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Rebekah Lesem with her sisters (courtesy Phyllis Fist)

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Fellowship Program

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TO OUR READERS . . .

If television enables all of us inside to see what is happening outside, is it enabling us to understand what is going on outside? Have we learned how to use and to harness this miraculous medium in a free and open society? Have we learned how to use it to advance the democratic process, the cause of justice, the causes of social and moral development; the enlightenment of the mind and the heart?

Newton N. Minow spoke these words to an audience in 1976 on the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. Minow, former chair of the Federal Communications Commission under President John F. Kennedy, had been invited in the College’s centennial year to deliver a lecture under the auspices of the Frank L. Weil Institute for Studies in Religion and the Humanities titled “Electronics and the Future.” We are happy to make the entire speech available to our readers for the first time in print. Indeed, the questions he posed to that group more than forty years ago remain as pertinent today as they were then.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with so many of us working, learning, and praying virtually, we have become even more dependent on technology. Not only do we see the outside world through our televisions, but now on our mobile devices and our computers as well. We can hardly escape it. Granted, technology has been our lifeline to staying connected with our loved ones, our schools, our communities, but it has also made us witness to the devastation, violence, and injustice that this year of crisis has wrought. We have seen and heard from the sick and the dying. We have seen daily the sacrifice of the first responders who are on the frontlines battling this virus. We have witnessed the growing lines of people in cities across the country waiting at food pantries and unemployment offices. As the United Nations has declared, the virus “is attacking societies at their core” and is particularly harmful to socially and economically marginalized communities, including people of color,

older persons, persons with disabilities, youth, and indigenous peoples.¹

Our screens and monitors have given us front row seats to the ravages of COVID-19. If the virus has shown us the many weaknesses, inequalities, and fissures within our society vis-à-vis health care, then the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor—with the final heartbreaking moments of Floyd's life going viral on social media—have shown how deep and systemic racial injustice is in America and how it, too, is a malady that must be eradicated. To paraphrase Minow, now that technology allows us to see what is going on outside, can we as a society use it to effect real, systemic, radical change to enlighten the heart and the mind?

We are all trying our best to make sense of the sweeping transformations that have overtaken us this year. We are living witnesses to these dramatic events in world history, and one wonders how this all will be remembered. How will researchers—twenty, fifty, a hundred years from now—recount this period of history? Who and what will be remembered? And who and what will be forgotten? What role can each of us play in collecting the evidence of this unprecedented lived experience? And what about the role of archives? If archives are “memory houses” where societal memory and historical identity are preserved, then we need to be certain that we are being as inclusive as possible in capturing the broad spectrum of memory and identity to create “personal and societal well-being that comes from experiencing continuity with the past, from a sense of roots, of belonging, of identity.”²

In placing this pandemic within its own historical context, historians and others have looked to past pandemics—most notably the 1918 Spanish flu—to offer lessons for our time. To move beyond the actual health crisis and to analyze the various effects that it has had on society as a whole, however, one can broaden the search to periods and subjects in which change occurred incrementally or even inconsistently. Contemporary topics such as the retreat of women's progress in the workplace; the prominent role of youth activism and civic engagement;

1 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included-covid-19.html> (accessed 25 November 2020).

2 Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 18.

the ever-increasing reliance on new forms of technology; and the almost mystical nature of leadership and authority can all be explored in old and new scholarship. In their own way, the essays in this double issue can shed light on all of these subjects and help us better frame our current reality and, in some instances, increase our awareness of how much more work needs to be done on the history of these salient topics.

The articles in this journal cover a hundred years of American Jewish history. In their article “Inching Toward Women’s Equality: Tentative Steps in Three Small Jewish Communities,” Cynthia Francis Gensheimer and David A. Frolick examine the leadership roles of young Jewish women in Reform congregations in Louisiana, Missouri; Keokuk, Iowa; and Quincy, Illinois—all located along a stretch of the upper Mississippi River—in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They were selected, write the authors, “to illustrate how expanding women’s responsibilities, in fits and starts, was an attempt to address problems faced in congregational governance, worship, education, and leadership” (4). The three women profiled—Sadie Wald of Louisiana, Rebekah Lesem of B’nai Sholom in Quincy, and Lena Levy Younker of Congregation B’nai Israel in Keokuk—assumed greater responsibilities in their respective Reform communities, moving from Sunday school teachers and Sabbath school directors to the equivalent of a rabbinical assistant (in the case of Lesem) and a proto-rabbi (in the case of Wald). All of this occurred at a time when women were still not admitted to their congregations as full members. While these “isolated, daring, and novel experiments” were not long-lasting, they were, as the authors conclude “harbingers of a future that insured full female equality in Reform Judaism” (55).

Tal Elmaliach, a historian at the University of Haifa, shines a spotlight on youth activism in his article on Avukah (Hebrew for “torch”), the university student organization affiliated with the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). The organization was active from its inception in 1925 to the dissolution of its New York head office in 1943. Elmaliach concentrates on the years 1925 to 1936, when the organization and its leadership moved from being apolitical and culturally focused to a more politicized and radicalized group aligning itself with Hashomer Hatzair, the kibbutz-based socialist-progressive wing of the Zionist movement. Its educational activities from 1934–on reflected this new ideological stance:

waging an uncompromising struggle against fascism in the United States, in cooperation with non-Jewish forces; reconstituting American Jewish leadership so that it would represent the interests of the larger community and not just the upper classes; and establishing a binational state in Palestine based on communal labor settlement (82).

Elmaliach cogently argues that, although it was short-lived, Avukah “may thus be seen as the left-wing predecessor of activist American Zionism” (81).

In his article “Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, and the Remaking of an American Jewish Prophecy,” Zev Eleff explores the use—or perhaps misuse—of history in the creation of a foundational myth of the Yeshiva world, or Orthodox Right, in America. Revered as the “architect” of the yeshiva movement (“Torah for its own sake”) in Lithuania in the nineteenth century, Rabbi Hayim ben Yitzhak purportedly foretold how America would develop as a Torah center that would usher in the messianic era, with “soil [that] could be tilled to nurture a so-called authentic traditional Jewish environment” (90). While this positive prophecy may have held in the pre–World War II period, Eleff shows how rabbinic leaders, *roshei yeshiva* such as Aharon Kotler, who rose to prominence in the postwar period, ultimately downplayed the legend’s messianism, making it more in line with the Yeshiva world’s counterculture of antimodernism “that recast the legend in European terms because it could not tolerate any indulgence of acculturation” (91). The power of myth and how leaders use it to assert their authority and stress their authenticity is at the heart of this fascinating article and resonates strongly with contemporary readers beyond the American Jewish community.

Finally, we end this issue with Minow’s 1976 lecture. Minow is perhaps best known for his 1961 speech to the National Association of Broadcasters, in which he referred to television as a “vast wasteland.” However, as President Obama remarked when Minow was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016, the two words Minow prefers we remember from his speech are “public interest,” which Obama

described as the “heartbeat of his life’s work.”³ Minow’s achievements in public broadcasting are pioneering: the Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962, which gave federal monies to educational station construction and repair; the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which is the nationwide system that exists today; and the All Channel Receiver Act, ensuring that all new televisions would include a tuner to receive UHF channels, to which most educational stations had been assigned.⁴ Minow is also known as the “father of presidential debates,” as he was the one to push for televised presidential debates in 1955 and still sits on the Commission on Presidential Debates.

In this speech, Minow summarizes the wonderful possibilities and opportunities that technology—in particular, television—affords us but cautions that we cannot let technology overpower us: “I ask you to help find direction for electronics, rather than continue to take electronic direction.” When the world around us is changing so quickly and so much of what is changing is displayed to us on every screen, it is hard to remind ourselves that we have control, that we can “find direction” rather than take it, that there is time to insert a sense of values and moral purpose to all that we do and see. But Minow also reminds us that “lethargy, inertia, and apathy are the most effective enemies of the democratic process” and, quoting his former colleague, Adlai Stevenson, “our government demands, it depends upon, the care and devotion of the people.” This must be our guiding principle, our lodestar through this difficult year and into the future, whatever it may bring.

Dana Herman, Ph.D.
Managing Editor

3 <https://www.c-span.org/video/?418918-1/president-obama-awards-presidential-medal-freedom> (accessed 27 November 2020).

4 Newton N. Minow’s archive, *Broadcasting in the Public Interest: The Newton Minow Collection*, is a joint collaboration between the Library of Congress and WGBH. https://americanarchive.org/special_collections/newtonminow (accessed 27 November 2020).



Nettie Younker (in black) with her sisters and Younker cousins.
(Courtesy Tedi Macias)

Inching Toward Women's Equality: Tentative Steps in Three Small Jewish Communities

CYNTHIA FRANCIS GENSHEIMER AND DAVID A. FROLICK

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, against the backdrop of the American suffrage movement, women seemed poised to take on leadership roles across many facets of society, including within the Jewish community.¹ At the Jewish Women's Congress in 1893, Ray [Rachel] Frank gave the opening and closing prayers and delivered a speech on "Woman and the Synagogue," making national headlines—and catching the attention of Isaac S. Moses, Isaac Mayer Wise, and other Reform rabbis, who urged Frank to become the first Reform woman rabbi in America. Frank demurred, and it would take another eighty years for America to ordain its first female rabbi.²

That story of the advancement of Jewish women, which played out primarily in American cities with significant Jewish populations, was entrenched in politics, tradition, halakhah, and progressive ideology. But in other, smaller Jewish communities dotted across the American

1 The authors thank John H. Dromey, Dan Sharon, Iris Nelson, Betty Allen, Bruce E. Nielsen, Tonya Boltz, Jean Kay, Peggy Azinger, Phyllis Fist, Tedi Macias, Carol Bouville, and descendants of many Jews mentioned in this article. The authors express their gratitude to the AJA for their individual fellowships and for the assistance of Elisa Ho and Dana Herman.

2 Sally Priesand, the first Reform woman rabbi in the United States, was not ordained until 1972. The first Reconstructionist woman was ordained in 1974, and the first Conservative woman in 1985. Orthodox women are now acting in some capacities as teachers and spiritual leaders but in a gender-segregated setting. See Pamela S. Nadell, *America's Jewish Women: A History from Colonial Times to Today* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 247, and Pamela S. Nadell, *Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination 1889–1985* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

landscape, the story of Reform women acceding to leadership roles in their synagogues was a story of survival. Although this change was motivated mostly by logistical necessity, a growing shift in permissible practices aligned with the Reform movement in America supported its legitimacy. By the late 1870s, there were 136 cities that were home to between one hundred and one thousand Jews, plus many more with even smaller populations.³ By the turn of the twentieth century, many of those Jewish communities no longer existed; those that remained struggled with diminished populations and either less-than-qualified spiritual leaders or no rabbis at all. The need for lay leadership was clear—but in these small towns, where most men tended to focus on business as they let religion take a back seat, the responsibility vacuum created by declining membership and vacating rabbis was sometimes filled by women, who had the time, the education, and the interest to take on those roles.

Most scholars who have studied the history of Jewish women in America have focused on women living in cities with large concentrations of Jews, while scholars of small-town Jewish life and commerce have not paid much attention to women.⁴ Shari Rabin's *Jews on the Frontier* delineates the problems faced by nineteenth-century Jewish men—and women—living in remote pioneer outposts. She uses the term “pragmatic adaptation” to describe the various accommodations they made, bending rules to try to live as Jews individually and communally.⁵ This work takes

3 Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 338–349; 1895 Iowa State Census, www.iowadatacenter.org/Publications/iowa1895.pdf (accessed 18 October 2020). Of the ten small Iowa cities that Weissbach identified, only five still had more than one hundred Jews in 1895.

4 Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Nadell, *America's Jewish Women*; Weissbach, *Jewish Life*; Michael Cohen, *Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish Entrepreneurship in the Reconstructionist Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Anton Hieke, *Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South: Ambivalence and Adaptation* (Boston: De Gruyter Press, 2013).

5 In *Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail*, Jeanne Abrams cites many examples of trailblazing Western women, arguing that since Jewish women were among the first white settlers in the West, they faced fewer limits than elsewhere. Jeanne E. Abrams, *Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail: A History in the American West* (New York: New York University

Rabin's approach to study the niche role of women who crossed gender boundaries to preserve small-town Jewish life.

Pamela Nadell's *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*, an in-depth history of the long path to women's ordination in America, provides much relevant background material, especially in detailing the story of Ray Frank, who got her start as a Sabbath school teacher, and several other women, decades later, whose path to serving as proto-rabbis began the same way.⁶ Some of them were wives of rabbis, who partnered with their husbands in significant ways, as described by Shuly Rubin Schwartz.⁷ Melissa Klapper's work is important in helping us understand the role that education played for the women poised to fill leadership roles within the Reform movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Klapper explains that, although fewer than a third of Jewish children received any formal religious education in 1880, "supplementary religious education marched in tandem with public education. Since girls ... often stayed in high school for longer periods, they were also more likely to stay in religious school."⁸ She describes the concurrent expansion of opportunities for Jewish women in secular and religious education and how the teaching profession—one of the few professions open to women at the turn of the century—attracted many Jewish women. At the same time, Klapper, Julia Richman, and other scholars acknowledge the uneven and haphazard quality of supplemental Jewish education, which they attribute to underfunding, parental apathy, poor curricular materials, but perhaps most importantly to the "ignorance and lack of preparation" of female Sabbath school teachers.⁹ Yet, as this article demonstrates,

Press, 2006); Shari Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

6 The *San Francisco Chronicle* outlined Frank's qualifications for the role and said that Rabbi Isaac S. Moses urged her to accept an offer to be rabbi of a Chicago congregation. "First Woman Rabbi," *San Francisco Chronicle* (19 October 1893): 12.

7 Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

8 Melissa R. Klapper, "The History of Jewish Education in America, 1700–2000," in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 196, 206.

9 In fact, when Samson Benderly set out to reform Jewish education, he recognized the

scattered throughout the United States, even in the smallest of towns, were exceptional women—highly intelligent, well informed, qualified, and motivated to teach in congregational schools and thereby become community leaders.

The phenomenon of women's expanded responsibilities in very small Reform congregations has, for the most part, been overlooked and is the emphasis of this article. By focusing on three small communities over the course of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, we will show that existential necessity forced the bending of old norms so that Jewish communities could survive. Success, it would seem, would be measured by survival. Two of these communities did not last long, while the third managed to maintain a temple until 2019. Nevertheless, their short-lived actions provided creative building blocks that are now an accepted part of the Reform Jewish landscape. These three small cities—Louisiana, Missouri; Keokuk, Iowa; and Quincy, Illinois—were chosen to illustrate how expanding women's responsibilities, in fits and starts, was an attempt to address problems faced in congregational governance, worship, education, and leadership. Located along a ninety-mile stretch of the upper Mississippi River, these communities were connected to one another and to the outside world through numerous familial and business relations, as well as through the Jewish press.¹⁰ Each town's circumstances and shortcomings were so unique that different formulas needed to be applied, but they are probably representative of many other small towns of the era.

The shift that gave women enhanced power within their communities grew from their roles as devoted congregational workers, teachers, and Sabbath school directors. It was made possible when intelligent

importance of educating Jewish girls and relied heavily on female teachers. Julia Richman spelled out in great detail the many problems with Jewish education at the turn of the century and proposed thoughtful remedies. Julia Richman, "The Jewish Sunday School Movement in the United States," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 4 (July, 1900): 563–601; Melissa R. Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860–1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 59–143; Klapper, "History of Jewish Education," 198; Jonathan B. Krasner, *The Bendersly Boys & American Jewish Education* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

10 Cynthia Francis Gensheimer and Anton Hieke, "Heimat and Home: Mobility Among Jews in Quincy, Illinois," *American Jewish History* 102, no. 2 (2018): 255–282.

girls who had been confirmed in Reform congregations went on to become Sabbath school teachers in numbers far greater than their brothers. Although this was true in larger cities as well, it was in small-town congregations without rabbis that women assumed added responsibility out of a fervent desire to keep their congregations viable. Such are the stories of Sadie Wald in Louisiana and Rebekah Lesem in Quincy.

The smallest congregations had always struggled to attract qualified spiritual leaders, but, paradoxically, they became increasingly marginalized once Hebrew Union College (HUC), founded in 1875, began ordaining rabbis with credentials adapted to the American way of life.¹¹ American Reform leaders had hoped that such a seminary would produce enough qualified rabbis, including some circuit preachers, to serve even congregations in

11 Isaac Spiesberger of Keokuk described how some “country” congregations had disbanded for lack of qualified rabbis: Of the half dozen applicants from all over Europe, one is chosen who “has a good voice as canter [*sic*], delivers a tolerable sermon, appears to know how to instruct children in the Hebrew and German branches....” The congregation finds, however, that “one is addicted to strong drink, another keeps bad company, a third is not fit to teach our children, a fourth is so bigoted and headstrong, that he is bound to carry out his own peculiar ideas.” Cassi [Isaac] Sembach, “Keokuk, Iowa,” *The Israelite* (4 August 1871): 6. Cassi Sembach was a pen name of Isaac Spiesberger, an immigrant from Sembach Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany. Many correspondents to nineteenth-century newspapers used initials or pseudonyms, some of which were playful. Cassi, for instance, is Isaac spelled backwards. The correspondents’ names will be stated when the authors of this article can make positive identifications. Prior to being hired in Keokuk in 1887, Rabbi Samuel M. Laski had served at least twelve other congregations. In 1899, a rabbinical group voted to send him \$50 because he was starving, “having been deserted by successive congregations.” “One Sabbath Enough,” *Pittsburgh Dispatch* (22 May 1889): 6. Hired in 1889, Rabbi Jacob Korn remained in Keokuk only fifteen months. Over a span of about three years surrounding this time, he worked also in Woodville, Mississippi, and Atlanta and Athens, Georgia. Congregation B’nai Israel Minute Book, 1 September 1889, 2 February 1890, and 31 August 1890, The Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica, MS 56, Codex 026.1, Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (hereafter Katz Center). A digital scan of the minute book can be found at <https://colenda.library.upenn.edu/catalog/81431-p3df6k85h> (accessed 28 October 2020). Letter to the editor from Bruder Lustig, Woodville, MS., dated 5 December 1890, *The American Israelite* (18 December 1890): 5; “Personal and Pertinent,” *Pensacola News* (14 April 1894); hankstories.com/anna-bernstein-korn-a-tragic-story-chapter-5 (accessed 18 October 2020).

far-flung places, but HUC graduates gravitated to prestigious pulpits in large cities, and circuit preaching never succeeded for want of viable funding. Accreditation called into further question the employment of some whose credentials and abilities were suspect. Calling positions in small southern towns “rabbinical graveyard[s],” historian Adam Mendelsohn described them as “often poorly paid, isolated backwater postings that lacked prestige and opportunities for advancement, but that came with a taxing job description.”¹² Louisiana was never able to afford a full-time rabbi, and by 1900, both Quincy, with twenty members, and Keokuk, with twenty-one, had also become “rabbinical graveyards.”¹³

During the mid-1870s, however, rather than being graveyards, places like Quincy and Keokuk nurtured ambitious young immigrant rabbis.¹⁴ The experiences of Rabbis Isaac S. Moses in Quincy and Ferdinand Becker in Keokuk prove another of Mendelsohn’s points: that frontier congregations offered “latitude for innovation and independence.”¹⁵ Moses and Becker, while fulfilling the demand for capable rabbis who could preach in both German and English, presided over their congregations during periods of rapid depopulation and, as seen below, tackled the associated threats in creative ways that empowered women.

Early Reform and Traditional Gender Roles

Early reformers in Germany advocated egalitarianism in matters of prayer and worship. In 1837, Rabbi Abraham Geiger declared, “The social position of women in Judaism remains unnatural.”¹⁶ Historian Michael A. Meyer describes Geiger’s position as “proposing that women and men should be entirely equal in religion except where differentiation flowed

12 Adam Mendelsohn, “Two Far South: Rabbinical Responses to Apartheid and Segregation in South Africa and the American South,” *Southern Jewish History* 6 (2003): 63.

13 *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. II, 1900–1901 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1900), 245, 254.

14 Isaac Mayer Wise through his travels and networking knew many such congregations very well and orchestrated assignments for young rabbis he thought could benefit from serving for a few years in such places.

15 Mendelsohn, “Two Far South,” 66.

16 Goldman cites this quotation among others as being from Geiger, “Stellung des weiblichen Geschlechtes,” 1–14. Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, 25, 223.

from natural distinctions between the sexes.”¹⁷ Geiger in Germany and, subsequently, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise in the United States took the lead in pushing for many changes, but early reformers quickly discovered that their ideas clashed with the traditions of their congregants.

Beginning in the 1840s, when he occupied his first American pulpit, Wise attempted to forge “a pathway to reform.”¹⁸ He introduced mixed choirs and mixed congregational seating, but he never achieved perfect equality for the women of his congregations, even when he moved to Cincinnati. In his 1857 Reform prayer book, *Minhag America*, Wise declared, “Ten Adults, Male Or Female, Make a Minyan.”¹⁹ A *minyan*, or the required minimum who must be present when the Torah is read or the mourner’s *kaddish* is recited, had traditionally been ten adult Jewish men. In this very sharp break from tradition, Wise promulgated a controversial stance that dated back to the inception of Reform Judaism in Germany, but which had not been universally adopted there or in America.²⁰ Even among the American congregations

17 Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 140.

18 American rabbis Isaac Leeses, Max Landsberg, Kaufmann Kohler, Emil Hirsch, Isaac S. Moses, Joseph Stolz, and Leopold Wintner, among others, also advocated for expanded female participation.

19 This directive can be found on page twelve of the 1872 edition, wherein it states: “Ten adults, males or females, to be a *minyan*.” Wise prepared a draft of *Minhag America* in 1847. At the time there were numerous *minhagim* in use around the United States. Some were brought over from Europe; others were written in the United States. Each reflected a particular style of religious practice. Wise wanted his *minhag* to reflect the American environment and have broad appeal. It shortened and/or eliminated some of the traditional services and prayers, and it was written in both Hebrew and English. Although first published in 1857, the 1872 edition is the one that was most widely disseminated, especially in the southern and western United States. The first edition of the prayer book was titled *Minhag Amerika*, but we use the later spelling. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 253–254.

20 At the Frankfort Conference in 1845, Samuel Adler said, “The custom not to include women in the number of individuals necessary for the conducting of a public service is only a custom and has no religious basis.” David Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 260–261; Wise’s inclusion of women in the count for a *minyan* was extremely controversial at the time. “Rabbi Wise and the Jewish Woman,” *The American Israelite* (8 November 1923): 4.

that adopted the new prayer book, it is likely that few immediately made the change to count women toward a *minyan*.²¹ However, the importance of this change in wording cannot be overvalued, because a respected authority figure realized that, for the Reform movement to progress toward modernity, it had to make women full and equal partners in religious practices. This would turn out to be a slow process since it would require the acquiescence of male lay leaders and a generational shift in thinking. Wise's remarks in 1876 show that he was still striving to make that happen in both congregational governance and religious practices:

The principle, the advancement of the cause, justice to woman, and the law of God inherent in every human being, require that *woman be made a member of the congregation, of equal rights with any man; that her religious feelings be given full scope to develop and she be fully attached to the sacred cause of Israel*. All laws contrary to this principle, on any statute book of a congregation, should be wiped out as reminiscences of barbarism and degrading to the cause of religion.²² (Emphasis added.)

David Philipson, in his respected history of the Reform movement, is even more emphatic: "Nowhere was the orientalism of the synagogue more pronounced than in the inferior position assigned to woman in the public religious life."²³

21 In 1867, for instance, counting women was still enough of a novelty that *The Occident*, a leading national Jewish newspaper with a traditionalist bent, published the following searing statement: "One of our doctors [rabbis] permitted women to be taken as a *Minyan* in a place where there are men enough, if only they would attend worship." "Education," *The Occident* (December 1867): 423.

22 Isaac Mayer Wise, "Women in the Synagogue," *The American Israelite* (8 September 1876): 4. Isaac Mayer Wise, "*Das Recht des Weibe in der Gemeinde* [The Rights of Women in the Congregation]," *Die Deborah* (22 March 1867): 146. Wise criticized Orthodox rabbis for relying on the Talmudic opinion of one rabbi to prohibit singing by women. "Does the Canon Law permit Ladies to sing in the Synagogue," *The Israelite* (10 August 1855): 1. For good general discussions of Wise's positions, see Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1981), 292–295, and Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*, 20–21.

23 Philipson, *The Reform Movement*, 509.

Within a generation, the Jews in our three communities would adopt or identify with Reform Judaism. The challenges of reaching consensus on what traditions should be retained or discarded required some adroit persuasion and varied with each localized environment and its individual personalities. An across-the-board challenge was the declining participation of men in congregational life caused by demographic changes, indifference, and economic competition.

The changes in Reform practice in America must be considered against the backdrop of the American frontier environment. Initially, few women aspired to break from the traditional role of presiding over the home and rearing children, and the opportunities to do so were few and far between. As Jews immigrated in the mid-nineteenth century and fanned out to small towns across the American landscape, male and female benevolent and burial societies sprang up as the seeds for building community.²⁴ Gender specific in almost every case, these societies filled the pressing requirements of buying land for a cemetery and preparing corpses for burial, and also seeing more generally to the needs of fellow Jews. Although many small communities lacked the numbers to hold regular weekly worship services, each year at the High Holidays peddlers came in from the countryside, and local men led services in makeshift quarters. Hundreds of communities began this way, because they could rely on the many men who had the necessary religious training. As their numbers grew, Jews, even in the smallest of places, envisioned a future with regular services in a synagogue under the direction of a *hazzan* [cantor], who could serve also as teacher, *shohet* [slaughterer], and/or *mohel* [circumciser].

During this time, nearly all the Jewish women who settled along the upper Mississippi River were German-speaking immigrants who aspired

24 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Moral Sublime: Jewish Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Writing a Modern Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Salo W. Baron*, ed. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (New York and New Haven: The Jewish Museum and Yale University Press, 2006), 36–54; William Toll, *The Making of an Ethnic Middle Class: Portland Jewry over Four Generations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

to enter the middle class. As Marion Kaplan says of Jewish women in Germany:

For women, in fact, *religion and family were one totality*. Whereas Judaism relegated women to a peripheral role in the synagogue, it placed them on a pedestal in the home.... Family life and the observance of the Sabbath, holidays, and dietary laws were clearly women's domain.²⁵

Imbued with strong Jewish identities and religiosity, Jewish women had carried these ideals with them from Europe. After prospering during or immediately after the Civil War, many Jewish immigrants in small communities along the Mississippi River did become solidly middle class. Nearly all the women married young. Idealized as spiritual and pious, they were charged with maintaining bourgeois households and rearing well-behaved, educated Jewish children.

Ascertaining the degree of Jewish literacy among the women in these communities is difficult. Most came from small central European towns, where they might have received a few hours a week of Jewish education at home from a tutor, as part of their regular schooling, or in a supplemental school.²⁶ According to Kaplan, "boys received far more intense religious and Hebrew instruction to prepare them for the Bar Mitzvah. It was not uncommon, therefore, while services went on below them, for women to read the *tkhines* or German prayers and translations of the Hebrew services and to chat with other women."²⁷ Revered for their special place within the home, women prayed "in their own way in their own space."²⁸

25 Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 70.

26 In Hechingen, Germany, as early as 1838, the rabbi taught a weekly coed class before one of the Sabbath services. Boys attended up to age eighteen and girls until age sixteen. Manuel Werner, "Die Juden in Hechingen als religiöse Gemeinde," *Zeitschrift für Hohenzollerische Geschichte* 21, no. 108 (1985): 102.

27 The immigrant women who settled along the Mississippi River would have likely prayed in German and did not recite the *tkhines*, which were Yiddish private prayers and devotions for women. Kaplan, *Jewish Middle Class*, 66.

28 *Ibid.*, 65.

These women's American-born daughters would break the constraints of their mothers' upbringing. At the end of the nineteenth century, as explained below, these young women constituted the backbones of their small-town congregations. Although this sort of shift was occurring in large cities, too, it was in small cities that reservations about breaking gender rules were overcome out of necessity, in an effort to preserve Judaism.

Early Jewish Settlement on the “Upper Mississippi River”

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Mississippi River's 2,300 meandering miles constituted the heartland's major commercial highway. Because it was also a jumping-off point for Western exploration, the river invited the creation of many settlements for trade, ideal for the typical immigrant Jewish peddler and small merchant.²⁹ The three communities that are the focus of this article are merely dots on a very large canvas; they represent hundreds of places where Jews set up shop, married, started families, and hoped to live out their dreams.

Phineas and Delia Block settled in Louisiana, Missouri, in 1825. While Phineas operated a mill and a commission and grocery business, he also acted as “Spiritual Adviser to all the Hebrews for many miles around.”³⁰ Phineas and Delia's close relative, Louisa Block, and her husband, Abraham Jonas, settled further up the Mississippi River in Quincy in 1838.³¹ The first permanent Jewish residents of Keokuk

29 At this time the key commercial internal river ports were Cincinnati on the Ohio River; St. Louis at the confluence of the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi Rivers; Memphis; and New Orleans. See Timothy R. Mahoney, *River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820–1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), for a detailed account of the impact of these rivers on the communities mentioned in this article.

30 Block served also as a *shohet* and probably a *mohel*. The closest community of Jews to Louisiana was ninety miles away in St. Louis. “The Hebrews for many miles around” consisted of peddlers and traders who roamed the area. Charles Edward Pancoast, *A Quaker Forty-Niner: The Adventures of Charles Edward Pancoast on the American Frontier*, ed. Anna Paschall Hannum (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930), 43–44. Pancoast was quoted in Walter Ehrlich, *Zion in the Valley: The Jewish Community of St. Louis*, vol. 1 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 37.

31 Jonas had previously been active in politics and in the Masons in Kentucky, and he

arrived in the mid-1850s from western Poland and southwestern Germany. In fact, most Jews in the three towns were from southern Germany or western Poland.³²

As these communities attempted to establish congregations, they sought to reach agreement on a range of issues, including the form of *minhag* (ritual). Lee Shai Weissbach writes of the struggles in these places to resolve conflicts amicably: “There is reason to believe that battles over the adoption of Reform were especially intense in small communities . . . because the limited size of smaller settlements inhibited the establishment of dissident congregations when conflicts arose.”³³ In Quincy and Keokuk, these compromises eventually resulted in single Reform congregations, which would have a profound effect on the status of women.

The region’s Jewish population peaked around 1870, when Quincy had both a traditional and Reform congregation, Keokuk had one congregation beginning to shift from traditional to Reform, and Louisiana had none.³⁴ By this time, however, the frontier had moved beyond the Mississippi River, railroads were displacing river traffic, and big-city industrialization and immigration concentrated capital in growing urban areas such as Chicago and St. Louis.³⁵

followed this path in Illinois. Eventually he and Lincoln became very close friends. See Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).

32 See Gensheimer and Hieke, “Heimat and Home.”

33 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 159.

34 Gensheimer estimates that just under five hundred Jews lived in Quincy in 1870, fewer than one hundred in Keokuk, and around forty in Louisiana. Precise numbers are impossible due to the transience of the population, especially among young single male peddlers. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Jews in other nearby small places, such as Hannibal, Missouri, and Pittsfield, Illinois, organized “associations” to conduct worship and education. Hannibal eventually erected a synagogue. Unfortunately, all records of these groups have been lost. Farther up the Mississippi beyond Keokuk, Jews could be found in Iowa in Ft. Madison, Burlington, Davenport, Clinton, and Dubuque, and in Rock Island, Illinois. See Oscar Fleishaker, *The Illinois-Iowa Jewish Community on the Banks of the Mississippi River*, doctoral dissertation, Yeshiva University, 1957.

35 Simon Glazer, *The Jews of Iowa* (Des Moines: Koch Brothers Printing Co, 1904), 305–306.

Counting the Women

By the mid-1870s, declining Jewish populations in small towns, widespread indifference among Reform Jews, and general business slowdowns had unforeseen and deleterious effects on Jewish life along this stretch of the Mississippi. The decline in synagogue membership and its corresponding effect on congregational operations was so precipitous as to threaten the survival of some of these young congregations. Quincy provides one example of how this created a new reality.

Initially, Quincy's congregational leaders thought these changes were temporary and underestimated the degree to which they threatened their community. After all, these Jewish pioneers believed that Quincy would be a magnet for other Jews. Individually, most of them had found a satisfactory financial footing, while collectively they had established two congregations whose impressive structures represented lasting permanence. In 1876, however, Lewin H. Cohen, secretary of B'nai Sholom, reported to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC):

I am sorry to report a decrease in our membership on this occasion, but hope next year to do the opposite. Death, insanity and removal from the city on account of business misfortunes here injured us by [depriving] us of members good & true but trust for better in the future.³⁶

Not only did this exodus imperil the financial solvency of Quincy's congregation, but it drained the workforce as well. There were still important tasks to tend to, such as looking out for the sick and poor, educating children, celebrating holidays, maintaining and heating the temple, and paying the rabbi's salary. Quincy's Jewish women, through their various benevolent associations and volunteerism, had shouldered a portion of the burden for all of those activities, demonstrating both their capacity and capability to

36 Lewin H. Cohen to Lipman Levy, secretary of the UAHC, 10 March 1876, box A1-3, folder 11, MS-72, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH (hereafter AJA). Reflecting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Temple B'nai Sholom in 1895, Rabbi Elias Eppstein recalled: "The old members went home [died] and the younger generation moved to larger cities. The decrease really commenced immediately after the Chicago fire, in 1872, when many went out in search of big fortunes." Shirachirim [Elias Eppstein], "Quincy, Ill.," *The American Israelite* (15 August 1895): 8.

manage communal tasks. In many respects, they provided the social fabric that kept the community together. From a modern perspective, by this time, it would seem logical to assume that leaders in small-town Jewish communities would have considered whether it was appropriate to elevate the status of women in both religious and congregational life. However, even though a few rabbis had begun to advocate for enlarged responsibilities for women, this did not garner broad appeal. In fact, the nation's leading Reform rabbis made clear that they did not entertain the thought of women as the community's future teachers and leaders.

Shortly after HUC was founded to train future rabbis, an 1877 rabbinical conference considered a proposal to establish a "Hebrew young ladies' seminary" for instruction in "Hebrew, English, German and French, including music and the arts, also a practical knowledge of domestic duties."³⁷ The conference participants rejected the proposal, however, feeling that it should first put HUC on a firm financial footing. A leading proponent voiced his disappointment by saying that he was "of the opinion that a Hebrew Young Ladies' Seminary is as essential to the prosperity of Judaism as the College [HUC] is for the education of teachers and rabbis in Israel."³⁸ Implicit in this discussion were two parallel goals: to prepare women to be good Jewish wives and mothers, and to prepare men to be rabbis who would serve as teachers. Nevertheless, women in these small towns had as much interest in the affairs and survival of their communities as men, and survival was the paramount concern.

In our three communities, the survival challenge manifested itself in different ways. For Keokuk, the initial challenge was to maintain a *minyan* to ensure regular worship services, the most important reason for the congregation's existence. For Quincy, there was first the need to persuade unaffiliated Jews to join the synagogue and become active participants by incorporating them into synagogue governance, and subsequently the need to maintain the religious school. Louisiana's Jews were so few that they were never able to sustain a permanent rabbi; they needed to find someone within their ranks to assume the responsibility for their children's education.

37 "The Fourth Council of the United Hebrew Congregations," *The American Israelite* (20 July 1877): 5.

38 "Rejected," *The American Israelite* (27 July 1877): 4.

Making a *Minyan*

Once a community organized a public worship pattern, ensuring a *minyan* emerged as a new challenge. Liberated from the strictures that applied in Europe, many men began moving away from traditional Saturday synagogue attendance, thus imperiling regular worship in many localities.

According to the long-standing tradition mentioned above, women had not historically counted toward the *minyan*. Rachel Biale explains that both men and women have traditionally been required to pray, but that “women’s prayers remained essentially private, personal, and spontaneous supplication... Prayer in public requires the presence of a quorum, a *minyan*, and usually takes place in a synagogue.... The definition of a quorum does not only exempt women, it totally excludes them.”³⁹

As already mentioned, even among the American congregations that adopted the *Minhag America* prayer book, few were likely to have made an immediate change to count women toward a *minyan*. Indeed, there is no consensus as to exactly when American Reform congregations as a group began to move away from the *minyan* requirement altogether. On the one hand, Jacob Rader Marcus speculates that by 1869, “it was probable that ... the most liberal congregations disregarded the need for an all-male quorum when they conducted services.”⁴⁰ Yet Jews in Quincy and Keokuk, adopters of the *Minhag America*, still heeded the concept of *minyan* well into the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴¹

39 For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Rachel Biale, *Women & Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women’s Issues in Halakic Sources* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 20–24.

40 Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 56–57. Among the positions taken by the rabbis that affected women were equalizing the status of the woman at a marriage service and declaring divorce and the determination of the death of a missing spouse to be civil matters. The rabbis present were Kaufmann Kohler, L. Mayer, S.H. Sonenschein, M. Schlesinger, Isaac Mayer Wise, David Einhorn, and Bernhard Felsenthal. David Polish, “The Changing and the Constant in the Reform Rabbinate,” *American Jewish Archives* 35, no. 2 (1983): 270. Unfortunately, Marcus does not elaborate on whether “disregarding the need for an all male quorum,” meant dispensing with the quorum all together or permitting a mixed or all-female quorum.

41 Reform Rabbi Eppstein, who served congregations in Milwaukee, Kansas City, and Quincy during the nineteenth century, wrote in his diary that because he lacked a “quorum,” he was at times unable to hold services and at other times held only “informal” services or did not read from the Torah. When the *Union Prayer Book* replaced the *Minhag America* in

In 1860, while visiting the small town of Lafayette, Indiana, Wise encountered the *minyan* problem firsthand. He observed a young congregation of about thirty men committed to their businesses, but not, in his opinion, commensurately committed to their synagogue. Wise advised:

I am sorry to say, that the *Hazan* frequently finds no *minyan* (ten male adults) in that the men of Lafayette, like the men of so many other towns, were not committed to their Synagogue on Sabbath. I, therefore, instructed him to count the ladies to a *minyan*, not to suspend the divine service, *as the act of confirming girls puts an end to the idea, that females are not members of the Synagogue as well as males.*⁴² (Emphasis added.)

