. After that year the opportunities to emigrate from Lvov were far narrower. Two decades later, nine out of every ten Jews trapped in German-occupied Poland would be murdered.

In spurring the spectacular growth of the city, Wurn was a decisive figure. He therefore invites a comparison to Atlanta’s master builder, Ben Massell. Like Wurn, Massell had been born abroad (although in Lithuania rather than Hapsburg Poland), and arrived in the United States as a child. Each family owned a grocery store that served a largely black clientele. Massell, however, built downtown, about a thousand buildings in all. There were so many, in fact, that in 1961 the booster Ivan Allen, Sr., a former president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, proclaimed that General “Sherman burned Atlanta, and Ben Massell built it back.” Suburbanization is integral to the enormous growth of Atlanta. Yet its dazzling downtown flourished. It became a regional capital and even an international mecca, while Jacksonville’s sluggish center failed to keep pace.

Lonnie Wurn practiced law for fifty-two years and died in 2008. His most important client had been born in the *shtetl* of Pusalotes, before Lithuania had achieved its independence. (Over 90 percent of Lithuanian Jewry perished under the Nazis.) Because an older brother of Ben Setzer, Abraham Setzer, had earlier moved to Jacksonville, other members of the family settled in the
city during the era of the Great War. Ben Setzer arrived in 1914, and started out in the ice business on Eighth Street. He then opened his first grocery store on Fifth and Silver streets in 1925. Over a span of nearly four decades, he opened a chain of thirty-eight supermarkets from Jacksonville to central Florida; and Setzer had become a multimillionaire.\textsuperscript{52} In 1958 he sold the business to Food Fair. At the closing negotiations, at least according to apocrypha, Setzer asked all the lawyers present whether the entire contractual arrangements had been properly signed and finalized. Assured that the sale had been correctly completed, he then asked the representatives from Food Fair whether they happened also to be interested in buying the adjacent parking lots. The story may be a little too good to be true,\textsuperscript{53} but it underscores a reputation for canniness.

\textit{Benjamin Setzer, c. 1930.}
\textit{(From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida, originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)}
With three partners, including his son Sidney, Setzer could concentrate on putting into practice the concept of the self-service discount store. “Stack It High and Sell It Cheap” was the motto of the business formed in 1955, Pic N’ Save. Its appeal was not to the feinshmeckers (as the Lower East Siders would have referred to aesthetes with pretensions to refinement), but instead to satisfy the masses, without the cachet of glamour. Pic N’ Save opened its first store in the Arlington section of Jacksonville in 1955. Within three decades Setzer and his partners built twenty-five discount stores, each of which generally occupied 40,000 to 55,000 square feet. So popular did they become and so accessible were their locations, that, according to a 1985 survey (the methodology of which cannot be verified), six out of ten of the city’s residents claimed to have shopped at a Pic N’ Save in the previous thirty days. At its peak it employed five thousand workers and executives. A “tough businessman,” according to the son of one of the partners, Setzer became a multimillionaire all over again. Unwilling to leave well enough alone, he bought out two partners. He also replaced his older son Sidney with younger son Leonard, a Wharton School graduate who later became president of the city’s Jewish Community Alliance. The Setzer family was fated to discover, however, the melancholy lesson that, in achieving business success, you only live twice.

At first nothing seemed likely to decelerate the momentum with which Pic N’ Save lured customers. Any serious rival would have to be merciless in the precision of its discount pricing, demanding in the cost-shaving that it expected of its suppliers, and eager to crush any signs of a unionization that might raise the wages of employees. Unfortunately for Setzer’s ambitious legacy, such a company emerged from Bentonville, Arkansas, and would become the 800-pound gorilla of retailing of the entire planet. By 1991, when Wal-Mart generated $32.6 billion in sales, some Pic N’ Save stores had begun to lose money, and four years later the company declared bankruptcy. With professional liquidators hired to dismember the company, what Setzer had so cannily and so relentlessly built formally went under in 1996. But to crush it took the bring-it-on competitive drive and the disciplined power
of the biggest company in sales in the United States. In destroying Pic N’ Save, Wal-Mart admittedly got an assist from the likes of Kmart, Target, Circuit City, and Toys R Us. But the victory really belonged to the company that became the largest grocer, the largest toy seller, the largest furniture retailer, and the largest private employer in the nation, and finally the largest retailer in the world. A pillar of the Jacksonville Jewish Center, Setzer is not buried in a pauper’s grave; and his family, although ripped apart by dissension and lawsuits, ended up, with a farsighted legal assist from Lonnie Wurn, far more comfortably than when the first grocery store opened.

Antisemitism did not evidently impede the Jewish retailers who made their fortunes in Jacksonville. Here, too, the city cannot be differentiated from the rest of the South, where judeophobia has historically been too mild to exert significant or damaging impact. Nevertheless attitudes have occasionally bubbled up that played into discomfiting, negative stereotypes. In 1977 the Reverend Jerry Falwell, for example, told his followers in Richmond that some folks don’t like Jews because they “can make more money accidentally than you can on purpose.” (Falwell later claimed to have merely uttered a “jest,” though he was not noted for a robust sense of humor.) Tammy Faye Messner, the former wife of Jim Bakker, the televangelist who founded the PTL ministry and Heritage USA, a Christian theme park in South Carolina, has said of him: “As far back as I can remember . . . he’s been really great with money. I think that’s the Jewish part of Jim. . . . His grandmother was a German Jew,” she explained of Bakker, who was imprisoned for fraud. What is impalpable, elusive, even mysterious about the Jewish accumulation of wealth can be a stimulus to wonder, fantasy, prejudice, and resentment. Shylock knows that “our sacred nation” is hated for the ascetic purposefulness that he himself lives by, for “my bargains, and my well-won thrift” (The Merchant of Venice, I.3). In the United States a little more than a century ago, the Populist animus against the financial manipulators operating in distant cities was tinctured with a rhetorical, although not programmatic, antisemitism.55
Christianity itself may well have reinforced such resentment against the wealthy. The poor are blessed, according to the Sermon on the Mount; and insofar as religion transmitted such attitudes to many of Jacksonville’s residents, a certain moral obloquy may have been attached to those who enjoyed the fruits of competitive capitalism and an open society. Though some mixture of envy and animus must have been brewing in the collective unconscious of the city, very little evidence has surfaced that antisemitism was ever made explicit or took the form of discrimination in Jacksonville. For most of its history, the Jews rarely sought to breach the social chasms that subtly separated this minority from its neighbors, especially after working hours. The result was a modus vivendi that seemed both a matter of choice and a source of satisfaction.

The Value of Education

One Jewish businessman who recorded reflections on the subject of judeophobia was Alexander Brest, who was born in 1894 in Boston to poor immigrant parents who had fled from what became Poland. Brest put himself through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on scholarships and part-time jobs, and graduated from MIT with a degree in civil engineering in 1916. Two years later during World War I, Brest was stationed in Jacksonville, an experience that left him “with sand in my shoes.” He remained there, and in 1924 formed the Duval Engineering and Contracting Company. The capitalization of $5,000 came from Brest’s savings, the result of having taught civil engineering at the University of Florida. But he doubted that, as “a damn Yankee in Florida, and a Jew to boot,” he could be the face of the company in impression management, in glad-handing officials, and in securing contracts. So an affable native Floridian, a former student of Brest’s in Gainesville named George Hodges, agreed to help Brest launch Duval Engineering. Hodges became its president in a fifty-fifty partnership. During an era of tremendous growth, the company flourished.

Jacksonville was definitely situated in cracker country. But there is no historical spoor to track bigotry against Jews; and, near
the end of his life, Brest insisted: “I have never experienced anti-
semitism.” He did admit, however, to reluctance to test too 
severely the forbearance of his neighbors. So he made a habit of 
avoiding the possibility of friction: “I have never sought members-
ships in organizations or groups that restricted entry. I simply 
stayed away from those people or clubs once I realized that they 
did not welcome Jews.”57 Halle Cohen of Cohen Brothers could 
not escape the dilemma, however, when the otherwise restricted 
Ponte Vedra Country Club invited him to become the token Jew-
ish member. He refused.58 The situation was at least ambiguous. 
The Jacksonville Social Register did include some of the Jewish 
families like the Cohens and Furchgotts who were the earliest to 
reach Jacksonville and who managed to become prosperous. The 
sources of wealth did not even have to be prestigious. Brothers 
Isador and Hugo Grunthal operated a wholesale grocery business, 
for example, and were not “very satisfactory in their payments.” 
In 1876 R. G. Dun & Company “advise[d] some caution in extend-
ing credit in large amounts.” But Isador had at least one 
redeeming virtue. A Johnny Reb, he had fought under Stonewall 
Jackson and P. G. T. Beauregard. In Jacksonville that Civil War 
service gave him the pedigree that Jews call yichus. Isador’s 
granddaughter, Myra Grunthal Glickstein, recalled that “Jewish 
families were as prominent socially in Jacksonville as Gentiles,” 
which is surely a bit of a stretch. One of her sons, attorney and 
judge Hugh S. Glickstein, left Jacksonville permanently and later 
claimed that the antisemitism, plus the racism, that pervaded the 
city helped push him away.59

Not even the most snobbish of social clubs could impose any 
restrictions upon highway construction, however; and as Jackson-
ville expanded (and took its chances with the objections of old-
timers to sprawl), Duval Engineering thrived. Before it was sold 
after four decades under Brest and Hodges, the company had 
built more than two thousand miles of roads and streets, includ-
ing much of the city’s expressway system, and paved Cecil Field. 
Brest also helped build the Jacksonville Naval Air Station, as did 
another construction firm under Jewish management, the S. S. Ja-
cobs Company. Further south, Duval Engineering paved the first
road into Cape Canaveral (later Cape Kennedy), and constructed the first missile-launching platform there.

Civil engineering did not exhaust Brest’s knack for seizing economic opportunities. Indeed he exhibited an intuitive gift, a nimble and instinctive flair for business. He invested heavily in real estate, for example. An ardent believer in growth, Brest had the sort of foresight that enabled him to snap up empty land east of Jacksonville toward the beach at forty dollars an acre, and then later sell the land for thousands of dollars an acre. He appears to have been equally shrewd in the stock market. A connection with Miami’s Mitchell Wolfson also proved helpful. With his brother-in-law Sidney Meyer, Wolfson had founded Wometco, a chain of movie theaters, in 1925, and after World War II created the first television station in Florida, Miami’s WTVJ (Channel 4). In 1957 Brest became a founder of the second television station in Jacksonville. When few such stations were in operation, they tended to dominate local markets, which meant that the acquisition of a television license was like a license to print money. But even as an owner of WTLV (Channel 12), Brest could appreciate the value of public television, and thus helped put WJCT (Channel 7) on the air by donating the funds for the tower space, equipment, and other facilities.60

In 1939, at the age of forty-five, he had married a Viennese refugee, Mia Helen Deutsch. Her parents managed to get out of Austria as well and joined the couple at their home on River Road in San Marco. Rather than get sand in her shoes, however, Mia Brest wanted to live in a more cosmopolitan city than Jacksonville, and the couple divorced in 1957. Their two sons mostly grew up with their mother in New York City. Paul and Peter Brest often visited their father in Jacksonville and as teenagers traveled with him overseas during the summers. Each sought to carve out distinctive careers rather than becoming engineers. Paul graduated from Harvard Law School, clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan, and eventually became the dean of Stanford Law School. Peter elected social work and rose to become the associate commissioner of New York City’s Department of Social Services.61
With no particular need to pass his business interests to his sons, and with a dedication to the importance of charity that Brest claimed to have learned from his pious mother, he redefined himself as a philanthropist who intended to exert a major impact on the city. For example, he gave three-quarters of a million dollars to establish the Museum of Science and History and a planetarium. He donated 1,200 acres of wetlands, near Fort George Island, to create the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. Another $2.8 million went toward expansion of the Metropolitan Park. Unacknowledged in the public tributes to him when he turned one hundred, or in the obituaries the following year, was the private help that Brest also provided. During the 1930s, for instance, Rabbi Israel Kaplan of Congregation Ahavath Chesed had asked Brest to sponsor a Jewish family desperate to flee the Third Reich. Brest agreed to accept financial responsibility for one family he did not know and eventually signed more than fifty such affidavits. Such gestures make even an exalted term like *mitzvot* seem inadequate. To deal with the mounting humanitarian crisis that the Third Reich fomented in the 1930s, he became president of the Jewish Community Council, forerunner of the Jacksonville Jewish Federation.

His favorite was Jacksonville University (JU), an institution lacking academic distinction but which Brest, who died in 1994, undoubtedly helped make less mediocre. The systemic challenge that JU faced was the caliber of public education in Duval County. In the early 1960s, for example, it ranked last among the sixty-seven counties in the state in per pupil spending. Duval County had become the fifteenth largest school system in the United States; but even when included among the twenty biggest, the ranking was still last in per pupil funding. Of Florida’s ten largest counties, Duval also ranked lowest in teachers’ salaries. Yet it was hardly poor. In the early 1960s, Duval ranked third in per capita and median family income in Florida. The state imposed no income tax, and yet the boom years in construction did not seem to generate the revenue from property taxes that could have boosted public education. In fairness to Duval County, it has not exactly been an aberration. By the twenty-first century, no state—not even
Mississippi or Arkansas—had worse high school graduation rates than Florida. In the early 1960s, so indifferent were Jacksonville’s taxpayers to the value of public education that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools disaccredited all fifteen public high schools in Duval County.\(^{64}\)

One privately-funded program offered a partial solution in encouraging promising high school students to attend college. A president of Congregation Ahavath Chesed, Philip N. Coleman came to the rescue of such pupils, though he himself had never graduated from high school. Born in Savannah in 1882, he had used sixty dollars that his mother had given him to take a bookkeeping course, which constituted the end of his formal education. After moving to Jacksonville, Coleman made a fortune in the lumber industry, primarily through the American Cross-Arm Company, which supplied telephone poles. However business success came at a certain price. Two years before his death in 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would be formed, and would discover that toxins from the Coleman-Evans wood preserving process had seeped into the soil at Whitehouse, ten miles west of Jacksonville. For three decades, beginning in 1954, the company had been contaminating the soil with pentachlorophenol (PCP) and dioxin, which the EPA had to clean up as a Superfund site during the twenty-first century. Coleman was associated with several major philanthropic enterprises, including the River Garden Hebrew Home, and served on the national board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now called the Union for Reform Judaism). But his most imaginative project was the Dollars for Scholars program, which Coleman initiated in 1962 and chaired. He also provided most of its funding in its early stages. About four hundred graduating high school seniors eventually benefited from this program, which began just as the entire Duval County public school system was being disaccredited. Such graduates could thereby seize opportunities for higher education.\(^{65}\)

They did not have to attend JU (to which Coleman also significantly contributed). But those who did matriculate there stepped onto a campus that Brest did more than anyone else to
transform. He served as a trustee beginning in 1953 and eventually lavished an estimated $6 million on the campus. It is dotted, for example, with the Alexander Brest Museum and Gallery, a dormitory, and athletic fields, plus unglamorous drainage projects made possible by his generosity. The ideal of tzedakah that he claimed to have picked up from his mother had not exactly been abandoned. With his almost feral drive and his boundless optimism, the 5’ 4” Brest seemed to incarnate the expansionary energy of his adopted city. The combination of attributes that he exhibited—technical skill as an engineer, acumen as a businessman, and a desire to redistribute much of the wealth that he had acquired—inspired a full-page headline on the front page of the morning daily newspaper when he turned 100: “This city will never see another’ like Alexander Brest.” That headline could have been his epitaph as well.

The chances of a sequel would have been considered very long. But strangely enough Jerry Zucker managed to beat those odds. Born in Tel Aviv in 1949, he came to Charleston with his parents and brother three years later. His father, Leon Zucker, was a rabbi who had survived the Holocaust. The family soon moved to Jacksonville, where the rabbi and his wife, Zipora Zucker, taught in the Hebrew school of the Conservative synagogue and instructed, among others, a multitude of Mizrahis. Growing up in Jacksonville, Jerry Zucker met Anita Goldberg, a native of the city. They became sweethearts at Terry Parker High School and married in 1970. She emulated her mother-in-law by becoming a teacher of young children. While still at Terry Parker High School, Zucker became an inventor, coming up with a push-button telephone at the age of seventeen. His high school science project was “A Revolutionary Phase Factor for Colinear Electromagnetic Waves.” Zucker also developed a special interest in pacemakers and surgical tools. At the University of Florida he accomplished the feat of pursuing three majors (chemistry, physics, and mathematics), and then earned a master’s degree in electrical engineering from Florida State University in Tallahassee.

Eventually he obtained more than 350 patents for his inventions. A sister, Rochelle Marcus, recalled: “If Jerry dreamed it, he
could design it. If he could design it, he could produce it.” 68 Like Brest, Zucker showed a remarkable deftness in business as well. In 1983 he founded the InterTech Group, a conglomerate that makes plastics and fabrics that are operable in the minus-200-degree world of cryogenics. InterTech Group is one of the largest privately-held American businesses. Zucker capped his career by purchasing Canada’s largest retailer, the Hudson’s Bay Company. Founded in 1670, Hudson’s Bay Company was the oldest commercial corporation on the North American continent. Like a magnetic needle that could not be dislodged from an inevitable spot on the dial, a southern Jewish magnate had aptly found recourse in retailing. By 2008, when Forbes magazine estimated Zucker’s net worth at $1.2 billion, he had become just about as wealthy as a brace of Bronfmans, or maybe even a pair of Pritzkers. As a philanthropist Zucker donated millions of dollars to assorted charities before he succumbed to cancer at the age of fifty-eight. Hudson’s Bay Company announced that his widow would succeed her husband as its chief executive (or “governor”), the first woman to hold that position. Anita Zucker also took over as chairperson and chief executive officer of the InterTech Group.69

Zucker’s death in 2008 was “heart-breaking . . . for our community,” Mayor Joe Riley announced.70 But Riley served Charleston, South Carolina; and the community to which he referred was not Jacksonville. After earning his master’s degree in Tallahassee, Zucker had gone to work for a pulp and paper company in Palatka, Florida. He never returned to live in Jacksonville, the city that had shaped him. The synagogue he later served as president was in Charleston. Therefore Zucker’s brilliant career in science, business, and philanthropy is only partly a Jacksonville story.

The Advantages of Opportunity

Ben Stein, who was born in 1898, was no relation to the merchandising magnate Jay Stein. But to triumph in business in Jacksonville, such a surname evidently helps. Ben Stein’s career cannot be separated from the interplay of broad historical forces
of which he took shrewd advantage. During Prohibition, some Jews managed to make money legally. The most famous example was Samuel Bronfman, the immigrant distiller who, as a Canadian, did not have to obey the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. His Seagram distributors broke no Canadian export laws in carrying the liquor right to the U.S. line. What happened after that failed to arouse his curiosity. A deadpan Bronfman recalled: “I never went on the other side of the border to count the empty Seagrams bottles.” Although Lonnie Wurn’s parents did a brisk business selling feed to farmers, in the 1920s some of the most eager customers bought one-hundred pound bags of sugar. These bootleggers needed the sugar as an ingredient in moonshine. When Prohibition ended in 1933, Ben Stein got a liquor distributorship for northeast Florida. He figured that Duval County would not want to be the exception to all the gin joints in the country that were suddenly entitled to operate legally. Indeed, until passage of the ill-fated Eighteenth Amendment, Duval County had been one of only two counties in Florida to be wet.71

The popularity of alcoholic beverages might well be considered a constant that could guarantee a steady income, although several of the Protestant sects that condemned drinking as sinful might well impose a special limitation on the lucrative appeal of this business in the South (at least in theory). In the postwar era Stein seized a new and extraordinary investment opportunity resulting from an impending transformation in eating habits. “Would you like some fries with that?” would come to rank just below “How are you?” and its variations among the most frequently asked questions on the planet. Starting in the 1950s, the fast food industry became a phenomenon fueled by the bicoastal rivalry between McDonald’s, which started in California, and Burger King, which started in Florida. The national passion for fast food had been demonstrated as early as the Jacksonian era when railroad personnel and passengers demanded snacks. Before the end of the nineteenth century, a European visitor commented that the national motto seemed to be: “Gobble, gulp, and go.” But the true takeoff that tapped such habits began in the
immediate post-World War II era. Southern California, a notable site of the car culture, spawned not only McDonald’s but also Jack in the Box, Taco Bell, and Carl’s Jr. Eventually more earthlings would be able to recognize the golden arches than they could identify a symbol like the Christian cross.72

Incorporated in 1954, Burger King of Miami eliminated the carhops of the drive-ins. Self-service would reduce the overhead, and, for the sake of speed, the menu would be extremely limited. Hamburgers cost eighteen cents as did milk shakes. French fries cost ten cents as did a few soft drinks. Hungry Floridians who wanted a more varied cuisine had to dine elsewhere. A founder of Burger King attributes the brilliant idea of fast-food (eureka!) to a drive-in on Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville Beach in 1953. As part of his investment portfolio, Ben Stein provided loans to some Burger King restaurants. They did so poorly (bad locations, bad management) that he realized that the debts could not be repaid.
In an effort to protect his investment, he assumed control of the Duval County operations of Burger King, which placed him in contact with the headquarters in Miami. "We discovered that it was a pleasure to do business with Ben Stein," James McLamore, a company founder (along with David Edgerton), recalled. "He was a very astute businessman, and I always found him to be fair-minded and straightforward with us. Ben’s problem was that he had taken over a restaurant business that he knew very little about." The South Florida franchises were booming while the Jacksonville operations performed poorly.73

Whether Stein simply gave Burger King too low a priority among his businesses, which were the Southern Industrial Corporation and the Property Corporation, or whether the presidency of Congregation Ahavath Chesed, in the 1950s, which had grown to 450 families, distracted him, the historical record does not disclose. But whatever his indifference to the logistical complexities of grilling hamburgers for increasingly eager and impatient customers, he had paid sufficient attention to this segment of his investments to do something canny. The Jacksonville-based Burger King of Florida, Inc., appropriated and registered two trade names—Whopper and Home of the Whopper—in Washington. Stein did not bother to tell the Miami office, which was focusing on making the business grow in south Florida, and which by the end of the 1950s was turning a hefty profit. Stein continued to face difficulties in selling franchises because the restaurants in north Florida seemed so badly run.74

But south Florida was hustling, so much so, in fact, that by 1958 Burger King of Miami, Inc., felt poised to challenge the biggest restaurant chain in the Southeast, Royal Castle, which William D. Singer had founded exactly two decades earlier in Miami, and which operated as far away as Louisiana.75 (Singer had also parlayed the popularity of five-cent hamburgers into a political career, especially in an effort to expand the state’s highway system. He served as president of Temple Israel of Miami as well. His son-in-law, Richard B. Stone, would become the second Jew, after David Levy Yulee, to represent Florida in the U.S. Senate.)76 The corporate campaign to take on Singer’s Royal Castle was
planned with the moxie and precision that military historians invoke in describing, say, Napoleon’s battles against the German states in 1805 to 1806. In this particular food fight, Burger King triumphed. It was adept at figuring out how to benefit from the growth of suburbs, from the increasing dependence upon the automobile, and from the rising number of working mothers who could no longer provide home-cooked meals for their families every night.

