

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

**Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society**

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Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Sandra Berman, *Primary Sources Section Editor*

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> Although his parents' names are unknown, clues in the naming of his children suggest they might have been Simon and Rosina.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>

Born about 1747, Isaiah Isaacs came to Virginia from Frankfurt-am-Main before the Revolutionary War and became the first Jew to settle in Richmond.<sup>16</sup> 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. Proudful 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.<sup>17</sup>

*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.<sup>18</sup>

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."<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> 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."<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> Isaiah's younger brother, David Isaacs, also a merchant, moved from Richmond to Charlottesville by 1804, perhaps to assist Isaiah after Hetty's death.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> One of his descendants suggests that Abraham spent time in New York preparing to be a rabbi.<sup>29</sup> New York Congregation Shearith Israel lists him before 1820 as a member, whereas Richmond's Beth Shalom 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.

Descendents 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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.<sup>33</sup>

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."<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> Fanny gave birth to at least seven children in Virginia: Hester (September 1, 1813),<sup>39</sup> Simon (January 6, 1815),<sup>40</sup> Rosina (circa 1816),<sup>41</sup> Isaac, or Isaacs, (November 12, 1817),<sup>42</sup> Augustus (circa 1818),<sup>43</sup> Henry (circa 1820),<sup>44</sup> and David (February 12, 1823),<sup>45</sup> and possibly two who died as infants.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> In 1823, when Fanny's brother reached adulthood, Hays Isaacs went to court to have the estate split between them.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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."<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup>

#### *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.<sup>56</sup> Virginius was born en route to Arkansas on May 1, 1827, in Opelousas, in south-central Louisiana.<sup>57</sup> His birth was followed by Eugene (circa 1829),<sup>58</sup> Juliet Pauline (September 1, 1830),<sup>59</sup> Ellen (circa 1833),<sup>60</sup> and Laura (September 20, 1835).<sup>61</sup>

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.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup>

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.<sup>67</sup>

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.

*Block House, Washington, Arkansas.  
(Photo by Jay S. Miller, courtesy Arkansas State Parks.)*

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.<sup>68</sup>

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.<sup>69</sup>

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.<sup>70</sup> 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."<sup>71</sup>

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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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.<sup>75</sup>

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

*Water Lilly plate and Cornflower tea cup, from excavations  
at the Block House, Washington, Arkansas.*

*(Photo by Leslie Walker, courtesy Arkansas Archeological Survey.)*

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.<sup>76</sup>

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.<sup>77</sup>

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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup>

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.<sup>82</sup>

#### *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. Inter-marriage, 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*.”<sup>83</sup>

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.<sup>84</sup>

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.<sup>85</sup>

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.<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup>

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."<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup>

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.<sup>90</sup>

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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

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.<sup>93</sup>

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.<sup>94</sup>

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.<sup>95</sup>

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

*Tombstones of Juliet Block Jennings, Simon Block, and Isaac Block (foreground, left to right) and Laura Block (rear, behind small marker). Pioneer Cemetery, Washington, Arkansas.  
(Courtesy of Historic Washington State Park.)*

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.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup>

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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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.”<sup>102</sup> The Dispersed of Judah (Nefutze Judah), a

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.'"<sup>103</sup>

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.<sup>104</sup>

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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup>

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.<sup>107</sup>

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.<sup>108</sup>

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.<sup>109</sup>

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 Paraclifta, 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.<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup>

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

*Washington business district, c. 1920.*  
 (Courtesy of Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives,  
 Robert B. Walz Collection, Washington, Arkansas.)

business partner) owned hundreds of acres, valued at \$21,000 by 1860.<sup>112</sup>

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.<sup>113</sup>

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 Representatives for the Eleventh General Assembly from November 1856 to January 1857. David ran on a Whig ticket in the largely Democratic state, but because of the Whigs economic activism, they received more support in commercially-oriented towns and plantation 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.<sup>114</sup>

Augustus and Henry, in business in Fulton, began looking elsewhere for opportunity. In early 1850 Augustus left the partnership 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 Orleans. 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 farming 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 economics of the Gulf and Mississippi region.<sup>115</sup>

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 established 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.<sup>116</sup>

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.<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup>

