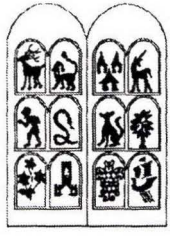
THE JEWS OF HARRISBURG



MICHAEL B. COLEMAN



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THE JEWS OF HARRISBURG

An informal history by a native son

Michael B. Coleman

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to:

My late grandparents Celia and A. Louis Buch and Sarah and Michael Iscovitz

My parents Bertha and Sondell Coleman

My sister Ellen Kay Coleman

My wife Kathleen S. Coleman

My daughter Alicia M. Coleman

Many years ago I resolved that if this book were ever finished there were five men for whom I must reserve a special place:

In loving memory:

Jacob Miller *Harry Spector*

In honor of:

Dr. Donald B. Freedman *Attorney Arthur L. Goldberg*
Alex Grass

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 7

FOREWORD 9

INTRODUCTION 11

PREFACE 13

CHAPTER 1 THE DAY OF THE ISRAELITE 15
Harrisburg in the 1840s . . . Some early Jewish settlers

CHAPTER 2 A TEMPLE EMERGES 23
Ohev Sholom . . . B'nai B'rith . . . Lazarus Bernhard

CHAPTER 3 EAST AND WEST 33
The Strouses . . . Peddlers and other strangers . . . Chisuk Emuna

CHAPTER 4 THE WHOLE MISHPOCHOH 43
The Goldsmiths . . . The Kuhns . . . The Lowengards . . . The Clasters . . . The Tausigs . . . Harris Cohn . . . Kesher Israel

CHAPTER 5 NEVER ON FRIDAY 57
Early Jewish Education . . . The YMHA . . . The Jewish Ladies' Aid Society

CHAPTER 6 GROWING 71
The Lehrmans . . . Simon Michlovitz . . . Ben Abrams . . . The Brenners . . . Temple Beth El

CHAPTER 7 ALL FOR ONE 85
The founding of the United Jewish Community . . . The Blue Ridge Country Club

CHAPTER 8 NOSCITUR A SOCIO 95

CHAPTER 9 THE JEWS OF HARRISBURG DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR 111
Zionism and anti-Zionism . . . Jews and the theatre

CHAPTER 10 FRONT AND VAUGHN 125
The new Jewish Community Center . . . The Six Day War . . . Temple Beth Shalom . . . The Jewish Home

EPILOGUE 135

APPENDIX 139

FOOTNOTES WILL BE FOUND AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

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I must warmly thank Rabbi David L. Silver for his invaluable assistance. Without his guidance this book would be of no consequence whatsoever. I cannot emphasize too strongly Rabbi Silver's aid and counsel but state here, if nowhere else, that any mistakes or inaccuracies within the text are mine.

Special mention goes to Samuel Morrison, who, being the first person to read what was any semblance of a manuscript, offered necessary comment and criticism.

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The final production of this work could not have been made possible without the untiring efforts of Morton Spector, Joan Brenner, Samuel and Mollie Morrison, Jerry and Marti Morrison, Herbert Rubin, and Allen Rosen.

My wife Kathy put up with too many hours of writing and re-writing into the night through what seemed like endless changes of seasons. There always was something to check, re-check, and sometimes change altogether. She was most understanding.

Although there were a number of "final" manuscripts, the final, final manuscript was typed by Carolyn Fansler.

And a special word is due to my long-time friend Mickey Shapiro, who, every six months or so, beginning in 1968, would ask, "Well, is it done yet?" It finally is.

Foreword

Mike Coleman has written an interesting, thoroughly-researched, historical analysis of the Harrisburg Jewish community. The hours must total in the thousands that Mike has spent in reading, interviewing, studying and writing in order to put together this very serious, yet delightful account of our local heritage. I personally spent many hours with him several years ago and had long since forgotten about what I then thought was an overly-ambitious project by a highly motivated young man.

Mike has been active in many areas of endeavor in Harrisburg. He is a former school teacher and radio announcer, a well-known expert on sports, a good tennis player (before it became fashionable), a highly-respected stockbroker, and now, of greatest importance, an author—an author of considerable merit. We all will benefit from Mike's curiosity and his diligent efforts to satisfy that curiosity. This study, which reads more like a story, portrays segments of our lives and the lives of our ancestors which I have thoroughly delighted in recounting.

With one's "roots" being so much in vogue since the American

Broadcasting Company's televised series, it seems that this book is being released for publication at a timely juncture. It certainly bears mention that Mike Coleman has not only very generously given the community of Harrisburg this scholarly work, but he has also paid personally for the entire cost of printing and publishing the book, as well as donating all the proceeds from the sale of the book to the Jewish National Fund, the agency dedicated to reclamation of land and the planting of trees in the State of Israel.

It is rare to find a person as honest and generous as Mike Coleman. It is rare to have the opportunity of participating in an event of this magnitude. I am deeply gratified that Mike asked me to write a short introduction to his book and I am certain that each of you will find your own pleasure and enjoyment in reading a native son's in-depth study of the Jews of Harrisburg.

Samuel L. Abrams
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Introduction

The first spark of an idea to write a book like this came to me in 1963 while a student at Dickinson College attending the class of the late Professor John C. Pflaum on the History of the Civil War. While doing the research for a paper on "The Jews During the Civil War" I noticed that books had been written concerning the history of the Jews in many smaller and medium-sized American communities. But not Harrisburg. And why not? Harrisburg has always been my home. We have an active and vital Jewish community here. Let's try it. Fifteen years later, the rest, as they say, is history.

Preface

This book does not endeavor to recount every incident that ever occurred or was related to the Harrisburg Jewish Community. Rather, it is an attempt to tell of some of the people and events that helped shape the Jewish community into what it is today. Extensive effort has been made to include information about all of the local synagogues, and to some extent, at least, many of the other major Jewish organizations in our town. The fact that some group or individual has been left out is an error of omission and is in no way a conscious effort to exclude anybody. At least five community-wide appeals for information over a fifteen year period fully satisfies my own sense of attention to thoroughness. I hope this book is both enjoyable and informative and trust that it examines a diverse and complex subject in an entertaining and enlightening manner.

1

The Day of the Israelite

Harrisburg in the 1840s was a busy and industrious community, and although still a country borough, served as an important hub for trade. Canal boats carried goods up and down the Susquehanna, and its citizens, who numbered about 6,000 enjoyed a direct mail link with the major Eastern cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

Moreover, Harrisburg was, since 1812, the capital of the Keystone State, and, despite its rough exterior, enjoyed a certain inner sophistication and worldliness. It was, after all, the site of the December, 1839, Whig national convention which nominated William Henry Harrison and John Tyler for the Presidency and Vice Presidency—"Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!"[1]

Since it was the capital, legislators gathered in Harrisburg from all across the state, bringing with them ideas, money, news, and an energetic spirit. Hotels and restaurants, catering to their comfort, flourished. The railroad brought other visitors, some to stay, others to continue on to points north, south and west. The frontier spirit mingled congenially with big-city sophistication.

As to the physical layout of the town, the business district consisted

of small shops, general stores, and warehouses where farmers brought their produce to be sold. The area stretched out along Market Street, from Front to Fifth. The buildings housing the state government were where they are today, at the then northern part of town, on Third Street between Walnut and North.

Most of the inhabitants were of English, Scotch-Irish, or German descent. They were primarily Lutheran or Presbyterian with a sprinkling of other Christian denominations. Life was hard; and rewards, when they came, were few.

THE DAY OF THE ISRAELITE

Although it is a fact that Jews were in America a year after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth,[2] this part of the American past has somehow escaped the attention of most historians. Yet we do know that the first Jewish community was established in 1654 at New Amsterdam by 23 *Sephardic* Jews (Jews of Spanish descent as differentiated from Eastern-European Jews, known as *Ashkenazim*) who landed from Brazil. Other early Jewish immigrants came from Holland, Germany, Poland and Spain. They settled in Delaware (1656), Rhode Island (1658), Connecticut (1659), Carolina (1665), and Georgia (1733).[3] They became merchants, peddlers, and physicians, and some were even indentured servants.

Because of the distance between these early Jewish communities there did not exist, prior to 1700, any organized group life; nor was there any communal or religious solidarity whatsoever among these various settlements. Most of the early Jewish arrivals in the New World were *Sephardic*, but there were also some Yiddish-speaking *Ashkenazim*. By the Colonial period, *Ashkenazim* constituted the majority of Jews in America. Yet their number remained small. On the eve of the American Revolution only about 2,000 Jews, or "Israelites" as they were then called, made their home in the Colonies. They lived primarily in or near large Eastern cities. Most supported the Revolution.

JEWS IN PENNSYLVANIA AND HARRISBURG

Although Jews had settled in Pennsylvania as early as the 17th century, it was not until about 100 years later that they constituted any significant number. By 1750, small Jewish communities had sprung up in Philadelphia, Lancaster, Easton, Reading, York and Shaeffers-

town.[4] Shortly after 1825, when the total Jewish population in the country numbered about 6,000, large-scale emigration from Germany began, and Jewish communities sprouted up in Pittsburgh, Scranton, Wilkes-Barre and Harrisburg.[5]

It was sometime during the early part of the 19th century (the exact date will never be known) that the first Jew arrived in Harrisburg. No doubt he was an itinerant peddler. Since the town was a center of trade, peddlers could make a fairly decent living selling their goods to outlying farm families. Following a circuit, they would go from one farmhouse to another, often making friends and sometimes being put up for the night. The peddler would reward the family's generosity with a shirt, sunbonnet, blanket or whatever else they might accept in return. These peddlers also made a small contribution to the social development of the area, for in addition to supplying basic commodities, the peddler carried with him news, information and sometimes even gossip which served to relieve the routine of frontier life. Thus, the arrival of the peddler could be a welcome occasion to many rural households.

Contrary to popular belief, peddling was not begun by the Jews. It was already an American institution long before the Jews took it over from the Yankee traders who preceded them. Peddling was the easiest and fastest way to achieve some sort of economic independence, albeit at times a meager one. Moreover, peddling had a natural attraction for the Jew, who wanted to be his own boss, or who could not get a regular paying job because of anti-Semitism, or because his religion forbade his working on the Jewish Sabbath, which to non-Jews was just another business day.

In addition, a peddler could get started on a modest capital investment. Most peddlers began on foot, later acquired a horse and wagon, and eventually settled in a town where they opened a small shop. This occurred in countless towns and cities across the nation. Harrisburg was no exception.

It is impossible today to tell accurately who was Jewish and who was not in those early days. The similarity of Jewish and German names compounds this difficulty. We can only assume that some Jews lived in Harrisburg before any permanent Jewish settlement was established in the town. Some merely passed through, pausing only long enough to rest and gather supplies before continuing on. Those who stayed were to become the founders of the Harrisburg Jewish community.

It is necessary at this point to explain why it is not possible to say

with any certainty whether people with Jewish-sounding names were indeed Jewish, or if they were, even practiced their religion. First, there is a paucity of any written records detailing Jewish life and affairs in those early days. Second, in a society overwhelmingly non-Jewish, many Jews might have found it expedient to disassociate themselves from their Jewish background and be assimilated into the larger community around them.

Moreover, many of the early Jewish arrivals in the New World were single men. With a scarcity of Jewish women in and around the Susquehanna Valley, intermarriage was not uncommon. Then, too, many Jews who came to America were marginal Jews to begin with or found it difficult, once here, to maintain their Judaism. In the doubtful category we find J.D. Gerber, a grocer who operated a store on Third Street, between Market and Chestnut. There was Michael Neumann, a butcher who operated a shop on Walnut Street between Fourth and Fifth. One of the founders of the Harrisburg B'nai B'rith was Joseph Neumann. Michael, who may have been related to Joseph, could conceivably have been the town's first Jewish butcher. There was Jacob Neuman, a feather cleaner at Second Street, above Pine. And finally, there was C. Strouse who had a dry goods store on Paxton Street between Front and Second.[6] He may have been related to the later Strouses.

Again, there is no conclusive evidence that these early Harrisburgers were Jewish, or, if they were, that they took their faith seriously. What we can conclude is that during the early and middle half of the 19th century, exposure to Jewish life and culture was negligible, if not totally non-existent.

This does not imply that Jews altogether forgot their heritage upon arriving in their new homeland. In 1848, the *Occident*, a leading journal of Jewish life and affairs, ran the following item which describes the consequences faced by some Jews who practiced their religion living in a society which mirrored an Anglo-Christian point of view:

> "At the Court of Harrisburg, the Sheriff came and took property of Jacob Specht and Peter Fyock, which was sold to pay their fines for working on Sunday, together with the costs attending their prosecution. Three other men, Andrew Monn, David Monn and John Burger, having no property upon which a levy could be made, would have suffered themselves to be taken to jail, except that their bail was responsible for the money. The fines and costs of the last three amounted to about twelve dollars each; those of the first two were more, but we do not know exactly how much. Probably one hundred dollars will not more than cover the ex-

penses attending the prosecution of these five men for working on Sunday."[7]

The article goes on to lament that a "band of peaceable and conscientious citizens, who believe that the fourth commandment requires them to rest on the seventh day and work on the first, and act accordingly, are watched with inquisitional strictness, and subjected to fines and imprisonment whenever a wicked law can be so construed as to apply to them."[8]

This moving account explains to some degree why Jews often chose to hide their heritage rather than to publicize it and thereby risk confronting the prevailing legal and civil codes of the day.

SOME FIRST FAMILIES IN TOWN

The pattern of settlement of the Jewish community of Harrisburg follows the pattern of many other American Jewish communities. Jews settled in a given place either because they had relatives already living in a particular town, or because they knew of a *landsman* (fellow townsman) to whom they could go for help in securing a job or getting started in business. Often agencies, specifically set up for this purpose, served the role traditionally reserved for relatives or *landsleit.*

German Jews, who were the first to emigrate to America in large numbers, began arriving early in the 19th century. They came to America for two main reasons. The primary motivation for coming to the United States was to escape induction into the German army. Most young men who turned 17 either went into the army or the university, and because most Jews were barred from the university, the army was inevitable. This might not have been so bad were it not for the fact that Jews, regardless of education or family status, rarely advanced beyond the rank of private, unless, of course, they purchased a commission, which at the time was legal and ethical, but very costly. Clearly, a career in the Kaiser's armed forces was not an avenue to success.

A second reason why German Jews sought out America was the revolutions which convulsed Europe during 1848. Combined with a tumultuous social climate and the real possibility of political anarchy, in addition to outbreaks of violence and mindless terror, many Jews were victims of physical attacks and financial ruin. Faced with a bleak future in the army, an unsettled social climate, and anti-Semitism,

many Jews—young single men as well as whole families—simply packed up and left their homeland. Europe, it seemed to many, was a dead end.

It is impossible to list all of the names of early Jewish residents who settled in Harrisburg. However, by 1860, the year Harrisburg was incorporated as a city, the Jews who did live here apparently planned on staying, for they were listed in *Boyd's Business Directory* of that year along with their occupations.

A brief rundown will reveal names familiar and unfamiliar, which represented the backbone of our earliest Jewish community. There was Lazarus Bernhard, hotel owner, corner of North Fourth Street; Fletcher Bowen, machinist, Susquehanna House; Isaac Dinkelspiel, clothier, 20 Market Street, residence at 2 Market Street; Henry Heilbrunner, clothier, 6 North Market Square; Jacob Heilbrunner, peddler, 6½ North Market Square; Joseph Lowengard, clothier, 114 Market Street; Joseph Neumann, peddler, Strawberry Alley; Henry Oppenheimer, peddler, Blackberry Alley; and Solomon Schweitzer and Abraham Schweitzer, clothiers. Together with Henry Heilbrunner they owned Schweitzer, Heilbrunner Co., on North Market Square. Also, Leopold Polloch, clerk, 4 South Market Square; Leopold Wiler, dry goods, 25 Market Street, and Moses Wiler, dry goods, 4 South Market Square.[9]

A few years later, in 1863, *Gopsill's Directory* listed other Jewish entrepreneurs who were apparently doing well enough to rate inclusion in this business guidebook. They were: Jacob Eslinger, clothier, 114 Market Street; Aaron Kauffman, milliner, 4 North Market Square, residence River Alley; David Kauffman, Market Square; Jacob Levi, residence Walnut and Huckleberry Alley; Raphael Lowenstine, dry goods, Walnut near Fourth; Max Fuchs, clothier, 75 Market Street; Joseph Neumann (in business with Jacob Levi), 106 Market Street, residence Walnut near Huckleberry Alley; Solomon Oppenheimer, dry goods, North Seventh Street; Joseph Schweitzer, clothier, Market near Fifth Street; Morris Stern, of Stern and Traulman, Market and Sixth Streets; Benjamin Strouse, of Strouse and Bros., residence Dewberry Alley near Walnut; Jacob Tausig, wholesaler, North Fifth near Market; Jacob Ullman, North Second near Market; Leopold Willer, dry goods, Market near River Alley; William Wolf, clerk, residence 28 North Second Street.[10]

Many of these early Jewish families in Harrisburg did not leave any descendants. Such names as Dinkelspiel, Marks, Appell, Rapp, Elinger, Oppenheimer, Schweitzer, Lowenstein, and Fleishman have disap-

peared from the local community.[11] The reasons for this are varied. Some simply moved away. Others had only girls, or the boys remained single, or if they did marry, either they did not have any children or the children died in infancy. Thus, for one reason or another, the family name was lost.

An example of this is Barney Ansbacher, a peddler in clothing and jewelry, who emigrated here from Germany. Barney lived all his life in America in Harrisburg, and when he died in 1905 at the age of 75, he was still an eligible bachelor.

FOOTNOTES

1. Paul B. Beers, *Profiles from the Susquehanna Valley,* Harrisburg, Pa., Stackpole Books (1973), p. 140.
2. "United States," *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia,* New Revised Edition (1962), p. 1859.
3. *Ibid.*
4. "Pennsylvania," *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia,* New Revised Edition (1962), p. 1487. An especially interesting aspect of early American Jewish life is the mysterious Jewish community which apparently existed in the Lebanon County community of Shaefferstown. It is assumed that there were German-Jewish settlers there prior to 1725, perhaps as early as 1705. It is known that a Jewish cemetery existed in Shaefferstown about 1725, but nothing of it remains today. The cemetery, it is claimed, was located a short distance south of what was Stirgels Tower but has since disappeared. This information is based on correspondence conducted between February 18, 1973, and April 19, 1975 with Colonel Harry E. Balmer USAFR (Retired) of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a noted historian of the Lancaster area, who wrote to me with information of Shaefferstown after hearing a radio program on which I appeared in 1973 with Rabbi Jonathan Brown of Temple Ohev Sholom concerning the history of the Harrisburg Jewish community.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Business Directory of Harrisburg, Lancaster, Columbia and York and Local Villages Adjacent for 1858-1859.* Harrisburg, Pa.: Wallace and Philips (1859).
7. *The Occident,* VI, 1848, pp. 413-414.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 414.
9. *Boyd's Business Directory of the Counties of Adams, Bucks, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Lancaster, Montgomery, and York.* Philadelphia: William H. Boyd (1860).
10. *Gopsill's Directory of Lancaster, Harrisburg, Lebanon, and York.* Jersey City: James Gopsill (1863).
11. Many of these names appear on the headstones in the old Ohev Sholom cemetery in Progress which I visited on two occasions for the purpose of gathering information for this project.

2

A Temple Emerges

The year 1853 was a notable one for the young nation of America. This was the year of the Gadsden Purchase, when the government acquired from Mexico 30,000 square miles of semi-desert land in the southwest. The borders of the country were being filled in like a giant jig-saw puzzle. Not only was it a time of expansion, but it was also one of social and intellectual ferment. A young female novelist in New England had stirred up a storm with the publication the year before of her book delineating the horrors of slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did much to prick the conscience of America while giving impetus to the Abolitionist cause.

Encamped in the woods at Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau contemplated the evils of civilization while communing with his transcendental God. And a bearded mystic poet named Walt Whitman was readying publication of his provocative and controversial American classic *Leaves of Grass.* America was maturing and with it came the often painful and agonizing task of self-examination.

Harrisburg's population in 1853 numbered about 10,000, including

24 Jewish families. It was during this year that organized religious life began for the Jews of Harrisburg with the founding of Ohev Sholom, Harrisburg's first synagogue. The tiny congregation, headed by Abraham Rapp, conducted its first meeting on the second floor of the Duncan Building, at Third and Walnut Streets. Ohev Sholom, then an orthodox synagogue, held regular services and religious school sessions at this site for several years thereafter.

Although this marked the beginning of official religious observance, it was not the first time Harrisburg Jews had come together in worship. A year before, in 1852, services marking Rosh Hashana were conducted by members of the community.[1] Recognizing the need for a cemetery, the congregation acquired a suitable site in Progress in April of 1855.

The congregation continued to grow rapidly, for in 1858, an article in the *Occident* noted, ". . . the number of our people in the state capital must be quite considerable. The congregation is called Ohev Sholem [*sic*], and the officers are Abraham Rapp, President; Moses Pollock, Vice President; Lazarus Bernhard, Secretary."[2]

Yet despite its gain in membership, the congregation was still without a full-time rabbi. In 1863, the *Occident* took note of an advertisement issued by the congregation for a spiritual leader and the publication remarked at the "liberal" salary offered considering the "paucity of Israelites" residing in town.

Little is known about the early rabbis and other functionaries at Ohev Sholom. We do know that Rabbi Reuben Strauss was the first recognized leader of the congregation. We'll never know whether he got the position through reading the notice in the *Occident.* But by 1864, he was Ohev Sholom's first full time rabbi.

Religious education played an important part in the life of American Jews even in those early years. Religious schools were supported by the congregation and presided over by the rabbi. As early as 1863, Harrisburg Jews maintained a school which instructed "young Israelites in the duties and doctrines of their faith."[3] By the time Rabbi Strauss became the spiritual leader of the Harrisburg Jews, religious education was an accepted and routine part of community life. Commenting upon this, the *Occident* reported that ". . . the religious training of the children progresses favorably, and the school conducted by Mr. Strauss is well attended."[4]

Three years later, the *Occident* noted the founding of a Sunday school, "with S. Oppenheimer as Superintendent; I. Newman, Treasurer; R. Lowenstein, Librarian; and Mr. Wolf, Secretary."[5] The edi-

tor of the influential Jewish journal, overjoyed at the founding of the school, said:

> "We were pleased to be called on to send some elementary books to the school, and hope to be soon informed that others of a more advanced kind are needed. We cannot too often and too strongly urge the opening of schools, if they be even the simplest kind, and for the smallest children. Education is of the kind that the first step is as much needed as the highest attainment, and therefore the commencement is the beginning of the desired consummation, only if it be duly followed by gradual progressive advance. We trust this will be the case in Harrisburg."[6]

The editor of the *Occident* was not to be disappointed, for religious education continued to occupy the mind of the community, and more and more youngsters were enrolled in education programs. Ironically, as the children became schooled in religious doctrine, their parents—at least during the Civil War—displayed a certain laxity toward religious rituals, perhaps because of the unsettled climate which the war produced. Whatever the reason, there apparently were some in the community who did not feel compelled to keep their religious obligations. This laxity was not peculiar to Harrisburg, for it occurred in other communities as well. The *Occident* took cognizance of this and bewailed: "It is a matter of deep regret to all who feel an interest in public righteousness, that the Sabbaths and festivals are unfortunately, as elsewhere, habitually violated, and as a consequence, public worship is greatly neglected."[7]

While some Harrisburg Jews may have been indifferent toward keeping close observance of the Sabbath and other holy days, certainly there are others who were just as militant in honoring their obligations, and were eager to share their beliefs with others. In fact, at about the same time that the *Occident* was criticizing the apostasy of some Harrisburg Jews, the community welcomed into its fold a convert to Judaism. Paradoxically, this noted Jewish publication did not look with favor upon conversion. It, in fact, raised doubts about its relative value. An abridged version of the incident follows:

> "We have been requested to give publicity to the fact that a lady, a non-Israelite, lately arrived at Harrisburg, to be converted to our faith. We are not told where she resided; but only that she had been an attentive reader of Jewish periodicals for some time past, and was thus acquainted with the principles of Judaism. We are told that a committee duly organized after a full and proper examination, felt convinced it was a free conviction which induced her to claim affinity with Israel; wherefore she was received into our communion . . . after observances which our laws require. . . . In

> recording this fact we cannot avoid saying, that we would have been more pleased with the whole occurrence, had the lady . . . not been engaged to a young Israelite; for though she may be and no doubt is sincere in her profession of faith, there is always . . . a suspicion of interested motives being the impelling cause for a conversion, and this should ever be avoided."[8]

Whatever may have been the motives behind the young lady's decision to adopt the faith of Israel, this particular episode does serve to illustrate that the Jewish community during those early days did have the facility and capacity to accept a convert, and that some sort of religious standard did exist which allowed for conversion. We can only assume that the community envisioned the conversion as an asset; it did not act hastily or without judgment; and that it accepted in good faith the young lady's reasons for embracing her new religion.

B'NAI B'RITH

> "The young Israelites of the capital of Pennsylvania have formed themselves into a society for mutual assistance, and watching with members in case of sickness, and to accompany the dead to the grave and to see that the last offices are properly rendered. The name adopted is the 'Young Men's Beneficial Society,' and the officers for the present year are: Leopold Pollock, President; Morris Hamburger, Vice-President; William Wolf, Secretary; David Block, Treasurer; Noah Adler and Jacob Eslinger, Trustees,"[9]

Thus did the *Occident* report the formation of the first fraternal-social organization in Harrisburg which was run exclusively by Jews, for Jews. When the Beneficial Society first made its appearance, few would have believed that the organization would be so short-lived. But within a year the Society's duties were taken over by the local chapter of a relatively new and flourishing national Jewish organization, B'nai B'rith.

Harrisburg's chapter of B'nai B'rith, Salem Lodge No. 26, was incorporated February 24, 1856, when it received its charter. The lodge's first president was Lazarus Bernhard. Other founding officers were Joseph Neumann, Vice-President; Herman Alder, Cassirer; and William Wolf, Secretary. The first meeting of Harrisburg's B'nai B'rith, whose membership numbered 18, took place at the Sons of Temperance Hall at Second and South Streets. For many years the local chapter was dominated by German Jews, and the lodge's minutes were written in German during the first decades of its existence.

B'nai B'rith, which was founded in 1843 in New York City by Henry Jones, served as an important social, cultural, and unifying agency for American Jews who had recently arrived in the New World. The Harrisburg chapter of B'nai B'rith, besides functioning as a burial society, also served a unifying purpose, especially in the non-religious sphere. The organization acted as a meeting place where members would gather to exchange news, renew old ties, and share a sense of fellowship. It further served to keep alive the individual member's sense of Jewishness, which could be easily enervated in a community which was overwhelmingly Christian. One drawback was the fact that the local chapter tended to be insular, and since it was founded and run by German Jews, non-German Jews found it difficult to be accepted for membership.

But the best of any organization's strength is its ability to adapt to changing conditions, and B'nai B'rith had this characteristic. It was founded and flourished in an age when people, especially immigrants, were culturally starved. The lodge offered its members a respite from the drabness of work and the dullness of routine. Various social activities and assistance programs served to give lodge members a sense of identity and purpose. As an example of its ability to adapt to changing times, B'nai B'rith ceased its burial function once the State Insurance Commission helped to provide death benefits, and as the standard of living among Jews rose, families no longer needed the services of a burial society. As a result, this function simply ceased to exist.

Unlike many other fraternal organizations which sprang up during the mid-19th century and faded from the scene as quickly as they appeared, B'nai B'rith enjoyed strong leadership which responded to changes in American life. Old programs and ways of doing things were discarded, and new ones were adopted as the need arose.

B'nai B'rith experienced an upsurge in membership during the Civil War, partly because of increased prosperity and partly because of the desire of Jews to establish themselves socially.

As an example of the social function of Harrisburg's Salem Lodge, one of the first items of business which the fledgling organization attended to was a motion to hold a ball in April, 1856, two months after its founding. A band from nearby Carlisle was hired for $12, and the affair, which drew quite a large crowd, was a huge success.

Moreover, the local lodge kept up strong ties with the Holy Land. In 1856, Salem Lodge contributed $25 to the Palestine Relief Fund, a considerable sum in those days.

Members' eyes may have been turned toward the Holy Land, but

their hearts belonged to their new nation of America. In 1861, lodge members proposed giving $20 to the Military Relief Fund. Another motion stated that members who joined the Union forces to put down the rebellion be relieved from paying dues while maintaining all benefits if wounded or killed.

Moreover, in the only entry written in English during the whole of 1865, a resolution put the Salem Lodge on record as deploring the assassination of President Lincoln while stating the members' sympathy "with the bereaved family of the deceased who have lost a fine and devoted husband and father and with the nation at large who mourn over the loss of its honest and capable leader. . . . That while our hearts are filled with grief and sorrow . . . we look to the high and mighty Ruler of the Universe and pray to Him to soothe the grief of the afflicted family and to give His protection and blessing to our Country, in this our dark hour of trial and sorrow."[10]

For 30 days the charter of Salem Lodge was draped in mourning as a tribute to Lincoln. And when the funeral train carrying the slain President passed through Harrisburg, lodge members, their mourning badges affixed to their lapels, lined the route in silent tribute. Such was the grief which the Jewish community felt at the tragic death of the fallen American President.

LAZARUS BERNHARD

Lazarus Bernhard, an enigmatic figure who played a prominent role in the early years of the Jewish community, was a charter member of the local B'nai B'rith lodge and also its first president. His was a controversial name in town, for Bernhard was a man of deep convictions who was not loath to express them openly. He was an activist, an organizer, a businessman, and something of an oddity.

Bernhard ran a hotel at the corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets, and in 1858, he is listed as being the proprietor of a "Lager beer saloon" on Canal Street.[11] His stature as a businessman brought him into contact with a great many people, both Jew and non-Jew, and he was probably the first Jew in town who was a "familiar face." Although there is no evidence available about his forebears, Bernhard was related to the Strouse family, and, in addition, was active in the town and its politics. Bernhard was affiliated with a political faction known as the "Copperheads" (northerners sympathetic to the

Southern cause during the Civil War), and he took part in a Copperhead convention held in Harrisburg at the Zion Lutheran Church.

During the years 1855 to 1861, Bernhard was the local *hazan* (cantor) and *shochet* (kosher butcher); he also served briefly as president of Ohev Sholom congregation, and once was its secretary.