Within the ranks of Burger King itself, however, Stein remained an impediment. Without an intimate knowledge of the business, or even an intense personal interest in it, he could not seem to promote or encourage franchises in his Florida territory. But because he still held the rights to names like Burger King, Whopper, and Home of the Whopper, McLamore and his partners in Miami had no choice except to buy out Stein. In 1961 he agreed to turn over to the Miami organization the rights to the trade names, the title, and the interest in using the names, plus total interest in trademarks and service marks. According to this contract, Burger King of Miami, Inc., could exercise worldwide rights to the trade name and the trademarks. In exchange the Miami office agreed to send Stein 15 percent of all the royalties of the national operation every month, although he insisted on retaining control of Duval Country, the management of which he gave to one of his sons. David A. Stein had worked weekends flipping burgers at fifty cents an hour on Beach Boulevard and, in 1959, dropped out of the University of Florida to devote himself fulltime to Burger King. He proved, McLamore acknowledged, “to be a very effective manager . . . . Within a few years David had these restaurants operating profitably,” and they became “a credit to the system.”

His father remained a free rider. Every month, as the company grew at a rapid pace, Ben Stein was certainly crafty enough to notice that his check kept getting bigger and bigger. He was doing nothing to augment the fast-food empire or even working up a sweat. Yet his bank account burgeoned. To avoid “paying Ben Stein a king’s ransom every year,” McLamore concluded that he had to purchase all of the remaining trademarks and national franchising rights that Stein still owned and end the 15 percent
monthly royalties arrangement. “We had to pay his price, whatever it was.” The price turned out to be over $2.5 million in a deal concluded in 1967, little more than a decade after Stein entered the business. His son remained for four decades thereafter a major franchisee and supplier of Burger King, which he made profitable enough to enable him to become a key founder of the Jewish Community Alliance and then to pledge the largest gift ever made to Florida Community College at Jacksonville. Ben Stein died in 1984.

*Piety and Pleasure*

Urban historians might devise a spectrum of American communities in terms of their susceptibility to sin. One side could be marked with Mark Twain’s depiction of hedonistic, hell-raising Virginia City, Nevada: “Vice flourished luxuriantly during the hey-day of our ‘flush times.’ The saloons were overburdened with custom; so were the police courts, the gambling dens, the brothels and the jails.” To which Twain (or rather Hal Holbrook in his impersonation of the humorist in 1959) added: “It was no place for a Presbyterian, and I did not long remain one.”

In welcoming voluptuaries, Jacksonville certainly could not compete with Virginia City, even though the wife of the novelist Stephen Crane, Cora Taylor Crane, ran the most prominent brothel in Jacksonville. Although located in a black neighborhood, “The Court” provided white women for white male customers. Or consider a handsome volume recently sponsored by the Jacksonville Historic Landmarks Commission. On one page are drawings of demolished or destroyed buildings. Indeed, even to mention such “cherished landmarks evokes a powerful sense of loss.” The page depicts not only the building that housed Congregation Ahavath Chesed on 46 West Union Street but also three bordellos on the 800-block of Houston Street. The moral climate of Jacksonville did not escape the notice of H. L. Mencken, and it is doubtful whether American journalism ever produced a greater connoisseur of sinners and hypocrites. After the great fire in 1901, his Baltimore newspaper sent him to Jacksonville to cover the relief efforts. He could see the city for himself; and in his memoirs
published in 1941, Mencken was undoubtedly amused to write that “during the next decade the population more than doubled, and today it is a metropolis comparable to Nineveh or Gomorrah in their prime, with the hottest nightclubs between Norfolk and Miami.”

Mencken overstated his case. Had Jacksonville really resembled the biblical cities of debauchery, an unflinchingly stern deity would have guaranteed that the First Coast is toast. In fact the city has generally preferred to project piety and attract the devout rather than the dissolute. In 1956 Elvis Presley appeared for the first time on an indoor stage in Florida. A reverend from the Trinity Baptist Church prayed for the rocker’s soul and condemned him publicly for having “achieved a new low in spiritual degeneracy.” A local judge, Marion Gooding, had even prepared warrants for Presley’s arrest, to be served if “obscenity and vulgarity [were put] in front of our children.” But Presley’s pelvic gyrations turned out to be not suggestive enough for Judge Gooding to conclude that the morals of minors had been impaired and the warrants were not served. Other evidence of the municipal promotion of virtue can be cited. Biblical quotations are printed on the editorial page of the Florida Times-Union, which has been the city’s leading newspaper for over a century. Early in 2005, when Super Bowl XXXIX hit town, David Garrett, who represented the Jacksonville Baptist Association, announced that he wanted fans “to see loving people who care about their city. I want them to see Jesus.” Jacksonville made such spiritual experiences easier to absorb than elsewhere, according to David Burton, the director for evangelism for the Florida Baptist Convention: “We are very blessed here, whereas you go to some other cities in the nation where maybe the Super Bowl is being played, it seems like darkness, like the evidence of Satan is heavy there.” The not-so-veiled allusion was surely to New Orleans where nine Super Bowl contests have been played, but where sympathy for the devil is reportedly common. Indeed Jacksonville has defined itself as so God-fearing a community that seventeen pages of small print in the latest edition of the Yellow Pages are required to list all the churches.
(Those pages also include ministerial and denominational advertisements.)

But at least on the calendar, Saturday night takes precedence over Sunday morning; and entertainment and leisure have also advanced their claims in a century that the mass arts have so indelibly marked. Presley’s 1956 performance was held in the Florida Theatre, which had opened in 1927. Over a million bricks had been used in its construction. Lavishly superseding the nickelodeons where movies throughout the nation had once been exhibited, the Florida Theatre was fully air-conditioned, an unusual convenience for moviegoers in that decade. The building has since become a National Register Site. The architect who co-designed the Florida Theatre was Roy A. Benjamin, whose father, Simon Benjamin, had succeeded Morris Dzialynski as one of the early presidents of Congregation Ahavath Chesed. Indeed Roy Benjamin’s young grandson, Mike Rothschild, attended Presley’s show at the Florida Theatre. The minister of the Trinity Baptist Church was presumably absent.

Roy Benjamin was among Jacksonville’s most prolific and able architects and he specialized in movie houses. During a professional career that began around 1907 and ended with his retirement after World War II, Benjamin designed over two hundred of these pleasure palaces throughout the Southeast. In Jacksonville his Arcade Theatre, which opened in 1915 and had a seating capacity of 1,250, may have been for its time the largest cinema in the South. Patrons could enter the Arcade from two parallel streets, Adams and Forsyth; and the long rows of shops that sandwiched the box office anticipated the conversion of Americans into citizens of what the Harvard historian Lizabeth Cohen has called “a consumers’ republic.” In 1938, when Benjamin’s San Marco Theatre opened on the Southside, the double bill cost all of thirty cents as the price of admission. This movie house remains fetching particularly for its Art Deco façade. Indeed an authoritative history of what the French critic Georges Duhamel in 1931 called the “temple of moving images” cites the San Marco Theatre as an important instance of “the new Art Moderne aesthetic.” A 2001 article in USA Today included this “beautifully
Florida Theatre, 128 E. Forsyth Street, Jacksonville,
co-designed by Roy Benjamin, opened in 1927.
Restored in 1983, Florida Theatre hosts around 200 cultural events a year.
(From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida,
originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)

maintained” theater on the short list of the ten best “places to see a classic cinema” in the United States. In 1939, when the population of Jacksonville was recorded as 129,459, they could attend sixteen movie houses, including three for Negroes. Benjamin also designed several apartment buildings, most importantly the sixteen-story Park Lane Apartments, which became in 1926 the first high-rise building in Riverside and was for many years the third-tallest building in Jacksonville.84 He thus exercised the sort of influence on the city that is reminiscent of the inscription on the
commemoration stone of Sir Christopher Wren, who is entombed in his St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. The injunction reads: “Si monumentum requiris, circumspice” [If you seek his monument, look around].

_The Speculators_

Roy Benjamin’s wife Phyllis often recalled a family of boys passing through her neighborhood collecting scrap metal for their father, and what struck her was how “barefooted and grubby” they looked. Their surname was Wolfson. Louis E. Wolfson, who was born in 1912, and his brothers would acquire wealth of a magnitude that makes them loom larger than any of the other Jewish businesspeople who belong directly to the annals of Jacksonville. Controlling at his peak total assets of about a quarter of a billion dollars, Lou Wolfson was running more than a dozen corporations by 1955, and he dominated close to ten others. He served formally as chairman of the board of seven companies, as president of three others, and as a director of three more. Wolfson had become, according to business historian Robert Sobel, “the most colorful businessman of his time.” Two years later Fortune, the monthly business magazine, identified the nation’s wealthiest Americans. (Unsurprisingly the group was heavily weighted toward beneficiaries of the oil depletion allowance as well as heirs and heiresses.) Wolfson ranked thirty-fifth. With one exception, no one ahead of him was younger (and even in that case by only one year). The flamboyant credo that animated Wolfson (“it’s easier to make a million than a hundred thousand”) would dwarf the wildest ambitions of “Ragged Dick” and “Mark the Match-Boy” and all the other nineteenth-century go-getters Horatio Alger had invented.

From a historical perspective, the scrap metal business has been almost as strikingly Jewish as baking _hamentashen_, interpreting the Talmud, or becoming a violin virtuoso. The task of collecting and selling rusty iron pipes and discarded automobile parts is politely termed the salvage business and, in an era of ecological consciousness, may be called recycling. However it is named, the metaphor is nearly perfect for the struggles of a
marginal minority in the Diaspora, because unwanted industrial detritus seemed a fitting endeavor for a cast-off, shunned group whose meager lot was taken as evidence of a triumphant Christianity. The Yiddish poet I. J. Schwartz’s epic *Kentucky* (1925), which traces three generations of a family living in Lexington, Kentucky, has the patriarch earn a small fortune in scrap metal. Mordecai Richler’s first novel, *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955), evokes this grueling business; and his own father was a Canadian scrap yard dealer. So was a young Louis B. Mayer, who worked in his father’s junkyard, before working on his own scrap metal operations in Boston and Brooklyn. (He then got into the nickelodeon business.) In Kansas the immigrant father of future Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania owned a junkyard. In Chicago the immigrant Chess family had a scrap yard (the Wabash Junk Shop); sons Leonard and Phil would later achieve fame and fortune in the record business. The father of the artist Philip Guston (né Philip Goldstein) worked as a junkman in Los Angeles. In Amsterdam, New York, the immigrant father of Issur Danielovitch Demsky bought a horse and wagon to pick up pieces of metal, rags, and other junk. “Collecting the things that people had thrown away was an awful way to make a living,” and “our yard was always full of junk.” The son understandably opted for another vocation under the name Kirk Douglas. After becoming world famous, he put statues made of scrap metal in his garden. The eponymous founder of Atlanta’s William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, which opened in 1996, entered his Uncle Max’s junk business. When Max Breman died, William Breman took it over. During World War II, the company made bolts for aircraft and canteens for G.I.’s. The business grew into the highly successful Breman Steel Company. Or take Sam Tenenbaum, an heir to his own family’s scrap metal business. He has funded the Tenenbaum Family annual lectureship in Jewish Studies at Emory University. A 2008 magazine article devoted to the current state of the business profiles Nathan Frankel, a 1995 graduate of Brandeis University who runs a family business, the Frankel Iron and Metal Company, in California. The sophisticated shredding machine that is now standard in the business was invented half a century
ago by the Proler brothers of Houston. Their given names, Hymie, Sammy, Jackie, and Izzy, raise doubt whether they believed in the Resurrection. Scrap metal was a business dominated by Jews who never stopped living in the Iron Age. Virtually no start-up capital was required, and an element of independence could be maintained. The peddlers often needed a place to keep all the scrap, which resulted in the creation of junkyards.88

The origins of the greatest of all of Jacksonville’s Jewish fortunes began in junk collecting on Davis Street with such items as glass, rags, and discarded newspapers and then continued with the inclusion of scrap iron, which Morris David Wolfson peddled from a horse-drawn cart. (Readers of Mosaic can recall that single horse and single cart from which another Lithuanian immigrant, William Schemer, sold fish in Jacksonville.) The scrap iron was collected and brought to M. Wolfson & Co. on Myrtle Avenue,89 and handshakes alone certified transactions. The sons helped out in the afternoons after school and went to the junkyard on weekends too. “In those days,” one of Lou’s younger brothers, Saul, recalled, “you worked morning to night, Saturday, Sunday, until you got the job done.”90 The insecurity that the family faced in its early years in Jacksonville can be exaggerated. The Wolfsons lived modestly, and were certainly not desperately poor.91 Nevertheless they were familiar with the world from which the fabled Jewish reminiscence emerged: “We only ate chicken if we were sick, or the chicken was.”

It is apt to insist that, for much of his life, toil was the destiny of Morris Wolfson. Wolfson was born in 1879 in a Lithuanian shtetl so obscure that even its spelling (Posville or Pasvalys) is uncertain. Because an older sister had already settled in America and was able to help him, an impoverished Morris Wolfson joined her in Baltimore in 1896, at the age of seventeen. He lived in a few other cities before marrying Baltimore-born Sarah Goldberg in 1905. Sarah gave birth to Irene Wolfson in 1907, to Sam two years later, and other children followed. Within a year of Lou’s birth in 1912, the family moved from St. Louis to the La Villa neighborhood, where Jacksonville’s impoverished eastern European Jews settled in the heart of the black section. The Orthodox synagogue,
Congregation B’nai Israel, was located in La Villa. Its rabbi, Benjamin Safer, had two sisters and four brothers, all of whom had come there from Lithuania in the early twentieth century. One of them, Max Safer, worked from dawn to dusk on a horse and wagon to collect used bottles and barrels and then wash them for resale. In such a neighborhood, the Wolfsons were hardly peculiar. Saul was born in 1916, Morris Wolfson became a naturalized citizen a year later, and Cecil was born in 1919. Three years later Percy was born, but he died of pneumonia only a year later in Lou’s arms, a tragedy that strongly affected Morris Wolfson’s later decision to fund a children’s hospital in Jacksonville. Morris spent very little on himself. He never mastered English and, instead of flipping through the Florida Times-Union, read the world’s most widely circulated Yiddish newspaper, the Forverts, the socialist daily published in New York. Morris and Sarah Wolfson and their eight children later relocated their home to Fifth Street in a middle-class neighborhood in Springfield.92

One Wolfson child was good enough at sports to hope to get beyond public school. At Andrew Jackson High School, from which Lou graduated in 1930, he captained the basketball team, lettered in baseball and track, and as an end on the football squad was named to the All-Southern team. Athletic promise enabled him, with parental encouragement, to achieve the fairly rare feat of attending college—the University of Georgia—on a football scholarship. The stipend was generous enough for him to send twenty-five dollars a month to his family in Jacksonville. A severe gridiron injury to his shoulder during a game against Yale doomed any hope of continuing to play right end for the Bulldogs. Wolfson was no standout in the classroom; at least according to some later magazine profiles, the correct spelling of laissez-faire was beyond him. When the economy began to tank, Wolfson dropped out of the University of Georgia to return home in 1932. College friends later recalled his vow “to make some money,”93 which is a little like Michelangelo looking up at the bare ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and indicating that it needed a few dabs of paint.
The six oldest Wolfson children, c. 1920, (from left to right) Irene, Sam, Louis, Edith, Saul, and Cecil. (From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida, originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)
The ordeal of hard work, especially in the scrap metal business, did not alone ensure emancipation from the poverty that pervaded the South. It represented the foremost economic problem in the United States, according to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938. No region was historically more destitute or more likely to assign its residents to a lifetime of sheer drudgery. Call it a variation on the labor theory of value. “Cotton on the roadside, cotton in the ditch,” Nashville’s Bob McDill sang. “We all picked the cotton, but we never got rich.” (Substitute “citrus,” and the switch to Florida leaves the truthfulness of the lyric unaffected.) Becoming wealthy required shrewdness and luck. Both of these attributes became evident near Starke, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jacksonville, when Lou and Sam Wolfson noticed piles of plumbing supplies and fixtures that belonged to the son of J. C. Penney, the department store magnate. The elder Penney was so devout that he had intended to build a community home for retired clergymen. But by 1933 the Great Depression had torpedoed such plans, and the Wolfson brothers offered Roswell Penney $275 for the unused brass fittings, lead pipes, and other supplies, which Sam and Lou then trucked to the scrap metal yard of M. Wolfson & Co. in Jacksonville.

From there the brothers delivered the supplies to plumbers, contractors, and industrial plants, and quickly formed their own company, Florida Pipe and Supply. Disposing of the cast-off supplies piecemeal earned about $100,000, which provided Lou and Sam with a tidy profit of 36,263 percent. Because the retired clergymen whom Penney had wanted to help expected any heavenly reward to be the gift of the Savior, never was the wry adage more apt: “Jesus saves, but Moses invests.” Penney eventually recovered and bought new supplies to finish the retirement home. But Lou Wolfson was on his way to becoming a millionaire, something he accomplished by the age of twenty-eight. (Some perspective on the cost of living during the Depression is needed to appreciate the alteration of his status. When Wolfson was twenty-eight, the bus fare in Jacksonville cost eight cents, and a taxi ride from downtown to the airport to catch a flight on the only options, Eastern Air Lines or National Airlines, was $1.25.
Green fees were then in the one dollar to two dollar range at the city’s ritziest country clubs, not that Jews were allowed or welcomed to play golf there.)

The football injury kept Wolfson out of World War II, although his brothers who were old enough, Sam, Saul, and Cecil, served in the military. With wartime government contracts soon enriching Florida Pipe and Supply, it earned as much as $4.5 million a year. Wolfson was able to purchase a shipyard in Jacksonville. To buy another shipyard, in Tampa, he borrowed half a million dollars from Alexander Brest and his partner. The business boomed. For the French, Wolfson built freighters; for the Dutch, he built dredging ships. But the most relentless corporate engine of his wealth was Merritt-Chapman & Scott, of which he acquired a controlling interest in 1949. Two years later he became chairman of the board and president. This construction and marine salvage conglomerate built tunnels, roads, and ships throughout the world and was ranked at 210 on the Fortune 500. The dams built in North America included the Cougar, the Folson, and the Gorge High. In the 1950s the Priest Rapids and the Glen Canyon dams constituted the largest construction projects that a single contractor had ever assumed up to that time. Merritt-Chapman & Scott also built part of the Throgs Neck Bridge. In 1949, when Wolfson took over the company, it was grossing about $40 million. Within six years Merritt-Chapman & Scott earned about eight times that amount, largely as a result of mergers with companies that Wolfson also controlled.

He also owned the controlling interest in New York Shipbuilding Corporation, a Merritt-Chapman & Scott subsidiary that managed the third largest shipyard in the United States. A photograph from 1959, when the Savannah was finished, shows him standing next to Mamie Eisenhower. Here’s to the ladies who launch: she is smashing a champagne bottle on the hull of what was the world’s first nuclear-powered passenger and cargo ship. The following year Wolfson’s company launched the USS Kitty Hawk, a supercarrier. New York Shipbuilding must have done good work, because by the end of the century the Kitty Hawk was enjoying the second longest active status in the U.S. Navy.
Louis Wolfson and First Lady Mamie Eisenhower in Camden, NJ, July 21, 1959, as she launches the NS Savannah. (From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida, originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)
(Ranking first, oddly enough, is the far more ancient USS Constitution, nestled in Boston Harbor.)

