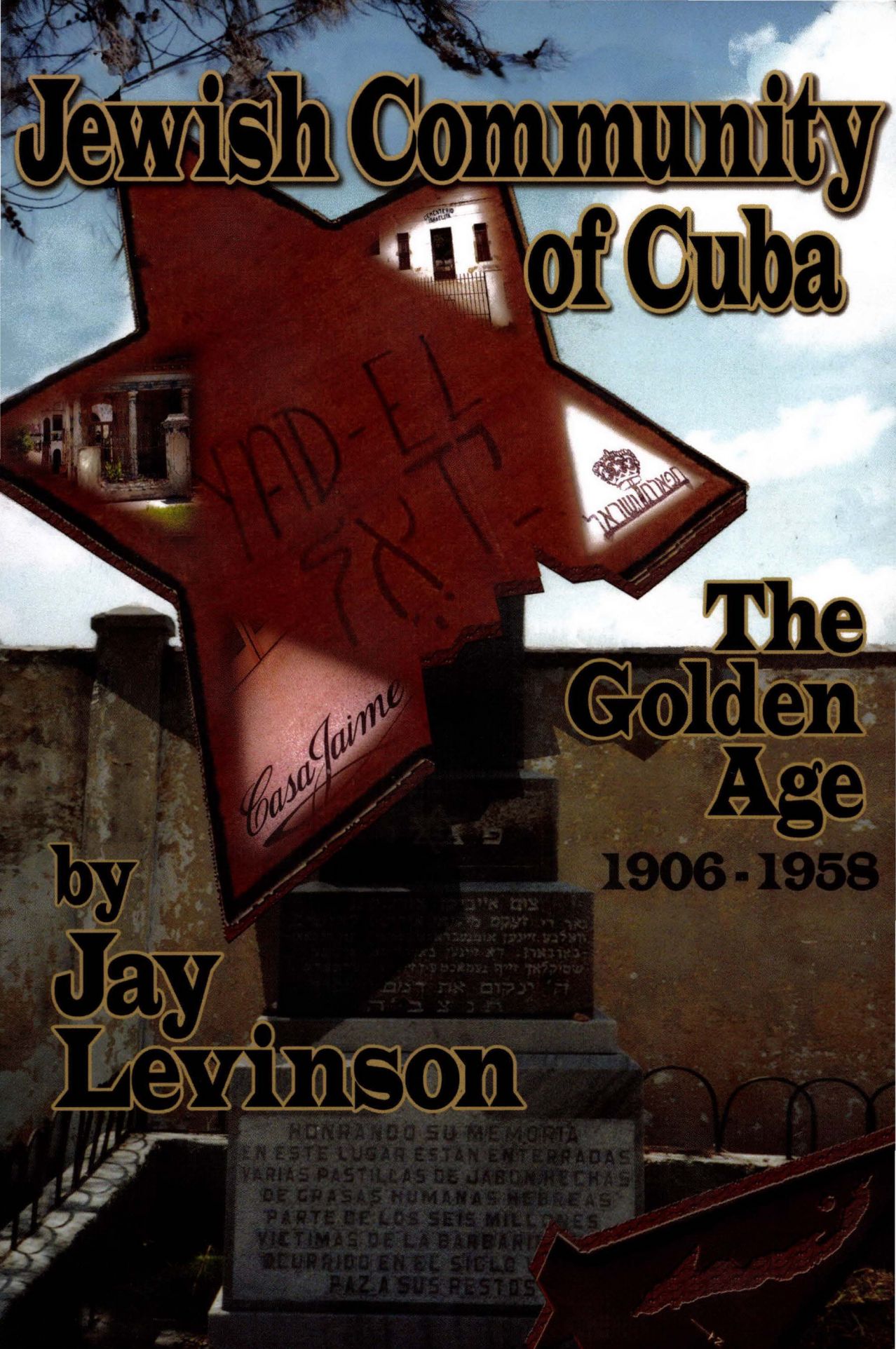

Jewish Community of Cuba
The Golden Age
1906 - 1958
by Jay Levinson
Casa Jaime
HONRANDO SU MEMORIA
EN ESTE LUGAR ESTAN ENTERRADAS
VARIAS PASTILLAS DE JABON HECHAS
DE GRASAS HUMANAS HEBREAS
PARTE DE LOS SEIS MILLONES
VICTIMAS DE LA BARBARIE
PAZ A SUS RESTOS

Jewish Community of Cuba

The Golden Years: 1906 - 1958

by ***Jay Levinson***

John Jay College of Criminal Justice
City University of New York
New York, New York

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In memory of

David Stamelman
Albert Adler
Jeanette Lappe

Three high school teachers not forgotten.

"Havana is a very lively community. It is a beautiful city, a place where our people can, if given a little opportunity, succeed in establishing themselves..."

Commission Report to John L. Bernstein, President of HIAS - 23 July 1921

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Preface

Introduction

As this book will explain, there was no one single Cuban Jewish Community. There were essentially three Jewish groups in Cuba, each functioning as a "community": (1) Americans (more accurately, English speakers), (2) Sephardim and (3) Ashkenazim. Each group can then be broken into sub-groups. The fact that for many years Sephardim and Ashkenazim lived side-by-side in the same Havana neighborhood was not motivated by a desire to live together. There were sociological, linguistic, and cultural differences that changed at different periods of time, but always separated the communities. Each group felt security within its own constituency. Living in the same neighborhood was the practical consequence of economic necessities – relatively inexpensive housing and proximity to places of employment.

Acculturation

If there is any one theme that runs through the history of these groups, it is the Acculturation Cycle – the process of going from (1) immigrant (Ashkenazim, Sephardim) or foreigner (Americans), to (2) Cuban (desired by Ashkenazim, Sephardim; resisted by Americans) to (3) emigrant.

Every person has to adapt to society and find his place. For those born in-country, the process of adjusting to society is gradual, starting at a very early age. Informal upbringing at home, as well as formal education in school, are both key factors in the formation of the future adult member of society. Another influence is the unrecordable string of personal experiences that shape one's ideas.

In the initial decades of the Cuban Jewish Community there were no members who grew up in country. During the early years of the Community no prominent Jew had known life in Cuba under Spanish colonial rule. Very few Jews personally experienced the American occupation (1898-1902). Jewish leaders born and raised in Cuba did not yet exist. No one had a Cuban upbringing. The Jews were immigrants and foreign businessmen. They had to first become Cubans. It was only in the late 1930s and early 1940s that Jews born in Cuba came of age and started to become active in community affairs. It was the beginning of a new Jewish Cuba, but even into the 1950s many older immigrants overshadowed the younger generation.

Not all of the Jews who came to Cuba accepted the "Cubanization" process. Immigration to a new country is a major step. For most Jews who immigrated to Cuba, there was no turning back to the country of origin, but there was the theoretical

possibility of moving onward. Many Jews came with the idea that they would "try out" Cuba. For them Cubanization was met with uncertainty. Was this really what they wanted?

There were Jews who rejected becoming Cuban. Those who fit into this category are immigrants and refugees who had no intention of staying in Cuban longer than it took to arrange departure. This was true in the 1910s, in the 1920s, and onward until the end of World War II. These people separated themselves from Cuban culture, because it represented a life they did not want. They, however, did identify themselves with Jewish life, sometimes setting up their own Jewish institutions apart from the Cuban-Jewish infrastructure. This is true of the World War II "Belgians," who were enough in number with sufficient financial resources to establish their own autonomous community.

A sub-group is those Jews who wanted to leave, but could not obtain visas to other countries. They had to stay, and often it took years for them to reconcile their situation. It is often hard to please a generally dissatisfied person. This sub-group of Jews was dissatisfied; its members were hard to please.

The American community did not view itself as Cuban. For the most part its members resisted Cuban life and Cuban culture. They were Americans. Their synagogue was American. Their schooling was American. Their focus was American. They were only resident in Cuba. Yet, it was impossible not to be influenced by local culture to which many families were exposed for decades. When these Americans fled Cuba after the Revolution, they felt like refugees no less than others. A major difference was that virtually all had a family network and economic infrastructure already in place in the United States.

Community

Community is the aggregate of individuals who want to function together. Two stages can be identified: (1) associating with one another, and (2) working together. Not only do individuals go through this process. So do their communities. First nucleus communities form, then one community tries to work with others. In Jewish Cuba communities did form, but they never really moved to the second stage of working together for any length of time. Although periodic efforts were made at Community unification, these all failed.

This is not to say that there was animosity between the groups. There were, however, frictions, some of which can be traced (1) to conflicts of interest, and (2) to individuals finding themselves in different stages of the cycle.

After the Revolution and outside the scope of this book, the cycle was completed – immigrant - local - emigrant. In the two or three years after the Castro Revolution the

majority of Cuban Jews left the country. The cycle was then started again, most frequently in the United States. Cuban emigrants became American immigrants.

Cubanization

What did it mean to become Cuban? The process of Cubanization was slow and moved on several tracts: learning the Spanish language, conforming with bureaucratic requirements, establishing an economic base, adapting to cultural norms, developing a social network, arranging for permanent family residence. The completion of the process is the transformation from immigrant to Cuban.

Different people "Cubanized" at different speeds. Some never finished the process. Others moved along very quickly. Nor does someone move on all tracts at the same speed. They might have been very "Cuban" in one area, very "immigrant" in another.

This course of Cubanization was a determining factor in the building of the Cuban Jewish Community. The stages of Cubanization determined the needs of the community. Institutions were consequently built and tailored, as much as possible, to those needs. When enough people had similar needs, an organization was usually formed. As needs of the group changed, so did the organization. When there was no longer a consensus of need, the organization usually fell apart or meandered on without purpose or aim. Since there were various waves of immigrants, each had to go through the Cubanization process more or less independently. Only after immigration stopped was unification within each of the three groups of Cuban Jewry even thinkable.

Cubanization held the danger of assimilation, but it was not a movement contrary to Jewish ideals. For those who maintained their Jewish identity and cultural/religious ways, it was a matter of adapting life to Cuba, not deserting Judaism.

Emigration

This book stops with the Castro Revolution. History, however, did not abruptly come to a screeching halt with the flight of Batista and the entry of Revolutionary forces into the Cuban capital. The Jewish Community was vibrant. For a while the community continued to function. But, just as the Cuban Jewish Community was coming into its own, the stage of Cubanization was cut short. The Revolution changed the political and economic atmosphere of Cuba. Jews began to emigrate, first the few, then the many.

The exact process of change is outside the realm of this book, however the author has taken the liberty of letting the reader know what happened in later years to people and organizations playing major rôles in the period before the Revolution – what truly was the heyday of Cuban Jewry.

Perspective

Some historians write political history, and then address social movements and cultural developments in separate chapters. The author is of the opinion that these aspects of the human experience cannot be separated. They are inter-dependent. The book, therefore, is more or less chronological – except that when a topic is raised, a multi-year overview is given to provide better perspective.

Cuban Jewish history is not an independent topic. The history of the Jews was influenced by world events and by events in Cuba. This cannot be ignored. Even the "simple" story of, for example, building synagogues in the 1950s can only be described taking into account the Cuban economy, the concept of suburbia, post-War needs for unity, psychological desires of *nouveau riche*, etc.

Jewish Cuba was, for the most part, a society with a steady flow of immigrants. Therefore, extensive coverage is given to the foreign roots of those immigrants. More detail than usual is also dedicated to the United States, given its dominant rôle in Cuban affairs.

Oral Testimony

Efforts were made to verify information given to the author in personal interviews, but second sources were not always available. The information in those interviews is only as good as the memory of the persons retelling the past.

Variation in information has also been included to help in better clarifying facts. For this same reason many names have been cited.

Spelling

Numerous spelling irregularities exist in names cited in this book. Various people, organizations, and periodicals have been inconsistent in the transliteration of names. Notes are included wherever possible concerning spelling variants. This is not a pedantic or picayune exercise. It is important in the computer age since many name searches do not allow for Soundex-type variants. The spelling variations also are symbolic and indicative of the meeting of two cultures, immigrant and Cuban, as Jews tried to adjust (even in spelling) to their new environment.

Indexing has been done using the most common spellings with the understanding that since differences are usual very minor, the reader will still be able to find the name for which he is searching.

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Introduction

Overview

Although the history of the Cuban Jewish Community starts after the War of 1898, reports abound of Jews being on the island ever since the landing of Columbus. This presence was more important *post facto* to Jews of the 1940s-1950s than it was in past centuries. A centuries-old tradition of Jews in Cuba gave the later Jews a sense of roots in the country. Social aristocracy was very much based upon the length of time a family was resident in Cuba; Jews could not answer the criteria as individual families, but historic presence in Cuba brought pride to the Jewish Community and to its leaders. Tales of Jews spending time in Cuba for centuries was part of the modern community feeling of being "Cuban," even though objectively nothing in the early years transpired of long-range importance in the development of a Jewish Community.

That presence emphasized that despite the Inquisition, the Spanish could not blot out Jewish history.

Age of Discovery

The first person of Jewish origin to reach Cuban shores is presumed to have been Luís de Torres, a *converso* (Jew turned Christian), who served as the interpreter for Christopher Columbus.

In the era of discovery the main objectives of ships setting sail from Europe for distant lands were: (1) to convert the heathens to Christianity, and (2) to find passage to the East to facilitate trade. These ships reached Cuba to trade or to take on supplies. If Jewish sailors on these ships did not avidly support the objective of spreading Christianity, they certainly were in strong agreement with the second goal – in earlier stages to bring back wealth to Europe, then in later years to amass wealth in the Americas.

During the entire period of Spanish rule in Cuba, Jews were not interested in founding any kind of community. In the early years those Jews who came to Cuba were unaccompanied by their families. They were refugees fleeing persecution of the Inquisition in Spain and soldiers of fortune seeking wealth and excitement. They were men of adventure, who made no effort to settle down. Nor could these Jews start a community even if they had wanted to. It was illegal to be openly Jewish (in legal terms even a secret Jew) according to the laws of the Inquisition, and that restriction was carefully enforced throughout the Spanish world.

It is difficult to say how many Jews reached Cuba in the first centuries after Spanish occupation of the island, since only scant information is available. The sources are incomplete and in many cases of dubious validity,[3] though they have become the source of modern folklore.

Whatever their numbers, Jews had no historical significance in Cuba during this period – certainly not *as Jews*.

Several writers have felt the need to produce interesting tales of Jewish activity. These stories might whet curiosity in the popular press, but they are quite questionable historically. One source claims that most of Columbus' colleagues were Jewish, and that *Kol Nidre* (Eve of Yom Kippur prayer) was recited on each of Columbus' ships.[4] That is very doubtful, since such a public display of Judaism would have been dangerous in light of the Inquisition – even on a ship far from Spanish shores. At least one source suggests that there was even *continuous* Jewish presence in Cuba from the early Spanish period.[5]

The Name of the Game: Business

From the mid-seventeenth century to the nineteenth century "secret Jews" apparently used Cuba as a trading point for extensive international business between the Americas and Europe. This was evidently part of a Jewish trading network. Although most commerce during this period was oriented toward Spain, this Jewish network probably had partners not only on the European Continent, but also in Curação and Jamaica as well. It is thought that although the Jews involved in trading were numerically few, they had an influence particularly in Santiago de Cuba, where the population of the city was small; this, however, is not sufficiently documented. Such influence was probably socio-economic and certainly not religious.[6]

Later there were various Jews who appeared in Cuban historical records. In the early 18th century it appears that the name of one Santiago resident involved in trade was "Cohen" (presumably of Jewish descent, if not in fact Jewish).[7]

There are several sporadic mentions of Jews. Another example of a Jew in Cuba is Juan Ellis, who was deported from the country in 1850, though evidently not for religious reasons.[8]

There may also have been a small number of Jews from Spanish Morocco who settled in Cuba for trading reasons during the nineteenth century. Their experience in Cuba has not yet been extensively documented, and most of them and their descendents had left the country by the onset of the Spanish-American War. There is also reason to believe that Arabs from French Morocco were present in Cuba during the same time period, presumably also for trading purposes.[9] By the early twentieth century the Moroccans had also left Cuba.[10]

Luís Schlesinger, a Jew born in Hungary in 1828, was an officer in the 12 August 1851 attempt by Naciso López to land forces in Cuba and liberate the island from Spanish rule. (Overall command had previously been offered to Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis, who both declined, so the task was given to López, a much lesser-known personality.) Schlesinger viewed himself as a professional soldier; he had no particular allegiance to Cuba nor interest in the country. He had participated in the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848-1849, and was taken prisoner. He escaped and fled to the United States. It is from New Orleans that he sailed with López to Pinar del Río with the goal of freeing Cuba from Spain and annexing it to the United States. López and Schlesinger were captured. López was executed; Schlesinger was exiled to North Africa. Luck played into Schlesinger's hands. Again he escaped. Schlesinger then spent the rest of his life as a lawyer, first in the United States and Central America, and finally in Paris (1885), where he died on 29 April 1906.[11] [12] Schlesinger is reported to have been Jewish, but religious affiliation is an inconsequential footnote to history. His activities had no Jewish content *per se*. Schlesinger's motivation was simple – soldiering was his business.

By the late nineteenth century most Jewish individuals had either left the country or had assimilated into the local population.[13] Until then they never established what might be called even the seeds of a future community. Soon, though, life would change.

The Fight for Cuban Independence

The Cuban struggle for independence was a volatile movement during much of the 19th century. Throughout the century there were actions against the Spanish (of which the López invasion was just one), but it was not until the 1860s that independence protagonists organized themselves on a large scale.

The late 1860s were years of turmoil for the Spanish in Cuba. The local economy had collapsed. Cuba had taken the place of the United States in the world cotton market, as the Americans fought their Civil War. Once fighting ceased in the United States in 1865, and the American economy recovered, Cuba lost its position in cotton. Conditions on the island worsened. On 10 October 1868 Carlos Manuel de Céspedes raised the call of revolution in Yara, Oriente Province against Spanish rule. His fight lasted for ten years, at which time Spain tried to salvage its deteriorating position by finding a solution to stop the conflict. The Spanish had no choice. They had to enact reforms.

Cuba was not the only country caught in an atmosphere of change. In general the period was one of turmoil. In the Caribbean life of the 1860s was dominated by the U.S Civil War. The 1870s saw continued mayhem. The 1880s started off no differently. 1881, in particular, was a year of international upheaval. The new economics of the Industrial Revolution caused changing life styles. Russian Czar Alexander II was murdered, and large numbers of Eastern European Jews began emigrating from Russia and its neighboring territories. It was also a year of uproar in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, a situation that led to later Jewish emigration to Cuba. Profound changes were also reaching Cuban shores.

The monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba had been absolute for centuries. The formal cancellation of the Inquisition had been declared in Madrid in 1834, and within a year or so Jews started to settle openly in the Spanish capital.[14] Despite the declaration, there still was no true freedom of religion in Cuba. It took a while for the news of the cancellation to reach Cuban shores. The Roman Catholic Church had a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo* and its religious monopoly. For at least 50 years after the termination of the Inquisition only Roman Catholic worship was, in fact, tolerated in Cuba.

Cuba could never be termed a very religious society,[15] and for many Roman Catholicism was dictated by fiat, not chosen by conviction. There were few options. African religions practiced by slaves and their families were ignored. They were not deemed threatening to the Church. The slaves were viewed with disdain. Their private lives were considered inconsequential.

Jews were not treated with such indifference. Judaism was a Western religion, with a history of conflict with the Holy See and its doctrines. Jewish practice could not be overlooked. The atmosphere of religious intolerance against Jews stunted the growth of a Jewish Community and made the formation of any formal Jewish congregation illegal.

Jews were not the only target of intolerance. The Roman Catholic Church felt threatened even more so by Protestantism, and as a consequence it sought to enforce the general prohibition against other religions. It was feared that Protestantism might appeal to members of the Church, who had very questionable respect for the clergy.

One reform forced upon the Spanish in 1881 was to formally allow non-Catholics to enter Cuba and reside in the country. This, of course, included Jews. The reform, however, was only cosmetic. Its purpose was to quell dissent and not to make any true change in society. In reality virtually nothing changed. The Roman Catholic Church remained supreme.

The 1880s-1890s were anything but tranquil in Cuba. The population was not satisfied, and the Spanish tried numerous methods to sustain quiet. The Spanish also perceived that the United States was doing its best to foment unrest. This caused growing anti-

American spirit amongst Spaniards in Cuba, as the colonial rulers reacted to friction and a conflict of interest with the United States. It was, however, to the benefit of the Spanish to avoid direct confrontation with the Americans. Cuba was a far-off colony held in place by a weak and faltering monarchy. In was decided that Spain should make every reasonable political effort to avoid war. The quick rout of Spain in the War of 1898 showed the accuracy of the assessment to avoid confrontation and armed conflict.

Countering American influence was only one problem. The Spanish were desperate to control the Cubans. Growing insurgency was rampant. Rebellion against Spanish rule in the Philippines meant the redeployment of troops from Cuba. Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau (1838-1930), the Spanish governor of Cuba, initiated a "reconcentration policy," resettling parts of the Cuban population in pre-determined areas to prevent contact with rebels. The policy failed, as the resettled Cubans began to suffer from hunger and malnutrition. The international image of Spain was negative, as the situation in Cuba became even worse. Weyler was reassigned to Spain, where he served three short terms as Minister of War (March 1901 through December 1902, July 1905 through December 1905, December 1906 through January 1907). There were not many options. To many Cubans the only plausible solution was to throw off the yoke of Spanish rule.

Reportedly reliable sources list Jews active in the Cuban War of Independence (e.g., August Bondi, Horatio Robins, Akiba Roland [aka Carlos Roloff Mialowski, 1842-1907],[16] Captain Kominski and a "Schwartz"[17]) and Jews who fought with Cuban forces during the subsequent Spanish-American War of 1898.[18] Fighting in a war does not necessarily mean philosophical commitment to the cause of battle. No, these were not long-term residents of Cuba who rose to the call of nationalism. Most were, as in earlier times, soldiers of fortune seeking the excitement of war. There are no records showing their involvement in the Jewish Community that soon started taking shape.

Another Jew of note came to Cuba at this time, but he as well had no influence on the Cuban Jewish Community that would take root. Dr. Joseph Krauskopf (1858-1923) was an American rabbi sent by the National Relief Commission to tour the front in the Spanish-American War, and his tour included Cuba. Krauskopf was born in Prussia and was a member of the first graduating class from Hebrew Union College in 1872. He had served as a rabbi in Kansas and Philadelphia.[19] In addition to his official duties, Krauskopf conveyed one thousand Reform prayerbooks and various other Jewish items to soldiers, many of whom were in Cuba.[20] Krauskopf's activities were limited to American troops throughout his trip. He had no known influence on the few Jews involved with Cuban forces. His visit to Cuba was short, and he soon left the island.

Until the expulsion of Spanish rulers in 1898, those few Jews in the colony kept a low profile. Various sources cite exceptions to the rule – professed Jews who lived openly in Cuba before 1898. Even if these unconfirmed accounts are true, they are individual cases unconnected with any Jewish Community. That situation, though, started to

change as the 19th century drew to a close, and Cuba entered post-Spanish rule.

In summary, the reports of Jews in Cuba before 1898 might be interesting from a curiosity perspective, however trying to prove or disprove any of the stories of popular history is pointless. These Jews had only incidental influence at best on later Jewish communal history in Cuba. They never underwent an acculturation process as Cuban Jews.

The Spanish Leave

The War of 1898 marked defeat for Spain and the end of the monarchy's rule in Cuba. The last years of that rule were problematic. After American forces invaded Cuba in 1898, the Spanish soon admitted defeat. Four centuries of Spanish presence and rule came to an end with no civilian infrastructure in place to take over.

As a result of the Spanish-American War, Cuba became independent *of Spain*—but that by no means meant absolute independence. From numerous points of view the Republic of Cuba was dominated, if not directed, by United States political and economic interests. And, the power of the Roman Catholic Church was also not totally annulled, even under American influence and its famed policy of Separation of Church & State.

The political future of Cuba at the end of the War of 1898 was uncertain. The American desire to own Cuba was historic. Dating back to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826; president 1801-1809) there had been several efforts by the United States to purchase Cuba, given the close proximity of the island to the North American mainland. This included proposals put forth by U.S. Presidents Thomas Jefferson (1808), James Knox Polk (1848) and Franklin Pierce (1854). Even after the efforts of Pierce the issue was not dead. Particularly in the 1840s and 1850s Cuba was seen as a potential addition to the slave states of the United States South, since it too allowed slavery. The perceived importance in American politics was so great that the Ostend Manifesto of 18 October 1854 suggested very openly that if Spain would not sell the island, the United States might invade and seize it.

The interest in annexation to the United States was not one-sided. There were both North American and Cuban annexation movements. Gaspar Bentancourt Cisneros (1803-1866) was a noted Cuban who foresaw the future of his country best served as part of the United States. He was not the only Cuban with this position. In the first half of the 19th century numerous Cuban slave owners saw their interests and future allied with their cohorts in the South of the United States.[21]

Following the Spanish defeat there were several options regarding the future of the island; these ranged from annexation to the United States ... to declaration of a colony along the model of Puerto Rico ... to full independence. Ironically, Spain thought it

could best preserve its interests by opposing full independence[22] for its former colony. An interim solution was United States military occupation, which lasted formally for four years until the Republic of Cuba was declared on 20 May 1902. Even then the future of Cuba remained uncertain. Usually, uncertainty is a negative factor in decision-making, but not in the case of Cuba. Many doubted that the Republic would last very long. The close relationship with the United States and flirting with annexation or colonial status turned Cuba into a desirable destination for refugees and economic investment.

Platt Amendment

In 1902 the United States exacted a price for the withdrawal of its troops.[23] Senator (R-Connecticut) Orville H. Platt (1827–1905; U.S. Senator 1879–1905) introduced a rider to a military appropriations bill specifying an open-ended lease by the United States of a military base in Guantánamo, and giving the United States the right to intervene in Cuban affairs. Later in 1901 the "Platt Amendment" was annexed to the Cuban constitution. It became the legal basis for U.S. intervention in Cuba in 1906, 1912, 1917, and 1920. It also served as a tacit threat against Cuba, often forcing the Cuban government to align itself with United States policy to avoid military action against the island. Until 1934 when the Platt Amendment was repealed, Cuba functioned virtually as an American protectorate, very similarly to Panama and Nicaragua. Even after repeal, American influence in pre-Revolution Cuba remained extremely strong.

Once the Spanish departed, American businessmen started to stake out interests in Cuba. Those who came were people with commercial interests who took advantage of the opportunity to develop businesses, relying upon the supply of raw material from Cuba or upon commercial trade between the island and the United States. The dominating U.S. political rôle served American business interests. It was seen as protection of investments. The Platt Amendment thus increased the number of American businessmen in Cuba. As Louis A. Pérez, Jr. explains:

> The beneficiaries of North American rule were North Americans. They descended upon the war-ravaged island by the shipload, a new generation of carpetbaggers: land-dealers and speculators of all types, agents for corporations and small homesteaders, all in search of opportunity.[24]

One prominent example of a Jewish-American businessman in Cuba at this time was Frank Maximilian Steinhardt (born 1864 in Munich), who opened the first electric trolley line in Havana in 1901 and served as CEO of La Polar Brewery. He was ultimately appointed U.S. Consul General, in which position he served around 1907.

Some basic statistics can illustrate the growth of American investment in Cuba during this period. Before the Spanish-American War it is estimated that American investment in Cuba was about $95 million. In 1902 this grew modestly to $100 million, but ten

years later it more than doubled to $205 million. With investment American big business began to dominate the new Cuban economy. By 1904, for example, the American Tobacco Company managed to garner control of 52% of Cuban tobacco exports.[25]

Year	*U.S. Investment*
Pre-1898	$ 95 million
1902	$100 million
1912	$205 million

With investment and business interests came businessmen, including Jewish businessmen. The demise of Spanish rule and government under a North American shadow meant dramatic changes for Cuba. A Cuban Jewish Community could now take shape.

SECTION I:

THE FORMATIVE YEARS
1906-1933

Chapter One: The Early Ashkenazi Community

A New Population in Cuba

After the departure of the Spanish a new economy had to be launched. Cuba was no longer a tool to serve Spanish interests. A new economic era had begun, and Cuba needed the population base to support it.

At the outbreak of the 1898 Spanish-American War there were fewer than 1000 non-Spanish Westerners in Cuba. U.S citizens were particularly unwanted. The Spanish had made a concerted effort to limit the residence of people from the United States in light of the growing tension between the two countries. That restriction ceased to exist as soon as the short war was over.

The small number of foreigners was problematic in developing an economy, since they harbored the promise of ties to economic markets abroad. But, it was not only the lack of foreigners that was problematic. The indigenous Cuban population was also declining, as even before the war Cubans had begun leaving the failing colonial economy for better opportunities elsewhere. The net result was a shortage of workers in Cuba.

There were those professionals who stayed in Cuba. Even as colonial economic problems intensified, not everyone wanted to leave the island. After the defeat of Spain, some Spanish residents still saw their future in Cuba and stayed in the country. This was particularly true of lower-level government clerks who remained in their jobs in the new government bureaucracy of the American occupation. Later this would be the seed of a larger Spanish community. Civil servants, however, do not make an economy. Cuba needed industry and jobs. And, Cuba needed investment.

First, businessmen came to Cuba. Potentially lucrative business opportunities opened up as the focus of commerce shifted from the court of Spain to the market of the United States. Large American companies sent representatives to Cuba. Most of these big business employees were non-Jews, though some were Jews.

There was a different economic phenomenon regarding small businesses. There were those from the United States who expanded their own business concerns until it was easier to run operations from Havana rather than from Key West, Jacksonville, Tampa, New Orleans, or certainly New York. These people also came to Cuba.

After businessmen came immigrants. The nascent economy needed people. It needed entrepreneurs, and it also needed workers. It needed producers, and it needed consumers. Officials ruling Cuba in the post-Spanish era realized that Cuba had to be

populated. As a result, immigration of people who wanted to live in Cuba was encouraged. Employment was one reason that people came. Religious and political freedom followed. Of the immigrants who came to Cuba, some settled in the country. Others tried out life in the tropics, then left. In future years those immigrants who stayed in Cuba would literally change the nature of the country.

Many groups came – Americans, yes. Spanish, yes. Other Europeans, yes. Jews, no problem. Chinese, not wanted![26] Cuba was a land of opportunity. By 1907 Cuba hosted more than 11,800 immigrants or foreigners, of whom 6,000 (including a small number of Jews) came from the United States. These years were only the beginning of a trend of immigration. By 1932, 850,000 immigrants had come to Cuba from Europe. This book focuses on Cuban Jewish history, but perspective must be maintained. Jews never constituted a large percentage of the Cuban population, nor was concern with Jewish interests of primary Cuban interest.

The immigration situation in Cuba differed from that of the United States and became a source of friction between the two countries. Cuba was encouraging immigration. Starting in 1905-1906 the United States began to worry about the large number of immigrants reaching its shores. Then the United States increasingly restricted immigration. The point of contention was that many of the immigrants to Cuba, in fact, wanted to come to the United States, or at least they held out such travel as a feasible possibility. Many of them did move northward after a stay in Cuba. So, the United States felt threatened by seeing so many immigrants to the Cuban island.

Not surprisingly, Spanish-speakers dominated Cuban immigration. During the period 1902-1920, 68% of immigrants arriving in Cuba came from Spain or from other Caribbean / Spanish colonies. (The growth of the Spanish community in Cuba would have important implications for the country's Jews, particularly in the 1930s.)

In the new Cuba it was not only economics that changed. There was a new economy, but there was also a shift in social values and norms. The new population developed its own sociological infrastructures. As the twentieth century began, a post-colonial social order was initiated. An Americanization of thinking and behavior came with the four year American occupation of the island. Aristocratic birth and ancestry specifically in Cuba had determined the colonial Cuban social register. This continued, but a new parallel social order began to take root. Status came with wealth and achievement. Social groups formed around language, common interest, and economic standing. Birth to aristocratic families became less and less of a factor.

Jews in Cuba

It is hard to make general comments about the Cuban Jewish population at this point in time, although such generalizations can be found in some popular literature. Not only was the population small. That segment of the population about which records exist is

even much smaller. It is questionable to describe a trend, when the activities of only a handful of people are known. Nevertheless, some guarded statements can be made.

The Jewish Community that would develop in Cuba traces its origins to awkward beginnings in the period of the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, or as some would like to explain historical events, the bellicose American intervention in the continuing Cuban War of Independence. Only then did Jews start openly seeking out their religious brethren, if just for social/cultural reasons and to solve the problem of Jewish burial. Religious observance was not the motivating factor.

Some of the "American Jews" who arrived in Cuba during the first years of the twentieth century were, in fact, born in Eastern Europe – in Romania. They had immigrated to the United States as young men and established themselves as businessmen. When they arrived in Cuba, they were United States citizens, despite their foreign birth. These new Americans spoke English, Yiddish, Romanian, and sometimes additional Eastern European languages. English was the common linguistic tie. It was the language of the American dream, of business and of social interaction.

Not only did Eastern European Jews come to Cuba. Several American-born descendents of Central European Jewish immigrants who had arrived in the United States between 1830 and 1880 also made their way to Cuba. These "German" Jews had established themselves in the United States. Many were born and raised in the South, and were involved in light manufacturing businesses that relied upon Cuba for raw materials or production. These German-American Jews were buyers; they were businessmen in Cuba, and not immigrants to the island. They were likely to speak only English, although some picked up limited Spanish in their early business dealings with Cuba, even before their arrival in the country.

The arrival of Jews to specifically Havana is best documented, but ample testimony exists that during the first few years of the century there were Jews in other Cuban cities, though few details are known of their activity. These Jews marked a turning point in Cuban Jewish history. For the first time not only Jewish men reached Cuban shores. Businessmen brought their families. Conditions were right to live openly as Jews, and also as Jewish families.

Turkish or Ottoman Jews also immigrated to Cuba at the beginning of the 20th century. These were Sephardic Jews. They were not businessmen; they were workers. And, they typically spoke no English. From the very beginning they did not fit into the Americanized Jewish society of businessmen. As soon as these Sephardic Jews were numerous enough, they began to found their own Ladino-speaking social circle.[27]

In the first years of the twentieth century, when a Cuban Jewish Community was about to take shape, most Jews on the island were Ashkenazi. They had both the numerical and the monetary advantages over the Sephardim. They were the first to organize. The Sephardim would organize six years later when their numbers increased.

Roots of an Ashkenazi Community

The early Ashkenazi Jews in Cuba were not anti-Sephardic. They simply constructed a lifestyle to their own American tastes. They were American (perhaps better-said, Americanized), so that is the lifestyle they continued to maintain.

These American Jews had the options of associating with other Jewish Americans or with non-Jewish Americans. In the new Cuba there were no official social restrictions. Wealth was a primary determining factor of associating socially. Language was another. So, from the very beginning American Jews followed the two options of wealth and language. As to Jewishness, they took both paths.

- Some American Jews viewed themselves most importantly as part of the larger American community in Cuba and interacted extensively with other Americans.
- Other American Jews placed primary importance on functioning within Jewish circles (*American* Jewish circles).

Those who saw themselves first as Jews, then as Americans, were making a social statement. This was not a religious proclamation. These Jews were not religiously observant. Even Roman Catholic affiliation was, for the most, a hereditary fact and not an act of professed faith or active involvement. Cuba was, for the most part, a non-religious country. Any strict religious observance was an anomaly. These Jews who saw their primary affiliation as Jewish were sewing the seeds of an eventual existence separate from the rest of the American community. In the long run they would be viewed not as Cubans, not as Americans, but as Jews on Cuban soil.

Whether friends were Jewish or non-Jewish, the social circle of these early Jews in Cuba was American. That exclusive association with other Americans tended to impede their integration into Cuban society. The phenomenon would continue for a half century. Throughout the years of pre-Revolution Cuba many Jews associated with the American community kept their separate status (at a certain point perceived to be a higher social status). Speaking English, they were part of what became the "ABC community" – Americans, British, and Canadians. Most of the ABCs lived in Havana, where they ran local businesses or managed branch offices of international corporations. They belonged to the Rotary, Lions, B'nai B'rith, or Knights of Columbus, as well as a yacht club and a country club – a very American life style.[28]

The numbers of Jews in Cuba was not great in 1906. There were only about one hundred people who identified themselves as Jewish. But, a community began to grow. The need for a Jewish Community – an *American* Jewish Community – became felt.

During the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century a major segment of

Cuba's Jewish population came from the Ottoman Empire and subsequently from independent Turkey. At first their numbers were small. By 1906 there were apparently only a handful of Sephardic Jews in the country. They spoke Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). These Sephardim, who came to Cuba without any American background, had no place in the American-Ashkenazi society that was forming.

United Hebrew Congregation

Founding the Congregation

On 5 August 1906 eleven English-speaking Jews held a formal meeting in Havana with the intention of founding a congregation and cemetery.[29] The venue was the home of Manuel Hadida at Pasaje Arcado No. 9.[30] Hadida was a Sephardic Jew originally from Algeria, who apparently had migrated from North Africa to Paris, and then to the United States. Evidently it was from the United States that he moved to Havana. Typical of the period, most of the others were Ashkenazi "Americans," although some had been born in Europe.

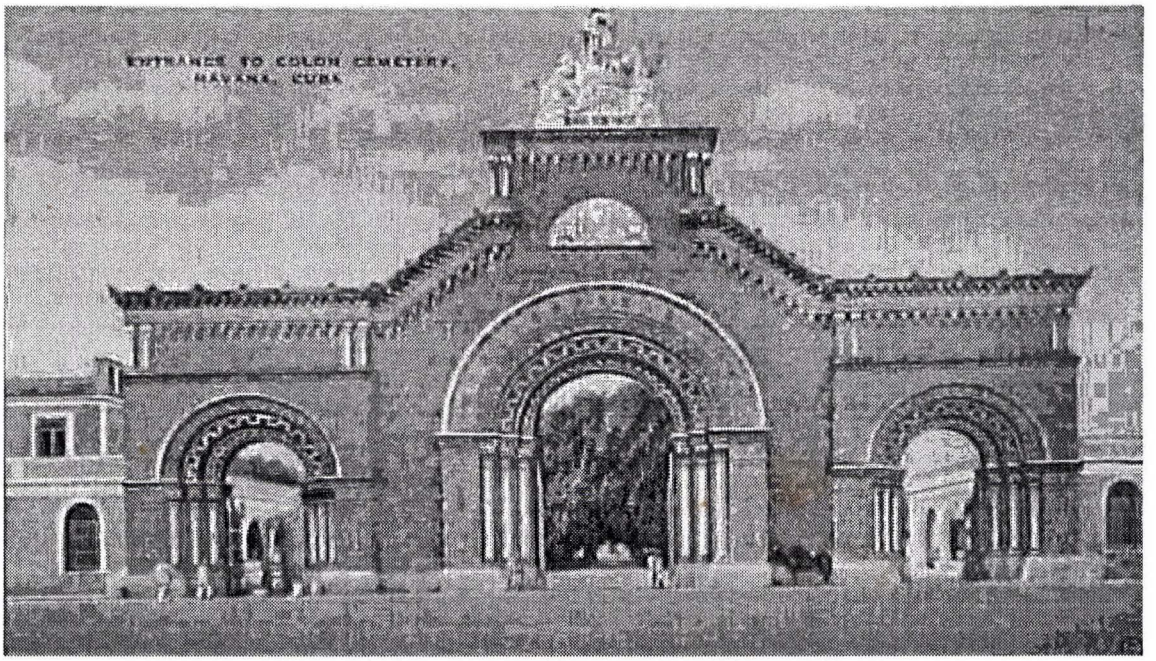
At this meeting, the eleven men declared their intention to create a congregation for the more than one hundred "hebrew (*sic* without capital letter) settlers" on the island, and to purchase land to be used as a cemetery "after its solemn dedication according to Jewish rites."[31] (The spelling errors in the Minutes are another indication of non-American origin of the recording secretary.) This community would presumably include the Jews of Havana, Matanzas, Camagüey, and the Island of Pines (more recently Isle of Pines, then renamed Isla de la Juventud [Isle of Youth]). Although these cities are mentioned in the minute book, written records of Jewish settlement from this period are to be found only regarding Havana. Mention of the estimated number and general location of other Jews outside Havana also suggests that there had been contact amongst the Jews in Cuba; however no known records are extant.

The group formed what became United Hebrew Congregation (UHC), somewhat of a Jewish "home away from home." Their emotional "home" was the United States, not Cuba. Jewish heritage was a cohesive bind. None in the group was punctiliously observant of religious dictates. Conversing in English in an atmosphere that was Spanish-speaking united them. These Jews were also financially successful. (Subsequently, when Joseph Steinberg encountered financial difficulty, he felt out of place and ceased to be active in the group.) Thus, later when immigrant Jews started to arrive from Turkey, the newcomers were not welcomed. These *turcos* were of a different Jewish culture. They were not English speakers. They were not businessmen. Nor were they well-to-do.

Members Attending the First Meeting of UHC

Louis Jurick,[32] Joe Steinberg,[33] Jacob H. Heller, Martin Cohn, Maurice Schechter,[34] Isidaor Leirano, Emilio Berkowitz,[35] Adolph Dynner, Maurice K. Jessel, Alexander Freidman (*sic* and not "Friedman" in Minutes), and Manuel Hadida. Max (Moise) Steinberg of Matanzas was also present.

Manuel Hadida had a special interest in hosting the meeting. One of his relatives had recently died and, in the absence of alternatives, was reportedly buried in the local Roman Catholic "Colón" cemetery.[36] [37] That was the new central cemetery of Havana. In 1868 the colonial government started buying the land for the Colón Cemetery. "La Currita," "La Portuguesa," "La Noria," "Baeza," "Las Torres," "La Campaña," and "San Antonio el Chiquito" were acquired. It was not until 1903 that the Colón Cemetery was finished. According to protocols, all buried remains were to have been exhumed from other Havana cemeteries and reburied in Colón. The land of the other cemeteries was then redeveloped.



The Cemetery

According to one report, there had been earlier "Jewish burial" in Cuba, but this was restricted to American Jewish soldiers killed during the Spanish-American War. The

fallen soldiers were supposedly buried in a special section of a U.S. military cemetery.[38] There is no confirmed substantiation to this report, and according to United States Department of Defense sources, (1) records from this period are less than complete, and (2) many bodies were later repatriated to the United States for reburial.[39]

Consecrating a separate Jewish cemetery was not a simple affair. Although there was official separation of church and state in post-Spanish Cuba, the Roman Catholic Church still held a monopoly regarding death and burial. Other minorities, such as the Chinese, benefited from intervention by their respective governments when their interests were involved. Jews, however, had no such address. Thus, Jewish Americans in Cuba chose to capitalize on their American rather than Jewish identification; they sought intervention by the United States Government. The Americans, of course, had special influence given their general position on the island.[40]

At the first meeting Louis Jurick was elected chairman of the Hebrew Congregation of Cuba, and Manuel Hadida was chosen as general secretary. On 19 August 1906 the name of the group was changed to United Hebrew Congregation (UHC) of Cuba, and Robert Diamond was elected treasurer. The pressing need for a Jewish cemetery was unfortunately highlighted a month later when Diamond passed away suddenly. Joseph Steinberg was appointed the new treasurer.

As efforts were made to establish a Jewish cemetery, burial continued to be a very difficult problem needing recurrent attention. A note dated 26 November 1908 in the UHC minute book states that the previous day A.M. Edelweiss had passed away. On the day of the note he was buried in the Roman Catholic Colón Cemetery.[41] In accordance with Jewish Law, the body was not embalmed. The person entering the note in the minute book added, "When our Cemetery will be in shape to receive the dead, we are duty bound to remove the remains of Brother A[lberto].M. Edelweiss, [and rebury him] where he belongs."[42] This, however, was never done. The Russian-born Endweiss was buried in a paupers' section of Colón Cemetery (NE 7),[43] which was redeveloped, probably in the 1920s.[44] Nothing remained of the grave. Cemetery records show no mention that the body was ever exhumed and interred elsewhere. Edelweiss was never a member of UHC. He was poor. He was Russian with no American connection. He did not fit into the UHC crowd.

The moving of remains was possible. That is exactly what was done with the body of Mrs. J.H. Heller Sufter. On 19 July 1913 her remains were reburied in a publicized ceremony in the Guanabacoa Jewish cemetery, after they were exhumed from previous interment in "Colón."[45]

In seeking Cuban permission for a Jewish cemetery, Manuel Hadida took a leading rôle in interfacing with the U.S. Government. After all, it was the United States that had the strongest influence on Cuba. On 7 October 1906 Hadida reported that he had met with Rabbi Haim (Henry) Pereira Méndez (13 April 1852 - 21 October 1937), spiritual leader of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue, Shearith Israel, in New York. Méndez

recommended that Hadida consult with Adolphus Simeon Solomons[46] (26 October 1826 –18 March 1910) of Washington, D.C., who had influence with the State Department. Solomons was not a newcomer to the United States; he was a Sephardic Jew, born in New York to John Solomons, who had made his way to the United States in 1810.

Solomons was an influential Washingtonian with strong White House and Congressional connections. In 1851 Secretary of State Daniel Webster (1782-1852; Secretary of State, 1841-1843, 1850-1852) appointed Solomons as "special bearer of dispatches to Berlin." President Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885; President, 1869-1877) offered Solomons the position of Governor of the District of Colombia (which Solomons declined). Solomons did not shun his Jewish affiliation. On 12 February 1883 the United States State Department sought Solomons' advice and assistance regarding the distribution of charity funds to Americans in Ottoman Palestine.

Not only was Solomons active in political circles. He was active in Jewish circles as well. Solomons was acting president of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) when the institution was reorganized in 1902.

The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York played an important supporting rôle for United Hebrew Congregation. Solomon Schechter (1847-1915), a renowned JTS president and faculty member, had three family members in Havana's United Hebrew Congregation.

Even before Solomon Schechter joined the faculty of JTS, he was a guest in the Washington, D.C. house of Adolphus Solomons.[47] Thus, JTS was a link between Schechter and Solomons. The two also knew Rabbi Pereira Méndez quite well. Pereira Méndez had also been active in JTS. In 1910 it was, in fact, Rabbi Pereira Méndez who officiated at Solomons' funeral.

The UHC-JTS cooperation did not end with the issue of the cemetery. The Schechter-JTS connection helped collect funds needed by UHC to aid World War I refugees in Cuba.[48] The connection, however, came to an end as time passed. The last overt indication of close cooperation was in 1923, when UHC hired a JTS student as rabbi for the High Holidays. This marked the end of an era. The working relationship had been both personal and somewhat ideological. New power groups were taking over in both JTS and UHC. In Havana the old guard of Eastern Europeans immigrants to the United States comfortable with traditional ceremonies was being replaced with Americans to whom Reform Judaism spoke their native language – English. The 1923 hiring of the rabbi was the last public connection between the two institutions. UHC was on its way to becoming the Reform congregation of Cuba.

Although UHC had a working relationship with JTS, the synagogue was by no way Conservative by conviction. It was an association of convenience, not philosophy.

Presumably it was through Solomons that Hadida succeeded in having an order sent to the United States Minister in Cuba, with instruction to help the congregation obtain the necessary permit to acquire land for a cemetery; this was reported at the fifth meeting of the United Hebrew Congregation leaders.

At the eighth meeting of United Hebrew Congregation, Hadida announced that the Cuban government had granted a permit for the cemetery. On that same evening, Hadida began soliciting subscriptions for gravesites so that they could go ahead with the purchase of the land. The cemetery, consecrated in 1910,[49] is in Guanabacoa, a neighborhood across the bay from Habana Vieja. First settled by Europeans in the 16th century, Guanabacoa was a poor area, until wealthy residents moved in during the 1920s and 1930s. The cemetery occupies the former Finca El Aguacate and is still in use at the time of this writing.

The cemetery was never restricted to Ashkenazim. On 26 December 1912 Sephardim asked that one of their brethren be buried in the United Hebrew Congregation cemetery.[50] A grave was approved for the cost of $50. On 28 May 1915 it was decided that a child's grave would cost $25. In the following years there were extensive discussions, correspondence and negotiations between the UHC and the Sephardic *Chevet Ahim* regarding burial arrangements.

Members of UHC rarely used the cemetery when they passed away. Their orientation was towards the United States, and that is where most were buried.[51] Use of the cemetery was more commercial than anything else.

Only on 8 February 1942, after more than two decades of continuous effort, was a Sephardic burial area consecrated on the former Finca Cata in Guanabacoa. The first burial in that cemetery was during March of that year.

The Guanabacoa cemeteries contain Holocaust memorials (the earliest in Latin America), erected in March 1947, as a project of war refugees in Cuba. The primary initiative was that of Gezelschaft Bais Hahayim.[52]

The acquisition of a cemetery is often a key act in the formation of a Jewish Community. This is not unique to Havana. In many locations a cemetery preceded the establishment of a congregation by a number of years. It is significant that the Havana congregation and cemetery were created from the same effort and during the same time period. In 1906 the leaders envisioned a synagogue that would serve the entire Jewish Community, but they expected that the community would be similar to them, both culturally and religiously. There was no room for deviation. That unanimity did not turn out to be the case. The different groups of Jews that found their way to Cuba would live separately from each other and develop parallel community structures. As George Weinberger, an American visitor, wrote in 1918, "Able to afford better clothes, luxuries, etc., it is perhaps not strange that they [the American Jews] do not care to associate with the poorer class of their people."[53]

The Synagogue

On 18 April 1907 elections were held for the first regular officers of UHC, and on 2 May 1907 they were formally installed. Joseph Barker became the first president of the new congregation.

From the very beginning UHC was tied to people and interests in the United States, a very natural step given the composition of the membership. On 7 November 1907 it was voted to repair a "Safer (*sic*) Torah"; the scroll was sent to New York. On 7 May 1908 it was recognized that funds had to be collected outside Cuba; a Mr. Aronson was offered 10% of the earnings (later declined) to collect in New York City. On 14 September 1908 it was decided that prayer books were needed for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services; they were ordered from the United States. UHC minutes also show that Maurice Schechter was able to procure another *sefer torah*, again from the United States.

Some years UHC hired a hall for High Holiday services. Other years they used more improvised quarters, such as in 1914, when the congregation president, Charles Berkowitz, the owner of a large retail store, offered his home. The renting of facilities or using private residences was not only an economic indicator of affluence and large homes. It is symptomatic of an uneasy sense of community in which these Jews still did not have the collective confidence of a long-term future in Cuba to enter into a significant multi-year commitment, although money was not lacking. It was also indicative of a social characteristic – the community was close-knit, and opening one's home to others was accepted.

According to Cuban-Jewish lore, in 1911 six Sephardic immigrants came to the hotel where the United Hebrew Congregation was holding their High Holiday services. The Sephardim were reportedly refused entrance to the hotel, speaking neither English nor Yiddish. How could they possibly be Jews![54]

This story was probably embellished with the passage of time. Sephardic was not at all the issue *per se*, since there were Sephardic members of United Hebrew even before this "incident." That United Hebrew had no intrinsic ethnic prejudice against Sephardim is supported by the leading rôle played by *American* Sephardim in the founding of the congregation. Indeed, Hadida was chosen to be Vice President of the first Board of Directors, and other Sephardim played active rôles. Nevertheless, the congregation held social and religious expectations dramatically at odds with the mentality of both the poorer Sephardim and the later-to-arrive Eastern Europeans.

Even in its early years UHC was already moving in the direction of American non-Orthodox Judaism. The Sephardim were very traditional in their ritual practices, if not in their lifestyle. And, they were neither affluent nor American. It was clear that the Sephardim could not possibly integrate into the existing congregation.

Non-American Jews

When Sephardim started to arrive in Cuba, it did not take them long to realize what was obvious – UHC was not for them. By 1912 (certainly by 1914) American businessmen were no longer the only element in the nascent Jewish Community. Times were changing. Sephardim were of sufficient number to set up their own community infrastructure. In fact, they had no choice.

Chapter Two: The Early Sephardic Community

Arrival of the First Sephardim

The first Ashkenazi Jews started arriving in Cuba in about 1898; the first Sephardic Jews came to Havana perhaps in 1902, certainly by 1904.[55] The differences between these dates are only a technicality. Until about 1908 there were too few Jews to make any meaningful distinction between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The main emphasis was on American – not Ashkenazim, not Sephardim. English was the Jewish *lingua franca* in Cuba. If you did not speak English, you simply did not fit into "the" society. And, if you did not have money, you also did not qualify.

When Turkish (i.e., Sephardic) Jewish immigrants began to arrive in Cuba during the first decade of the twentieth century, they typically lived with lesser means. The community and social infrastructure that they soon developed reflected such.

The Sephardim had another difference from the American Jews of United Hebrew Congregation. They saw Cuba as their new home. It was not just a place of residence from which they could conduct business. They were refugees. They were the first of several waves of Jewish refugees to reach Cuban shores. They were seeking a safe haven from the anti-Jewish policies of the Ottoman Empire. The *turcos* did not leave their homeland by choice. They left under pressure. The Americans, on the other hand, were enjoying a home away from home.

Immigration

During the first decade of the twentieth century Jews in the Turkish and Greek areas of the Ottoman Empire were experiencing problems; Jews in the Polish and Russian parts of the Romanov Empire were subject to numerous pogroms. Jews in both areas started to emigrate, however with different patterns:

- The primary destination for **Ashkenazim** was the United States. Cuba was not a serious option. Arrival in Cuba came only years later, during and after World War I, on the way to the North American mainland.
- Although some **Sephardim** left the Ottoman Empire for the United States, many chose to make their new homes in Cuba and other Latin American countries..

There was a demographic pattern to migration. The Sephardic Jews who arrived in Cuba were refugees from the final years of the decadent Ottoman Empire; the large majority came from what is today Turkey;[56] Jews in the Greek areas tended to reach other countries.

It is important to note that some Sephardim did immigrate to the United States. Those immigrants kept contact with their Sephardic brethren in Cuba, but the contact was social and familial. It had few economic implications. Those in the United States still had not established themselves. They were also struggling to build a community and could not be of significant financial or business assistance to those who went to Cuba. Nor did they use the later Ashkenazi model of forging commercial ties between families in the two countries.

The Sephardic emigration to Cuba can be divided into two major periods. Each had its own characteristics: (1) Before World War I, and (2) after World War I.

There was little movement of immigrants to the Western Hemisphere in the years during the "Great War." The few immigrants who arrived in Cuba during the war tended to come from countries of short-term residence (e.g., the United States) after having left the Ottoman Empire earlier.

It is important to look at Ottoman history to better understand the root causes of this immigration and the nature of the Sephardic Jewish Community in Cuba.

Background: Education and Values

For most of the nineteenth century the teetering Ottoman Empire was in turmoil. Despotism and economic failure were at the root of the *Tanzimat* ("Re-Organization"), an internal reform movement that took hold in the Empire from 1839 until 1876. The *Tanzimat* was a period of change in reaction to crisis. It was an early stage in the process of introducing Turkey into the world of Western European values, culture and economics. In this atmosphere the roots of later emigration took hold.

There was a general wave of reform in the Ottoman Empire beginning in 1839, based upon the feeling that "modernization" (westernization) would stem the increasing decline of the Empire. In 1854 the first "modern" school opened its doors in Istanbul.

Jews were influenced by the spirit of the day. Shortly after the beginning of the *Tanzimat*, Jewish secularism and secular education became widespread throughout the European parts of the Ottoman Empire. Even in Palestine, an Ottoman-ruled area and religiously very traditional, the modern Lemel School for boys opened in 1856; the Evelyn de Rothschild School for girls started shortly thereafter. This was only one outward sign of changes in the Empire.

For non-Jews "modern" was a euphemism for "secular." In Jewish circles "modern" was a code word denoting non-rabbinic/non-traditional instruction. Primary areas of study were foreign languages, history, and other non-religious subjects. The basic aim was to "Westernize" Ottoman life. This was in parallel with the European Haskalah (Enlightenment) Movement that was popular at the time. In many ways this

"modernization" can be seen as a reaction against Ottomanism. Europeans implanted the idea that identification with the West might solve the problems of the East, even though Eastern reality was very different from Western life. It was in these "modern" schools that the seeds of emigration in later years began to nurture.

The most famous "modern" Jewish schools were associated with the Alliance Israélite Universelle,[57] founded in France in 1860 to aid Jews of North Africa and the Levant. The philosophic guidelines of the Haskalah-oriented Alliance were integration, acculturation and international Jewish solidarity.[58] Secular schools associated with this movement opened in Edirne (Adrianople)[59] in 1867 (boys) and 1870 (girls), Izmir and Salonika (an Ottoman city at the time) in 1873, Istanbul (Constantinople) in 1875,[60] and Kirklareli probably in 1878. Many of the later immigrants to Cuba received their education in these Alliance schools. This explains, in part, their relative lack of religious observance. The schools were secular. The Alliance schools preferred instruction in French, not Ladino (the language of the local Jews). Again, this is another reason that a Ladino base never lasted after the first generation of Sephardic immigrants to Cuba; it was a language of convenience and not of deeply rooted commitment as Yiddish was amongst Ashkenazim.

In broad philosophical terms the Alliance, itself an international movement, opened the eyes of its students to an entire new world outside the confines of the Ottoman Empire. In the past Ottoman subjects moved within the borders of the Empire. Now education supplanted migration within the Empire with emigration to far-off new nation states.

Not everyone accepted the Alliance schools. There was opposition. An extreme example is Edirne, where the local school was burned down, probably by arson, a year after it opened.[61]

An overview of "Jewish" education in European Turkey (Tarakya) at the onset of the twentieth century shows blatant diversion in the approach to schooling. There were traditional Jewish schools and "modern" schools that can be placed into five categories:[62]

- Run by local Jews
- Run by outside Jews
- Run by Christian missionaries
- State-run for both Moslems and Non-Moslems
- Military-run, open to all (e.g., to study medicine)

It is in these schools that ideas were formed, ideas that would forge the future of Turkey. Some Jews accepted that future. Others rejected it and started to look elsewhere for a place to live.

International Problems

The Russians, a centuries-old adversary of the Turks, swept through Ottoman Bulgaria in 1877, and by January of the following year their army threatened Istanbul.

Modern borders suggesting a defined distinction between Turkish and Bulgarian ethnicity and culture are not at all reflective of this period. There was an ethnic jigsaw puzzle overlaying the area, all under overall authority from Istanbul. The pieces of the puzzle were "rearranged" intermittently beginning in the 1870s due to recurrent military actions.

On 3 March 1878 the Treaty of San Stefano declared a Russian protectorate over Bulgaria; only in July of that year did the Treaty of Berlin void that protectorate. The Russians brought not only their army to Bulgaria. They also brought anti-Semitism,[63] which quickly took hold in the previously tranquil area. Following blood libel, slaughter, and plunder, "Bulgarian Jews by the thousands found refuge in Constantinople."[64] Some returned to Bulgaria as life quieted down in the pseudo-liberalism encouraged by a new constitution, but many others continued their search for a new home. For some, that search would bring them to Cuba after problems arose in Turkey as well.

Jews fled from Bulgaria to Turkey, but throughout the area there was unrest, and borders were changing. In 1878 Great Britain seized Cyprus from the Ottomans, and four years later Egypt was wrestled from the Empire. Agitation in the Balkans was constant, until the eruption of the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913.

Jews were perceived as loyal citizens of the Ottoman Empire, having been recognized in 1835 as an "official" community with a chief rabbi, according to protocol on par with Greek Orthodox and Armenian clerics. In the fluid politics of the Empire, being loyal citizens still did not guarantee that the direction of change was in the best Jewish interest. With the turn of the century, some Jews began to see their future in countries abroad.

Young Turks and Early Emigration

The "bubble burst" with the Young[65] Turks Revolution of 23/24 July 1908. The revolution brought new concepts to the Empire – nationalism and the nation-state. The spirit of nationalism had never influenced the Ottoman Empire. The concept of nationalism was sweeping Europe, but it was considered threatening to the Empire, and was excluded. The Empire was a conglomerate of ethnic groups all ruled from the Porte with more autonomy or less autonomy according to the era and personalities involved. The concept of a nation did not exist. It was religion – Islam – that provided the cohesive bind that kept the Empire together. There were non-Moslems in the Empire, but they played a secondary rôle.

The rise of nationalism meant a shunting of Islam. According to the philosophy of nationalism, factors such as national identity (a variable in many cases) and common language overshadowed religion. In Ottoman terms, nationalism followed by the desire to establish nation-states signaled a rejection of the Empire. Advocates of nationalism were saying that Turkey is for those who speak Turkish and upheld the Turkish cultural heritage. (For many years there were competing movements in the Arab world – to declare a number of smaller states or to strive for a Pan-Arabic union, similar to the Ottoman Empire but based upon "Arab" rather than "Islam," i.e., nationality rather than religion.) A corollary to this was the secularization of the state, stressing Turkish national values, not religious values.

For Turkish Jews secularism portended problems. Jews lost much of their separate status – in Ottoman terms, they lost their quasi-independence as a *millet*, in which they functioned essentially as their own polity. Turkish language and culture were imposed without the modern democratic guarantees that protect minorities. Emigration, which started in a trickle at the very beginning of the new century, became more attractive to many Jews. In the early twentieth century mostly young, single, male Jews chose to emigrate rather than to face obligatory military service.[66]

In many ways the Young Turks were both a continuation of the reforms of the *Tanzimat* and a reaction against them.

- The Young Turks supported the secularization begun during the *Tanzimat.*

- During the reform period secular education stressed foreign languages. The Young Turks, in a spirit of a new Turkish nationalism, chose a different policy. They stressed Turkish (never the language of the Jewish Community).

The Young Turks perceived speaking Ladino as a threat to the emerging ideas of the Turkish nationalist state.[67] It was non-conformity. Even though Ladino was only a language of convenience, Jews perceived the preference for Turkish as a threat of anti-Semitism. Thus, perceived Jewish interests came into conflict with the growing ideal of a newly emerging Turkish nation/state.

Jews in the European sections of the Ottoman Empire began to feel other conflicts. The strong Alliance educational movement was focused on France, which turned out to be a World War I adversary of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish Jews also forged economic links with many of their European co-religionists, again sometimes in countries that had declarations of war against the Ottomans.

Military conscription was yet another change important to the Young Turk movement that was more bothersome and problematic than language. In 1855 a law had been passed stating that military service was the "duty and privilege" of all citizens, yet

Jews were granted an exemption from service by paying a special tax, *bedel-I askeriye*.[68] The tax was paid each time a military obligation was declared, and in some cases total sums proved to be expensive, however money did provide a solution to the problem of serving in an Islamic army. In 1909 that exemption tax was canceled. Jews were included in compulsory conscription.[69] As noted, military service was a primary inducement for Jews to leave.

Early Zionism

With the rise of the Young Turks there was increased interest in Zionism,[70] both within the context of modern nationalism and as a reaction to the first steps toward what would later become the Republic of Turkey.

In 1882 Sultan Abdül Hamid II had issued a prohibition against Jewish settlement in Palestine, yet immigration (*Aliyah Aleph*, 1882-1904) occurred nevertheless, primarily due to local non-enforcement of restrictions. *Aliyah Bet* (1904-1914) also saw the immigration of Jews to Palestine, many of whom came from Turkey. Although immigrants did come during these two periods, the possibilities of immigration were limited for both political and economic reasons. A Zionist office was opened in Istanbul, and Theodor Herzl visited the city for interviews with the Sultan to promote the Zionist cause, since it was legally from the Porte that Palestine was ruled.

For many Jews the main thrust of Zionism was *not* aliyah (immigration to Palestine). It was a statement of nationalist belonging, cultural identification, and the revival of Hebrew.[71] (This held true in Cuba as well, where Turkish Jews were active in the Zionist movement in the 1920s.)

Zionism was an uncomfortable issue with many Alliance supporters within the Jewish community, since the two movements were seen as divided not only on the issue of support for Jewish settlement in Palestine, but also on general philosophy. In Turkey the Alliance was stronger than Zionism. In Bulgaria Zionism held the upper hand, to the extent that the Zionist influence was a significant factor in the closing of 16 of 17 Alliance schools in the country.[72]

The personification of Alliance-Zionist problem was Haim Nahum (1873-1960), the Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire until 1920, who was an Alliance student appointed to office by the Young Turks. During his tenure he had to walk a very careful line between Alliance interests and those of the Zionists.[73] His tenure was undistinguished, and it is no wonder that when Jews left Turkey, they also severed their connections with his official Turkish rabbinate.

Turkish Educational Reform

Another incentive for Jews to emigrate from Turkey was the educational reform enacted in the years following the Young Turks. A 1914 law, for example, set a mandatory two month summer vacation in elementary schools; for Jews this meant no vacation in the Hebrew month of Tishrei (containing religious holidays) which had previously been the custom. There were also restrictions imposed on foreign teachers, a ruling that strongly affected the Alliance schools. In 1915 matters only became worse. It became mandatory to employ Turkish instructors approved by the Empire to teach Turkish language, history and geography. When this regulation was strictly enforced after the declaration of the Republic in 1923, it became clear that no non-Moslem teachers would be approved. Then in 1924 the "Unification of Education Law" forbade the teaching of religion in many schools.[74] All of these measures, together with the dismissal of non-Moslem civil servants, constituted clear inducements for Jews to leave Turkey.