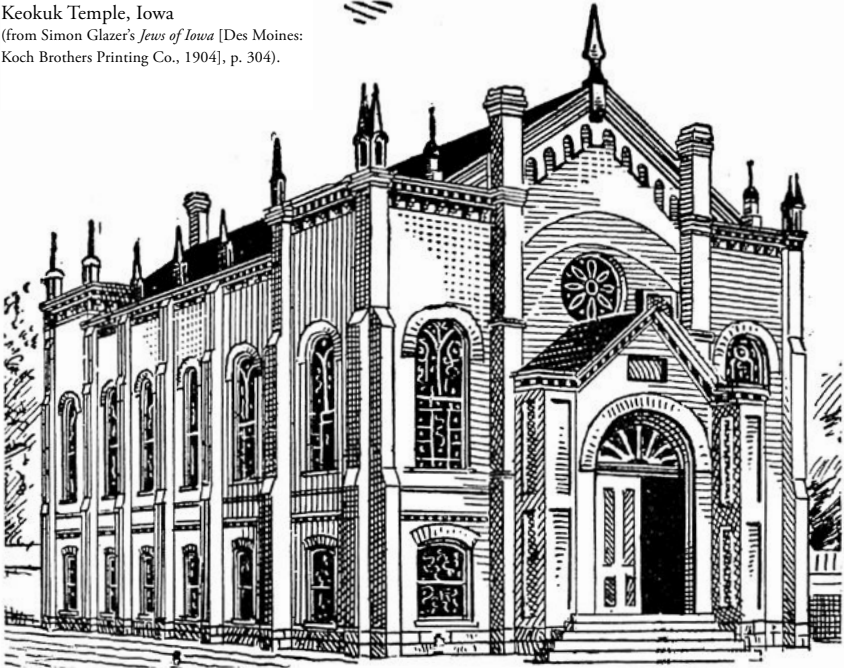
In Wise's mind, the confirmation of girls qualified women to be full participants in congregational life.⁴³ This shift in thinking would prove to be prescient and an important key to placing women on an equal footing with men.

1892, all mention of *minyan* requirements was gone. Isaac S. Moses wrote the first edition of the *Union Prayer Book*, which was then published with some modifications by The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). Wise himself gave up the *Minhag America* and yielded to the *Union Prayer Book*. *Diary of Rabbi Elias Eppstein*, 3 January 1873, Milwaukee; 18 September 1880, 16 April 1881, 20 April 1881, 17 June 1882, and 19 May 1883, Kansas City; 7 January 1898, 9 November 1901, 5 April 1902, Quincy; *Elias Eppstein Diaries*, MS-220, AJA; "Isaac S. Moses," *The American Israelite* (13 December 1917): 3.

42 The authors thank Shari Rabin for bringing this example to their attention. "Lafayette, Ind.," *The Israelite* (6 January 1860): 214. Sandford C. Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley* (Lafayette, IN: Courier Steam Book and Printing Co., 1860). Unfortunately, the authors were not able to establish whether the congregation in Lafayette heeded Wise's advice to count women toward a *minyan* in 1860. No further discussion of the matter appeared in *The American Israelite*, and the congregation continued to use traditional ritual until it revised its constitution in 1876. Irit Erez-Boukai, "On the Banks of the Wabash: Jewish Life in Greater Lafayette, Indiana 1840–1960," *Indiana Jewish History* 31 (August 1996): 16, <http://images.indianahistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16797coll18/id/1057/rec/1> (accessed 19 October 2020).

43 Wise's thinking suggests that confirmation qualified women to participate in prayer, yet traditionally there was no litmus test for counting men toward a *minyan*; any male over the age of thirteen counted, regardless of his level of education or literacy. Moreover, neither bar mitzvah nor confirmation was ever made a condition for communal prayer or congregational membership. See, for instance, David Philipson, "Confirmation in the Synagogue," *Central Conference of American Rabbis* (1890–1891): 47.

Keokuk Temple, Iowa
 (from Simon Glazer's *Jews of Iowa* [Des Moines:
 Koch Brothers Printing Co., 1904], p. 304).



KEOKUK TEMPLE

Keokuk, Iowa: “Opening Divine Service If Ten Ladies Are Present”

In 1863, after a period of intense factionalism, Keokuk’s congregation of sixty-two men was able to incorporate as Congregation B’nai Israel. They adopted the *Minhag Ashkenaz*, which the city’s German element favored.⁴⁴ By 1869 and still without a permanent home, the congregation adopted the *Minhag America* prayer book, thus joining the ranks of the American Reform movement.⁴⁵ During the Panic of 1873, after a mass exodus of Jews from the city, the congregation had dwindled to around fifteen men, not enough to ensure a *minyan* for regular religious services.⁴⁶

44 Jews had been worshipping communally in Keokuk since the mid-1850s, but Congregation B’nai Israel’s charter was granted in September, 1863. Dr. [Max] Lilienthal, “Keokuk, Iowa,” *The American Israelite* (3 August 1877): 4–5.

45 Fleishaker, *Illinois-Iowa Jewish Community*, 195. The congregation joined the UAHC in 1874.

46 “Keokuk, Iowa,” *The Israelite* (17 January 1873): 7.

Like rabbis in many small communities, Keokuk's young Rabbi Ferdinand Becker found the worshippers at services, particularly on Sabbath morning, to be increasingly populated by women.⁴⁷ His reflective letter to *The American Israelite*, dated 8 November 1875, spells out how the congregation resolved the dilemma of ensuring a full *minyan*:

I can not help giving credit to the ladies, both old and young, who attend the divine service very regularly on Friday evening, as well as on Sabbath morning, on holidays and on all other special occasions. They feel well pleased because *we adopted the rule to open divine service if ten ladies are present, as well as if ten men are present*. Many a time we could not open at all if we had to wait for our men, who always make the well-known excuse: "We like to come, but we can not lose the best business day of the week, so we can not leave the store."⁴⁸ (Emphasis added.)

Becker provides no clues as to how long the congregation—or Becker individually—had considered liberalizing its *minyan* requirement. Nor do we know whether it was a contentious decision or whether Wise's edict about equality in the *minyan* was even considered. No rabbi could unilaterally make this change, because it required approval of the congregation's male members. The women presumably would not have pressed publicly for this change, as it would have seemed inappropriate. However, the men could not deny the obvious religious devotion of their wives and daughters, nor could they deny that the women's participation was necessary to sustain the congregation into the future.⁴⁹

47 In 1872, at the age of twenty, Ferdinand Becker arrived in New York and within two years had been hired to be Keokuk's rabbi. In a letter to the editor of *The American Israelite*, a correspondent from Keokuk wrote: "We have been fortunate in securing the services of a good minister, Rev. Ferdinand Becker, who, though a very young man, is working well.... The manner in which he conducted the Confirmation ceremonies on Shabuoth evening, gave great satisfaction." Becker was born in Gaugrehweiler, a hamlet southwest of Frankfurt. Sembach, letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (10 July 1874): 5.

48 F.B. [Ferdinand Becker], letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (19 November 1875): 5.

49 For a more detailed explanation of the divisions among Keokuk's Jews, see Michael J. Bell, "'True Israelites of America': The Story of the Jews of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994): 94.

49 Throughout Rabin's *Jews on the Frontier*, she mentions many places—with and without rabbis—where Jews struggled to make a *minyan*, including Keokuk. She and the authors of

Comprising a *minyan* was not the only way these women sustained the congregation. These immigrant women also felt that they fulfilled a religious obligation through charitable deeds and financial support of their congregation. A few years before they began to be counted for a *minyan*, Keokuk's Jewish women purchased the land for a synagogue and donated it to the congregation with the proviso that it be used for that purpose. Completed in 1877, the resulting building was one of Keokuk's finest buildings: Iowa's first synagogue.⁵⁰ Rabbi Max Lilienthal singled out this group for emulation by saying, "The Jewish ladies stand unrivaled as to this point; they have set a noble example to all the sisters throughout the land. Three cheers for the Jewish ladies of Keokuk!"⁵¹

The Keokuk *minyan* decision may have stimulated similar debates in other small towns dealing with worship attendance problems.⁵² In 1888, another small congregation, this one in Topeka, Kansas, informed the readership of *The American Israelite* that "the ladies make up the full quorum" on Friday evenings. The explanation was clear: "The religious ardor of our masculine members would hardly stand the test of a high degree Fahrenheit."⁵³

Counting women toward a *minyan* did not lead to the penetration of other boundaries in Keokuk. Women did not gain further religious

this article discovered the Keokuk example independently. Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier*, 49.

50 Simon Glazer explains that the women's benevolent society spearheaded efforts by buying the land in 1872. He says, "The soul of the Keokuk Jewry were the godly ladies." Glazer, *Jews of Iowa*, 303. Through a series of annual masquerade balls attended by Jews and Christians, the Keokuk women had raised the funds to purchase the lot and then quickly raised \$750 toward the synagogue's construction. This encouraged the men, who raised an additional \$2,250 in 1874. By the time Rabbi Lilienthal visited Keokuk to dedicate the temple in 1877, the congregation had paid off all but \$1,000 of the building's \$12,000 cost. Dr. [Max] Lilienthal, "Keokuk, Iowa," *The American Israelite* (3 August 1877): 4-5. "Keokuk, Iowa," *The Israelite* (17 January 1873): 7; Sembach, letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (10 July 1874): 5. Glazer, *Jews of Iowa*, 191.

51 Dr. [Max] Lilienthal, "Keokuk, Iowa," *The American Israelite* (3 August 1877): 4.

52 Even though the congregation in Davenport, Iowa, had adopted Reform as their worship mode in 1879, it took ten more years before women were counted as part of the *minyan*. Glazer, *Jews of Iowa*, 280-281.

53 Hecla, "Topeka, Kan.," *The American Israelite* (20 April 1888): 2.

privileges, such as reading from the Torah or leading the prayer service. Their advancement toward that end was gradual; it grew as girls attended Sabbath school and were confirmed. Even though Keokuk's women achieved *minyán* status in 1875, no woman led any part of worship until five years later. Even then it was a "novel occurrence," during the confirmation service at Shavuot in 1880, as "two girls, namely Misses Bertha Spiesberger and Nettie Younker, assistants in the Sabbath-school, opened and closed the services with prayer."⁵⁴ The two girls were from Keokuk's leading Jewish families. Unlike their immigrant mothers, these American-born girls attended public school and studied Jewish history, holidays, ritual, theology, and some German and Hebrew alongside the boys.

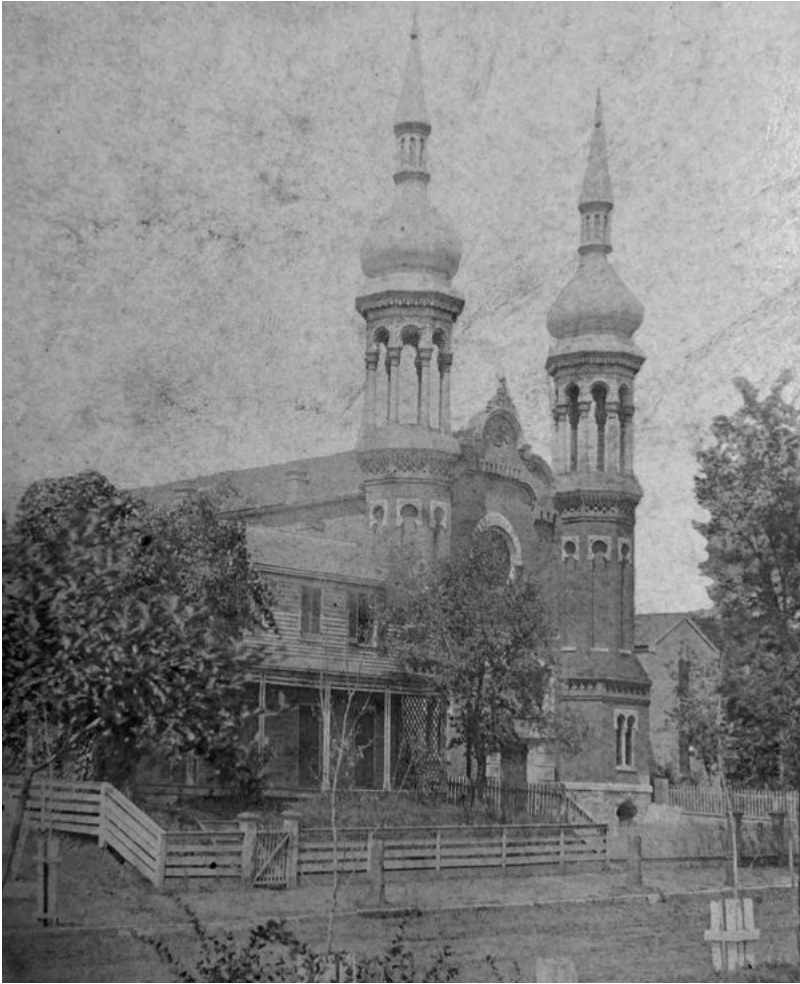
Quincy, Illinois: Attracting New Members

The story of the formation of Quincy's congregation follows a pattern of many other small to medium communities. In 1849, about a decade after the Jonas family arrived in Quincy, the city's small number of Jews began holding regular High Holiday services in "a room ... containing a Scroll of the Law, fitted up for the purpose of divine service," and by 1851 they had raised enough money to purchase a burial ground. When Wise visited Quincy in 1856, he suggested that the "40 souls of the Jewish persuasion, hailing from Germany, Poland and England" would make a nice congregation. In December of that year, Quincy's first Jewish congregation, the traditional Congregation B'nai Abraham, came into existence.⁵⁵

By the start of the Civil War, Quincy had become one of most politically and economically influential cities in Illinois. Seeking to attract more co-religionists, Edward Jonas described Quincy in 1863 as a "peaceful and prosperous" city of 20,000, with a Jewish congregation

54 Whether these prayers were recited in English or Hebrew is unknown. Sembach, letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (4 June 1880): 2.

55 For a history of Jewish life in Quincy from 1838 to 1872, see David A. Frolick, "From Strangers to Neighbors: The Children of Abraham in Quincy, Illinois," *Journal of Illinois History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 2–36.



B'nai Shalom, Quincy, IL.
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

of 45 paying members comprising 200 persons of all ages.⁵⁶ A year later, however, B'nai Abraham began to fracture when a small group of reformers seceded to found Reform Congregation B'nai Shalom. Over the next eight years, the two congregations warily co-existed as they

56 E.J. [Edward Jonas], "Quincy, ILL.," *The Occident & American Jewish Advocate* (July 1863): 190.

sought to attract and retain members. After B'nai Abraham's membership further declined and a fire seriously damaged its wooden structure, the two groups finally merged in 1872. Quincy's Jewish population, which included many young families, had peaked around this time at about 500 people, but many, particularly single men, had not affiliated with either congregation.⁵⁷ Little did the members of the recently consolidated B'nai Sholom realize that their newfound confidence would be undermined by an approaching population drain that would affect their financial well-being. This trend would continue until the end of the century, when there would be only about 170 Jews in the city.⁵⁸

When defining the meaning of "member," congregations historically treated married couples as single units, with the men considered to be the members. This entitled them to vote on congregational matters, sit on committees, and hold office. As Daniel Judson's recent work on American synagogue finance explains, only those who owned pews and paid annual assessments were entitled to membership and voting rights.⁵⁹ Widows who inherited their husbands' pews were considered members, but they were generally not granted voting rights.⁶⁰ The price of membership and its associated privileges was the willingness and ability to pay.

57 As was typical elsewhere, many men who lived in the area did not join the congregation. For some the barrier was cost, and for others it was indifference or transience. In 1879, for instance, when the Keokuk congregation numbered twenty-two, there were "forty-five members, residents and non-residents" of the local B'nai B'rith Keokuk Lodge No. 179. *The History of Lee County, Iowa: Containing a History of the County, Its Cities, Towns, &c* (Chicago: Western History Co., 1879), 648.

58 Calculations of Cynthia Francis Gensheimer. Simon Glazer counted fewer than eighty Jews in Keokuk in 1905. In 1906, in response to an Industrial Removal Office survey, Moses Kingsbaker estimated Quincy's Jewish population at one hundred. Industrial Removal Office Records, reel #65, box 123, American Jewish Historical Society, New York (hereafter AJHS). Glazer, *Jews of Iowa*, 306.

59 Dan Judson, *Pennies From Heaven: The History of American Synagogues and Money*, doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 2016, 55–57.

60 Dues-paying widows were granted the privilege of voting at New York's traditional Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in the 1880s, and Philadelphia's Orthodox Mikveh Israel enfranchised women in 1882. No Reform congregation is known to have granted women full membership privileges earlier than 1895. Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 292, 295; Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, 194.

Karla Goldman explains that congregations were very slow to extend full membership to women. As Goldman points out, “For the most part, nineteenth-century American Jewish congregations, like traditional synagogues, continued to deprive women of any official status within the community. Women were consistently excluded from lay and religious leadership, and even from membership.”⁶¹

Women’s fundraising became essential to the smooth operation of congregations, and their voluntary associations, such as benevolent societies, formalized the manner in which they shared the burden of pastoral care with their rabbis. The women’s associations had their own governance structures, with formal constitutions, bylaws, and elected officials. The congregation and women’s groups interacted formally and informally, since in small towns the women’s groups functioned as congregational auxiliaries and the officers of the women’s benevolent societies were, in most cases, married to the officers of the congregation and men’s benevolent societies. Hence, women became an informal part of the governance of the congregation.

An 1874 census compiled for the UAHC reported that B’nai Sholom, at fifty-eight members, was close to the average congregational size among the reporting communities.⁶² In the four subsequent years—during the tenure of Rabbi Isaac S. Moses—the congregation lost nearly one-third of its members, though through no fault of the rabbi.⁶³ Congregational leaders could not reverse the losses due to death and relocation. They had to confront what had become the national problem of growing indifference

61 *Ibid.*, 2.

62 Keokuk’s B’nai Israel reported only eighteen members. “Proceedings of the Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations: In Cleveland, Ohio, July 14, 15, and 16,” *The American Israelite* (24 July 1874): 5. The census responders were congregations east of the Mississippi River, save for Des Moines and Keokuk.

63 Although a local newspaper had reported that B’nai Sholom counted sixty members at the end of 1877, that figure appears to have been inflated. According to reports that B’nai Sholom filed with the UAHC, the congregation had fifty-nine members in 1874 but only forty-two in 1878. Lewin Cohen to UAHC, 16 December 1874; Jos. Kaufman to Lipman Levy, 18 March 1878, Union for Reform Judaism A1-3, MS-72, AJA. “Hebrew,” *The Quincy Whig* (13 December 1877): 2. Poor business prospects in Quincy, not the arrival of Rabbi Moses, caused the membership drain.

by recruiting the unaffiliated, especially the young.⁶⁴ By this time, Quincy included a sizable number of educated, American-born young women who could be a potential source of new members.

Rabbis nationwide attempted various solutions to hold onto their flocks.⁶⁵ Moses, with enthusiasm and urgency, announced a novel solution from the *bimah* during a Sabbath service the weekend of 19 January 1877. Using biblical language to rouse his congregation to recruit new members, he “invited the congregation to return to God their father.” Three officers of the congregation immediately took up the challenge.⁶⁶

A process was quickly initiated that resulted in the following blanket offer: “*Each Israelite, including women, over the age of eighteen can become an honorary member of the congregation including the full privilege of a seat and a vote free of charge.*”⁶⁷ Twenty people immediately

64 In 1878 only about half of the eighty-eight members of Quincy’s two B’nai B’rith lodges belonged to B’nai Sholom, which was reported to have forty-two members. Quincy was not at all unusual in this respect. It should also be noted that some men who moved away from Quincy retained their membership in a Quincy B’nai B’rith lodge rather than transferring elsewhere. Annual reports to the UAHC of Congregation K.K. Bnai Sholom, Quincy, Illinois, for the year ending 1 March 1878; *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of [B’nai B’rith] District Grand Lodge No. 6, Held at Chicago, Ill., January 1878* (E. Rubovits, Chicago, 1878); Deborah Dash Moore, *B’nai B’rith and the Challenge of Ethnic Leadership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 1–11.

65 Rabbi Isaac M. Wise remarked during a western tour that he found men in California preoccupied with business, reluctant to support congregations, and attending synagogue only on the High Holidays. In a letter from Quincy, published in *Die Deborah* (17 April 1876): 2, “Daisy Plummer” observed that despite their rabbi’s continued urging, Jews in Quincy paid “homage to indifference” and “in that we are the same as all other congregations.” Almost a year later, Lewin Cohen, secretary of the congregation, also realized the severity of the problem. Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier*, 142; Isaac M. Wise, “Editorial Correspondence Number XI,” *The American Israelite* (14 September 1877): 5; Lewin Cohen, “Letter From Quincy,” *Die Deborah* (2 March 1877): 1.

66 “Quincy, ILL,” *Die Deborah* (2 March 1877): 1. One of those officers was the energetic and forceful president, Isaac M. Lesem.

67 Moses likely perceived that the cost of membership created a barrier for many. Later in life he became a proponent of the free-church movement and founded a Chicago congregation on the principle of voluntary dues. Kerry M. Olitzky and Marc Lee Raphael, *The American Synagogue: A Historical Dictionary and Sourcebook*, 125; Judson, *Pennies*, 105–108; “Jews Form New Church,” *Chicago Tribune* (5 September 1896); “A New Thing in Congregations,” *The American Hebrew* (28 August 1896): 414.

signed up. Lewin Cohen, B'nai Sholom's secretary, described the next meeting in a letter to *The American Israelite*: "[It] turned out about all the Jewish young men and ladies in the city; the honorary membership was greatly increased, the young ladies also signing."⁶⁸ Moses immediately formed a Sunday evening Bible study class open to all, and the class's executive committee included both men and women.⁶⁹ Cohen ended a subsequent letter on an optimistic note: "Perhaps this report may also contribute to achieving similar results in other congregations; thus our straightforward endeavor for the well-being of our religion could find a doubled and quite worthy reward."⁷⁰

Unfortunately, there is no record of the total number of individuals, men or women, who took advantage of the honorary membership offer. Even Cohen sent conflicting messages.⁷¹ The Bible class functioned like a club, so it is no surprise that women were allowed to vote for its officers; however, it is unlikely that women were extended the same privilege when the congregation met to elect its officers. One conclusion is clear: Honorary membership, despite the welcoming invitation, did not convey much of lasting consequence to the women.

The entire experiment in honorary membership was short-lived. By December 1877, an observer noted that the Sunday evening Bible class was suffering a "slow drag."⁷² In fact, B'nai Sholom seemingly neither allowed full membership for women nor gained many, if any, permanent

68 "Letter From Quincy," *Die Deborah* (2 March 1877): 1; and Si. Onilli [Lewin Cohen], letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (16 March 1877): 6.

69 Dr. [Max] Lilienthal, "Keokuk and Quincy," *The American Israelite* (10 August 1877): 5.

70 Cohen, "Letter from Quincy," 1.

71 In one version of events, honorary membership, including voting privileges, was offered to both young men and women without charge. The other version said the honorary members did not have to pay dues but were not allowed to vote or hold office. Anonymous, "Letter from Quincy," 1; and Si Onilli, "Letter to the Editor," 6.

72 When discussing how to cover the cost of the weekly meetings, someone suggested the pattern used by Christians be followed, namely to ask females as well as males to contribute weekly. A correspondent from Quincy explained that "Some of our fine young men say we don't want to see the ladies pay." He went on to opine, "I hope the Bible Class will continue and not allow the few pennies to interfere with the good cause." Tojey, letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (4 January 1878): 5.

male members as a result of the offer. Nevertheless, the idea represented a small step toward an egalitarian Reform Judaism.

Religious Education

In 1860 Wise predicted the future when he envisioned that coed schooling and confirmation would effectively open the door to gender equality in Reform congregations.⁷³ This gradually empowered women, first as advanced Sabbath school students and then as teachers, preparing them to be their rabbis' closest educational assistants. Eventually, this put them in a position to serve as proto-rabbis in communities such as Louisiana, Missouri, which was never able to secure a permanent rabbi, and Quincy, Illinois, where a woman became something akin to a rabbinical assistant.

In small communities, reinforcing a child's Jewish identity through education was extremely important. Education, however, was another area in which small-town Jews had to make practical adaptations. Most historians cite Rebecca Gratz's Hebrew Sunday School (HSS), founded in Philadelphia in 1838, as the prototype for American Jewish supplemental education, but the majority of schools established in small Midwestern and western cities were first led by men.⁷⁴ Gratz was able to draw from a large pool of educated women able to volunteer their time. The HSS was a community-wide school whose curriculum focused on Bible study and basic religious values and precepts, and instruction was entirely in English.⁷⁵ While other established and robust commu-

73 "Lafayette, Ind.," *The Israelite* (6 January 1860): 214.

74 Goldman states correctly that in general Philadelphia's Jewish women's benevolent work, though "creative, vigorous and persistent," was not typical. She says also that they "established an American pattern in which Sunday schools with female teachers became a familiar and accepted model of Jewish supplementary education." The authors of this article have not found that "pattern" to have been followed when Sabbath schools were established in the Midwest. Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, 61–62.

75 At the time of the founding of the HSS, Rabbi Isaac Leeser, who urged and encouraged Gratz's efforts, had been at the helm of Gratz's Orthodox congregation, Mickveh Israel, for nine years. Leeser was a strong proponent of egalitarian education—for girls as well as boys, poor as well as rich. When Philadelphia's Hebrew Female Benevolent Society created the HSS, the group mandated that teachers were "to be appointed among the young

nities along the Eastern Seaboard—Richmond, Savannah, Charleston, Baltimore, New York, and Augusta, Georgia—did adopt the Gratz model, German-speaking immigrants in small towns had to rely on the resources at their disposal to teach whatever they felt most important, usually in congregational schools.

All along the frontier, Jewishly literate men, some with extensive training, volunteered or were hired to tutor children. Advertisements for rabbis or *hazans* during this period specified that the job would include teaching. Nothing captures the haphazard state of Jewish education in America better than the discussion among twenty-seven attendees at an 1871 rabbinical conference convened to create a union of American congregations. The problems of the prevailing free-ranging approach to education were summed up as follows:

Every teacher, capable or incapable, conducts the religious school in his place, as he pleases, and uses such textbooks as suit him best. One thinks the Hebrew is necessary, and another thinks it is not. One teaches Bible stories as mystical as possible and the other does not want to know anything about it. One teaches a catechism entirely contrary to the doctrines preached from the pulpit, and another thinks everybody can make his own catechism... [T]he congregations suppose the young are taught religion, while in numerous instances they are taught the peculiar notions of some superficial thinker.⁷⁶

The conferees—all male—realized the existential importance of

ladies of the congregation [Mickveh Israel].” Over time, the board members continued to be drawn exclusively from Mickveh Israel. Eventually, Leaser withdrew his support for the HSS because he felt that a school that met only one morning a week was inadequate. He helped found the Hebrew Educational Society, another community-wide, coeducational school. Most Philadelphia congregations continued to operate their own congregational schools, which prepared boys to become bar mitzvah. David Uriah Todes, “The History of Jewish Education in Philadelphia 1782–1873 From the Erection of the First Synagogue to the Closing of the Maimonides College,” doctoral dissertation, Dropsie College, 1952, Katz Center; Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 149–169.

⁷⁶ “The Importance of the Conference,” *The Israelite* (23 June 1871): 8; “The Conference,” *The Israelite* (9 June 1871): 8.

producing quality curricular materials that would standardize religious education. However, the proposed instructional resources never materialized, and the execution of the plan depended on individuals and congregations.⁷⁷ In the cities along the upper Mississippi, men initially assumed responsibility for religious instruction, but by the end of the century educated women took their place.

Like their sisters in Keokuk and Quincy, the Jewish women of Louisiana, Missouri, lent their financial support to a host of causes, including Jewish education, when they organized a Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society in 1874.⁷⁸ This was seen as a logical extension of the maternal nurturing role women occupied within their homes, so that, for instance, when two women passed the hat in Louisiana for contributions to re-establish a Hebrew Sunday school, the Jewish press called them "two true mothers in Israel."⁷⁹

At this time, nearly half of the Jews living in these three communities were under age fourteen, creating a strong imperative for Jewish education.⁸⁰ Almost without exception, the adult women were immigrants who married young and immediately began large families; thus, unlike in Philadelphia, there was no pool of educated, single women available to teach.⁸¹ Men on the frontier, on the other hand, married later, and

77 "Importance of the Conference," 8. "The conference must furnish the congregations with complete plans and specifications, how to organize and to conduct Hebrew schools, which text books must be used, how much of each is to be imparted in a given time ... by uniformity, to make the text books cheap and above all things correct in doctrine and diction; that the great object of religious education be attained in the best and most systematical manner possible. The conference has declared its willingness to take care of the theoretical part and has given it into the hands of committees. The practical part thereof must be left to the congregations." Also see Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier*, 70–71.

78 Women in Louisiana, Missouri, also supported Jewish orphans and indigent rabbinical students. F.F. [Ferdinand Fishel], letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (20 March 1874): 6; I.M. [Isidor Michael], letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (24 August 1877): 2.

79 I.M. [Isidor Michael], letter to the editor, 2.

80 Calculations of Cynthia Francis Gensheimer.

81 Only two Jewish women in Quincy—Kate Cohen and Annie Jonas—fit the profile of those who taught at Philadelphia's HSS. Cohen was one of the first Sabbath school teachers in Quincy, but during the Civil War Jonas worked closely with educated Christian women in a soldiers' aid society and later converted to Christianity. See Cynthia Francis Gensheimer, "Annie Jonas: Jewish Daughter, Episcopal Wife, Independent Intellectual," *American Jewish*

some of those found the time to be volunteer teachers.

Louisiana provides a useful example of how a small town without a spiritual leader educated its children in fits and starts, first relying on male teachers but eventually on a woman. “Verily the light of our divine religion penetrates every nook and corner of our broad land, no matter, however secluded the place may be.” Simon Lesem, a young Louisiana merchant who had immigrated with his brother from the German Palatinate in 1867, penned those words as part of a glowing report about Louisiana to *The Israelite*.⁸² When a Sunday school was initiated in 1870, Lesem reported, “some of our young men had undertaken the task of teaching the same, and go to work with much zeal.”⁸³ Like Quincy and Keokuk, Louisiana had a core group of men with sufficient Jewish literacy to serve as teachers.⁸⁴ Its twenty-four students most certainly included girls as well as boys—those whose “young minds” were being taught “the truth of our glorious religion and its lasting principles.”⁸⁵

When Lesem departed, Louisiana’s Sabbath school closed, but soon a grocer with “considerable Jewish learning” stepped into the breach.⁸⁶ Two young women joined him on the faculty and the school’s governing board, but the lead teachers were men.⁸⁷ After the school lapsed yet

History 98, no. 3 (July 2014): 83–125.

82 Simon Lesem, letter to the editor, *The Israelite* (20 May 1870): 7.

83 *Ibid.*

84 At least a quarter of the members of Louisiana’s Hebrew Cemetery Association, which organized services for the High Holidays, were able to lead services, and some of them, including Benjamin Younker and Solomon J. Bloch, were highly skilled. When the association’s charter members met to plan High Holiday services in 1871, seven of the twenty-six men were considered to lead prayers. Hebrew Cemetery Association Ledger, 11 June 1871; 13 August 1871. Collection of Betty Allen, Louisiana, Missouri; “Death of B. Younker,” *Louisiana Press Journal* (7 September 1897). Simon Lesem, letter to the editor, *The Israelite* (13 October 1871): 6.

85 Lesem, letter to the editor, *The Israelite* (20 May 1870): 7.

86 Philip Zuzak was the president of the Sabbath school board, but young women served as secretary and treasurer. I.M. [Isidor Michael], letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (24 August 1877): 2.

87 L.J. Reinheimer was considered “the foremost teacher of the Sunday school” when he left Louisiana for Chicago in 1880. When Philip Zuzak’s family left Louisiana in the mid-1880s, Louisiana was again without a Sabbath school. I.M., letter to the editor; “Obituary,” *The*

again in the mid-1880s, families had to educate their own children. Several subscribed to *The Sabbath Visitor*, a national publication targeted to Jewish children unable to attend Sabbath school.⁸⁸ Scattered in small enclaves throughout the country, many subscribers reported reading the publication with their mothers, and this essentially substituted for their religious school education.⁸⁹

When no man in Louisiana stepped forward to lead or teach after this relapse, the responsibility fell to a woman, Sadie Liebenstein Wald. In 1888, the eighteen-year-old high-school graduate left her Chicago home after marrying Adam Wald, a prominent Louisiana merchant. In her memoir, Wald explained how she came to establish a Sabbath school in Louisiana. An Orthodox rabbi from St. Louis visited and “seized upon me as a likely teacher and urged that I undertake a Sabbath school.”⁹⁰ Soon after, she was teaching the city’s Jewish children in her home.⁹¹ She explained, “These classes filled a need, for while few were pious, many yearned for spiritual sustenance.”⁹² Whereas Louisiana’s first Sabbath

American Israelite (6 March 1924); “Louisiana, Mo.,” *The American Israelite* (24 December 1880): 206. From their new home in western Kansas, the Zuzak children sent in frequent correspondence to *The Sabbath Visitor*. Herman Zuzak to “Cousin Sadie,” McPherson, Kansas, *The Sabbath Visitor* (January 1887): 576, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3101954;view=1up;seq=242> (accessed 19 October 2020).

88 Klapper, *Jewish Girls*, 112–113; Naomi W. Cohen, *What the Rabbis Said: The Public Discourse of Nineteenth-Century American Rabbis* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008); I.M. [Isidor Michael], letter to the editor.

89 See, for example, Jennie Zuzak to “Cousin Sadie” (McPherson, Kansas), *The Sabbath Visitor* (September 1886): 313, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3101954;view=1up;seq=242> (accessed 19 October 2020).

90 Sara L. Hart, *The Pleasure Is Mine: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Newman-Valentine, 1947), 56–57. The Walds lived in Louisiana as a young married couple and had one child. After Adam Wald died on 1 January 1901, Sadie returned to Chicago, eventually marrying Phillip Hart, becoming Sara Hart. Her memoir was written after that marriage.

91 Wald established the school in 1896. Hart, *Pleasure Is Mine*, 56, 57. By this time, her only daughter, Hilde, was seven years old, thereby contributing to Hart’s desire for a Jewish school. In similar manner, Alice Lyons Allmayer founded and ran a Sunday school in Ottumwa, Iowa, when her children were school-age. Jolly, letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (10 July 1890): 3.

92 Hart, *Pleasure Is Mine*, 57.



Sadie Liebenstein Wald (1869–1949).
(Courtesy Carol Bouville)

school—whose faculty consisted of young working men—was held on Sundays, Wald convened her school on Saturday mornings. Her weekly program included a religious service for the town's children—complete with “unusually good” music, and recitation of the “Hear, O, Israel” and biblical passages.⁹³ This filled a religious void in Louisiana, because for twenty-five years men there had conducted services every Friday night, but they kept their stores open on Saturday and held no services on that day.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Wald had become a community leader, presiding over services held for children on Saturday mornings. She achieved this stature because she was devoted enough to launch a Sabbath school. Little is known about Wald's qualifications other than that her Chicago rabbi, Emil G. Hirsch, thought highly of her, and another rabbi considered her “a likely teacher.” In her own words, she “was raised, as thousands of girls were, someday to marry and to have a family, and that was about all.”⁹⁴

A few years later Wald's cousin, Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, visited Louisiana. In 1893 Solomon had organized the Jewish Women's Congress and founded the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW),⁹⁵ and in 1895 she made her way to Louisiana to open a section of the organization there. As section president, Wald led a weekly Saturday morning Bible study session for Louisiana's adult Jewish women.⁹⁶ At these Saturday morning sessions the group also read “a published

93 Sadie Wald, “Plain Tales from a Small Town,” *Proceedings of the Council of Jewish Women Second Triennial Convention Cleveland, March 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1900* (Chicago: Toby Rubovitz, 1900), 116.

94 Rabbi Hirsch of Chicago's Reform Sinai Congregation officiated at the Walds' marriage. Shortly beforehand, Hirsch congratulated Wald “on the extremely happy choice and good taste displayed.” Hart, *Pleasure Is Mine*, 48.

95 Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893–1993* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993); “Hannah Greenebaum Solomon,” Jewish Women's Archive, <https://jwa.org/womenofvalor/solomon> (accessed 19 October 2020).

96 In 1895 fourteen women in Louisiana joined together to form a local section of the recently founded NCJW. “Report of the Louisiana, MO Section,” *Proceedings of the First Convention of the National Council of Jewish Women Held at New York, Nov. 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19, 1896* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1897), 90–91.

sermon by one of our Rabbis ... [lending] an air of devotion ... to the Sabbath day.”⁹⁷ Wald spoke in New York at an NCJW convention and offered this Sabbath plan as a model for women in other small cities. She suggested, “The morning’s program might be augmented by the singing of appropriate melodies, and in the course of time, a nucleus would be formed for a Sabbath service, decorous and devout, *even without the Rabbinical leader*” [Emphasis added.]⁹⁸ There is no record of Wald’s reading from the Torah or officiating at significant events, such as High Holiday services, weddings, or funerals. In fact, like the men who preceded her, Wald left Louisiana five years after having established the Sabbath school, and the school likely closed at that point. Nevertheless, by acting as an ad hoc leader, Wald took on some of the functions of a rabbi, which was very progressive for a woman of her day.

The Louisiana story shows how one community accepted the leadership of a woman to provide its children with some kind of Jewish engagement intended to insure their Jewish identity. Sadie Wald creatively filled that void—and more—through a thoughtful consideration of what her community needed.

The development of Jewish education in Quincy took a much different trajectory because of its strong rabbinic leadership and its larger size. In time, however, a woman, Rebekah Lesem, assumed a role very much like that of Sadie Wald in Louisiana and Ray Frank, who had received acclaim based on her teaching in Oakland, California, her Yom Kippur sermon in Spokane, and her speech at the Jewish Women’s Congress.

Immediately after the Jews of Quincy organized Congregation B’nai Abraham in 1856, they advertised for a *hazan* whose responsibilities would include educating the children.⁹⁹ Even though religious leaders

97 “Report of the Committee on Religion,” *Proceedings of the First Convention of the National Council of Jewish Women*, 191.

98 Ibid.

99 In 1856 “the assembled residents ... had already supported a Schochet among them.” M. Jacobs, “Quincy, Ills,” *The Israelite* (28 January 1859): 238; “Es wird ein Chazzan und Lehrer dort gesucht” (We seek a *hazan* and teacher), “Quincy, Ill.,” *Die Deborah* (14 November 1856): 99; “Rev. Israel Worenski is Hazan and Shochet,” “Quincy, Illinois,” *The Occident and Jewish Advocate* (October 1857): 360.

came and went, and the competing B'nai Sholom was founded in 1864, each rabbi supervised religious education as an important component of his job.¹⁰⁰ Regular public exams were conducted to demonstrate the accomplishments of the children.