Of course Wolfson had not been born to make ships but to make money; and by the mid-1950s, the crackerjack journalist John Gunther described Wolfson as an “ambitious and fiercely energetic young promoter.” But almost no one was calling Wolfson the first “corporate raider.” The term had barely entered the vernacular. But, in effect, what he had done was to consolidate the first postwar conglomerate, that is, a corporation that was characterized by diverse, often unrelated, and even random interests. An unusually wide wingspan enabled him to soar. If this innovation was uncredited, however, the explanation is that he and his partners invested their own money rather than raising it from passive investors, institutions, or the general public. Nor did the companies that were acquired fit into any cohesive pattern other than the impression that their stock had previously been selling at a price below actual worth. Much later, in 1977, he boasted that “whoever stayed with me and went in when I went in and stayed with me . . . made money.” If he exercised “management control,” came the qualifier, “no one’s ever lost money in any publicly owned company if they started with me until I got out.”

His closest associates became known simply as “the Wolfsons.” They consisted of eight men linked closely but not formally with the speculator in the effort to identify companies that had underappreciated values or greater profit potential. The Wolfsons’ task was to gain control of these firms. Two of the eight men, Louis’s brothers Sam and Saul, remained in Jacksonville. The Wolfsons’ pioneering exercises in corporate raiding culminated in 1955, with the launching of what Harvard historian Richard S. Tedlow calls “one of the first unfriendly takeover efforts in modern American business history.” The spectacular proxy battle to take over Montgomery Ward, the second-largest mail-order house in the nation, from its crusty, arch-conservative, octogenarian chairman, Sewell L. Avery, became “the business story of the year.” Wolfson met with Montgomery Ward shareholders in cities throughout the United States but his first stop was Jacksonville. Reporters portrayed him as tall, dark, handsome, muscular, and
Four Wolfson siblings at a gala commemorating Jacksonville Wolfson Children’s Hospital, 1992, (from left to right) Saul Wolfson, Sylvia Wolfson Degen, Cecil Wolfson, and Edith Wolfson Edwards. (Courtesy Hazel Mack, Archivist, Congregation Ahavath Chesed.)

(From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida, originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)
courtly. He spoke with a southern drawl and took the press by storm. Publicity presented the conflict in terms of a hustling outsider’s dynamism pitted against an imperious, sluggish, and “decadent management” that was falling further and further behind Sears, Roebuck. But the story ended with Wolfson’s defeat. He did become a director but got only three seats on Montgomery Ward’s nine-person board. Quitting within a year, he netted a paper profit of $857,000 and received dividends of another $600,000. By then Avery had been brought down. A month after fending off what he called “raiding parties,” Avery resigned; and soon the company he had led since 1931 would disappear as well. Soon thereafter Wolfson became the largest single stockholder in American Motors, but failed to mount a challenge to the presidency of George Romney.

By then, however, Wolfson’s career had spun out of the radius of Jewish business in Jacksonville. In 1950 he moved to Washington, where he had succeeded a year earlier in making a hostile tender offer that secured a controlling interest in the Capital Transit Company. That inventive takeover mechanism made him responsible for the management of the bus and streetcar system of the District of Columbia. How to reconcile the interests of the riders, the employees, and the stockholders was a challenge that (to put it mildly) eluded him; and the purchase and operations of Capital Transit brought down on Wolfson the worst publicity of his career to date. Under the leadership of “the Wolfsons,” executives at Capital Transit got whopping salary increases and stockholders received enormous dividend increases. Having bought into Capital Transit for $2 million, he sold his shares in 1956 for over $13 million. The Wolfsons thus made millions on their investment. But routes were reduced by a fifth, and fares increased four times. Under fire, Wolfson relocated to Miami Beach in 1952.

There, in a house facing Biscayne Bay, he lived with his wife, the former Florence Monsky of Montgomery, whom he had married in 1935, and with her mother, Jenny Monsky. The entwinement of these two families undoubtedly reinforces the folk wisdom that, before doing field work among, say, the Kwakiutl,
anthropologists seeking to appreciate the intricacy of kinship networks should begin with southern Jewry. Lou Wolfson’s brother Saul married Florence Monsky’s sister Hazel; and Sam Wolfson, after his first wife died, married the sisters’ first cousin from Wetumpka, Alabama. In Montgomery the Monskys fit the paradigm of small-town Jewry as owners of the Classy Clothes Shop and the Guarantee Clothing Store. So smooth was the family’s adjustment to regional values that a first cousin, LeRoy Monsky, played guard for three seasons at the University of Alabama, made All-America in 1937, and as team captain that year also led the Crimson Tide to the Rose Bowl. Another first cousin of the Monsky sisters, Doran Weinstein, joined Florida Pipe and Supply as early as 1940. Inserted into the inner circle of business associates, “the Wolfsons,” Weinstein became president of Capital Transit before being placed in charge of the Devoe & Raynolds paint company. A niece of the Monsky sisters has evoked the world of Montgomery Jewry in Midnight Suppers (1983), a novel that refers to Temple Shemetz Torah, to the Classy Clothes Shoppe, and to the E-Light Café (where political deal-making in the state capital was famously conducted). Louis E. and Florence M. Wolfson had four children. In that era, when the rich were more democratic in their lifestyle and were still much less insulated from the rest of us than later in the century, Stephen, Marcia, Gary, and Marty attended public schools.\[103\]

In 1959 Lou Wolfson began to show a serious interest in horse breeding and thoroughbred racing. In 1978 his colt, Affirmed, based at Harbor View Farm near Ocala, won the Triple Crown, the last horse to accomplish the feat.\[104\] In 1972, four years after Florence M. Wolfson’s death, the widower married Patrice Jacobs, the daughter of the horse trainer Hirsch Jacobs. Although Wolfson lived over half a century on Miami Beach, and died there in 2007, Stephen Wolfson claimed that his father had always regarded Jacksonville as his home. Long after Lou Wolfson’s permanent departure, the Jewish Community Council in Jacksonville continued to receive his donations, and the personal attorney he had loyally retained was Joseph Glickstein, Sr., a former president of the Temple. Glickstein had represented Morris Wolfson
and remained, until his own death in 1982, an attorney for Lou Wolfson as well. Wolfson’s father had belonged to the Conservative synagogue while late in life also providing the major financial support for the Orthodox shul, Etz Chaim, founded after World War II. Yet Lou Wolfson had minimal religious allegiances. His funeral services were conducted in the city that had spawned him, at Congregation Ahavath Chesed, where he and his first wife had retained membership. He is buried at the Temple Cemetery in Jacksonville.¹⁰⁵

The absence of biographical attention is striking. Indeed a recent history of Wall Street notes that speculators like Wolfson, who flourished in the immediate postwar era, have now sunk into oblivion, leaving no “permanent imprint on the country’s cultural conscience.”¹⁰⁶ His impact is therefore yet to be adequately measured. Certainly the sheer diversity of the companies under his control defies summation here. He invested in oil wells and an amusement park and owned steel mills as well as companies making power shovels, truck-trailers, kitchen appliances, and television cabinets.¹⁰⁷ He was a financier whose companies actually made things in an economy still dominated by manufacturing. A buccaneering product of the Bible Belt counted on the productivity of the Rust Belt. Wolfson’s abiding interest in movies, however, also deserves attention.

In the mid-1940s, he bought into a studio, Monogram Pictures, for $400,000, and several years later sold his shares for over $1.2 million.¹⁰⁸ Nothing further of consequence happened to link him to the film industry, however, until a former gag-writer for Sid Caesar’s Your Show of Shows flew to Jacksonville. Mel Brooks was then a comic whose career, despite the hilarious energy of The 2,000-Year-Old Man, had not reached the show-biz stratosphere. Brooks met with Arvin K. Rothschild, a member of the board of directors as well as vice president of the Universal Marion Corporation. Wolfson was the chairman of its board. Rothschild was a vice president of U-M Productions, of Royalty Productions, and of U-M Telefilms, Inc., as well. The film project that Brooks came to Jacksonville to pitch was arguably in bad taste. But what he had in mind was definitely about bad taste; the working title of the film
The Wolfsons with Triple Crown winner, Affirmed, on magazine cover.
(From the Collection of the Jewish Museum of Florida,
originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.)
was *Springtime for Hitler*. There are different versions of, or variations on, what happened next. In one recollection, as Brooks explained the plot to Rothschild at his Southside home, the host was not exactly stationary. Indeed his belly laughs propelled him onto his living room floor, and the spasms of uncontrollable mirth signaled to Brooks that his proposed film was likely to be green-lighted. According to the Jacksonville *Journal*, however, Rothschild was bursting out loud with laughter while reading the scenario in the barbershop of the Universal Marion Building. When Brooks came to Jacksonville, he had dinner with Rothschild and other members of Beauclerc, a Jewish country club located on the Southside. They, too, cracked up. Brooks’s title admittedly had to be made blander; but with the Universal Marion Corporation cofinancing *The Producers* (1968), his first feature film won him an Oscar for the best original screenplay the following year. Wolfson’s indirect but decisive contribution to the career of Mel Brooks ensured that the laughter that his other films would provoke could become part of the national soundtrack. It also represents a curious sidelight to a Jacksonville business that had begun in scrap metal.

*Scandal*

Of all the figures portrayed in this essay, Louis Wolfson is unique in terms of the direct political consequences of his financial conduct. Within a decade of the Montgomery Ward defeat, he ran into problems with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). In 1966 U.S. Attorney Robert Morgenthau of the Southern District of New York charged Wolfson, along with a close associate from Jacksonville, Elkin B. “Buddy” Gerbert, of selling unregistered stock in a company called Continental Enterprises. Located in Jacksonville, Continental Enterprises was a spin-off of Capital Transit and specialized in movie exhibitions and real estate. The SEC required a controlling stockholder who sought to sell more than a tiny fraction of outstanding shares in the company during a half-year period to provide a registration statement. That a controlling stockholder is selling those shares in his or her own company, the SEC argued, might well be of keen
interest to others; hence the regulation. In 1967 Wolfson and Gerbert were convicted of conspiring to violate the securities laws by selling the unregistered stock.

The sources of this criminal prosecution remain mysterious. Not since 1933 had anyone who had been charged with selling unregistered stock ever faced imprisonment, rather than civil penalties. “I have asked Wall Street brokers about this matter and they say that this particular section is violated by scores of brokers,” wrote a syndicated columnist who much admired the financier’s character and generosity. “No one was prosecuted under it until Louis Wolfson showed up.” William Casey, for example, was also guilty of selling unregistered stock and merely paid a fine. That did not stop him from becoming the chairman of the SEC (and later, under President Ronald Reagan, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency). Wolfson denied any criminal intent and insisted that he had not known that such transactions were illegal. He asked: “Why would I want to violate any rule or regulation when I could register stock and sell the stock?” Having sold the unregistered stock openly and in his own name, rather than through a foreign nominee account, Wolfson had even reported the sale to the SEC. He also reported the Continental Enterprises sale on his income tax returns, a gesture that might ordinarily suggest the absence of criminal intent. Wolfson hired the celebrated criminal defense attorney, Edward Bennett Williams, to challenge the conviction; and in 1969 an appeal reached the Supreme Court. The court announced on April 1, however, that it would not consider the appeal. Wolfson and Gerbert served nine months in a federal minimum-security prison near Pensacola, Florida.111

What gave this case its unexpected historical importance is that as Wolfson was going down, he took a U.S. Supreme Court justice with him. The legal troubles that Wolfson experienced happened to coincide with suspect efforts to make contributions to a jurist (and even to a former jurist). Wolfson denied that he sought any quid pro quo and insisted that his proposed donations were merely intended to convey his appreciation to admirable
members of the highest bench. Money has been known to change hands to or from the Supreme Court. The wealthy Justice Louis D. Brandeis had, after all, secretly helped to fund the progressive advocacy of his friend, Professor Felix Frankfurter, who had to live within the confines of an academic salary. But when Wolfson offered to provide a salary supplement to former Justice Arthur Goldberg, who had become Ambassador to the United Nations, Goldberg decisively rebuffed the overture.

Goldberg’s successor on the Supreme Court (and also an occupant of its “Jewish seat”) was less prudent. Before taking that seat in October 1965, Abe Fortas had enriched himself in private practice, and his resentment at the modest judicial salary of $39,500, which was raised to $60,000 in 1969, apparently intensified the sin of greed. (That attribute is the downside of the yearning to escape poverty reflected in the lives that are explored in this essay.) Fortas drove a Rolls-Royce, had no children to educate, and liked collecting checks the way many American boys relish the chance to collect baseball cards. The encounter with a financier willing to sign such checks proved fatal to the career of one of the most talented and liberal of modern Supreme Court justices. The deal had been struck within three weeks of Fortas’s ascent to the bench, and common sense should have told him that the arrangement was bound to arouse suspicion. The Wolfson Family Foundation volunteered to pay him $20,000 a year, which was then half of his Supreme Court salary, for as long as he lived. Fortas’s wife, tax attorney Carolyn Agger, was to receive the same amount for as long as she lived were she to survive her husband. In 1966 the entire outlay of the Foundation for charitable purposes was $77,680, so the check that Fortas deposited in January 1966 accounted for nearly a fourth of what was disbursed. In early June Wolfson was indicted. He should have been regarded as damaged goods, something Fortas was slow to recognize. Indeed, four days after the indictment was handed down, the justice flew to Jacksonville to attend the meeting of the trustees of the Wolfson Family Foundation. Although he resigned later that month, he did not bother reimbursing the Foundation for the $20,000 honorarium—though no actual services seem to have been performed—
until the end of the year, so that the income from the Foundation did not have to be reported on the jurist’s tax returns.\textsuperscript{113}

In late June 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Associate Justice Fortas to replace Earl Warren as chief justice. The nomination was stalled, however, because, for the first time in the history of the Senate, Republicans launched a filibuster against a Supreme Court nominee. They wanted the next president, presumably a Republican, to pick Warren’s successor; and in early October Johnson was obliged to withdraw the nomination. In spring 1969, when the Supreme Court rejected Wolfson’s appeal, Fortas recused himself from the decision. Less than a month later, \textit{Life} revealed the eyebrow-raising news of the annual retainer that Fortas had accepted from the Wolfson Family Foundation; and the GOP assault upon his personal probity became too vociferous to ignore. Fortas met with Wolfson in his brother’s home in Jacksonville, where he momentarily switched to Yiddish, referring to “these momzers” who were “after me . . . and they want to get me.” When the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) subpoenaed records of the Wolfson Family Foundation in Jacksonville and discovered in the contract that Fortas had signed how remarkably generous the trustees had been, resignation from the Supreme Court soon became the only option. The public controversy that he acknowledged arousing had to be quelled, even though he had broken no law. Fortas did believe that the SEC and the legal system had “mistreated” Lou Wolfson. The jurist had not in any way intervened in Wolfson’s behalf, or even hinted that he would do so, according to the financier’s testimony to the FBI. If the payment was intended to be a bribe, why would the Foundation have written a check?\textsuperscript{114}

The new president, Richard M. Nixon, achieved a vacancy on the Court, and in 1969 named the conservative Warren E. Burger as chief justice. Three years later Nixon was able to appoint to the bench William H. Rehnquist, whom the attorney-general described as “to the right of the Sheriff of Nottingham.”\textsuperscript{115} (That bizarre location on the political spectrum was uttered in praise.) The ignominy Fortas had inflicted upon himself was unmatched, and not since then has a Supreme Court justice been forced to quit
the bench. Any hope of rehabilitation was squelched in 1977, when arguably the greatest reporter of his generation, Bob Woodward, secured tapes of conversations between Fortas and Wolfson. That new evidence revealed a closer association—although no illegal actions—than acknowledged eight years earlier. How different might the course of American jurisprudence have been, had the largesse of Lou Wolfson not been such a temptation? Conjecture is bound to be inconclusive. Had Fortas gotten the chance to serve as chief justice, the direction Earl Warren had taken constitutional interpretation in enlarging civil rights and civil liberties might have been perpetuated. A group of eminent legal scholars did not need to speculate on what might have been. They ranked Fortas’s judicial career in the “near great” category; and of all the justices who ranked as “great” and “near great,” none had ever served so briefly on the Supreme Court.

Perhaps the most redeeming feature of Wolfson’s career—philanthropy—remains integral to his Jacksonville roots. As early as 1946, his father had wanted to establish a children’s clinic in the city; and as M. Wolfson & Co. blended into Florida Pipe and Supply, he had become wealthy enough to donate half a million dollars for such a medical center. But the immigrant junk dealer died two years later, and not until 1951 would the Wolfson Family Foundation be formed. Its first and most important commitment was to the Baptist Memorial Hospital (now called the Baptist Medical Center), located on the Southside on the St. Johns River. A fifty-bed pediatric care unit opened in 1955, and sixteen years later was consolidated into the 180-bed Wolfson Children’s Hospital. For thirty-five years, until 1986, Lou Wolfson chaired the foundation, which eventually bestowed millions of dollars on the Baptist Medical Center including funding of a wellness center. Other beneficiaries of multimillion-dollar donations included the Wolfson Student Center at Jacksonville University and the River Garden Hebrew Home/Wolfson Health and Aging Center. Cecil Wolfson succeeded his brother as chairman of the foundation’s board. So lavish was its generosity that, shortly before Lou Wolfson’s death, the Wolfson Family Foundation exhausted its endowment, having spent itself to the vanishing point.
Presentation in 1972 by Louis Wolfson to B. S. Reid of Baptist Memorial Hospital of Jacksonville.
The $200,000 check was first payment toward a $1 million pledge to the hospital.
(Courtesy Hazel Mack, Archivist, Congregation Ahavath Chesed.)

The Challenge of Race Relations

In the four hundred mile swath of territory between Atlanta and Orlando, no better children’s hospital existed at the end of the 1950s than the Wolfson Children’s Hospital. Hope Haven Hospital was already in operation on Atlantic Boulevard, first for children with bone diseases, later mostly as a rehabilitation center for polio victims. Wolfson Children’s Hospital was designed to be more comprehensive. Perhaps more importantly, it was supposed to be open to all. In a 1946 letter to his five sons, Morris D. Wolfson had urged “you boys” to “make sure that all persons affiliated with
this Clinic in any way have no prejudices as to race, creed, or color.” Bigotry would undermine the duty of those staffing such an institution to “consecrate themselves to the task of giving relief to the young.” Indeed the plaque testifying to that aim, to heal the sick “irrespective of race, color, or creed,” deeply impressed attorney Abe Fortas when he came to Jacksonville in 1965 to attend a board meeting of Merritt-Chapman & Scott.120

In the immediate postwar era, however, the doctrine of “separate but equal” still prevailed, and remained authoritative both in law and in custom. The cruelty of Jim Crow became all too apparent in 1955 when a ten-year-old girl from Lake City, stricken with a lethal meningitis virus, needed to be treated at Baptist. There was no hope for her survival otherwise since no black hospital provided adequate care. Joel Fleet, a pediatrician, came to the rescue. Fleet had grown up in Live Oak, Florida, where his father and later his brother had run a department store since 1905. Their family constituted half of all the Jewish families in town. Fleet graduated as valedictorian of his Suwannee High School class in 1932 and finished Tulane Medical School eight years later. In 1940 he came to Jacksonville’s Conservative synagogue, the Center, to marry Margaret Fishler. She had grown up in a kosher home in Fernandina Beach, where her Romanian-born father had paradoxically gone into the shrimping business. Her parents were strict. They had even prohibited interfaith dating, although only three Jewish boys her age lived in the town, and two of them were her brothers. In 1955 Joel Fleet desegregated Baptist Memorial Hospital by getting the endangered black child admitted. No other patients and no nurses objected to the presence of the new patient. And from then on, the children’s wards at Baptist accepted all races.121

By the standard of what was once called “minority relations,” the Wolfson family was liberal and enlightened. Burned into Lou Wolfson’s memory—he might not yet have been ten years old—was the sight of a black teenager whom the Ku Klux Klan had tarred and feathered, tied by a rope to a car, being paraded through the streets. The Klansmen “were laughing like hyenas,” Wolfson recalled. Until that episode he and his brother Sam had
Dr. Joel Fleet tending to a young patient.
(Courtesy of the family of Joel Fleet, MD, Jacksonville.)
run neighborhood errands for the firemen in the station. But after observing these good ol’ boys flaunting their Klan regalia, the brothers did their best to avoid walking past the station. Soon after Lou Wolfson took charge of Merritt-Chapman & Scott, he insisted on a clause in the company’s bylaws prohibiting discrimination in hiring. When he took charge of Washington, D.C.’s Capital Transit in what was then a very southern city, such a commitment remained evident. The future historian Edward S. Shapiro, who grew up in Washington, D.C., has not forgotten from his childhood “seeing a white bus driver sitting in the seat behind the driver’s seat instructing a black bus driver on the finer points.”