Emigration

Few could leave the Ottoman Empire immediately following the Young Turks Revolution. Political tension leading up to the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), World War I (1914-1918), and the Turkish War of Independence (1918-1923) meant that only a small number of people were able to emigrate.

Gabriel Arié, a Jewish resident of bordering Bulgaria, noted the general desire to leave in a diary entry made in January 1919.[75] In European Turkey many Jews were living in poverty.[76] In 1923, however, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed. More than ten years of war were over, and the Turkish emigration floodgates opened. During this period 10,000 Sephardic Jews left Turkey for the United States alone.[77]

Jews were only a small percentage of the emigrants, hence they were less affected than others by what was essentially population transfer. (This same phenomenon will be seen in post World War I Central Europe.) Emigration served the interests of the Republic of Turkey. It was one of the methods to reorganize ethnic settlement in the Republic according to the new political boundaries.

Leaving the Old Country Behind: Example of Edirne

For many immigrants it was not difficult to leave their Turkish cities, since many of the Jews were only recent arrivals to those places. They had no time to establish roots. In Edirne, for example, a large part of the Jewish Community arrived as refugees following the Berlin Conference of 1878, which created a Bulgarian state (with ensuing persecution). This can be seen from the following population statistics for the city:[78]

Year or Period	*Jewish Population of Edirne*
1870	4,000-5,000
1900	15,000
1914	28,000 Jews including an influx of war refugees
Immediate post-World War I	13,000
1927	5,712 (flight of many Jews after Greek occupation[79] in the Turkish War of Independence).This occupation was particularly problematic for Jews, who remembered nineteenth century cases of blood libel in Greece.

The refugee population in Edirne not only felt no particular attachment to the city. The problem was only compounded when a large fire destroyed large segments of the city in 1903. Personal dwellings and property were lost, and most of the Edirne synagogues were damaged. Economic problems and overcrowding in Edirne also made acculturation and adjustment of both Jewish and non-Jewish refugees quite difficult. Edirne is an example of the repeated political and military problems plaguing the area. It is also a prime example of a population seeking to migrate, but in this case hampered from moving by wars.

Moshe Mitrani[80] relates that according to the head of the local Alliance school, during the Balkan Wars some 500 Jewish families evacuated the city and fled to Istanbul. Siege was laid to Edirne on 30 October 1912, and the city fell to the Bulgarians on 26 March 1913. After a lull in the fighting and supposed disengagement, the Ottomans retook the city on 21 July 1913. It is no wonder that the Jewish population statistics fell dramatically:

Arriving in Cuba

A destination for many Turkish emigrants was Cuba. Particularly until the Sugar Crisis, Cuba was a land of economic promise. Even afterwards, the migration pattern had been set and continued. Some refugees went to Cuba because family and friends were already there. Others did not understand the economic crisis that gripped Cuba or thought that it would be temporary.

The Turkish Jews wrote to friends back in Turkey, who then joined them. This was the pattern in Cuba. This was also the pattern in the United States.[81] Knowing Ladino made learning Spanish easy. The United States occupied Cuba for four years, and then they

dominated the country as titular rule was passed to Cubans. Thus, many immigrants felt that Cuba was *almost* the United States.

Many of those who settled in Cuba began peddling not only in Havana, but throughout the entire country. This put them in a position to see first-hand conditions in various parts of the island, and they could make an educated decision about where they wanted to settle. In some cases a community started and grew. In other cases these Jewish peddlers became the only Jews in the town.

The large majority of *turcos* settled in Havana. The initial settlement outside Havana was restricted by nature to the non-religious. Jewish observance is predicated upon the existence of a community and the services it provides. A religious Jew simply could not function outside the capital. That, however, changed as numbers increased.

General perspective must be maintained. In Jewish terms, "many" immigrants came from the Ottoman Empire. In Cuban terms, however, only about 1% of the immigrants were from Turkey-Syria,[82] and that 1% was divided between Jews and Arabs.

Parallel Arab Immigration to Cuba[83]

Emigration from the failed Ottoman Empire was not restricted to European Turkey, nor was it limited to Jews. As the Empire fell apart, 600,000 emigrants left Greater Syria (80% for the Western Hemisphere). This number included many Arabs as well as some Jews. Others emigrants also left other parts of the territory ruled by the Sultan.

At the beginning of the 20th century Arabs also saw Cuba as a transit point to the United States. The estimates vary, but it seems that they some 40% of the Arab immigrants to Cuba remained in the country. After all, there was a flourishing economy[84] until the Sugar Crisis.

Just as for the Jews, a main impetus for Arab immigration to Cuba was the 1909 Ottoman law dictating mandatory conscription into the army. This induced primarily Christian Arabs in Ottoman areas to seek a new home. Thus, just as Jews were making their way to Cuba (and for many onward to the United States), so did many Maronite Christians follow the same path.

There were, however, basic differences between Jewish and Arab emigration from Greater Syria:

- Syrian/Lebanese Jews tended to join their religious counterparts in Mexico City and in New York. Primarily Jewish *Turks* came to reside in Cuba, where knowing Ladino[85] made learning Spanish easy.

- Syria/Lebanon Christians came to Cuba. They were often called and considered *turcos,* since Syria/Lebanon also belonged to the Ottoman Empire.

- Syrian/Lebanese Moslems never were of sufficient number to build a mosque in Cuba until one was constructed in Havana as a political gesture in the period after the Castro Revolution.

In many ways Arab social development paralleled that of the Jews. As Jewish immigrant groups were forming, so were those of the Arabs. The Sociedad Progreso Sírio de la Habana was organized in 1918, the Sociedad Palestina in 1919, and the Sociedad Libanesa in 1920. Only in 1938 did those societies amalgamate into one central organization. Most Arabs stayed in the Havana area,[86] though some did move into the interior of the country.

There were differences in social development:

- Jews looked adversely on marriage into the Cuban society, though with the passage of time the phenomenon became increasingly common.

- Christian Arabs had no problem with intermarriage from the time of their arrival in the country, since they were Christians marrying into a Christian society.

Beginnings of *Chevet Ahim* in Cuba

Sephardic immigration to Cuba was very different from the post-World War I waves of Ashkenazim that came. As already noted, leaving Turkey was by necessity for most of the Sephardim, but Cuba was a destination of choice. Just as the Ashkenazim, there were some Sephardim who later used Cuba as a gateway to the United States.[87] Most, however, came to Cuba and stayed; Cuba was not a transit point in a voyage elsewhere.

From a very early stage it was clear to the *turcos* that Cuba was home and that a Jewish Community infrastructure had to be developed. Thus, unlike the case of UHC, a synagogue building was rented as soon as it was practical.

In November 1914 a group of Sephardim founded the *Chevet Ahim* Congregation in Habana Vieja. (The following year Jews from Edirne founded a synagogue of similar name in New York.) Interestingly, George Weinberger explained the Sephardic motivation for founding such a congregation not as religious, but as a "need for mutual assistance in a foreign land."[88] Even so, Weinberger was very impressed with the punctiliousness of their observance. "This congregation stands first amongst the Jewish societies of Cuba in its strict observance of the Jewish religion."[89]

This was somewhat of an overstatement since there were only a handful of Jewish

organizations in Cuba at that time, but the congregation did have its own synagogue building albeit rented, and the complex included a chapel, a library, a meeting room, and "a few living rooms."[90] *Chevet Ahim* stayed in that same facility on Calle Inquistadora until it was closed in the 1990s.

The activities of *Chevet Ahim* went far beyond just prayer. In 1918 the congregation initiated "Bikur Jolim," as the Hebrew name suggests, a group dealing with the needs of the sick. A leading person in organization of the group was Carlos Mitrani. "La Buena Voluntad," a woman's volunteer organization, was also initiated, and burial arrangements were made in cooperation with United Hebrew Congregation.

The Balkan Wars and World War I together with the fall of the Ottoman Empire gave further reason to Jews to leave what was to become modern Turkey, but it was not until the early 1920s that large-scale emigration became feasible. When Turkish Jews joined their brethren in Cuba, the island was already in economic difficulty. Yet, the immigrants still came to the island. Turkish Jews continued to come to Cuba even after immigration to the United States was severely restricted. One frequently quoted estimate is that of the 2700 Sephardic Jews in Cuba in 1925, only some 700 had entered the country before 1922.

In 1923 *Chevet Ahim* made a major religious decision when Garshon Maya (born c. 1876) and his wife, Cadun Pérez, immigrated from Silivria, Tarakya, Turkey (65 kilometers from Istanbul). Maya became rabbi of the congregation. He also acted to regulate the *kosher* slaughter of meat, done primarily in Havana and shipped to other Jewish communities in Cuba. And, he played an instrumental rôle in organizing the record keeping of marriages in the Havana Jewish Community.[91]

A Case in Point: The Fins Family[92]

The story of Alegra Fins and her family illustrates the points raised. In 1914, with war approaching, her father left his wife and three children in Turkish Thrace and headed for New York. His primary reason – to avoid conscription and fighting in the Ottoman army. New York, however, proved problematic. Fins spoke no English. So, he moved onward to Cuba where he amassed a quick fortune in business. In 1920 he was able to contact his family and bring them to Cuba. Then economic difficulty set in, and Fins lost his fortune. The story is just one example of immigration at the time, and its basic line is quite typical.

Chapter Three: The Late-1910s and the End of an Era

Introduction

As World War I dragged on, people even as far from the front lines as Cuba looked forward to the end of hostilities. Little did they realize that the end of the Great War would mark the end of an era. Modernization would drastically change life styles, and there would be significant population transfer. Life would be different in Europe. Life would also be different in Cuba.

Religion in Havana: Before the Post-WWI Influx

Harry Sandberg, an American, surveyed religious life in Latin America in 1917.[93] The date is important, because it is just before the influx of the post-World War I refugees into the region. In his notes, Sandberg gives a vivid description of Latin America as he saw it at the time. Regarding Cuba, Sandberg's perspective was quite limited – Havana was Cuba, and Cuba was Havana.

It is clear from Sandberg's comments that Jewish affiliation was more cultural than religious. United Hebrew Congregation held only Sabbath services. Some of Sandberg's observations were in error; he mistakenly reported the same "Sabbath only" was true for *Chevet Ahim* as well, although such was not the case.

In 1917 there was no rabbi yet in permanent residence in Cuba. Sandberg offered a concise summation of the situation in Havana, "Despite the considerable Jewish population and the increasing number of women and children, there is little religious activity in Cuba. Whenever the services of a rabbi are required, such an official is invited to the island from Florida."[94] That itinerant rabbi was Gedaliah Mendelsohn (born Bausk, Courland, Russia, 14 December 1871-died Baltimore, Maryland, 1954).[95]

From 1917 until 1920 Mendelsohn served as spiritual leader of Bnai Zion Congregation (founded 1887), in Key West, Florida. The congregation, then Orthodox but Conservative in later years, had split in 1911 upon the departure of Rabbi Julian Shapo, who had served as spiritual leader from 1907.[96] Mendelsohn is to be credited with reuniting the members of the synagogue and its breakaway competitor.

The phenomenon of itinerant rabbi was common at the time, particularly (but not only) in the southern United States. Both Mendelsohn and Shapo held numerous posts, each time helping establish a Jewish community.

Mendelsohn was a fluent Spanish speaker. In fact, during his tenure in Key West, he served as a censor for material in Spanish; he was deemed too much underweight to serve in the US Army during the War.

Mendelsohn was periodically invited to Cuba to officiate at ceremonies when needed. This usually meant twice-a-year trips, both to Havana and to Santiago de Cuba, primarily to perform circumcisions.[97] He left no lasting imprint on the Cuban Jewish community. That community was still forming, and Mendelsohn's visits were too infrequent. As an Orthodox Jew of Lithuanian background, he had nothing in common with the community-leading UHC and its constituency when he visited Havana. His trips to Cuba stopped with the end of his employment in Key West. There, on 10 September 1919, an unusually forceful hurricane destroyed an ice cream factory which he and his family were running. A rabbi/mohel from Turkey had also taken up residence in Santiago de Cuba, making Mendelsohn's trips superfluous. Mendelsohn moved onwards.

There had always been a close connection between Cuba and Key West, which is much closer to Havana than to Miami. The American city housed many Cubans. There, also, had been a traditional link between Jews in Key West and the Cuban independence movement, dating back at least to the last decade of Spanish rule on the island. Jews collected funds every Sunday for the movement. José Martí (1853-1895) was reportedly so thankful, that he came to the home of Louis Fine to thank the Key West Jewish community for its support.[98]

Mendelsohn was a jack-of-all-trades – rabbi, shochet, mohel, and chazzan.[99] In Key West he fulfilled all four functions. His association with music was more than a hobby; he studied the subject seriously at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. In his younger days his basic procedure was to build the seeds of a congregation, then he would pick up and move on to another city. Mendelsohn had been a rabbi in Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia. He took up the position in Florida as a peacemaker in a troubled congregation. After Key West he moved to Montclair, New Jersey, a well-to-do suburb of Newark. He eventually settled with his second wife in Baltimore, Maryland,[100] where he stayed for more than thirty years. Cuba was a stage in his personal history. He was an active man who looked forward to new professional challenges.

At the close of World War I much of the Cuban Jewish Community was not self-supporting. Members of UHC tried to help the needy as best they could, but the problem was too big. In the long run much of the budget for the Community came from charitable contributions raised in the United States. Yet, the lack of full-time clergy is not a financial statement reflecting limited means. It is yet another indication of the non-religiosity of the Cuban Jewish Community. If a low ratio of mikvas (ritual baths) to population showed a low level of religious observance amongst immigrants to New York in the early years of the twentieth century,[101] the total absence of such facilities in Havana at this time can only make a similar and even stronger statement.

Life in the provinces was no different from the situation in Havana. Throughout Cuba synagogues were often inaugurated several years after the first Jews settled in a city. By 1917 there were Jews in several Cuban cities, but no synagogue was yet to be found in the Provinces. Communities had not begun. There were just individual Jews. In 1917 Jews in the provinces were too few to formulate a meaningful community infrastructure. A corollary to this statement is that a religious Jew cannot live outside a Jewish Community, since only when there is a prayer quorum (*minyan*) of ten can he fulfill his religious obligations. Thus, Jews without communities is another indication of irreligiosity.

Despite this pessimistic picture of Jewish religious life in Cuba, intermarriage was reportedly very rare in Havana. Speaking of the 1920s, David W. Utiansky states that he knew that by then only one Jew had been married to a non-Jew (Christian).[102] Intermarriage, though, was more common in the provinces,[103] although no accurate statistics exist. The reports of little intermarriage were based upon that segment of the population that was Community-affiliated, primarily synagogue-affiliated. Hence, the "database" is prejudiced from the onset and unreliable.

Social Fabric of the Community

As already noted, a year after Sandberg, George Weinberger published his reminiscences and observations of Jewish Cuba. He detailed his impressions of the Jewish Community.

The most important congregational leader whom he met was a prosperous fruit exporter, Moises Behar, who had emigrated from Smyrna. The president of the *Chevet Ahim* congregation was Victor Atún, formerly of Izmir (a graduate of the commercial school, Hilsverain für Deutsche Jüden, hence German-speaking). Despite wealth and Western orientation, these two Jews still found their place in the traditionalist Sephardic community.

Two of the other central figures in the congregation at this time were Moises Bensignor (immigrated to Cuba in 1911) and Elie Nahum, also from Smyrna. The post-World War I immigration would soon restructure both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities. The prominence of Jews from Smyrna would soon be all but forgotten, as people came in large numbers from other cities.

Weinberger noted that while there were about eighty Sephardic families living in Havana at the time of his visit; he conservatively estimated that between sixty and seventy-five percent of the Sephardic men were single. This agrees with other immigration profiles, including the Ashkenazi Jews who came to Cuba in the 1920s. Singles were the rule; families were the exception.

For comparison purposes, the size of the Sephardic community was roughly similar to the size of the American (UHC) community. Yet, life was separate. Ashkenazim traveled in their circles; Sephardim traveled in their circles. Little did the two groups intermingle.

David Blis Enters Cuban Jewish Politics

The reality of separation, however, was totally unacceptable to David Blis, who sought to establish a common social organization to unite the community.

David Blis[104] (originally Blissnianski, Bliznianski; born Grondo, Poland 1872; died Havana, Cuba 1942) was a unique phenomenon in Cuban history. He was married to his Chilean-born wife, a Sephardic Jew, in Argentina in 1906.[105] He emigrated from Mexico to Cuba in 1913.[106] This was a time when many people left Mexico due to the Revolution of 1912. He was strongly Zionist in orientation, vehemently anti-socialist / anti-Communist, and identified himself as a Reform Jew, having studied in Reform rabbinical seminaries in Berlin and Cincinnati. He had affiliated himself with UHC, but he also accepted honorary membership in *Chevet Ahim* and in the Centro Israelita (from which he was expelled for "irregular" behavior).

In 1916, David Blis suggested to United Hebrew Congregation president Jacob D. Barker that the young men of the community form a club. That was his first step. At the conclusion of Rosh Hashanah services held at the Hotel Plaza, Barker proposed to the UHC membership that the plan to form a club be implemented. On 1 October 1916, ten young men met at the home of Charles Berkowitz; they organized the Young Men's Hebrew Association of Cuba (YMHA) at Calle Obispo No. 97 in Habana Vieja.

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ROTARY HEADQUARTERS

Notwithstanding the great differences separating the different ethnic groups, the Asociación de Jóvenes Hebreos de Cuba comprised Jews of all spectra. Weinberger, during his visit to Cuba, was one of those present at this initial meeting. "The biggest problem at first was whether the Sephardic Jews should be admitted to membership, as it was known that some of the prospective supporters of this club were prejudiced against them."[107]

David Blis made an eloquent appeal in favor of admitting the Sephardim, and those present agreed. For Blis it was only natural, given his wife's Sephardic background. It was the same David Blis, an iconoclast virtually beyond comparison, who was the primary motivator behind the resolution of the Cuban Senate formally supporting the Balfour Declaration in a vote on 30 April 1919.[108]

At the next meeting the officers of Congregation *Chevet Ahim* were invited to join the organization. Almost immediately after they did so, some of them were elected to the newly formed board of directors. This first joint effort was made possible by the fact that the "Eastern" and "Western" Jews now had a common language – Spanish. At the first meeting following the successful integration of the Sephardim, many of the leaders made articulate speeches stressing the need for cooperation among Jews. Repeatedly the hope was expressed that wherever different groups of Jews existed side by side, as in Cuba, they would be able to profit by this example of unity.

There were problems. Unity and the linguistic triumph of Spanish were premature. Weinberger comments that although the establishment of this organization meant that there was a meeting place for young Jewish men, "there is still lacking a school, where the boys and girls can be instructed in Hebrew."[109]

The euphoria of unity was short-lived. Soon community differences caused the YMHA to fail, and in 1919 the organization was officially disbanded. Before another attempt could be made, the demographic composition of Cuba changed. It was not until the influx of World War II refugees that American-style social groups flourished. In 1939 a new Havana YMHA was offering *gratis* evening classes in Spanish and English, and Wednesday night dancing.

On 7 May 1943 another American social group, B'nai B'rith,[110] was introduced into Cuban Jewish life (under the auspices of the United Hebrew Congregation). For B'nai B'rith 1943-1944 was a period of organizational growth. The lodges on the European Continent had disappeared, but B'nai B'rith remained in Egypt and Palestine. In the United States the organization surpassed 100,000 members. Youth organizations were added. B'nai B'rith Canada was strong. 1943 was the centennial of the organization, and the spirit was expansion.[111] Establishing a new lodge in Cuba fit into the spirit of the times.

The Economy

The wealth and prosperity of Cuba were based upon a one-product economy – sugar. Much of the country's employment was either directly involved with sugar or dependent upon sugar production.

If an American businessman was not involved directly in sugar, he was certainly a beneficiary of the sugar economy. In the last two decades of the 19th century Americans started buying Cuban sugar plantations. It is estimated that by the War of 1898 the United States already controlled the Cuban sugar industry.[112] If that date is early, American control certainly was a fact by the end of American occupation in 1902. Apologists for that involvement point out that the Cuban sugar industry was in a shambles; they suggest that American investment revived the industry (thus justifying American control).

By 1910 the United States imported nearly all of its sugar from Cuba[113] (primarily due to a 1902 reciprocal trade agreement). Even so, Cuban sugar production out-paced U.S. needs, and more and more was sold off on world markets. Thus, sugar became increasingly subject to world prices. In the short run this was extremely positive, since there was a very strong demand for sugar during World War I. Part of the reason was the destruction of French beet-sugar farms due to the fighting. Demand was so high that prices soared, and new mills were built, very often on credit. Then, in 1920, the market deflated. The war was over, and sugar prices plummeted.

Economic crisis ensued when the price of sugar fell in 1920 from 20.93 cents/lb. to 8.33 cents/lb. This decline caused severe economic difficulty throughout the rural areas of Cuba, and quickly the crisis spread to Havana as well. Not everyone, however, lost during the crisis. Cubans lost, but some Americans won. Some of the sugar mills were acquired at very cheap prices by large American concerns – Hershey Chocolate, Hires Root Beer, and Loft Candy.[114] Production was very inexpensive, and the companies controlled the user market – their own production lines. By controlling both production and end-use, the companies bypassed the economic principle of selling for a good profit. Sugar was transferred at the cheapest price possible, and although the final product was sold with good profit, that money remained outside Cuba.

American Jews benefited from Cuban sugar, but that was not the case of Cuban Jews. The latter did not own major parts of the sugar industry, but they certainly were beneficiaries of the booming Cuban economy. Sugar meant jobs and prosperity. Then the economic balloon deflated. Cuban Jews, as all others in the country, began to suffer from economic hardships. 1920. The era of prosperity was over.

The Future

Despite divisions in the Jewish Community, Weinberger was very optimistic about the future. He did not foresee the ruin of the Cuban economy. He wrote, "Because Cuba is a prosperous country, with vast possibilities for the future, there is no doubt that the Jewish colony in Havana will increase and help to make possible the living of the Jewish life so precious to most Jews."

If that statement was true in 1918, it certainly was not accurate after the fall of sugar prices in 1920, when Cubans (Jews and non-Jews alike) were confronted with a severe economic crisis. Ironically, it was during this time of economic difficulty that the next large waves of Jewish immigrants arrived. Sephardim came – primarily those whose immigration had been stopped by World War I. But, large numbers of Ashkenazim also made it to Cuban shores, and the proportion of Ashkenazim to Sephardim in Cuba was significantly altered. This was not the time for any joint social club. The idea of would have to wait. Cuba had changed. The Cuban Jewish Community had changed. There was a new situation.

Chapter Four: The Coming of Eastern European Jews

Introduction

The 1920s brought the arrival to Cuba of thousands of Ashkenazi refugees from Eastern Europe, primarily from newly independent Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Most of these immigrants were not stereotype Jews from traditional Jewish homes, where religious law was observed at least superficially. There were some moderately religious Ashkenazim who came to Cuba in the 1920s. The majority, however, were non-traditional. There were numerous reasons why a large number of Bundists and assimilationists settled in the country. These non-religious types set both the religious and social tone of Jewish Cuba for many years to come.

The impetus for immigration was not Cuba. The primary attraction was the United States. But, Cuba is an enticing country. Many of the immigrants did not stay by default. They liked the country and subsequently stayed by choice.

The Dream of the United States

Beginning in 1881 large numbers of Jews began the difficult and lengthy process of immigration to the Western Hemisphere, increasing the Jewish population in the U.S. from 250,000 in 1880 to 3,600,000 in 1920. At its onset this was a period of virtually unrestricted immigration, but slowly opposition to the arrival of large numbers of newcomers mounted in the United States. The United States was the preferred destination for those fleeing Eastern Europe. For example, following the Kishinev and Bialystok Jews fled Eastern Europe; 90% of these refugees made their way to the United States.[115] In 1906 American concern about immigration became so acute that the United States Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization sent an investigative team to Europe to look into the causes of increasing numbers of people landing in America.

Initially, all healthy white immigrants could enter the United States. For most Europeans this first meant admission through Castle Garden, then from 1891 through Ellis Island. Slowly, however, requirements were added. First- and second-class passengers disembarked in their new country at Red Hook, a point in Brooklyn opposite Staten Island; there they were given preferential treatment, under the assumption that since they were wealthy enough to pay higher transportation fares, they represented a higher class of society. Only the poorer steerage passengers

continued onward to Ellis Island, where more severe restrictions were enforced. There some 5000 immigrants were processed on a busy day.

Steps to limit immigration were enacted incrementally. Literacy tests were inaugurated in 1917; then a test to match shapes was added. If a medical examination showed an incurable disease, the person was deported. Trachoma, a chronic and contagious eye disease, was another reason for deportation. In all, about 2% of the would-be immigrants were turned back. As time passed, immigration rules soon became even more restrictive. The majority of Jewish immigrants were from Russia/Poland (until the end of World War I essentially one country). The situation in Russia was difficult, if not intolerable. Increasing numbers of Jews had to find a new homeland. As immigration to the United States became more selective, alternatives had to be found.

Situation in Tsarist Russia

Anti-Semitism in Tsarist Russia during the nineteenth century was almost a way of life. It culminated in the pogroms of Kishinev (1903),[116] Zhitomir (1905), Bialystok (1906), and others. Some of the pogroms were within the official borders of Russia. Others were on the other side of legal lines. But, the next effect was the same. Russian-inspired anti-Semitism was threatening the Jews.

Nor were all threatening acts immediately physical. The anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*[117] was published, and Mendel Beilis (1874-1934[118]) was put on trial in Kiev for blood libel in 1913.[119] This was only the most publicized of several blood libel cases at the time. Pogroms and this "bestseller" book set the tone of life for Jews in Russia.

This open Russian anti-Semitism had its foreseeable effect. Many Jews fled Russia. The wave of emigration started with the assassination of Alexander II (1818-1881, tsar 1855-1881) and continued through the outbreak of World War I. Jews had to leave. That was the net result that many Russians wanted. Then conditions created by World War I stopped the flight of what is estimated to have been well more than a million Jews who left Russian during roughly thirty years to find new homes in other countries.

The intensification of anti-Semitism was only one aspect of a general Tsarist policy to crack down on what were considered undesirable elements. Other groups targeted by the régime were anti-Establishment political parties. Here Jews suffered two-fold – once for being Jews, then again for joining movements advocating change and the fall of the Romanov Empire. The newly created Zionist movement was an attraction for many Russian Jews. Zionism meant change by leaving Russia for Palestine. Socialism was another movement that attracted Jews. Socialism (in its various varieties and nuances) meant change by replacing the Tsarist monarchy with a new ideology. If Zionism meant rejection of the Tsar, Socialism was an open call for his overthrow.

Jews sought change. The first Zionist Congress was held in Basle in 1897. Not by coincidence the first national congress of the Russian Bund was held in the same year. The Bund was different from general socialism. It was a movement that stressed Jewish identity within the framework of socialism.[120] The emergence of Zionist-Socialist parties can be traced to a combination of these two political philosophies.

As the twentieth century began, attitudes of many Russians were shifting. There was widespread discontent and a desire for a new Russia. The repressive measures of the government were to prove ineffective in stopping change. If anything, they were an aggravating factor that intensified the desire for a new way of life.

World War I signified an abrupt turnaround in Russian politics. A minority of Jews thought that loyal support of the Tsarist régime would better their political lot; most Jews, however, opposed fighting to defend Russia from attack by Western powers.

The deteriorating military situation and the crumbling of the Russian army quickly altered reality. Change was afoot, but anti-Semitism was still strong. Jews were blamed for Russian military failures. Anti-Semitism only increased. On 5 July 1915, for example, all publications in Hebrew characters (i.e., in Hebrew or Yiddish) were banned in Russia – theoretically as part of military censorship.

The war situation was fluid and deteriorated rapidly. The Tsarist army was being routed. By 1916 some 40% of Russian Jews were no longer on land controlled by the Russian army. Other Jews were ruled only nominally by Russia; the national government could no longer make its will felt. It was clearly out of control.

The February Revolution of 1917 overthrew the Tsar and ushered in a period of democracy that cancelled anti-Semitic legislation and brought legal equality to Russian Jews. The new government, generally identified with Alexander Kerensky (born Simbirsk, Russia, in 1881; died New York, 1970), allowed a new freedom of expression, and Jewish culture began to flourish in the shadow of the failures of war. That was theory, but it was short-lived.

The end of World War I did not usher in an era of prosperity and security. For Jews the situation in Europe after World War I became increasingly intolerable, just as the United States was tightening up on immigration. Or, when examined from a different aspect, the situation in Europe caused the flight of such a large number of refugees that the United States reacted by tightening its immigration procedures. On 15 February 1919, for example, 1,500 Jews were murdered in a pogrom in Proskurov, Ukraine. This was only one of 1200 anti-Jewish "actions" during 1918-1919. In several countries Jews understood the message. They started to leave. Many would soon reach Cuban shores.

Leaving Poland

Flight from Poland had historical roots. Anti-Jewish feelings were nothing new. Anti-Semitism was at the root of population movements in the nineteenth century as well. The post-World War I situation created yet another window of emigration.

Rise of Independent Poland

A renewed movement for Polish independence began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In the one hundred fifty years before World War I Poland slipped from non-existence and a semi-autonomous state to what might almost be termed a Russian vassal. Two different approaches to the "New Poland" had historic implications. Roman Dmowski[121] (born Warsaw, 1864; died Drozdowo, 1939) was a member of the Polish National Committee (PNC); he favored gaining independence by supporting the government of Tsarist Russia. Roman Piłsudski (born in Zulowa, Russia [near Vilna, now in Lithuania], 1867; died Warsaw, 1935) was a socialist and took the opposite tact, opposing the Tsarist régime. During the Polish-Soviet War after World War I, Piłsudski fought against the invading Bolsheviks.

As the fight for Polish independence was being waged, anti-Semitism was intensifying throughout the country. In large measure Dmowski, who advocated ridding the new Polish state of all Jews, led this anti-Semitic movement. He was also responsible for a 1919 boycott of Jewish stores.[122] Dmowski, a rabid and declared anti-Semite, rose to be a member of the Sejm and Foreign Minister (1923-1926). It would be totally false to fix sole blame for anti-Jewish acts on Dmowski. Rather, he took advantage a wave of popular feeling already existent. Numerous Roman Catholic clerics gave ecclesiastical legitimacy to that anti-Semitism with their own anti-Jewish pronouncements.[123] As later history would show, Piłsudski as well was not without his anti-Semitic side, although he refrained from outspoken public pronouncements.

During this period Poland was undergoing significant changes. The Great War ravaged Europe. New refugees were created. Then, in November 1918 Poles declared their independence (and spontaneous acts of anti-Semitism commenced). As a result of the treaty signed in Versailles on 28 June 1919, independent Poland officially joined the world of sovereign countries, albeit with still undefined and contested borders. Western Poland suffered from German occupation, the Soviets were pressuring for eastern parts of the country and were threatening with forces that would invade, and the Ukrainians also wanted to annex part of the country. At the same time Western powers were uncertain of their own policies towards Poland; hence, they offered little real support.[124]

Organized and wonton anti-Jewish pogroms began[125] in November 1918, with people being dragged into the streets and beaten, and property stolen. What started in Lwów (Lemberg) and Galicia soon spread to the Polish Ukraine.[126] Jews were fired from many jobs. The Polish government denied that there were pogroms,[127] but in reality, anti-

Semitism was gaining an official foothold in post-bellum Poland.

Minorities

There were significant questions as to the nature of the new Polish sovereign state. Roughly one quarter to one third of its residents were non-Polish (Ukrainians 14.3%, Jews 10%,[128] German-Prussian 3.9%, and other groups such as ethnic Russians). There was a debate whether Poland should follow the Western model of a democratic state based upon the concept of a yet-to-be-unified Polish nation, or if the Eastern model of autonomous minorities should be used. A further factor in this complex picture is that it was impossible to unite all of the minority groups behind an agreed-upon solution, since some of them (e.g., the Ukrainians) also harbored anti-Jewish sentiments and did not want to grant them autonomous status.

A decision was finally made. The Western model was chosen. Polish citizenship was granted to minorities, and in a separate Minorities Treaty rights of equality were given to the various linguistic and cultural groups in Poland. It was envisioned that the League of Nations would be a strong organization and the guardian of the rights granted in the treaty. That Minorities Treaty was in large degree a response to growing anti-Semitism[129] and a hope for the future.

Although minority rights were uncomplicated to grant in theory, it was difficult to put the Minorities Treaty into effect, particularly in the Polish region that was recovered from Russia. Citizenship was granted to usual "residents of Poland," a term defined as those living in the entity called Poland in 1908. That legal stipulation was difficult to apply in the territory recovered from Russia. The legal uncertainty was also used as an excuse for those not wanting to grant citizenship to Jews.

Piłsudski had favored the federal solution with autonomous regions.[130] By the end of the Polish-Soviet War even he realized that such a solution was no longer viable. There were too many minorities in the new territories to be absorbed. The popular idea was now the denationalization of minorities and their subjugation to the "Polish nation." This was confirmed on 5 November 1922 by the election results for the Second Sejm.

Szymon Ashkenazy, a Jewish professor in Poland at the time, analyzed the question of post-World War I nationalism in Poland. It was his conclusion that the mistake was to place emphasis on nationalism, instead of patriotism.[131] Thus, at the beginning of the post-World War I period Poland started the process of denationalization of minorities. It had an effect of ethnic cleansing, rather creating a positive loyalty to the new country.

Instability

For many reasons, and not only the lack of patriotism, was the new Poland less than stable during the post-World War I period. From 1918 until 1926 there were 14 different Polish governments.[132] Several events stand out in particular:

- The first president, Gabriel Narutowicz (1865-1922), was assassinated during his first week in office. Narutowicz was not a professional politician. He was an engineer involved in the design and construction of hydroelectric plants in Switzerland, Spain, and Italy. He assumed the job as Poland's Minister of Public Works, then Minister of Foreign Affairs.

- On 5 September 1924 an attempt was made in Lwów on the life of President Stanisław Wojciechowski (born in Kalisz, 1869; died in Golobki near Warsaw, 1953).

- Baseless charges regarding the attempted assassination were brought against a young Jewish university student, Szlomo Stanisław Steiger, who was later acquitted in court. The acquittal was not before the start of an anti-Semitic campaign.

Finally, in 1926 Piłsudski staged a coup,[133] and began a dictatorial rule that brought stability but not democracy to Poland. The first two years of new dictatorship signaled a respite in anti-Semitism, but afterwards measures against Jews were renewed. As a result, Jewish emigration can be divided into two general periods in the newly independent Poland – before the Piłsudski coup (1926) and after the renewal of Anti-Semitism (1928). This, of course, is not a definitive grouping, since there were emigrants who left in the two years of relative quiet.

Jewish Community

The position of Jews in the setting up of a new Poland was complex. First, there was no unanimity in the Jewish position regarding changes the country was undergoing. The Polish Jewish Community was fractionalized. Just as Poland's future was uncertain, so was the vision of its Jewish Community uncertain.

The Jewish Community was splintered into groups ranging from the ultra-Orthodox Chassidim (who favored autonomy for a well-defined Jewish Community) to assimilationists (who favored equal rights in a nation-state where Jews would mix and interact with other nationalities). From 1871 until 1896 Ludwick Natanson, an assimilationist physician, served as head of the Warsaw Jewish Community. He used that position to further his ideas.

The entire situation was made more intricate by the fact that many Polish Jews had sided, if not militarily then at least culturally, with Germany and Austro-Hungary

during World War I. Thus, the Western powers dictating the Versailles rearrangement of Europe held a certain negative disposition or distrust of many Polish Jews. These governments were also influenced by their own Jewish constituencies, which were quite involved in deciding what they thought would be best for the Jews of Poland. And, there was a growing Communist movement amongst Polish Jews. This, as well, further distanced them from the trust of the Western powers.

Ironically, the new Polish nation-state was envisioned as a nascent democracy, yet it started with three years of anti-Semitic slaughter and pogroms, then a series of restrictive laws that impacted upon virtually every aspect of Jewish life (except political positions and election to the Sejm, which were exempt from anti-Jewish measures).[134] Restrictions, such as on college attendance, had less of an effect on the Orthodox, who maintained their own schools; they had more of an effect on secular Jews, who wanted to benefit from public education.

Zionism

The new emphasis on nationalism and the concept of a Polish nation had a parallel in the Jewish Community. This was the rise and support of Zionism, the concept of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. The direct effect was Jews concentrating their thoughts (if not efforts) on settlement in Palestine. The side-effect was a Polish distrust and disliking for Jews, who were seen as opponents to the new Poland. This was a convenient excuse for anti-Jewish measures. Given the historical record, even if there had been no Zionism, there still would have been Polish anti-Semitism. Although Zionists were only a small minority of the Jewish Community, it was simple for Poles to extend their hatred of the few to hatred of the many.

Economics

Another factor contributing to the national atmosphere of uncertainty was the changing Polish economy. The end of World War I meant the end not only of a political era, but also of an economic era. Much of Poland was poor. Seventy percent of the work force was agriculture-based. The redevelopment of Poland meant an entirely new economic structure with more influence on manufacturing and industrialization. The industrialization that redesigned Western economies in the late nineteenth century began to take hold in Poland at the same time that forward-looking economic planning was lacking. All of the post-World War I years were difficult. By-products of economic change and dislocation were erosion of the national currency and run-away inflation, primarily in 1922-1923.

For Jews this picture of economic problems meant increased uncertainty and yet another cause to suffer from the resurgence of anti-Semitism in the new competitive atmosphere.

Emigration

The net result of this situation was an increase in the desire to leave Poland. This was true not so much for the ultra-Orthodox, who more or less tolerated their lives in Poland. In essence their life style was separatist. They did not use Polish schools. They did not socialize with Poles. Contact with Gentiles was mostly in the market place, and there the relationship was buy-sell with little interchange other than product-payment. Even occasional boycotts of Jewish businesses effected the ultra-Orthodox less, since much of their business was either Jewish-oriented (religious books, ritual needs, kosher food, traditional clothing) or was based on fixed clientele within the community. Thus, fewer ultra-Orthodox were inclined to leave Poland. Of those who did leave, very few came to Cuba. The very few who did come had no real influence on the Caribbean island.

It was primarily Communists and secularists whose desires for a new life were fanned by the changes that were sweeping Poland. Then their hopes were squashed, as the new Poland began to take shape. One of the largest disappointments was for the assimilationists, who had hoped to join the Polish nation in academia, in the arts, and in the work force. They were the victims of anti-Semitism just as were the Orthodox, but the assimilationists reacted differently. The ultra-Orthodox never wanted to be "Polish." The assimilationists were rejected as Poles. Their reaction was disappointment and disillusion with a future in Poland.

The vast majority of the Jewish emigrants from Poland were would-be immigrants to the United States. Immigration, however, was closed. Many disembarked from their ships in Cuba, not as a matter of choice, but because they had no immediate option. For some of these Jews their stay on the island was short, as they found legal exceptions and loopholes, and managed to move to the United States. Others became residents, then citizens of the island.

A good part of these Jews reached Latin America, which explains in part the relative irreligiosity of the Polish Jewish population in Cuba and the active Polish-Jewish Communist movement in the country. An occasional religious Jew, even a Chassid, did reach Cuban shores,[135] but these cases were the exception to the rule.

When these Polish Jews did land in Cuba, they tended to relive Polish habits as much as possible. This is a typical immigrant pattern, also seen earlier in Cuba with the pre-World War I Sephardic immigration. Most Jews had lived in cities in Poland; these same Jews lived in cities after they arrived in Cuba. In Europe many Jews were in various aspects of the clothing business; the same model held true in Cuba.

Leaving the USSR

The situation in the newly created USSR was slightly different from that in Poland. Just as nationalism took root in Poland, so did it in Russia and the areas under the control of the Romanov Tsars. Towards the end of World War I various nationalist groups sprung up, as Russia strove towards a new future. For Jews it was a renewal of Zionism. For Ukrainians and other nationalist movements, there was a desire for autonomy if not independence. Again, however, there was an unexpected change in the political winds.

The Bolsheviks had seized power in October 1917. The new policy was the Soviet International, uniting people under the common yoke of Communism, a euphemism for the Russification of minority areas. When the Bolsheviks spoke about autonomy, their intent was rule in various geographic areas. Jews were virtually ubiquitous in the new USSR, but were not a majority in any region. Hence, Jews were to be excluded from autonomy. The dream of a Jewish autonomous area in far-off Siberia was a failure that never received serious support. Enforced assimilation was the goal. Slowly, the Soviets struggled and fought to solidify their rule and enforce their line of thinking.

The more secular Jews were attracted to Socialism and Communism. It was they who at first supported the new Bolshevik régime. It was they who became dismayed and left the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics when the government limited freedom. It was they who brought the Bundist-Socialist (if not Communist) ideal to Cuba after leaving Russia.

Bundist-Socialist values posed a problem of acculturation in Cuba. The country was having economic difficulty after the sugar crash of 1920, but Cuba was, after all, a capitalist-oriented market economy. The political and economic mentor and model was the United States. Socialism was seen as a threat to the American ideal that permeated Cuban society, and the Cuban government saw socialism as alien to Cuba. To raise a socialist banner was to wave a flag of confrontation. Although the Cuban sense of free speech permitted certain liberties, if nothing else immigrants' championing Socialist or Bundist causes hindered acculturation into the Cuban mainstream.

Cuba as Second Choice

Between 1910 and 1917 an estimated 3773 European (Ashkenazi) Jews entered Cuba, primarily with the intention of travel onward to the United States.[136] During World War I there was a lull in immigration due to a new cause for Ashkenazi Jews to reside in Cuba. Given the travel difficulties of the war, entry to the United States was problematic. Some Jewish immigrants to the United States found themselves staying in Cuba much longer than they originally had planned.

Americans showed heightened concern about the immigration situation. Xenophobic anti-immigration sentiment in the U.S. was intensifying dramatically, and in early 1921 the United States Congress passed the first overall immigration restrictions. These restrictions made it impossible for most Eastern Europeans to emigrate directly from Europe to the United States and to its primary gateway, Ellis Island. But, as United States immigration restrictions tightened, there still were legal clauses that could be found. Under the new rules immigration quotas for Latin America were much more generous than quotas for Eastern Europe, and residency in several Latin American countries (including Cuba) could be quickly established. So many of the European immigrants to the United States transited Cuba, where they wanted to remain just long enough to establish legal residency, which took one year. Unlike Jews from the Ottoman Empire, these Jews had no desire to prolong their stay in Cuba. The country was merely a transit point for onward travel. There were, however, problems in the offing.

Oddly enough, steamship companies played a key rôle in turning Cuba into a third country destination. Economics can exert strong pressure on politics, sometimes from unexpected directions. Steamship tickets had to be sold. As the reality of the new immigration restrictions in the United States began to be felt, it was in the interest of the steamship companies to suggest viable alternatives, so they could fill their ships with passengers. They began to publicize Cuba as a potential destination in its own right.[137]

The emigration process from Eastern Europe had always been difficult. Those leaving from Russia, Romania, Galicia/Poland, or Lithuania had to travel a long and circuitous route to reach one of the major European ports of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bremen, Rotterdam, or Hamburg and from there they still faced a long ocean voyage. Third class passage was not inexpensive. In 1903 the cost of a steamship ticket to Ellis Island was $34, a substantial sum of money for a poor person at the time. That price stayed more or less stable until the 1920s, except for a price war in 1908. Despite the endemic poverty of most of the emigrants, large numbers succeeded in getting the money together. Gerald Sorin (1940-) explains the rôle that the steamship company agents played in the emigration process:[138]

> Emigrants often turned to steamship ticket agents for help. Agents were sometimes simply swindlers, who took the money and disappeared, but official agents of the shipping companies could, more or less, be trusted. They frequently relieved the emigrant of the trouble and expense of procuring a passport by "arranging for his delivery" to a port in Germany for an agreed-upon fee, generally amounting to a fifty percent surtax on the cost of a ticket. This would usually include help with route logistics, border crossings, accommodations, and all the necessary bribes.

Many of these vessels carried raw material, for the most part wood products, from the U.S. to Europe, but on the return passage to the United States there was a fair amount of available space. Albert Bellin, a German Jew who was head of the Hamburg-American shipping line, initiated the idea of putting bedding structures into the almost empty cargo holds. It was the same Bellin, a sharp businessman, who introduced

expanded services for the rich – cruises from Northern Europe to the Mediterranean and around-the-world travel.

Steerage class was another ticket for many Jews. This provided little living space aboard ship. The origin of the term is ample description of the difficulty of the trip. *Steerage* class meant travel in the area in the bowels of the ship adjacent to the equipment needed to *steer* the vessel, originally near the rudder. There were no breathtaking views of the ocean, nor elegant dinners with top-rate entertainment, but a ticket in steerage did get the passenger to his destination.

A berth in steerage provided the passenger with a bunk bed made of iron and a straw mattress; there was no pillow. The difficulty of travel was not important. Passengers were happy that they had succeeded in making the journey. With the enactment of the 1921 Johnson Act restricting immigration to the United States, this route was limited to only the few who could pass the stringent entry requirements and were lucky enough to have been included in the strictly limited quota.

In 1924 United States immigration restrictions were again tightened. The one-year Latin American residency provision was canceled. Those who had not entered the United States by 1924 had to remain in Cuba. Many would-be immigrants to the United States were stranded in their tropical paradise. The net result of limited U.S. immigration was the growing feeling amongst Ashkenazi Jews that Cuba was their home. The country was no longer just a waiting station before moving onward.

In some cases this meant families were split between the United States and Cuba. In one case, for example, the parents left the Ukraine in 1918 and settled in New York. The son lingered behind, married, and emigrated from the Ukraine in 1924. He was unable to obtain papers for the United States, so he settled in Cuba. (According to the family, he was so exhausted from travel in steerage that he disembarked in Cuba rather than continuing onward to Mexico, his initial destination.) Particularly in this case separation was not as tragic as first might be thought. Over the years mutually advantageous business relationships were developed between family members in Cuba and in the United States.[139]

The U.S. immigration laws passed in 1921 and 1924 resulted in the dramatic cutback of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Between 1924 and 1931 only 72,000 Jewish immigrants arrived in the U.S. from Cuba, in contrast to the 656,000 immigrants who came between 1907 and 1914.[140] During this period Cuba maintained open immigration with no visa required for entry into the country (except for Chinese[141]) despite U.S. opposition. The Americans felt that virtually every immigrant coming to Cuba was a potential threat to the U.S. immigration quota. Cuba did cooperate in preventing residents of the island from being smuggled illegally into the United States, but the Machado régime stood fast on not changing Cuba's immigration policy. Machado was adamant. Cuba was an independent country, theoretically not subject to American whim.

Restrictions changed the picture of immigration to the United States, but they did not change the reality of life in Europe. Remaining in certain parts of Europe, especially Poland, was intolerable for many Jews. Anti-Semitism was rife, and mandatory military service was wrought with difficulty. For the latter reason it was common that younger men left Poland for a new life abroad. Many refugees were single. Others were married and brought their families, often in stages as they earned money for passage.

Cuba was nicknamed "Hotel Cuba," because people were constantly coming and going. It was also impossible to know the exact number of Jews in the country at any given time during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Many of those who intended to move to the United States did so despite restrictions, although a certain percentage decided to remain. Some waited for a turn in the quota. Others arrived in the United States under other conditions. Sender Kaplan *et al*[142] assert that 8,996 Ashkenazi Jews entered Cuba in the period 1924-1935. The peak was 1924-1925, just after the new U.S. immigration law changed the plans of many would-be immigrants to the Mainland.[143]

Most of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants landed in Havana, but about ten percent disembarked at smaller ports in Cuba. Many of those who went ashore at other ports either stayed in those places or found their way to small cities or towns nearby, such as Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, and Camagüey. Some joined the Sephardic Jewish residents; a few formed the nucleus of their own community; and, others maintained no official Jewish affiliation.

As soon as U.S. immigration restrictions went into effect, questions arose as to how to best absorb Jews into Cuban society. One solution was to settle Jews throughout Cuba.[144] That recommendation, however, neglected sociological and economic reality. Distances made travel time between cities a serious problem. Settlement throughout the island was only partially feasible. Jewish communities outside Havana always remained primarily Sephardic.

When many arrived in Cuba, they found very few opportunities for employment. There was little of the economic development that had taken place in the United States. A large number of immigrants arrived destitute and were in immediate need of assistance, but the Cuban government had few social service benefits available, even for those who had been born in the country. There was no welfare program for the country's poor. Some of those who remained in the country succeeded in starting small businesses, but that was without government support.

The Americans in Cuba (i.e., the UHC crowd) did try to assist the immigrants, but the problem was simply too great. Despite assistance given, the social distance between the Eastern European immigrants and the established American Jews was significant. The relationship was thus similar to that between "uptown" German Jews and "downtown" Eastern European Jewish immigrants in New York. The situation was uncomfortable.

The prosperous elite extended assistance to less fortunate brethren, but at the same time they tried to preserve social distance as a means of maintaining their status. In the Cuban case, the American Jews did not want to become associated in the popular mind with the "Alemanos," or Germans. (Epithets were common in this period. Sephardic Jews were commonly referred to as "turcos" [neutral connotation] or "polacos." Rich American Jews "wanted nothing to do with 'polyakas.'"[145] This name-calling was an overt symptom of the deep divide within the Jewish Community at the time.)

James Knopke was very straight-forward in his description of the Polish and Russian immigrants of the 1920s, "Not the most literate people in the world." This was contrary to the later pre-World War II refugees who were more refined. Even so, "The Schechter's invited immigrants to their house every Sunday night."[146]

In this background the task of supporting the indigent among the newly arrived immigrants fell on American Jewish groups, such as the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which had more means available than American Jews resident in Cuba. They were in a position to help, and they did.

In many respects most of the Jews who came to Cuba remained foreigners. Neither their lifestyle nor mentality was typically Cuban. Yet it would be a cardinal error to under-estimate the Cubanidad, the "Cuban-ness," that Cuban Jews developed over the years. Even though they felt that they were different – even though they wanted to be different – they called themselves Cuban. Numerous accounts have emphasized the strength of this identity, even when the Jews leaving Cuba were not even born in the country. Long after their emigration refugees still considered themselves Cuban – sometimes Cuban-Jews, Cuban-Americans – but Cuban.[147] Virtually all the Jews spending an appreciable amount of time on the island underwent at least part of the Acculturation Cycle; they went from immigrant to Cuban, even though they were never totally Cuban. There was always something that set apart even the most secular Jew.

Chapter Five: Ashkenazi Synagogues in Havana

Synagogues of the 1920s and 1930s

Even though Jewish society in Havana was not particularly observant, the synagogue was still an important facet of Jewish life. For all except the most outspoken secularists it was part of the culturally accepted framework of the community. If prayers were more *pro forma* than religious duty, they still imparted the feeling of Jewishness to the congregants. The synagogue also served as a social center, where Jews could meet, discuss community affairs, and maintain friendships.

United Hebrew Congregation was the first synagogue to be established. Then several more synagogues were established in Havana, each catering to its own clientele. As community needs changed, the composition and religio-political alignment of the synagogues also changed.

Adath Israel and *K'neseth Israel*: Ashkenazi Synagogues

Just as the earlier Sephardic immigrants, Eastern Europeans were not welcomed at the United Hebrew Congregation. Even if they were officially and formally accepted, the mostly-English, non-traditional service was quite unfamiliar, and the synagogue's social atmosphere was decidedly unfriendly. *Chevet Ahim* was also not a viable option with its Sephardic chants and rituals, unfamiliar to Ashkenazim. The Eastern European Jews were looking for a setting that was religiously and socially comfortable.

A quiet step towards the establishment of an immigrant synagogue took place in 1923, when Ben Zion Sofer, an observant Jew from Ponovesz, Lithuania, started prayers in his apartment located at Calle Paola No. 17 (bajos).[148] By 1925 that *minyan* developed into Congregación *Adath Israel*, on the second floor of Calle Jesús María 103, several blocks away in Habana Vieja. Over the years the first floor became a sausage factory that was owned by a local Jewish businessman. When the congregants would gather to pray, the aroma of pork, strictly forbidden by Jewish Law, permeated throughout the synagogue.[149]

Even though the majority of the Ashkenazi immigrants to Cuba were not strictly observant, *Adath Israel* was always Orthodox or at least nominally so. Its prayer services were traditional, and it officially stood for religious observance. Moshe Baldas summed up the religiosity of the synagogue in 1929, "*Adath Israel* had a *talmud torah* (religious school), but since the community was not very religious, it did not send its children. There were some fifty children..." Baldas interestingly adds, "All of the *shochtim* were teachers..."[150] The community was not large enough to support separate

occupations in the religious sector. Yet, the congregation did feel the need for a rabbi.

Rabbi Tzvi Kaplan

Initially, Tzvi Kaplan (1864-1939)[151] served as the congregation's rabbi. He had immigrated to Cuba in 1928, following the advice of a friend who reported that the Jewish Community was looking to hire a rabbi; his family followed one year later.[152] Within a short while, however, a dispute broke out in *Adath Israel*, and a group headed by Kaplan bolted from the synagogue. In 1929 his group founded *K'neseth Israel*, where Kaplan remained as rabbi until his death in 1939. The differences between the two synagogues were typical of immigrant society – national origin. Members of *K'neseth Israel* were primarily Russian and Lithuanian; members of *Adath Israel* tended to be from Poland and Galicia. The division was an effort to re-create aspects of "the old country."

Rabbi David Rafalín

David Solomon Rafalín was born 15 January 1899[153] at Pinsk, Poland, and received rabbinical ordination from the highly respected Slobodker Yeshiva in 1922. The departure from Pinsk of Rafalín and others was a common move. When the city was taken over by Poland from the Russians in April 1919, thirty-five Jews were charged with being Bolsheviks and executed without trial. The threat to the rest of the Jewish Community was clear. Many decided that it was time to leave. Some left sooner. Some left later. But, many left.

Pinsk had been a very Jewish city. On the eve of World War I there were 28,000 Jews, who comprised almost three quarters of the city's residents. The population was small enough that many of the Jews knew each other. Hence, it was typical that Jewish friends or acquaintances in Pinsk met again when they reached Cuba and renewed their contact. Pinsk is only one example; there were others. This is different from the pattern of the Sephardim. They intentionally tried to reconstruct old country neighborhoods. The Ashkenazim merely encountered "old friends" in their new countries.

Rafalín came to Cuba in 1929 and served as rabbi of *Adath Israel* after Kaplan resigned. Although at least initially his position was *de facto* and not official due to internal synagogue disagreement, Rafalín still remained until 1932.

Life in Cuba was a hard transition for Rafalín. It was far from the observant religious atmosphere to which he had been accustomed in Europe. He worked hard to promote Torah observance in Havana – specifically Kashrut, family purity, and religious studies, and some members of Adath Israel asked him to stay as their rabbi.[154] He even sought rabbinic support from counterparts in New York.

Religious life was tumultuous during Rafalín's short tenure at *Adath Israel*. At one point, for example, Avraham Weintraub, purportedly a qualified *shochet* (ritual slaughterer of meat), started to practice his trade at the butcher shop of Yudel Plotkin, Calle Cuba No. 130. Rafalín, not knowing Weintraub and having doubts about his skills, removed his *kashruth* certification from the store. Weintraub then claimed that he had supervision from Kaplan, who quickly announced in public that such was not true.[155] As the *shochet* and the rabbis exchanged allegations and printed sheets that were widely distributed, most of the public stood aside. Strict observance of *kashruth* was much more important to the rabbis than to the majority of their congregants.

The desire to keep Rafalín as rabbi of Adath Israel was not unanimous. There was opposition. As early as the summer of 1929, only several months after his arrival in Cuba, he was already trying to arrange papers to immigrate to the United States, but evidently a visa was not forthcoming. He moved to Mexico instead, where he remained until he died in 1979.

Unconfirmed reports claim that he departed Cuba hurriedly after problematic political involvement with Julio Kramer, a prominent member of United Hebrew Congregation. If true, that would not be surprising, since Kramer represented a very different religious approach. In any event Havana was a difficult home for the devout rabbi.

Kramer, with whom Rafalín had problems, is a typical example of fluidity in synagogue affiliation. He arrived in Cuba in August 1916 and affiliated with United Hebrew. In the 1950s he became a member of the Patronato. It is not that he underwent a transformation from Reform to Orthodox. Rather, the complexion of UHC membership changed from immigrant-to-America to born-in-America. In the 1950s UHC was also no longer *the* congregation of social status. He was one of several who changed affiliation to restructure their social contacts.

Rabbi Shlomo Eichenstein

Rabbi Shlomo Yaacov Z. Eichenstein (1898-1963),[156] who had immigrated to Cuba from Poland, eventually replaced Rafalín at *Adath Israel*. Eichenstein stayed in Havana for a year and a half (1936-1937), but he felt the community was not sufficiently religious and left with the intention of returning to Poland after a short stay in New York. He did not, however, venture back to Europe; he remained in New York. During his time in Havana, Eichenstein also had problems with Tzvi Kaplan[157] and David Blis, to the extent that Kaplan reportedly struck Eichenstein physically during an argument in a Havana slaughterhouse.[158] *Adath Israel* supported its rabbi with a public protest.[159] Eichenstein proved to be a problematic person while he was in the United States, where he reportedly encountered difficulties with the police.

Eichenstein tried to infuse religion into Jewish education during his time in Havana. He also gave his rabbinic approval to a new butcher shop at Calle Cuba No. 130[160] after Plotkin/Weintraub sold out. It was part of a religious-economic competition to control

the slaughter and supply of kosher meat.

Despite problems, and despite the immigrants' eagerness to begin their new lives in the United States, tropical Cuba certainly seemed a pleasant stopover. The combination of warm weather, blue skies, delicious fruits growing on the trees, and exotic birds, must have overwhelmed the Eastern European Jews with a pleasant mixture of sight, smell, and sound. But, for many tropical Cuba had ceased to be a stopover. It was now home. It was in that atmosphere that *Adath Israel* began to develop.

United Hebrew Congregation

The American Jews in Cuba were an affluent group, and from the very beginning membership in United Hebrew was considered socially prestigious. For one reason, the members of United Hebrew Congregation came to Cuba as businessmen. All the other congregations, both in Havana and in the provinces, were composed of immigrants and refugees. Some of the immigrants amassed considerable wealth in Cuba, but it was many years before they were able to progress past the label of their refugee background. It was also hard for them to shun the appellation of *nouveau riche*.

The difference in background is also one of the reasons why United Hebrew members remained aloof from the Cuban Jewish Community. Their inherent interests were different. Virtually all UHC members had American citizenship; that put them at odds with refugees, who were trying to obtain American citizenship. The Jews from UHC just could not envision themselves as equals with the refugees, even in later years when there were second-generation refugees. The key was ... they were still refugees.

From its inception the United Hebrew Congregation was based on an American, rather than a Cuban, model. First association was with the American Conservative movement, then with the American Reform movement. UHC was always American. Services were conducted in English and Hebrew, with the "Union Prayer Book" used as the basic *siddur* as early as the late 1920s. In later years some services were conducted in Spanish, German and Hebrew (still within the Liberal or Reform tradition) to accommodate a growing number of Central European Jews unfamiliar with English, but it was always the "Americans" who were in control.

Many of the most important Cuban Jewish families belonged to this congregation. There were exceptions to the "American rule." There were several families not from North America. There status in the social register compensated for national origin. The family of the brothers Adolpho and Gustavo Kates came from Antwerp, Belgium, and before that from Bessarabia;[161] David Abravanel's family arrived in Cuba from Turkey via Curação. Morris Mayorkas' family had also immigrated from Curação; Mayorkas later served as president of United Hebrew Congregation (1954-1956). These families came to Cuba with wealth. They were not the social riffraff.

From the 1920s UHC families played an influential rôle in Cuban Jewish politics. The prime mover was not the synagogue, itself; influence and power were personal, not organizational. It was UHC members who wielded their weight in the Jewish Community and with the Cuban government.

Brandon Family

The Brandon's, for example, were a Sephardic family who traced their roots back to ancestors in Portugal. They chose to identify with United Hebrew Congregation for social reasons, rather than with the poorer Sephardic community. The family of eight boys and two girls came to Cuba in the 1910s from Panama. Some of the family had also lived in Curação. They are related to the Maduro's, another prominent Sephardic clan, who for some reason declined to participate actively in the Jewish Community.[162]

One story relates that a brother, Stanley Brandon, in Ecuador supplied to Panama what later were to be known as Panama hats.[163] Another version of the story says that the hats were made in Panama, but retouched in Ecuador.[164] More important than the exact details of manufacture is the example of international business cooperation between members of the same family. Many of the Cuban businesses of this period were based upon family connections, which meant reliable partners in other cities and countries.

Jacob Brandon (born 1880, Panama; died 1982, New York)[165] was the most active family member in the 1930s and 1940s. He was married to Esther Steinberger, an Ashkenazi, and was also a distant relative of Noble Brandon Judah, US ambassador to Cuba from 1926-1930. Brandon represented Dupont in Cuba, and was very active in Cuban-Jewish affairs. In the 1940s Brandon served as the president of the Havana B'nai B'rith Lodge. He also was respected by the Cuban government. President Loredo Bru awarded Jacob Brandon with the Céspedes Order of Merit, and later President Batista recognized his efforts in publicizing Cuba's contention that Dr. Carlos J. Finlay (1833-1915) discovered the mosquito responsible for the transmission of yellow fever.[166]

Both Jacob Brandon and his brother, David Philip (1908-1998), served as officers in United Hebrew Congregation. David was a textile broker married to a Cuban woman, Martha Torok. The American orientation that UHC membership suggested was more manifest in another brother, Isaac ("Mike"), who moved to the United States in 1939 when war appeared to be imminent. His motivation was to be in the United States during the war and to tacitly encourage his daughter to find a husband of American upbringing.

The American Jewish group of which the Brandon's were actively part was widely perceived as haughty and reluctant to interact with the other groups of Jews who came to Cuba after they did.[167] This, however, should certainly be qualified. Despite cultural differences, starting during the World War I period UHC tried to welcome new Sephardic arrivals. They took a leading rôle in the operation of the Centro Macabeo, a

relief organization set up with coordination from the JDS and HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). On 23 May 1923 the aforementioned Centro Macabeo became part of UHC.

Dizik Family

The Dizik family was from Europe, and they initially affiliated with UHC. Soon, however, they looked elsewhere for affiliation. They remained active in UHC, but they eventually became associated with the formally Orthodox *Adath Israel* and Patronato synagogues.

Moving from a Reform to an Orthodox synagogue was not an indication of a change in religious orientation. The Dizik family was never religiously observant.[168] The change was more of a social realignment, similar to the move made by Julio Kramer, another UHC member who changed affiliation.

Over the years UHC had changed. Immigrants to the United States had founded the synagogue. By 1920 the membership was solidly American-born. Ben Dizik spoke no functional English. UHC was appropriate for status, but not for socialization considerations. Numerous Cuban Jews, including Ben Dizik's son, Moshe, who held simultaneous membership in UHC and the Patronato synagogue in the early 1950s, adopted this approach of dual membership.

A Look at UHC

There have even been published accounts that criticized United Hebrew Congregation for not giving enough help to less fortunate brethren. To the contrary, the Americans did display a great deal of concern in many cases. The gravity of the problem was just overwhelming. The UHC Ezra[169] Society, run by the women of the congregation, was organized in 1917 to give aid to the immigrants.[170] The problem became even more critical after the first U.S. Quota Act was passed in 1921, leaving hundreds of Eastern European Jews stranded in Havana without any money and with nowhere to go. The American group provided food and clothing, and showed them charitable compassion.[171] In 1922 UHC ran a community Passover *seder* for the immigrants.[172] But, they could not do everything that was needed.

Not everyone saw the United Hebrew Congregation in a positive light. Many Cuban Jews continued to see United Hebrew Congregation as snobbish.[173] American Jewish philanthropic organizations also felt that UHC was uncooperative in working with them and unhelpful to the immigrants.

It was not until 1923 that United Hebrew hired its first rabbi, B. Leon Hurwitz, who

was brought to Havana from New York for the High Holidays. He was a rabbinical student, who was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary two years later, in 1925. He then held several rabbinic posts before entering academia in Florida in his later years. The appointment was a point of strong debate. On 27 July 1922 it had been proposed that a rabbi be engaged for six months. At a special meeting on 10 August 1922 Joseph Steinberg proposed a motion, seconded by Adolpho Kates, that David Blis, then in New York, be authorized to engage the services of a rabbi for the holidays. This was apparently an attempt to hire a permanent spiritual leader, since the rabbi was to be on two-month trial (watered down from the earlier proposal of six months, but longer than is needed for the ten day period of High Holidays). The motion was tabled indefinitely. Then, a year later on 23 August 1923 it was reported to a meeting that Blis had hired Hurwitz.