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.<sup>119</sup>

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.<sup>120</sup>

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.<sup>121</sup>

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.<sup>122</sup>

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.<sup>123</sup>

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.<sup>124</sup>

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.<sup>125</sup>

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 theirs 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.<sup>126</sup>

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.<sup>127</sup>

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.<sup>128</sup>

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.<sup>129</sup>

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.<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup>

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.<sup>132</sup>

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.<sup>133</sup>

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.<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup>

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.<sup>136</sup>

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.<sup>137</sup>

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.<sup>138</sup>

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.<sup>139</sup> 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

masons. Among the professional residents were about a dozen physicians and numerous lawyers and judges.<sup>140</sup>

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.<sup>141</sup>

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.<sup>142</sup>

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.<sup>143</sup>

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.<sup>144</sup>

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 Virginus'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, [Virginus] was left poor and embarrassed with debt.<sup>145</sup>

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.<sup>146</sup>

It was not unusual in Hempstead County for women to be named as executrices. 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.<sup>147</sup>

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

location. 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.<sup>148</sup>

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.<sup>149</sup>

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, Virginus pushed on to Kosse in Limestone 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, Virginus died unexpectedly on October 17, 1871, just four months prior to his last child's birth. He was forty-four years old. Clearly, Virginus 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 Orleans.<sup>150</sup>

Eugene never left much of an impact wherever he lived. As the youngest brother, he followed the family into the Block businesses, 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 Virginus in Calvert, Texas. Eugene remained in Calvert as Virginus expanded the stores northward, and continued there after Virginus'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.<sup>151</sup>

The early deaths of David, Virginus, and Eugene—all of whom died in their early to middle forties—may well be attributed 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 today that can lead to high cholesterol and heart disease.<sup>152</sup> Whatever the cause, these were the brothers outside of New Orleans who would have expanded the Block businesses into a regional network. David built on what Abraham started in Washington, while Virginus and Eugene continued their father's pattern of settling along a transportation corridor on the advancing 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.<sup>153</sup> 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.<sup>154</sup>

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.<sup>155</sup>

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.<sup>156</sup>

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.<sup>157</sup>

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.<sup>158</sup> 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.<sup>159</sup>

He succumbed to his injuries the following day.<sup>160</sup>

*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)

- 7 Henry Block (1820–1882) m. Laura— (b. c. 1834)
  - 7.1 Juliet P. Block (c. 1851–1878)
  - 7.2 Abraham Block (c. 1852–1867)
  - 7.3 Emma J. Block (b. c. 1856)
  
- 8 Infant son Block (c. 1821–before 1830)
  
- 9 David Block (1823–1865) m. Almedia Trimble (c. 1832–1909)
  - 9.1 Rosina Block (c. 1848–1908)
  - 9.2 Abraham Block (1851–1901)
  - 9.3 David Walter Trimble Block (c. 1854–1876)
  - 9.4 Frances Block (c. 1855–1916)
  - 9.5 Estelle Block (1859–1886)
  - 9.6 Ellen Block (b. c. 1861)
  - 9.7 Juliet Block (1864–1914)
  
- 10 Virginius Block (1827–1871) m. (1) Lenora Tunstall (d. 1866)
  - 10.1 Tunstall Block (c. 1861–by 1880)
  - 10.2 Virginius Block Jr. (1864–after 1920)

m. (2) Sarah Tunstall (d. after 1913)

  - 10.3 Lenora Block (b. 1869)
  - 10.4 Cora Block (b. 1872)
  
- 11 Eugene Block (c. 1829–1875)
  
- 12 Juliet Pauline Block (1830–1858) m. Orville Jennings (1825–1866)
  - 12.1 Edwin Brittin Jennings (1853–1888)
  - 12.2 Ernest Jennings (1855–1882)
  - 12.3 Laura Ida Jennings (1856–1859)
  - 12.4 Chester Jennings (1857–1919)
  - 12.5 Julius Jennings (1858–1858)
  
- 13 Rosalie Ellen Block (c. 1833–1867)
  
- 14 Laura C. (or E.) Block (1835–1853)