Dr. Lewin Cohen was important to the organization of educational opportunities in Quincy. In 1869, when B'nai Sholom was temporarily without a rabbi, Cohen, a very learned and committed Jew, organized a congregational school to teach "principles of religion and morality" using passages from the Hebrew Bible in catechism. The school served fifty children, with Cohen and another man teaching the two upper classes and Cohen's erudite sister, Kate, and another woman, Fanny Bernheimer, teaching the younger students.¹⁰¹ These four volunteer teachers were all young, single, affluent, well-educated native English speakers.¹⁰²

In 1873, the first full year following the merger of the two congregations,

100 In 1878, in a letter of recommendation for Rabbi Ferdinand Becker, the officers of Keokuk's B'nai Israel described him as "Minister and Teacher" and gave him a glowing recommendation, including that he was "very proficient in Teaching the Children." Correspondence, Ferdinand Becker, SC-789, AJA.

101 Born in Scotland, Lewin Cohen and his sister Kate were highly distinguished. Their mother, Harriet, was a sister of Abraham Jonas. Lewin Cohen's publications and his eloquent correspondence to the UAHC as secretary of B'nai Sholom made him known to the wider Jewish world. Kate was an accomplished teacher of piano and voice. "Lewin H. Cohen, M.D.," *The Medical and Surgical Reporter*, ed. Charles W. Dulles (July–Dec 1888), 574; Lewin H. Cohen, "Two Prize Essays on the Post-Biblical History of the Jews," *The Israelite* (9 July 1869): 10. "Last Rites for Kate Cohen to be Held Today," *Chicago Tribune* (5 December 1933): 24; "Miss Bertelle is Appreciated," *Quincy Daily Whig* (2 September 1903): 8; "In Floods of Rich Harmony," *Quincy Daily Herald* (18 July 1906): 8.

102 B'nai Sholom's financial and congregational records from this period have been lost, but the manner in which the secretary thanked Cohen and the other teachers, wishing them success also in their "every-day affairs," suggests that they were all volunteers. Foreshadowing the future, at a public examination marking the end of the school's first term, prizes in the two lower classes were evenly divided between boys and girls, but girls captured five of the six prizes awarded in the two upper classes as well as that for best essay. Most notably, girls were chosen to deliver the opening and closing prayers. "The Examination of the Hebrew Bible School," *Quincy Daily Herald* (18 May 1869): 4.

ninety students attended the newly combined school.¹⁰³ One man was paid to help the rabbi teach Hebrew, and all but one of the seven volunteer teachers was a man.¹⁰⁴ As was standard around the country, Quincy's rabbis retained a great deal of discretion over the religious school curriculum. For example, Rabbi Moses taught students about prayer, holiday celebrations, and how to live a righteous life. In the notes that he used to guide his teaching, he eschewed "ceremonial symbols" and declared that "a life devoted to righteousness is the only truly human one."¹⁰⁵ At confirmations, which were festive celebrations full of pageantry, children recited prayers in English and Hebrew, gave speeches, and sang hymns. At an 1868 confirmation service, one girl "became moved to tears and the contagion spread to her fellow confirmees and to the audience until nearly all were weeping with her as she sobbed forth in broken utterances her prayer."¹⁰⁶

As men grew disinterested and did not prioritize the school, women filled the void, in short time comprising the majority of Quincy's Sabbath school faculty. In 1886, the teaching staff consisted of four young women and one middle-aged male Hebrew teacher.¹⁰⁷ That year at Shavuot, nine girls and three boys were confirmed.¹⁰⁸

103 "Annual Report to The Union of American Hebrew Congregations of Congregation K.K. Bnai Sholom, Quincy, Ill for the Year Ending March 1, 1874," Union for Reform Judaism Records 1873–1991, MS-72, box C-5, AJA.

104 "Hebrew School under charge of Minister and one paid assistant. Sabbath School taught by seven volunteer teachers under direction of the Minister as Superintendent; School controlled by a Board of Directors; two school rooms in basement of Temple. Rev. Mr. Moses, assisted by the following: Mr. F. Hoffman, Mr. B. Vasen, Mr. G.M. Jackson, Mr. David Nelke, Mr. Alex [Alexander] Levi and Miss Hattie Levy." Mr. F. Hoffman was the paid assistant, leaving only five of the seven volunteer teachers named. "Annual Report to The Union of American Hebrew Congregations of Congregation K.K. Bnai Sholom, Quincy, Ill for the Year Ending March 1, 1876," Union for Reform Judaism Records 1873–1991, MS-72, box C-5, AJA.

105 Isaac and his brother Adolph also published several books for confirmation students. Isaac S. Moses Papers (1873–1926) Confirmation materials 1880, 1892, n.d., MS-122, box 1, folder 3, AJA.

106 "The Feast of Pentecost," *Quincy Daily Whig* (28 May 1868): 4.

107 Scribner, "Quincy, Ill.," *The American Israelite* (12 February 1886): 5. "Shebuouth," *Quincy Daily Whig* (10 June 1886): 3.

108 "Quincy, Ill.," *The American Israelite* (25 June 1886): 1.

It should be noted that in Sabbath school, girls learned Hebrew alongside boys, capturing the top prizes in the language and occasionally reading from the Torah.¹⁰⁹ Even though the congregation was firmly Reform and followed the Reform movement's emphasis on confirmation in lieu of bar mitzvah, exceptions were made for individual boys to become a bar mitzvah throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰

In Quincy in the quarter century between 1873 and 1900, roughly equal numbers of boys and girls stayed in religious school through age thirteen.¹¹¹ However, as Melissa Klapper observes, girls far outnumbered boys in postconfirmation classes, as well as in secular public high

109 Girls won eleven of twelve prizes awarded to Hebrew students at the public examination in 1886. One girl and one boy read from the Torah on that occasion. Over the years, several boys read from the Torah at their confirmations, and in 1891 a girl—Jessie Lesem—did so, too. “The Examination of the Hebrew Bible School,” *Quincy Daily Herald* (18 May 1869): 4; “The Feast of Weeks,” *Quincy Daily Herald* (28 May 1871): 4; “Shebuouth,” *Quincy Daily Whig* (10 June 1886): 3; “Hebrew Sunday School,” *Quincy Daily Herald* (8 July 1886): 4; “Confirmation,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (11 October 1886): 3; “Confirmation,” *Quincy Daily Herald* (13 June 1891): 3.

110 “Next Saturday will occur the Bar Mitzvah of Herbert, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Nelke, in honor of which his parents will give a seven o'clock dinner at Hotel Newcomb,” *Jewish Voice* (St. Louis) (16 November 1894): 5; “This Saturday morning, at 10 o'clock, a very impressive ceremony will take place, being the occasion of the ‘Bar Mitzvah,’ or confirmation of Master Eli Jackson,” “Ninth Street Temple,” *Quincy Daily Herald* (18 October 1884): 4. Pauline Levy to Lena Levy Younker, 18 December 1889; Anna Berkson to Sam Younker, 24 January 1894. Younker Family Correspondence, collection of Cynthia Francis Gensheimer. Nadell, *America's Jewish Women*, 182–183. There was still no female counterpart to the bar mitzvah; the first bat mitzvah in the United States occurred in 1922, and in Quincy on 11 November 1955, when Barbara Teper, under the tutelage of Reform Rabbi Joseph Lieberles, read from the Torah. Conservative Rabbi Sidney Rothstein, who arrived a year later, continued the practice. Email from Barbara Teper Pearson to David Frolick, 26 October 2020.

111 Between 1873 and 1900, sixty-eight children were reportedly confirmed in Quincy. Girls made up 55 percent of all of those confirmed. However, adding in the boys known to have become bar mitzvah brings to seventy-four the total number of children educated through age thirteen, and exactly half of those were boys. Gensheimer's estimates of confirmands, as well as those of bar mitzvahs, are based on accounts in the press, and therefore are underestimates.

school.¹¹² Jewish girls—mostly from affluent families—were among the first high school graduates in Quincy, Keokuk, and Louisiana, but few of their brothers completed high school. The demands put on teenage boys to “learn the trade” included being sent to other cities to work for relatives, becoming traveling salesmen, and, for those who stayed in town, working full time, including Saturdays.¹¹³ Their sisters generally did not travel when school was in session, so they were available to be Sabbath school teachers and trained for that role in postconfirmation classes.¹¹⁴

Starting in 1890, all of the Sabbath school teachers in Quincy were young, American-born women who worked under the supervision of Rabbi Eppstein.¹¹⁵ Women in Quincy were marrying later—or not at

112 Klapper, “History of Jewish Education,” 206.

113 For instance, a biographer of Keokuk’s Nate A. Spiesberger explained, “During vacations, holidays, and after school hours, he busied himself about his father’s establishment [a wholesale millinery concern in Keokuk]. When he was thirteen years of age he regularly entered the employ of the house.” *The Illustrated Milliner*, May 1915, 61. Similarly, Nate’s sole brother completed eighth grade, whereas both sisters graduated from high school. Keokuk, Quincy, and Louisiana, Missouri, had multiple examples of this phenomenon. For instance, at age sixteen, Ike Stern left the Keokuk public schools to work in his father’s wholesale millinery business, but his sister Lenora graduated from Keokuk High School in 1887. Annette Mann, “Mr. Ike Stern” in “A History of the Jews of Des Moines,” *Reform Advocate* (9 May 1908): 40; *The Comment* [Keokuk High School yearbook], 1921. At age fifteen, Aaron Younker left Keokuk’s public high school to work at Younker Brothers, a dry-goods store. Johnson Brigham, *Des Moines: The Pioneer of Municipal Progress and Reform of the Middle West Together with the History of Polk County, Iowa*, vol. 2 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1911): 1370. Similarly, Samuel Michael remained in public school in Quincy until age sixteen, when he began as a clerk in his uncle’s store. *The History of Pike County, Missouri* (Des Moines: Mills & Company, 1883): 708. Samuel Michael’s sister Sadie graduated from Louisiana High School in the Class of “Sweet Sixteen,” so named because it consisted of thirteen girls and three boys. *Louisiana Press Journal* (9 December 1924). Published lists of the earliest high school graduates in Louisiana and Keokuk enable some quick comparisons of brothers and sisters within the same families. Five daughters of Benjamin Younker and his wife Annie Wilchinski Younker, for instance, graduated from Louisiana High School, but none of their three sons did. Four of the five daughters of Manassas Younker and Lena Levy Younker graduated from high school, and the fifth daughter completed eleventh grade, but neither of their sons graduated.

114 Girls did most of their traveling during the summer or at winter break.

115 For instance, in 1891 Rabbi Eppstein supervised a faculty of five single, American-born

all—and during their single years some had the time, training, and inclination to teach. Half a century after Rebecca Gratz established her Sunday school, Quincy had a small pool of young, single women like those who constituted Gratz's faculty. This shift to an all-female faculty mirrored what was happening throughout the country in Reform congregations large and small.

Despite the fact that most of the country's Reform religious school teachers had been confirmed, many nationwide were not well equipped for the job, either by temperament or training, and some of them taught for only a short time before they married.¹¹⁶ Some had scant knowledge, due to their own weak religious education. Others were unreliable, had insufficient pedagogical skills, or were unable to control unruly behavior.¹¹⁷ While the qualifications of young female teachers varied consid-

young women (Rebekah Lesem, Nellie Berger, Lillie Bachrach, Sophie Kingsbaker, and Tenie Goodman), each a representative of a family that had been a pillar of Quincy's Jewish community for several decades. The next year, Jennie Eppstein, a daughter of the rabbi, joined the faculty, and later in the decade four others of similar backgrounds joined: Alice Meyer, Rosa Morris, Naomie Levy, and Clara Wile. Although none of the mothers of these women had taught in the school, they belonged to the Ladies' Temple Aid Society, which purchased books and supplies for the school as well as provided prizes, treats, and entertainments. By 1895, all available evidence suggests that both the Sabbath school and other advanced Jewish study in Quincy had become an all-female pursuit led by Rabbi Eppstein. The rabbi taught weekly classes on the Hebrew Bible and probably taught the high school girls who met every week in the temple to study Hebrew. "Confirmation," *Quincy Daily Journal* (12 June 1891): 6; *The American Israelite* (10 November 1892): 2; (11 February 1897): 7; (9 December 1897): 3.

116 The chronicler of Kansas City's Reform congregation, Frank J. Adler, gives a sense of how quickly the faculty turned over: "Most of those [young women teachers] who resigned did so on account of getting married. Nine vacancies on the teaching staff thus developed in one year, and the openings were vied for by young would-be brides. Applications to fill one of the vacancies were so numerous that the school board placed a sign on the temple door, reading: 'Over fifty applicants ahead of you. If the wedding cyclone continues, call again in about a month.'" Frank J. Adler, *Roots in a Moving Stream: The Centennial History of Congregation B'nai Jehudah of Kansas City 1870–1970* (Kansas City, MO, 1972), 83. See also Richman, "Jewish Sunday School Movement."

117 Keokuk, with its small pool of qualified teachers, reflects the acute problems of recruiting faculty for small-town religious schools. A Keokuk Sabbath school teacher asked her friend to substitute one Saturday when she had an appointment at the dressmaker, and another

erably, the few who staffed Quincy's religious school at the turn of the century had the benefit of good training.¹¹⁸ By 1900, even though the school met twice a week, Quincy's reduced Jewish population required only two teachers for its twenty-five pupils.¹¹⁹ Those teachers—almost certainly Rebekah Lesem and Jennie Eppstein—were both knowledgeable about Judaism, and Lesem was a trained teacher.

Throughout his career, Rabbi Eppstein championed education for girls, and during his time in Quincy, he continued to make female education a top priority. Although he found that women made up the majority of worshippers at many services, he lamented that some did their marketing on Saturday and made “the Friday eve the only evening for theaters, balls, dances, and other places of amusement.”¹²⁰ Beginning in 1894, the Quincy section of the NCJW—the first section established outside of Chicago—conducted weekly discussions of Jewish literature and Sabbath school work. Rebekah Lesem and Rabbi Eppstein's daughter

seemingly quit in the middle of the school year. The disorderly conduct of some students had been a long-standing problem, going back at least to 1888. The school disbanded some months after Sam Younker wrote the following in January 1893: “Our Sabbath School is getting along very well now and all the teachers are satisfied and the general behavior is very good except your loving Brother Sam.” When the school resumed in December 1893, Amanda Younker wrote, “They think of organizing a Sabbath School to be held after Schul every Saturday morning. Every one is very intusiastic [*sic*] about it, but no doubt it will have the fate of all the other[s].” Congregation B'nai Israel Minute Book, 4 November 1888, Katz Center; Pauline Younker to Nettie Younker, 16 December 1893; Kate Younker to Nettie Younker, 23 December 1893; Dorothy Younker to Nettie Younker, 26 December 1893; Sam Younker to Nettie Younker, 6 January 1893; Amanda Younker to Nettie Younker, 7 December 1893; Younker Family Correspondence, collection of Cynthia Francis Gensheimer. 118 Unlike Keokuk, which had struggled for years to attract qualified rabbis, Quincy retained a series of capable rabbis who ran good educational programs throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. See n. 115 for the names of the young women who staffed Quincy's religious school in the 1890s.

119 Keokuk's religious school, which met three times a week, had one teacher for its thirteen pupils. *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. II, 1900–1901 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1900), 245, 254.

120 Diary of Rabbi Elias Eppstein, January 29, 1898; October 1, 1898. Elias Eppstein, “Our Sabbath Schools,” *The American Israelite* (20 December 1894): 4.

Jennie led the sessions.¹²¹ Rabbi Eppstein, who attended these discussions, had high hopes that they would inspire women to revive Jewish life in Quincy and transmit their love of Judaism to their children.¹²²

Rabbi Eppstein followed in the footsteps of Rabbi Moses by similarly focusing his confirmation classes on topics that would have resonated with acculturated Jewish girls from prominent families—girls wanting perhaps to emulate their mothers' religiosity and yet adapt it to the mores of their day, including Progressive Era ideals such as personal social service.¹²³ Eppstein's diary indicates that he enjoyed leading Quincy's postconfirmation class. He referred to the class as the "normal class," thus reflecting the prevailing view that it was the training ground for teachers.¹²⁴ By working so closely with the rabbi as students and then teachers, some young women proved that they were more than capable of assuming greater congregational responsibility. One such woman, Rebekah Lesem, exemplified the intelligent woman whose education ultimately empowered her to achieve a position of authority within the congregation.¹²⁵

Rebekah Lesem: The Model "Modern" Jewish Teacher

The eldest of a family of seven girls, Rebekah Lesem was born in Quincy

121 "Quincy, Ill.," *The Jewish Voice* (16 November 1894): 5; Diary of Rabbi Elias Eppstein, 17 December 1896; 26 December 1896.

122 After a year of NCJW study, the rabbi enthusiastically reported that in Quincy he had seen "our mothers and daughters searching and taking up the discarded volumes containing the history of our people." Eppstein, "Our Sabbath Schools," *The American Israelite* (4 April 1895): 5.

123 Eppstein's *Confirmant's Guide to the Mosaic Religion* (n.p.: F.A. Schober, 1868) shows his strong belief in God and the afterlife of the soul and spells out his thoughts about Shabbat, the major holidays, and the Ten Commandments. In the back of the book, he lists prayers in English and a few prayers in German. His thoughts about what constituted the proper curriculum for a confirmation class may have evolved in the twenty-two years between publication of *Confirmant's Guide* and his arrival in Quincy. Precise numbers of students who continued in postconfirmation class are difficult to determine.

124 S. [Elias Eppstein], letter to the editor, *The American Israelite* (10 November 1892): 2.

125 Speaking of Rebekah Lesem's work leading the Quincy NCJW study sessions, one observer noted that her "enthusiasm and love for study cannot but awaken a renewed thirst for knowledge." CHIC, letter to the editor, *The Jewish Voice* (St. Louis) (16 November 1894): 5. "Quincy, Ill.," *The American Israelite* (4 April 1895): 5.

in 1863 and at thirteen was confirmed by Rabbi Isaac S. Moses.¹²⁶ In many respects, Lesem represented young Jewish women living in acculturated Midwest households. Her parents, Henry Lesem and Mary Kern, immigrants from the Palatinate, were part of the large Lesem clan that founded and sustained both Quincy's Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society and Congregation B'nai Sholom.¹²⁷ An accomplished pianist who graduated from Quincy High School, Lesem subsequently earned money by teaching piano and volunteered to choreograph children's musical and dramatic performances staged by the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society. In some respects, however, Lesem's life was unusual. Her family was more transient than most, and her childhood was spent moving from one small Midwest town to another.¹²⁸ Her father died when she was twenty-one, and, unlike her female Lesem cousins, whose fathers and husbands were extremely successful businessmen, she remained single and supported herself. Not only was Lesem thoughtful and highly intelligent, but, much like Ray Frank, she was also well versed in Reform Jewish theology and practice, Torah, Talmud, and Jewish history. Under Eppstein's tutelage, she became one of the young women who comprised the Sabbath school faculty.

At the 1893 Jewish Women's Congress in Chicago, the thirty-year-old Lesem drew on her experiences teaching in Quincy's congregational school to deliver the address, "Advanced Sabbath-School Work." By the time she gave her speech, Eppstein had made her responsible for the postconfirmation class, an endorsement of both her substantive and pedagogical expertise. In addition to being well qualified to speak on the subject, Lesem may have come to the organizers' attention from having

126 That would have made Rebekah Lesem a teenage eyewitness to the honorary membership experiment.

127 Not only were there a large number of Lesems in Quincy, but Lesems could be found in Louisiana and Hannibal, Missouri, and Gillespie, Illinois, among other places.

128 Rebekah Lesem lived in St. Joseph, Missouri; Leavenworth, Kansas; Quincy, Illinois; and Clay Center, Kansas. Only one of Lesem's sisters married. Her mother, Mary Kern Lesem, was a charter member of Quincy's Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society and was "long ... prominent in the affairs of that congregation [B'nai Sholom]." "78th Birthday of Mrs. Mary Lesem," *Quincy Daily Journal* (8 January 1914): 3. For Henry Lesem's obituary, see "Died," *The Times* (Clay Center, Kansas) (24 January 1884): 1.



Rebekah Lesem (1863–1951).
(Courtesy Phyllis Fist)

been personally acquainted with another participant, Rabbi Moses, as well as knowing Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, the chair of the gathering and the person who invited the speakers.¹²⁹

In her talk, Lesem proclaimed that “the future of our cause” lies in the hands of Jewish teachers. She argued that Sabbath schools should inculcate in Jewish children the kind of ethical precepts that would lead them to work toward social progress. This reflected the tutelage of Moses and Eppstein, as well as the general prophetic focus of many other Reform leaders. Lesem further decried that religious school teachers, particularly those in small cities, still lacked good textbooks and proper training.

By zeroing in on the dull way that the subject matter was presented in most Sabbath schools, Lesem declared that no one should be surprised that Jewish children opt out as soon as they can. She wrote:

It is then no wonder that our children cease to attend Sabbath school after their thirteenth year with such a sigh of relief. They leave with such a slight acquaintanceship with their religion as may be derived from a study of their confirmation speeches or from their [*sic*] teachings of a poorly taught volunteer teacher.¹³⁰

She then offered suggestions on how to engage and motivate students by selecting appropriate curriculum, actively engaging children in class discussions, and ensuring that teachers themselves are adequately trained.¹³¹ Perhaps as a result of her exposure at the Jewish Women’s Congress, she was appointed, alongside Julia Richman and Sadie American, to the NCJW’s prestigious national standing committee on Sabbath schools.¹³²

129 Hannah Greenebaum Solomon knew Lesem because Lesem’s aunt, Theresa Greenebaum Lesem, was Solomon’s sister. When Theresa Greenebaum Lesem lived in Quincy in the 1870s, she was secretary of the Hebrew Ladies’ Benevolent Society. Unfortunately, there appears to be no record of what Moses said about Lesem or her presentation when they shared the podium at the Jewish Women’s Congress.

130 Rebekah Lesem, “Advanced Sabbath-School Work,” *Jewish Messenger* (20 October 1893): 5.

131 Ibid.

132 “Miss Lesem of Quincy is Honored by the National Council of Jewish Women Now in Session in New York City,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (17 November 1896): 4. Rebekah Lesem,

In 1895, Lesem became the first person from Quincy to attend normal school.¹³³ Upon her return, she became a public school teacher and helped train other teachers while taking post-graduate courses in education during summers at the University of Chicago.¹³⁴ Not only did she develop pedagogical expertise, but she had in-depth knowledge of Jewish history and could analyze the Bible as literature and demonstrate its contemporary relevance.¹³⁵ After Eppstein suddenly retired and left Quincy in 1906, the congregation, its membership greatly diminished, had difficulty attracting and retaining rabbis. During a hiatus in rabbinic leadership, Lesem, head of the Sabbath school, may have been one of the congregants who helped conduct services. This can be inferred from the following report: “The Sabbath-school under the supervision of Miss Rebecca Lesem, is doing fine work.... Not having a rabbi, the various members have been reading the services Friday evening. The children of the Sabbath-school sing the chants and responses.”¹³⁶

Though it may have been only an occasional occurrence, conducting a part of religious services allowed Lesem to venture beyond the boundaries of the customary gender norms of the day, much as Sadie

“Advanced Sabbath-School Work,” *The Jewish Messenger* (20 October 1893): 5; “National Council of Jewish Women,” *The American Jewess* 2, no. 2 (November 1895): 115.

133 “Boys and Girls of Yesterday,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (5 December 1914): 2.

134 Rebekah Lesem made a career of teaching, which, in her day, required that she remain single. After graduating from Illinois State Normal School, a college that trained teachers, she lectured and published in the general field of pedagogy. When she left her job teaching eighth grade in Quincy to begin teaching at the Illinois State Normal School, Quincy’s superintendent of schools declared her “one of the most competent teachers in the public schools.” She returned to Quincy to train teachers locally and later taught at the Milwaukee State Normal School and at a residential school for disabled children outside Chicago. Rebekah Lesem’s transcript from the University of Chicago states that she graduated from Illinois State Normal University in 1896 and earned a degree in education at the University of Chicago in 1912, mostly through summer coursework beginning in 1901. “Child Study,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (5 December 1896): 4; Rebecca Lesem, “Ethics of the Teaching Profession,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (6 April 1909): 6; *Diary of Rabbi Elias Eppstein*, 26 September 1895, MS-220, AJA; “Miss Lesem Resigns,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (6 June 1904): 8; “Class of 1879,” *Quincy Daily Journal* (5 December 1914): 2.

135 Rebekah Lesem, “Hebrew Literature,” *The Jewish Messenger* (19 April 1895): 1.

136 “Quincy, Ill.,” *The American Israelite* (12 December 1907): 2.

Wald had in Louisiana.¹³⁷ In fact, Lesem's relatively unrecognized actions mimicked those of Ray Frank, whose teaching and oratory skills had gained national acclaim even before she spoke at the Jewish Women's Congress. Frank honed her skills as lecturer by teaching children and adults in Oakland, California. In 1890, she agreed to speak following Yom Kippur services while visiting Spokane, Washington, because the then-small community would otherwise have had no service to mark the solemn day.¹³⁸ Decades later, several American women acted briefly as proto-rabbis, and their stories, like those of Wald, Lesem, and Frank, reflect how Sabbath school teaching prepared them for leadership roles.¹³⁹

Entrees for Women into General Congregational Affairs

Although Reform congregations increasingly entrusted women with greater responsibilities, especially as teachers, they were still not considered equal partners in the governance process. As a general rule around the country, Sabbath school committees were the first congregational committees to include women, and that opened the door to full participation in synagogue affairs later.

Even though Jewish women in Louisiana, Missouri, became officers

137 Rebekah Lesem's married sister, Carrie Lesem Fist (1864–1939), provided the impetus and leadership for twelve families to establish the first congregation in Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1905. After her husband died, she became a beloved matron of the dormitory of the Hebrew Union College. Randall M. Falk, *A History of the Jews of Oklahoma with special emphasis on the Tulsa Jewish Community*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College, 1946, 10, 124; "Rabbis—And a Mother," *The American Israelite* (12 March 1931): 1; "Obituaries," *The American Israelite* (2 February 1939): 9.

138 "Ray Frank," Jewish Women's Archive, <https://jwa.org/womenofvalor/frank> (accessed 27 October 2020). "First Woman Rabbi," *San Francisco Chronicle* (19 October 1893): 12.

139 In the 1920s and 1930s, a few women attended rabbinical school but none were ordained. Over the years, many rabbis were assisted by their wives and daughters, who were then in a position to step in when a congregation was without its rabbi. Shuly Rubin Schwartz describes several examples of this phenomenon, including that of longtime Sabbath school teacher Paula Herskovitz Ackerman, wife of Rabbi William Ackerman of Temple Beth Israel in Meridian, Mississippi, who served as her congregation's spiritual leader after her husband's death in 1950. Nadell, *Women Who Would be Rabbis*, 90–101, 120–125; Ellen Umansky, "Paula Ackerman: Pioneer in the Pulpit," *Southern Jewish History*, 14 (2011): 77–117; Schwartz, *Rabbi's Wife*, 84–85, 160–164.

of its short-lived Sabbath school board in 1877, there is no evidence that they were recruited to join whatever governance structure existed there. In Keokuk, women continued their traditional roles through their work with the Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society, yet there is no evidence that any woman ever held a congregational office.¹⁴⁰ The all-male board of directors of Congregation B'nai Israel did, however, appoint two women to the congregation's school board in 1886.¹⁴¹ These two—Lena Levy Younker and Caroline Blum Spiesberger—were key members of the cadre of devout women who had worked hard to raise funds for their synagogue.¹⁴² In 1906, after the deaths of Younker and her husband, Manassas, and at a time when B'nai Israel was desperate for funds, the couple's four single adult daughters, "the Misses Younker," were listed as dues-paying members.¹⁴³

140 Extant congregational records cease in 1906, which was probably when the congregation had dwindled in membership to the point that formal meetings ended.

141 Congregation B'nai Israel Minute Book, 3 January 1886, Katz Center.

142 At one time Lena Levy Younker served as president of the Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society, and when she died in 1891 she was eulogized as a "true mother in Israel." The temple's *ner tamid* (eternal light) burned for a full year in Younker's memory. "A Good Woman's Death," *The American Israelite* (8 October 1891): 7 (reprinted from the *Daily Gate City* of Keokuk, Iowa); Congregation B'nai Israel Minute Book, 5 October 1891, Katz Center.

143 The eldest daughter, Nettie Younker, was one of the two girls who first prayed publicly in Keokuk. She later belonged to the Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society but also assumed nontraditional and unofficial responsibilities within Keokuk's tiny Jewish community. Nettie's brother Samuel was nominally secretary of Keokuk's congregation, but the last set of congregational minutes in 1906 state that Nettie, without holding any official title, did the bookkeeping for him. Furthermore, even though only men were appointed to the volunteer committee set up to help Jewish immigrants arriving in Keokuk through the Industrial Removal Office (IRO) in the early 1900s, Nettie's correspondence to the IRO indicates that she was actively involved in finding jobs for the newcomers. In nearly all larger cities, the IRO correspondence was conducted by men. In the nearby small town of Hannibal, Missouri, home to only ten Jewish families at the time, Rebecca Levy Tobias was secretary and treasurer of the IRO committee. For the report of IRO field representative Stanley Bero, naming the four men who comprised Keokuk's volunteer committee, see Stanley Bero report dated Jan. 23, 1907 in Industrial Removal Office Records, I-91, Box 18, AJHS. For a report filed by Nettie Younker with the IRO, see report of Miss N. Younker, Keokuk, Iowa, undated, Placement Records from Cities Which Persons Removed To, 1904–1906; Industrial Removal Office Records, box 15, AJHS. For a report filed by Rebecca Tobias, see report of Mrs. R. Tobias,



Lena Levy Younker (1845–1891).
(Courtesy Tedi Macias)

Although Quincy had experimented with honorary female membership, no woman held congregational office during the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁴ Instead, women retained traditional congregational roles in their voluntary associations.¹⁴⁵ Through the local section of the NCJW, however, Quincy's women made inroads into congregational governance. In 1896, the Quincy NCJW president reported: "Our entire Sunday School Board is composed of women, six of the members of the Jewish Council."¹⁴⁶ That same year, Lesem's national Sabbath School Committee of the NCJW was able to claim credit for having placed women on the boards of Sabbath schools in eighteen cities. Like Quincy, most of these cities were in the West and Midwest.¹⁴⁷ B'nai Sholom's financial ledger that begins in 1902 lists only two women—the divorcee Betty Milroy and widow Mary Lesem—who paid dues during the first decade of the twentieth century. Whether these two women were considered full members with voting rights is unknown.

Even as the NCJW promoted the appointment of women to school

Hannibal, Missouri, received 24 Jan. 1905, Industrial Removal Office Records, box 15, AJHS.; Congregation B'nai Israel Minute Book, 11 June 1906 and 26 Oct. 1906, Katz Center; "Keokuk, Iowa," *Jewish Voice* (20 October 1905): 7.

144 Eventually Jewish women in Quincy became officers and board members of the congregation, but no woman ever achieved the presidency.

145 For the most part, the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society concentrated on helping needy and sick Jews and providing proper burials for its members. The Temple Aid Society (also called Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society) focused on supporting B'nai Sholom, its rabbi, and its Sabbath school. For example, the Ladies' Aid Society raised the funds to install new windows in the synagogue. "Quincy, ILL.," *The American Israelite* (4 April 1895): 5. The Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society eventually morphed into the Temple Sisterhood, and responsibility for the needy shifted to the B'nai B'rith.

146 The president of Quincy's branch of the NCJW at this time was Rebekah Lesem's cousin, Jennie Lesem Nelke. "Report of the Quincy, Ill., Section," *Proceedings of the First Convention of the National Council of Jewish Women*, 74.

147 Admitting women to serve on Sabbath school boards was still rare on the East Coast, as Rosa Sonneschein explained: "In New York Dr. Kohler's congregation has elected women on the Sabbath School Board, a measure which has for many years been successfully employed in the West." Rosa Sonneschein, "Editorial," *The American Jewess* (December 1897): 142; "Report of the Corresponding Secretary, Sadie American, dated November 17, 1896," *Proceedings of the First Convention of the National Council of Jewish Women*, 149.

boards, and though Philadelphia's Orthodox congregation Mickveh Israel had already counted women as members since 1884, only a few Reform congregations admitted women as full members before 1900.¹⁴⁸ Despite having been a long-standing subject of debate, supported by rabbis such as Isaac Mayer Wise, individual congregations were slow to approve the change. For example, at a meeting of the Jewish Ministers' Association (JMA) in 1885, Reform Rabbi Leopold Wintner presented a paper, "The Admission of Women to Active Congregational Membership."¹⁴⁹ A year later, because of dissension among those present, the JMA tabled Wintner's motion to allow women to serve as congregational trustees. The milder version that was passed granted "that women can become active members of congregations by having a voice in the meetings and serving as members of committees on Sunday-schools."¹⁵⁰ Women could exercise their influence only indirectly through specific assignments, or, as some claimed, by influencing their husbands.

In June 1895 Rosa Sonneschein, founder and publisher of *The American Jewess*, decried the fact that married women were denied membership status in congregations and issued a call for change.¹⁵¹ In July,

148 By the time they were granted membership privileges, the women of Mickveh Israel had proven their mettle in numerous ways, including operating the HSS for nearly a half century, and establishing a Jewish orphanage. For a full discussion, see Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, 192–196. Goldman credits Ruth Alpers for having found the documentation supporting Mickveh Israel's vote: "Seat Holders (both male and female) are eligible to membership after holding seats in the Synagogue for one year." "Congregation Mickveh Israel," 1 September 1884, Philadelphia, papers of K.K. Mickveh Israel, Resolutions, Appeals, and Decisions of the Board of Managers, 1848–1885, SC- 9631, AJA. See also "The Foster Home's Jubilee," *The Jewish Exponent* (21 April 1905): 4; "Women as Members of Mickveh Israel," Charles J. Cohen, "Letter to the Editor," *The Jewish Exponent* (28 April 1905): 2.

149 The JMA was an East Coast association of rabbis that existed prior to the formation of the CCAR in 1890. "Hebrew Convention," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (15 April 1885): 2; *Jewish Conference Papers (1886) of the Jewish Ministers' Association of America* (New York: Philip Cowen, 1887), 41, 42, 47, 48.

150 *Jewish Conference Papers (1886) of the Jewish Ministers' Association of America* (New York: Philip Cowen, 1887), 48.

151 Sonneschein had examined names of over 20,000 members listed in the records of 102 congregations "coming from every section of this country and representing every shade of

following Sonneschein's dare, Hirsch's Sinai Congregation in Chicago and Max Landsberg's B'rith Kodesh Congregation in Rochester granted membership privileges to women.¹⁵² At a rabbinical conference that month, Rabbi Moses commended the two Reform congregations for this and said: "I plead for a larger share of woman's work in our congregational life. Why should woman not have the right to membership, to vote and to hold office, especially if she contributes the same amount of money and often the tenfold amount of earnest and loving work?"¹⁵³

An editorial in the *American Hebrew* indicated how the momentum favoring women was shifting. Noting the growth in giving women greater opportunities to participate, it said: "Among other denominations, as with us, and in secular institutions as well, woman has been looked upon as good enough to contribute money for support, but has not been asked to take an active part in managing affairs, or even by vote to have a voice in the selection of officers."¹⁵⁴

In 1897, when Hirsch surveyed prominent Jewish women about women's proper role in the synagogue, the published responses remind the modern reader of the divide among women as to full gender equality,

our ancestry belief." By 1896, she stated that a few congregations extended membership privileges to single and widowed women, and that one congregation, "the blessed Temple Isaiah, in Chicago," granted women "the unconditional right of membership and representation." *The American Jewess* (June 1895): 153; "Editor's Desk," "Editorial," *The American Jewess* (December 1896): 137.

152 The record is somewhat ambiguous, but Cleveland's Tifereth Israel may have allowed women to become members in October 1895. Even though Chicago's Sinai Congregation counted women as members at this time, it is not clear whether they were permitted to serve on the board of directors. Mrs. Emanuel Mandel, an NCJW officer and member of Rabbi Hirsch's congregation, wrote: "I believe that women are well fitted to take an active part in the affairs of the synagogue. They are represented on almost every board of directors, be it educational, charitable, or philanthropic. Why not on that of the synagogue or congregation?" E.G.H., "Editorial Note," *The Reform Advocate* (4 July 1895): 1; Tobias Brinkman, *Sundays at Sinai: A Jewish Congregation in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 223. Annual meeting of the congregation, 19 October 1896, The Temple (Cleveland, OH) records, 1850–1942, MS-504, AJA. Quotation of Mrs. Emanuel Mandel, Chicago, "Woman in the Synagogue," *The Reform Advocate* (20 February 1897): 4.

153 "Nearing the End," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY) (13 July 1895): 12.

154 Editorial, "Woman in the Synagogue," *The American Hebrew* (16 August 1895): 354.

even in the Reform movement.¹⁵⁵ Most, including Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, continued to maintain that women's most important roles were as wives and mothers creating proper Jewish homes, and rearing children in the faith. Typical respondents echoed the traditional belief that women were best suited to handle the educational and charitable work of the congregation, as well as other tasks relying on domestic skills. About half of respondents, including Solomon, did maintain, however, that qualified women should be able to assume any role in the synagogue, including that of rabbi.¹⁵⁶

In the 1890s the growing pressure to welcome women's full participation in the synagogue was taking place in the shadow of the growing national women's suffrage movement. Some Jewish women supported the movement, while others did not.¹⁵⁷ In Quincy, where only two Jews—both men—signed a suffrage petition in 1870 and where local newspapers mocked women's suffrage in the 1890s, it is likely that most Jews still opposed suffrage.¹⁵⁸ Yet Lena Salomon Swimmer, who served two lengthy stints as president of Quincy's Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society, publicly argued in favor of suffrage and led the drive that earned women the right to serve on the city's school board.¹⁵⁹ Although Jewish women took on some expanded congregational responsibilities, most Jews still advocated traditional roles for women within the synagogue. Even Ray Frank opposed women's suffrage and felt it inappropriate for

155 "Woman in the Synagogue," *The Reform Advocate* (20 February 1897): 7–10 and (27 February 1897): 24–27.