The check that Wolfson gave to Fortas—a fellow southerner, a fellow Jew, and a fellow liberal—was ostensibly for studies of “racial and religious relations” in the United States. Wolfson’s interest in this subject was enduring; and his opposition to bigotry was unflinching, according to Nathan Perlmutter, director of the Miami office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) during the 1950s and 1960s. Perlmutter, who became the national director of the ADL and would earn a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1987, knew Wolfson well, but not merely because of a shared struggle against racial and religious prejudice. Perlmutter’s first book explained how to handicap horse races. Sensitivity to racial injustice was what Lou Wolfson remembered of his father, who had often tried to help the black laborers who worked at the junkyard to clarify and resolve their financial difficulties: “I never did forget his humility and his feeling for people.” Morris Wolfson “was an uneducated man. But he knew right from wrong, and he didn’t spare the rod to teach it to his sons.” The Universal Marion Corporation also owned a Miami Beach newspaper, the Sun, that was editorially progressive; and because of lavish donations to Senator George S. McGovern’s presidential campaign in 1972, Louis E. Wolfson’s name was included on the enlarged list of enemies whose income tax returns a vindictive Nixon White House sought to have audited. Another sign of his liberal politics is the biographer whom he hired, although the book was never published because of his wife’s
objections: Robert Sherrill, the sardonic Washington correspondent of the *Nation.*\textsuperscript{125}

Any historical effort to understand Louis Wolfson requires an appreciation of context and ought to contrast his legacy with the values of one of Jacksonville’s most charitable citizens. Jessie Ball duPont was the third wife and later the widow of Alfred I. duPont (who died in 1935), and the sister of the most powerful businessman in northeast Florida, Ed Ball. In 1957, when *Fortune* ranked the richest Americans, only four women in the nation were estimated to be wealthier than Mrs. duPont. With perhaps $200 million to her name, the monthly magazine situated her in the upper brackets even well above Lou Wolfson. A very active Episcopal layperson, she was a major benefactor of handicapped children, poor pupils, and scholarship students as well as hospitals. Upon her brother’s death, the Nemours Foundation purchased Hope Haven Hospital. In 1987, renamed as the Nemours Children’s Clinic, it became affiliated with Wolfson Children’s Hospital. The chief of surgery was Albert H. Wilkinson, Jr., whose roots in the Jewish community could scarcely have been deeper. His great-great-grandfather was Julius Slager, a Confederate Army veteran who was, according to local historian T. Frederick Davis, among “the more prominent Hebrews of this city.” Slager became an early president of Congregation Ahavath Chesed and belonged to the First Families of Jews who had moved to a mostly empty state. Wilkinson was also the great nephew of Furchgott’s president, Fred Meyerheim. Wilkinson began practicing as a pediatric surgeon in Jacksonville in 1959. He has recalled that the Hope Haven Hospital that Jessie Ball duPont so generously supported then pursued a policy that he considered “an affront”: black patients were not admitted.\textsuperscript{126}

Indeed she also drew the line at aiding schools in which either the student body or the faculty was racially mixed. In the summer of 1953, for example, she expressed resentment at the collapse of the “will of the majority,” which for her was the essence of democracy. What Mrs. duPont dreaded was that “the minority group (negroes) must [instead] be given all the power and they must dictate the policies and way of life to . . . the majority group
Because of this tyranny of the minority, the government was about to deny to “our child, as we were given, the privilege of an education in an all white school.” Her awareness of what she called “the darkie problem” as a postwar challenge to democratic ideals could be discerned in her private correspondence as early as 1946, especially when Mrs. duPont learned of black instructors at women’s colleges like Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith. Her racism was genteel: “I do not wish them sitting in the drawing room with me.” She refused to provide scholarships at institutions in which the races were mixed on the faculty, believing that the white race was superior according to the history of all civilizations. Gunnar Myrdal’s classic plea for democratic inclusion, *An American Dilemma* (1944), left Mrs. duPont unconvinced. Unlike white southerners, “the Swede has had no experience with the negroes,” she huffed. The population of Jacksonville was then a little less than a third black, and her knowledge of this minority might be treated with some skepticism. In her will she tried to ensure that the scholarships that assorted southern colleges and universities could bestow would be confined to students “of the white race.” The IRS restrictions seemed to have stymied her, however, and nothing came of her intention.

Lou Wolfson’s older brother Sam lived in a different world. In 1953 he bought the Jacksonville Braves, a Class A baseball club that had finished seventh the year before. The Braves played in the South Atlantic League, commonly called the Sally League. Sam’s club thus competed with teams in the Deeper South from Montgomery, Alabama; Columbus, Augusta, and Savannah, Georgia; and Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina. In 1953 the Sally League was also observing its fiftieth birthday. To mark the occasion, the Jacksonville Braves experimented with desegregation by hiring three players: Horace Garner, Felix Mantilla, and nineteen-year-old second baseman Henry “Hank” Aaron. That year this trio was so crucial in winning the Sally League pennant that, after the three players came out of the clubhouse together in Savannah, which had added two black players on its own squad, a white baseball fan was waiting for the Braves. Struggling to find the right words to convey his emotions, he
gushed: “I just wanted to let you niggers know you played a hel-luva game.” (Sometimes even the primordial furies of racism yield to admiration for the skill required to hit a hard line drive to right field.) When the Braves celebrated their victory with a party in a Savannah restaurant, three players were nevertheless denied the right to join their teammates. “When we got back to Jacksonville,” Aaron recalled, “there was another party for the team at a country club. Somehow, Mr. Wolfson arranged to get us in, even though black people were not included at affairs like that in the South.” (A black journalist wanted to cover this breach of Jim Crow, but was blocked at the door.)

In Jacksonville, for the last home game of the 1953 season, the Braves’ players were honored. When Aaron got up, Wolfson told the crowd: “Henry Aaron is like a son to me.” Such praise, Aaron later noted, “wasn’t the sort of thing a wealthy white man usually said about a black kid in the South.” What Aaron and his two teammates had done helped to erode the foundations of white supremacy in a region that happened also to admire athletic excellence, an attitude that could not forever be reconciled with racism. As the Most Valuable Player in the Sally League, “Aaron may have started Jacksonville down the road to racial understanding,” a columnist in the *Jacksonville Journal* opined. “I’m not sure I’ve ever done anything more important,” the Atlanta Braves’ slugger concluded. That claim would reduce the significance of breaking the lifetime home run record that had been set by the protagonist of *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948), an Allied Artists film which Monogram distributed and which Sam Wolfson’s younger brother Lou helped bankroll. *Variety* called this biopic “semi-fictional.” In 1963, when Sam Wolfson died, the obituary in the local morning newspaper ran five columns. It saw fit to mention his coin collection, business activities such as a failed bid to take over the Cleveland Indians, and even the name of the manager who was hired to bring Sally League championships to the Braves. Entirely unmentioned was the role of the deceased in advancing racial integration, perhaps because the editors regarded such an achievement as ambiguous, or perhaps because such a gesture...
would have done him no credit among many white readers of the Florida Times-Union.

As the history of the desegregation of the Sally League makes evident, race relations cannot be left out of the heritage of a southern city like Jacksonville. The Wolfson family was not alone in its liberalism or in challenging the cruelties of white supremacy.

In 1900 the population of Jacksonville was officially just over 57 percent black, while the proportion of whites did not quite reach 43 percent. That same year, James Weldon Johnson, the principal of the largest black public school in the state, Jacksonville’s Stanton School, made an indelible mark on African American culture by writing the lyrics to “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Although his lyrics make no reference to race, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” became “The Negro National Hymn,” sung for the first time at the Stanton School. His brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, also a resident of Jacksonville, wrote the music. Although James Weldon Johnson would not have been legally permitted to sit down and order a cup of coffee in a downtown restaurant, he succeeded in becoming the most accomplished and distinguished person ever to emerge from Jacksonville. He was a poet and later a Broadway song-writer, an attorney, a diplomat, and finally the executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Although a “race man,” Johnson was no racial chauvinist. His autobiography expresses satisfaction with who he is. But his book also fantasizes that had he not been born black, he would have ordered a genie to “make me a Jew.” Johnson did not explain why. No student of his career has offered a convincing answer either. It is safe to conjecture that Jacksonville did not inspire or encourage Johnson to imagine crossing such a line into Jewishness. No biographical evidence points in that direction. No Jacksonville Jewish family appears to have befriended him in any memorable way.

New Orleans, by contrast, had the Karnoffsky family, Lithuanian immigrants who started at the bottom by working as (what else?) junk peddlers. To draw attention to the items on their wagon, they hired a black child to blow a tin horn. He became
part of the Karnoffsky family, joining them at dinner and coming to cherish Jewish cuisine. He spent more time in their home than with his own family, sensing that such Jews differed in their social attitudes from most other southern whites, and vowing that “I will love the Jewish people all of my life.” Louis Armstrong got very good on that tin horn and on an old cornet that Morris Karnoffsky helped him buy. However absent an equivalent experience in the life of James Weldon Johnson, at least the Jacksonville years did not discourage an appreciation of the Jewish heritage and of its legatees.

Unfortunately the atlas of what Mark Twain skewered as “the United States of Lyncherdom” includes Jacksonville, where two black men were lynched in 1919. During the following decade the Ku Klux Klan held rallies in Hemming Park, where the central plaza featured a tall Confederate Monument that faced the Cohen Brothers store. And a race riot—with blacks and whites battling one another downtown—broke out in 1960. The following year, the Reform synagogue was vandalized by a nineteen-year-old sailor, who painted a swastika as well as the word “Juden” on a side of the building and hurled a rock through a stained glass window. The culprit was alleged to have objected to the unfair trial to which the former Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann was about to be subjected in Jerusalem.

But Jacksonville generally managed to escape the turmoil that erupted in other southern communities in the 1950s and 1960s. In Orlando, for example, two NAACP lawyers, Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg, arrived in 1952 to defend a young black man before an all-white jury. The defendant was accused (with three other blacks) of beating a white man and then kidnapping and raping his wife although no medical evidence proving rape was ever produced. Orlando tested the South’s reputation for hospitality when the Klan welcomed Marshall and Greenberg on Saturday night with a torchlight parade. Because of racial segregation, the two attorneys were separated; and throughout the night Klansmen surrounded Greenberg’s hotel with trucks and torches. The defendant was convicted and sentenced to death, though the governor commuted the sentence.
The menace that the Klan projected might be contrasted with what happened in Jacksonville that very year, when the great contralto Marian Anderson came to town. Probably for the first time in the city’s history, a racially integrated audience was permitted, though several hundred white music-lovers boycotted the performance at the Duval County Armory and demanded a refund. So direct a violation of Jim Crow policies was not immediately repeated, however, and a figure as distinguished and unthreatening as Marian Anderson was needed to take even that modest step toward decency. It might be added that another three years passed before even the Metropolitan Opera allowed a black singer to perform on its stage, when Anderson undertook the role of Ulrica in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*.142

During the 1950s Jacksonville far exceeded Orlando in size, which may partially explain the different reception granted to outsiders in 1952; urban scale probably tended to promote a temperate, live-and-let-live attitude. In Jacksonville it was a bit easier than in many other parts of the South for blacks to distinguish “the Man” from the Klan, although even to this day Florida’s statute books protect the Confederate flag from “mutilation or disrespect.”143 The civil rights activist Andrew Young once remarked that, without Atlanta, Georgia would be Mississippi. But even Atlanta had a terrifying race riot in 1906; and local Jews had to confront the consequences when a little girl was found dead in 1913, and then in 1958 when a synagogue was bombed in a “city too busy to hate.” Mayor Young might also have had trouble explaining why Birmingham did not make Alabama little more than Mississippi. But at least Florida also meant Miami, where increasingly numbers of northern Jews settled. Those who were Communists or labeled as such were especially dedicated to championing civil rights and enjoyed some impunity in doing so. The two fish-out-of-water agitators whose commitment to equality is nicely resurrected in Raymond A. Mohl’s monograph, *South of the South* (2004), had no counterparts in Jacksonville. One of the activists, Matilda Graff, had to flee Miami and seek refuge in Canada. As late as the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, segregation was firmly enforced in Jacksonville,
where even black teachers who held charge accounts at Cohen Brothers were prohibited from sitting down to eat in its lunchroom. The city did, however, harbor some Jewish businesspeople who rejected the regional commitment to racial injustice.

In the antebellum South, Jews willingly sought black customers. In 1856 the northern liberal traveler and landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, reported that “a swarm of Jews, within the last ten years, has settled in nearly every Southern town.” They were “opening cheap clothing and trinket shops” and were “engaging in an unlawful trade with simple negroes, which is found very profitable.” These tradesmen’s shops, Olmsted added, were located “in the narrowest and meanest streets, which seem to be otherwise inhabited mainly by negroes.” In 1870 one of the Furchgott family’s two Charleston stores was reported to “do a negro trade.” Fyodor Dostoevsky, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Richard Wright leveled the accusation of exploitation at Jewish tradesmen who cheated southern blacks in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. It is safe to say, however, that such generalizations are tricky, and “exploitation” fails to do justice to such interactions. The standard should not be John Brown, a martyr to the cause of black liberation, but instead a modest range somewhere below the heroic and yet above the malicious. Especially in the critical postwar years, Jacksonville’s merchants were probably no more sympathetic to civil rights than were coreligionists who owned stores elsewhere in the region. But no one in Jacksonville was as intransigent as Charlie Leb, a deli owner in Atlanta who had the distinction of refusing service to Harry Belafonte. Leb’s hostility to civil rights was so intense that he expressed solidarity with the Ku Klux Klan. Atlanta Jews reacted to him with such enmity that by the end of the 1960s he went bankrupt because of the dramatic decline in their patronage. Jewish merchants in Jacksonville were close to the norm. Very few of those “immersed in the desegregation struggle were inherently hostile to change. On the contrary,” the British historian Clive Webb has concluded, “many had earned a reputation for moderation.”
Jacksonville’s Jewish merchants undoubtedly exhibited a range of attitudes toward their customers. Evidence is spotty, but here are some historical examples. During the Great Depression when the Rothstein family could support higher education for only one son, Abe got the chance to go to law school and Dave sold shoes downtown at the edge of a black neighborhood. Many of Dave Rothstein’s customers worked for Ed Ball’s Florida East Coast Railroad, which never paid wages high enough to enable unskilled black laborers to acquire the capital that a capitalist system privileged. At least the Duval Shoe Store allowed such customers to buy shoes on credit, and when these hardworking men got paid, they stood in line to ask the owner, “Mr. David, will you cash my check?” He agreed to do so. One of his former employees continues to doubt that Rothstein ever deducted the entire price of the shoes or ever charged interest. A more complicated figure was Nathan Shmunes, who owned a department store on Davis Street. Shmunes hired a black man to run the men’s clothing department, and customers could use a “layaway plan” so that they did not have to pay interest. One customer, Shmunes’s daughter recalls, was so loyal that the Canadian-born merchant reciprocated by paying for some of her groceries and for her physician. Yet Shmunes’s remarks about blacks were tainted with racial prejudice, which vulnerability to crime undoubtedly fortified. When one holdup man demanded the contents of the cash register, Shmunes told him to work for money if he wanted it. The advice was rejected rather explosively, but the pistol aimed at the owner misfired. Such incidents spurred Shmunes to close the Davis Street Department Store.147

In James Weldon Johnson’s novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912), its anonymous narrator, raised in the North, is advised that few of “the respectable coloured people” travel in the South; and when they do, “they generally have friends in the towns to which they go” who host them. When the narrator gets to Jacksonville, he stays at “a respectable boarding-house for coloured people.” Prior to World War I, the era in which Johnson’s novel is set, few options existed in the region besides rooming houses or hospitable friends and relatives. Even the segregated
YMCA and YWCA, heavily funded by the Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, were scarce and suitable only for brief layovers. After World War II, when motels became noticeable features of the American landscape, the Chicago-born Lionel Gaines built and owned the Astor Motel, off of Highway 90 in Jacksonville. His was among the very few motels in town where black travelers including musicians like Lionel Hampton could stay in the final decades of the Jim Crow era. Other Jews who catered to a black clientele included Harry Finkelstein, who owned a pawnshop on the same corner as a nightclub where a musically promising student from the Deaf and Blind School in St. Augustine performed. The young pianist later took the name Ray Charles. Close by was the ornate Strand Theatre, which was built after World War I and which showed movies and put on vaudeville acts.

Arvin Rothschild, Roy Benjamin’s son-in-law, managed the Strand as well as two other black movie theaters, the Roosevelt and the Frolic. Located on Ashley Street, west of Broad Street, all three theaters were incorporated into another of the Wolfsons’ companies, a black cinema chain called National Theatre Enterprises, which later merged into Continental Enterprises. A native Indianan, Rothschild was free of racial prejudice and could be sardonic about the absurdities of the rules enforced on both races. In 1958 Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier played a pair of escaping chain-gang prisoners in United Artists’ The Defiant Ones, which opened locally at a movie house restricted to whites, the Five Points Theater. Rothschild teased its owner, Sheldon Mandell, that his box office policy should be: “Whites manacled to Negroes will not be admitted to this theater.” Future social worker Richard McKissick remembered another African American, an ex-con, asking the owner of the Roosevelt Theater for a job: “Rothschild gave him one, explaining that everyone needs a second chance.” Since the early 1970s McKissick has regarded Rothschild as his “mentor.” Later McKissick worked at keeping young ex-offenders from falling back into crime for the Greater Jacksonville Economic Opportunity Corporation (GJEOM) and other civic agencies. Head Start was perhaps the most famous and admired
feature of the GJEOC anti-poverty program. When the organization was established in 1965, Rothschild served as its first president. Because a black president of such an entity could not yet have been imagined given the Jim Crow environment, what was needed was a white man with soul and Rothschild fit the bill.\textsuperscript{149}

Born in Philadelphia, Bob Myers served as a U.S. Army captain in World War II before moving to Jacksonville in 1947. As the owner of Purcell’s and Nancy Scott women’s clothing stores downtown, he catered to white customers. In less than two decades, perhaps coinciding with his presidency of Congregation Ahavath Chesed, he may have been the first white, downtown merchant to put a black employee in a sales position out front. The woman had worked in the receiving department in the back of Purcell’s when Myers decided to promote her to sales. His son Johnny Myers recalled: “I remember some white customers closing their charge accounts in protest, and there was some graffiti on the store windows. But my father did not back down. Later the other white merchants followed suit.”\textsuperscript{150} What clothiers like Bob Myers did, however modestly, should be contextualized within the Weltanschauung of the immediate postwar era. Consider two Nobel laureates from the South. William Faulkner, the winner of the literature prize in 1949, famously expressed his faith in the human triumph over adversity. Earlier he had praised southern blacks like Dilsey Gibson, the “mammy” of \textit{The Sound and the Fury} (1929), because “they endured.”\textsuperscript{151} Martin Luther King, Jr., had already made it clear that southern blacks had endured enough when he received the Peace Prize in Oslo fifteen years after Faulkner’s award. The velocity of such changes could scarcely have been anticipated.

\textit{Beyond Business}

Not everyone who belonged to the Jacksonville Jewish community stayed in business, or in Jacksonville, although no one could escape the influence of the stores and companies that the families mentioned in this essay created and continued. Even those who pursued other vocations benefited from the wealth that
businesspeople generated, and even those who were disaffected could not disentangle themselves entirely from the dominant impulses of the community. Differences did not necessarily mean distance, except broadly over time. “I must study Politicks and War,” John Adams famously asserted in a 1780 letter to his wife Abigail, “that my sons have the liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy . . . [and] Commerce . . . in order to give their children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine.”152 The linear evolution that Adams described did not mark the trajectory of his own family, which pursued the vocation of “Politicks” for two more generations. His expectations did not fit the intergenerational aspirations of the Jewish mercantile class either. But Adams raised the right question about the uses of struggle in securing freedom for posterity. How financial well-being could be activated across time, and how economic comfort could provide options for progeny against the headwinds of history constitute the final section of this essay.

Let the Zacharias family be illustrative. Its founder, Aaron Zacharias, was born either in Prussia or New York City in 1845. After the Civil War (probably in 1866), he came South with his younger brother, Abraham. Aaron grew tobacco for the cigar factories of Tampa and, as early as 1870, was listed in Jacksonville’s first city directory as a general merchant as well as tobacco dealer, conducting business downtown. Zacharias became the secretary of Congregation Ahavath Chesed at its founding in 1882. He and his wife, the German-born Theresa Budwig Zacharias, had a son, Isadore, who became an attorney. In 1901, the year of the great fire, Isadore Zacharias married Irma Kaufman, whose father just happened to be in the scrap metal business in Jacksonville. In the building boom after the fire, the legal practice prospered and the family could afford to employ several servants at their Laura Street home. Irma Zacharias, a violinist, became dedicated to the art John Adams spelled as “Musick.” Their son Jerrold was born in 1905. In 1922, right after he graduated from Duval High School (then the only high school for whites), the Zachariases decided to move to New York. For a while Isadore managed to commute almost weekly to his hometown to practice law. But it became clear
that, because of the superiority of New York’s musical life, Jacksonville would no longer be their residence. Jerrold Zacharias did very well academically at Duval High School and enrolled at Columbia College. Yet he recalled learning little or being truly stimulated in Jacksonville, which educationally “never laid a glove on me.”

Had this branch of the family remained in Florida, he would never have met Isidor Isaac Rabi, a future Nobel laureate. At Columbia they began a lifelong friendship that reinforced Jerrold Zacharias’s commitment to physics. He helped pierce the secrets of the atom, specializing in particle physics. During World War II, Zacharias worked at MIT on the development of radar defense systems and at Los Alamos where he helped to make the atomic bomb. In 1956, inspired by one of Rabi’s ideas, Zacharias developed the first practical atomic clock. As though that invention were not enough, in the same year he became a pivotal pioneer in precollege science education (even as Jacksonville’s taxpayers seemed to be buckling under the strain of supporting their public schools). Zacharias dedicated himself to the development and reform of the physics curriculum through the Physical Sciences Study Committee that the National Science Foundation supported.