Besides his involvement in politics and religion, Lazarus Bernhard was also involved in protest. In 1864, the Harrisburg *Telegraph* reported a bizarre incident in which Bernhard marched through town carrying a large banner with the inscriptions: *Thou Shalt not Commit Murder* and *The True Christian does not Seek the Blood of his Fellow Man.* Although the sentiments were noble, they did not sit well with the editor of the *Telegraph*, who denounced the incident and mixed his denunciation with a vial of anti-Semitism. The *Occident* learned of the episode and reprinted the *Telegraph*'s remarks: "To Lazarus Bernhard, a rabbi of good standing, who bore a banner with the above inscriptions . . . please inform your Christian fellow-copperheads who murdered the Saviour, and who shed the blood of the early Christians."[12]

The *Occident*, countered this blatant anti-Semitism in a forceful and civil manner. It said of Bernhard: "As regards Mr. Bernhard, he is no Rabbi. He acted as *Hazan* formerly, and has now no connection with the *Kahal* at Harrisburg, to our knowledge. We do not sanction his carrying a flag; but that is a matter of taste for which he is not responsible to us."[13]

What is interesting here is whoever said Bernhard was a rabbi? Did he try to pass himself off as one? Was he called "rabbi" by Christians who did not know any better, just as some overly devout Christians are called "sky-pilot" and "preacher?" His life is shrouded in mystery and contradiction.

In 1865, the ubiquitous Bernhard turned up at the dedication ceremony for Ohev Sholom's new synagogue at Second and South Streets. The *Occident*, reporting on the ceremony, stated that the "exercises commenced at four o'clock, and were conducted by the Rev. Reuben Strauss, and Lazarus Bernhard, the former minister, of Harrisburg . . ."[14] Bernhard, apparently ever eager to please, delivered an address which the *Occident* reported as being "well received."

Nothing more is known about this colorful and controversial figure. Bernhard's name suddenly drops from circulation. Perhaps he moved on to another town in search of other causes. Whatever happened to him, he did add a touch of color to the local scene while injecting into the life of the community both humor and controversy.

FROM ORTHODOX TO REFORM

In 1867, a momentous change took place in the life of the Jewish community of Harrisburg. This was the year that Ohev Sholom turned from orthodoxy to reform.

Changes, at least physical ones, were already present early in 1865, when the congregation purchased for $5,000 the former Temperance Hall, at the corner of Second and South Streets, which the members turned into their new synagogue. Formal ceremonies marking the occasion were held on May 12, 1865, with Rabbi Reuben Strauss officiating (the same ceremony attended by Lazarus Bernhard). Commenting on the occasion, the editor of the *Occident* reported, with a touch of insouciance, that "the ceremonies presented nothing unusual; but were, we are told, conducted in a style both proper and solemn."[15]

What were some of the reasons for the changeover from orthodox to reform, not only in Harrisburg but elsewhere? To find the answer it is first necessary to retrace the immigrant's journey back to Europe, and especially Germany, for it is there that liberal Judaism had its origin. Germany was rife with intellectual ferment, and the new ideas about politics, religion, economics, and philosophy which swept the universities made a deep impression upon the minds of young men eager for change. It is not surprising, then, that German Jews who came to America brought with them new concepts about their religion and its role in a rapidly expanding industrial society.

Actually, the first inkling of reformism in America dates back to 1845 when Rabbi Leo Werbacher, an orthodox rabbi, joined the Cultus Society, which in turn founded Temple Emanu-El in New York City. Like many reform movements, once it got going its results outstripped its original aims. Originally, the purpose of the reformers was to omit seemingly obsolete prayers and to introduce a choir and instrumental music into the synagogue. The primary intention of the reformers was to have the right to abandon whatever they considered outmoded, this being one object of the reform movement. So, too, was the dropping of the second day of *Rosh Hashana*, and the requirement that worshipers must cover their heads in the synagogue.

These were changes which reflected a deep concern among Jewish leaders and intellectuals who thought that many of their fellow Jews had begun to turn away from their religion. In an attempt to reverse this trend during the 19th century, many felt that by making some concessions, Jews who might otherwise give up their faith altogether would return to the fold.

Interestingly enough, the impetus to the reform movement was aided by women. During the pre-Civil War era, the cause of women's rights was a popular issue (the first Women's Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848). Younger Jewish women, especially the wives and daughters of the more Americanized men, supported the reform movement as a form of rebellion against the segregation imposed upon them by the ladies' balcony.[16]

Still another reason for the success of the reform movement in America was the immigrant's natural desire to blend into the American mainstream. Although the immigrants who left Europe still thought of themselves as Jews, by the time they came to America they began to see themselves as a new type of Jews equal to their non-Jewish fellow citizens. And as Jews prospered in their new homeland, they sought the kind of Judaism that would sanction in theory the easing of Jewish rituals, which had already taken place in practice. Jews who had been in America for some time and had absorbed ideas about American life wanted the kind of religious setting which would sharply distinguish them from their more recently arrived ultra-Jewish neighbors. These Americanized Jews sought a religion that would allow them to emphasize their Americanism rather than their so-called Europeanism.

Because most Jews in America and Harrisburg during this time were of German origin, the change from orthodox to reform was not as great as some might have imagined. For one thing, the German-Jewish ritual was not as rigid, severe, or dogmatic as that of Eastern Europe. Thus, there already existed practices in the American ritual which were just a step or two removed from the aims of the reform movement itself. As a result, when reform did come, the transition was palatable and facile.

In 1867, when Ohev Sholom formally became a Reform temple, the first thing the congregation did was to ban the requirement that worshippers had to wear hats or *yarmulkes* (skull caps) inside the *shul* (sanctuary). The services were conducted in German, and Hebrew was dropped completely. In addition, the congregation had an organ installed and hired a Christian choir. Those in Harrisburg who chose not to go along with the change from orthodox to reform had to more or less "go it alone" until the rebirth of Orthodox Judaism in the early 1880s.

FOOTNOTES

1. S. Herbert Kauffman, "A Century of Inspiration," in *Temple Ohev Sholom,* Harrisburg (1953), p. 7. Much of the following information about the early years of Ohev Sholom has been taken from this book, published in honor of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the temple. Unfortunately, all of the temple's original records have regretfully been either lost or misplaced, a fact established after much investigation and inquiry to various individuals connected with this institution.
2. *The Occident*, XV (1958), p. 502.
3. *The Occident*, XXI (1863), p. 141.
4. *The Occident*, XXII (1864), p. 473.
5. *The Occident*, XXV(1867), p. 213.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *The Occident*, XXII (1864), p. 473.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 473-474.
9. *The Occident*, XIII (1855), p. 466.
10. Taken from the *Minutes* of B'nai B'rith, Salem Lodge No. 26, April 21, 1865.
11. *Business Directory of Harrisburg, Lancaster, Columbia and York, and Rural Villages Adjacent for 1858-1859.* Harrisburg, Pa.: Wallace and Phillips (1859), p. 27.
12. *The Occident*, XXII (1864), p. 369.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *The Occident*, XXIII (1865), p. 141.
15. *Ibid.*
16. In all orthodox synagogues, women were segregated in a specific section, usually a balcony.

3

East and West

Of the earliest Jewish families in Harrisburg who made a name for themselves in the community, the Strouses are preeminent. The Strouse family were *Sephardic* Jews who came to America from Frankfurt, Germany, first by way of Spain and then France. Benjamin, the first of the family to arrive, came over in 1850. Benjamin Strouse, who was the oldest of four children, was soon followed here by brothers Joseph and Michael, and a sister, Regina.

What prompted the Strouses to choose Harrisburg as their new home? The answer basically is the same as for most other families who emigrated here: they knew or were related to someone already in town. In the case of the Strouses, it was Lazarus Bernhard, the ersatz rabbi who seemed ever willing to be of service.

Soon after his arrival, Benjamin opened a clothing shop at Fourth and Market Streets. A man who took his religion seriously, he was one of the first to join the fledgling Ohev Sholom congregation. However, he did not stay long in Harrisburg, possibly because his business failed. Benjamin also suffered a severe personal loss when, in 1854, his wife, Henrietta, died at the age of 32. He left Harrisburg and lived out the remainder of his life in Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

Joseph Strouse was also a clothier, and he fared better than his brother Benjamin. He took for his wife a "Southern belle," Isabella Mayer, who was born in Charleston, South Carolina. She was the daughter of Isaac and Rebecca Mayer, Portugese Jews who left the South, settled in Philadelphia, and opened a clothing store there. There is a story, apochryphal in origin, that one of Isabella's sisters, who later married Abe Goldsmith, was courted for a time by one of the Guggenheims.

Joseph Strouse was an industrious, thrifty man who made quite a success for himself in business. As did many of the small shop owners of the time, Joseph originally started by supplying many of the local peddlers with their wares. He acted as wholesaler and middleman between the manufacturers and the itinerant salesmen who travelled the countryside. Later he abandoned this aspect of his business and became a retailer of wearing apparel. Hard work and honest dealings earned him the respect and confidence of the entire community.

Joseph Strouse's industry extended to other areas as well, for he was the father of thirteen children, eight of whom survived infancy. Joseph's offspring were Renna, Blanche, Vinnie, Grace, Lily, Benjamin, William and Joshua. He and his family originally lived at the corner of Front and Chestnut Streets, which was near to what at that time was marshland. Sanitary conditions being what they were, it was not surprising that a malaria epidemic broke out, and Joseph, deciding that it would be wise to live elsewhere, moved his family into a new home at 313 Market Street. It was here that Joseph Strouse lived until his death in 1913. Remembered as a devout man, Joseph was very active in the affairs of the temple, and he served as its president for twenty-seven years.

Of Michael Strouse, the third brother, little is known. He is said to have possessed a lively, ebullient personality which served him well, for Michael was also a clothier and competed with his brothers for business. An example of Michael's wit was the time he sold a customer a pair of trousers that were a full size too small. The next week the man returned with them on, and before he had a chance to complain, Michael greeted him effusively by stating, "Boy, you really grew since I saw you last!" Michael Strouse died four years after Joseph, in 1917.

Joseph Strouse's sons also made names for themselves in the community. William, civic-minded and personable, formed a partnership with his brother Ben in what became known as the Globe Store, the largest haberdashery in town at one time. Will was active in the Harrisburg Board of Trade, the forerunner of today's Chamber of Com-

merce. Much of the credit for making Harrisburg a leader in the retail clothing business must go to Will Strouse for his efforts in boosting Harrisburg. His business acumen was complemented by the handsome, dashing figure he cut. He was distinguished by his elegant *pince-nez* glasses and high white collar. Will was honored for his civic contributions by the National Association of Railroad Trainmen, who awarded him a medal at their annual convention.

Will Strouse married Hannah Hutzler, and they had two children: Joseph, and Dorothy, who married Lester Wallerstein of Richmond, Virginia.

Benjamin, the second son of Joseph Strouse, was active in Masonic circles and was a warrant member of Zembo Temple. His wife was Catherine Thompson of Harrisburg, and they had two children: Marian, wife of the late Henry Sharpe, former publisher of the Gettysburg *Times* and the late Milton Strouse, who was at one time secretary of the Pennsylvania Realty Association.

Joshua Strouse, the brother of Will and Benjamin, took for his wife Rose Pyke and they had one child: Hortense, now Mrs. Stanley D. Adler. The Pyke family originally came from Reading, and Rose Pyke's mother's maiden name was Speier. She was one of thirteen children, and one brother, Theodore Speier, moved to Harrisburg and married Emma Wolf, whose father, William, was an early member of the Harrisburg Jewish community.[1]

MAKING A LIVING

In relating the story of the Strouses, it might seem that the clothing business was the only commercial venture in which Jews were engaged. Of course, this was not the case. Jews, like everyone else, had all sorts of businesses and occupations. They were both employer and employee. There is no denying, however, that the clothing business did have a natural attraction for Jews, and some early families did become quite successful as clothiers or in related fields. Conditions for success in this trade were ripe during the mid-19th century, for it was about this time that ready-to-wear merchandise, at least for men, was gaining wide public acceptance. The manufacture of clothing was being taken out of the home and being put into the factory. This practice of mass production started in New Bedford, Massachusetts, about 1800, when sailors in that port city had no time to wait around for the local tailor or housewife-seamstress to stitch together a suit or pair of

trousers. Astute Yankee merchants began to have clothes made up in advance, and suits of one size were offered to the local sailors. The practice did little to enhance their appearance, but it did catch on and proved quite a success. The idea spread quickly, and by 1835 factories were spilling out ready-to-wear clothing in all sizes for men and boys. Women's apparel continued to be made in the home, however, either by the lady of the house or a local tailor or seamstress. During the Civil War, new methods of sizing were developed because of the need for mass-produced uniforms. Following the war, these methods were retained and factory-made clothing began to appear not only in large cities, but also in small towns and hamlets.

It was about this time that the travelling salesman or "drummer" made his appearance on the American scene, going from store to store in his particular territory and taking orders on ready-made apparel. Unlike his counterpart, the peddler, the "drummer" traveled light, carrying only a sample case and order book. He was prepared to supply local stores throughout America with ready-to-wear clothing.

What were these clothing stores like? They were often small, dimly lit, and low-ceilinged, with a bare wooden floor and no display windows. Selling and merchandising were catch-as-catch-can affairs. Competition was keen and the profit margin small. Shop owners would hang their wares outdoors during the day and carry them in at night. Transactions were often carried on in front of the store, sometimes in the street. "*Hondling*," high-pressure bartering, was not uncommon. Potential buyers were hectored by the shop owner, and sometimes, if the customer showed the least bit of interest might even be pulled in off the street and shown a quick succession of articles in an effort to get him to buy. A wise customer would never agree to the first price quoted by the store owner. He would counter with a lower figure and eventually a compromise price would be agreed upon.

On the other hand, a smart shop owner knew enough to offer his goods at a deliberately higher figure, knowing that he would have to come down in price if he were to make a sale.

Boyd's Business Directory for 1871-72 lists at least thirteen clothiers in Harrisburg who were Jewish. Besides Joseph Strouse, there were Issac Dinkelspiel, Herman and Sol Marks, Joseph Neuman, Abraham Rapp, Joesph Schweitzer, Levi A. Segelbaum, Louis Segelbaum, Simon Stein, George Wolf, Samuel Kuhn, and Ben Strouse. Interestingly enough, each of their stores was located either on Market Street or Market Square, with the exception of Abraham Rapp, whose place of business is given as 302 Broad Street.[2]

THE COMING OF THE EASTERN JEWS

No fixed date can be given to the year when Jews from Eastern Europe first set foot in the New World. Throughout history there have always been individuals in every age who took the first step by making the momentous decision to leave their homeland and begin life *de novo* in a strange and far-off place. This is why individual Jews from the east of Europe were living in America as early as the 17th century. However, it was not until two hundred years later that significant numbers of Eastern European Jews began arriving here in search of a better life and freedom from persecution.

When one thinks of Eastern Europe, he thinks immediately of Russia and Poland, Bohemia and the Balkans. This is a region of the world with an exotic but turbulent history, of shifting frontiers, war, despotism, political intrigue, and social turmoil. No wonder then that masses of Jews (and non-Jews) felt no compunction about leaving their native land for the peace and opportunity which awaited them in America.

Why did Jews especially leave? Religious persecution was one answer. But the persecution of the Jews in Eastern Europe, especially in Russia, was a religious persecution with a political basis. As the 19th century plodded on to an undistinguished conclusion, the Metternichean alliances, forged after Napoleon's defeat to insure the stability and power balance of Europe, began to fall apart. The bloody revolutions of 1848, and, even later, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 were examples of the failure of Metternich and his followers to achieve anything more than a temporary solution to the social ills plaguing the continent. As industrialism spread across the face of Europe, factions developed. Worker was pitted against *bourgeoisie.* The Church often found itself in an unholy alliance with repressive, undemocratic governments. Students battled police in the streets. Political oppression grew as masses of people became restless and discontented with high taxes and low wages. Beatings, jailings, even death, were meted out indiscriminately to dissenters. In Russia, the reactionary Czarist government was faced with an internal crisis caused by the spread, from west to east, of the Industrial Revolution and all the attendant political, social, and economic problems it engendered. To counteract public displeasure at rising prices and loss of jobs to machines, a scapegoat was needed. The Jews were easy targets.

The Russian pogroms were the primary cause of this mass migration of Jews to America. These persecutions were planned by the Czarist

government to distract public attention from internal problems. As the Industrial Revolution moved across Europe and upset the old economic order, the peasants were crowded off their lands by the advent of large-scale farming. Some of them replaced Jews who for centuries had made their living as middlemen, innkeepers, and artisans.

The Jews of Eastern Europe, persecuted and beleaguered by all around them, sought refuge in America. So great was the movement of Jews from Eastern Europe to the United States during the years following 1881, that it represented the greatest population shift in Jewish history since the Exodus from Egypt. In fact, today the majority of Jews in America are descended from families who came here from the east of Europe. And of the 2,750,000 Jews who settled in America since the very first Jew arrived a year after the Pilgrims, over 90 percent came over after 1881.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GERMAN AND NON-GERMAN JEWS

From the time Eastern Europe Jews began arriving here in appreciable numbers, there existed a noticeable difference between them and the more established German Jews. Polish Jews especially felt put down by their German brothers, who looked askance at the Yiddish which they spoke. German Jews had long before discarded Yiddish, and they considered the Polish Jews uncultured, even crude. Furthermore, Polish Jews, at least those who settled along the eastern seaboard, often were forced into jobs that the German Jews had outgrown. And in an age when one's occupation determined his social standing, this made Polish Jews outcasts in the eyes of German Jews. Moreover, these newly arrived immigrants served to remind German Jews of *their* former status, and, as every amateur psychologist knows, no one wants to be reminded of his past when it is not as glamorous as his present.

Thus, it becomes apparent that Jews from the East did not find it easy to mix freely with the close-knit and "clannish" Jews from Germany and Western Europe. There is another reason why the two groups remained apart, and that is traceable to the Civil War. The war tended to Americanize the German Jews, to solidify their allegiance to the Union in a time of crisis. The German Jew, living here for several years, wished to become a part of the American mainstream, to lose his identity in the great, amorphous, but largely mythical "melting pot" of American life. Following the war, rapid industrialism (which

demanded more and more skilled workers), the spread of Reform Judaism, and improved economic and social conditions all served to improve the status of German Jews and cause a further widening of the gulf which separated them from the "greenhorns" of the East. It was not until well into the present century that this rift was healed. and Jews from all parts of Europe saw in each other the common heritage which they shared.

Conditions in Europe also served to shape the immigrant's perspective of himself by the time he landed in his new homeland. In Europe, German Jews had been "culturally emancipated" and they tended to have a more worldly outlook. This was not the case with Jews from Russia and Poland. In the "Old Country," German Jews were allowed a greater participation in the society around them. This was in direct contrast to the Russian Jew, who lived exclusively in the Pale of Settlement and enjoyed little contact with Russian society as a whole. Like their Polish brethren, Russian Jews also spoke Yiddish, which further contributed to their isolation. No wonder, then, that German Jews, who looked upon themselves as emancipated, worldly and sophisticated, found it difficult to accept as equals these new immigrants who came to America *en masse* during the latter part of the 19th century and for many years thereafter.

CHISUK EMUNA

The year 1883 is not a particularly memorable one. No major wars erupted that year. No government crisis aroused the attention of the populace. There was no depression, no civil turmoil, no new attacks on the nation's institutions. Calm prevailed. Industry and commerce flourished. Even art, always a vagrant, enjoyed a measure of support from the *noblesse.* The innocence and modesty which characterized American culture of the period remained unshaken in what Mark Twain described as the "Gilded Age."

In Washington, President Chester A. Arthur inauspiciously manned the American ship of state. The major piece of legislation coming out of the nation's capital that year was the Pendleton Act, which established the Federal Civil Service Commission.

For a handful of Harrisburg Jews, 1883 was the year that Orthodox Judaism returned to the community in the form of a new congregation dedicated to the principles of stricter religious observance. The new synagogue was named Chisuk Emuna B'nai Russia, and it was granted its charter on December 3, 1883. This was the first orthodox congrega-

tion in town since 1867 when Ohev Sholom turned to Reform Judaism. The first worship services were held in a rented hall at 634 Walnut Street. Named president of the congregation was Abel Cohen, while Reverend Broudy acted as cantor and *shochet.* There was no money to employ a full-time rabbi.

From these humble beginnings, Chisuk Emuna congregation fulfilled the hope which its dozen founders had for their synagogue at its inception. Today Chisuk Emuna prospers and serves, in various ways, the spiritual needs of the community. It is, in the best sense of the term, a pillar of society.

But things were not always as they are today, for the tiny congregation faced hard times at the start. It took a year before members had put together enough funds to purchase land for a cemetery and it was not until 1893, ten years after its founding, that Chisuk Emuna could hire a full-time cantor.

Slowly things began to improve, and in 1894 property was purchased at North and Filbert Streets for $3,000. It was there that a synagogue was built at a cost of $1,225. Three years later, however, the congregation faced another reversal in its fortunes and almost lost its investment, when the property was put up for sheriff's sale because the mortgage had not been paid. It was only through the generous efforts of two men, Levin Cohn and Moses Katzman, that the property was rescued. These two benefactors purchased the building for the sum of $1,051. The congregation retained control of the synagogue and at the same time hired a rabbi. Two years later, in 1899, Messrs. Cohn and Katzman presented the congregation with a clear deed to its synagogue. To the devout members of Chisuk Emuna, who were struggling to keep their tiny congregation together, this act of sweet generosity must have appeared heaven-inspired.

For the next several years Chisuk Emuna continued to grow and add new members. In 1905 however, a fire gutted the old wooden synagogue making in unusable. Out of this emerged a new house of worship, a handsome brick building which was quickly erected on the old site. With a new synagogue came a new rabbi, Rabbi Goldstein, who served as spiritual leader for two years, from 1905 until 1907, when his place was taken by Rabbi Eliezer Silver.

A year before the end of World War I, in 1917, it became apparent that new quarters were needed to handle both the increased number of members and the range of activities which Chisuk Emuna offered the community. New property was acquired at Sixth and Forster Streets for $21,000, and a new synagogue was built at a cost of $75,000. This

was to be Chisuk Emuna's home for the next forty years. Following what had now become a tradition, with this new synagogue came a new rabbi, Rabbi Romanoff, and a new cantor, Cantor Abramson.

Chisuk Emuna was founded by Russian Jews who did not feel at home in a Reform temple. The founding of Chisuk Emuna was really a reaction against modernity and a return to what the founders considered a purer form of Judaism. The immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe felt comfortable with the traditional forms of worship which they grew up with in their native land, and they sought to perpetuate these traditions in their adopted country. Chisuk Emuna, in addition to offering a friendly meeting place for people of similar backgrounds, provided the ingredients for normative Jewish observance. The Filbert Street *shul*, for example, housed a *mikveh* (ritual bath) in its basement. However, during World War I, with the advent of the community *mikveh* built on Boas Street, the advantage of this earlier *mikveh* was minimized.

Most important remains the fact that the new immigrants felt at home at Chisuk Emuna, being among people who spoke the same language and shared the same general background. There was little communication between these newer residents in town and the more established German Jews, although some contact did exist between the brotherhoods of Chisuk Emuna and Ohev Sholom. The two organizations exchanged occasional visits with each other, but beyond such more or less perfunctory gestures there was little in common between these two quite different institutions.

By 1919, Cantor Lochmonovitz joined Chisuk Emuna, and in 1923, Rabbi Moses Etter became spiritual leader. Rabbi Eliezer Silver had left Chisuk Emuna to join Kesher Israel in 1911. Rabbi Etter, a devout and learned man who was extremely popular in the community, served the congregation for twenty-four years, until 1947 when Rabbi Philip H. Singer became Chisuk Emuna's first English-speaking spiritual leader. It was under Rabbi Singer's leadership that *Strength of Faith*, a weekly publication devoted to religious and social issues, was begun.

The next several years saw a number of different rabbis come and go. In 1949, Rabbi Schneebalg was appointed. He stayed two years and was followed by Rabbi Hershel Saville who worked closely with the young people of the congregation. The "Minyonaires," a teen-age club, was formed under his tutelage.

The years following the end of World War II saw a number of profound changes take place in the life of the synagogue. The first of these occurred in 1953 when Rabbi Robert Aronowitz, a man of pro-

gressive ideas, took over the reins of the congregation. He began the first steps toward liberalizing the ritual when he permitted women to sit with the men and instituted the use of English in the worship service. In 1955, the congregation decided to move uptown and sold its property at Sixth and Forster Streets. Daily worship services were moved temporarily to the Jewish War Veterans Home at Third and Woodbine Streets, and High Holy Day services were conducted at the Jewish Community Center on Third Street. One year later, in 1956, Chisuk Emuna split with the Orthodox movement and became a Conservative temple, allying itself with the United Synagogue of America. Part of the reason for the switch from orthodoxy to conservatism was attributed to declining membership rolls during the early fifties. At one point membership dipped to as low as fifty or sixty regular worshippers. There was even talk about a merger with Kesher Israel, but this was voted down.

Following the changeover to conservatism, the membership of Chisuk Emuna picked up, and by 1958, when the synagogue celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary, the ceremonies attracted over 300 persons to the new modern edifice built in 1957 at a cost of $250,000. In keeping with the past, the new temple brought a new rabbi, Abraham B. Eckstein, and a new cantor, Herschel Sender. Under Rabbi Eckstein, a Hebrew school and a Sunday school were started for the religious and moral education of the young people of Chisuk Emuna.[3]

FOOTNOTES

1. Information on the Strouse family was obtained primarily by a number of interviews with Charles Adler II, the son of Hortense Strouse Adler, the first of these being, ironically, on the morning of Monday, June 5, 1967, the first day of the Israeli Six Day War of 1967. Subsequent interviews were conducted with Mr. Adler on Sunday, March 3, 1968, and with Mr. Adler and Mrs. Hortense Strouse Adler on Tuesday, August 8, 1972. Mr. Adler, himself a community leader and one very interested in genealogy and history, was most helpful throughout this project, especially in its earliest and most difficult stages.
2. *Boyd's Business Directory,* Harrisburg, Pa.: William H. Boyd (1871).
3. Information concerning the history of Chisuk Emuna Congregation has been gathered primarily from *Congregation Chisuk Emuna—Diamond Jubilee*, a dedication book published on December 27, 1958, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the synagogue. Also in an interview with Mr. Milton Urie, Mr. Ormond Urie, Mr. Hyman Katzen and Rabbi Joshua Adler on Monday, August 14, 1967.

4

The Whole Mishpochoh

The last two or three decades of the 19th century have been termed the "Gilded Age." This was an era of relative prosperity and peace. It was a time of railroad building, of the closing of the American frontier, of uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and of an ever increasing reliance upon machines and machine technology. So-called "captains of industry" came to wield great political and economic power. Tycoons such as John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan and Jay Gould were elevated to prominence and wealth by a series of friendly Washington administrations which maintained a general *laissez-faire* attitude toward business.

To the average citizen, life was fairly placid, and the problems which he confronted seem miniscule when compared with those of today. There was more time for fathers to spend with their children. Church-going was looked upon as an obligation. Civility was still a virtue.

What about social life? Without radio, television, and motion pictures, what did people do with their leisure time? Some spent it reading. Others looked to the family and community for fulfillment.

To many, the synagogue was the real focus of organized community activity. One of the highlights of the social season was the annual masquerade ball held at Ohev Sholom during Purim time, and going to temple was "the thing to do."

Outside the synagogue, social events such as dances, banquets and weddings were conducted at the Chestnut Street Hall. Other favorite spots were the Columbus Hotel at Third and Walnut, and the Grand Hotel on Market Street, which attracted the single set. Beer drinking was a popular pastime for the thirsty males in town at these two "watering troughs," where women, needless to say, were not permitted at the bar.

The women of the community formed their own social groups. One in particular was the Hebrew Ladies' Social Circle, which later became the Ohev Sholom Sisterhood. Many "good works" were performed by these women, from giving money to the poor to improving the physical quarters of the temple.[1]

THE GOLDSMITHS

One of the best ways to understand how Harrisburg Jews lived during the latter years of the 19th century is to look at the lives of particular individuals and families. It is a fact that many Jewish families in Harrisburg do have a common kinship today through marriage. An example is that of the Goldsmiths. Joseph Goldsmith was a German Jew born in 1854 who arrived in Harrisburg when he was just sixteen years old. He was an upholsterer by trade and went into business (later to become M. Lee Goldsmith and Son) with a man named Fry. Joseph married Frieda Kuhn, daughter of another prominent family, and they had two children: Lee, born in 1869, and Isabelle, who became the wife of Jacob Lowengard, still another noteworthy figure in the community.

Joseph had a younger brother, Abraham, whose daughter, Pearl, was the wife of Herman Tausig, of whom more will be said later. Another daughter of Abraham Goldsmith, Estelle, became the wife of Sam Kades.

Joseph Goldsmith was a prominent figure in town, well to do and immensely popular. His wife, who often made visits to New York, used to carry her lunch with her on these excursions. Frieda, who had a mind of her own, would buy a bunch of grapes and eat her lunch in some of the finest restaurants in Manhattan. What is remarkable is that none of the proprietors seemed to mind very much.[2]

THE KUHN FAMILY

The Kuhn family came to America from Obersolze, Germany, "where they kept the pigs in the parlor," according to one descendent, the late Al Hirschler. Samuel Kuhn, born in 1844, was a *landsman* of Joseph Strouse, and he was given a job in Joseph's clothing store when he was still in his teens. A real "go-getter," Sam, by the time he was twenty, had learned enough English to start his own business with the financial help of his mentor and benefactor, Joseph Strouse. Along with his younger brother, Solomon, the two Kuhn boys rented a vacant store for twenty dollars a week, stocked it full of ready-to-wear clothing, and opened for business. The brothers apparently possessed a high degree of business acumen, for the Kuhn Clothing Company became a flourishing success, and it went on to be the oldest continuous Jewish retail business in Harrisburg before it was closed in 1967.

The Kuhn brothers had several sisters: Bertha, Henrietta, Frieda, and Amelia. Amelia married Charles Seligman of Denver, Colorado, who operated a saloon in that frontier city. When Sam learned of this he became upset and quickly put aside matters of business and hurried west. He talked his brother-in-law, Charles, into selling his tavern and going elsewhere. Sam's displeasure was partly triggered by the news that his sister had given birth to her son, Alfred, in the middle of one of Denver's frequent and impromptu gunfights! In any event, his brother-in-law took Sam's advice, and Charles headed back east to Chicago where he started a cigar business which proved quite successful. Sam returned home happy, secure in the knowledge that Chicago was a more civilized city when it came to respecting the peace and comfort of expectant mothers.