156 Based on the responses, it seems that few congregations of the time allowed women to hold office.

157 "Many Jews viewed the suffrage movement with suspicion. They considered many suffrage leaders xenophobic at best and anti-Semitic at worst." In fact, "no major American Jewish women's organization endorsed suffrage until 1917." Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 31–51.

158 Ferdinand Nelke and J.S. Rosenthal signed the 1870 petition. Petition for Suffrage, Denman File, Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County.

159 Cynthia Francis Gensheimer, "Lena Swimmer Was Tireless Mover and Shaker," *Quincy Herald-Whig* (11 October 2015): 7A; "Meeting of the Parliamentary Club," *Quincy Daily Journal* (20 October 1894): 7; "Suffrage," *Quincy Daily Journal* (11 May 1895): 7.

married women to have careers.¹⁶⁰ Leaders of the NCJW considered women's work with Sabbath schools to be an extension of their natural maternal talents.¹⁶¹ In 1902, when Solomon was the first woman to speak from the *bimah* during Friday evening services at Boston's Temple Israel, her daughter Helen recognized the historic importance of the occasion. Helen was elated to witness how intently the congregation listened to her mother but noted also that they were impressed with her "sweetness and womanliness."¹⁶²

At this point, traditional gender norms still restricted the space that women could occupy within the governance structure of the synagogue. However, in short order, prevailing attitudes tilted toward a growing acceptance that elevated the position of women in synagogue life.

In 1916 Jennie Franklin Purvin, an acculturated Chicago communal volunteer, credited confirmation with making young women qualified for parity within synagogue governance. Purvin boldly claimed that "with very, very few exceptions," the men in control of congregations simply paid their dues and attended High Holiday services, leaving "all synagogal activities to their wives and mothers and daughters."

160 Ray Frank declined Rabbi Isaac S. Moses's offer to be a rabbi. She was not in principle opposed to single women having careers, even being rabbis if they were so qualified. However, speaking of herself, she told a newspaper reporter, "I do not even aspire to the office of rabbi, because being a woman I could never be one; that is thoroughly masculine." "Ray Frank, Paradoxical Positions," <https://jwa.org/womenofvalor/frank> (accessed 20 October 2020). At the same time, she offered another explanation as to why she didn't want to be a rabbi: As a rabbi she would have to answer to a congregation and would lose the ability to speak her mind freely. "A Latter Day Deborah," *San Francisco Examiner* (12 November 1893): 14; "Some Common Sense from a New Woman," *Arizona Weekly Citizen* (Tucson) (23 November 1895): 2; Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*, 59.

161 See also Cornelia Ney, "Women on Congregational and Sabbath School Boards," *1899 Council of Jewish Women*, 189, National Council of Jewish Women Collection, MS-NAT. N2, box 1, Western Historic Manuscript Collection, Kansas City. "Religious Schools," *The Council of Jewish Women*, May 1903, n.p., Hannah G. Solomon Collection, box 8, folder 1, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

162 Helen Solomon to Henry Solomon, 3 March 1902, Hannah G. Solomon Family Collection, box 17, MS-749, AJA. See also Cynthia Francis Gensheimer and Kathryn Hellerstein, "'No Better Education': Helen Solomon at Wellesley College, 1901–1902," *American Jewish History*, 104, nos. 2/3 (2020).

At the same time, she maintained, men refused to break with tradition and allow women “a vote on the important matters which come before every synagogal board.”¹⁶³ Purvin made a direct connection between confirmation and empowerment:

Was not tradition broken when the Americanized Jew took his boys from the Cheder and placed his children, both boys and girls, in the religious school of the congregation? Was not a tradition broken when the Reform Jew gave up the Bar Mitzvah ceremony and substituted therefore the rite of confirmation, not only for boys but also for girls? Have not these girls, long since grown into womanhood and motherhood, earned the honor thus paid them and brought renewed vitality and vigor and inspiration into the life of the religious community? Then why not crown their painstaking and worthy efforts with official recognition?¹⁶⁴

Despite prior attempts, it was not until 1917, three years before the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, that the CCAR supported political suffrage for women.¹⁶⁵ Once the federal amendment was ratified and American women gained universal suffrage, American Reform congregations made it common practice for women to be granted full membership.¹⁶⁶ Subsequently, however, the movement to appoint women to important congregational committees or to hold elective office remained slow. The school committee remained the first step to women’s acceptance, and in many cities the president of the temple Sisterhood became the sole female on the congregation’s board of trustees.

Conclusion

The concept of pragmatic adaptation goes a long way in explaining the decisions that granted women new authority in small Jewish communities struggling to survive. This article looks at the adjustments made

163 Jennie Franklin Purvin, “The Woman on the Board,” *The Reform Advocate* (15 January 1916): 713–714.

164 Ibid.

165 Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 389.

166 Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*.

by three small Jewish communities when women stepped in to fill the vacuum created by voids in male leadership. Looking back, women did not seem to seek radical changes in their congregational roles, but rather took on new responsibilities as a matter of personal religious responsibility and practical necessity. A consequence of this was fuller participation in congregational affairs.

When Rabbi Isaac S. Moses spoke immediately after Ray Frank at the Jewish Women's Congress in 1893, he was alarmed that thousands of Jews living in small towns still lacked qualified teachers and rabbis. He had known Rebekah Lesem from her time as a student in his confirmation class in Quincy, and he had certainly followed Frank in the national press before hearing her speak at the Congress. Putting two and two together, perhaps, he conceived of a creative, pragmatic way to meet a pressing need. Citing "dire necessity," Moses proposed "placing women preachers in the pulpits in the smaller communities, and advocated the establishment of a ladies' seminary for the education of women preachers and teachers."¹⁶⁷ Moses's suggestions were not adopted, and we don't know whether he urged Lesem to become a rabbi or work at the proposed seminary. Moses, who had offered honorary membership to women in Quincy in 1877, continued to be ahead of his time. His proposing, in the mid-1890s, a seminary to prepare women for the rabbinate shows how far American Jewish opinion had shifted since 1877, when rabbis proposed a Hebrew young ladies' seminary to prepare girls to be better mothers and wives. In fewer than twenty years, the women of Keokuk, Quincy, and Louisiana, along with nationally known figures like Frank and Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, had demonstrated the potential for women to be equal partners with men in Reform Judaism.

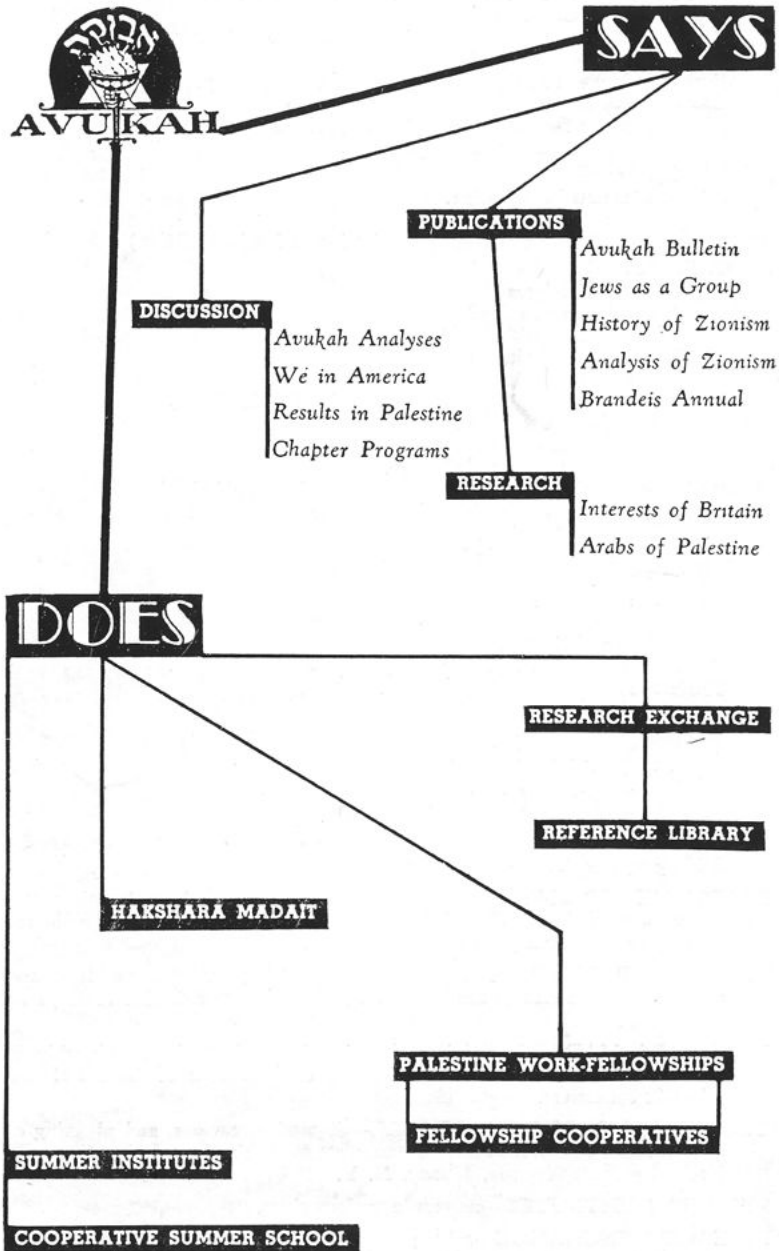
167 In 1895, Moses spoke at the annual convention of the CCAR, where he voiced his support for full membership of women in congregations as well as his concerns about the future of Jewish life in small communities. He advocated establishing colleges for Jewish women and offered suggestions to bolster Jewish life in small communities. "Jewish Women's Congress," *The Reform Advocate* (September 1893): 60; "Nearing the End," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY) (13 July 1895): 12; "Ray Frank—The First Woman Rabbi?—Debates about the Ordination of Women," Jewish Women's Archive, <https://jwa.org/womenofvalot/frank/first-woman-rabbi/debates-about-ordination-of-women> (accessed 20 October 2020).

In summary, several conclusions are noteworthy. First, the women in these three towns seemingly did not demand a change in their status, for they would have considered such a thing to be unseemly. In addition, while prominent rabbis urged a greater role for women, especially through the Jewish press and national conferences, it took rabbis at the local level to help shepherd the way. In some cases, local men had to vote to authorize women's expanded roles, whereas in others female educators simply stepped in to fill voids at critical junctures. Factors beyond local control, such as economic and demographic reversals, created existential crises, and the creative experiments that preserved Jewish life in these small towns were made possible within the Reform movement, which was at the same time adapting many religious practices to contemporary American life. Thus, early inclusionary steps for women in Reform Judaism, though in some ways almost accidental, fit within the framework of the country's religious and political changes.

Unfortunately, in these three towns, as well as in many others, the pragmatic changes only temporarily staved off the decline and demise of small-town Jewish life. Even though gender accommodation ultimately did not save the day, opening the doors for female participation helped these Jewish communities survive a bit longer and maintain Jewish engagement. While they were isolated, daring, and novel experiments, these precedent-setting acts were harbingers of a future that ensured full female equality in Reform Judaism.

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Avukah Says, 1936.
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Avukah: American Zionist Students Between Culture and Politics, 1925–1936

TAL ELMALIACH

Avukah, a North American Zionist student movement, was founded in 1925 and remained active until the end of World War II. During this period, it functioned as the campus arm of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). At its acme, the movement had some two thousand members, mostly on the large campuses of the American Midwest and East Coast; several thousand more were in its direct circles of influence.¹

On the face of it, Avukah was a marginal phenomenon. It had fewer members than other American Jewish youth organizations at that time, and it did not occupy a central place in the Jewish community or in national politics. Neither was it of importance in the Zionist movement. Historical research reflects this marginality: Avukah gets a mention in some works about American Jewry between the world wars, and some of them chronicle it in some detail.² But no one has provided an adequate account of it to date.

1 Convention report, 17 June 1942, PB 308, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem (hereafter NLI).

2 Robert F. Barsky, *Zellig Harris: From American Linguistics to Socialist Zionism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Alfred Jospe, "Jewish College Students in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book* 65 (1964): 131–145; Samuel Grand, "A History of Zionist Youth Organizations in the United States from Their Inception to 1940" (doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1958), 89, 132; Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the World* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Alon Gal, "Brandeis and Hashomer Ha'Tzair," *Yaad* 8, no. 26 (November 1991): 66–70; Yehuda Riemer, *Me-Olam Hasbefa La'hagshama Halutzit: He'Halutz b'tzefon Amerika, 1933–1953* (Efal: Yad Tabenkin, 2009), 89–90; M.S. Chertoff, "Avukah," in *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*, ed. Raphael Patai (New York: Herzl Press and McGraw-Hill, 1971), 99; Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (New York: Ktav, 1975), 127; Michael Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project 1914–1933* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

As I will show, Avukah's importance lies not in its influence (or lack thereof) but rather in its metamorphosis. Avukah began as a decentralized, apolitical organization, associated with the American Jewish establishment, that focused on organizing cultural activities. In the mid-1930s, it transformed into a cohesive social movement with a well-established socialist ideology, and it sought a role in helping to shape American society, organized American Jewry, and the Zionist enterprise. Avukah's development demonstrates the broad phenomenon of the 1930s, where a significant number of politically engaged American Jewish students turned to the left, some within the Zionist fold, others in Stalinist or Trotskyist camps. In this article I focus on how these students first became engaged with politics. I argue that Avukah's transition from culture to politics illustrates the dynamic way American Jews adapted Zionism from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s as they reacted to events in Europe and Palestine and to the conditions they faced in America.

In an important article from 1979, Ben Halpern, once a member of Avukah, formulates a thesis that has become the historiographical convention regarding American Zionism.³ According to Halpern, American Zionism was shaped by two ostensibly contradictory trends. The first was American Jews' efforts to integrate into their surroundings; the second was their effort to retain their particularity. According to Halpern, even though twentieth-century American Jews lived in a fundamentally different environment from their European counterparts, their integration into the surrounding society did not resolve their sense of being outsiders, a minority, and a Diaspora. Yet neither did these feelings stand in the way of their efforts to fit in. On the contrary, in a dialectical fashion, the two reinforced each other.⁴ In his article "Another Look at the Americanization of Zionism," Ofer Shiff offers a detailed breakdown of that phenomenon into its constituent components by addressing the work of scholars who followed in Halpern's footsteps

3 Ben Halpern, "The Americanization of Zionism, 1880–1930," *American Jewish History* 69, no. 1 (September 1979): 15–33.

4 Ben Halpern, *The American Jew: A Zionist Analysis* (New York: Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1956).

while elaborating on his thesis.⁵ Mark Raider and Raphael Medoff, for example, demonstrate that American Zionism underwent a process of adjusting its concepts to American perceptions and life; Jonathan D. Sarna and Charles S. Liebman go one step further and claim that, because the American milieu to which Zionism had to adapt itself was constantly changing, the internal stresses of the Americanization process that Zionism underwent also altered. Shiff himself argues that the process reflected transformations in American society and culture and that each American Jewish generational cohort reacted differently, shaping Zionism according to its needs.

I will use and expand on the paradigm crafted by these scholars to explain the changes that Avukah went through. Avukah's members shifted, I will argue, from cultural to political Zionism as a consequence of their Americanization process. However, this process was not influenced only by its American environment, but also by changes that occurred in the Zionist Jewish community in Palestine, known as the Yishuv, and by the growing peril faced by European Jewry. Furthermore, not only did each American Jewish generational cohort react differently to these changes, shaping its Zionism according to its needs, but young Zionists conceived of American Zionism in various ways. As such, other youth groups reacted differently than Avukah did to the events of the time.

The article is divided into three parts. First, I offer a background survey of the arena in which Avukah operated—that is, the larger context of American Jewish youth and student organizations between the two world wars. This will be followed by two sections recounting the two stages of Avukah's transformation. In each section I consider Avukah's different theaters of action as well as the other organizations that operated parallel to it. In my conclusion, I propose that Avukah's history informs and offers a broader perspective on the Americanization of Zionism.

5 Ofer Shiff, "A New Perspective on the Americanization of Zionism" (Hebrew), *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel* 10 (2000): 180–206.

Jewish and Zionist Youth and Student Organizations in the United States between the World Wars

Jewish organizations became a presence on American campuses during the first decade of the twentieth century and continued to develop in the 1920s and 1930s as the number of Jewish students grew. The great majority of Jewish students were the children of immigrants who arrived from Eastern and Central Europe during the early years of the century.⁶ Jewish student organizations demonstrate the dialectic character of the overall Americanization process: As opposed to assimilation, Americanization involved integration into American culture while stressing Jewish differences and uniqueness. These campus groups sought to create a safe and friendly social space, deterring assimilation by keeping young Jews from drifting away from the Jewish community. They helped young Jews integrate into American society as a minority with a distinct identity.⁷

One of the ways that the non-Orthodox stream—to which most of the students belonged—used to achieve these goals was the adoption of two central and complementary foci of identity: Judaism as a culture and the Zionist idea. In both cases, particularistic Jewish identification was meant to serve the American identification by claiming that the ethos of Jewish culture and Zionism was compatible with the American ethos. The two foci meshed because the Zionist movement was perceived as an important source of the new secular Jewish culture, as expressed in the writings of Ahad Ha'am.⁸ At the start of the twentieth century, the American Jewish philosopher Horace Kallen formulated

6 Between 1919 and the mid-1930s, the number of Jewish college students grew from a bit more than 14,000 to more than 100,000. Between 1900 and 1909, 19 percent of college-age Jews were enrolled in institutions of higher education; by the mid-1920s, the percentage had risen to 42 percent. For more information, see Lee J. Levinger, *The Jewish Student in America* (Cincinnati: B'nai B'rith, 1937), 23, 52, 72; Jospe, "Jewish College Students"; Daniel Greene, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 14–63.

7 Jospe, "Jewish College Students"; Chaim Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 62–82; Greene, *Cultural Pluralism*, 14–63.

8 Greene, *Cultural Pluralism*, 26.

this way of thinking about identity under the rubric of “cultural pluralism.” According to Kallen, America was a society to which each minority made a unique contribution to the mosaic of national character. Zionism, according to Kallen, was what enabled modern Jews to be part of this mosaic. The combination of multicultural liberal progressivism and Zionism was manifested during Louis D. Brandeis’s tenure as head of the American Zionist movement, from 1914 to 1921. It was embodied in the platform adopted at the ZOA’s founding convention in Pittsburgh in 1918, which Kallen was instrumental in drafting.⁹

Most of the Zionist activity that young American Jews of the interwar period participated in took place off campus. It was of two types: The first was philanthropic and cultural in nature and identified with the largely bourgeois stream that was called General Zionism. It was exemplified by organizations such as Young Judea, a youth group founded in 1909; Junior Hadassah, founded during World War I for women 18–25 years old; and Masada, for men of the same age, which came together at the end of the 1920s but was officially founded in 1933. The second type of activity that pioneering Zionist youth movements pursued were identified with socialist Zionism; these groups included Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, and Young Poale Zion. They became active in the United States in the 1920s and focused on pioneer training in preparation for settlement in Palestine. In fact, however, few members of either type of organization actually moved to Palestine. Some of them went to college, where they continued their Zionist activity by affiliating with Zionist student groups.¹⁰

The first Zionist student organization in the United States was founded at City College in New York in 1902. In 1905 it, and Zionist clubs at several other colleges, united to form the Collegiate Zionist League (CZL). During World War I, many more students began participating in Zionist activities, leading the CZL to reconstitute itself as the

9 Alon Gal, “Overview,” in *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews*, ed. Alon Gal (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 1–21.

10 For further reading see Grand, “Zionist Youth Organizations.”

Intercollegiate Zionist Association (IZA).¹¹ IZA was the first type of organization, focusing on cultural and philanthropic activity. At its height it had some 2,500 members at thirty-three universities, and it received financial support from the ZOA. But it did not last long. In 1920, the ZOA decided to limit its educational activity among the young generation in the United States and stopped funding IZA, redirecting funds and energies to the development of the Yishuv in Palestine.¹² Without funding the organization shut down, although local initiatives continued on several campuses.¹³

While organized Zionist activity on American campuses came to an end, two other Jewish student organizations—Menorah and Hillel—had presences there. Menorah was founded at Harvard in 1906 and went national in 1913. It was a characteristic product of the Progressive Era, based on the belief that it was possible, through planning, to create a more just society of civil and economic equality. It also advocated the idea of cultural pluralism (Horace Kallen was one of the founders of the organization). Menorah's members organized lectures and study groups, but its most important project was the publication of *the Menorah Journal* that gained the respect of the American Jewish community. The journal's editors and main writers were not, in fact, students, but rather adult intellectuals. (Among the writers were non-Jews such as John Dewey, Randolph Bourne, and Charles Eliot.) Some members of Menorah were sympathetic to Zionism, but the organization did not emphasize it. Menorah's efforts were mostly cerebral rather than practical or political, so as not to disturb the delicate dialectical process of integration by means of particularity.¹⁴

Hillel, founded in 1923 by the venerable B'nai B'rith brotherhood, was a less intellectual alternative to Menorah. While it was by definition

11 Jonas S. Friedenwald, "The Intercollegiate: A Retrospect," *Kadima* (Federation of American Zionists, 1918), 193–204. Available online: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015063885282;view=1up;seq=16> (accessed 24 January 2019).

12 David H. Shapiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism: The Political Transformation of American Zionism in the Holocaust Years, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994), introduction.

13 Jospé, "Jewish College Students."

14 Greene, *Cultural Pluralism*, 42.

a religious organization, it also organized cultural and social activities.¹⁵ But Hillel had competition. A survey conducted by B'nai B'rith in 1937 found that the most successful Jewish campus organizations were the Jewish fraternities and sororities, which had hundreds of chapters and between 15,000 and 18,000 members. They also offered a safe and separate space for Jewish students, but unlike Hillel, which integrated religious, cultural, and social activities, and Menorah, which focused on intellectualism, the fraternities were solely social groups.¹⁶

The Founding of Avukah: Zionism as Culture

The end of World War I and the postwar period saw important changes in the United States as a whole, among American Jews, in the Yishuv in Palestine, and in the interrelationships between the three. The Progressive Era came to an end in the United States, giving way to a period of isolation. The transformation had broad consequences for American Jewry. In 1919, the federal government instituted immigration quotas, which by 1924 largely barred entry. The Red Scare led to harassment of communists, many of whom were Jews. Antisemitism increased in the 1920s; one of the consequences was that some universities instituted quotas on the number of Jews accepted. American Zionism underwent a crisis, brought on in part by the end of the emergency world Jewry faced during World War I and the resignation of Brandeis and his supporters from the leadership of the American Zionist movement in 1921. Membership in the ZOA plummeted.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Yishuv became the most important focal point of the Zionist world movement and began to interact directly with American Jewry to recruit supporters. This began outside institutional frameworks, as members of the Yishuv visited the United States during World War I. Relations went to the next level in the 1920s, when official delegations from the Yishuv arrived in the United States.¹⁸

15 "Welcome to Hillel," City College of New York Archive, religious organization collection.

16 Levinger, *Jewish Student in America*, 54–56.

17 Cohen, *American Jews*, 26–38.

18 Michael Brown, *The Israeli-American Connection: Its Roots in the Yishuv, 1914–1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

The growth in the numbers of American Jewish students and the insecure position of American Jewry following World War I ostensibly created good conditions for Zionist activity on campuses, but the American Zionist movement was weak. In the end, it was emissaries from the Yishuv who restarted Zionist activity among students. These emissaries arrived in the summer of 1925 under the aegis of the Jewish National Fund (JNF, also known as Keren Kayemet Le-Yisra'el, or KKL), with the goal of furthering Zionist education among the young generation.¹⁹ The American Zionist establishment did not cooperate, partly because of its weakness and partly because its leaders objected to Yishuv interference in American Zionist education. As a result, the delegation from Palestine established relations directly with local young Zionist activists.²⁰ Two of them, Max Rohde, a young attorney in Washington, DC, and Joseph S. Shubow, a student at Harvard, had been seeking to reestablish a nationwide Zionist student organization. The partnership was successful and soon produced a plan for a new organization. On 27 June 1925, fifty-one representatives from twenty-two colleges and universities met in Washington to announce the genesis of the new organization, Avukah.²¹

The name Avukah, meaning “torch,” was chosen to signify the activist approach of its founders. They wanted to contrast with the approach of Menorah, which they claimed was lukewarm on the problems faced by American Jewry and the Jewish people as a whole. The attitude was typified when members of Menorah avoided engaging in any practical action in support of Zionism.²² Avukah also maintained that it was unlike any previous Zionist student organization. Marie Syrkin, a prominent American Zionist activist (the daughter of Labor Zionist leader Nachman Syrkin) wrote in August 1925 that Avukah would operate in an entirely new way. “With the close of the war and the giving of the

19 JNF Youth Delegation files, KKL5\746, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA); Lawrence Cohen, “History of National Avukah Reveals 15 Years of Growth,” *Avukah Student Action*, 28 July 1939.

20 Rebekah Rigger-Kaplan, *Eliezer Rigger* (Jerusalem, 2018), 56–70.

21 Joseph S. Shubow, “When We Lighted the Torch,” *Avukah Annual 1925–1930*, 37–41.

22 *The Palestine Bulletin*, 3 August 1925; *Doar Hayom*, 17 May 1926.

mandate,” she declared, “Zionism emerged from the hazy distance of a Utopia to the disconcerting clarity of a reality.” Furthermore, because of what she called “postwar hysteria” in the United States, “it became increasingly difficult to stress any ethnic or ethical differences.” Such a state of affairs, she maintained, had severe consequences for the Jews.²³

Syrkin’s account of the unstable state of American Jewry heralded a change of sorts. While the dangers that American Jews faced were not anywhere near as grave as those faced by their European brethren, the dream of a multicultural liberal society had been shattered. The situation required a rethinking of how Jews might integrate into American society. It challenged the founders of Avukah from the start to define themselves against the changing America in which they lived.

But despite the founders’ declarations that Avukah was different, it quickly became clear that Avukah’s vision did not really respond to the demise of the multicultural liberal society dream and the development of the Zionist project; rather, it was based on a model similar to that of previous Zionist organizations—that is, Zionism as a cultural movement. Settlement in Palestine made no appearance in Avukah’s stated goals. The closest was the assertion that the organization would endeavor

to promote the Basel Program; to study the life and literature of our people from the positive, creative Jewish national spirit of our youth; to join in the spirit and work of the Chalutzim [pioneers] of Palestine; to aid the development of the Hebrew University of Palestine and to cooperate with student Zionist bodies throughout the world in carrying out the aforesaid purpose.²⁴

In other words, Avukah’s vision was much like that of Menorah. Avukah, as its founders saw it, was primarily a select group of people who sought a theoretical-cultural familiarity with Zionism, so as to create a leadership reserve for Zionist American Jewry. Indeed, the organization stated explicitly that its principal purpose was study.²⁵ Despite

23 Marie Syrkin, “The New Youth Movement,” *The New Palestine*, 14 August 1925.

24 *The Palestine Bulletin*, 3 August 1925.

25 Annual report, June 1927–May 1928, Pnina Lahav Collection, Ben-Gurion Archive, Sede Boker (hereafter BGA).

Syrkin's claim that Avukah was operating under new circumstances with regard to the actualization of the Zionist idea, in practice, nothing in the organization's goals reflected anything new. True, Avukah's initial endeavor was relatively successful—immediately after it was founded, ZOA announced that it would lend support and recognize Avukah as its representative on American campuses. By 1928, Avukah had twenty-nine chapters and some 1,200 members.²⁶ Furthermore, between 1928 and 1930 its members mobilized, with some success, to lead a public campaign calling for Hebrew to be taught as a foreign language in American schools.²⁷ At the same time, however, the vagueness of its goals and character received heavy criticism, especially in light of the changes going on in the American, Jewish, and Zionist arenas. Its own members referred to its activity, in real time and in retrospect, as “old Zionism” and “European-style Zionism”; its rhetoric was referred to as “conventional American Zionist propaganda” and “traditional Zionist phraseology.”²⁸ Such critiques show that Avukah still belonged to the older generation and that it needed, in some way, to change its character and its focus. It also looked as if Avukah lacked any real capacity for the kind of political and ideological thinking that would address the new stage that Zionism and American Jewry had entered, as well as the needs of Jewish students at a time when the Progressive idea and the concept of cultural pluralism were collapsing. The organization's periodical, *Avukah Bulletin*, did not serve as a platform for voicing political opinions or discussing the great events of the time, including the collapse of the global economy in 1929 and the start of the Great Depression. Avukah's members also frequently asked faculty members in the field of Jewish studies for inspiration,

26 Grand, “Zionist Youth Organizations,” 135.

27 “Hebrew to be taught in New York high schools,” *Avukah Bulletin*, May 1930.

28 Convention report, 17 June 1942, PB 308, NLI; Michael Katzenstein to Pnina Lahav, 3 August 1983, Pnina Lahav Collection, BGA; Alfred J. Kahn addressing the history of Avukah, Convention report, 17 June 1942, PB 308, NLI; Maurice B. Pekarsky, “Avukah: Today and Tomorrow,” *Avukah Bulletin*, December 1931; Solomon Abramov, “Problems of Avukah Cultural Work,” *Avukah Bulletin*, February 1932.

instead of coming up with original ideas.²⁹ Additionally, Avukah was criticized from the outside for being lowbrow. Maurice Samuel, an important contemporary Zionist writer, led the attack, arguing that the organization reflected the low intellectual level of Jewish students as a whole.³⁰ Like these outside critics, some of Avukah's own members felt that the organization did not meet the needs of Zionist students, nor did it live up to its potential.³¹

Avukah's founder and leader during its first years, Max Rohde, was the force behind the view that the organization should concern itself solely with culture and avoid practical activity, including philanthropy, as well as any political affiliation.³² It is most likely that Rohde had concerns of financial survival, given that Avukah suffered from severe budgetary constraints. Maintaining a nonpartisan stance enabled it to enjoy financial support from ZOA (which was officially nonpartisan), and it granted Avukah the status of an affiliated organization. It also enabled Avukah to cooperate with other Jewish student organizations.³³ Nonpartisanship made it possible for the leaders of B'nai B'rith (which was also officially nonpartisan) to adopt Avukah. As a consequence, Hillel was told to extend all necessary assistance to Avukah, including helping it establish new chapters. Another product of this position was the establishment of a high-profile "friends of" organization, with the endorsement of figures such as Rabbi Stephen Wise and Judge Julian Mack. Avukah also raised money from private donors—another reason to maintain its nonpartisan character.³⁴

29 From Rabbi Blumenfeld report to the Eastern Regional Conference, *Avukah Bulletin*, December 1931.

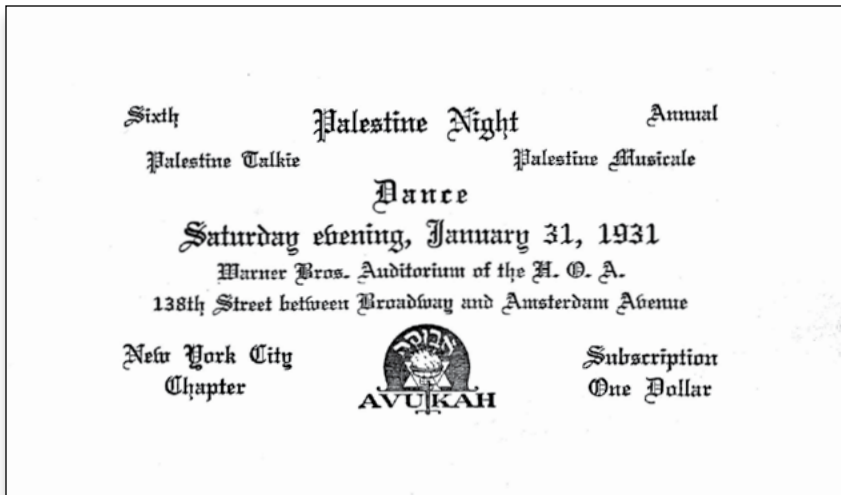
30 Maurice Samuel, "The Nature of Avukah," *Avukah Annual*, 1928; Samuel Saretzki, "Avukah vs. Intellectualism," *Avukah Annual* 2 (March 1929): 23–26.

31 Annual report, June 1927–May 1928, Pnina Lahav Collection, BGA; Avukah's Future—Palestine project for Avukah, May 1928, Pnina Lahav Collection, BGA.

32 Grand, "Zionist Youth Organizations," 95, 98.

33 Avukah Convention, 15 July 1927; Annual report, June 1927–May 1928, Pnina Lahav Collection, BGA.

34 "Avukah Advisory Board Formed," *The New Palestine*, 2 November 1928; Avukah Convention, 15 July 1927; Annual report, June 1927–May 1928, Pnina Lahav Collection, BGA.



Palestine Night dance card, 1931.
 (Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

By the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, Avukah had put itself on a firm organizational and financial footing but was having trouble defining itself. It was divided into groups with different approaches. One, led by Rohde and his successor, Rabbi Samuel Blumenfeld, wanted to maintain and reinforce the solely cultural approach. A second group, led by Rebecca Shmuckler and Shimon Agranat (who would later serve as Israel's chief justice), the leaders of the Chicago branch, pushed for the organization to raise money to support pioneering settlement in Palestine.³⁵ A third group called for Avukah to take positions on Palestine-related issues: what the character of the Yishuv should be, for example, and stances toward the Arabs and the British Mandate.³⁶ A fourth group, led by Chaim Arlosoroff, then serving as the World Zionist Organization's emissary in the United States (1926–1929), wanted to advance Avukah's capacity for serving as an educational movement.³⁷

35 Avukah's Future—Palestine project for Avukah, May 1928, Pnina Lahav Collection, BGA; Pnina Lahav, *Judgment in Jerusalem: Chief Justice Simon Agranat and the Zionist Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3–39.

36 Grand, "Zionist Youth Organizations," 105–106.

37 Chaim Arlosoroff, "American Zionism," 1929 (Hebrew), see: <https://benyehuda.org/arlosoroff/043.html> (accessed 24 January 2019).

Other fundamental questions about the nature of the organization also came up in the debate among these trends. For example, should Avukah remain a small organization focused on training a cultural elite (the Menorah model), or should it be a mass movement that would disseminate the Zionist idea to the larger Jewish public (such as European Zionist organizations)? Should Avukah work in tandem with Yishuv institutions on projects in Palestine, or manage such projects independently? Ideologically, Avukah's members were increasingly sympathetic to the pioneer enterprise and the Zionist labor movement, leading to fears that it would be labeled a partisan organization.³⁸

These issues did not receive any organized response. The cultural group continued to control the movement, but a decision was also made to launch a campaign to rehabilitate Kibbutz Hulda after it was devastated in the 1929 disturbances.³⁹ Transforming Avukah into a mass movement would not be easy even if it wanted to do so, given the difficulties that American Zionists as a whole were having in mobilizing the Jewish public. As such, it remained an organization with a small number of members; that they were students gave the movement an intellectual cast. Its cultural Zionist approach manifested in a central summer school that offered an array of programs: lectures by Zionist leaders from the United States and the Yishuv, as well as by scholars, artists, and writers; Hebrew language lessons; and social events that presented the Zionist project to students. Avukah also published an anthology, edited by Arlosoroff and Schmuckler, to mark the tenth anniversary of the founding of the pioneering Zionist youth movement HeHalutz.⁴⁰ The volume, featuring writers such as Hayim Nahman Bialik, Yosef Haim Brenner, and A.D. Gordon, included reports and analyses of the suffering and distress of European Jewry and of the answer provided by pioneering Zionism. From 1925 through 1932, Avukah published compilations of

38 Chaim Arlosoroff to Rabbi Blumenfeld, *Avukah Bulletin*, October 1931; Samuel M. Blumenfeld, "Whither Avukah?" *Avukah Bulletin*, December 1931.

39 "From Hulda to the Agricultural Center of the Histadrut," 25 May 1935, KKL5\5152, CZA.

40 Chaim Arlosoroff, Shlomo Grodzenski, Rebecca Schmuckler, eds., *Hechalutz* (New York: The Zionist Labor Party Hitachdut in America and Avukah, 1929).

articles, written by movement members and sympathizers, on subjects about which there was a broad Zionist consensus—for example, the right of the Jews to their own state, the younger generation's role in the Zionist enterprise, the lay of the land in Palestine, and the efforts to develop it. No clear stands were taken on controversial issues.⁴¹

5TH ANNUAL PLEASE POST

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AT GLEN COUNTRY LODGE
GLEN SPEY, NEW YORK.
JUNE 20-JULY 3
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"ZIONISM AND
WORLD CHAOS"

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SUMMER SCHOOL 1934

Avukah summer school poster, 1934.
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

41 *Avukah Annual 1925–1930; The Brandeis Avukah Annual of 1932.*

Increasingly, Avukah displayed admiration for the Zionist labor movement, but this did not cause any real problems because, in this respect, Avukah was part of a larger trend. American Zionism as a whole developed cultural links to the labor movement in the 1930s, because association with the progressive wing of the Yishuv was amenable to the American Jewish agenda of integration through diversity.⁴² These ties led to a certain resemblance between Avukah and the socialist-Zionist youth movements, to the extent that there was potential for competition between them. However, the student organization differed in several ways. The youth movements did not operate on campuses, where Avukah was the sole Zionist organization; at the same time, Avukah did not seek members among high school students. Formally, Avukah was tied to the American Zionist mainstream and presented itself as apolitical and nonpartisan, whereas the youth groups were affiliated with and operated by movements and parties outside the United States. Furthermore, Avukah did not inculcate the imperative of settling in Palestine, which the youth movements saw as their central mission. Sociologically, by the beginning of the 1930s, Avukah's membership was American-born, while the members of the youth movements still included many immigrants.⁴³ This, of course, changed when immigration ceased, but the youth movements then developed a Palestine-centered orientation. In contrast, despite its Zionism, Avukah remained rooted in the American experience. In other words, while the Zionist youth movements were focused on making a contribution to the Yishuv, Avukah was devoted to the Americanization of Zionism. Nevertheless, as its undefined mission and identity shows, Avukah's Americanization enterprise was dynamic

42 Jonathan D. Sarna, "A Projection of America as It Ought to Be: Zion in the Mind's Eye of American Jews," in *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews*, ed. Alon Gal (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 41–59; Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 124; Jonathan Krasner, "New Jews in an Old-New Land: Images in American Jewish Textbooks Prior to 1948," *Journal of Jewish Education* 69, no. 2 (2003): 7–22.

43 Raider, *American Zionism*, 58; Rachel Rojanski, *Zehuyot niqdashot: Poale-Zion bi-tzefon Amerika, 1905–1931* (Sede Boker: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2004), 307.

in terms of its components and meanings, because of the changes that occurred in the arenas in which it operated during the late 1920s.