## 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.

<sup>1</sup> Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, 2005); Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (Lebanon, NH, 2006); Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1973); Abraham J. Peck, "That Other 'Peculiar Institution': Jews and Judaism in the Nineteenth Century South," *Modern Judaism* 7, no. 1 (1987): 99-114; Stephen J. Whitfield, "Commercial Passions: The Southern Jew as Businessman," *American Jewish History* 71 (March 1982): 342-357; John McKay Sheftall, "The Sheftalls of Savannah: Colonial Leaders and Founding Fathers of Georgia Judaism," in *Jews in the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society*, ed. Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, with Malcolm Stern (Macon, GA, 1984), 65-78; David T. Morgan, "Eugenia Levy Phillips: The Civil War Experiences of a Southern Jewish Woman," in Proctor, et al., *Jews in the South*, 95-106.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Medearis, *Washington, Arkansas: History on the Southwest Trail*, rev. ed. (Hope, AR, 1984), 70; Randall L. Guending, Kathleen H. Cande, Maria Tavaszi, Skip Stewart-Abernathy, and Barbara Ruff, *The Archeological Investigation of the Block Detached Kitchen: The 1982 and 1983 Arkansas Archeological Society Digs, Old Washington Historic State Park*, Project 02-01 (Fayetteville, AR, 2002). See also, Mary L. Kwas, *Digging for History at Old Washington* (Fayetteville, AR, 2009).

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

<sup>4</sup> Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*; Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Cambridge, MA, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, SC, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Wilma Abeles Iggers, ed., *Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: A Historical Reader* (Detroit, 1992), 17-19, 21, 52; Guido Kisch, *In Search of Freedom: A History of American Jews From Czechoslovakia* (London, 1949), 22; Isidor Bush, "The Jews in St. Louis," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 8 (October 1951): 61; *Occident*, April 1857, 107; Goodspeed, *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas* (Chicago, 1890), 405; Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820* (Baltimore, 1992), 108.

<sup>9</sup> Kisch, *In Search of Freedom*, 22; Walter Ehrlich, *Zion in the Valley: The Jewish Community of St. Louis 1 [1807-1907]* (Columbia, MO, 1997), 34. Bush calls Wolf Bloch the pioneer. Bush, "The Jews in St. Louis," 61.

<sup>10</sup> Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 25, 321; Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond From 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, 1917), 133, 242; Ira Rosenwaike, "The Jews of Baltimore to 1810," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 64 (June 1975): 294, 310, 314, 319; Jacob Ezekiel, "The Jews of Richmond," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (hereafter cited as *PAJHS*) 4 (1896): 23, 26; Ehrlich, *Zion in the Valley*, 33-36.

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*, 149–153.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Early Jewish Settlement in Charlottesville, <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/seek/early.html> (accessed July 11, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769–1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), 1–35, 349–350; Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond*, 13–16, 32; Ezekiel, "Jews of Richmond," 24; Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Although "Hays" is not a typical Sephardic name, the family emigrated from Holland and is identified with early Sephardic families. Malcolm H. Stern, *Americans of Jewish Descent: A Compendium of Genealogy* (New York, 1971), 75; Holly Snyder, "Queens of the Household: The Jewish Women of British America, 1700–1800," in *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover, NH, 2001), 16; Solomon Solis-Cohen, "Note Concerning David Hays and Esther Etting His Wife, and Michael Hays and Reuben Etting, Their Brothers, Patriots of the Revolution," *PAJHS* 2 (1894): 66; Rosenwaike, "The Jews of Baltimore to 1810," 291–320; Eric L. Goldstein, *Traders and Transports: The Jews of Colonial Maryland* (Baltimore, 1993), 54–57; David de Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682–1831* (New York, 1952), 328–331; Etting Family, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=508&letter=E&search=Etting> (accessed April 2, 2009); Hays Family, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=388&letter=H> (accessed April 2, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Solis-Cohen, "Note Concerning David Hays," 65–66.