In the interim, Adolpho Kates proposed that United Hebrew Congregation supervise *kosher* slaughter and that a kosher restaurant (presumably for immigrants) be opened.[174]

Chapter Six: Adjusting to Life in Cuba

Introduction

The change in United States immigration laws was a major trauma for many in the Cuban Jewish Community. The multitude of would-be immigrants to the North American mainland had to change plans. They had to come to grips psychologically with a new situation. They would not be moving to the United States. They would be living in Cuba. Havana was no longer a waiting station until onward travel could be arranged. It was now home. Jews from Eastern Europe suddenly shifted from travelers to immigrants. Later Jews would be making yet another change – from immigrants to full-fledged "Cubans."

A traveler is a guest. He does not need his own institutions. If anything, he uses the institutions of others to assist him in a temporary situation. Travelers who stay for an extended period might develop social clubs, but nothing with a commitment to permanence. Immigrants, however, are different. In Cuba, as travelers became immigrants, they had to start their own Jewish institutions. Most existing Cuban institutions did not meet their needs. Their institutions could no longer be temporary immigrant clubs of a fluid nature, here today / gone tomorrow, and devoid of Cuban influence. They became Cuban institutions, affected by the politics and social trends of the country. Those institutions were part of a new infrastructure to set up Jewish life on the island.

In many ways Cuban Jewish history was repeating itself. The United Hebrew Congregation started as a "Jewish social club" for Americans with a business interest in Cuba, but with no long-term commitment to the country. Only gradually did that attitude change. With the immigrants of the early 1920s the initial attitude was similar, but there was one major difference – the fiat of staying was abrupt and without choice.

It is not simple to record the history of Cuban-Jewish institutions during this period. In many cases record keeping was lax, or papers were unfortunately lost. Of the immigrant institutions that sprung up, some were long-term. Others lasted only for months or for a year at best. It took almost a decade before Cuban Jewish society found its equilibrium.

Synagogues are one part of the immigrant experience. The history of synagogue buildings is straightforward to trace. It is the history of known structures containing considerable property owned by organizations with legally registered names and presiding officers. Even so, Cuban synagogue organizations were dynamic. They served both social and religious functions. Religious ritual remained more or less

unchanged in the immigrant synagogues; Conservative and Reform changes in prayer were not to be found, except in United Hebrew Congregation.[175] The social rôles of the synagogue organizations certainly reflected the flexibility of the situation. Those organizations changed in function and orientation, even when the official synagogue remained. Their evolution is hard to document.

Movements are even more difficult to track. They are less stable, changing place and name; appearing, disappearing, and reappearing. Sometimes an organization gave concrete expression to the ideas of a movement; sometimes organizations did not develop. It is easier to date the change of address of a synagogue than fix the time of a shift in political thinking.

Adjusting to the End of the New "Promised Land"

As early as 1921 the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) maintained representative offices in Habana Vieja, initially under the name "Jewish Committee for Cuba," at Calle Cuba No. 131. HIAS representation in Cuba was established due to the large increase in numbers of Jewish immigrants to the United States via Cuba, a phenomenon that started in March 1921. Transit through Cuba was not immediate, from one day to the next. Even in the best of cases, migrants spent weeks if not months in Cuba.

Most Jews who arrived before 1921-1923 were able to be on their way northward by September 1925. Although this might seem relatively rapid given later experience, it certainly meant that immigrants to North America needed assistance during their stay in Cuba. That involved finding and funding housing, supplying food, and providing tropical clothing for immigrants who typically had woolens appropriate for the colder regions of Northern Europe. There were also immigrants who suffered medical problems from the change in climate.[176] Members of *Chevet Ahim* were able to give only symbolic support. They also had their own problems with Sephardic immigrants, whom they viewed as their primary responsibility. UHC was also at a loss to solve the problem. The task of helping the Ashkenazi immigrants simply became too burdensome even for the well-to-do UHC without outside assistance.

UHC was far removed from the Yiddish spoken by the immigrants, hence there was a communications gap as well.[177] Not that the members of UHC really wanted to communicate. They would have been more than happy to leave their money and have no contact with the "lower class" immigrants.

As immigration to the United States became increasing difficult until it was virtually stopped, internal economic conditions in Cuba were also worsening. Therefore, as early as in 1921 HIAS, and in 1922 the JDC, sent warnings to their representatives in Europe to urge Jews still on the Continent not to migrate to Cuba due to economic problems on the island. In 1924 *Chevet Ahim*, which functioned not only as a

Sephardic religious institution, but also served as a communal organization, sent a similar message to the Jews in Turkey. Economic difficulties in Cuba were real. In May 1924 a commission of the National Council of Jewish Women found that, in fact, 90% of the immigrants who had arrived in Cuba were unemployed.[178]

Yet, Jews still came to Cuba. The general rule of immigration is that migrants move from a land of less economic opportunity to a country of greater economic possibilities. This was true with Cuba. Both European and Turkish prejudice and policies against Jews induced Jews to move onward. Cuba was perceived to be a land of opportunity despite its economic difficulties.

HIAS interpreted its mandate to "assist with immigration" to the United States very broadly. In December 1924, for example, HIAS posted notices in Jewish restaurants[179] in Havana, warning against smuggling when people traveled to the USA.[180] Smuggling and illegal entry into the United States had become large problems, to the extent that the U.S. Government was rounding up illegals for deportation. Rabbi Shapo, formerly from Key West and at this time in Miami, helped post bonds and seek legal refuge for Jews coming to Florida illegally from Cuba.[181]

After the adoption of the quota system that limited entry to the United States, HIAS was faced with a different dilemma. The functions of the HIAS office in Havana greatly changed. As long as Jews were in Cuba awaiting transfer to the United States, it was within the HIAS mandate to offer assistance. The dilemma was that in the new situation the would-be immigrants were no longer bound for the United States. There were also no more new immigrants to help. The major task was assistance to immigrants already in Cuba, who needed to adjust to their new country.

There was no practical alternative. HIAS had to be careful to work within its internal organizational rules. Monetary support for settlement in Cuba could be justified relatively easily, but more had to be done. It was not certain that the organization had a legal mandate to do more. The Jewish Committee for Cuba had to expand activities given the new situation of no immigration to the United States. Although on shaky legal ground, medical service was provided to immigrants, a library was opened, and classes were held to teach both English and Spanish.[182]

Even though the large majority of Jews in Cuba did not want to stay on the island, no immediate options presented themselves. Most immigrants could not return to their native countries. Some had forfeited citizenship to qualify for emigration permits. Others had escaped military obligations by simply leaving; they could not return. The possibility of repatriation also posed a philosophical problem to HIAS, since their operational mandate did not specifically cover return of refugees to Europe. A small number of people, mostly infirm and "unfit for Cuba," were quietly sent back to Europe. An exemplary case was that of a certain *yeshiva bocher*, "who is not of this world," and could not adjust to the country.[183] These activities of HIAS regarding

repatriation were very limited and not publicized.[184] The main problem, in any event, was helping Jews adjust to Cuba.

Given the situation of immigrants, a new framework stressing Cubanism became a pressing issue. So, on 25 April 1926 it was decided to phase out the American-operated Jewish Committee for Cuba, and widen social programs under the Cuban-operated Centro Israelita.[185] This decision was put into effect during the Summer 1926.

Efforts were also made to find other destinations for some of those who had become stranded in Cuba and wanted to move on. Other Latin American countries were potential solutions. These countries were, albeit, an option, but they provided no advantage; their economies were no better than that of Cuba. Otherwise, choices were few. At one point it was thought to send some immigrants to Canada, but with the "Canadian Solution," as well, there were numerous problems. In 1926, for example, Canada was looking for farmers who could be placed throughout the country. There was a general feeling that Jews would not remain farmers, nor would they even remain in Canada.[186] Given the chance, they would relocate to the United States. Canada, therefore, was not a real possibility.

For most the plausible option was to remain in Cuba. Better phrased, for most the *only* practical option was to remain in Cuba.

The Rise of Machado

The Cuban economy of the early 1920s continued to suffer from the fall of sugar prices and alleged mismanagement. The general economic situation led to the rise to power of Gerardo Machado on 20 May 1925. The motto of his presidency was, "Water, Streets and Schools," a slogan advocating construction projects to jump-start employment. Havana took on a new face with improvements to the Prado. The Central Highway was constructed between 1926-1930, connecting major Cuban cities so that products could be more easily supplied throughout the country. Efforts were also made to introduce new industries and limit reliance on sugar production. World economics, however, worked against Cuba and Machado. His plans were only complicated by economic consequences of the Great Depression that hit the United States at the end of the decade. Popular dissatisfaction mounted, and the government – guilty or not – was singled out as the culprit. That dissatisfaction spread to the Jewish Community, where dissident groups of various persuasions began to organize.

Unrest in Cuba was general. A growing movement demanded that basic changes be made to the Cuban Constitution. The nature and content of the changes, however, were not universally accepted. A new constitution was, in fact, adopted – but not until 1940. As pressure and unrest mounted, Machado's approach was clear; he became increasingly dictatorial and repressive.

Jews in Cuba: 1920s, 1930s

Ironically, it was during this period of economic displacement that Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe gained momentum, despite the efforts to persuade Jews not to come. Employment was extremely difficult for Cubans. For immigrants employment was all the harder.

When Ashkenazi Jews poured into Habana Vieja, it was not to join their Sephardic brethren in the neighborhood, nor to create a lifestyle based upon a religious framework, albeit Sephardic, that had already been established. The primary motive was much more pragmatic. The neighborhood was centrally located, and housing was inexpensive.[187] Economics was a central factor of daily life, and the decision to locate there was primarily economic.

Few Eastern European immigrants were skilled workers; few were tradesmen, such as butchers, tailors, shoemakers, painters, or tanners. Most Jewish immigrants simply did not have job skills appropriate for the Cuban market.

Peddling

Unskilled workers, in Havana and other urban centers, had very few employment options. There were very few jobs in industry, since Cuba was primarily agricultural. It was unlikely that a European immigrant would work on a sugar or tobacco plantation because of the intense heat, the very low pay, and the competition with native-born peasants, as well as immigrants coming from Caribbean and Central American countries. These jobs were also alien to their European background. In "the old country" very few Jews worked the land. There were some Cuban jobs in railways, the building industry, and in the ports, but these jobs were also deemed unsuitable for Europeans. The fact that few knew Spanish was an additional impediment to finding employment. The net result was dual: (1) to seek employment within the Yiddish-speaking Jewish Community, in service-type jobs that required little investment, and (2) to find independent low-investment employment outside the community; in many cases that meant street photography or peddling.

Thus, employment in peddling was a step forced upon the immigrants by their disadvantages, since the mainstream Cuban economy was not a source of employment for them.[188] The question was how to turn disadvantage into advantage.

The primary customers of peddlers were both Cubans and tourists. The language skills needed are minimal. Initial investment is small and profit relatively immediate. Often the original merchandise is acquired on consignment, meaning fundamentally no investment.

Harry Viteles (1894-1971)[189] visited Cuba in conjunction with the Emergency Refugee Committee (New York). He reported that there were five hundred Jewish peddlers in Havana as of February 1925, and three hundred more scattered throughout the provinces. His numbers were probably too conservative. The fallacy of his statistics is that he concentrated on the Ashkenazi population, and of those Jews he concentrated on Jews in Havana.

Price, not quality, determined sales in the Cuban peddling business. Enterprising businessmen tried to cut costs as much as possible, so they could sell at a low price. That meant moving from buy-and-resell peddling to more sophisticated operations. The first step was to lower the cost of raw materials to make finished products; the next step was to cut out middlemen by taking over manufacture and wholesaling, and selling directly to the consumer. In numerous cases Jews were able to make deals to buy raw materials with family or trusted *landsmen* abroad, predominantly in the United States. Many Jews also used these same routes to sell their lower-priced goods to trusted sources in the larger and more lucrative North American market.

One of many examples is Max Pincus (1900-1977), an immigrant of 1924 who went from peddling to manufacturing, and in the process from poverty to wealth. Pincus was one of the many caught in Cuba by the change in U.S. immigration laws. In 1927 Pincus' parents visited him in Cuba and brought patterns and cloth for shirts from New York, where they had immigrated before United States entry quotas were tightened. By 1933 his shirt company was so successful that he traveled to New York, where he bought six used sewing machines. For months he trained to use his newly acquired machines. He stayed with family, who had found the machines and had arranged for the training. This business expansion would have been virtually impossible without family connections.[190]

Yes, Cuba had a market economy, but economics was a closed circle. Most of the Jewish peddlers bought their products from Jewish businessmen (just as Spanish immigrants operated in their own closed economic circle). They had few overhead expenses, and they were willing to settle for extremely narrow profit margins, where volume was the key to making money. Some of the more successful, as Pincus, went into manufacturing. Others were slowly able to open stores and sell a wider range of products from a fixed location.

The father of Max Lesnick can be cited as a stereotyped example of peddling. He was born in Russia in 1903. After his parents died, he immigrated to Cuba in 1922. Penniless, he worked for a month on the railroad. With his earnings he started peddling, and then opened a store in San Antonio de las Huelgas (Las Villas Province) where rents were cheaper. His next step was a store in Havana on Calle Aguirre.[191]

The success of some peddlers brought the "profession" to an end. As the Cuban economy recovered and as peddlers opened stores, there was less of an economic reliance on street vendors. Times changed in the 1940s, and wide-scale peddling

(chiefly in Havana, but later in the provinces) became a phenomenon of the past. In the United States it was department stores that ushered in a fundamental change in retail sales at the beginning of the twentieth century; in Cuba that development was much later in coming. There the equivalent socio-commercial development was the opening of large multi-product stores. These stores, however, stayed within a single area of merchandise: linens, clothing, etc.

Peddling, as can be seen, can correctly be analysed as an economic stepping-stone. It was used differently by Ashkenazim and Sephardim: (1) Ashkenazim tended to use peddling as a method to make money and connections, then open stores. Some later owned and operated many of the small retail shops in central Havana, including stores that sold tourist trinkets. Others owned some of the larger retail stores. Yet others operated import-export concerns. (2) Sephardim more often remained "peddlers," but after initial successes they frequently transported merchandise by car or pick-up truck along standard weekly routes. Rural cities were sometimes a lucrative part of those routes. In other words, they transformed peddling from the poor man's drudgery to the businessman's pursuit. Another typical pattern was to start peddling in a small town, then move up to a large city; in many cases the ultimate goal was to move to Havana.

Particularly in the 1920s peddling fulfilled a critical social function. Principally amongst Sephardim, who viewed themselves as one community with "branches" of *Chevet Ahim* throughout Cuba, the itinerant peddlers were a key communications link for the Jewish Community. This was in an age before widespread telephone service in Cuba and an efficient postal system.

The Professional Class

Immigrants were poor, but not all Jews in Cuba experienced poverty. There still were the Americans. Decades in Cuba had changed nothing. They were American Jews in Cuba, and not Cuban Jews. They continued not to have substantial contact with the immigrant society, whom they did view as fellow Jews. Clearly, when Nazism and persecution arose as issues in the 1930s, the immigrants were not forgotten.

There was economic progress. Many of the Americans became executives in big business enterprises. In 1936 they established the Cámara de Comerciantes e Industriales Hebreos de Cuba, to protect Jewish Community-wide interests – as perceived, of course, by the business sector. The Cámara wanted to reframe the image of the Jew in Cuba, from the striking worker with leftist or Communist tendencies to the middle class businessman[192] striving for production and stability.

As years passed, a number of successful professional craftsmen began to emerge amongst the immigrants. The privileged few set up organizations to protect their interests. The result was that groups such as the Tailors Union were not a socially unifying guild bringing together workers from various ethnic and social backgrounds.

Instead, these unions solidified divisions, since most of their members tended to come from defined segments of society. Many of the Jewish guilds were tantamount to closely-knit social clubs designed to exclude newcomers both from the work place and from the organization.

Jewish Demography

By 1925 there were between 7,500 and 8,000 Jews in Cuba.[193] About 2700 were Sephardim, and 100 were Americans. One estimate reports that the majority of Sephardim lived in the provinces.

The rest of the Jews were Eastern Europeans, three thousand of whom were single men, which created a significant social imbalance. The Jewish Community was being restructured. United Hebrew Congregation quickly went from being the only Ashkenazi congregation in the country to being the smallest synagogue in Havana.

It is hard to track population changes year by year, but generalizations can certainly be made. There are somewhat detailed statistics regarding the European background of immigrants. The Eastern Europeans who arrived in the country between 1925 and 1938 came from the following countries: 60 percent Poland; 23 percent Russia; 6.3 percent, Lithuania; 2.9 percent Romania; and the rest from other Eastern European countries.

The above numbers reflect a 13 year period. More specifically, among the immigrants who came in the mid-1930s there is a clearer demographic breakdown. During that period between ten and twelve thousand Jews arrived in Cuba. Their demographic profile again changed from the earlier model, in good part due to changes generated by the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany. More families came. Joint Relief Committee files on 8,379 of these immigrants show the new statistical pattern. 55% of the new group were men; of these, 58.5% were married and only 33.7% were single; 6.2% were widowed, and 1.6% divorced. This contrasts with the earlier pattern of predominately single men. 14.9% were below the age of 18; and 20.4% were over age 50.

As to countries of origin, 41.7% were from Germany; 7.6% from Austria; 24% came from Poland. This was also a shift from earlier Polish predominance. It is curious that the Germans never organized their own community. Many were able to leave Cuba for other destinations. Others associated with already existent communities.

Members of the Centro Israelita filled out 5,390 questionnaires during the years 1925 – 1938. There are also 5,369 files with questionnaires completed by the Joint Relief Committee in Havana. Finally there are registers of circumcisions, marriages, and deaths. (According to reports written by the directors of the Jewish Committee for Cuba, only about 15% of this group of immigrants remained in Cuba. The rest managed to move on, primarily to the United States, despite immigration restrictions.)

A look at the Jews of Havana shows that from the beginning of record keeping in the early century through and including 1930 there had been 312 weddings in the community. Of those, 49 (slightly less than 16%) were in the Sephardic community, a very rough indication of relative size. The large majority (248 or 79%) were in *Adath Israel*, and only 13 were in United Hebrew (reflecting age of members, the relative size of UHC and the fact that with their North American focus, members preferred milestone ceremonies in the United States).

Based on the above statistics it is clear that the Eastern European population in Jewish Cuba shifted from a large number of bachelors to families. This was only further confirmed by marriage of many of the bachelors (during this period albeit often to non-Jews). In light of this change many of the community institutions changed to meet new needs.

Development of Newspapers[194]

The first attempt as publishing a local Jewish newspaper was in 1925, when *Das Frei Wort* appeared. That effort by Jaïm Berniker was amateurish, with the text prepared on a typewriter. It was followed by Oyfgang (1927-1930) that was supported by the Centro Israelita. Only in 1932 did a commercial newspaper really take root.

Habaner Lebn

The first issue of *Habaner Lebn* was published on 11 November 1932. Over the years this newspaper was headed by Sender Kaplan (son of Rabbi Tzvi Kaplan), with the assistance of Abraham J. Dubelman.[195]

Sender Kaplan

In 1935 Kaplan married Julia Yarmus who had immigrated to Cuba from Zaromb, Poland in 1925 or 1926.[196] The Yarmus family owned a light manufacturing facility at Muralla 422.

Abraham Dubelman

Dubelman was born on 5 December 1908 in Poland / Russia. He immigrated to Cuba in 1925 and started in retail sales, but then he became a writer. For many years he was a correspondent for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA); he also wrote numerous freelance articles for several Yiddish-language publications. In 1961 Dubelman left Cuba and moved to New York, where he lived until 1976. He then moved to Florida. He passed away on 13 January 1990.

This Yiddish-language Zionist-oriented newspaper existed until its last issue on 30 December 1960.[197] It was a victim of the Revolution. Its readers fled Cuba. Its editor fled Cuba.

In every respect the newspaper was Sender Kaplan, and Sender Kaplan was the newspaper. He set the tone. He set editorial policy.

For many years Kaplan also held senior positions in the Cuban Zionist movement, including election as its president, and at one point Kaplan was also the Honorary Consul of the State of Israel to the Republic of Cuba.[198]

Habaner Lebn was more than just Zionist oriented; in later years it received regular financial assistance from Keren HaYesod.[199] That, plus revenue from the annual Almanac, were backbones of financial support for the newspaper. As Kaplan recalled in his later years,[200] it was not simple to maintain a Zionist line when the newspaper began, given the preponderance of Leftist writers contributing materials. In that regard, Kaplan the Editor, was very liberal. The pages of *Habaner Lebn* exhibited a very wide range of views, including those of Kaplan's opponents in the Jewish Community. Yet, Kaplan did use the newspaper as a weapon in his personal skirmishes in the community.

From its beginning the paper was aimed at Cuban Jews, and not at tourists, transitory residents or immigrants. It did have advertising from abroad (including Poland and Palestine), but again this included products such as cooking oil, of possible interest to residents. Only in the 1950s did the paper include some Spanish, as more Cuban Jews became conversant in the language.

Other Jewish Newspapers

Numerous publications popped up from time to time, many lasting no more than several issues due to poor planning, lack of real direction, and insufficient funding. *Palabra Hebrea de Cuba* appeared three times weekly in the late 1940s. It was another Yiddish publication, but with a definite Communist leaning.

Even the Patronato began a very Cuban publication, *Unzer Vort*, in 1955 (first issue 31 May 1955).

Publication in Yiddish was a phenomenon naturally restricted to Ashkenazim, and only to that segment which found its primary expression in that language. For many others the basic language of communication was Spanish. This latter segment of the population also read the popular Cuban press in addition to Jewish Community publications. *Palabra Hebrea de Cuba,* for example, was published for many years. Some of the regular Cuban newspapers, however, covered Jewish topics and even had columns of specific Jewish interest.[201]

It is significant that the Sephardic immigrants of the early twentieth century quickly lost Ladino as their primary language. Although publication in Ladino was never as prolific as in Yiddish, the library of *Chevet Ahim* bears ample testimony to congregants' having read Ladino. Yet, no regular Ladino newspaper was ever printed in Cuba.

Publications in non-Jewish Cuba

The era of Jewish publications paralleled similar developments in non-Jewish Cuba. The major thrust was political or cultural (a polite offshoot of political). Some publications lasted longer (Cuba Cóntemporanea, 1913-1927); some lasted for a shorter period of time (Juventud, 1923-1925; Atueí (1927-1928); Revista de Avance, 1927-1930). This was an era of strong desire to express political ideas, and an era of government repression.

Chapter Seven: More Community Organizations

Background: The General Tenor of Life in Cuba

Community life in Cuba was conducted in the shadow of national politics. Jews were in no way immune from Cuban national developments, although no Jew was yet to rise to a high government position. The second Machado presidential term was ushered in with great fanfare on Independence Day, 20 May 1929. Machado laid out his accomplishments and plans for his new administration.[202] A highlight of the inaugural celebrations was the opening of the Capitolio, a massive government structure built in the architectural design of the United States Capitol. The edifice, constructed on the former Villanueva Station of the Ferrocarriles Unidos de la Habana (defunct since the days of José M. Gómez), was symbolic of the problems that would soon plague the government. The original budget called for $3.5 million in expenditures, but the final cost was $20 million. Compounding the problem was rampant malversation; an estimated more than half of the over-run was graft.[203] It is in this atmosphere that the Jewish Community of Cuba continued to develop.

Zionist Union in Cuba

During the World War I period in Havana there were demonstrations that had a connection with Zionism (including the singing of *Hatikvah*), but no real movement existed. Participation was primarily by Sephardim; Ashkenazi opposition had cultural affinities.

- Members of United Hebrew Congregation saw open association with Zionism as a contradiction to their American affiliation.[204] During this period philosophic opposition to Zionism was also common in Reform Judaism, the direction in which United Hebrew Congregation was moving.

- Many of the new Eastern European immigrants were opposed to Zionism because of their Bundist and socialist inclinations.

It was, thus, understandable that organized and active political Zionism began in the offices of the *Chevet Ahim* Synagogue in the mid-1920s as a possible option. This happened after the enactment of the 1924 U.S. immigration quota system. The Zionist option, however, was more theoretical than practical given the existent situation in Mandate Palestine.

Not all Ashkenazim rejected Zionism in Cuba of the 1920s. The first notable Ashkenazi pro-Zionist effort was the immigrant-initiated Unión Sionista[205] de Cuba, founded in 1924, concurrent with the stiffening of United States immigration rules. Palestine was proposed as an alternative place to live. The organization, however, was not viable; it existed more on paper than in deed.

Zionism was primarily a cultural expression, but practical *aliyah* was not ignored despite its difficulties. Given political facts in Palestine the mere desire to immigrate to the Holy Land was insufficient. There were more potential immigrants than Jews allowed to enter Palestine. The limiting factor on *aliyah* was British restrictions on immigration to Palestine; therefore, there was competition amongst the Jews of various countries to receive entry permits.[206] When a Cuban Jew did go on *aliyah*, there was great fanfare, such as the joyous farewell party given to Aharon Alboknik on 4 May 1933.

The Zionist movement had a formal correspondence center in Jerusalem, but logistical support for offices in Havana was provided from a splintered worldwide network lacking cohesive organization and timely communication. Direction came from Jerusalem, Yiddish calendars were printed in Poland, Spanish literature was sent from Buenos Aires, and the British controlled the most coveted commodity of all – immigration permits to Palestine. The thrust of the Havana operation was to assist a very limited immigration to Palestine and to collect monies for the *Yishuv*. As years went by, "Zionism without *aliyah*" dictated that the movement have a primarily social function.

Politics, education, and synagogue could not be separated. Particularly in the Sephardic community Zionism took on a religious flavor. The Sephardic rabbi, Garshon Maya, assumed an active rôle in the Zionist movement and gave a religious tone to its programs. Maya was an activist. For him the Land of Israel was an integral part of Jewish education. He became a moving force in the field, and introduced religious Zionism into the schedule of events.

A key Sephardic landmark in the organization of the Cuban Zionist movement was the 1927 visit to Havana, Camagüey and Matanzas of Rabbi Shabtai[207] Djaen (1883-1947) of the World Confederation of Sephardic Communities. Djaen, originally from Beograd and a distant relative of Rabbi Garshon Maya, made his mark as an accomplished Ladino writer, poet[208] and rabbi. His visit was used to promote the Zionist ideal and to further Maya's position in the Sephardic community. He helped start the Organización Pro-Confederación Universal Sepharadim de Cuba, with Vitali Catarivas of *Chevet Ahim* serving as honorary president, and Victor Mitrani elected president.[209] The local political loop was closed; the election of Mitrani reinforced the politico-religious position of Maya. His rabbinic position became secure.

Another visitor from abroad who helped further the Zionist cause was Albert Einstein (1879-1955) who met with Jewish leaders during his stay in Havana 20-21 December

1930 on a trip westbound that would take him to San Diego, California through the Panama Canal.[210] While in Havana he gave a speech in German supporting Palestine as the Jewish homeland.[211]

Within Cuba the Zionist movement suffered from problems of communication. It was hard enough to set up offices in Havana. Zionist offices in other Cuban cities with Jewish populations were all the more difficult to establish (and in most cases remained an unrealized dream).

In the mid-1930s the Cuban Zionist movement changed its tone. Leftist youth elements such as "HeHalutz" and "HaShomer HaTza'ir" took control. Secularism replaced religious motivation, Yiddish replaced Spanish, and many Sephardim withdrew to form "Maccabbi," where Ena Dworin[212] and Isaac Habif were teachers. Matters turned out well at least for Dworin and Habif. The two were later married.

Bonds for the Yishuv in Palestine

By the late 1930s a major Zionist effort was the sale of bonds for the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Little other Zionist activity was undertaken until news of the Holocaust came from war-torn Europe and caused a revitalization of the movement.

The sale of bonds for the *Yishuv* was big business. One unconfirmed anecdote relates that Rabbi Meir Lasker of UHC was able to pressure Charles Schapiro (1902-1972),[213] a United Hebrew Congregation member, to buy $60,000 worth of Bonds for the *Yishuv* in Palestine. Schapiro owned a factory in Guanabacoa and owned a large department store. In a recorded interview,[214] Lasker proudly pointed out that when Schapiro fled Cuba after the Castro Revolution, he lost $7,000,000 ... but he retained the bonds that he had bought.

Although Lasker liked to tell this otherwise unconfirmed story, the absolute accuracy of the account is not important. The story does illustrate the sale of bonds in Cuba. Sales were hard. Economics were hard. But there were significant sales.

Umbrella Organizations

The effort to start an American-style "Y" in the late 1910s was only the beginning of community-wide organizations in Cuba. The goal of a social umbrella organization controlling all of Cuban Jewry, or at least a major segment of it, remained part of the agenda in the Jewish Community virtually until the Revolution. During the 1920s-early 1930s there were several efforts in the Cuban Jewish Community to set up all encompassing organizations, which would serve as umbrellas to house the gamut of Jewish activity.

1. *Chevet Ahim* tried to accomplish this by setting up a network of loosely affiliated branches throughout Cuba.
2. The chief competition in the Sephardic community was the Unión Hebrea de Cuba.
3. The tendency to create an umbrella for a variety of activities existed as well in *Adath Israel*. This approach was seen in the 1920s-1930s, then again after World War II.
4. The Centro Hebreo was established with the goal in mind of encompassing all community activity.
5. After the heyday of the Centro Hebreo, the Centro Israelita functioned as the umbrella organization until the 1950s, when it was challenged by *K'neseth Israel / Adath Israel* and more significantly by their offspring, the Patronato.

Chevet Ahim

Although primarily a synagogue, *Chevet Ahim* worked to comply with the principle used by foreign organizations to determine levels of charity funding – the more members, the more money. In pragmatic terms that meant the more organizations affiliated, the more members enrolled, the more money received. This is part of the explanation why *Chevet* Ahim developed a national framework of affiliate congregations. (Later, the Centro Israelita also adopted the approach of developing affiliates as a funding gimmick.)

Unión Hebrea de Cuba

In Havana competition to the social functions of *Chevet Ahim* came in 1926 with the creation of the Unión Hebrea de Cuba led by Joseph (José) Cohen[215] (born Constantinople 1896; deceased 1981[216]).

Rabbi Cohen was born to a family who traced its history in the Ottoman Empire back many generations. During World War I he served in the Third Division of the Ottoman Army, seeing service in the Gallipoli Peninsula and in the Palestine Campaign. He was held as a prisoner of war in Damascus, and then later worked for the British government in Palestine.[217]

Cohen took up residence in Havana from 1920 until moving to Atlanta, Georgia in April 1934; there he assumed duties as rabbi of a local Sephardic congregation, Or Beth Shalom.

The two organizations, *Chevet Ahim* and the Unión Hebrea de Cuba, merged in 1935-1936. They jointly ran a social center that was then opened on the Prado. Alberto Mitrani,[218] an officer in *Chevet Ahim*, was instrumental in that unification. Mitrani later

became president of the Unión social salon.[219] Mitrani was born in Kirklareli, Turkey. He studied in Paris before immigrating to Cuba. His father had been a tax collector for the Sultan. Both parents are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kirklareli.

Adath Israel

Umbrella activities went beyond the usual synagogue men's club. Those activities extended to community-wide *kashruth*. This was part of internecine competition and fighting to control the Ashkenazi community.

Yidishe Kulturegruppe

The Yidishe Kulturegruppe was founded in 1921 as an early attempt to establish a community-wide cultural organization for Eastern Europeans, but the attempt was short-lived. This was still a time of migration. Most of the members emigrated from Cuba to the United States or moved elsewhere in Cuba. Moving out of Havana was part of early Ashkenazi settlement in the Provinces. Finally, the organization was disbanded.

Centro Hebreo de Cuba

In the Spring, 1924, the Yidisher Kultur (Jewish Cultural) Center—more commonly known as the Centro Hebreo–was formed at Calle Cuba No. 851. On 1 June 1925 it moved to Calle Zulueta No. 37. The Center offered lectures, "literary trials," *kesteluwent* (or, plural, *kesteluventn* – evenings devoted to questions and answers), an amateur theater, and an evening school with Spanish and English courses. The Centro began as an immigrant's reaction to foreign involvement – it was founded as an organization of immigrants, for immigrants, and by immigrants. Soon, however, the organization became politicized. Its orientation became Socialist / Communist and anti-religious. The evening courses were incorporated into the Workmen's Circle's educational system, a well-known Yiddish-oriented secular Socialist organization headquartered in New York.

As an indication of orientation, the Centro Hebreo subscribed to the Bundist magazine Folkszeitung in Warsaw. The Bund was both socialist and secular. This secularism was, at times, quite blatant. The Centro Hebreo was emphatically opposed to religious activities and would not cooperate with the Jewish Committee for Cuba (begun 1925, disbanded 1927) in organizing religious services for the High Holy Days.

The initial orientation of the Centro Hebreo gave no indication of being leftist, but clearly leftists succeeded in dominating the organization in its earliest stages. Soon, several people decided that they wanted a school, if not religious in practice, then at

least teaching the basics of Judaism. This group included David Blis, Avraham Kleiman, and Ruben Heiblum (immigrated to Cuba from Pinsk in 1923; described as of religious sentiment, but kept his store open on the Sabbath).[220] In April 1925 David Blis was elected president of the Centro through the influence of the Russian-born Fiodor Valbe, one of the founding members. Blis believed that the Centro should serve all the immigrants and therefore should not push any particular political or religious ideology. Blis was also in favor of accepting foreign (American) financial aid, but his leftist opponents contended that with money comes influence. This difference of approach led to a rift between the leftists and Blis' more moderate group.

On 1 March 1925 the Centro numbered 250 members, but internal fighting made continuation of the Centro untenable. The situation was aggravated by a refusal to pay dues,[221] fixed at $1 per month – instigated both as a protest measure and as a result of the faltering economy. Thus, the organization split into two groups. The Centro Hebreo immediately faltered and ceased to exist in the Summer 1925. The moderates started the Centro Israelita in September 1925 as is elsewhere described.

At its short-lived height the Centro Hebreo was involved in education, welfare, and the fight against anti-Semitism. Sender Kaplan, perhaps simplistically, attributed this attitude of establishing all-encompassing umbrella movements to the Federation movement that took hold in the United States starting in the 1920s.[222]

Centro Hebreo Breakaway: The Kultur Farain

In April - May 1925, during the last days of the Centro Hebreo's existence, left-wing members formed the Kultur Farain (Unión Cultural Hebrea) within the overall framework of the Centro. Several Jewish Communists led the Farain. Most of the members were workers, and by the late 1920s membership numbered between five hundred and six hundred.[223] The organization set the tone of its operation by organizing a Yom Kippur program stressing atheistic themes.

The Communist orientation of the Farain was clear but not official. The Farain was never formally declared by its membership to be a Communist organization. Most of the members, in fact, did not belong to the Communist Party. But, Communists dominated the leadership. Those Communists maintained contact with the Cuban labor movement and supported the trade unions in their struggle for better working conditions. However, they went beyond being a labor organization. The Kultur Farain certainly supported Communist causes. It issued statements supporting the Soviet Union and made other ideologically oriented pronouncements that followed Communist Party lines.

In October 1931 Porra, Machado's special police, closed down the Cuban Communist Party (again to be made legal in 1938) and the Kultur Farain. The police confiscated all Farain equipment and possessions. Since the police had earlier shown little interest in

the organization, this action created a great deal of controversy. The unexpected raid occurred immediately following the Kultur Farain's usual secular Yom Kippur program. One feature of the program was a song with a satirical description of the leaders of the Centro Israelita, which led some of the leaders of the Kultur Farain to believe that the Centro Israelita had informed on them from anger. Others report, however, that there were Jewish police informants at the Kultur Farain meetings, and that there was no direct connection with the Centro Israelita.[224]

Not all in the Kultur Farain was politics. The organization developed a serious amateur theater led by Geltman (who had also led the theater in the Centro Hebreo), a Yiddish literary circle, a series of political debates and lectures, and the customary "literary trials" and kesteluventn. They were also planning to found a children's Yiddish school, but that never materialized.

Activism took many forms in the Cuban Jewish Community. For some Jews it meant dedication to a particular Jewish organization. For others activism was identification with several Jewish organizations. Fabio "Avreml" Grobart[225] was a secularist, who had emigrated from Lithuania. His primary identification was with Communism, and in 1925 he was instrumental in founding the Cuban Communist Party. He was active in both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations furthering the Communist cause. He was not the only one. There were many others who were associated with both general and Jewish Communist organizations.

After its demise there were several efforts to revive the Kultur Farain in different formats. In early 1933 some of the former members of the Kultur Farain started the Yidisher Sportsclub. They had about sixty members, but within a few weeks the police closed down that organization as well. Fifty-seven people were arrested; forty-nine of those were sentenced to fifteen days in prison and a $15 fine.[226]

Following the 1933 Revolution, on 26 May 1934, some of the same leaders organized the Yidishe Geselshaft far Kunst un Kultur (the Jewish Association for Art and Culture). In October 1940 the same group created the Yiddishe Folks Zenter, the Jewish People's Center.

None of these organizations attained prominence in the Jewish Community.

Centro Israelita

The Centro Israelita began on 1 September 1925 as the direct offshoot of the Centro Hebreo. It was a tangible expression of permanence in Cuba. Ashkenazim began to realize that Cuba would be home, and they started to build a community infrastructure. It was more than David Blis' earlier attempt to found a YMHA; this was an attempt to establish a community. (Blis took an active rôle in the Centro Israelita. He was elected

president of the Centro Israelita on 16 July 1934, but he served only until 4 November of the same year.)

The Centro was not detached from reality. Although it was founded by Jews who felt that Cuba was the place where they would establish their lives, it did have a section for emigration, which assisted those who wanted to leave the country. This assistance included connections with diplomatic representations to arrange visas.

The Centro Israelita rented space for $400 per month at Calle Zulueta No. 37, the same address where the Centro Hebreo had set up offices. (After the Revolution the street was unsuccessfully renamed Ignacio Agramonte, but it is still called Zulueta in popular parlance.) In the uninitiated public mind the two organizations were synonymous, given the same address, similarity of name, and identical function (certainly perceived to be such). More importantly the two organizations set the same goals for themselves. They both tried to meet the cultural and social needs of the Jewish Community in Havana, and to represent the community to the government. In fact, however, the organizations were very different.

In the early years, if there was a positive cultural bias in Centro Israelita activities, it was in favor of Russians,[227] who constituted a large part of Havana's Ashkenazi population. Enrique Edelstein served as president of the Centro Israelita from 1 September 1925 until 18 May 1926, when he was replaced by Julio Kramer (served until 31 May 1927, then again from 16 June 1928 until 18 May 1929). Although previous nationality was considered important at the time, in retrospect, Capitalist / Bundist would have been a more important differentiation.

The Centro Israelita quickly became the leading Jewish organization in the country. By the end of 1926 the Centro Israelita counted 1200 members, and it was regarded by foreign Jewish organizations as the principal address for anything relating to the Jewish Community. This was in good part due to David Blis' general policy to cooperate with foreign organizations. HIAS, for example, considered the Centro Israelita its representative in the country, and subsidized some of its activities as did the Joint Distribution Committee and the National (USA) Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).

The Centro Israelita was an umbrella organization for numerous societies and groups. It tried to be all-encompassing, but in the end it contained all those organizations that fit the Centro's broad political stance. It was a very mainstream organization in terms of ideology, expressing an ethnic and national Jewish sentiment by using what would later become the Israeli flag as a banner; Hatikvah, later to be the Israeli national anthem, as a theme song; and, the Jewish star as an emblem. Too much deviation from the approved stance signaled problems.

In light of its important political and educational functions, as well as the social rôle that it played in the lives of so many Cuban Jews, the Centro Israelita served as an

arena for ideological discussion. The Centro, however, tried to provide a forum and not take sides on issues, maintaining its theoretically neutral stance. Some of these conflict discussions were between the moderates and the radicals, and others between the Communists and the Zionists.

The anti-tuberculosis effort is an example of the Centro at work. Tuberculosis was a common disease, and people in the Jewish Community established a committee with a clinic to deal with the problem. Abraham Schnaider founded the Comité Hebreo Protector de Tuberculosis y Enfermes Mentales in about 1930; by 1932 it had been responsible for 1500 medical examinations.[228] In December 1932 David Blis and Rafael Zilber, later a leader in the Cuban Zionist movement, were active members.[229] Controversy, however, broke out between the Comité and the Centro in 1933.[230] Some of the key Comité members were reportedly Bundists. The Centro responded by founding its own organization, the Anti-Tuberculosis Society, on 26 February 1935; its clinic opened at Calle Luz 464, Habana Vieja on 1 May 1935. In this way the Centro enforced its monopoly over the Jewish Community. The older organization was forced to cease operations.

One of the founders of the Tuberculosis Society was José Dworin[231] (1904-1971), who had arrived in Cuba from Pinsk in 1924, followed by his mother and two brothers six years later.[232] One of his daughters, Adela, would become the *de facto* librarian of the Patronato and deputy head of the Comisión Coordinadora in the post-Revolution period.

In Cuba of the late 1920s in particular there was a proliferation of organizations, and a good number were under the umbrella of the Centro. This was only natural, since the Centro was new and had to establish itself. It tried to encompass as much of the Jewish Community as possible.

The financial needs of organizations under the general umbrella were publicized for fundraising purposes, but the actual need was dubious. Without casting criticism on the Centro Israelita, Victor Mitrani very bluntly described the general situation, "Why do so many societies exist that do nothing useful?" Part of the reason he attributes to the egos of some who want to be leaders.[233] Although these words oversimplify the situation, they do describe a rudimentary truth. Many organizations just petered out. Others were based not so much on ego as on personal ideas; these organizations merged with others of similar (albeit not exactly identical) points of view. This variety of organizations was typical of Cuban immigrant associations, both in the Jewish and in the Arab sectors.

Over an almost twenty-five-year period, the Centro Israelita was the most important Jewish organization in dealing with the Cuban government. The Centro actively tried to work with government officials to ensure the welfare of the Jewish Community in the country. The Centro fought against any appearance of anti-Semitism, or any measures that would negatively impact upon the Jews. For instance, there was a

proposal in 1937 to prohibit the slaughter of cattle through *shechita* (ritual slaughter). The Centro prevented the passage of this law, which was, at least theoretically, designed to prevent cruelty to animals. The main impact of the proposed legislation would have been to preclude the Jewish Community from having ready access to kosher meat.

There were also legal and economic threats that made life difficult for peddlers, barbers, and street photographers. Peddlers required a license, and there was a proposal to dramatically raise the license fees. Barbers faced a new, tougher licensing exam that many of them might fail, and the street photographers faced the risk that their permits might be withdrawn. In 1929, for example, the Centro helped organize the Sociedad de Protección de Barberos y Peluqueros de la Habana, a politically centrist group designed to defend workers' rights.[234] In each case the Centro Israelita intervened for the welfare of a particular group of Jews and by extension the entire community.

Another organization under the Centro's umbrella was the Asociación Feminina Hebrea de Cuba, founded in 1928 with Sra. Goldstein as president.

Community activists comprise only a small percentage of any population. Given the small size of the Cuban Jewish Community, it was not surprising that many of the same people held positions in more than one organization. Often the wives held positions in women's organizations, where they associated with the wives of their husband's friends. This intensified the close-knit feeling of the Jewish Community. For example, in the 1950s Dizik and Pincus[235] would work together as leaders in the Patronato; earlier, their wives worked together as officers in the Asociación Feminina Hebrea de Cuba.

Another function of the Centro Israelita was to provide medical assistance to the needy. In the 1930s, for example, Miguel Valdés served as physician of the Centro.

Mergers under the Centro's umbrella were common. In late 1930 the Geselshaft far Kunst und Kultur decided to join the Centro Israelita. In September 1938, their youth section merged with the Centro youth group and with the youth club Kadima of the United Hebrew Congregation (Centro Macabeo) to form the Yidisher Jugent Farain in Cuba Beim Yidisher Zenter. This was a major step toward the unification of the various youth groups. Part of the reason behind merger was the basic tendency to move towards a more united community; another part of the reason was the depoliticizing of youth organizations, hence the canceling of reasons for independent operations.

The history of the Centro was at times tumultuous, and the presidency of Gustavo Kates, from 6 April 1936 until 13 November 1938, was far from easy.[236] A major reason was how to confront the situation in Europe and the resultant refugee problem. Matters only worsened. The years 1938-1940 were even more problematic for the Centro. Not only were there were no simple solutions to the refugee problem. Leadership in the Centro deteriorated. On 16 September 1938 Jacob Brandon wrote to

Cecilia Rezovsky (1891-1968) of the JDC, "The Centro [Israelita] is actually controlled by a class of people who do not reflect honor of our community..."[237]

Círculo de Estudiantes Hebreos

General student unrest at the Universidad de la Habana culminated in 1923 with a declaration of academic autonomy. The immediate crisis was resolved, but problems continued throughout the decade. It was during the second Machado régime that the Universidad became a hotbed known for political activity. The Universidad had been organized according to the Varona Plan (Military Order No. 266, 30 June 1900, and modifications) during the American occupation. Theoretically at the heart of the problem of the early 1920s was the inability of the Universidad to change with the times.[238] Autonomy, demanded by students, meant that the Universidad would not be dependent upon the Government for administrative authority. Rather, the Claustro General de la Universidad would enact statutes with the approval of the Council of Professors. This was thought to be a procedure that would be more flexible and better respond to changing needs.

The author of the Varona Plan, according to which the university was being run, was Enrique José Varona y Pera (1849-1933). Ironically, in the 1920s it was the very same Varona who sided with the students against Machado.[239]

Quality of education was not the issue. The university had the curious ratio of 4 or 5 teachers for every one student. Although there were charges of appointments by patronage, the Universidad de la Habana was always the foremost academic institution in the country, and many of its students and teachers became leaders of Cuba. The issues were political, and Jewish groups also became involved in that political activity.

Machado's tactics were to rule with an iron fist. He ordered the universities and high schools closed as of 1 July 1931 in an effort to silence criticism of his régime. The Cuban courts ruled that closing illegal, but the court decision made no impression on Machado. The institutions remained closed. This had the effect of forcing students from university politics into national politics. Since school closing was a move perceived as anti-student, it remained only a natural development that students became anti-government. This anti-government attitude was only intensified in early 1933, when Machado's police killed a total of 32 students.

A group of Jewish students (two-thirds Sephardim) at the Universidad de la Habana organized the Círculo de Estudiantes Hebreos (also Círculo Estudiantil Hebreo[240]) under the aegis of the Centro Hebreo on 15 July 1928.[241] Moisés Salinas was elected president and Alberto Birman vice-president. The nascent organization, ostensibly designed to help other Jewish students with their university studies, was yet another organization disbanded by the Machado régime. After the Revolution of 1933 the Círculo reopened, this time however as an Ashkenazi organization. This is indicative of

the population shift that had taken place in the Cuban Jewish Community; it should absolutely not be construed as an Ashkenazi - Sephardic rift.[242] The numerical majority and leadership had effectively passed from Sephardim to Ashkenazim. As the latter were settling into Cuba as long-term residents, their influence began to be felt.

HaShomer HaTza'ir[243]

European Jews founded the Cuban branch of HaShomer HaTza'ir (Jewish World Scout Organization) on 30 April 1933. In the beginning years this was the primary youth movement for Ashkenazi Jews, who joined primarily for social rather than ideological reasons. Most members joined at ages 11 or 12. There were no "American" members, no members from "rich" families, and very few Sephardim (who preferred the Centro Macabeo and Betar, since the language of HaShomer HaTza'ir was Yiddish).

During the 1930s Cuban branch activities were focused toward Europe, and not Palestine, though this changed dramatically over the years. For part of its existence HaShomer HaTza'ir ran a summer camp in the Havana area.

Shelichim, organization members from abroad, helped the movement. In 1947, for example, Abraham Fein and Nissim Cohen fulfilled that function.[244] There was also a tie to the United States. In 1949 a group of members traveled to the United States for *hachsharah* (preparation), and only afterwards to Israel.[245]

After the establishment of the State of Israel the movement became very ideological, stressing *aliyah*. By the 1950s many of the members left the organization, since then there were other social alternatives, such as Zionist Youth (Noar Tziyoni). Part of the fall-off in membership was parental opposition to *aliyah*, which became a very practical issue. Moving to Israel posed the psychological threat of children living far from home.

HaShomer HaDati, a religious Zionist organization, was established in parallel to HaShomer HaTza'ir in the 1940s. Relations between the organizations were friendly, even extending to sports competitions. It was felt that HaShomer HaTza'ir attracted older Cuban youth; HaShomer HaDati was popular with newer arrivals to Cuba.[246]

Other Organizations

As early as 1930 it had become increasingly obvious that the Centro Israelita was not really able to serve as an umbrella organization for all Jews in Cuba. Although various Jewish organizations could coordinate their actions on particular occasions, it was felt that a permanent organization that could represent all Jewish groups was still needed. Several initiatives were organized by individuals to set up such an organization, with varying degrees of success.

Fiodor Valbe was a community activist in the broadest sense. In April 1930 Moise Mitrani and Valbe founded the Comité Organizador de la Federación Israelita de Cuba. During April 1930 Valbe wrote letters to provincial governments trying to locate Jewish organizations.[247] Valbe was also a member in the Revisionist Party in Havana – and he was the oldest member – 30 in 1931, when only one other member was over 24.[248]

In September 1931 M. Lissovich proposed yet another plan to create a Jewish Federation. This effort was supported by *Adath Israel*, the Anti-Tuberculosis Committee,[249] and the Frauen Farain. Opposed to it were the Centro Israelita, the United Hebrew Congregation, the Ezra Society, *Chevet Ahim*, *K'neseth Israel* (the congregation that formed as a break-off from *Adath Israel*), and the Zionist Association.

The rest of the decade saw numerous organizations formed and then later abandoned. These included the Comité Intersocial, which was active between November 1931 and June 1935, a Comisión Jurídicia, a Jewish Committee of Cuba between May of 1935 and May of 1936, and in 1939 an attempt to set up a Comité Central. Some attempts were short-lived; others lasted a bit longer. None really succeeded in their original mission, although a few came close to setting up a fragmented community. Not only did the Jewish Community have differences in background, but ideological disagreements also precluded effective cooperation. In many cases two groups with similar backgrounds and similar ideologies had personality clashes and turf issues that barred a cohesive working atmosphere.

Jewish Politics

Internal squabbles severely affected the efficacy of the Centro Israelita as the organization tried to hold the community together. The community factionalized into too many small groups, which inhibited any unity. One way for these groups to acquire legitimacy and recognition was to affiliate under the umbrella of the Centro. Such affiliation donned the group with an aura of legitimacy.

The Centro held power as the umbrella for the Jewish Community. At the end of 1938 the request of the Geselshaft far Kunst und Kultur to merge with the Centro was rejected. There was no true loyalty to the Centro. Merger was a power ploy. The Geselshaft leadership then recommended to its various members that they join the Centro individually in February 1939 with the object of controlling the Centro. When this group of left-wingers became the majority, its members tried to take over the leadership of the Centro. The tension between the two groups became even greater after the Soviets signed a treaty with the Nazis, and World War II broke out in fall of 1939. The politically moderate original members of the Centro mobilized and were able to win the majority of board seats in the Centro's 1940 election.

The Centro represented the moderate Eastern European immigrants. The United Hebrew Congregation as an institution was not part of the Centro Israelita. Although it is true that a few of its members played active rôles in the Centro, most of the English speaking American Jews regarded United Hebrew as their Jewish institution; for them, further affiliations were superfluous.

Sephardim were also not an integral part of the Centro. Their native language was either Ladino or, for the younger population, Spanish. The Centro was primarily Yiddish-speaking, as one can deduce from the names of the various organizations that were simultaneously competing with it and involved in it. This language barrier made it virtually impossible for most of the Sephardim to participate in Centro activities. The Sephardim, however, seemed very willing to participate when possible – at least in the 1920s. In 1927, for example, a group of Sephardim edited a Spanish supplement to the Centro's newspaper, Oifgang, beginning with Issue No. 9, with articles by José Cohen, Victor Mitrani, and Guershon Maya.

In summary, the Sephardim and the Americans were not really part of the Centro. Leftist Eastern Europeans did not remain within the organization. And, there were also other Jewish organizations. Despite efforts to the contrary, the Centro Israelita failed to attain its goal of being the sole Jewish organization in the country capable of representing all the Jews of Cuba. Nevertheless it played an important rôle as a social center and programming hub.

Chapter Eight: Beyond Havana

Settlement outside Havana

From the arrival of Jews after the Spanish-American War the focal point of Cuban Jewish history was Havana. As Cuba's capital and economic hub, Havana has always had the largest Jewish Community. And, it is the best-documented city of the Cuban-Jewish experience. The city also has been Cuba's communications center for links with the outside world, again amplifying its importance. But, settlement was not limited to Havana. Jews came to other Cuban cities as well.

If one looks at the Havana community in 1918 at the end of World War I, there were Americans, Sephardim and a small number of Eastern European Ashkenazim. In the Provinces there were essentially no Americans; the few in the provinces came for business, but they were Havana-based. The vast majority of Jews who reached cities and towns in the provinces were Sephardim. In 1918 they were too few to organize communities. Only in the 1920s did their numbers increase sufficiently to lay the infrastructure for Jewish communities.

A misconception in history is that Ashkenazim did not settle in the provinces until the World War II era. There were individual Ashkenazi Jews in many cities in the 1920s, and perhaps earlier, as can be seen from commercial advertisements in newspapers. Their numbers, however, were small. Ashkenazi communities came later, primarily because the Sephardic settlement was so much larger that it overshadowed the Ashkenazim. In most (but not all) cases Ashkenazi community institutions were first developed in the 1940s.[250] Camagüey was one exception. The city had a short-lived Ashkenazi community in the 1920s.

In many cases immigrants lived together in the same neighborhood, whether it be in Havana or in the provinces. Yet, each immigrant group kept its own identity. Cuba was a culture shock for immigrants. The language was different. The music was different. The climate was different. So was the food and even the sense of humor. These are some of the reasons that newcomers typically group in immigrant neighborhoods both as a reconstruction of the "old country" and as a cushion against the new environment.

Perhaps the overriding factor in determining the pace of settlement was the price of housing in Cuban immigrant neighborhoods. Even ordinarily inexpensive residences were often unaffordable to newly arrived immigrants. A common solution was to rent beds or rooms, or seek lodgings in the apartments of extended family. This reinforced the process of building immigrant neighborhoods. After neighborhoods were established, the next step was putting together a community infrastructure. This was done in city after city in Cuba. The focal point of community organization was usually

a synagogue that also served as an immigrants' center. For the non-traditional, social clubs served that function. And, in many cases provision was made for Jewish burial, if not locally then at least in a relatively nearby city.

To every rule, however, there is an exception. Although most immigrants to Cuba grouped together in immigrant neighborhoods, there were those who shunned the big cities of the Island and moved into small Cuban towns where there were, at best, only one or two other Jews. Business or the potential of business brought them there. The much lower cost of housing attracted them. In some cases they stayed in the small towns and assimilated into the general population. In other cases they returned to the fold and to larger Jewish communities. In most cases no records remain; there was no Jewish Community to keep records. Sometimes there was a hope that a community would develop, but that never happened. At some point the hard decision had to be taken to move onward.

Sephardim were different from the earlier Ashkenazi Jews. The American Jews who arrived in Cuba, for the large part established and well-to-do businessmen, sought residence in Havana. After all, it was the commercial center of Cuba. Records show that several American Jews settled in other cities from which they conducted commerce, but they were still tied to Havana. The Sephardic Jews began a different pattern. As soon as they established local independent communities, those communities nominally affiliated with *Chevet Ahim* in Havana (see below).

Although most ships carrying immigrants did land in Havana, some docked in other cities. Many decided to remain in their port of disembarkation. Or, they lacked the financial means to travel onward.

When the Eastern European Ashkenazim came to Cuba after World War I, the Sephardic communities just developing in the interior of Cuba could not provide the community and social services needed. Yes, the Sephardim were also Jews. But, prayers were sung differently. One group spoke Yiddish; the other group spoke Ladino. There was no social bind.

By the time of the Castro Revolution a younger generation had grown up. For them the cities of origin in Turkey were irrelevant, and "old country" social links became unimportant. It was a new generation – in many cases the grandchildren of the immigrants. They were totally acculturated and did not need the cushion of ghetto neighborhoods. Immigrant society had passed on. This, combined with the mass exodus from the country, meant that after the Revolution many Jews who chose to remain in Cuba left small towns and moved to Havana.

Turkish Jews

Most Cuban Jews of Turkish origin came from the Istanbul (Constantinople) region, where the largest community was located. Those Jews who came from European Turkey (Tarakya) outside Istanbul tended to recreate their towns of origin; people from a Turkish town would settle in the same Cuban city.

This was true in other countries as well. Jews who immigrated to Argentina tended to come from Izmir and Aydin. Jews from Marmara settled in Seattle and established the Ahavas Ahim Synagogue; Jews, particularly from Tekirdag, founded Seattle's Bikur Cholim. In 1906 Jews from Rhodes, later captured from the Ottoman Empire by Italy in 1912, were the primary activists in the establishment of the Atlanta Jewish Community. They founded Congregation Ahavat Shalom. In 1910 bachelors and a few families arrived in Atlanta from Turkey as refugees from the Young Turks. As more Turkish immigrants started filtering into Atlanta, they broke off from Ahavat Shalom, and in 1912 they founded Or Hahayim. In 1914 the two synagogues again united, this time under the name Or Ve Shalom.[251] More immigrants came from 1920-1924.[252]

It is impossible to separate Cuban Jewish history from the Jewish Communities of other countries. The communities were intertwined. In 1929 the rabbi of the Atlanta congregation was Menachem Serfati[253], who had relatives in Cuba. Serfati resigned in 1932, and was succeeded by Joseph Cohen of Havana.

Settlement in the Provinces

Artemisa

The city is sixty miles southwest of Havana. A community center was located at Agramonte (Artemisa) 25, Pinar del Río.

Baracoa

In the mid-1920s there was a small Jewish community including Ashkenazim in Baracoa, a small Cuban city near Guantánamo.[254] There is, however, no record of organized community services.

Caibarién

The earliest confirmed record of a Jew living in Caibarién is Albert Escenazi, born in Adrianople (Edirne),[255] who is listed as resident in the city on 21 May 1921;[256] he passed away on 9 August 1931 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery at nearby Camajuaní.

Caibarién was an affluent port city boasting its own yacht club. The local economy was based upon fishing and the arrival of small boats in the harbor. By-products of the port were a customs house and a railroad center.[257] In later years the port was closed as part of a program to regulate border control, and the city's economy declined sharply.

After the Revolution

The current synagogue is located at Calle 16 No. 1719 in the house of Sara Bertha Levy, the great-granddaughter of Solomon Levy, the first person buried in the Jewish cemetery in Santa Clara. In 2002 seven Jewish families remained in the city.

Camagüey

The minutes of a United Hebrew Congregation meeting in 1906 mention Jews in Camagüey, but no further information is available.

The Club that Failed[258]

Organization of the Ashkenazi Jewish Community in Camagüey encountered a false start in 1925, when the Jewish Committee for Cuba sent K. Chiefez sent from Havana to assist the recently arrived Eastern European immigrants. Chiefez arrived in Camagüey early in the year. On 5 February 1925 Chiefez sent word back to his boss, Walter Monteser, that he was having difficulty finding a moderately priced building to house a club,[259] but five days later a facility with four rooms, a kitchen, hall and courtyard was rented at San José No. 1A, not far from the railroad station.[260] By early March there were fifteen subscribers to a small library and 75 club members, three quarters of whom had paid the fifty cent monthly dues.[261]

The club was active even in its first month. It took on the official name, Centro de la Cultura de los Inmigrantes de Camagüey, and the by-laws stated quite specifically that it was no have no political character whatsoever. The facility was open every day from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., except on Sundays and holidays when it opened at noon. Every Sunday there was organized entertainment. Otherwise, the main activities were games like dominos. The Centro was primarily social, but efforts were also made to provide classes in Spanish and English. An arrangement was made as well to provide Passover *matzos* sent from Havana.[262]

The Centro was a reflection of immigrant Camagüey at the time. Letters were sent to the four Jewish storekeepers, asking them to close shop by 7:30 p.m., so that they could come to the club. Efforts were made to enroll as members as many immigrants as possible – "over [one] hundred Jewish immigrants [single men], four families, and two girls."[263]

The summer began to usher in problems. The Cuban economy was hard hit by the sugar crisis, and times were difficult. Many encountered problems paying their dues;[264] others moved to small towns in the surrounding area or to Havana.[265] Fifteen to twenty people would come to the club on an average evening, but of some one hundred members, only 30 to 35 could afford to pay dues.

The summer saw the beginning of serious problems. Chiefez reported to Lewis on 3 July that "Communists" wanted to destroy the club, and Lewis responded on 16 July that there were similar problematic elements in Havana as well.

Economics continued to worsen. A new committee to head the Centro was elected, and the political atmosphere changed dramatically. The committee renamed itself a council ("soviet"). Chiefez was asked to vacate the room he used as living quarters at the club. Not an evening went by without a fight.[266]

Rosh Hashanah sealed the fate of the club. Services were held, and the Centro building was crowded with people from Camagüey, the province, and even some from as far away as Oriente. There was a profit of $50 from fundraising, but the council of Communists running the Centro would not let the money be used to offset the budget operations deficit.[267] The Jewish Committee for Cuba was extremely dissatisfied with the general turn events. On 24 September 1925 Chiefez was instructed to close the Centro.[268] The next day the furniture in the Centro was quickly sold.[269] Chiefez returned to Havana, and the Centro was part of the past.

One source relates that later more than 500 Ashkenazim later came to the city,[270] but this early effort to organize the Ashkenazi Jewish Community in Camagüey failed in the political atmosphere typical of the 1920s.

By 1927 there was a thriving Jewish Community in the city. The thrust of the community was Sephardic. There were an estimated one hundred Sephardic families resident in Camagüey, divided into two communities – Bnei HaTikvah (founded Summer 1927) and Ahim HaMacabbim.[271] Many of these Sephardic Jews had come from Silivria, Turkey.[272] The need to form some kind of community organization became apparent as early as 1923, but it was not until 1927 that a strong organization was established.

On 22 December 1927 a meeting was held in a private residence on Calle San Fernando No. 133. Representatives of Ahim HaMevarhim and Bnei HaTikvah joined together, and the Camagüey Union Israelita Tiferet Israel was founded. Roberto Levy[273] served as interim president, and Elias Behar was secretary. Soon a permanent set of officers was elected: Isidoro Mechuland, president; Elias Behar, secretary-general; Marco Eli, treasurer. A synagogue was opened at Calle San Fernando No. 137 1/2.[274]

After the Revolution

Today Calle San Fernando is known as Calle Bartolomo Massó. The numbers on the street have also been changed. The synagogue extended to the parallel street, Calle Pobre (now known as Calle Oscar Primelles No. 314 according to the current numbering system). Over the years the primary entrance to the synagogue was moved to Calle Primelles, where a Star of David still appears in stone over the doorway to what are now apartments.

Rabbi Guershon Maya of *Chevet Ahim* in Habana Vieja spoke at the meeting in 1927. The following year one of his nine children, Nissim (born 1897, died 1985)[275] moved to Camagüey, where he served in Tiferet Israel as rabbi, *shochet*, and *mohel*.

The Ashkenazi community again grew in the city as a result of the influx of World War II refugees. The Centro Hebreo de Camagüey, a Yiddish speaking organization, was established at Calle Calle República No. 465[276] on 29 April 1942 (official approval 6 May 1942) following an initiative of Isaac Tuñick, the Centro's first president, and Luís Sinolovsky, secretary. In 1943 the Centro had 40 members.[277] On 10 June of that year the official address was moved to Calle Pobre No. 314.[278]

Not every effort to organize the Jewish Community in Camagüey had a religious orientation. There was a social club on Calle San Esteban (old street name). In August 1929 the Unión de Damas Hebreas was founded. The Unión moved to several different addresses, all residences of members, until it was dissolved on 2 December 1938. This can be seen as a Jewish activity associated with more general women's movements of the era.

Purchasing land for some one hundred graves from an existing graveyard was the first step in starting the Jewish cemetery.[279] The earliest known grave in the cemetery is that of Moises Israel, who died on 12 November 1924. Two unmarked graves of the period, though, might be from an earlier date in the same year, 1924.[280]

Jewish education was weak. Despite the large community, there was never a full-day Jewish school in the city. There were efforts at instruction after students finished the day in public school. For many Judaism was a tradition passed down at home and not learnt in schools.[281]

As the lack of educational facilities suggests, the Jews of Camagüey were not scrupulously religious. On the Sabbath some stores were closed, but many were not. The Jewish Community of Camagüey, however, was closely knit, often functioning as one large extended family (particularly in the Sephardic community where marriage with relatives was not infrequent).