From Culture to Politics

Later, after Avukah was relatively well established, its leaders divided the period between the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s into two stages. The first, from 1925 to 1933, was referred to as the “romantic period,” and the second, between 1934 and 1936, was the “era of political awakening.”⁴⁴ That 1933 was the watershed was not a matter of chance. It was the year when the Depression reached its most severe and affected students as well, and it is when Hitler came to power in Germany. In Palestine, Chaim Arlosoroff, a friend of Avukah’s, was murdered, an event that signaled the growing tension between the Zionist labor movement and its Revisionist rivals, who have been blamed for the murder. These far-flung events all came together to catalyze change in Avukah. But there was another important factor internal to the student organization. In 1934, Zellig Harris (1909–1992) was named its president. Harris, later a noted linguist, had joined Avukah at the end of the 1920s, when he was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania; he assumed the presidency after completing his doctoral degree. He gathered around him a circle of friends and family members that became the movement’s leadership. Guided by a fierce belief in socialism tinted with anarchism, he thought that the kibbutz was the epitome of that ideal. He imagined a Palestine of kibbutzim, a pioneering society living in peace and embodying the antithesis of capitalism, which he blamed for the rise of fascism. Harris would later join Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek and divide his time between Israel and the United States.⁴⁵

Harris was an important supplementary cause of the transformation of the nature of Avukah’s activities. But even before he became president, it was evident that the tranquil atmosphere on America’s campuses was being swept away by a new wind that was politicizing the student

44 Adrian Schwartz, “The Development of Avukah,” lecture in Avukah’s summer school, 22 June 1941, 2914(3)6.1, Hashomer Hatzair Archive, Givat Haviva; Alfred Kahn, Convention report, 17 June 1942, PB 308, NLI.

45 Barsky, *Harris*.

public.⁴⁶ In 1934, *The New York Times* published a survey that showed how the economic crisis was affecting political trends on campuses.⁴⁷ The survey, encompassing nine colleges on the East Coast, reported of the participants that

77 percent saw politics in America as the tool of the wealthy, 44 percent opposed the free enterprise system, 52 percent did not know whether the American form of government would continue to work, 50 percent were willing to try socialism, and 13 percent were in favor of communism and revolution.

From 1934 to 1936 the student population underwent further radicalization as a result of international events and the clouds of war gathering on the horizon. In 1935 Japan invaded Manchuria. Mussolini conquered Ethiopia in 1935–1936, and in 1936 Nazi Germany's army moved into the Rhineland. This series of events aroused and radicalized many students. A survey conducted at City College of New York in 1936, a stronghold of radicalism with a student body composed mostly of Jews, found that more than a third of the 2,206 respondents advocated socialism (23 percent defined themselves as communists) and more than half the students identified, overall, with the left.⁴⁸ Students of liberal views, who in the Jewish context were those who ascribed to Menorah's progressive ideals, were turning to Marxism and revolution.⁴⁹ These students opposed American involvement in the impending war. American intervention in World War I and the treaty arrangements that followed it had, they argued, produced only negative results, as the rise of fascism in Europe proved. In 1934, some 25,000 students staged a strike against the war. A year later, 150,000 students struck, demonstrating the growth of antiwar sentiment on America's campuses.⁵⁰

46 Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19.

47 *The New York Times*, 10 December 1934.

48 Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), 364–374.

49 Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 43, 46.

50 Ralph S. Brax, *The First Student Movement: Student Activism in the United States during*

The Depression, the rise of fascism, and the looming world war stimulated the growth of radical left organizations among students. The most important were the youth wings of the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID); the Socialist Workers Party (the Young People's Socialist League, YPSL), and the Communist Party of America (the Young Communist League, YCL).⁵¹ These organizations grew significantly during the first half of the 1930s. YPSL, for example, expanded from just a few hundred activists across the United States in the mid-1920s to more than 1,200 at the beginning of the 1930s and 2,500 at the midpoint of the decade, including 800 of them in the New York area alone.⁵² YCL, at first tiny, grew even more spectacularly, with 11,000 members in the mid-1930s.⁵³ YCL and YPSL were especially attractive to Jewish students; most of their leaders were New York-born Jews who had excelled at the city's public high schools and still lived with their parents. Their radicalism, as well as their aptitude for activism, crystallized in the atmosphere of political activism that pervaded their teenage years.⁵⁴

With the rise of a radical leftist agenda on campuses, Avukah found itself operating in new and challenging conditions. First, Zionism was not popular as a national movement in a time of nationalistic rampaging, and all Zionist organizations found it increasingly difficult to

the 1930s (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1981), 41–60; Patti McGill Peterson, "Student Organizations and the Antiwar Movement in America, 1900–1960," *American Studies* 13, no. 1 (spring 1972): 131–147.

51 See Philip G. Altbach, *Student Politics in America: A Historical Analysis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 10–57; Philip G. Altbach and Patti Peterson, "Before Berkeley: Historical Perspectives on American Student Activism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 395 (May, 1971): 1–14; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Rebellion in the University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 159–196; Wald, *New York Intellectuals*, 27–41.

52 YPSL 1924 organizational manual, Collection 309, box 1, folder 20, Tamiment Library, New York City (hereafter TL); "Some questions to the New York Ypsels," 1935, Collection 309, box 1, folder 27, TL; Patti McGill Peterson, "The Young Socialist Movement in America from 1905 to 1940: A Study of the Young People's Socialist League," (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974), 135–136.

53 Altbach, *Student Politics*, 17.

54 Peterson, "Young Socialist Movement," 218. See also Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

enlist support from the younger generation.⁵⁵ Second, Avukah found itself confronting, on the radical side, older organizations with long and well-developed organizational and ideological traditions. Third, these organizations were competitive, and Avukah found itself vying with them for student support.⁵⁶ YPSL worked to establish a cultural front to influence the larger public, and the members of YCL specialized in agitprop and learned how to speak on street corners and participate in public debates.⁵⁷ In such an environment, Avukah had to train its members to debate the radicals (most of whom were themselves Jews) over questions touching on Zionism. Avukah's central challenge, then, was engaging what Isaac Deutscher called "non-Jewish Jews" who, even if they felt solidarity with other Jews and were troubled by their situation, preferred to operate in non-Jewish frameworks in the hope that an overall change in the world would also improve the lot of the Jews.⁵⁸

These changes led Avukah's members to make specific demands and to seek to adapt the movement to these new conditions. "The thinking student of today is radical. He realizes that the capitalistic system lies at the root of the present unbearable world crisis. He is revolutionary," wrote Avukah's secretary for the New York region, Benjamin Itzkowitz, in April 1932.⁵⁹ At the same time, Jewish students grew dismissive of Menorah and Hillel, which they saw as conservative and irrelevant.⁶⁰ Harris also pushed for change, declaring that "Avukah must strengthen

55 Grand, "Zionist Youth Organizations," 113.

56 Reports of the annual convention of New York YPSL federation, February 1936, Collection 309, box 1, folder 14, TL.

57 YPSL Circle educational program, n.d., Collection 309, box 1, folder 9, TL; YCL Manual on Peace and the 21st Anniversary of Soviet Union, 1938, Collection 132, box 42, folder 34, TL; YCL, "The ABC of Agitprop Work," 1935, Collection 132, box 42, folder 35, TL; "Objection to Zionism from a Radical Point of View, with Some Answers," *Avukah Bulletin*, November 1935.

58 Wald, *New York Intellectuals*, 27; Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 600; Convention report, 13 July 1937, PB 308, NLI.

59 Benjamin Itzkowitz, "Avukah, American student Labor-Zionist federation," *Avukah Bulletin*, April 1932.

60 Berkowitz, *Western Jewry*, 167.

its organization and clarify its ideas, its point of view in Zionism.”⁶¹

Immediately upon assuming the presidency, Harris began laboring on a meticulous and intensive educational program to provide ideological instruction to the organization’s members.⁶² The program’s indoctrinational character resembled those of radical campus movements.⁶³ At the end of 1935, Avukah’s annual convention resolved to lend official support to the League for Labor Palestine, a fundraising body operated by the Yishuv labor organization, the Histadrut.⁶⁴ These developments were criticized by people outside the movement and also by a few of its members, but Harris argued that people should not confuse taking a stand on issues—which he considered vital—with identifying with a political party.⁶⁵ That is, he defended the politicization of Avukah while presenting it as independent of party affiliation.

Under Harris, Avukah also inaugurated a fierce campaign against the Zionist Revisionist right, led by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, which was gaining support from young Jews in both Europe and the United States. Jabotinsky’s followers were on a collision course with the labor movement in the Diaspora and in Palestine. As early as 1932, progressive Zionists, Avukah included, perceived the Revisionists as a real threat, especially in light of what they saw as Revisionist sympathy for fascism. Itzkowitz argued, for example, that Avukah needed to choose sides in the bitter battles among Zionist factions. Supporting the Revisionists was unthinkable, Itzkowitz wrote, and the bourgeois General Zionists were “opportunists.” As such, he maintained, Avukah had to lend open political support to socialist Zionism.⁶⁶ Under Harris, the organization began pushing Revisionist sympathizers out.⁶⁷ In an open battle

61 *Avukah Bulletin*, October 1934.

62 *Ibid.*

63 See, for example, “A Short History of Socialism in America by YPSL,” Collection 309, box 1, folder 9, TL.

64 Grand, “Zionist Youth Organizations,” 119.

65 Zellig Harris, “Are We Partisan?” *Avukah Bulletin*, May 1936.

66 Benjamin Itzkowitz, “Avukah, American Student Labor-Zionist Federation,” *Avukah Bulletin*, April 1932.

67 Isadore Solkoff, “Letters to the Bulletin,” *Avukah Bulletin*, December 1934.

at Avukah's ninth convention, in December 1934, the movement decided that Revisionists would not be permitted to act under the aegis of Avukah.⁶⁸ An exchange of letters in 1935 between Harris and Albert Einstein, published in the *Avukah Bulletin*, testifies to just how vicious the struggle was. Einstein encouraged Avukah's fight against the Revisionists, whom he claimed were "as much of a danger to our youth as Hitlerism is to German youth."⁶⁹

Avukah was also affected by changes taking place within labor Zionism. In 1930, the Marxist (Ahdut Ha'avodah) and non-Marxist (Hapo'el Hatzair) socialists in the Yishuv united to form the Workers Party of the Land of Israel, Mapai. In 1933, Mapai achieved hegemony in the Zionist movement. The central stream of the labor movement, with which Avukah had identified thus far, was now a mass movement. As part of the process, Mapai underwent an ideological transformation that its leader, David Ben-Gurion, encapsulated in 1935 in the slogan, "From Class to Nation." It meant that Mapai was setting aside revolutionary socialism and adopting a constructive civil approach in which strengthening the Yishuv's institutions and, in the long run, establishing a state took precedence over promoting working-class interests. Furthermore, Ben-Gurion negotiated in 1934 a series of agreements with the Revisionists, but different segments of the labor movement sharply criticized them, and they were eventually rejected by Histadrut, the institution that represented them all. These changes led in the 1930s to fierce conflict in Mapai as well as in the larger labor movement, between a faction led by Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson and an opposition led by the pioneering elements. The major components of this dissenting group were the two largest kibbutz movements—Hakibbutz Hameuhad, led by Yitzhak Tabenkin, and the Marxist-revolutionary Hakibbutz Ha'artzi–Hashomer Hatzair, led by Meir Yaari and Yaakov Chazan. While Hakibbutz Hameuhad was part of Mapai and, until it broke from Mapai in 1944, battled its leadership from within, Hakibbutz Ha'artzi–Hashomer Hatzair offered an ideological and

68 Lawrence Cohen, "History of National Avukah Reveals 15 Years of Growth," *Avukah Student Action*, 28 July 1939.

69 "A Letter from Einstein," *Avukah Bulletin*, March 1935.

political alternative to Mapai within the labor movement and constituted itself as an independent social and political body.⁷⁰

The combination of, on the one hand, global events and the consequent radicalization of student politics in the United States and, on the other hand, the increasing moderation of Mapai's ideology and the simultaneous rise of the Revisionist movement led Avukah to move closer to Hashomer Hatzair, which was more in tune with the prevailing ideas in its American milieu. No less important was that Hashomer Hatzair was an independent group, to the point of being anti-establishment, in the American Zionist arena.⁷¹ Hashomer Hatzair was largely uncontested in this role because the only other socialist-Zionist faction active in the United States, Poale Zion (which was affiliated with Mapai), had become less militant by this time.⁷² The partnership was initiated by Hashomer Hatzair activists, who maintained that their radical Zionism was all the more critical in light of developments around the world and in the United States. The movement thus sought inroads into new populations, students included.⁷³ In the mid-1930s members of Hashomer Hatzair and Avukah, most of them in the New York area and some of them college students, established close ties. The ties quickly grew stronger, and by 1935 the two movements were unofficially allied and referred to themselves as "sister movements."⁷⁴ Hashomer Hatzair assigned Avukah a plot in its training farm in Liberty, New York, which became the site of Avukah's summer school. It was also the base of Avukah's Kibbutz Aliyah, a training program for young people who wanted to join pioneering settlements in Palestine. The connection with Hashomer

70 For further background, see Elkana Margalit, *Hashomer Hatzair: From Youth Community to Revolutionary Marxism, 1913–1936* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hemeuchad, 1971); Matityahu Mintz, *Havle ne'urim: Ha-tenu'ah ha-Shomrit, 1911–1921* (Jerusalem: Hasifriya Hatzionit, 1995); David Zayit, *Halutzim Ba-mavoch Ha-politi: Ha-tenu'ah Ha-kibbutzit, 1927–1948* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1993).

71 Riemer, *Me-Olam Hashefa*, 68–76.

72 Raider, *American Zionism*, 138.

73 Grand, "Zionist Youth Organizations," 272.

74 Letter from Moshe Furmanski, *Avukah Bulletin*, March 1935; Moshe Furmansky to presidents of local chapters of Avukah, 10 April 1935, Hashomer Hatzair Archive, Giva'at Haviva, 4.1(1)2912.

Hatzair also contributed to Avukah's radicalization, as it adopted parts of Hashomer Hatzair's ideology, including its cooperative-anarchistic vision and the idea of the binational state.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Avukah did not officially adopt revolutionary Marxism or the "revolutionary homeland," i.e., the Soviet Union, both of which were foundational to Hashomer Hatzair ideology.

Despite the turbulence in the world and in Palestine, the American Jewish community remained calm during the first half of the 1930s. According to Hasia Diner, American Jewish experience in the interwar period was very different from that of the world's other Jews. In contrast with the state of emergency the great majority of their brethren faced, those who had managed to get to the "land of gold" were busy trying to get into the middle class and integrate into American society.⁷⁶ Consequently, many members of the American Jewish establishment were indifferent to the changes that American society underwent after World War I. The members of Avukah saw this as an attempt to defend the status quo—a state of affairs that led to the Great Depression and to the rise of fascism in Europe.⁷⁷

Avukah also charged that American Zionism had not updated its views or changed its cultural and philanthropic character despite the need for a fundamental rethinking of its goals.⁷⁸ America's "Jewish

75 Avukah's ideological affiliation with Hashomer Hatzair was first seen in 1936, when Avukah translated and published *Analysis of Zionism* by Meir Yaari, a Marxist interpretation of the involvement in Zionism of each of social strata of the Jewish people. It was written a few years earlier and was also published in Yehuda Guthelf and Avraham Cohen, eds., *Sefer ba-Shomrim* (Warsaw: Hashomer Hatzair Publishing, 1934), 377–387. Regarding Avukah's radical ideas, which were similar to Hashomer Hatzair's, see New discussion series, n.d., B1258, NLI. On the idea of a binational state in general and among American Jewry, see Shalom Ratzabi, *Between Zionism and Judaism: The Radical Circle in Brith Shalom, 1925–1933* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Hedva Ben-Israel, "Bi-Nationalism versus Nationalism: The Case of Judah Magnes," *Israel Studies* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 86–105.

76 Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 205–258.

77 Avukah manual, n.d., B 1255, NLI.

78 Nathan Glazer, "History of American Zionism," lecture in Avukah's summer school, 22 June 1941, Hashomer Hatzair Archive, 2914(3)6.1.

problem,” including facing discrimination and other concrete dangers, certainly differed fundamentally and in severity from that of European Jews, Avukah argued, yet American Zionism had copied the organizational template of European Zionism, which is useless in the case of America. American Zionists, it claimed, needed to go beyond cultural and fundraising activity and become a political movement. Avukah’s members also spoke of “the failure of Jewish education to meet the modern needs of the youth” and termed the Jewish establishment’s policy as “hush-hush” and “be nice.”⁷⁹ Avukah was not the only one claiming this, and the claims were linked more to its radical viewpoint than to its socialist one. Other wings of the young American Zionist leadership—for example, that of Abba Hillel Silver—shared this critique, even if they advocated political solutions different from those supported by Avukah. They, too, defied the old leadership.⁸⁰

The breach between Avukah and the American Jewish establishment thus hinged on the youth’s authentic need for a more profound approach to countering the possible rise of fascism in America, providing aid to suffering European Jews, and promoting the Zionist solution. As members saw it, the fundamental question facing them was “What of us who are staying here?”⁸¹ For the members of Avukah, it was clear that masses of American Jews would not settle in Palestine, meaning that doing so was not relevant to them on a personal level. At the same time, the formula for American Zionism that Kallen and Brandeis advocated—supporting the Yishuv as a symbol of social Progressivism and developing a Zionist culture based on this symbol as part of their integration into liberal American society—was no longer valid. American society had changed utterly. There was a need to make clear statements that could be translated into action, both in fighting fascism and in advancing the Zionist project. Avukah did not last long enough to realize this activist

79 Convention report, 13 July 1937, PB 308, NLI; Alfred J. Kahn refers to Avukah’s turn to radicalism in retrospective, Convention report, 17 June 1942, PB 308, NLI.

80 Shpiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism*. For further reading, see Ofer Shiff, *The Downfall of Abba Hillel Silver and the Foundation of Israel* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

81 “What of Us Who Are Staying Here,” *Avukah Bulletin*, April 1936; Alfred J. Kahn addressing the history of Avukah, Convention report, 17 June 1942, PB 308, NLI.

pattern. However, it heralded the process by which American Zionism would transform from a cultural-philanthropic enterprise into a political movement that, in the years to come, would play a decisive role in the establishment of the State of Israel.⁸² Avukah may thus be seen as the left-wing predecessor of activist American Zionism. The research literature refers to it as “survivalist Zionism,” a current that was led by people and organizations quite different from Avukah in their ideology—people such as Silver and later Emanuel Neuman, and movements such as the Revisionists and B’nai B’rith.⁸³

The loss of confidence in American Jewish leadership reinforced the direct ties between Avukah and the Yishuv. In 1935 the organization began offering grants to enable members to travel to Palestine, and from year to year a growing number used the opportunity to make a direct acquaintance with the Yishuv.⁸⁴ They spent most of their time at Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim. Furthermore, at Avukah’s convention in 1936 the major speakers were, for the first time, emissaries from the Yishuv rather than American Jews.⁸⁵ Avukah’s board of trustees, made up for the most part of figures from the golden age of the Progressive Movement, became a mere figurehead, serving mostly to give the organization a respectable façade for the purpose of fundraising.⁸⁶

Along with firming up its ideology, pushing out Revisionists, connecting with Hashomer Hatzair, and struggling with the establishment, the main significance of Avukah’s political turn could be seen in its educational activities. The anthologies of articles that Avukah published from 1925 to 1932 gave the impression of being designed to present the group to the larger public as seriously intellectual and apolitical. In contrast, in 1934 the Avukah leadership began producing original in-depth analyses of Jewish history, the state of American Jewry, and

82 Zohar Segev, *From Ethnic Politicians to National Leaders* (Hebrew) (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2007); Shpiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism*.

83 Gal, “Overview.”

84 Convention report, 13 July 1937, PB 308, NLI.

85 Grand, “Zionist Youth Organizations,” 119.

86 Cohen, *American Jews*, 127.

the future of the Yishuv.⁸⁷ This material gave expression to an ideology based on three complementary principles: waging an uncompromising struggle against fascism in the United States, in cooperation with non-Jewish forces; reconstituting American Jewish leadership so that it would represent the interests of the larger community and not just the upper classes; and establishing a binational state in Palestine based on communal labor settlement. At the end of 1936 Avukah founded its own independent publishing house and distribution office. Within a year it had disseminated 15,000 copies of its publications, including about 6,000 copies designated for use in the ideological education activities of its members.⁸⁸ That same year, the ZOA's periodical, *The New Palestine*, reported that "Their [Avukah's] publications are edited by themselves, sold by their own members, they have their own speakers and lecturers and they have, what is of even greater importance, decided views of their own, sometimes so arrogantly expressed that the elders are quite shocked."⁸⁹

In other words, Avukah was independent, having completed its transformation from a cultural to a political organization. From its origins as a student organization that took care not to rock any boats, it had become a radical Zionist movement, part of the militant wing of Zionism, American Jewry, and the American student scene.

Conclusion

Avukah fits Ben Halpern's Americanization of Zionism paradigm in several ways. The paradigm's central claim is that American Zionism sought, dialectically, both integration into American society and the maintenance of Jewish particularity. Avukah's members did not settle in Palestine, nor did they become Palestine-centered in the way that the pioneering youth movements like Hashomer Hatzair were. They went on with their lives in the United States while grappling with the issue of what Zionism meant for them as American Jews. At first,

87 Avukah's first original publications were "The Jews as a Group" (1934) and "Short History of Zionism" (1936). See Convention report, 13 July 1937, PB 308, NLI.

88 Ibid.

89 *The New Palestine*, 1 May 1936.

members combined the integrative and particular by viewing Zionism as a Progressive project, in line with the idea of cultural pluralism proposed at the beginning of the century. The case of Avukah thus supports the conclusions of those who developed Halpern's insight, arguing that American Zionists adjusted their concepts and perceptions to the American milieu. At this time, Avukah engaged in cultural activity that romanticized the figure of the pioneer in Palestine and the new society coming into being in the Yishuv. It took no interest in controversy within the Zionist movement. It remained avowedly apolitical; its sympathy for the labor movement was cultural, not ideological. Labor Zionism embodied the Progressivism that attracted Avukah's members as part of their integration, as Zionists, into American society.

Toward the end of the 1920s, as the economic crisis emerged and isolationism grew worse, the liberal, multicultural American dream began to collapse. On top of this came the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, menacing the continent's Jews, and the rise of Revisionist Zionism in opposition to the labor movement. The labor mainstream in the Yishuv moderated its views and its American affiliates followed. While the American Jewish and Zionist establishments gave no sign of responding to these developments, they heralded a grim future for Avukah. Halpern and the scholars who followed in his wake maintained not only that American Zionism adapted itself to its local environment but also that the environment was dynamic and thus required American Zionism to readjust its emphases. The case of Avukah expands on this. The student movement's turn to radicalism was not only a response to events in the United States but also those in the other arenas to which it was tied—the Yishuv and the Jewish world as a whole. The threat its members felt became increasingly urgent. Under the circumstances, Avukah began to see itself in a different light. In this it was part of a broader process in American Zionism, which also began to adapt itself to events in these other arenas. The result was a transformation from a cultural-philanthropic movement into an activist and political one.

Another claim scholars made in the wake of Halpern is that American Zionism not only adapted to changing circumstances, but that these changes were generational as well, with each generation adjusting Zionism to its needs. This certainly applies to Avukah, but its case

requires further elaboration. Avukah developed a pointed critique of the “old” Zionism, which it claimed did not comprehend the true position of American Jews and the catastrophic nature of the Jewish problem as a whole. In this it resembled other forces of its own generation that had much different ideologies. But the generational cohort to which Avukah’s members belonged did not respond uniformly to the era’s challenges. While Avukah combined radical socialist ideology with militant Zionism, students who affiliated with Menorah struggled in the 1930s to shore up the liberal idea while playing down those factors that threatened it. Young Poale Zion, for its part, did not dedicate significant attention to politics; it moved from focusing on the needs of immigrants to focusing on Palestine. Other young Jews joined radical left student organizations such as YCL and YPSL. They took a broad radical view of events but chose to effect change in the world from within the framework of general, non-Jewish movements. For them, the Jewish question was not a separate one, distinct from global and class issues. Clearly, the needs of this younger generation were diverse—that is, within each group there were different views on the Jewish question, which engendered different kinds of Americanization processes among its members.

The case of Avukah thus offers new insights into the process by which Zionism became Americanized. Its history reveals the way in which the dialectic relationship between integration and particularism were shaped in the course of this process. The parallel events and crises in the American, Jewish, and Zionist arenas led to a reconstitution of the process of Americanization among Avukah’s members. The integrative element—the dream of a liberal, culturally pluralistic society—was intensified and became radical socialism. The particularistic component—the romantic, apolitical view of the Zionist project—was also strengthened and eventually transformed into militant and activist Zionism (although this did not include, for the most part, the goal of settling in Palestine). This reconstituted American Zionism, in both aspects, was more radical—that is, both more integrative and particular than it had been before. That might have exacerbated the contradiction between them, but instead it further catalyzed the dialectic dynamic of the Americanization of Zionism. A new synthesis emerged, one that embodied a transition from culture to politics.

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Rabbi Aharon Kotler delivers a lecture in the Bialystoker Synagogue on New York's Lower East Side, late 1950s.
(Courtesy Beth Medrash Govoha)

Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, and the Remaking of an American Jewish Prophecy

ZEV ELEFF

In 1937, Rabbi Moses Yoshor published a Yiddish biography of his sainted teacher, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Ha-Kohen. For Orthodox Jews, Rabbi Yisrael Meir of Radun was an all-important figure of deep piety and esteemed learning, known by the title of one of his works, the *Hafetz Hayim*. From 1912–1915, Yoshor had studied at the *Hafetz Hayim's* yeshiva in the small Belarusian town and then at several other schools before migrating to the United States. He settled in Brooklyn, a socioeconomic step up from New York's Lower East Side.¹ There, Yoshor enjoyed a long career in the rabbinate and as a successful public scholar and writer.² That he set out to chronicle the *Hafetz Hayim's* life is understandable. By his own account, Yoshor had “enjoyed the master's confidence on many an occasion, had free access to his personal correspondence, and was considered one of his household.”³

1 This article is written in honor of the seventieth birthday of my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter. It is my dutiful pleasure to acknowledge the insight and comments of colleagues Gavriel Bachrach, Dovid Bashevkin, Menachem Butler, Paul Stieglitz, as well as this journal's anonymous reviewers and its editor, Dana Herman. Their careful reading of earlier drafts did much to improve the present article.

See Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 9–49.

2 For a brief biography on Yoshor authored by his son-in-law, see Chaim Henoch, “Ha-Rav Ha-Ga'on Rabbi Moshe Meir Yoshor,” in *Ha-Ramban ke-Hoker u-ke-Mekubal* (Jerusalem: Makhon Harry Fischel, 1982), 3–6.

3 Moses M. Yoshor, *Saint and Sage* (New York: Bloch, 1937), xvii. See also, “Saint and Sage,” *Palestine Post* (6 June 1937): 5.

But Yoshor's decision to live in the United States, given his devotion to the late sage of Radun, is somewhat curious. In the 1890s, the Hafetz Hayim had published an entire book to deter Jews from journeying to the New World, warning his coreligionists of the spiritual dangers that awaited them there. He feared for Jews' ability to maintain kashrut standards and abide by the myriad other religious regulations in the American religious "wastelands."⁴ Yoshor did not avoid addressing the apparent contradiction between his teacher's position and his own American predicament. In fact, he devoted a full chapter of his multivolume work to the Hafetz Hayim's anti-America efforts. Toward the end of that section, Yoshor reconsidered the context of his teacher's position. He pointed to the numerous rabbis and scholars who had settled in the United States in recent years and improved Sabbath observance, increased the level of Torah study, and "halted the spirit of lawlessness" among America's Jews.⁵ Yoshor suggested that the Hafetz Hayim would have revised his view of Jewish life in the United States had he been still living and apprised of the current religious conditions across the Atlantic.⁶ Yoshor intended to reclaim the Hafetz Hayim from Eastern European leaders who still used Rabbi Yisrael Meir's writings to discourage Jews' attempts to escape the Nazi persecution on the eve of World War II. To bolster his point, Yoshor concluded with the following legend:

It is regrettable that some of the great leaders refrained from legitimizing what Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin had predicted over a century ago: that America would become the center of Judaism and the Torah would find in America its host, the last stop along the ten exiles, according to the

4 See Arthur Hertzberg, "'Treifene Medina': Learned Opposition to Emigration to the United States," *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1984): 1–30. See Yoshor, *Saint and Sage*, 270, in which the author minimized the extent of Rabbi Yisrael Meir's opposition to migration to the United States.

5 Moses M. Yoshor, *Dos Leben un Shafen fun Hafetz Hayim*, vol. I (Brooklyn: Shulsinger Bros, 1937), 238.

6 According to Yoshor's descendants, the Hafetz Hayim cautiously advised Yoshor to relocate to the United States and improve the conditions of traditional Judaism there. Email correspondence with Gil Yashar, 9 April 2019.

tradition. After it had already passed through these nations: Babylon, Africa, Egypt, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Poland and Lithuania—America will be the last Torah center [before the Messiah].⁷

Rabbi Hayim ben Yitzhak was the founder and *rosh yeshiva* (school head or dean) of the Etz Hayim Yeshiva in Volozhin. Established in 1802, the Volozhin yeshiva set the standard for Torah study—Torah for “its own sake”—in Lithuania and other parts of Eastern Europe.⁸ Young men of considerable promise learned in yeshivot while others worked to support these schools or, at the very least, celebrated them from afar. The rank-and-file revered the yeshiva heads such as Rabbi Hayim and the men who succeeded him. Rabbi Hayim held a special station as the architect of the yeshiva movement. As a champion of Torah for its own sake, Rabbi Hayim stressed that Talmud study—even the more technical discussions on torts and damages—was a means to draw close to God. Scholarship was transformed into a devotional ritual.⁹ In Volozhin and the academies created more or less in its image, hundreds of promising scholars pored over Talmud folios and rabbinical codes, reinforcing Lithuanian Orthodox Judaism’s total commitment to Torah study above all other religious activities.¹⁰ Furthermore, the prominence of these rabbinical schools elevated its leaders in the public mind. In short order, the *roshei yeshiva* replaced many local community rabbis at the forefront of Lithuanian religious life.¹¹

7 Yoshor, *Dos Leben*, 238.

8 See Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century: Creating a Tradition of Learning*, trans. Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz (Oxford: Littman Library, 2012), 15–47.

9 See Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah’s Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries* (New York: Ktav, 1989), 73–87.

10 The Lithuanian yeshivot that flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries modeled themselves after this, though some schools augmented their curriculum with *mus-sar*, or moral instruction. See Shlomo Tikochinski, *Torah Scholarship, Mussar and Elitism* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2016), 76–132.

11 See Immanuel Erkes, “Authority and Autonomy: The Rosh Yeshiva in the Lithuanian Yeshiva and His Disciples,” in *Yeshivot and Battei Midrash*, ed. Immanuel Erkes (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2006), 209–242; and Shaul Stampfer, *Families, Rabbis and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2010), 277–302.

Yoshor's was one of the first recountings of the Rabbi Hayim story in the United States. Eventually, the legend emerged as the foundational myth for the so-called Yeshiva World, the Orthodox Right in the United States. By myth, I do not mean to pass a judgment on whether Rabbi Hayim revealed such a prophecy in his lifetime. Rather, I aim to highlight how this brief story supplied a "usable past" for this Orthodox Jewish group. It foretold and justified their American efforts. Others rehearsed the tale, emphasizing that Rabbi Hayim began to weep after issuing his prediction. According to the earliest iterations, Rabbi Hayim cried because he purportedly intuited the rampant assimilation that would overtake American Jewry.¹² Rabbi Hayim apparently foresaw this. He grieved over the collateral damage done as pioneering scholars and students worked the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual American terrains to grow them into a self-sustaining Torah center.¹³ The raconteurs of the tale interpreted this as a worthy sacrifice. All parts of this version focused on the United States: its potential, its weaknesses, and, ultimately, its eschatological purpose. Just like Moses Yoshor, the legend's transmitters understood it as enough to offset the hesitation of a new wave of Eastern European immigrant rabbis around the turn of the twentieth century. Rabbi Hayim's tears over assimilation assuaged the discomfort of American Jews and helped them come to terms with their religious disenfranchisement from their brothers, sisters, and children. Despite the anguish and attrition, the viability and importance of the United States as a Torah center implied that the American cultural soil could be tilled to nurture a so-called authentic traditional Jewish environment.¹⁴

However, this attitude did not last. The narrative was challenged by a later migration of Eastern European *roshei yeshiva*. They supplanted the earlier version of the myth.¹⁵ In its place, a new iteration appeared as a

12 On the religious conditions of Orthodox Jews in this period, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 84–108.

13 Zev Eleff, "A Far-Flung Fraternity in a Fertile Desert: The Emergence of Rabbinic Scholarship in America, 1887–1926," *Modern Judaism* 34 (October 2014): 353–369.

14 See Zev Eleff, *Authentically Orthodox: A Tradition-Bound Faith in American Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020), 1–26.

15 For other cases of American Jewish mythologies rallying around "Holocaust" and

cultural production of an antimodernist rabbinic impulse that recast the legend in European terms because it could not tolerate any indulgence of acculturation. In these later versions, Rabbi Hayim shed tears for the six million Jews who had perished in the Holocaust, as well as the devastation that would eradicate so many of the yeshivot that, to these scholars, represented the most essential attribute of European Orthodox Jewish life. Told in this guise, America was removed from the story's focus. Instead, the legend emphasized the regeneration of European Orthodox Judaism on top of a spiritually blank and intellectually insignificant American surrogate. In this revision, the United States was not just negligible; it was altogether negated by Europe and its bygone Torah academies.

Accounting for Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin's Prophecy

It is not possible to verify the historicity of the legend. Rabbi Hayim did not record it, nor is the account mentioned by his disciples in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Jews in Eastern Europe were vaguely aware of the American Revolution but had little contact with the fledgling American Jewish communities and the one thousand women and men who inhabited them.¹⁶ European Jewry's awareness of their American counterparts significantly increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, long after Rabbi Hayim may or may not have predicted America as an eventual destination for Jewish life and Torah study.¹⁷

Rabbi Hayim, born in 1749, was an ideal candidate for such a legend. To cite one historian, Rabbi Hayim "emerged as the most commanding and authoritative personality in Russian Jewry."¹⁸ He was the

"Rebirth," see Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 132–136.

16 See Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585–1984* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 237.

17 See Israel Bartal, "Heavenly America: The United States as an Ideal Model for Nineteenth-Century East European Jews," in *Following Columbus: America, 1492–1992*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Felton (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1996), 11–22.

18 See Lamm, *Torah Lishmah*, 3.

primary disciple of Rabbi Eliyahu, the famed Vilna Gaon. The Gaon of Vilna—literally, the “genius” of Vilna—was one of the formative figures of Lithuanian Jewish history, reorienting and reemphasizing Torah scholarship as the primary goal of traditional Jewish life and leadership.¹⁹ Rabbi Hayim deepened and popularized the Gaon’s mantra, “Torah for its own sake” (though the phrase has its roots in the Talmud) and established the first modern yeshiva with a vision to create an academy for large numbers of high-level students to study Talmud in a methodical fashion. From the vantage points of location, curriculum, instruction, and even fundraising, the Etz Hayim Yeshiva differed from preceding yeshivot and set a standard for later schools that arose in Lithuania during the 1800s. His reputation as a scholar, accomplishment as an institution builder, and link to the Gaon placed Rabbi Hayim at the top of traditional Jewish leadership.

Given Rabbi Hayim’s high station, it is very reasonable that a legend linking him to an American Orthodox community that placed significant value on Torah study would accrue considerable currency as a “usable past” and foundational origin story—or prehistory.²⁰ In this respect, the account of Rabbi Hayim’s prediction of the cultivation of America as a Torah hub parallels other “historical memories” that helped Jews in the United States claim a sturdier foothold in their adopted New World milieu. From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, American Jews told tales to legitimize their American Jewish heritage. Many rabbis, for instance, marked Thanksgiving and Independence Day with sermons that merged the teachings of Judaism with the messages of those national holidays, sometimes claiming that Protestant America derived the lessons of those occasions from Jewish

19 See Immanuel Etkes, *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 10–36.

20 In Hasidic circles, a similar legend exists, that Rabbi Hayim Halberstam (1797–1876) of Sandz had predicted that the “American exile” would be the final stage before the arrival of the Messiah. The claim appears in the late edition of a collection of Halberstam’s sayings and traditions. See Rafael Tsimetbaum, *Kol Ha-Katuv le-Hayim* (Jerusalem, 1962), 165–166. See also David Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 638.

sources.²¹ As well, Jews sometimes embellished the role of businessman Haym Salomon—and other Jews who might have stood out in the annals of well-trodden American history—to support their compatriots in the War for Independence.²² There are instances of efforts to claim Columbus and his shipmates as Jewish.²³ On occasion, Jews linked their origins to Native Americans—some claimed Native Americans were the biblical Ten Lost Tribes—and colonial America, a trend popular among several Christian denominations.²⁴ These examples amounted to a “form of cultural production” that helped stabilize American Jewish life.²⁵ Likewise, the Rabbi Hayim tale harmonized American and Jewish destinies by highlighting the perspicaciousness of a leading rabbinical figure in the age of Jefferson.

Perhaps the most detailed reliable source of the Rabbi Hayim legend appeared more than 150 years after the protagonist had died. In 1975,

21 “That our Republic is the flower of the Hebrew seed, is universally acknowledged,” wrote Moses Yoskor, the Hafetz Hayim’s America-embracing biographer mentioned at the opening of this introduction. “The American Liberty Bell with the Biblical inscription thereon, ‘Proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof,’ is a symbol of the Jewish genius.” Moses M. Yoskor, “Wit and Wisdom in Jewish Folklore,” *Jewish Forum* 19 (April 1936): 89. There were some unsuccessful attempts in the postwar period within the Orthodox Right camp to embrace an earlier American Jewish heritage. See, for example, the articles included in the bicentennial issue of the *Jewish Parent* 28 (April 1976).

22 See Beth S. Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1–14.

23 See Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Mythical Jewish Columbus and the History of America’s Jews,” in *Religion in the Age of Exploration: The Case of Spain and New Spain*, eds. Bryan F. Le Beau and Menachem Mor (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996), 81–95.