After the shock of Sputnik in 1957, Zacharias argued that it was even more crucial to inspire pupils to understand how scientists work through observation, measurement, and the distillation of evidence. The history of discovery is punctuated by failure, and by the imperative to learn from mistakes, he insisted. By redirecting pedagogy toward an appreciation of the uncertainties of experimentation, Zacharias “started a revolution in science teaching in the United States,” President Kennedy announced in 1961. (The juxtaposition in the early 1960s was too striking to pass over in silence. The public school system in Jacksonville that had spawned Zacharias was so deficient in lab facilities that all of its high schools stood on the brink of losing accreditation.) Appreciating the deepening civic need for advanced science, he served on the Science Advisory Committee of presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. In that postwar, Cold War
climate, the nation’s most politically influential physicists belonged to the Los Alamos generation and typically taught in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Zacharias belonged to that inner circle. By the time of his death in 1986, he had served as Institute Professor of Physics at MIT, where he directed the Laboratory for Nuclear Science and Engineering.\(^{156}\) So consequential were his contributions to science education in particular that he inspired a biography by a fellow physicist, Jack Goldstein of Brandeis University.

Other Zacharias family members remained in Jacksonville. Besides Isadore, four sons and two daughters grew up in the Laura Street home of Aaron and Theresa Zacharias. Pauline Zacharias, before marrying Max Oberdorfer, Sr., served as first president of the Jewish Women’s League, the forerunner of the Temple Sisterhood. Among her successors was Theresa Zacharias plus the former Adele Strassberger of Baltimore, whose husband, Herbert Zacharias, was another son of Aaron and Theresa. In 1896 Herbert had been a member of the first confirmation class at Congregation Ahavath Chesed, and his wife Adele served as temple organist and directed the Temple Choir.\(^{157}\) Percy Zacharias worked as a vice president of Cohen Brothers. Another of Aaron and Theresa’s sons was Ellis Mark Zacharias, born in 1890. As a boy, his biographer claims, Ellis loved to roam the waterfront. At age eight, he was fascinated by the Navy patrol boats that came to Jacksonville to protect the coast against a badly overmatched Spanish navy during the Spanish-American War. Eager to join the U.S. Navy, Ellis left Duval High School to attend a preparatory school in Annapolis and in 1908 entered the Naval Academy. Following graduation four years later (along with Richard E. Byrd), Zacharias became an ensign.

It could not have been easy for a Jew to serve as an officer in the U.S. Navy; just ask Uriah P. Levy or Hyman Rickover to rejoin the living in order to show you their psychic scars. Still Ellis Zacharias persevered. In particular he became a close student of Japanese society and culture in the interwar period. While serving as naval attaché to the American embassy in Tokyo during the 1920s, Zacharias achieved fluency in Japanese. His chief interwar
responsibility, however, occurred in the following decade in Washington, where he headed the Far Eastern division of the Office of Naval Intelligence. His warnings that, if hostilities were to break out in the Pacific, imperial Japan would launch a surprise attack and that Pearl Harbor would be a vulnerable target, were evidently either ignored or could not be effectively implemented. Such remarkable claims, it is important to
note, have been rebutted. Nor can they be evaluated here, although it is incontestable that Pearl Harbor was the nation’s most catastrophic intelligence failure prior to September 11, 2001. Zacharias’s memoirs do not suffer from vagueness and even assert that he predicted an attack upon Oahu on a Sunday morning.158

And the war came. Captain Zacharias commanded a heavy cruiser, the Salt Lake City, which carried out early assaults on the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, as well as on Wake Island. In April 1942 the Salt Lake City also protected the aircraft carrier, the Hornet, from which Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle launched the daring B-25 bombing raids that lasted thirty seconds over Tokyo. Zacharias also commanded a battleship, the New Mexico, that participated in the assaults on Saipan and Tinian (Operation “Forager”), and served as Deputy Director of the Office of Naval Intelligence from June 1942 until August 1943. In the summer of 1945, he participated in the psychological warfare program of the Office of War Information, seeking to break Japanese morale through the fourteen radio broadcasts that he delivered in Japanese and directed at the home islands. After V-J Day Captain Zacharias publicly doubted whether the defeat of Japan had required the dropping of the atomic bomb, the terrible weapon that his brilliant nephew, Jerrold R. Zacharias, had helped to develop as a member of the Manhattan Project. Brandishing commendations that included five battle stars, Ellis M. Zacharias won promotion to Rear Admiral upon his retirement in 1946. He died fifteen years later. Readers of the official history of Congregation Ahavath Chesed are bound to be touched by how democratically his name appears on the list, in simple alphabetical order, among the members of the synagogue who served in the world wars.159

But what about the “Painting, Statuary, Tapestry, and Porcelain [sic]” that John Adams implied were the ultimate expressions of civilization that the masters of war and politics might bequeath to their posterity? Among Jacksonville Jewry, perhaps the chief benefactors of the arts have been Jay Stein and Morton Robert Hirschberg. Such a list might be contrasted with a
few other southern sites where the impact of Jewish philanthropy has been more decisive. In 1911 Isaac Delgado, a sugar and molasses dealer in New Orleans, established an art museum. In 1971 the Isaac Delgado Museum was renamed the New Orleans Museum of Art. The wealth that the Cone Mills Corporation generated in Greensboro, North Carolina, when channeled through the exquisite taste of the sisters Claribel and Etta Cone, made possible the remarkable collection of French paintings in the Baltimore Museum of Art. The Nasher Sculpture Center, based on the distinctive collection of Raymond and Patsy Nasher, is found in Dallas.

In contrast, wealthy Jews have generally been ancillary to the support of the fine arts in Jacksonville. That list of patrons is even shorter once Jay Stein’s recent arrival is considered. Upon moving to the city in 1984, he joined the board of the Cummer Gallery of Art and of the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. Stein later became a member of the board of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., as well as a founding benefactor of that city’s U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He is also among the most generous contributors to the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Lonnie Wurn served as a lifetime trustee of the Cummer Gallery, which has been perhaps best known for its collection of what John Adams had singled out: porcelain. Wurn and his son Larry especially committed themselves to the support of the Gallery’s collection of early Meissen treasures. That the roll call of Jewish benefactors is not larger is not easily explainable, though oral history can slightly buttress the record of support. For example, Ben Stein’s wife Ruth had two pianos in their home and the couple supported the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. After one of its concerts, which featured Isaac Stern, the Steins invited the violinist to their home for a party. At the end of the evening, Stein presented the virtuoso with a bottle of wine. He hugged his host as an expression of appreciation and promptly dropped the bottle, which smashed. The damage had no effect upon the Steins’ patronage of classical music in the city.
Morton Hirschberg, who brings this story full circle, was the only other significant Jewish patron of the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens. His mother, Mena Williams Hirschberg, was the niece of Morris Dzialynski, and recalled in a short memoir having been chosen in 1885 “to make the presentation speech of the flag of the State of Florida at the inauguration of Governor Edward A. Perry at the Capitol in Tallahassee.” A photograph of her at the gubernatorial inauguration is reproduced in *Mosaic* although the flag that the young Mena Williams is shown holding happens to be Old Glory. Her husband, Julius Hirschberg, had owned the cigar factory in Tallahassee where his nephew, Day Apte, the diarist’s husband, secured his first job. After the turn of the century, Julius Hirschberg moved to Jacksonville, where he became a successful real estate developer. Their son, Morton Hirschberg, born in Tallahassee in 1897, was confirmed at Jacksonville’s Congregation Ahavath Chesed in 1911. Coincidentally that was the year Arthur Ruppin, the most eminent social scientist of the Jews in that era, published *Die Juden der Gegenwart* (The Jews of the Present), and lent his authority to the view that “the Jewish race is the incarnation of the capitalist-business spirit.” Also in 1911 the most influential scholarly work on the Jewish adherence to that very spirit appeared: Werner Sombart’s *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (The Jews and Economic Life). In challenging Max Weber, Sombart substituted medieval and early modern Jews for the Calvinist worldly ascetics, and like Ruppin argued that this beleaguered people was hardwired for commerce. Despite Sombart’s pro-Nazi proclivities two decades later, his scholarship and interpretations have sometimes been taken quite seriously. David Ben-Gurion even translated one of Sombart’s earlier books into Hebrew.

Hirschberg shrewdly expanded the investments that he had inherited, and, upon his death in 1978, his estate provided the largest single bequest ever received by the synagogue that his great-uncle had founded barely a century earlier. The sum that Hirschberg allotted even topped the bequest of Philip N. Coleman to Congregation Ahavath Chesed in 1974, two years after his death.
Conclusion: Businessmen as Citizens

The philanthropy such financial acumen made possible typified some of the businessmen whom this essay portrays and stimulates the larger scholarly question that Sombart posed. “His claims may be absurd,” the great English historian H. R. Trevor-Roper concluded, “but at least we cannot deny the economic importance of the Jews.” To be sure Sombart’s extravagant historical speculations did not impress the great Jewish historian Salo W. Baron. He could nevertheless discern a “metaphysical sympathy” of the Jews for capitalism and acknowledge their affinity for enterprise. The diasporic experience reflected “their detachment from the soil, the bourgeois spirit of their urban life, [and] the artificiality of all Jewish existence . . . as against peasant concreteness.” Money, Baron added, is “the most abstract and irrational of values.” It encouraged “the Jews [to be ready] to carry its implications to the logical extreme.” Take, for example, the declaration of Sol Nazerman, the Holocaust survivor and protagonist of The Pawnbroker, that “next to the speed of light, which Einstein tells us is the only absolute in the universe, second only to that I would rank money.” A sociological correlate can be discerned today in the United States, where 4 percent of Catholic households earn more than $100,000. Mormons are commonly regarded as superbly equipped for free enterprise, so that it comes as no surprise that the proportion of their households above $100,000 is triple that of Catholics. Thirteen percent of Mormon households earn more than that figure. But that proportion is only half of the 27 percent of Jewish households that earn that much.166

A president of the Jacksonville Jewish Community Council during the Great Depression, Hirschberg had served in the U.S. Army during World War I and in the Navy during World War II. Such enduring patriotism also typified a gratitude that generations of Jews expressed in various ways toward the republic that gave them refuge and sheds an eerie light on the advice that one of President John Adams’s recent successors, Richard M. Nixon, gave in the Oval Office in 1972. Learning of the friction his daughter Patricia “Tricia” Cox was facing in making public appearances in museums, Nixon recalled that his other daughter,
Julie Eisenhower, had participated in a museum program in Jacksonville. The president of the United States could scarcely have been more dismissive: “The arts—you know—they’re Jews, they’re left-wing—in other words, stay away.” The example was ill-chosen. None of the Jews who helped enhance the artistic life of Jacksonville could be characterized as left-wingers, nor could any of the other Jewish business people who prospered there be so designated. They were hardly animated by the desire to fight the power, but in some cases hoped to join it in a city where enterprise and initiative could pay off—at least for some.

The neo-Marxist project of writing “history from below,” the challenge of recounting “history from the bottom up,” would therefore not be suitable for Jacksonville’s Jews, many of whom did not stay down long. The faith in free enterprise particularly propelled the first and second generations. The prospect of upward mobility, the exaltation of personal autonomy, and the dream of liberation from poverty have been central ingredients in the ideology that was shared throughout the nation, by the native-born and the newcomers, by prospectors and peddlers, by winners and also by losers such as Teach, the small-time hoodlum who struts in David Mamet’s 1975 drama, American Buffalo. This profane punk defines the economic options that the society makes available as “the freedom . . . of the Individual . . . to Embark on Any [expletive deleted] Course that he sees fit . . . . In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit. . . . This country’s founded on this.” Four years after Congregation Ahavath Chesed had been formed, the class of 1886 at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama showed the ubiquity of this ideology by picking as the class motto what proved to be a cruel delusion in the era of systematic racial segregation: “There Is Room at the Top.” Sinclair Lewis’s George Babbitt’s exhortation to himself (“Gotta hustle”) expressed the ethos of making it (or at least faking it, since there is not room at the top for all). A can-do spirit, a ferocious yearning not to accept destitution as though it were destiny, were widespread in the republic a century or so ago. Such attitudes were virtually idiomatic and were absorbed with notable intensity among Jacksonville Jewry.
However, generational change did mean a lesser commitment to achieving success in business. Jacksonville could not be entirely exempt from the national impact of the 1960s. Soon after that tumultuous decade, journalist Harry Golden came to the city to interview the rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Chesed. Sidney M. Lefkowitz informed Golden that younger Jews were “turning away from profit-oriented careers and seeking work in areas bringing personal satisfaction” such as the professions and education. Active participation in competitive capitalism could exact a high psychic price, and one scion of a Jacksonville family bequeathed a touching testament to a business civilization and its discontents. A great-great-nephew of pawnshop owner Harry Finkelstein (previously mentioned), Kenneth N. Fink, married the daughter of Ben Friedman of the Vogue Shops and became a Jacksonville attorney specializing in securities law. In his profession Fink was driven. So dependent was he upon the fetish that transforms time into discrete units, upon the Algeresque icon that marks the regularity and punctuality of modern work, that a senior partner remarked that Fink happened to be wearing two watches. “It only increased my embarrassment when I noticed that they were both on the same wrist,” he recalled. But a debilitating illness (possibly chronic fatigue syndrome) suddenly and mysteriously provoked an acute resistance to the pressures of the corporate culture. The various remedies Fink sought included kabbalistic healing, astrology, clairvoyance, and Sioux “sweat lodges.” His spiritual autobiography records a transition “from the boardroom to the ashram.” Having already joined the ranks of those who were “materially comfortable,” Fink could discern what was emotionally missing in “a life that was competitive and demanding.” From it he could disenthrall himself and experience “a new kind of freedom” that tapped into “my interest in subtle energies and . . . different planes of consciousness.”

Fink’s chronicle of disenchantment is quite rare among Jacksonville Jews. So are the exact equivalents of the very great Jewish fortunes built from a single company rooted in a southern community. Jacksonville lacks a counterpart to, say, Atlanta’s Home Depot, founded primarily by Arthur Blank and Bernie Marcus in
1978, and which became the nation’s second largest general retailer (after Wal-Mart). Charlotte can boast the Family Dollar variety store chain, founded in 1959 by the twenty-two-year-old Leon Levine, the son of a Rockingham, North Carolina department store owner. Family Dollar spread into nearly every state and employs over 35,000 full-time and part-time workers. Leon’s son Howard Levine is currently the chief executive officer of this Fortune 500 corporation. The 2,200 retail outlets of Zales jewelry had their origins in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1924, although the company moved to Dallas two decades later. Founder Morris Bernard Zale (né Zalefsky) revolutionized access to what had once been a largely upscale business. Austin boasts Dell Computer, which founder Michael Dell made into one of the world’s largest manufacturers of personal computers. Nor has the company of any Jacksonville family ever enjoyed the cachet that consumers have bestowed on a business outside the South like Baskin-Robbins, founded in Glendale, California, by two brothers-in-law who had drawn largely on their bar mitzvah money. Ditto the Cincinnati family that succeeded so well at baking and marketing matzo that an astronaut, thrilled to be walking on the moon, could exclaim: “Man, oh Manischewitz!”

The annals do not reveal any such equivalents in Jacksonville. Yet the city can still rightfully make its claims on historical attention. For anyone curious about the Jewish experience in the South and in America itself, the commerce of this community ought to be in play. The aim of this essay, then, has been to amplify what historians have learned of Jewish enterprise elsewhere through plugging a hole in the historical knowledge of Jacksonville.
Special thanks are due to two residents of Jacksonville: Barbara Kiersh for her exemplary and indispensable research, and archivist Hazel Mack of Congregation Ahavath Chesed for her savvy and her scrupulousness. Gratitude is also hereby conveyed to Sharon Laird, archivist of the Jacksonville Historical Society. For their assistance, the author also wishes to express appreciation to Allan Arkush, Andy Barmer, Mark K. Bauman, Frances Bay, Sandy Berman, Avi Bernstein-Nahar, Dorothy N. Cone, Margaret Fleet, Dennis Frank, Abraham Fuks, Harry A. Gaines, Mark I. Greenberg, Hugh S. Glickstein, Robert A. Gutman, Mikki Harvey, Richard H. King, Ann O. Koloski-Ostrow, Kathleen Krizek, Jane Leavey, John P. McDermott, Jack Mizrahi, William Nussbaum, Judith Pinnolis, Kevin Proffitt, Leonard Rogoff, Dale Rosengarten, H. Michael Rothschild, Jane Rothschild, Edward S. Shapiro, Blanche Slott, Ralph Szymczak, Cassie Vichozsky, Erin Warnke, Beryl H. Weiner, Michael D. Weinroth, Lee Shai Weissbach, Louise Westling, Joan S. Whitfield, Lee C. Whitfield, Ronald M. Whitfield, Albert H. Wilkinson, Jr., Linda F. Wilkinson, Maury I. Wiseman, Emily B. Wurn, Jacqueline Wurn, and Marcia Jo Zerivitz. The support of the Theodore and Jane Norman Fund for Faculty Research at Brandeis University is also hereby acknowledged with gratitude.


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NOTES

A Second Eyewitness to Jim Conley’s Actions:
The Leo Frank Case Revisited

by

Stephen Goldfarb*

That my vindication will eventually come I feel certain. Whether I will live to see it, I cannot tell. I am human enough to want to live to see it, for it is my right and due. But I may not. Still, one thing is sure. The truth cannot be executed. Vindication may be long in coming, but it will come.
—Leo M. Frank¹

The Leo Frank case began on April 26, 1913, with the murder of thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan in the National Pencil Company factory in downtown Atlanta. A month later Frank, the factory’s manager, was indicted for the crime and, after a month-long trial during that summer, was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. After nearly two years of unsuccessful appeals, Governor John M. Slaton commuted Frank’s death sentence to life-in-prison on June 20, 1915. On August 16, 1915, Frank was kidnapped from the state prison in Milledgeville, transported to Cobb County, and lynched about dawn the following morning. He was thirty-one years old. Although there is little doubt that Frank did not murder Mary Phagan, information continues to come to light that further demonstrates his innocence.²

On September 10, 2003, as part of the Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, I sat in on an interview of Major Corbett W. Clark, United States

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Army, retired, at the Atlanta History Center. Clark had served in the Philippines during World War II and was awarded a Silver Star.³

After his interview, in response to a comment I made about researching the Frank case, Clark told me that he had known a woman employed in the National Pencil Company factory at the time of Mary Phagan’s murder. Through his sister’s marriage he had met Julia Fuss Bell, who was sixteen years old at the time of the crime.⁴

Major Clark told me that over the years he had visited with Julia Fuss Bell many times, and on more than one occasion she had told him that, on the day of Phagan’s murder, she had been at work and witnessed the factory sweeper, Jim Conley, carrying the limp body of a white girl on the first floor of the building. When confronted, Conley threatened that should Julia repeat this story, he would kill her and her family. Clark’s wife repeated and confirmed the story when I visited with them in their home on December 9, 2005. This was further confirmed in a videotaped interview that I had with Major Clark in his home on January 25, 2009. The salient section of that interview follows:

GOLDFARB: Major Clark, you have told me about her [Julia Fuss Bell’s] link to the Leo Frank case. Would you . . . tell us as much as you can about what she knows about the Leo Frank case?

CLARK: Well, she told . . . us that she worked for the National Pencil Factory in Atlanta where Mary Phagan worked. She was a sixteen-year-old girl, and lots of girls worked there with the supervisor and the owner was Mr. Leo Frank. And she said that they remembered when Mary Phagan was killed, and the girls all knew that Leo Frank didn’t do it, but he was accused of it. . . . So they said they remembered that they saw . . . the custodian [Jim Conley] take Mary Phagan’s body down into the basement. And the custodian told the girls that if . . . they . . . told on him and get him in trouble . . . that he would kill any of ’em that told on him. . . .

CLARK: She saw Jim Conley take the body [of Mary Phagan] down to the basement. She [was] . . . always scared to death to tell anything about it.⁵
Julia Fuss Bell’s account mirrors that of the factory’s office boy Alonzo McClendon Mann. In 1982, five years after Bell’s death, the Nashville *Tennessean* reported that Mann, in his eighties and in failing health (he died in 1985), had seen Jim Conley on the day of Mary Phagan’s murder carrying her body toward the trap door that led to the basement. When confronted,
Conley threatened, “If you ever mention this, I’ll kill you.” Upon his return home Mann’s mother admonished him “not to get involved.” And for nearly seventy years, Mann held his tongue.6

The statements by Fuss and Mann directly contradict Jim Conley’s testimony that had proved crucial to Frank’s conviction. On August 4, 1913, during Frank’s trial, Conley testified that he had helped Frank remove Phagan’s body from the second floor of the factory, where Frank’s office was located and where the murder was posited to have taken place, to the basement by way of the freight elevator. Were this so, then Conley could not have been on the first floor with Mary Phagan’s body.

In an odd coincidence, both Julia Fuss and Alonzo Mann testified at the Frank trial on the same day, August 16, 1913. Although the trial record is lost, a relatively accurate reconstruction, apparently based on the documents associated with the appeals of the original trial, exists.7

The following summarizes Julia Fuss’s testimony, first questioned by defense attorney Reuben Arnold and then cross-examined by prosecutor Hugh Dorsey:

Julia Fuss. Work on the fourth floor of the pencil factory; have never know [sic] anything wrong or immoral to be going on in Mr. Frank’s office; talked with Jim Conley Wednesday morning [four days after murder of Mary Phagan]. He was sweeping around there and asked me to see the newspaper. As he read it he kinder [sic] grinned. He told me he believed Mr. Frank was just as innocent as the angels from Heaven. He was never known to tell the truth; would not believe on oath.

