Our Story

Recollections of Omaha's Early Jewish Community 1885-1925

Edited by Jonathan Rosenbaum
and Patricia O'Connor - Seger

Consulting Historian, Carol Gendler
Book Design, Patricia O'Connor - Seger

Published by the Omaha Section of the National Council of Jewish Women
under the direction of Molline Cassman and Roie Meyers.

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Cover photograph:

Rebbitzen Bayla (Levitan) Grodzinsky, mother of Abe, David, Manuel, Helen, Rose, Fannie, and Bill, arrived in Omaha from Lithuania between 1890 and 1893

Copyright December, 1981: Omaha Section of the National Council of Jewish Women

Cover photograph: *Rebecca Sherman, arrived in Omaha from Russia,1881.*

Errata:

p.iv Last line should read: Jewish Federation of Omaha, Esther K. Newman Grants Committee

p. 7 Information under middle photo, top row, should read: **Rev. Arthur Gendler,** Born July 23, 1889, Chumsk, Poland, Arrived in Omaha, 1921

p. 8 Information under upper left photo, top row, should read: **Morris Epstein,** Born June 15, 1890, Paritch, Russia, Arrived in Omaha, 1922

p. 15 Photo caption should read: *Rose (Gorelick) Blumkin's grandparents in Russia*

p. 26 Photo caption should read: *Katz family, c. 1907. Ethel, Bessie, Mother Leah, and Sarah.*

p. 49 Last line of fourth paragraph, second column, should read: *Selikovich became Selicow*

p. 59 First line of second column should read: 10th Street. It was called Mrs. Tuchman's Restaurant.

p. 70 Third last name of the first line of the photo caption should read: *Arbitman*

p. 91 Photo identification should read: *Abraham Sherman, arrived in Omaha from Russia, 1881.*

p. 104 Photo identification second column should read: *Max Arbitman, Abe Arbitman, and Sam Freed in front of Spaulding Grocery*

p. 132 Photo caption in column one should read: *Samuel Friedman, Omaha High School Cadet*

p. 137 End of first paragraph, column one, lines omitted should read: "At the mission we had recreation, games, and a lot of fun. When I came home I said to my mother in Yiddish, 'I learned a new song. A sunbeam, a sunbeam,

Photo caption should read: *Frances (Blumkin) Batt, three years old*

This book is dedicated to our parents and grandparents whose memories and experiences have enriched our lives.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to those whose generous support made this book possible.

Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities



The Council Thrift Shop
The Jewish Federation of Omaha

Blumkin Foundation
Milton S. and Corinne Livingston Foundation
Mrs. Ella Milder in memory of her husband Hymie Milder
Esther K. Newman Foundation.

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Foreword

"Our Story" is told by 57 of Omaha's older Jewish residents, who share memories and experiences which provide a personal and authentic account of the roots of our Jewish community.

Episodes in the lives of these storytellers form a pattern which reflects the breadth of their common experience. The storytellers are not identified to avoid placing the emphasis on the individual rather than on the content. Names were used only when mentioned in context. The editors' comments are in italics in order to distinguish them from our storytellers' dialogue. The translations of all foreign words in italics may be found in the glossary. It is our hope that this approach will help the reader share the strong feelings of Jewish identity and cultural continuity expressed by those interviewed.

This book is a collaborative effort by volunteers and professionals.

Early in 1979, Roie Meyers and I were asked by the Omaha Section, National Council of Jewish Women, to direct an oral history project.

Phase I, funded by the Omaha Section, N.C.J.W., began with the recruitment of volunteers who compiled a list of questions which followed a basic outline: where the early Omahans came from, why they left their homeland, what they found when they got here, and how their lives progressed. Other volunteers selected the interviewees, trained interviewers, and finally tape recorded the interviews using the questionnaire as a guide.

The Omaha Section, N.C.J.W., is sincerely grateful for the significant contribution of these 43 volunteers.

The criteria for selecting the people to be interviewed was that they be over 75 years of age and have come to Omaha by 1923. An ad in the *Jewish Press* and in the *Council Bulletin* requested early residents to contact us. All respondents who met the requirements were included. The technical problems involved in recording and transcribing the tapes at times made it difficult to hear and understand all of the names and places mentioned. However, every effort has been made to confirm and correct spellings and other details.

Phase II involved collecting and then coordinating pictures and memorabilia with selections from the transcribed taped interviews and turning them into an attractive, cohesive book. This required the creative talent of our graphic designer, Patti O'Connor-Seger.

Rabbi Jonathan Rosenbaum, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, University of Nebraska at Omaha, served as editor and advisor and contributed his scholarly expertise in a broad, Judaic overview of the project.

Carol Gendler, historian and currently librarian of the Douglas County Law Library, was our historical consultant. Her knowledge of early Omaha history is shown in her essay which provides the necessary historical background.

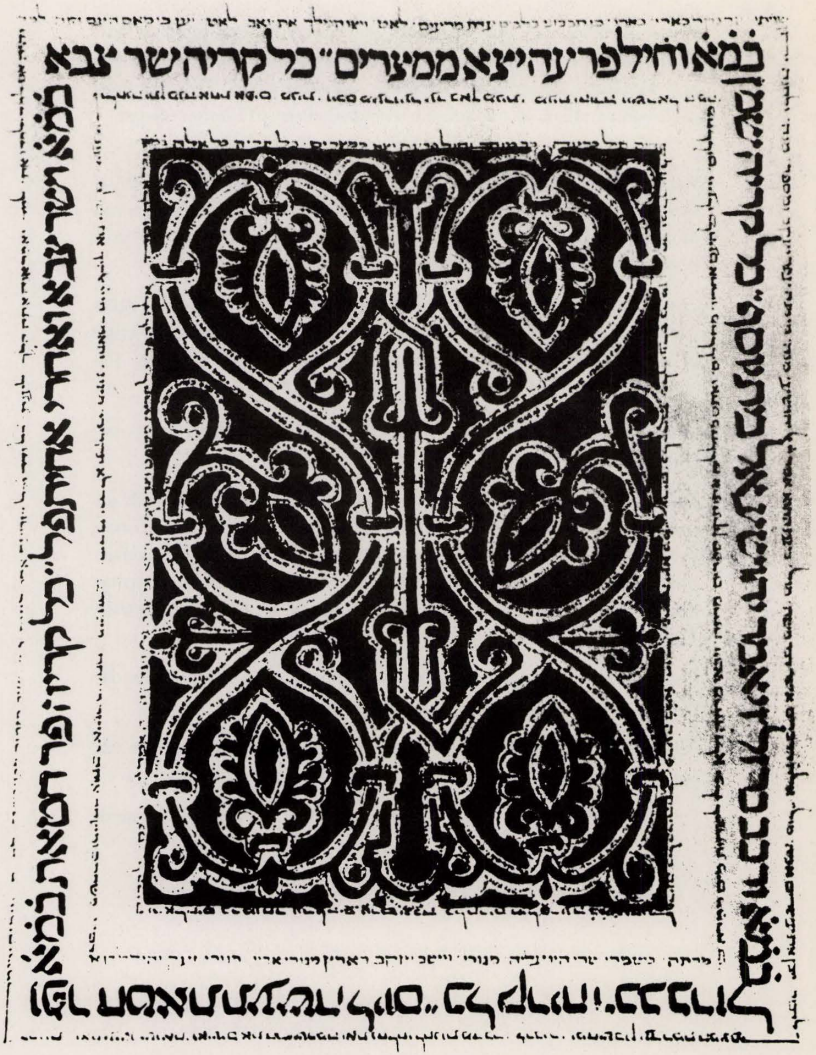
We appreciate the depth and significance that their efforts have contributed to this project.

Phase III of our project combines publication of the book with an interpretive photo-documentary exhibit of selected pictures, memorabilia and text taken from the book. The taped interviews, photographs and exhibit materials will become part of the permanent archive of the Omaha Jewish community located in the Jewish Federation Library.

Phases II and III were funded by the generous gifts of those foundations and individuals previously acknowledged.

"Our Story," book and exhibit, brings to life a colorful bygone era and preserves for the future a permanent link with the past.

Molline Cassman



An illuminated Bible manuscript page written in Burgos, Spain (1260) *National and University Library, Jerusalem*

From Promised Land to Land of Promise

by Jonathan Rosenbaum

There were approximately eight million Jews in the early Roman Empire. Nineteen hundred years later, on the eve of the Holocaust, there were less than seventeen million.[1] During the same period the world population rose from 300 million to 2.2 billion.[2] The raw statistics show loss, but also indicate survival. For almost two millenia Jews endured statelessness while simultaneously maintaining dynamic intellectual and moral qualities.

The recollections of Jewish life in Omaha represent a unique product of the larger historical experience which molded Jewish survival from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem until the disembarkation at Ellis Island. The transition from statelessness to citizenship in America provided Jews with a new opportunity for self-expression while simultaneously testing the identity which had nurtured them through centuries of oppression.

Full appreciation of the factors that fostered the development of Jewish life in Omaha requires a brief examination of the challenges that centuries of statelessness presented to Jewish religious, cultural and intellectual institutions. Only within this framework can the impact that American freedom had on Jewish life be fully understood.

From State to Statelessness

Ancient Jewish life required a state. From the conquest of Canaan until the coming of Rome, Jews lived principally in their own land of Israel. Jews normally enjoyed religious autonomy, though not always political independence. Under Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks, Jewish life and state were linked. The coming of Rome brought change and challenge.

For sixty years (6-66 C.E.) Roman governors ignored Jewish religious sensibilities and suppressed Jewish dissent. Finally, Jews rebelled. The Jewish War of the First Revolt (66-73) took thousands of lives. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the great fortress at Masada fell.

Despite the loss of life and shrine the fervor of the Jewish desire for independence continued. Two rebellions erupted over the next sixty years. The Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135) ended with the execution of Jewish soldiers and rabbis alike, and the razing of Jerusalem to its foundation. The Romans forbade Jews to live in their holy city and rebuilt it as a pagan center. Jewish learning gradually shifted eastward to Babylonia where Roman power had not penetrated.

By the mid-third century Jews of the Roman Empire received citizenship. In 313 C.E. Emperor Constantine established Christianity as the favored religion. Despite the deep connections between Judaism and Christianity, Jews were once more deprived of fundamental rights within the Empire. The ecclesiastical synod of Nicaea barred Christians from social and religious contact with Jews and Emperors Constantius and Theodosius II limited Jews' religious, economic and social rights.

The fall of Rome in the mid-fifth century did not improve the civil plight of the Jewish community. The Eastern Roman Empire remained intact at Byzantium. Its Emperor Justinian repealed even the fundamental rights guaranteed by his predecessors. Oppression did not go unchallenged.

Under Christendom and Islam

The dramatic rise of Islam in the seventh century displaced Byzantium in the Near East and provided Jews with genuine if limited rights. Though Islamic law denied Jews equality they, like Christians, were generally protected from forced conversion and allowed religious autonomy. However, the "Pact of Omar," which defined minority rights in Muslim lands, imposed special, heavy taxation on non-Muslims, prohibited them from building new houses of worship, deprived them of horses and weapons, and required them to dress differently than Muslims. Jews under Islam remained second-class citizens by law.