Samuel Kuhn died in 1905 at the age of sixty. He bequeathed his business to two of his nephews and Morris Jacobson, a close associate who worked in the Kuhn store. Solomon, born three years after Sam, lived until 1928, when he died at the ripe old age of eighty.[3]

THE LOWENGARD CLAN

No history of the Jews of Harrisburg would be complete without inclusion of the Lowengard family. Joseph Lowengard, the patriarch of the clan, was born in Bohemia in 1821. His first wife having passed away at an early age, Joseph married Sophia Spitz of Athens, Georgia. From this second marriage came sons Joshua (who died in infancy), Jacob, Harry, Leon and daughter Theresa.

The family originally lived at 428 Market Street, the site of the family's retail establishment, and later moved to a large home at 416 Briggs Street. All of the Lowengard boys were known for their diverse interests. Harry became associated in the printing business with brother Leon who published the first Sunday newspaper in town, the Harrisburg *Sunday Courier.* Leon Lowengard was also a serious weekend farmer, for he owned a 160 acre farm north of Harrisburg in Halifax. When Leon decided that he had had enough of farming, he vowed to donate his land to the state of Pennsylvania and so stipulated in his will. He stated that the property should be given to the state so that it could be made into a recreational park. However, the state refused to accept the land because it felt that it was too remote to be of any current use. At Leon Lowengard's death in 1951, his entire estate went to underwrite a scholarship fund for Jewish students in Dauphin County.

Jacob Lowengard also sought a business career. In September of 1896, Jacob, just out of high school, went to work for Burns & Co., furniture dealers located at 2 South Second Street. Eventually Jacob Lowengard became a partner in the business where he was active until his death on February 14, 1960. Jacob participated in the affairs of Ohev Sholom, where he was for a time superintendent of the Sunday School and a member of the temple's board of directors.

Jacob Lowengard's wife Isabelle was the daughter of Joseph Goldsmith. Brainy and industrious, Isabelle Goldsmith Lowengard was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Dickinson College in 1904, a time when it was rare for a young women to seek formal education past high school. During her lifetime Isabelle Lowengard was well known in temple and civic activities.

During World War II, the newspaper aspect of the Courier Press ceased to function. Harry had died, and Jacob's son Benjamin (Harry's nephew), who had joined the business, was called into the service. It was hard to get qualified people to run a newspaper, so it quietly expired. However, the Courier Press continued with its printing enterprise and is an ongoing concern in 1978. The Lowengard family has always been active in the cultural and political life of the city of Harrisburg. Benjamin Lowengard, among his other activities, served as president of the Harrisburg School Board from 1971 to 1974, and his brother Joseph has been a patron of the arts in our city for many years.[4]

THE CLASTERS

Hyman Claster, who arrived in Harrisburg around 1854, is the first

known Russian Jew to have settled permanently in Harrisburg. As did many immigrants of the day, Hyman came to America alone, leaving his family behind in the "Old Country" and sending for them later. Soon after his arrival, Hyman got together enough capital to open a small peddler's supply house at Cowden and State Streets. It was the custom for local peddlers to stock up on a supply of wares, make their rounds, and return the following week when they would get their commission and a fresh supply of goods. Initially, Hyman ran his supply house by himself. Later, after other members of his family joined him here, he had the help of his wife and children. Hyman's wife prepared meals for the peddlers while they were waiting to be outfitted.

Hyman Claster had a sister, Mrs. Leah Krauss. A year after she and her husband arrived in America, Mr. Krauss died and Leah was left with five children to raise. Called affectionately "Tante Leah," she lived originally in Middletown. Upon her husband's death, Hyman asked her to move to Harrisburg, but Tante Leah said "no." A proud woman with an independent spirit, she tied a pack on her shoulders and began making the rounds of Middletown and its environs as a female peddler.

Hyman Claster had three sons, Isaac, Henry and Joseph, and one daughter, Annie, who died at the age of nineteen of typhoid fever. Henry Claster, who came to America at the age of thirteen, was the victim of a humorous and no doubt embarrassing experience soon after he arrived. Because he spoke no English, the youngster was placed in the first grade in school. His classmates, half his age, giggled and snickered at the sight of the big teenager in their midst. Eventually the laughter subsided and Henry's presence was accepted.

Unlike his father, Henry started out in the liquor business, but soon thought better of it and turned to jewelry. Henry Claster is remembered in later years as being tall and handsome, exuding a dignified air with his elegant cut of clothing and mane of white hair. Henry's daughter is Mrs. Jeanette Laubheim, a Harrisburg resident for many years.

Another son of Hyman Claster was Isaac, who had a clothing store. His children were Sammy, Moses, Willie, and Ida Claster Steinfelt, of Lancaster.

The third son of Hyman Claster was Joseph, who, like his father, also operated a peddler's supply house. Joseph had six children and after his father's death, Joseph's mother came to live with him and his family, remaining in their home until her death many years later.

Hyman Claster was one of the founders, in 1883, of the orthodox synagogue Chisuk Emuna. Ironically, not all Hyman's sons shared

their father's devotion to the cause of Orthodoxy, for they were of the opinion that they and their children could fare better in the modern world by aligning themselves with Reform Judaism. Many Jews believed that orthodoxy was out of step with American society. Since the rituals and laws of Orthodoxy were rigidly observed, one had to be a scholar to practice the religion to the letter. This was the reason Henry Claster and his family made the decision to join Ohev Sholom. In fact, Henry was one of the first Russian Jews in Harrisburg to go Reform. However, Henry Claster did later maintain membership in the Kesher Israel Synagogue.

Henry's wife, whose maiden name was Schwartz, was a progressive and dedicated woman. She started a Sunday school at Chisuk Emuna even though her own children went to Ohev Sholom. A feature of the school was that girls were allowed to enroll (Esther and Helen Arch were students there). The school flourished until the men at Chisuk Emuna began to grumble. They objected to the fact that the children were wearing out the carpet! However, the real reason for their annoyance was the fact that most Orthodox men did not think too highly of giving girls a formal religious education, and they were strongly opposed to any such concept.

One of Henry Claster's contributions to the community was to help found both the Y.M.H.A. and Y.W.H.A., as they were called then. Henry believed that young people needed a place to go, a place that would provide wholesome activities while keeping them out of trouble. Henry got Leon Lowengard interested in the project, and they acquired property and initiated a regular program for youngsters. Together they were responsible for what ultimately was to become the Jewish Community Center.

Henry was involved in acquiring a new cemetery, Mount Moriah. He and Ben Strouse and Rabbi Friedman bought a tract of land and presented it to Ohev Sholom. However, some people were superstitious about having loved ones buried in ground that was once farmland, and initially it was difficult to get people to purchase lots there.[5]

THE TAUSIG FAMILY

Tragedy often found its way into the lives of individuals and families. An example is the story of Jacob Tausig, who was born in Bohemia, near Prague. Although the exact date is not known, Jacob came to America sometime in the mid-1850s. He was born in 1825 and

made a living as a peddler, following a circuit in which he stopped at such towns as Lancaster, York, and Ephrata. In between these wanderings, Jacob managed to get married and father ten children. His wife apparently traveled with him, no doubt in a horse-drawn cart loaded with merchandise, as he made his lonely rounds. An old family Bible lists the names of all of his ten offspring, each of whom was born in a different community.

Then, suddenly, tragedy struck. His wife died, leaving Jacob to bring up the children alone. Embittered, Jacob Tausig, a scholarly man whom the rabbis had sought out whenever there was a difficult problem they needed advice on, renounced his religion and became an apostate. "What type of God is it that would take a mother away from her children?" Jacob is rumored to have asked. There was no one to answer him.

Jacob Tausig remarried, this time to a woman who lived in New York with her niece. The marriage was arranged through a matchmaker, and the couple met for the first time in Harrisburg. Settling permanently in town, Jacob Tausig abandoned peddling and opened a jewelry store. He and his new wife, Mary, lived on a street that no longer exists, between Walnut and Market Streets, in what was at that time one of the nicest neighborhoods in the city. Later, he and his family moved into a new home on Sixth Street. Mary gave Jacob two children, Edward and Herman, and things began to brighten for him. The family, coming from Bohemia, spoke German in their home, not Yiddish which was the case with most Eastern European immigrants. This no doubt endeared the Tausigs to many of the German-Jewish families in Harrisburg.

There is an interesting human-interest anecdote about Jacob Tausig which points out his great generosity and compassion despite the terrible personal loss he had suffered. Many itinerants came into town on the railroad, and they would invariably seek out Jacob Tausig who was known as a "soft touch." His store was directly across from the train station, and he always welcomed these poor people with open arms, often even taking them home with him. His wife would prepare a hot meal, and Jacob would provide them with carfare if they were continuing further west. If they planned on staying, Jacob would help them to get lodging and a job.

One winter, a man, barefoot and penniless, staggered into Jacob's store and pleaded for help. Jacob took off his own shoes and gave them to this unfortunate soul. Together they went to Jacob's home where the traveler got the usual hot meal and rest. Before sending him

on his way, Jacob gave the destitute fellow his own overcoat and money to tide him over.

Herman Tausig, one of Jacob's sons, helped his father run his jewelry business. He married Pearl Goldsmith, a daring, modern woman who had a penchant for the new "horseless carriage" which was making its appearance on the dirt highways of America. Pearl was reputedly the first woman in Harrisburg to drive an automobile. Every Sunday, Pearl, Herman and the family could be seen going for a spin in their handsome open touring car. They would drive up along the river and across the wooden-covered Clark's Ferry Bridge. The trip must have been hair-raising, for the bridge was old and would creak and sway under the weight of the machine as it lumbered across the weather-beaten timbers. Through the cracks in the planking, one could see below the swiftly moving current of the Susquehanna River. The bridge was wide enough for only one car to pass over at a time, and another vehicle coming in the opposite direction would have to back up to let the other car through. Often drivers would disagree as to who was first on the bridge and a shouting match or worse ensued.

The life of Herman Tausig paralleled that of his father in many ways. His wife Pearl died at a relatively young age in an auto accident, and Herman later remarried. The family business, Jacob Tausig and Son's Jewelers, was eventually sold to Charles Laubheim who in turn was bought out by Royal Jewelers.

The Tausigs had many friends in town, among them the Seligmans, Strouses, Buxbaums, Kaufmanns, Nachmans, and Jacob Millers. Joe and Frieda Goldsmith were particular favorites, and were known affectionately as "Uncle Joe" and "Aunt Frieda."[6]

During this time, Jews more or less stayed out of the limelight, wishing only to be accepted as fellow citizens who were part of the American mainstream. They did, of course, have many dealings and associations with the larger Christian community around them and it was not uncommon for many Jews in Harrisburg to exchange gifts and visits with their Gentile friends during the *Chanukah* and Christmas seasons.

Ironically, many Jews sometimes found it easier to mix with non-Jews than those of their own religion; i.e., German Jews at this time rarely socialized with their Russian or Polish brethren and vice versa. For the most part, however, while Jew and Christian got along amicably, the degree of contact between the two did not really amount to much, and was usually group sponsored and carried out through various social, fraternal, civic or religious organizations.

HARRIS COHN

Harris Cohn came to America from Russia in order to avoid service in the Czar's army. He lived in Harrisburg at 20 South Fourth Street at a time when most of the Jewish people in town resided in the area of Fifth and Walnut or along Market Street. Harris Cohn started out as a peddler and later went into the manufacturing of hoop skirts. His shop was at 202 Market Street, where he also sold corsets.

Harris Cohn was prominent in the business life of the city during the 1880s. He was a friend of Milton Hershey and a founder and director of the Harrisburg Trolley Company. Harris Cohn also owned shares in the Harrisburg Power and Light Company, and his grandson, Charles Goodman, formerly of Harrisburg, recalls that if the gas in the lamps would dim a little, people would say about his grandfather, "Tell Harris Cohn to put a quarter in the meter!"

Harris enjoyed riding in the streetcars through town. He did it for relaxation and also to get a breath of fresh air. Upon boarding the vehicle, he would grab a front seat so that his view would not be obscured. The conductor would be afraid to ask for any money even though Harris usually took along his three grandchildren, making four free fares in all.

Harris Cohn married Anna Aaronson, and their one daughter, Rose, was wed to Oscar Goodman of New York in 1884 in a wedding ceremony that was the talk of the town. So prominent was the occasion that the editor of the Harrisburg *Patriot* dispatched a reporter to cover the event, which took place at Ohev Sholom.

An hour before the scheduled start of the ceremony, a large crowd had collected in front of the temple. People strained for a glimpse at the bridal party, which arrived at 5:45 p.m. Three policemen were detailed to the synagogue to keep order and see that only invited guests were admitted. Rose Cohn was radiantly magnificent in a gown of white faille *Francaise* trimmed with Irish point lace and ornamented with orange blossoms.

Preceding the bride and groom into the sanctuary were the ushers—Messrs. Sol Kuhn, Henry Kuhn and Charles Adler, all of Harrisburg, and a Mr. Pohatsky, of New York, and four maids of honor: Jennie Marks, Lillie Strouse, Hilda Fleishman and Miss Newmark, daughter of Rabbi Newmark. Each of the young ladies carried baskets of orange blossoms, which they scattered in the aisle and upon the altar.

Rabbi Newmark led the rest of the bridal party into the temple. This consisted of a beaming Oscar supporting his bride, Rose, followed by

Harris Cohn and his wife; Max Goodman, a brother; and Mrs. Charles Goodman, mother of the groom.

Solemn and impressive was the way the ceremony was described. The couple advanced to the altar and stood stoically beneath the bridal canopy as Rabbi Newmark united them in holy wedlock. A highlight of the ceremony was the use of three languages, English, German, and Hebrew to perform the nuptial rites.

It was reported, incidentally, that the happy couple, who later made their home in New York City, received so many gifts that they filled two large rooms in the Cohn household.[8]

KESHER ISRAEL

In 1902 Harrisburg acquired a new synagogue with the founding of Kesher Israel. Originally called "Casseur Israel," Kesher Israel was an orthodox institution begun by dissident Jews unhappy with the leadership and ideas of Chisuk Emuna. The conflict arose not only over ideology but also from cultural and regional differences which had carried over from Europe. Quite simply, not everyone got along with everybody else, and it is said that serious altercations often broke out in front of the *shul* following many of the worship services. Thus, we can assume that one of the reasons that the congregation was founded was for the purpose of conducting religious activities in a dignified fashion and without internal strife.

Those names which appear on the original charter, witnessed and signed in October, 1902, were: Levin Cohen, David Goldberg, Barnet Handler, Max Isaacman, David Houck, Max Williams, and Dave Garonzik. From the beginning, it was the intention of the founders to break away from the ultraorthodoxy of the past and to create a modern orthodox synagogue dedicated to education and social interaction as well as worship to the Almighty.

In order to house its members, a building at the corner of Fourth and State Streets, the former First Free Baptist Church, was purchased for $11,500 and was used by the congregation until 1918 when a structure at Capital and Briggs Street was erected.

In 1908 the first constitution of the congregation was drawn up and signed by a committee consisting of: Levin Cohen, Simon Cooper, Wolf Freedman, Abraham Garner, David Goldberg, Lewis Hoffman, Meyer Katz, Max Levin, Isaac Sneidman, Max Williams, J. Yoselowitz, Max Cohen, David Houck, Abraham Abramson, Henry Claster, and Eli Goldstein.

By 1910 membership in Kesher Israel had grown to 62, and the fol-

lowing year, 1911, the congregation received its first full-time spiritual leader when Rabbi Eliezer Silver accepted the pulpit at the modest salary of $6 per week. Born in Lithuania in 1881, Rabbi Eliezer Silver was a scholar who had been trained by many of the outstanding Talmudic teachers in Europe. He arrived in the United States in 1907 and came to Harrisburg through the help of Rabbi Levinthal of Philadelphia, one of America's most prominent synagogue elders. At that time congregations did not elect rabbis as they do today. Instead they were "placed," or sent to a synagogue by officials from the national organization. The rabbi's salary was paid out of a fund into which individual members of the congregation contributed a fixed sum. Rabbi Silver originally had been placed at Chisuk Emuna but soon found himself in disagreement with the leadership and decided that it would be best to leave. Rabbi Silver wanted strict autonomy, and the hierarchy at Chisuk Emuna was not prepared to grant it to him. He tendered his resignation and joined Kesher Israel. Along with him went many members of Chisuk Emuna who also were dissatisfied with the way things were being run there. Under Rabbi Silver's tutelage, the study of Talmud every morning and evening was begun and a regular *minyan* (service in which ten of-age men were required to be present) was held thrice daily.

During his tenure in Harrisburg, Rabbi Silver did not concern himself with the affairs of Kesher Israel alone. He organized the Free Loan Society, designed to help those who, wandering from one town to another, looking for work and a place to settle, were provided a night's lodging and money to continue their travels. He offered counsel and solace to Jews in towns surrounding Harrisburg who otherwise would have been without the services of an orthodox rabbi, often traveling at his own expense to minister to their needs.

Because of his wide renown in synagogue affairs, scholarly works, and charitable activities, and his reputation for fair play and wise judgement, Rabbi Eliezer Silver soon became one of the most influential rabbis in the United States.

There are several pungent anecdotes about Rabbi Eliezer Silver which are recalled by his son, Rabbi David L. Silver, the present head of Kesher Israel. Rabbi Silver tells how many immigrants would seek out his father for advice, and particularly for *Din Torah*, adjudication in the age-old Jewish tradition. One woman involved in a real estate suit sought him out and told him, "I must win this case." The women indicated that if the ruling went against her, she would take her life with a vial of poison that was in her purse. Rabbi Silver, refusing to be

intimidated by the now hysterical woman, replied that he was going into the kitchen and bring back a glass of water "so that the poison would go down easier." The woman got the message and calmed down.

Rabbi Eliezer Silver left Kesher Israel for Springfield, Massachusetts in 1925 and was succeeded by Rabbi Chaim Benjamin Notelovitz. Before leaving, Rabbi Silver, because of his devout and scholarly mien and his eminent position in national Jewish affairs, established Kesher Israel as one of the leading orthodox congregations in America and was the most important factor in reestablishing Orthodox Judaism in the Jewish community of Harrisburg.

Almost from the day of its founding, Kesher Israel opened its doors to all sorts of Jewish activities: charitable, educational, and social as well as religious. The earliest meetings of the Y.M.H.A. took place there in 1911, and from 1910 to 1916, the Machzike Hadas Congregation held its services in one of the synagogue's chambers. In 1914, the Administrative Board of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis met at Kesher Israel. The synagogue also hosted a number of meetings of the *Talmud Torah* Society and during World War I, Jewish citizens gathered at the Fourth Street site for discussions concerning relief for the desperate victims of the European conflict.

In 1917, the synagogue at Fourth and State Streets was sold to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for $25,000 and the project of erecting a new building was undertaken by the congregation which then numbered 158 members.

Sunday, June 23, 1918, was a festive day in the community, and there was considerable pomp and ceremony in celebrating the joyous occasion of the dedication of the new edifice. Led by Rabbi Eliezer Silver and Nathan Gross, the president of the congregation, members and friends of Kesher Israel gathered at the old synagogue at Fourth and State Streets and from there marched to the new site at Capital and Briggs where the dedication exercises began at 12 noon. The following men comprised the dedication committee: David Friedberg, William Bristol, Henry Brenner, my grandfather Louis Buch, Jacob Friedberg, David Horwitz, Louis Silbert, Joseph Silberman, Simon Toor, Abraham Garner, and Aaron Gordon.

The beauty of the new synagogue was commented upon by all. There was particular praise for the leaded art glass windows with their gorgeous designs, each symbolizing matters of Jewish historic importance. The Holy Ark and *Bimah* (platform), finished in white enamel and gold, and the domes in the ceiling were all features of note that made the interior one of striking beauty and charm.

PROGRESS AT OHEV SHOLOM

Meanwhile, things were progressing at Ohev Sholom. In 1875, the first temple was dedicated at Second and South Streets. The building, which had been at one time a Methodist Church, was erected in 1820 and had been used as both a house of worship and headquarters of the Sons of Temperance.

Ohev Sholom was host on November 28, 1898 to the first conclave of Pennsylvania rabbis which met in Harrisburg to discuss problems and concerns of interest to the rabbinate. On October 1, 1902, Ohev Sholom celebrated its fiftieth anniversary by holding a three-day celebration during *Rosh Hashana.* It was at this time that the final payment was made on the building mortgage. A significant part of the program was the brotherhood meeting on the second night. Several Christian ministers from Harrisburg addressed the congregation and spoke eloquently of Ohev Sholom's important role in the religious life of the community.

In 1920, a new temple was dedicated at Front and Seneca Streets by Rabbi Louis J. Haas and several rabbis from other cities. As reported in *The American Israelite*, "The new synagog is one of the most imposing religious structures in Harrisburg and was erected at a cost of $90,000. The congregation, which is sixty-five years old, includes many prominent citizens."[10]

Ohev Sholom celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary with a banquet and special religious services in 1926, and in 1952 the temple completed a full century of service to the community with the opening of a remodeled house of worship.

THE SUBURBAN CLUB

Around 1903, some Harrisburg Jews started their own country club in Lawnton as a social and recreational center for community residents. The Suburban Club, as it came to be called, did not last long, five or six years according to the late Al Hirschler who remembered some of the activities held there. These included parties, masquerade balls and family outings, and sports—tennis and baseball, but no golf. The men got together occasionally for poker.

It was started by German Jews and used almost exclusively by them. Families would pack a box lunch and leave early Sunday morning, traveling by horse and buggy or car, if one was fortunate enough to own one. The men would get together for a few innings of baseball or several rounds of cards. The ladies played tennis, sipped tea and

ginger ale, and exchanged news and gossip. The youngsters could always find something to keep them occupied.

The baseball team was a popular feature of the club. No records of the team's achievements were kept, but it is known that they had a full schedule, playing neighboring teams from York, Lancaster, and Reading, and traveling to these towns by train.

Besides the recreational aspect, the club served as a spa and mixer. There was a kitchen where members could buy food and drink. A bar served the men.

Unfortunately, the Suburban Club was only a passing fancy. It became moribund for two reasons. First, it was inaccessible in distance and consumed too much time in travel. Second, many members simply found it too much of an economic burden to keep up the club's dues. By 1910, the Suburban Club was no longer a viable enterprise and it quietly ceased to function.[11]

FOOTNOTES

1. More will be said about this organization in Chapter 5.
2. Much of the information on the Goldsmith family was based on an interview with Mr. Richard Goldsmith, Sunday, April 1, 1973.
3. Information on the Kuhn family is based on an interview with the late Mr. Al Hirschler on Thursday, June 20, 1967, and an interview with the late Mr. Hirschler and Mr. Richard Goldsmith on Sunday, April 7, 1968.
4. Information on the Lowengard family is based on an interview with the late Mrs. Isabelle Lowengard and Mr. Joseph Lowengard on Sunday, October 16, 1966 (the very first interview conducted for this project) and an interview with Mr. Joseph Lowengard on Thursday, May 3, 1973.
5. Information on the Claster family is based primarily on an interview with Mrs. Jeanette Laubheim on Wednesday, August 23, 1967.
6. Information on the Tausig family is based primarily on an interview with the late Mrs. Cecelia Friedman and Mr. Lewis Friedman, and Mrs. Blanche Frank on Monday, September 4, 1967.
7. Information about Harris Cohn is based on an interview with the late Mrs. Rene Goodman, and Mr. Charles Goodman, and Mr. Edgar Stern on Wednesday, August 30, 1968.
8. Information about the wedding of Mr. Oscar Goodman and Miss Rose Cohn is based on an article about the event in the Harrisburg *Independent*, November 8, 1888, supplied to me by my good friend Mr. Milton J. Shapiro, great-grandson of Harris Cohn.
9. Information concerning the founding and development of Kesher Israel Synagogue was obtained through the untiring help and assistance of Rabbi David L. Silver in a series of interviews and meetings numbering at least five. Without his help, both in reviewing the contents and criticizing the style, this book could never have been written.
10. *The American Israelite*, September 23, 1920, p. 7.
11. Information on the Suburban Club was obtained in the interview cited above with the late Mr. Al Hirschler on June 20, 1967.

5

Never on Friday

JEWISH EDUCATION IN HARRISBURG AFTER 1900

A pluralistic society always presents the danger that the values of the majority will usurp those of the minority. In the life of the Jewish people dating back to the time of the Patriarchs, the problem of retaining and perpetuating group identity has plagued Jews. How does any minority prevent erosion of basic beliefs, tenets and philosophies? What is the effect of secularism on religion?

The home and the synagogue have stood as bulwarks impeding the erosion of basic Jewish traditions. These two institutions have advanced the timeless truths associated with Judaism: the synagogue through religious worship and the home by example and close family ties. The role of the professional educator in fostering Jewish identity among young people is equally important. Harrisburg was fortunate in always having in its midst dedicated men and women to instruct its youth in Jewish ways.

In the present century, one such individual was Joseph Klein, an able, personable scholar who, from about 1907, conducted Hebrew classes in his home on State Street, then at 635 Boas Street, and finally

412 Briggs Street until he joined the Harrisburg Hebrew School as principal in the mid-1920s. Parents paid $3, then $4 a month to have their children attend his school six days a week. Only on Fridays did the school not have classes. Rabbi David L. Silver was a pupil of Mr. Klein, and he remembers that the curriculum included the study of the Bible, Hebrew, Jewish history, Jewish culture and Jewish law. He recalls Mr. Klein as a man who expected high standards of his charges, and who kept them in tow with an intensive program of instruction. Long hours of study were required to get a passing grade.

Another who was concerned that the youth were not being properly informed about their Jewish heritage was Dr. Nachman Heller, a Harrisburger of great erudition who offered instruction in Jewish education.

Hirsch Meyerowitz, an emigre from Latvia, who came to Harrisburg in 1901, ran his own printshop and conducted part-time classes for young people.

The *Hasidic shul* at Fourth and Hamilton Streets was run by members of Machzike Hadas, founded in Harrisburg in 1904. The synagogue instilled to its younger members the tenets of *Hasidism* through its method of worship.

Unfortunately, most of these early efforts at religious education did not touch a significant portion of the community. Many schools, while being long on education, were short on funds and disbanded almost as quickly as they were begun. There was no single community-supported school offering a curriculum of Jewish education to the young. Then, around 1920, the concept of *Talmud Torah* caught on. One must go back to the cultural soil of Eastern Europe to find the roots of *Talmud Torah.* It was the custom among the well-to-do to have their children instructed by private tutors. It was *gauche* to have a child in a community school, such as *Talmud Torah.* Only poor children went there. This same attitude, against community-run schools unfortunately persisted in America. But with the rise of secularism and the lowering of moral standards following World War I, concerned leaders in the community threw tradition to the wind. Recognizing that children were growing up lacking even the rudiments of Jewish life and culture, opposition to a *Talmud Torah* abated. The idea of a community school for all children, rich and poor, was accepted. Here, finally, was a chance for all Jewish boys and girls to receive instruction in the faith of their ancestors. In Rabbi Silver's words: "The *Talmud Torah* was started so that parents could not find an excuse for not giving their children a Hebrew education."[1]

Harrisburg's *Talmud Torah* was the brainchild of Rabbi Eliezer Silver, Joseph Silberman and his wife, Jennie, Izzie Lipmann, and Jacob Cohn. It was first organized at Kesher Israel synagogue but classes were held both there and at Chisuk Emuna. Rising enrollment forced the *Talmud Torah* to seek a new site which was found at 637 Boas Street; but, this too, proved inadequate. The school moved first to Forster Street; and, finally, in the mid-twenties, into the "Y" at 1102 North Third Street.

The school, which met afternoons following the student's regular public school classes, soon became affiliated with the Jewish Welfare Federation. It became so popular that it was soon luring scholars to its ranks. Mr. Klein gave up his own private school and joined the *Talmud Torah*'s faculty. So did Mr. Meyerowitz, who stayed on and retired as the school's longest-tenured instructor.

Within a few years, the name *Talmud Torah* was Americanized and became, if somewhat prosaic, the Harrisburg Hebrew School in 1920. However, the change of name in no way diminished the school's high standards. Classes met six days a week and the well-rounded curriculum stressed intensive study of the works of the prophets, Torah and Commentary Rashi, grammar and literature, Jewish ethics, singing and current events. There was even a program for children under six enrolled in the kindergarten. Funds for the school's upkeep and salaries came from a paid membership and regular synagogue appeals.

Thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Eliezer Silver, Jewish education in Harrisburg was given a new breath of life. Where before, education was random and diffused throughout the community, now it had been coalesced and brought under one roof. The chief beneficiaries have been the Jews of Harrisburg, for they have been enriched and invigorated through a program of study which stresses Jewish identity and commitment to Jewish ideals stretching back nearly six millennia.

Adult education was to receive considerable attention. Rabbi David L. Silver, continuing the work his father had begun a decade earlier, organized the Talmud Study Circle, and classes were conducted in Yiddish. Many Jews from Harrisburg attended these Saturday afternoon sessions. The courses continue today, with Rabbi Silver still at the helm. Many serious minded persons meet regularly.

Rabbi David L. Silver has pushed for programs of high educational standards within the community. His insights into pedagogical theories, his love of teaching, and his erudition qualify him as an expert on Jewish education. He strongly favors community-supported Hebrew schools that are run separately from the synagogue. He views

the school as a vital conduit for perpetuating group identity, especially during the present age with its rampant secularism and assimilation. Hebrew schools, he argues, should not be used by the congregation as an enticement to lure new members. The first and only function of a Hebrew school is education of the young in the tenets of religion and culture. So strongly does he feel about this, that he is fond of quoting the passage from the Talmud that stresses the higher importance of a school over that of a synagogue.

"A synagogue can be sold to build a school," Rabbi Silver reminds us.

In 1970, the Harrisburg Hebrew School commemorated its Golden Anniversary. For half of its existence, the school has been in the capable hands of Benjamin Lipsky, who was named to the post of principal in 1942. Lipsky and his dedicated wife Pninah, have been instrumental in the success of the Harrisburg Hebrew School.

THE YESHIVA

A rare distinction is Harrisburg's claim to be the first small Jewish community in America to have a full-time day school, the Harrisburg Yeshiva Academy. Begun in the forties by Rabbi Silver, the Yeshiva met opposition when the idea was first proposed. Some feared that its standards would be compromised. Others argued that there were not enough youngsters to support such a venture. On both counts, these fears proved baseless. The Yeshiva Academy has prospered and retained the high standard of excellence which Rabbi Silver and Aaron S. Feinerman envisioned for it when they welcomed the first students in 1944. It boasts of a comprehensive program of study of both Jewish and regular academic subjects. Classes, which run through the ninth grade, are conducted in English and Hebrew. The Hebrew principal for many years was Rabbi Paul Goldberg. There is little faculty turnover, a strong indication of the dedication of its staff. One teacher Eleanor Koplovitz, has amassed over twenty-five years of service to the Yeshiva.