<sup>21</sup> Rosengarten and Rosengarten, *A Portion of the People*, 75, 77; Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York, 2003), 13–14; Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 14; Kaye Kole, *The Minis Family of Georgia, 1733–1992* (Savannah, 1992), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967), 4–5, 139, 214.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond*, 14, 327-330; Morris U. Schapes, ed., *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654-1875*, rev. ed. (New York, 1952), 99-102; Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 349, n. 9; Bingham, *Mordecai*, 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Henley Indexes, from the marriage and obituary citations compiled by Bernard J. Henley from Virginia newspapers on microfilm at the Library of Virginia, *Virginia Argus*, April 8, 1806; *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 9, 1806, <http://ajax.lva.lib.va.us> (accessed September 13, 2004); MAS Declarations, 1816, v. 72, nos. 2194, 2195, 2196, 2197, 2198, University of Virginia Library; Anon., "Extracts From the Note Books of Rev. J. J. Lyons: Items Relating to the Hays Family, New York," *PAJHS* 27 (1920): 323, 329; Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 57-91.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Pauline Booker Carter, Monroe, LA, to Lottie C. Morgan (hereafter cited as Carter and Morgan), n.d., c. 1981, Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives, FH#012, "Block-Conway-Brittin Genealogy."

<sup>30</sup> Elliott Ashkenzai, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge, 1995), 4; Kenneth Libo and Abigail Kursheedt Hoffman, *The Seixas-Kursheedts and the Rise of Early American Jewry* (New York and Waltham, MA, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> The records of Beth Shalome were destroyed in a fire in 1865. Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 353, n. 69. Ezekiel, "Jews of Richmond," 21-27; "Manuscript Material: Items Relating to Congregation Shearith Israel, New York," *PAJHS* 27 (1920): 45, 76; Max J. Kohler, "Phases of Jewish Life in New York Before 1800," *PAJHS* 2 (1894): 87; "Nation's Oldest Jewish Congregation Traces Roots to Sephardic Exiles," <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/csiap.html> (accessed October 4, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Snyder, "Queens in the Household," 28.

<sup>33</sup> "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.

<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Department of Taxation, Personal Property Tax Books, Richmond City, Virginia, 1799-1834, Library of Virginia, Reel 364.

<sup>37</sup> James William Hagy, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston* (Tuscaloosa, 1993), 91, 99; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), 20-21.

<sup>38</sup> Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* (New York, 1988), 67, 75.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> 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."

<sup>41</sup> 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.

<sup>42</sup> HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> 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.

<sup>44</sup> 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,

image 0166); death certificate, New Orleans, 18 February 1882; Grant, "History of the Abraham Block Family"; Carter and Morgan, "Block-Conway-Brittin Genealogy."

<sup>45</sup> HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 29; Bobbie Jones McLane and Capitola Hensley Glazner, *Hempstead County, Arkansas, Marriage Records, 1817-1875* (Hot Springs, AR, 1968), 15; Pauline Booker Carter to Mrs. Haynes, March 25, 1969, in Don Montgomery, compiler, "Block Family References," typescript, Old Washington Historic State Park, n.d., 7 (hereafter cited as Montgomery, "Block Family References").

<sup>46</sup> 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."

<sup>47</sup> 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.

<sup>48</sup> *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.

<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> *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.

<sup>51</sup> Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 96-97, 125.

<sup>52</sup> Faber, *Time for Planting*, 110, 113; Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore, 1992), 56, see also n. 33; Larkin, *Reshaping of Everyday Life*, 204-231; S. Charles Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (Fayetteville, AR, 1998), 17.

<sup>53</sup> 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*,

66-70; Hasia Diner, "Entering the Mainstream of Modern Jewish History: Peddlers and the American Jewish South," *Southern Jewish History* 8 (2005):1-30.

<sup>54</sup> Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 12; Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 97; Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860*, 10, 19.

<sup>55</sup> 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.

<sup>56</sup> 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.

<sup>57</sup> 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.

<sup>58</sup> *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.

<sup>59</sup> HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> 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.

<sup>61</sup> 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.

<sup>62</sup> Carolyn Earle Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens, GA, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> 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, Willborn [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).

<sup>64</sup> 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.

<sup>65</sup> LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 22, 52-53, 58, 65, 67, 71; Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2006), 111-113.

<sup>66</sup> Bingham, *Mordecai*, 21-22; Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 2-15.

<sup>67</sup> Guendling, et al., *Block Detached Kitchen*, 62, 67; Medearis, *History on the Southwest Trail*, 17; LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 5; Jean Sizemore, *Ozark Vernacular Houses: A Study of Rural Homeplaces in the Arkansas Ozarks 1830-1930* (Fayetteville, AR, 1994), 74; Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (December 1965): 555.