1. Salo W. Baron, "Population," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), 13. col. 871.

2. Nathan Keyfitz, *World Population* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968), viii; Donald J. Bogue, "Population," *Encyclopedia Americana* (Danbury, Conn.: Americana, 1980), 22. 403.

Christian discrimination against Jews was more severe. After the fall of Rome Jews experienced some relief from oppression, but as the influence of the Roman church spread to the West, legal disabilities were re-instituted.

Intolerance to Jews was not universal. Pope Gregory (590-604) personifies moderate Christian policy toward the Jews. Though theologically antagonistic, Gregory protected Jews against serious economic persecution, violence, and religious compulsion. His precedent was followed by Charlemagne whose son issued charters granting the Jews permission to "live according to their Law." In the late ninth century, however, a weakening central government caused guarantees of protection to deteriorate.

Days of Terror

The Crusades which began in 1096 shattered the relatively comfortable if unstable status of Jews in Christian Europe. As the Crusaders marched eastward they did not ignore local Jews. Thousands of Jews were killed by Crusaders who did not hesitate to appropriate their property. Jewish lack of fundamental rights and their consequent dependence upon local rulers for protection made them prey for this abuse. From this time, Jews throughout Western Europe were legally barred from crafts, agriculture, and most forms of commerce. They were mainly restricted to money-lending and often exploited by noble debtors aware that excessive debt could always be remedied by expulsion. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period of intensive religious intolerance, Jews were expelled from England, France, a variety of German cities, the Papal State, the Kingdom of Naples, Venice, Spain and Portugal.

The Renaissance provided no relief. Indeed, the early sixteenth century inaugurated a new implement of Jewish misery: the ghetto. Beginning in Italy in 1516, Western European Jews were increasingly restricted by law to areas assigned to them.

The Jewish experience in Eastern Europe had begun more hopefully. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Jews had received invitations to Slavic lands. In the ensuing centuries, Jews in Poland and Lithuania generally prospered establishing an autonomous communal organization and superb institutions of learning. Yet between 1648 and 1660, a revolt by Orthodox Cossacks against their Catholic overlords destroyed large portions of the Jewish population. The lack of rights, arms, or lands had again wreaked havoc upon the Jews.

The Modern Age

Modern movements did not bring improvement. For example, the Protestant Reformation did not lead to Jewish rights. While in 1523 Martin Luther reminded his followers that Jews should be treated "according to the law of Christian charity," twenty years later he proposed a total suppression of the same people who, in the interim, had not accepted his approach to Christianity.[3] Even the eighteenth century Enlightenment did not curb anti-Semitism nor provide a more equal position for Jews. While Napoleonic promises and concessions produced hopes, these were shattered at Waterloo. In a bastion of European democracy like England, Jews were denied the right to take elected seats in Parliament until 1858.

The insidious progress of European anti-Semitism continued to the point that it may be viewed as current events rather than history. When Germany lost the First World War and subsequently suffered economic devastation as a result of the Treaty of Versailles and the Great Depression, virulent anti-Jewish feeling was manipulated by Adolph Hitler to help promote his rise to dictatorship, and, ultimately, the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history: the murder of six million Jews between 1939 and 1945.

The Jewish Response

Jewish statelessness with its accompanying disabilities raises the question: How did Jews maintain their identity? The answer lies in the vitality of Jewish religious

3. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 165-69.

and intellectual life. The development of a dynamic Jewish law and the mobility of centers of Jewish learning help explain Jewish survival. These twin responses consistently protected the Jew in the ebb and flow of his statelessness.

The transition from Written to Oral Law laid the groundwork. Rabbinic application of Biblical statutes to changing situations permitted Judaism to advance without surrendering its principles. The codification of the Mishnah about 200 C.E. and the development of dialectic interpretations upon it over the next three centuries produced the Talmud.

Between 600 and 1050 subsequent Jewish learning and legal authority was centered in Babylonia and entrusted to a Gaon, the rabbi respected as the greatest contemporary authority. Questions of Jewish law were sent to the Gaon from all parts of the world. His responses allowed communities of the world to adapt without sacrificing their identity. By the time the Gaonic institution flickered out in the mid-eleventh century, Jewish intellectual centers had already arisen in North Africa, Spain, and Northern Europe. *Responsa* (answers to questions of Jewish law) continued to be written as new scholars were trained. Codes of Jewish law also began to appear and from the sixteenth century to the present day its explicators have continued to apply Biblical and rabbinic precedents to modern questions.

Had Jewish learning been restricted to scholars, the average Jew might well have surrendered his identity to the blandishments of his oppressors. The brilliance of the Jewish system of law was that it encouraged all adherents to study it in depth. Throughout the Middle Ages Jews saw literacy as fundamental. Schools took precedence over synagogues; children were taught to read Hebrew from their third year; elementary education and tutors were available. Larger regional academies existed in the Muslim world and throughout Europe. In most Jewish communities, rabbinic learning endowed one with a far higher status than wealth. Thus, the Jews who faced the degradation and violence which commonly accompanies their statelessness possessed a sophisticated knowledge of their religion which armored them against the erosion of their principles.

The Challenge of America

For the Jew the American experience has been unique. As Christopher Columbus' three small vessels embarked from their harbor, the last ships carrying expelled Spanish Jews were also leaving. The Jewish connection with Columbus' voyage is not restricted to an accident of dates. The newly commissioned Spanish admiral received financial support from Jews and the Jewish background of five or six of Columbus' crew has been clearly established.

As early as 1391, some Spanish Jews had been forceably converted to Christianity. Later, at the time of the expulsion, others publicly accepted conversion in exchange for the right to remain in Spain. Many descendants of those forced converts subsequently sought freedom in lands outside the Spanish and Portuguese sphere. Most fled to Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, North Africa and parts of the Ottoman Empire including Palestine. The Western hemisphere also beckoned, but the Spanish Inquisition with its zeal for discovering heretical deviance made the voyage westward as well. Less than eighty years after Columbus' first voyage the first Jew to be executed in the Americas was burned at stake for practicing of his religion.

Oppression in the New World, however, was uncharacteristic. Under Dutch rule Jewish refugees found some solace. In 1631, hundreds of Jews came to Dutch Recife, the capital of Brazil, with the first rabbi in the Americas, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca. The city's conquest by the Portuguese in 1654 forced these Dutch Jews to flee. Though individual Jews had already made their way to North America, thirty-three Jewish refugees from Recife established the first Jewish settlement in what is now the United States. The governor of the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam was openly anti-Semitic and attempted to expel the refugees, but his

superiors at the Dutch West Indies Company in Amsterdam overruled him. Nevertheless, the new arrivals were obligated to support themselves. They met this condition and soon became active citizens in the colony. By 1682 they had rented a house for a synagogue. When the colony became British a year later, the Duke of York, after whom the colony was renamed, permitted religious worship "for any persons whatever" thereby guaranteeing religious freedom for Jews.

Such was not the case throughout the Colonies. In 1762 some Jews were denied citizenship in Rhode Island and Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale College, expressed the opinion that Jews would "never become incorporated with the people of America."[4] However, after independence, George Washington wrote to the Jews of Newport that "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship." Washington stated that "The Government of the United States which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection shall demean themselves as good citizens."[5]

Yet, despite the new Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Washington's letter, Jews did not immediately enjoy equal rights in all the states. Most states did eventually adopt articles enfranchising Jews, but it was not until 1826 that they were finally permitted to hold office in Maryland.

Most of the Jews in Colonial America were of Spanish and Portuguese background and actively supported the American Revolution. Several died in the service of the nascent republic for rights which were more than edicts of toleration.

However, freedom issued a new challenge: How was the Jew to survive as a minority without anti-Semitism's ironic dividend of separation? Writing to relatives in Poland, Haym Salomon, the most famous Jewish patriot of the American Revolution, described his adopted home homeland as a place of *"vinig yiddishkayt"* (little Jewishness).[6] Indeed, the Colonial American Jew represented a minute minority. Shortly after the American Revolution there were only 3,000 Jews in the United States out of a population more than a thousand times that number. Demographic obscurity would abate as new immigrants reached America, but the problem of preserving Jewish identity in a free society would remain.

By 1840 the mostly Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese) migrations to America had produced a Jewish population of approximately 15,000. This first wave of Jewish immigration was followed by a far larger second wave. Between 1840 and 1880 the Jewish population of America would rise to 250,000 stocked mostly by German Jews who had fled repressive laws and blatant anti-Semitism in post-Napoleonic Germany. The new immigrants often began as peddlers and settled throughout the United States as some of the earliest settlers in the Midwest and on the West Coast. They quickly established charitable orgnizations, free loan societies, hospitals, lodges, newspapers and journals, and a variety of programs for Jewish education.

This immigration also expanded liberal Judaism. As early as 1824, the Sephardic Congregation of Charleston, South Carolina, had committed itself to the Reform Movement which had recently emerged in Germany. In ensuing years this movement which seemed ideally suited for a free society would gain extensive strength as German immigrants lent their numbers to its cause. Traditional Judaism also had its scholars and partisans throughout the nineteenth century, but communal leadership was increasingly in the hands of liberal Jews. The Reform Movement constituted a creative and thoughtful attempt to deal with a society where acceptance rather than anti-Semitism posed the severest challenge to Jewish survival. By 1875 the Reform movement had founded the first rabbinical seminary in the United States. Early graduates of this institution would lead congregatons in numerous communities including Omaha.

By the late nineteenth century, German and other western European Jews had undergone the process of

4. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 81.

5. Lee J. Levinger, *A History of the Jews in the United States* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961), 124-25.

6. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew: 1492-1776* (Detroit: Wayne State Univeristy, 1970), 2. 102-107.

American acculturation. Like numerous other immigrant groups they had risen from poverty to comfort. They had also faced with varying decrees of success the special American challenge of assimilation. The dual disabilities of limited Jewish knowledge and consequent religious apathy began to take their toll. The complexion of Jewish life in America, however, would be decidedly changed by an event unanticipated by the American Jewish community.

In 1881 the "reformist" Russian Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. His successor's government blamed Jews among others and sponsored anti-Jewish riots (pogroms) which "spontaneously" erupted throughout much of southern Russian and the Ukraine. In the spring of 1882 the new government issued the infamous May Laws which limited Jewish internal movement, educational and professional opportunities, and expelled Jews from Moscow to their former Pale of Settlement. A steady stream of pogroms, impoverishment, military conscription, and medieval anti-Semitism convinced many eastern European Jews that their destiny lay outside their birthplaces. Again, the issue of freedom determined Jewish migrations and, for many, physical survival.

Between 1880 and 1920 the Jewish population of the United States rose from 250,000 to 3.5 million. At first the new immigrants were dependent upon the institutions previously established by German Jews. Placement agencies provided necessities and employment. Often the head of the household would make the voyage to America alone only later bringing his family when economic circumstances permitted. Slowly, families were re-united on American shores.