At least one storeowner reported that all of his clients were Jews, not because of anti-Semitism, but because of sociological patterns.[282] This should not be seen as a phenomenon unique to Camagüey. The same was reported in Havana. It is also quite frequent in most societies that small retail stores in particular stress a personal relationship with a regular clientele, rather than the anonymity typical of large "department stores."

After the Revolution

The Camagüey synagogue was closed in the years after the Castro Revolution, and Nissim Maya moved to Florida. That old synagogue building is currently occupied by a series of private residences. A new synagogue in Camagüey was dedicated on Rosh Hashanah, 1998

Camajuaní

The city is located on the road between Santa Clara and Remedios (leading to Caibarién). A cemetery was established in Camajuaní in 1932.[283] In the 1950s 50 Jews, if not more, lived in the town.[284]

Campechuela

It is thought that the Jewish Community in Campachuela began in the 1920s.

After the Revolution

The current synagogue is located in the house of Leon Bali, Calle Martí. There are about 30 members.

Ciego de Ávila

The Colonia Hebreo was founded on 1 August 1924 (approved by government authorities on 9 October 1924) at Calle Independencia No. 11, with Rafael Behar Falio serving as president. Other officers were: Marios Behar Baly, vice-president; Daniel Ofaya Levy, treasurer; Lazaro Behar Behar, Alberto Baly Motola, José Levy Saliva, Elia Benrey Baly, Jacobo Sevilla, officers. Objectives were: social, synagogue, circumcision, marriage, burial, and establishment of a cemetery when possible (never done).[285] In 1927 Alberto Bali was president; Victor Behar, secretary; Isidoro Bali, treasurer.[286]

Ciego de Ávila is a small inland town, and its pattern of Jewish settlement is typical. Immigrants in the town felt the need for some type of Jewish socialization. The order of the objectives in paperwork to establish their organization is more than coincidental evidence that socialization took precedence over religious prayers. Social priorities came first, then religious functions. An examination of the list of officers also bears testimony to the closeness of families (perhaps best described as extended families or clans).

Christian Arabs also gravitated to Ciego de Ávila. Organizational remnants of their immigrant period still remain,[287] but there is no recorded contact between the two communities.

Cienfuegos

The Jewish Community developed neither its own synagogue nor its own cemetery. Santa Clara was traditionally considered the regional center for Cienfuegos Jews. It is there that they went for religious services on holidays. It is there that many were buried. The fact that no synagogue – not even a *minyan* in a private house – was founded is ample evidence of the non-religious nature of the city's Jewish Community.

After the Revolution

The current *minyan* is located in the house of Rebeca Langus, Calle 39 No. 5001 (altos), e/ 50 y 52. In 2002 there were 27 members of the Jewish Community.

Guanabacoa

It is unknown when the Jewish Community developed in the town of Guanabacoa. In the late 1920s Samuel Epstein, owner of Aetna Knitted Fabrics from New York's Lower East Side,[288] established Sedanita[289] in rented facilities in Guanabacoa. The company imported $75,000 worth of equipment for the production of underwear, shawls, and scarves; it employed 200 workers. But, Jewish-owned businesses do not constitute a Jewish community. Sedanita moved to San José de las Lajas after it was sold to the Brandon family evidently in the late 1930s.

It is clear that earlier there were other Jewish-owned light manufacturing plants in Guanabacoa as well. In the 1930s these included the factory of Charles Shapiro. From available evidence Shapiro's business went well. After Sedanita moved out, Shapiro bought the building that the Epstein's rented, and used it to expand his own knitting and dying company.

By the 1940s there was a Jewish Community in Guanabacoa headquartered in the Centro Israelita at Calle Martí 252.[290] There was also a WIZO branch. Records of the founding of the community are missing.

The Guanabacao community apparently was business-oriented, and basing a community upon businesses is problematic. Even during the 1950s the Jewish community in Guanabacoa was in decline. It was one of the early casualties of emigration after the Castro Revolution.

Guantánamo

Jews lived in Guantánamo possibly as early as 1912,[291] but certainly by 1918.[292] They engaged in commercial activities. There apparently were insufficient Jews to formulate a community until years later.

The Unión Israelita de Guantánamo was founded at Calixto García No. 20 (older numbering system, now number 803) based on a meeting attended by 26 Jews at Calle Pedro Pérez No. 957 (new numbers) e/ Palma (now Masó) and Giró on 25 April 1929. That meeting was held in the store of a local Jew; from all existing evidence that storeowner had been living in the area for some time before he took the initiative to start a synagogue.

A month later it was reported that the new congregation had 33 members. This was a community slightly different from others in Cuba. From the very beginning members were both Ashkenazim and Sephardim, mostly the latter. Jacobo Zapayo[293] served as first president of the congregation.[294]

In 1954 the congregation started to build a new synagogue at the same address where it was located. Concrete was poured for one of the walls. Construction, however, was terminated before the new building was finished. The congregation apparently disbanded. It seems that many of Guantánamo's Jews left the city in the 1950s, well before the Revolution.[295] This was probably due to changing economic patterns, newly found income and the distance of Guantánamo from other Jewish communities.

Although the Jewish cemetery for Guantánamo is in El Cristo, several members of the community have been buried in the local Roman Catholic cemetery due to problems of distance to the Santiago de Cuba region.[296] Another way to look at such burial is as a sign of irreligiosity; observant Jews would reject burial in a non-Jewish cemetery.

After the Revolution

The current synagogue in Guantánamo is in upper floor of the house of Rodolfo Mizraji, 5 Oeste No. 913 (near the city cemetery).

Holguín

After an initial meeting at the house of Rodolfo Zillon[297] Namer[298] (Calle de Morales Lemus No. 54) on 30 October 1921, Jews in Holguín decided to organize the Unión Israelita Bené Zion on 24 November 1921 (approved by provincial authorities on 29 December 1921).[299] This was Cuba's third official synagogue, after UHC (1906) and *Chevet Ahim* (1914) in Havana. Namer was elected president, and León Behar was secretary; two members of the Motola family also attended. Objectives of the Unión were: humanitarian assistance, synagogue, circumcision, wedding contracts, and burial. Namer became the Cuban Consul to Palestine.

Manzanillo

The Manzanillo Asociación Israelita *Chevet Ahim* began on 24 February 1924. It was located at Calle Enrique Villuendas No. 72. Israel Esquenazi served as president, and Luias Egozi was secretary.[300] On 19 January 1925 Nissim Maya officiated as rabbi at the wedding of Samuel Behar y Maya and Bienvenida Levy. Israel Esquenazi was president of the Manzanillo *Chevet Ahim* at the time.[301]

By 1927 officers changed. The new president was Garson Bejar, and Samuel Capuano was vice-president. The organization was active during the 1940s. During the 1950s, however, the community began to falter. It was formally dissolved on 26 December 1961.

Matanzas

UHC minutes show that Moises Steinberg was resident in Matanzas in 1906. Nothing is known of his activities in the city.

One source of Jewish immigration to Matanzas was Kirklareli[302] (also Kirklesi [Greek] and Kirk-Kilise), where numerous people were displaced as a result of the Balkan War and the victory of the Bulgarians over the Turks in 1912. In 1873 Kirklareli numbered 18,000 residents, one thousand of whom were Jews. In the wake of the First Balkan War the general population swelled to 30,000, including 1300 Jews. In 1912 Jews fled to Istanbul as the Bulgarian army threatened the city. A year later Bulgarians fled as their army was expelled. In 1922 it was Greeks who fled.[303] Many Jews never came

back to Kirklareli. Many of those Jews who came to Cuba from Kirklareli gravitated to Matanzas.

The first known Jewish organization in Matanzas was *Tiferet Israel*, already existent in 1928 when records show that Alberto G. Maya was president.[304]

World War II refugees reached Matanzas. The Centro Israelita de Matanzas was founded at Ríos 130 on 10 October 1942 with mostly Ashkenazi members. Once there was an Ashkenazi presence, other Jews already in Cuba moved to Matanzas.[305]

Yaakov (Jacobo) Segal (died 1980 in Miami) was a pivotal member of the Matanzas community. In about 1940 he married, opened a store, and served as the *hazan* at religious services in Matanzas.[306] In the 1950s Segal was president of the community. At that time Yisrael Einstein was secretary; Yehezkael Bradman[307] was treasurer. The vast majority of community members were relatively new immigrants.

During World War II there was a Belgian diamond business in Matanzas. It closed, however, right after the war.[308]

Nuevitas

The first Jewish residents of Nuevitas were the Romano's who arrived in the city from Istanbul in 1926.

After the Revolution

Today there are 73 members of the community, but not all are actively identifying themselves as Jews.

Sancti Spíritus

After the Revolution

The current synagogue is located at Brigadier Reeve No. 2 e/ Avenida de los Mártires e Isabela María de Valdivia.

Santa Clara

The Jewish Community in Santa Clara developed slowly. Sephardic Jews[309] settled in the area around Santa Clara as early as 1920, but a *minyan* was hard to find. It was only in the city of Santa Clara, itself, that community prayer was held.[310]

On 9 March 1929 a synagogue and community center were inaugurated at Independencia No. 65 in a rented facility. The congregants were primarily Sephardim; there were only a very few Ashkenazim. Moises Mitrani was the first president of the Centro Hebreo de Santa Clara. Other founders were Nisim Kahan; Isaak, Roberto, and Victor[311] Behar; Victor Pintz; Alberto Ashkenazi; Alberto and Nissim Assa; Emilio Adato; Leo Mizraji; and, Solomon Méndez. By 1943 there were 75 members. It was only amongst World War II refugees that the first large number of Ashkenazi Jews settled in Santa Clara.[312] Some Ashkenazim, however, also settled in some of the provincial towns, such as Santo Domingo.[313]

As in other cities, and just as was the case in Havana, a major concern of the Jewish Community was a cemetery. A burial area, called Cementerio de los Sirios, was established as an extension of Calle San Miguel in 1932 and placed under the control of the synagogue. On 27 July 1932[314] the first deceased, Salomon Levy Levy, was buried. Until that time the Jewish dead had been transported to Guanabacoa for interment.

After the Revolution

The current synagogue in Santa Clara is located at Edificio No. 5, Apto. 8, Resparto Cardoso.

Santiago de Cuba

In many respects Santiago de Cuba, the most populated city in the eastern section of the country, is unique. In terms of Jewish history it is the largest city with the least influence from Havana. This is due to the distance from the Cuban capital – 944 kilometers (587 miles) – and the resultant independent growth. In non-Jewish terms as well Santiago exercised its own importance throughout Cuban history.

The city of Santiago dates back to its discovery by Diego Velásquez de Cuellar, of Spain in 1514-1515. The cathedral, built in 1522, set the tone of the city. As the rest of Cuba, Santiago was primarily Roman Catholic. The U.S. Army conquered the city on 17 July 1898, and in 1902 non-Catholic worship was formally legalized under the constitution of the Republic of Cuba.

Santiago was a rough city, and the surrounding area was no different. In 1912, for

example, riots against the many blacks (descendents of former slaves) in eastern Cuba took some three thousand lives.[315]

Only with the arrival of Turkish refugees after World War I did the city's Jewish Community begin to grow. Just as Camagüey became a center of Jewish immigrants from Silivria, immigrants from Edirne gravitated to Santiago de Cuba. The first Jew not hiding his religion and listed in Oriente Province records was David Levy in 1917.[316] But, he was only the first of many. Other Jews soon followed to Santiago.

By 1924 there were enough Jews to establish a branch of *Chevet Ahim* in Santiago at San Fermín (new name, Calle Desiderio Fajardo) No. 260 (altos) (corner of Calle Habana),[317] upstairs from a grocery store. Isaac Chiprut Confí (1899-13 May 1943),[318] who had landed in the Port of Havana in 1920 from Edirne, served both as rabbi and *mohel*, and José Castiel Levy (1890-1963) functioned as *shamash*. Castiel lived in the shul until 1950, when he moved across the street.[319] Yechua Behar Abraham (1872-1939) was the first president of the congregation.

Inconvenience in traveling to Havana strengthened local community organizations, especially before the National Highway was constructed during the Machado presidency. Rather than relying on kosher meat shipped to the city from Havana, Chiprut found himself working as the *shochet* in Santiago, where he specialized in slaughtering chickens.

The original Jewish residents of Santiago were primarily Sephardim, yet there were some Ashkenazim in the community. Although they prayed together, testimony exists that in later years a separate Ashkenazi *minyan* was established for *Yom Kippur*.[320]

Santiago de Cuba followed the rule. In Havana, Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities developed separately even though in the same neighborhood due to cheaper living costs. As Cuba's second largest city, Santiago was a major port and market. The city attracted Ashkenazi Jews. The desire to separate from the Sephardim for cultural reasons was present. As soon as there were thought to be enough people, efforts were made to establish a separate community. That came as a result of strife in Europe.

War tensions and anti-Semitism in Europe brought changes to the community. Ashkenazi Jews fleeing from Nazi Europe began to arrive. On 31 March 1939 they organized the Asociación Israelita de Oriente, with Mendel Silber taking a leading rôle. The organization, however, soon stopped functioning. Three years later on 17 October 1942 the Ashkenazi refugees organized the Centro Hebreo de Oriente (approved 9 November 1942). Mendel Silber (again the driving force) was president, and his home at Estrada Palma 453 served as the official address. In April 1943 Enrique Pundik was chosen as the new president. If official papers are an accurate indication, the Centro ceased to function later in 1943. One problem with these Ashkenazi refugee organizations is that many of the Jews left the country as soon as they could. This left instability that was hard-felt particularly in a small community. These organizations

were more social than religious.[321]

A new Sephardic synagogue was built at Calle Mariano Corona No. 273. Overseeing the project were Chiprut, and his rabbinic successor, Victor Farin Serfati (1877-1980) (synagogue rabbi from 1946[322] until his emigration from Cuba to the United States in 1967).[323]

The Jewish Cemetery of Santiago was opened in the nearby village of El Cristo. It served all of Oriente Province. For example, one of the earliest graves is that of Dona Namer of Holguín who died of 20 March 1928 at the age of 22.

After the Revolution

The synagogue was renovated in 1961, but the action was purely symbolic. Santiago had been a focal point of the Castro Revolution. The 1953 attack on the Moncada was launched from Santiago. On 1 January 1959 Castro declared victory of the Revolution in Santiago. For the revolutionary government the city of Santiago was a point of pride. But, while the synagogue was being renovated, Jews were looking to emigrate. The community was on its way into decline. In 1977 the few remaining members of the synagogue petitioned the government to dissolve their organization, and the request was granted in May 1979 (Resolution 112 of the Ministry of Justice). Only after the Fourth Party Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (1991) was a request made to reconstitute a Jewish Community organization in Santiago. On 25 July 1995 the synagogue was rededicated at its address on Calle Corona. Today one of the two Torah scrolls is from the pre-Revolution synagogue.

Yehudah Behar[324] is an example of Jewish life in the early days of the Santiago de Cuba community. Behar abandoned his native city of Edirne, Turkey before World War I rather than fight in the Ottoman army. He traveled to Santiago, where his older brother was already living. Local Jews met Behar at boat-side and loaned him money to pass his first days in Cuba. He was no stranger to people in Santiago. He remembered several Jews from back in Edirne. As time passed, Behar took on the Spanish name, "León," and acclimated himself to Santiago, where he remained until after the Revolution.

SECTION II:

IN THE SHADOW OF WORLD WAR II

Chapter Nine: Years Leading to World War II

Introduction

In the early 1930s the Cuban political leadership was faced with both domestic and international problems. On the domestic front there was growing unrest in the wake of increasingly repressive measures instigated by the Machado régime. This included an undercurrent for change, which had existed even before Machado became progressively dictatorial. To further complicate matters, Cuba suffered from the world depression that had begun in 1929.

A common "solution" for the economic dislocation rampant throughout the world was to force solutions at the cost of foreigners and minority groups. In more polite global terms this was called the emergence of a new nationalism, in which preferential rights were given to citizens at the cost of foreigners. This happened in Cuba as well. Cuba for Cubans! In some countries foreigners were expelled. In other countries foreigners were pressured to leave. In Cuba the situation was more polite; leading up to World War II it became increasingly difficult for foreigners to remain without some type of external financial assistance.

On the international scene the rise of Nazi Germany engendered a wave of anti-Semitism. Nazi support groups existed even in many of those countries that would go to war against Germany, and Cuba was no exception. Specifically, at the time when refugees from Europe sought safety outside Central Europe, Cuba was undergoing waves of anti-foreign sentiment. It was not naive xenophobia. It was a hatred encouraged by Nazis and Falangists, and sustained by economic problems. Nor was the United States void of Nazi supporters. As early as 17 May 1934 American Jews held a rally in New York's Madison Square Garden, attended by thousands. Primary on the agenda of protest were Nazi activities in the United States.

When the Cuban government dealt with domestic problems during the 1930s, particularly during the latter half of the decade, life and decisions were influenced by world politics. Hence, one cannot consider Cuban Jews during the years that led to World War II without taking into account world economics and politics. The international scene had a dual impact: (a) directly upon the Cuban Jewish Community, and (b) indirectly, as world events affected Cuba and then consequentially influenced the way the country related to its Jewish Community.

Cuba, itself, was less than politically stable, first following the Sergeants' coup of 1933 and its aftermath, then during the protracted negotiations preceding the adoption of what became the Cuban Constitution of 1940. Spanish and Caribbean workers in Cuba were the targets of most anti-foreign legislation, but there was a spillover to Jews as

well. There was no strong national government that could take the situation in hand. The government typically reacted when it was forced. It was a classic case of management by reaction. There was no proactive program.

It was within this background that the Jewish refugee problem of World War II emerged in Cuba and was handled.

Economics

The Great Depression of 1929 struck Cuba as well as many other countries, and the economic problems that had begun with the fall of sugar prices continued to worsen. There was little money to employ workers. The sugar harvest of 1932-1933 totaled only half of the harvest ten years earlier, and real wages plummeted to the level of 1909-1910. The Cuban economy was based on sugar, and the sugar industry took much of the brunt of reaction. Riots ensued at the sugar mills, which were to many Cubans a symbol of foreign domination and profiteering – non-Cubans profiting from the faltering Cuban economy (albeit with very small financial gain).

Throughout the early 1930s these economic problems only became worse, promoting discontent with the ruling government throughout the country. Distrust and dislike became emotional and irrational. Plantation owners were foreigners. Many workers were foreigners. Foreigners were deemed a convenient and culpable target – in large measure more convenient than culpable. They were made to symbolically pay the price of Cuba's economic woes, although they were not the true cause of the country's problems.

The anti-foreign wave of discontent had severe effects on Jews. It was not in the sugar industry that Jews suffered, since it employed very few Jews. Many of the less affluent Cubans were peddlers. A large number of Cuban storekeepers complained that street peddlers, operating without the overhead of running a store, were ruining their businesses by undercutting prices. Due to the economic situation the Cuban retail market, both in stores and in peddling, was heavily oriented towards price, rather than quality or service. Undercutting price was the key to making a sale. A long-established store with a record of product responsibility was less important to the potential buyer.

As a measure to restrict the activities of peddlers, the City of Havana passed a law in early 1932, raising the license for peddling from $6.26 to $125. From the government's point of view the measure had the desired effect. It forced many peddlers to leave this line of work. Alternatively, other peddlers moved their mobile businesses to the provinces. For a large number of Jews the immediate consequence was unemployment; for others it was virtual banishment to areas without Jewish communities.

In 1932 the City of Havana also banned street photographers, again an immigrant occupation in which many Jews were employed. This decree, however, was soon rescinded.

Some politely referred to the emergence of a new nationalism in Cuba. This was only a cultured euphemism and circumlocution for anti-foreign sentiments. The attitude in Cuba was typical of many countries of the time. Perhaps the most blatant example was Hitler's Germany, which used the nationalistic pride of Germany and open hatred of Jews and other minorities to unite the country against a background of economic problems.

Immigration

The year 1932 was the last "normal" year for immigration from Europe. Hitler's basic ideas were known, and he was already a rising political power on the German political scene. He still had not, however, achieved a ruling political position. Nor did a majority regard him as a real candidate to lead Germany. Many innocently thought that Nazism was a ludicrous phenomenon that would soon fade away. He would never make political progress, and in a short while Germany would return to normalcy! Against the background of this false hope for a positive future in Germany, 165 Jewish immigrants arrived in Cuba during 1932. According to Centro Israelita records, 98 of these immigrants came from Poland. Only 8 were of German origin.

The large proportion of Polish Jews is not surprising. As has been shown, Poland had been experiencing recurrent incidents of anti-Semitism, which led to a steady stream of emigrants since the end of World War I. These incidents were at the heart of emigration from Poland in the 1920s. They were again the root cause of emigration from Poland in the 1930s. They were not, though, the only reason for which Jews left Poland. This can be seen from the fact that emigration from Poland included not only Jews. Economic problems, as well, confronted Poland. In 1934, for example, 42,563 emigrants left Poland. The majority of those leaving the country were not Jews. A significant number, though – 47% or 19,026 – *were* Jewish.[325] Some of these emigrants came to Cuba. After a decade of continued immigration from Poland, by 1932 the majority of Cuba's Jewish Ashkenazi population was of Polish background.

The Polish government actively assisted people, Jews and others, to leave the country. It even set up an Emigration Office in the Ministry of Labor & Social Welfare. Nor was Poland the only country to do such. The governments of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania set up similar offices. The motivation absolutely was not humanitarian, helping emigrants as a result of compassion for their situation. These offices aided emigrants to obtain entry permits from other countries for one simple purpose – so that they could leave. The government initiative was both economic and ethnic – rid Poland of more workers to be employed and of non-Polish minority

groups. In many ways these offices can be seen as a sophisticated precursor to the "ethnic cleansing" that would soon overcome the country.

There were countries that agreed to receive immigrants. In 1926, for example, Canada had agreed to accept 11,000 Poles between the ages of 18-50 who would agree to work in the agricultural sector. This was agreed upon despite immigration restrictions enacted in 1923, limiting new arrivals to persons already having relatives in Canada. As the Depression took place and worsened, however, the list of recipient countries for refugees grew increasingly shorter. Even Canada tightened its restrictions. Cuba, throughout this period, remained on the very short list of possible countries of destination.

HICEM

Leaving a country is a significant undertaking. The emigrants needed assistance in their quest for a new life, and the Jewish Community tried to provide an answer. HICEM was established on 3 April 1927 to unite Jewish efforts to deal with immigration. The acronym was drawn from the initials of its three constituent organizations – **HI**AS (Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society in New York), **IC**A (Jewish Colonization Association in Paris), and **Em**igdirect (in Berlin).

At first HICEM efforts met with success in assisting Jews to resettle, but by the second half of the 1930s the organization was no longer able to handle the Jewish refugee problem. The flow of refugees was too great. There were also internal organizational difficulties that can be traced to the new situation overtaking Central Europe.

Emigdirect ceased to exist in Berlin in 1934 due to Nazi-imposed restrictions in Germany, where it was headquartered; it moved the following year, though only symbolically, to Paris. ICA was restricted in the use of its funds by new regulations in England, where it was incorporated. After the German invasion of France in 1940, the fledging ICA then had to scramble to find a new headquarters in Portugal to replace the Paris office. By then Emigdirect was no longer an issue. HIAS became the only viable member of HICEM, but even its rôle was hampered. HIAS was focused on immigration specifically to the United States. Operations in other areas brought it into bureaucratic conflict with the JDC.

The basic concept of HICEM was also overshadowed by political events. HICEM was built to deal with emigration of individuals. It was never designed to deal with the larger question of population shifts that meant building of entire communities and their communal organizations. The 1930s also saw another change. Emigration from Poland continued, but suddenly Jews started to stream out of Germany. When HICEM was founded, its Berlin office helped organize aid for Polish Jews; by 1934 that office was shut down as a result of Nazi actions. German Jews went full cycle from being generous donors giving aid to becoming the primary candidates to receive aid.

There was a rise in the Zionist aspiration to populate the Land of Israel. The preferred destination of many Polish Jews was, in fact, Palestine, but the Mandate Government imposed entry restrictions. Mass immigration was impossible; only limited numbers of individuals were admitted. Many of the Jews who could not enter Palestine ended up in Cuba and other Latin American countries instead.

For German Jews legal immigration permits for Palestine was a moot point. Even when a visa could be gotten, the wait was too long. By the time Jews started leaving Germany in large numbers, the main objective was to find a country of refuge – any country of refuge. Palestine was a possibility – legal or not. So was any other country in which they could find at least temporary safety. German Jews became progressively more desperate as time passed.

Cuba Reacts to Immigration

As immigration to Cuba continued and the domestic economic situation worsened, the Cuban government gradually initiated action against foreigners. Jews were not the primary targets, and in the beginning they received somewhat preferential treatment. To cite one example, the Cuban Government issued a decree requiring the registration and fingerprinting of all foreigners in the country. Essentially, this meant a census and registration of non-citizen immigrants – both those intending to remain in Cuba, and those planning to travel onward whenever visas be available. To make life easier for Jews, a special and "convenient" arrangement was made with the Jewish Community whereby this paperwork could be completed in the offices of the Centro Israelita. Part of the reason is that the Centro was considered a friendly and reliable organization with which the government could work comfortably.

These registration measures were a reflection of the quandary of the Cuban economy, and the calculation that restrictions on foreigners would improve the economic status of locals. Those foreigners who did not register became subject to expulsion from Cuba. The statistics generated from the registration also gave the Cuban government a better idea of the magnitude of the non-Cuban population.

Registration as a method to control immigration was an omen of the future. Thus, at the same time as anti-Semitic measures were forcing Jews to leave Germany, Cuban economic problems complicated reception of refugees. The Cuban government, itself, was also functioning with pronounced difficulty. An ineffective Cuban national government meant, amongst other things, the absence of a uniform national immigration policy. Various different departments formulated their own rules effecting immigrants, sometimes due to overlapping responsibilities, sometimes due to the ideas of people in charge. At times immigration policy was very inconsistent. What resulted was an invitation to favoritism and graft.

The true final destination of many refugees was not Cuba. As in years passed, it was the United States. Thus, bribery to allow illegal residence of refugees was envisioned as having no long-term effect on Cuba. The refugees would soon be gone – certainly in theory, but not so soon as events unfolded.

During this period there was also a recurrent problem of stowaways on passage from Cuba to the United States. This was despite numerous warnings of the physical dangers involved. Illegal travelers were invariably returned to Cuba when they were discovered. Cuban tolerance for stowaways was short-lived. In 1933 Cuban law was amended, and stowaways were deported to their country of origin. Even so, the problem continued. Hiding on a ship was still deemed a reasonable risk.

In its report for 1932 the Centro Israelita noted that none of the would-be immigrants to the United States was expelled from Cuba despite often-illegal status in the country. During the same year 136 Jews, unable to immigrate to the United States and suffering economic hardships, traveled from Cuba back to Europe.

Situation in Cuba

Jews in Cuba not only had to deal with the local political situation; they also worried about international developments. From 1933 Jews around the world were gravely concerned with the rise of Hitler in Germany and the enactment of anti-Semitic legislation. By 1933 there were German and Austrian Jewish refugees–as well as Eastern European refugees–coming to Cuba. They were in desperate need of assistance. As discussed, however, they were arriving in a country suffering both political and economic problems.

Cuban President Machado was forced to resign from office on 12 August 1933. From Havana he fled to the Bahamas. From there he moved onward until he settled in Miami, Florida, where he passed away and was buried in 1939. Several weeks after the fall of Machado, on 4 September 1933, a "Junta Revolutionaria" assumed power and elected Ramón Grau San Martín as leader of the country. He took office on 10 September 1933. Grau could not bring stability to the country. He ruled until the following year, when he was deposed.

In another response to domestic economic pressures the Cuban government attempted to formally restrict immigration in 1936. It was hoped that by preventing new workers (immigrants) from looking for jobs, they could not aggravate the already high unemployment rate. The United States also restricted immigration for similar reason; hence many Cubans felt that their limitations conformed with guiding policy lines from their northern neighbor. The Immigration Law of 1936 required those coming to Cuba to post a $300 bond to be refunded upon departure. The following year the price of the bond was raised. This was another attempt at blocking immigration – primarily the immigration of poorer people, who would constitute a drain on the economy. In Jewish

circles the restriction was circumvented in good part by American organizations that posted the bond for most Jewish arrivals. Needless to say, when money is involved, corruption often follows not far behind. Cuban officials offered no exception.

The repeated Cuban intention throughout this period was clear – to restrict immigration and to restrict the employment of foreigners. According to one report in 1938 the Minister of Labor, Juan M. Portuondo Domenech, wanted to deport 50% of the foreign workers in Cuba; although Jews were not the primary objective of this intended plan, they certainly were amongst its potential victims.[326] The implications of threatened selective expulsion from Cuba in parallel with ruthless expulsion from Europe were certainly clear to Cuban Jews.

Labor Law of 1933

Many historians view the Labor Law of 1933 in the context of anti-Semitism. Such an analysis is shallow and misleading.

The law was initiated under Machado, but it was passed after the fall of his régime during the 100-day presidency of Grau. This is one indication that the law was not the work of one man; it was an expression of a popular anti-foreigner attitude. The law restricted non-Cuban workers by requiring that half of all employees in a business be of Cuban birth.

This law applied to *employees*. It did not restrict the self-employed – from the heavily taxed peddlers in Havana to business owners. The law was popular amongst Cubans, and was later incorporated into the Constitution of 1940. There were even efforts to raise the required percentage of Cuban employees to 80%.

One should view the law as anti-foreign, not necessarily anti-Semitic. From this perspective, the main targets of the 1933 legislation were the Spanish and in particular Caribbean (especially Haitian) residents in Cuba. The contention is that the Spanish refused to "Cubanize" their way of life, and maintained family businesses that denied employment to local Cuban workers. Those of Caribbean extraction worked for notoriously lower wages, giving their employers a strong advantage in the price-oriented market place. It was felt that legislation was necessary to counter these phenomena in an era of economic difficulty and widespread unemployment.

Jews, however, did fall victim to the legislation. Within the Jewish Community the net effect of these 1930s attitudes was multi-fold:

1. Strengthening of Zionist feelings[327] as a reaction to legislation that was perceived as negatively effecting Jews
2. Intensification of conflict with the Spanish

3. Development of private family enterprises to escape legal requirements that specified "employees"

Regarding the second point, there was a commercial conflict with the Spanish, who often ran businesses in competition with those of Jews. As noted, the Spanish approach was to run operations with Spanish-only employees[328] and the import of products from the former imperial power. In many ways this was a left-over from Spanish rule in the country. Jews took a different approach, manufacturing products (usually shoes and cloth garments) in-country under sweat-shop conditions, thus competing handsomely on price. A by-product of the poor working conditions was the rise of workers movements (i.e., socialists, Communists – both in the Jewish and non-Jewish communities) in the 1920s. A spin-off of the Labor Law of 1933 was the Cubanization of factories and the improvement of working conditions.

Regarding the Spanish, anti-Semitism was an issue that could not be ignored. Anti-Jewish feelings were fanned by the Franco victory in Spain. Many observers trace much of the 1930s anti-Semitism against Cuban Jews to the Spanish in the country.[329] This only intensified the economic competition between the Jews and the Spanish. Nazis in Cuba tried to take advantage of the Spanish feeling that the government was persecuting them and favoring Jews. Many Spanish were ripe to accept this message.

As Jews ceased to be employees and moved into their own small businesses, the need for Jewish labor movements declined.[330] This is one of the reasons that the later 1930s were not characterized by Jewish labor organizations, as were the 1920s.

Cuban apologists have also offered the explanation that moving against foreign workers was a method used by Machado to regain slipping popularity after years in which the lot of the Cuban worker was totally ignored. It is their thesis that Machado tried to unite Cuba against an enemy – foreigners – rather than adopt progressive positive measures to ameliorate Cuba's economic situation.

The Labor Law of 1933 was faulty from a legal consideration, as can be seen in 1936 when the Cuban High Court ruled that it was illegal to differentiate between naturalized Cuban citizens and those born in the country. Born in Cuba, or naturalized – no differentiation could be made. The wording of the law was not by chance. It was reflective of an attitude that even after naturalization, foreigners remained foreigners.

The ramification of the legal decision was that the Court had confirmed as Cuban all those Jews naturalized after five years of residence in Cuba; many Spanish, who were much more reluctant to assume Cuban citizenship, remained foreigners for the purpose of the law. Jewish-Spanish relations became only worse.

Anti-Semitism

Historically, Cuba knew only isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, never officially sanctioned by any post-Spanish Cuban government;[331] the few recorded incidents,

primarily during the 1930s and World War II period, have been attributed to foreign agents. This has the political advantage of minimizing the Cuban rôle. There were, though, some anti-Semitic acts carried out by Cubans. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that given the background of relative safety, so many Jews decided to stay in Cuba.

Dr. José Miller, appointed official head of the Cuban Jewish Community (Comisión Coordinadora) in 1981, discounts open anti-Semitism but asserts regarding the pre-Revolutionary period, "Jews were not welcome in many social clubs and other public places," hence they developed a parallel society.[332]

This is confirmed by the fact that Max Pincus, Mayer Fuchsberg,[333] and Max Lesnick[334] decided to open a country club in the late 1950s, because they were denied membership (though admitted as guests) in a prestigious non-Jewish club in Havana.[335] This was even though they were allowed to join a middle class club. The three, in fact, started to acquire land in Habana del Este, but the project came to an abrupt end after the Revolution, when the land was confiscated as part of a rural nationalization policy.

Dr. José Altschuler Gutwert (1929-)[336], another post-Revolutionary leader of the Jewish faith and enjoying high government positions, also points to a small incident, but relates that overt acts were few. He states clearly, however, that there was anti-Jewish hate in pre-Revolutionary Cuban society.[337]

As early as the Summer 1932 anti-Semitic sentiment instigated from Europe was considered an important enough problem that the Centro Israelita tried to stop it by organizing the Comité de Intervención. The number and severity of anti-Semitic acts in Cuba rose. After Hitler came to power, the German Embassy in Havana often promoted local anti-Semitism in the form of propaganda aimed primarily at inciting those Spanish-born residents in Cuba who already supported Franco (1892-1975)[338] and his anti-Jewish statements. The Spanish were divided with some supporting Franco and others supporting the Republicans.

The problem of Nazi-generated anti-Semitism in Cuba had a corollary. Communism was seen as anti-Cuban and a threat to the régime in power. There was a certain justification to this. It was a fact that Russia was sending agents to Cuba to strengthen the Communist Party and encourage unrest. Some of these agents were Jews.[339] Many of the Cuban Bundists and Communists were Jews, thus also giving theoretical encouragement to anti-Semitism.

Although Cuba was a safer refuge than certain European countries, there still were problems. On 30 September 1933, the evening of Yom Kippur, Havana Jews were about to close their shops to go to synagogue, when rumors began to circulate that they were in fact closing their businesses in protest against government suppression of a Communist demonstration a few days earlier. The police attempted to force the Jews to reopen their stores, and two Jews were arrested. There were also allegations that Jews had been involved in violence associated with the demonstration. The Centro Israelita

tried to appeal, but with only partial success. The chief of the Havana police charged that the Jewish colony was destroying public morals and called for the introduction of Jewish immigration restrictions. To close the incident Grau San Martín ordered that the two Jews arrested on Yom Kippur be released.[340]

One of the arrests is an excellent example of the hysteria that was sweeping Cuba. The wife of a Jewish musician, Drachman, was arrested as a Communist. She wore a red skirt! Although this incident seems too absurd to be true, it was recorded in the *Habaner Lebn* newspaper together with other tales of Yom Kippur 1933. Many Jewish homes were searched for seditious materials, and soldiers entered the *Adath Israel* synagogue, but they refrained from searches and arrests.[341]

The "Red Skirt" was not an isolated incident. On 5 October 1933 Havana Police Chief G. Granero was interviewed in the newspaper, *Mañana*, and called Jews an immoral element. Two months later, on 17 December 1933, an armed soldier accompanied by three men in plainclothes killed two Jews and wounded another in a store on Calle Monte; there was no apparent provocation.[342]

A simplistic explanation would be that the Chief of Police was responsible for anti-Jewish actions. That, certainly, is true. There is, however, a broader explanation. On the one hand the perceived anti-Jewish attitude of Granero probably left the impression that he would tolerate additional actions without seriously mobilizing police resources to enforce the law. On the other hand Granero could hardly encourage or tolerate even limited lawlessness without approval from either government echelons or from the general public – if not from both! An unresolved question is to what exact level Granero was willing to allow anti-Semitic acts.

One must always keep perspective and not jump to conclusions. Not every act of violence against a Jew is anti-Semitic. On 19 January 1934 a gang of four robbed Isaac Goldberg on Calle Reina. Anti-Semitism? No. It was a simple case of criminal activity – theft.[343]

Although the overall situation remained more or less tolerable, these episodes and others indicate that Cuba, like other countries in the 1930s, was ripe for anti-Semitism. The rise of fascism in Germany found enthusiastic support in certain quarters. In the eyes of Nazi followers, under the right circumstances the Jews (and not other immigrant groups such as the Spanish) could become the scapegoats for Cuba's domestic problems.

The most difficult period was the mid- to late 1930s, when Nazi supporters made continuous efforts to instill anti-Semitic feelings amongst Cubans. The years of World War II were less problematic. Then Cuba was openly allied with the United States, and the population was less open to listening to German propaganda.

The primary Nazi propaganda method was to capitalize on economic problems and resentment of foreigners. In many cases the Cuban national government intervened and took corrective action.

Meir Lasker provided an example of government intervention against anti-Semitic acts. After the Revolution of 1933 and the ouster of Machado, Fulgencio Batista tried to gain popular favor by building a library in honor of the Cuban national hero, José Martí. Batista asked the Jewish Community for financial assistance. Lasker and UHC members Adolpho Kates, Jacob Brandon, and Louis Jurick[344] succeeded in raising $10,000, a very substantial amount of money at the time. Soon thereafter anti-Semitic attacks were broadcast on a Havana radio station. A delegation of Jews went to Batista, who sent them onward to President Gómez. The radio station was curiously destroyed, and the broadcasts ceased.[345]

The Cuban Jewish Community tried to show unity in countering Nazi influence. In May 1935 an organization, the Jewish Community for Cuba, was created as an umbrella group to organize charities as well as community groups fighting anti-Semitism.

The rise of the Nazis in Germany generated a crisis for Jews throughout the world. In Cuba, local Nazis fought against the Jews with another immigration tactic. The attempt was not to limit immigration number or impose fees; that would punish non-Jews as well. The Nazis campaigned for the specific and complete termination of Jewish immigration. Particularly vicious was Dr. José Ignacio Rivero (1895-1944), who controlled three newspapers. Much of his newspapers' propaganda was aimed at inciting the Spanish-born community in Cuba, many of whom had pro-Falangist sympathies. Rivero accused Sender Kaplan, the editor of the *Habaner Lebn*, of spreading anti-Cuban propaganda. In late March 1936 Kaplan was arrested and charged with printing a leftist student newspaper. There apparently was some convoluted truth in the accusation, but investigation showed that Kaplan's Cuban apprentice had published the newspaper without permission. Kaplan was held in prison for four weeks before being cleared of all charges and released.

At one point Rivero wanted to publish a local edition of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." The printing was stopped, to a substantial degree due to the efforts of Adolpho Kates.[346] Unfortunately, that was only a temporary success. Reportedly, the volume was published nonetheless at a later date.

Jews felt that Cuba was the doorway to Latin America. This was a key factor in the decision that they could not ignore anti-Semitism in Cuba. From their point of view Nazi propaganda had to be stopped in Cuba before it spread throughout the entire region.[347] Sometimes there were successes. Sometimes there were failures. It was unanimously agreed, however, that something had to be done.

Two sources suggest that one cause of anti-Semitism was the high profile that Jewish refugees kept in Havana. Since they were not allowed to enjoy employment, they frequented sidewalk cafés where they were seen by passers-by. It would be more plausible to assert that annoyance with the presence of Jews is an indication of the existence of anti-Semitism and not a root cause.[348] From the refugees' perspective, life in Havana was demoralizing, "...far too many are sitting listlessly in Havana with nothing to do but drift along in the easy Cuban life, dream of the distant past, worry about their families, and fret about the chances of their getting their visas. Such an atmosphere is particularly demoralizing for the young men and boys..."[349]

Post-War

Even in the post-World War II period there were isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, for example the 1947 publication of an anti-Jewish tract written by Enrique Trinchet.[350] J.A.F. Pérez published another in 1979.[351] These publications were certainly the exception and not the rule.[352]

World War II taught lessons. In November 1948 there were anti-Semitic broadcasts on the radio. Enrique Baikowitz of the Centro Israelita immediately turned to the government to have the broadcasts stopped.

Cámara de Comerciantes

The Cámara de Comerciantes e Industriales Hebreos de Cuba was envisioned as an organization with closely defined objectives. It was established to protect the commercial interests of Jewish businessmen, primarily against anti-Semitism.

By the late 1930s the Cámera had an expanded function. It had assumed a central leadership rôle, filling the vacuum that existed at the time and going beyond the definitions of its anticipated function. The Cámara assumed new tasks out of default; it was an organization that functioned well. The Centro Israelita was having severe institutional problems and could no longer unify the community. Another reason was that the 350 member Cámara was composed of businessmen who had money and could raise additional funds for the defense of Jewish rights and privileges, unlike the more financially constricted Centro.

In March 1939 the Jewish Community organized a conference for the purpose of combating Anti-Semitism in the country. During the conference the Farainigten Komitet Zum Bakemfn Dem Antisemitism in Kuba (the United Committee to Combat Anti-Semitism in Cuba) was established. At first it was part of the Cámara, but in June 1939 it established itself as a separate entity. Soon it took the name Zentral Komitet Fun di Yidishe Organizazies in Kuba – Comite Centro (Central Committee of Jewish

Organizations in Cuba). This new name indicated that the Committee now intended to represent the Jewish Community on all issues and not just defend it against anti-Semitism. It continued to function during the World War II period.

Situation in Europe and the Cuban Reaction

No picture of this period and its immigration into Cuba would be complete without summarizing the situation in Europe from which Jews were fleeing.

In Germany anti-Semitism and the rise of the Nazi party are well-known events. In the November 1932 German elections the Nazis received one third of all votes, more than any other party. In many quarters this set off a prospicient alarm, even though few foresaw the true extent of what was to transpire.

The Nazi threat, however, was only one reason to leave Europe at this point. There was another aspect of the Jews' departure. There was a breakdown of the social fabric in parts of the European Jewish Community. An indication of this can be found in the Annual Report of the Centro Israelita for 1932, "Special attention is given to family matters, wives and children whose husbands and fathers after arriving in Cuba have abandoned them in Europe." This was true not just for immigrants to Cuba, but for those going to other countries as well. The key word is "abandoned." This differs from earlier immigration patterns in which the father would come in advance, earn money, and pay for the subsequent passage of other family members. This time men left Europe with the true intention of leaving their families behind.

There were those few who understood the threat of Nazi Germany with clear foresight from the earliest days of Hitler's assumption of power. Perceptive premonitions can be found throughout the pages of *Habaner Lebn* from the Spring, 1933. Most explicit was an editorial on 19 May 1933 (p. 5) warning of the dangers of war. The threat of anti-Semitism in Poland was also clear from the pages of *Habaner Lebn,* primarily due to the reporting of the newspaper's correspondent in Warsaw, Y. Steinberg. But for numerous reasons, during the initial years of the Nazi régime few German refugees came to Cuba. In both 1933 and 1934, for example, Polish refugees arriving in Cuba overwhelmingly outnumbered Germans.[353] Immigrants from the Soviet Union could not come to Cuba; at this point the USSR government prohibited emigration.

In 1935 the Comité Israelita de Cuba addressed the refugee problem, but it understood neither its extent nor its gravity. The committee naively postponed the matter, "...the Committee purposes to study ways and means of opening the friendly doors of Cuba to a reasonable number of German refugees, as soon as economic conditions make this feasible..."[354] The urgency of what was transpiring was not at all understood. That failure to grasp the situation in Germany was paralleled with a poor social assistance infrastructure, which in 1935 did not meet even local Cuban needs, let alone those of immigrant refugees. That infrastructure was politely described in these words, "The

indicated functions and objectives of the above societies [five principal Jewish societies organized for social services] are to a considerable extent still in embryonic stage."[355] The situation in Germany, of course, only grew immeasurably worse when the Nuremberg Laws were passed on 15 September 1935.

The situation of the Jews in Germany again continued to worsen rapidly. From 1933 through 1938, 169,000 Jews would leave Germany. In July 1936 the Jewish U.S. Congressman, William Irving Sirovich (D-NY 14th District, born 18 March 1882; died 17 December 1939; served in Congress 1927-1939), raised verbally with the President of Cuba the possibility of accepting 100,000 or 200,000 refugees. This proposal served as fuel for further anti-Semitic sentiments in the United States.[356]

Even under the threat of anti-Semitism and the rise of Nazism in Europe, it still remained hard for the Cuban Jewish Community to work cohesively. The reasons included differences in backgrounds, the fragmented nature of the Jewish Community, and even economic competition. There was also a disparity in strategic approaches toward specific issues. For instance, in the latter part of 1938 many Jews called for a large demonstration to protest Nazi persecution of German Jews, but the United Hebrew Congregation refused to support the effort. Leaders of UHC argued that the sensitive issue of immigration to Cuba made it important that the Jewish Community act with extreme caution and lower public profile. According to that opinion, a demonstration would give the impression that the Jews were causing public disorder at a time when there was already a great deal of sentiment in favor of restricting or ending Jewish immigration. It was feared that such demonstrations might actually give support to people opposed to accepting refugees. This argument seemed very rational at the time, although in retrospect it can be judged weak and acquiescent.

The Rich and the Poor

In considering the refugee issue it must be remembered that Jews were not the only refugees who strove to reach Cuban shores. Amongst the non-Jews there was a large number of Latin Americans seeking a better economic future in Cuba; they were coming from countries even more problematic economies than the Cuban. There were also refugees from the Spanish Civil War. This latter group posed particular concern to Cuban authorities, who feared that they might become a destabilizing element in an already unstable atmosphere on the island.

As mentioned, in Cuba there was an anti-foreign attitude, as unemployment soared amidst worsening economic decline. Even the Eastern European Jewish immigrants of the 1920s were having financial problems, and many of them also needed assistance. Each new refugee was seen as further exacerbating the problem. So, as Jews were fleeing Europe for their lives, there was reluctance amongst the Cuban population to accept more immigrants into Cuba.

A major part of the solution to the problem of accepting new refugees was graft. It was a pragmatic solution. Through payoffs, refugees were able to find a new, albeit temporary, home in Cuba.

Not all Cuban Jews were poor. There were Jews who were well-off financially, for the most part in the "American Community" (United Hebrew Congregation) and amongst the unaffiliated. Thus, there were various fundraising campaigns that generated significant monies. In 1937 Ben Zion Wagschal of ORT organized a fundraising campaign; Reform Rabbi Meir Lasker served as honorary president.[357]

Arrival of World War II Refugees

The JDC realized that Havana had the potential of becoming a center for Jewish refugees escaping Europe, and so, strongly influenced by Jacob Brandon, in the late 1930s they opened the Jewish Relief Committee (JRC) in Havana. The JRC was to exist until 1950. Establishment of the JRC was a legal maneuver allowing for greater operating flexibility, since the JDC could not be involved in activities that were deemed political. The JRC skirted that restriction. In the new legal framework many JDC employees staffed the JRC. At first the JRC operated without legal incorporation, but later appropriate paperwork was filed. One of the reasons was the "50% Law" – the JRC could only keep its foreign (JDC) employees, when it was registered as a duly constituted non-profit organization.

The JRC underwent several administrative and personnel changes, but it retained a small, compact core that ran its affairs. In the early World War II years Charles Jordan, the Director, was assisted by García Montes and Dr. Giberga. That was the core group. The larger organization and Board of Directors rarely met. If any person from the board had to be consulted, it was in private meetings. Dr. Torrientes, a former prime minister, was hired as the JRC lawyer in an attempt to cover all political bases.

By 1938 the Western country consulates in Germany were flooded with Jewish refugees seeking asylum. *Kristallnacht* was the final message to Jews that there was no more hope of a safe existence – of any existence – in Germany. The desire to emigrate was uncompromising and urgent. But by this time almost every country had exceptionally restrictive quotas in place, and few refugees could find any country willing to accept them.[358]

In 1938-1939 the earlier trickle of Jewish refugees from Nazi-dominated Europe to Cuba was overshadowed by a surge of some 5000 Jews in flight from arrest, torture, and almost certain death.[359] Cuba remained a possibility. It was both a destination in itself and a waiting station until hopeful entry into the United States could be arranged. The dimensions of the refugee problem overwhelmed Jewish organizations. This was a global problem. In 1940 in Cuba alone Jewish organizations met 288 boats. There were 3419 Jews who intended to stay in Cuba; 5763 Jews declared that they were in transit

to other Central and South American destinations. Nor were all Jewish passengers declared on ship manifests. There were also 11 stowaways found on these ships.[360] In all probability there were others who were not discovered.

Many refugees stayed in Cuba for several months until onward travel permits could be arranged, however there were numerous problems. In 1938, for example, the number of US immigration visas issued each month in Havana was reduced from 75 to 16 at the same time as the number of refugees fleeing Europe soared dramatically. The US was well tuned into reality. The Americans realized that most refugees very little interest in Cuba; they really awaited transfer to the US. The American reaction was to become much more restrictive.

Some refugees who arrived showed that they had no idea what Cuba was like. But, did it matter? The only important fact was that the island was a possible escape from the Nazis. After 1938-1939, further surges of refugees arrived in Cuba during 1940 (after the occupation of the Netherlands) and in 1941.

The refugees of 1938-1939 are yet another example of Cuba as a transit point for further travel. By July 1941, only 400 of the 5000 who had come to Cuba in this immigration remained in the country.[361] Many Allied countries could no longer turn a deaf ear to their suffering. The immigration of 1941-1942 – Jews primarily from Belgium, Netherlands, and France after the occupation of these countries[362] – was no different. By December 1941 an estimated 35% of those immigrants had already resettled in the United States; others had traveled onward to Mexico, Argentina, and Chile.[363]

To a large degree and as a result of Jewish efforts, the United States Government intervened in Cuba to bring some order to the situation. Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar, the effective power behind the presidency, represented the Cuban government in discussions; he showed a non-hostile if not sympathetic attitude towards the Jewish refugees.[364] A letter from Professor Joseph P. Chamberlain to George Warren, 6 July 1938, quotes Jacob Brandon, saying that Batista was "not unfriendly to a degree of Jewish immigration." Brandon complained that some Cubans were opposed to accepting refugees; this Cuban decision was based upon the U.S. refusal to raise its entry quotas[365] – in other words, increased immigration to Cuba without a parallel raising of United States immigration quotas would mean that the refugees would remain in Cuba. Dr. Morton Kahn, reportedly a close associate of Batista, reported to the JDC that Batista held "very friendly and well disposed views" towards Jewish immigration, but felt that the US Jewish Community could not support the refugees in Cuba for "4 or 5 years."[366] This fear might have been part of the reason that Batista was reluctant to take a stronger rôle in the St. Louis affair.

Given the desire of most refugees to reach North American shores, it was within United States interests to be involved in the Cuban immigration issue.

Representatives of the Centro Israelita, the Joint Relief Committee, and others met many of the Jewish refugees arriving in Cuba at port. Representatives of these organizations also made regular visits to the immigration reception center in Tiscornia.[367] The fact that more than one organization dealt with the same aspect of the refugee problem was symptomatic both of the aforementioned disorganization in the Jewish Community and of competition between social groups.

Word got out that Cuba was good for the Jews. Since local laws prohibited employment of refugees, many of the new arrivals were on relief. In early 1939, for example, there were 120 dissatisfied Jewish refugees in the Dominican Republic. They were looking for visas, so that they might come to Cuba and benefit from JRC relief.[368] And, the generous availability of relief encouraged fraud. Refugees who had come earlier met boats and provided consultation to newly arrived travels on how to maximize upon relief benefits. There was also ample evidence of false and incomplete statements.[369] Cubans certainly knew about the relief payments, and jealousy of such is only a natural reaction.

The refugees established their own organizations, which served both financial and social needs. This was a repeat of the same phenomenon that had occurred in the 1920s. The largest was the Asociación Democrática de los Refugídos Hebreos, set up in cooperation with the cooperation the JDC in December 1941. Dr. Viktor Ornstein, a Czech refugee of about 60 years of age, was the organization's first president and served until his resignation on 4 November 1942, just prior to his emigration abroad; his wife, Eugenie, ran the organization's school that taught English, Spanish and Americanization classes to immigrants. The Asociación had members who came from 18 different countries. Ornstein personified the refugee problem in Cuba. The population was fluid – not just rank and file members of the community, but also the leaders. There was a negative net effect from a Cuban viewpoint. Jewish refugees in Cuba that were dedicated to assisting each other, but few had any allegiance to Cuba. The country was only a temporary home.

This was a period of desperation, as European Jews scrambled to save their lives. A rather sad joke circulating at that time was told of a German Jew who walked into a travel agency in 1939 and asked to see a map of the world. After looking at it closely, he realized that there was no country on the map that would be willing to take him in, so he asked the travel agent if perhaps he did not have another map of another world.

Cuba was no exception to this general reluctance to give the European Jews safe haven. Nevertheless, there were possibilities in Cuba. Corrupt officials made profits selling landing permits to prospective immigrants; these permits stated that the holder would stay in Cuba only for the period of time necessary to obtain a visa to the United States. The permit also affirmed that the bearer was of good health. Of very significant consequence, the permit stated that the person was not to engage in any type of employment in Cuba.

There were complaints about the apathetic approach of Cuban Jews to the refugee situation. One assessment was that Cuban Jews felt they were doing refugees a favor in rendering assistance. Internal politics forced Brandon to resign from the Joint Relief Committee during the last days of December 1938 (yet he did remain personally active in trying to help refugees). When a refugee ship was expected several days later, JDC representatives concluded that they could not count on the Cuban Jews to help. The local Jews were too divided to be effective.[370]

Cuban Immigration Situation in 1939

On January 13, 1939 Cuban President Federico Laredo Bru (1875-1946; president 28 December 1936 - 10 October 1940) signed Law No. 55, legislation that would have far-reaching consequences. For the first time a distinction was made between immigrants and tourists. From the date of the law Cuban diplomatic missions abroad no longer had the authority to unilaterally issue *immigration* visas.[371]

Immigration Visa

According to the law, all non-Cubans arriving in the country were required to have an entry visa issued with the express approval of the Secretaries of Housing and of Labor, and by the Director General of the Immigration Department. Only with these three approvals could a Cuban diplomatic mission abroad issue an immigration visa. This process resulted in the almost complete cessation of immigration visas being issued.

Tourist Visas

The issuance of tourist visas was the loophole in the law. The granting of these visas to refugees was not merely postponing resolution of the refugee problem. It was a total denial of the problems that refugees suffer. When tourist visas were issued to supposed "non-immigrants," this meant virtually no efforts were made towards absorption, since the stay of the travelers was theoretically temporary. Therefore, as the Cuban government walked away from the problems of the refugees, American-based Jewish relief organizations had to step in.

There were problems with the new law from the very beginning. The Commissioner of Immigration was given great power in the visa issuing process. Manuel Benítez Gonzalez, a former colonel in the army during the Machado era and a staunch Batista loyalist, filled the position at the time. Benítez had been assigned to Oriente. Benítez' son, also called Manuel Benítez, had been a sergeant who sided with Batista in the coup of 1933.

Benítez' loyalty to Batista was absolute, and he was rewarded handsomely. After his immigration post, Benítez served as head of the National Police of Cuba from 1940 to

1944, when he was jailed, then exiled to the United States for involvement in an effort to thwart the national elections. He served as a member of Cuban Legislature from 1948 to 1958. He was also implicated in a plan to invade Cuba from the Dominican Republic to overthrow the Revolutionary Government and reinstall Batista.

The policy of Benítz was to use Law No. 55 to his own financial advantage, personally pocketing significant sums of money in exchange for visa authorizations.[372] The law did not define "immigrant" and "tourist." A "tourist," allowed to land in Cuba, became virtually anyone who would pay Benítez $150.[373] These payments could be made virtually worldwide through Cuban consulates. At least one family made a payoff in Detroit to get a Cuban entry permit,[374] presumably with the payment forwarded onward. Thus, the purpose of the law was thwarted. A steady flow of immigrants continued to arrive in Cuba in the first four months of 1939.

Bribery was a way of life in Cuba at the time, and there was no point of taking an ethical stance. The goal of Jewish organizations was simply to save Jews, regardless of the price, and bribery was not cheap. The March 1939 monthly accounting sheet for the JDC in Havana shows the following amounts for payoffs:

07 March 1939	$ 3 370.93
14 March 1939	3 352.18
21 March 1939	3 298.30[375]

It is plausible that Batista explicitly knew of Benítez' bribery system and quietly acquiesced, as long as the matter did not get out of hand.[376] This is quite probable, since little happened in Cuba during this period without the knowledge and tacit approval of Batista.[377]

Although the dishonesty of Benítez is clear, there is also a positive side. He did not exercise his authority to deport people. He also released some people from Tiscornia without taking payment.[378]

Pragmatically, it was simple for the Jewish Community to work with Benítez. When visas would otherwise have been available, he made them possible at a price that certainly was affordable, if not for most individuals, then certainly for Jewish organizations. No effort is being made to judge the morality of supporting a corrupt system when it serves one's purpose to save lives. The point here is that the relationship was "mutually beneficial" in what can be described as a crisis situation. The net effect was that through this system of graft Jews escaping from Nazism had a place to flee.

There were problems with the arrangements in Cuba. Benítez maintained the fiction of "tourists," by prohibiting these immigrants from working. Thus, in effect they had to live off foreign contributions. Money from abroad, of course, had the beneficial side effect of helping the Cuban economy.[379]

By March 1939 Benítez was exceeding what could be tolerated by the Cuban Establishment, and even he began to realize that the days of his bribery operation were coming to a close. One JDC report states, "Mr. Benítez is more than angry. He is a wild man let loose. He definitely blames our Committee [JDC] for cutting in on his racket... Also, with investigations and publicity from several sources, he wants to get his money while the getting is good.... He is a dangerous enemy and an important friend..."[380] This was written from a Jewish perspective, but it hints at the broader problem. Opposition to Benítez was growing. That opposition would soon be an important factor in the events of May 1939.

In the Midst of Problems

Not all refugees came as healthy individuals. One serious problem could not be ignored. In one documented case,[381] typhoid broke out amongst refugees.

As the early months of 1939 passed, refugees traveled as far as New Zealand, looking for a safe haven. And, more and more countries placed restrictions on immigration. From Kenya to many Latin American countries doors were closed. Brazil forbade employment of immigrants. Even the U.S. State of Pennsylvania legislature was considering a law to restrict immigrants through registration. Cuba, however, remained an immigration possibility, in good measure thanks to Benítez.

Grave problems were in the offing. Very few people realized how desperate the situation would rapidly become.

Chapter Ten: The St. Louis

Introduction

A major incident in Cuban Jewish history was the arrival of the St. Louis and refusal of authorities to let its refugee passengers disembark in Havana Harbor. A new home for Hitler's victims was so close, yet so far. The reasons for the Cuban refusal for the ship to land were not simple. They were based on several factors: previous immigration policies, economics, Cuban internal politics, tacit messages broadcast by the United States (which also refused entry to the ship's passengers), and a misunderstanding of a changing British policy in Mandate Palestine.

Refugee Ships: Background to the St. Louis

In 1939 the situation of European Jews worsened not only in Germany, but in other countries as well. Hungary passed legislation not very different from the Nürnberg Laws. Poland stripped Jews of citizenship if they were resident abroad for certain periods of time. Many Jews, therefore, often became stateless persons, subject to persecution. Jews were simply not wanted in large segments of Europe. In April 1939 the Polish government openly raised with England the possibility of mass Jewish immigration.[382] And, the situation in Germany, itself, kept deteriorating.

The signs of imminent war seemed more and more convincing. On 1 April 1939 the Republican Government in Spain collapsed, and Franco's Nazi-backed forces took control of the entire country. The fascist victory was of immense psychological support to Hitler, who saw his sphere of influence and support increasing.

The pace toward war hastened. England declared compulsory military conscription on 26 April 1939. Non-aggression pacts were signed, and Germany complained about encirclement. Mutual defense treaties were negotiated. Not surprisingly, increasing numbers of Jews tried desperately to flee from Germany in particular and from Europe in general. During the month of April 1939 alone the US Embassy in Paris received 30,000 visa applications.[383]

With legal immigration precluded, in numerous cases Jews boarded ships and tried to enter countries illegally. The primary destination was Mandate Palestine, either by traveling directly or by landing on a nearby coast, such as Egypt, and completing the journey overland or on small vessels. British authorities intercepted many of the boats. From 15 February 1939 until 15 April 1939 1220 refugees who landed in Palestine were caught by the British and denied entry.[384] Many of these refugees were from two incidents: (1) on 25 March 1939 the SS Sandu was sent back to Konstanz with 269

refugees, and (2) on 2 April 1939 the SS Astir was prevented from landing with 710 refugees.

The response policy of denying entry that guided the British into April 1939 was considerably different two months later. Public opinion and events in Europe were main factors in forcing this change. The episode of the St. Louis in Cuba must be viewed against this background of the increasing threat of war in Europe and a new British immigration policy in Palestine in light of European developments.

SS ASSIMI

The voyage of the SS Assimi was a pivotal incident that highlights the change in British immigration policy in Mandate Palestine. Planning for the ship's sailing began in December, 1938. A company in Greece chartered the SS Assimi, built in 1905 in Odessa. The ship carried a Panamanian flag, though there was no connection with Panama other than registration.

The ship was designed to carry 150 passengers, but some 470 people were aboard. To compensate for overloading, passengers were restricted to 15 kg. of baggage each.

On the first night after nearing the shores of Palestine, 90 passengers were unloaded before early morning patrols. Then luck changed. On the second night seas were too rough to let off passengers. The following night 110 people made it to land, but under gunfire from the British. On 20 April 1939 the Assimi was seized off the Palestine coast near Kfar Vitkin. Entry was denied to its remaining 270 refugees, all traveling without entry permits for Palestine. After being held in Haifa Harbor, the ship's crew was put on trial for aiding and abetting illegal immigration. The captain, Gregarious Bagulatis, was imprisoned and sentenced to nine months in jail. But, the British did not plan well. Under law the ship could not sail under the direction of the deputy captain as long as the captain was alive. So, Bagulatis was released from jail, and the ship was put out to sea with two days of provisions.[385]

This, however, was not an isolated incident. The British learned very quickly that there were yet other ships bringing refugees from Europe. Two more incidents are important to mention in examining changes in British response policy.

SS PANAGIYA CORRESTRIO

On 22 April 1939 this ship carrying 182 refugees was also intercepted off the Palestine coast. The vessel was in poor condition, which influenced the decision to land the refugees and place them in the Haifa quarantine center. The British had no choice. Forcing the ship to set sail was not an option. It was absolutely not sea-worthy.

Ashkelon

In yet another incident 170 Jews were put ashore near Ashkelon. A larger ship had brought them off the coast of Palestine; smaller craft then brought them ashore. The refugees were arrested and brought to the Sarafand Detention Center between Ramle and Rishon Le-Tziyon. The refugees had spent 36 days at sea on their voyage from Germany. There was no ship caught, so they could not be sent back to sea "conveniently."

The immigration policy that the British used in Palestine vacillated between enforcement and compassion. On the one hand the Immigration Ordinance was amended on 27 April 1939, increasing fines and prison sentences for aiding and abetting illegal immigration. On the other hand the "convicted" captain of the SS Assimi was freed to sail his ship out of harbor.

The British policy was calculated in terms of the political situation. The feeling of an approaching war dictated reality. It was clear that fighting would break out. The major question was, "When?" England could no longer conscience sending Jews back to Germany.

Commencing with the SS Panagiya Correstrio and the Ashkelon group, refugees were symbolically detained for a short period of time (in part to deal with health matters), then they were allowed to enter Palestine. The number of refugees admitted was deducted from the monthly permitted immigration quota, but the important fact is that they were admitted. The British, though, did not have a totally free hand to determine policy. Arab leadership was opposed to Jewish immigration even under the circumstances of the Nazi threat. The MacDonald White Paper on Palestine was issued on 17 May 1939, and the British did not want to preclude Arab acceptance of the document by flagrantly increasing Jewish immigration.