24 See Abraham Melamed, “The Discovery of America in Jewish Literature of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Following Columbus: America, 1492–1992*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Felton (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1996), 443–464; André Neher, *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: David Gans (1541–1613) and His Times*, trans. David Maisel (Oxford: Littman Library, 1986), 119–135; and Robert Tracy McKenzie, *The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning from History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 146–171.

25 See Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5 (Autumn 1998–Winter 1999): 52–79; and Jacob J. Schacter, “Facing the Truths of History,” *Torah u-Madda Journal* 8 (1998–1999): 200–273.

Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik of Chicago included the legend in his remarks to an assembly of Orthodox educators. According to Soloveichik, the “remarkable story” was transmitted to him through a line that began with Rabbi Itsele of Volozhin, the son of Rabbi Hayim. Rabbi Itsele was reportedly present at his father’s Sabbath afternoon discourse sometime between when the yeshiva opened in 1802 and when Rabbi Hayim died in 1821. Rabbi Itsele allegedly relayed it to his son-in-law and successor, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin. Berlin told the tale at the bar mitzvah of his great-grandson, Moshe Soloveichik. He then passed it on to his son, Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik (they spelled their surnames slightly differently) and the latter repeated it on a number of occasions.²⁶ Other members of this noted rabbinic family rehearsed the tale in near-exact fashion, also tracing the story to Rabbi Itsele.²⁷

In Soloveichik’s retelling, slightly different from Yoshor’s, Rabbi Hayim insisted that Torah would have to cycle through every major geographic location before the Messiah’s arrival. David Tevele, one of the most outstanding students in Volozhin, interrupted his teacher to ask where the final station would be.

“In America!” responded Rabbi Hayim.

At that point, recounted Soloveichik, Rabbi Hayim “burst out into hysterical crying.” The students were taken aback by the outpouring from their normally stoic master. Neither Tevele nor anyone else had the nerve to press further.

After the close of Sabbath, Rabbi Hayim’s son checked in on him. “Everyone was amazed that you cried. Why did you cry?”

“Can you not understand why it was that I cried? Remember that in order for America to become a center of Torah it will be necessary to endure enormous suffering and tremendous self-sacrifice,” answered Rabbi Hayim. “Who knows how many Jews will be found who will have the fortitude and the courage to demonstrate this self-sacrifice and to endure all this suffering.”²⁸

26 See “Address by Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Brisk of Chicago,” *Jewish Parent* 27 (August 1975): 9.

27 See Dov Eliach, *Avi Ha-Yeshivot: Toldot Hayav u-Mishnato shel Maran Rabbenu Hayim Volozhin* (Jerusalem: Makhon Moreshet Ha-Yeshivot, 2012), 16–18.

28 “Address by Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik,” 9.



Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik (center) with students at Hebrew Theological College in the late 1960s.
(Courtesy Hebrew Theological College)

The legend gained traction because it appeared to fit rather neatly into Rabbi Hayim's broader rabbinic schema. First, the notion of ten exiles and Torah sojourns has roots in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 31a). Second, Rabbi Hayim did not need to know much about Jews in the United States to have issued this claim. It was enough that he was likely aware of the relatively recent American Revolution, and his fear about attrition and assimilation would also have been a sensible concern. If Torah needed to traverse through every part of the globe to fulfill Judaism's eschatological mission, it would have to travel to the United States, as well. In fact, Rabbi Hayim wrote something similar about "time" that would have jibed with the above formulation about "place." Rabbi Hayim posited that there must be someone engaged in Torah learning at every moment. If not, the world would lose its spiritual scaffolding and implode into its primordial state.²⁹

29 See Hayim ben Yitzhak, *Nefesh Ha-Hayim*, ed. Yissakhar Dov Rubin (Bnai Brak, 1989), 269–270.

Soloveichik told this version of the Rabbi Hayim myth many times, emphasizing his extended family's sacrifice and determination to cultivate Torah learning in the United States:

The Talmudic style of Rav Chaim [Soloveitchik] was brought to the United States by his son, Rav Moshe, who was married to Pesha Feinstein, daughter of Rav Eliyohu Feinstein and first cousin to Hagaon Rav Moshe Feinstein. After serving as Rav of Rasein, Chaslawitz, Antepolia, and Warsaw, Rav Moshe was appointed Rosh Yeshiva and Dean of Yeshiva Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, a post which he held from 1929 to 1941. Thus the tradition of Torah scholarship which was rooted in Brisk and Volozhin was revitalized on American soil.³⁰

At least one other scion connected to Volozhin received this tale in Eastern Europe and took its message very seriously. Rabbi Hayim Ozer Grodzinski was the preeminent rabbinic figure in Lithuania in the decades leading up to World War II. Several sources report on the factors that Grodzinski considered when issuing a limited number of visas to rabbis who could resettle in the United States. In May 1924, the U.S. Congress enacted the Johnson-Reed Immigrant Act, which imposed severe restrictions on migration from Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe. Anticipating the continued demand for religious leaders hailing from Europe, Congress included Section 4(d) to permit exemptions for "ministers of any religious denomination" as well as "professors for colleges and seminaries."³¹ On several occasions, Grodzinski was queried whether Jewish communities should help attain travel visas for young and inexperienced rabbis or renowned and aged rabbinic scholars. Grodzinski was unequivocal: send the older rabbis more expert in Torah learning because they will do more to help fulfill the prophecy of Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin.³²

30 See *An Epic of Torah Learning: The Story of Yeshivas Brisk of Chicago* (Chicago: Yeshivas Brisk, 1980), 7. See also Noson Kamenetsky, *Making of a Godol* (Jerusalem: Hamesorah, 2002), 190–192.

31 See Jonathan D. Sarna and Zev Eleff, "The Immigration Clause that Transformed Orthodox Judaism in The United States," *American Jewish History* 101 (July 2017): 357–376.

32 See Aharon Sorasky, *Rabban shel Yisrael* (Bnai Brak: Netzah, 1931), 261–262; Pinchas

Contextualizing the Rise and Fall of American Orthodox Messianism

The Rabbi Hayim legend is not without American precedents. In fact, Jews in the United States had a long history of clinging to mystical customs and tales that endowed their lives in the Jewishly remote New World with significant eschatological purpose. Colonial Jews, for example, believed that their presence in the Americas fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that the Israelites would be scattered to the "four corners of the earth."³³ Applied from the writings of Menasseh ben Israel, this sentiment elevated American Jews' role in bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven. Much later, the throngs of Jews who emigrated from Europe to the United States in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century heard a lot about the coming of the Messiah, particularly in the context of Zionism.³⁴ Moreover, many rabbis and laypeople who resettled in the New World hailed from Lithuania, where scholarly elites were well known for their eager anticipation of the messianic redemption.³⁵ Leading figures such as the Hafetz Hayim published pamphlets to

Hirschprung, *Fun Nazishen Yomertal* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing Co., 1944), 236; and *Iggerot Rabbi Hayim Ozer*, vol. 3 (Bnai Brak, 2010), 466. For an English rendering of Hirschprung's account, see Pinchas Hirschprung, *The Vale of Tears*, trans. Vivian Felsen (Toronto: The Azrieli Foundation, 2016), 245. Hirschprung reported the vision belonging to Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik of Brisk. I can think of two possibilities for the error. First, perhaps the tale was not as well known in Europe as it would become in America. Second, it is possible that Hirschprung confused the story with an America-related tale involving Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik. On this, see Meir Bar-Ilan, *Mi-Volozhin ad Yerushalayim*, vol. I (Tel Aviv, 1939), 246–251. In addition to the above, see the account about Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman in Aharon Sorasky, *Or Elhanan: Sipur Hayav u-Ketzot Derakhav shel Rabbenu ha-Ga'on ha-Kadosh Rebbe Elhanan Bunim Wasserman*, vol. II (Los Angeles: Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon, 1978), 242.

33 See Laura Leibman, "Sephardic Sacred Space in Colonial America," *Jewish History* 25 (February 2011): 13–41; and Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Mystical World of Colonial American Jews," in *Mediating Modernity: Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World, Essays in Honor of Michael A. Meyer*, eds. Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 185–194.

34 See Kimmy Caplan, *Orthodoxy in the New World: Immigrant Rabbis and Preaching in America (1881–1924)* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2002), 254–302.

35 On the Orthodox Lithuanian migration to the United States, see Shaul Stampfer, "The

admonish Jews to become proactive and prepare for the Messiah—“one cannot wait for Elijah the prophet.” Rabbi Yisrael Meir and others connected recent social and political upheaval in Europe to the eschatological visions of scripture and rabbinic texts.³⁶

America’s Orthodox Jews were well acquainted with this messianic excitement. In the late 1930s, one of the Hafetz Hayim’s disciples, Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman of Baranovichi, embarked on an extended fundraising mission to the United States.³⁷ Wasserman traveled to major Orthodox hubs and was received with significant enthusiasm. Often, he shared his thoughts on the impending arrival of the Messiah. During his American sojourns, Wasserman published a pamphlet on anticipating the “footsteps of the Messiah.” He relayed that the rampant Jewish nonobservance in the United States that had concerned the Hafetz Hayim, however counterintuitively, fulfilled the prophecies of traditional religious texts. Writing in Yiddish to ensure that Eastern European-born laypeople could read it, Wasserman declared that at the “end of days” Jews would spend much time in theaters and other “impure” sites.³⁸

Geographic Background of Eastern European Jewish Migration to the United States before World War I,” in *Migration across Time and Nations: Population Mobility in Historical Contexts*, eds. Ira A. Glazer and Luigi de Rosa (New York: Holmes & Meir, 1986), 220–230. On the messianism of Eastern European rabbis at this historical juncture, see Gershon C. Bacon, “Birth Pangs of the Messiah: The Reflections of Two Polish Rabbis on Their Era,” in *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era: Metaphor and Meaning*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 86–99; and Motti Inbari, “Messianic Expectations in Hungarian Orthodox Theology before and during the Second World War: A Comparative Study,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 107 (Fall 2017): 506–530.

36 See Yisrael Meir Ha-Kohen, *Tzipitah li-Yeshuah* (n.d.). For other citations of messianism in the Hafetz Hayim’s writings, see Elkanah Schwartz, “The Chofetz Chaim on Moshiach Consciousness,” *Jewish Observer* (October 1974): 9–11.

37 See Sorasky, *Or Elhanan*, vol. II, 173–217. On Wasserman’s reliance on the Hafetz Hayim in the former’s messianic writings, see Gershon Greenberg, “Elhanan Wasserman’s Response to the Growing Catastrophe in Europe: The Role of Ha’gra and Hofetz Hayim Upon His Thought,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 174–204.

38 Elhanan Wasserman, *Ikveta de-Meshiha* (Tel Aviv: Tzi’erei Agudat Yisrael, 1961), 26–27. The solution, which would beckon the Messiah, was to follow trusted rabbinic leaders, forsake other evil “secular” influences, and repent. See *ibid.*, 36–39.

But the Rabbi Hayim myth was popularized at a moment in which America's Orthodox Right pivoted away from messianic thought. In the post–World War II period, the Yeshiva World deescalated the messianism that had animated earlier generations. To be sure, not all Orthodox Jews underwent this change. For instance, religious Zionists' messianic anticipation increased after the establishment of the State of Israel and spiked after Israel's seemingly hard-to-explain victories in the Six-Day War.³⁹ Of course, the Orthodox Right still believed in the eventual arrival of the Messiah, although they no longer expressed it so aggressively.⁴⁰ This matched concurrent trends among Christian millennialist thinking in the United States.⁴¹ The Yeshiva World was far more accustomed to listening to their rabbinic leaders discuss the paramount commitment to Torah learning “for its own sake,” made famous by Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin.

Several examples of the turn from Messiah-related discourse are illustrative. Consider an exceptional case among the Orthodox Right that proves the rule. Before and after he returned to Europe, Wasserman charged a young Baltimore-based rabbi, Shimon Schwab, to continue his effort to educate American Jews on how their deeds and piety might help bring the Messiah.⁴² In 1941, Schwab anonymously published a thin volume on the Messiah, applying rabbinic and kabbalistic sources to the Nazi terror and the “antireligious” spirit of Communist Russia. Both items, for Schwab, suggested that the Messiah would arrive soon.⁴³

39 See, for example, Michael Rosenak, “The Miracle of the Israeli Realism; Notes on the Six-Day-War,” *Jewish Life* 34 (July-August 1967): 5–13. In addition, see other editorials and articles published in this Orthodox Union issue.

40 I examined and conducted a digital search of sermon manuals, collected writings, and rabbinical journals (mainly *Hapardes*) available via HebrewBooks.org and Otzar HaHochma. The exception that proves the rule is Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Chabad. Schneersohn settled in the United States in 1940 and for the remaining ten years of his life published many sermons that invoked messianism.

41 See Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 327–366.

42 See Wasserman's letter to Schwab reproduced in Shimon Schwab, *Beit Ha-Sho'evah* (Brooklyn: Hadaf Printing Inc., 2008), 10–11.

43 See, for example, *Beit Ha-Sho'evah* (New York: Shulsinger Bros., 1941), 54–55, 70–71.

In 1967, Schwab reprinted this work under his own name, but, tellingly, removed the passages that connected recent events to traditional texts.⁴⁴ Perhaps Schwab deleted these sections with the understanding that his rabbinical colleagues in the United States tended to eschew talk of the Messiah. Moreover, Messiah-laden discussions remained absent from American rabbinical journals and the published sermons of influential leaders such as Rabbi Aharon Kotler of Lakewood's Beth Medrash Govoha. In the 1970s, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky astonished a large audience at the annual Agudath Israel convention when he announced that the Messiah would arrive within ten years.⁴⁵ A decade later, Kamenetsky returned to that same Agudath Israel forum to explain his miscalculation, conceding that "people are asking," apparently still somewhat startled by Kamenetsky's Messiah prediction.⁴⁶

Messianism was not an afterthought among the Yeshiva World. Yet, it was certainly secondary to Torah for its own sake. For this reason, the Rabbi Hayim tale was very useful. The prophecy directed adherents to refocus their energies to establish Torah centers in the United States while suggesting that, however it might happen, the Messiah would arrive afterward. No formulation of the story suggested straightforwardly that increased Torah study would bring the Messiah. Instead, the legend acknowledged Judaism's Messiah-driven mission while refocusing the more urgent need to reinforce traditional Torah study.

Furnishing a Foundational Myth for the So-Called Yeshiva World

More than anyone else, Rabbi Aharon Kotler was responsible for this reorientation among America's Orthodox Right. Kotler enhanced the

44 See Shimon Schwab, *Beit Ha-Sho'evah* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1967). Despite this revision, Schwab continued to focus more on anticipation for the Messiah than many of his rabbinic colleagues in the United States. See, for instance, Shimon Schwab, *Selected Writings* (New York: C.I.S. Publishers, 1988), 113–115, 144–146; Shimon Schwab, *Selected Speeches* (New York: C.I.S. Publishers, 1991), 15–29, 37–48; and Shimon Schwab, *Selected Essays* (New York: C.I.S. Publishers, 1994), 83–84.

45 See Yaakov Kamenetsky, "Some Thoughts on Moshiach," *Jewish Observer* 10 (November–December 1974): 9–10.

46 See Yaakov Kamenetsky, "Finding the Permanent in the Transitory," *Jewish Observer* 15 (January 1981): 15.

“Torah for its own sake” ideology, well beyond Rabbi Hayim’s intentions. Yoel Finkelman has noted that while Kotler’s forebears in Eastern Europe preached intensive Torah study as an ideal, they were “comfortable with the idea that God’s original plan was to have only a minority of full-time yeshiva students.”⁴⁷ In contrast, Kotler’s sermons displayed “discomfort with the very idea of Orthodox businessmen.”⁴⁸ To help his cause, Kotler offered the Rabbi Hayim tale. In April 1941, a few days before Passover, Kotler, the famed *rosh yeshiva* in the Polish town of Kletsk, disembarked at the port of San Francisco. Before an Orthodox delegation, Kotler declared it his mission to “do everything in our power to plant the tents of the Torah in their character, form, and size, fully and authentically, here in this land.” Kotler announced that he was summoned to the United States by a vision told “in the name of Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin about the migration of Torah through its ten hosts until the arrival of the righteous Messiah. The last encampment will be America.”⁴⁹ The legend suited Kotler’s undertaking. It stressed the supreme role of the yeshiva to facilitate the Jewish future, disregarding other aspects of Eastern European life that were in any case peripheral to Kotler’s learning-focused enterprise. The tale also connected his own sojourn from Lithuania to the United States. For the next two decades, Kotler repeated the connection between his efforts to establish Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, his support of other American Torah initiatives, and the fulfillment of Rabbi Hayim’s prophecy.⁵⁰

Kotler had help. In the late 1930s and 1940s, an elite class of rabbinical scholars made use of the loophole in the above-mentioned Johnson-Reed Immigrant Act to flee the Nazi terror. Their leadership was the

47 Yoel Finkelman, “An Ideology for American Yeshiva Students: The Sermons of R. Aharon Kotler, 1942–1962,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 58 (Autumn 2007): 319.

48 *Ibid.*, 320.

49 Aharon Kotler, *Mishnat Rebbe Aharon*, vol. IV (Lakewood, NJ: Machon Mishnas Rabbi Aaron, 2005), 190. See also “From the Archives,” *Jewish Observer* 23 (November 1990): 43.

50 See, for example, Yitzchok Dershowitz, *The Legacy of Maran Rav Aharon Kotler: A Vivid Portrait of the Teachings, Qualities, and Accomplishments of the Venerable Rosh Hayeshiva* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2005), 160; Shmuel Rolnik, introduction, s.v. “nevu’ah,” *Torat Shmuel* (Brooklyn, 2005); and Yisrael Kalman, *Harhak Ma’alyah Derakbekbah* (Lakewood, NJ, 2002), 155–156.

primary reason, cited one observer at that time, for the “rise of the Yeshiva World” in the postwar period.⁵¹ In addition to Rabbi Kotler, some of the Lithuanian scholars who arrived in this period were Rabbis Eliyahu Meir Bloch, Joseph Breuer, Moshe Feinstein, Reuven Grozovsky, Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, Yitzchok Hutner, Avraham Kalmanowitz, Yaakov Kamenetsky, Dovid Lifshitz, Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, and Shimon Schwab.⁵² This list, with few exceptions, represents the most outstanding individuals who exercised top-down leadership in the formation of America’s Yeshiva World.⁵³

Scholars have tended to define the Yeshiva World by focusing on its oppositional attitudes. Jeffrey Gurock described this group as “resisters” who “reject acculturation and disdained cooperation with other American Jewish elements” out of fear of diluting “traditional faith and practice.”⁵⁴ Samuel Heilman preferred the term “rejectionist” to describe one who “denies and hence conceptually rejects the legitimacy of his non-Orthodox contemporary” and “remains within the shelter of the traditional Orthodox world.”⁵⁵ Charles Liebman typically labeled it “sectarian Orthodox” and dwelled on this group’s separatist tendencies, although he did acknowledge the Orthodox Right’s constructive commitment to traditional Talmud study (for men) and moralistic teachings.⁵⁶ This feature was on par with America’s Protestant fundamentalists, who possessed antimodernist proclivities but also recruited adherents due

51 See Elkanah Schwartz, “Two Lecterns,” *Jewish Observer* 1 (February 1964): 12.

52 See Sarna and Eleff, “Immigration Clause,” 76.

53 See William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 180–193. The Modern Orthodox in the United States also valued these forms of study but made room for other religious books and texts associated Western learning and culture. See Zev Eleff, “Jewish Immigrants, Liberal Higher Education, and the Quest for a Torah u-Madda Curriculum at Yeshiva College,” *Tradition* 44 (Summer 2011): 19–34.

54 Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Resisters and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 35 (November 1983): 109.

55 Samuel C. Heilman, “The Many Faces of Orthodoxy, Part I,” *Modern Judaism* 2 (February 1982): 27.

56 Charles S. Liebman, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” *American Jewish Year Book* 66 (1965): 91.

to the small but important positivistic aspects of their faith.⁵⁷ Owing to this, Liebman, borrowing from a vocabulary already in circulation among America's Orthodox Right, was the first to introduce the term "Yeshiva World" into the scholarly lexicon.⁵⁸

The latter matter is important. The nomenclature is useful to make a crucial distinction between the culture of Torah study in Eastern Europe and the later types in Israel and the United States. The term "Yeshiva World" does not appear, at least with any regularity, in Lithuanian rabbinic literature, nor in its Yiddish (*yeshiva velt*) or its Hebrew (*olam ha-yeshiva*) incarnations.⁵⁹ This designation would have had too far-reaching implications for the Orthodox rank-and-file. In Eastern Europe, most boys received a rudimentary religious education in *heder* and concluded their formal studies at thirteen to work and help their families. "The majority of Jews," wrote Shaul Stampfer, "such as the peddlers, shoemakers, and tailors, could not study a page of Talmud on their own. They were pious, they said their psalms, they went to hear the Midrashic sermons on Saturday afternoons in the synagogues, but they were not themselves learned."⁶⁰

The situation was different in the United States. Here, the rabbinic newcomers in the postwar era championed Jewish education for all young people.⁶¹ This is how Kotler and others figured they could ensure the "continuation of Israel's Torah tradition, brutally interrupted by Nazi tyranny."⁶² It worked. From 1947 to 1963, the number of

57 See Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88.

58 Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," 33. The sociologist William Helmreich then furthered the term's usage. See Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*.

59 My thanks to Shaul Stampfer for his guidance in determining this based on correspondence and a thorough search and mining of the Otzar HaHochma database.

60 See Shaul Stampfer, "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society," *Studies in Jewish Education* 3 (1988): 283.

61 See Doniel Zvi Kramer, *The Day Schools and Torah Umesorah: The Seeding of Traditional Judaism in America* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1984), 13.

62 Cited in Doniel Zvi Kramer "The History and Impact of Torah Umesorah and Hebrew Day Schools in America" (doctoral diss., Yeshiva University, 1976), 30.

Orthodox girls attending the Orthodox Right's all-female Bais Yaakov schools increased from 1,200 to 5,000 students.⁶³ The yeshivot swelled, as well. The United States was host to a handful of these half-filled schools in the 1930s. By 1976, there were forty advanced yeshivot and a total enrollment that hovered around 6,500 students.⁶⁴ Kotler's Beth Medrash Govoha, Mesivta Chasan Sofer, Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, Ner Israel, Telshe Yeshiva, Tifereth Jerusalem, Torah Vodaath, and Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim all took significant steps to attract young men to their yeshivot.⁶⁵

These efforts to form a Yeshiva World in the United States were an attempt to recreate the part of the Old World that these *roshei yeshiva* knew best.⁶⁶ Kotler once explained that the purpose of his Lakewood yeshiva was to replace the "typically exceptional" young men who perished in Europe by cultivating the "remnants" who had escaped to the United States.⁶⁷ To him, the yeshiva was the only way to block out the "impurities" of American life.⁶⁸ Some members of the old guard of Orthodox Judaism that had preceded this wave of rabbinic émigrés pushed back, dubbing this approach reductionist and an altogether "radical change"—but to little avail.⁶⁹ In this vision of Orthodox life in Eastern Europe, it made good sense to encourage young men to remain in yeshivot for longer durations. These schools "cannot exist

63 Leslie M. Ginsparg, "Defining Bais Yaakov: A Historical Study of Yeshivish Orthodox Girls High School Education in America, 1963–1984" (doctoral diss., New York University, 2009), 12–13.

64 See David Singer, "The Yeshivah World," *Commentary* 62 (October 1976): 72.

65 See Alvin Irwin Schiff, *The Jewish Day School in America* (New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1966), 61–62, 237–239.

66 See Menachem Friedman, "Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultraorthodox Judaism," in *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without: Anthropological Studies*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 235–255.

67 Kotler, *Mishnat Rebbe Aharon*, vol. IV (Lakewood, NJ: Machon Mishnas Rabbi Aaron, 2005), 242.

68 *Ibid.*, 255.

69 See, for instance, Oscar Z. Fasman, "Trends in the American Yeshiva Today," *Tradition* 9 (Fall 1967): 49.

only for a few,” asserted one of Kotler’s disciples about the burgeoning Yeshiva World. “They exist for all.”⁷⁰ One perceptive observer offered the following:

Jewish popular mythology to the contrary notwithstanding, not all students of Talmud are geniuses, and the yeshivah is not that exclusive preserve of brilliant minds that it has been made out to be. This was true in the European past as well as in the American present, but with one important difference. In Lithuania the yeshivot were elite institutions that catered to the few—a fairly select group of motivated and talented young men who, in the midst of grinding poverty, dared to aspire to scholarship. Not everyone achieved this goal, but the elite nature of the academies created an environment in which a good number actually did. In America, on the other hand, the relative prosperity of Orthodox Jews has brought a yeshivah education within reach of almost everyone. At the same time, the heads of yeshivot have increasingly come to view their schools less as temples of pure learning than as instruments for inculcating Orthodoxy in a secular society, and this has led them to adopt much less stringent admissions policies than in the past. Some good has come from the resultant democratization, but it has also led, inevitably, to a lowering of the standards of study.⁷¹

The leaders of the Orthodox Right reimagined their communities through their own Yeshiva World perspective rather than through the routine and the more common lives of, to borrow from Stampfer, the unlearned “peddlers, shoemakers and tailors.” As the Yeshiva World symbolized, these schools became the essential cultural anchor for the Orthodox Right. As the community’s lifeblood, the yeshiva was the nucleus for social networks, a reference point for shared experiences, and the seat of the most powerful leaders in this faith-based enclave.

70 Competition still existed in these environments, and students who outshined their peers were rewarded with increased status. Still, without grades or other indicators of performance, the Yeshiva World tended to measure a student’s “success” based on the hours he spent in the study halls rather than his ability to master a rabbinic text. See Helmreich, *World of the Yeshiva*, 180–193.

71 Singer, “Yeshivah World,” 72.

The Yeshiva World moniker caught on as more of its male adherents could claim stature and experience studying in these academies. It is also common for women to identify with this designation even though the traditional yeshiva is an exclusively male space. Women, just as much as men, identify as “yeshivish.” In addition to particular modes of dress, language, and other behaviors linked to this religious group, women’s efforts to earn a living to support their husbands engaged in full-time Torah study and to raise sons who will one day enroll in advanced yeshivot make these women integral—not just honorary—members of the Yeshiva World.⁷² All members of the Yeshiva World, then, had a stake in fulfilling Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin’s prophecy to bring Torah study to the United States.

The Counterculture of Antimodernism

Sociologist Charles Liebman was aware that widespread access was a crucial feature of the Yeshiva World. But in the 1960s, Liebman still figured that this community “lack[ed] the intellectual-philosophical perspective to broaden its appeal.”⁷³ He was wrong. To date, the Yeshiva World currently comprises three-fifths of the 500,000 Orthodox Jews living in the United States and is poised, thanks to a birthrate of more than 4.1 children per household (compared to the Jewish average of 1.9 and 2.2 for the general American public), to increase in numbers.⁷⁴

72 See Sarah Bunin Benor, *Becoming Frum: How Newcomers Learn the Language and Culture of Orthodox Judaism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 111–117; and Laura Shaw Frank, “Yeshivish Women Clergy: The Secular State and Changing Roles for Women in ‘Haredi’ Orthodoxy,” in *You Arose, a Mother in Israel: A Festschrift in Honor of Blu Greenberg*, ed. Devorah Zlochower (New York: Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, 2017), 103–109.

73 Liebman, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” 91.

74 The fertility rate for American Orthodox Jews is reported at 4.1 children per household. That figure is decreased slightly due to the Modern Orthodox, who have fewer children and comprise thirty percent of the overall Orthodox population. No specific rate is listed for the Orthodox Right. See Alan Cooperman et al., *A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews: A Further Analysis of the 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2015), 11. See also Samuel C. Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 62–77.

What accounts for this resilience? The Yeshiva World appealed to many searching Jews as a “viable choice,” a countercultural brand of Orthodox Judaism that featured a “radical non-conformity to the values, attitudes, and life style of the ‘modern’ world.”⁷⁵ The Lithuanian extracts who emerged as the leaders of the Yeshiva World—not unlike other leaders of the American religious right—offered their followers a more insular form of religious instruction that stressed piety of conduct.⁷⁶

The Yeshiva World paralleled historian George Marsden’s definition of Christian fundamentalism: “militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism.”⁷⁷ Both religious groups vigorously opposed all things “modern,” a trend that tended to resonate with segments of American Christians who no longer recognized religious ideologies in the politicalized statements of their “liberal” leaders.⁷⁸ Instead, these disenchanted Protestants of the 1970s were taken by the “Right’s ability to balance biblical rigidity, pietism, and separatism.”⁷⁹ The antimodernists within American Protestantism had emerged around the turn of the twentieth century as the vigorous opponents of ministers and theologians who believed in the “conscious, intended adaptation of religious ideas to modern culture.” In contrast to the religious modernists who tended to see God in “human cultural development” and believed that “society is

75 See David Singer, “The Case for an ‘Irrelevant’ Orthodoxy: An Open Letter to Yitzchak Greenberg,” *Tradition* 11 (Summer 1970): 78; and M. Herbert Danzger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 71–95.

76 On Jewish and general cases of religious counterculture in this period, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots Politicians, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011), 326–361; Preston Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 39–55; and Mark Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 96–129.

77 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4.

78 Axel R. Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 111–112.

79 *Ibid.*, 113.

moving toward a realization of the Kingdom of God,” the antimodernists eschewed attempts to draw religious meaning from human progress or modern culture.⁸⁰ They condemned modernism as a heretical sort of alchemy that interpreted religion based on in-vogue social fashions rather than the other way around. Ironically, the liberal upsurge in pluralism during the post–World War II era allowed for this conservative spirit to take root. The same religious culture also set the rise of the Yeshiva World in motion.

The antimodernism of the Yeshiva World outpaced its forebears in Eastern Europe, and for good reason. With all its lurking dangers and economic uncertainty, life in Eastern Europe was hardly utopian. There was much for the rabbinic elites in Lithuania to loathe about their indigenous environment.⁸¹ Yet, the Orthodox Right considered “America” decidedly dystopian. In the main, Eastern European rabbis believed that the United States was a nation scaffolded by unredeemable modernist foundations. While they could not point to passages in scripture or a principle of faith that life in America had unequivocally violated, these rabbis still charged that the widespread nonobservance of kosher standards and Sabbath desecration sufficed to render America incompatible with Judaism.⁸² They did not articulate such a staunch view of Lithuania or elsewhere in Eastern Europe.⁸³

The sentiment was exacerbated by the Yeshiva World in the postwar period, despite the liberties accorded to them in the United States.⁸⁴ Its leaders dismissed the location of their new residence as a dint of

80 William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 2.

81 See, for example, Yosef Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence: Orthodoxy in the Grip of Nationalism*, trans. Joel A. Linsider (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 11–49.

82 See Hertzberg, “Treifene Medina,” 1–30.

83 The same had long been true of groups of Protestant elites in Europe who, from the nineteenth century onward, bundled up “America” with other heresies. See, for example, Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 95–123.

84 Some of these rabbinic scholars wrote with gratitude that the United States served to them as an asylum from the conflagration in Europe. See, for example, Moshe Feinstein, *Iggerot Moshe*, vol. VII (Brooklyn: Noble Books, 1985), 244.

circumstance, preferring instead to wax nostalgic and project an image of Jewish heritage anchored in a “metanarrative of the Jewish past,” tradition-minded and Lithuanian yeshiva-focused.⁸⁵ For example, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter in Cleveland, who was born in the United States but trained in the Telshe Yeshiva, which was rooted in the “blessed soil” of Lithuania, wrote about how “in Eastern Europe a large percentage of Jews was observant.” He emphasized that this community was “led and directed by greatness in Torah” and that “Torah giants of the generation put their stamp on all of life.”⁸⁶ Likewise, an Orthodox woman in New York recommended in the 1960s that schools make sure that young pupils “learn specifically what Orthodoxy lost when the Nazis invaded the dynamic Torah fortress of pre-war Europe.”⁸⁷

Gifter and other members of the Yeshiva World’s top-down rabbinic leadership supplanted the Orthodox rabbinic establishment (of mostly congregational rabbis) and guided dutiful adherents through this unabashed antimodernist lens. Often, this manifested itself as a sorting exercise of behaviors based on what fit sentimentally within Eastern European tradition as opposed to what ought to be considered “heretical” and “modern,” grounded in terms of its link to American life.⁸⁸ These forces reoriented the Rabbi Hayim prophecy. The legend’s storytellers in

85 See Hasia R. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17–23; and Yoel Finkelman, “Nostalgia, Inspiration, Ambivalence: Eastern Europe, Immigration, and the Construction of Collective Memory in Contemporary American Haredi Historiography,” *Jewish History* 23 (2009): 57–82.

86 Mordechai Gifter, *Torah Perspectives* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 11.

87 Miriam A. Bloom, “Seeks Yeshiva Course on Holocaust,” *Jewish Observer* 1 (February 1964): 29.

88 See Zev Eleff and Seth Farber, “Antimodernism and Orthodox Judaism’s Heretical Imperative: An American Religious Counterpoint,” *Religion and American Culture* 30 (Summer 2020): 237–272. The *roshei yeshiva* newcomers gained a strong foothold through their charisma and Torah scholarship. For one of the first to notice this change in the Orthodox power dynamic, see Emanuel Rackman, “From Synagogue Toward Yeshiva: Institutionalized Cult or Congregations of the Learned?” *Commentary* 21 (April 1956): 352–358. The Europe-America binary was oversimplistic and sometimes inaccurate. See Chaim I. Waxman, *Social Change and Halakhic Evolution in American Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2017), 89.

the immediate postwar period grew uncomfortable with the tale's tolerance for America. It seemed to extend a license to blend Judaism with the far too imperfect modern moment. Though it did not countenance assimilation and secularization, the myth left room for milder dosages of acculturation or, put differently, Judaism's adjustment to American norms and culture.

What could be done about Rabbi Hayim's American prophecy? In the post-World War II epoch, the tale was well entrenched and could not be easily erased from the Orthodox Jewish consciousness. The next best thing, then, was to repurpose it and curb its usefulness for the modernist line of thinking. These rabbinical raconteurs therefore changed the Rabbi Hayim story to stress the destruction wrought by the Holocaust and the importance of reestablishing the European yeshivot in their most "authentic" milieus, apart from the local modern spirit and attitudes. The changed meaning of the legend suited the Yeshiva World's antimodernism and encouraged the restoration project of an idyllic European Jewish environment.

The Europeanization of Rabbi Hayim's Prophecy

The Rabbi Hayim legend took on a different form after the arrival of Rabbi Aharon Kotler in 1941. His goal in the United States was not to harmonize Torah and American life. Kotler vigorously opposed an indigenous "materialistic" culture that sapped the spirituality that he identified with his earlier life in Europe.⁸⁹ Kotler considered the American Jewish community at a decided nadir of Torah learning, especially when compared to the scholars he had known in Lithuania.⁹⁰ For these reasons, Kotler had established his yeshiva far away from the larger American Jewish neighborhoods. The site removed his students from the "toxic" culture in America and gave the venerated *rosh yeshiva* his best chance to restore, in his view, the grandeur of European Torah life.⁹¹

Kotler's repeated recountings of the tale did not focus on the second portion of the story and Rabbi Hayim's anguish over the repositioning

89 Aharon Kotler, *Mishnat Rebbe Aharon*, 148.

90 *Ibid.*, 216.

91 Finkelman, "Ideology," 314–332.

of Torah to the United States. While subsequent retellings did, they revised it to fit Kotler's ardent antimodernism. The first attempts to reorient the Rabbi Hayim prophecy to Europe and the Holocaust occurred in the late 1940s. For example, Rabbi Abba Zions, one forlorn immigrant rabbi in the United States, wrote a short essay in the pages of a popular Hebrew rabbinical journal, mourning the destruction of European Jewry and calling on his colleagues in the New World to shape the future of Orthodox Judaism. To bolster his point, Zions repeated the vision, including the part about "Rabbi Hayim wailing a great cry." Here, however, the writer did not claim a tradition to explain Rabbi Hayim's somber reaction. To the contrary, "in that time," concluded Zions, "they did not comprehend the meaning of this, exactly how it would come to pass—the development of Torah study in America—however, these matters are well-etched in our hearts, and we are awestruck."⁹² This reflected a trend among American Jewish writers and intellectuals who made it their mission to shoulder the burden of Jewish culture after the Holocaust. However, in most of these instances the intention was to take this on while concomitantly embracing certain aspects of American life.⁹³ The so-called Modern Orthodox elites shared in this vision of coalescence.⁹⁴ But the leaders of the Lithuanian Orthodox exile like Kotler did not possess such hybrid goals. Just the opposite, they desired to regenerate their world in a new location, thereby totally negating local influences.

This was the point of emphasis of Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, whose retelling of the myth placed Kotler and the Holocaust at the center of Rabbi Hayim's prophecy. Lifshitz recalled that back in the yeshivot in Lithuania, he and other luminaries were afraid to travel to the United States, even after World War I left European Jewry in a most perilous state. Lifshitz singled out Kotler as the major figure who courageously "came to America and fought on behalf of Torah to build Torah and

92 Abba Zions, "Merkhaz Ha-Torah u-Darkho li-America," *Hapardes* 21 (January 1947): 45–46.

93 See Markus Krahn, *American Jewry and the Re-Invention of the East European Jewish Past* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 96–118.

94 See Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators," 127–146.

raise her trumpet.” As for Rabbi Hayim’s weeping, Lipshitz’s version portrayed the head of Volozhin yeshiva wailing twice, each representing a different explanation of the Torah transplant to the United States: “I cry for the terrible destruction of the scholars of Europe; six million Jews will be killed until just a tiny remnant will travel to America. I weep a second time for the exile of the Torah; that it must go to such a challenging place where so many will fall as sacrifices, so many will descend. But there, Torah will be rebuilt in grand fashion.”⁹⁵ First, Lifshitz’s version of the Rabbi Hayim legend foretold the fate of European Judaism and its need to relocate to another locale. This was primarily a Europe-centered prophecy. For Lifshitz, America was not a land imbued with potential; it was a spiritually arid nation that promoted modern sensibilities alien to a traditional Torah climate. The genius of Kotler was that he had developed a plan to replant the European Torah edifices on top of the inhospitable American soil. Later rabbinic émigrés borrowed this model.