The eastern European immigrants tended to be staunchly orthodox, Yiddish-speaking, and from small villages or *shtetlach.* The American Jewish community of German and central European descent saw them as foreign. The famous banker, Jacob Schiff, helped to underwrite the Jewish Theological Seminary because he felt that an intellectual center of Conservative Judaism would serve as an appropriate bridge between eastern European Jews and America.

The eastern European immigrant would not remain dependent for long. Hard working and often intoxicated with the freedom he now enjoyed, he rose from sweatshops to achieve educational and financial success. The eastern European community founded major rabbinical academies *(yeshivot)* and established elementary and secondary day schools with intensive curricula in Jewish studies. More recently, the amalgamated Jewish community consisting of all groups has produced programs of higher learning and chairs of Jewish studies.

While these developments strengthened the maintenance of Jewish identity, the threat of assimilation in America has not been eradicated. While intermarriage among the immigrant generation was quite rare, successive generations have consistently exhibited higher incidences of this symptom of lost identity. Later waves of immigration, of German Jews during the 1930's, eastern Europeans after the Second World War, and Soviet immigrants in the 1960's and 1970's have not been immune from the blandishments of acceptance.

The bar mitzvah certificate at Omaha's Beth Israel Synagogue describes the Jewish goal in America as being both a "staunch Jew and patriotic American." This challenge remains the key to survival in a land where Jews are both free and a minority. If the Jewish community of Omaha is a microcosm of American Jewry, then the transitional generation which made the voyage from oppression to freedom requires study. Those who negotiated the paradox of being a Jew and "making a living," of achieving Jewish learning and secular expertise, of religiosity and modernity, as the world moved from horse-drawn to atomic-powered, are worthy of special attention. Like sailors newly arrived in port, they stumbled as they made their way up the shores of a new land. However, their success at preserving and transmitting observance and identity in a changing world may well provide a preview of the ultimate outcome of the Jewish adventure in America.

Our Storytellers



Louis Albert
Born May 15, 1898
Kostokovitch, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1913



Jennie (Katelman) Bear
Born September 15, 1900
Council Bluffs, Iowa



Rose (Gorelick) Blumkin
Born December 15, 1893
Schidrin, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1917



Bernice (Kulakofsky) Brodkey
Born May 27, 1903
Omaha, Nebraska



Lorene (Rosenstock) Cohn
Born September 24, 1896
Omaha, Nebraska



Max Cohn
Born March 10, 1891
Vollner, Gokerny, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1896



Sarah E. (Brodkey) Dansky
Born December 7, 1897
Omaha, Nebraska



Fannie (Rothenberg) Denenberg
Born April 11, 1902
Monisti, Romania
Arrived in Omaha, 1910



Ethel (Katz) Levenson Edgar
Born February 10, 1897
Skadvchisick, Latvia
Arrived in Omaha 1907



Rose (Steinberg) Eisenstatt
Born December 10, 1896
Cork, Ireland
Arrived in Omaha, 1901

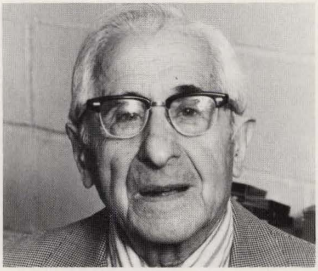


Morris Epstein
Born June 15, 1890
Paritch, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1922

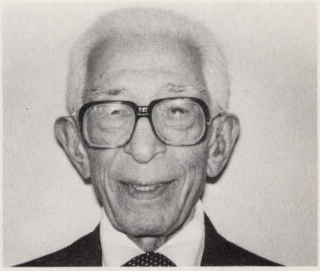


Sarah Ray (Bernstein) Epstein
Born December 25, 1898
Omaha, Nebraska

Photo not available



Sam Freed
Born December 13, 1898
Minsk, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1912



Louis A. Friedman
Born April 15, 1900
Shadrin, Minsk, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1923

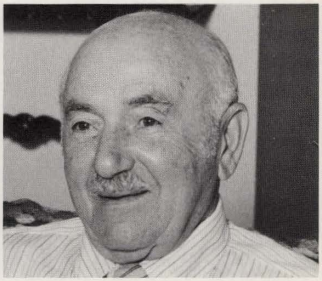
David L. Feldman
Born September 23, 1902
Zaslow, Ukraine, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1922



Rebecca (Gorelick) Friedman
Born August 15, 1901
Shadrin, Minsk, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1923



Samuel Friedman
Born July 22, 1883
Little Sioux, Iowa
Arrived in Omaha, 1887



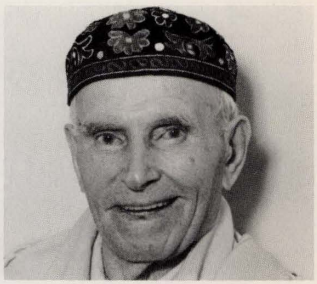
A. B. Gendler
Born February 16, 1902
Belogorka, Ukraine, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1922



Rev. Arthur Gendler
Born July 23, 1889
Chumsk, Poland
Arrived in Omaha, 1921



Max Givot
Born July 8, 1905
Ekatrinaslov, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1906



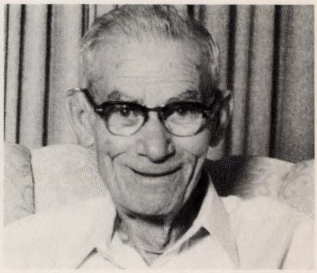
Ben Gorelick
Born April 15, 1892
Shevin, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1914



Joe W. Gotsdiner
Born January 4, 1896
Odessa, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1910



Edith (Trustin) Graetz
Born April 28, 1885
Dinitza, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1896



William Grodinsky
Born August 5, 1894
Omaha, Nebraska



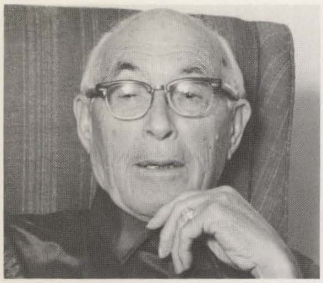
Lena (Meyerson) Grossman
Born September 11, 1898
Mitau, Latvia
Arrived in Omaha, 1907



Hyman Guss
Born January 1, 1885
Minsk, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1907



Kiwa Hornstein
Born October 10, 1889
Klaynorlee, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1914



Meyer Katzman
Born May 1, 1896
Davidifka, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1909



Anna C. (Cohen) Kaufman
Born March 20, 1896
Omaha, Nebraska



Abe Kesselman
Born July 1, 1904
Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1906



Dora (Moreno) Kirshenbaum
Born April 16, 1894
Kipel, Gabernia, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1921



Mary (Tatle) Kubby
Born January 14, 1901
Omaha, Nebraska



Carl Lagman
Born June 2, 1903
Ukraine, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1922



Minnie (Faier) Levine
Born February 27, 1900
Iasi, Rumania
Arrived in Omaha, 1909



Anne (Selicow) Levinson
Born March 15, 1903
Ukraine, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1908



Esther (Saltz) Lipsman
Born November 12,1889
Lublin, Poland
Arrived in Omaha, 1909



Alfred S. Mayer
Born May 15, 1900
Fremont, Nebraska



Samuel Meyerson
Born January 3, 1887
Latzkava, Lithuania
Arrived in Omaha, 1906

Photo not available

William "Doc" Milder
Born June 26, 1893
Omaha, Nebraska



David Miller
Born November 15, 1890
Kapula, Poland
Arrived in Omaha, 1907



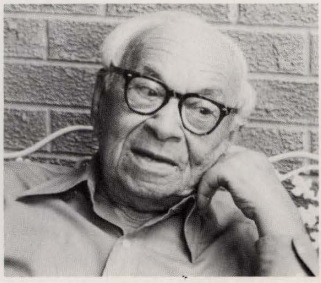
Gertrude (Tatle) Newman
Born June 9, 1904
Omaha, Nebraska



Nate Nogg
Born November 16, 1897
Commimetz, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1899



Bess (Lindenbaum) Pollak
Born September 5, 1908
Vilna, Poland
Arrived in Omaha, 1910



Aaron Rips
Born February 2, 1894
Minsk, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1910



Rose (Hertzberg) Roffman
Born August 9, 1903
Omaha, Nebraska



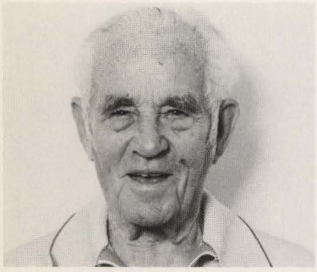
Dora (Sherman) Rosenblatt
Born January 25, 1896
Omaha, Nebraska



Blanche (Cohn) Rosenfeld
Born September 13, 1892
Lincoln, Nebraska
Arrived in Omaha, 1900



Sarah (Tuchman) Rubin
Born February 5, 1894
Omaha, Nebraska



Jack Saylan
Born December 14, 1898
Kiev, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1913



Yetta (Ruback) Saylan
Born June 16, 1897
Kopila, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1907



Edith (Pinkovitz) Schneider
Born August 8, 1895
Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1905



Eva Schwartz
Born December 24, 1905
St. Louis, Missouri
Arrived in Omaha, 1917



Ida (Auerbach) Stein
Born May 18, 1894
Zaslav, Russia
Arrived in Omaha, 1902



Berta (Newman) Stern
Born May 30, 1895
Galszecs, Hungary
Arrived in Omaha, 1912



Freida (Newman) Cherniss Swartz
Born July 20, 1887
Galszecs, Hungary
Arrived in Omaha, 1898



Silvia (Segal) Telpner
Born December 6, 1901
Bucharest, Romania
Arrived in Omaha, 1904



Rose (Kaplan) Wolpa
Born January 9, 1898
Omaha, Nebraska

1 Born Proud

Our heritage has been rich — our lives full. In good times and bad we managed to retain our integrity and identity as Jews. This priority has guided our destinies. Our lives were never one-sided. There was always the good with the bad, the sweet with the bitter.

"Now, my mother was going with a young man, but since her sister wasn't as pretty as she, my mother was forced to hide whenever her parents would try to find a match for Dvora. Finally, Dvora did get married, but mother was not allowed to marry the man she was going with. Her marriage to father, a very, very learned man, was arranged. Mother ran the family business. Father went to *shul* three times a day. He didn't know and didn't want to know anything about business. One day, a fire swept through the little town and my parents were left with nothing but dad's Latvian visa and his education. With no other choice, they moved to Mitava, Latvia. There my father established himself as a Hebrew teacher. The Hebrew teacher was paid last after everyone else. There were times, especially on holidays, when mother would put the kettle on with water making believe she had some chicken soup, but actually we ate only herring and bread."



Meyerson family, 1905. Meyer, Mother Ettabaila, Benny, Samuel, Father Yehuda, Lena, Arthur



Hershel and Merle Maizlish, Joe Maizlish, Etta (Maizlish) Klein and Goldie (Maizlish) Staenberg

Many of us from Omaha came from a life in the shtetl. It was all we knew. It embraced us in our early years and fostered us through adolescence till many of us were either forced to join the army, escape, or find urban work.