Several other incidents only serve as further examples of this new approach. This did not mean, however, that the doors of Palestine were wide-open to Jewish immigrants. Admission was only a *de facto* solution to resolve the status of those who managed to reach Palestine territorial waters.

The most dramatic example of the change in policy is the SS Assimi. On 7 June 1939 the same vessel that had been returned to sea reached Palestine once again. The ship had been to Athens, then Istanbul, then anchored off a small Aegean island.[386] With nowhere else to go, the ship headed back to Palestine. This time its passengers were transferred to the Haifa quarantine station from which they were released and allowed to enter Palestine (again, their numbers being deducted from the month's immigration quota).

Against this background of Jewish flight from Europe in the Spring 1939, the Nazi government in Germany initiated a propaganda ploy to hide its atrocities and to show that Germany was not the only country that did not want Jews on its territory. Other

countries, as well, did not want Jews. To this end the Germans allowed a limited number of refugee ships to set sail from its shores. Some sailed in supposed secret, but one in particular sailed with great fanfare and publicity – the SS St. Louis. Its destination was Havana, Cuba.

The Germans picked the St Louis carefully for their propaganda ploy. Final planning was in March and early April 1939 (before the change in immigration policy in Palestine). From all indications a sailing to Cuba would yield the response that the Nazis sought.

The Germans had been active in Cuba, and their hand was not always clandestine. The Germans tried to fan the flames of anti-Semitism in Cuba, as they also did in numerous other countries. They had met with certain success, which encouraged them to try their propaganda ploy.

- On 28 September 1938 the Nazi Party of Cuba, headed by Juan Prohías, was legalized. This was considered a success of particular importance for the Nazis and a defeat for the Jews. Prohías was a known entity. Three years earlier Adolph Kates, the Jewish leader in the fight against anti-Semitism, had successfully prevented Prohías from propagating anti-Semitic campaigns on a Havana radio station and in La Correspondencia, a Cienfuegos newspaper.[387]

- German anti-Semitic propaganda in Cuba capitalized not only on the scarcity of jobs. Housing was at a premium in Havana, and rents were frozen at 1937 levels. Each new refugee meant one fewer bed available. And, the foreign monies that Jews received from American charities were seen as helping to distort the housing market for Cubans. Many Cubans accepted this line of propaganda.

- On 20 October 1938 the Nationalist Fascist Party of Cuba became legal, and ex-President Grau San Martín rendered them his support. An example of the activities and popularity of the party was on 8 May 1939. On that date the party held a conference with an estimated 40,000 attendees and a national radio hookup that featured Primitivo Rodriguez, a known anti-Semite, inflaming listeners to fight until the last Jew has left Cuba. Rodriguez, of Arab descent, went on to be Minister without Portfolio in the second Grau government.[388]

Thus, the choice of a voyage to Havana was not by chance. It was decided that Cuba held out a good possibility of operational success.

SS St. Louis Sets Sail

The Hamburg-Amerika line's SS St. Louis[389] was one of three ships carrying refugees and scheduled to arrive in Cuba in May 1939. As history turned out it was also one of the last civilian refugee ships to leave Germany before the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939. The St. Louis carried 937 refugees and set sail on 13 May 1939. As the company advertised in a circular dated 15 April 1939:

> The fare is RM 800 -- in 1st Class, with surcharge of 20% for cabin with bath. Tourist Class fare is RM 500 --. A deposit in both classes for the return* journey of RM 230 -- per person is required.
>
> Bookings for this journey can only be offered to those whose papers are entirely in order.

In financial terms of the times, the prices were rather substantial. Only well-to-do people could possibly afford the trip. This was part of the propaganda game. The Germans did not want to show that the world was rejecting a voyage of poor Jews of lower status perhaps infected by disease. No, this ship carried richer Jews who made a dignified appearance.

Although a deposit for a return journey was mandatory, the intentions of the passengers were absolutely clear – virtually all of the passengers were fleeing for their lives. The intended trip was one way only. Of the 927[390] passengers, all but 22 were Jews, and 734 held American immigration quota numbers, which enabled them to enter the United States between 3 months and 3 years after arriving in Cuba.

Warning

Jewish leaders realized that refugee immigration was operating in Cuba on very shaky ground. In January 1939 a suggestion was made to charter a ship to bring refugees from Europe to Cuba. David Bressler wrote from Havana to Cecilia Razovsky at the JDC that chartering such a ship would be playing into enemy hands and would "unduly alarm many others (Jews among them) who at the moment are not ill-disposed to Jews coming here."[391]

Resentment against refugee immigrants was building. On 12 April 1939 the Cuban Cabinet authorized the Labor Department to deport all refugees found to have entered Cuba illegally.

The situation was clear. Then there was a discreet warning that went ignored four days after the sailing of the St. Louis was announced. Manuel Benítez, the self-enriching Commissioner of Immigration, came to the Centro Israelita with a request. Max Stone passed that request onward to HICEM in Paris:

"The Immigration Director in Cuba made us understand that it is not desirable the arriving of such a great number of immigrants [on the St. Louis] at once. ... We are turning to you with the request perhaps you can do anything to stop the sailing of this special boat."[392]

Benítez enjoyed the financial compensation for issuing visas. He wanted to issue visas and pocket the rake off. But, this time he realized he could not. He realized something was wrong. Stone also realized that the St. Louis was a *special* boat.

The decision to proceed was not simple. Yes, Benítez provided a warning. But, pressure on the Jews was mounting. Some of the Jewish passengers were released from Nazi "work" camps on condition they leave Germany. HICEM made a decision. They would not oppose the sailing of the St. Louis. They felt that they *could not* oppose it.

The German propaganda machine was well coordinated. When is was clear that the St. Louis would be arriving in Havana Harbor, fascists were set to unleash a letter and telegram deluge upon the presidential office.[393] One article, placed in the 4 May 1939 issue of *El Pueblo,* warned that the arrival of 1,000 refugees on the St. Louis would mean, "Immediate Displacement of Our Workers."

Travel Documentation

According to the stated requirement to board ship, all passengers who sailed on the St. Louis were in possession of Cuban landing permits (as distinguished from immigrant entry visas valid for prolonged residence). Unknown, however, to Jewish sources in Germany, changes were afoot in Cuba. Benítez had been issuing so many visas that the Cuban Government had been put in a very difficult position. It felt forced to act and stop the refugee flow.

The shipping company headquarters in Germany knew exactly what was going on through its office in Havana. It has also been suggested that the German government was directing the company's actions with the aim of causing an international incident. After all, the Hamburg-Amerika was a German company working in cooperation with the German Government. The Havana office of Hamburg-Amerika even notified the Cuban government of the ship's sailing with over 900 Jewish refugees,[394] as part of the German effort to force a reaction.

During this period President Federico Laredo Bru asked the Cuban Congress to further restrict immigration. The result was Decree No. 937, according to which all foreign visitors, except Americans, would be required to post a bond of $500 and receive authorization from the Cuban Secretaries of State and of Labor for entry into the country.

Some sources suggest that the real reason the law was changed is that Benítez was reluctant to share the graft that he had been receiving. Part of the pressure for the government to act against Jewish immigrants came from Nazi propaganda and agitation in Cuba. The Cuban desire to please the United States in not accepting more refugees (whose true aim was to reach North America) also cannot be discounted.

A question immediately arose concerning permits and visas already issued, often at a considerable price.

In retrospect it was in keeping with the mood of the times to restrict immigration, that all outstanding Cuban residence visas were invalidated on 5 May 1939, a week before the St. Louis sailed. Decree No. 937 published in the official Cuban Gazette had several other parts: (a) Persons deemed a "public charge" by the Secretary of the Treasury would be deported. (b) Foreigners must deposit a $500 bond if they are to show that they are not a "public charge." (c) The Secretaries of State and Labor will communicate in writing to transportation companies *prior* to embarkation regarding the status of passengers. The motive of Cuba, as well as that of many countries at the time, was quite clear – they were afraid of being inundated by a flood of refugees.

The ruling was unclear. At first it was thought that visas already issued were still valid. And, Manuel Benítez did nothing to clarify the situation. On 9 May 1939 Benítez was quoted as having said that "as long as there is ink and paper we will continue to issue permits..."[395] Only on 17 May, after the sailing of the St. Louis, did it become absolutely clear that previously issued visas were no longer to be honored.[396]

The refugees on board the SS St. Louis thought that permits issued before 5 May 1939 were still valid. Only when they arrived in Havana on 27 May 1939 did they learn to the contrary. Even after arrival, for several days they still maintained hope that they would be granted entry into Cuba.

Even if the refugees did know that their papers had been invalidated, they would still have made the journey. They had no effective choice, given the situation in Germany and other Central/Eastern European countries.

As discussed above, even totally illegal refugees to Mandate Palestine were admitted into the country. This, however, was not to happen with the St. Louis.

Havana Harbor

The St. Louis arrived in Havana Harbor on 27 May 1939 at 4:00 a.m. The ship, however, was not to be alone. It raced across the Atlantic to out speed two other refugee ships that arrived soon afterwards, the SS Flandre (from France) and the SS Orduña (from England).

Upon the arrival of the St. Louis the only passengers allowed to disembark were those fewer than thirty (including all of the non-Jews) who carried regularly issued visas.[397] This included one family who stayed in Havana for about six months until the regular U.S. visa they held enabled them to move to the United States. A decision was made with the active participation and approval of Cuban President Bru. The St. Louis was to be a special case.

When the SS Orduña arrived at noon, Cuban citizens and some refugees were landed; the ship then sailed onward with those refugees denied entry, and finally found a friendly port in Latin America. The SS Flandre arrived the following day. Treatment of the passengers made the situation eminently clear – non-Jews could land, but Jews not.[398] This ship also sailed onward to Latin America. The St. Louis remained in harbor, trying desperately to disembark its passengers.

Over the years numerous Jews had been denied admission to Cuba for a variety of reasons.[399] Some Jews quietly went back to Europe more or less of their own volition. Others moved onward to other Latin American ports. The issue went unnoticed by the general public. But, the St. Louis was different. There were almost one thousand Jews involved. The ship was large. And, times had changed. The Nazis wanted an incident. They certainly achieved one.

As time passed, desperation on the St. Louis became rampant. One passenger, Max Loewe, was so dismayed by the situation that he slashed his wrists and jumped into the harbor. He was rescued by a crewmember and taken to the Calixto Garcia Hospital. Ironically, Loewe was the only passenger without a visa who was able to reach shore; he was allowed to remain in Cuba. Reportedly, the attempted suicide of another passenger was kept secret.

One passenger never reached Havana Harbor. A 92-year-old Professor Mendelsohn from Würzburg had died during the voyage and was buried at sea before the ship arrived in Havana.

On 2 June the game was just about over. Captain Gustav Schroeder set sail from Havana Harbor and maneuvered his ship in circles off the coasts of Florida and Cuba, buying time as negotiations continued. The United States also denied entry to the refugees. On 5 June 1939 Cuba announced that it would accept the refugees on condition that a $453,000 bond ($500 per refugee) be deposited by the next day. Some Jewish organizations were naïve and thought the offer was serious, but collection of the money proved impossible. The St. Louis was forced to set sail for a return journey to Europe. As the ship made its way towards Europe, the lights of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida cities could be seen in the distance. How close safe haven was, but yet how far!

While the St. Louis was at sea and headed back to Europe, an arrangement was worked out whereby Belgium, where the ship docked, took 214 of the passengers, the Dutch government received 181, the British government 287, and the French admitted the

remaining 224. This decision was communicated to the St. Louis on June 13, and the ship landed in Antwerp on June 17. Later, of course, the Nazis invaded the three continental countries, and most of the unfortunate Jews who had been passengers on the St. Louis were killed. The 287 who were sent to England survived.[400] In total, only 363 of the passengers on the St. Louis were alive at the end of World War II.[401]

Again in context within the realities of June 1939, the refugees were given a plausible safe haven. Belgium, the Netherlands and France were, at the time, plausible countries of resettlement. It was the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939 and the subsequent Nazi conquest of France and the Benelux countries that changed the situation. The rout of three of the four destination countries had not been expected.

Analysis

Motivation behind Cuban decisions regarding the St. Louis is complex. No one single reason can conveniently explain the incident:

Laredo Bru was involved in a power struggle with Batista-Benítez, and wanted to assert his will to publicly enforce laws and gallantly thwart corruption. Part of that power struggle was a cabinet shuffle earlier in May. Benítez was also removed from his immigration post in the midst of the St. Louis incident and reassigned to a meaningless job in the Treasury Department, where he dealt with delinquent tax payments.

Who broke the new law of 5 May 1939? In pure legalistic terms there were technical infractions. It was not only the Jews who wanted to enter Cuba to save their lives; it was also the shipping line, Hagap, who brought the refugees. Since Hagap was a German official company, this effected Cuban-German relations.

Yet another factor has to be considered. When Laredo Bru refused to let the SS St. Louis land, he was following the same policy that the British used in Palestine until late April. It is unknown to what degree Laredo Bru was aware of the new British policy to allow refugees to land even when they did not have proper paperwork.

It is plausible that part of the denial of landing was a Cuban desire to show the United States that the local government was cooperating in reducing the number of potential immigrants to the Mainland. After all, Cuba was operating in unison with United States policy. The United States would not let the Cubans in either.

In terms of Cuban history, the St. Louis is a major incident. In more global terms, however, the St. Louis was just one of many refugee ships seeking a safe haven, made famous in later years by books and a movie. At the time the Palestine Post, for example, gave short one-time coverage to the arrival of the ship, then the issue was not

mentioned again for a week. Coverage in the New York Times was more frequent, but superficial.

The St. Louis is an historical landmark often cited as an example of ambivalence to the fate of Jewish refugees from Nazi oppression. The fact is, however, that the incident not only shook the world's conscience. It also had a profound effect on the Government of Cuba. The incident was never repeated.

Although eyes were focussed on the Cuban refusal to allow the refugees to disembark, many analysts have reasoned that the United States also shared part of the blame. Even though it, too, refused to receive the ship, the incident did not make a large impression on the American public.

Germany gained its propaganda advantage from the incident. Cuba had served the German purpose. There was, however, no reason to drag out the story once political and propaganda goals were achieved. Rather than showing European compassion in accepting the refugees, the Hamburg offices of the shipping line, almost certainly under government instruction, issued what can only be called a classic example of disinformation – it promulgated a fictitious report that the Dominican Republic had supposedly accepted the refugees![402] The SS St. Louis had been a propaganda success. Germany was not the only country that did not want Jews.

As can be seen, the crisis of the St. Louis with its ultimate resolution was not a sudden event that took place without background. It was the unfortunate result of a building refugee crisis and a series of intertwined European and Cuban events that culminated in a very difficult situation.

Jewish Cuba

The St. Louis incident also had a profound influence on events in the Cuban Jewish Community. During the handling of the ship, the "uglier side" of certain individuals and organizations surfaced. This involved the Centro Israelita in particular. This was during the presidency of Max Stone, who led the organization from 13 November 1938 until 12 May 1940.

- Many American individuals had forwarded $500 to be used to post bonds for the St. Louis passengers in the hope that the money would enable disembarkation. The Centro Israelita tried to deduct 15% for "costs," before returning the money. The story broke in the Habaner Lebn, 14 June 1939. Charges ensued that the Centro wanted the money to cover its unrelated $1500 budget deficit. Pressure was exerted on the Centro. On 17 June 1939 *Habaner Lebn* reported that the 15% idea had been dropped.

- One decision was that taken by HIAS as a result of the St. Louis, "The Internal politics of the Central [English for Centro] Israelita have reached a point where the HIAS feels it is necessary to work through some other agency in Cuba."[403] The JRC then came to represent HIAS in Cuba.

There was an attempt to reorganize Jewish treatment of refugees, theoretically to avoid duplication. The JRC was to handle relief. The American Friends Service Committee made assignments for refugee housing, and the Centro Israelita "received" the refugees and dealt with consular affairs.[404] The JRC handled "large" groups. The expenditure of significant funds stayed with the JRC. The motive was clear.

Lessons Learnt: The Iberia

One of the German motivations in the St. Louis affair was to try to stop the exit of refugees from Europe by showing they had no where to go. The goal failed. In post-incident Cuba, in fact, it had the opposite effect. There was an increased understanding of the refugees' predicament.

Another incident soon followed. Several weeks after the St. Louis left Havana Harbor, 52 Jewish passengers arrived on the SS Iberia without the new paperwork required by the Cuban government. These travelers were placed under confinement in Tiscornia and threatened with deportation to Europe on the Orinoco on 4 July 1939. The government declined to accept $500 bonds for these passengers, since they had *entered* Cuba against the law.[405] Times, however, had changed. On 26 June President Bru agreed to postpone the deportation by 20 days.[406] After further postponements President Bru finally signed a decree on 14 August, saying that each person detained in Tiscornia could stay in Cuba "for a reasonable time," after having posted a $500 bond. The crisis was over.

Mrs. Gómez Calá had replaced Benítez, but negotiations concerning the Iberia passengers were held primarily with Bru. This was considered a presidential matter.

Gómez was a marked change from her predecessor. She was receptive to immigration concessions, particularly for wartime agricultural and industrial enterprises.[407] She also provided a tactful and refreshing façade of honesty in government. She did not take payoffs. She was sharp enough to have her husband handle dubious payments and not handle them herself. She ran for Senator in the elections of 1940, and asked the JRC for a "campaign loan" to be repaid with her and her husband's "legal services."[408] The approach was much more judicious than that of Benítez.

Chapter Eleven: The War in Europe and Refugees

Introduction

Although World War II was fought far from Cuban shores, its influence was still felt in the country. The Jewish Community was affected, as it tried to respond to Nazi-generated anti-Semitism. A large influx of refugees also impacted upon the Community. The religiously observant Belgian refugees stayed more or less aloof from the rank and file of Cuban Jewry, but other immigrants did interact with the Jewish Community. Particularly the Reform movement saw the immigrants as a way of increasing its strength.

Cuban politics was in the background of all decisions regarding refugees. From 1940-1944 Fulgencio Batista was the elected leader of Cuba. Policy decisions regarding refugees passed through his hands ... for better or for worse.

Immigration Policy

Many refugees had been formally or informally allowed to stay in Cuba, thus saving them from the Holocaust. As noted above, more than five thousand Jewish refugees had managed to reach Cuba's shores between June 1938 and May 1939. Most were from Germany and Austria. Despite the fact that immigration rules had already been tightened, there were still loopholes; there was also the option of bribing sympathetic or greedy immigration officials to deal compassionately with the refugees. These immigrants were generally granted temporary residency permits; as a result they were not allowed to take jobs. They, therefore, received support from the JDC, as well as any help they were been to receive from relatives in the West.

There were problems. In April 1940 the Cuban Commissioner of Immigration, Dr. Candita Gómez Calá, ordered renewed registration of all refugees in Cuba. Arrests of those not registered ensued until a solution was found with the JRC.

Nor was there ever any shortage of imaginative immigration schemes to outwit Cuban refugee restrictions. In 1940, for example, it was found that refugees from France, Belgium and the Netherlands would go to Spain where they obtained visas for the Dominican Republic, Ecuador or Haiti, with a thirty-day transit visa for Cuba. Upon arrival in Cuba they would pay off officials to extend their transit visas,[409] so that they could stay until their U.S. quota number opened.

Cuba was not without sympathy, particularly after the trauma of the St. Louis. On 5 September 1941 the SS Navemar, a Spanish freighter designed for 28 passengers

belonging to Compañia Española de Navegación Maritima of Barcelona, docked in Havana with no fewer than 1000 refugees. For humanitarian reasons more than 300 of these refugees were allowed to enter Cuba, even though they held no Cuban visa at all.[410] (The German warship SS Barbarigo sank the Navemar on its return from Havana and other ports on 23 January 1942; two crewmembers perished and 34 survived.)

A factor complicating refugee absorption into Cuba was the fear of admitting Nazi spies feigning to be displaced persons. These foreign agents had to be identified and arrested. There were two sides to this fear:

- There was paranoia. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Cuba interned German, Italian, and Japanese citizens in Finca Torrens. Several persons were also arrested as spies, but in most cases the charges were soon dropped as unfounded.[411]

- The Germans saw a propaganda opportunity and capitalized upon this situation. German-inspired reports increased fears of spies as supporters, and disrupted the processing of Jewish refugees.[412]

The influx of refugees into the country stopped abruptly in 1942 with the adoption of restrictive immigration procedures, primarily in the United States, the country for which most refugees were bound. When the United States restricted immigration, Cuba responded to pressure and did the same. At this point Batista, Cuba's president, was not about to openly challenge the North Americans with an independent immigration policy.

The immigration issue was again raised in yet another event that took place in Havana Harbor. On 25 April 1942 the SS São Tome arrived from Europe via Casablanca,[413] carrying 255 Jewish refugees.[414] New regulations canceled the validity of all visas that had been legally issued but not used. The boat remained in Havana Harbor, but the St. Louis was not to recur. On 5 May the decision was made to allow passengers to disembark and be transferred to the Tiscornia Immigration Camp.[415] In another humanitarian move, the Government of Cuba did allow refugees in Tiscornia to remain in the country for the duration of the war without being deported. Some of these refugees, however, were to remain in the immigration camp for as long as seven months.[416] On 26 October 1942 the then-Commissioner of Immigration in the newly elected Batista régime, Dr. Ituarte, released those refugees still in Tiscornia and granted them thirty-day renewable visas.

One source[417] estimates that from 1934 to 1944 more than 10,000 Jewish refugees (half from Germany-Austria, half from Poland and other eastern European countries) entered Cuba. Many of the World War II refugees were interned in the Cuban Immigration Camp before being settled, even temporarily.

During World War II Cuban immigration policy was not consistent. In some periods it was restrictive. In other periods it was less problematic. Different nationalities came at various times. And, as quickly as the refugees came, so did they leave. By 1946 most had left the country. The percentage of those who departed the country increased to 85% by 1949.

A look at the refugees of 1941 shows a random sample of who was coming to Cuban shores. Through mid-December 1941 4,550 Jewish refugees from Europe recently came to Cuba. Of these, 2,500 had arrived since the beginning of October. 50% were German/Austrian, and 20% were Polish. Others were Belgian. 5% were considered stateless. The nationalities, however, are not totally accurate. They denote the last country of residence and not necessarily nationality as determined by birth, ancestry, permanent residence, or culture.

Very few of the refugees were young. Of those who arrived from October through December 1941, 90% were over 50 years of age. Between 90%-95% intended to leave for the United States.[418]

Possessing a visa to Cuba was not always sufficient for travel. A Jerusalem lawyer, Rosa Ginzberg, wrote on 31 August 1944, "I made inquiries at a traveling agency and they told me that unless there is a transit visa for U.S.A., they could not get any accommodation [for travel to Cuba]..."[419]

Another example of the refugee population is the Cuban Mizrachi (also Mizraji) movement, established by a Mr. Levy and under the honorary tutelage of Rabbi Aaron HaLevy Teitelbaum (1890-1950).[420] 175 members on the day of founding during World War II dwindled to 25 in August 1946, by which time much of the temporary population of the war years had left the country. The vast majority had, in fact, left Cuba in the several months immediately after the war.[421] Levy, himself, moved to Nahariya, Palestine. He was one of the fortunate few, since visas to Palestine were difficult to obtain.[422] By 1947 nothing remained of the Cuban Mizrachi movement.[423] There was, however, a restarting of Mizrachi in Cuba during the 1950s with an entirely new membership.

Support for Cuban Mizrachi, including religious supplies such as *ethrogim* for Succot,[424] came from abroad. It was a politico-religious movement of foreigners.

Not all Jewish refugees with papers permitting entry into Cuba in fact arrived in the country. In one case Jewish women saved from Nazi work camps were brought to Sweden, an officially neutral country during World War II. Even after the war the Swedish government would not allow exit of the women unless they held visas valid for a country of destination. The Embassy of Cuba in Stockholm provided a solution and issued collective visas for women, theoretically to work "in agricultural work when they arrive in Cuba." The women never traveled to Cuba. They never intended to reach Cuban shores. Arriving in Latin America was a hoax. Their true plan was

clandestine entry into Mandate Palestine.[425]

Morale

A major factor in daily life during the World War II period was public morale. Many families had been separated as a result of their flight from Europe. Most refugees were forbidden to work in Cuba, a law that was strictly enforced during the war years. With family worries and no employment (meaning too much spare time and resultant financial problems), many refugees suffered from low morale.

Belgian Jews in Cuba

The German army invaded Belgium on 10 May 1940. The Jewish Community at the time was estimated at 66,000 persons, roughly one third of whom would be sent to concentration camps. By 12 May 1940 many Jews were already fleeing the invading German enemy, most often seeking safety in France. Many of these "Belgians" were born in Poland and had come to Antwerp as children or as young adults. On 15 May Belgium surrendered. The fate of those Jews who remained was sealed.

In France, however, safety was also not to be found. On 14 June German troops marched into Paris. Again, Jews had to flee from the Nazis. A small minority actually returned to Belgium. Others again went southward, this time to the Iberian Peninsula. For many fear dictated that neither Spain nor Portugal would be safe as well. Spain was the home of the anti-Jewish Falangist movement. And, there was the perceived threat that here, too, Nazi forces would invade. So, many Jews again set out for foreign lands.

The paperwork needed to leave Europe came in two parts. First an emigrant needed an entry visa to a country that would accept him. Then he could apply for an exit visa to leave Europe. Only with these two permits could someone legally board a departing ship. Some refugees who started their flight in Belgium found their new home in Cuba. They retained assets from the diamond trade. This provided the financial means to obtain visas and pay for passage. In many cases this financial independence is what saved their lives. One refugee[426] relates that in Europe a Cuban consul sold unauthorized visas to his family and pocketed the payment. Those illegal visas, however, were sufficient to apply for exit visas from Europe. Another refugee recalled that her family traveled on "false Laissez Passee [*sic*] papers to leave Belgium for France, and … false visas to get into Spain."[427]

In October 1940 Cuba again began to allow immigrants to disembark and come into the country. More than five thousand additional Jewish refugees were able to enter Cuba from this time until mid-1942. Many of those who came were Jews in flight from Antwerp, Belgium. In many cases transportation was arranged by the JDC.

The Belgian refugees in Cuba founded their own immigrant society, the Unión de Refugíados Hebreos. (There were other "national" refugee associations. In addition to another smaller Belgian society, there were also separate groups representing Jewish refugees from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Poland, and Germany.)

Julius Erwin Wolff

The case of Julius Erwin Wolff is an example of the problems encountered by Belgian refugees. Wolff was born on 1 July 1902 in Neu-Ulm, Germany. In 1938 Wolff succeeded in moving to Belgium, but he was forced to flee to France after the Nazi invasion of 1940. He was caught and interned, first at Le Vicheant, then at St. Cyprien. He then escaped to Spain, only to be caught at Puigcerda. He was held at refugee camps until he set sail for Cuba on 22 September 1941. His ship, the SS Magallanes, arrived on 6 October 1941.[428] The Magallanes had been launched in 1927. It started trans-Atlantic trips to Havana in 1940 with a westbound passenger load of mostly refugees. The ship was taken out of service in 1953 and scrapped four years later.

The tribulations of Wolff did not end with his landing in Havana. He made two concerted efforts to obtain a United States visa during the years of World War II. Both times he enlisted the aid of his cousin, Albert Einstein, who sent letters of support to the U.S. Department of State. But, both times the applications were rejected.[429]

Einstein wrote letters of support for other Jews, not necessarily living in Cuba, who were looking for United States visas. This included Carl Zuckmayer (1896-1977), a former teacher and lecturer in Vienna and Berlin. Zuckmayer, born to a Jewish mother, had found safety in Cuba, and wanted to immigrate to the United States.[430] (Eventually he was granted U.S. citizenship, although he lived for much of the post-World War II period in Europe.)

Business

In 1942 the Cuban government encouraged the refugees from Belgium to establish a local diamond industry based upon their trade and skills from Europe. The first business was started in October of that year. A Cuban director was needed to comply with local legal and political protocol. Carlos Kates, holding Cuban citizenship, headed the Primera Industria Cubana de Diamentes, S.A. (Calzada de Buenos Aires No. 157), and his father, Gustavo Kates, represented coordination with local interests by serving as treasurer. There was a diamond cutting and polishing factory near Havana in Regla, and some of the refugees tried living there.[431] That community, however, was short-lived.

The Cuban diamond industry, all refugee-generated, became quite successful, employing not only many refugees but also a significant number of Cuban citizens (due in good measure to the "Fifty Percent Law" of 1933, which was still in force). By

March 1943 three additional diamond enterprises started. By the end of 1943 there were 1500 people employed in the diamond industry. A year later William Berger wrote in the *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque that the industry employed 600 Jews and twice as many non-Jews spread amongst 26 different workshops.[432]

This was not the only refugee industry in Cuba. Other refugees started the country's first zipper factory.[433]

The Belgian Jews were different from the Eastern Europeans who had arrived earlier. Most carefully observed Jewish Law with exactness and enthusiasm previously unknown in Cuba.

Punctilious religious observance meant new procedures. During this period the norm in Havana was to buy a live chicken in the market, bring it to be slaughtered, then prepare it (including soaking-salting according to Jewish law) at home. The Belgians, however, did not accept the local religious slaughter of chicken,[434] which was being done for Ashkenazim at the time by Yoel Lipschitz.

Julius Steinfeld, a former member of the Vienna Judenrat[435] and a staunch *Agudas Yisrael* supporter, was a key figure in the Belgian community. Although he managed to leave Austria through his political connections, he could not obtain exit permits for many of his relatives. After arrival in Cuba, Steinfeld organized a series of community programs. In one project;[436] he appointed Beirish Dembinsky to take care of the kosher slaughter of chicken for their community. This continued until Dembinsky moved to the United States. (After arrival in the United States, he continued in kosher slaughter for a short time; he was disturbed by the religious irregularities that he saw, and changed profession.)

Chicken was one issue. Until 1944 there was no trustable beef, at least for the strictly Orthodox.[437] Then there was a change from a very unexpected direction not connected with the Belgians.

Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum approached General George C. Marshall of the United States Army in 1943. There was no supply of kosher beef for US troops! Marshall was sympathetic to Teitelbaum, and promised that if Teitelbaum could supply canned kosher beef, the U.S. Army would distribute the beef to soldiers. Teitelbaum took up the challenge. He established the Tamar (Teitelbaum in Hebrew) Food Provisions Company, headed by his son, Bernard. Wartime restrictions on beef prevented Teitelbaum's company from starting a slaughter and packaging operation in the United States, so he rented the Lykes Brothers facility near Havana.

Lykes was a large Florida-based concern with extensive business interests in Cuba. By 1959 Lykes enterprises owned ranches comprising almost 20,000 acres (80 km^2). The company had started as a homestead by Fredrick Lykes at Silver Hill, near Brooksville, Florida in 1851.[438] Seven years later his son, Howell Tyson Lykes, began exporting

cattle to Cuba; by 1879 the company was sending 100,000 head of cattle per annum to the island. In 1900 Howell Tyson Lykes' sons, Fred and Howell (Jr.) Lykes, started the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company, which shipped the cattle from Florida. For Lykes, shipping was in the tradition of the extended family. Howell Tyson Lykes was married to Almeria Belle McKay, the daughter of Captain James McKay, who also owned a shipping business. That was the beginning of a large Lykes shipping company eventually with cross-Atlantic sailings. They also built Cuba's first modern slaughterhouse in Matadero Luyano in the 1920s.[439] The philosophy that guided the Lykes brothers was simple. Management viewed the food trade as more than mere commerce – it was a tool to increase understanding and friendship between people. Their operations also provided much-needed jobs in Cuba.

Tamar slaughtered beef in the Lykes' facility, then prepared and canned the meat. Finally the provisions were sent to U.S. soldiers through the Army and the Jewish Welfare Board. At first Rabbis Yisrael Rosenberg and Eliezer Rosenbaum of Agudath HaRabanim certified the *kashruth* of the slaughter, then Rabbi Teitelbaum assumed the responsibility. Although the canned beef was produced for export, an arrangement was made by which Jews in Cuba could buy some of the meat. The slaughterhouse, however, was short-lived. Towards the end of World War II American licenses were granted. The Tamar Company closed its operations in Matadero Luyano and moved to Newark, New Jersey.[440]

Kosher milk was another Steinfeld project. He organized the supply of kosher milk (*cholov yisroel*) for the Vedado refugees and the few others who were interested. And, Steinfeld was instrumental in arranging that *shmurah matzohs* for Passover be sent to Havana from New York.[441]

Kosher restaurants were also a problem. Hanabana, a strictly kosher restaurant, was opened, failed not too long thereafter, and then closed. This was despite frequent patronage by the Belgians. A second "restaurant" was set up in the Lamm Family apartment to feed men who had been separated from their families.[442]

The Belgians also obligated refugee aid organizations to change their methods and deal with religious needs. The Belgians, for example, requested kosher food when they were held in Tiscornia.[443] This was a new issue. It was not that Jewish relief organizations were opposed or even indifferent to religious needs. Simply, until the arrival of the Belgian refugees, those fleeing to Cuban shores were not observant, except for very few individuals. So, the lack of kosher food was not considered to be a problem. No one had asked for it. At first the Cubans had a quick answer for the Belgians – Ellis Island also does not supply kosher food, so why should they make any effort? This is just another example of how the United States was perceived as a model for Cuba. At heart, though, the Cubans held nothing against the immigrants. Organization takes time. After two months kosher supplies were brought in.[444]

The refugees tried to reconstruct their lives as much as possible in the refugee camp. In

1942 some of the refugees in Tiscornia established a temporary school for younger children, and one of the refugee organizations sent school supplies to support the effort.[445]

Not all who came from Belgium, however, were religious. One was a Reform rabbi. There were also families that were not strictly observant, who did not mix socially with the main group of Belgians.[446]

Now a new group was added to the Jewish Community in Cuba. (1) First there were the American businessmen. (2) Then came the Sefardim. (3) Refugees of the 1920s and 1930s formed a completely separate group. (3) Finally there were the Belgian refugees, who comprised their own group.

The Belgians adjusted reasonably well to Cuba, especially in their business relations with the Jewish community. But, the contact was business, not social. Business was primarily with the Ashkenazim. That was not an expression of cultural prejudice; it was the reality of a common language – Yiddish.

The Belgians had virtually no social interaction with other Cuban Jews.[447] Part of the reason was the fact that the Belgian refugees settled in Vedado. At that time the only other large Jewish group in Vedado were the Americans of United Hebrew Congregation, most of whose members did not speak Yiddish. Not only was language the problem that discouraged interaction. There was also a difference in attitude. The Belgians did not view Cuba as their ultimate home. It was only a transit point in their flight to the United States. "Hotel Cuba" – this is only another of the many examples. The United Hebrew crowd also felt that they were not Cuban. They *already* were Americans. The slight nuance made a significant practical difference.

Not all of the Belgian Jews, however, confined all of their activity to their own closely-knit society. J. Dorf lectured to *Betar* on Jewish history; Ringler spoke to the meeting of *Betar* about geography of the Holy Land.[448]

The Belgians set up their own institutions. The center was Majzike Torah, a synagogue and *talmud torah,* founded on 16 July 1942[449] by Rav Shmuel Alter. In 1944 the Belgians established a *mikvah,* built by Shalom Kleinhaus (1885-1953),[450] formerly of Antwerp. Kleinhaus had previous experience; he had already been involved in building a *mikvah* in Antwerp before the war.[451] In the spirit of helping Cuban Jewry, the Belgians even paid rent until 1950 on the building in Habana Vieja near the railroad station, although they left Cuba by 1946.[452] The untiring Julius Steinfeld directed the *mikvah* project.[453]

Rabbi Shmuel (Samuel) Alter was the spiritual leader of the Belgians. Alter was a chassidic rabbi who held a rabbinic position in Vienna. He arrived in Vedado during February, 1942 on the S/S Serpapinto from Marseilles via Casablanca. Alter remained in Cuba until 1947, when he moved to Brooklyn – first Brownsville, then Boro Park. In

Havana he lived in the Majzike Torah building. He had three daughters, two of whom died in Europe (Hebrew Years 5682, 5685) and one during the time he was resident in Havana (1943, buried in the UHC cemetery in Guanabacoa).

Professional achievement came to Alter after he left Cuba, when he authored Likute Batar Likute (Hebrew), a multi-volume series published in New York by P. Feldheim beginning in 1951. He started to work on these books in Havana.[454]

Majzike Torah was immediately successful. A year after it was founded, it had almost one hundred subscribing members and a student enrollment of thirty-nine in an afternoon and evening program. Rabbi Alter was joined in the school by Shlomoh Ha-Kohen Rotenberg[455] and by Dr. Friedman (1897-1960). Rotenberg had been a teacher in Antwerp; he left Havana during World War II and later became a prominent rabbi in New York.[456] Friedman came from Vienna; in 1946 he returned to Europe where his joined his wife; in 1954 the two immigrated to Montréal where their daughter was living. Friedman taught reading, prayers,[457] and bar mitzvah lessons, as well as serving quietly as a doctor, his principle profession.[458] His medical practice in Havana was restricted to quiet activity in the Jewish community, since as a non-citizen refugee he was not permitted to work.

Rabbi Mozes Merzel, a clergyman resident in the United States, held meetings in Miami in 1944 with the goal "to come to Havana to open three Yeshivas."[459] His family was among the "Belgian" community in Havana, and he had a clear appreciation of local needs. His plans, however, did not take into consideration events on the European battlefield. The end of World War II and the departure of the refugees (i.e., observant Jews) from Cuba made Merzel's ideas a moot issue. Cuban Jewry would soon take a very different turn in religious orientation.

The hysteria of war had strange consequences. Holding an Austrian passport, even by Jews, was problematic during World War II. Rabbi Moishe (Mozes) Hochhauser and Usher Segel were amongst those "Austrians" interned as "enemy aliens" in a British camp in Jamaica. Thanks to special efforts through the American ambassador, in late 1943 these two Jews were brought to the Belgian community in Vedado to serve as teachers, their former profession in Austria.[460] Segel gave a nightly Talmud class and was active in the synagogue's school.[461]

Hochhauser served as private tutor; some of his students were refugee children learning in secular public schools in the mornings;[462] Asher Schwebel[463] (originally from Lemberg) also taught in Majzike Torah.

It was also agreed that a *Sefer Totah* and *shofar* would be forwarded to Cuba from Camp Gibraltar, Jamaica; these religious items were forwarded, but by mistake not to Cuba. They were sent to New York, and protracted negotiations were undertaken for transfer to Havana.[464]

Most of those who prayed in Rabbi Alter's center at Avenida "I" No. 154 in Vedado had fled to Cuba in the early years of World War II. Two *minyan* regulars in the synagogue made the trip from Nazi-occupied Belgium on irregularly issued Spanish passports.

Majzike Torah was an all-purpose facility. It was a synagogue, school, and anything else that was needed. Rav Alter lived on the property, and after he moved to the United States, others moved into the living quarters. The building synagogue housed Majzike Torah. It was also the address of the Tzirei Agudas Yisroel of Cuba, an Orthodox youth movement founded at a meeting in the house of Julius Steinfeld at Calle 21 No. 416[465] with Jacob Rosenheim serving as president. Also at Majzike were the Zeirei publication, *Panu Derej*,[466] and Pirchei Agudath Israel for younger boys, with its publication, *'itoneinu,*[467] and Bnos, a girls' group (no publication known). Naturally, the language of all activities was Yiddish, since the membership was exclusively refugees. Majzike Torah was also an active social center, but not in the usual sense. It was there that refugees, religious and non-religious, came to inquire about the possible fate of others.[468]

When need arose, Majzike Torah also organized a burial society, apart from those already functioning in Havana.

Even during the war not all Belgian Jews remained in Havana.[469] One refugee arriving in Havana is known to have volunteered to the Free Belgian Army. He was brought to Cornwall, Canada for training, and later fought in Europe.[470]

In terms of Rav Alter's *stiebel* (informally conducted synagogue typified by tables and chairs rather than pews), his *talmud torah* and *minyan* were only memories (now forgotten by most) by mid-1946. After World War II most of the Belgian Jews either returned to Antwerp or moved to New York or Israel. Most continued to work in the diamond trade, and many, as well as their children, are active in the trade to this day.

The "Belgian Shul of Havana" was functioning on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur 1947. The congregation had changed. Only a quarter of the congregants had come to Cuba during World War II. The rest were post-War refugees, most from Poland. By Rosh Hashanah a year later the synagogue was history.

The Belgian Jews made a solid contribution to the cultural and religious life of the Havana community. But that was to *their* Community. They had little influence on the overall Jewish Community. Their involvement was fleeting; they came and left within a few years.

Problems

Problems, sometimes of a very unexpected nature, kept plaguing the Jewish Community. Wartime restrictions meant that only Spanish and English announcements could be broadcast on the radio as a measure to enable censorship and heighten the difficulty of the enemy's passing clandestine messages. This meant, however, that Belgian and other Jews not fluent in Spanish could not avail themselves of radio as a source of news. Only after significant effort did the Jewish Community arrive at an agreement that Yiddish could be used by one of the radio stations, Radio Cremata.

Yosel Lieberman, a veteran of the *stiebel* in Vedado, left Cuba for New York in 1946. In conversation he describes a dichotomy of Cuban-Jewish society.[471] Very simply put, he terms it "us" (the refugees who wanted to make no long-term investment in Havana) and "them" (those permanent in Cuba, who were building a future in the city).

Jewish Demography and Economics in Havana: 1940 - 1943

It is difficult to describe the Jewish Community at any one specific moment due to its fluid and transient nature, but cumulative statistics[472] give a general picture.

Marriage

From early century through and including 1943, 1037 weddings were celebrated in the Jewish Community in Havana. This does not include any weddings within the World War II refugee community. There is reliable testimony that one wedding was celebrated in Majzike Torah during its five-year existence.

The countries of birth of the wedding partners give another indication of population constituency:

Country	Number
Argentina	1
Austria	15
Belgium	3
Brazil	1
Bulgaria	1
Cuba	26
Curação	1
Czechoslovakia	29
Egypt	1
England	2
Germany	22
Hungary	25
Latvia	9
Lithuania	84
Netherlands	2
Palestine	1
Poland	1042
Romania	63
Russia	294
South Africa	1
Switzerland	3
Syria	3
Turkey	18
USA[473]	45
Yugoslavia	2
Other/Unknown	124

It can thus be seen that Cuba over the years had been primarily Ashkenazi, primarily of Slavic origin.[474]

Death

Death records through 1940 also show a similar preponderance of Polish and Russian immigrants. The high number of deaths of immigrants born in Turkey is probably more of an indicator of age than their numbers in the population.

Of the 154 persons who were born in Cuba and passed away through 1940, only two (one male, one female) were adults (over 15 years old). 111 were infants less than one year old, and 41 were children (aged 1 - 15). The generation that was born in Cuba was still young.

Country	Number
Argentina	
Austria	7
Belgium	1
Bulgaria	1
Chile	1
Cuba	154
Czechoslovakia	2
England	1
France	2
Germany	25
Greece	6
Hungary	11
Italy	3
Lithuania	19
Mexico	1
Palestine	1
Persia	1
Poland	172
Romania	21
Russia	115
Syria	4
Turkey	200

Records published in 1943 show burial according to *chevra kadisha* (burial society), and once again there is a decided majority of Ashkenazim. (The statistics cover the "previous year," and it is unclear if the reference is to the Latin or Hebrew calendar.)

Burial Societies	Burials in 1942
Chesed shel Emet (Ashkenazi)	43
Bruder fon Yisroel (Ashkenazi)	6
Chevet Ahim (Sephardi)	23

Chesed shel Emet (founded 25 July 1925) used the older American Hebrew Cemetery in Guanabacoa. Bruder fon Yisroel (1945 reorganized under the name Bais HaChaim[475]) and *Chevet Ahim* used the newer burial grounds. The predominance of Ashkenazi burials continued through the years up to the Castro Revolution. Organized statistics for the provinces are missing.

Economics

Jews were employed in three basic industries: (1) diamonds (as noted above), (2) light manufacturing (primarily garments), and (3) sales (clothing / shoes / textiles[476]). Some businesses both manufactured their own products and sold merchandise bought from

others. In each sector the Jewish contributions to the Cuban economy were significant. Regarding shoes, for example, Jewish establishments (manufacture and sales) accounted for 3000-4000 jobs, 95% of which were held by non-Jews. It was first American Jews who were involved in the shoe industry in Cuba, but by World War II they were overshadowed by Eastern European refugees who produced a full product line, from the inexpensive to luxury items.[477]

Jewish Community

In the Spring 1942 Moses Leavitt, Secretary of the JDC (1940-1946), visited Havana. His trip report[478] provides a scathing criticism of the Havana Jewish Community. Leavitt wrote exceedingly bluntly that the community of some 10,000 Jews "is as disorganized a group as one can find." Although this condemnation is largely overstated, Leavitt's words contain a basic truth.

In another statement Leavitt asserted that the 50-member "American Community" took little interest in the refugee problem. This was a very simplistic understanding of attitudes in UHC. It would have been more accurate to say that many, if not most, members chose a low-key approach of general non-involvement in refugee matters. This was an active decision to avoid possible putting business interests at risk. It was not at all a rejection of the issue. The UHC rabbinate was anything but apathetic towards refugees. The primary rabbinic advocate of active involvement was Lasker, whose efforts for refugees were vigorous over a period of several years. That, however, placed him at odds with his congregation.

With pronounced bitterness Leavitt reported to his New York bosses that the Jewish immigrants of the 1920s "have not formed any organization and have no sense of community welfare." As has been shown, that was certainly not true.

For the JDC the days of the exceptionally accurate reports of Laura Margolis were over. Leavitt's report was flawed. It was not a good basis upon which to promulgate the organization's policy.

Religion

Other than the Belgians, the vast majority of Cuban Jewry – both Ashkenazim and Sephardim in Havana – was not religiously very observant.[479] Many attended synagogue, more as a cultural expression or social event than as a religious duty. Stores of Jews were open on the Sabbath, sometimes with the owner politely absenting himself, but even this is contrary to Jewish Law. Many owners even attended early Sabbath services, so that they could open their stores on time for the business day. Even some of the leaders of the Jewish Community conducted business as usual on the Sabbath.

The façade of keeping kosher was maintained by many. Meat (usually chicken) was slaughtered by a *shochet*, but the niceties of the slaughter were not necessarily observed. Rabbi Meir Rosenbaum related that in 1948-1949 one *shochet* was using a knife that was not permitted; he even declined to have it inspected. Yet, people kept buying the meat that he slaughtered.[480]

The JDC assisted local Jews by coordinating the import of Passover matzo from the United States.[481]

Reform. There was no lack of intrigue in wartime Havana. Rabbi Meir Lasker, spiritual leader of United Hebrew Congregation, was of German origin. He had a high-profile stay in Havana, but he eventually made his name as a Reform rabbi in Philadelphia. Lasker saw an opportunity in promoting Reform Judaism amongst the refugees from Germany. He played a two-sided game. Yes, he wanted to help the German-Jewish refugees; but, he saw that help as a tool to help his own personal stature.

There were internal tensions in United Hebrew. Although the congregation was decidedly American and decidedly low-key on the refugee issue, Rabbi Lasker made a strong effort to become the leader of the German refugees in Cuba. Some of the German refugees had attached themselves to the Reform Movement in Germany, if not formally then certainly culturally. As part of this effort to lead German refugees Lasker set up a school United Hebrew Congregation. The effort drew considerable controversy both in Havana and abroad. In the United States debate was more about Lasker's methods of operation than school content. Finances became a main problem. On 29 March 1939 Lasker wrote to Philip Block, head of the American ORT, "Our own Temple has opened schools where some 500 are receiving instruction in English and Spanish... However the work is too large for a small community[482] as ours."[483]

Lasker thought that Block would be sympathetic, since he had a special interest in Cuba. In 1947 Block traveled to Cuba and established an ORT school in Havana to teach watchmaking, sewing, and leather work. The school was a success, but it folded soon after the Castro Revolution, as many of the students left Cuba.

Rabbi Lasker also tried to find financing throughout the Reform movement in the United States, but he had no success. By early 1941 his Hebrew school was more or less a moot issue. As Laura Margolis of the JDC explained in a conciliatory letter to Jane Evans, head of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, "...there has been a rapid immigration [*sic*] out of Cuba, thus eliminating the need for Rabbi Lasker's school for refugees."[484] By that summer Lasker, himself, had left Cuba.

Lasker's school should be kept in its proper context. For fundraising purposes the school he tried to start was given a nominally religious "flavor," but when objectively viewed, it could hardly be called a religious school. More accurately, it was a cultural

program run by a religiously affiliated organization.

Another attempt of the Havana Reform synagogue to act as the leader of the German refugees who came. On Rosh Hashanah 1941 the Portuguese ship SS Nyassa landed in Havana Harbor. The ship was a regular on the trans-Atlantic route; earlier in 1941 it had taken passengers, mostly refugees, from Lisbon to New York.[485] There were numerous religious Jews aboard the autumn sailing (based on requests for kosher food). Many of the passengers walked to Tiscornia Camp, where services were held and a festive meal was served. At that meal Lasker's successor at UHC, the German-speaking S. Schapira, recited *kiddush*, and Dr. Joshua Breuer, a refugee on the ship and son of a leading German Orthodox rabbi, spoke.[486]

It was clear that the Reform could not lead *this* group of German refugees. By Yom Kippur the rôle of UHC was downgraded to the face-saving measure of providing wine and cake. Breuer remained in Cuba for about a year, frequenting Habana Vieja, but moving into Vedado, where he associated with the Belgian refugees. Breuer was a pediatrician, but he was not permitted to work. When he was admitted to the United States, he settled in New York's Washington Heights, where his brother was the chief rabbi of the German-Jewish Community. He died in about 1960.

Lasker was a dynamic and forceful leader. Schapira performed poorly as his successor. As Judah Cahn of B'nai B'rith reported,[487] Shapira was "inefficient." He was described as having a negative personality and inadequate Spanish. He reportedly announced that he wanted to return to Antwerp as soon as the war would be over. This turned off many people, who interpreted his statement of personal intentions as a declaration of disinterest in Cuba. This also turned off members of United Hebrew, who were totally American-focused.

Multi-faith. Inter-religious cooperation existed in dealing with refugees in Cuba. For an extended amount of time the JDC handled several cases for the American Christian Committee on a reimbursement basis. Funds were dispersed through the JRC in Havana, and repayment was made in the New York offices of the organizations.

There was one inter-denominational educational effort aimed at assisting refugees. In August 1939 the Quakers rented a large estate and 21-room mansion, Finca Paso Seco, in Calabazar, 12 miles outside Havana. There they instructed what started out as some forty Jewish refugees in agriculture, carpentry, bookbinding, automobile mechanics, and plumbing. The school, run for a year by Emmett Wilson Gulley of Newberg, New York, also held courses to assist refugees in getting US citizenship. This effort was under the shared auspices of the Joint Relief Committee and the American Friends Service Committee, but it was viewed with suspicion by the Cubans, who sent police to the school to find out what was "really" going on. Not only were the Cubans suspicious. United States Government agents also investigated the inter-denominational effort at Finca Paso Seco.[488]

The Finca was a microcosm of world problems at the time. Dealing with the refugees was wrought with difficulty. A report at the time by Frank Rice (1893-1946) summarized the situation very succinctly:

One may never forget that the refugees have all been through unheard-of experiences, have been thrown out of the land that was their home and are wanted nowhere else in the world. The nervous and mental state that this has produced is quite incredible and is in itself perhaps sufficient to explain the disheartening lack of gratitude and eternal complaining dissatisfaction expressed by so many here for the kindness and care which they receive here. When a whole scale of human values has been upset in a land, it is not surprising that those coming from that land should bring with them the disordered scale and instead of realizing their great good fortune in being safe from the darkness and chaos of Europe, should complain about the presence of macaroni on the table once or twice a day.[489]

No, dealing with the refugees was not simple. There were differences of opinion amongst the refugees as to what they wanted, and differences among Finca staff members as to what should be done. One thing was clear. The Finca was preparing refugees to ultimately move to the United States. It was not preparing them to remain in Cuba. But, whatever was done was not appreciated positively, "Many in their discontent with the present, turned to the past, or to the future..."[490] The present was no good. It would never be any good. Despite all the good that the Finca was doing, it was a no win situation.

Even the management of the Finca realized that there were conceptual problems with the Finca program.

The men seem to take little joy in learning to use their hands skillfully and find little pride in doing a job capably and well. They are city folk and want to see the bright lights, hear the traffic, feel the sidewalks beneath their feet. The country is mo place for that and it may be no place for them. Some, I know, would rather be back in Habana...

So I have come to doubt very seriously indeed the value of the Finca. ... The rewards are, under these circumstances, not worth the price.[491]

There had been plans for other such "farms" and "colonies" in which Jews were to settle, but nothing real ever materialized. For example, in 1938 Lt. Col. Railmundo Ferrer suggested building a 13,200-acre farm/Jewish settlement near Santa Cruz de los Pinos.[492] There was opposition, both Jewish (most vociferously Meir Lasker) and non-Jewish. The plan generated extensive correspondence, but came to naught. A major problem in all of these plans was to convince refugees to leave Havana for other areas in Cuba.

SECTION III:

THE COMMUNITY COMES OF AGE

Chapter Twelve: A New Era

Times of Peace

The end of World War II meant more than the cessation of hostilities. It slowly ushered in a new lifestyle for Cuban Jews. There were problems. There were difficulties. But, there was a bright future. The War meant economic recovery for the country, with many Cubans enjoying a more comfortable lifestyle. Money was available, and aspirations changed.

Cuba was visited by prominent Jews. The well-known American Yiddish author, Ben-Zion Goldberg (1895-1972) (son-in-law of author Shalom Aleichem), came on a visit to Cuba in 1944. In 1951 he was invited to write a piece for the fiftieth anniversary volume published by the Centro Israelita.[493] By then the effort of the Patronato to assume leadership of the Jewish Community was quite evident. Publication of a book by the Centro can be seen as a high-profile tactic to maintain public image. It was hoped that including Goldberg in the volume would help show the Centro's status. Another author, Shalom Asch (1880-1957), also came to the island and its Jewish community; in Havana he met with Rafael Zilber, head of the Zionist Organization, and David Utiansky, a community activist.

Indeed, the first months after the end of the war were times of trauma for the Cuban Jewish Community. Refugees had brought with them vivid testimony of Nazi persecution in Europe. Particularly Ashkenazi Jews had lived in concern for their relatives on the Continent. For many the family tidings that came from Europe were bitter, telling of the extermination of entire families. The JDC became heavily involved in locating relatives, so that family members could establish contact and join each other again. Those in displaced persons camps or in other refugee centers were not difficult to find through official government lists. It was more of a challenge to find the many who had changed identities while in hiding or who had found refuge in private homes. In one case a Cuban Jew suffered a psychological breakdown that required several years of treatment as a result of learning that family members in Poland had all been murdered during the war.[494]

Another problem arose when hostilities in Europe were over. The end of the war brought further displacement. Again it was a time of migration. Most of the refugees who had found safe haven in Cuba left the country. By the end of 1946 the Belgian refugee community in Havana had virtually disappeared, as most of its members found new homes in the Metropolitan New York area. Only a few returned to Europe. In New York they established an informal network of "ex-Cubans" that was to stay cohesive for more than fifty years. This was in contrast with other refugees who left Cuba after the war and cut all ties to what had been a very difficult time.

The Belgians had never melded into Cuban society, and after their departure they were quickly forgotten. They left no lasting influence on the Jewish Community. Their language was Yiddish, which Cuban Jews were leaving in favor of Spanish. Yiddish did continue, but it was losing ground. The Revolution, only some fifteen years after the War, marked the end of Yiddish in Cuba. Many of the Yiddish speakers left, and those who remained began more and more to conduct their affairs in Spanish. The Belgians were part of the abandoned Yiddish culture.

As a result of emigration, the Belgian diamond industry in Cuba collapsed. Many other businesses closed. Slowly, though, the atmosphere calmed down.

Another factor came into play. The lifestyle of the Belgians – strict religious observance – was an anathema to the Cuban Jewish Community. Those who were religious did not practice Judaism with the strictness shown by the Belgians. The locals did not relate to the way of life and let it be forgotten.

The immediate post-War period was a time for the resettlement of displaced populations in Europe. But, Jews began to look towards the future. For Cuba, the end of hostilities did not mean that refugees were only leaving the country. They still were coming. From 1946 through 1948 it is estimated that from 300 to 500 displaced persons who survived concentration camps or hiding from the Nazis immigrated to Cuba.[495] One family was José and Magdalena Weisz, who abandoned religious observance and worked virtually endless hours, only to rediscover Jewish observance in Israel, where they settled years later after the Revolution.[496] The refugees included about two hundred who came in 1946 from countries that had been overrun by the Nazis.[497] But, no one realized that the clock was ticking. Cuba would be changing drastically in a little more than a decade.

Zionism

Zionism became an active movement in Cuba after World War II. This was encouraged by the need to resettle refugees and by the desire to change previous political realities after the defeat of the Nazis. The previous Zionism of Cuba remained – cultural and financial identification with Palestine – but a new activism took hold. The declaration of the Jewish State meant that entry restrictions to the Holy Land were null and void. Cubans were finally able to make the trip to Palestine / Israel.

In Cuban eyes the emergence of the State of Israel meant developing a policy of relating to the new country. This came during a time of domestic Cuban turmoil.

Zionism offered a certain mystique for Jews around the world, and Cuba was no different. For most Jews who chose to remain in Cuba, the country was by now home. Most war refugees for whom Cuba was a transit point to the United States had left by

1947. Even so, the vast majority of Cuban Jews were tantalized with the return of the Jewish people to Palestine. They donated considerable amounts of money to the cause of a return to the Promised Land. Zionism took precedence over other charities.

In early 1945, for example, Agudah of Cuba was collecting money for its programs in Palestine, and Mizraji was collecting for the JDC. Both acquiesced when they were "ordered by the Zionist organization to stop [collecting]..." so that preference could be given to a Keren HaYesod campaign.[498]

This should not be interpreted that Agudah of Cuba officially approved of the Zionist political ideal. Many of its members and supports, refugees themselves, saw Palestine as a homeland for displaced Jews, and it was in this context that they made donations. Agudah also maintained its own fund in Cuba, Keren Hajischuw, for support of the religious ideal in Palestine.

According to a 1945 description, "Keren Hayishuv is a fund that was established by Agudath Israel for the purpose of settling Eretz Israel in the spirit of the Torah. To date, Agudath Israel, through Keren Hayishuv, has several colonies in Eretz Israel. The money that is now being raised will enable hundreds of Orthodox Jews to work on a colony, (Kevutzah) and at the same time to be strict observers of every mitzvoh. It is of no value to live in Eretz Israel, to cultivate the holy earth, and to be non-observant."[499]

As early as 1943, if not in 1942, the Belgian/Agudah community in Havana was fundraising for the support of Aguda members in Palestine. It was viewed as problematic when two Agudah kibbutzim in Palestine had to associate, albeit for financial and not ideological reasons, with the Zionist political framework and Keren HaYesod.[500]

Betar[501]

The *Betar* movement in Cuba was founded in Havana in January 1939, as an expression of Zionist spirit. The original members, later to be called *"Darga bet,"* were mostly 22 year olds of Polish background.

The post-War atmosphere and renewed activist interest in Zionism instilled a new interest in *Betar*. In 1946 Teddy Schwartz, a World War II veteran of the Canadian Army, came to Cuba and organized *"Darga Aleph,"* a group of 18-year-olds. Schwartz also arranged that 38 members of *"Darga bet,"* by then 30 years old, go to Israel to fight in the War of Independence. The Cuban contingent in Israel was the largest in Israel from Latin America, if not in numerical terms, then certainly as a percentage of the population.

Not all of the 38 Cubans succeeded in arriving in Palestine. Some of the volunteers arrived in Israel on 9 March 1947 on the Ben Hecht. The Cubans were amongst 626

illegal immigrants on the ship, caught by the British and brought to an internment camp in Cyprus. They were not able to reach the shores of the Holy Land in time to help the war effort.

Daniel Levy and David Mitrani were two Cubans, both members of Maccabbi, who met a tragic end, with the shores of Palestine in sight. They died on 22 June 1948 aboard the *Altalena,* an *Irgun* ship trying to bring fighters and weapons into Israel. The ship was to have arrived on 15 May 1948, but sailing was delayed as the purchase of weapons took longer than expected. On 1 June 1948 the *Irgun* agreed to cease all independent operations and accept Israel Defense Forces command. The fighters and weapons aboard ship then became the subject of an internal power struggle amongst Israeli forces. David Ben-Gurion, head of the provisional government, finally made the decision to take the ship by force. It was in the shelling on 22 June 1948 that the two Cuban volunteers died.

Daniel Levy was born on 6 January 1927 in Havana. David Mitrani was born on 6 September 1929 in Havana; he was a 21 year old medical student and the son of Mordechai and Rachel Mitrani, who had immigrated to Cuba from Turkey. Until the immediate post-Revolution period the *Betar* group in Havana held an annual memorial for Levy and Mitrani.

In addition, the Cuban Jewish Community sent large sums of money to help the cause of Israeli independence. José Dworin was one of the principal conduits of donations from the Jewish Community via *Betar* to *Etzel* (Irgun Tzevai Leumi).[502] Both he and his brother, Abraham / Andrés Dworin (1905-1978; arrived in Cuba 1924; emigrated from Havana to the United States after the Revolution) were active in Betar.[503]

There was a lull in *Betar* activity after the establishment of the State of Israel. The mission of *Betar* had been accomplished. Many of the activists had gone on *aliyah.* The visit of Menachem Begin (1913-1992) in 1950 generated a swell of activity, but it was not until the following year that the organization reconstituted itself with the enrollment of a group of *tironim* (new recruits).

The *Betar* that emerged in 1951 was different from what the organization had been. It was no longer a separatist or Revisionist version of Zionism. It was part of the Unión Sionista.[504] It held some of its meetings in the Patronato, which was part of its power base.[505] Its members came from three primary Jewish neighborhoods in Havana – Habana Vieja, Vedado, and Marianao. *Betar* had achieved recognition and respectability.

In 1954 *Betar* wanted to further rejuvenate its efforts in Cuba, so a bold initiative was undertaken. Shmuel Matza, just graduated with a law degree from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was sent from Israel to Havana. His job as *Betar* emissary was to bring strength to the Cuban office of the movement. There was no salary for his position. Instead, he was appointed Headmaster for Jewish & Israeli Studies at the

Tajkemoni School. He also gave classes and lectures for the general public and for academicians. Matza stayed in Havana until December 1956, when he returned to Israel. No replacement was appointed.[506]

Not all *Betar* leaders left Cuba for Israel. Najman Solovejczyk[507] (third *mefaked* of the movement) left for the United States in 1957. Selig Shaftel (fourth *mefaked*) also moved from Cuba to the United States.[508]

The United Nations: 29 November 1947

It is hard to evaluate the performance of the Zionist office in Cuba in terms of immigration to Palestine. During the British Mandate immigration was complicated and not always permitted. It is much simpler to evaluate the performance of the Zionist office in Cuba regarding the United Nations vote on Partition. They lost!

The United Nations vote to partition Palestine was strongly contested in the weeks and months preceding 29 November 1947. Worldwide, Arabs mobilized in country after country to oppose Partition. Jews lobbied strongly in favor of Partition. Cuba was no different. Both Arabs and Jews tried to influence the Cuban vote of 29 November 1947 at the United Nations General Assembly.[509] In the end Cuba cast its ballot against Partition. The Zionist cause lost the country's vote. The reason is still a matter of academic controversy.

According to a partial explanation offered by Sender Kaplan,[510] Jews ordinarily did not take an active rôle in Cuban politics. Political involvement ended with Jewish rôle in leftist / Communist parties of the 1920s and 1930s. And, that involvement was individual; it did not concern the community interests of Cuba's Jewry. One can argue that when the Jewish Community mobilized to influence the Cuban vote in the UN, the Community was politically inexperienced.

Arabs, according to Kaplan, exerted considerably more influence as a community. Kaplan cites examples of (1) Raul Roa (b. 1908; Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs 1959–1973) and (2) Batista's brother, who had married Arabs. That gave Arabs better footing for exerting influence. The fallacy in this reasoning is that Roa was in a government position only after the Revolution.

Concerning Batista's brother, the claim of Arab influence through the marriage is rather dubious with the Palestine Partition vote. Batista was usually a reliable source of support for Jews. After he assumed power in 1952, for example, the Jewish Community was able to arrange that Nahum Goldman of the Jewish Agency meet with him.[511] Batista's brother, "Panchín" (later the mayor of Havana), could not have influenced the government; Grau was in power, and Batista was in exile in Florida. If anything can be said, it was that the pro-Jewish lobby misjudged the 29 November 1947 vote and did not exert sufficient influence in proper places.

Max Lesnick attributes the pro-Arab vote to the Curí family. There is no substantive proof to support this thesis.