Cross-examined. Have never heard Mr. Frank accused of any act of immorality or familiarity with the girls in the factory.8 Jim Conley got two papers from me on Tuesday and Wednesday. I bought them. Jim always seemed to be kind of nervous or half drunk or something. He aroused my suspicions after he began to read the papers and grin about them and comment on them.9

Newspaper accounts of Fuss’s testimony also include the following:

[Dorsey:] Did you see any blood on the [second] floor of the factory?
[Fuss:] Yes. Some of it had been chipped up, but some of it was left.
[Dorsey:] What do you think the spots were?
[Fuss:] I think they were paint.
[Dorsey:] Why?
[Fuss:] Because paint was used near there all the time.10

The summary of Mann’s testimony later the same day is even briefer:

*Alonzo Mann:* Am office boy at the National Pencil Company. I left the factory at half-past 11 on April 26th [1913]. When I left there Miss Hall, the stenographer . . . was in the office with Mr. Frank; never saw him bring any women into the factory and drink with them; have never seen [C. Brutus] Dalton there.12

Mann next enumerates the people whom he saw and several he did not see in the pencil factory on April 26. Jim Conley was not on either list.13

Neither Julia Fuss nor Alonzo Mann testified to seeing Jim Conley with the body of the murdered Mary Phagan on the first floor of the pencil factory. Conley’s threats had effectively sealed the lips of both young people—in the case of Mann, with the aid of his mother.

In his seminal book on the case, Steve Oney argues that had Mann testified as to what he had seen on April 26, 1913, it would not have mattered since it “added little of probative value.”14 However, if both Fuss and Mann had testified to what they had actually witnessed, it is possible that the jury would not have convicted Frank of murder. A guilty verdict required unanimity of the jurors, and just one dissenting vote induced by the reinforcing testimony would have produced a hung jury.

On the other hand, given the intense public frenzy over the case and the daily headlines in the press, it is probable that no testimony could have averted the jury from finding Frank guilty. At least today almost a century later as eyewitnesses provided links to the past by sharing memories expressed but long suppressed, we draw closer to fulfilling Frank’s prediction that he would be vindicated and his innocence established.
The statement by Mann prompted the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith to apply for a pardon for Frank. After considering the application for a year, the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles denied the request. A second application for a pardon, not to absolve Frank of the murder of Mary Phagan but rather for the state of Georgia to admit its responsibility for Frank’s lynching based on the state’s failure to protect him, was approved in 1986. From a distance of more than a score of years, it is again impossible to determine if Fuss’s collaborating statement would have made any difference in the granting of the earlier application for a posthumous pardon for Frank.¹⁵

NOTES

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² Scholarly study of the Frank case began with the Columbia University dissertation (1966) by Leonard Dinnerstein, revised and published as The Leo Frank Case (New York, 1966) and revised edition (Athens, GA, 2008). Oney’s And the Dead Shall Rise adds substantial new material and is now the standard account of the case. See also Harry Golden, A Little Girl is Dead (New York, 1965).


⁴ Julia Fuss Bell obituary, Atlanta Constitution, February 22, 1973. Fuss married John Boyd Bell, Sr. She was the mother-in-law of Major Clark’s sister, Margaret Clark Bell, Margaret having married John Boyd Bell, Jr.

⁵ Interview with Corbett W. Clark conducted by author, January 25, 2009, with both video tape and transcript in the unprocessed manuscript collection, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center. When asked whether he was familiar with the name
Alonzo Mann, Major Clark responded, “No, I’m not familiar with that name.” Clark’s answer indicates that he was not just reading Mann’s story into his remembrance of Fuss’s remarks.

6 Leonard Dinnerstein, “The Fate of Leo Frank,” *American Heritage*, October 1996, 106; Stephen Goldfarb, “Leo Max Frank (1884–1915),” in *Encyclopedia of American Jewish History*, ed. Stephen H. Norwood and Eunice G. Pollack, 1 (Santa Barbara, CA, 2008), 179. Subsequently, Mann made a sworn, videotaped statement while he was attached to a lie-detector, which confirmed his earlier statement to the press. For apparently the complete text of this sworn statement, see Mary Phagan [Kean], *The Murder of Little Mary Phagan* (Far Hills, NJ, 1987), 247–257.


8 Among the main contentions of the prosecution was that Frank was notorious for approaching the young women and girls who worked for him for sexual favors and that he murdered Mary Phagan when she rebuffed his advances. The trial record shows that some female factory workers agreed; many more, like Julia Fuss, judged Frank’s behavior toward his female employees as above reproach. Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, 295–297.


10 *Atlanta Constitution*, August 16, 1913. The question here is whether the red spots on the second floor where Frank’s office was located were Mary Phagan’s blood or paint. Conley testified that Frank told him that when he tried to advance on Phagan, she backed off and hit her head against a piece of machinery while attempting to escape.

11 Hattie Hall (not to be confused with the factory worker Corinthia Hall) testified that she was in the office until almost noon. She further testified that Frank requested that she remain “all afternoon and help him, that he was busy.” As Oney comments “Neither of these actions was consistent with the thinking of a man planning a midday tryst.” Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, 279.

12 Lawson, *American State Trials*, v. 10, 214. Apparently, Mann’s testimony generated so little interest that there is no account of it in any Atlanta newspaper. This is unsurprising since the defense called over 150 witnesses. Most, like Mann, were character witnesses. Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, 297. C. Brutus Dalton had testified earlier in the trial that he knew Frank and that he and Frank often consorted with women in the pencil factory on Saturdays. After the trial and sentencing of Frank to the death penalty, Dalton retracted this testimony. Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, 258–259, 389–390.


14 Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, 645.

15 Ibid., 645, 648–49
Note from the Primary Sources Section Editor . . .

As an archivist for the last thirty years, I have had the opportunity to uncover unique primary sources that were once hidden away in attics, basements, garages, and cellars. Researchers are regularly discovering documents in either newly accessioned collections or in those that have been gathering dust in repository stacks that add a different perspective to a point in history or that support or reject established historical arguments. Primary Sources, a new, annual section of Southern Jewish History, will invite historians of southern Jewish history and archivists to present, interpret, and comment on some of their research discoveries. It will also showcase some of the materials available in a variety of archives. Please contact me if you are interested in contributing.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Grassroots Reactions to Kishinev Pogrom in Fort Worth and Atlanta

by

Hollace Ava Weiner and Sandra Berman*

Letter to Governor of State of Texas, May 29, 1903
Handbill for Mass Meeting, Fort Worth, June 4, 1903
Address for Kishineff Relief Fund, Atlanta, June 4, 1903

Condemnation of the April 1903 Kishinev pogrom, in which forty-nine Russian Jews were butchered and 1,500 Jewish homes and businesses ransacked, was swift and widespread across the United States.¹ Front-page headlines decried the atrocities. Public protest meetings were staged in fifty cities.² A B’nai B’rith petition rebuking the czar and signed by 12,544 Americans was cabled to Moscow.³ These collective figures, however, tend to leave listeners unfazed, particularly a century later when such terms as “ethnic cleansing,” “genocide,” and “holocaust” have become commonplace.

The outrage the Easter pogrom of 1903 provoked in the United States comes into sharper, more poignant focus through examination of primary source materials preserved in two disparate southern repositories: the Texas State Library & Archives Commission in Austin and the Ida Pearle

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and Joseph Cuba Community Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta.

The Texas archive preserves a handbill advertising a “MASS MEETING” in Fort Worth, a western cow town that in 1903 was home to a struggling immigrant shul. The circular, set in eight different typefaces and splashed with three exclamation points, is found in the papers of Governor Samuel W. T. Lanham. Printed on low-quality newsprint, the handbill was attached to a typewritten letter from Congregation Ahavath Sholom requesting that “his Excellency” the governor appear at Fort Worth’s Kishinev protest alongside a host of local elected officials and entertainers.4

The Atlanta document, far more scholarly and sophisticated, is a seven-page reprint of a thousand-word speech delivered by a fifth-generation American Jew, the son of one of Atlanta’s leading families.5 Printed on high-quality paper with a thick cover of card-stock, the booklet was published for posterity. It is accompanied in the Breman Museum archives with a clipping from the Atlanta Constitution of June 14, 1903, that includes a photo of the twenty-eight-year-old orator and praises his address as “one of the best speeches . . . heard in Atlanta regarding the massacre.”6

Taken together, these documents convey the emotional pitch and grassroots concern of Jewish Americans, whether they were foreign born or citizens with roots extending to the Revolutionary War. Both sets of documents serve as appeals to non-Jews and stress common concerns for human decency and shared mistrust of Russia. Both speak to a brand of patriotism that perceives Jews as forebears of American ideals.

Taken separately, however, the Atlanta monograph and the Texas circular tell different stories. In small-town Fort Worth, Orthodox Jews may not have assimilated, yet they easily interfaced with the civic and business community. In Atlanta, because of its size and location in the Deep South, there were more fissures in the community. Atlanta’s Jewish organizers remained cognizant of these divisions at every step.
Background and Implications

The riots in Kishinev, the provincial capital of Bessarabia, erupted on Easter Sunday, April 19, 1903. Provoked by rumors and sermons alleging that Jews had killed Christian children to obtain blood for Passover rituals, mobs of churchgoers, ruffians, common criminals, and peasants from outlying villages attacked the city’s Jewish quarter. They maimed men, women, and even babies while ransacking businesses and residences. Police and soldiers garrisoned in the provincial capital waited three days to intercede, giving credence to accusations that the attacks were “abetted by the ruling authorities.”

Although accounts of the Kishinev massacre were horrific and bloody, the pogrom was part of a pattern of continuing violence that stretched from the 1880s to the Bolshevik Revolution. Such pogroms became the catalyst for the mass emigration of eastern European Jews from Russian lands. In the United States, the Kishinev massacre evoked human rights concerns as well as anxiety about how to assimilate a new tide of several hundred thousand refugees. Ripples from Kishinev extended to the international, national, and local levels.

The Handbill: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

What could be more ephemeral than a handbill? Today’s promotion becomes tomorrow’s litter. Distributed on street corners and left on countertops, a handbill evokes immediacy. The size of print and varied fonts telegraph urgency and import. Punctuation, as in the overuse of exclamation points and capital letters, likewise conveys emotion and relative significance.

The Fort Worth handbill promoting a June 4 “MASS MEETING! to protest the KISHINEFF BARBARITIES!” measures only eight-inches by five-inches, a piece of paper easy enough to grasp in one hand and bold enough to convey alarm. The circular makes assumptions since it does not include the year or street address of the rally, much less the city
where the protest is to take place. It fails to mention the word “Jew.” The flyer assumes that the average person on the street had read the front-page headlines, which for five weeks had described the atrocities, the international reaction, and first-person accounts of witnesses who reached the West.

The turn of the century was an era of banner headlines and competing city newspapers. Radio was not yet in wide use. The telegraph was the main means of trans-Atlantic communication. For news updates, the public depended on multiple editions of newspapers published throughout the day.

On April 23, 1903, the Fort Worth Telegram’s afternoon edition reported in a page one headline, “Massacre of Jews. A Story of a Race War from Russia.” Three days later, the front page screamed, “Horrible Atrocities on Peacable [sic] Jews.” More grim details emerged May 10, again on page one: “Story of Hebrew Massacre at Kishineff.” Shocking details did not let up. “Terrible Scenes in Desolate Kishineff” were described in the afternoon paper of June 7, 1903, with “Anti-Semitic Feeling . . . Still Running High.”

That the brutal news from Bessarabia commanded front-page headlines in Fort Worth, a city with four-hundred Jews among its thirty thousand inhabitants, is an indication of the impact the Kishinev atrocities had on the American consciousness. Yet it also reflected the images and disproportionate influence of the Jewish community. Fort Worth, located in north central Texas, had few functioning Jewish institutions in 1903. These included a Hebrew cemetery that dated to 1879; an immigrant shul, Ahavath Sholom, chartered in 1892; a Zionist society organized in 1899; a Hebrew Relief Society formed in 1900; and a B’nai B’rith lodge and a section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), both dating to 1901. A Reform congregation, chartered in 1902 with forty-three members, had become dormant within six months of its founding.

It fell to Ahavath Sholom, an eleven-year-old immigrant congregation with a one-story wood-frame building and an
$84 balance, to organize a response. Jolted to action, the shul’s officers and trustees met May 10, 1903, at their regular bimonthly board meeting and discussed the “misfortune that happened to the Jews of Kishineff Russia.” The board collectively donated $62 for the national Kishineff Relief Fund in New York and voted to organize a “mass meeting” of the Jewish community on May 24 at the shul. That “mass meeting” raised $234.25 and prompted additional action. Those attending “moved to publicize the names of donors in local papers” and to organize a larger, public “protest meeting against the Russian government.”

At the congregation’s next board meeting, on May 31, a two-man committee announced that the venue for the public rally would be city hall. The current mayor, a former mayor, and a congressman would speak; a Methodist minister would give the invocation; and the president of the Fort Worth Board of Trade would preside. In previous years, the mayor had attended Ahavath Sholom’s Purim Ball, an indication of cordial relations between local elected officials and congregational leaders. Now, in the Jewish community’s time of distress, city officials were ready to assist their cause.

By then the handbill, preserved in the archives, which advertised the mass meeting of Thursday, June 4, was circulating throughout the town. Printed by the Press of Humphreys & Carpenter, the flyer advises readers to “watch Daily Papers for Program” details. The circular names the elected politicians heading the program as well as the entertainers, chiefly vocalist Maud Peters Ducker, the most sought-after local soprano for funerals, veterans’ reunions, and civic events. The only Jew named on the flyer is pianist Ida Goldstick, twenty-two, whose parents, Mike and Sarah Goldstick, had emigrated from Russia in the early 1880s and were Ahavath Sholom congregants.

During the final week leading to the rally, plans progressed efficiently. The daily paper published an article listing 136 donors to the Kishineff Relief Fund. Among those, eighty-two were eastern European immigrants who had
arrived in Fort Worth in the past eighteen years; sixteen were Reform or unaffiliated Jews, and thirty-eight were non-Jews. The latter contributions included $10 from the Texas Brewery Company, $5 from American National Bank, $2 from Southwest Oil, $2 from J. C. Harrison at State National Bank, $1 from former mayor and newspaper publisher B. B. Paddock, and $1 from Ben E. Keith, the leading fresh produce wholesaler. The article notes that a letter had been mailed to the governor on May 29 inviting him to participate in the rally.

The 166-word missive to the governor is typed on thin, blue-lined letterhead stationery that bears Congregation Ahavath Sholom’s name positioned above a Corinthian-column capital. The congregation was apparently poor, and the trustees wrote few official letters, since the stationery was printed in the previous century. The date line bears the imprint: “Fort Worth, Texas _____ 189_,” leaving a blank spot for insertion of the exact year. A slight brown stain from adhesive across the top edge of each page is evidence that the paper had been torn from a note pad.

The text of the letter is composed with correct diction and spelling. However, the appellation “his Excellency,” repeated in the salutation and the body, shows the trustees’ European antecedents and deference for authority. The letter relates how the “horrors of the persecution of the Jews” have “shocked the civilized world.” It reviews the nationwide protests “against the barbarities” of the Russians “toward the Jewish race”—a common if ambivalent catchphrase in the early years of the century for categorizing Jews, who were perceived as a people, a religious denomination, and not altogether Caucasian. The letter from the congregation goes on to ask that “your excellency . . . raise your voice with us in condemnation and protest against the atrocities of the Russians.” It assures the governor that his “presence will largely aid the cause of humanity and civilization.” The letter is signed by the committee, which consisted of L. G. Gilbert, forty, a Polish-born, department store owner who immigrat-
ed to the U.S. in 1888, and Ben Levenson, forty, a clothing-
store proprietor who came to the U.S. from Russia in 1887.18

Governor Lanham, a five-term congressman and the last
Confederate veteran to occupy the governor’s mansion in
Austin, had a record of representing cattlemen and pursuing
citizen claims alleging Indian depredations. He declined the
invitation with a formal written response to be read aloud at
the rally by the mayor.

Three hundred people attended the Kishinev protest
meeting of June 4, 1903, which was pronounced a success. An
additional $69.85 was raised. One of the vocalists sang an en-
core of “Dixie.” By acclamation those present endorsed a
resolution forwarded to the Independent Order of B’nai
B’rith that condemned “the inhuman . . . atrocious . . . uncivi-
lized and un-Christian . . . cruelties perpetrated upon . . .
Jewish subjects of the [Russian] empire.”19

Atlanta: A Speech Worth Repeating

Turn-of-the-century Atlanta ranked as the nation’s for-
ty-third largest city, touted as a gateway for growth and
commerce.20 Among its ninety thousand residents lived two
thousand Jews who supported three synagogues and a net-
work of Jewish institutions that ran the gamut from sewing
societies and literary clubs to the Gate City B’nai B’rith lodge,
established in 1870, and a Hebrew Orphans’ Home organized
in 1889. The city’s Reform congregation, The Hebrew Be-
nevolent Congregation (universally called The Temple) dated
to 1867. Its American-born rabbi, David Marx, came to Atlan-
ta in 1895 from his first pulpit in Birmingham. Like other
Reform rabbis of the era, he served as a veritable ambassador
to the gentile community.21 Eastern European immigrants,
who began arriving in significant numbers after 1881, started
an Orthodox congregation, Ahavath Achim, in 1887. A splin-
ter group launched a second shul, Congregation Shearith
Israel, in 1902. In Atlanta, unlike Fort Worth, widespread dis-
tinctions were drawn between the acculturated Jewish
families that had resided in Atlanta for several generations
and more recent arrivals, with their Yiddish accents, religious garb, and need for social services. There were “two layers of Jewish life in Atlanta,” observes writer Larry Tye.\textsuperscript{22} News of the Kishinev pogrom brought the two layers into closer contact.

Like the rest of the nation, Atlanta learned of the Kishinev pogrom through newspaper headlines. Both the \textit{Atlanta Journal} and the \textit{Atlanta Constitution} carried wire-service accounts datelined St. Petersburg. Day after day, the news columns detailed the extent of the government-sanctioned horrors against the Bessarabian Jews and the mounting movement in the United States to rebuke the Russian czar and raise money to assist the victims. Particularly haunting was a front page article in the \textit{Constitution} describing the murder of an Atlanta man’s aunt and uncle in the pogrom.\textsuperscript{23}

Amid rising distress, Ahavath Achim’s Lithuanian-born rabbi, Berachya Mayerowitz, launched a local Kishineff Relief Fund.\textsuperscript{24} The rabbi reached out to leaders of The Temple to coordinate solicitations. A Central Emigration Committee, headed by Leon Eplan, a founder and past president of Ahavath Achim, took charge of the fundraising as well as plans to resettle Russian immigrants in Atlanta. The committee’s executive board was comprised of four leaders from the Orthodox Ahavath Achim: Rabbi Mayerowitz, Leon Eplan, and two other past presidents, Milton M. Hirsch and Dr. Benjamin Wildauer. Serving as “advisory” members were three representatives from The Temple—Rabbi David Marx, Henry Alexander, and Aaron Haas, an elder statesman who had served as Atlanta’s deputy mayor in 1875—and two delegates from Ahavath Achim—Morris Lichtenstein and Joel Dorfan. All were affluent and prominent in civic and Jewish affairs.\textsuperscript{25}

The Bijou, one of Atlanta’s two finest vaudeville stages, offered its premises, rent free, for a Kishinev benefit June 4, 1903. Leon Eplan, with input from local musicians, took charge of the program and the logistics.
Eplan, born in Odessa in 1865, had settled in Atlanta in 1882 and had risen from a peddler with a horse and cart into a well-to-do merchant and effective grassroots organizer. He was among the founders of the city’s Jewish Progressive Club, the Morris Plan Bank, which extended low-interest loans to immigrants, and the Jewish Educational Alliance. He corresponded with relatives in Russia who were living in fear, and he passed along one of their letters to the Atlanta Constitution. Eplan understood both the social unrest in Russia and the social currents of Atlanta. Under his direction, the program at the Bijou would stress unity, humanity, and cultural harmony, with classical music selections led by Jewish violinist David Silverman in concert with well known sopranos, tenors, and baritones from the Jewish and non-Jewish community.

Gauging the pulse and pocketbooks of his potential audience at the Bijou, Eplan established a three-tier ticket-pricing system that encouraged attendance from a cross section of people. General admission tickets were priced at fifty cents, reserved seating at seventy-five cents. Big money would come from auctioning off the Bijou’s forty-eight boxes, which were “positively to be sold to the highest bidder” and expected to “bring a fancy price.” A public auction, conducted in the theater lobby two days before the benefit, allowed class-conscious Reform Jews to demonstrate their philanthropy and avoid sitting with the riffraff.

Tickets went on sale at multiple locations, among them the Baptist Publication Society, Harry Silverman’s cigar store at Five Points, Miller’s book store; Goodrum’s cigar stands, Phillips & Crew piano and organ store, Elkin & Watson Drug Company, Brannen & Anthony’s drug store, Oppenheim’s saloons (there were three), and “all hotels.” Ticket receipts totaled $500.