<sup>68</sup> Snyder, "Queens of the Household," 19, 24, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Larkin, *Reshaping of Everyday Life*, 75-76.

<sup>70</sup> 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.ualr.edu/trail\\_of\\_tears/Indian\\_removal\\_project/health/cholera.htm](http://www.apna.ualr.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.

<sup>71</sup> 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.

<sup>72</sup> Larkin, *Reshaping of Everyday Life*, 67, 94-98.

<sup>73</sup> Eugene A. Nolte, "Downeasters in Arkansas: Letters of Roscoe G. Jennings to His Brother," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 18 (Spring 1959): 5, n. 5. Juliet Pauline Block and Orville Jennings's children were Edwin Brittin Jennings (b. July 25, 1853, d. January 20 1888), Ernest Jennings (b. July 7, 1855, d. April 25, 1882), Laura Ida Jennings (b. July 6, 1856, d. May 11, 1859), Chester Jennings (b. September 27, 1857, d. December 11, 1919), and Julius Jennings (b. July 29, 1858, d. July 31, 1858).

<sup>74</sup> "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.

<sup>75</sup> 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).

<sup>76</sup> Bingham, *Mordecai*.

<sup>77</sup> 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.

<sup>78</sup> Hempstead, *Historical Review of Arkansas*, 1598; Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 263-264. Hester Block and Benjamin Jett's children were Edward D. Jett (b. 1835-1836, d. before 1911), Benjamin P. Jett Jr. (b. 1837-1838, d. May 17, 1917), Rosena V. Jett (b. 1838-1839, d. before 1911), Emma P. Jett (b. 1840-1841, d. before 1911), Mary Jett (b. 1842-1843, d. before 1911), William Augustus "Gus" Jett (b. March 4, 1846, d. February 25, 1923), Almedia "Media" Jett (b. 1850, d. 1929), Sevier Jett (b. 1852, d. 1899), Eugene Block Jett (b. November 13, 1853, d. after 1927), Charles H. Jett (b. June 27, 1855, d. April 16, 1920), and three who died as infants.

<sup>79</sup> McLane and Glazner, *Hempstead County Marriage Records*, 15; Charlean Moss Williams, *Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas: Gateway to Texas 1835, Confederate Capital 1863: "The Old Town Speaks"* (Houston, 1951), 231-232; Sharon Priest, *Historical Report of the Secretary of State*, 1998 (Little Rock, 1998), 181. David Block and Almedia Trimble's children were Rosina Block (b. 1848-1849, d. 1908), Abraham Block (b. August 27, 1851, d. January 1901), Walter Trimble (or David Walter) Block (b. 1854-1855, d. August 19, 1876), Frances Block (b. 1855-1856, d. 1916), Estelle Block (b. September 20, 1859, d. August 1886), Ellen "Nellie" Block (b. ca. 1861), and Juliet Block (b. October 3, 1864, d. February 21 1914).

<sup>80</sup> 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.

<sup>81</sup> [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).

<sup>82</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 141-143.

<sup>83</sup> Faber, *Time for Planting*, 92-93, 118, 122, 125; Diner, *Time for Gathering*, 88.

<sup>84</sup> Faber, *Time for Planting*, 90; Diner, *Time for Gathering*, 93, 127-129.

<sup>85</sup> Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans* (Waltham, MA, 1969), 195, 198; Schappes, *Jews in the United States*, 179-181, 609, n. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Korn, *Early Jews of New Orleans*, 215.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>89</sup> Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy and Barbara L. Ruff, "A Good Man in Israel: Zooarchaeology and Assimilation in Antebellum Washington, Arkansas," *Historical Archaeology* 23, no. 2 (1989): 101.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>91</sup> Marcie Cohen Ferris, "Dining in the Dixie Diaspora: A Meeting of Region and Religion," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, ed. Ferris and Greenberg, 226-254.

<sup>92</sup> Malcolm H. Stern, "Jewish Marriage and Inter-marriage in the Federal Period (1776-1840)," *American Jewish Archives* 19 (November 1967): 142-143.

<sup>93</sup> Bingham, *Mordecai*; Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit, 1997), 41, 89-90, 239-256,

<sup>94</sup> Korn, *Early Jews of New Orleans*, 214-215.