Recognition of Israel

Nevertheless, Cuba did recognize Israel quickly – *de facto* on 14 January 1949 and *de jure* on 18 March 1949. Both of these decisions were made during the Prío presidency.

The establishment of the State of Israel meant no more restrictions on *aliyah.* From December 1948 through June 1949, 223 Jews moved from Cuba to Israel.[512]

Visit of Menachem Begin

When Menachem Begin arrived in Havana Airport on 14 May 1950, the event had importance not only for the Revisionist Movement in Cuba, but also for the general Jewish Community. Dr. Israel Lipshitz and Dr. N. Bentley arranged the program. Hundreds availed themselves of arranged carpools and chartered busses to greet Begin at the airport.

In many ways the visit was a transition from the 1940s to the 1950s. It was Zionism of the late 1940s, but it was the wealthy and public display of the 1950s. Times were changing. A formal welcoming dinner was held at the Hotel Nacional, with tickets selling for prices between $20-$100.

Various groups tried to take advantage of the visit for their personal or organizational benefit. B'nai B'rith received Begin. Meyer[513] Rosenbaum, for example, tried to solidify his position as "Chief Rabbi" as he offered a benediction at the welcoming dinner and appeared prominently in the official photographs of Begin with Cuban President Prío. Begin was furthering his aims in Cuba, but some of the Cuban Jewish leadership was doing the same. They were using the visit to promote their own private goals. More than one person interviewed has suggested that Rosenbaum was promoting himself more than he was furthering the interests of the Jewish Community. His popularity had yet to peak. It is undisputable that soon his popularity would decline and his adversaries increase the longer he stayed in Havana.

Chapter Thirteen: The 1950s

A New Decade: The Illusion of Prosperity

By 1950 Cuba was a changed country. The economy was much stronger, refugees had either left or were absorbed, and there was a building boom under the guise of a prosperity that, in fact, benefited the few and impoverished the many. As Philip Wilson Bonsal (1903-1995), the last United States ambassador in Havana (1959-1961), explained:

> The Batista administration inspired confidence in business circles... The government conducted a lavish public works program to absorb the chronic and large-scale unemployment...[514]

Bonsal spoke of 1952 and onward, but Cuban prosperity started several years before that. New neighborhoods sprung up as the concept of suburbia took hold. For the newly developing middle class mid-century meant moving out of shared apartments in Habana Vieja. This was a time of owning homes, raising families in a healthy atmosphere, and stressing quality education as a key element in bringing up children. This was the dominating attitude in Havana and in the urban sectors of the provinces as well.

With money came leadership. The "*machers*" of the Cuban Jewish community changed. Members of UHC were no longer the only well-to-do Jews. There were new people, who wanted to make their mark. Active roles in the community meant status, and these *nouveau riche* Jews were looking for exactly that. Some people tried to gain positions in existing organizations, but the dominating trend was to establish new institutions.

Religion was not the key issue. Organizations were not founded in the name of religious values or *halachic* observance. Some organizations were orthodox in name, but not in practice. Orthodoxy was the cultural norm for the non-UHC community. It was the label needed for social acceptability. But, it was only that – a label. As time passed, it became less and less necessary.

Not all in Cuba of this epoch was positive. Much of the negative was deemed too endemic to be corrected. It was so much easier to ignore problems. Corruption, both by the government and by the Mafia (and often in cahoots with each other), was common. Violence existed amongst the *Mafioso* types, but the general population was unaffected. Most could tolerate the lawlessness; the attitude was, "Don't bother them, and they won't bother you." But there were those who dreamed of a New Cuba, a Better Cuba. Revolutionaries began to challenge the government. Throughout this atmosphere Jews had to find a place for themselves in Cuban society. Most distanced

themselves from the corruption, but a very few did not. Many benefited from the economic boon that corruption had nurtured. Soon, however, the bubble would burst.

The presidency of Carlos Prío Socorrás (1948-1952) started off positively. Havana became a magnet for tourism. Hotels were being built. Legalized gambling had put Havana on the map. New structures were going up in many parts of Havana. Talk of the construction of large synagogues was just one sign of apparent wealth in the Jewish Community. By 1950 Cuba appeared, at least superficially, to be prosperous. During the second régime of Ramón Grau San Martín there had been true progress, as Cuba emerged from the economic doldrums of World War II.

There was, however, a bitter reality. Poorer areas remained poor; poverty even worsened. And, corruption soon ensued. The seeds of discontent were present and ignored.

There was a significant change in social structure. Previously, the political-economic elite had been Cuban-born and mostly of Spanish ancestry, but in the 1950s this was rapidly changing. With affluence came a very basic sociological development in Cuba. It can be called a version of Americanization. The upper class was no longer reserved for those born to aristocratic families. "High society" was now for the wealthy. Money talked. Money became the decisive factor in determining social status. Most often those with money were also associated with American companies or had business ties with the United States.

Wealth was concentrated in Havana. The economy of the agrarian countryside was in a shambles, and the government did little, if anything, to rectify the situation. Distance hid poverty. Out of sight, out of mind. Rural workers earned only one third of the average Havana salary. Foreign companies reaped considerable profit from the rural sugar industry, but those funds were sent abroad. There was very little capital investment, and no interest in product diversification. Agricultural was mismanaged; according to some critics most of the $200,000,000 of agricultural imports could have been grown in Cuba. Statistics do not lack. In the early 1950s 87% of urban buildings had electricity; only 9.1% of rural buildings had electrical current.[515] There certainly are differences in the earning capability of farms and city centers, but even if this is taken into account, and even if there are errors in the exact numbers, one cannot escape the reality that there was a vast difference in wealth between Havana and other parts of the country.

The country was following the same pattern as that of other developing countries. Most of the wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small part of the population, while the majority of Cubans survived on very little. The income differential between rich and poor, "have" and "have-not," was only increasing.

An inescapable factor lurching behind the Cuban economy was the United States. Americans owned 40% of the sugar companies, 90% of the telephone and electricity

companies, and 50% of the railways. Some saw the United States as a positive factor of investment and trade, providing goods and services not otherwise available. That, however, was not the Cuban perception. Many saw the "North Americans" as the source of economic injustice. The rich had yet another point of view. They considered Cuba's neighbor to the north as a place of rest, a place a "get away" or vacationland. In 1955 it was estimated that wealthy Cubans owned $150 million in real estate in Florida alone. In several years that place of rest would become a habitat of refuge.

Another aspect of ties with the United States was purchases for business purposes. Many smaller Cuban businessmen made periodic trips to the United States to buy business merchandise and supplies. In many cases these trips involved purchases and sales involving family connections, hence the visits had both their business and family value. Rupture of contact between Cuba and the United States after the Revolution had its effect. For many families, to remain in Cuba meant rupture of business contacts and being cut off from American relatives (in some cases children who had been sent to American schools). Subsequent nationalization essentially meant the demise of many small businesses that were built on these family ties.

Batista of the 1950s

Fulgencio Batista seized political power in a bloodless *coup* on 10 March 1952 after it became clear to him that he would not be able to return to power through the democratic electoral process in voting scheduled for June. He was expected to run a poor third to Roberto Agramonte (favored in polls by a slight margin) and Carlos Hevia.[516] Batista's pretext for his *coup* was that Prío was supposedly planning revolutionary action on or about 15 April, so that he could remain in power.

As a footnote to history, Fidel Castro was also a candidate for the Cuban Congress from the "Ortodoxos" in the national elections that were never held.

At the time of his grabbing power in 1952 Batista was a known leader with a proven record, and he was an acceptable change in the eyes of much of the populace. The deposed president, Carlos Prío Socorrás, fled to Miami under heavy criticism of malfeasance, although he was ultimately to return to Cuba. The military, Batista's perpetual source of strength, supported the seizure of power, and the business community was reassured that there would be a greater degree of stability. There was no effective opposition to Batista's return to power.

Batista was considered positive towards Jews, so the Jewish Establishment in Cuba presented no opposition to his *coup d'état*. Nor were they organized for political involvement. The United States, always interested and involved in the domestic Cuban scene, was convinced that Batista would solve local problems without jeopardizing American interests. Rupture of the democratic process was ignored, since Batista promised to organize democratic elections and return the country to democratic rule.

Many believed that he would actually do this. After all, Batista had organized and run democratic elections in 1944, and even had accepted defeat, albeit begrudgingly (an understatement). And, Batista was true to his word. The charade of elections followed, giving Batista a false aura of legitimacy. The new presidency of Batista was marked by the façade of legality. Laws were passed, and people were expected to abide by them. Yet the Batista régime was infamously corrupt. Batista and his immediate circle were pocketing money virtually at every opportunity, as graft and bribery became accepted norms. Americans owned and controlled much of the wealth not in the hands of Batista and his cohorts.

The major interest groups were satisfied. The United States was content, even though Batista had made a mockery of democracy and scuttled the Cuban Constitution of 1940. His seizure of power was convenient. After all, Batista was a staunch supporter of the United States in trade issues in international fora. That support began to waver only towards the dictator's demise in late-1957 and during the course of 1958. Thus, many viewed the return of Batista to power with little cause for concern. He was thought to be quite tolerable in the Cuban context. Reality, however, turn out to be different. Cuba had changed, and so had Batista.

Throughout this Batista period the atmosphere in Cuba was an awkward combination of political apathy in some quarters and anti-government and revolutionary feeling in others. Batista had grabbed power in a time of unrest. Violence and terrorism were pervasive, and promises made by Batista for a better future proved insufficient to calm the country. Words were not enough. Action was needed, and no action was forthcoming.

For many people the solution was to ignore political life and continue on as though all were normal. Batista, though, had to react. He soon adopted the approach of a hard hand to regain security, while at the same time supporting the image of the happy life of building, growth, and prosperity.

Several political parties collapsed and were replaced by new movements. At the beginning of the decade *coups* were attempted not only by Batista whose attempt was successful, but also by others. Simply, Batista succeeded. On 11 April 1953 Rafael García Barcena tried unsuccessfully to capture the Campamento de Columbia (military headquarters, built by the United States after the Spanish-American War) in a feeble effort to install himself as the revolutionary ruler of Cuba.

Castro's 26 July 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks can be explained in the context of this general atmosphere. It was an act of revolution to bring about change, but at that point Castro lacked a name, lacked a written manifesto, lacked a detailed program, and lacked a defined ideology.[517] His attempted *coup* also lacked military sophistication. Immediately after the attack the government was unsure who was responsible. In its initial reaction the government accused Prío of standing behind the revolt. The government accused the Caribbean Legion. The government accused the Ortodoxos.

Then the truth became apparent. Fidel Castro was the mastermind behind the attempt to take the Moncada. He would eventually enshrine the date by establishing the 26 July Movement that would send Batista into exile.

Batista's reaction to the Moncada attack was ruthless with little if any regard for legal procedure. From Batista's point of view this was a direct, though not very well planned and executed, challenge to his rule. For the Jews of Cuba the attack was distant. The people involved were unknown. Life went on, even for the Jews of Santiago where the local synagogue was in reasonable walking distance from the Moncada. The event was on the fringes of daily concern.

Militant revolutionary groups were numerous.[518] Many insurgents were arrested; others were executed. These tactics only exacerbated the problem, getting the government into a political quagmire with the Cuban populace. Then, Batista went from bad guy to nice guy, from stick to carrot. As part of a political deal, an amnesty was declared on 13 May 1955 for political crimes, and those arrested were set free. Fidel Castro and some of his compatriots were thus released from jail. They would ultimately be the champions of Batista's downfall. Batista simply did not take Castro and his defeated entourage very seriously.

This political amnesty did not stop efforts to depose Batista. Nor were Castro and his movement the only challenge to the régime. Just as previously, others also tried. One serious effort worthy of mention was an April 1956 plot to overthrow the government; the Servicio de Inteligencia Militar (SIM) made arrests. Another was the 13 March 1957 effort by the Directorio Revolucionario to assassinate Batista in the presidential palace.[519] In an ambiance of violence and lawlessness the head of the SIM and the Chief of Police were murdered. Batista's forces retaliated. There were virtually no limits. Not even the diplomatic immunity granted to the Embassy of Haiti in Havana was honored. Police stormed the Embassy and then killed ten unarmed Cubans seeking asylum.[520]

Opposition to Batista also came various Cubans in Florida, headed by former President Prío and presidential candidate Roberto Agramonte, who sought the backing of the United States Government for their effort to bring down the Cuban régime.[521] There were attempts at unity in the opposition to Batista. After the fall of Batista, Prío would initially support Castro. Agramonte would join the Revolutionary Cabinet until he was suddenly dismissed.

Jews and Politics

Most Jews, and certainly Jewish organizations and institutions, did not mix into Cuban politics. Although a very few individual Jews had political rôles, the Jewish Community as a whole was apolitical and shunned activism. Some were not opposed to Batista. Others quietly held ideas against the dictator. But, political involvement was far from most people's minds. The majority of successful Jews were members of the new Cuban middle class. Their interest was in business. Politically they had one major goal – not to rock the boat so that business continued.

The political events of the 1950s would, in retrospect, determine the future of Cuba into the 21st century. Another reason that most Jews stayed aloof from politics is that there were no outstanding "Jewish issues" to be dealt with. There was no wave of immigrants. There was no intolerable level of anti-Semitism. Jews were successfully integrating into Cuban society and did not feel the need to stand out. One exception was Max Lesnick, who was an outspoken critic of the Cuban president. He, however, was not a prominent figure in the Jewish Community.

Just as the majority of the Jewish Community did not have a direct rôle in opposition to Batista, so did they not become activists in support of the Castro Revolution. After the Revolution it was common for Jews and others to claim that they had been early supporters of Castro and the 26 July Movement. The fact is that that no identifiable Jewish Community leader functioned in Castro's higher echelons of support.[522]

Castro was not the only opponent of Batista. There were many others. Few of the anti-Batista groups presented a well-defined and specific program as an alternative to Batista. At best there was a flaunting of slogans – honesty, democracy. These words drew no opposition; after all, they were not philosophic issues that demanded resolution. The slogans were also insufficient to motivate the masses to action.

Jews separated community issues from general problems. Jewish leaders felt that Batista had a warm feeling toward them – despite his failure to take a positive position on the admittance of the refugees on the St. Louis — and that he had exerted efforts to help Jewish refugees on other occasions. Perhaps more important, Jews were involved in economic activities that were prospering under Batista, namely retail and other middle class businesses primarily in Havana. One of the members of the Batista government, Prime Minister Garcia Montes, had represented the Joint Relief Committee during World War II, and so had a very in-depth understanding of the trials and tribulations that the Jewish Community had been through. Batista was perceived as "good for the Jews" (by those Jews with influence [i.e., rich and successful businessmen]).

A Family Business

Many of the businesses were intertwined family enterprises. The Weiss/Weisz family is an example. The family business in Hungary was watch parts and watch repair. When the family came to Cuba, they worked initially as watchmakers and went into retail, import/wholesale and manufacturing of jewelry.[523] The oldest brother, Fabian (1897-1969), developed a wholesale jewelry enterprise in Centro Havana on Calle Neptuno. From the 1930s until the mid-fifties his younger brother, David,[524] owned a retail jewelry store on Calle Galiano (between San Rafael and San José). Then David joined Fabian in the wholesale business. Their much younger brother, Max, came later to Cuba, and when he arrived in the late 1930s, he also opened a jewelry store, La Perlita, not far away on Calle Egido (the perimeter road of Habana Vieja).[525] José Weisz, another brother, came to Cuba in 1948 after surviving World War II in Siberia; his wife was an Auschwitz survivor. He started by working with Fabian, then he ran several businesses in Havana, progressing from poverty to a comfortable life style, until he left Cuba in the Spring 1959; he returned later that year, but departed again in April 1960. José Weisz knew Communism from post-War Romania. He had a premonition that May Day would bring further decrees and by then wanted to be out of the country with his wife and two children. They settled in Israel.[526]

Investing in Cuba

As time passed, the new prosperity became stronger. In the 1950s there was a resurgence of industry. Money began to flow. The socially mobile segments of Havana society created the "good life." The 1950s were a period of change for the Jewish Community, both in the private and public sectors. There was no longer a "Hotel Cuba" mentality. Cuba was now home to those who remained. Particularly in Havana, Cuba was a tropical paradise, where life was comfortable. Jews were ready to invest.

For many Jews improved economics meant exciting business opportunities. Some business investment is short-term. It is a calculated move to put money into an enterprise, maintain business operations for a certain amount of time, then hopefully reap a profit. The quicker that profit was, the better. Other investment is long-term, building the infrastructure for a business that has a long range potential. In the 1950s there was a new business strategy. There were still short-term business investments by the Jews of Cuba. There were, however, several serious longer-term investments, as well as an unprecedented number of large home purchases.

Little did anyone realize that soon Jews would be leaving the country. In historical terms "permanence" is a psychological state and not an unchangeable fact.

Organized Crime

There was another type of investment in Batista's Cuba of the 1950s. Organized crime gained a very strong foothold.

The Hotel Nacional opened in Vedado in 1930. The same architect who had built the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida designed the facility. It hosted as guests a wide variety of politicians, movie stars, Mafioso, and other celebrities. Some of the visitors to the hotel were Winston Churchill (1874-1965), Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), John Wayne (1907-1979), Frank Sinatra (1915-1998), Nat King Cole (1919-1965), Marlon Brando (1924-2004), and none other than Al Capone (1899-1947).

The hotel attracted headlines almost from its opening. After the Sergeants Revolution of 1933, the hotel was a fortified position of deposed army officers who were involved in a standoff against troops of the new régime. Soon, however, the hotel would become almost synonymous with organized crime.

Meyer Lansky (1895-1973),[527] who was always proud of his Jewish affiliation, was involved with gambling in the hotel as early as 1937. Two years later the FBI "interviewed" him about his activities in the Hotel Nacional and in Cuba.

Lansky had a long-running relationship with Batista, dating back to the months after Batista seized control of Cuba on 4 September 1933. Lansky would later flee Cuba on the same night of 31 December 1958-1 January 1959 when the Cuban leader escaped into exile. What started for Lansky with molasses for liquor production (spurred by US Prohibition, 16 January 1919 - 5 December 1933) reportedly extended to racetracks, drugs, abortions, and gambling.[528]

The late 1940s were an unsettled time not only in Cuba. Prosperity was not the only issue. There was a new order. The world was readjusting to a changed life style. Germany was a defeated enemy, as was Japan. England had seen its finest hour, and unrest was growing in the Empire. Countries were falling under Communist domination. The United States emerged as the leading democratic power.

Particularly after World War II Lansky realized that in the new-world situation American organized crime would have to change both form and venue to maintain its income. Cuba provided a strong possibility for illegal operations. It was a growing economy with relative political stability. Even changes in government were such that they did not pose a threat to Lansky's activities. Lansky, a shrewd businessman, played both sides. Batista was exiled to Florida during the Grau presidency, and Lansky kept contact with him in his Florida mansion. Lansky also played the other side of the coin and enjoyed contacts with Grau.[529]

During the 1950s Havana attracted a tremendous number of American tourists, many of whom came for the gambling, sex, entertainment, and sun that Cuba offered.

Between 1952 and 1958, twenty-eight new tourist-quality motels and hotels were built and opened on the island, most of them in Havana. This included Meyer Lansky's prize project, the *Riviera*, which opened in 1957; this was a twenty-one floor, $14 million extravaganza with 383 rooms. Approximately 300,000 tourists came every year to visit Cuba's nightclubs, casinos, and 270 brothels. There were also a large number of American military personnel visiting the country. In 1956, 375 American naval vessels carrying 84,000 individuals docked at one or another of Cuba's ports, and the uniformed personnel spent at least $2.5 million on the island.[530]

Dancers entertained at *Sans Souci* nightclub and the rumba was performed everywhere. The *Sans Souci* was, of course, not just a nightclub. It did feature top entertainers, such as Edith Piaf (1915-1963), Cab Calloway (1907-1994), and Tony Martin (1913-). Gambling was also a key activity in the nightclub – roulette, craps, slots, blackjack, *chemin de fer*, and high stakes bingo for those who so preferred. The nightclub was remodeled after the Gambling Enablement Authorization Act of 1955, so that it would conform with new legal requirements. When it reopened in 1956, its value surpassed the $1,000,000 threshold that allowed games of chance. Popular clubs were also the Las Vegas and *El Gato Tuerto.*[531]

Americans spoke of the "magic spell" and the "mystic beauty" of Havana's moonlit shores,[532] where gambling was a way of life. In the early 1950s there were 1704 stands authorized to sell tickets for "the numbers." In theory, 10% of the daily collection was spent in prizes, but there were always allegations of graft and irregularities involved in accounting for the monies collected.

American gangsters played a large rôle in the development of the hotel and casino industry. Lansky had nurtured contact with Batista for almost two decades, and his investment in the Cuban leader paid off. Ironically, in 1955 Batista officially brought in Meyer Lansky to help eliminate dishonest card games run in casinos that cheated people of sometimes-large sums of money. The gambling industry was revamped. According to post-Revolution sources, the Batista-Lansky "reforms" enabled the Cuban leader to drain off extensive personal profits (sometimes fronted by his wife and his brother).

Lansky never hid his Jewish background. The American "Mafioso," as he was described by U.S. Senator Estes Kefauver (1903-1963), had extensive contacts in Havana, including with some United Hebrew Congregation members. In addition, Lansky opened a line of communication with Jewish organizations, where he applied for membership and tried to buy favor. He was looking for both the respectability and business contacts that membership would give him. He offered money to the Patronato and asked for membership. The Patronato Board of Directors denied the application.[533] He did the same with the Hadassah Women's Organization.[534] It was realized that Lansky was not the kind of member that would bring honor to any organization.

The many millions of dollars generated by the casinos did not filter down through all

sectors of the economy. Many Cubans, already sensitive to corruption in government, focussed increased attention on dishonest dealings in the tourist industry. There was also a widening of the gap between rich and poor. Many blamed the Americans in part for the corruption and repression of the Batista régime. Many believed that the American gangsters, in collaboration with their own politicians, had in the words of Thomas Paterson, "...soiled the nation's reputation by turning Havana into the Las Vegas of Latin America, the Monte Carlo of the Caribbean, the brothel of the New World."[535] The grounds for the rampant anti-Americanism that would erupt during the Castro era were being prepared. To cite just one example, one of the first victims of the Revolution was the gambling industry. In the first days after the Castro takeover the casino in the Havana Hilton (itself a resented symbol of American power) was ransacked and destroyed.

After Batista took power, organized crime operations entered a new phase. Lansky convinced the Batista government to let him reopen casino operations in one wing of the Hotel Nacional in 1955 – the *Casino Parisien* for dining and dancing, the International Casino for gambling, and the Starlight Terrace Bar. Appropriate enabling legislation was passed, and the special wing was opened in January of the following year. Everything conformed with legal requirements...at least superficially.

The legislation allowed for casinos to be operated in hotels worth more than $1,000,000. There was a $25,000 license fee, and a $2000 a month tax payment. The sums involved were designed to restrict the ownership of gambling operations to the select few.

Profits were substantial, even in the construction stage. All foreign investment was matched with Cuban funds. Corporate taxes were waived, as were import taxes on building materials (sometimes as high as 70%). One fraudulent activity was to import unnecessary building materials, which were then sold off for other purposes as though customs duties had been paid.

Not by total coincidence, foreign investors started building several large hotels with casinos. These hotels included the Havana Hilton (opened 22 March 1958; renamed the Havana Libre after the Revolution), the Capri (opened 28 November 1958), and the Riviera, which was opened 10 December 1957 with sculptures by the reknown Florencio Gelabert (1904-1995); the hotel was nationalized on 24 October 1960 along with 166 other U.S. businesses.

Most hotel construction used reinforced concrete in contrast with earlier stone structures. Nor was it only hotels that were built. Numerous apartment buildings were also erected during the 1950s.

Vedado was the center of the new hotel industry. Vedado also became the suburb of choice for many up-and-coming families, including many Jews. A number of majestic stone mansions date from the art deco and art nouveau period with French, Italian, or

even Mayan designs visible from the street.

There were two aspects of organized crime operations. Graft and strong-arm tactics target quick money with no long-tern investment. One grabs what he can and launders the money elsewhere, realizing that operations can be halted very quickly and for unforeseen reasons. Organized crime was involved in this in Cuba. So was Batista. But the otherwise politically sharp Cuban leader never fully realized that these activities would be a significant cause of his downfall. Even so, Batista was still astute enough to manage his fortune so that it remained outside the grasp of Revolutionaries.

The other aspect of Cuban crime operations was the running of businesses very much under standard commercial principles. The casinos were businesses. They had to satisfy standard tourist needs from hotels, to restaurants, to entertainment ... even to clean streets and local transportation. They had to attract customers in a competitive atmosphere and develop a relationship in which customers were satisfied and chose to return. This brought the operations of organized crime into a partnership of common interest with the Havana's *comerciantes* – some needing the same services, some supplying those services. It was a partnership dominated by the much better-funded criminal element, which succeeded in distorting the entire local market. The rectification of that situation would be a major goal of the Castro Revolution.

Chapter Fourteen: Jewish Community Life of the 1950s

Community Institutions

The wealth of the 1950s meant the building of community structures and institutions. Building was part of a major social transformation within the Jewish Community. It was the Cubanization of the local Jews. Cuba no longer was a transit point for immigrants to move onward to yet another country. For the most part those who wanted to leave Cuba had already left. For the first time the large majority of Cuban Jews made the personal, psychological, and financial commitment that they were staying.

Schools with a full curriculum were needed. And, the Cuban Jewish Community finally built synagogues. Previously they had used existing structures that constructed for other purposes, then adapted to use for prayer. The same was true for other community offices. They all occupied already existing facilities. The persistent feeling had been a lack of confidence in Cuba and in its future for Jews. The Jewish Community had been dominated, if not by immigrants, then at least by immigrant thinking. That attitude had now changed.

The decision to build large community-center-type buildings was typical. Cuban synagogues always were always social centers, overshadowing religious prayer. The perceived affluence of the 1950s meant that money was available. No, just rooms for prayer were not enough. The concept of "community center" took over. There also had to be meeting rooms and social halls.

A post-War desire to unite the splintered Jewish Community emerged. In many ways this effort at unity was a reaction to the departure of the refugees[536] and the need for psychological reassurance. After all, World War II had been a War against the Jews. Now the Jews wanted to group together as a defense for the future. There was, however, also a power struggle. Who would lead the Jewish Community? There were several contenders.

Jewish Schools

The varied nature of the Cuban Jewish Community produced numerous schools of different orientations and directions. In some cases the reason that a school was established was language – Hebrew, Yiddish, or Spanish. In other cases need was seen for a more religious or Zionist orientation.

The Jewish educational system was highly political. In many instances schools were

seen as the extended arms of political or cultural (quasi-political) groups. Unaffiliated Jewish schools were the rarity. The schools tried to serve the needs of students, but those needs were often defined as education to further the position of the founding group. Not that this situation is unique! In many communities Jewish schools have been established to further a particular religious line or to emphasize Hebrew or whatever other language.

Chevet Ahim

Major efforts to establish Jewish education in Cuba can be traced to *Chevet Ahim,* which took the initiative in starting a Jewish school. The pro-Zionist Colegio Theodor Herzl, was founded in 1924 at Inquisidor 407, Habana Vieja. This was an effort initiated by Joseph Cohen, who served as headmaster; Victor Mitrani[537] and Marco Pitchón also assumed leading roles. Later David Pérez was associated with the school, before he undertook his own education projects. There were, however, numerous problems at the Colegio. Both Ashkenazi and Sephardic children attended the school,[538] leading to ideological confrontation; the Sephardim were decidedly more traditional than the Ashkenazim. A makeshift solution was to divide secular and religious instruction, thus removing religious influence from non-religious subjects; secular studies were taught in the morning, with Hebrew and religious subjects taught in the afternoon.

Language perennially plagued Jewish education in Cuba. United Hebrew favored English, European Ashkenazim preferred Yiddish, and the Sephardim had no trouble with Spanish. The Colegio Theodor Herzl was a compromise. The Colegio taught in Ladino and Yiddish in the afternoons, but this arrangement was only temporary. All too quickly the school became geared to a Yiddish-speaking clientele and lost both its religious and Zionist character. For a while there was a theoretical compromise to teach in Spanish,[539] but that proved to be impractical. The school lost its Ashkenazi-Sephardic appeal. The school became Ashkenazi and Yiddish-speaking. This was formalized in 1926 when the school was reorganized, separated from *Chevet Ahim*, and brought under the newly created Centro Israelita / Jewish Committee for Cuba. By the school year 1927-1928 there were 185 students.[540] The school became not only Ashkenazi; it was for all intents and purposes totally secular in orientation. That could be traced to the growing influence of Bundists in the Ashkenazi population.

The new arrangement, however, was short-lived. *Chevet Ahim* Rabbi Garshon Maya criticized the situation,[541] and in 1930 he organized a new "Colegio Theodor Herzl" (Colegio Union Zionista de Cuba). This school not only served as a center of learning, but also published religious material in Spanish for students and the masses.[542] Religion returned to the school.

As the Community developed, Jews enjoyed increasing affluence and stability. The Havana community eventually became large enough to support four Jewish day schools.

Centro Israelita

The largest of these day schools was the autonomous school at the Centro Israelita, founded in the 1930s. The day school had an enrollment of 360 students by 1950. When the school moved from Egido Street in Habana Vieja to Santos Suarez, it opened a high school so that students could continue their studies after the eighth grade. The school stressed a conventional Eastern European approach to education, including the Yiddish language. Although basic Jewish subjects such as holidays were studied, the approach was secular and certainly not religious.[543] Children studied Yiddish and Spanish through the 6th grade, at which point they went into public school. Hebrew was taught from the third grade. Enrollment dwindled drastically, to less than forty by the end of the 1950s, as the school lost its basic appeal. It simply did not progress with time and offer the type of education that Jews began to seek.

This was the last Jewish day school to close after the 1959 Revolution. The Government never officially shut it down. The institution was allowed to peter out as problems accumulated. The final issue was the discontinuation of bus transportation for out-of-area pupils in the early 1970s.

Tajkemoni

Adath Israel fought the Centro Israelita for control of the Jewish Community. One battleground was Jewish education. It should not surprise that just as these organizations set up other groups so as not to support the Centro, they did the same in education. Rabbi Meyer Rosenbaum, when he was still associated with Kehilla Ahdut Israel (the combined *Adath Israel* and *K'neseth Israel*) founded the orthodox Tajkemoni School (Calle 21 No. 561 in Vedado) on 20 October 1949. Tajkemoni was an Orthodox yeshiva-type school with an enrollment of about eighty Ashkenazi pupils. It constituted a threat to the Centro and its Colegio, and it was probably responsible for some of the decline in enrollment at the Colegio. The principal was Yosef Abrami, who was present at the founding meeting of the Patronato. Abrami previously had taught in the Centro Israelita.

Other Jewish Schools

At times there were other Jewish schools. The Modern Jewish Day School was run by Dr. Ida Glazer-Castiel (born in Santiago de Cuba) and had an enrollment of about one hundred; instruction was in both Hebrew and Yiddish. Another option was the Colegio Sholem Aleijem with instruction in Yiddish and a decidedly leftist-Communist orientation.

David Pérez (6 February 1912 – 11 October 2001) provided an innovative approach to Jewish education. He was a graduate of the Universidad de la Habana, which gave him a good insight into Cuban society. After his stint with Colegio Theodor Herzl, Pérez opened Academia Pérez in the 1930s on Calle Sol in Habana Vieja. He understood that Jews were heavily involved in business; the point of the high school was to prepare students for the commercial world. The language of instruction was Spanish, and Ashkenzi students learned with Sephardim.

The ultimate compliment about his efforts came from his students. As they graduated, married, and started their own families in the 1950s, they came to Pérez with the request that he open an elementary school for their children. That was the beginning of the Albert Einstein School located at Quinta Avenida and Calle 12 in Miramar. Despite the prestigious address, tuition was based upon the ability to pay. And, there were several non-Jews who attended they school! The school, however, was not to last more than several years. It was closed by government decree in May, 1961. David Pérez left the country two months later.[544]

After the Revolution

After leaving Cuba, Pérez settled in New York, where he worked as a bookkeeper. He then taught at Long Island University and Brooklyn College before retirement. He passed away in Florida.

Non-Jewish Secular Schools

Ruston Academy

Not everyone attended Jewish schools. Many Jews attended the Ruston Academy, a private American school in Havana from 1920 until 1961.[545] The school was founded by Hiram Hall Ruston, an educator formerly from Louisiana who lived on the premises; then it was headed from 1944 by James D. Baker (born Kentucky, 1907-died Los Angeles, 24 February 2001). The school was originally located in Vedado at Avenida "G" (Presidente) and 5th, but in the 1950s it moved to the outlying suburbs. Ruston was nationalized and closed based on the promulgation of 30 April 1961, but by then most students had already fled Cuba (many according to the recommendation of the school principal, who felt already in late 1959 that Cuba was not safe for American children). The attractions of Ruston[546] were quality education[547] and instruction in English. It was, therefore, considered a prestige school. Amongst the Jewish families sending children to Ruston were Schechter, Weisz, Dizik, and Brandon (essentially UHC families, although Dizik later reaffiliated with *Adath Israel*).

The Ruston Academy also prided itself on being a secular[548] institution open to people of all faiths. The conclusion should not be drawn that those Jews who attended were interested in only an essentially non-religious education; Ruston presented a quality in education that was unrivaled elsewhere. And, even the "religious" Jewish schools had weak religious programs.

Many Jews enrolled in Ruston as their first Cuban school; others came as transfer students from both Cuban[549] and Jewish[550] schools. The common pattern was to continue in American universities after graduation from the Ruston Academy.

Ruston was a relatively closely-knit group. In numerous cases several children from the same extended family attended Ruston; there were also cases of students, then in later years their children, studying in Ruston. There are numerous examples of the sustained familial/parental support that the school received. This was not only in recognition of academic excellence. The choice of a school for a child was part of social status,[551] and association with Ruston included that element. The son of Fulgencio Batista attended the school, as did the daughter of Miguel Gómez, and the niece of Carlos Prío.

One of the teachers at Ruston was Boris Goldenberg, who was born in Russia and grew up in Germany. He had joined the German Communist Party, but he was expelled in 1929. In 1933 the Nazis arrested him; after he was released, he went to France from which he escaped to Cuba in 1941. Goldenberg became a Cuban citizen in 1946. In the early 1950s he began teaching at the Ruston Academy. In July 1960, he left Cuba for West Germany, where he became the director of the Latin American department of Radio Deutsche Welle. Later Goldenberg served as Prime Minister Willy Brandt's advisor on Latin American affairs.

Deutsche Shule

Several Jewish families are known to have sent their children to the Deutsche Shule; until 1936 it was an acceptable option for at least one Jewish student despite the school's very German cultural inclination.[552] By 1939 the staff openly identified itself with the Nazi movement to the extent that the principal, Dr. Heidrich, and members of her staff were seen in a Havana cinema rising and saluting, "Heil Hitler," when pictures of the German führer were shown in the newsreels.[553]

Non-Jewish Religious Schools

The St. George Academy was another English language school in Havana that attracted some Jewish students. Although it was not a religious school *per se* (despite its Catholic name), the required Academy school uniform had an embroidered cross, which made this very unappealing to many more traditionally inclined Jews.[554]

The Methodist School was another non-Jewish option chosen by non-religious Jewish families.[555] It had a strong English program. Students were expected to attend weekly chapel, however participation in the Christian service was not enforced.

Summation

All of the schools suffered financial hardships because of their lack of coordination. Once affluent Havana Jews began to leave the country after the Revolution, it became even more difficult for these schools to function.

New Neighborhoods

Marianao

One of Batista's first moves as President was to re-organize the municipal boundaries of Havana. Marianao started as a Havana suburb. In the re-organization it was incorporated into the city.

Marianao had a Jewish Community for many years. An ironic early mention of Jews in Marianao was in the arrest notices of two residents, Luis Brill and Zalman Kozolchyk, in Santiago de las Vegas in early 1934.[556]

A decade later a small Jewish Community developed around the Centro Israelita de Marianao y la Vecinidad (founded 1945-1946 at Calzada Real[557] No. 100 by Avraham Kozolchyk[558]). The emphasis of the Centro was not religion and prayer; it was seen more as a social center where Jews could gather.[559] This pattern of a community center was repeated in numerous other areas.

Kozolchyk's own store, "El Encuentro del Marino," was only a few buildings away from the Centro, at Calzada Real No. 122, on the corner of Castillo Marianao. And, the Kozolchyk family was prominent in running the Centro; in 1954 Solomon was Administrator; Chaim was second vice-president; and, Avraham served as president.[560]

Small stores run by upcoming Europeans, both Jewish and non-Jewish, typified the area in the 1950s. Prosperity was, however, short-lived. The storeowners left after the Revolution and subsequent nationalization.[561] Life had changed. A Jewish Community in Marianao ceased to exist.

Vedado

During the 1950s there were more than twelve thousand Jews living in Cuba. This is the estimated number calculated by the Jewish National Fund, and it is probably more or less accurate.[562]

No longer was the center of Jewish settlement in Habana Vieja. New neighborhoods began to develop in the wealthy atmosphere that Havana was enjoying. Not only Marianao became part of the city. Vedado and Playa became popular neighborhoods in the enlarged city. Luxurious new homes were built in these areas, and Jews .moved into these new neighborhoods in large numbers. Vedado had been home to the wealthy American Hebrew Congregation and to the World War II Belgian refugees. Now Vedado was within the financial reach of many more people.

Since increasing numbers of Jews owned homes in Vedado, it was only natural that the neighborhood was chosen as the primary area for the building of new synagogues. The exception was United Hebrew Congregation. They were already in Vedado. They wanted to move yet further out to an even more affluent area.

Vedado lies mid-way between Habana Vieja and the tunnel that was built in the 1950s under the Almendares River to Miramar, just to the west. Although there were already bridges over the river, yet even-so the tunnel made a major impact on life. Vedado quickly became the center of commercial life in Havana. During the early colonial period settlers left the area densely forested as a natural barrier against pirates who might attack; later it was a military base, hence its name – Vedado (forbidden [area]). It wasn't until the beginning of the twentieth century that the trees were cut down so that the elite of Havana could build large homes in what was then a rural setting. By the 1930s, increasing numbers of wealthy residents from Habana Vieja were moving into the new upscale suburb, but World War II temporarily stopped the process. After World War II and its austerity, Vedado began to flourish once again. By the early 1950s Vedado was ripe for development. Two new synagogues would be constructed there.

Synagogues of Havana

On 13 October 1947 an organizational meeting was held in the offices of Charles Sheinfeld at Calle Zulueta 464. The goal of the meeting was to discuss a project to unite the Jewish Community.[563] But, results were short-lived and partial. Nevertheless, the first tangible results were seen at *Adath Israel*.

Adath Israel

Adath Israel was situated at Jesús María 103. Meyer Rosenbaum assumed the elected position of Rabbi (or as he was to contend, *the* Orthodox Ashkenazi Rabbi of Havana) on 1 April 1948. *K'neseth Israel* was in the next building, at Jesús María 105. In February 1949, twenty years after splitting apart, the two congregations merged together under a short-lived new name, *Ahdut* ("Unity") *Israel*. Rosenbaum was a primary influence in the unification.

It was obvious that new community institutions were needed for the post-War era. Rosenbaum simplistically attributed the desire to build a new united synagogue to overcrowding of existing buildings.[564] This explanation served his purposes well. No one could quibble with facts. The combined *Ahdut Israel* synagogue *was* overcrowded. Rosenbaum tried to maintain cohesiveness by contending that there was no option. The shul was simply too small. A new building was a must! The building issue, however, was really much more complex. Discord soon arose, not over whether to build, but over where to build.

Jews were redefining themselves. And, there was pressure to adapt the community to new needs. The desire of the socially mobile class to build a new synagogue and other community functions in Vedado can be seen as a part of suburbanization, similar to the phenomenon that gripped the United States at the same time. The major difference was that in the United States suburbanization continued into the 1960s, if not even longer. In Cuba the phenomenon came to a screeching halt a few months after the Castro Revolution.

Unity in Rosenbaum's synagogue was not to be. The discussions to build a new synagogue to replace *Adath Israel/K'neseth Israel* split the Building Committee.[565] Some people favored building in Habana Vieja, while others preferred Vedado. Rosenbaum was hardly impartial. During 1949 he lobbied continuously for a location in Vedado. A decision was finally made on 8 December 1949 – a new synagogue would be built in Vedado to lead Havana's Ashkenazi Jews. Elections for a board to lead the building effort of the new synagogue were held on 28 January 1950.[566] In some cases the synagogue in a new neighborhood becomes a branch of the synagogue in the older neighborhood, but not this time. Differences and rivalries were too great. There was a total break between the Habana Vieja and Vedado factions. The new synagogue in Vedado would have no connection to *Adath Israel*.

The results of the vote jolted the *Adath Israel* community (i.e., Havana's Ashkenazi community). The Centro Israelita withdrew all connection with the new synagogue; the Centro realized that the building project was a threat to its own very existence, since any association with the project would be interpreted as taking sides. Those at *Adath Israel* who favored a location in Habana Vieja totally withheld their support from building in Vedado. It took those in Habana Vieja several years to recoup administrative strength. Then they decided to construct a new synagogue at the corner

of Acosta and Picota Streets, in the heart of what was the Jewish Quarter of Habana Vieja. Two dilapidated apartment buildings had stood on the lot. The residents had moved out, and the structures were bought and demolished.

Oscar Baisman[567] (born 1932, Havana), a member of the congregation, volunteered his services to Kalmon Wodonos. Baisman had just graduated from the Universidad de la Habana. He was appointed architect of the synagogue. He was the architect for the H.D. Rosen Ink Factory in Rancho Boyeros, a unique structure for the era.

Jacinto Folch, also a graduate of the Universidad de la Habana, served as construction engineer.

Two banks provided loans for the new building of *Adath Israel,* which included a sanctuary with six hundred seats, a chapel, a *mikvah*, and a banquet hall. Rabbi Rosensweig, another *Adath Israel* member, served as the *halachic* authority on the *mikvah.* The cornerstone for the new $100,000 synagogue building was laid in April 1956. By the following year construction had progressed sufficiently to allow partial use of the building, and in 1958 the project was essentially finished. Then political life changed. By late 1959 Baisman, who was married in the building, decided to leave Cuba. The following year he was gone, as well as many other *Adath Israel* members.[568]

There was another price to the decision to build in Vedado. Ben Zion Dizik (1888-1960), president of *Adath Israel*, left the congregation and joined the Vedado faction. Rabbi Rosenbaum[569] was already a resident of Vedado on Calle L #2, a half block from the Malecón.[570] Several times when he had to spend the Sabbath in Habana Vieja, he stayed with the family of Alter Katz (born, Romania, 1898 – died, Brooklyn, 1971); other times he walked to Habana Vieja from Vedado.[571] That era was over. Both Rosenbaum and Dizik soon took active rôles in the then-forming new community center and synagogue in Vedado that was to become the Patronato. (Katz, a dedicated friend of Rosenbaum, stayed with the *Adath Israel* faction, though he continued a warm association with the rabbi, particularly on matters of *kashruth.*[572] It was also Katz who made *kitels* for the Belgian community before Rosh Hashanah 1942. He departed from Cuba in 1960.)

At *Adath Israel* a new leadership took over headed by Kalman Wodonos (1890-1991),[573] who served as president. Wodonos was born in Brest-Litovsk, and immigrated to Cuba in 1924. His primary profession was in leather goods. Wodonos had been active in community causes since serving as vice-chairman of Centro Israelita in 1929. He was also an ardent pro-Zionist. Wodonos left Cuba after the Revolution and established residence in Dade County, Florida. Shortly after dedication, the new synagogue was without its leader.

After the Revolution

Adath Israel has remained nominally Orthodox throughout the seventy-five years of its existence. Today it has the only mikvah in Havana. It has been very rarely used since the early days of the Revolution.[574] The *mechitzah* dividing men from women in the ground floor prayer area is relatively new. The main sanctuary with women's gallery has been recently renovated; it is in only occasional use due to the reduced size of the congregation. The congregation receives strong and ambitious support from Chabad, which sends emissaries throughout the year and runs an annual summer camp for children.

Patronato

For many the successful vote championed by Rosenbaum and Dizik[575] to build a new facility in Vedado, signaled a call to action. The advocates of a new synagogue took pride in the democratic voting process in which 419 votes were cast.[576] For Rosenbaum a new community meant the possibility of accomplishing personal goals that he could not attain in *Adath Israel*.[577] Rosenbaum did try to keep the *K'neseth Israel* name. He claimed that he represented *K'neseth Israel* in its "new" temporary location at Egido 504.[578] The effort failed. Those who were to build in Vedado were not interested in the past. They were looking to chart a new future for Cuban Jewry.

Founders of the new Vedado synagogue started their work in earnest. The first practical step towards the building of the new center took place in the law offices of Adolpho Delgado[579] on Monday, 19 December 1950, after the vote to proceed. A meeting was held to map a new direction for Havana's Jewry. The goal was to establish a new Jewish center that would take over existing institutions. Participants at the meeting were Herman Heisler,[580] Ben (Zion) Dizik,[581] Isaac Gurwitz,[582] Max Schwartz,[583] Herman[584] and Morris[585] Berezinsky, Eliezer Brinberg,[586] Leib Hiller[587], Wolf Shaftel,[588] Yosef Abrami,[589] Sishe Schaftel,[590] Fabian Weisz, Julio Carity,[591] Shimon Atran,[592] and Rafael Rosenberg.[593] The outcome of the meeting went as planned. Building of the new center was approved without any major obstacles.

The project soon became a reality. Julio Carity moved from the Centro Israelita where he was an important organization officer; he took a leading role in the new venture. The new community center / synagogue were to be his personal project to promote his dreams for the future of Cuban Jewry.

Dizik played a dominant part in the project, but not all in life works according to plan. A sudden and unexpected event changed Dizik's future and diminished his influence in the planning of the new center. In 1952 he had a stroke that left him partially disabled; at that point he withdrew from an active rôle in community affairs. (Dizik passed away in the center in November 1960, when he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage in the midst

of saying goodbye on the very day he was to have left Cuba. He is buried in Guanabacoa.)[594]

Several sub-committees were established to begin planning construction and making necessary arrangements. Max Pincus[595] became president of the building committee, and Isaac Gur(e)witz, the general secretary, served on the committee as well. The building committee included architect Aquiles Capablanca, a professor on the faculty of the Universidad de la Habana, and Enrique Bikovich. Amongst Capablanca's other works was the Ministry of Interior building (1953) in the Plaza de la República (now Plaza de la Revolución).

Pincus was a non-observant Jew. After serious illness in the 1940s he decided to take a more active interest in the Jewish Community.[596] He joined the building effort as an expression of material success and social status. According to Rabbi Rosenbaum,[597] Pincus vehemently opposed the inclusion of a *mikvah* in the building plans. Relations between Rosenbaum and Pincus went from bad to worse. Rosenbaum's statements were more indicative of a personal animosity that he nurtured, rather than a description of objective reality.

Gurwitz was the son of Polish Russian parents who had arrived in Cuba in 1924.[598] His father started as a peddler of neckties, and opened a very successful clothing manufacturing business in Habana Vieja.

The finance committee also included Leon Guilfarb, Simon Burman, Nachum Rosenzweig, and Julio Carity.

Land was purchased in Vedado, at a location convenient to most of the membership. The plot and residence had belonged to the former Cuban president, José M. Gómez. The building standing on the land was demolished. Soon thereafter, on 17 June 1951, the cornerstone was laid; that honor was given to Pincus in exchange for a formidable contribution.[599]

The name of the center has two parts that well describe its function: 1) The Patronato—the Patrons, or Benefactors—i.e., those who donated money for the center to be erected in Vedado, and 2) Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba, or House of the Jewish Community of Cuba. Joined together – Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba, and in common parlance – Patronato.

Anyone could use the facility, but there was a catch. Only members could vote. Membership fees were fixed at $500,[600] thus insuring that decisions were made only be the very wealthy. After all, the Patronato was the playground of the rich.

The Patronato was constructed in several stages; final completion was in 1953.[601] But, the Patronato was put into use long before completion of the entire building. On 17 June 1952, a year to the day after laying of the cornerstone, 400 people attended a

ceremony on the first floor of the building. Formally the ceremony was called the "Pre-Inauguration."[602] A week and a half later, on 29 June 1952, Miriam Yavitz[603] was married to Moisés Sapir in the first marriage celebrated in the partially finished building;[604] unfortunately, the marriage ended in divorce not long thereafter.

A sense of cooperation developed very quickly amongst the leaders of the Patronato. The Board of Directors hired Rosenbaum[605] as the rabbi. Rosenbaum had championed the building project when he served at *Adath Israel*. Now he would continue with the project. Services were held in Rosenbaum's house and at Egido 504 until the Patronato building opened. After all, he could not return to *Adath Israel* that he had bolted.

The Patronato was a continuation of the dream of Community unity that was never realized. The Patronato was meant to overshadow the Centro Israelita and to replace it. In many ways this was a continuation of the same fight that *Adath Israel* began, before the synagogue had split. If there could be no unity by consent, several members of the Patronato looked for unity by control – the dominance of money. The Patronato would be the wealthiest, the biggest and the best. It would eclipse all else. The new building was not only to have the largest synagogue and the largest social hall in Havana's Jewish Community. It would also have classrooms / meeting rooms, and a library. The facility was to encompass all.

The domineering goal of the Patronato did not go unnoticed. Sender Kaplan, editor of *Habaner Lebn*, became an outspoken critic of the Patronato and of its president, Herman Heisler.[606] He very adeptly assessed what was happening.

The Patronato was officially opened with great fanfare in a weekend series of celebrations beginning on Thursday evening, 27 October 1955 in the presence of President Batista, Prime Minister Jorge García Montes, and other dignitaries. Membership was just short of one thousand families, the vast majority of whom were Ashkenazim. Most had formerly belonged to the Centro Israelita in Habana Vieja. There were also some Sephardim and some American Jews (technically Ashkenazim, but as explained earlier, in Cuba considered a distinct group).

There was a separate ceremony for the dedication of the library. On 4 October 1955 the first book – a Bible – was ceremoniously placed on the library shelves. Avraham Marcus-Matterin (born Lithuania, 1916; died Cuba, 1983), a journalist[607] by trade, was appointed chief librarian in 1954.[608]

The Patronato was never a very religious institution – only nominally Orthodox. Some of the prominent leaders even lived beyond Sabbath walking distance. Nor was the congregation's membership exceptionally religious. Although building a synagogue as part of the complex was *de rigueur* for what was envisioned to be the leading synagogue of Cuba, there was strong opposition to other religious symbols. Rabbi Rosenbaum suggested adding a mikvah; he was turned down. He also suggested adding

six classrooms; he was turned down emphatically. "Over my dead body," a leading congregant admonished the rabbi.

Although most of the year women sat in the balcony, on occasional Friday nights there was a community *oneg shabbat*, at which time women sat downstairs without a *mechitzah* (dividing curtain or wall),[609] but separate from the men. According to recollections, there was never with a *mechitza* separating women from men.[610] After Rosenbaum's tenure, women moved to the lower floor on most occasions. The Patronato became even less observant. On the other hand Rosenbaum moved further right in his religious observance after his departure from Cuba.

Politics were ubiquitous in the Patronato. One key issue was *kashruth*. The goal was to wrestle the control of *kashruth* away from *Adath Israel*; this would be the realization of Rosenbaum's ambition to control religious functions and realization of the Patronato's goal simply to control.

The major issue in *kashruth* was *shechitah* (ritual slaughter of meat). Until the building of the Patronato, *Adath Israel* held a monopoly on *shechitah* supervision in the Ashkenazi sector. First at *Adath Israel*, then at the Patronato, Rosenbaum assumed a leading rôle in this area. The Patronato sought to break the *Adath Israel* monopoly (and not pay the fees charged by *Adath Israel*) for meat served in their restaurant and catering hall. That difference of opinion was one of several differences that intensified ill feelings between the two congregations.[611]

Rabbi Rosenbaum soon became embroiled in politics at the Patronato. He was also a very unique person for whom it was hard to acclimate in a bureaucratic community setting. He was extremely independent, not heeding to group decisions. The Patronato leadership encountered problems with him. Rosenbaum, the offspring of a distinguished rabbinic family, rapidly came into a series of serious conflicts with the Board of Directors at both the organizational and personal levels, but he always retained popularity with many of the regular members. There were several points of dispute:

- Rosenbaum insisted upon entering into private business arrangements in addition to serving as rabbi of the congregation; the board wanted him to be a full time rabbi and they felt that engaging in business pursuits compromised the Patronato's status. One person raised questions about the ethical, if not legal, nature of Rosenbaum's transactions.[612] This would later be the reason he left Cuba.

- Rosenbaum continued to use the titles, *HaGaon Shlita* and *Mara D'Asra* (usually reserved for the most prominent rabbinical authorities) "of Havana and the Provinces" (i.e., all of Cuba).[613] Although the Patronato considered itself as the leading Cuban Jewish organization, there was reluctance to have Rosenbaum enjoy the equivalent personal status. According to Rosenbaum the true motivation of the community was to reduce the religious function of the Patronato, stress social affairs, and affiliate with the American Conservative movement.

By 1955 the problems between Rosenbaum and the Board of Directors became quite serious. Rosenbaum ceased to be the rabbi of the Patronato in the Summer 1956, and left Cuba during the following winter.

After Rosenbaum there were no further full-time rabbis at the Patronato. The congregation hired a cantor from Florida, Phillip Hillel Brum(m)er (died 1993), who took up responsibilities on 27 July 1956.[614] He would come to Havana on Thursdays and stay until Sunday almost every week. This arrangement continued even after the Castro Revolution[615] – with decreasing frequency, until diplomatic relations were severed between the United States and Cuba in January 1961. Then it was no longer possible for the cantor to continue commuting.

Brumer was a businessman in Florida, a fact that did not prevent his being hired. After Brumer left the Patronato, he associated himself with a Conservative synagogue in Florida, then a year later moved to England. His Conservative affiliation in Florida is quite indicative of the direction in which Patronato leaders wanted to lead their synagogue.

After the Revolution

By the beginning of 1960, on the first anniversary of the Revolution, many Jews sat eyeing the situation and their suitcases. Herman Heisler was still president of the congregation; Isaac Gurwitz was secretary; and, Julio Carity (1901-1985) was treasurer, but only on paper. Carity was already in the United States; he would stay in Florida.

Membership in the Patronato was still strong. One year later Heisler and his inner circle were gone, not only physically, but also on paper. Many of the Patronato members were also gone. An estimated 3,800 Jews left Cuba in that year. An era was over. All that was left was memories of the past and false hopes about the future. For those who remained, it meant functioning in a synagogue without leadership.

Times had changed. Wealthier Cubans had the primary incentive to leave, usually for the United States, presumably on business trips or to take care of personal and family matters. This open ruse had the benefit of theoretically keeping options opened, in the hope that Castro was only a passing phenomenon. Often the trips were quiet and unannounced. Leaving meant at least the temporary loss of Cuban business assets and personal property. Those who left tried all types of arrangements to save their wealth, which was ultimately nationalized anyway.

Herman Heisler left Havana in October 1960. The family felt that they would be returning when Castro would be deposed. For that reason they "loaned" their Miramar house and two cars to the Embassy of Israel, with the intention of recovering the property upon eventual return. Since Heisler was in the export business, when he arrived in the United States he was able to collect on bills, thus giving him a small

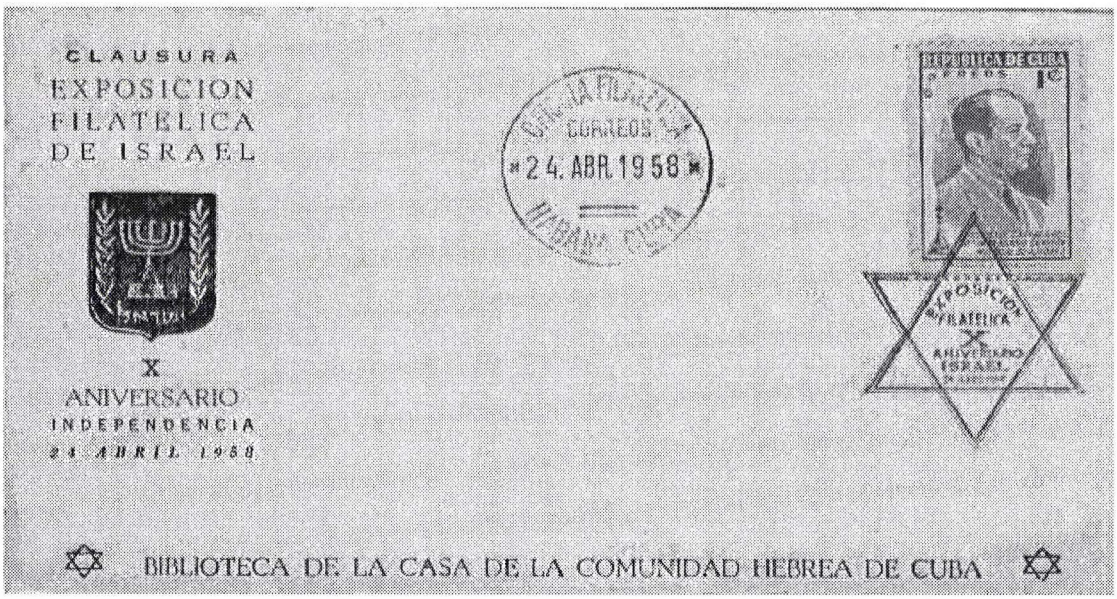
financial base. From his point of view the Revolution could not last long.[616]

Carity left Cuba in December 1959. His wife was an American from Chicago, and he had business assets in the United States. From Florida he arranged for payment in full of the Patronato's mortgage so that the Revolutionary Government would not confiscate the building. In fact, the Revolutionary Government did not confiscate buildings for this reason, however Carity's perception might well have been such based upon the pre-Revolutionary norm. It is unknown if he used assets in the United States or those in Cuba. Another motive was that residence in Florida was temporary; Castro could not remain in power for long. By paying the mortgage he reassured himself that the Patronato would stay in Jewish hands.[617]

Members of the community then started to lead the prayer service. Arnold Weitz led the congregational prayers until his death in the early 1970s, and Pedro Schaffel (died 1978) and Samuel Ochemberg also played important rôles. José Blumenkrantz (died 1999) then became the most important ritual leader, assisted by Samuel Lipshitz (Lipszyc) (died 1999) and Luís Chanivecky (Chanivequi) (died 2000). Following the Revolution a significant part of the Patronato complex was closed, leased, and subsequently[618] sold in 1982.

The leadership of the Centro Israelita and other influential leaders in Habana Vieja had opposed the building of the Patronato. Although an Ashkenazi committee at the Patronato was involved in laying the cornerstone, the community center was intended to cater to the needs of the entire community, both Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Many Jews hoped that the Patronato would be democratic and would efficiently unite the Jewish Community and provide a home for all of its local organizations. They perceptively understood that the new Patronato would draw the center of the Jewish Community out of the center of the city and into the suburbs. Clearly, this would result in their organizations losing many, if not most, of their members. This concern did not prevent the newly affluent suburban leaders of the Patronato to raise between $750,000 and $1 million for construction of the new building. The fear of the Centro Israelita became a reality. The Patronato quickly replaced the Centro Israelita as the *kehillah*—the Jewish Community center for the Havana community.

The library of the Patronato became a central institution in the Jewish community. Its services went beyond those of simply providing books. In 1958 the library served as a center for a philatelic exhibition in connection with the tenth anniversary of the State of Israel.



Philatelic exhibition in the library of the Patronato

Sephardic Havana

At the beginning of the 1950s the Union Hebrea *Chevet Ahim* controlled the Sephardic community through a loosely knit network of branches in many of the Cuban cities. The headquarters was in Havana, and it was there that issues of power were decided. In Havana one branch of the organization was the synagogue, Congregación Unión Israelita *Chevet Ahim* with its associated school, which remained active in its second floor location in Habana Vieja. People came and prayed, and socialized. The other facility under the aegis of *Chevet Ahim* was the official social club on the Prado, which doubled as a synagogue on High Holidays.

The Sephardic community in Habana was split, not unlike the Ashkenazim. In *Chevet Ahim*, as well, there was a pronounced desire to build a new building, and the question was where. Just as this question split *Adath Israel*, this same phenomenon also split *Chevet Ahim*. Many of the more affluent Sephardim had moved to Vedado and Miramar, and that is where they wanted to build. Other parts of the *Chevet Ahim* membership opposed the idea to build outside Habana Vieja.[619] Again, tension reigned, and the community was divided.

Just before Rosh Hashanah 1955 Rabbi Raphael Yair Elnadav (born Jerusalem 1921) was hired and brought from Israel to conduct services; he was an accomplished Sephardic cantor.[620] *Chevet Ahim* was too small for holiday services, which were conducted in an auditorium. Elnadav estimates that some 2000 people participated – a clear indication that a new synagogue was needed. During the year prayers were in the

synagogue, but the next Rosh Hashanah it was back to the auditorium. (Elnadav stayed in Havana until the June 1959, when he realized that his future awaited him elsewhere.)[621]

Nissim Gambach (1909-2002) tried his hand at being the congregational rabbi, but the arrangement was short-lived. He would not be the person to lead *Chevet Ahim.*

A decision was finally taken. A new Centro Hebreo Sefaradí was to be built in the suburbs. Those who wanted to build used temporarily rented quarters on the Prado[622] while they looked for a plot of land on which to construct a new synagogue. First they purchased property in Miramar at Avenida 5 and Calle 40, and began construction, but then work stopped. In 1957, they began building again, this time in Vedado at Calle 17 No. 462, corner of "E," and not far from the Patronato. President Isidoro Abravanel oversaw the building project. Jaime Mitrani was the construction engineer. But, as with the Ashkenazim, there were problems. First prayers in the partially finished building were held on Rosh Hashanah 1958. At the time of the Revolution, the new synagogue was not totally completed. The building project was finished after the Revolution, by which time many people in the Cuban Jewish Community had already left Cuba.

The fanfare of building dedication was less joyful than what had been envisioned. Every effort was made to maintain a holiday atmosphere. Despite these arrangements, there was a bittersweet feeling[623] as those who remained in Havana realized that times were changing very rapidly.

The poor remained in *Chevet Ahim.* For them there were no financial resources to fund the construction of a new synagogue in Habana Vieja. By the time they could begin to address the question, "What next?" the Revolution stopped the process.

After the Revolution

After the Revolution, when most of the Sephardim had already emigrated or were preparing to leave, the *Chevet Ahim* and the Centro Hebreo Sefaradí began to work together closely. Services alternated between the two buildings, and the leadership was unified. In 1995 the Cuban government decided to close down *Chevet Ahim* entirely, purportedly due to structural problems in the building. Nevertheless, Jewish communal leaders were eager to make sure *Chevet Ahim* remained within the Jewish Community and would not be turned over to the government. José Levy Tur, president of the Centro Hebreo Sefaradí, related that he hopes the building will be turned into a museum of Cuban Jewish life. Of the *Chevet Ahim* building Levy said, "Inside these walls the Sephardic Jews lived the best years of their lives."[624]

United Hebrew Congregation (UHC)

United Hebrew Congregation was always a non-traditional synagogue, and over the years it liberalized even further. It was always a small congregation (some 75 to 100 families in 1951), but it played a leading rôle in Cuban Jewish affairs.

From the 1920s a supplementary school functioned at UHC. In the 1930s Rabbi Meir Lasker was the primary Sunday teacher; the wife of Maurice Schechter supplemented with Hebrew instruction twice a week.[625] By the 1950s there was no more weekday instruction; only the Sunday School remained, and that was with focus on *bar mitzvah* preparation.[626]

Throughout its history, the vast majority of UHC members were Jews from the United States. Several Reform rabbis were employed in UHC. Some stayed longer than others. Some were more right- or left-wing than others. But, all were liberal in basic outlook.

Rabbis. There was not always a rabbi at the synagogue. Victor Eppstein (1901-1985) was the first to lead the congregation for more than the High Holidays. He assumed the post in 1929 for a short tenure until he moved onward to Kingston, New York. He was followed by Meir Lasker, whose eight year term at UHC was the longest of its rabbis.

Samuel W. Chomsky[627] (1909-1984) spent a very short time as rabbi after Lasker, then he took a position as a U.S. military chaplain as his country formally entered World War II. His career would later take him to the Jewish Veterans Society and the U.S. Veterans Administration. S. Shapira, a Reform refugee and former Chief [Reform] Rabbi of Antwerp, then filled his position at UHC.[628]

UHC started the post-World War II period with Arthur B. Lebovitz taking on rabbinic duties in 1946. By 1949, however, Lebovitz had found a rabbinic slot in Niagara Falls, New York. Rabbi Milton Weissberg, who had been ordained by Hebrew Union College in 1947, was next to fill the rabbinic post at UHC. Weissberg stayed with UHC through 1951, when he assumed duties as the rabbi of Temple Beth Ha-Shalom, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

From an historical viewpoint the congregation had begun without any specific religious orientation, but slowly liberalism became the hallmark. The succession of rabbis all represented Reform Judaism. Formal affiliation with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was seen as a logical step, and the congregation officially joined the Reform movement on 15 January 1951.[629] This was during the tenure of Weissberg.