"What did a *shtetl* have? It had two rows of houses and two synagogues. Not only did it have two synagogues, it also had two *shochtim.* You know what a slaughterer of meat is? My father went to the same synagogue as his father but his *shochet* was a personal friend. Not the same as my grandfather's ... We had a *mikveh.* No Jewish girl could get married unless she went to the *mikveh.* The men and the women both went. The women went on Friday morning and the men went in the afternoons. It was necessary to go to *shul* pure.

"All the houses were built out of logs. There were no boards. Logs. We cut our own logs down and laid them one next to the other. There was no such thing as paint. We didn't know what paint was like. The oven was of bricks. You baked, you cooked, and you got the heat out of it. Facilities? There was a barn — that's where you did, you'll pardon me ...

"About 75% of our *shtetl* were Jews — one long street and houses on both sides. My dad was a go-getting sort of a man. You know he built a beautiful home, big enough so that he could rent out a room to help somebody else in need."

"In the *shtetl* there was frozen water inside of the house. Eight kids used to sleep on the floor on straw mattresses. When it was real cold, we used to crawl up on top of the loft. In the summertime, the flies used to eat us up. One room measured 12 x 17 feet. *(We can rely on the figures; Mrs. Blumkin, in her eighties, still sells carpet.)* Another room was an 8 x 12. That's all. All the kids slept in one room. There were about 40 feet between each house. The outside of the house was made of round logs."

"Water came from a well. We had two wells in the city. One was in our part of town, the northern part. We had buckets, all wooden buckets, which we carried on our shoulders. We went there with a great big ladle. From that we drank, from that we watered our animals."

"There were times when we did not have a well and we had to go to the river to get water and carry it way up the hill. Pretty good hill! If it had steps, it would have been fifty to sixty of them."

"We had neighborhood stores and the two food stores were both owned by Jews. They weren't grocery stores. We didn't buy any groceries. We made our own bread, we had our own chickens. We bought rye. There was



Rose (Gorelick) Blumkin's Mother Sarah, and Father Solomon Joseph

one mill in town that ground all the flour. The miller had a short leg. He ground all the flour. We'd go in there and buy food, sixty pounds at a time. We'd knead it like we do here, put it in an oven, and bake it. Some families would run out of bread. They would go to neighbors and borrow. They'd borrow a loaf from this neighbor, a loaf from that neighbor, five or six loaves. When mom baked, she baked twelve loaves."

"No Jew was allowed to own land in Russia. The only land we could own was the land our house was on. It stood on approximately two to three acres. We raised all our own garden stuff. Each one had a cow because this was one way of getting food. There was a government pasture where we were allowed to take the cow each morning."

"The cow gave milk, the chickens gave eggs and on *Shabbat* my mother would buy a half a pound of meat for ten *kopeks*. It would be the equivalent here of five cents — that's all it cost then. And the month when my mother got money from my dad she would buy white flour and make *challah*. Otherwise, it was rye bread, rye bread, rye bread, and rye bread. One meal we'd have rye bread with butter, we'd have rye bread with cheese, we'd have rye bread with buttermilk, we'd have rye bread with cucumbers, we'd have rye bread with potatoes and we used to have potatoes three times a day. Potatoes in the morning, potatoes at noon, potatoes at night. In the morning, potato soup, at noon, mashed potatoes or some other kind; at night, a potato with a jacket on it and a piece of black bread. We didn't think there was anything else; we were happy about it."

"We grew our own fruits and vegetables. We had trees. We had the same plums that we have here and the finest little pears. We had strawberries and blueberries that mom used to can. If a person got sick, she'd give them a little strawberry jam and tea. Tea had to be imported."

"Since most of the week we ate bread and potato soup, we looked forward to *Sabbath*, because then we always had a full meal. When we came home after school on Friday, we would line up and father would place his hand on each of our heads and give us his blessing. In a happy house we would sing *Zemirot* and have our festive meal. We felt a deep love for our parents and hoped someday to make things easier for them."



A. B. Gendler's grandparents, Goldie (Bathseva) and Mendle Noddle, Lithuania, 1875

Many of us were lucky enough to have received a good education, and others were only able to read and write. Education was the best investment our parents could have made for us. Whether our lives were middle class or struggling for survival, our thirst for knowledge was universal.



Freed family, 1911. L to R: Sam, Mother Miriam, Dora, Schoal; lower left, Harry

"Everyone had a desire to know what was going on in the world. As the younger generation came into being they wanted to know what was going on in the world, in Moscow, in Leningrad. At that time Leningrad was called St. Petersburg, named after Peter the Great. The only time we'd know anything would be if somebody happened to be on a trip to Kiev or Moscow and brought back a newspaper that was five months old. Everybody read it. That's how much desire we had to know and we didn't always know. I remember distinctly the Russo-Japanese War which began in 1905, as far as we were concerned." *(It actually began in 1904.)*

"After we delivered the milk to the dairy, we used to send the Russian fellow and the horses and wagon back home and I used to go to school. From 8:00 to 12:00 I used to go to a public school. It wasn't a Russian public school. It was the Jewish people that started it so that we would have an education. I used to go to school from 8:00 to 12:00. Then from 1:00 to 6:00 I went to Hebrew school."

"I had no schooling but a rich girl taught me. She didn't charge any money. She was about seventeen and she heard I had a good head and we didn't have money to pay for it, so she offered to teach me."

"My family decided to bring in a rabbi to teach the girls. The boys used to go to the synagogue where they would learn their Hebrew. The girls used to sit around a great big table. The rabbi used to come to teach us and so I sat in too, even though I was the youngest. I learned how to read and write Yiddish. Now I don't remember learning anything else."

"In the Russian school, I learned geography, multiplication and Russian so fluently that I used to write requests to the governor for the townspeople ."

"Grandmother was a very educated woman and a very religious woman. She wouldn't come to this country and my grandfather wouldn't come back to the old country from America. She didn't want to come to this

country, so he stopped sending her money. When he stopped sending her money she was educated enough to be a teacher in her home. She taught Hebrew. She taught people to read and write. I was always over at my grandmother's. That's where I learned. When I came home I wrote beautiful Yiddish. I still can."

"My father could write either Russian or Yiddish. We all knew how to write Yiddish, but very few of us knew how to write Russian."

Not all of us were raised by our parents. The attraction of America often meant fathers came before children. Some of us were brought up by grandparents.

"We spoke Hungarian language altogether, with my grandparents, in school, everywhere. German was a second language which I took up in school. I could read and write at that time. I was already high school age when I came over. My grandfather never wanted me to come, although my family was here. But since I didn't know any of my sisters or my father, I was not anxious to come. I had many comforts and wonderful, patient grandparents who raised me. But, then my grandfather died. A year or so later, Grandmother, who was a very wise woman, said, 'No, Berta, you will have to go to join your family in America.'"



Berta (Newman) Stern, her Aunt Katie Goodfriend, and her grandparents, Hungary, 1910



Berta (Newman) Stern and Malvina (Newman) Greenspan, Hungary, c. 1905

"My home was comparable to what we would call here upper middle class. My grandparents raised me. I had my own private room. My grandparents had their room, and then we had another small living room and a kitchen. We had a maid who slept in the kitchen. The bathrooms were not outdoors, but in sort of a covered place. It wasn't a bathroom, it was a toilet. However, my aunt and uncle had a regular bathroom in the same house. It was more like an apartment, but it belonged to my grandfather and my uncle, my grandfather's son. We had oil lamps that were cleaned every week by the maid and filled with oil. However, if I remember right, already my aunt and uncle had electric bulbs. Not real fixtures, but a hanging globe."

Our childhood pleasures were simple . . .

"I was too small to go in swimming. I had a little cousin that lived with us. We used to go down and sit on the bank and watch my sisters swimming. They didn't have bathing suits. They used to take white sheets, bed sheets, and wrap them around themselves. We used to watch them. Oh, I feel like I can see them now. We used to put our feet in the water. The water was just as clear as crystal!"



Newman Sisters' home village, Galszecs, Hungary, c. 1910

Our mischieviousness was typical.

"After my brother Meyer's Bar Mitzvah, he returned to Windau with me. I helped him locate a job in a clothing store. Every Sunday I would play cards with the other clerks on the third floor. One Sunday, instead of my card game, I went to Meyer's dormitory. There I found a card game in progress ... but no sign of Meyer. The other boys told me he wasn't there. I didn't believe them, and finally I noticed Meyer's feet sticking out from under the bed. I was supposed to be responsible for him, having promised the folks to look after him. I was pretty mad, and told him he was too young to be gambling, particularly since I was responsible for him."

My brother's sense of honesty matured with age, for when later put to the test, he emmerged victorious.

"Every Sunday one of the clerks was supposed to wait in the store to help men load paint that had to go to the docks. After a month, I was the appointed one. When I entered the store, I noticed that the cash drawer was open, and filled with copper money. It was more money than I had ever seen, and I had to at least touch it. I went to the drawer and held the money in my hands. I stood there and cried. It was a great temptation for one as poor as I. I put the money away. When I was through delivering the paint, I went upstairs to give the key to Mr. Jacoby. He could see that my eyes were red and asked why I had been crying. I finally told him, he should not leave the cash drawer open. It was too much of a temptation, but that I had left it without taking anything. He then told me that this was his way of testing the honesty of his employees, and that I had passed the test."

Our history as successful scholars, tradesmen, craftsmen, businessmen, and merchants is known to all. However, government restrictions on ownership, heavy taxes, and infringement on our personal freedoms limited the scope of our success and financial advancement. Some suffered injustices and cruelties more than others. Many women were strong, capable and often expert business managers.

"My father was a rabbi. He used to pray all the time in the synagogue. Never made a living. My mother had a little grocery store and supported the kids. The grocery store was in the house. We were open all hours. Anybody who came to buy, we sold. We sold sugar, flour, thimbles, beans. Just bagged things. Not vegetables because they'd spoil."

"Grandfather used to make carriages for the nobility. There were two shops. One on one side of the *shtetl*, one on the other."

"My grandfather had a grain business which he eventually turned over to his son. They used to go out in the country, buy the grain, then the peasants brought it in



Ethel (Katz) Levenson Edgar's grandfather, Joshua Hessel Levenson, c. 1900

big wagons to a warehouse. We had a coachman and a beautiful black buggy."

"My father was an importer, oil mostly. They had oil wells, but over there you couldn't own them if you were Jewish. You could manage them. They were in the Poeschki oil fields that were bombed during the war, but Standard Oil took it away from them. They could take property away from people without any question. At one time they were the main operators in the Poeschki oil fields. That was big business then. Once a man fell in a tank. We laughed so! He looked like a little tar baby. They pulled him out. I can see that just like today. The black tar was coming off him, but he was rescued. They got him."