Jewish education has always been disseminated in traditional ways through the synagogues, which run their own Sunday schools and mid-week classes. Despite what some critics decry as disinterest among Jewish youth, these traditional means of educating the young continue to attract those eager for knowledge about their heritage. As an example of the community's commitment to Jewish education, the Harrisburg High School for Jewish Studies was begun in 1967 with 8

students and 2 teachers. In just eleven years, enrollment and faculty have more than quadrupled and all indications point to further growth in the future.

EARLY DAYS OF YMHA

A community without organization, without a unifying agency to bring disparate parties within it together, is a community lacking direction and cohesiveness. Fortunately, Harrisburg has never lacked organizations which express the diversified interests of its people in an arena of cultural similarity. Synagogue life has been augmented by a lively and varied program of athletic, fraternal, cultural, and intellectual activities of broad appeal. Probably the most successful single organization that brought together all elements of the community under one roof was the Y.M.H.A., the forerunner of today's Jewish Community Center.

The Harrisburg "Y" dates back to just before America's entry into World War I. The year was 1915 when Louis Brenner, state representative of the National Council of Y.M.H.A.s and Y.W.H.A.s laid the basis for a successful beginning. Speaking before a mass meeting attended by several hundred in the old Technical High School auditorium, Mr. Brenner roused the community to action with a spirited exhortation about the success which other "Y's" had in developing programs at a local level. His words were persuasive, for very soon a committee was busy looking for a site for Harrisburg's own "Y." A vacant house at 6th and Sayford Streets was leased, and Leon Lowengard was named president of the local organization. Leon was a good choice. Single, outgoing, and an excellent organizer, he devoted many hours to planning programs relevant to the needs of the community.

Initially, the "Y" functioned as a place that offered wholesome activities to young people to keep them out of mischief. Gradually, the "Y" enlarged its appeal. Sports, recreation, physical conditioning, games and leisure-time competition dominated the program at first. Scouting, for boys and girls, was an important "Y" function.

In addition, there was available to the more cerebral-minded, a diversity of cultural, intellectual and religious programs, such as literary discussion groups, choral societies, dramatics and debating teams.

Finally, the "Y" served to bring together people of various shades of belief and background. Factionalism—German Jews versus those from Eastern Europe, which had a negative impact in the Jewish com-

munity—lessened. The two groups began to participate together in activities that emphasized their similiar interests.

Flexibility was a virtue of the "Y." This was demonstrated by the way it adapted itself to the needs of the community during times of change. In World War I the "Y" shifted the focus of its concern and became a sort of quasi-USO club, providing a host of activities and diversions for Jewish soldiers stationed at Army posts in Carlisle, Gettysburg, and other central Pennsylvania towns.

After 1918, with the Armistice signed and doughboys returning home, the "Y" switched back to strictly community-oriented programs. However, the transition was not without difficulty. Interest in the "Y" waned and activities were curtailed. For several years it subsisted with irregular meetings sparsely attended by a few die-hards at the old Knights of Pythias Hall at Second and Pine Streets.

Then the Jazz Age exploded. Interest reawakened. Members returned. Programs were revived. The age was not unlike our own. New ideas, fads and lifestyles sprouted like mushrooms. Women, too, were rethinking their place in society. Some dared smoke in public; others marched for the vote. Under the leadership of Miss Anna Smarr and Mrs. William Israel, the Y.W.H.A. devised programs of interest to single and married women on politics, feminism, home decorating, dramatics, literature and social service. In 1924, leaders of both the Y.M.H.A. and the Y.W.H.A. agreed to merge. Jacob R. Geoffrey was named to head the newly wedded "Y's," and when he was installed as executive director, he presided over an organization that boasted 709 members, 13 clubs and organizations, and a Sunday School with 150 pupils, a dozen teachers, and eight grades. Although the "new Y" did not lack for members or enthusiasm, the same could not be said about its facilities. There was no gym, and arrangements had to be made to use the one at Felton Hall.

Before long, a building at 1102 North Third Street, complete with combination gym and auditorium, became the "Y's" new home. These expanded facilities were dedicated by Herman Tausig, president of the "Y," at a colorful ceremony.

In 1925, Mr. Tausig was re-elected president along with Louis Lehrman, vice president; Henry Brenner, treasurer; and Paul Goldblatt, executive director. It was under Mr. Goldblatt's guidance that the programs at the "Y" flourished. A native New Yorker and a graduate of New York University, he was 26 when he stepped into the director's post. Popular with just about everyone in town, he was a fine athlete,

community leader, and was instrumental in the new-found popularity of the Harrisburg Y.M.H.A.

One of the most important names associated with the "Y" during its formative years was Henry Claster. His commitment, dedication, and expertise in extending the organization's activities and influence within the community were untiring. He was helped by able people who were always willing to pitch in and do what they could. Special committees to oversee fund-raising, membership drives, and building programs were chaired by prominent individuals active in the business and cultural life of the community. Here, in a typical year (1926), were the chairmen of the standing committees: Simon Michlovitz, membership committee; Lou Nathan, social committee; David Kaufmann, building committee; Joseph Claster, finance committee; Henry Schiffman, house committee; Louis Lehrman, religious committee; and Samuel Finkelstein, ways and means committee.[2]

A long-time Harrisburger intimately associated with the "Y" and later the Jewish Community Center (the name change occurred in 1941) is Albert Hursh. Albert Hursh began working for the Jewish Community Center in 1933. Mrs. Pauline Levinsohn, who was president of the Jewish Ladies' Aid Society, asked him if he would like to work at the Center part-time after school. These were the rough days of the Depression and the Ladies' Aid Society was assisting his family and also helping him to continue his education. Hursh gladly took the opportunity, for he was elated to get any work at all under these trying financial circumstances. After a few months, Louis Lehrman, who at the time was treasurer of the Center, asked him if he would like to continue on a full time basis at a salary of $10 per week. He accepted the offer after graduating from high school and continued serving in various capacities until 1951 when he was appointed executive director of the Jewish Community Center and the United Jewish Community. 1978 marks his 45th year of continuous service to the Jewish community of Harrisburg.

Albert Hursh recalls how the "Y," during its early days, stressed sports and competition. Filling in the hours with purposeful activities was the goal of the founders. Scouting was quite popular. Boy Scout Troup 2 was reorganized by Scoutmaster Harry Sherman, and regular meetings were held at the Center. "Heis" was a popular athlete, and he later signed on as the "Y's" physical education director.

The local "Y" always had a good basketball squad, and it competed in the Central Pennsylvania Y.M.H.A. League. The home team

played quintets from Coatesville, Reading, Lancaster, York, and Steelton. In 1926, the varsity was captained by Harry "Heis" Sherman, and the rest of the squad included: Hyman Williams, Manny Lax, Joe Crane, Lou Weiss, Manuel Cohn, Morris Michlovitz, Ben Lehrman, Frank Kremer, Sam Forman, Bob Cohn, Sam Abrams and Ben Garner. League games were held on Wednesdays, and they were usually a sell-out. Steelton was a big rival, and in the opening game of the 1926-27 season, the locals "trounced" their foes 28-17. Low-scoring games were the norm then. The basket may have been the same height, but the players apparently were built closer to the floor.

But no one lives by sports alone. Thus, for the less physically motivated and more intellectually inclined, the "Y" hosted a literary discussion group for teenagers. The writings of leading American authors and poets were read and analyzed. Carl Sandburg, Emily Dickinson, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, and Robert Frost were some whose works were digested. Young people met, appropriately, in a top floor garret, and although symbolic, the place was either too cold in winter or too warm in summer. But that was the price these young literati were willing to pay for intellectual stimulation.

By far the most popular single event at the "Y" was the annual Thanksgiving Day dinner-dance. The first one, in 1920, was at the Penn-Harris Hotel.

In the mid-twenties, the "Y" was home to 42 different organizations. Some of the groups that met there were: Mutual Loan Society, *Arbeiter* Ring (workman's group), Jewish Ladies' Aid Society, Sunday school, Teacher's Training class, Women's Jewish study class, Young Judea Boys, Young Judea Girls, Girl Scouts, Hadassah, Hadassah Buds, Beta Rho and Sigma Alpha Rho fraternities, and Machzike Hadas Congregation.

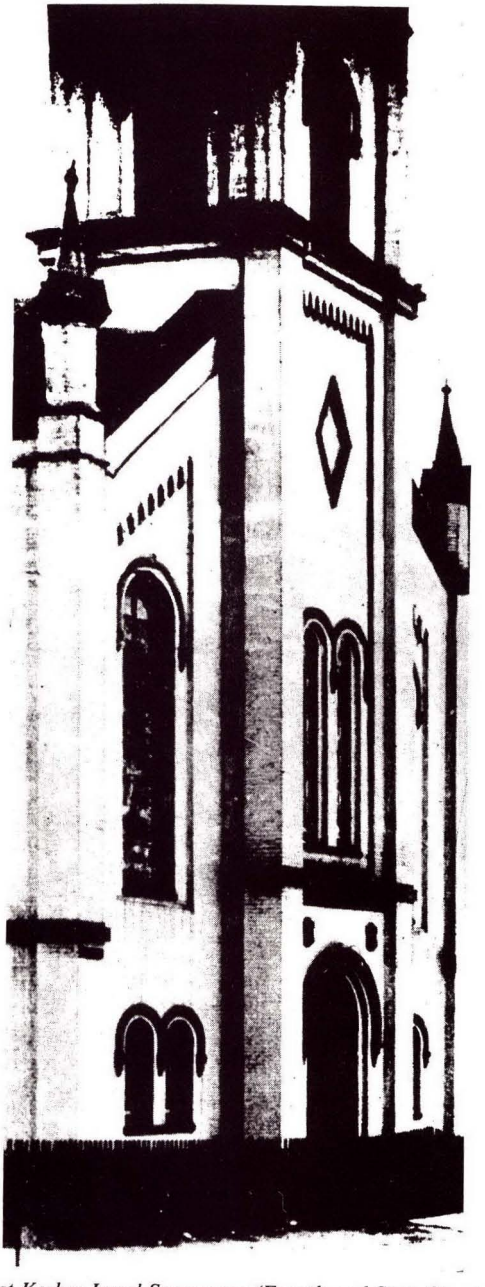
Where did the "Y" get its financial support? Membership dues were one source, but often they were not enough. The year the gym was added, family dues were upped to $18 annually, and as more activities became available, it was necessary to look for additional revenue elsewhere. Even a concerted membership drive, like the one in 1925, only reached half its goal, signing up 250 new people out of a projected 500. Some income was realized from special events, such as dances, minstrel shows, choral offerings and plays. But the biggest source of revenue was the yearly contribution from the Harrisburg Welfare Fund, a non-sectarian, city-wide philanthropy which was the forerunner of the Community Chest and later the United Way. The Welfare Fund aided all worthy organizations regardless of creed, and



Four great Spiritual Leaders (left to right): Rabbi Philip David Bookstaber, Rabbi Reuben J. Magil, Rabbi David L. Silver, and Cantor Abraham Reisman



The Suburban Club, 1906 (left to right): Row 1: Benjamin Strouse, Estelle Kades, Lilly Sims, Ed Sims, Dorothy Strouse (now Mrs. Lester Wallerstein of Richmond, Virginia), Herman Berg, Evelyn Guttman, Mildred Guttman, Hortense Strouse (now Mrs. Stanley D. Adler). Row 2: Mr. Levinson, Mr. Levin, Leon Lowengard, Isabelle Goldsmith Lowengard, unidentified, Eli Goldstein, unidentified, Sam Kades, unidentified



First Kesher Israel Synagogue (Fourth and State Streets)

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דער

חברה קשר ישראל

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נאָרד אַמעריקאַ.

1902.



האַררישבורג, פאַ.

געדרוקט בייה. ל. מאיראָוויטץ, 533 פילבערט סט.

1908.

Constitution of the Kesher Israel Synagogue



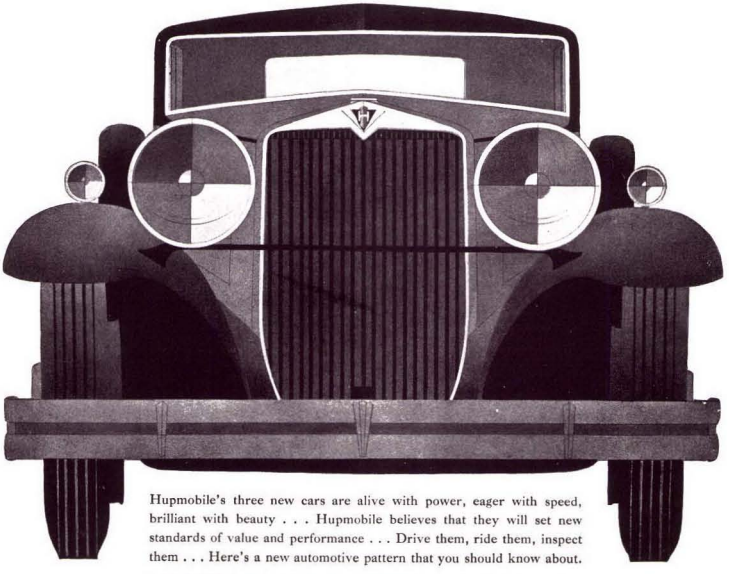
Early Officers of the Temple Beth El Congregation (clockwise from upper left): Henry H. Brenner, President; Hyman Morrison, Vice-President; S. Sidney Raffel, Treasurer; Arthur Koplovitz, Vice-President; Max I. Klass, Financial Secretary; Monroe Cohen, Recording Secretary

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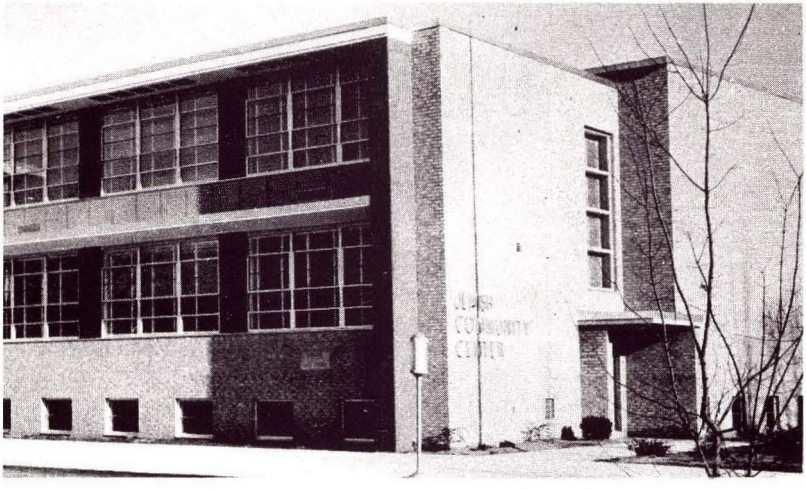
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An early advertisement for the M. Brenner & Sons Motor Company



Jewish Community Center, Harrisburg, Pa.



Gustav Kaplan: Founder of the United Jewish Community



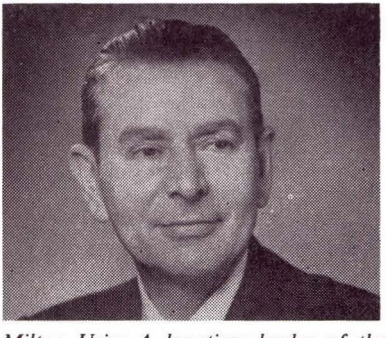
Miss Mary Sachs



Rabbi Eliezer Silver: Kesher Israel's first rabbi and during his lifetime one of the nation's outstanding spiritual leaders



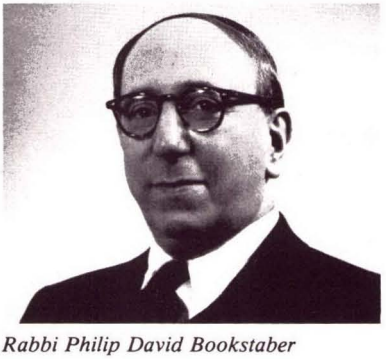
Rabbi David L. Silver



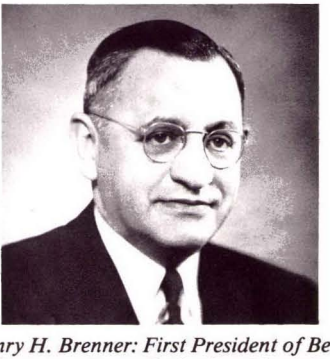
Milton Urie: A longtime leader of the Chisuk Emuna Congregation



Jacob Miller: A Harrisburg Jew Beloved By All Who Knew Him



Rabbi Philip David Bookstaber



Henry H. Brenner: First President of Beth El Congregation and a leading Harrisburg Jew for over half a century.

the "Y" was one of the fortunate beneficiaries. In fiscal year 1925-26, the "Y" was granted $7,956.50 toward its operation budget of $10,156.50. The remaining $2,200 represented membership dues which the "Y" was obligated to raise.

As a place for new and exciting ideas, the "Y" provided a forum for important figures in the arts, religion, literature, politics and social thought, who spoke before large and enthusiastic gatherings. In May 1928, the Zionist leader Stephen S. Wise was invited to Harrisburg and spoke to an overflow crowd in the old Chestnut Street Hall. The United League invited leading names in Jewish affairs to lecture at the Center. Here are the names of those who were invited to speak at the Fall, 1928 program: Maurice Samuel, author and philosopher; Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, called by the *Community Review* the "silver-tongued orator of the American rabbinate;" James Waterman Wise, social commentator; Professor Mordecai M. Kaplan, rabbi and founder of the Reconstructionist Movement; Louis Golding, Anglo-Jewish novelist; and Rabbi Nathan Krauss of Temple Emanuel in New York.

In an era predating the rise of the women's movement, it was natural that the "Y" reflected a predominantly masculine image. Athletics and sports were emphasized. However, women were not left out. Women did play a role, albeit a limited one, in the planning of activities. The Young Women's League offered courses in literature, music, dramatics and social service. Officers were Lee Marcus, president; Sophia T. Reiter, vice president; Pauline Fischman, secretary; and Rebecca Aronson, financial secretary. Membership in the league soared to over 40 within a year after its founding.[3]

Women also ran the Ohev Sholom Sunday school at the "Y." Helen Mayer, Peg Strauss, and Jeanette Laubheim taught there. They are remembered both for their high degree of dedication and colorful organdy dresses and Leghorn hats so popular at the time.

As the official voice of the "Y," the *Community Review* was started in 1925 and the first issues were filled with short, pungent and newsy items about upcoming events, new programs, reminders of financial obligations, and vignettes on people and activities. The *Review* was, and remains today, a valuable wellspring of news, information and a link between the Center and the community it serves. Its editor for several years was the late Solomon Hurwitz, a young lawyer admitted to practice the same year (1928) he took over from Paul Goldblatt, the outgoing editor. He retained the *Review's* lively style and kept it informative and topical. Sol Hurwitz, later to become one

of Harrisburg's leading attorneys, immersed himself in community affairs, serving on the executive committee of the Unity League and as president of the Beth El Junior Brotherhood.

By 1931, growing pains forced the "Y" to move again, this time next door to 1110 North Third Street in a building belonging to the Orioles Club, and it remained a focus of activity into the late fifties. Indeed, it was during the lean years of the Depression that the "Y," increasingly being called the Jewish Community Center, was more popular than ever. It was said that this was because anyone could find at the Center others who were as bad off as he.

By 1933, there was a proposal to place the "Y" under the aegis of the new United Jewish Community. The idea was debated thoroughly, and in the end it was approved. Although the Center was reorganized with new by-laws, the basic function of the "Y" remained the same. It continued to serve the community with a varied diet of athletic, cultural, and philanthropic activities. Its progress after reorganization is contained in another chapter.[4]

THE JEWISH LADIES' AID SOCIETY AND TRAVELER'S AID

"Charity begins at home," and this in essence, was the rationale behind many of the community, benevolent, and charitable organizations which sprang up in the nineteenth century and whose activities continued into the twentieth. The purpose of these local groups was varied. Some served as adjuncts or auxiliaries of the synagogues and temples, while others took care of the needy, the indigent, the sick, and the bereaved. Two such organizations were the Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society and the Traveler's Aid.

Originally called the Ladies' Hebrew Social Circle, this group comprised women whose husbands belonged to Ohev Sholom. They first met in 1888 and served the needs of the temple and the community.

Meetings were held at members' homes. Dues, twenty-five cents a month when the Circle first started, were collected, and delinquent members had to make good when they fell behind in their payments. Some of the most influential women in the Jewish community belonged to the Circle. A partial listing included Mesdames Joseph Strouse, H. Marks, William Strouse, Joseph Lowengard, Abe Goldsmith, Joseph Kahn, E. Stern, Al Hirschler, Charles Adler, Abe Mayer, R. Fleishman, J. Spiesberger, H. Astrich and Joseph Goldsmith. There was apparently no trouble getting women to join, for a resolution of October 15, 1896, aimed at discouraging the practice of soliciting new

members stated that ". . . any lady desiring to become a member shall make application through a member."

Besides helping the poor and destitute, the Circle held many fund-raising events, such as dances at the Chestnut Street Hall, a strawberry festival at Ohev Sholom, card parties, picnics, and temple suppers.

The women organized a building fund to aid the temple, and with the money purchased altar lights, had electrical wiring installed and refurbished the Sunday School room. On more than one occasion the ladies contributed toward the liquidation of the mortgage or to pay off other expenses incurred by the memberships. In 1896, 1898, and 1901, the women were instrumental in helping save Ohev Sholom from financial embarrassment. In each of those years the ladies presented the temple with a bank draft of $150 toward current obligations due. In return, the ladies were presented with a certificate of appreciation from the temple elders.

By 1902, the Circle had a membership of at least eighteen women. Following the completion of business, the ladies settled down to refreshments, chatter, and for those who wished, a game of lotto. However, either because their husbands complained or because some of the women were chronic losers, the practice resulted in the "Great Lotto Debate" and was eventually stopped. The ban was only temporary, because the following year the ladies decided to restore the game. As a concession to those who were opposed to bringing it back, the women agreed to indulge only once a month so as "to promote sociability," or at least that is what the minute book records. The pro-lotto women apparently won the day because a later entry noted that "the meeting adjourned in order to play Lotto . . ." To promote sociability, of course.

The Circle celebrated its eighteenth anniversary in 1906 and elected as its president Mrs. Charles Adler. Her fellow officers were Mrs. E. Stern, vice president; Mrs. George Rosenthal, treasurer; and Mrs. Joseph Kuhn, secretary. Shortly thereafter, the ladies initiated an organ fund and quickly raised $7.25. In addition, they were busy refurnishing the temple, buying white curtains for the Ark, decorating the pulpit for *Succoth*, and supplying elegant hand-made candles for use at *Chanukah.* Moreover, the Circle unanimously endorsed a motion to "have steam heat put into the temple."

As to the charitable work performed by these generous and spirited women, money was regularly raised for Harrisburg Hospital and presented on special holidays, such as Thanksgiving Day when the women dispatched ten dollars as a "Thanksgiving offering." More-

over, funds were provided for a day nursery, and there was a "sick fund" for individuals in need. An early entry in the minutes indicates that members of the Circle were much concerned about the suffering of others outside of the community. In 1889 a contribution was forwarded to Johnstown to ease the condition of flood victims.

Even the deceased were not forgotten. Money was allotted for repair and upkeep of the cemetery, and an 1890 entry shows that five dollars was sent to cover the expenses incurred by an unnamed man who died in the hospital.

During World War I, the women aided the homeless, the wounded, and other victims of the carnage in Europe. Drives were organized for various relief agencies, including the Red Cross and the United War Work Fund. In the twenties, the Circle shifted its attitude toward new members. Where once it was *verboten* to solicit prospective members, by 1924 all this changed. The Circle set up a "Propoganda Committee" headed by Mrs. S. Friedman. Her job was to corral women into the organization. A typical entry of the time noted that Mrs. Joseph Goldsmith "contributed $10.50 from the sale of noodles." Rabbi Bookstaber was given a reception costing $47.88, with the ". . . ice cream left over from the reception sent to the Polyclinic Hospital and flowers to Harrisburg Hospital."[5]

In later years the Circle evolved into the Ohev Sholom Sisterhood and it continued to perform a valuable community service through the efforts of its dedicated members.

TRAVELER'S AID

As to the activities of the Jewish Traveler's Aid, its primary function was assistance to destitute or down-and-out individuals and families who either intended to settle in town or stopped off on their way to another city. The organization, which originally held its meetings in the office of Joseph Claster, was never very large, but it did enjoy the dedication of those who participated. Travelers who arrived in town without money were given meals and lodging at the homes of members. Some were offered jobs while others were directed to possible employment opportunities either in Harrisburg or its environs. Itinerants headed for another city were given a train ticket to a town closer than the one they requested. The reason for this was that many of these people never got off where they were supposed to. Instead they alighted at a nearby town and cashed in the ticket for the difference. Joseph Goldsmith was in charge of dispensing the train

tickets. He gained a reputation as a no-nonsense, straight-from-the-shoulder type who dealt fairly but firmly with people down on their luck who sought help from a friendly, humanitarian source.

WORLD WAR I

"The war to end all wars," as Wilson termed World War I, affected Jews the same way it did other groups of Americans. Husbands, sons, and brothers marched off to fight the "Hun" who was devastating Europe. Families were separated, endured hardships, made sacrifices, and in some instances lost loved ones during the conflict. The rows of grave markers at Flanders and other places attest to the supreme sacrifice which cut across all religious and ethnic lines. When the call for volunteers went out, Jews responded with the same zeal and patriotic fervor as did other segments of American society. Jews were proud to serve their country. Local organizations got involved too. The Ladies' Aid Society collected for needy relief; the Red Cross rolled bandages; Boy Scouts conducted paper and scrap metal drives, and young people grew victory gardens.

JOSEPH GARNER

The late Joseph Garner, born in 1896 in the unlikely town of Texas, Maryland, served in France with the American Expeditionary Force. His family came to Harrisburg in 1901, and his father was a merchant who had a large house at 1898 North Sixth Street.

Joseph Garner entered the army in 1917, first going to the 28th Division headquarters at Mt. Gretna, Pennsylvania, then for further training at Augusta, Georgia, and finally winding up with a two year stint in France. A fellow Harrisburger, Charles Goodman, was in the same unit: the 103rd Supply and Ammunition Train. Mr. Garner drove a truck, transporting munitions from the railhead to the troops in the field. He was fond of telling about an incident which occurred to him and several other Jewish soldiers stationed at Chateau-Thierry. They had been granted leave to attend *Rosh Hashana* services in Paris and were on their way to the train depot to catch the Paris Express when up roared a messenger on a motorcycle. "All personnel return to base!" the doughboy shouted through a cloud of dust. "All leave's been cancelled. The 28th Division is moving out!"

Mr. Garner and his pals looked at each other. "Listen buddy," he replied, "tell 'em you never saw us. We're on our way to religious services."

The messenger broke into a big grin. "Okay, fellas," he winked, "sorry I just missed getting the news to you." He tossed back a snappy salute as he zoomed off.

Mr. Garner and the others made it to Paris and observed the High Holy Days at the same synagogue where the Rothschilds worshipped. There was no room for him in the main sanctuary, so he was ushered onto the *Bimah.* Seated next to Mr. Garner was the eminent English jurist and statesman, Rufus Daniel Isaacs, the first Marquis of Reading!

By 1919 Garner was a civilian again. His army duties served him well, for he started a hauling service in town. Motor vehicles were just catching on as commercial carriers, and he recognized their potential to industry. He and his brother-in-law, Mort Israel, became partners in what was originally known as the Garis Motor Co. and was later to evolve into Central Storage and Transfer, operated today by his son A. Joseph Garner.

In earlier times Mr. Garner's father, Abraham Garner, a devout synagogue goer, frequently attended the early morning services at Kesher Israel. Mr. Garner remembered, as a young lad, attending these services with his father and recalled that the talk outside after the service was of business, mostly the day's prices for scrap metal. The devout men of the *shul* were offended by such talk, preferring to keep the chatter of the marketplace as far away as possible from the pious works of the synagogue.[6]

FOOTNOTES

1. Information concerning Jewish education in Harrisburg was obtained primarily from the interviews cited above with Rabbi David L. Silver.
2. *Community Review*, Harrisburg, Pa.: October, 1926.
3. Much of the information presented in this work concerning the founding and development of the Jewish Community Center of Harrisburg was obtained during a number of interviews with Mr. Albert Hursh. These occurred on Sunday, May 2, 1971, Sunday, March 5, 1973, Thursday, November 6, 1975, and Sunday, January 4, 1976. Mr. Hursh, being intimately connected with the Center for much of his life was in a better position than anyone else whom I can think of to help me become familiar with the day-to-day workings of the Harrisburg Jewish Community. I owe him a huge debt of gratitude for his help in the construction of the book, and indeed it is my opinion that the Jewish Community as a whole has been made better due to his long and dedicated service.
4. Much of the information concerning the Y.M.H.A. and its successor, the Jewish Community Center, has been obtained from the above cited interviews with Mr. Albert Hursh, as well as numerous excerpts from the *Community Review* covering the period 1926-1972.
5. These and other quotes appearing in this section are from the *Minutes* of the Ladies' Hebrew Social Circle, 1870-1925, recorded on microfilm and available from the American Jewish Archives, located in Cincinnati, Ohio.
6. Information in this section was obtained in an interview with the late Mr. Joseph Garner on Thursday, June 6, 1968.

6

Growing

THE GROWTH OF JEWISH BUSINESS 1917-1929

Following the end of hostilities in Europe, America once again turned its attention to domestic concerns. It is a sad fact that the war, which cost over 53,000 American lives had proven to be profitable for many engaged in supplying and outfitting the government with the armaments and materiel of conflict. War meant a boom to the economy, for the military was an insatiable consumer of just about everything. Thus, the years after the Armistice were years of reorganization on the part of the business community as it attempted once again to get back to a normal peacetime economy.

The growth of businesses owned by Jews in Harrisburg paralleled the fortunes of many non-Jewish-owned concerns. They suffered the same vicissitudes as others, and there were success stories as well as failures.

THE LEHRMANS[1]

Louis Lehrman came to New York City from Russia in 1886. He was one of eight brothers, four of whom were half-brothers, for his

father Bernard was married twice. The other Lehrman brothers who came to the United States were Nathan, Sam, and Abraham. Nathan, the oldest, moved to Denver, Colorado, and liked it so much that he settled there permanently.

Louis remained in New York and took a job for a time with a shirt manufacturer, but he despised the teeming, crime-ridden streets of the big city. Biding his time, and with what little money he was able to save, he packed his bags and said goodbye to New York. Before he departed, he talked Abe into going with him and the two turned up in Gary, Indiana, making their living there as peddlers. Here in the very heartland of America, the air was breathable, the pace was slower, the people were friendlier, and the opportunities were better suited for success.