After Weissberg left in 1951, Benjamin B. Lowell[630] (ordained by Hebrew Union College in 1926) took up the job of spiritual leader. Lowell had previously served in Montgomery, Alabama and with B'nai B'rith Hillel National Headquarters.

Lowell's career with UHC came to an untimely end when he passed away in June, 1953 during a visit to the United States, where he went for treatment of leukemia. A eulogy by Philip Bernstein, a friend from boyhood and a colleague as an adult, ends with a unique insight into the man leading Havana's Reform congregation:

May the G-d in whom Ben was not quite sure he believed, at least give peace to his soul.[631]

A dubious description of a deceased clergyman! Some suggested that Cuba had become the refuge for problem cases in Reform rabbinic circles. Lowell seems to be a fitting example.

Mordechai M. Thurmon[632] (ordination by Hebrew Union College in 1931, died 1985) assumed rabbinic duties a month after Lowell's passing, then returned to a permanent position in the United States.

Abram M. Granison was next. He took over and was the congregation's rabbi two years later at the time of UHC's Fiftieth Anniversary. During Granison's tenure prayers were standardized using the Union Prayer Book, revised edition. (The congregation had used the earlier version of the Union Prayer Book at least from the early 1930s.)

At the time of the congregation's 50th anniversary celebration in 1956, the Golden Anniversary yearbook stated, "There is no doubt that a growing number of Jewish people prefer a liberal ritual provided it entails no loss of the beauty and sanctity of original scripture."[633]

Granison was replaced at UHC by Rabbi Dr. Frederick Solomon[634] (1899-1980), a very unique person. Solomon was born in Berlin, received rabbinic ordination in England, and came to the United States in 1954. He was married to the former Margot Simonson. After a term as rabbi of UHC in Havana, he moved to New Hampshire. Always a lover of art, his publications in the field caught the eye of the president of Nathaniel Hawthorne College. In addition to being a congregational rabbi, Solomon was also the Chairman of the college's Department of Art.[635]

Congregation. The Golden Anniversary Yearbook speaks with optimism about the future. For decades, many in the congregation had felt it prudent to avoid embarking on extensive building plans. Most of the UHC congregation continued to see the United States as their real home; therefore there was a great deal of hesitation in undertaking a project that would involve a long-term commitment of money and energy. The general consensus was that they should "wait and see what the future is likely to have in store for us." The congregation, therefore, rented a building in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana for use as a synagogue. Although it was not built as a house of worship, the structure included grand Roman columns and other distinguished architectural features, making it an impressive synagogue nonetheless. It took the congregational leadership a long time to make the commitment to buy land and to build a synagogue.

Congregants of United Hebrew were looking for stability in their personal lives and in their religious congregation. Lasker had been UHC rabbi for eight years before taking his new position in Philadelphia. That era of a long tenure was a fond memory of a past era. The frequent change of rabbi raised the basic question of UHC life in Havana – how permanent or transitory was it? Should land be purchased and a synagogue be built, or should the congregation continue to rent quarters? In 1953, for example, building plans were cancelled, and the monies already collected were spent to modernize and air condition the existing building.[636]

In 1956 the editor of the UHC Golden Anniversary volume was able to write, "The Jewish population in Cuba is steadily increasing and the constant influx of the new industries, many of which are operated by Jewish investors, betokens a bright future for the United Hebrew Congregation."[637]

The decision to undertake construction came at the same time that other Jewish synagogues and community buildings had been built or were in the process. That provided support to those in favor of building.

Optimistically looking toward a bright future, in 1956 the congregation selected a plot of land for a new synagogue in Miramar on 5th Ave and 32nd Street. Two sets of plans were drawn up to build a magnificent new temple. One set of plans called for renovation of the house existing on the plot of land. The other set called for demolition of the house and construction of a new synagogue. Construction never commenced. There was ambivalence because most of the American Jews still felt that their real homes were not in Cuba. With the victory of the revolutionary forces the plans were permanently aborted; almost all of the Americans returned to the United States after the break in diplomatic relations.[638] Shortly thereafter the new revolutionary government seized the new plot of land, and therefore no synagogue was ever built in Miramar or anywhere in Playa. The new plot of land became a footnote in history.

Probably more than any other Havana synagogue, the members of UHC constituted a very close-knit group. Some of the members continued that connection during their many years abroad in exile from Cuba, but as years passed, that connection became weaker. There no longer was any reason to keep together.

After the Revolution

The United Hebrew Congregation continued to function until the late 1960s, but with a drastically reduced membership. Even after that, the congregation dwindled onward, then slowly died out. Some suggest that the congregation was able to maintain itself until the mid-1970s, and others remember that there was still a bit of life left until the beginning of the 1980s. The synagogue building was closed in 1981. On 20 December 1987 UHC tangible property was transferred to *Adath Israel*. It is for this reason that the Reform Union Prayer Books that once belonged to UHC are incongruously being stored (through the time of this writing) in the officially orthodox Adath Israel. In 2001 the Cuban government was remodeling the building, and in September 2002 the United Hebrew Congregation of the past reopened as a residence for Latin American journalists. The symbol of American Jewry in Cuba was no more.

Chapter Fifteen: Jewish Life on the Eve of Revolution

Just before the End

The Jewish Community of the 1950s was at its peak. Times were good. Until at least mid-1959 no one thought that the end of Cuban Jewry's golden years was in sight.

As in the past the focus of Cuban Jewish life was not religious observance. In Havana and to a larger extent in the provinces emphasis was on social and cultural activities. Jewish organizations provided an opportunity for Ashkenazim to speak Yiddish and for Sephardim to meet their co-religionists. Both groups maintained synagogues, but those synagogues were social centers perhaps even before they were houses of prayer. This was true in the early days of the community. This was true in the 1950s. It is estimated that only 30% of Havana's Jews kept kosher.[639]

Report of Mendel Kochanski

Where did Jews fit into the economic picture of 1950s Cuba? They were part of the pervasive illusion of prosperity that dominated Cuban thinking. Mendel Kochanski,[640] who visited the country in 1950 and spent a large amount of time with the Jews there, explained that most Cuban Jewish merchants had stores that were "somewhere between hole-in-the-wall stores and substantial emporiums." Kochanski had very definite views on the Jewish Community, and the impressions he recorded from his trip are worth noting at length, even though many of his observations are somewhat superficial and exaggerated.

Kochanski wrote, "There are hardly any poor Jews in Cuba, and there is no Jewish working class. There is an air of satisfied prosperity about every Jew you will meet in Havana, even if his American-made car is a 1948 model, and he cannot afford to go to Miami every year. Few live in Habana Vieja, the majority having acquired homes in the prosperous Vedado suburb, while others live in...fashionable Miramar, which is undoubtedly one of the world's most luxurious and beautiful urban projects." Kochanski was obviously influenced by the Jews whom he met, and he clearly associated with well-to-do people. Contrary to his statements, Jews still lived in Habana Vieja, and in numbers to support not just one, but two synagogues. But, he was right that abject poverty was a matter of the past. The years of the Depression and World War II depravation were over.

Some Cuban Jews of the early 1950s were wealthy businessmen, but even they undertook no leading roles in Cuban affairs. The community as a whole was very much on the periphery of Cuban society and political life. One reason was the lack of

language skills. Although those Jews who arrived in the early twentieth century had already learnt Spanish, most of the more recent Eastern European arrivals did not speak Spanish comfortably. Yiddish was still the *lingua franca* of much of the Ashkenazi community. It was this generation that was leading the Jewish Community. Kochanski writes "the majority neither know nor attempt to learn Spanish beyond the barest rudiments." Their focus was on business ties with the North American mainland and a life cloistered within the confines of the Cuban Jewish Community.

Kochanski describes what he observed, "While in Havana I participated in a meeting attended by about twenty people. When in the course of the session the secretary produced a letter written in Spanish, there was only one person, a girl who came to Cuba as a child, who could read it and translate the content into Yiddish for the benefit of those present."

Kochanski is exaggerating. As one Cuban Jew explained, "no tan calvo, que se le vean los sesos" (it is not so bald that you can see the brains). And, Kochanski was narrowly focussed. He concentrated his observations on people like himself – Ashkenazi Jews.

One of the reasons that the Eastern European Jews seemed to have resisted learning Spanish was that they were constantly looking towards the United States as a cultural model, a point of business contact, and an eventual immigration destination. The Yiddish newspaper, *Habaner Lebn*, was published in Havana twice a week. There were also other newspapers and magazines. Even so, many still went to great efforts to acquire New York Yiddish newspapers, which arrived in Cuba four days after they were published in the United States.

Many of these Eastern Europeans had planned to settle in the United States, but they were barred by quota restrictions. Even as late as 1951 Kochanski had the impression that they still regarded themselves as transients, despite living in Cuba for as long as twenty-five years. "They steadfastly refuse to be identified as Cubans, and are ready to liquidate their businesses and take their families across the Florida straits at the drop of the US consul's rubber stamp."

Cuban Jews were consciously copying what they considered to be the cultural and social norms of American Jews as they had been doing for decades. At the same time they actively avoided integrating Cuban cultural trappings into their way of life and identity. For example, Kochanski noted that the Yiddish of most Eastern European Jews in Cuba lacked virtually any Spanish admixtures. On the other hand, their Yiddish did include numerous American expressions. Kochanski was convinced that there wasn't enough contact with American tourists to have resulted in this degree of influence, nor did it seem to him that the reading of New York Yiddish newspapers would produce such an impact. Rather, he suggested, many had a strong desire to identify themselves with the American Jewish Community and to assimilate as much as possible into that group. He writes that this effort was remarkably successful in many cases.

A Havana Legend: Moshe Pipik Restaurant

There were numerous Jewish restaurants in Havana. Some were kitchens for the needy. Others were cafés. Yet others were full-menu restaurants. One, however, stands out as a Havana landmark. Kochanski reports, "My most startling experience in Havana was a visit to a restaurant seriously named *Moishe Pipik*,[641] owned by a formidable woman from Poland who puts a 'Mrs.' in front of her name instead of the Spanish 'Sra.' and speaks the purest New York Yiddish. She never set foot in the United States, but offers you a 'shtikele boiled chicken' as naturally as if her establishment were on Delancey Street in New York instead of Avenida Acosta in the heart of Habana Vieja." The restaurant offered take-out and delivery services[642] in good American tradition.

The restaurant had a history that started long before Mrs. Reisel Wainstein, the owner mentioned by Kochanski. The restaurant began with Moshe Sandberg, who came to Cuba from Lwów, Galicia, in 1923 or 1924. A few years afterwards he opened Restaurant de Sandberg at Calle Acosta 25 (old numbering system). The address became Acosta 211, when the direction of traffic was changed, and new numbers were assigned beginning at the waterfront.

The intended clientel was the immigrant population of Habana Vieja. The desire to cater to immigrants during the 1920s was more than a business opportunity; it was a culturo-religious function of serving the community.

Sandberg played with nicknames for the store. He tried *Moshe Kishke*. He tried *Moshe Pipik*. The latter name succeeded, even though the store was failing. In the early 1930s Sandberg sold the store to Mendel and Reizel Wainstein, who had immigrated to Cuba from Russia in 1928. They renamed the restaurant 'Viena Restaurant,'[643] but it was still commonly called *Moshe Pipik*. Mendel Wainstein passed away. Reisel continued in the business. By 1940 Wainstein's new restaurant, true to Kochanski's description of an American establishment, was the "Jewish-American Restaurant" at Calle Acosta 211 (new numbering system).[644] But the nickname, *Moishe Pipik*, continued. Don't argue with success! Soon Wainstein formally changed the name of the restaurant to *Moshe Pipik*. The restaurant became a Havana landmark, and so did Reizel Wainstein. Her name was kept on the restaurant even after it was sold to Alexander (Sender) Kanfer and Zechariah Altman in the late 1940s or early 1950s. The facility was also used for community *sedarim* for Passover.

The arrangements for *kashruth* varied over the years. Sometimes there was rabbinical supervision. Other years there was no rabbinic supervision. But, *Moshe Pipik* was always a restaurant with a Jewish flavor.



Moshe Pipik in the 1950s.

The Kanfers had arrived in Havana during World War II on the São Tome. They had come to Cuba with money, so they opened a tourist shop, then they purchased a building in Vedado. Finally, Chana Kanfer (1902-1990) and her daughter, Lilly, went to work in the restaurant; Sender Kanfer spent his time in import / export. After the Revolution, Sender Kanfer passed away (1960), and Lilly Kanfer Gottlieb (1925-2002) and family as well as Chana Kanfer went to the United States. After a brief stay in Florida, Chana Kanfer settled in New York City and Lilly Kanfer Gottlieb and family lived in Tewksbury, New Jersey on a farm run by her in-laws. Eventually they moved to Mountainside, New Jersey.[645]

And what happened to the "Moshe" of *Moshe Pipik*? After selling the store, Moshe Sandberg tried another restaurant, this time for tourists, on the Prado opposite the Capitolio. It soon failed. Sandberg then worked for Alberto Behar as a salesman of gifts and novelties until he left Cuba in 1960.[646]

One anecdote is well remembered. On 20 February 1942 the successful but by-then-widowed Reizel Wainstein prepared a lavish wedding for her daughter, Sarita, at the Centro Israelita. All was ready for the ceremony. The bride and her attendants were in their gowns. The meal was ready. Only one person was missing – José Lifshutz, the groom, never showed up.[647] His clothes were found in a locker on the beach in Marianao, and nearby was a capsized boat with missing oar. Rumors suggested that said that Lifshutz had feigned his death and had taken a boat to Venezuela, possibly

with a Cuban girlfriend. That speculation made good copy in the press, but no evidence of wrongdoing was ever found. More probably, Lifshutz had drowned, and his body was washed out to sea.[648] The would-be bride eventually married a musician and lived in the United States.[649]

After the Revolution

For many years the restaurant served as a carpentry shop. In 2002 discussions were initiated to re-open the restaurant as a place to attract Jewish tourists.

Jewish Community in its Heyday

Kochanski found the Jewish Community to be prospering economically, but he reported that there was virtually no Jewish participation in the local political life. Language problems were one polite reason to explain the absence of Jews in politics. A more serious cause was that political activity was restricted to a small group of influential leaders from the upper land-owning classes. The vast majority of the population, including the Jewish Community, was excluded. There were also virtually no Jewish politicians, since a politician would either have to come from an influential land-owning family, be a high-ranking military officer, or have a great deal of popular appeal. There were also virtually no Jews in the civil service.

The disenfranchisement of the less- and non-privileged did not concern the Batista government, yet it should have. It soon would be one of the root causes for dissatisfaction with the government and popular support of the Castro rebellion.

Kochanski was very concerned with the low level of Jewish education and culture in the community. He observed that parents appeared concerned that their children were acculturating into the Cuban way of life. "Parents look with concern on their Cuban born offspring, whose attire, dark complexions, and easy-going manner distinguish them little from the prevailing population."

Even more serious, "community life is too poor to provide any…cultural nourishment." Consequently some of the younger generation emigrated. A small number of HaShomer HaTza'ir made *aliyah*.[650] Many emigrated to the United States, but most adjusted to the pleasant and relaxed life of the country. Some of the parents said that their children spent all their time "learning Cuban dancing," the national pastime. Kochanski heard contempt as well as concern in their voices.

If Kochanski found Jewish life in Havana superficial, he found virtually no Jewish communal life whatsoever in many of the small towns that he heard about on his visit. Some of the Jews in small towns worked for a few years to save up some money, and

then moved to Havana where they could then use the money to start a business there. "The others build a feeble shell around their families to protect whatever spiritual values they brought along from their old homes."

Interestingly, many of the more isolated families felt most connected in a Jewish fashion when American Jewish fundraisers came to visit them to solicit contributions. Kochanski believed that "The big brother across the Florida Straits could probably do more for Cuban Jews than send fund raisers and teach them to say 'a shtikele chicken.' The least that could be done would be to provide them with badly needed teachers and community workers. Surely there must be some institution that could do something about this."

But one of the reasons that nothing more was done about these concerns was that most Cuban Jews did not share his concern. From their point of view the Jewish Community was achieving the upper middle class affluence that they had worked so long to reach, and they were benefiting from the economic prosperity that some sectors of the population were enjoying. While millions of Cubans suffered in abject poverty, many small and large businessmen were doing extremely well. This prosperity continued—and increased dramatically–after Fulgencio Batista returned to power.

Winds of Change

Despite the extreme wealth of some, the 1950s were very troubled. Batista's military coup had created a political crisis in the country, and Batista began to utilize political repression as his primary instrument of governing. Times had changed since Batista had first grabbed power in the 1930s. The economy was undergoing structural changes at the same time when the population was growing. Every year approximately 40,000 people entered the employment market in an economy that was unable to generate sufficient jobs. This included not only working class youth, but university graduates as well. As Louis A. Pérez aptly described, "The 1950s were years of deepening crisis, of disquiet and despair, of disappointment and disillusionment."[651]

One measure of crisis in society is education. According to the census of 1953, 25% of Cuban adults had never been to school, and more than 50% had never learned past the sixth grade.[652] The Batista régime did little to alleviate the problem. In 1958 no more than half the children between ages 5-15 were in school.[653] These statistics also hide part of the severity of the problem. More prevalent schooling in Havana hid the grim situation in the rural provinces. A serious result of the education crisis was increasing unemployment, and unrealistically low wages when token employment was available.

Although the Jewish Community was effected by some of these realities, on the whole its mood was very upbeat and optimistic. While many of Jews, particularly World War II refugees, had long since left the country for the United States, almost all of those who remained had acclimatized and had come to regard Cuba as their home. Many

Jews were enjoying the material wealth enjoyed by the privileged elite. In the midst of their building and planning, few were aware of the problems that confronted Cuba; few were aware of the revolution that was lingering at their doorsteps.

On 26 July 1953 Fidel Castro Ruz had been thrust into headlines by storming the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba in a foiled attack against the Batista régime. Imprisoned then self-exiled to Mexico, Castro returned to Cuba on the *Granma* on 2 December 1956 and started the guerilla opposition that would take him from struggle in the Sierra Madre mountains to a triumphant entry into Havana. Batista clamped down on news about the rebels, but when Herbert L. Matthews reported in the New York Times on 24 February 1957 that Castro was alive in the hills, the reputation of the rebel leader became a symbol of opposition to Batista. Castro was the revolutionary leader who succeeded. Through practical measures, good publicity, and field success he became the most plausible answer to Batista. His was a revolution that was fought in the hills and in the countryside. Havana was never the overt battleground. Batista could clamp down with relative ease on student unrest at the Universidad de la Habana. Dealing with opposition in the outlying areas of Cuba was much more difficult.

When Batista fled Cuba to the Dominican Republic in the post-midnight hours of 31 December 1958-1 January 1959, many people viewed his exit as another almost routine event in a country that so often had changed government by revolution. Castro was the model of a popular leader who would replace a régime that had ruled by instilling fear with a government that would hold power by common consent. Very few understood the imminence of the real changes that were to take place. No one anticipated that the superficially thriving life of Havana would come crashing to a halt virtually within months.

It does not seem totally absurd to argue that the cause of prosperity was also the seed of the revolution. The wealth that built the new Cuba of Batista was also the cause of its ultimate demise.

If Castro was the personification of the "have not's," it seems only natural that once able, he would turn against the "have's" and their ultimate benefactor, the United States. His was a revolution different from what Cuba had known in the past. It was not just another military coup motivated by monetary greed. It was a *revolution* of philosophy and principle – to redistribute wealth for the betterment of the Cuban people, and once-and-for-all to stop United States interference and influence in internal Cuban affairs.

First Months of the Castro Revolution

When Revolutionary forces entered Havana on 1 January 1959, not everyone was dissatisfied. Not everyone who *was* dissatisfied left Cuba. Many were in favor of the

Revolution. Of those opposed, there were those who thought that the Revolution would not last. After all, Cuba was but ninety miles from the United States, so surely there would be a quick end to the Castro régime.[654] And, there were those who misjudged the revolution and thought that it was merely yet another insignificant expression of Cuban nationalism.

The enthusiasm of January 1959 brought in a new leadership throughout Cuba. New people were given national-level jobs. New municipal leaders were appointed. A wave of "honesty in government" brought about a ransacking of casinos. It was hoped that bribery and payoffs were a thing of the past. But, little by little daily life started to change in new directions. The political line of the Cuban government started to take a new course. Economic policies were rethought.

Initially, it was business as usual. Many Jews took the attitude that national government mattered naught. Storekeepers bought and sold merchandise. Many continued their business trips to the United States, to buy and to sell. But, soon the bubble would burst. Within three years most of Jewish Cuba would be gone or in the process not just of leaving, but of fleeing.

Closing the Book

After the Revolution

On the eve of the 1959 Revolution some 15,000 Jews lived in Cuba. The first months after the Revolution were a time of hope and expectation for most. Soon, however, the false prosperity of the 1950s could no longer be sustained. The Revolution was not what had been expected. Businesses were soon nationalized in stages. Tension mounted with the United States, then relations between the two countries were broken. Most Jews started packing out. For those of the older generation the Castro government brought back bitter memories. In the 1920s and 1930s they had fled Eastern European Communism. Now they were fleeing Communism once again. By 2000 only 1,100 Cubans who called themselves Jewish remained in the country.

There was a noteworthy change in the Jewish population. In the past Jews were most often non-religious. Now intermarriage became a significant issue. Of those who called themselves Jewish, perhaps about half were Jewish according to *Halacha*, being either the offsprings of Jewish mothers or products of proper conversions.

According to a decree of the Revolution, Cuba chartered its new path as a socialist state. Atheism was the official government line, and in line with the spirit of the times, some synagogues were closed. In Havana parts of larger synagogue buildings were transferred to government control.

Why did Jews stay? Why do they still stay? For many older members of the community, Cuba is their life. In theory these people can leave, but age and health make remaining the most preferable option.

Others are intermarried into non-Jewish Cuban families; *aliyah* or resettling in Jewish communities abroad are not practical options for those who have no association whatsoever with Judaism. And, not to be forgotten, there are those who remain because they believe in the Communist ideal. There are also those who today have commercialized being Jewish; they live well in Cuba as the "unfortunate" Jew, a tourist attraction and the routine recipients of charity and assistance programs.

Anti-Semitism was not a reason that Jews left Cuba. Jews were never treated differently from other Cubans. Equality was one of the main tenets of the Revolution.

Cuban government policy changed at a meeting of the Fourth Party Congress in 1991. Religion was once again recognized. Slowly, Jews filtered into synagogues. It is inaccurate to say that these Jews discovered the "forgotten" Jewish history of Cuba. For most that history was never known. Those who found their way into synagogues

came in search of new answers to life's meaning, answers the Revolution failed to provide. These Cubans are either part of a younger generation or older people not necessarily active in the Jewish Community during their youth. Most of the history was also recorded in local Yiddish publications no longer to be found in Cuba. Even when publications are available, only a bare handful of Jews in Cuba are at ease reading Yiddish.

Today Havana has three synagogues – the Patronato, the Sephardic Center, and Adath Israel. The first two function Friday evening and Shabbos morning (although they are open during the week for social functions and to receive tourists); Adath Israel (nominally Orthodox) has daily service both in the mornings and afternoon-evening. Outside Havana services are Sabbath only (often just Friday night). They are not an extension of the past. They are a new beginning after years of interruption.

Place of Cuba in Jewish History

Cuban Jewish history is a repeat of a pattern found in many countries – the abrupt transformation from a society at its peak to a community in crisis. The Revolution, without judging its merits for the Cuban people, brought about a change in values that stunted Jewish life. To continue a Jewish existence, Jews had to leave. And virtually all of them did. Barely two years passed from the height of Jewish life until the crumbling of the Cuban Jewish Community.

Appendix 1 - Population Statistics

Measuring the Cuban Jewish population has been a perennial game of estimations. Particularly for American Jews, Cuba was a second address, generally in connection with business travel and an "official" permanent address in the United States. Others never declared residence in Cuba, as they waited to emigrate, also to the United States. For these reasons all Jewish population statistics are estimates. Certain basic trends, however, are evident.

Jewish Population in Cuba[655]

Year	Place	Total	Ashkenazim	Sephardim	Notes
1898	Cuba	*			
1906	Cuba	100			Per Bejarano
1916	Cuba	1 000	100	900	Per Bejarano[656]
1925[657]	Cuba	8 000	5 200	2 700	100 USA
1928	Cuba	10 000	6 000	4 000	Doar HaYom, 25-4-28
1929		8 000			Per Rafalín letter
1930s	Cuba	12 000			
1935	Cuba	10 000			Per J. Brandon
1939	Havana	6 000 to 15,000[658]			
1941	Cuba Havana	10 000 8 000			2000 refugees
1942	Cuba	8 000			Per JDC, 6000 refugees
1943	Cuba	14 000			Per Eshquenazi
1944	Cuba Havana	11 000[659] 8 000			
1949	Havana Cuba	8-9000 10-12000			Per S. Kaplan
1951	Cuba	12 000			Per Y. Shatski

1952	Cuba	12 000	7 200		
	Havana	8 000			
1958[660]	Cuba	14 500	10 000	3 500	1000 undetermined
	Camagüey & Oriente	1 200			
1965	Cuba	2 500			
1974	Cuba	1 500			
1989	Cuba	891[661]			
1997	Cuba	1 800			JDC
	Havana	1 400			
2001	Cuba	1 400[662]			
	Havana	1 000			

* In 1881 the Spanish monarchy permitted Jews to enter Cuba. An American historian estimated that by 1898 there were 600 Jews in Cuba. That number, however, was disputed by Mattelin (interview with AJC, Miami, 1982), who suggested a more accurate number was about 60.

In many ways these numbers represent a distortion of Cuban-Jewish reality, given the *de facto* rôle of Cuba for many years as a transit point for immigration elsewhere. If any numbers are particularly significant, they are the comparative statistics for 1952 and 1965, which give an indication of post-Revolution emigration. In most years stability in numbers can be interpreted as a rough correlation between the numbers of immigrants and emigrants. A more meaningful statistics, currently unavailable, would be the number of Jews who spent enough time in Cuba to have had a "Cuban experience" by which they could be called Cuban.[663]

Appendix 2 - First Jewish Newspapers in Cuba

Newspaper	Date	Comments
Das Frei Wort	01 Apr 1925	Prepared on typewriter in the HIAS office. One issue only. Jaïm Berniker, editor.
Kubaner Yiddisher Yom Tov Bleter	01 Apr 1927	41 issues. Editors: Jaïm Berniker, Pinchas Berniker, Tzvi Schapira.
Oyfgang	01 July 1927	Numbers 1-8 in Yiddish, 9-22 Yiddish and Spanish/Ladino, 27-27 Yiddish.
Yunge Spratzungen	1928?	Published by the Kultur Farain
El Estudiante Hebreo	May 1929	Fiodor Valbe, editor. Last issue No. 12, May 1930. Part of student political struggle.
Unzer Vort	August 1930	
El Mundo Hebreo	30 Jan 1931	David A. Kurland, editor.
Habaner Lebn	11 Nov 1932	Started as weekly. Biweekly from No. 211 (23 Nov 1937).

Appendix 3 – Selected Biographies

Batista y Zalvídar, Fulgencio

Batista (President of Cuba 1940–1944, 1952–1958) was born in 1902 in Banes, Oriente Province of Cuba to peasant parents. In 1921, he joined the Cuban Army and learned typing and stenography. Batista became a court stenographer and was promoted to sergeant, and in 1928 he was assigned to the office of Chief-of-Staff General Herrera. Batista was one of the key figures behind the Sergeant's Coup. Batista's rise in rank was meteoric. Once in power, Batista promoted himself to Colonel and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces. He was the power behind successive puppet presidents, until he was elected President of Cuba in 1940. He was defeated in free elections in 1944 and went into exile in Florida. On 10 March 1952 Batista again seized power. The U.S. Government quickly recognized his government. He ran a corrupt and often cruel dictatorship until he fled Cuba to the Dominican Republic on 1 January 1959. Batista settled in the Portuguese Madeira Islands. He died in Spain in 1973.

Castro Ruz, Fidel

Castro was in born on 13 August 1926 in an agricultural area of Mayari, Oriente Province. He attended Catholic schools in Santiago de Cuba and Havana, including a Jesuit boarding school, Colegio de Belén. He started Universidad de la Habana in 1945 and was graduated in 1950 with a law degree. In 1948 he married Mirta Diaz-Balart; they divorced six years later. Early in Castro's career he was a member of the Ortodoxo Party, an outgrowth of revolutionary politics of the 1930s and 1940s. Castro was always an outspoken opponent of Fulgencio Batista. He was arrested after the 26 July 1953 failed attack on the Moncada. Sentenced to fifteen years, he was released from prison on the Isle of Pines in 1955. A year later he led an 81-man group who landed clandestinely in Oriente Province on the Granma that sailed from Tuxpan, Mexico. On 1 January 1959 his 26th of July Movement succeeded in forcing Batista into hurried exile. Castro became the ruler of Cuba.

Granison, Abram

Granison was born in Pittsburgh on 10 January 1909. He received a college degree from the University of Pittsburg in 1929, then rabbinic ordination from the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1933. During the years 1940-1948 he was active with the Jewish Welfare Board. Granison had been the assistant to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, where he held the official title of

Placement Director. When Nelson Glueck became president of the combined Hebrew Union College and Jewish Institute of Religion, Granison's position was cancelled. This was at the time after UHC had become an official member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and after short employment in Paterson, New Jersey, Granison assumed rabbinic duties in Havana. In 1957 he became rabbi in Temple Israel of Tallahassee, where he served until his death on 6 September 1965.[664]

Granison was described as an "ardent exponent of the values, which adhere in liberal Reform Judaism. By avoiding lapses into earlier ritualism, he has helped the congregation to attain a consistent and uniform religious service and a more realistic approach to routine problems."[665]

Grau San Martín, Ramon

Grau (1887–1969; President of Cuba 1933–1934, 1944–1948) was on the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Havana where he taught anatomy, and rose to prominence in the background of the student demonstrations against President Machado. He allied himself with students and military opposed to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, and following the ouster of the latter Grau was named provisional president. In an atmosphere of revolution Grau was also removed from power by the forces of Fulgencio Batista y Zalvídas. He was considered impractical, yet many of the reforms announced during his administration were incorporated into the new constitution of 1940. It was Grau (anti-interventionist, but not anti-American) who unilaterally abrogated the Platt Amendment. Batista defeated Grau in the elections of 1940, but Grau defeated the Batista mechanism four years later. Under Grau there was increased economic prosperity. With wealth, however, came corruption. Grau opposed the Batista government of 1952-1958. He remained in Cuba after the Revolution, and died there in 1969.

Grobart, Fabio

One example of a Kultur Farain leader was Fabio Grobart, one of the original members of the Communist Party. Grobart was born Abraham (Avreml) Simchowitz on 30 August 1905 in Trestene, a shtetl near Bialystok in Russian-controlled Poland. His father, Motel, made hair brushes in a small factory and his mother, Rochel, worked in a laundry; both parents died young. After a short stay with his grandparents, Grobart lived with an aunt and uncle in Gonionc. In school Grobart excelled in Talmud and reviewed the day's assignments with children of richer families in exchange for dinner. After World War I Avreml clandestinely became a member of a Communist youth organization in Poland. He had witnessed the battles between the Poles and the Soviet troops and had been impressed by the justness and equality of the Soviets, especially compared with the anti-Semitic terror of Marshall Jozef Klemens Piłsudski's troops.

Grobart became the Communist youth leader for the entire Bialystok area. The Polish police wanted to arrest him, but he escaped towards Germany. He had an uncle in New York who sent him money for passage to America, so he was able to board a ship, which arrived in Cuba in the summer of 1924. In Havana he met his future wife, Ela, who shared his revolutionary commitment. In Havana Port Grobart saw an office which had a portrait of Lenin on the wall; this was the workers union, through which he met Carlos Baliño, a combat veteran of the War of Independence and a comrade of José Martí, and Julio Antonio Mella, founder of the Federation of University Students. Both were Marxists dedicated to fighting a struggle for national liberation combined with a social revolution. Together they helped found the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) on 16 August 1925. Grobart was active in the Communist Youth Movement as well. As a consequence of his activities, he was jailed several times by President Machado. Two of Grobart's early colleagues were the first PCC martyrs – Claudio Bruzón, a Spaniard, and Noske Yalob, an Eastern European Jew. Both were tortured savagely and then thrown to sharks in the sea. Grobart participated in the Yiddish Kultur Verain with other left-wing Eastern European Jews where they discussed their views on politics, singing socialist songs, and trying to help advance progressive causes. They published their own newspaper and had a radio program in Yiddish as well. They also organized an inn where Cuban leftists and other poor people could eat *gratis*. After the Castro Revolution, Grobart edited the magazine, "Cuba Socialista," which was the theoretical organ of the Revolution. Castro invited Grobart to create the Institute for the History of the Socialist Revolution and the Communist Movement in Cuba. He was elected deputy to the national assembly as an elderly man, and received numerous awards from Communist parties throughout the eastern bloc. He remained a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party until his death on 21 October 1994.[666]

Kates, Adolpho

Adolpho E. Kates was born on 26 February 1886 in Antwerp. With his patrician appearance he was nicknamed "The Duke." Even though he was somewhat more traditional than many of the other UHC members, in 1925 he was still elected to serve as president of the congregation. He enjoyed a long and distinguished career of active service in the Cuban Jewish Community. In the 1940s he served as president of the B'nai B'rith Lodge in Havana. He was head of the Israel Bonds Drive in the 1950s. When Menachem Begin visited Havana in May 1950, Kates sat at the head table and delivered a welcoming address. He also represented numerous American companies, both Jewish and non-Jewish, for their dealings in Cuba. As representative he placed numerous advertisements in the Cuban press, thus giving him a perceived leverage over those periodicals. Kates is one of the very few Jews to be listed in Havana's social register.[667]

Lasker, Mayer

Rabbi Mayer Lasker[668] was an influential rabbi associated with UHC. He was born in 1904 in Kiev, Ukraine. He immigrated to the United States in 1907 as a small child, and was ordained by Hebrew Union College in 1928. Lasker started his tenure at United Hebrew in 1933 after the job of rabbi had been vacant for some months. He was sent by Hebrew Union College originally only for the High Holidays, but the short-term position lasted much longer. Lasker remained at United Hebrew for eight years, during which time he generated considerable controversy. He finally accepted a pulpit in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1941 and left Havana. During his time in Havana, he was an activist in Zionist and community affairs. He represented the B'nai B'rith ADL. He also tried to establish the Central Committee of Jewish Societies in Cuba, through which he sought to gain a commanding rôle in local activities. Lasker was often at odds with the JDC, which charged his United Hebrew Congregation with being "indifferent" to the plight of most of the refugees.[669] Lasker died on 15 October 1993.

Machado Morales, Gerardo

Machado (1871-1939; died in exile in Florida; President 20 May 1925 - 12 August 1933 when overthrown by military) was a businessman who became a presidential candidate in 1924, trying to use his market experience to solve Cuba's economic problems. He also championed the nationalist cause, a policy that at times took upon itself militaristic overtones. One expression of this was the wearing of uniforms in secondary schools (including Jewish institutions[670]). Cuban President Alfredo Zayas (1861–1934; President of Cuba 1921–1925) supported him in his electoral victory over Mario Garcia Menocal (1866–1941; President of Cuba 1913–1921). In his reforms he imposed a tax on foreign (American) capital investments and built a central highway, 1129 kilometers long. He also encouraged investments in tourism, manufacturing, and mining. He justified strikebreaking as an effort to attract business to Cuba, but he did not do enough to treat the causes of the strikes. Machado and his increasingly dictatorial and repressive régime were forced out of power in 1933 after the constitution was amended to allow Machado a second term as president.

Menocal, Mario Garcia

Cuban President Mario Garcia Menocal (1866–1941; President of Cuba 1913–1921), had heavy involvement in the sugar economy. He was born in Mexico, educated at Cornell University in the United States, then served as a general in the War of 1895. From 1906-1908 he held the position of national chief of police, after which he entered business. He constructed and operated a large sugar plantation and mill. It was during his presidency that many of the foreign sugar concessions were granted.

Prío Socorrás, Carlos

President Prío (in office 1948-1952) ran one of Cuba's more corrupt and violent administrations. He was born 14 July 1903 in Bahía Honda, Pinar del Río Province. He died in Florida on 5 April 1977.

Prío started his political ascendancy in the student movement of 1930, and as a result of his activities he was exiled by Machado. In 1935 he was again exiled, this time through Batista's manipulations. In 1940 he was elected to the Senate, and in the elections of 1 June 1948 he was chosen to be president. During his term of office there was a breakdown of law and order. Prío also became rich from his own dubious activities. He was deposed by Batista on 10 March 1952. He was vehemently opposed to Batista from his exile in Florida, and at one point allied himself with Castro. Prío returned to Cuba as Castro took power. He then split with Castro and returned to exile in Florida, from where he was active against the Cuban government.

Although Prío played an active rôle in the Cuban opposition to the Castro Revolution, he was still disliked by many people due to corruption during his presidency.[671]

Rosenbaum, Meyer

Rabbi Meyer Rosenbaum[672] was born on 12 August 1910[673] in Charnovitch, at the time in Austro-Hungary. In 1918 the area came under Romanian rule. Rosenbaum left in 1933 for Palestine, where he learned in Hevron Yeshiva (Jerusalem). He received his rabbinic ordination in 1936. In 1937 he moved to New York. In 1948 Rosenbaum arrived in Cuban on a charity collection mission for the Israeli *Irgun.* He soon became the Rabbi of *Adath Israel-K'neseth Israel*, then later rabbi of the Patronato.

Rosenbaum was also accomplished in the secular world. He attended the University of Vienna and New York University. In Cuba he taught at the Universidad de la Habana.

After leaving Cuba he moved to Venezuela; subsequently he also lived in Guatemala, Mexico, and Israel, until he finally settled in New York to tend to an ailing daughter.

Rosenbaum passed away in New York on 31 December 2003.

Rosenberg, Philip

Not everyone loses in times of adversity. For some crisis is the port of opportunity. Philip Rosenberg came to Cuba after the Sugar Crisis of 1920, and he soon became one of the wealthiest men in the country. Rosenberg was part of the team that represented National City Bank in dealing with defaulted mortgages. He served as president of the

General Sugar Corporation (GSC). Later he also directed the Vertientes-Camaguey Sugar Company. During World War II he was elected head of UHC. His wife was the former Jeanette Levine.

Rosenberg's secretary and right-hand assistant in the GSC, James Knopke (married to Helen Anne Mayrsohn), a graduate of Ruston Academy, was president of UHC in the late 1950s.

Rosenberg had been an orphan on the streets of Chicago,[674] and was probably the congregation's richest and best-known member; he was reported to have owned 18% of Cuba's sugar crop and shuttled about in his own airplane.[675] Rosenberg immediately sensed the implications of the Castro Revolution. By mid-1960 the GSC of Cuba was history.

Schechter, Maurice[676]

Maurice Schechter was present at the founding meeting of UHC. His biography gives insight into the era.

Schechter was born in Focsani, Romania. His paternal grandfather was Israel Schechter, the twin brother of Solomon Schechter, of Cairo Genizah fame and associated with the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. According to family lore, at age 17 Maurice set out by foot from Romania to Hamburg with John Zoller, who later would be a member of United Hebrew (though not present at the organizing meeting). Zoller was Maurice's business associate for some thirty years. The two made it to Hamburg, then to Philadelphia in 1898. Schechter took several railroad jobs, then he moved to Cuba in 1902 after contact with his cousins, the Steinberg's, who were already in the country. Schechter financed the trips of his two sisters from Romania to New York, and later to Havana. The two were active in the Sisterhood of United Hebrew. His sister, Blima (1893-1979), was the mother of James Knopke.

Schechter had a good business sense. After arrival in Cuba, Schechter tried peddling in the streets and quickly realized that the job was not for him. He then sold women's clothing door-to-door in wealthier neighborhoods, until he opened a shop. By 1907 he was making monthly buying trips to New York, where he met his cousin and future wife who had immigrated to the United States from Palestine. She came in 1904 to live in the house of her cousin, Solomon Schechter. They were married in 1913, and she then joined him in Cuba. From women's clothes Schechter branched out into men's clothing as well, and he secured a contract to sell clothing to the Cuban armed forces. He also became a distributor in Cuba for Arrow shirts from 1915 until the 1930s, when the position was upgraded to "representative" of the American company. During part of the time Arrow maintained a factory at San Antonio de los Baños. His son, Roy,[677] inherited the representation until April 1960, when he left Cuba. Roy was reportedly the first *bar mitzvah* celebrated at UHC.[678]

In Jewish terms membership in United Hebrew was considered prestigious. Schechter was also a member of another distinguished organization, the Havana Rotary Club. During this time club memberships, school affiliations and residence addresses were status symbols in new and Americanized "upper" Cuban society.

Schechter diversified his business investments, but not all went well for him. During the sugar boom he bought a farm and a mill, but in the crash of 1920 he lost a significant amount of money as prices plummeted.

Solovejtczyk, Najman

Najman Solovejtczyk[679] (born 1906 in Jaffa, Palestine) was certainly a very interesting example of a "Belgian," who impacted on the general Jewish Community. As with many other Belgians, Solovejtczyk spent most of his youth in Poland where his family had moved from Palestine. He joined his brother in Antwerp, married a Polish girl, and started to work in the diamond industry. In October 1941 he reached Cuba in his flight from Nazi persecution. Unlike most Belgians, Solovejtczyk was not at all religious. He proudly stated that he was in Havana for a year before he went to a synagogue. During his years in Cuba Solovejtczyk worked in the diamond industry (Arco del Hotel Pasaje, Havana).

Solovejtczyk intended to leave Cuba for the United States, but he could not receive a visa, according to his contention because of his purported political affiliations. He stayed in Cuba until 1957 when his paperwork was finally approved.[680]

Solovejtczyk was an ardent Zionist from his days in Poland, when he was the general secretary of Yardeniya. He had been a member of *Betar* in Poland, and he was voted the third leader of the Cuban *Betar* movement. He was involved in financing the travel of Cubans who volunteered to fight in the Israel War of Independence.

Steinberg, Joseph and Max[681]

The "1898 war veteran" with the most influence on the later Jewish Community on the island was Joseph Steinberg (born, 10 June 1873; died, 7 January 1954), who became a member of United Hebrew Congregation and President, B'nai B'rith Havana Lodge. In many circles he has been lauded as the great Jewish hero of the War of 1898. Sometimes, however, accepted historical traditions are inaccurate. Despite reports in other sources, in fact Steinberg was not a war veteran who followed José Martí to fight in the battles for Cuban independence; he came to Cuba only after American victory in 1898.

Joeseph Steinberg's contribution to Martí's cause was most unusual. He was a grocery store owner in Tampa's [Vicente Martinez] Ybor neighborhood, and the Cuban revolutionary was one of his regular customers. Steinberg frequently gave Martí (and possibly his friends) credit, even when the Cuban was not able to pay immediately for purchases. Martí's grateful entourage invited Steinberg to Cuba when the political situation enabled such and acknowledged Steinberg's previous favors with honorary rank. That was Steinberg's support of the Revolution.

Steinberg never was a success in business – not in Tampa, and not in Havana. In Cuba he started as a peddler, and opened a sales business. His "office" was a desk and workspace in the enterprise of his cousin, Maurice Schechter. (He was a "tenant," and had no connection with Schechter's operation.) He was too poor to keep up socially with the United Hebrew crowd, so he ceased an active rôle in the 1910s. Only years later, as a community "elder," did he again assume a leading rôle.

Max Steinberg, Joseph's brother, also started in peddling. At the time of the founding of United Hebrew in 1906 he was listed as being resident in Matanzas. Max Steinberg decided that his future would be better abroad. He left Cuba in the 1920s to seek his future elsewhere. [682]

Notes

[1] Anne Schechter Hertzberg, 14 November 2002, and Roy Schechter, 10 November 2002 telephone conversations with the author.

[2] Telephone conversations of Levinson with Anne Schechter Hertzberg, 14 November 2002, and Roy Schechter, 10 November 2002.

[3] Leizer Ron, Hemshech oyf Kubaner Erd (Yiddish), (Havana, 1950), pp. 70-72. Dionisio Castiel, Sintesis histórica de los hebreos de Cuba, (La Habana: Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad de Cuba, 1955).

[4] Albert Barrocas, "The Jews of Cuba," in ed. Sol Beton, Sephardim & A History of Congregation Or VeShalom, (Atlanta, Georgia: Congregation Or VeShalom 1981), p. 84. No further sources cited despite the claim that "there is actual evidence."

[5] Max J. Koehler, "Los Judíos en Cuba," *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 5704 / Septiembre 1943, p. 11.

[6] Olga Portuondo Zuñiga (Historian of Santiago de Cuba) in conversation with the author, Santiago, 9 August 2002.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Barrocas, *loc. cit.*

[9] Dr. R. Menendez (Director, Casa de los Arabes) interview with the author, Havana, 20 August 2002.

[10] Thomas T. Orum (Bowie State University) interview with Dana Kaplan, Washington, D.C., April 2000.

[11] Marco Pitchón (president of UHC at the time the reference was published), "El Comandante Luis Schlesinger" *Habaner Leben* Almanaque 1956, pp. 45-52.

[12] This contradicts the statement by Seymour B. Liebman (in Barrocas, *op. cit.*) that Lewis Schlesinger played an active role in the Cuban War of Independence. If anything, he played a role in the failed invasion of 1851.

[13] Orum, interview.

[14] Jacobo Israel Garzón and Uriel Macías Kapón, La Comunidad Judía de Madrid. (Madrid: Comunidad Judía, 2001).

[15] Julia Ward Howe, A Trip to Cuba, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860). Observation by Howe confirmed in other sources.

[16] Seymour B. Liebman, "Cuban Jewish Community in South Florida" (in Hebrew), Tefutsot Israel (American Jewish Committee, Jerusalem), Volume 22:2 (1984), p. 160. Also Abraham Marcus Matterin, "Los Hebreos y la Bandera Cubana," El centario de la bandera cubana, (La Habana: Israelia. 1950).

[17] Alfred Werner, "Outpost in the Caribbean," National Jewish Monthly, July-August 1951, p. 374-375, 387.

[18] For a list of Jewish soldiers see, Cyrus Adler, "Preliminary List of Jewish Soldiers and Sailors who Served in the Spanish-American War," American-Jewish Yearbook 5661 (24 September 1900 to 13 September 1901), (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1900), pp. 525-622.

[19] Abraham J. Feldman, "Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf," American Jewish Yearbook 5685. (Philadelphia, 1924), pp. 420-447.

[20] Jewish Exponent, 22 July 1898, p. 8.

[21] Samuel Farber, Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933-1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), p. 6.

[22] Carlos Alberto Montaner, Viaje al corazón de Cuba, (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés Editores, 1999), p. 47.

[23] Margalit Bejarano, The Jewish Community of Cuba, 1898-1939: Communal Consolidation and Trends of Integration under the Impact of World Jewry and Cuban Society, Hebrew University of Jerusalem doctoral dissertation, October 1992.

[24] Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution, (New York & Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1988) , p. 195.

[25] Jorge Ibarra, Prologue to Revolution: Cuba, 1898-1958, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 28.

[26] Bejarano (1992), *loc. cit.* Duvon Clough Corbitt, A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1947-1947. (Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury College, 1971).

[27] The claim of 500 Sephardic Jews arriving in Cuba 1902-1907 (Hemsheich of Kubaner Erd, Havana, 1950) is not documented.

[28] Thomas G. Paterson, Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution, (New York & Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 49.

[29] Minutes of meeting, 5 August 1906. A copy of the minute book covering 1906-1923 is to be found in CAHJP (Hebrew University of Jerusalem at Givat Ram) Inv. 7667.

[30] Street no longer exists.

[31] "The United Hebrew Congregation: A Historical Outline," United Hebrew Congregation Temple Beth Israel Golden Anniversary, 1906-1956, (Havana: United Hebrew Congregation, 1956), p. 9.

[32] Born 24 March 1875, died 14 Sept 1938. At this time he lived at Monte 203, Centro Habana. Married to Lina Jurick (1883-1958). His name was also spellt Jurik.

[33] In this period lived at Calle Obispo 102, Habana Vieja. Later co-owner of Steinberg Bros. Department Store, Owner of store at Calle San Rafael 1 ½, Centro Habana; later at Calle Obispo 100. Born 10 June 1873. Died 7 January 1954.

[34] Also spelled Schachter. Store located at Calle San Rafael No. 27. Died 1952.

[35] One source related that the wives of Jurick, Berkowitz and Heller, "had no interest in anything Jewish." Although this is probably an exaggeration, it is certain indicative of a non-religious orientation.

[36] Not buried under name Hadida per cemetery archives. Anne Schechter Hertzberg in telephone conversation with Levinson (14 November 2002) relates the version that the deceased was a salesman, not a relative.

[37] Leizer Ron, Hemshech oyf Kubaner Erd (Yiddish), (Havana, 1950), p. 6. Cites David Blis, Habaner Lebn, No. 59.

[38] Liebman, *loc. cit.*

[39] James Knopke mistakenly attributes the opening of the Jewish cemetery in Guanabacoa to the need to bury US solders. James Knopke interview with Bejarano, 29 November 1991. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.

[40] Margalit Bejarano, La Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba: La memoria y la historia, (Jerusalem: Abraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 67-68. Another study of oral history to reconstruct the Cuban non-Jewish past can be found in Jose B. Fernandez, Los Abuelos: Historia oral cubana, (Miami: Ediciones Universal), 1987.

[41] Major burial ground in Havana, and today's primary cemetery in Havana. First burial in the cemetery 29 September 1872.

[42] Moshe Baldas brings down a garbled version of this story in his interview with Bejarano in 1981. Baldas was born 1905 in Galicia; immigrated to Cuba 1927, and became the official head of the Jewish Community (Comisión Coordinadora) after the Castro Revolution. He served in that position until he immigrated to Israel in 1981. Dr. José Miller (born 1922 in Cuba) succeeded him as head of the Comisión Coordinadora and head of the Patronato. Baldas' reminiscences were recorded in a series of interviews conducted in Hebrew by Margarit Bejarano. The transcripts of the interviews can be found in the Department of Oral History, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A tape recorded interview with Miller (not transcribed) can be found in the same collection.

[43] Cemetery Archives, Book No. 574. Also, burial list of 1908.

[44] Colón cemetery archivist conversation with the author, 21 August 2002.

[45] *Habaner Leben* Almanaque 1943, p. 316.

[46] Material concerning Solomons, newspaper clippings, and biography in File P28/Boxes 1-5, American Jewish Historical Society Archives, New York, New York. Also see Robert Shosteck and Samuel H. Holland, "Adolphus Simeon Solomons: His Washington Years," The Record, (Washington: Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington), Vol. 5:1 (1970), pp. 13-32. A popular biography stressing

his assistance in establishing the American Red Cross can be found in the Jewish Press Israel Edition, August 2004, p. 41.

[47] Letter, Adolphus Solomons to Solomon Schechter, 3 January 1902. In Jewish Theological Seminary Archives, New York.

[48] Obituary of Jeanne Schechter (5 April 1886-11 March 1983) (wife of Maurice Schechter) in Jewish Theological Seminary Archives, New York. Unsigned, but attributed to her daughter.

[49] Per Maritza Corrales Capestany conversation with the author, Havana, August 2002.

[50] There are also Jewish cemeteries in other Cuban cities. Corrales has analyzed state-held death records and has tried to trace the personal history of every person buried in a Cuban Jewish cemetery.

[51] Leon Yarmus interview with Bejarano. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.

[52] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1947, p. 15.

[53] George Weinberger, "The Jews in Cuba," The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger, Volume 102:14 (February 8, 1918), p. 1.

[54] Moshe Bensignor quoted in Berajano (1996), pp. 76-79. Bejarano interviewed him in Miami in 1984, when he was 91 years old. This account is his self-told recollection. For conversation see material in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History

[55] Barrocas, *op. cit.*, Lieberman, *op. cit.*, give the date as 1902. Also citing 1902 see Sender Kaplan, Raul Moncarz, Julio Steinberg, "Jewish emigrants to Cuba: 1898-1960," International Migration, Vol. 28:3 (September 1990), p. 295 ff.

[56] Margalit Bejarano, "The Place of the Sephardic Community in Jewish Settlement in Latin America" (in Hebrew), Pe'amim (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute), Volume 76 (Summer 1998), pp. 30-51. According to an analysis of Sephardic Jews buried in Cuba through 1945, 89.5% were born in Turkey, 3.5% in Greater Syria, and 3% in the Balkans.

[57] For a discussion of the Alliance school movement in Turkey, see Aron Rodrigue, French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). A general source about the Alliance is Jacques Bigart (secretary of the Alliance), "The Alliance Israélite Universelle," in ed. Cyrus Adler, American Jewish Yearbook 5661 (24 September 1900 to 13 September 1901), (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1900), pp. 45-65.

[58] Aron Rodrigue, Images of Sephardic and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1939. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1993), p. 10.

[59] Preference is given to using modern Turkish names for the purpose of simplicity.

[60] Avigdor Levy, The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire, (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1992), p. 113.

[61] Mahir Şaul, "The Mother Tongue of the Polyglot: Cosmopolitism and Nationalism among the Sephardim of Istanbul," in ed. Mehmet Tütüncü, Turkish-Jewish Encounters, (Haarlem, Netherlands: Editions Mehmet Tütüncü, 2001), p.142.

[62] Ilan Karmi, The Jewish Community of Istanbul in the Nineteenth Century: Social, Legal and Administrative Transformation, (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1996), p. 63.

[63] Vicki Tamir, Bulgaria and Her Jews: The History of a Dubious Symbiosis, (Sepher-Hermon Press, Inc., published for New York: Yeshivah University Press, 1979), p. 94.

[64] Tamir, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[65] "Young" should be understood as "new" or "new generation."

[66] Bejarano (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[67] Mahir Şaul, *op cit.*, p.131.

[68] Stanford J. Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 156.

[69] Walter F. Weiker, Ottomans, Turks, and the Jewish Polity: A History of the Jews of Turkey, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992), pp. 124-125.

[70] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[71] Rodrigue, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[72] Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[73] See ed. Esther Benbassa, Haim Nahum: A Sephardic Rabbi in Politics, 1892-1923, (Tuscaloosa, Alabama and London: University of Alabama Press, 1995).
[74] Rodrigue, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-164.
[75] Esther Benbassa with Aron Ridrigue, Une vie judéo-espagnol à l'est: Gabriel Arié (1863-1939), (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1992), p. 376.
[76] Marc Angel, La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1982), p. 12.
[77] *ibid.*
[78] Avigdor Levy, "The Jews of Edirne during the Balkan Wars according to the Diary of a Jewish School Mistriss," Hamizrah Hehadash, Volume 39 (1997-1998), (Jerusalem, Magnes Press, Hebrew University of Jerusalem), p. 18.
[79] This occupation was particularly problematic for Jews, who remembered nineteenth century cases of blood libel in Greece.
[80] Not to be confused with the Moshe Mitrani of Santa Clara, Cuba, but probably of the same general family. There were several Mitrani families who immigrated to Cuba from European Turkey.
[81] For information on Sephardic immigration to the United States between 1899 and 1925, see Marc D. Angel, La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982).
[82] Margalit Bejarano, "L'Intégration des Sépharades en Amérique Latine: Le cas des communautés de Buenos Aires et de la Habane," in ed. Esther Benbassa, Mémoires Juives D'Espagne et du Portugal, (Paris: Editions Publisud, 1996), p. 215.
[83] For overview of Arabs in Cuba see, Rigoberto Menéndez Paredes, Componentes arabes en la cultura cubana, (Havana: Ediciones Boloñes, 1999). Also, Mario González Quirpga, "La inmigración árabe en Cuba," El Arabe (Unión Arabe, La Habana, Cuba) No. 49 (October 1997), pp. 8-9.
[84] Luis F. Gillo, "La imprenta arabe en el siglo XIX cubano," El Arabe (Unión Arabe, La Habana, Cuba), Volume No. 51 (June, 1998), pp. 18-22.
[85] For background on Ladino, see Jay Levinson, "Ladino: A Lost Language?" Jewish Tribune (London), 16 October 1998, p. 9.
[86] Gillo, *loc cit.*
[87] See Beton, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
[88] Weinberger, *loc. cit.*
[89] Weinberger, *loc. cit.* This is a superficial observation that must be understood in context. There is testimony suggesting that on the Sabbath and religious holidays certain members of the congregation went from synagogue to work (forbidden in Jewish Law). During this period more Ashkenazim than Sephardim married non-Jews, although other sources deny the phenomenon. It is perhaps the strong Sephardic opposition to intermarriage that in part prompted this statement. This is also a broad and general statement with no criteria by which to assess the evaluation.
[90] Weinberger, *loc. cit.*
[91] Habaner Lebn Almanque 5705 / Septiembre 1944, p. 237.
[92] Fins interview with Bejarano, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History, file (122) 40.
[93] Harry O. Sandberg, "The Jews of Latin America," in ed. Samson D. Oppenheim, American Jewish Yearbook 1917, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), p. 85. Article pp. 35-105. Section on Cuba, pp. 84-86. Weinberger, *op. cit.*, describes *Chevet Ahim* as much more observant.
[94] Sandberg, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
[95] Date of birth from autobiographical material written by Mendelsohn for his family. Provided by Charleyne Epstein to the author. Mendelsohn's mother died in 1875. Mendelsohn married Pese Rebbekah Lustgarten in 1888 (died 1924). Immediately thereafter he moved to the United States, where he started out as a singer in a traveling Italian opera group (Bernstein interview with the author, Jerusalem, 28 December 2004. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History). Later Mendelsohn was an important figure in the Chicago Yiddish theatre

for which he wrote music. Mendelsohn's father remained in Russia and went missing in World War I. See also Jewish News (Newark, New Jersey), 28 September 1962, pp. 18-19.

[96] Ronald Shapo telephone interview with the author, 27 March 2005.

[97] Bernstein, interview.

[98] Malvina W. Liebman and Seymour B. Liebman, Jewish Frontiersmen: Historical Highlights of Early South Florida Jewish Communities. Miami Beach, FL: Jewish Historical Society of South Florida, n.d. P. 11.

[99] Baritone. Accomplished pianist as well. Letter, Joe Pearlman to Samuel Proctor, 30 June 1955 in Jewish Museum of Florida Archives, Miami, Florida. Also published sheet music with Isaac Reingold (1873-1903): Was Wet Sein der Sof? (I. Reingold: Chicago, 1899); Ghetto Songs (Reingold & Levin: Chicago, n.d.); Meine Gefüle (Reingold: Chicago, 1900); Shmilik-Asrilik (Mendelsohn: Newark, n.d.); On Mount Scopus (with Goetzel [George] Selikovitsch)(New York: Bloch Publishing, 1925?). Mendelsohn was also a Mason per Bernstein.

[100] Charlyne Epstein telephone interview with the author, 17 November 2004.

[101] Harold P. Gastwirt, Fraud, Corruption, and Holiness: The Controversy over the Supervision of Jewish Dietary Practice in New York City 1881-1940, (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974).

[102] Utiansky interview with Bejarano, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History. Utiansky was editor of the Kubaner Bleter/Páginas Cubanas (first issue 1 December 1938). Later he wrote a column in Kubaner Idish Vort. His observation concerning marriages to non-Jews is particularly significant given his Communist orientation and presumably non-religious circle of friends. Utianksy was born in Poland and immigrated to Cuba in 1927.

[103] E.g., see David Pernas interview with the author, Camagüey, 7 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[104] For a biography (non-critical), see Yehoshua Hochstein, "David Bliss: Finest in Jewish Latin America" (In Yiddish), *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1947, pp. 78-92. Also ed. Leon "Leib" Hiller and Nahman Solowiejczyk, Der Grunshteyn, (Havana: Patronato, 1951), pp. 46 ff.

[105] Judy Rosen (granddaughter of Blis) telephone interview with the author, 4 July 2003.

[106] José Miller, current head of the Cuban Jewish Community, credits Blis with the establishment of the Guanabacoa cemetery. This is in error, since the cemetery predates Blis' arrival in Cuba. See http://www.beth-israel.berkeley.ca.us/programs/cuba/cuba.html

[107] Weinberger, *op. cit.*

[108] See Boris Sapir, The Jewish Community of Cuba, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary Press, 1948).

[109] *ibid.* Weinberger's observations were published in February, 1918, and presumably written several months before. The *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1943, p. 59 reports that a Jewish school was started by Sephardim in 1918, but precise details are lacking.

[110] For a history of Bnei B'rith in Cuba see, Marco Pitchón (president of the Havana Chapter at the time of writing), "La Bene Berith de Cuba," *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 5714 (1953), pp. 55-57. The chapter had 359 members. Pitchon was also the editor of Bene Berith Fragmentos: Revista Mensual (started in September 1949, then revived by Pitchon in 1952). Also see Maritza Corrales Capestrany, Fragmentos de un ado: 60 aniversario de la logia Bené Brith Maimónides de Cuba, (Havana, 2003).

[111] Edward E. Grusd, B'nai B'rith: The Story of a Covenant, (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), pp. 226-247.

[112] Leland H. Jenks, Nuestra colonia de Cuba, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Palestra, 1960), p. 63.

[113] Lester D. Langley, The Cuban Policy of the United States: A Brief History, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1968), p. 136.

[114] *ibid.*

[115] Ellis Island Immigration Museum (New York, New York) exhibit, July 2002.

[116] Michael Davitt, Within the Pale: The True Story of the Anti-Semitic Persecutions in Russia, (New York: Barnes, 1903).

[117] First published in 1905 at Tsarskoje Selo in a book by Sergi Nilus (1862-1930). Later edition in English see, Sergi Aleksandrovich Nilus, The Protocols and World Revolution, including a Translation

and Analysis of the "Protocols of the Meetings of the Zionist Men of Wisdom," (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1920). For early histories and analysis of this document see, Herman Bernstein, The History of a Lie, "The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion": A Study, (New York: Ogilvie Publishing Co., 1921). Also Lucien Wolf,. The Myth of the Jewish Menace in World Affairs or, The Truth about the Forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1921). For modern printings see, ed. Reuven Ehrlich, Hate Industry: Anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish literature in the Arab and Muslim world (Part 1), (Herzliya, Israel: Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies), Information Bulletin No. 4 (September 2002).

[118] Beilis immigrated to Palestine in 1914. In 1920 he moved to the United States, where he passed away in 1934. His memoirs were published first in Yiddish, then in English translation in Mendel Beilis, The Story of My Sufferings (Di geshikhte fun mayne leyden); translated by Harrison Goldberg, (New York: Mendel Beilis Pub. Co., Inc., 1926).

[119] Maurice Samuel, Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beiliss Case, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966). Also, Ezekiel Leikin, The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial that Shook the World, (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1993).

[120] Solomon M. Schwarz, The Jews in the Soviet Union, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1951), p. 49. Also, S. Ettinger, "The Jews in Russia at the Outbreak of the Revolution," in Lionel Kochan, The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 25.

[121] Pseudonym, Kazimierz Wybranowski. For description of his philosophy see, Alvin Fountain, Roman Dmowski: Party, Tactics, Ideology, 1895-1907. (Boulder: East European Monographs; New York: distributed by Columbia University Press, 1980).

[122] Zosa Szajkowski, "Western Jewish Aid and Intercession for Polish Jewry," in in ed. Joshua A. Fishman, Studies on Polish Jewry 1919-1939, (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1974), p. 150.

[123] Paweł Korzec, "Antisemitism in Poland as an Intellectual, Social, and Political Movement," in Fishman, *op. cit.*

[124] U.S. Minister in Poland (Gibson) to Acting Secretary of State, 22 March 1920. "[Polish actions] no longer concern the powers who have refused to interest themselves in Polish-Bolshevik relations." This was at a time when the Russians were thought to have the best chance at military victory. (See Gibson to Secretary of State, 17 January 1920.). Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920 (Volume III). (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936).

[125] Korzec, p. 37.

[126] Korzec, p. 39.

[127] Korzec, p. 43.

[128] Jews were 9.8% according to the 1931 census that described them as those "of the Mosaic faith," the assimilationist phrase used to denote Jews.

[129] Celia S. Heller, On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

[130] Marian Kamil Dziewanowski, .Joseph Pilsudski: a European Federalist, 1918-1922, (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1969).

[131] Arthur L. Goodhart, Poland and the Minority Races, (New York: Brentano's, 1920), p. 21.