David Miller's grandparents, Sarah and Abraham Laib Miller, Kapula, Russia, 1889

"As a boy of fifteen I worked in a bakery. The first year I got nothing. I got board and room the second year. The third year I got $36.00 a year."

We began young, but not without dreams.

"I used to tell my mother when I was six years old that I'll grow up, I'll make money, and go to America. I was thirteen years old when I left. I didn't have any money. I had a brand new pair of shoes. I put them on my shoulders and I walked eighteen miles to a station to take a train to the big town — to find a job — to start making money.

"Everywhere I went in the big town they looked at me and said, 'You're too little, too young.' How can they expect to hire me? It was getting late. They told me that one of the storekeepers, his girl was leaving for America. I came and asked him for a job. He said, 'Oh, you are just a kid. I cannot hire you.' I said, 'I'm not a beggar. I've only got four cents left. Let me into your house to sleep tonight and I'll show you I know how to run a business.' So he let me in and I came in the morning to work. I started to roll up material and wait on customers. I figured in my head before anybody could take up a pencil. The proprietor said, 'You stay, I never saw anything like it.' And I stayed there until I got married. Seven years. I built up a big business and I was treated wonderfully. I lived in a very wealthy home with a maid and everything.

"The business used to take in a couple hundred rubles a day. That was a lot. We made out very well! I built him a much bigger business, just as I had promised. There were six helpers. When I was sixteen, I became manager over six men. If my boss bought the wrong thing, I told him he bought the wrong thing. He used to say to me, 'I'm not mad at you when you say I didn't buy the right thing. I'm not a girl like you."

2 Leaving Home

Reasons

The reasons we left home were basically threefold. We needed to be free to be who we were — Jews. The military did not respect our need to keep kosher. Terrorists groups pillaged our villages, abused our families, and often stole our valuables. We needed to escape the daily tensions fear had instilled. America provided us with a dream, a land of opportunity. We needed a place to belong, to call our own. These needs motivated our choices.

"I was born in 1896. In 1903 I was seven years old. I remember distinctly the Russo-Japanese War and the fear my parents had and what prompted the talk of America. A Hebrew Aid Society had been formed. Now, what were the reasons that prompted our people to leave? First, to escape the military service. That was the highest motivating factor. Secondly, fear of the pogroms. I remember when it happened in 1905. Thirdly, in America everybody thought that money was growing on trees."

1. Military

"Everybody had to serve that was 21 years old. Service was for four years. They had a rule that the oldest son was ostensibly the future, the one who would take care of his old parents. He was absolved from service but anybody younger could be taken.

"My father was the oldest. They gave him what's known as a blue card. A blue card said he didn't have to go into the service. Everyone else had a red card. Father's three younger brothers were supposed to go. All three of them escaped by cutting off their big toes on their right feet. They are still here. One uncle is now at the Sher home.

"I have a cousin from St. Louis University. His father had to do it *(i.e., cut off his big toe).* To go into the service, to give up four years of your life, to eat pork, that was the worst thing that could happen to a Jew in Russia."

"My brother never went into the army. You know why he never went to the army? His fingers, they were together, webbed. It cost 100 to 250 rubles to put them together. He had them sewed together. He's still got them together. I held a candle for a cousin. With a plain knife, he took off his big toe. We put a little poison on it to make it black. The toe got black. If you didn't take it off, your whole foot got black. Some died. But my cousin took it off. He never went."

"I hated the Bolsheviks from the first minute. Up to 1917 we lived very well and then when they came they ruined everything. They took everything. Yes, when



Meyer Kirshenbaum with a friend in the Russian army, 1913

the Bolsheviks took over the parliament after they overthrew the Tsar I hated them. They wanted to take me to the army. I was hiding out. They caught me and they did put me in the army. I hated them."

"They were very abusive to the soldiers. My brother was fourteen or fifteen, so one day my mother said, 'If we stay, Sam will have to go to the army. We just can't let that happen.' She treasured him because he was the only boy. We sold everything. We sold our silverware, our linens, everything, and we all came to America."

"My father had served in the Russian army for four years. He was in the tailoring department. That's where he learned to tailor men's things. A Russian officer who had been one of his superiors warned him and told him that the war with Japan was coming. If he didn't want to stay in the service, he'd better take his family and leave. That was in 1903. The Russo-Japanese War began in 1904."

"My father's personal reason was to get his children out of Russia. He wanted to bring me to the United States. He himself went through hell to get to the United States, but there was something about him, he didn't care how much hell he went through in the process of improving the lives of his children. His children shouldn't have to go through the same thing."



A. B. Gendler is pictured with soldiers of the Polish army during Passover, 1920

2. Pogroms

"In 1880 and 1881 the Polish people were antagonistic to Jews and there were many pogroms against the Jewish people. One night during one of these, the tongues were cut out of all my grandfather's cattle and they had to be destroyed. After this sad state of affairs, the entire family moved to the city of Lahavitz, in Valentinia Gaberna, Russia. *Gaberna* means estate, where they lived until 1887 when grandfather died. Before his death, the entire family tried to immigrate to the U.S. When they got to the border between Russia and Germany they were caught at the border, confined and returned to the city of Lahavitz from which they came. They did not have the proper passports."

"In 1905 I joined the Social Democratic party. This was mainly for the betterment of working conditions, like a union. Later it became more political. About that time, there were strikes all over the country, including Windau, Germany. The Social Democrats took over most of the town. To suppress the uprising, the Cossacks were sent in to find the men who started the trouble. They raided the third floor rooms where I stayed and three of my fellow clerks were bayonetted to death. I was really scared and ran to the basement and hid under a barrel."

"We came very close to having a pogrom. There was a crowd of about 8,000 on a Sunday morning. Whiskey was sold through a government store — vodka. Thirteen miles away was a military station. Two Jewish owners each contributed 100 rubles and they sent a fast courier to get the head of the military police to come. They paid him off and he came and disbursed the crowd. One slight move and they would have started shooting. Prior to that, we knew it was coming. Where did we hide our valuables? What kind of valuables did we have? Candlesticks, silver. Each home had a great big cellar in the basement holding forty to fifty bushels of potatoes. My mother had me dig out the potatoes and hide everything under the potatoes."

"There was once a rumor that there would be a pogrom in the city and we had a relative who worked for other noblemen on the other side of the town. These relatives took care of the whole estate, so when this rumor came, they took me and my sister and one or two other children to their home. They felt we would be safe in the noblemen's compound. We slept there overnight on the stove. You know they had tremendously large stoves. Well, that's where we slept. They had the best of everything. In the morning the wife made us a breakfast of pancakes with butter, cream, and cheese. She also put sugar in the mix! But that pogrom never took place."

"I fought one time when they had a pogrom in our city. I was trained because I worked in the treasury. By golly, if they could have torn in, they would have really robbed us. But we were trained well. We really knew how to shoot. I had four medals. We knew that the attack was going to happen, because we had that Jewish Self Defense, a real organization, and it wasn't only Jews; it was also Christians — a lot of them volunteered. They were well equipped to fight, and we knew that an uprising was going to break out exactly at noon. The Christian fellow used to go mix with the opposition. He found out that they were planning to attack exactly at noon. And the first place was to be a big hardware store, actually a block long. Many cities lost a lot of people because they were not prepared. In our city, we really let them have it. It was estimated that we killed about 4,000, but I personally don't think so. We lost ten of our people the day of the attack." *(The events above took place during the Russian revolution).*

Exodus

The decision to leave our places of birth was not always synonymous with the act. Obstacles were numerous.

"Months elapsed between the time we decided to leave and our arrival in the U.S. My cousin Dave Miller and I left on a horse and wagon and went from Kapula, Poland to Neshvish Gradie, Poland. We then took a train to Warsaw, stayed overnight, and took a train to Kollish, Poland (the border town). In order to do anything or get anything, everyone wanted a pay-off, or one was arrested. In Kollish, they changed my name to David Levine. They gave me the name of the people I was staying with. They put a shawl around my neck and told the authorities that I had swallowed a needle and needed to go to Germany to see a doctor. Mrs. Levine and I walked across the border to Germany and then she left me on my own. I went to the hotel and stayed in the lobby waiting for my cousin Dave. My mother had given me a small portion of food so I wouldn't starve, but I was so parched from lack of anything to drink I couldn't eat. I talked someone into giving me some money (50¢ or thereabouts). I bought wine and drank it all. I could then swallow food. I continued to wait for my cousin. I told the authorities he was my brother. The border town we were headed for was Skolmijis, Germany. My cousin finally came across with the next group. We then took the three day journey by train to Skolmijis. From there we went to Bremen. They made us take off our clothes. They were then steamed to get rid of any bugs we might have picked up. There were no bathrooms so when I had to go, I went outside. My *tallis* was all I had to clean myself. I used it, then threw it away."

"My wife's family had left earlier. We too decided to leave, but we had trouble getting out of the country. We had to steal a boat at night and that was a job. In order to accomplish this, we paid a man and he took us to the border Christmas Eve because at that time we thought the guards would be drunk. We went to the boats, but there was nothing but snow. It was so cold. When a guard started to shoot at us, everybody hid themselves. My wife was pregnant at the time and she couldn't run to hide herself. She had to raise her hand. She raised it up, so I had to do the same myself and come back. We came back and they put us in a little farmer's home where a guard was staying. My wife laid on the floor crying. I went to the farmer lady and said, 'My wife has ten gold coins. Please give them to the guards and let us cross the border.' The lady went to the guards. They agreed to it! So we gave them the gold coins and they took us to the border. They knew everything about the underground. They said to go this way and to a certain house. There you will find your people."

"Across the Russian-Polish border, they caught me. They took away the horses and arrested us. The Communist Party arrested us, put us in a little jail. Shortly, a Communist with a short rifle came and released us, and started to move us toward the big city. It was in the summertime and we walked. The gentile with me touched me, 'Morris, we are two strong men, let's kill him and throw him in the river.' A little boy fight the Communists? 'I wouldn't do that.' He asked me a couple of times. 'It's nothing for me and you.' I said, 'I don't want it.' We walked into a big village. About 300 farmers. A big long village. There was a Jewish couple there. I knocked on the door and we went in. They knew me! I had to tell them the story. They gave us bread. The Communist and the gentile laid down to sleep. When they were both fast asleep, I ran away by myself."

"We had to cross the border so we went to an underground organization. We paid seventy-five American dollars to take all of us. We had the money to buy our way. I went with my mother because the underground couldn't take us together. They told me to go separately. 'You go this night, and your mother will go another night.' I went across the border without trouble. I saw the Communists and the Russians, but it was fine. My mother went another night. There were about ten women. My mother was a little older and as she was walking slowly, they left her in the woods by herself. They ran away, but she couldn't make it. She stopped by herself. She sat in the woods. It was not yet springtime and she was almost frozen to death. God saved her. In the morning, she saw a little house. She went to it, frozen. She knocked on the door. A lady took her in. She was ready to die. She wanted their help. They gave her a glass of tea or something like that. One Polish word she remembered. If she hadn't known that word, she would have been lost. They would have sent her back to Russia. She was in Poland, already. My father was waiting for her, but they came and said they lost Mrs. Epstein in the woods. In the morning, however, they came into the house. There they saw a lady. It was Mrs. Epstein. 'Mr. Epstein,' they said, 'your wife is arriving!'"