The night of the benefit, despite inclement weather, the Bijou Theater was packed. Keynote speaker Henry (Harry) Aaron Alexander opened the program and set the tone. Alexander was a handsome young Jewish attorney with deep
roots in Atlanta’s civic affairs and Reform Jewish community. A fifth-generation American and a third-generation Atlantan, Alexander had a pedigree. His great-great grandfather, British-born Abraham Alexander, Sr., was an officer in the American Revolutionary Army and was appointed U.S. Auditor for the Custom House in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1848 his grandson, Aaron, moved his family to Atlanta. They were the city’s first American-born Jewish residents. Aaron Alexander established a successful hardware business and helped found the Atlanta Mining & Rolling Mill in 1866. His son, Julius, served in the Confederacy and married Rebecca Ella Solomons, who gave birth to Henry Alexander on October 10, 1874. Henry attended the University of Georgia and the University of Virginia, receiving a law degree there in 1895. That year he became chief clerk of the law department for the Cotton States and International Exposition, held at Atlanta’s Piedmont Park. This prestigious position helped launch his legal career.32

Henry Alexander’s opening address at the Bijou riveted the audience. In less than ten minutes, he delivered a history lesson that linked the ancient origins of the “Hebrew people” to the aspirations of America’s founding fathers.33 Entwining religious vocabulary with democratic traditions, he referred to the “mission” of the “tribe of shepherds” from ancient Canaan, the “martyrdom” they had suffered, and the “Hebraic ideals” of “justice and brotherhood” that, from their genesis in the desert, had become the foundation blocks of American democracy. Solemnly, he recalled the “stain of crimson” inflicted upon Jews persecuted by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, and most recently the czars. With reverence, he mentioned other persecuted religious groups such as the Pilgrims and the Huguenots who had found safety and purpose in colonial America. As if speaking to a jury, he equated responsible behavior with American ideals, which in this instance included denouncing persecution abroad. Undoubtedly, Alexander had heard similar rhetoric, to good effect, from his own rabbi.34
Mindful of the elephant in the room, Alexander confronted growing prejudices among Americans toward eastern European Jews:

I grant you that their garb may be outlandish, their speech unintelligible, and their ways and manners wholly foreign to this country; but do not forget that through the veins of the humblest Jew who lands at the port of New York, there flows the unsullied blood of the priests and the prophets, and, though his bearing be ungainly and his presence uncouth, his fundamental conceptions are identical with your own, and his soul is radiant with the very ideals of justice and of brotherhood that lie at the basis of your government.35

With those specifics out in the open, Alexander moved toward his conclusion. Persecuted Russian Jews, victims of czarist pogroms, were “entitled” to American citizenship because the spiritual origins of Judaism were in consonance with American ideals. Alexander departed the stage to thunderous applause. The rest of the entertainment was “heartily received.” The audience enjoyed encore after encore.36

The talk of the town the next few days, however, was Alexander’s eloquent speech. The *Atlanta Constitution* reprinted the address ten days later on page five beneath the two-column headline, “AN ELOQUENT PLEA MADE FOR THE JEWS.” So many compliments poured in that Alexander was persuaded to give the text to Atlanta’s Franklin Printing and Publishing Company for wider distribution. The speech reprint, which measures ten-inches-by six-and-a-half inches, was among the papers that the Alexander family subsequently donated to the Breman Museum.

**Conclusions**

Despite the passage of more than a century, the Alexander monograph and the Texas handbill and letter remain fresh and poignant, tangible reminders of the terror and alarm that the world’s first, widely publicized acts of ethnic cleansing evoked in the United States. They also illustrate how several factors influence diverse degrees of peoplehood
or ethnic identity, and general community support. They demonstrate the development of an ecumenical language that facilitates the interaction of Christians and Jews at civic gatherings by equating Judaism and Americanism.

Long-term impacts in each city were vastly different. In Fort Worth, the public protest served as an exercise in community building. It strengthened ties within and beyond the Jewish community. The two-year-old B’nai B’rith fraternal lodge comprised of a cross section of Jewish men volunteered to bring refugees to Fort Worth through the Industrial Removal Office (IRO), a New York agency that relocated eastern European Jews to inland cities. Within two weeks of the protest rally, Fort Worth welcomed an immigrant family with four sickly children. The refugees’ condition was so wretched that Orthodox women formed a Ladies Hebrew Relief Society, the forerunner of the Ladies Auxiliary to Ahavath Sholom, which still serves the congregation. Fort Worth eventually received seventy-two immigrant families through the IRO.

The venue of the 1903 protest—City Hall—and the lineup of elected politicians on the dais demonstrate the degree to which Fort Worth’s Yiddish-accented businessmen had integrated into the economic and civic mainstream of their small frontier town. The decision to invite only non-Jewish leaders to speak reveals a degree of self-consciousness among the organizers, perhaps because of their foreign accents. On the other hand, it may indicate what savvy organizers and advertisers these merchants were. They knew how to package a program.

The organizers could have invited American-born Jews within their midst to speak, as Leon Eplan did in Atlanta by featuring Henry Alexander as keynoter. But few of Fort Worth’s American-born Jews, including a Cincinnati-educated attorney, had participated in the planning process although several donated money to the cause. The meager participation by acculturated Jews demonstrates their reluctance to wear their Judaism in public.
Assisting the IRO with Kishinev-era refugees prepared Fort Worth for the next wave of eastern European immigrants, some 263 refugees who resettled in the city between 1907 and 1913 through the Galveston Movement. By that time, Fort Worth’s Reform congregation, Beth-El, had reorganized, and its members actively participated on refugee-resettlement committees. Reform women in the local section of the NCJW started an Americanization school that convened at night at the county courthouse, another instance of bicultural cooperation at the small-town level.

In Atlanta, a dynamic urban center, the legacy of the Bijou benefit is more complex. Alexander’s speech addresses seeds of discomfort over mass immigration. It is one thing to proclaim “brotherhood” in the abstract, as the Atlanta Journal did in an editorial May 23, 1903, decrying the Kishinev pogrom. It was harder to espouse brotherhood six weeks later as foreign-speaking, strangely-garbed, “undesirable . . . and . . . impoverished . . . aliens” began congregating on Decatur Street. On July 6, 1903, the Journal ran an editorial under the heading, “The Immigration Peril” that impugned the character of refugees who were other than Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, or Scandinavian. “Europe sends us pushcart men, organ grinders and street peddlers, men who go to fill up the slums of our great cities,” asserted the editorial, which advocated restrictive immigration laws.

The reprint of Henry Alexander’s speech and the clipping from the Constitution illustrate a moment in time. The horrors of the pogrom hit close enough to home that residents from all social classes embraced the metaphor of Atlanta as the Gate City to the New South, an urban oasis with economic opportunities and diverse houses of worship. Leon Eplan and his committee seized the moment to capitalize on the city’s idealized image of itself. Featuring the patrician Henry Alexander as keynote speaker at the Bijou represented a masterful power play. Alexander did not represent the consensus among conservative Atlantans, much less the views of the Jewish establishment. Yet his family’s
lineage, wealth, and prestige coupled with his eloquence swayed Atlantans to contribute money and, at least initially, welcome and assist a new stream of Jewish immigrants.

Henry Alexander’s speech was remarkable considering the underlying fears of the community of which he was a part. While Atlanta’s German Jews actively contributed to Kishinev relief efforts, concern for the new refugees did not significantly alter the two-layer hierarchy that distanced one group of Atlanta Jews from the other. German Jews, although concerned with the welfare of their Russian brethren, remained segregated from this group by differences in religious observance and economic circumstances.

Three years later, when the Atlanta race riot of 1906 erupted, Russian immigrants made comparisons to Kishinev. As in Kishinev, the Atlanta rioting continued several days, from September 22 to 25, until police authorities stepped in to quell the disturbance. The mayhem left twenty-seven people dead. Exaggerated reports of black men attacking white women preceded the violence. In the riot’s aftermath, fears arose that exacerbated racial tension. Out-of-town newspapers in Richmond, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C., made unflattering comparisons to the Russian pogrom. In general, Jews did not speak out against the Atlanta race riot, just as they tended not to speak out against the lynching of African Americans, which was routinely reported in the press. Atlanta’s Jews were more concerned with their own wellbeing and safety.

Reports of repeated violence breed indifference. The archival documents pertaining to Kishinev expose a time when such reports were rare. Although Henry Alexander’s published speech and the Fort Worth handbill are products of different scenarios, they retain the urgency, alarm, and emotion that explain why, a century ago, a pogrom in far off Bessarabia shook Americans down to the grassroots.
Letter to Governor of State of Texas, May 29, 1903

Congregation Ahavath Sholom to Governor Lanham, May 29, 1903.
(Courtesy of the Texas State Library & Archives Commission.)
To: his Excellency, Hon. S. W. T. Lanham,
Governor of the State of Texas,
Austin, Texas,

Dear Sir—

The horrors of the persecution of the Jews at Kishineff has shocked the civilized world, and especially the citizens of our great country, and in every city meetings are being held protesting against the barbarities of the Russians toward the Jewish race. The citizens of Fort Worth have likewise ordered a mass meeting to be held on Thursday evening, June 4th 1903 at 8 o’clock P.M. at the City Hall, to which your excellency is cordially invited to raise your voice with us in condemnation and protest against the atrocities of the Russians. Kindly notify us if you can honor us with your presence on this occasion. Address your reply to our city Mayor, Hon. Thomas J. Powell. At this meeting there will be a subscription fund raised for the benefit of the sufferers, and your presence will largely aid the cause of humanity and civilization.

Very respectfully yours,

Committee.
Handbill for Mass Meeting, Fort Worth, June 4, 1903

Broadside from the Records of Governor S. W. T. Lanham, May 1903.
(Courtesy of the Texas State Library & Archives Commission.)
Address for Kishineff Relief Fund, Atlanta, June 4, 1903

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS
OF
HENRY A. ALEXANDER
OF THE BAR OF ATLANTA, GA
AT
BENEFIT CONCERT
GIVEN FOR
KISHINEFF RELIEF FUND
ON JUNE 4, 1903

More than four thousand years ago, amid the hills of Canaan, there came into existence amongst an obscure tribe of shepherds, a new religion that based itself upon the ideals of the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. Endowed with a transcendant spirituality, this handful of desert wanderers, with an audacity
that sprang from absolute conviction in the final triumph of their faith, conceived it as their mission to spread and carry these ideals to all the peoples of the earth, and, looking upon the sea, and from the sea to the heavens, took the sands of the seashore and the stars of the heavens as the similitudes of their greatness. This people was the Hebrew people, and this faith was the Hebrew faith.

The course of this people through history is marked by a deep and terrible stain of crimson. All races have had their struggles and their martyrdoms, but confined to limited times and places. The martyrdom of the Hebrew has covered all places and all times and his empire of pain, as wide as that of the Caesars or of Charlemagne, has covered Europe and had its seat in all the capitals of its countries. Of the great kingdoms of the earth, there is not one from the Pharaohs to the czars that has not shed his blood. There is not one that, looking upon the strange banner which he bore, and finding incomprehensible the truths emblazoned thereon, has not set upon him in fury and sought his utter extermination. Upon the Jewish soul to-day is carried the scars of wounds made by almost every race under the sun. Here fell the lash of the Egyptians, here the scourge of the Assyrian, and here entered the sword of Rome. Here burnt the fires of the Spaniard, and here the satire and mocking laughter of the Greek.

To all this, upheld by his great purpose and immutable conviction, he has opposed a calm and untroubled front, and even looked in pity upon his torturers. By his astonishing survival from the perils that beset him, he has demonstrated to mankind that the soul dedicated to the cause of imperishable truth becomes itself imperishable. And although since he left his own Judea, the earth has been to the greater portion of his race as a great dungeon, he has looked through the bars of this prison and lifting his eyes to the stars, has heard them sing again the songs of Amos and of Job, and proclaim anew the imperial destiny of Israel.

More than a century ago, amidst the storms of revolution, there was established in North America a new government that laid its broad foundations in the principles of religious liberty, and in the Hebraic ideals of justice and of brotherhood.
Encouraged by these principles, there flocked to its shores the victims of religious persecution from all parts of the world. Of such, indeed, was the greater part of its earliest population. Not the dregs and scum of Europe were they, but of that noble type which, holding its convictions of truth dearer than all else, is gladly willing to surrender everything, even life itself, in its sacred cause. Not aristocrats were they by the creation of kings, but invested only with that natural nobility that springs from the spirit of martyrdom. The judgment of the historian and statesman has long since recognized that the spirit of these men transmitted to their latest descendants has been the mightiest influence that has worked for the greatness of America. It is to the highest interest of America that to men like these and moved by this cause her doors should stand forever open.

Within the past month has come to our ears the appalling news of the latest tragedy in the martyrdom of the Hebrews, and by reason of that tragedy America is to-day face to face with another immigration that owes its origin to the same cause of religious persecution. It is appropriate to say on this occasion that, of all those who, for this reason, have sought refuge there, there are none, whether the Salzburgers of Georgia, the Huguenots of South Carolina, the Catholics of Maryland, or the Pilgrims of Massachusetts, that have a better title than the Jewish emigrant to the privileges of American citizenship, and none, who, by their own contributions to civilization can show a better right to live beneath the flag of the Great Republic.

I grant you that their garb may be outlandish, their speech unintelligible, and their ways and manners wholly foreign to this country; but do not forget that through the veins of the humblest Jew who lands at the port of New York, there flows the unsullied blood of the priests and prophets, and, though his bearing be ungainly and his presence uncouth, his fundamental conceptions are identical with your own, and his soul is radiant with the very ideals of justice and of brotherhood that lie at the basis of your government.

Is it not true that by his own sufferings in behalf of these ideals, borne throughout the centuries and through all the hells of
persecution, he has fairly earned the right to realize and enjoy them here? But more than this. Here, where we honor fidelity and courage of conviction, what shall we say of him, who for so long and against such odds, has massed his little band about the standard of his fathers, and flung defiance in the face of the ages? Is he not, in the fullest measure, entitled to American citizenship? That he is so entitled, this nation has declared and its open ports proclaim its welcome.

Never since history begun has liberty administered to despotism a more terrible and stinging rebuke than the spectacle of the American republic thus welcoming those whom Russian tyranny has found unworthy of its citizenship. This is the mighty protest which the American people make against the crimes of Kishineff. This is the protest that outweighs all the Secretary of State could say. This is the spectacle that will never fade from the hearts and consciences of men. If the day shall come, as many believe it will come, when the armies of America and England, beneath the shining banner of liberty, and the legions of the czar beneath the black eagles of despotism, shall meet in battle to contest the sovereignty of the world, it is the blood of Kishineff that, crying from the ground, will turn the tide for the soldiers of liberty.
NOTES

The catalyst for this article was a handbill that Fort Worth historian Jan Jones found in the papers of a Texas governor and copied for Hollace Ava Weiner. The authors express their thanks to Bryan E. Stone and Marni Davis for their thoughtful critiques, with additional thanks to Davis for her research assistance.

1 Paul R. Bartrop, Samuel Totten, and Steven L. Jacobs, *Dictionary of Genocide* 2 (Westport, CT, 2008), 246–247. The current accepted spelling of “Kishinev” is used throughout this article except where it appears as “Kishineff” or “Kishinef” in proper names for organizations, published titles, direct quotations, and descriptions of archival materials.


3 The Kishinev protest petition, authored by IOBB President Leo N. Levi (originally from Galveston, TX) in collaboration with attorney Simon Wolf, was cabled to Russia by Theodore Roosevelt’s administration where government officials declined to receive it or present it to Czar Nicholas II. Secretary of State John Hay placed it in the State Department Archives. The petition asks the czar to accord religious liberty to all subjects and reproaches the regime’s tyrannical practices against Jews. Jacob Rader Marcus, *U.S. Jewry, 1776–1985: The Germanic Period (Part 2)* (Detroit, 1992), 512–522; Adler, *Voice of America*, xxiv.

4 “Mass Meeting at City Hall—Thursday June 4—Kishineff Barbarities!” a broadside, Records of Governor S. W. T. Lanham, Correspondence, May 1903 [301–207], Texas State Library & Archives Commission; “Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Fort Worth, Texas to Governor S. W. T. Lanham, May 29, 1903, regarding persecution of Jews at Kishineff,” 1, 2, Governor S. W. T. Lanham, Correspondence, May 1903 [301–207].


7 Authorities may have targeted Jews to silence dissidents pushing for constitutional monarchy. Marcus, *U.S. Jewry*, 520, 523.

8 *Fort Worth Telegram*, April 23, 1903; April 26, 1903; May 10, 1903; June 7, 1903.


10 Congregation Ahavath Sholom minutes, May 10, 1903, translated from Yiddish by Esther Winesanker, minute books and translations on file at Fort Worth Jewish Archives of
the Jewish Federation of Fort Worth and Tarrant County at Ahavath Sholom (hereafter cited as FW Jewish Archives.)

11 Congregation Ahavath Sholom minutes, Special Meeting, May 24, 1903, FW Jewish Archives.

12 Ibid., May 31, 1903, Special Meeting, FW Jewish Archives.


14 Ida Goldstick’s brothers, Rufus and George, took the stage name LeMaire and became successful New York vaudeville actors and writers. Rufus LeMaire later became a Hollywood theatrical agent and casting director for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Jan Jones, Renegades, Showmen, & Angels: A Theatrical History of Fort Worth, 1873–2001 (Fort Worth, 2006), 155; Maud Peters Ducker was a charter member of several local music societies and recommended the name "Harmony Club" for the city’s early women’s music club. Fort Worth Press, January 27, 1933.

15 “Mass Meeting Next Thursday, Public Invited in Behalf of Kishineff Sufferers. Promises: Addresses will be Made—Governor Lanham Invited—List of Local Donors to the Relief Fund.” Fort Worth Telegram, May 31, 1903.

16 Description from John Anderson, preservation officer, Texas State Library & Archives, e-mail correspondence with Hollace Ava Weiner, May 1, 2009.


18 “Gilbert Family” folder and “Brachman Family” folder, Personalities/Family Histories box, FW Jewish Archives.

19 Liberal Donations to Kishineff Fund,” Fort Worth Telegram, June 5, 1903.


23 “Uncle and Aunt Among Victims; Atlanta Man’s Relatives Murdered in Russian Slaughter; N. Weltmann Hears of His Uncle and Aunt Falling in Massacre—Will send for Brother to Come to Him in This Country,” Atlanta Constitution, May 22, 1903.
25 “Uncle and Aunt among Victims.”
26 Eplan’s Russian relative sent him a clipping from The Odessa News about what provoked the Kishinev riots: “The Christian citizens . . . created disturbances directed against the Jews . . . (The) direct cause of the trouble is traced to a few unprincipled Christians who spread a rumor that the Jews have killed several Christian children for the sole purpose of obtaining blood for religious purposes.” “Big Benefit Tonight for Kishinef Jews,” Atlanta Constitution, June 4, 1903; Mss 12, Samuel Leon Eplan Family Papers, Breman Museum archives. On Eplan, Lichtenstein, and conflict between Jews of eastern European and German descent in the Atlanta Jewish community, see Mark K. Bauman, “Role Theory and History: Ethnic Brokerage in the Atlanta Jewish Community,” American Jewish History 73 (September 1983): 71–95.
27 The Bijou program included selections by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky; arias and duets from sopranos Mrs. T. H. Wingfield and Mrs. Jimmy Byrd Cooper, tenor J. W. Marshbank, and baritone Thomas F. Weaver. The accompanist was pianist S. R. Cooper. Mrs. Vance Hunter did several readings. “Benefit Concert Will Be Held Tonight; Atlanta Will Contribute Tonight to Help the Suffering Jews in Far Away Russia,” Atlanta Journal, June 4, 1903.
28 “Will Auction Seats for Kishinef Benefit; Sale will be Held in the Lobby of Bijou Theatre Tomorrow at Noon.” Atlanta Journal, evening edition, June 1, 1903, 7.
29 “To Seek Aid for Survivors; Final meeting of Central Emigration Committee Today,” Atlanta Constitution, May 25, 1903.
30 Ibid.; Phillips & Crew piano and organ was located at 37 Peachtree, Elkin & Watson Drugs at 29 Marietta Street, the Brannen & Anthony drugstore at 102 Whitehall, and Israel Oppenheim’s saloons at 33 N. Forsyth, 27 N. Pryor, and 7 E. Alabama. Oppenheim lived on Washington Street. Atlanta City Directory, 1903.
31 “Benefit Concert made $500 for The Jews; Sufferers from the Massacre in Russia are Aided by the People of Atlanta,” Atlanta Journal, evening edition, June 5, 1903.
32 Henry Alexander was elected to the Georgia General Assembly and served from 1909 to 1910. In 1914 he was asked to help in the appeals process for Leo M. Frank, a Jew convicted of murdering thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan, a worker in the factory where Frank was superintendent. During World War I Alexander served as a U.S. Army captain, and in 1921 he married Manya Zelmanova Klinitzkaya, the daughter of a Talmudic scholar from Russia. Such an intermarriage of a scion of an old, established American Jewish family with an eastern European was rare during this era. Alexander died in 1967. His life blended both layers of Atlanta’s Jewish society. Alexander Family Papers, Breman Museum archives.
34 Wilkes, “Rabbi Dr. David Marx and the Unity Club.”
35 “Introductory Address of Henry A. Alexander of the Bar of Atlanta, Ga. at Benefit Concert Given for Kishineff Relief Fund, on June 4, 1903,” 5–6.