<sup>95</sup> Kole, *The Minis Family*; Libo and Hoffman, *The Seixas-Kursheedts*.

<sup>96</sup> HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 14-15.

<sup>97</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 13, 1887.

<sup>98</sup> 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).

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

<sup>100</sup> 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.

<sup>101</sup> "Second List of Subscribers, 1844," *Occident*, <http://www.jewish-history.com/Occident/volume1/jan1844/subscribe.htm> (accessed November 11, 2008); Diner, *Time for Gathering*, 121, 208.

<sup>102</sup> *Occident*, April 1857, 106-108.

<sup>103</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, April 4, 1857.

<sup>104</sup> Bingham, *Mordecai*.

<sup>105</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 38.

<sup>106</sup> Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia, MO, 1971), 22, 41, 53; Lewis E. Atherton, *The Southern Country Store 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1949), 66; Whitfield, "Commercial Passions," 342-357.

<sup>107</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, May 20, 1829, May 31, 1832, May 4, 1842, May 5, 1847, May 31, 1848, November 25, 1857, August 13, 1862, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 2, 11-13, 21-22, 79, 83; Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 176-177, 234; Medearis, *History on the Southwest Trail*, 6; Goodspeed, *Southern Arkansas*, 383; Atherton, *Frontier Merchant*, 18-19, 94, 142-144, 150; Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, 14-15, 53; Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa, 1988), 23; Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 95-125.

<sup>108</sup> Atherton, *Frontier Merchant*, 30, 59-69, 93-94; Advertisements from the *Washington Telegraph*, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 9-12, 79-88; Guendling, et al., *Block Detached Kitchen*, 65-66; Art Black and Cynthia Brandimarte, "Henderson & Gaines, New Orleans Ceramics Importers," *Research Notes: Historic Sites and Materials*, no. 2, (Austin, TX, November 1987).

<sup>109</sup> Atherton, *Frontier Merchant*, 17-18; Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, 53-56; Hempstead County probate records, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 41-57.

<sup>110</sup> Goodspeed, *Southern Arkansas*, 216; *Washington Telegraph*, May 4, 1842, October 30, 1844, April 28, 1847, May 5, 1847, October 30, 1844, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 9-10, 81-82; Hempstead County Tax Records, 1841, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 22; Goodspeed, *Southern Arkansas*, 246-247; W. D. Lee, "A Historical Sketch of Center Point," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (Autumn 1953): 264-265; Medearis, *History on the Southwest Trail*, 31. For other Block business locations, see LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Mary L. Kwas, "Simon T. Sanders and the Meredith Clan: The Case for Kinship Studies," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 65 (Autumn 2006): 250-273.

<sup>112</sup> Hempstead County Tax Records, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 22, 24, 27, 33-35; Desmond Walls Allen and Bobbie Jones McLane, *Arkansas Land Patents: Sevier County (Granted Through 30 June 1908)* (Conway, AR, 1991), 20; Allen and McLane, *Arkansas Land Patents: Howard County (Granted Through 3 June 1908)* (Conway, AR, 1991), 20; Allen and McLane, *Arkansas Land Patents: Hempstead County (Granted Through 30 June 1908)* (Conway, AR, 1991), 22.

<sup>113</sup> Rosengarten and Rosengarten, *A Portion of the People*, 100-107.

<sup>114</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, April 10, 1850, April 24, 1850, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 80-81; Priest, *Historical Report of the Secretary of State*, 226, 573; Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 77-78; Donald P. McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society, 1819-1861* (Fayetteville, AR, 2000), 161-163.

<sup>115</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, April 3, 1850, January 15, 1851, January 22, 1851, February 26, 1851, June 11, 1851, March 24, 1852, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 80, 82, 84-85; Atherton, *Frontier Merchant*, 93-94; Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, 139-140. New Orleans City Directories, 1855-1859, <http://www.usgwarchives.net/la/orleans/directry.htm> (accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>116</sup> Harold M. Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey: The Kempners of Galveston, Texas, 1854-1980s* (College Station, TX, 1990), 6-16; Rose G. Biderman, *They Came to Stay: The Story of the Jews of Dallas, 1870-1997* (Austin, TX, 2002).