Katz family, c. 1907. Sarah, Bessie, Mother Leah, and Ethel. "Mother cut all of our hair short before our trip. The rumors of lice on the boat frightened her."

Passage

For many of us passage was full of anxiety and fear, normal emotions at the outset of a new adventure. Would the new land provide for us as well as the old? We hoped for better. Some had read of Abraham Lincoln and some had even studied the U.S. Constitution. The dream of private ownership, citizenship, and the right to prosper according to our own initiatives spurred us on, made us ready to gamble. Hard work and sacrifice were taken for granted, but our feelings were mixed. Many of us left our wives and children to prepare the way — a new home to receive them. Some of us ventured into the unknown with family or friends. Mothers and children usually had to manage alone. For most, the experience of crossing to our new land was physically oppressive, full of sickness, hunger, and exhaustion. Once in the port, there were often problems with papers, passports, and legal documents. Stranded, without knowledge of language we were in need. It was at this point that the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) usually stepped in to help.

"The family in Latvia consisted at that time of my father, mother, brothers Myer, Arthur, Benny and myself. When we got to Libau, they wouldn't allow my brother Myer to board the ship. His eyes were bad. So we had to leave him behind in spite of my mother's tears and my father's heartache. I was quite ill on that little ship that brought us to Liverpool. I was also still frightened. I was afraid that the policeman would come after us and take us off the ship. But he didn't. When we finally arrived in Liverpool, we went to the immigrant house there and stayed about a week. We had to wait to get on the big ship that would take us to New York. It was there that my brother Benny became ill. It was scarlet fever. He was taken to a hospital. I was in the same bed with him at the time. I was not quite nine, he was not quite seven. I was fortunate enough not to get the disease but that poor child did. When it came time for us to get on the big ship, we didn't know what to do because we didn't want to leave Benny alone. But the HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, took over. In spite of my mother's tears and all of us feeling terrible, we got on the ship and left Benny in the care of this Society. On the ship, I was terribly ill, as we were riding in steerage. The dirt, the filth, the terrible togetherness. I was very ill, so they took me to the ship hospital. We finally arrived in New York near the end of May, 1907, knowing very little English. I could speak German, Russian and Yiddish."

Several Months later Benny was reunited with his family.

Omaha Daily Bee, Sat. July 20, 1907
New York, July 19

Adorned with a motley array of tags, which were pinned on his coat, shirt and trousers, in many cities on the route from far-off Minsk, Russia, to this city. Seven year old Benjamin Meyerson is quartered in the Hebrew home for immigrants in this city. He is bound for Omaha, where his parents who left Russia several years ago, now reside.

The boy remained with his uncle until recently, when his parents sent for him, and he started alone on what probably has been the most remarkable journey ever taken by a little fellow of his age. Benjamin's uncle tagged him so that the railroad men might know where to ship the tiny human freight. He also appended to the boy's coat a request that wherever the wee journeyer stopped he should be bathed. The child has been scrubbed in a score of cities.

At each point where the boy changed cars he was retagged, until when he arrived two days ago on the Etruria. He looked like a misshaped trunk that had gone through the grand tour.

"At the port I noticed a girl traveling to America. They wouldn't let her go because she didn't know any language at all. She was about 17 or 18. A very pretty girl, as a matter of fact, I've still got her picture. So, I went to the company and said, 'In thirty days this girl is going to read and write.' He said, 'You guarantee it?' 'Yes, if not, I'm going to stay here.' He said, 'No, you can't. You've got to go because the 28th of June is the last date you can leave the country. You can't leave in

July or August. It will be too late for you.' I said, 'Okay, in thirty days I'll teach her.' And, I'll tell you, I taught that girl so much, day and night, starting from the alphabet. In two weeks, I said, 'Either you learn or you are going to go back to Russia.' She learned."

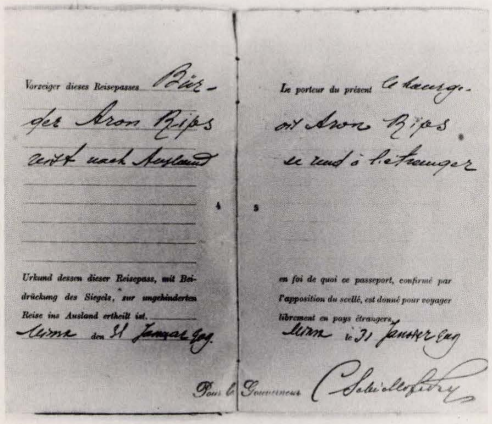
"The material that my suit was made of cost me $3.00 a yard, and when they steamed it, it shrunk so it didn't fit. I was very unhappy and my cousin and I pulled and stretched it until it fit once again. We stayed in Bremen, Germany for a few days and then I paid $10 so I could get on the same boat as my cousin. This was my cousin's second crossing. The name of the ship was Kaiser Wilhelm the Great and it was the fastest ship. It was a seven day trip. We crossed to America in 1904. After I paid the $10 I was told there was no room for me. A few days later a man from my hometown decided not to go on the ship so he gave me his steerage ticket. My cousin had a 2nd class ticket. The first three days I was deathly ill. My cousin Dave looked after me the best he could. He took me to his part of the ship and fed me and filled my pockets with food so I wouldn't starve."

"During the trip by ship, my mother was in bed constantly. She was throwing up all the time. My poor mother was in bed and I brought her things to eat because she couldn't stand the food — they were very religious people."

"I remember my father telling me how horrible it was on the ship. It was just awful. He had a dreadful experience. A baby died in his arms, and Papa loved children like nobody. You can imagine, even at that age — he must have been very young — and he never got over it."

"I cried all the way because I realized I'll probably never see my wonderful grandmother. Many relatives and friends I left behind. I was coming to a strange country, to a family I had never known. And I cried, I think, from the time I left till I arrived in Omaha."

"My father was in this country two years earning nine dollars a week. In two years he sent for us third class. We were on a ship, a very third class ship. The beds were three or four high, one on top of each other, and if the top one got seasick, they'd vomit on the next beds down."



Passport book of Aaron Rips, 1909



Passport stamp, 1909



Passport pouch of Aaron Rips

"My mother had hampers full of clothes, she had lovely clothes. She even had furs. She was a wealthy person. One of her hampers was stolen on the way. She had silver and all sorts of nice things. I can still remember the boat I was on about 1890. It was a beautiful boat. My older sisters used to go up on deck and they used to dance and have a good time. It took us almost three weeks to get to America. We did not go right to Omaha; we went to Canada. This is the way they sent some of the travelers. We landed in Canada, in Montreal."

"My mother took a lot of food with her because she wasn't going to eat non-kosher food. We had loads of food mostly baked stuff, but everybody was sick except me. I was the only one that wasn't sick so I really had a good time. We must have gotten some food on the boat but most of the time it was food that my mother brought. I still remember the first bananas and we had some fruit on the boat. Not much, but I remember how good the oranges were."

"We had a good time on the boat. People were nice to us. We used to go up to the captain and visit with him. He used to ask us up there, as kids, and we enjoyed the trip. It took six weeks to get here, but we got here."

"I wasn't sick. I was a child. They used to count the people every day, and we came with a family from Russia — Kirschhorn was their name, and they had seven boys, and I got friendly with Bernard, and one day he said, 'Let's hide.' So we went into the men's washroom and hid. They counted the people a dozen times, and kept saying, 'Two people are missing.' Finally they found us. A lot of people were sick. We

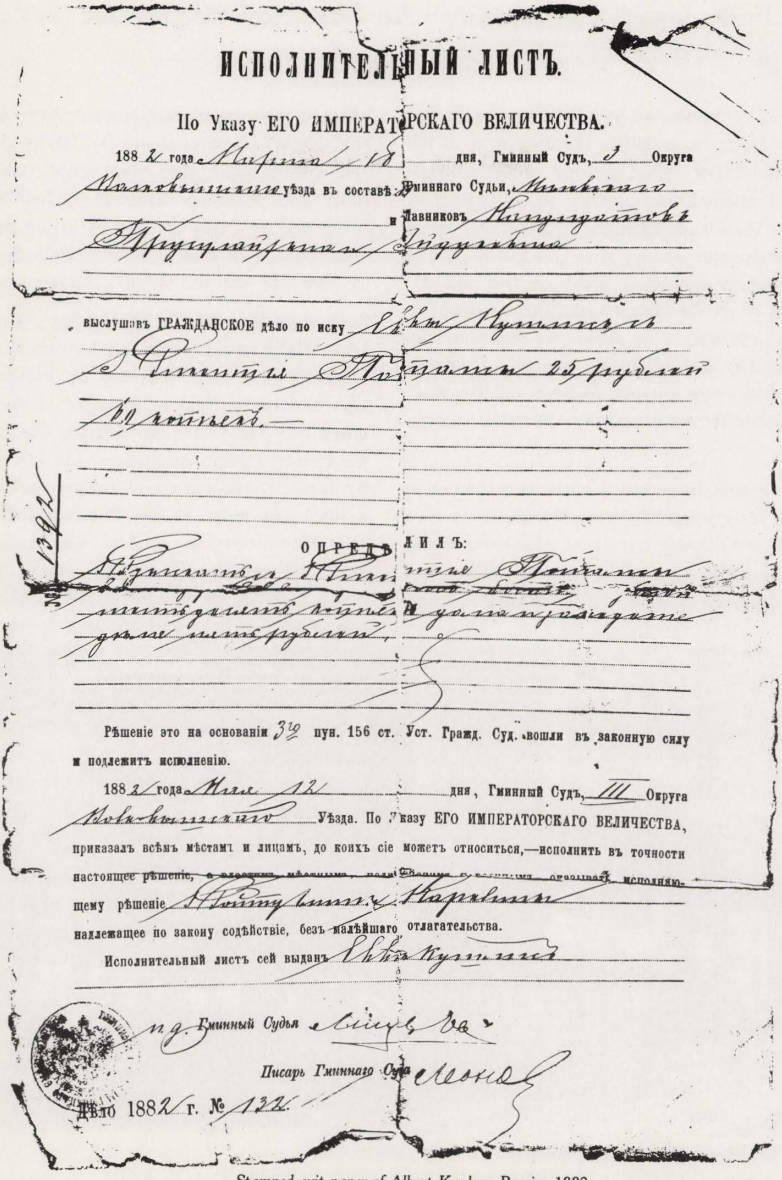
came second-class, which wasn't good. People just laid sick on their bunks. My father tried to help everybody. He would take tea to them and everything. As a child I didn't suffer, but it must have been miserable for the adults. We were thirty days at sea. We arrived in the U.S. at Galveston, Texas."

"There was only one thing they required of us. A certain amount of money which was nominal and we had to pass a physical. Any communicable disease turned us right back. The rule was that the same boat that brought us had to take us back to where we came from. A Jewish doctor kept on treating our eyes for six solid weeks and anything on our heads that was contagious. On the boat, they used to wash everybody's clothes in steel kettles. In the clean kettles they would cook cabbage and that's what we ate."