[132] Heller, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[133] For details see, Rothschild, Joseph .Pilsudski's coup d'etat, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

[134] Zosa Szajkowski, "Western Jewish Aid and Intercession for Polish Jewry," in Fishman, *op. cit*, p. 154.

[135] Anne Schechter Hertzberg telephone conversation with Levinson, 25 November 2002.

[136] Kaplan *et al*, *op. cit.*

[137] Boris Sapir, "Yidn in Cuba," Yivo Bleter – Journal of the Yiddish Scientific Institute, vol. 24 (January-June 1945), p. 339-340.

[138] Gerald Sorin, A Time for Building: The Third Migration 1880-1920, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 43.

[139] Rosalie Pincus Fuchsberg and Adela Raquel Fuchsberg (daughter and grandaughter of Max Pincus) telephone interviews with the author, 17 November 2002.
[140] Henry L. Feingold, A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream 1920 – 1945, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 29.
[141] Utiansky interview with Bejarano, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[142] Kaplan *et al*, *op. cit.*
[143] Mexican Jewish history followed in parallel, including reaction in the early 1930s against peddlers and a rise of anti-Semitism. See Solomon Kahan, "The Jewish Community in Mexico," Contemporary Jewish Record: Review of Events and Digest of Opinion, Volume 3:3 (May-June 1940), pp. 253-263.
[144] YIVO Archives. Joseph Marcus to Jacob Fain, 17 October 1921.
[145] Letter in Zionist Central Archives, 11 Nov 1941.
[146] James Knopke interview with Bejarano, 29 November 1991. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[147] Rosa Perelmuter, "Cuban-Jewish Responses to Exile," The Jewish Experience in the Southern Americas Conference, Tulane University and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, New Orleans, April 2000. See also David Resedo and David O. Kurliand, "Somos Cubanos," in *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque, 1944, pp. 16-19; both authors wrote from Santiago, and they considered the period of Jews in Cuba not from the first community in Havana, but from the beginnings of the Santiago community.
[148] Currently Calle Leonor Pérez; the house number is not apparent, probably due to renumbering in the 1930s.
[149] Isaac Gelen interview with Dana Kaplan, Havana, June 2000. Confirmed in Blasbalg interview with the author, Brooklyn, New York, 20 June 2002. Blasbalg tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[150] Baldas interview with Bejarano, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[151] Dates per grave stone, Guanabacoa UHC Cemetery.
[152] Sender Kaplan interview with Bejarano. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[153] Alternative information 15 September 1900.
[154] Rafalin letter to Vaad Agudat HaRabannim d"Artsot HaBrit, 13 Av 5689 (1929). (In Hebrew)
[155] Yuda ha-Kohen Shtrasser, Aharon ha-Kohen Perl. Tsadik mah pa`al: toldot admure Burshtin, u-ferakim nivharim mi-pe`ulot-ha-hatsalah bi-shenot ha-za`am shel manhige ha-Yahadut ha-haredit be-Ar. ha-B. (Jerusalem: Mekhon Zikhron tsadikim, 2000). (In Hebrew)
[156] Sometimes Eichenstein was called by his mother's maiden name, Brandwein. This can be traced to a distortion of the Cuban custom to affix the matronymic surname after the patronymic surname. Thus, his name would be Shlomo Yaacov Z. Eichenstein Brandwein. In the United States the legal name was Solomon Eichenstein.
[157] David Eichenstein (rabbi's son) telephone conversation with the author, 22 September 2002.
[158] Strosser and Perl, pp. 271-272.
[159] Der Yiddisher Velt, Havana, 5 November 1936.
[160] Strosser and Perl, p. 269.; Die Zeit / El Tiempo, 14 September 1936, p.21.
[161] Specifically, from town of Bendery in Tighina district of Bessarabia. Only part of the larger family emigrated from Eastern Europe. Yad VaShem records show several Kates family members from Bendery who perished during the Holocaust. In some sources Kates' roots are described as Romanian, probably because Bendery was under Romanian rule from 1918 until 1940. At the time Kates were born, Bendery was in Russia; it was also incorporated into the USSR in 1940. Today Bendery is in Moldova.
[162] Knopke, interview.
[163] Anne Schechter Hertzberg telephone conversations with the author, 14 and 25 November 2002.
[164] Alice Brandon Meltzer telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2002.

[165] Dates according to Earl Brandon (son), 21 September 2005. Date/place of birth read from memoires written by Jacob Brandon in 1953 (unpublished).

[166] Stephen Denker communication with the author, 8 August 2005 based upon Denker-Earl Brandon conversation, May 2005.

[167] Also impression of Carita Malki during the late 1930s, early 1940s. Malki telephone conversation with the author, 14 May 2002.

[168] M. Lasker interview with Bejarano, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History. Both Rosenbaum and Roy Schechter in interviews with Levinson attest that the Dizik family was never strictly observant despite their later Orthodox affiliation.

[169] Ezra, the Hebrew world for "help." Not Ezra, the Prophet.

[170] Photocopies of selected minute books can be found in CAHJP (Hebrew University of Jerusalem at Givat Ram) Inv. 7668.

[171] Margalit Bejarano, "The Jewish Community of Cuba: Between Continuity and Extinction", Jewish Political Studies Review, (vol.3, numbers 1 and 2, spring 1991), p.119. Bejarano's sources for this are: A. Misbir, "Cartas de Cuba", (Israel: May 20, 1921); David Blis, "Memories," *Habaner Lebn*, (May 29, 1936);

[172] UHC minutes, 11 April 1922. A copy of the minute book covering 1906-1923 is to be found in CAHJP (Hebrew University of Jerusalem at Givat Ram) Inv. 7667.

[173] Even regarding a later period, Roy Schechter (born 1924) described UHC as "noses all the way up in the air." (in telephone conversation with the author, 10 November 2002).

[174] UHC minutes, 25 September 1922.

[175] Not to be considered an immigrant synagogue, although it did attract a small number of World War II refugees.

[176] A later example of the phenomenon is Julius Erwin Wolff, who wrote on 7 May 1943, "Das tropische Klima hier bekommt mir schlecht..." He then proceeded to detail diagnosed problems. Letter in Albert Einstein Archives (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), 56-374.00.

[177] Sapir, *op. cit.,* p. 22.

[178] Sapir, *op. cit.,* p. 111.

[179] During the 1920s and 1930s there was a Jewish restaurant at Calle Cuba No. 116. The Dreiman & Son Restaurant (kosher), established 1928-1929, was located at Calle Cuba No. 126.

[180] Letter reporting to New York and signed by HIAS Director for Cuba, Lee Lebovitz, 30 December 1924.

[181] Liebman and Liebman, pp. 33-34.

[182] Letter to Society of the Red Cross [Miguel Varona] from Jewish Committee for Cuba [Welfare Division], 31 March 1926.

[183] Letter to New York and signed by HIAS Director for Cuba, 15 June 1925.

[184] Letter to New York and signed by HIAS Director for Cuba, 27 May 1925.

[185] Letter to New York and signed by HIAS Director for Cuba [Morris Lewis], 13 May 1926

[186] Internal letter of Jewish Committee for Cuba, 24 March 1926.

[187] Marcos Materin interview with Max Lesnick interview, 21 February 1982. (New York: American Jewish Committee, Oral History Library, 1982). Note: Materin and Matterin are both used, apparently interchangeably. The Spanish section of the *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque uses both spellings.

[188] Ivan H. Light, (1979). "Disadvantaged Minorities in Self-Employment." International Journal of Comparative Sociology 20:1-2 (1979), 31-45.

[189] Harry Viteles, "Report on the Status of the Jewish Immigration in Cuba" (February 1925), p. 13, 21, 66-68, in HIAS Archives. His primary expertise was in development iussues, mostly in Palestine.

[190] Rosalie Fuchsberg (daughter of Max Pincus) interview with the author, Forest Hills, Queens, 10 June 2003. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History. Details also in Rosalie [Pincus] Fuchsberg, Through the Corridors of Time, late 1990s, unpublished.

[191] Max Lesnick interview with Bejarano. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[192] Baldas, interview.
[193] Boris Sapir, "Jews in Cuba II", The Jewish Review, (July – September 1946), p. 109.
[194] List of early Cuban Jewish newspapers in Appendix 2.
[195] Born in Poland. Arrived in Cuba 5 April 1925. Wrote for the New York *Tug* and for Cuban newspapers, primarily *Habaner Lebn.* For obituary see Miami Herald, January 14, 1990, Page 3B. Wrote book, Der blinder: un andere dertseylungen. (Havana, Cuba: Farlag "Havaner lebn", 1954). (Earlier version same publisher, 1935).
[196] Sister of Leon Yarmus who was active in the Centro Israelita.
[197] Kaplan was also active in the Jewish Community in Florida, where he lived after the Castro Revolution. See Liebman, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
[198] Diplomatic List, 1960.
[199] Zionist Central Archives, KK/4-9528, 10 December 1952.
[200] Kaplan, interview.
[201] Matterin, interview.
[202] Gerardo Machado y Morales, Manifesto al País: 1929-1935, (Havana: Precidencia, 1929).
[203] W. Adolphe Roberts, Havana: The Portrait of a City, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1953), p. 134.
[204] For background see, David Rudavsky, Emancipation and Adjustment: Contemporary Jewish Religious Movements, Their History and Thought, (New York, Diplomatic Press, 1967.) Lasker states in his interview with Bejarano that an American group in UHC was opposed to Zionism and to his rôle as President, Committee for Eretz Yisrael Ha'Ovedet (Labor Zionism).
[205] Earlier spelling preferred Sionista. In later documents Zionista is preferred, but it is not used exclusively.
[206] Zionist Central Archives KKL/5-6810. Letter from KKL General Secretary to Moises Salines Mitrani, 15 October 1934.
[207] Also "Shabetay."
[208] For example of his poetry see Oyfgang, Issue No. 10, 15 December 1927.
[209] Oyfgang, No. 9 (15 December 1927), p. 5.
[210] Museum of the Diaspora (Tel Aviv) Photo Archives number 23567 mistakenly gives the date as 1939.
[211] Albert Einstein Archives (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) 28-124.00, 28-126.00.
[212] Possibly a distant relative of José Dworin, mentioned below, per Ileana Paklak e-mail correspondence with Levinson, 28 January 2004. In Maritza Corrales Capestrany, The Chosen Land: Jews in Cuba, (Chicago: Salsedo Press, 2005) p. 244 Adela Dworin is quoted that Habif was one of her father's cousins. If so, this would probably be through marriage to Ena Dworin.
[213] 1930s lived with his wife, Wilma, in Guanabacoa, where he owned a luxurious home. Their son, Jeffery, attended the Ruston Academy. Jefferey Schapiro interview with Stephen Denker.
[214] Lasker, interview.
[215] Joseph I. Cohen, *op. cit.*
[216] Papo, *loc. cit.*
[217] Sandra Berman, The Bremen: Atlanta Jewish Community Archives, Rabbi Joseph I. Cohen Family Papers, Summary in May, 1995.
[218] Abravanel (head of Kirklareli community) interview with the author, Kirklareli, Turkey, 27 May 2002.
[219] Message from Hilda Mitrani Bennet to Levinson, 17 November 2002.
[220] Kaplan, interview.
[221] *Ibid.*
[222] *Ibid.*
[223] Boris Sapir, "Jewish Organizations in Cuba," Jewish Review, (January to March 1947), p. 266.
[224] Sapir, *ibid.*, p. 282 note 4. Sapir bases his information on reports in the Yiddish paper Oifgang, (August and September 1934).
[225] Also known as Otto Modley, Aaron Sinkovick, Abraham Simcowiz, José Michelón.

[226] *Habaner Lebn*, (Numbers 13, 17, 20 and 21, all from 1933). Also see El País, (March 30, 1933).
[227] "Centro Israelita de Cuba: Informe annual 1927-1928," Oyfgang, No. 16 (8 July 1928), pp. 33.
[228] Boletín de la Colonia Hebrea de Cuba: Comité Hebreo Protector de Tuberculosos y Enfermes Mentales, December 1935.
[229] Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv, Photo Archives picture no. 36723.
[230] Habaner Lebn, 9 June 1933, p. 4.
[231] 1950s owner of a clothing factory. Son of Beryl Dworin (died in Pinsk during the Bolshevik Revolution) and Tybl Aisemberg (died WWII). Brother of Moishe Dworin (died WWII). Married in Havana to Michla/Maria Slutzker (from Pinsk; died 2 January 1993 in Havana). Daughters Bella Plotnick, Adela Dworin (both living in Havana at the time of this writing).
[232] Dana E. Kaplan, "The Jews of Cuba since the Castro Revolution," in ed. David Singer and Lawrence Grossman, American Jewish Yearbook 2001, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2001). p. 39. Article pp. 21-87.
[233] Victor Mitrani, "La Torre de Babel?" Oyfgang, No. 11 (15 January 1928), pp. 3-4.
[234] Bejarano (1996), p. 58.
[235] Married to Max Pincus (originally Pincusevitch) in USSR on 28 February 1922. Arrived Havana 10 October 1924 with her husband and daughter; husband's brother and his family.
[236] Gustavo Kates served again as president, 12 May 1940 - 13 February 1941.
[237] JDC Archives, File 505.
[238] Luis F. Leroy y Galvez, La Universidad de la Habana: Síntesis Histórica, (Habana: Universidad de la Habana, 1960).
[239] Josefina Meza, "La obra social de Enrique José Varona," in ed. Josefina Meza y Pedro Pablo Rodr□guez, Enrique José Varona: Política y Sociedad, (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1999).
[240] Article by Oscar Gronstein in Oyfgang Issue No. 17, (15 September 1928).
[241] Oscar Gronstein, "C□rculo de Estudiantes Hebreos: Informes sobre la organización de los estudiantes hebreos," Oyfgang, No. 17 (15 Sept. 1928), pp. 18-19
[242] For recognition of the problem, see letter of David Pérez, "A los estudiantes hebreos de Cuba," Oyfgang, No. 17 (15 Sept. 1928), pp. 15-16.
[243] See Yehiel Harari interview with Bejarano. Tape in Department of Oral History collection (122)5, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
[244] Museum of the Diaspora (Tel Aviv) Photo Archives number 36384.
[245] Museum of the Diaspora (Tel Aviv) Photo Archives number 36387.
[246] Ruth Kaufman conversation with the author, 10 November 2002.
[247] Example, letter of 20 April 1930 to Oriente Province. Filed in Provincial Archives, File 2566, Santiago de Cuba.
[248] Jabotinsky Institute in Israel (Tel Aviv), archival file 54/5/2 "gimel."
[249] Functioned until 1985, existed until 1986. Avraham Bereznick interview with Bejarano. Department of Oral History, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, file (122) 43 (31 October 1990).
[250] See Nuestro Plantel, July-August 1941, which lists businesses with Ashkenazi names in Bayamo, Holguin, Guantanamo, Camagüey, Santiago, Tunas, Cienfuegos, Banes, and Santa Clara.
[251] Joseph Papo, Sephardim in Twentieth Century America," In Search of Unity. (San Jose, California: Pelé Yoetz Books, 1987), p. 281.
[252] Joseph I. Cohen, "Congregation Or Shalom: The Formative Years, 1906-1937," ed. Sol Beton, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[253] Derived from "Frances." See, Raoul Siniol, Momento Sefarde, Jerusalem (private printing), 1980.
[254] Celina and Paula Stein interview with the author, New York, June 2003. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[255] Wife was born on 12 January 1891 in Turkey.
[256] Official citizenship papers held by grandson, Alberto Eskkenazi (note spelling difference), of Santa Clara, Cuba. It is possible that there were Jewish residents in 1920. See Sara Bertha Levy interview with

the author, Caibarién, 5 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.

[257] For general history of Caibarién, see José A. Martínez-Fortun y Foyo, Apuntos Históricos de Caibarién, (Caibarién: Eudaldo Valdés e Hijos, 1939). Also. L. Valdes Quesada, Las Villas: Album-Resumen Ilustrado, (La Habana: La Milagrosa), n.d.

[258] Incident summarized in Oyfgang, No. 1:1, 8 July 1927 (in Yiddish).

[259] HIAS Archives, film MKM 15.44, Chiefez to Monteser, 5 February 1925.

[260] Chiefez to Monteser, 10 February 1925, in JDC Archives.

[261] Chiefez to Monteser, 6 March 1925, in JDC Archives.

[262] Chiefez to Monteser, 29 March 1925, in JDC Archives.

[263] Chiefez to Monteser, 6 March 1925, in JDC Archives.

[264] Chiefez to Lewis (replaced Monteser in the Havana office), 15 June 1925, in JDC Archives.

[265] Chiefez to Lewis, 3 July 1925, in JDC Archives.

[266] Chiefez to Lewis, 10 September 1925, in JDC Archives.

[267] Chiefez to Lewis, 22 September 1925, in JDC Archives.

[268] Handwritten note, Lewis to Chiefez, 25 September 1925, in JDC Archives.

[269] Dated reeceipt in YIVO/HIAS Archives, MKM 15.44.

[270] Testimony of Elias Maya in Bejarano (1996), p. 17. There the date of Ashkenazi immigrants coming to the city is erroneously given as 1927.

[271] Oyfgang, *loc. cit.*

[272] Immigrants from Silivria established Ahim Amevorahim in New York in 1915.

[273] The current president of the community, David Pernas Levy, is his grandson. Many current leaders were not associated with Jewish Communities in the first two or three years after the Revolution, hence there is no continuous line of history.

[274] Tiferet Israel minutes book. No date for the opening at San Fernando 137 1/2 is given. Earliest mention of the address is 1935. The pattern of synagogue openings was to hold an organizational meeting in someone's house, file legal paperwork using that address, then rent larger quarters.

[275] In general, the Maya family was active in Cuban Jewish affairs. In later years Gracia Maya, for example, served as president of WIZO. It should be noted that there were several different Maya families.

[276] Residence of Tuñik.

[277] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1943, p. 276.

[278] Records in organization's file, Provincial Archives, Camagüey.

[279] Interview of David and Reina Pérez with Bejarano, 11 June 1984. File (122)4, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[280] David Pernas interview with the author, Camagüey, 7 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[281] *Ibid.*

[282] Pérez interview with Bejarano, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[283] David Tacher interview with Kaplan and the author, Santa Clara, 4 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[284] For general background about the city see José Garjía del Barco y Alonso, Camajuaní y la Revolució n del 95, (La Habana: El Siglo XX, 1928).

[285] Notice, 9 October 1924 filed in the Provincial Archives, Camagüey.

[286] Notice, 22 September 1927 filed in the Provincial Archives, Camagüey.

[287] Levinson conversation at Unión Arabe, Havana, 30 July 2002.

[288] 446 Broome Street, New York, New York.

[289] Located at Calle Pepe Antonio 126, Apartado 15 from at least 1933. Per Stephen Denker correspondence with Levinson, 23 February 2004. Corporate headquarters were in Havana, per Denker, 16 August 2005.

[290] It appears that the address doubled as a private business. Later after the community center and the business closed, the facility was used as a private residence. At this writing the quarters used for the community center are unoccupied.
[291] Rodolfo Mizraji Tellez interview with the author, Guantánamo, 11 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[292] Eugenia Farín Lévy interview with the author, Santiago de Cuba, 8 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[293] Spelling uncertain, since source, *Habaner Leben* Almanaque 1943, p. 253, is in Yiddish. There is an Abram Zapayo buried in the Guanabacoa Cemetery on 24 June 1956. Also spelled Sapallo, Sapayo.
[294] Provincial archives file No. 2566, Santiago de Cuba.
[295] Rodolfo Mizraji places people leaving Guantánamo beginning in 1959. See Rodolfo Mizraji interview (*sup.*) with the author, 11 August 2002. The author feels that this date is implausible – too late for problems that surfaced in 1954, too early for changes brought by the Revolution.
[296] *Ibid.*
[297] i.e., Zion.
[298] Business was Importador de Tejidos "El Tigre," Calle Libertad No. 63, Holguín.
[299] Provincial archives file No. 2565, Santiago de Cuba.
[300] Provincial archives file no. 2566, Santiago de Cuba.
[301] Per marriage contract (*ketuba*) held by Alberto Eshkenazi of Santa Clara, Cuba,
[302] For background on the community see Erol Hacker, "Alliance and the Jewish Community of Kirklareli (1878-1934)" (in Hebrew), Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Judaism (Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem), Volume 81 (Fall 1999), pp. 68-89. Emigration to Cuba and the United States, p. 76.
[303] *ibid.*
[304] Picture on front page (Spanish) of Oyfgang, Issue No. 16, 8 July 1928.
[305] Eduardo Bradman telephone interview with the author, 16 October 2002.
[306] Baldas, interview.
[307] A Bundist who arrived in Havana from Poland in 1929. Opened a shoe store in Las Tunas. After World War II moved to Matanzas where he bought a clothing store. This was Bradman's first synagogue affiliation. Eduardo Bradman telephone interview with the author, 16 October 2002.
[308] Baruj Benhaim Behar interview with the author, Havana, 16 August 2002.
[309] Mostly from Constantinople/Silivria region of Turkey, per David Tacher, interview with Kaplan and the author, Santa Clara, 4 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[310] Fins, interview.
[311] Born, 1897; died, 06 Jun 1962.
[312] *Habaner Leben* Almanaque 1943, p. 251.
[313] Isser Fisher interview with the author, Brooklyn, NY, 23 May 2003. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[314] Date per tombstone
[315] Rafael Duharte Jiménez, Santiago de Cuba y África: Un Diálogo en el Tiempo, (Santiago de Cuba: Ediciones Santiago, 2001), p. 20.
[316] Archivo Histórico Provincial, Gobierno Provincial, Legajo 334, 1917: Comercios, Exp. #30 as brought in Eugenia Farin Levy, Sinagoga de Santiago de Cuba, (Santiago de Cuba: Comunidad hebrea, 1997), p. 12.
[317] The current Communidad Hebrea HaTikva is located at Pío. Rosado No. 268 entre Habana y Trinidad, Santiago de Cuba.
[318] Dates per cemetery grave stone.
[319] Eugenia Farín Lévy conversation (not recorded) with the author, Santiago de Cuba, 8 August 2002. Remembered with slight differences by a former resident of Santiago.
[320] Eugenia Farín Lévy interview, Santiago de Cuba, 8 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.
[321] *ibid.*

[322] Kaplan (2001), p. 83.
[323] Farín Lévy, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[324] Eitan Behar (grandson) interview with the author, Beersheva, Israel, 13 May 2002.
[325] Harold Fields, "Contemporary Migration by Jews," Report to the First World Jewish Congress, Geneva, 8-15 August 1936. Document in YIVO Archives.
[326] Margalit Bejarano, La historia del buque San Luís: La perspectiva cubana, (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999).
[327] Matterin, interview.
[328] Lesnick, interview.
[329] Baldas, interview.
[330] Margalit Bejarano, "The Deproletarization of Cuban Jewry," Amilat, Judaica Latinoamericana, (Jerusalem: Magnes University Press, 1988), pp. 57-67.
[331] Bejarano has written extensively on anti-Semitism in Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s. For example, see her "Anti-Semitism in Cuba under Democratic, Military, and Revolutionary Régimes, 1944-63," Patterns of Prejudice, Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1990, p. 32-46.
[332] See http:// www.beth-israel.berkeley.ca.us/programs/cuba/cuba.html
[333] Married to Pincus' daughter, Rosalie.
[334] Politically active in Cuba during the post WWII period. Journalist in USA after the Revolution. Born 8 September1930. Son of an immigrant father born in Russia in 1903 and a Roman Catholic mother born in Cuba. See Lesnick, interview.
[335] Rosalie Fuchsberg conversation with the author, Forest Hills, NY, 16 June 2003.
[336] Autobiographic information in Corrales (2005), pp. 101-111.
[337] José Altschuler interview with Kaplan and the author, Havana, 15 August 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History. The idea of small and unpleasant incidents of anti-Semitism was also cited by Rosalie Pincus Fuchsberg (telephone conversation with author, 17 November 2002) when she was a pupil in a non-Jewish school.
[338] Bejarano (1990), *op. cit.*.
[339] Rosalie Pincus Fuchsberg, Through the Corridors of Time, unpublished, p. 19. Example of a relative who was such a Russian agent.
[340] Boris Sapir, "Jewish organizations in Cuba", *op. cit.,* p.275.
[341] Habaner Lebn, 6 October 1933, p. 2.
[342] Boris Sapir to L. Sobel, "The Election of Ramon Grau San Martin," (Translation from German), JDC Archives, file 516.
[343] Habaner Lebn, 19 January 1934, p. 2.
[344] Active in UHC from 1906, Centro Israelita during 1930s.
[345] Lasker, interview.
[346] Baldas, interview. Also letter, Jacob Brandon to William Rosenfeld, 6 June 1938, in JDC Archives, File 505.
[347] Comité Israelita de Cuba meeting report by Jacob Brandon, 13 April 1935, YIVO Archives, New York.
[348] Knopke, interview. Also, "With little to do and gathered in one spot they were more obvious and subject to becoming an object of dislike on the part of the local population." Jack Sutters e-mail correspondence with the author, 27 January 2004.
[349] Pres Buckman, Bill Dar, Norm Eddy, Report of the S.P.C. Unit 21 on Refugee Work at Finca "Paso Seco," July 1940. American Friends Service Committee Archives, Philadelphia.
[350] Enrique Trinchet, "Jirones cubanos: Conozca la politica, cierta prensa, el commercio judio y espanol, y la didactica como lo que son - tumores nacionales." (Habana, 1947).
[351] J.A.F. Pérez, Sionismo, el facismo de la estrella de David, (Habana, 1979).
[352] In the 1980s there were other titles written by Palestinians and published in Havana. The main motivation was political – anti-Israel, not anti-Semitic.
[353] Comité Israelita de Cuba annual reports covering 1933 and 1934.
[354] Comité Israelita de Cuba meeting report by Jacob Brandon, 13 April 1935.

[355] *ibid.*
[356] Letter to HIAS New York [Isaac L. Asofsky] from Centro Israelita de Cuba [Abraham Schneider], 29 July 1936.
[357] YIVO Archives, RG 380.
[358] For Cuba as one possibility to receive refugees, see letter from Dr. A. Leuterbach, Executive [Office] of the Zionist Organization, to Mizrachi Organization, Jerusalem, 16 January 1939 (in Hebrew). In Religious Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file no. 153.
[359] William Berger, Significación para Cuba de la última corriente de migración hebrea, Almanaque Habaner Lebn 5705 / Septiembre 1944 (in Yiddish), Havana, p. 18. Berger immigrated to Cuba from Vienna, Austria in 1938 and was a board member of the Asociación Democrática de los Refugídos Hebreos.
[360] HIAS Report for 1939 in YIVO Archives, file R6 245.4.4. MKM 1621.
[361] *ibid.*
[362] Including Jews from Eastern Europe who had previously fled to these countries.
[363] Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[364] Bejarano (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 11.
[365] JDC Archives, File 505.
[366] Letter, David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, 7 January 1939, in JDC Archives, File 506.
[367] Currently a military installation in Casablanca.
[368] Letter, Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, 30 March 1939, in JDC Archives, File 506.
[369] Report, Cuba: Relief Situation, by J. Schrier to Cecilia Razovsky, in JDC Archives, File 506.
[370] Letter, David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, December 1938, JDC Archives, file 505.
[371] Bejarano (1999), *op. cit.*, p.13.
[372] *op cit.*, p. 14.
[373] For specifics of transactions see letter, L. Berenson to David Bressler, 31 December 1938, in JDC Archives, File 505.
[374] Interview, Eric Billes-Levinson, 28 June 2002 in Southfield, Michigan.
[375] JDC Archives, File 506.
[376] Bejarano (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[377] Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts, Voyage of the Damned, (New York: Stein & Day, 1974), p. 88, assert that Bru closed down the Benítez operation because he was not receiving payoff money. The author of this book knows of no substantiating proof to this claim.
[378] Bejarano (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[379] Bejarano (1999), *loc. cit.*
[380] Letter, Laura L. Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, 20 March 1939, JDC Archives.
[381] Letter to Joint Distribution Committee, New York from Joint Relief Committee / Cuba, 21 February 1942 (HIAS Archives).
[382] Times of London, 4 April 1939, p. 15.
[383] Palestine Post, 15 May 1939, p. 1.
[384] Palestine Post, 26 April 1939, p. 1.
[385] For a personal story (with unsubstantiated details), see Shlomo Dror, "The Asimi," Americans and Canadians in Israel Bulletin, Volume 7:5 (February 1965), pp 8-9.
[386] Palestine Post, 8 June 1939, p. 1.
[387] Letter, Adolph Kates to William Rosenwald (American Jewish Congress), 28 September 1938, in JDC Archives, File 505.
[388] Kaplan, interview.
[389] The first sailing of the St. Louis was in 1929. The ship continued to sail for the Hamburg-Line, then for the Hamburg Sud Amerika Line.
[390] Some sources count only 936 passengers.
[391] JDC Archives, file 506.
[392] Letter by Stone to HICEM, Paris. 19 April 1939. YIVO Archives, MVM 16.21.

[393] "Review of the Year 5699" in ed. Harry Schneiderman, American Jewish Yearbook 5700 (14 September 1939 to 2 October 1940), (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America), p. 366.
[394] Bejarano (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[395] Memo of telephone conversation, Willliam Goldsmith to Cecilia Rozgovsky, 9 May 1939 at 2230 hours, in JDC Archives, File 506.
[396] *idem*, p. 20. Lasker (in interview with Bejarano) claims that he was called in by the United States ambassador who asked him to use his influence in the Jewish Community in New York to stop the ship from sailing.
[397] A Nazi spy also made it to land long enough to retrieve documents and return to ship.
[398] Bejarano (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[399] Kaplan, interview.
[400] As of this writing there is a St. Louis survivors association that meets annually in different cities.
[401] Yated Neeman (in Hebrew), 24 December 2003, p. 8.
[402] Palestine Post, 7 June 1939, p. 1.
[403] HIAS Report of Immigration in Cuba, 24 February 1940. YIVO Archives, MVM 16.21.
[404] Minutes of JDC meeting, 7 July 1939, in JDC Archives, File 507.
[405] Letter, Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, 16 June 1939 in JDC Archives, File 507.
[406] Memorandum of telephone conversation from Dr. Jorge García Montes to L.A. Crosby, 26 June 1939 at 1300 hours, in JDC Archives, File 507. It was unclear if the 20 day postponement was from the date of the conversation (26 June) or from the date of the deportation order (4 July).
[407] Letter, Jorge García Montes to Robert Pilpel, 7 September 1939, in JDC Archives, File 508.
[408] Memorandum of telephone conversation, Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, 6 July 1940, in JDC Archives, File 510. Rôle of husband in receiving payments specified in letter, Margolis to Pilpel, 28 August 1940.
[409] Letter, Margolis to Pilpel, 4 August 1940, in JDC Archives, File 510.
[410] JDC Archives, File 376.
[411] Example is the case of Victor Isaac Meyer, arrested for espionage, then charges dropped. See New York Times, 15 October 1942.
[412] See, for example, El Tiempo, 3 January 1941, p. 1, which carried a report about Polish and German refugees who would form a Fifth Column.
[413] Explanation of the ship service of the time and the rôle of Casablanca can be found in Man Gottschalk, "The Jewish Emigrant - 1941," Contemporary Jewish Record: Review of Events and Digest of Opinion, Volume 4:3 (June 1941), pp. 261-268.
[414] For a personal account see Blasbalg, interview. Blasbalg was a refugee aboard the ship.
[415] Letter from Centro Israelita de Cuba to HIAS Executive Director [Isaac L. Asofsky], 5 May 1942.
[416] Per Blasberg, interview, release from Tiscornia was based on a payoff to the Cubans.
[417] Encyclopedia Judaica, Volume 5, pp. 1146-1151.
[418] Memorandum on the Make-up of the Refugees in Havana, Cuba, 15 December 1941, in JDC Archives, File 512.
[419] Jabotinsky Institute archival file 26/3/13 "het."
[420] For biography and involvement in the Mizrachi movement, see Mordechai Staiman, "His name is Aaron," and other amazing Chassidic stories and songs. (Brooklyn: Otsar Sifrei Lubavitch, 2002), pp. 5-56
[421] Zionist Central Archives, letter signed by Yitschak E. Birnbaum, 18 August 1946.
[422] Religious Zionist Archives, File 31/1-32/1. Letter (in Hebrew), A.M. Ganchovsky to Meshulam Horowitz, 5 Tishrei 5706 (September 1945).
[423] Letter 5 January 1947 from HaKibbutz HaDati in Tel Aviv to World Mizrachi in Jerusalem. Religious Zionist Archives, File 269.
[424] Letter (in Hebrew), Board of Cuban Mizrachi to World Center [Jerusalem], Executive [Office] of the Zionist Organization, 19 Elul 5705 (28 August 1945). Religious Zionist Archives, File 31/1-32/1.
[425] Interview of Avraham Avishai on his assignment to Sweden, by Moshe Klinger (in Hebrew), 5 November 1974. Haganah Archives (Tel Aviv), 123/abcl/5/b.

[426] Blasbalg, interview.
[427] Ruth Kaufman telephone conversation with the author, 10 November 2002 (Message I).
[428] Albert Einstein Archives (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 56-382.00.
[429] Albert Einstein Archives (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 56-373.00, 56-376.00, 56.377.00.
[430] Albert Einstein Archives (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 34-301.00.
[431] Chaya Fuchs Zeigerman interview with the author, Brooklyn, New York, 5 June 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[432] For further details see, L. Lande, "The Diamond Industry in Cuba" (in Yiddish), in *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1943, pp. 199-212. See also El Mundo (Havana), 7 March 1942.
[433] Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
[434] Jackie Censor interview with the author, Queens, New York, 9 July 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[435] See Elchonon Herzog, "Julius Steinberg," and Jacob Bauminger, "Julius Steinfeld in Cuba," in 25 Years Adas Yereim Anniversary Journal, New York, n.d.
[436] Blasbalg telephone conversation with the author, 10 June 2003.
[437] *Ibid.*
[438] Kyle S. van Landingham, Pioneer Families of the Kissimmee River Valley. Private printing, 1976, 2001.
[439] John Parke Wright IV e-mail correspondence with the author, 27 January 2004.
[440] Bernard Teitelbaum telephone interview with the author, 18 June 2003. Also taped interview, 26 June 2003, with tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History. Bernard Teitelbaum had other business interests in Cuba, such as tobacco and cigars, however these ventures had no connection with the Jewish Community.
[441] Letter Julius Steinfeld to Michael G. Tress, 6-5-43. In Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York
[442] Yitzchak Rosenberg interview with the author, Brooklyn, New York, 22 June 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[443] Letter, Charles Jordan to Robert Pilpel, 27 February 1942, in JDC Archives, File 513.
[444] Estelle Stern Wolf relates (Interview with the author, New York, 14 July 2002) that it was found out at some stage that the "kosher" food (bread per A. N. Blasbalg, conversation with the author, 17 July 2002) was prepared with lard.
[445] Habaner Lebn, 8 July 1942.
[446] Ruth Kaufman telephone conversation with the author, 10 November 2002 (Message II).
[447] Zeigerman, interview.
[448] La Voz de *Betar* (Cuba), September 1944. In Jabotinsky Institute archives file 3/2-39 "bet."
[449] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque (in Yiddish), 5704 / September 1943, p. 280.
[450] Dates provided by Malvine Lampert (Kleinhaus' daughter) in telephone interview with the author, 24 November 2004.
[451] After World War II Kleinhaus returned to Antwerp for a couple of years, but with ill and without family or friends in the city, he then moved to New York, where he passed away. Malka Gutfreund telephone interview with the author, 23 November 2004.
[452] Blasbalg, interview.
[453] Blasbalg telephone conversation with the author, 10 June 2003.
[454] Yitzchak Rosenberg, interview. Chaya Fuchs Zeigerman, interview.
[455] *ibid.*
[456] Rotenberg was the author of Be-fithe `olam. Brooklyn: Hotsa'at Keren Eli`ezer, 1964; Toldot `am `olam. (Brooklyn: Keren Eli`ezer, 1967 and reprints)
[457] Blasbalg, interview.
[458] Sabina Friedman Monheit (daughter) telephone interview with the author, 7 November 2005.
[459] Isi Gutwein to M G Tress, 22 February 1945. Letter in Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[460] Blasbalg, interview.
[461] Report of Havana Zeirei Agudah, July 1943. Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[462] Estelle Stern Wolf, interview.

[463] Name variant and further details in Yitzchak Rosenberg, interview.
[464] I Gutwein and B Censor to S Eichenstein, 24 October 1944. Letter in Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[465] Report of Havana Zeirei Agudah, July 1943. Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[466] Edited by Aharon Noach Blasbalg. Copy in Holocaust Center, West Bloomfield, Michigan. Part of the problem in preparing the publication was lack of a Hebrew-character (Yiddish) typewriter. See letter, Bernard Censor (Secretary, Organización Zeiri Agudath Israel en Cuba to M.G. Tress (President, Agudath Israel Youth Council, New York), 16 May 1945. In Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[467] Edited by Jackie Censor. Copy in Holocaust Center, West Bloomfield, Michigan. In Spanish with occasional articles in English. Censor states that although the editorial team preferred Yiddish, most of the readers were looking for a Spanish publication. Censor telephone conversation with the author, 21 November 2002.
[468] Blasbalg, interview.
[469] Yad VaShem testimony, file 03/5497. 10 October 1989.
[470] Yad VaShem testimony, file 03/5133.
[471] Lieberman telephone conversation with the author, September 2001.
[472] Per *Habaner Lebn Almanaque*, various issues.
[473] Lasker explains in his interview with Bejarano that many of the American youth left Cuba after high school and married in the United States.
[474] Statistics per *Habaner Lebn Almanaque*, various issues.
[475] Selected minute books in CAHJP/Jerusalem, Inv. 7664.
[476] S. M. Kaplan, "Jews in Cuba: Economic Life" (in Yiddish), *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1943, p. 15.
[477] *ibid.*
[478] 13 April 1942, Observations on Visit to Havana, March 26th to April 6th, 1942 in JDC Archives, File 513.
[479] Rosenbaum-Levinson interview, 18 June 2002, Cedarhurst, New York. Also, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[480] *ibid.*
[481] For example, regarding Passover 1944 see letter, Pilpel to JRC, 23 December 1943 (and following correspondence), JDC Archives, File 515.
[482] YIVO records show that on 2 December 1942 Dr. B. Surovich reported concerning ORT's work in Havana, "The local Jewish leaders show little enthusiasm for the refugees. They are of the opinion this work should be done by the JDC." In all probability the main reference was UHC; it was their leadership that showed little enthusiasm for the refugees. The synagogue's members were also dis-satisfied with Lasker's efforts to set up a school for refugees.
[483] YIVO Archives RG 380.
[484] Letter by Margolis, 20 February 1941 in JDC Archives, File 511.
[485] Thomas F. Weiss – Levinson correspondence, 25 January 2004.
[486] JDC New York, Press release, 3 October 1941, in JDC Archives.
[487] Trip Report (Havana) addressed to A.L. Sechar, 18 December 1944, in B'nai B'rith Archives, Washington, D.C.
[488] Eleanor Slater, unpublished essay, "The Quaker Star in Cuba" (5 September 1939.). Quoted in Michael Luick-Thramsaus doctoral dissertation, "Creating 'New Americans': WWII-Era European Refugees' Formation of American Identities," (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2 July 1997).
[489] Frank A Rice, Report to American Friends, 30 March 1940. Copy in American Friends Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
[490] Rice, *ibid.*
[491] Rice, *ibid.*
[492] Isle of Pines. Attachment to letter, Jacob Brandon to Charles Libman (Refugee Economic Corporation, N.Y.), 3 November 1938, in JDC Archives, file 505.
[493] Letter (in Yiddish) from Centro Israelita to Goldberg, 23 January 1951. Goldberg Archives at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[494] Sara Zaidspiner Rosenblum interview with the author, at Mill Basin, Brooklyn, New York, 18 June 2003. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[495] Report by Sender Kaplan, Unión Sionista de Cuba, 9 June 1949.
[496] Magdalena Weisz interview with the author, Bnei Braq, Israel, 21 November 2005.
[497] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1947, p. 18. Also Isser Fisher interview with the author, Brooklyn, NY, 23 May 2003. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[498] Letter, Gutwein to Tress, 16 May 1945. Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[499] 'Itoneinu. Havana: Pirchei Agudath Israel, Year 1, Issue 5 (August 1945), p. 5.
[500] A N Blasbalg (President, Zeirei Agudath Israel en Cuba) and I Gutwein (Keren Hajishuw of Cuba) to Keren Hajishuw, New York, 17 February 1944. Letter in Orthodox Jewish Archives, New York.
[501] Historia de Ken *Betar* de Cuba. Unsigned document dated Havana, 27 May 1952. Jabotinsky Institute archival file 1/1/39 "bet."
[502] Receipt in Jabotinsky Institute archival file 27/2/18 "chaf."
[503] Adela Dworin telephone conversation with the author, 01 January 2004; Dworin could not recall that her father, José, ever had any connection with Betar. Gusewich telephone conversation with the author, 13 January 2004; Gusewich stated that José Dworin and he were members together in Betar for many years.
[504] Jabotinsky Institute archival file 3/1/39 "bet."
[505] Jabotinsky Institute archival file 2/1/39 "bet."
[506] Matza interview with the author, 25 March 2004, Jerusalem, Israel. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[507] Born Jaffa 1906. Active in the Beitar movement in Poland during the 1930s. Arrived Cuba October 1941.
[508] Hadar, Volume 2:1, 3 October 1959. In Jabotinsky Institute archival file 1/2/39 "bet."
[509] Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv, Photo Archives picture no. 36718.
[510] Kaplan, interview.
[511] Baldas, interview.
[512] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 5713 (1952), p. 39.
[513] Also uses spelling, "Mayer."
[514] Philip Wilson Bonsal, Cuba, Castro, and the United States. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971.)
[515] Ed. David P. Barkin and Nita R. Manitzas, Cuba: The Logic of the Revolution, Andover, Massachusetts, 1973. Pp. 4-5.
[516] Mario Llerena, The Unsuspected Revolution: the Birth and Rise of Castroism,(Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 37.
[517] Llerena, p. 39.
[518] Directorio Revolucionario, Federacion Estudantil Universitaria, Frente Cubano, Movimiento de Liberacion Radical, Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario.
[519] See Miriam Zito Valdés, Asalto, Habana: Editorial Abril, 2001.
[520] Llerena, p. 64.
[521] Llerena, p. 133.
[522] José Altschuler, interview.
[523] Harold Weiss telephone conversation with the author, 8 November 2002.
[524] Born in Hungary. Arrived in Cuba June 1924.
[525] Harold Weiss telephone conversation with the author, 6 November 2002.
[526] Magdalena (Raizel) Weisz interview with the author, Bnei Braq, 21 November 2005.
[527] Hank Messick, Lansky, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971). Robert Lacey, Little Man: Meyer Lansky and His Gangster Life. (Boston: Little, Brown. 1991). Dennis Eisenberg *et al*, Meyer Lansky: Mogul of the Mob, (New York: Paddington Press, 1979).
[528] Missick, *ibid.*

[529] *ibid.*

[530] Thomas G. Paterson, Contesting Castro: The United States and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 52. For a popular overview of organized crime in Cuba at this time see Enrique Cirules, El Imperio de la Habana, (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1999).

[531] Gilberto Seguí, "Los olores de la calle," in ed. Jacobo Machover, La Habana 1952-1961: El final de un mundo, el principio de una ilusión, (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1995).

[532] Rosalie Schwartz, Pleasure Island: Tourism & Temptation in Cuba, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 49.

[533] Rosalie Pincus Fuchsberg conversaton with the author, 17 November 2002.

[534] Rolita Lifshutz Grabb telephone interview with the author, 1 June 2003.

[535] Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[536] Abraham and Rosa Gusewich interview with the author, Astoria, Queens, New York, 23 June 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.

[537] Not to be confused with the V. Mitrani who was active in the Alliance schools in Turkey in a slightly earlier period.

[538] Memory is selective. Pérez remembers that only Sephardic students learned in the school. See Pérez-Bejarano interview.

[539] "Centro Israelita de Cuba: Informe annual 1927-1928," Oyfgang, No. 16 (8 July 1928), pp. 33.

[540] *ibid.*

[541] Garshon Maya, "A mis hermanos los padres sefaradim," Oyfgang, No. 11 (15 January 1928), pp. 1-3.

[542] E.g., Ezra Behar, Fundamentos de la moral hebrea, (Habana, 1931) with introductory letters by Garchon Maya and José Cohen.

[543] Leah Katz Censor interview with the author, Queens, New York, 16 July 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.

[544] Leon Pérez telephone conversation with the author, 16 October 2005.

[545] Closed 17 April 1961 (day of the Bay of Pigs invasion). Nationalized 1 May 1961 (as were other private schools).

[546] Illustration is advert from Havana Morning Post, Sunday, 3 October 1926.

[547] Carl R. Berman, Jr. telephone conversation with the author, 5 November 2002. Also, Nancy Levin telephone conversation with the author, 5 November 2002.

[548] Dori Kaplan telephone conversation with the author, 5 November 2002. Also Ruth telephone conversation with the author, 6 November 2002.

[549] Myriam Sarachik telephone conversation with the author, 5 November 2002. Some Jews attended Ariel. Despite the seemingly Hebrew name, this was part of the Cuban school system. Ruth Kaufman telephone conversation with the author, 6 November 2002.

[550] Harold Weiss telephone conversation with the author, 5 November 2002.

[551] Rosalie Pincus Fuchsberg, telephone conversation with the author, 17 November 2002.

[552] Lasker (also Laskar) Steinberg telephone conversation with Levinson, 17 November 2002. Before the Revolution Steinberg owned Household & Commercial Decorative Illumination Co., Calle 23 No. 1401 entre 22/Zapata, Vedado.

[553] Alice Brandon Meltzer telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2002.

[554] Harold Weiss telephone conversation with the author, 6 November 2002.

[555] Students included Salomón Heisler, the son of Herman Heisler. Sara Zaidspiner Rosenblum, interview.

[556] Habaner Lebn, 2 March 1934.

[557] Street renamed Avenida 51 and renumbered in approximately 1952, soon after the March *coup*.

[558] Born in Krinzi, Poland. Arrived in Cuba 10 July 1929. Also active in the Centro Israelita in Habana Vieja .

[559] "The Centro Israelita in Marianao" (in Yiddish), *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1946, pp. 244-246.

[560] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1954, p. 254.

[561] Director, Mariano Museum interview (not recorded) with the author, 21 August 2002.
[562] Some estimates go as high as fifteen or even sixteen and a half thousand. See, Gerzon Minkowicz, Tsifern un faktn vegn Idishn yishev in Kuba, (Havana, 1952).
[563] Ed. Leon "Leib" Hiller and Nahman Solowiejczyk, Der Grunshteyn, (Havana: Patronato, 1951), p. 51.
[564] Meir Rosenbaum interview with the author, Cedarhurst, Long Island, New York, 18 June 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[565] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1949, p. 17.
[566] Hiller and Solowiejczyk, p. 59.
[567] Parents immigrated from Korets, Poland (Ukraine) to Cuba in 1927. Family name was changed at Cuba Immigration from Waisman due to a clerical error.
[568] Oscar Baisman telephone interview with the author, 12 February 2004.
[569] Later author of several books, including Der haynt in Toyre, (Mexico City, 1968) (in Yiddish); En la lucha por mi fe, (Mexico City, 1964) (in Spanish); ha-Torah le-or ha-tequfah: sidrat ma'amarim le-farashiyot ha-shavua v'ela-mo'adim ba-aspaqlaryah shel ha-metsi'ut [The Torah in the Light of Our Epoc (*sic*)], (Tel Aviv: Measef Yisrael, 5730-1970) (in Hebrew).
[570] Literally, "embankment," i.e., the sea wall protecting part of the city. At one time known as Avenida de Antonio Maceo.
[571] Leah Katz Censor interview with the author, Queens, New York, 16 July 2002. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History. Conversation Joseph Katz conversation with the author, Lawrence, New York, 18 June 2003.
[572] Joseph Katz interview with the author, 9 November 2005 in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.
[573] Business at Bernaza 210, Habana Vieja. He was active together with the JDC in arranging for Jews to enter Cuba, per Blasbalg, interview.
[574] Baldas, interview.
[575] Later Rosenbaum and Dizik argued about the function and building plans of the new synagogue. Specifically at issue was Rosenbaum's desire to add classrooms for a yeshiva-type school. Rosenbaum comment to the author (not taped), Cedarhurst, Long Island, New York, 18 June 2002.
[576] Nuestra Palabra, 30 June 1955, Issue 1:2, p. 7.
[577] Leah Katz Censor, interview.
[578] Nuestra Voz, 19 September 1951.
[579] Rosenbaum claimed that he initiated the effort. Rosenbaum, interview
[580] 1902-1980. Per *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 5704, p. 331 born in Lithuania, and immigrated to Cuba in 1923. For twelve years he lived in Bayamo, where he was a successful businessman. Then he moved to Havana where he was a partner in the Heisler & Percal Cuban Hosiery Mills at Placencia No. 264. Heisler also served as head of the Camera de Comerciantes e Industriales Hebreos in Havana from 20 September 1939 until 18 October 1940 (after an interim period following the 8 January 1939 resignation of Gustavo Kates.). Although Heisler became president of the nominally Orthodox Patronato, he was not a religiously observant man.
[581] *op. cit.*, p.p. 327-329, arrived in Cuba in 1922 from the Ukraine. In Havana he ran an underwear and shirt factory, "Petronio," at Villegas Nos. 409 and 433.
[582] Born in Poland. Immigrated to Cuba in September 1924. Was in the garment manufacturing business until he emigrated in 1960. For obituary, see Miami Herald, December 23, 1982, Page 3B.
[583] Owned La Unica, Calle Sol 453 (later 453-455). Schwartz came to Cuba on 7 April 1924. He died on 22 June 1957.
[584] Arrived in Cuba 26 September 1926 from Bialystok, Poland. Manufactured and sold women's clothing.
[585] Came to Cuba in 1929 from Minsk. Family enterprise was "El Francés," a hosiery business in Havana.
[586] Owner of a light manufacturing facility at Amargura 361.

[587] Leon "Leib" Hiller was ordained as a rabbi in Poland. He was a member of Agudas Yisroel, then later Secretary-General of Agudah Youth in Frankfurt. He came to Cuba on 31 May 1941. From 1949 until 1950 he edited the weekly, *Unzer Stim*. He left the country in 1956.

[588] Used first names both Wolf (Yiddish) and Ze'ev (Hebrew). Born in Poland. Immigrated to Cuba 25 September 1930. Owned a fabrics store at Compostela 561 between Muralla and Sol in Habana Vieja. As of August 2002 the sign next to the door of the store, Shaftel & Terner, was still to be found (Terner broken from sign).

[589] 1915-2004.

[590] Born in Poland. Arrived Cuba 29 November 1922. Owner of Almacén de Tejidos.

[591] 1901-1985. Tie manufacturer (Reporter Sello de Oro neckties) in Cuba. Had immigrated to Cuba from Russia on 4 April 1923. For biographic synopsis see *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1957, p. 343. For obituary, see Miami Herald, December 4, 1985, Page 3B.

[592] Owner of a factory in Calabazar, Havana. Born in Romania. Arrived Cuba 8 August 1924. 1931-1932 active in the Anti-Tuberculosis cause. 1944-1945 president of K'nesseth Israel. Also active in Bnai Brith.

[593] For description of activities and picture see *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1948, p. 246

[594] Serita Dizik Gantz (daughter) telephone conversation with the author, 26 November 2002.

[595] Factory at his former residence, Calle Muralla 107. During this period lived in Miramar (beyond normal walking distance from the Patronato).

[596] Rosalie Fuchsberg telephone conversation with the author, 17 November 2002.

[597] Meir Rosenbaum, interview.

[598] 1931 picture of Gurewitz with his wife, Mary, see Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv, Photo Archives picture no. 36371.

[599] A short video clip of part of the ceremony can be found in Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Department of Oral History.

[600] Baldas, interview.

[601] Patronato de La Casa de La Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba. Boletín #25, Habana, 30 de junio, 1953.

[602] [Patronato] Boletín No. 20, August 1952.

[603] Father, Isaac Yavitz, owned Optica "ORBE" at Calle Reina 115, Havana.

[604] Patronato de La Casa de La Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba. Boletín #20, Habana, August, 1952.

[605] Rosenbaum's picture can be found in the weekly *Parshat HaShavua* column that he wrote (in Yiddish) in Nuestra Voz (*Unzer Stim*). Rosenbaum published occasional religious articles in numerous other publications, usually with his picture (a common custom in Cuba at the time).

[606] [Patronato] Boletin No. 14, 14 February 1952.

[607] Matterin wrote for a number of publications. His picture can be found in the *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque of 1946, p. 191, where he served as a staff member. It can also be found in the article, "Escritores Hebreos en Cuba," which he authored in the 1945 Almanaque, pp. 19c-23c. For a while he edited Hebraica: Revista Mensual Ilustrada de Temas Preferentemente Hebreas (first issue November 1946). There were extensive rumors that Matterin wanted to write a book about Cuban-Jewish history, a goal that was never achieved. One idea is that his 1981 interview in Miami was instead of that book. Although custom would say that be use Marcus as his name, he preferred to use Matterin (matronymic). Autobiographic material and pictures in Corrales (2005), pp. 200-205.

[608] After his death, he was succeeded by Adela Dworin, who had joined his staff in 1970. For biography of Adela Dworin, see Dana E. Kaplan, "The Jews of Cuba since the Castro Revolution," in ed. David Singer and Lawrence Grossman, American Jewish Yearbook 2001, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2001), p. 40. Article pp. 21-87.

[609] Salomon Heisler telephone conversation with the author, 4 December 2002.

[610] Leah Katz Censor, interview. Confirmed by the seating plan published in Patronato de La Casa de La Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba. Boletín #20, Habana, August, 1953.

[611] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1957, p. 158.

[612] Abraham and Rosa Gusewich, interview.

[613] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 1954, p. 314.

[614] Noticias del Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba, Volume 1:2, 31 August 1956, p. 3.
[615] Officiated at a wedding in February 1960 at the Patronato.
[616] Salomon Heisler telephone conversation with the author, 4 December 2002. The house arrangement was well known. Also Serita Dizik Gantz telephone conversation with the author, 26 November 2002; Betty Heisler-Samuels e-mail correspondence with Levinson, 26 November 2002.
[617] Brenda Carity Krisner telephone conversation with Levinson, 6 December 2002.
[618] Moshe Asís, "Cuban Jewry during Thirty Years of Revolution, 1959-1989," in Yahadut Zemanenu (Contemporary Jewry): A Research Annual, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Volume 6 (1990), pp. 325-342.
[619] *Habaner Leben* Almanaque 1956, p.26.
[620] Raphael Yair Elnadav, Ladino folk songs. [Sound recording], [n.p.] Collectors Guild CGL 605. [1961]. Reissued 1993 by Boynton Beach: Leisure Time Music.
[621] Rafael Elnadav interview (not recorded) with the author, 2 November 2005 in Brooklyn, New York.
[622] At one time also known as Paseo de Martí
[623] Hilda Mitrani e-mail correspondence with the author, 8 October 2005.
[624] José Levy Tur (Centro Hebreo Sepharadí) interview with Kaplan , Havana, November 1999.
[625] Anne Schechter Hertzberg telephone conversation with the author, 25 November 2002.
[626] In Lasker, interview. Lasker noted that there was a K-9 school under UHC for refugee children. Corroborating details are needed.
[627] For obituary by Maurice S. Kleinberg, see Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook 1985, pp. 285-286.
[628] Charles H. Jordan, Director of JRC to Moses Leavitt, JDC, 26 June 1942, in JDC Archives.
[629] Charter granted 9 March 1952.
[630] Originally Goldstein, but he assumed the family name of his second wife (whom he divorced, as did he with his first wife).
[631] Philip Bernstein, "Ben Lowell" (obituary), Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook 1953, pp. 220-222.
[632] For obituary by Jerome D. Foxman, see Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook 1986, p. 279.
[633] "Liberal Reform Judaism and the Future of Our Congregation", Golden Anniversary 1906-1956, *op. cit.*, page 30.
[634] Also spelt "Salomon," particularly in Cuban records. Lived at Avenida 43 No. 2209 (Altos), Miramar – as members who opposed United Hebrew building a new facility in Vedado. Obituary written by Samuel Umen, Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook 1980, pp. 245-246.
[635] Also wrote Critique of Modern Art, (Nashua, New Hampshire: Nathaniel Hawthorne College Press, 1970).
[636] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 5714 (1953), p. 20.
[637] Golden Anniversary Yearbook.
[638] Abraham J. Dubelman, "Cuba," in American Jewish Yearbook 1962 (Volume 63), (New York: American Jewish Committee and Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962). P. 483. Article pp. 481-485.
[639] *Habaner Lebn* Almanaque 5713 (1952), p. 38. For comparative purposes, that would appear to be in line with 2001 figures from the United States, where one estimated figure is 21%. See, United Jewish Communities, National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000-01, September 2003, p. 7.
[640] Mendel Kochanski, "The Jewish Community in Cuba", Jewish Frontier, (September 1951).
[641] Acosta No. 211. Kashrut supervision in the early 1950s by the Yiddishe Kehila (Rosenbaum) per Meir Rosenbaum, interview. Currently (2005) the store is a carpentry shop.
[642] Celina Stein, Growing Up Jewish in Havana. (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Company, 2002). In an interview with the author, New York, June 2003 Stein said that the deliveries were restricted to the Tiscornia camp.

[643] Vida Nueva. Havana. September 1938, p. 24. Also, "Shtral": Edición extraordinaria del Comité Anti-Tuberculoso. (Havana, August 1939), p. 56.

[644] Almanaque 1940 de la Asociación Feminina Hebrea de Cuba. Havana, 1940. P. 46. It seems that Wainstein had a very limited advertising budget.

[645] Michael Gottlieb interview (not recorded) with the author, Livingston, NJ, 20 October 2004.

[646] Rose Sandberg Luski – Levinson telephone interview, 15 June 2003.

[647] Chernivecky interview with the author, Havana, 18 August 2002. Celina Stein Spielman and Paula Stein Kalishman interview with the author, 20 May 2003 in New York City. Abraham and Rosa Gusewich, interview. Anita Lifshitz Stone telephone interview with the author, 30 May 2003.

[648] Rolita Lifshutz Grabb telephone interview with the author, 1 June 2003. Also Pincus Fuchsberg- interview with the author, 10 June 2003. Tape in Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Department of Oral History.

[649] Celina Stein, *op. cit.*

[650] For an overview of *aliyah* from Latin America, see Donald L. Herman, "Israel's Latin American Immigrants", American Jewish Archives, (vol. XXXVI, Number I, April 1984), p. 16-49.

[651] Louis A. Pérez. Jr., On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, & Culture, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 455.

[652] Richard R. Fagen, The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969). P. 35.

[653] *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

[654] Fins, interview.

[655] For a general analysis of Cuban population statistics, see Raul Hernandez Castellon, La Revolución Demográfica en Cuba, (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1988). The rate of increase in Jewish population during the early 20th century roughly paralleled that of the general Cuban population.

[656] Parallel to statistics in the American Jewish Yearbook 5678. Perhaps based upon the same source.

[657] Ya'akov Shatski, Yidishe yishuvim in Lateyn-Amerike (in Yiddish), (Buenos Aires, Aroysgegeben fun Amerikaner Yidishn Komitet, 1952).

[658] Report on Short Study of Situation of Refugees in Havana, February 1939. By Emanuel Hochhauser. In JDC Archives, File 506. Centro Israelita reported 6000. JDC reported 10,000-15,000.

[659] José Miller states that in 1945 there were 25,000 Jews in Cuba. That numbers seems to be high and to have no basis in fact. See: http://www.beth-israel.berkeley.ca.us/programs/cuba/cuba.html.

[660] Liebman, *op. cit.*

[661] Moisés Asís, Raquel Marquizer de Stolar, Alberto Bóez Esquenazi, unpublished study. A possible reason for the discrepancy between the statistics of 1989 and 2001 is the renewed identification with Judaism following the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, which legalized religion in 1991.

[662] The Comisión Coordinadora recognized 1102 persons for the purpose of distributing Passover foodstuffs.

[663] This is a qualitative, not only quantitative, measure. Birth of a child in Cuba, for example, is a significant event even during a short stay.

[664] Rabbi Stanley Garfein e-mail correspondence with the author, 25 April 2002.

[665] Originally Graniwitz. Official obituary written by Samson A. Shain, Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, Volume 76 (1967), pp. 140-142. Granison served as rabbi in Paterson, New Jersey; Havana, Cuba; Tallahassee, Florida in that order and not in the order listed in the obituary.

[666] Fabio Grobart Jr. correspondence with Kaplan., February 2003. Also, see his reminiscences in Fabio Grobart, Un Forjador Eternamente Joven, (Havana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1985), "Tributo a Fabio Grobart" Granma, October 23, 1991. Autobiographic information also in Corrales (2005), pp. 32-39.

[667] Ed. Julio de Céspedes, Registro Social de la Habana, (Havana: 1951).

[668] Interview with Margalit Bejarano on 6 February 1987 in Department of Oral History File (122) 26, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For obituaries see Simeon Maslin, "Meir Lasker," in Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, 1994, pp. 182-184. Philadelphia Inquirer, October 16, 1993, Page D08.

[669] Trip Report of J.C. Hyman, 18 January 1940, in JDC Archives, File 509.
[670] Pérez, interview.
[671] Document 259. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Woodward) to the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Ball). In U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1961-1963 Volume X. Washington: Government Printing Office.
[672] Meir Rosenbaum, interview.
[673] Other records show 25 September 1912.
[674] Lasker, interview.
[675] Kaplan, interview.
[676] Roy Schechter telephone conversations with the author, 7 November 2002 and 10 November 2002. Anne Schechter Hertzberg, telephone conversation with the author, 14 November 2002.
[677] Born Solomon Schechter. Changed his name to Roy upon immigration to the United States. Married to the former Lois Levine.
[678] Anne Schechter Hertzberg telephone conversation with the author, 25 November 2002.
[679] Spelling variants exist. See interview with Bejarano on 20 May 1981, Department of Oral History file (122)2, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
[680] Hadar, Volume 11:1, 3 October 1959. In Jabotinsky Institute Archives file 4/1-39 "bet."
[681] Telephone conversations of Levinson with Anne Schechter Hertzberg, 14 November 2002, and Roy Schechter, 10 November 2002.
[682] Anne Schechter Hertzberg, telephone conversation.

Glossary

Ashkenazim – Jews of Western origin. Usually England, France, Benelux, Germany, Romania, and Slavic countries.

Bais Hahayim – Euphemism for cemetery. Also the name of a burial society in Havana.

Chazan - Cantor

Cholov Yisroel – Milk taken from a cow with a Jew present to supervise

Converso – Convert to Christianity as a result of the Spanish Inquisition

Kitel --- White garment worn by men over their regular clothing on Rish Hashanah (many) and Yom Kippur (most).

Kol Nidre – Evening prayer on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Minyan - Ten Jewish men who comprise a prayer quorum

Mohel – Person who performs circumcision

Seder (plural **Sedarim**) – Festive meals on the first night(s) of Passover

Sefer Torah – Scroll written by a scribe and containing the first five books of the Bible

Sephardim – Jews from Spain, Balkans, North Africa, and countries farther east

Shamash – Sexton of a synagogue

Shechitah – Ritual slaughter of meat and fowl

Shochet – Person who slaughters animals

Siddur – Prayer book

Stiebel - Informal synagogue particularly common amongst ultra-orthodox

Talmud Torah - Religious school

Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement

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JEWISH COMMUNITY OF CUBA

tells the story of *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim* fleeing from persecution abroad and finding refuge in Cuba, their trials and tribulations of adjusting to a new country, and the building of a vibrant Jewish Community. The Cuban Jewish Community grew from a parlor meeting of eleven Jews in 1906 to a network of schools and synagogues throughout the country. This is a story of peddlers going from rags to riches, Belgian refugees setting up a wartime diamond industry, and an American Mafioso in search of respectability. While reading this book, you will experience the Cuban Jewish Community in its Golden Age. This all came to an abrupt end in 1959, after the Revolution.

The cover, depicting the dramatic and sudden break between Cuba and the Jewish Community, was designed by Sheina Carlebach Berkowitz, a graphic artist living in Jerusalem. Photos were taken by Jay Levinson.



Jay Levinson, a retired civil servant and freelance writer, has published many books and articles about his numerous travels in over 50 countries. He has written extensively about Jewish sites and history. Levinson holds a Ph.D. from New York University and is currently an adjunct professor at John Jay College. In writing this book, Dr. Levinson conducted copious interviews, reviewed documents in archives, referred to period newspapers, visited sites, and traipsed through Cuban graveyards to search for information - even on tombstones.

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