<sup>117</sup> S. G. Reed, *A History of the Texas Railroads* (Houston, 1941), 65, 70-71.

<sup>118</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, March 7, 1855, December 26, 1855, April 2, 1856, November 25, 1857, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 83, 88-89; Hempstead County Marriages, 1817-1875, <http://files.usgwarchives.org/ar/hempstead/vitals/marriages/hemgroom.txt> (accessed April 3, 2009); Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 78.

<sup>119</sup> Bertram W. Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865: Address of the President," *PAJHS* 50 (March 1961): 191; Hagy, *This Happy Land*, 91-99; Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*, 15-16; Diner, "Peddlers and the American Jewish South," 19; Whitfield, "Commercial Passions," 353.

<sup>120</sup> Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 20-21; Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South," *PAJHS* 50 (March 1961): 157; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1967), 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery," 168; Hagy, *This Happy Land*, 96-97.

<sup>122</sup> Solis-Cohen, "Note Concerning David Hays," 65; Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond*, 15-16.

<sup>123</sup> Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond*, 328.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-329.

<sup>125</sup> Hagy, *This Happy Land*, 99-100.

<sup>126</sup> *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.

<sup>127</sup> Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, 57–91; Joshua D. Rothman, “Notorious in the Neighborhood: An Interracial Family in Early National and Antebellum Virginia,” in *Dixie Diaspora*, ed. Bauman, 285–330; Carol Ely, Jeffry Hantman, and Phyllis Leffler, *To Seek the Peace of the City: Jewish Life in Charlottesville* (Charlottesville, VA, 1994), 3–5. Rothman’s book and article detail this complex and fascinating story of David Isaacs and Nancy West.

<sup>128</sup> Korn, “Jews and Negro Slavery,” 176; Rawlings, ed., *Early Charlottesville*, 72–74, 79–82; Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, 57–91. Stern indicates David and Nancy had seven children. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 126. A brief mention of the David Isaacs family, with errors, is also found in Edgar Woods, *Albemarle County in Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA, 1901), 359.

<sup>129</sup> Hempstead County tax records, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 22–38; 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedules, <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com> (accessed April 15, 2009).

<sup>130</sup> Linda McDowell, *Black Slaves and Early Freedmen of Hempstead County, Arkansas, 1819–1850* (Little Rock, 2000), 82–83, 91, 108, 111–112, 114–115, 118, 121–122. The names of four African Americans owned by the Blocks are known. David purchased Robert G. Samuels, his mother Becca, and sister Mary from Nicholas Trammell in 1849. Abraham and Fanny Block may have owned Aunt Lotty Block, identified from a small headstone in Washington’s Pioneer Cemetery as a “faithful servant.” Williams, *The Old Town Speaks*, 280–282; Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 305; McDowell, *Black Slaves and Early Freedmen*, 115; author’s visit to Pioneer Cemetery, Washington, AR, August 17, 2005; HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries*, Book 5, 45.

<sup>131</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, October 8, 1856, December 3, 1856, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 90–91; Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 28–54.

<sup>132</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800–1860*, 128; Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship*, 102–103; McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 68–72, 95.

<sup>133</sup> Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 25; Pauline Booker Carter, “Block-Conway-Brittin Genealogy”; *Occident*, April 1857, 106–108; also reprinted in “Trail Blazers of the Trans-Mississippi West,” *American Jewish Archives* 8 (October 1956): 67–69.

<sup>134</sup> New Orleans City Directories, 1855–1859, 1870–1871, <http://www.usgwarchives.net/la/orleans/directry.htm> (accessed March 30, 2009); Charles Gardner, *Gardner’s New Orleans Directory for 1861* (New Orleans, 1861), 64, 78; Gardner, *Gardner’s New Orleans Directory for 1866* (New Orleans, 1866), 89, 101, 288; *Daily Picayune*, February 9, 1896, part 2; Chambers, *History of Louisiana*, 101.

<sup>135</sup> 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.

<sup>136</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 8, 1896, February 9, 1896.

<sup>137</sup> Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey*, 43–50.

<sup>138</sup> Biderman, *They Came to Stay*, 24–25; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 10, Orleans Parish, Louisiana (roll M593\_524, p. 177, image 28); Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Ward 1, Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

<sup>139</sup> Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 33–35.

<sup>140</sup> Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 129–130.