38 “Statistics of Jewish Immigrants Who Arrived at the Port of Galveston, Texas, During the Years 1907–1913, Inclusive, Handled by ‘Jewish Immigrants’ Information Bureau’ of Galveston, Texas,” Henry Cohen Papers, Manuscript Collection 263, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.


40 David Yampolsky, a Russian Jew living in Atlanta, described the 1906 race riot as a “pogrom on the blacks.” Hertzberg, Strangers within the Gate City, 191.

41 “The race for governor between Hoke Smith and Clark Howell turned into an ugly campaign of racial hatred aimed at disenfranchising the African American voter. Reports of attacks on white women by black men that same summer were emphasized and exaggerated in the local press, and racial tensions were soon strained to the breaking point.” The Breman Museum, Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited, an exhibit, Race Relations-text panel, 2007; Leonard Dinnerstein, The Leo Frank Case (Athens, GA, 2008), 8.

42 The Richmond News Leader and the Washington Star likened the Atlanta riots to the slaughter of Jews in czarist Russia, while the St. Louis Dispatch editorialized, “With what grace can Americans offer words of scorn and loathing against Russia to the massacre of the Jews when such atrocities are possible in the capital of one the oldest American states?” The Atlanta Journal rejected the analogy, declaring, “The Negro race is the criminal race in the South. The Jews of Russia are a law abiding and inoffensive people.” Mark Bauerlein, Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906 (New York, 2001), 230.

43 The primary sources are presented here without correction to any errors in punctuation, spelling, or grammar that appear in the original.
Note from the Exhibit Review Editor . . .

I am delighted to help launch a new feature of Southern Jewish History. With this volume we begin a section on exhibit reviews. Our knowledge of southern history and heritage comes in many forms and is accessed by the public in many ways. One important means for learning about the past is through visits to museums and historic sites. When we can, we offer this regularly through our annual conference, and we take participants to area sites that help the past come alive. This new section on exhibits will provide analysis of what is currently on display in an area nearby or one you may be visiting. Some of these exhibits will travel and could be seen at a later date in another city. With these reviews, you will be able to learn more about the subjects that are of interest in the museum world, and the ways those subjects are addressed. It is our hope that these reviews will encourage our readers to access public history sites and to critically evaluate the history that is told and is yet untold. We begin this section with three reviews. From Maryland’s neighborhoods to Texas’s immigration policies through Galveston Island to the world of black colleges and Jewish refugees in the Deep South, these reviews illustrate the diversity and richness of Jewish experiences in the South.

We cannot review everything, but if you know of a major exhibit that warrants a review, please contact me. Or, if you would like to be a potential reviewer, I also would like to hear from you.

Phyllis Leffler
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Exhibit Review


It is well known that American intellectual life was profoundly transformed by the wave of refugee scholars, most of them Jewish, who fled fascism in the 1930s. Less well known is the role that America’s historically black colleges played in providing a desperately needed haven for some of these scholars. At least sixty refugee scholars taught at historically black schools between the 1930s and the 1960s. Most stayed only a few years, but a handful spent the balance of their careers there, mentoring generations of students, some of whom would go on to play leadership roles in the civil rights movement.

This fascinating story is compellingly told in the Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow exhibit. Mixing video recollections with letters, photographs, broadsheets, and a few emblematic items, such as a Ku Klux Klan robe, the exhibit emphasizes the similarities between the Nazi racial policies that drove the refugees to the U.S. and the Jim Crow system they found on arrival. At the same time, it presents the moving personal stories of the scholars, often through the recollections of their former students.

Few of the refugee scholars had had any real contact with or knowledge of black Americans prior to taking up their new posts, and many of their students, particularly at the smaller schools in the Deep South, had not had much contact with Jews. However much political sympathy the Jewish refugees and their African American students and colleagues may have felt for each other, the cultural gaps were huge. One can almost feel the discomfort in the old black and white photographs of these formal, middle European scholars in their woolen three piece suits, standing
stiffly among their colleagues in the stifling southern heat. Often traumatized by what they had experienced in Europe many refugees were initially reluctant to draw attention to themselves by identifying too conspicuously with the black cause.

Over time, however, those who stayed at the black colleges formed deep personal bonds with their students. These colleges placed a strong emphasis on teaching and mentoring which suited many of the refugee scholars perfectly. Further, while the black colleges were creations of segregation, they were never themselves segregated. Indeed as the late John Hope Franklin notes in the book that inspired this exhibit, they were “about the
only places in Jim Crow America where white Americans and African Americans could communicate on the basis of equality and mutual respect.”¹

In this setting, black and Jewish intellectuals soon began to have a profound influence on each other. This is seen in their work, perhaps most clearly in the paintings of Viktor Lowenfeld, who taught art at Virginia’s Hampton Institute from 1939 to 1946. We also see it in recollections of the students and colleagues of memorable teachers such as Ernst Manasse, who taught German, Latin, and philosophy at North Carolina University in Durham from 1939 to 1973, and Ernst Borinski, who taught sociology, German, and Russian at Tougaloo College in Mississippi from 1947 to 1983. Over time this identification with African Americans inevitably turned political. Thus we learn that years before the sit-ins, Manasse quietly stopped patronizing theaters, restaurants, and other public facilities that did not allow blacks and that Borinski was targeted by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Committee. We also see the court records of Lore May Rasmussen of Talladega College who was arrested for dining with a black friend in a black owned café and fined twenty-eight dollars for the crime of “Casual Indifference” to Alabama segregation law. (The café’s proprietor was fined fifty dollars after offering the defense that she had not realized Rasmussen was white).

This raises the one issue I would have liked to have seen explored further. While the exhibit deals with some tough history, it basically tells a “feel good” story, based largely on the affectionate recollections of former students. It says almost nothing about what contact, if any, the refugee scholars had with the American Jews in their communities. Of course, most southern Jews had made their accommodation, however uncomfortably, with Jim Crow. The analogy between Nazi and Jim Crow racism, so obvious and inescapable for the refugees and their African American colleagues was vehemently denied by many southern Jews into the 1960s and sometimes beyond. One is thus left wondering what they made of the refugees and what the refugees made of them. That quibble aside, however, Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow is a compelling exploration of a small but important chapter in intertwined histories of Jewish and African Americans.

Philip Kasinitz
City University of New York, Graduate Center, New York City


Between 1907 and 1914, about ten thousand eastern European Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States through Galveston, Texas, and were dispersed by rail to hundreds of communities throughout the Midwest and West. Managed from New York and supervised locally by Galveston’s Rabbi Henry Cohen, who met every boat at the dock and personally guided Jewish immigrants through the cumbersome arrival procedures, the Galveston Movement is a key event in Jewish immigration history. As this fine exhibit reveals, however, Jewish immigration was just one small piece of Galveston immigration history. For nearly a century, the island city served as a port of entry for thousands of
immigrants from throughout the world. While the Jewish portion of the exhibit figures prominently, it is about much more than Jews—and about much more than Galveston.

Forgotten Gateway is a large and well-funded presentation (support came from the National Endowment for the Humanities among other sources) that combines archival materials, photographs, physical objects, and interviews with immigrants’ descendants, reflecting several years of effort by a multidisciplinary team of researchers. Visitors to the Bullock Museum include families, tourists, and school groups, and the curator has made a great effort to appeal to a broad general audience. Information cards are concise and informative, many displays encourage hands-on involvement, and video screens loop well-produced short films featuring scholars and descendants offering background information. Wall-sized photographs and recorded background noises (seagulls screeching, customs officials giving orders) subtly set a mood. Period props are used especially well: one display opens a footlocker to reveal the contents carried by a typical immigrant, and video monitors are perched atop piles of luggage, mitigating the sleek anachronism of flat-screen televisions.

The exhibit is particularly good at explaining why immigrants would choose remote Galveston: a wealth of original documents attests to the promotional campaigns conducted by railroad companies, shipping lines, and Texas boosters. Another strength is the depiction of the immigrants’ perspective. One room devotes a kiosk to each of the questions they were required to answer upon arrival, revealing how fraught even the simplest queries could be: “What is your name?” (a label often in flux); “Are You Healthy?” (by whose standards?); “Are You Married?” (single women were suspect); “Are You an Anarchist?” (some were). The Galveston Movement gets special attention. Reproductions of dozens of letters Rabbi Cohen received from grateful immigrants fill a wall, and audio clips remind us that an Orthodox rabbi, Ya’akov Geller, was also at the docks to welcome immigrants seeking kosher meals and accommodations. And though no explanation is ventured, a fascinating set of original documents
reveals that Jewish immigrants were deemed unhealthy at the Galveston port at a much higher rate than were other groups.

While the Jewish immigrant experience is prominently featured, Forgotten Gateway emphasizes that Galveston’s immigrants were of every ethnicity and nationality. It notes rightly that many of the first “immigrants” to arrive at the port came in cargo ships from Africa, and it also gives due attention to Chinese railroad workers, Comanches displaced by immigrant colonies, Mexican migrants crossing the border, and recent arrivals from Africa and Asia. The point is that Texas immigration is multifaceted and continuing—but here the exhibit suffers its greatest weakness. Billed as a historical survey of immigration through a single port (Galveston, 1846–1924), many elements range far afield from this narrow focus in an attempt to link the past with present issues. A video at the entrance plays interviews with recent immigrants and shots of arriving airliners, images that jar someone expecting Galveston circa 1846. Throughout the displays, contemporary accounts by immigrants with no connection to Galveston are interspersed among the documents. These are suggestive, but they also draw the viewer out of the moment and imply comparisons across time, place, and culture that may not be valid. There is a very good historical narrative about Galveston buried within Forgotten Gateway, but in fact the exhibit delivers much more than its subtitle promises: it is about immigration to Texas in general, and about the continuing tug-of-war between immigration and nativism. A broader title might better have conveyed the scope of materials included.

The feature that strays furthest from Galveston is also the most innovative and indispensable to the exhibit. In the final room, a wall-sized timeline depicts American immigration history. Visitors write the names and nations of origin of the immigrants in their own families on sticky notes and post them on the appropriate panels on the timeline. The effect, as notes accrue, is fascinating. Historical trends—waves arriving from various points in the world, periods of restrictiveness or laxity in enforcement—can be plainly read in the quantity and content of the notes on each panel. On the opposite wall, visitors post full-
length narratives of their own immigration experiences. This marvelous (and clearly popular) interactive element has little to do with Galveston per se but has everything to do with why anyone should care about this subject. Forgotten Gateway lacks the strict focus that may satisfy historians, but reveals to a diverse general audience the many contours and complexities of American immigration history, and it invites viewers to remember their own immigrant backgrounds and how newcomers continue to shape American life.

Bryan Edward Stone
Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas


Voices of Lombard Street, the Jewish Museum of Maryland’s marvelous historical exhibit on Baltimore’s turn-of-the-century immigrant neighborhood, serves its subject in two important ways. It provides a snapshot of life in East Baltimore when it was the epicenter of the city’s Jewish life. In addition, it chronicles the history of East Baltimore and the dramatic changes in its landscape over the course of a century. If it had done only one of these things and done it well, this exhibit would be deserving of great praise; that it achieves both is an especially impressive feat.

The curators focus on the twentieth century, while also briefly situating the neighborhood within Baltimore’s longer history. Geographically situated on the dividing line between the North and the South, Baltimore developed features of both regions. It was an industrial and commercial center that had relied upon the southern plantation economy since the colonial period. The city
attracted thousands of free black laborers before the Civil War, even while enslaved blacks were widely employed by manufacturers, artisans, and families seeking domestic help. Baltimore was also one of the nation’s most active immigrant ports during the nineteenth century. Although most of Baltimore’s European newcomers were Catholics from Ireland and Germany, a small community of central European Jews had earlier put down stakes in the city. The exhibit gives them only a cursory mention; while German Jews did build several synagogues in the neighborhood—two of which, the Lloyd Street Synagogue (1845) and Chizuk Amuno (1876), have been renovated and currently bookend the Jewish Museum of Maryland complex—they never generated a dense residential enclave in the area.

Eastern European Jewish immigrants began to gravitate to East Baltimore at the end of the nineteenth century. They soon created such a visible presence that this immigrant and working class quarter previously known as “Oldtown” came to be called “Jewtown.” Most of Voices of Lombard Street revolves around this era of the neighborhood’s history, describing day-to-day life through photographs, maps, historic artifacts, and, occasionally, a cacophony of sound effects. Particular attention is paid to the quotidian: life-size recreations of an immigrant apartment’s living room, a tailor’s shop, storefronts along Lombard Street (the neighborhood’s commercial thoroughfare), and even a backyard privy show what this environment might have looked and felt like a hundred years ago.

Although the East Baltimore represented here was predominantly Jewish, the curators acknowledge the multitude of experiences that the neighborhood spawned. The “voices” of Voices of Lombard Street are decidedly plural. African Americans and Italian immigrants also lived in the neighborhood, as well as in their own residential enclaves nearby. All shopped at Lombard Street’s primarily Jewish-owned stores. Interviews with a diverse cross section of former denizens are quoted throughout the exhibit, and they suggest that ethnic and racial coexistence was not without its tensions. The exhibit also reveals occasional friction among the neighborhood’s Jews, especially
regarding morality and leisure. A census register from the early twentieth century indicating that some area brothels were owned and staffed by Jewish women, for example, is presented next to a newspaper report of a local rabbi’s campaign to shut these businesses down. (An essay in the exhibit’s catalogue gives a scholarly account of Baltimore’s Jewish Court of Arbitration and its efforts to settle legal differences between Jews outside of municipal channels.)

As was true for most other immigrant communities, the post-immigrant generation left in search of better housing and more space. Where most historical exhibits on urban Jewish life end at the mid-century exodus to the suburbs, Voices of Lombard Street stays with the neighborhood even after it had been designated a slum by the city and hundreds of its brick row houses were demolished and replaced by public housing. By 1970, more than 90 percent of area households were black, many of them poor. Although East Baltimore was increasingly marginalized and impoverished, Lombard Street’s commercial district remained constant for a while longer—not only as a shopping thoroughfare, but also as an enclave of Jewish entrepreneurship. This section of the exhibit, along with co-curator Deborah Weiner’s excellent catalogue essay on postwar Lombard Street, explains the neighborhood’s decline within the context of both local and national developments in urban planning and black-Jewish relations.

Today, the neighborhood is undergoing another flurry of urban renewal, in part because of its official designation as a historic district. The Jewish Museum of Maryland has certainly been a beneficiary of East Baltimore’s reinvigoration. With Voices of Lombard Street, the museum returns the favor in the best way it can—by documenting and exploring the neighborhood’s history with intelligence, creativity, and sympathy for a multitude of perspectives.

*Marni Davis*
Georgia State University, Atlanta
Glossary

Aliya ~ literally, going up; moving from the Diaspora to Israel; the act of going up to the bimah for an honor, such as reading from the Torah during religious services

Ashkenazi ~ A Jew associated with central and eastern Europe

Beth din ~ rabbinical court

Feinschmecker ~ variant: faynshmecker ~ literally, good taster; a person with refined, high class, exacting taste; a snob, overly picky, when used negatively; an aesthete or gourmet, when used positively

Hamentashen ~ triangular pastry, usually filled with prune or poppy seed, eaten during Purim

Hanukiyah ~ special candelabra, or menorah, designed with nine candle holders for Hanukkah candle lighting ceremony

Hanukkah ~ variants: Chanukah, Hanukah ~ Feast of Lights, eight-day holiday commemorating victory of the Maccabees over Syrian rulers, 167 BCE

Juden ~ German for Jews

Kashrut/kosher ~ Jewish laws governing food

Luftmensch (plural: luftmenschen) ~ literally, man who lives on air; a dreamer, without known or a significant source of income, unrealistically optimistic

Matzo ~ unleavened bread eaten primarily during Passover

Menorah ~ A candelabra with seven or nine lights that is used in Jewish observances
Mikvah ~ variant: Mikveh (plural: mikvaot) ~ ritual bath

Minhag (plural: minhagim) ~ form of Jewish ritual

Mishigas ~ variant: mishugas ~ foolish, crazy behavior

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

Mohel (plural: mohelim) ~ person who performs ritual circumcision

Momzer ~ devil, negative term for someone; literally, bastard

Parnossah ~ livelihood

Pogrom ~ organized violent attack, a massacre, against Jews

Sephardim ~ Jews and/or their descendants originating in the Mediterranean region, especially Spain and Portugal

Shokhet ~ variant: shochet ~ ritual slaughterer, kosher butcher

Shtetl (plural: shtetlach) ~ small town or village in eastern Europe associated with Jewish residence

Shul ~ congregation or synagogue

Tallit (plural: tallitot) variant: tallis (plural: tallesim) ~ prayer shawl

Talmud ~ collection of post-biblical ancient teachings justifying and explaining Jewish law; compilation of Mishna (code of Jewish religious and legal norms) and Gemara (discussions and explanations of Mishna)

Tzedekah ~ variant: Tzedaka ~ righteous giving; charity

Yichus ~ lineage; bloodline
Note on Authors

Archivist Sandra Berman is a native of Cleveland, Ohio, presently residing in Atlanta, Georgia. She earned a B.A. in history from Cleveland State University and an M.A. in history and archives from Case Western Reserve University. From 1974 to 1978, she worked as an archivist for the Western Reserve Historical Society during which time she established the Cleveland Jewish Archives. Berman did freelance archival work before being hired in 1984 by the Atlanta Jewish Federation to establish an archive for Atlanta’s Jewish community. In 1992 the archive was renamed the Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. It is the largest archive of its type in the Southeast and is accessed by researchers worldwide. Berman has curated numerous exhibitions at The Breman, including Hello Ima, Hello Abba: Celebrating Southern Jewish Camping Experiences; Zap! Pow! Bam! The Superhero: The Golden Age of Comic Books 1938-1950; and Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited. Sandra Berman also co-authored exhibition text and catalogues for all of the above exhibitions.

Dianne Ashton is professor of religion and director of the American Studies Program at Rowan University. She earned her Ph.D. in Religion Studies at Temple University. Her most recent book is Four Centuries of Jewish Women’s Spirituality, revised edition (2008). She is currently working on a history of Hanukkah in the United States, to be published by New York University Press.

Recipient of a Ph.D. from Emory University, Marni Davis teaches American and Jewish history as an assistant professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta. She is currently working on a manuscript examining Jewish participation in American alcohol commerce during the temperance and prohibition eras. Her article, “‘No Whisky Amazons in the Tents of Israel’: American Jews and the Gilded-Age Temperance Movement,” appears in American Jewish History 94 (2008).
Stephen Goldfarb received his Ph.D. in the history of science and technology from Case Western Reserve University. He retired from a public library in 2003. In addition to his interest in Leo Frank and southern history, he is a collector of prints (etchings, lithographs, and the like) and curates exhibits of the works of American printmakers. He also writes a book column for the quarterly Alabama Heritage.

Philip Kasinitz is professor of sociology and chair of the Program in Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center and the former president of the Eastern Sociological Society. He is the author, co-author, or editor of numerous books including, most recently, Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age, published by Harvard University Press (2008).

Mary L. Kwas is a research associate archaeologist with the Arkansas Archeological Survey at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. She holds an M.S. in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her book, Digging for History at Old Washington, an interpretive treatment for the general public, was published by the University of Arkansas Press in 2009. Her research on the Block family grew out of this work and her desire to put people back into the story. She served as guest editor of a special issue on “Historical Archaeology in Arkansas,” for the Arkansas Historical Quarterly (Winter 2008).

Bryan Edward Stone is an associate professor of history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi. He also has been a visiting professor at the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where he taught a course on Texas Jews. His first book, The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas, will be published by University of Texas Press in spring 2010.

Hollace Ava Weiner is the author of Jewish ‘Junior League’: The Rise and Demise of the Fort Worth Council of Jewish Women and Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and their Work, both from Texas A&M University Press. She edited the anthology Lone Stars of David (Brandeis University Press). Her research into Olympic athlete Babe Didrikson Zaharias—“The Babe, the Ladies, and the Gentleman’s Game of Golf”—will be presented at the 2010 conference of the Texas State Historical Association. Her essay “Let My Peo-
ple Eat,” about a community Passover Seder for the troops, will appear in the forthcoming anthology *Grace & Gumption Cook Book: Stories of Fort Worth Women* (Texas Christian University Press). Weiner, formerly a writer with the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, is the archivist for the Fort Worth Jewish Archives and the Beth-El Congregation Archives in Fort Worth.

Stephen J. Whitfield was born in Houston, Texas, raised in Jacksonville, Florida, and graduated from Tulane University. He holds the Max Richter Chair in American Civilization at Brandeis University, where he has served as chairperson of the Department of American Studies. The author of eight books, Whitfield is also the editor, most recently, of *A Companion to 20th Century America* (2004).
Errata for Volume 11 (2008)

The following are corrections for errors found in *Southern Jewish History*, volume 11, published in 2008.

Page 95, lines 4 and 5 from bottom:
Delete sentence: “Of these only the Levkoffs were not members of KKBE in the 1960s.” Members of the Levkoff family were members of KKBE at that time.

Pages 146 and 147:
All references to the “Micanopy Historical Society Museum,” or “MHSM” should read “Micanopy Historical Society Archives,” or “MHSA.

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