Samuel Lehrman was a man of great learning. He came to America alone, about 1898, later sending for his family. Unlike his brothers Louis and Abe, Sam did not remain in New York. No sooner had he arrived, than he answered an ad in the Jewish *Tageblatt*, which was seeking a teacher for the *shul* in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Sam applied for the position but for one reason or another was turned down. Discouraged but not beaten, Sam Lehrman moved to Middletown and took a job teaching at the Hebrew School there. He stayed in Middletown for about a year before going to Steelton, where he again taught in the Hebrew School and performed some rabbinical duties at the synagogue. However, Sam was not satisfied, for he opened a small grocery store, named appropriately enough, Samuel Lehrman Grocery, at Front and Chambers Streets in Steelton.

Sam had remained in touch with Louis and Abe in Indiana, and he wrote them about the business, even inviting them to come to Steelton to work with him. The two brothers were easily convinced and wrote back that they were on their way.

Louis, in fact, did join Sam in running the grocery, while Abe opted for a partnership in a clothing store in Steelton. Abe Lehrman did well until the Depression, when his business went bankrupt and he turned to Sam and Louis for help. They offered to get Abe started again, Sam suggesting that he go into the tobacco business while Louis thought that paper would be more profitable. Abe decided on janitorial supplies, an odd compromise, but one that worked out well for him.

Sam and Louis' business was named the Harrisburg Grocery Company and was originally located at 323 Broad Street until 1926, when it was moved to Seventh and Kelker Streets. In time, the two brothers decided to go their separate ways, because each thought he could do

better on his own. Sam stayed with the original business, Harrisburg Grocery, which supplied grocery products to stores within a 30 mile radius of Harrisburg, while Louis rented quarters at the old Pennsy Supply Building at 10th and Mulberry Streets.

Joining Louis in this new venture came his son Ben, and the business became known as Louis Lehrman and Son. Louis Lehrman developed a new concept in wholesaling. He operated his business entirely on one floor, thus making it easier to control stock and incoming and outgoing inventory. He also initiated a policy of seven-day credit to his customers, the small retail grocers whom he served. Mrs. Martha Hurwitz, Louis' daughter, recalls that her father had a philosophy of "no futures," that is, credit would not be extended beyond a definitely agreed-upon time limit, usually seven days, although this was flexible. Louis Lehrman found this to be a profitable arrangement. His business continued to do well even at the height of the Depression. However, during the 1936 flood, Louis Lehrman and Son was ruined when the onrushing waters inundated the plant and contaminated the stock. With the aid of his brother, Samuel, Louis relocated the business in a safer area atop the hill at 17th and Sycamore Streets.

From Louis Lehrman and Sons was to develop, in the late fifties, first Rack-Rite Distributors, and then, beginning in 1962, the now giant Rite Aid Corporation based across the river from Harrisburg in Shiremanstown, Pennsylvania. Due primarily to the efforts of Alexander Grass, Lewis Lehrman (the grandson of Louis Lehrman) and David Sommer, Rite Aid has become one of the largest discount drug store chains in the country, counting over 670 stores as of June 1978.[2]

With Louis off on his own, Samuel Lehrman brought in two of his sons, Max and Jac, to work with him at the Harrisburg Grocery Company. During the 1930s, Harrisburg Grocery flourished, and Sam invested in a supermarket chain in Washington, D.C., in partnership with the Cohn family of Lancaster. Max was dispatched to Washington to help get things organized, and soon after, Jac was sent down to assist in this operation. Supermarkets were just beginning to come into vogue and Sam foresaw their tremendous growth possibilities. Harrisburg Grocery supplied the chain with virtually all its canned goods.

Sam later had to use a special warehouse in Washington to meet the demands of the chain, which in time became Giant Food, Inc.[3]

Harrisburg Grocery moved from 7th and Kelker to a new headquarters at 1001 Maclay Street in 1938.

Sam Lehrman, a close friend of Rabbi David L. Silver, retained an interest in religion even after he had given up his teaching duties to go into business. He enjoyed reading Hebrew, listening to records of famous cantors, and participating in discussions of Jewish concerns. Sam's wife, Helen, was raised in Zagare, Lithuania. The Sam Lehrman family lived over the store at Front and Chambers Street in Steelton from 1913 to 1919, when they moved to Harrisburg.

Sam was a philanthropist, always giving to charities and helping the synagogue. He was known as the perennial "big giver." Abundant anecdotes exist concerning this colorful Harrisburger. Mrs. Sally Lehrman, wife of another of Sam's sons, the late H. Albert Lehrman, recalls how Sam, like many others in town, enjoyed speaking Yiddish. When local people became affluent, suddenly they found it convenient to "unlearn" the language. Mrs. Lehrman remembers a time at a UJA meeting that Sam began telling humorous stories in Yiddish. They were so marvelous that the staid assemblage broke out in hysterical laughter, somehow recalling that they did indeed understand the language after all.

Sam Lehrman never lost touch with the religious teachings of his youth. When a trucker with a load of groceries complained that he needed help to unload the vehicle, Sam would invaribly reply, "God will help you." The driver usually understood what Sam meant and instead of standing around griping, he'd get back to work.

Sam Lehrman died in 1950, much remembered and much loved by his family and friends in the entire Harrisburg community.

THE CAREER OF SIMON MICHLOVITZ

The story of Simon Michlovitz parallels in some respects that of the Lehrmans. Simon arrived in America in 1890 from Zagare, Lithuania, now part of the Soviet Union. Simon chose Harrisburg because according to his son, Nathan, "He apparently thought this was the place to settle." His arrival here was really one of chance because Simon apparently did not have a *landsman* in town. No sooner had he arrived than he returned to Zagare to get his wife and three children, who accompanied him back to the United States.

Simon, too, began as a peddler, selling clothing, household goods, and farm supplies. And like Louis Lehrman, he looked upon peddling as something he did not want to do for the rest of his life. Around 1909, Simon had enough money saved to enable him and his family to

move into a large house at 606 Foster Street. At the same time he joined the Chisuk Emuna congregation and was active in synagogue affairs.

From peddling, Simon Michlovitz went into the scrap iron business, a wise choice, for it was here that he was to make his fortune. In later years, Simon was joined by his brother, Abe, and his brother-in-law, Dave Furman. With the outbreak of World War I, the demand for steel skyrocketed and business flourished. In 1917, he again moved his family, which now included 12 children, to another new house on 13th Street in the fashionable Hill section. Simon was the owner of Harrisburg's first electric car, a rakish black Peerless, which could be seen sporting along the dusty roadways in and out of town. However, an accident with another vehicle so unnerved him that Simon refused ever to drive again. He hired a chauffeur who remained in his employ until his death.

Simon Michlovitz's son, Nathan, remembers his father as being civic-minded and friendly, possessing an outgoing, vivacious personality and an excellent sense of humor. He was short in stature, but what he lacked in height he made up for in generosity. He was forever helping others. He even went out of his way to bring people over from the Old Country and often helped them to get started in businesses of their own. During the summer he took his family to Atlantic City, where they vacationed while Simon took care of his investments in that resort community.

Simon Michlovitz was a man whom many recognized whenever he strolled downtown. He enjoyed a reputation as a leader in the scrap iron industry, and his specialty was dismantling battleships and obsolete steel mills.

Simon was the epitome of the self-made man. He made his fortune despite the fact that he had no real formal education and, incredible as it may seem, still could not read or write English at the time of his death. He signed his name in Hebrew; yet his business know-how was astounding. In 1928, he got involved in a lawsuit in which he sued a company that would not cancel a contract negotiated and agreed to by a party who had subsequently died. The lawyers for the company questioned him closely as to what exactly was in the contract. Since he could not read English, how could he possibly know? Simon rattled off practically *verbatim* whole clauses, terms, and paragraphs contained in the document. He had memorized the language of the contract after someone else had read it to him. His memory and retention startled the judge and attorneys, but they could not dispute him. Simon's actions established a legal precedent whereby knowledge of

the conditions of a contract, rather than the ability to read it, was the criterion for determining whether it was binding.

Simon, who at one time thought nothing of writing out large checks to the synagogue and the Jewish Community Center (the old Y.M.H.A.), saw his wealth begin to dissipate in the years following 1929. Hard times fell upon him and his family. As the Depression wore on, things began to improve ever so slightly, but they never returned to what they once were. Finally in 1947, at the age of 75, a full and varied life behind him, Simon Michlovitz died of complications following a hernia operation. The scrap iron business which had provided him with so much was eventually phased out of existence.[4]

BEN ABRAMS AND THE VISION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM

The career of Benjamin Abrams could well have been an inspiration for other settlers in the New World. His life was initially one of hardship and deprivation followed by material success, personal satisfaction, and community service.

Benjamin Abrams was born March 3, 1871, in the village of Yoniskis in Lithuania. His parents were farmers who scratched out a borderline existence. Benjamin decided early that life should have more to offer than that to which he had been exposed. Thus, at the tender age of eleven he became an itinerant peddler of notions, matches and threads, first in his native village, later extending the periphery of his territory to encompass neighboring hamlets.

By the time he was fourteen, he had amassed enough capital to invest in a horse and wagon. This not only saved his aching feet, but also greatly expanded the area he served and the variety of merchandise he sold.

At sixteen, Benjamin was on his way to becoming the astute businessman which he was in later life. He speculated in fresh fruits, buying up apple and cherry harvests and selling them at a nice profit. Things went well for the next few years until he was nineteen, when the Czar demanded his services in the Russian Army. Benjamin put aside his profitable venture and spent the next four years in compulsory military duty. However, this time was not lost on him. Ben's army service enabled him to travel widely, and he developed a new outlook on life and a maturity of vision. He desired something better than the lucrative entrepreneurship he had known as a civilian. It was not a material goal he sought, but rather something more intangible—

personal freedom, something that was in short supply in Czarist Russia for common folk like Benjamin Abrams and millions of others.

Three years after his discharge from the Army, Ben married Ada Michaels, who lived in nearby Zagare. Although he had a family and greater responsibilities, Benjamin was dissatisfied with his lot. He wasn't making a great deal of money, nor did he feel that much of a future lay before him, at least not in Lithuania. He decided to start anew in America. Saying goodbye to his family, and telling them he would send for them as soon as he could, he boarded a steamer bound for New York.

When Ben Abrams arrived at Ellis Island, he had $40 in his pocket. However, he was in good health, and possessed a dogged determination to succeed.

Ben journeyed first to Boston where, by accident he met other recent arrivals from Lithuania, some of whom had known his wife in Zagare. They told Ben that he might find the going easier in Central Pennsylvania where some of his wife's relatives lived, and Ben followed their advice. First settling in Herndon in Northumberland County, Ben Abrams started his own scrap business. He scouted the outlying communities, buying scrap of all descriptions and selling it to dealers throughout the area.

The course of his business venture here paralleled that of his earlier one in Lithuania. Ben built up a tiny nest egg and invested it in a two-horse team, again extending his territory and enlarging the categories of "merchandise" he bought and sold.

Within a year he had enough saved to send for his wife, children and mother. Once reunited with his family, Ben moved to Harrisburg, opening his first shop in the old lumber mill at 7th and Forster Streets. Within several years, he rented more spacious quarters at Broad and Wallace Streets, and by 1925, business was so good that it was necessary to move once more, this time to the present site of what is now B. Abrams & Sons at 1616 North Cameron Street. The Abrams operation is one of the best-equipped scrap yards in the East, and during World War II, it was honored by the War Production Board for its outstanding contribution to the war effort.

Ben's three sons, the late Hyman S. Abrams, Samuel L., and Morris, and his son-in-law, the late Harry B. Schiffman, joined him in running the company. The rest of his family consisted of two daughters, Mrs. Sara Schiffman, and Mrs. Ida Abrams, both of Harrisburg.

Ben Abrams is remembered as a "doer," always eager to help out in community activities. He served as president of the Chisuk Emuna Congregation, and was in charge of the fund-raising campaign that paid off the mortgage on the synagogue building. He was a member of the executive board of the United Jewish Community of Harrisburg, and was active in the Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, and Elks.

Ben's wife, Ada, was a cousin of Simon Michlovitz, and one of Ben's closest friends in town was the late Hyman Freedman. Ben and Rabbi Eliezer Silver were *landsleit*, both coming from the same town in Lithuania.

When Ben Abrams died in 1948, the community lost a valuable friend. His many unselfish deeds, both on a personal and community basis, were an inspiration to others. Perhaps this was his way of repaying his adopted homeland for the opportunity of realizing that wistful goal of personal freedom which he envisioned as a young man and which was denied him in the years before he came to America.[5]

With the same spirit that marked his father's endeavors, Sam Abrams has played an influential role in the life of his community. He was a member of the Harrisburg School Board, and at the forefront of many local Israel Bond Campaigns. Of lasting significance has been his establishment of the Abrams Foundation, which provides scholarship oportunities for high school graduates of the Harrisburg area. Scholarships are also made available to teachers interested in furthering their education. Sam Abrams has been, for years, a leader both within the Jewish Community and in the city of Harrisburg.

THE BRENNER FAMILY[6]

Of all the many families gracing this history none were more active both within and beyond the Jewish community than the Brenners.

Morris Brenner, having come to Harrisburg from Hagerstown, Maryland, opened a grocery store at 623 Herr Street and the family was in town to stay.

Soon after, Morris' four sons began to take an active role in the family fortunes. Following their father's lead, Sam opened a grocery store at Seventh and Peffer Streets and Henry one at Green and Emerald. The two younger boys, Simon and Ephraim, bought a garage at 1702 North Third Street and started doing business in parts, service, and repair. This first led to a Hupmobile dealership at this location and later on, when Hupmobile ceased operations, the Dodge-Plymouth line was introduced.

After World War I, the grocery stores were sold and father Morris

and sons Sam and Henry went into the tobacco business, first locating in the ten hundred block of North Third Street. Later they moved to 923 North Third Street and finally in the late forties to their present location at Seventh and Division Streets. Meanwhile the automobile operations had moved to large, modern quarters at 1820 Paxton Street.

Within the realm of the Jewish Community, the Brenner family assumed a necessary and impressive role. Henry Brenner was president of Beth El for some forty years. As well, he was responsible for spearheading the building effort for the present Jewish Community Center. Indeed, without his assistance, this monumental achievement would never have gotten off the ground. Simultaneous with Henry's term as president of Beth El, for 25 years Samuel Brenner was president of Kesher Israel. Simon Brenner was president of the Beth El Temple Hebrew School board of directors and an important member of that congregation. Ephraim Brenner was actively engaged in the affairs of Temple Ohev Sholom and in addition, was one of Harrisburg's most prominent citizens, serving in many areas of endeavor, most notably perhaps as the general chairman of the Community Chest Campaign of 1945-46. Pauline Levinsohn, the oldest daughter of Morris Brenner, alongside her other fund-raising concerns, was at the forefront of the community effort for the Jewish Ladies' Aid Society. Another sister, Mrs. Esther Sherman, was busy for years in the affairs of Ohev Sholom Temple and the Harrisburg community at large. And the "baby" of the family, Mrs. Frieda Baker, has likewise been active in many good works, most notably the Beth El Sisterhood. Her husband, Ephraim Baker, was one of the outstanding leaders of Harrisburg B'nai B'rith and a past president of the Jewish Community Center.

The Brenners have been a diverse and active family, serving the Jewish community and Harrisburg at large for nearly fifty years. This tradition of service and participation has carried over to our present generation which has found many of the Brenners as leaders in various aspects of our Jewish communal life. Indeed the Brenner family has been and is one of the first families of our community.[7]

TEMPLE BETH EL

F. Scott Fitzgerald termed the twenties "The Jazz Age." It was a free-swinging era, a time in which the deprivations and anxieties necessitated by the Great War gave way to a paroxysm of good feeling, easy

living, and gaudy public display. Prohibition may have been the law of the land, but that did nothing to prevent the unlimited consumption of bathtub gin and bottled-in-your-local-garage-brand whiskey. Some speakeasies tacked a copy of the Volstead Act over the bar. It made a lively conversation piece.

Many changes were taking place, both in society and in the institutions of society. For example, co-education could never have become so generally accepted had there not first been a loosening of the rigid sexual segregation, which was a vestige of the Victorian Era, and which demanded that boys and girls not mingle socially unless closely supervised or chaperoned. Education was not the only institution affected by changing mores. Religion, too, was feeling these changes. One of the reasons why some members of the Orthodox community broke away to form Temple Beth El in 1925, was that men and women wanted to sit together during the worship service. The other reason was a strong desire to have the service conducted in English. Their members were second-generation Jewish sons and daughters who wanted to shed their European background and become full-fledged American citizens.

In a sense, Beth El was a product of the twenties' youth culture. It was founded by dissident young people unhappy over the leadership of Chisuk Emuna. In fact, once it completely divested itself of all ties to Chisuk Emuna, Beth El was a congregation of people whose average age was only about 28.

How did this Conservative synagogue get started? It began when some of the young people of Chisuk Emuna became dissatisfied with a number of things they saw happening in their congregation. First and foremost they were unhappy over the Friday night service. In addition to the regular Friday evening worship service, a second service was held for the benefit of the younger members who sought a more modern interpretation of their religious practices. The hierarchy of Chisuk Emuna promised them that they would get their own rabbi, but in fact this was merely a sop to quiet their dissatisfaction. At about the same time that friction was building between the younger element and the synagogue elders, Rabbi Moses Etter was brought in as the new spiritual leader of the congregation. Rabbi Etter was a devout, learned man, but he did not speak English and this was taken by the younger members as a rebuff and a deliberate act of disdain for their wishes. Conferring among themselves, the young people decided to switch their Friday evening services to the Jewish Community Center and also to hire a younger, English-speaking rabbi.

As a result, a number of rabbis were invited to conduct the Friday evening service and early in 1926, Rabbi Samuel Cohen, executive director of the United Synagogue of America, made several trips to Harrisburg and finally succeeded in forming a temporary organization. In April, 1926, Rabbi Joel Geffen conducted the first *Pesach* (Passover) services of the Beth El Congregation at the Jewish Community Center and very soon afterwards, was appointed rabbi of the new synagogue.

Leading the move were such men as Henry H. Brenner who was elected president of the new congregation; Louis W. Kay, Herman Nathan, Joseph Weiss, Max I. Klass, Louis Israel, Benjamin Abrams, Sigmund Miller, Nathan Bernstein, Maurice Rochman, and Arthur Koplovitz. These men and others wanted to perpetuate the aims of Judaism, while at the same time reflect the lifestyle of a younger, more Americanized way of life.

It was soon discovered that the auditorium of the Jewish Community Center was insufficient to meet the needs of the congregation, and a lot at Front and Wiconisco Streets was purchased in the summer of 1926 for the purpose of erecting a house of worship. The first efforts resulted in a campaign begun in February 1927 when a drive netted $16,000 to defray part of the cost of the ground.

The High Holy Days in 1927 ushered in a year of tremendous activity. Over six hundred persons attended the services which were held in the old Technical High School auditorium with Rabbi Geffen presiding and Louis Snyder acting as cantor. A Sabbath School, meeting at the Jewish Community Center on Saturday afternoons was organized by Rabbi Geffen, and the school grew rapidly from its original enrollment of twenty-five students to nearly a hundred. A Confirmation Class was established and three girls were confirmed on *Shavuos* 1928, with special ceremonies. Beth El was maturing quickly.

As the need for a temple became more imperative, a number of plans were submitted for the erection of a building. Philip H. Caplan was appointed chairman of the building committee and plans for the new synagogue were submitted and approved at a meeting in March 1928. The members of the congregation present at that meeting pledged nearly $50,000 toward the erection of the temple.

The big day came on Sunday, April 1, 1928, when Philip H. Caplan dug the first spadeful of soil, breaking ground for the building of Temple Beth El. Construction proceeded at a rapid pace, and on June 17, the cornerstone was laid with appropriate ceremonies.

Instrumental in the project was Harry Levin. He was the first to

outline plans for a structure to house the needs of the congregation, and his participation in the deliberations of the building committee was of immeasurable value. It was in great part due to his expertise that such a functional and beautiful house of worship came into being. Others instrumental in the planning and building of the new temple were Maurice Caplan, Hyman Morrison, Monroe Cohen and S. Sidney Raffel.

The fledgling congregation displayed intense devotion to every phase of synagogue life. The women formed the Sisterhood under the leadership of Mrs. Louis W. Kay and embarked upon any number of activities. Soon after, the Brotherhood was organized with Samuel Handler as the first president.

During the Depression of the thirties, serious financial problems faced the young synagogue, but with the arrival of Rabbi Max Gelb in 1933, Beth El congregation was instilled with a new breath of life. A Young People's League was organized to bring together youth from the entire Jewish community for social and cultural activities.

Emphasis on instruction for the youngsters of the congregation was present from the beginning at Temple Beth El, and classes in Hebrew education were held almost from the very first days of the synagogue's existence. In 1935, under the supervision of Rabbi Gelb, a three-day-a-week program of schooling was developed. Abraham Reisman assumed the position of Cantor of the temple, and principal and teacher of the Hebrew School, duties that he was to hold for the next twenty-six years. The first school board included: Sigmund Miller, chairman; Maurice Caplan, Samuel Handler, Herman Nathan, Morton Kay, Maurice Rochman, Mrs. Nathan Reif, Mrs. Simon Brenner, and Mrs. Louis Snyder.

The Junior Congregation developed as an outgrowth of the *Oneg Shabbos* Club which had been organized in 1933. By 1941, the High Holy Day services were included within the program of the Junior Congregation, and through their involvement, youngsters were able to acquire the abilities necessary for active participation at the adult services later on.

Toward the close of 1935, the congregation began to make elaborate preparations for the celebration of its tenth anniversary. The date was set for March 22, 1936, and a drive was launched to raise money to help reduce the temple mortgage as part of the festivities. On the very eve of the celebration, however, a devastating flood swept over Harrisburg and much of the Eastern part of the country. The flood caused havoc not only with Temple Beth El, but also with many

of its members, who suffered great personal and financial loss as the waters raged. But with the enthusiasm and spirit that had marked prior dilemmas, the people of Beth El, along with the rest of the community, bounced back, and shortly after it was decided to hold the anniversary celebration in early December.

During the first decade of its existence Temple Beth El was subjected to many severe tests. Here was a young congregation struggling for a foothold in the religious life of the community, facing Depression, flood and the uncertainties of everyday life. It is a tribute to those early pioneers of Beth El that the congregation has emerged today as a strong and unified religious body.

FOOTNOTES

1. Information about the Lehrman family was primarily obtained in interviews with Mrs. Martha Hurwitz on Wednesday, June 7, 1972, and with the late Mr. H. Albert Lehrman and Mrs. H. Albert (Sally) Lehrman on Tuesday, July 18, 1972 and Sunday, July 14, 1973.
2. Not enough can be said concerning the work of the Lehrman and Grass families in the field of philanthropy for the cause of the State of Israel. This work is of national significance for since 1969 Alex Grass has been a National Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal and one of its best known spokesmen and most tireless workers.
3. Not to be confused with Giant Food Stores, Inc. of Carlisle, Pa., founded by David Javitch and operated by two prominent Harrisburg Jews, Lee Javitch and Norman Lipsett.
4. Information about Simon Michlovitz was obtained in an interview with Mr. Nathan Michlovitz on Sunday, February 4, 1973.
5. Information about Benjamin Abrams was obtained during an interview with Mr. Samuel L. Abrams on Thursday, June 29, 1973.
6. Information on the Brenner family was obtained primarily in an interview with the late Mr. & Mrs. Henry H. Brenner and Mrs. Frieda Baker on Monday July 6, 1970.
7. The Brenner family has always been a particular favorite of mine. During my days at William Penn High School I spent many afternoons and evenings at the home of Mr. Morris Baker and his parents Mr. and Mrs. Ephraim Baker. Many members of the Brenner family would often come to the Baker home to visit the late Mrs. Leba Brenner, the widow of Morris Brenner and at the time the oldest living member of the Brenner family, who was living with the Bakers. Morris Baker, who lives in San Francisco, and I spent many hours in the company of members of the Brenner family and I had the priviledge of getting to know many of them quite well.

7

All For One

THE ONSET OF THE DEPRESSION IN 1929

Historians, economists, and political scientists *ad infinitum* have offered their particular theories of the cause of the Great Depression which more or less began officially on "Black Friday," October 29, 1929, when in one day the New York Stock Exchange lost on paper upwards of $8 billion.

"A depression," one wag remarked, "is the most democratic of times, in that everyone is equal. No one has any money!" This is not really true, for to paraphrase another pundit: "Money didn't suddenly disappear during the Depression; it simply changed pockets." This is closer to the truth, for even at the most abysmal period of this economic slump, there were still individuals of great wealth. More people were working than were not, and despite all the warnings and rumblings of impending revolution, the world did not stop. The country continued to function and people went about their business.

But for those who were not wealthy or could not find steady work, life was harsh. The Jews of Harrisburg were affected along with

everyone else. They helped elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 because they believed that his New Deal would do something to alter the situation. They supported, for the most part, his liberal (some called them radical) measures to get the country out of its doldrums and back onto its feet. These included unemployment compensation, federal deposit insurance, the WPA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. And Jews were just as heartened as everyone else by FDR's "fireside chats" and his warnings against fear and apathy. Life went on. People paid ten cents a week for five hundred dollar insurance policies. Movies cost a dime and everyone listened to the soap operas on the radio. Jimmy Doolittle flew a record 300 miles an hour, and Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for his unsentimental novels depicting American hucksterism and the narrow-mindedness of small-town America.

The attitudes of many Jews during the lean days of the thirties is best expressed by the answer one would receive to the question, "How's business?" The reply: "Look into your own cash register!" Just about everyone was faring poorly. Many of those who did work took home only a few dollars a day. It wasn't much, but it was enough to pay the rent and keep bread on the table. Meat was a rarity. People ate a lot of fish, potatoes, hash, eggs, and occasionally fresh vegetables. It was "waste not, want not," and leftovers four days a week.

Rabbi David L. Silver remembers the Depression years vividly. Elected rabbi of Kesher Israel Synagogue in late 1932, he actually assumed his post on the same day that the new President declared a bank holiday in early 1933. A thoughtful, reflective man with a scholarly mien, Rabbi Silver recalls that wealthy Jews in the twenties were "down and out" by the thirties. What he remembers most of all was the sense of frustration, even despair, that began to show itself within the community. Even President Roosevelt's optimistic preachments did not convince everyone that propserity was "just around the corner." Sermons preached during this period were designed to elevate the spirits of the community. They were uplifting in tone and meant to inspire. They served to raise the self-esteem of members who had lost not only their wealth but, more important, their sense of dignity and potential.

Yet despite all the hardship, it was not uncommon for one neighbor to help another. Spearheading this effort was Mrs. Pauline Levinsohn who was extremely active in civic drives and goodwill efforts to help the neediest. People pledged what they could, and whatever was given was received with gratitude. Mrs. Levinsohn and other women such as

Mrs. Jenny Kaplan and Mrs. Martha Hurwitz would go around and call upon local merchants soliciting for the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Ladies' Aid Society and other worthwhile organizations. All of this was prior to the United Jewish Appeal which later assumed most of these fund raising efforts. Collecting from storekeepers and merchants was a tedious and laborious effort, and sometimes a full day's activity would net these women only five or six dollars!

The dedication of many community-spirited citizens helped ease somewhat the plight of those most severely affected by the Depression. This illustrates the fact that in a time of crisis there are still those willing to give of themselves in a spirit of good will and service to others. The memory of Mrs. Pauline Levinsohn is perpetuated for her work during these hard times.

THE FOUNDING OF THE UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITY IN 1933

It is indisputable that the Jews of Harrisburg constituted a "community," by virtue of the fact that they lived within a definite geographical area. But the real meaning implies a coming together, a *communitas*, of people who share similar interests, ideas, goals, and living patterns. Ever since Jews from Eastern Europe began arriving here in appreciable numbers, there began to exist in Harrisburg really two Jewish communities, one German and primarily Reform and the other Eastern and generally Orthodox. Rarely did these two groups mingle socially. Not only did cultural differences exist between them, but also religious and often occupational differences as well.

By the 1930s however, the things that separated Jews began to seem less important, and many in the community, whether Reform, Conservative or Orthodox, looked more and more at those things that served to unite them. Several factors contributed to this change in attitudes, not the least of which was the second-generation Jews who, as compared to their elders, were less concerned about strict theological distinctions. Moreover, most Jews, like most other Americans, were becoming solidly middle-class, and prior social distinctions became less obvious or important. Events in Europe, particularly in Germany, also served to unite Jews of varying backgrounds. It was in 1933 that Rabbi Steven S. Wise, the great Zionist leader and founder of the American Jewish Congress, initiated the Jewish boycott of German goods. It indicated that Jews were coming together at last. From this

growing spirit of unity blossomed the concept of a cohesive, unified Jewish community.

The roots of this idea go back to Europe where the *Gemeinde* or self-contained community, had been in force for some time. It worked thus: the secular authority granted the Jewish community semi-official status. In return, the *Gemeinde* had the right to tax its members and hand over a percentage to the government. Problems endemic to the *Gemeinde*, as long as they were internal, were left to the community to settle on its own. The secular authorities did not intervene except when there was a dispute involving a Jew and a non-Jew.

In America, the concept of *Gemeinde* was tried in the early part of the present century under the inspiration of Mordecai Kaplan, a scholar and innovator, who believed that the only real way for the American Jewish community to remain viable and retain its identity was to adopt the *Gemeinde* plan of self-imposed isolation. It was tried first in New York City. Rabbi Jacob Joseph was brought in to oversee its operation, but almost as soon as it was begun the scheme collapsed because of petty squabbles and conflicts over jurisdiction and control. The real reason for the failure of the *Gemeinde* plan rested with the fact that it had no true legal or quasi-legal authority. This, compounded by Rabbi Joseph's lack of popular support, spelled the dissolution of the New York attempt.

However, the idea of a single, unified Jewish community did not die with the end of the New York experiment. In 1933, a young, idealistic, and prosperous Jew, Gustav Kaplan, was inspired by the writings of his namesake, Mordecai Kaplan, and believed that it was possible to make the single-community idea work. "All for one, one for all," was his motto. Kaplan felt that Harrisburg was the place in which to prove his idea.

The name given to the local *Gemeinde*-type plan was the "United Jewish Community." Its intended purpose was not to assimilate the various congregations, nor was it to get everyone to conform to one guiding principle of universal Jewishness. The purpose of the UJC was first, to provide a coordination of activities between Jews who shared common interests, and second, to act as a single fund-raising agency for all Jewish organizations, both overseas and domestic.