<sup>141</sup> Don Montgomery, “The Washington Historic District,” in *Sentinels of History*, ed. Mark K. Christ and Cathryn H. Slater (Fayetteville, AR, 2000,) 31.

<sup>142</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, July 9, 1862, October 1, 1862, March 4, 1863, August 5, 1863, September 2, 1863, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 13–16; Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 314–315; Williams, *The Old Town Speaks*, 252–253; John Christopher Schwab, *The Confederate States of America 1861–1865: A Financial and Industrial History* (New York, 1901), 12–15. LeMaster erroneously states that David was chosen president of the Hempstead County Confederate Association. LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 40.

<sup>143</sup> Medearis, *Sam Williams*, 263–264; Priest, *Historical Report of the Secretary of State*, 224. Benjamin Jett served in the Ninth General Assembly from November 1, 1852, to January 12, 1853.

<sup>144</sup> Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey*, 13–14; Kole, *The Minis Family*, 118–119; Ashkenazi, *Diary of Clara Solomon*, 3, 18, 28; Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*, 149–153, 126–127.

<sup>145</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, November 8, 1871.

<sup>146</sup> HCGS, *Hempstead County Cemeteries, Book 5*, 22, 29. Hempstead County Probate Records, Book I, 457, January 10, 1870, and Book H, 277, 308, 344, 345, 392, 401, 440, 444, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 56–60, 62–63.

<sup>147</sup> HCGS, *Hempstead County, Arkansas, Abstract of Wills, Intestate, and Other Probate Records, 1822–1917* (Hope, AR, 2001).

<sup>148</sup> Biderman, *They Came to Stay*, 2–30; Reed, *History of the Texas Railroads*, 71, 208.

<sup>149</sup> Biderman, *They Came to Stay*, 11–30.

<sup>150</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, November 8, 1871; Richard Denny Parker, *Historical Recollections of Robertson County, Texas, with Biographical and Genealogical Notes on the Pioneers and Their Families* (Salado, TX, 1955), 80; Ray A. Walter, *A History of Limestone County* (Austin, TX, 1959), 72, 79, 81; *Washington Telegraph*, August 13, 1862, March 4, 1863, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 13–14; Hempstead County Deed Records, Book S, 405, December 1, 1866, Book S, 428, January 9, 1867, in Montgomery, “Block Family References,” 75–76; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Precinct 1, Robertson County, Texas (roll M593\_1602, p. 175, image 351, and p. 182, image 367).

<sup>151</sup> Death certificate, New Orleans, March 3, 1875; Girod Cemetery, Louisiana State Museum Records.

<sup>152</sup> Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860–1876* (Fayetteville, AR, 2000), 70–72.

<sup>153</sup> 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

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Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman, eds., *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas* (Lebanon, NH, 2007). See also Hollace Ava Weiner, "Removal Approval: The Industrial Removal Office Experience in Fort Worth," *Southern Jewish History* 4 (2001): 1-44.

<sup>154</sup> Hempstead County Tax Records, 1866-1868, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 37-38; Hempstead County Deed Records, Book S, 405, 428, Book T, 352, 391, in Montgomery, "Block Family References," 75-76.

<sup>155</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 21, 1867, afternoon edition; *Arkansas Gazette*, October 15, 1867; "Yellow Fever Deaths in New Orleans, 1817-1905," Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, <http://nutrias.org/~nopl/facts/feverdeaths.htm> (accessed April 3, 2009); death certificate, New Orleans, LA., September 21, 1867; Girod Cemetery, Louisiana State Museum Records.

<sup>156</sup> *Washington Telegraph*, November 8, 1871, December 20, 1871; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Pass Christian, Harrison County, Mississippi (roll T9648, Family History Film #1254648, p. 380.3000, Enumeration District 141, image 0302); Michelle Woodham, "Tunstall Descendants," <http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/tunstall&id=I03445> (accessed February 27, 2004); Hebrew Cemetery, Canal & N. Anthony Sts., card file.

<sup>157</sup> *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.

<sup>158</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 19, 1882.

<sup>159</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 7, 1896.

<sup>160</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 8, 1896, February 9, 1896, February 9, 1896, Part 2; Hebrew Cemetery, Canal & N. Anthony Sts., card file.