The Kotler-caused reorientation of the foundational myth changed the origin stories of others ensconced within America’s Yeshiva World. Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman preceded Kotler, emigrating from Kovno to New Haven in 1930. After several false starts there and in Cleveland, Ruderman formed Baltimore’s Yeshiva Ner Yisroel in 1933.⁹⁶ He, too, looked to and cited the Rabbi Hayim legend to help articulate his American mission. In Ruderman’s recounting at an Agudath Israel convention in 1979, Rabbi Hayim “tearfully predicted [the migration of Torah to the United States] at the laying of the cornerstone of his yeshiva in Volozhin.”⁹⁷ In this rendering, the dramatic scene of Rabbi Hayim’s prophecy suggested that the model Etz Hayim Yeshiva in Volozhin was founded in the religiously fertile Lithuanian soil to be nurtured and then removed to the barren United States. Years later, at a memorial for Ruderman, Rabbi Moshe Sherer of the Agudath Israel heralded the

95 Dovid Lifshitz, *Tebilah le-David* (Union City, NJ: Gross Bros., 1994), 127–128.

96 See Dovid Katz, “Mishmeret Ha-Levi: Kiyum li-Dimuto u-lemishmeret Hayyav shel ha-Ga’on Rebbe Yaakov Yitzhak ha-Levi Ruderman,” *Yeshurun* 18 (2006): 157–169.

97 Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, “Torah for Others—and for Oneself,” *Jewish Observer* 14 (December 1979): 16.

recently deceased *rosh yeshiva* who, along with Kotler, had anticipated the “wanton destruction of European Jewry” and “thanks to him realized the vision of Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin.”⁹⁸

Some of the most recent articulations of the Rabbi Hayim legend have stripped the story of all its American-centered themes. Take, for instance, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland. In October 1989, Gifter spoke at a local synagogue about the European-focused mission of his school and the foundational myth upon which it rests:

Telshe has tried to maintain its tradition as one of the great yeshivos from overseas. The yeshiva there was one of five great Torah centers in Lithuanian Jewry, established in 1885. They did a wonderful job overseas, but Hitler brought about the job that had to be done in the United States. I doubt whether he had an idea what his destruction of Jewry would lead to.

I keep telling this story: Reb Chaim Volozhiner once burst out crying: “The last station for Torah before the coming of Moshiach will be the United States of America. One of his great disciples asked him: “So why does the Rebbe cry? What is there to cry about?” His answer: “I see how bitter it will be to create this last station.” No one understood what he was talking about. When Hitler came along, we began to understand what Reb Chaim Volozhiner had in mind.”⁹⁹

In this morbid formulation, Hitler was an instrument in moving the center of Torah from Eastern Europe to the United States. Rabbi Hayim did not envision the details of the Nazis’ genocide program but his tears were, according to Gifter, shed for the destined destruction of European Jewry. Gifter singled out his yeshiva among a handful of Talmud academies that had retained their European identity after transplanting to the United States. These yeshivot were destined to migrate to the New World but were never meant to graft themselves to the new

98 Moshe Sherer, *Bi-Shtei Einayim* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1988), 419.

99 Mordechai Gifter lecture at Oheb Zedek-Taylor Road Synagogue, October 1989, available at <https://torahdownloads.com/shiur-20827.html> (accessed 8 April 2019).

environment. Likewise, Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller of Telshe's Chicago branch recounted the tale and concluded with his own version of Rabbi Hayim's explanation for his sadness: "You don't know how much pain this will involve ... with how much suffering, anguish, and *shefichas damim* (bloodshed) this will come about."¹⁰⁰ Again, the thrust of the tale was centered on Europe and not the United States.

In the late 1970s, Charles Liebman confessed that he had underestimated the staying power of the Yeshiva World in American Jewish life. The sociologist congratulated the group that, through its fidelity to Jewish observance and rejection of modernism, emerged as the "voice of Jewish authenticity."¹⁰¹ Its leaders derived their power from their unimpeachable standing as Torah scholars and their claim, as Liebman noted, to an authentic Jewish past. In the final decades of the twentieth century, a new generation of Orthodox Jews expressed doubt about other Jews who mixed their tradition-bound faith with American sensibilities.¹⁰² The Yeshiva World's ability to remake Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin's prophecy was emblematic of a deeper capacity to formulate a religious vision that could be branded as "authentic" and, however incidentally, flourish in the United States. The desire to develop a "usable past" is therefore a pivotal part of this process, one shared by Orthodox Jewish elites and leaders of other varieties of American faiths.

Zev Eleff is associate professor of Jewish history at Touro College. He is also chief academic officer of Hebrew Theological College in Skokie, Illinois, and vice provost of Touro College Illinois. His most recent book is Authentically Orthodox: A Tradition-Bound Faith in American Life (Wayne State, 2020).

100 Chaim Dov Keller, "Searching for Meaning in the Maelstrom," *Jewish Observer* 36 (December 2003): 7. For an exceptional case, see A. Leib Scheinbaum, *The World That Was: America, 1900–1945* (Brooklyn: The Shaar Press, 2004), xv. The retelling in this book retained the assimilationist explanation for Rabbi Hayim's weeping because the scope of this book ended in 1945, at the end of World War II.

101 See Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodox Judaism Today," *Midstream* 25 (August/September 1979): 20–22.

102 See also Charles S. Liebman, "Extremism as a Religious Norm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22 (March 1983): 75–86.

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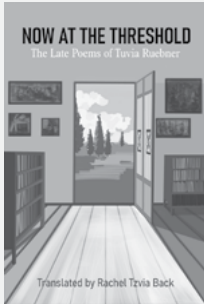
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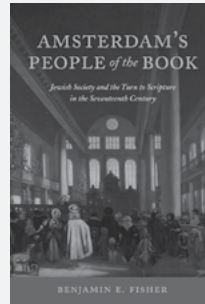
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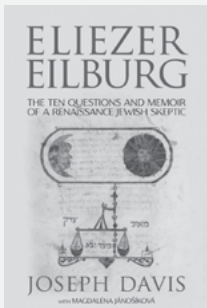
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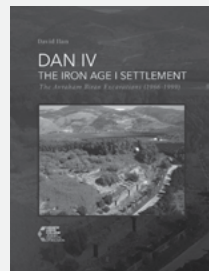
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Electronics and the Future

NEWTON N. MINOW



Newton N. Minow (center) with Samuel Sandmel (right) and L. Addison Lanier (left), 1976.
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Staying home during the coronavirus pandemic, our daughter Martha was looking through some old files and discovered a folder marked, “Reread.” She found a speech I gave at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) on 22 February 1976, titled “Electronics and the Future.” It was the Weil Lecture that year. Martha read it, found it surprising, made a copy, and sent it to me. When I read it—in the midst of the current crisis facing the world—I sent it to our friend Rabbi Sam Gordon, an alum of the College, and asked if he had been a student at the time of the lecture. He said he began his studies in the fall of 1976 and was not at the lecture but that his uncle, Jacob Rader Marcus, must have been present and that the American Jewish Archives, which was started by his uncle, would be the right place to house a copy. Sam sent a copy to Dr. Gary Zola, a distinguished scholar who directs that important institution today. Dr. Zola read the lecture and asked my permission to add it to the Archives and to publish it now in its Journal. I am honored that after forty-four years, the ideas I spoke about have a new life.

Dr. Samuel Sandmel, a revered leader, was my host at HUC-JIR. Before the Weil Lecture, he asked me about myself. I told him that we had just celebrated my fiftieth birthday, that my wife, Jo, and I were thankful for our twenty-seventh year of a fulfilling and loving marriage, that we had three daughters—one in law school, one in graduate school, and one in her last year of high school. I mentioned that I was in a group of lawyers trying to persuade the Federal Communications Commission and Congress to change the law to restore the televised presidential debates, which had not occurred after the Kennedy/Nixon debates in 1960.

Looking back today, Jo and I are even more thankful that in our nineties we are in the seventy-first year of our fulfilling and loving marriage, that our three daughters are all lawyers with exceptional national careers of public service, and that we have three grandchildren all doing good in the world. As for the televised presidential debates, the law was changed in 1976, and the League of Women Voters and the Commission on Presidential Debates asked me to help negotiate and organize every debate (forty-four so far) from 1976 on. As of this writing, we are now planning 2020. So, in my 95th year, I am blessed and a very lucky man.

With the benefit of today's perspective, Dr. Zola asked me what I now think I got right in that Weil Lecture and what did I miss? I think I got the right message—"If we do not align change with what we value, we will simply value change" and, "I ask you to find direction for electronics, rather than continue to take electronic direction." What I missed is how to make that message so compelling that people would act—and would seek leaders in government who place values above all. Dr. Zola also asks if I think this lecture is of interest to contemporaries and contemporary circumstances in twenty-first-century American Jewish life. I believe the pandemic is teaching us life-changing new lessons about the impact of technology. This Passover, like many American Jewish families, our family was scattered—we were in Cambridge, Brooklyn, Chicago, Los Angeles, and McLean, Virginia. But technology made it possible to share a seder for the first time together in decades with help from haggadot.com and Zoom. We may have all opened different doors to Elijah, but we were all together. As our religious leaders use innovative and imaginative tactics to bring all of us together, from social media posts to Twitter and Instagram to services like shivas and weddings on Facebook Live, I am pleased that my lecture now, more than four decades later, will reach a new generation to reflect about how technology can better serve our ancient traditions and eternal values.

WEIL LECTURE—

Electronics and the Future

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
CINCINNATI, OHIO

FEBRUARY 22, 1976 - NEWTON N. MINOW

Your morning news appears on a wall-size screen attached to your home communicenter. A video print-out of the day's schedule of movies, sports and lessons appears, subject to your choice, and you adjust the programming to meet your interests and time preferences. You set a timer to record programs or lessons you desire to keep on hand; meantime microfilm you ordered from a foreign data bank arrives. When it is time for your pre-arranged date with your Australian chess opponent, his moves appear on your screen just as yours appear on his.

You shop for clothes and food by viewing the merchandise on your communicenter, ordering with your computercard which automatically records the transactions with your bank. You participate in a community town meeting through the two-way video of your communicenter, expressing your opinion and votes on the current proposals. Your doctor scans your vital functions via electronic attachments to your communicenter, and connects you with a specialist at the Mayo Clinic who explains a new treatment to you.

By dialing central data banks, you obtain printouts and video cassette programs on recent scientific experiments, theological papers, legal cases—anything you'd like to study. You dictate a letter to be sent anywhere, or talk with anyone on your videoscreen. Pictorial, graphic, sound and print media become one whole center, opening up all sources of knowledge to you as well as serving as vehicles for your own personal communication.

Far out speculations on the distant future? No indeed; these were speculations twenty years ago. Now, they are technological reality. Videophones, microfilm, videotape, wallsize screens, dial information banks—all exist and are gaining in usage. The problems which remain are those of economics, costs, and marketing. When solved, the new

world of electronic communications will further dominate our lives. The technology is here and now.

But let us pause to heed James Thurber's warning about the speed of changing technology. Thurber wrote: "Man is flying too fast for a world that is round. Soon he will catch up to himself in a great rear-end collision and many will never know that what hit him from behind was man."

Too often we allow changes to happen simply because they seem to be logical fulfillments of existing trends. At this national Bicentennial, and this institution's Centennial, we have good reason to pause, to reflect, to recognize the implications of change in technology and communications. For if we do not align change with what we value, we will simply value change.

"Electrons have no morals. They serve free men and dictators with equal fervor. Their use in transmitting human ideas depends on those who design the machines and control their use, and in the United States this ultimately will depend on the general public." So wrote Ben Badikian, scholar of the new information technology. How will the changing techniques of communication affect the ways in which we see ourselves and our world? Will they foster the freedom of expression crucial to the survival of a creative democracy? Or will they manipulate and restrict individual communication? Will the media level information and culture to the lowest common denominator? Will Orwell's dread prophecies for 1984 only eight years away come true? Or will new technology challenge and elevate human senses and sensibilities? Let us today examine these questions in the hope that we direct electronics rather than simply take electronic directions.

First we need some broad historical perspective. If we remember that the past is prologue, we will understand how previous changes in communications technology and information dissemination revolutionized society. When Marshall McLuhan said that "the medium is the message," he gave us a valuable, if often misunderstood, insight: The way in which information is conveyed often touches and instructs us as much as the content of the message itself. As we shall see, the message of technological change in communications has been increased knowledge and dispersed power, bringing an expansion in sophistication, education and

democracy. If we perceive the meaning and manner of previous transitions, we can identify those directions we value, make moral judgments, and we can choose wisely among new alternatives.

All of us know that new tools and materials significantly change the lifestyles and concerns of a society. When ancient Egyptian rulers first started to write on papyrus made from reeds rather than on stone, messages suddenly became portable; a king's power could extend over more areas. But this expanded authority had to be shared with the copyists and the papyrus makers. Erik Barnouw, America's foremost historian of communications, concluded "All this meant a shift away from absolute monarchy, a dispersal of authority that is said to have penetrated deeply into Egyptian life. Papyrus begat bureaucracy."

Centuries later, paper was produced outside of the church monopoly of the Middle Ages. New technological changes culminated with the printing press of movable type. These changes in technique allowed mass production to spread classical knowledge, and also supported the business and vernacular of a new merchant class. The printing press spread the power of thought and creativity. Ideas took on new energy as they were sent more quickly and farther than they had ever traveled before.

With the expanded movement of information and ideas came social mobility and massive social changes. Custodians of tradition, of course, resisted the changes; in 1671, the Governor of Virginia expressed his thanks to God that the printing press, breeder of heresy and disobedience had not yet arrived in his colony. But the introduction of movable type democratized learning, shared knowledge, expanded faith in the dignity and reason of the common man, and ushered in the Renaissance and the Reformation. No longer could knowledge belong solely to the clergy or royalty; the technological change in communications advanced social change towards democracy.

In the 1800's, technology in the form of the camera and the telegraph allowed even more dramatic sharing of experiences. New methods of communications transmitted ideas more vividly and more quickly than ever thought possible. Suddenly "news" really meant what was new and immediate. Suddenly people had information in their hands of social changes across the globe. New information bolstered faith in their own power to overthrow tyranny, and to launch mass politics. By the 1870's

when the phonograph brought new entertainment inside homes and the telephone introduced connections between homes, more and more people communicated with each other.

In 1901 the *New National Dictionary* defined broadcast as the “actor process of scattering seeds.” A quarter-of a century later, the *New Century Dictionary* defined broadcast as “to scatter or disseminate, specifically, radio messages, speeches, etc.” In the space of those two decades, the new seeds being scattered were the impulses of radio. The change was much more profound than a mere change in dictionary definitions.

When radio broadcasting began in 1920 after decades of inventions and experiments, it created popular personalities, brought the voice of the President into every household, communicating the personality as well as the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Radio developed new trends in music. It made possible instantaneous transmission of breaking news stories. In 1925, an American and an Englishman independently experimented with combining radio techniques with new discoveries in photography and optics, using a scanning disc, vacuum tubes and photoelectric cells. Within ten years, refinements in technology proceeded rapidly and experimental television stations were operating by 1930. Broadcasting development was delayed during World War II. Television reappeared in 1946 and instantly captured the public’s imagination.

In 1947, some 14,000 homes viewed regular shows such as “Meet the Press,” “Kukla, Fran and Ollie,” and “Howdy Doody.” Five million American families were tuning in their sets in 1950. In 1960, the number soared to 45 million. Today more families have television sets than bathtubs. More than half the homes in America have color television. Last week, the New York State Assembly voted that a family’s television set was such a basic necessity that it could not be taken by creditors when possessions were seized to satisfy debts. People spent more time watching the tube than they did attending church, school, concerts—more time than in any single activity other than sleeping. Sixty percent of American families changed their sleeping patterns because of television schedules. Fifty-five percent changed their mealtimes, and 78% use television as an electronic babysitter. In large cities, plumbing systems had to be redesigned to accommodate heavy use of water during prime-time commercials. But besides changing the habits of viewers, television

modified the nature of entertainment and information transmission. Knowledge and experiences previously restricted to the few are available to everyone.

Television is our national mass medium. Its power is too comprehensive to be measured, even in megawatts. Capable of familiarizing any viewer with the mannerisms of a President, the trivia of a game show, the excitement of a Superbowl, the expressions of Groucho Marx, television has been accused of everything. Some believe that television creates unrest by showing prosperity to the poor. Some believe that television ended a war by bringing it into everyone's living room. Televising the McCarthy hearings, the Kennedy-Nixon debates, the political conventions and the Watergate hearings brought government and politics to a shared national experience, capable of new powers of mobilizing public opinion. The development of the mass media correlates almost exactly with the growth of an industrial society, a society increasingly urban and then suburban, undergoing changes more rapidly than any previous time in history. Television offers outlets for joy and grief; an antidote to loneliness, a companion in an era when old rituals lost their meanings.

We all identify President Kennedy's assassination and funeral with television. The launching of a space mission, a walk on the moon, a committee vote on impeachment—we were there, through television. Elderly and handicapped people keep in touch with current events and trends through television in a society which otherwise tends to ignore them. The mass nature of the media creates quick national heroes, instant national failures, memories and rituals, weaving new webs of social cohesion.

Television, in the opinion of thoughtful social scientists, alters the viewers' perception of events. Every microphone and camera become linked to the nervous system of the viewer; extending the areas of exploration behind the scenes, beyond the moon. Television blurs distinctions between what is formal and informal, news and entertainment, foreign and familiar. Sitting in the same chair, dressed in the same attire, the viewer can see a religious service, a soap opera, a gangster chase scene, a situation comedy, a newscast or a wrestling match. Reducing the special quality of certain events but increasing the importance of others, the television camera democratizes experiences as it carries them to each of our homes.

While printed or written language imposed a linear one-step-at-a-time transmission of ideas, television, along with film, carries complexity and simultaneity once possible only in face-to-face communication. Social scientists say the visual media reaches a different hemisphere of the brain than the one used in written communication. Lloyd Morrisett of the Markle Foundation noted:

Words can transmit knowledge about values, attitudes and sensibilities but the values, attitudes or sensibilities themselves are something apart from and different from knowledge about them ... Choosing a verbal model for the transmission of knowledge has meant some inherent loss in the capacity to transmit other qualities ... where words alone convey only poorly the excitement, fear and sudden rush of the stomach onto the throat from a ride on a roller coaster, a super wide screen and associated sound effects can do it very well.

The same holds for the drama of a Presidential resignation speech, an Olympics competition, the danger of a fire, the tension of a vote of the House Judiciary Committee.

A friend visited Los Angeles from West Germany, and drove along the freeways. He noticed that every home, whether an apartment building or a house, a mansion or a tenement, had a television antenna peering up from each rooftop. He told me that the television antennas were like periscopes enabling the people inside to see and hear what was going on outside. The metaphor is not only vivid, but also precise; television has become the sensory equipment of our era, involving sharpened perception powers, peering where we have not been before, enabling all of us inside to see what is going on outside.

Yet, if television enables all of us inside to see what is happening outside, is it enabling us to understand what is going on outside? Have we learned how to use and to harness this miraculous medium in a free and open society? Have we learned how to use it to advance the democratic process, the cause of justice, the causes of social and moral development; the enlightenment of the mind and the heart?

In 1976, we have not yet found the answers to these questions. The task for the remaining years in this century is to deepen the search for the answers, and to get more people involved in the search. I plead

especially today that our religious and academic leaders participate to a far greater degree than they have in the past. And today, I pose to you, briefly, two particular questions which need answers based on ethical and moral values. These questions deal with the role of television in politics, and the role of television in changing our constitutional system.

In this political, election year, candidates for the highest office in our land, President of the United States, travel around the country, speaking to small groups of people, quickly and in slogans. They are barely perceived by the electorate. In this 200th year of our adventure and experiment with self-government, we have a powerful medium which can bring the candidates and the issues into every home. Yet, it is not being used to enlighten and inform. Instead, we have sixty-second, thirty-second, and even ten-second commercials.

The United States Supreme Court, in the landmark decision of *Buckley v. Valeo*, last month, had some important things to say about the First Amendment and politics in 1976. The Court said: "The First Amendment's protection against governmental abridgement of free expression cannot properly be made to depend on a person's financial ability to engage in public discussion." It also said, "The electorate's increasing dependence on television, radio, and other mass media for news and information has made these expensive modes of communication indispensable instruments of effective political speech."

What the Supreme Court said is well known to each of us. Most Americans now receive most of their news from television. Most Americans form their political opinions and judgments based on what they see and hear on television and radio. Yet we have a system which too often bars access to the electorate except on terms of payment of vast sums of money. True, public funds are now available—but the disadvantages of the use of public funds under present arrangements in political campaigns offer major hazards to freedom.

Some years ago, I was asked to chair a bi-partisan commission organized by the Twentieth Century Fund to examine ways and means to use television more effectively in the process of choosing a President. Our Commission, after a year's intensive study, unanimously recommended in 1969 that the Congress of the United States change the rules. Legislation was introduced in the Congress, hearings were held—and nothing happened.

We said in our report, seven years before the Supreme Court's decision, that the electorate should have the opportunity to see and hear all significant candidates so that it could better judge their positions and personal qualities. We also said that this access of voters to a candidate should not depend exclusively on his or her ability to raise campaign funds. Therefore, we recommended that each significant presidential candidate and his running mate be given broadcast time simultaneously on all television and radio stations in the United States. The time would be called Voter's Time, and the programs would be designed to promote rational political discussion and involve live appearances by the candidates. We proposed that the federal government buy the time, at half rates, from the broadcasters to reimburse their costs, and we found that six half hours of radio and television time on every station in the country, in the six weeks before a Presidential election, would involve an expense of about \$4,000,000 every four years—or less than it would cost to mail a single post card to all voters.

Incumbents did not particularly like our idea, because it treats their opponents equally. Lethargy, inertia, and apathy were our foes. Nothing happened. A few years went by, and then Watergate lighted the fires of reform. But this simple idea—to link modern electronics with the political process, this simple, inexpensive idea, was not adopted.

My point is not that our proposal for Voter's Time is the panacea to solve America's problems for the last quarter of this century. My point is that religious and academic leaders of this nation were identified not with searches for solutions, but instead with the familiar forces of inertia, lethargy and apathy which are the most effective enemies of the democratic process. My old law partner, Adlai E. Stevenson, once said:

Participating in government in a democracy does not mean merely casting a ballot on election day. It means much more than that. It means an attitude, a moral view, and a willingness to assume a day-to-day responsibility. Too many say, 'Politics is dirty'—and that is about their only protest about the quality of government—and far more use the word 'politician' as a term of opprobrium, disrespect, and dishonor—and this in the land of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln ...

I would remind you of an axiom of political science: People get the kind of government they deserve. Your public servants serve you right. Our American government may be defined, perhaps, as the government that really cares about the people. Just so, our government demands, it depends upon, the care and devotion of the people.

Today, the care and devotion of the people is directed at the television set in their home. Television, like their public servants, serves them right, and gives them the kind of politics on television they deserve.

Let us turn now to another example of television's effect on our system, our governmental and constitutional system. Sometimes we amend our Constitution without knowing it. Constitutional amendments occur imperceptibly through technological change. For some years, I have concluded that in the case of television, this has already happened by altering the political boundaries of the country, its cities, boroughs, counties, and states.

Television signals spread out in circles, and cover a circle of about 60 to 75 miles from the transmitter. Cities and counties and states were marked by boundaries long before television, but today bear little, if any, relationship to communications boundaries. If we were starting the United States of America in 1976, instead of 1776, we could all learn important lessons from the business community which, when television arrived twenty-five years ago, redrew the boundaries of America with a television boundary line called a television market, or an "ADI"—an "area of dominant influence."

Advertising and marketing people, not a constitutional convention, divided the United States into 207 ADI's. Let us examine what this means in the case of New York, our most troubled large city, to see what it means.

Last year, Paul L. Klein, a New York City student of television, rather than a political scientist, observed that those who would solve New York City's problems ought not accept the city as Rand McNally did. Klein is perceptive in writing:

The boundaries between boroughs, villages, towns, cities, counties, and states were first drawn when the Dutch were running things here. They were negotiated by people who owned the land. They were boundaries

of convenience—often highly visible and unambiguous, like say, the Hudson River—and they made sense then. The same boundaries are useless today. Worse than useless. They obscure the nature of our problems, and they impede solutions by distracting us.

Thus, in the case of New York, if you measured by television signal boundaries, New York City would not be poor. Instead, it would encompass 18.2 million, not 7.8 million people, with an effective buying—and taxing—income of \$94.4 billion, not \$37.4 billion. The people who fled to the suburbs and outlying areas—who view the same television news program each evening as the people in the city and who comprise the same basic political community—would be a part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

Television signals know only electronic, not traditional geographic boundaries. The people within the circles of a television signal comprise a more sensible community of common interests than the archaic boundaries drawn before modern communications technology. Yet we persist in not adapting to technological change. Jefferson once wrote that while he did not favor frequent changes in laws and constitutions, we had to change as circumstances changed, for otherwise we would require a grown man to wear a coat which fit him when he was a young boy. Were Jefferson here today, and were he to examine television's effect on American life, would he want us to have ADI's instead of States?

These are issues which should be under close scrutiny in 1976—the effect of television on politics and our constitutional system. These are issues which should have the guidance of our moral and ethical philosophers, our intellectual and religious leaders. Television is far too important to be left to the broadcasters themselves, to the FCC, to the politicians. Television today has redrawn the political landscape of the nation. Our institutions, our Congress, our political parties have failed to reflect these alterations, and are still frozen in the structure of another era.

As an American Jew, deeply concerned about my country and my faith, I ask you to help find direction for electronics, rather than continue to take electronic direction. We need now to find new ways for our networks to link people's hearts together, rather than to divide them. I

ask you, in this center of moral values, to address yourselves thoughtfully to these issues. The Jewish people, throughout history, have been known as the People of the Book. That is because only books were around when Judaism began. If Judaism were to begin today, in today's technology, we would be the people of television, radio, film—for Jews from Sarnoff and Goldwyn to Paley and Goldenson have been the exciting pioneers in all the new media of communication. But our Rabbis and teachers still direct their concentration of Jewish moral and ethical values toward books—and the printed word.

During the Watergate crisis in America, America's attention, as to be expected, was aimed at the television tube. Two members of the clergy were on television regularly—Rabbi Korff and Father McLaughlin, both defenders of President Nixon. The picture most Americans saw and heard in their homes was of church leaders on the wrong side of what was essentially a moral issue. Why? Where were the prophets in this era of electronics?

In today's world we must be more than the People of the Book. Martin Buber, whose passion for books was boundless, once wrote:

If I had been asked in my early youth whether I preferred to have dealings only with men or only with books, my answer would certainly have been in favour of books. In later years, this has become less and less the case. Not that I have had so much better experiences with men than with books; on the contrary, purely delightful books even now come my way more often than purely delightful men. But the many bad experiences with men have nourished the meadow of my life as the noblest book could not do, and the good experiences have made the earth into a garden for me ...

How I wish we could ask our teacher, Martin Buber, about television. For television is a mixture of men and books, and its importance in our lives today and tomorrow is what nuclear fission was to conventional weapons. I believe Buber would teach us to take television much more seriously in the next twenty-five years than we have in the past. And that we bring to television a sense of values and moral purpose.

Television is, after all, the most powerful means of communication in the history of the world. It will not diminish in its power. It will increase,

and it is truly America's ADI—our area of dominant influence. And it will not wait. For as Edward R. Murrow once said of television: "This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it is merely lights and wires in a box."

A week before he was killed, President Kennedy told one of his favorite stories which we should ponder at this Centennial and Bi-Centennial occasion. The story was about French Marshall Lyautey, who walked one morning through his garden with his gardener. He stopped at a certain point and asked his gardener to plant a tree there the next morning. The gardener said, "But the tree will not bloom for one hundred years." The Marshall looked at the gardener and replied, "In that case, you had better plant it this afternoon."

Book Reviews

Jeffrey S. Gurock, ed., *Conversations with Colleagues: On Becoming an American Jewish Historian* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018), 270 pp.

Jeffrey Gurock's *Conversations with Colleagues: On Becoming an American Jewish Historian* serves as a group Festschrift, a celebration of American Jewish history's maturation, a crash course for those of us not in the field, and more. These sixteen reflections, ranging from five to fifteen pages each, resemble job talks given by senior scholars describing their intellectual arcs, with the distinct advantage that these scholars already hold (or held) their positions. While the reader will not know who declined invitations to contribute to this work, the historians (and one anthropologist) included have made field-defining contributions. Humor, irony, and gratitude provide the key notes—fitting for a group of scholars who often did not set out to become American Jewish historians but nevertheless built the field successfully. (Of course, even the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg did not think she was going to be a Supreme Court Justice, much less the notorious RBG.) Some of these scholars chose American Jewish history from the start; some of these scholars had well-launched careers before their focus turned to American Jewish history. If the budding *maskil* was the smart kid who hated *heder* most, this crowd comprises the smart kids who liked Hebrew school best—although, as Gerald Sorin noted, not as much as stickball. It would be pointless to summarize the impressive contributions traversed in these pages: These authors know their works best and write about them superbly. This review makes some brief outsider observations.

The speed with which this field burgeoned—from a few iconic figures at mid-twentieth century, such as Jacob Rader Marcus, Salo Baron, Oscar Handlin, and Moshe Davis (Gurock, "Introduction," 11), into a permanent feature of the humanities in the academy—is noteworthy. When one compares this to the battle to get Jewish

studies a university perch in Germany, the contrast astonishes. Leopold Zunz fired his opening salvo in 1808. Martin Buber took his chair at the University of Frankfurt in the 1920s. Jews taught other subjects, mainly in the sciences; rabbinical seminaries and lay societies discussed Jewish history and literature, but the professionalization of an academic field requires institutional recognition.

Noteworthy also is the location of this intellectual activity. Jacob Marcus's role in the founding of the American Jewish Archives and this journal loom large, not only for Gary Zola, student and successor, but in the reminiscences of scholars who have spent time working at the AJA. For non-Americanists, Salo Baron will be recalled as a polymath, medievalist, and champion of a more affirmative view of the Diaspora than either his predecessors or his Zionist contemporaries. He also encouraged young scholars in this field, and his polemics against lachrymosity seem to have had an impact. For all the assertiveness in championing the field, none of these masters has made American antisemitism their primary intellectual focus. Alongside Marcus and Baron, Jonathan Sarna plays a dual role in this book as student and teacher: Sarna chose American Jewish history as his field earlier than most and mentored some of the other distinguished figures in these pages. His is the longest entry, fittingly. Cincinnati, Boston, and, of course, New York have been the germinating locations of American Jewish historiography, efforts to champion other regions notwithstanding. (See native New Yorker Deborah Dash Moore's seminal *To the Golden Cities* or Mark Bauman's entry on his campaign for the legitimizing of Southern Jewish history.)

Noteworthy too is the bottom-up focus of much American Jewish historiography. Naomi W. Cohen taught several of the figures in this book at Hunter College and Columbia University and advised still others. Thoroughly grounded in Jewish intellectual and religious developments, Cohen's pioneering work in this field has dealt with American Jewish leadership, both biographical and organizational. Her studies of American Zionism often highlighted the political and institutional more than the ideological aspects of this movement. The field's "greatest hits," many of which these contributors authored, tend toward social history, communal history, and material history

rather than intellectual history. Works on Buber-Scholem-Rosenzweig alone comprise a library. By contrast, Stephen Whitfield, who characterizes his own point of origin as a “plain Americanist,” notes that Horace Kallen has not generated a modern biography. Abraham Joshua Heschel appears once in this volume (86), as a symbol of civil rights activism; Joseph Soloveitchick, not at all. Religious history is well represented in books by Sarna, Prell, Joselit, Schwartz, and Nadell. Dianne Ashton’s biography of Rebecca Gratz, Shuly Rubin Schwartz’s work on *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, and Marc Lee Raphael’s *The Synagogue in America* push the envelope in terms of religious studies as well. The rise of American Jewish history corresponds to the high-water mark of social history. This positive pull, alongside the negative push against American (and American Jewish) intellectual history that many of these contributors experienced early in their careers, appears to have had a noticeable impact on the direction of the field.

The most striking aspect of American Jewish history, however, is its gender balance. Half of the contributors to this volume are women, and any reader would say: rightly so! Yet few other areas of Jewish studies have been so evenly represented from the start. As Prell noted, the Reform movement officially acknowledged religious equality of men and women in the 1840s, only to wait until 1972 to ordain its first female rabbi. Access always matters: Any Jewish male at any time could stroll into a yeshiva and learn, or in my case, fail to learn, how to read Gemara. For women, this was more difficult and the hurdles more numerous. And not only for Talmud. The politics here recall the early generations of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in which scholarship seemed designed to advance progressive reform. Works such as Nadell’s *Women Who Would Be Rabbis* and Schwartz’s *The Rabbi’s Wife* marry scholarship and advocacy seamlessly. In all these works, the experiences and often differing roles of men and women are taken into full account. From this perspective, Beth Wenger’s *New York Jews and the Great Depression* innovates in more than one way. Wenger, the youngest contributor to this volume, wrote her doctorate with Paula Hyman, a figure (like Naomi Cohen) whose work and encouragement exerted a profound influence. Casually judging by

the names and books of junior scholars, this gender equality trend has not only continued but expanded to many non-Jews interested in the experiences of American Jews, however defined.

My only reservation about this volume is its unspoken message: that given enough talent, persistence, and guidance, you, too, can become a venerated scholar with stories to tell. I am not so confident that is true—even in America. But this volume forbids such an Eeyore-like conclusion: alongside their other admirable qualities, one appreciates the energy, enthusiasm, and collegiality still animating these contributors, and their fortunate students.

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Daniel G. Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 317 pp.

Daniel Hummel's *Covenant Brothers* focuses on the growth of Christian Zionism by highlighting the intersections of evangelical engagement in American politics, interfaith alliances, and American-Israeli relations. Hummel argues this "triangular relationship—international and interreligious in scope—created new categories of belonging and demolished long-held assumptions" (7). Whereas past scholarship has often emphasized evangelicals' end time scenarios involving Jews, Hummel instead underscores the interfaith work of American Jews and theologically conservative Protestants to promote an evangelical Christian Zionist embrace of Israel.

The monograph is organized in three sections, each of which astutely demonstrates the "covenantal" partnership alluded to in Hummel's title. The three-part structure of "roots," "shoots," and "branches" correlates to the terms apostle Paul used in Romans 11 to illustrate the connections

between Jews and Christians. According to Hummel, “the implications of Paul’s writings are clear to Christian Zionists: the two faiths—the two covenanted peoples of Israel and the church—have a shared root, a shared faith, a shared fate” (5). Christian Zionists further understand these collective histories through an interpretation of Genesis 12:3. They take this verse to mean that Abraham’s descendants (understood as the nation of Israel) will facilitate God’s blessings to everyone on earth. Evangelicals thus consider this as evidence of a covenantal relationship between Jews and Christians, an interfaith alliance that Christian Zionists have looked to strengthen.

The first section examines the years from 1948 to 1967 to trace the postwar evolution of American evangelical political involvement with Israel. Hummel concentrates his narrative on evangelicals who spent significant time in Israel. Chapter one argues that the small community of evangelical missionaries in Israel had a unique perspective with which to reconstruct the meaning of reconciliation between Jews and Christians. The second chapter examines the role biblical archaeology has played in evangelical concepts of a Judeo-Christian heritage. Hummel’s analysis sheds new light on interfaith dialogue by demonstrating how Christian Zionists used archaeological findings to prove the Bible’s authority and, in turn, to connect Judeo-Christian thought to biblical verses. Chapter three analyzes the influence of the American Institute of Holy Land Studies—a graduate school in Jerusalem established by G. Douglas Young, the “first modern Christian Zionist activist”—on the larger Christian Zionist movement (58).

The “shoots” (1967–1976) and “branches” (1976–2018) sections explain the growth of Christian Zionism from its “roots.” In these chapters, Hummel states that a combination of American Jewish political lobbying, international diplomacy, and Christian Zionism shaped American-Israeli relations. Hummel demonstrates the active involvement of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Affairs—and not solely the participation of American religious or political leaders—in promoting the “special relationship” between the United States and Israel (161). His discussion of Holy Land tourism intriguingly suggests that evangelical sightseeing trips to both ancient religious sites and contemporary neighborhoods fueled the growth of

Christian Zionism. Hummel also offers a fascinating discussion of how Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and American televangelist Jerry Falwell became the spokespeople for the American-Israeli and Jewish-evangelical relationships. The final two chapters effectively elucidate the contemporary status of American-Israeli relations. The historical and theological background for the formation of Christians United for Israel (CUFI) and the general rise of a global Christian Zionist movement is useful for understanding more recent events, including the 2018 relocation of the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Hummel's narrative closely attends to the evolving relationship between Jews and evangelicals. One question that arises is why Hummel considers the December 1975 conference co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and the American Institute of Holy Land Studies to be "the first formal Jewish-evangelical dialogue" (147). Throughout the late 1960s, evangelical and Jewish communal leaders met individually and in small groups to address theological concerns such as proselytization and end-time scenarios that might inhibit interfaith relations. Beginning in 1969, the American Jewish Committee and the Southern Baptist Convention held yearly interreligious conferences. Further articulating which Jewish-evangelical encounters functioned as official or unofficial forms of dialogue versus a more fully formed interreligious alignment can offer greater understanding of the timeline associated with American evangelical support for Israel.

Daniel Hummel's impressive research and detailed biographical accounts of the leading figures in Jewish-evangelical relations make this book an engaging read. *Covenant Brothers* compellingly makes the case for the inclusion of Christian Zionism in scholarly discussions of both U.S.-Israel relations and Jewish-evangelical interreligious alliances.

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David E. Lowe, *Touched with Fire: Morris B. Abram and the Battle against Racial and Religious Discrimination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 287 pp.

The resume of activist attorney Morris B. Abram (1918–2000) abounded with success. A Rhodes Scholar from Georgia, he helped in the postwar prosecution of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg. After returning to his native state, he spearheaded the legal battle against the electoral weight that the Georgia constitution granted to rural (and thus more conservative) voters. He took on white supremacy and became an ally and a friend of Martin Luther King Jr. After moving to New York, Abram became the youngest president ever to head the American Jewish Committee. From there he moved to Massachusetts, where he became the second president of Brandeis University. Abram then moved back to New York and chaired the United Negro College Fund; and soon after, Ronald Reagan appointed him to serve as vice-chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. An advocate of international human rights, Abram added a final item to a stellar career when he cofounded UN Watch, an organization intended to check the relentless anti-Zionism of the United Nations. This watchdog group was based in Geneva, which is where he died.

As a reformist lawyer and a communal leader, Abram exemplified the American Jew as liberal. His high-profile career spanned the second half of the twentieth century, when liberalism itself was subjected to the pressures of dramatic redefinition. It was his fate to experience—and then to seem to repudiate—that historic reorientation.