Henry Brenner, who along with Gus Kaplan, was one of the founders of the UJC, believed, too, in having one central "clearing house" for both fund-raising and distribution. Certainly the effort, despite some shortcomings and failures, did serve to bring together

Jews of quite diverse backgrounds. They worked harmoniously for the good of the community as a whole. Of course, not all of the schemes which were advanced materialized, nor did each of the ones tried necessarily succeed. One idea which was proposed, but never worked out, was to have Jewish tax collectors present tax money which had been collected from Harrisburg's Jewish population to the city in the name of the Jewish community. Needless to say, the idea never got off the ground.

Another idea to raise funds was to place a self-imposed tax on kosher meat. This failed too, simply because by the thirties many Jews did not keep kosher. In fact, during the Depression, many couldn't afford meat of any kind, kosher or not.

One result of the forming of the United Jewish Community was that it cut down somewhat on synagogue activity. Some saw this as a dubious achievement; others viewed it as a plus. In any event, Jews of various backgrounds did give of their time and energy in helping to extend the influence of the UJC while working to involve as many of their neighbors as possible within its realm. Today the UJC thrives and is the chief fund-raising agency through which money is raised to aid the State of Israel in its eternal struggle for survival.[1]

THE PROGRESS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER, 1933-1953

By 1933 the Jewish Community Center had grown considerably and after 1931 occupied new quarters at 1110 North Third Street. This building had been purchased for $75,000, a large sum considering the times and the economic plight of the community.

The JCC provided a number of activities: sports, social events, and cultural activities for all members who cared to participate.

The Center sponsored many educational and cultural programs for both youngsters and adults. As an example, the "Forum Series" was devised to help the community understand some of the important issues of the day. Guest speakers were invited to talk on a wide range of subjects. Those who appeared included such notables as H.V. Kaltenborn, of early radio fame; Martin Agronsky, who later became a correspondent for NBC news; Clarence Darrow, world famous trial attorney; and Irving R. Levine, another radio and TV journalist.

With an annual budget of about $40,000, the Center was not only able to expand its programs but also enlarge its staff. This included an

executive director, program director, and, in 1939, counselors for its summer day camp which was run for about 25 youngsters. The camp originally relied upon the facilities in the Center's courtyard, but later moved to Hagy's in Susquehanna Township.[2]

Despite the programs offered at the Center (it was still called the "Y" then), many youths in the community did not feel at home there. Some preferred the convivial but hardly wholesome atmosphere of Mooney's Pool Hall across the street. This establishment was run by Mr. Mooney, a friendly, jolly, "Jewish non-Jew," who was something of a "character." He spoke Hebrew and served *matzot* at *Pesach.* In some ways the "Y" actually vied with Mooney's for the attention of the town's Jewish youth. It is doubtful that, by frequenting Mooney's, a good boy ever went bad. However, that did not deter some in the community from looking upon the billiard hall with disdain. Most did not see it as an appropriate "character-building" agency. Parents advised their boys that it might be wiser to channel their youthful exuberance into more creative outlets. A professional pool player was not one of the occupations held in high esteem by the community elders.

By 1940, it was evident that new quarters would eventually be needed if the JCC was to continue serving the community on an expanding basis. That same year Gus Kaplan called a meeting at his home to discuss with others the practicality of acquiring new, more spacious quarters. Charles Feller pledged $2,500 toward a feasibility study on a new site and building. However, nothing came out of this, at least not right away. A year later the nation was plunged into war, and all dreams of a new JCC had to be postponed.

By the time the war was over there was talk again of building a larger facility, but then a new crisis developed, not in Europe this time, but in the Middle East. The situation in Palestine during 1947-48 occupied everyone's attention, and again the dream of a new JCC was deferred.

It was not until the early fifties that serious consideration was given to putting the plan into action. In 1952, a building campaign was inaugurated, but no one wanted to head such a laborious task. Yet the neighborhood encompassing the old Center was deteriorating and something had to be done. In an emotional appeal, Al Hursh asked Henry Brenner to head the drive. Henry listened courteously and replied, "I'll call you back." He did, the next day, and thus began the "Painless Campaign" of 1953.[3] Many in the community feel that if it were not for Henry Brenner, the new Jewish Community Center would not have been built for another twenty years and maybe not at all.

THE FOUNDING OF THE BLUE RIDGE COUNTRY CLUB IN 1936

The year the Jewish community acquired its own country club, the unpredictable Susquehanna overran its banks, resulting in the Great Flood of 1936.

Flooding is not uncommon in Pennsylvania. One immediately thinks of the Johnstown flood of 1889 which exacted a dreadful toll in life and damaged property. The March 1936 flood in Harrisburg, brought on by a spring thaw and heavy rains, transformed the city into a miniature Venice. Open fields resembled lakes. Photographs of the deluge show autos sitting dolefully in three feet of water while shopowners tried to salvage what they could from inundated stores. Homes were washed away, and for several days the downtown area was accessible only by boat. Eventually the water receded and the city began the laborious task of cleaning up and getting back to normal.

Blue Ridge was originally a public golf course owned at the time by a non-Jew named Calvin Black. Most Jewish people in town played at Reservoir Park, where a season ticket cost three dollars, or twenty-five cents per single round.

Dr. Benjamin Gainsburg, a local optometrist, was a golf buff who often could be found at Blue Ridge. It was through him that the club was acquired. Here is how he recalls the events leading up to its purchase:

"During the summer of 1936, on a Monday afternoon, I went out for a round of golf. I luckily happened to find myself in a foursome, Calvin Black being one of the players. I was at that time very friendly with Mr. Black. When we were walking down the fairway of the second hole, Mr. Black said to me, 'Doc, I may have some bad news for your group in a few days.' I said, 'How come bad news?' His answer was that he gave an option to purchase the club to a friend, and the option was to be taken up the following Friday. I said, 'Why would it be bad news for our group?' And the answer was the new owner would organize a new group of members, and the club would be restricted. I said, 'Calvin, there is many a slip twixt cup and lip, so if it should happen that the option will not be completed, call me. I will sign an agreement with you at the price you gave to your friend!' The price was quoted at $33,000."

"I heard nothing from Mr. Black and the following Thursday I again drove out to Blue Ridge. Mr. Black saw me, called me over, and said that his friend reneged on the option, and . . . 'if you are still in-

terested, the property is yours.' I cannot tell you the sensation I experienced. I could not believe that this was happening. I never had a greater thrill out of any deal I ever made before or since. I was talking to myself, saying now we have a place for what Calvin called 'our group.' I practically flew home to break the glad tidings to my wife. I came in the door like a lion out of his cage. I called to my wife, 'Martha, I have a surprise for you.' She said, 'I know. You bought me a new car.' I said, 'No, I bought the Blue Ridge Country Club.' And then all hell broke loose. She said, 'How could you do this at this time? The country is in a Depression. People are still unemployed in great numbers. You are in the midst of expanding your optometric business. You are working night and day. What are you going to do with a country club on your hands?' Well, it was a nightmarish weekend, but by Monday morning all was well because I made a promise to her that I would get two more men who would be interested in becoming my partners. This had to be done immediately because the following Tuesday I had to make settlement.

"I went downtown early and chanced to meet Dr. Bookstaber. I told him my story and asked him if he had any suggestions as to who in his opinion would be interested. He said, 'I have just the man. Let's go talk to Henry Goldman.' This we did, but there was no interest there. I said, 'Rabbi, I am not going to peddle this. If I do not get two interested parties, then I will have to go it alone.' We walked toward Second Street, passed Miller's Furniture Store, and I immediately thought of Jacob Miller. I told the story to Jake and he, without hesitation, said, 'I'll go along with you. I'll take one-third interest.' We then hit upon the name of Edward Schleisner. I called Ed on the phone from Miller's and told him I had something of importance to relate to him. Could he come over immediately? He did. We explained our deal and he, too, was agreeable. This was the first step in making Blue Ridge a reality for our people."

Once he had lined up others, events began to move swiftly. Dr. Gainsburg recalls how he "got busy compiling a list of names to call, to tell them the good news, and explain our plans. We had good attendance. Everyone, with one or two exceptions, was overjoyed with what was going to be in store for them. At one of the meetings we made a promise that should the time come, we would gladly turn over the ownership to the members at our cost. This was later accomplished, but not until Blue Ridge was a going concern. I think the club was purchased by the members almost twenty years later.

"In order to create more creature comforts and other needed

facilities, I sold fifteen bonds at $2,000 each, guaranteeing 4% interest on their investment. Later, I again solicited for buyers to make additional improvements and personally sold $100,000 worth of bonds at the same interest rate. When the club was purchased by the membership, every bond holder was paid back in full.

"Today, Blue Ridge is a well-organized club. The membership has grown tremendously since the early days. It is a great recreational asset to our people, and has helped to cement good relations with all in the community. It is our place. It is for us."[4]

FOOTNOTES

1. Information on the founding and development of the United Jewish Community of Harrisburg is based on the interviews cited above with Mr. Albert Hursh, and in an interview with Rabbi Gerald I. Wolpe conducted in September, 1966. Rabbi Wolpe, at that time the spiritual leader at Temple Beth El in Harrisburg, is currently rabbi at Har Zion Temple in Penn Valley, Pennsylvania.
2. Subsequently, the day camp was moved to the new Jewish Community Center building and today is conducted at the Center and the Green Hills Swim Club, north of Harrisburg.
3. More on the "painless campaign of 1953" will be discussed in a future chapter.
4. Information on the founding of the Blue Ridge Country Club was obtained in an interview with Dr. Benjamin Gainsburg in July, 1972, and by a written memorandum supplied by Dr. Gainsburg at the same time.

8

Noscitur a Socio —Know Him By His Friends

THE "JEWISH BISHOP" OF HARRISBURG

When Philip David Bookstaber arrived in Harrisburg in 1924 to become the new rabbi of Ohev Sholom congregation, he was 32 years old, unknown in town, and had only limited experience as a temple leader. On his death forty years later, he was hailed by Jews and non-Jews alike as an outstanding religionist, scholar, philosopher, humanitarian, and friend, whose compassion, charitable works, and dedicated leadership inspired all who knew him.

Rabbi Bookstaber was one of the most influential men in the history of the Harrisburg Jewish Community. He was, in one sense, a Renaissance man who combined scholarly reflection with participation in utilitarian activities. If he sometimes exhibited a contradictory, even irascible nature, it was because he was eminently human and susceptible to the same frustrations that beset us all. Thus, he could be vain and uncompromising at times, yet generous to a fault. He was intransigent on matters of religious doctrine, but innovative and imaginative when it came to secular ideas. He could be authoritarian, even dogmatic, yet he championed individual liberties and fought intolerance.

"Bookie," as he was affectionately called, numbered among his friends and acquaintances notable figures in religion, politics and education. Yet he liked nothing better than to lead a group of scouts on an over-night campout. He inspired confidence. He advised others. He cajoled and badgered and used his influence for the betterment of the community.

"He was a leader of men," the late Joseph Garner, a close friend of Dr. Bookstaber, recalled.

Another intimate, Myron Beitman, summed up Rabbi Bookstaber's stature: "He was an outstanding individual. He imprinted on the life of the Jewish community his philosophy, his character and his personality more than any other person that I have ever been acquainted with."[1]

What of his background? Philip David Bookstaber was born in New York on February 12, 1892, the youngest of ten children. His father, who originally spelled the family name "Bookstaver," came to America from Latvia. He was an Orthodox Jew who worked hard to give his children an education. Young Philip attended public schools in the city and City College of New York, from which he was graduated in 1911. At C.C.N.Y. he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and won a host of academic honors in everything from literature and oratory, to science and philosophy.

However, Bookstaber was no ivory tower intellectual. He played varsity baseball and lacrosse and was on the track team.

Next came graduate study at Columbia University's New York School of Social Work, which awarded him his master's degree in 1912. Then it was on to George Washington University for more advanced study. Again he did well, and even found time to captain the university debating team and get elected to Delta Sigma Rho, the honorary forensic fraternity. Simultaneously, young Philip worked as a consultant on immigration matters with the U.S. Department of Labor.

Leaving Washington, he journeyed west to Louisville, Kentucky, where he headed the local equivalent of that city's Jewish Community Center. It was in Louisville that he met his wife, and after a brief courtship, he was married. Within a year came the birth of his one and only child.

His life had been a fulfillment of every young man's dream; good education, a promising career and a happy marriage. Then tragedy struck. An influenza epidemic overwhelmed the city and took the lives of his wife and youngster. The shock was so profound that it moved young Philip to become a rabbi.

In 1915 he left Louisville and the painful memory it held for him and went to Cincinnati, Ohio. Deciding to continue his education and also teach, he landed a faculty position at Hebrew Union College, lecturing in sociology and at the same time attending classes in religion at the school. He had a similar arrangement at the University of Cincinnati, teaching economics while studying for his doctoral degree.

In Cincinnati, he was head resident at the Jewish Settlement House and, following his ordination as a rabbi at Hebrew Union College, became an assistant to Dr. David Philipson, the nationally known and respected rabbi of Rockdale Avenue Temple. This was a prestigious post for a young man like Rabbi Bookstaber who, although possessing the academic credentials, lacked the day-to-day experience of helping to run a temple. However, Rabbi Philipson, one of the deans of the Reform rabbinate, evidently saw leadership qualities in his bright young assistant, for he soon put him in charge of the religious school at the Rockdale Temple.

It was at this time that Dr. Bookstaber became interested in what was to become a lifelong avocation: scouting. In 1919, he founded Troup 75, named it the "Bookstaber Patrol," and built it into the first Eagle Scout Troop in the United States. Mr. Beitman, who knew Dr. Bookstaber in the Queen City, recalls that Troop 75 had an enviable reputation and "by numbers was probably the largest troop in the United States."

What was this remarkable man like? Physically, he was of solid build with an athlete's posture, thanks to his lifelong participation in sports. Mr. Beitman remembers him as "gregarious, outgoing, friendly, and adamant as to his ideas." Moreover, he was an effective communicator with those outside the Jewish community, and he sincerely . . . "liked people, liked to meet and talk to people, and he liked to meet them on their own terms." He was completely without prejudice, and he felt one duty of a rabbi was to establish a brotherhood with his non-Jewish friends. He went out of his way to make friends with the Christian ministry.

What brought him to Harrisburg? To those who seek some profound, exotic reason, look no more, for there was none. He came here because an opening existed at Ohev Sholom for a rabbi. He came and stayed nearly four decades. He was one of few clergymen of any faith to spend their entire careers in one pulpit. Whatever salary he was paid when he first started couldn't have been much, but that probably suited him fine, for Rabbi Bookstaber was not a materialistic person. His interests lay elsewhere—in his religious and philosophical studies, in scouting, in being friend and counselor, and later in life, benefactor

to the community. His love was the temple, and if there was one thing he was dogmatic about, it was the strict observance of Friday night worship services. In his mind, one was not a Jew unless he attended Friday night prayers. Mr. Beitman remembers how Dr. Bookstaber "would not mingle socially with anyone who did not come regularly to services on Friday night. During his lifetime that was a very definite principle with him."

His insistence on this point did not always sit well with others. When concerts were scheduled on the Sabbath at the Forum, he used his influence to call them off. He even got stores to close early. Another time there was a move to repeal the local Blue Laws which prohibited Sunday movies. Dr. Bookstaber allied himself with the Christian ministry who also opposed the repeal. Although he himself was an avid moviegoer, this did not prevent him from supporting retention of the Sunday closings. This made him unpopular with some in his own congregation, but he shrugged off criticism, and from the pulpit he not only defended his action, but also denounced Jews who did business during times which he believed should be devoted to prayer.

Rabbi Bookstaber had peccadilloes like everyone else, but they underscored his earthiness and appreciation of life's simple pleasures. One foible was his practice of forever inviting himself out to dinner. Mr. Beitman recalls that the rabbi dined out practically every night of the week at a different congregant's home! And he expected a low-stake pinochle game following dessert.

The good rabbi was a creature of habit. He took lunch daily at Davenport's on Market Street. He had the only charge account there, long before credit cards became popular, and his generosity was legendary. If he spotted a friend in the restaurant, he'd point him out to the manager and often the friend was the instant guest of the rabbi.[2]

Scouting was his passion. Each year he accompanied scouts to jamborees and conventions in both the United States and Europe. His scouting honors and commendations could have filled a room. He held the Silver Beaver, Silver Antelope, and Silver Buffalo awards for distinguished service to scouting. He was a delegate to international scout gatherings, and was the official chaplain at several scout encampments. But what delighted him most was the overnight camping trips he led. He loved exploring, roughing it, cooking over a crackling campfire, and hiking and sharing with the youngsters in his beloved Harrisburg Troop 10 his store of anecdotes, commonsense wisdom, and wise counseling on a host of subjects, trivial and profound.

He abhorred idleness, and was forever busy. Before coming to Harrisburg, he volunteered to be the Jewish chaplain at Camp Chillicothe, Ohio, during World War I. And in later years he was chaplain of several institutions of higher learning, including Gettysburg, Dickinson, Lebanon Valley and Elizabethtown Colleges, and Bucknell University. He was also chaplain of the Pennsylvania State Senate, a post which led to his sobriquet, "The Jewish Bishop" of Harrisburg.

Honors and titles came to him from diverse sources. He was granted an honorary Doctor of Literature degree from Gettysburg College in 1937, the first Jew to be so honored, and his alma mater, C.C.N.Y., presented him with its Distinguished Service Medal. The governor of Pennsylvania, George M. Leader, awarded Dr. Bookstaber the Commonwealth Medal, the highest state commendation to a citizen for meritorious service to the community. He amassed these and other honorariums during a long and fruitful career that officially began on September 6, 1924, when he was inducted into his post as Ohev Sholom's spiritual leader. The story in the Harrisburg *Patriot* the next day noted:

RABBI BOOKSTABER INSTALLED;
FLAYS RELIGION BY PROXY

His talk focused on a Jew's moral obligation to fulfill the letter and the spirit of Jewish religious law. It was a serious talk, befitting the occasion, and although it took some to task, was well received. Seated on the dais was his former mentor from Cincinnati, Rabbi Philipson, who did the honor of installing his one-time assistant in his new post. Placing his hands firmly atop the young rabbi's head, Dr. Philipson intoned: "May the congregation of Ohev Sholom Temple ever find in you the faithful friend, the true leader, the far-visioned man who will fulfill the high ideals of service to Judaism and humanity. The Lord bless and keep thee, the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and be gracious unto thee, and give thee peace."[3]

Anecdotes about Dr. Bookstaber's idiosyncracies delighted some, and exasperated others. One in particular stands out. Following an operation, he was invited by the late Joseph Garner to recuperate at his home. Six weeks of relative inactivity followed, and by then the rabbi was a little down. He had stored up so much nervous energy that he was to the point of bursting. Soon he was allowed to have visitors, and ten to fifteen people a day trooped through the Garner house. Dr. Bookstaber supplied each caller with a detailed account of his opera-

tion. Visitors who returned a second time heard the story over again, often with a little embellishment. Naturally, no one ever mentioned that they had heard it all before. Who wants to offend a rabbi?

Garner decided to do something about Dr. Bookstaber's loquaciousness. He found an opportunity one day when Hector, the Garner family dog, swallowed a rubber ball. The animal was rushed to the veterinarian where surgery retrieved the object from the animal's stomach. A week later Hector was up and around, and Garner, seated in the parlor with Rabbi Bookstaber, summoned the canine over and remarked aloud: "Hector went through a lot. He has a five-inch incision in his underside, but I never once heard him tell about *his* operation!" Future visitors were spared further details of the rabbi's surgery.[4]

Dr. Bookstaber was a foe of intolerance. During the twenties, the Ku Klux Klan was organizing local "klaverns" in the East and Midwest, and it had plans for obtaining a charter from the Commonwealth to operate "legally" in Pennsylvania. Dr. Bookstaber got wind of the scheme and decided to nip it in the bud. He got Joseph Garner to drive him over to Governor Pinchot's office, where his plea fell on sympathetic ears. After a brief but spirited discussion, in which the rabbi voiced his opposition to the Klan charter, the governor assured him that as long as he was in office there would be no KKK chapter in Pennsylvania.

An able and astute scholar, he enjoyed simple pleasures, particularly golf and cards. His interest in athletics gave birth to one of his famous maxims: "Never give up; you'll get your second wind."

He played golf after a fashion, but he was really more of a frustrated Sunday duffer like many of his congregants. This famous "one-hand-putting rabbi" could be seen on the links with people like Jake Miller and Ed Schleisner, or anyone else whom he could collar.

He liked to express himself on many topics and in different forums. For many years he had his own radio program, on the air each Saturday at 9 a.m., talking at random on a host of subjects. The program was quite popular and it enjoyed a faithful listenership, despite the early hour. How many of Ohev Sholom *Bar Mitzvah* boys and *Bas Mitzvah* girls remembered their Saturday morning radio appearance with their beloved and celebrated rabbi.

It was in the area of intellectual thought that Dr. Bookstaber excelled. He published books for young people, scholarly treatises, and religious tracts. His more didactic volumes include *Youth at the Cross, The Eternal Years, Adventures of the Spirit, Attaboy,* and *A*

Rabbi's Survey. Another work, published in 1939, was *Judaism and the American Mind in Theory and Practice.* In it, Dr. Bookstaber argued the case for a corporate Jewish life in America, and he based his thesis on what he saw as the "close kinship between the spiritual principle of Judaism and the democratic principle." This work won acclaim from theologians and became a text for confirmation, high school, and adult-education classes.

His other books were philosophical and speculative. It would be a disservice to the memory of Dr. Bookstaber to attempt any sort of critical analysis. However, the reader might be interested in knowing the essential theme of some of these more erudite works.

Postulates of Perfectibility, or *Creative Personality,* published in 1925, is a study of reflective thinking, specifically the nature of the creative factor in the cognitive process. It relates thought to reality, and it discusses what eminent thinkers have said about human thought. Dr. Bookstaber postulated the notion that the ideas put forth by Plato and Aristotle complement rather than oppose each other. Spirit and matter, he argued, are two primal forces in the universe, and they are symbolized by good and evil, flesh and soul. The individual who recognizes within himself this two-sided nature is eventually forced to first confront and then reconcile the duality and seeming division between these entities.

Three years later he published *The Place and the Function of the Temple Center in Congregational Life,* a pamphlet which grew out of a discussion among members of the Central Conference of Rabbis. Issued during a time when programmed activities in the community were first becoming popular, the work focuses on the temple center as a self-governing group of young men and women whose purpose is to develop wholesome activities that supplement the general spiritual policy and educational welfare of the regular temple organization.

It was in 1950 that he published his *magnum opus, The Idea of Development of the Soul in Medieval Jewish Philosophy.* Dedicated to "My Dear Congregation Ohev Sholom that made the publication of this volume possible," the work explores Greek influences on Jewish philosophical thinking, and it interprets the ideas of eight eminent Jewish thinkers from the 9th through the 13th centuries. The subject matter concerns the soul's relationship to positive thinking and day-to-day living. It is an important source book for understanding the ideas of seminal Jewish thinkers during the Middle Ages.

Rabbi Bookstaber's best-known book is a compilation of letters written to him by his friend Bertram M. Wallenstein. Its fanciful title

is *Gauchos and Tom-Toms: Being Wanderlusting Letters from Bert to Bookie Through South America and Africa.* Published in 1932 by Dorrance and Company, Philadelphia, it's an interesting, colorful, breezy, informative, and impressionistic account of people, places, and customs, on four continents (actually the title falls short, for Mr. Wallenstein took not only South America and Africa, but also the Holy Land and parts of Europe). The Foreword is by Dr. Bookstaber, and the frontispiece shows a picture of him seated, book in hand, gaucho hat perched cockily atop his head, with a long, thin-stemmed Irish pipe clenched in the corner of his mouth, and an impish twinkle in his eyes, looking out over steel-rimmed glasses. Attired in a paisley shirt, riding pants and cowboy boots, he's the picture of serene contentment with just a hint of rakish devilment. It captures perfectly his temperament and personality.

Despite his academic credentials and scholarly erudition, Dr. Bookstaber was not immune to falling back on homespun aphorisms to stress a point. One of his favorite expressions was, "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link." Another, slightly more original, was, "Pray with me and I'll play with you," referring to how he refused to partake in any activity with anyone who wasn't a temple regular. Dr. Bookstaber firmly believed that people needed religion and a set of eternal laws to live by. And Judaism, in order to survive in a pluralistic, and increasingly materialistic society, had to have the support of Jews committed to the basic tenets of their faith. On this there was no compromise. Religion was a powerful force in his own being, and it was his desire in life that he should lead others to find in Judaism those strengths and articles of faith which he felt gave meaning and purpose to human existence.

Although in religious matters he could be quite dogmatic, in political and social attitudes he was often flexible and quite liberal. His views on Zionism, for instance, underwent a complete metamorphosis. Early in life he opposed Zionist aims, mainly the creation of a separate homeland for Jews in Palestine. His views changed abruptly, however, when, in the thirties, Nazism threatened the very survival of the Jewish people. He backed the creation of a sovereign Jewish state and he rejoiced when it occurred in 1948. He journeyed to Israel several times, both singly and in groups. However, he had a phobia about air travel and always went by ship. It took longer, but it preserved his peace of mind.

Always healthy, Dr. Bookstaber kept active into his mid-sixties when high blood pressure slowed his pace, and Rabbi Hillel A. Fine

was called in to take over some of his duties. He vacationed in Florida, but in keeping with his frugal nature, he always stayed in moderately priced hotels and always registered as "Colonel" Bookstaber. He was, after all, an honorary Kentucky Colonel, a title he apparently delighted in, for most everyone in Florida knew him as "Colonel," and few as "Rabbi" Bookstaber.

During the last years of his life he aged considerably. Early in 1964, two years after his official retirement from Ohev Sholom, which honored him with a banquet on the occasion of his forty years' service, he journeyed to Florida for the final time. There he suffered a stroke and was rushed to Mt. Sinai Hospital in Palm Beach. Typically, he told the admissions office he was a poor man and not to put him in too fancy a room. Word of his illness got back to Harrisburg, and Myron Beitman immediately flew down to help out. The first thing he did was to have Dr. Bookstaber moved from the ward where he had been placed to a private room with round-the-clock nursing care. In March, Dr. Bookstaber returned home but remained confined to Harrisburg Hospital.

He was 72 now, and despite a tenacious will to fight on, his strength was sapped, and he died on May 20, 1964.

His passing was mourned by the entire community. At his interment in the Circle of Honor at Mount Moriah Cemetery, he was honored by the Ohev Sholom congregation, his fellow rabbis, Christian lay and religious leaders, local dignitaries, and numerous friends and acquaintances he had amassed during the four decades he spent in the community of Harrisburg.

His many honors, his charitable works, and his contributions to his adopted city are a matter of record. He had a reputation for humanitarian service that transcended simple political boundaries. In December 1956, the Jewish National Fund Council of Harrisburg honored him for his many philanthropic works, and the following year the council established a forest in Israel bearing Dr. Bookstaber's name.

The Bookstaber Chapel at Mount Moriah Cemetery was named in his honor by a grateful Ohev Sholom congregation. In addition, he served on the national boards of B'nai B'rith, National Council of Christians and Jews, and in 1963, he represented the Eastern Pennsylvania Region of Zionism at the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem.

Other organizations he belonged to included the Masons, the Harrisburg Consistory, and the Knights Templar. He was on the board of governors of the Harrisburg Community Theater, held associate membership in the Harrisburg Symphony Association, and for sixteen

years, he served as narrator at the Dauphin County "Round Table" of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

Honors, titles, memberships, and awards can never give a complete or faithful picture of anyone and certainly not of Philip D. Bookstaber. Those who knew him learned from him, for he was an inspiration to others. His view of life was positive and never despairing. One passage from *Judaism and the American Mind in Theory and Practice* is indicative of the philosophical outlook and optimistic perspective of the man.

Life, he wrote, is a continual unfolding of God's plan for mankind. There is a scheme, a purpose to life, and man was placed on this earth not by accident, he reasoned, but by design. Man's "activity does not lead just anywhere and nowhere; he is subject to laws, and laws that are to be discovered; he works with these laws and manifests freedom and progress thereby; progress becomes more than a dream . . . it becomes a line and working tool, a postulate."[5]

The community is richer and wiser for Rabbi Philip David Bookstaber's having been among us.

THE MERCHANT PRINCESS[6]

When Dr. Bookstaber published *Judaism and the American Mind In Theory and Practice,* he dedicated it to:

Mary Sachs
A Woman of Valor and Exponent
of the
Prophets of Israel[7]

His words accurately assess this remarkable individual who rose from lowly immigrant to successful businesswoman and philanthropist, and like Dr. Bookstaber, an inspiration to others.

Mary Sachs knew both triumph and misfortune. She lost her business but bounced back to become even more successful. There are few welfare or charitable agencies in Harrisburg that were not helped financially by her. She was respected not only among her fellow Jews, but also by the Christian community, whom she assisted so generously. Mary Sachs had the uncanny ability to convince others of the necessity of charity and good works.

Although Mary Sachs lacked a great deal of formal schooling, she was an intelligent and shrewd woman with a keen business sense and

perceptive judgment. She was born in Lithuania in 1888 and arrived in America with her family when she was four years old. The Sachs family settled first in Baltimore, and when Mary was old enough to work, she took a job in a factory because the family needed all the help it could get. However, her employment ended abruptly in 1907 when a Baltimore fire destroyed half the city and with it the factory where she was employed. She was 19 and she decided that it was time to start a new and separate life for herself. She left Baltimore and found her way to Harrisburg. Mary Sachs found a job as a stock girl in a department store. She lived in Steelton with a sister, Sarah, earning $6.00 a week, and commuting to Harrisburg to work.

One day the store scheduled a sale and someone was needed to oversee the furs near the front entrance. It was winter, with freezing temperatures outside; especially cold and drafty near the entrance. The other girls demurred, but Mary volunteered. On the first day of the sale a man came in looking to buy a fur scarf for his wife. Mary showed him what they had but he was skeptical.

"How do I know it'll wear?" the customer asked.

"Do you know the man who owns this business?" she countered.

Before he could answer, Mary continued, "Well, he's a good man, one with principles and integrity. He's a respected member of the community. A man's business and the product he sells should always take on the character of the man himself."

The customer was convinced, paid his money, and left with his purchase. The owner of the store had overheard the conversation and was suitably impressed.

The next day the same customer returned, complimented the owner on having a salesperson like Mary Sachs who believed in her employer's integrity and the goods he sold. He requested that she sell his daughter a fur coat. Because of her efforts, Mary was promoted and given new responsibilities and a degree of authority.