"When I got married, we had enough money for papa to go to America. He left in 1914. Then the war broke out. I became successful and made a lot of money to go to America. I supported my family of nine and left them a lot of money and a lot of dry goods. I took the train across Siberia, China, and Japan. I arrived in the U.S. in Seattle, Washington. From Seattle, I came to where papa was, Omaha. When I was on my way to America I thought the whole world was mine. I liked it. I thought the luckiest people in the world were in this country!"



Passport photo of Rose (Gorelick) Blumkin's family leaving Riga, Latvia. L to R bottom: Anne Gorelick, Father Solomon Joseph, Mother Sarah, Mary (Gorelick) Katz Klein, orphan Cousin Max (known as Murphy). Top: Simon Gorelick and Ruth (Gorelick) Lasher. C, 1920



ИСПОЛНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ЛИСТЪ.

По Указу ЕГО ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО ВЕЛИЧЕСТВА.

188 2 года Марта 18 дня, Гминный Судъ, 3 Округа Мозырскаго уѣзда въ составѣ Гминнаго Судьи, Мозырскаго и Лавниковъ Кипуздинскаго Прушлайдинскаго

выслушавъ ГРАЖДАНСКОЕ дѣло по иску Евы Кушнисъ къ Симону Ратнеру 25 рублей 50 копѣекъ.

1392

ОПРЕДѢЛИЛЪ:

Рѣшеніе это на основаніи 3½ пун. 156 ст. Уст. Гражд. Суд. вошли въ законную силу и подлежитъ исполненію.

188 2 года Мая 12 дня, Гминный Судъ, III Округа Мозырскаго Уѣзда. По Указу ЕГО ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО ВЕЛИЧЕСТВА, приказалъ всѣмъ мѣстамъ и лицамъ, до коихъ сіе можетъ относиться,—исполнить въ точности настоящее рѣшеніе, [illegible] исполнению-щему рѣшеніе Симону Кацелевичу Кацельсону

надлежащее по закону содѣйствіе, безъ малѣйшаго отлагательства.

Исполнительный листъ сей выданъ Евѣ Кушнисъ

Гминный Судья [illegible]

Писарь Гминнаго Суда [illegible]

Дѣло 1882 г. № 132.

Stamped exit paper of Albert Kaplan, Russia, 1882

Omaha's Early Jewish Community - An Historical Perspective by Carol Gendler

Beginnings

Jews came to Nebraska alongside the many other pioneers who began to populate the area west of the Missouri River shortly after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the territory to settlement in 1854. Unlike their co-religionists who would arrive later in the nineteenth century, these Jews were part of the general western migration which opened and settled vast areas of the American west. They were not so much Jewish immigrants as American pioneers who had fled political and economic unrest in western Europe and had come to seek fortune and freedom. They were little different from their Christian counterparts.

Arriving on the eastern seaboard in the late 1840's and 1850's, these Jews sampled various locations as they traveled westward, looking for a spot where they could trade peddler's packs for a main street storefront and the life of a transient for that of a developing community.

Most of these immigrant-pioneers were young, strong, and single. Unencumbered by family responsibilities and without skills, they often found retail business or other types of entrepreneurship the best way to make a living and establish themselves in a new community. Thus, they were able to assert their independence and to assimilate into the life of a frontier town.

Such were Jews like Leopold May, Aaron Cahn, and Myer Hellman who were among the first to come to Omaha. They were followed by Edward Rosewater, who arrived in 1863 as manager of the Pacific Telegraph office and later founded the *Omaha Bee*, one of the country's great newspapers. The life of the Rosewater family would remain intimately connected with the politics and pulse of this Missouri River town. The four Meyer brothers, and the Gladstone family were also early settlers. Of fifteen clothing establishments doing business in Omaha in 1870, about half were conducted by Jews and all were located within two



Volunteer Fire Department in front of Myer Hellman and Co. clothing store, c. 1865

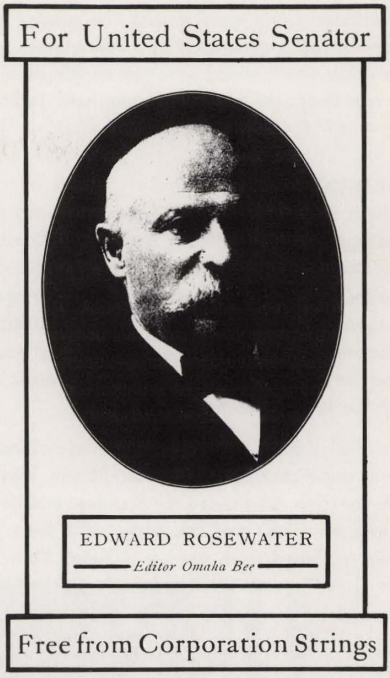
From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum

square blocks on lower Farnam and Douglas streets. Esther Jacobs and Addie Gladstone, daughters of pioneer Jewish families, were among the eleven members of the first graduating class of Omaha High School in 1876, and both went on to become public school teachers. Jews belonged to the volunteer fire department and Masonic lodges, participated in a variety of civic and social activities, and were active in politics.

As these young Jews married and started families, they had to reckon with the requirements of Jewish ceremonial life. Brides, located by a marriage broker, were often imported from distant communities. Marriages and circumcisions were usually performed by a rabbi or *mohel* brought to Omaha just for the occasion, or the ceremony took place elsewhere. When a rabbi's presence was not feasible, civil marriage vows would be read by a judge and a knowledgeable member of the Jewish community would conduct the Jewish marriage ceremony. *Kashrut* was very difficult to observe for those who tried. Until the 1880's, kosher meat was brought from Des Moines.

In 1867 the first recorded Jewish services were held in Omaha on Rosh Hashanah at the home of a restaurant proprietor named Rosenthal. A year later Jews were invited to join in the organization of Congregation B'nai Israel, an effort which resulted in the formal founding of the Congregation of Israel and a burial society in 1871. Land was purchased for a cemetery at 42nd and Redick, a confirmation ceremony was held, and a visiting rabbi came to town. Soon a Sunday School was in existence and in 1884 the first synagogue in Nebraska was dedicated at 23rd and Harney.

In its early years the Congregation of Israel tried to accommodate its practices to a diversity of Omaha Jews, a goal obviously difficult if not impossible to achieve. The establishment of orthodox congregations by east European immigrants who arrived in the 1880's eliminated the necessity for this accommodation. In 1889 the congregation of Israel affiliated with the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations. William Rosenau, Leo Franklin, Abram Simon



courtesy of Carol Gendler



Congregation of Israel (later Temple Israel), Omaha's first synagogue. Built in 1884 at 23rd and Harney, the temple served the congregation until 1908. Rabbi Frederick Cohn is pictured at left. Courtesy of Temple Israel

and Frederick Cohn were among the notable rabbis who served the congregation in its early years, and a new building which would serve the congregation until 1953 was dedicated at Park Avenue and Jackson in 1908.

Developments

As Jewish religious life expanded, so too did Jewish philanthropy and social life. A Hebrew Benevolent Society was organized in 1869 and though it was short-lived, such efforts became permanent in 1881 when scores of refugees began to arrive. Soon started a never-ending series of charity balls, fairs, and activities designed to raise funds to aid the less fortunate members of the Jewish Community.

Kesher Shel Barzel and B'nai B'rith were among the fraternal organizations available to Omaha Jews. The Centennial Club, later called the Standard and then the Metropolitan Club, was the scene of a busy social schedule for Jewish high society. A Young Men's Hebrew Association provided social and literary entertainment for the younger people.

As Omaha prospered, so did some of its Jews. Edward Rosewater attained prominence as newspaper editor and politician. I. Oberfelder Importers and Jobbers, Moritz Meyer Tobacco Company, Max Meyer and Brothers Music and Jewelry dealers, Elgutter's Mammoth Clothing House, Polack's Palace Clothing House, and the Kirschbraun Creamery were among the city's leading businesses. These were soon joined by the Nebraska Clothing Company and the Boston Store, which later became J. L. Brandeis and Sons, a store which would remain long after others fell victim to depression and panic. Brandeis interests were involved in planning for the Fontenelle Hotel, the Omaha Athletic Club, the Elks Club, and the Medical Arts Building in downtown Omaha. The Brandeis Theater and office building were completed in 1910. Many organizations and institutions, both secular and Jewish, became the beneficiaries of Brandeis family generosity.



Julius Meyer at a Metropolitan Club children's party. Bottom row: June Abrams, Lillian Meyer, Blanche Frank, Ruth Meyer, Irene Rosewater, unidentified, Lorene Rosenstock, Verna Kirschbaum. Top row: unidentified. C. 1900

The Eastern European Immigration

The 1880's brought the first groups of Russian Jewish immigrants. These refugees, always poor and often uneducated and unskilled, were assisted, perhaps reluctantly at times, by those Omaha Jews who had attained success and become well integrated into the community. The increase in the Jewish population that resulted from the influx of east European immigrants, however, had a profound effect on the Omaha Jewish community. This dramatic increase in numbers provided strength for the community, but at the same time strained its resources and complicated its structure far beyond any previous experience.

The first sizeable group of refugees arrived from Russia in July of 1882. These 161 Jews included some forty families and a number of single men and women. They were greeted and cared for by a local committee which found them housing and jobs and attended to their needs. Among this group were the city's first *mohel*, Julius Cherniss, and Henoch Marks, who would operate the first kosher butcher shop.

Various national organizations were involved in the settlement of eastern European Jews in Omaha. The Industrial Removal Office was especially prominent in this regard. Based in New York, it was created in 1901 for the express purpose of removing or diverting refugees from the crowded cities of the eastern seaboard and settling them in the interior of the country. The IRO also administered the so-called Galveston Plan,

W YORK REMOVAL COMMITTEE
CYRUS L. SULZBERGER, Chairman
NATHAN BIJUR, Vice-Chairman
EUGENE S. BENJAMIN, Secretary
MAX SENIOR JACOB FURTH
DAVID M. BRESSLER, General Manager
MORRIS D. WALDMAN, Asst. Manager

RECEIVED FEB 26 1907

OMAHA REMOVAL COMMITTEE
M. LEVY, Chairman
C. BRANDEIS SAM FRANK
L. HARRIS N. A. SPIESBERGER
HARRY B. ZIMMAN

Industrial Removal Office

OMAHA. NEB. Febr. 23, 1907.

Hon. David M. Bressler,
174 Second Ave. N. Y.
Dear Sir:-

Referring to the application of Abraham Scholnick and family, for transportation to Omaha, beg to report that I have carefully investigated this matter and learn that Mr. Scholnick resides in Omaha and has resided here for the last ~~two~~ weeks. The situation is this, about 6 weeks ago, Mr. Scholnick applied to your office for transportation for himself and wife. Since applying for same, he concluded to come to Omaha. He had $100.00 in his possession at the time application was made and concluded not to wait. Since being in Omaha, he purchased a horse and wagon and engaged in the peddelling of junk and second-hand furniture. He is doing fairly well and will be able to support the rest of the family, should you conclude to send them. I presume his wife, or the applicant for this concession, did not inform you of the above facts. Mr. Scholnick claims that he can not contribute anything towards the expense of bringing his family to Omaha.