Abram told much of this story himself, in *The Day is Short* (1982), written in the shadow of acute myelocytic leukemia (which he overcame); and the extensive interviews that Eli N. Evans conducted with him amplify that sprightly autobiography. They were excerpted in *American Jewish History* in 1983. Abram's papers are deposited at Emory University; and David E. Lowe, a Savannah-born independent scholar, has drawn heavily upon such sources. He has also interviewed many of Abram's relatives and associates, including Abraham Foxman, Vernon Jordan, Norman Podhoretz, and George Shultz. Lowe was an undergraduate at Brandeis in 1968 when he met then-President Abram, and later worked in the Civil Rights Division of the Anti-Defamation League. The task that Lowe has

assigned himself in *Touched with Fire* is to rescue Abram from an unmerited oblivion. The result is a succinct, sympathetic, and engaging work that suffers from neither off-putting adulation nor out-of-control detail. So balanced, judicious, and well-researched is Lowe's achievement that no subsequent biography of Abram will ever be needed. In 2019 *Touched with Fire* won the National Jewish Book Award in the Biography category.

Growing up during the Great Depression in the hamlet of Fitzgerald, Georgia, Abram found the life around him uncongenial. His Romanian-born father spoke with an accent and struggled to make a living in dry goods. Abram's American-born mother was the granddaughter of a rabbi, but he himself knew very little of Judaism. He was intellectually driven as well as sensitive to the daily cruelties of Jim Crow, so escape from Fitzgerald was mandatory. With an undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia and a law degree from the University of Chicago, topped with the cachet of study at Oxford University, Abram started his career in private practice in Atlanta, where, shaped by his liberalism, he inevitably saw racial injustice as the most urgent of social problems. But the county-unit system gave the most backward parts of Georgia—and its most rabidly racist politicians—undue influence. (*Touched with Fire* is very good at explaining how elections were weighted against cities and against blacks.) Before the hopes of beleaguered black citizens could be energized, the state's peculiar voting arrangements had to be effectively challenged.

It took Abram close to fourteen years before the county-unit system was smashed in *Gray v. Sanders* (1963), in which a majority of the U.S. Supreme Court justices disregarded their colleague Felix Frankfurter's warning against intervention in the "political thicket." Instead they agreed with Abram that the Fourteenth Amendment and its majestic promise of "the equal protection of the laws" could not be logically squared with how Georgians picked their state legislators. Abram's winning argument got an assist from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, making his first appearance before the Supreme Court. Had Abram done nothing else in his professional life, he deserves credit for bringing the democratic ideal of popular sovereignty—that is, "one person, one vote"—somewhat closer to realization. Sadly, that principle, which was novel in 1963, defies easy application. The Constitution requires that each state—no matter how small or large—is given exactly two representatives in the

U.S. Senate (Article I), and that presidents are selected by the Electoral College (Article II, plus the Twelfth Amendment) rather than awarded the largest number of popular votes. Thus, the principle of equal participation in the suffrage is systematically elusive. Martin Luther King Sr. nevertheless praised Abram in 1983 for having been “in the forefront of the public battle against racial discrimination” from virtually the moment “he arrived in Atlanta in 1948.” No Southern white, “Daddy” King added, could invoke “a longer experience in support of civil rights” (184).

The fight that made Abram’s legal career so honorable became his nemesis, however, when he became a university president in 1968. How the definition of progressivism shifted in the course of the 1960s became evident in January 1969, when black students at Brandeis occupied a building, renamed it for the late Malcolm X, and demanded that both undergraduate admissions and faculty hiring take racial identity fully into account. The formal enlargement of opportunity ceased to constitute a universalist principle that liberalism sought to champion, in the name of the ethos of individual merit. The historical mission of liberalism had been the elimination of the barriers of bigotry (rooted in irrationality) and privilege (rooted in ancestry), so that anyone’s aspiration could be cultivated and so that talent could be rewarded. No wonder that such a project attracted so many Jews. They assumed that the extinction of religious and racial prejudice would ensure the fair and widespread distribution of educational achievement and economic welfare. But that agenda proved glacially slow for vast numbers of black Americans, whose frustration and disenchantment inspired collective demands that race should matter. Commonly translated into a policy of affirmative action, which Abram feared could readily be perverted into quotas, the ideology of “Malcolm X University” collided directly with the rationale for the birth of Brandeis University itself. As its president, and for the rest of his life, he condemned affirmative action as “an ethnic spoils system, [which] once introduced, is bound to become entrenched and requires a suspension of the Fourteenth Amendment” (180).

Though Abram won a tactical victory over the black militants in January 1969, in this instance he lost the effort to maintain the values that had activated his public life. He served only seventeen months in the Brandeis presidency; no one’s tenure in that job, other than interim officeholders, would ever be shorter. It was the first significant setback in Abram’s career;

and the memory of that failure “troubled him for the rest of his life,” according to Lowe (7). Though he continued to claim fidelity to liberalism as it was understood earlier, the emergence of black militancy drove Abram to the right. Nor was he alone in coming to see the Democratic Party, which generally favored the implementation of affirmative action, as hostile to the interests of an American Jewry that recalled the adverse effects of an earlier version of “racial” preferences. Jimmy Carter, in 1976, became the last Democrat for whom Abram would ever vote in a presidential race. Four years later, he voted for Reagan and denounced his fellow Georgian as “feckless” and “hopeless” (174). When Reagan picked Abram to serve on the Commission on Civil Rights, among the opponents of the nomination was Andrew Young, who had been one of King’s key lieutenants.

Abram of course insisted that not he but liberalism had changed, a broader trajectory that Lowe does not fully address. But Abram did transform himself into a Jewish communal leader in ways that would have been unpredictable in the small-town South of his origins. He chaired the National Conference on Soviet Jewry from 1983 until 1988 and from 1986 until 1989 also chaired the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. For someone who had never even become a bar mitzvah, such an ascent was remarkable, a tribute to political and diplomatic skills that were almost entirely independent of any special knowledge of Jewish history and culture. Though nurtured in his boyhood in an atmosphere of anti-Zionism, Abram made UN Watch pivotal to the monitoring of the persistent anti-Israel attacks that characterized the oratory at the United Nations. In seeking to promote Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union and in defending the security of the State of Israel against its detractors, Morris Abram sought to reconcile such distinctive communal commitments with the advocacy of the individual rights that were once deemed central to American liberalism. This potential tension between these programmatic aims makes his career paradigmatic and endows *Touched with Fire* with genuine value.

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Sean Martin and John J. Grabowski, eds. *Cleveland Jews and the Making of a Midwestern Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 254 pp.

The writing of American Jewish community histories has gone through four stages of development. In its initial phase, back in the bad old days of ancestor-worship work, deadly tomes consisted primarily of the listing of the names of hundreds of Jews—almost all men—who built and maintained local areas. Rabbis often penned these accounts and were sure to give themselves much credit for community achievements.

The professionalization of the field took an important step forward during a second era in the early 1960s, when a fine historian, Professor Lloyd Gartner, with the encouragement of the distinguished Americanist Allan Nevins, co-authored worthy histories of Milwaukee and Los Angeles. In one case, Gartner turned to a local rabbi for assistance, and in another, he worked with a hometown rabbi who was also an academic. As late as 1978, Gartner found time—apart from his other literary pursuits—to compose a similar account of Cleveland Jewry. Though free of the self-congratulatory tone of earlier works, Gartner also focused on institution building, leadership activities, and conflicts among elites.

By that time, community histories had become even more sophisticated as a third period of development was underway. They were benefitting from the use of quantified data-like census materials, and local voices began to be heard and chronicled. Marc Lee Raphael's history of the Jews of Columbus, Ohio, and Steven Hertzberg's work on the Jews of Atlanta were standouts. And then, at the turn of the millennium, the combination of intriguing sources and sophisticated monographic articles about life among Boston and Brooklyn Jews led the way during this fourth, most recent stage, in making the field even more accessible to general and academic readers alike.

Cleveland Jews resembles these recent books, even if it lacks the charm of the Boston book, which adds a wonderful set of photographs to impeccable scholarship, and the panache of the Brooklyn book, which includes spicy memoirs among the erudite works of professional historians. Thus, though the Cleveland Federation arguably sponsored this anthology for its membership, in the end, it is more for

academicians than general readers. Indeed, its greatest strengths lie in its bringing together a fine array of specialists who write in their areas of expertise and who explicitly and correctly situate the local Jewish experience both within the contexts of national American Jewish and general Midwestern history.

Mary McCune's work, which links and contrasts national trends in feminism to the evolution of the Cleveland branch of the National Council of Jewish Women, is the most impressive contribution to this book. Significantly, she uses her article to urge scholars "to look away from the coasts like New York" (123) in contrasting how long-standing, local women's organizations reacted generation by generation to changes in social and political movements within and without their city. And then there is the delightful biographical sketch of Harvey Pekar, whose comic strip, featuring the less-than-super-hero persona "American Splendor," was drawn out "of the streets of Cleveland" (81) and published from 1976 to 2008. The sketch illuminates Pekar's and his hometown's complex Jewish immigrant and second-generation identities. Readers are also reminded at the outset of this article that two Cleveland Jews, beginning in 1938, were the originators of Superman, the true superhero.

My problem with this book is the limited chronological reach of some of the other contributions who do not extend their studies to the present. Indeed, of the ten pieces in this work, four end their discussions with the early 1960s. And one interesting biographical sketch, that of innovative Jewish educator Abraham Hayyim Friedman, finishes in 1939; understandably, I suppose, since he died that year.

Ira Robinson's richly documented investigation of Cleveland's Orthodox lives and leaders is also far from up to date. While this worthy article includes several important documents that give depth to our understanding of national religious trends within Orthodoxy, the study effectively ends in 1940. Only in the last paragraph does he hint at the impact the European-transplanted Telshe Yeshiva has made upon its observant Cleveland community and American Jewry generally over the past eighty years.

By the same token, David Hammack's paper on Jewish philanthropy concludes in 1990, with a generation and a half of developments and changes still to be studied. In fact, even within the period that he has

chosen to examine there is more material and analysis of the origins of Federation and other local charities from the turn of the twentieth century than even the period 1960 to 1990.

Perhaps most important—and disappointing—Todd Michney’s study of “Jewish-black relations in Cleveland” (142–161) ends in 1960. And while the questions surrounding “interactions and relations ... encompassing not only coexistence and cooperation but also fear, distrust and antagonism” (255) are, in fact, taken up in a different article on suburbanization, this article fails to elaborate on why tensions in the inner city were devoid of the violence that took place in other comparable places in America from the 1960s to today.

Ultimately, while this book advances the field and should be read and respected, work remains to be done to bring the history of this important center of Jewish life up to date.

Jeffrey S. Gurock is the Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University.

Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Linda G. Levi, and Maud S. Mandel, eds., *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 501 pp., including index and photos.

For over a century, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC, or in short, the JDC) has been carrying out its vital humanitarian work in continually changing political, economic, and social situations throughout the Jewish world, priding itself on non-partisan and legal (or quasi-legal) activities. Created in 1914 for the “Relief of Jewish War Sufferers” in Eastern Europe and Palestine, the JDC was formed out of a broad coalition of American Jewish organizations, large and small, with varying religious and ideological orientations. Although it was envisioned originally as a temporary committee to aid Jews through the crises that arose during and after World War I, by the post–World War II decade the JDC had become a permanent global organization for American Jewish aid abroad in all areas of health, education, welfare,

and often emigration and resettlement. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of Jewish life over the last century without the JDC, or the “Joint,” as it is known outside the United States. The humanitarian activities of the JDC are mentioned in countless studies on various aspects of world Jewry since World War I: European Jews, the Jewish *Yishuv* in Palestine and later the State of Israel, North African and Middle Eastern Jewish communities, Jewish migrations, the Holocaust, American Jewish communal work, and more. Since its inception, the JDC has commissioned many surveys documenting its activities, and numerous staff members have authored memoirs; however, until now, few scholarly publications have focused on the JDC itself, spotlighting its challenges and the complexities of its work. Fifty years after its formation, the pioneering American historian of migration, Oscar Handlin, wrote *A Continuing Task: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1914–1964* (New York: Random House, 1964). Not long after, in the 1970s, the renowned Israeli historian and scholar of the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer, made a serious contribution to the field, resulting in two groundbreaking volumes on the history of the JDC,¹ as well as other books that relate to JDC activities in Europe. All of these are essential for any study of the JDC; however, by virtue of their comprehensive goal, presenting an overview of JDC policies and activities, they cannot be expected to delve into the complexities of JDC work in each locale and situation.

The JDC at 100 not only represents an enormous step toward rectifying this lacuna, it also opens the field for more research. This engaging volume is the result of a scholars’ workshop held in New York in 2014 on the occasion of the JDC centennial. The editors’ thematic introduction is followed by thirteen original essays, each focusing on a specific time and place. The majority of the contributors are from Western, Central, and Eastern European countries, and augment their findings from the JDC archives with local Jewish and government sources of their countries. Many of the articles are the result of recent doctoral theses, thus bringing exciting new work to our attention.

The articles are more or less chronologically ordered, from the aftermath of World War I in the early 1920s until 1990. Some of them span a few years, others decades. Seven articles examine activities in Central and Eastern European countries after the Russian Revolution, during

communist rule. The first is a fascinating study by Rakefet Zalashik, which follows the cooperation and collaboration of the JDC with the OZE, the Russian-based Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews, and the TOZ, its sister organization in Poland. These efforts focused on issues of health and hygiene in the war-ravished countries in the 1920s, particularly after the OZE (later becoming the OSE, headquartered in Berlin) was banned by the Soviet authorities in 1921. Zalashik, as well as other contributors, examines not only the organizational activities, but the tensions between “center” and “periphery”—that is, between the JDC headquarters in New York and its American donors, with their uniform policies and budget requirements, and the Eastern European organizational beneficiaries, with their own priorities. These interactions intensified the already existing “East/West” relationships (28). Much of the success or failure of the work—the cooperation or clashes—depended on the abilities and sensitivities of the JDC workers in the field to negotiate between the two sides and build interpersonal relationships.

The theme “Parameters and Predicaments,” the subtitle of Elissa Bemporad’s article on the JDC in Minsk in the interwar years, is also characteristic of Jaclyn Granick’s essay on the JDC and relief in the Ukraine, 1920–1923, and Mikhail Mitsel’s chapter on JDC programs in the USSR, 1941–1948. These essays examine the complex and often frustrating work of the JDC under the communist regime in the Soviet Union. The JDC was often required to undertake “nonsectarian” work, compromising its aid to Jews while assisting non-Jews in order to gain permission to operate in the region. Although technically the JDC only undertook work which was officially sanctioned, in actuality it also carried out quasi-legal and semi-clandestine activities.

Six chapters examine the routes and processes of emigration of Jewish survivors/refugees/emigrants from Eastern Europe and their settlement options, both temporary and permanent. Two are especially noteworthy: Marion Kaplan’s work on the little-known resettlement plans in the Dominican Republic, “DORSA and the Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosúa, 1940–1945,” and Zhava Litvac Glaser’s “Laura Margolis and JDC Efforts in Cuba and Shanghai,” which chronicles Margolis and the amazing work she accomplished. These chapters highlight negotiations between the JDC, local authorities, and Jewish communities during wartime, again

emphasizing both the tensions between policy and action and the critical importance of the personality of the JDC director in the field.

Many of the articles are primarily descriptive—uncovering forgotten or unknown chapters in the history of the JDC and highlighting local events and global politics that affected regional JDC staff and activities. The contributors each focus on specific aspects of the complex interplay between standardized JDC policy emanating from New York and its nuanced implementation by dedicated staff workers in the field; negotiations with local authorities and changing government regulations; and the needs of the various groups of Jewish refugees. All, of course, impacted profoundly on the lives of the Jews who were assisted, but based on JDC documentation, little recognition is given to the agency of these “clients”. Of particular note are those articles presenting a more critical analysis of events within a larger historical or theoretical context. Laura Hobson Faure and Veerle Vanden Daelen’s article, “Imported from the United States? The Centralization of Private Jewish Welfare after the Holocaust,” examines the agency of Holocaust survivors and local initiatives vis-à-vis the “American imperialism” of JDC officials in post-war Belgium and France—a situation that created “tensions and challenges as multiple ideas and convictions clashed” (280). In Belgium the JDC was forced to retreat from its policy of recognizing a centralized, country-wide administration in favor of semi-autonomous activities in Brussels and Antwerp; in France, ironically, countrywide centralization was achieved not as a consequence of JDC policy, but as a united force opposing JDC authority.

One of the most riveting articles, Inga Veksler’s “JDC and Soviet Jews in Austria and Italy,” presents an analysis of events between 1971 and 1990, which many of today’s readers can recall. She makes extensive use of interviews and memoirs, in addition to archival resources, focusing on the Russian emigrants and their perceptions of JDC assistance. In what was “the organization’s biggest, most costly, and most controversial transit migrant group since the postwar migration” of displaced persons (439), clashes flared up between the emigrants/recipients and the JDC donors and staff workers due to differing and misunderstood cultural norms and standardized American JDC policy. Through this case study, Veksler emphasizes the “experiential as well as structural continuity” (441) of refugee/migrant

groups in a broader context, focusing as much on the emigrants' anxiety and emotional limbo, as on the challenges of their geographic transit.

The essays in this volume are readable and well written. Moreover, they include extensive and meticulous endnotes, referencing archival resources and scholarly works, which pave the way for further work. The reader is drawn to reflect upon the similarities in issues presented in various studies. For example, from the chapter by Avinoam Patt and Kierra Crago-Schneider that examines JDC work and the motivations of individual Jews remaining in or returning to postwar Germany, 1947–1957, one can certainly draw comparisons with Kinga Frojimovics's chapter on those returning to Hungary during the same general time period.

The JDC has left an invaluable inheritance for scholars and those interested in family histories. One rich source is its trove of widely disseminated newsletters, booklets, advertisements, and films publicizing its work primarily aimed at its indispensable donors. Its extensive archive of internal reports, conference proceedings, and correspondence, is essential for understanding the mechanisms of JDC's work and how its New York leadership and field workers perceived it. The digitization of the vast JDC archives during the last decade has made this treasure chest of materials readily accessible online for scholars and all interested in the study of Jewish communities world-wide during the past century.

Although these diverse essays were first presented as papers at a JDC conference and based primarily on the JDC archives, I would like to see the research broadened, with critical analyses of the archival documents, augmented by discussions of positions beyond those reflected in the organization's records, as those recorded in communal and governmental records, personal memoirs, oral documentation, and visual materials. The results will no doubt lead to a better understanding not only of JDC's vital role in the Jewish world, but of Jewish history during the past century in general.

Finally, the title of the book, *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism*, is a bit misleading, as the editors indeed acknowledge: "Given its origins in a first-time gathering of scholars devoted to the history of the JDC, it offers only a partial geographical and chronological view of JDC's activities" (1). Even so, it is rather surprising that there are no articles focusing on the activities and policies of the JDC in its formative years

during World War I in Eastern Europe and Palestine, nor on pre-State Israel and the subsequent decades after its independence, nor on the far-reaching work of the JDC in Islamic countries since World War II. Furthermore, totally absent are studies on the JDC within the context of American Jewry and the development of American Jewish organizations, especially in relation to the United Jewish Appeal, which is its major channel for funding.

These comments notwithstanding, as well as the difficulties of reviewing a diverse collection of essays, this volume is of great value for scholars working on a wide variety of projects: on specific topics and communities in which the JDC was involved; comparative studies on the challenges confronting Jews in modern times; the problems facing refugees and emigrants; and the work of global aid organizations. Individuals interested in family histories that intersect with events described in this volume will find the relevant articles extremely useful, providing the necessary context for their own stories, as well as ample sources to continue their search.

I join the scholars who contributed to this notable volume in calling for further research, not only uncovering important chapters of the global history of the JDC, but also, and perhaps more important, analyzing its policies and the complex work in larger theoretical and historical contexts, and giving agency to the wide range of actors on the international stage.

Michal Ben Ya'akov is a retired associate professor of history at the Efrata College for Education in Jerusalem and founding director of its graduate program, "Memory, Heritage and Education." She has coedited four collections of essays and has authored more than forty articles on North African and Sephardic Jews in late Ottoman Palestine and on North African Jews and European refugees during World War II. She has worked intensively on JDC activities North Africa and has twice been granted research fellowships at the American Jewish Archives for her current project, "American Images and Perceptions of North African Jews."

1 Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Joint Distribution Committee, 1929–1939* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974); *Ibid.*, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939–1945* (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, 1981).

Mark A. Raider, *The Essential Hayim Greenberg: Essays and Addresses On Jewish Culture, Socialism & Zionism* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 572 pp.

The time is approaching when the ... essential aims of the Zionist movement ... will have to state in clear terms its aspirations and demands... There is ... more than one reason to assume that from the viewpoint of strategy it is not desirable the we should occupy for any length of time a position of passive waiting, no matter how watchful, and let others try and decipher our aims or to translate them into definite political terms. (273)

Mark A. Raider's work on the American Jewish experience, modern Jewish history, Zionism, and Israel are well known among scholars from across disciplines as meaningful contributions to multiples areas of study. It is no surprise, then, that Raider has done it again with his most recent book on the selected works of Hayim Greenberg. Greenberg's essays and addresses are nothing short of a treasure trove of modern and contemporary Jewish thought, and Raider's translation, organization, and contextualization make Greenberg and his considerable corpus available to English language readers like never before.

Greenberg was a central figure in early- to mid-twentieth-century Jewish cultural and political discourse, a man known and beloved by David Ben-Gurion, who considered him a "man of the rarest quality" (2). Greenberg's *New York Times* obituary called him a "leading personage" of the Zionist movement, and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency considered him "a leading philosopher of labor Zionism" (2). And yet today, as Raider notes, Greenberg, who enjoyed international renown as a remarkable public intellectual, "has all but vanished from Jewish public consciousness" (2). Why, we might well ask, has he "slipped down the proverbial memory hole?" (2) Raider's introduction provides readers with answers that shed light on the profound changes Western Jews have experienced since the end of World War II. Reasons include the major evolution in image and status of American Jewry since the 1950s, and Israel's radical shift away from Greenberg's Labor-oriented worldview that once shaped its political discourse. Yet Greenberg's vision of the Israel–Diaspora as passionately symbiotic, and his accompanying reluctance to engage in lockstep ideologies, make his work especially

rewarding; he represents a political path not taken and a transnational and multilingual relationship with Jewishness that has disappeared from much of Western Jewry.

Greenberg may not be in vogue at the moment, but his obvious faith in humanity, and his fierce proclamations that gifts such as democracy and freedoms of speech and thought are nonnegotiable, are powerful and worth (re)visiting. Scholars and students of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Western political and nationalist thought will find this book intriguing; as a scholar of early Zionism, Greenberg's work makes me feel a kind of nostalgia and longing for a time when so many paths seemed possible. Perhaps the lesson of Greenberg's work is that much is *still* possible, even when we are led to believe it is not.

Ingrid Anderson is the associate director of the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies at Boston University and a senior lecturer in the College of Arts and Sciences. Her first book, Ethics and Suffering Since the Holocaust: Making Ethics "First Philosophy," is available through Routledge Jewish Studies Series. Her current research includes Jews of color in the United States and Israel, Zionist and anti-Zionist thought, and masculinity in Zionist and other Jewish discourses.

Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, *Confronting Hate: The Untold Story of the Rabbi Who Stood Up for Human Rights, Racial Justice, and Religious Reconciliation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019), 416 pp.

Confronting Hate, by Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald Strober, details the exceptional life story of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum. Chapter by chapter, this fascinating narrative about Tanenbaum unfolds in an engaging and accurate manner. It is excellently written and could easily serve as a template for action to help resolve the problems of antisemitism and racial injustice that we see on an almost daily basis.

Born in Baltimore in 1925, Marc, who initially went by his first name Herman, quickly was recognized for his academic abilities and concern for social issues. After graduation from Yeshiva College, he was accepted

into rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Even during his seminary days, his literary talents were apparent. One of his many jobs included being a scriptwriter for the seminary's highly acclaimed program, "The Eternal Light," and he was hired as the *Jewish Post's* bureau chief and to do public relations for the seminary and other major Jewish organizations—all while still a student.

After ordination, Tanenbaum began a short stint in the congregational rabbinate. He soon returned to institutional work as the public relations director of the Synagogue Council of America, an organization devoted to promoting cooperation among Judaism faith movements. By 1954, he became that agency's youngest professional leader. In this role, he honed his abilities in public relations, speech writing, and institutional relations.

It was a hectic time in Tanenbaum's life. In addition to his leadership at the Synagogue Council, he was running his own public relations company and consulting with another. In the midst of this unbelievable schedule, in May of 1955, he somehow found time to get married to Helga Weiss, with whom he would have three children. During his seven-year tenure at the Synagogue Council, Tanenbaum was involved in innovative initiatives covering interfaith relations, racial prejudice, and international concerns.

As a result of his pioneering work, he was offered the prestigious position of director of Interreligious Affairs at the American Jewish Committee (AJC). In this role, Tanenbaum became involved in a project known as the Second Vatican Council. In the late 1950s, the Catholic Church was beginning to reconsider its attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Tanenbaum initiated contact with clerics at the Vatican and with Popes Pius XII and John XXIII. The topic being discussed had persisted for two millennia: Jews being held responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. To assist with his work in the Vatican, Tanenbaum consulted with luminaries from the Jewish community, including Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Dr. Louis Finkelstein, Dr. Salo Baron, and the chief rabbis of Rome and France. Other Jewish leaders, such as Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, felt that any changes the Catholic Church made in its liturgy or teachings were internal church matters.

These meetings and conferences were of the utmost importance. The Catholic Church was going to address theological beliefs that had generated antisemitic beliefs over the centuries. In June of 1963 the pope died, and a new leader, Paul VI, took over. It is hard to imagine the many levels to these conversations. Arab countries developed opposition toward this initiative, as did some Jewish and Catholic groups. The possibility that the effort could be delayed or derailed altogether was strong. It would take a master at public relations and a dedicated cleric to move the whole process forward. Marc Tanenbaum was that person.

In October of 1965, the Church issued its “Nostra Aetate” (“In Our Time”) declaration. Tanenbaum made two telling comments about this document. The first comment spoke to the historic and exceptional nature of the declaration: “For the first time in the history of the twenty-one Ecumenical Councils, the highest ecclesiastical authorities have committed the Catholic Church throughout the world to uprooting the charge of collective guilt against the Jews, eliminating anti-Semitism and fostering mutual knowledge and respect between Catholics and Jews.” The second comment made clear that he understood that two thousand years of prejudice would not be magically or immediately dissolved: “The antagonism of centuries will not be swept away overnight. For people of good will on both sides, decades of massive work would lie ahead.”

Among the many spiritual leaders Tanenbaum met and developed a relationship with was the Reverend Billy Graham. Tanenbaum worked with Graham to support Israel on the highest political levels. This connection developed to the extent that in 1982 Tanenbaum called him “the greatest friend of the Jewish people in the entire Christian community in the 20th century.” Yet in a March 2002 article in the *Chicago Tribune*, based on a White House tape, it appears that both Richard Nixon and Graham spoke about the Jewish community in highly prejudicial and stereotypical terms.

Tanenbaum was involved in other major areas of social, political, and religious reform. In the arena of race relations, he served as the president of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organizations, developing stronger ties between the Black and Jewish communities. Tanenbaum was deeply involved in helping Jews from the Soviet Union leave that country for a new life in Israel or the United States. As the

representative of the AJC, he worked with European clerics to help modernize and modify the Oberammergau Passion Play, which had generated antisemitism for centuries.

Tanenbaum's activism on behalf of the oppressed led him to travel to Southeast Asia with Elie Wiesel, actress Liv Ullmann, and other leaders to work to alleviate the enormous stress of the so-called Boat People, who had become refugees from that region. In December of 1979, he testified before Congress about his work and impressions of the situation in Asia. "How many Nazi Holocausts, how many Cambodian genocides can the world endure and regard itself as worthwhile to continue?"

In the midst of maintaining this hectic professional schedule, Tanenbaum's marriage was imploding. In the late 1970s he and Helga divorced. He was later introduced to Dr. Georgette Bennett, who was from a family of Holocaust survivors. After a romance of a few years, they were wed in June of 1982. In 1983, after two decades as the AJC director of Interreligious Affairs, Tanenbaum became the head of the AJC's International Affairs Office. In this role, he traveled around the world pursuing various interests. He announced his retirement from the AJC to take place in October 1990, on his 65th birthday.

Life had one more major surprise for the Tanenbaums: a baby. In December of 1991 they found out that Georgette, through the blessings of modern medicine, was pregnant. Sadly, at the same time, Tanenbaum's heart was failing. He passed away on 3 July 1992. Tributes to this larger-than-life spiritual leader came from across the country and world. In his memory, Georgette, with the support of like-minded people, formed the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. Two months after his passing, his son, Joshua-Marc, was born.

Of all the accolades Tanenbaum received, one in particular, which Georgette accepted on his behalf, aptly summarized his contributions to Judaism, Christianity, and the world. Presented by the New York Board of Rabbis, it had as its Hebrew title, "Navi Lagoyim," "Prophet to the Nations (Gentiles)." This designation is first recorded in the Book of Jeremiah, with God describing Jeremiah in that manner. "Prophet to the world" seems likewise an appropriate description for this rabbi who accomplished so much. It is hoped that future generations will study his life and be inspired by his actions.

Rabbi Albert I. Slomovitz, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of history at Kennesaw State University, a retired military chaplain, and the author of The Fighting Rabbis, America's Other Clan: The United States Supreme Court, and A New Look at Rabbi Jesus: Jews and Christians Finally Reconnected. He is also founder of The Jewish-Christian Discovery Center.

Cora Wilburn, *Cosella Wayne: Or, Will and Destiny*, edited and introduced by Jonathan D. Sarna (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), xl + 294 pp.

This fascinating volume by the little-known American Jewish writer Cora Wilburn offers new insight about Jewish women authors during the nineteenth century. Serialized literature, as much of this volume is, can seem slow when compiled into a single unit, and, moreover, nineteenth-century literary sensibilities can seem florid when compared to those of the twenty-first. Fortunately, Jonathan Sarna provides a penetrating analysis to help readers appreciate the significance and the literary strength of Wilburn's work.

Nineteenth-century American women enthusiastically embraced print culture. By the 1820s, literature designed by and for them included advice manuals compiled by mothers' associations and, soon, books offering advice on domestic labor. By midcentury, illustrated magazines offered women household advice, serialized fiction and short stories, dress patterns, recipes, needlepoint and embroidery instruction, and more. The quiet, secluded work of writing was customarily considered suitable for decent women, and as the opportunities for publication expanded, more women produced literature. Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous complaint about the "hordes of scribbling women" testified to the popularity of the work.

Jewish women joined the trend. Actress and poet Adah Isaacs Menken (1835–1868), for example, published her book of poetry, *Infelicia* (1868), which lauded Judaism and disparaged the male domination that ruined women's lives. More famously, Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) penned sonnets, prose, and translations that reached a broad audience and earned high praise and a place on the base of the Statue of Liberty.

The American Israelite (1854–) of that era provided column space for poets such as Annette Kohn. Jewish monthly magazine the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate* (1843–1869) included poetry and short stories by British author Grace Aguilar, sisters Marion and Celia Hartog, Rebecca Hyneman, and others. Aguilar also published the influential volume *The Spirit of Judaism* (1842), along with *The Perez Family* (1847) and the *Vale of Cedars* (1850), each of which were distributed in both the United States and England.

But, as Sarna points out, Cora Wilburn's *Cosella Wayne* (1860) is the first "novel written and published in English by an American Jewish woman writer and the first coming-of-age novel to depict Jews in the United States." It had remained hidden from researchers because it appeared serialized in the Spiritualist magazine *Banner of Light* rather than in a Jewish periodical. Location is everything in archival research as much as in real estate, and Wilburn's work was placed to be forgotten. The diary, which corroborates Sarna's thesis that *Cosella Wayne* is semi-autobiographical, was located within the minutes of Boston's Beth El Synagogue (housed in the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati) and noted in a brief thank-you letter to Jacob Rader Marcus. The 1917 *Standard Book of Jewish Verse* included only three of Wilburn's poems. It is a great testament to Sarna's ability to comb archival collections that he found her work. Moreover, no living relative of Wilburn's argued for her importance.

Given all of that—florid prose, an obscure publication vehicle, only three poems reprinted more than a century ago—modern readers might wonder why Sarna's volume is significant. But it is. First, Wilburn's work includes descriptions of Jewish life in many parts of the globe that seldom appear in American Jewish literature. Probably born in Alsace, Wilburn's early years took her to London, Burma, Oman, Iran, and probably Curacao before she came to the United States and settled for a time in Philadelphia, then Boston, and finally Maine. In *Cosella Wayne*, for example, she describes a Passover celebration in an "oriental" home (Persia or Turkey?), the relations between its family's generations, spouses, and servants according to their clothing, food, and manner, and follows it with an equally richly described betrothal ceremony three months later. She describes Philadelphia's Jews from the perspective of a

penniless woman seeking assistance from smug charitable women. Much of nineteenth-century women's literature explores issues of confinement and escape (as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explained several decades ago), but Wilburn's heroine traverses the world.

Second, as Sarna explains, many of the issues addressed in this novel resonate with twenty-first-century readers. How do I understand my true identity? How do I deal with antisemitism? What is spirituality, and how do I live a spiritual life? In what way can a woman defend herself against sexism and male aggression, even if that comes from a parent? What place can Judaism have in my life, what is its core meaning, and how can its rituals enrich my life? What makes a house a home?

Wilburn's novel addresses those issues because they were the issues that she cared most about in her personal life. Born Henrietta Pulfermacher (Powdermaker), her father was a dishonest and violent man who dragged his wife and daughter around the world with him as he defrauded various people and then escaped the law. Her own interest in the Spiritualist movement, which was very popular in the years before and during the Civil War, provided her with solace and a community, but she never fully rejected Judaism. On the contrary, though she at one point converted to Catholicism, she strived to resolve her religious conflicts and confusions through a Spiritualism that seemed to encompass both Judaism and the bit of Catholicism she appreciated (though it never seemed to include the Trinity).

Readers can find much to reward their effort in this volume. The human search for meaning, solace, and a place in the world is not confined to any particular century.

Dianne Ashton is professor of religion studies at Rowan University. Among her publications are Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America, Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality, and, Hanukkah in America: A History.

SELECT ACQUISITIONS 2019

Altshuler, David

Papers of David Altshuler pertaining to URJ and NFTY camp programs, 1964–1990.

Received from David Altshuler, Larchmont, NJ

American Hebrew Academy (Greensboro, NC)

Records of the American Hebrew Academy, including board minutes, curriculum development, promotional material, architectural drawings, photographs, and student records, 2000–2019.

Received from Glenn Drew, Greensboro, NC

Association for Jewish Studies

Accrual to the manuscript collection of the Association for Jewish Studies, including board minutes, *AJS Review*, and conference proceedings, 1970–2018.

Received from Warren Hoffman, Association for Jewish Studies, New York, NY

Avodah Dance Ensemble

Records of Avodah Dance Ensemble, including newsletters, correspondence, photograph albums, and scrapbooks, 1971–2004.

Received from JoAnne Tucker, Santa Fe, NM

Berman, Oscar

Papers of Oscar Berman including correspondence, clippings, marriage certificate, photographs, and HUC-JIR Board of Governors tribute, 1919–1951.

Received from Chuck Marcus, Ponchatoula, LA

Brin, Ruth Firestone

Accrual to the papers of Ruth Firestone Brin, consisting of notes and drafts for her unfinished novel, “Five Gold Coins,” undated.

Received from Judith Brin Ingber, Minneapolis, MN

Cowan, Rachel

Papers of Rabbi Rachel Cowan, including sermons, prayers, and other writings, life cycle records, correspondence, photos, and clippings, 1961–2018.

Received from Lisa Cowan, Brooklyn, NY

Feinstein, Abraham

Papers of Rabbi Abraham Feinstein, including sermons, addresses, correspondence, and news clippings, 1919–1987.

Received from Mizpah Congregation, Chattanooga, TN

Jewish American Heritage Month

Records of Jewish American Heritage Month, including correspondence, press releases, media coverage, and presidential proclamations by George W. Bush and Barack Obama, 2008–2011.

Received from Abby Schwartz, Cincinnati, OH

Katzenstein, Martin

Papers of Rabbi Martin Katzenstein, including sermons, correspondence, and life cycle records, 1943–1970.

Received from David Katzenstein, New York, NY

Kerber, Justin

Papers of Rabbi Justin Kerber, including sermons, Divrei Torah, adult study materials, and other rabbinical papers, 2003–2019.

Received from Justin Kerber, St. Louis, MO

Landsberg, Lynne

Papers of Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, including correspondence, sermons, and records related to her work with the Religious Action Center and her work with disability issues and awareness, 1977–2016.

Received from Dennis Ward, Staunton, VA

Makom Solel Lakeside Congregation (Highland Park, IL)

Congregational records, including board minutes, correspondence, rabbinic sermons, and newsletters, 1956–2016.

Received from Rick Schuster, Makom Solel Lakeside, Highland Park, IL

Manaster, Kenneth

Collection of Mitzvah Corps material including correspondence, news clippings, photographs, and a radio interview given by Kenneth Manaster, 1962–1964.

Received from Kenneth Manaster, Santa Clara, CA

Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (OSRUI)

Records of Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (Oconomowoc, WI), including board minutes, correspondence, programming material, photographs, and scrapbooks, 1961–2012.

Received from Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute, Oconomowoc, WI

Person, Hara

Collection of congratulations letters received by Rabbi Hara Person on her appointment to Chief Executive of Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), 2019.

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Roberts, Daniel

Sermons and writings of Rabbi Daniel Roberts, 1980–2015.

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Rosen Family

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Schindler, Alexander

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Society for Classical Reform Judaism

Records of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism (SCRJ), including board minutes, correspondence, and newsletters, 1991–2018.

Received from Jill Silverstein, Boston, MA

Stagecrafters, Inc.

Records of Stagecrafters Inc. theatre company (Cincinnati, OH), including scrapbooks, photos, promotional material, and correspondence, 1970–2019.

Received from Neil Kravitz, Cincinnati, OH

Temple B'nai Israel (Parkersburg, WV)

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Remarks of Rabbi Israel Zoberman on a National Day of Caring, read in the Congressional Record by Representative A. Donald McEachin, August 2019.

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