However, the longer-tenured employees resented this *parvenu's* getting ahead so quickly, and they fabricated a story to get her fired, but the scheme backfired. Mary asked for an airing of the charge and was vindicated. Her employer made her manager and fired all those involved in her accusation. Miss Sachs, in an act of generosity and *mechila* (forgiveness) hired them back!

Her honesty and forthrightness never failed her. By 1918, the store was under new management. One day a friend came into the shop and Mary advised the woman not to purchase a high-priced item, but rather an equally good one that was on sale. The new owner heard

about it and fired Mary, charging her with disloyalty. However, losing her job was to be a blessing in disguise. Out of work, and contemplating her future, she now had her heart set on opening up a women's specialty shop of her own. But how? She had no capital, no inventory, and no credit.

Fortunately, the same woman friend she had advised not to buy the high-priced merchandise advanced her the necessary cash to get started. Mary Sachs rented space at 208 North Third Street, the Lowengard Building, and was in business at last.

It was a shoestring operation at first and Mary Sachs had to rely on her innate ingenuity to survive. She purchased a hundred dollars worth of flowers and affixed to them messages of congratulations from the wholesalers who refused to sell her anything on credit. She placed the bouquets all around the store and shortly word of this tactic got back to them. They appreciated the young woman's *chutzpah* (nerve) and extended her all the credit she needed. Her stock shelves piled up with merchandise and she was on her way.

Customers were few at first, but the personalized service she offered coupled with fine-quality goods at reasonable prices attracted a repeat and growing clientele.

For more than ten years her shop prospered, but then hard times came for Mary Sachs. In 1931 tragedy struck when a fire gutted the entire store, completely wiping her out. To compound the loss, she had not fully insured the premises.

Since her savings were depleted and debts were piling up, friends pledged financial help to get her started again. However except for one, each failed to come through. She did secure a $10,000 loan from one friend, and she deposited the money in a bank in Lancaster. However, this was before the establishment of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and, unfortunately eleven days later the bank failed. Fate, it seemed, had conspired against her.

Mary Sachs never lost heart. She borrowed on her life insurance, and with the help of creditors, had the wherewithal to get started again. She was a woman who saw in these setbacks a test of her resolve. Mary Sachs looked upon her business in the traditional sense of earning a living and showing a profit, but also, as she herself stated, as a profession.[8]

To Mary Sachs, her business was her life, and so was helping people of all faiths. Her reputation as a giver, to causes, to charities, to organizations and to individuals, was known throughout Pennsylvania and came to be known to many throughout the nation.

She liked to travel, especially to New York where she inspected and purchased the glamorous fashions she sold in her downtown store and a branch she operated in Lancaster.

Numerous anecdotes about this lively, buoyant woman illuminate her unselfish personality. It was a physician, so the story goes, who started her on a lifetime of giving. When still a salesgirl earning a meager salary, she was told by her doctor that she would eventually need her appendix removed. It was elective surgery and could be done at almost any time in the immediate future. The cost: $100. Mary started saving but heard a rabbi describe the squalid existence of orphaned Polish children he had seen and of the urgent need for funds to help them. The story tugged at her heart, and she wanted desperately to give, but the only savings she had were earmarked for the operation. Mary returned to the doctor and explained her dilemma.

"How much do you want to contribute to help these youngsters?" he asked.

"I want to be able to give at least $25," she replied.

"Okay, the operation will cost you $75," she was told. On that day she learned what sharing meant. It was a lesson that remained with her the rest of her life.

Her philosophy was, "Some people collect paintings and other valuables. I am a collector of helping. It makes me feel more alive."

She generously supported local Scout troops. In 1927, she donated $10,000 to the Hidden Valley Scout Camp, and a year later was lauded for her generosity to the Harrisburg Welfare Federation. She underwrote a contribution for $15,000, guaranteeing either to raise that much from others or meet the pledge herself.

Numbered among her friends were the mighty and the humble. She entertained in her home at 2917 North Front Street such people as Quentin Reynolds, Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna, and Eleanor Roosevelt, who was Mary's house guest when that great lady spoke before the local UJA.

Mary Sachs was an enterprising and innovative woman. Her approach to retailing and merchandising caught the attention of the influential *Women's Wear Daily*. In an article titled "Today and Yesterday in Retailing," by Kenneth Collins, Miss Sachs was praised for the high quality of service which her stores provided customers. The author was also struck by her advertising, particularly the offbeat character of its subject matter. These ads, which she wrote herself, sparkled with wit, humor and sober reflection. They discussed her philosophy of life, business dealings, human nature, ethics, customers,

charity, fashion, politics and employees. Her advertising was never patronizing or denigrating. She herself possessed a stimulating mind and a tender heart, and these qualities were reflected in her ads, which were a delightful combination of common-sense wisdom and old-fashioned *schmaltz* (folksiness).

Someone described her as a romantic but also a realist. Once when an Israel Bond drive seemed destined to fall short of its goal, Mary contributed what was needed to bring it over the top, for, she noted, it would be "unthinkable" for it to fail.

Ohev Sholom Temple lauded her many contributions to the community and noted her civic-mindedness:

> You have what you give . . .
>
> Mary Sachs regarded her civic life as a privilege rather than a duty. She believed and practiced the ancient proverb, 'What one tries to keep he loses; what one gives away, he keeps forever!'
>
> For more than forty years, Miss Sachs contributed substantially to the preservation and growth of our temple. She served as vice-president and was a member of the board of trustees for many years. Her financial assistance and foresight helped make possible, among other things, the parking lot, the addition to the temple, and the furnishing of the rabbi's study.
>
> Prominent in countless civic ventures and philanthropies, Miss Sachs was the donor of . . . the Rabbi Bookstaber room in the Harrisburg YMCA, and the alms box in the chapel of Mercersburg Academy. Nearly every hospital in Harrisburg and Lancaster has benefited from her substantial contributions. A continuous scholarship at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine is but one of her grants in the field of higher education.
>
> Miss Sachs was an extraordinary woman—a dynamic combination of concern and generosity. By her example, she spurred others to greater participation and giving. Often, it was her lead that made major fund drives successful. Whether it was the UJA, the United Fund, or a hospital drive, she would not compromise with failure.
>
> Her own purposeful dedication is kept alive because of her vision in enabling the trustees of the estate to choose the most lasting contributions of their fellow man.
>
> Now, through this endowment of the religious school building, future generations will benefit from her concern. She lives through her gifts.[9]

This moving tribute came after her passing on June 14, 1960. She had lived a full and rich life, one that was an inspiration and model for others. It was symbolic that in keeping with her outlook on life, the honorary pallbearers at her funeral were people of different faiths and callings: General Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Jr., Scott Leiby, Senator

Edward Martin, Dr. Harvey Smith, General Edward J. Stackpole, Dr. A.C. Baugher, and Louis Snyder.

Today, Hannah Cantor, who was associated with her sister Mary Sachs for many years, is carrying on the fine tradition of philanthropy through the administration of the Mary Sachs estate, generously contributing to worthy causes in many diverse areas of the community.

Mary Sachs left behind a legion of friends who, saddened at her passing, could take comfort from having known this truly unique individual.

FOOTNOTES

1. Very much of this short biography of Rabbi Philip David Bookstaber was obtained from interviews with Mr. Myron H. Beitman on Sunday, March 8, 1970 and on Wednesday, June 23, 1971.
2. If I may be allowed a personal recollection: As a young boy I can remember any number of times running into Dr. Bookstaber in downtown Harrisburg. It was always a great treat just to see him, but in addition the good rabbi always had a shiny new quarter ready and waiting. "Heck," I remember saying to myself, "I'm not even a member of his congregation. I wonder what great surprise he must have for my cousin Sam Latt, who was!"
3. Harrisburg *Patriot*, September 7, 1924, p. 4. "Rabbi Bookstaber is Installed; Flays Religion by Proxy."
4. This anecdote is based on information obtained in the interview with the late Mr. Joseph Garner cited in Chapter 5.
5. Philip David Bookstaber, *Judaism and the American Mind in Theory and Practice*, New York, Bloch Publishing Co., (1939,) pp. 154-155.
6. Miss Mary Sachs is referred to as "The Merchant Princess" by the late Senator Edward Martin of Pennsylvania in the *Congressional Record—Proceedings and Debates of the 85th Congress, Second Session* in the Senate of the United States on Monday, July 14, 1958.
7. Bookstaber, *op. cit.*, Dedication page.
8. Much of the biographical information on Miss Mary Sachs was obtained from "Extension of Remarks" of Senator Edward Martin quoted in the *Congressional Record,* cited above, and also in the interviews with Mr. Albert Hursh cited in Chapter 5.
9. Proclamation issued by Temple Ohev Sholom, Monday, June 27, 1960.

9

The Jews of Harrisburg During the Second World War

JEWISH PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR AND WAR EFFORT

The evening of November 23, 1939, was a gala one for the Jewish community of Harrisburg, for it was the night of the annual Thanksgiving Ball. The Community Center, spanking clean and decorated with colorful lights and streamers, was filled with partygoers. The men had on their best suits, and the women looked elegant in their long gowns. Red McCarthy and his orchestra had arrived early, for they would supply the music this evening, lively mariachi numbers (the ball's theme was "Night in Mexico"), foxtrots, waltzes and maybe even a polka or two.

For many in attendance this was a chance to relax, and forget for a few hours personal cares as well as the dismal news about events in

Europe and elsewhere. Hitler had crushed Poland and was turning his armies on other victims. Hundreds of thousands of refugees had fled the Nazi advance, and daily the number of dead and wounded civilians rose higher. Yet opinion about the war, which was barely three months into the shooting stage, was divided. Some thought that the United States should intervene on the side of the Allies. Others argued that Europe's problems were not America's, and "Don't get involved" was a sentiment which was held by many.

However, thoughtful minds shared the belief that it was only a matter of time, and conscience, before the world's greatest democracy would be forced to take a stand in defense of freedom against the Nazi and Fascist powers. Europe, indeed Western civilization, was threatened, and America would have to act sooner or later.

Years before the fighting began, there were those who saw in the events of the day a frightening portent of the future. One was Rabbi David L. Silver who, in January 1934, warned of the perils which Jews faced from the emergence of anti-Semitism in Germany. In a signed editorial in the *Community Review*, titled "Erewhon-Jewish Valhalla," he petitioned local Jews to throw off "smugness, complacency, parasitic concomitants, and petty provincialism" and to redirect "their orientation to life . . . with the insight of the cosmopolitan and the perspective of historic Israel."[1] He ended with the hope that Jews would return to their faith with renewed dedication and purpose and work to build a new Jewish nation free from persecution. His words were a tocsin, and engendered local action.

In April 1934, a German-Jewish Relief Campaign was launched to aid refugees. Community interest in the plight of Jews overseas mushroomed. Knowledgeable speakers were invited to discuss issues vital to Jewish survival. At one Community Forum lecture, Dr. Everett Martin, director of The Peoples Institute of Cooper Union, New York, delivered a talk on "The Answer to Fascism." He, too, warned that complacency and smugness were unwitting accomplices to the spread of totalitarianism, and he explained how dictatorship can gain hold of a nation when its citizens no longer care about how they are governed or by whom.

By 1940, the plight of the war victims in Europe was on many people's minds. Early that year Harrisburg Post 97 of the Jewish War Veterans, and the Ladies' Auxiliary, joined with the Red Cross in preparing medical and personal supplies to be sent to war sufferers. Meetings were held every Thursday at 8 P.M. at the Community Center. Mrs. Joseph Katz was chairwoman.

Interest in the political situation in Europe was high. In April 1940, there was a benefit screening of the film *Crisis* at the Senate Theater. It described the fall of Czechoslovakia and the death of democracy in countries overrun by Germany and only emphasized the need for positive action.

More and more of the news in the *Community Review* was about the status of Jews in other lands. There were many notices about organizations forming to aid Jews abroad.

Even before America became a combatant in the war, Washington was calling up young men for duty in the armed services, and about 300 Harrisburg Jewish men were given their draft notices. Ironically, the first Jewish casualty occurred on December 5, 1941, two days before Pearl Harbor. Nathan Sherman, 18, a young sailor stationed aboard the destroyer *U.S.S. Buck*, died from internal injuries suffered when his ship struck heavy seas. Nathan, president of Sigma Alpha Rho fraternity before he went into the Navy, was a popular young member of the community. To honor his memory, a dance sponsored by SAR scheduled for December 6th was cancelled, and the Jewish community as a whole deeply mourned the loss of one of their own.

When the country was plunged into a shooting war in December, 1941, Harrisburg reacted like thousands of other towns across the land. It literally and figuratively rolled up its sleeves and vowed to do its part to destroy Hitlerism. Young men and women volunteered for service and patriotism was a word which people pronounced unashamedly. American flags flew everywhere and although it was a time of great concern, one that hinted of loss and separation, it was also a time when people of all backgrounds were drawn together by a common cause. The country had something to believe in. The United States was fighting to preserve freedom and democracy in the world.

The sentiments of the community were summed up most eloquently in a front-page editorial in the *Community Review* several days after war was declared. The editor noted that ". . . the next few years will demand sacrifice and will be years of hardship and some deprivation." The editorial noted that ". . . courage, fortitude, emotional balance and hard work are the requisites for every individual to meet to help the war effort. We no longer can expect life as usual, but the way we can approximate normal routine will boost morale."[2]

The community can be proud of its men and women who served their country in time of need, and a number of Harrisburg Jews gave their lives for their country during World War II. Miles Goodman, Jr. was one. A 1940 graduate of William Penn High School, Miles was a

student at Penn State when war was declared. He volunteered immediately and was sent, in 1942, to Navy flight training school at Corpus Christi, Texas. It was there he met and became a close friend of John Glenn, the future astronaut and United States Senator. Completing his flight training, Miles switched over to the Marine Air Corps, as did his friend John Glenn, both of whom were now 1st lieutenants.

Miles' first duty station was Midway, in the central Pacific. From there he was shipped to the Marshall Islands where his squadron conducted bombing and strafing raids on Japanese targets in the South Pacific.

Then, on July 10, 1944, Miles flew his last combat mission, a raid on Japanese positions on Maleelpa atoll. He was killed when his Corsair fighter was shot down.

"Miles and John Glenn were in the same formation that day," his father, Miles Goodman, Sr. recalled. "Glenn on the right wing and Miles on the left. They waved to each other during that flight. John Glenn was the last person to see my son alive."[3]

What about domestic participation in the war effort? At home, people went about their business, but their attitude seemed sober and often filled with melancholy as many of their loved ones were far away and in dangerous circumstances. There were shortages of food and fuel, but these were endured. At the Center, there was a premium on space. Club dates were rescheduled and there was a shortage of office supplies. Air raid drills were common in town. People attended classes which showed how to organize paper and scrap-metal drives, ways to conserve fuel and gas, and tips on making the most of the family food budget. In a word, the community responded positively to the needs and exigencies of the day.

Although many Center activities were curtailed, big events such as the annual Thanksgiving Day Dance and important club meetings continued virtually unaffected. Life went on, with some inconveniences and sacrifices.

The September 18, 1942, issue of the *Community Review*, reported that Herbert L. Sainer was made director of two agencies, the United Jewish Community and the Jewish Community Center. He replaced Judah J. Shapiro, who left to become director of B'nai B'rith's Hillel Foundation at Cornell University.

Around 1943, the *Review* began printing letters from Jewish servicemen overseas. One correspondent was Herbert Harris, of the 37th Ordnance Company, APO, San Francisco. He wrote that he was stationed somewhere in New Guinea, where "men are men and women are unheard of."

Other letter-writers supplied the *Review* with a footlocker full of colorful anecdotes and stories which boosted morale at home and kept the community in touch with local men serving in uniform.

In May, 1943, the *Review* announced that Herbert L. Sainer, executive director of the Jewish Community Center, was inducted into the army, and that his post was to be filled by Ned Goldberg, former director of Melrose House in the Bronx, New York.

In June 1943, other changes in the leadership of the United Jewish Community were announced. Succeeding Gustav Kaplan, the founder of UJC and its president for ten years, was Henry H. Brenner. Mr. Kaplan was named president *emeritus*. Others who filled leadership spots were: Morris Jacobsen, and Miss Mary Sachs, both named honorary presidents; Edward W. Schleisner, Jacob Miller, and Samuel Finkelstein, vice presidents; and Sigmund Miller, treasurer.

In addition, the *Review* noted the Jewish population in town had risen to an estimated 1,200 families, or about 4,800 people in all.

Through 1944, the Center began a concerted drive to pay off the mortgage. Drive chairman Joseph Garner reported in February of that year that $47,500, or 56% of the goal had been pledged. The purpose of the campaign was to make every Jewish group and organization at the Center free of debt and save interest and amortization costs on the Center property.

By early 1945, it was clear that the war, at least in Europe, was about over. Allied troops had liberated all of Western Europe and were now knifing through Germany. It was just a matter of time before the Nazis capitulated. There was much rejoicing at the daily news bulletins announcing each Allied success. Then, in April of that year, great sadness touched the community. The death of President Roosevelt left the nation stunned, and locally FDR's passing was noted in the *Community Review*, pointing out what a sad time it was in the life of all Americans. Out of respect to the deceased President, the Center suspended all activities during the week of April 13. Memorial services were conducted at the synagogues, and there was a genuine outpouring of grief for the dead President and sympathy for his family. Prayers were offered that the nation would absorb the loss and win the fight for peace in the world.

PROGRESS AND FULFILLMENT AT KESHER ISRAEL

1942 marked the 40th anniversary of the founding of Kesher Israel Synagogue. By this time Kesher Israel had over 225 members and was busily helping its congregants and the Jewish community as a whole

endure the difficult days of World War II as well as might be expected under the circumstances. Rabbi David L. Silver had taken over leadership of the *shul* in March of 1933, a time when many of the members of the synagogue were enveloped in the ravages of the Depression. But the scholarly yet energetic young rabbi did not allow the gloom around him to retard his efforts at further developing the efficacy of Kesher Israel as an important house of worship. He soon found time, in addition to his other duties, to organize the brotherhood, the sisterhood, and the Junior Congregation which he felt were so necessary to synagogue life. Congregational suppers, picnics, and a monthly Kesher Israel bulletin only added to, but never overrode the main function of the *shul*.

On October 18, 1942 Kesher Israel celebrated its 40th anniversary with a dinner attended by many members of the congregation. Thanks in part to a generous gift from Samuel Lehrman and his family, Kesher Israel had succeeded in raising sufficient funds to enable the cancellation of the mortgage, and this event brightened the festivities. Holding the corners of the document were Mrs. Fanny Nathan, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, who had returned to Harrisburg for the occasion, Samuel Brenner, president of the congregation, and Rabbi David L. Silver. As Samuel Lehrman set the mortgage afire, a thrill of accomplishment and *nachas* (sense of joy) swept over those assembled.

By 1947 it was becoming apparent to all that a new location for the synagogue must be found. Many of the congregants had moved to the uptown area of Harrisburg, and the growth of the Commonwealth complex dictated a change. After much negotiation with state officials led by Samuel Brenner, Samuel Finkelstein, Jacob Friedberg, Nathan Gross, and Irving Yaverbaum, the sale of the Capital and Briggs Streets *shul* was finalized for $74,850 on April 11, 1947. Samuel Levy was chosen building committee chairman, and a lot at the corner of Third and Schuykill Streets was selected under the auspices of a committee which included Samuel Brenner, Joseph Silberman, Samuel Lehrman, Oscar Kasoff, Jacob Gittlen, Samuel Glass, Jacob Cohen and Emanuel Cohen. The purchase was made on November 12, 1947, and ground breaking ceremonies occurred on October 10, 1948 with Herman Hervitz serving as master of ceremonies.

September 11, 1949 was another important day in the history of Kesher Israel. Many hundreds of spectators were present to witness the unlocking of the door by Samuel Brenner, and the new synagogue was officially opened. The afternoon program was highlighted by an

address by Rabbi Eliezer Silver and Kesher Israel had found a beautiful new home.

Yet another milestone was passed with the 50th anniversary celebration held in 1952. H. Robert Kleinman was named to head the Golden Jubilee Committee and the event was climaxed with a banquet on May 25, 1952.

In 1954 Cantor Moshe Orbach came to Harrisburg from Bridgeport, Connecticut. His services to the synagogue and to the community have been appreciated by all with whom he has come into contact, and both Jews and non-Jews in our city have thrilled to his beautiful voice and religious recitations.

In 1960 Samuel Brenner resigned as president of the congregation after 25 years of dedicated service. Named honorary president for life, Samuel Brenner was feted at a testimonial dinner at which time Samuel Levy was accorded the tribute of honorary vice-president.

As membership in Kesher Israel increased, it became necessary once again to expand, and a building committee, under the leadership of Jacob Stein was formed for the purpose of looking into the project. The much-needed addition to the synagogue was completed in February, 1963. Blending in perfectly with the original structure, the new wing included a social hall, a daily chapel, kitchens to provide separate dairy and meat facilities, a large youth activities room and a rabbi's study. When Jacob Stein accepted the key to the newly expanded *shul*, Kesher Israel had truly come of age.

But perhaps nothing in the history of Kesher Israel had more import than the celebration, held on April 1, 1973, of the 40th anniversary of Rabbi David L. Silver's leadership of the synagogue. At the testimonial dinner in his honor, Toastmaster Aaron S. Feinerman paid lasting tribute to the man whose untiring dedication to his congregation and to his community has been an inspiration for others to follow. For 45 years, as of the writing of this book, virtually every citizen of Harrisburg has been touched by the judgement, foresight, and wisdom of Rabbi Silver. Through the years Rabbi Silver has become a national Jewish figure, receiving honors and tributes of every conceivable kind. But these mere worldly decorations do not reveal the warmth, the generosity, and the kindness of the man who has been held in the highest esteem by his congregants since first answering the challenge on March 5, 1933, and who since that day, has been rabbi to the entire Jewish population of Harrisburg.

At its 75th anniversary celebration in 1977, the membership of

Kesher Israel not only was able to look back upon three quarters of a century of accomplishment, but also ahead to future years of rewarding synagogue life and the knowledge that hard work and devoted leadership has made Kesher Israel one of the outstanding orthodox congregations in the country.

EFFORTS AT ZIONISM AND ANTI-ZIONISM

Historically, Zionism has been a movement to unite and settle the Jewish people in a sovereign homeland. The dream of Zionism was realized in May, 1948, when the State of Israel was founded.

As a modern political movement, Zionism dates back to the late 19th century when anti-Semitism took on a virulent character, leading to the Russian pogroms of the 1880s and the Dreyfus Affair in France a decade later.

Zionist ideas and Zionist programs were disseminated in the writings of Jewish intellectuals in Europe during these years. Notable were the works of Rabbi Hersh Kalisher, Moses Hess, Leon Pinsker, and Theodore Herzl, whose *Der Judenstaat*—the Jewish State—was an eloquent polemic which argued for the creation of a separate Jewish homeland. A fountainhead of the Zionist movement was the first Zionist Congress held in Basel, Switzerland in 1897. Here the Basel Program was adopted, which launched the first real organized drive to secure a permanent home for the Jewish people in what was then called Palestine.

Zionism took different forms in Europe and the United States. Zionist ideas were brought to America by immigrants from Eastern Europe fleeing persecution. They were fired by the dream that someday Jews all over the world would have their own nation, one free of persecution. By 1890, Zionist organizations had sprung up in New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Milwaukee, Boston, Philadelphia, and Cleveland. However, many of these early Zionist groups were loose, unstructured gatherings of like-minded individuals who lacked any real political or economic power. It was not until the late twenties and early thirties that the ideas of Zionism began to be heard by a larger audience.[4]

Locally, the Zionist Organization of America was reorganized in 1937, under the leadership of Oscar Tobey, president; M. Baker, vice president; Louis Gordon, secretary; and Joseph Levinsohn, treasurer. This fledgling group sought one hundred new members within the community.

Zionism was a volatile subject, for it demanded of its adherents

loyalty to both the United States and the Jewish homeland. However, some American Jews felt that there was a clash of interests in this, and the question was hotly debated.

In the thirties, the Council on Palestine was organized at the Jewish Community Center to take up this question. The Council brought together both Zionist and non-Zionist organizations. Represented were the Henrietta Szold Chapter of Hadassah, Senior Hadassah, Mizrachi Zionist Organization, Junior Hadassah, Masada and Young Judaea. A nominating committee, headed by Mrs. Louis Gordon, was set up to prepare a slate of officers for the embryonic organization. She was assisted by Maurice Rochman, temporary chairman, and Pauline Cohn, temporary secretary.

In 1937, the Jewish War Veterans of Harrisburg conducted a dedication ceremony in which the American flag and the banner of Zion were presented to the Center. Taking part in this colorful ceremony were: Barney Gross, post commander; Charles Toor, junior vice commander; Arthur Nydick, quartermaster and toastmaster; and assistants Louis Fisher, Meyer E. Fichman, and Gus Kaplan. Members of the post's Ladies' Auxiliary were also on hand.

During the years 1933-40, interest in Zionism grew steadily. The ZOA chapter in town did much to spread the word about the aims and work of Zionism here and abroad. Many people who previously wanted nothing to do with Zionism now supported the goals of the movement. Rabbi Bookstaber, as noted before, was one who became a convert to the Zionist program. Others who furthered Zionism were Bernie Koplovitz and Charles Feller.

CHARLES FELLER

Charles Feller did much not only for the cause of Israel, but also for the community. A humanitarian and philanthropist of wide-ranging interests, Feller was a merchant who gave jobs to the handicapped and aided those who needed a second chance in life. He was born in 1879 in Harlau, Rumania, and he came to America when he was 21 years old. A linguist, he spoke French, German, Russian and English. He gave untiringly to such organizations as the Jewish National Fund, UJA, Bonds for Israel and was president of the Jewish Community Center in 1947. He was a supporter of libertarian groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, and a staunch friend of Israel.

During World War II, he was active in many drives and appeals. He headed one drive that netted 100 tons of clothing for the Russian people, and set an example by donating his own coat. He once met Albert

Einstein and was so impressed by him that he sculpted a bust of the famed scientist.

Both Feller and his wife Mary had the reputation of giving employment to the handicapped. In 1965, Charles Feller was invited to Washington to sit in on a conference of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. He was only too happy to offer his services and saw the hiring of the disabled, where possible, as an obligation of all employers.

"We're put on earth to help other people," he once said in an interview.

Feller possessed a warm affection for his adopted homeland and city.

"I love Harrisburg," he said. "I've always found it a warm and generous city. For any good cause . . . the people of Harrisburg will respond."[5]

Not everyone in the community espoused the Zionist doctrine. Many who supported the creation of a separate State of Israel were adamantly opposed to the concept of dual citizenship, which implied dual loyalty. Particularly during World War II did interest in the creation of a separate Jewish homeland abate, and understandably, for American Jews, like all other Americans, were more and more concerned with events in Europe and the Pacific and the internal safety of the United States. Anti-Zionists tended to be from the Reform element in the community and were tagged "assimilationists." They decried any and all "isms" that required a person to divide his or her loyalty between two nations.

A local anti-Zionist organization active in town was the American Council for Judaism. This group became something of an anachronism after 1948, when the primary goal of Zionism, the creation of a Jewish state, was no longer a dream but a reality.

JEWS AND THE THEATRE

Although politics and religion occupied the attention of many, in no cultural enterprise did Jews participate more enthusiastically than in the legitimate theatre. The community has always supported the arts, and the theatre was no exception.

Assessing the history of Jewish theatre locally, it can be viewed as a continuing dramatic experience that grew out of a nucleus of people involved in the cultural life of the community. A popular diversion

has always been the local amateur theatre groups, particularly those associated with the old "Y" and the new Jewish Community Center. Minstrel shows and talent nights always drew appreciative audiences.

In the twenties, there were the Center Players, who regularly performed musicals, comedies, and dramas. *Brighten Up* was an original musical comedy put on at the Oriole's Hall next to the old "Y." Tickets went for 75¢ and $1. The late Ben Levi, a Harrisburger, wrote the book; Mitchell Grand did the lyrics and music; and the production was directed by Sylvan Garonzik and Earl Handler.

By the thirties, the Jewish Community Players were formed, and they presented original offerings, designed their own scenery and costumes, sold tickets and prayed for successful opening nights. The group did musicals and dramas, and one of its first productions was *Waking Up*. The cast included Goldie Berk, Gregory Cooper, Herman Shall, Betsy Herman, Manny Lax, Sammy Levitt, Mollie Levitt (now Mollie Morrison), and Steps Levin.

Another, more serious offering, really a melodrama, was *The Treasure*, by David Pinski. This was an allegory about religious and political persecution, and it offered a gruesome and savage depiction of intolerance. If the play was slightly overblown, its intentions were admirable. Directed by Earl Handler and Goldye Rosenberg, the play starred Benjamin Kaplan in the role of Chone, a gnome-like gravedigger; Martha Gittlen, as Chone's wife, Jochne-Braine; Tillie Goldye Berke, Chone's daughter; George Zalkind, who gave a cameo performance of Chone's dimwitted son; and extras Edward Astrich, Paul Kushel, Rose Levin, Louise Gordon, Joe Zalkind, Robert Smigel, and Harold Kopp.

The Community Players limited their repertory to works by Jewish authors, portraying Jewish characters, and focusing on concerns vital to Jewish life and culture.

In the mid-fifties Lewis Ibsen assumed the chairmanship of the Jewish Community Center dramatic committee. His duties were to revive this once active entity and to evolve a program of dramatics from as many aspects as possible. Lectures were given on makeup, scenery, sound, lighting, and playreading and soon an active and viable nucleus of thespians was created. For a decade the group had a popular following and its annual performance of a major Broadway show was a highlight of the Center calendar. Many new names appeared on stage such as Shim Lehrman, Jay Krevsky, Bert Goldberg, Ben Feierman and Lew Ibsen himself. All of these individuals, along with Frank Menaker and Sue Morrison Dym, later distinguished

themselves in performances at the Harrisburg Community Theater. Ibsen became especially active, appearing in over 20 HCT productions, the most memorable one perhaps with Shim Lehrman in *The Sunshine Boys.*

Over the years Lew Ibsen has contributed yeoman service to many Jewish organizations. He has written, produced, directed and performed in programs for the dedication of the new Jewish Community Center, the dedication of Chisuk Emuna Synagogue, and the 40th and 50th anniversary celebrations of Beth El Temple. Lew Ibsen stands with his old friend and co-star Shim Lehrman as the two most memorable Jewish figures in the recent history of the theatre in Harrisburg.

Continuing the tradition of theatrical presentations, the Jewish Center Youth began a yearly series of well-known Broadway musical productions, commencing with *Good News* in 1959. These productions proved quite popular and today involve not only the younger members of the Center, but also the more mature element in the Harrisburg Jewish community.

TEMPLE BETH EL—YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Stressing religious as well as educational development along the lines advocated by the Conservative movement, Temple Beth El, by the late thirties, found itself overflowing with numerous activities and organizations designed for the benefit of its members and the community as a whole.

In 1939, the "*Bar Mitzvah*" year of the temple, the congregation held a special anniversary dinner and a loving cup was presented to Arthur Koplovitz "in grateful appreciation for 13 years of loyal and faithful service."[6] Indeed, it was Arthur Koplovitz, as Financial Secretary, who had been responsible for maintaining the temple's monetary stability from its founding, and whose untiring dedication was one of the major reasons for the emergence of Beth El as a leader in the religious life of the community.

In 1939 the beloved Rabbi Max Gelb moved to a new congregation in White Plains, New York, and was replaced by Rabbi Reuben J. Magil who arrived from Buffalo, New York. Rabbi Magil quickly established himself at the temple and in the community. Finding that the children of the temple became disinterested after *Bar Mitzvah* and Confirmation, he began a Sunday High School taught for many years by Charles Rosenthal, Rabbi Magil's book reviews became an awaited-for event by the women of the city and often drew standing room only

crowds. And no wonder, for I remember well, as do many others in the community that great voice, that magnificent, almost menacing style, that supreme command, which thrilled, delighted and even frightened a book review audience, a Hebrew class, and even an entire High Holy Day assemblage.

The attack on Pearl Harbor saw many Beth El boys go off to war with attending heartache and concern. One bright spot during the war was the economic prosperity that enabled Beth El to retire its mortgage and this was done on Sunday, November 14, 1943 at a special dinner held at the Jewish Community Center. With peace came an enlarged congregation of some 480 families and talk began of expanding the temple facility. On August 27, 1950, the dedication of the new addition took place at a dinner attended by most of the temple membership. The new quarters for Hebrew classes increased the educational options, and the social hall, now called Sisterhood Hall, made it possible for both youth and adult groups to arrange religious celebrations and social events.

One pride and joy of Temple Beth El has always been its religious school. For over four decades it has performed distinguished service in spreading the knowledge of Torah among the youth of the temple. Under the supervision and guidance of Rabbi Magil, Cantor Reisman and Mr. Ernest A. Weiss, who came to Harrisburg in the fall of 1946, the religious school flourished and prospered. By 1955, its twentieth anniversary, the religious school of Temple Beth El served the young people of the congregation from pre-schoolers to late teens. It stands as a monument to the cause of Judaism and our Jewish heritage.

During the unsettled sixties, Temple Beth El served as a beacon of sobriety for its membership. The congregation was now in the capable hands of Rabbi Gerald I. Wolpe, who presided over the 35th anniversary dinner held in March of 1961. Still at the helm of the temple after 35 years of growth was Henry H. Brenner, whose moving yet humorous remarks left tears of joy in the eyes of many who attended.

In 1966 Irving Goldenson received the rarely presented "Man of the Year" award for his untiring service to the temple at the fortieth anniversary dinner held on October 2. Henry Brenner was honored upon his retirement as president of the temple during its entire existence. A bronze plaque was presented to Mr. Brenner. The plaque, mounted permanently in the temple, reads:

"In appreciation for his pioneering efforts, inspiring leadership, and devotion as president of Temple Beth El 1925-1965. Presented by a grateful membership—October 2, 1966."

In February 1967, the Aronson Memorial Lecture was established by Dr. and Mrs. Raphael Aronson and Dr. and Mrs. Robert Stern, memorializing Lewis M. and Lillian Aronson, husband and wife, who were instrumental in the growth and development of the temple.

Many men and women are remembered as helping to make Beth El the institution that it is today. Lew Nathan's involvement in temple activities for 20 years made him the obvious choice for executive secretary when his retirement from work coincided with the temple's need. Who can forget Louis Snyder and his work with the temple choir and many other congregational activities. Mention of the temple choir brings to mind Mrs. Miriam Manaker for her work in the choir and other sisterhood endeavors. Hyman Freedman and David Baker are remembered for their help in conducting the worship services as *Gaboim* (congregational leaders and attendants to the *Torah*).

Today, under the leadership of Rabbi Jeffrey A. Wohlberg and President Morton D. Rosen, Temple Beth El has established itself as one of the leading religious institutions in the city. It has the largest membership of any Jewish congregation in the area. It has an active and viable religious school. But most of all, Temple Beth El has an active group of faithful and loyal Jewish men and women who have given their time and money to make it a place that its congregants have always been proud to call "home."

FOOTNOTES

1. Rabbi David L. Silver, quoted in the *Community Review*, Harrisburg, January, 1934.
2. Editor, *Community Review*, December 12, 1941.
3. Harrisburg *Evening News*, February 2, 1962, p. 29. "Family of Glenn's Buddy in Pacific Keeps Anxious Vigil for Space Trip," Leon Baden. This article antedated John Glenn's historic space flight later that month.
4. "Zionism," *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia,* New Revised Edition (1962) pp. 1963-1970.
5. Harrisburg *Evening News*, May 19, 1965, p. 24. "Reporter at Large," Paul B. Beers.
6. Quoted in *Beth El Temple,* Harrisburg, (1976), p. 19, A dedication book published in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the synagogue. This book was put together through the efforts of Marilyn and Richard Abrams, Eleanor Koplovitz, Joan Leopold, Arnold Saft, Susan and Bruce Kogan, Esther Root, Carol Sudhalter, and myself. In addition, many others helped in the planning and production of this work, and while none of the historical articles are signed, the above people were most instrumental in their compilation.

10

Front and Vaughn

DREAMS OF A NEW JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

When Dwight Eisenhower took the oath of office of President in 1953, the nation was in the throes of a new conflict, the Korean War, and people worried about Communist invasion, The Bomb, inflation, and the private escapades of Hollywood actresses. And then there was the younger generation. Kids dressed in weird clothes, displayed unconventional attitudes, and were beginning to listen to "crazy" music.

It's a good bet that 1953 will not go down in history as one of the century's more illustrious years. Locally, however, it does have significance, for in that year plans were formalized to build a new Jewish Community Center to replace the then-existing quarters at 1110 North Third Street, in use for 22 years.

Spearheading the fund-raising drive was Henry H. Brenner, who called a meeting at his home to discuss the "nuts and bolts" of the project. Attending this meeting were those in town whose financial aid was vital to the success of the enterprise. One novel idea was that this would be a "painless campaign," i.e., contributors would pledge a

specific amount and make regular payments on an installment basis. Henry Brenner, along with another prominent businessman, Joseph F. Brenner (no relation), suggested that each of the 20-odd people at the meeting pledge $1,000 each for five years. That alone would amount to $5,000 each, or $100,000. The remaining funds would come from equally generous givers who were not at the meeting but who would be contacted later, and from smaller contributors in the community.

Mary Sachs pledged $6,000 over five years, and Henry Brenner offered to head the drive, but only if he was allowed a free hand in running it, emphasizing that its aim was to acquire contributions from as many as possible in the Jewish community. The new Jewish Community Center was to be a gift to the community from *all* members of the community.

THE PLANNING AND BUILDING

Like everything else in this world, the cost of something today is always higher tomorrow. So it was with the proposed new Jewish Community Center. Originally, the cost was estimated to be $800,000, but with inflation, the pricetag was soon well over one million. Another meeting was called, this time to mull over what could be cut out of the proposed building in order to save money. Al Hursh argued that it would be foolish to cut back on "extras." His position was that the community deserved a first-class facility. Moreover, people might not join or contribute so readily if the new JCC didn't offer the most modern services and up-to-date equipment. Hursh's argument won the day, and everyone agreed to go ahead as planned. To raise the additonal funds, a membership drive was launched, and, as always, the community responded enthusiastically. In one two-week period in 1954, over $525,000 was raised!

Much of the credit for the success of the campaign has to go to a tireless membership committee of 250 that corralled over 1,000 dues-paying members for contributions in what was to become a major effort.

Working diligently to unearth new sources of funds were Hursh, who made a presentation to the local United Way, which resulted in a $20,000 donation to the campaign, Henry and Joseph Brenner, Morris Weiner, and Dr. Donald B. Freedman, the first membership chairman.

First choice for the location of the new Center was where the Poly-

clinic Medical Center's parking lot is now located on Third Street. However, this spot was thought to be too confining, and another location was sought. Aaron Rubin suggested a lot at Front and Vaughn. Henry Brenner looked it over, liked what he saw, and it was agreed that this would be the location of the new Harrisburg Jewish Community Center.

When the bill came in for all costs, acquisition of land, construction, furnishings, and equipment, it amounted to $1,250,000. But the community got its money's worth. The new Center sits on a 4.3 acre plot and is 663 feet long, more than the length of two football fields!

There are three floors totalling 84,000 square feet. Facing the north on Front Street is a large recreation area available for a host of outdoor sports activities. The parking lot can accommodate 120 cars.

As for construction, the building can withstand the severest of shocks, for it's built of reinforced concrete flooring and steel; the ceilings are soundproof, and air conditioning cools all necessary areas. A public address system reaches every section of the building.

THE OPENING IN 1958

The present JCC building was formally dedicated the week of January 19-26, 1958, with many festive ceremonies and activities attended by members of the community and local dignitaries. The week-long calendar of events included cultural programs, tours, sports competitions, workshops, music recitals, youth activities, and Sabbath services.

The opening-day ceremony consisted of a ribbon-cutting at 3 P.M., Sunday, January 19. Louis Lehrman placed the *mezuzah* on the door post and the long-awaited day became a reality. On the evening of January 26, the week's activities were crowned with a gala dedication banquet and closing ceremony highlighted by a skit, put on by the Dramatic Group, depicting the history of the Center, from its beginning back in pre-World War I days, to the present.[1]

In 1966, history of sorts was made when Mrs. Roslyn Benjamin became the first woman to serve as president of the Jewish Community Center.

Today, the Jewish Community Center has grown beyond the original expectations of its planners. It offers a broad category of services, activities, and educational and cultural programs that serve every segment of the community.

The basic aim of the JCC is spelled out in the Center's own statement of purpose:

"The basic purpose of the Jewish Community Center is the development of well-adjusted, happy individuals and active citizens in the Jewish and general community. It endeavors to realize its objective by providing constructive group experience under the guidance of professional staff. The programs, flexible in nature, are directed to all age groups of the Jewish community of Harrisburg.

"The organization is incorporated to serve as a meeting place for the entire Jewish community; to work cooperatively with all groups in the enjoyment of Jewish communal life; to serve as an instrument by which the Jewish people of Harrisburg may promote the welfare of the Jewish community; and to cooperate with the general community in promoting the civic welfare of Harrisburg.

"It strives to help individuals know, understand, and appreciate their rich Jewish and American heritage and to make their greatest contribution to Jewish values and American democracy."

HEROES

After the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Egypt on June 5, 1967, the Jewish community of Harrisburg answered the call for help. And not for the first time, because for years Harrisburg Jews had actively worked for and donated to the United Jewish Appeal. The UJA was an outgrowth of the United Israel Appeal, a Zionist fund raising organization founded in 1927 as the United Palestine Appeal. In 1939, the United Palestine Appeal and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee merged their fund raising efforts to establish the United Jewish Appeal, and consequently, the UJA has become the chief American Jewish fund raising organization for the resettlement of Jews in Israel and elsewhere. In Harrisburg the campaign is known as the "U.J.C.A." or the "United Jewish Community Appeal" since it benefits local, national and overseas needs. Hence, the "C" stands for "community." Since its inception, the UJA has raised billions of dollars on behalf of needy Jews and has been vital in the establishment and preservation of the State of Israel.

Harrisburg ran its first official campaign in 1926. Headed by Philip H. Caplan, the drive netted $41,042, and after a dramatic dip in the Depression-ridden thirties, by 1967, the UJA was averaging about $300,000 annually in local contributions.

Then came that Monday in June, 1967, when for the third time in

less than three decades the clouds of war appeared in the Middle East.

Jews all over the world were dismayed and fearful for the fate of the tiny Jewish nation. The national leadership of the United Jewish Appeal called an emergency meeting at the Hilton Hotel in New York City, attended by a Harrisburg delegation headed by Alex Grass and including Morris Schwab, Lee Javitch, and Albert Hursh. Coming home after hearing what encouragement and advice the national organization had to offer, the local delegation set a goal of one million dollars, an unprecedented figure considering the past results of the campaign and the moderate size of the Jewish population in Harrisburg.

Immediately the wheels were set in motion for the Emergency Campaign of 1967. Spearheaded by sizable pledges from a number of Harrisburg Jews, the leaders of the drive pushed forward to reach their $1 million goal. Ads were taken in the local newspaper, phone squads were organized, and all members of the community were encouraged to give what they could to aid in the cause. A huge outdoor rally, chaired by Lewis Lehrman, was held at the Jewish Community Center. In attendance were members of the local clergy, Governor Raymond Shafer, Mayor Albert Straub, many other non-Jewish citizens and hundreds of members of the local Jewish community. The main address was given by Rabbi Gerald I. Wolpe of Temple Beth El, and it is remembered as one of the most poignant messages ever delivered within recent memory for the cause of freedom and the rights of the individual.

Inspired by the tireless effort of the Emergency Committee, the enormous success of the outdoor rally, and the stirring words of Rabbi Wolpe, the Emergency Campaign managed to reach its $1 million goal in the miraculously short time of 4½ days. People were lined up ten deep at the main desk of the Jewish Community Center with their contributions. Many non-Jews in Harrisburg sent in money. The campaign in Harrisburg mirrored the success which the brave Israeli army accomplished on the battlefield, and in six days victory was complete.

Not forgotten in the wake of the conflict was the generosity and dedication of the Jews of Harrisburg as they rallied to the cause. The success of the Emergency Campaign of 1967 established the Jewish community of Harrisburg as a leader in the national effort of the United Jewish Appeal and set a standard by which future generations would have to be measured.

In 1973, another world crisis, the Yom Kippur War, again threat-

ened the destiny of Israel, and the Jews of Harrisburg responded with even more staggering results. This campaign, under the leadership of William Brody, raised the astounding total of $2,871,294 to make it the most successful UJCA drive in the community's history. The people of the State of Israel know that they have many friends in far away Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

GENE

Three years before, in 1970, the Harrisburg Jewish community, and indeed the city of Harrisburg, mourned the loss of one of its outstanding citizens with the passing of Eugene Gurkoff. Born in Harrisburg in 1921, and educated in the city schools, Gurkoff served in the European theatre during World War II. Part of his tour of duty included flying fragile, engineless gliders on dangerous missions behind German lines. Returning home, he worked for a time at *Hermanns Shoes* for his longtime friend Herman Latt, but by 1948 was attracted into a Venetian blind assembly business owned by Frank Whitcomb. Located in Penbrook, the business, called "Whit-Co," began to grow rapidly. However, the next year Gurkoff had the opportunity to purchase a small aluminum storm-and screen-door manufacturing company located on Bridge Street in New Cumberland. Selling out his interest in Whit-Co, and calling the new enterprise the "Capitol Door Company," Gene Gurkoff was on his way.

In 1950, the Capitol Door Company was thriving and Gurkoff had the foresight and business acumen to expand. With necessary help from the Dauphin Deposit Trust Company, he moved the business from New Cumberland to its present location in Hampden Township, and renamed it "Capitol Products." The facility, located on the Carlisle Pike, three miles from Mechanicsburg, originally contained 32,000 feet of floor space and soon the company offered a complete line of prime aluminum windows, patio doors, and related fabricated products. In 1955, Capitol Products purchased its first extrusion press and soon not only manufactured its own aluminum extrusions, but also soon began selling them to others. The business became so successful that a public offering of the company's stock was made in 1958, and eventually the shares were traded on the American Stock Exchange. Gurkoff sold out his interest in Capitol Products in 1969 to the Ethyl Corporation, which subsequently acquired the entire company one year later.

Gene Gurkoff was, in many ways, the Horatio Alger of Harrisburg:

modest beginnings to substantial wealth through hard work, acute business sense, and guts.

From his days as a young man he was generous to a fault, often contributing to various causes more than he really could afford. While never an active religionist, he nevertheless became involved, soon after 1948, with the cause of the new State of Israel, and he became an early contributor to the UJCA and various Israel Bond drives.

It was through one such bond drive that Gurkoff got to know Mary Sachs. He visited her one afternoon for the purpose of asking that gracious woman if she would allow the drive organizers to use her home for a meeting. From then on the two of them became great friends and often were at the head of many charitable efforts in the community for both Jewish and non-Jewish causes.

Gurkoff visited Israel twice and became enthused about its culture, tradition and especially its people. For it was people and how he could help them which meant the most to Gene Gurkoff, in his dealings in business, charitable works, and in life itself. He was a man not easily describable in words alone. Kind, impulsive, generous, courageous, and intelligent: Gene Gurkoff was all of these.

THE WEST SHORE JEWISH CONGREGATION[2]

The 1960s represented an era of upheaval and social agitation. Perspectives were spiced with the influence of radicalism and dissent. The early '70s saw an expression of shock and disenchantment move across the face of America as Watergate unfolded into its overwhelming proportion. Despite the malaise by which this country was gripped, positive sparks were yet visible within the troubled nation. The conception of the West Shore Jewish Congregation was one such beacon in the night.

Morris Kranzel, a Philadelphia-bred Jew, came to this area with his family in 1953. He established himself on the West Shore, which at that time had at most ten Jewish families.

Kranzel converted his garage into a successful hardware store which later developed into the popular Lower Allen Shopping Center. While still a member of Chisuk Emuna and a board member of the Jewish Community Center, Kranzel nonetheless believed in the need for a synagogue across the river. The growth of the Jewish population in this area in the late 1960s further justified his claim.

In October 1970, Kranzel brought his idea to the attention of the public. Advertisements asking: "Are you interested in a Synagogue on

the West Shore?" were placed in the local newspapers. The response was stunning. That same fall, Temple Beth Shalom was founded with a congregation of twenty-three charter families. In need of a place of worship, the Reverend Charles Idler offered the use of the Christ Presbyterian Church in Allendale. Here, on April 23, 1971, the new congregation gathered for its first service. In the meanwhile, Morris Kranzel donated 3½ acres of land for a synagogue.

Dr. David Ben-Ami, who came to Harrisburg in 1969 to head the Jewish Family Service, became the rabbi of the new congregation. Ben-Ami had escaped Germany and the Nazis late in 1937. He became a rabbi in 1962, already having two doctorates, one in theology and the other in education, to his credit. With the experience of heading synagogues in Rochester, New York, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Dr. Ben-Ami, as well, had founded congregations in Putnam County, New York, and Reston, Virginia. His wife, Evelyn, joined the effort by taking responsibility for the synagogue's music. The noted Harrisburg Civic Opera soloist, Tanya Lear, became the Cantor.

Individuals such as Morris and Stu Kranzel, David Shuster, and Robert and Jerry Frank, did much of the synagogue construction themselves. The dedication of the new temple, which took place on October 20, 1974, was attended by more than 350 people, many of whom were representatives of the area's thirty-five Christian churches. Such is an example of the atmosphere of respect and cooperation which Temple Beth Shalom has fostered.

Today Temple Beth Shalom has a congregation of over 80 families and Kranzel predicts the membership will rise to 200 families within five years. The most encouraging symbol of the new temple rests in the fact that at least 75% of the present members are Jews previously unaffiliated with other congregations. This attests to the vital function that a House of Peace has served for the Jews of the West Shore.

"CAST ME NOT OFF IN THE TIME OF OLD AGE"

The good name of a community is personified through its deeds. In the past, the Harrisburg Jewish Community has clearly demonstrated concern for its children, its men and women, and its senior citizens. Recently, a further step was taken to provide care for the elderly who can no longer adequately support themselves nor live alone at home.

It was Rabbi David L. Silver who first advocated the need for a Jewish Home, but for years the community was financially unable to proceed. However, in 1966, Mrs. Spencer G. Nauman gave a $50,000

gift from the McCormick Foundation to Rabbi Silver and Aaron S. Feinerman, earmarked specifically for this purpose. With this gift, plans were formulated to realize the dream of a Jewish Home. In 1970, Horace S. Goldberger, twice the president of the United Jewish Community, and one of its outstanding leaders, became president of the Home. The next year, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Brenner hosted two successful meetings in their home raising over $1 million. The project was off to a solid start.

The late spring of 1972 saw the ravage of tropical storm Agnes with its extensive damage to homes and businesses. The Jewish Community was hit hard, and as a result, payment of pledges for the Home had to be delayed. In direct response to the catastrophe, a decision was made to move the proposed site for the new Home from the Harper Spong property on Front Street (adjacent to the Jewish Community Center) farther out of the city and away from the river. Accordingly, twenty acres of land in Lower Paxton Township were purchased from the Blue Ridge Country Club and the project began to move ahead.

The Jewish Home was conceived to offer a comfortable, well-ordered residence where people could live in the dignity of a traditional religious and kosher atmosphere. The $1.9 million contemporary brick structure is designed for 60 residents (32 single rooms, 14 double) with a central core permitting future expansion to accommodate 120 residents. Three levels of care are provided: residential; intermediate—where some supervision is necessary; and skilled—where 24 hours of nursing supervision is required. The Home receives federal funding under Medicare and Medicaid and will be maintained through residents' fees, and a fund raising arm, the Jewish Home Guild, already flourishing with a membership over 700.

My father, Sondell Coleman, chairman of the building committee, was a happy man in the spring of 1975 as ground was broken for the Jewish Home. Two years later, on April 13, 1977, the first residents were admitted, and on May 1, 1977, the dedication ceremony took place. Rabbis, cantors, and the Jewish leaders of the Greater Harrisburg area were present as well as those directly involved with the Home: Horace Goldberger, president; Sidney Slotznick, vice president, my uncle Raymond Buch, building campaign chairman; and Rosalie Goldberger, Guild chairman. Addressing the audience, Rabbi David L. Silver commented: "It is a beautiful Home, not lavish, not gaudy, not big, but a beautiful Home. We of Harrisburg have done our duty to the Torah." A beautiful *Sefer Torah*, the gift of Milton and Ormond Urie and their families, was placed in the Holy

Ark of the chapel, and the bright spring day seemed to reflect the joy of the participants as the Home was officially opened.

A short time after the May 1 Dedication, the Harrisburg Jewish Community was stunned by the death of Horace Goldberger. It had been due to his great efforts that the Home had become a reality.

It is significant that the Jewish Home represents the first facility of its kind in the Central Pennsylvania area. The approximately 1,600 families in this community have gone a long way towards fulfilling the commandment "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother . . ." With the good work continuing, one can only hope that the closing portion of this *mitzvah*, ". . . that thy days may be long upon the land," will be realized as well.

FOOTNOTES

1. Information describing the planning and building of the new Jewish Community Center of Harrisburg was obtained from Mr.Albert Hursh in the interviews cited in Chapter 5.
2. Information concerning the founding and development of Temple Beth Shalom was obtained primarily from an article in the Harrisburg *Evening News*, November 25, 1974, p. 30, "Reporter at Large," Paul B. Beers.

Epilogue

The history of the Jewish Community of Harrisburg is a story of the best in the American and in the Jewish personality blended together. America, as a symbol and as a reality, has infused her people with a respect for pioneer efforts and individual enterprise. Jewish Consciousness, on the other hand, has always spoken in terms of community and social responsibility. The Jew is obligated, in effect, to be his brother's keeper.

We recognize the significant contributions of persons, transplanted from their homelands, who struggled to give body to their belief in America's promise. It was their hard work and sacrifice which provided a sense of purpose and accomplishment to the community as a whole. The determination with which the few forged ahead lent hope to the many, and a collective consciousness evolved among Jews that together they could build a life so long denied their ancestors in Europe.

The American Dream, once rooted, flourished, and the Jews of Harrisburg saw their share of the fruits. Within a relatively short time a vibrant community had developed, exhibiting the influence of sev-

eral Jewish persuasions. While differences have existed and contrasts sustained, today's Jews of Harrisburg can all take pleasure in their rich inheritance. Indeed, the sense of unanimity and cooperation that is visible here stands as a light to communities elsewhere.

The spiritual mood of this area is said to be reflected in a physical structure. Truly, the Jewish Community Center does stand as a monument to our history and as a symbol of our achievement within the region. Here the various threads running throughout the community are joined. Among all areas of social, cultural and educational opportunity, the Center represents some of the finest Harrisburg has to offer. All the constituent elements are brought together and the boundaries of synagogue and congregation are transcended. Drawing upon every facet of Jewish endeavor, the Jewish Community Center radiates with intensity. As well, in the area of cultural affairs, attendance by the community-at-large has always been encouraged. This, more than anything, broadens the scope and the appeal of the Center. For example, when Elie Wiesel, world-renowned author and survivor of the Holocaust, made his stirring appearance in the fall of 1975, everyone, regardless of background, participated in an experience that twisted the conscience of the whole world. If there is to be an address for the Jewish Community of Harrisburg it is the Community Center. No other institution represents as much a focal point as this. The Center aptly personifies the spirit of unity which is a hallmark of the locality.

In June of 1972, a ravaging storm crashed into Pennsylvania, leaving it and five other states as disaster areas. The flooding produced by Agnes was the most extensive in the country's history. Harrisburg, among the hardest hit regions, was virtually cut off by the floodwaters of the Susquehanna. Electric power failed; hospitals resorted to emergency generators; roads, railways and the airports were under water; factories, homes and shops were destroyed. As the savage floodwaters summoned by the tropical storm slowly subsided, the toll in lives and property damage made it clear that the storm was certainly one of the worst natural disasters in United States history. Agnes truly tested the mettle of the Harrisburg community. Those least affected by the flood rushed to the aid of those less fortunate. Side by side, men, women and children shouldered the burden and pain of the devastation. The Jews of the area met their test and stood their ground. The response from the Jewish Community in this urgent time of need perhaps best exemplifies the spirit of cooperation, her single most distinguishing trait. Within the Jewish circle, one was

quick to come and assist his fellow man. But as well, throughout the community-at-large, Jews did their utmost to overcome the scourge of Agnes.

The balance of American and Judaic character, which has worked so successfully in Harrisburg, is well reflected in an ancient Hebrew adage. Hillel said: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" This attitude echoes deeply in the American psyche. Continuing, he said: "And if I am only for myself, what am I?" Succinctly stated, this stresses the necessity of Jewish social obligation. Yet Hillel went one step further. "And if not now, when?" This last injunction is a call for immediacy. It is this final element, that of deliberation and expediency, with which the Jewish Community of Harrisburg has molded its destiny.

Appendix I: The Next Hundred Years

If, in the year 2078, one would assume the task of writing the history of the Jewish community of Harrisburg beyond the 1970s, he or she might want to start with the following Harrisburgers, all prominent in the life of their community in our time:

AARON S. FEINERMAN—Co-founder, with Rabbi David L. Silver, of the Yeshiva Academy of Harrisburg in 1944; president for 17 years. President of the United Jewish Community 1957-1958. President, Tri-County United Fund, 1965. Currently president, board of managers, Holy Spirit Hospital.

EDWARD FRIEDMAN—Deputy Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1935-1938 and 1950-1966 under six different governors, both Republican and Democratic. Appointed Attorney General by Governor William Scranton in 1966. In this position established the Bureau of Consumer Protection within the Department of Justice. Past president of B'nai B'rith, Salem Lodge No. 26.

FRANCES S. GOLDBERG—Active in many phases of community

life. President, Yeshiva Academy of Harrisburg. Past president, Harrisburg Chapter of Hadassah. Member, board of directors, Osteopathic Hospital. One of the founders of Kosher Meals on Wheels program.

LOIS LEHRMAN GRASS—One of the area's outstanding citizens. Responsible, through her benefaction, for the creation of the Rose Herman Lehrman Arts Center at the Harrisburg Area Community College. Chairman, board of directors, WITF, Hershey, Pennsylvania. Member of the board of directors for the Eastern Region of the United States of the American Red Cross. Co-founder of the Harrisburg chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women.

SAMUEL HANDLER—One of the outstanding attorneys in the history of our city. First Jewish president of the Dauphin County Bar Association. Often quiet and reserved, he nevertheless was for years an important force within the Jewish community and without. Died 1970.

ELI HERMAN—Has served the Jewish community in many capacities, most notably as president of the Jewish Community Center, vice-president of Temple Beth El, and president of the Jewish Home. One of the true backbones of the Jewish community's spiritual life.

WILLIAM W. LIPSITT—Harvard College and Harvard Law School graduate, decorated for bravery during World War II. Past president, B'nai B'rith, Salem Lodge No. 26. President of the Harrisburg School Board 1957-1961. Elected in November of 1965 to a ten year term as a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas for the Twelfth Judicial District of Pennsylvania, the first Jew in Dauphin County to attain this position.

MARTIN H. LOCK—Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dickinson College and honor graduate of the Dickinson School of Law. Elected in 1959 as the first Jewish District Attorney, and indeed the first Jewish major county-wide officeholder in Dauphin County history. Served as District Attorney from January 1960 until his death in 1965.

MIRIAM G. MENAKER—Has served her community in almost countless capacities. Past president of the Beth El Sisterhood and director of that congregation's choir for over 25 years. 1976 Woman's Division Chairman of the Harrisburg UJCA. First woman and first Jew elected to the city council of Harrisburg, 1970. Vice-president of the Harristown Development Corporation and past president of the Wednesday Club.

STANLEY A. MILLER—One of Harrisburg's most active civic leaders. Former president, Harrisburg Community Theater. Secretary, Department of Public Welfare for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1970-1971, the first Harrisburg Jew within memory to hold an official cabinet position within the state government. Involved in a multitude of community-wide organizations and activities, serving with merit and distinction in them all.

GILBERT NURICK—Another of Harrisburg's leading attorneys. President, Pennsylvania Bar Association, 1967, Director of the Polyclinic Medical Center. Former president of the Tri-County United Fund. Director of the Hershey Foods Corporation (1965-1971). Winner, Distinguished Alumnus Award from his alma mater, the Pennsylvania State University (1968). Recipient of numerous other honors and awards within and without the legal profession.

DR. ISRAEL O. "I.O." SILVER—One of, if not "the" first citizen of Steelton, Pennsylvania. Graduate of the Jefferson Medical College, 1934. National vice-president of the American Technion Society, and for many years president of the local chapter. Physician and friend to the famous and successful Steelton and Steelton-Highspire athletic teams for over thirty years. President and chairman of the board of directors of the B'nai B'rith Housing Corporation in Harrisburg.

Of course there are many others whose names could be found here. In fact, many local Jews who are alive and well in 1978 are included in the main text of this book. The above twelve I believe deserve mention and their inclusion is the result of an informal poll I took among many Harrisburg Jews as to whom might be included.

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Coleman, Michael B.
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