Respectfully yours,
H. B. Zimman
Secretary
By H. B. Zimman

courtesy of Carol Gendler

which sought to admit immigrants through a port of entry in the South, thus completely avoiding their exposure to and possible temptation to settle in eastern cities where they might find their *landsleit*.

The IRO processed the majority of Omaha's Jewish population through a one-on-one program of sponsorship and settlement by which each immigrant was guaranteed a place to live, a job, and a local sponsor who would assure that the refugees did not become a public charge. A total of 2,135 Jewish refugees were settled in twenty-three Nebraska cities and towns by the IRO. Others followed according to the so-called "magnet theory", attracted by relatives and friends who had previously settled here.

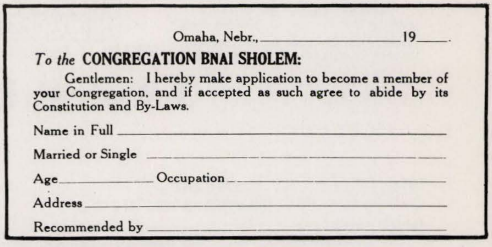
Eastern European immigrants, most of whom were necessarily orthodox Jews, came first to an area between 9th and 13th streets, Harney to Center. In this neighborhood the first orthodox congregations were organized as *minyanim* in a store front, living room or backyard.

B'nai Israel was organized in 1883 and dedicated an existing building at 1407 S. 13th St. as a synagogue in 1889. In 1891 Rabbi Henry Grodzinsky, "a bearded patriarch with a most musical voice", came to serve the orthodox community. Lithuanian Jews reorganized as Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol in 1897 and held their services in a remodeled building at 1109 S. 13th St. A new synagogue was dedicated at 19th and Burt in 1911 by which time the concentration of orthodox Jewish population was shifting to this area on the near north side of downtown Omaha.

In 1884 a group of Russian Jews decided to split off and organize their own synagogue, Chevra B'nai Israel.

The Russishe Shul met for a time in rooms at 10th and 11th and Jones and then rented quarters at 111 North 10th St. In 1889 Russian Jews dedicated the first orthodox synagogue building in Omaha at 12th and Capitol. Its membership was entirely foreign-born. In 1910 the congregation consecrated a new synagogue at 18th and Chicago, sharing with the Litvishe Shul the services of Rabbi Grodzinsky.

There were other orthodox congregations. Chevra Bikur Cholim, founded initially as a charitable society, held religious services as well. In the fall of 1896, under the direction of Jacob Klein, members of this organization reorganized as the Hungarian Society. Later they were known as the Liberty Society and still later, as B'nai Sholem. Some of the members of these groups apparently were responsible for the founding of B'nai Jacob Anshe Sholem, which held services at 22nd and Cuming shortly after the turn of the century. Jacob Klein and his followers purchased and remodeled a former church building in 1908 at 24th and Nicholas. B'nai Jacob, familiarly known as the Kapulier Shul, also purchased a cemetery tract at Pleasant Hill. The property at 24th and Nicholas was sold in 1948 and the synagogue building was moved to 30th and Cuming, where it stands today.



Omaha, Nebr., _____ 19____.

To the **CONGREGATION BNAI SHOLEM:**

Gentlemen: I hereby make application to become a member of your Congregation, and if accepted as such agree to abide by its Constitution and By-Laws.

Name in Full _____

Married or Single _____

Age _____ Occupation _____

Address _____

Recommended by _____

courtesy of Carol Gendler

Beth Hamedrosh Adas Yeshuron was organized in 1916 by some members of the Russishe Shul who lived too far from that synagogue to walk on Shabbat and holy days. The congregation, called the Kippiler, occupied a house and in 1922 built a synagogue at 25th and Seward. After the Kapulier Shul was moved to 30th and Cuming a merger was effected between these two congregations which resulted in B'nai Jacob Adas Yeshuron.

South Omaha Jews incorporated Adas Yeshuron, or the Congregation of Israel of South Omaha in 1909 and refurbished a building at 25th and J. This congregation was disbanded in 1961.



South Omaha Synagogue dedication ceremonies, 1909 *courtesy of Carol Gendler*

Foundations of the Present

Early in their development, it became the practice of the orthodox congregations to share the services of a rabbi. In addition, the idea of a merger of all or some of the traditional congregations was discussed regularly and in 1932, not long after the founding of the Conservative Synagogue, the four major congregations joined into the Omaha Union of Orthodox Congregations, or Va'ad H'oer. This alliance, however, remained a rather loose affair until 1944 when a complete merger of Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol and B'nai Israel was effected, culminating in the construction of Beth Israel Synagogue at 52nd and Charles Streets in 1952.

Throughout the 1920's considerable thought and effort was devoted to organizing a Conservative congregation, and, after a number of false starts, the "Conservative Congregation" held its first services in the fall of 1929. Within a year 269 families had affiliated with the congregation, which joined the United Synagogue of America. This new institution became known as Beth El in 1935, purchased cemetery ground at 84th and L, and in 1939 built a synagogue at 49th and Farnam after holding services at the Jewish Community Center for ten years.

Until about 1900 the orthodox and Reform Jews, roughly approximating the eastern European refugees and earlier arrivals respectively, maintained separate social and philanthropic institutions and interacted rarely. The Reform Jews represented the upper strata of Omaha Jewish society.

THE

Annual Report

of

The Associated Jewish Charities of Omaha, Neb

From September 1st, 1904
To September 1st, 1905

L. HARRIS, Secretary,
209 South 13th Street.

courtesy of Carol Gendler

Receipts.

From Sept. 1st, 1904 to Sept. 1st, 1905.

Sept. 4th	$ 35.65
Sept. 18th	316.38
Oct. 16th	290.50
Oct. 30th	18.00
Nov. 13th	122.00
Dec. 4th	247.00
Apr. 16th	35.00
	$1,060.53
Loan	300.00
	$1360.53

Disbursements.

Transportation	$ 133.50
Coal	140.80
Groceries, Miscellaneous	92.60
Foreign Charity	86.25
Home Charity	907.38
	$1360.53

courtesy of Carol Gendler

The orthodox community boasted of the Omaha Hebrew Club and the Jewish Ladies Relief Society. Reform Jews were active in B'nai B'rith and the Congregation of Israel's Jewish Ladies Aid and Sewing Society. After 1903 major responsibility for the dispensation of charity was assumed by the Associated Jewish Charities, which in its formative years was controlled by the orthodox community. This group had long since outnumbered the earlier, more liberal arrivals. By 1914 most of the organizations within the Jewish community were federated as the Associated Jewish Charities and included members of nearly every organization in the community. Representatives of all segments of the community were involved in the organization of the

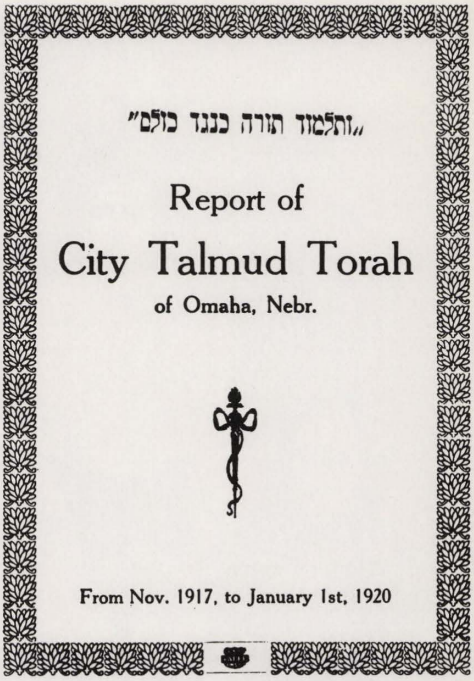
Wise Memorial Hospital in 1901. Under Jewish sponsorship, the hospital welcomed patients of all religions, regardless of ability to pay. After several short-lived locations, a building was constructed at 24th and Harney. In the early 1930's it became impossible for the Jewish community to support this venture and the hospital building was sold.

Efforts to establish a Jewish Community Center began with the opening of the Omaha Jewish Institute in 1906 at 21st and Burt. Fund-raising drives were halted at various times by the 1913 tornado and by World War I, but finally in 1926 a center was dedicated at 20th and Dodge. This building would serve the community until its replacement in 1973 by a new facility at 132nd and Dodge.

Other organizations abounded. Numerous Zionist groups for people of all ages (from the Zion Fairies to Knights of Zion), labor and socialist groups, political affiliates, peddler's unions, an orphanage, a bath house, a funeral home, a Free Loan Society, and City Talmud Torah soon took their places in the community. An "old people's home" at 25th and Charles was replaced in 1947 by the Dr. Sher Home at 52nd and Ames. In 1981 plans were announced for the Rose Blumkin Jewish Home and for housing for the elderly on the grounds of the Jewish Community Center. The 1920's also saw the founding of the *Jewish Press* and the Highland Country Club.

AZA, national Jewish youth fraternity, had its origins in Omaha in 1923 under the direction of Sam Beber. Along with Henry Monsky and Philip Klutznick, Beber eventually held important leadership positions in B'nai B'rith and in other Jewish and secular activities.

Omaha Jews have not only served the Jewish community, but also their city, state, and country. Harry Zimman served three terms on the city council and was acting mayor in the first decade of the twentieth century. Victor Rosewater chaired the first home rule city charter convention in 1913 and was active in national Republican party affairs. Support from Jewish voters was sought in local and national elections.



courtesy of Carol Gendler

The history of Omaha is not without its calamities. Tornadoes, those frightening and destructive samples of Nebraska weather, have twice concentrated their fury on the Omaha Jewish community. In 1913 a killer storm attacked the heart of the Jewish neighborhood at 24th and Lake, leaving a number of Jews injured and 153 Jewish families directly affected. The Jewish community quickly organized its own tornado relief effort and many families received aid as a direct result of these efforts.

Thus, the Omaha Jewish community has matured and prospered. Nebraska has been a hospitable home for Jews who in turn have contributed much to their city, state, and nation.



Fogel family. Top row: Emma Sleetz and brother. Bottom row: Grandmother Sleetz, Rose (Sleetz) Fogel, Morris Fogel, Laura, David, Celia

3 Breathing Free

First Impressions

"When we came close to the United States and saw all these buildings, it was a mixed impression: a little bit happiness and a little bit fear. No more going back. This was our last stop."

"It was pretty tough in the beginning. The main satisfaction was the freedom."

"We were very happy. We had come to be free."

"In New York I saw a mailman. He had a uniform on. Where I was born and raised, a uniform used to throw a scare into us. It was a sign of the police. I saw the mailman smiling and I said hello to him and knowing what I knew, what I went through, I went down and kissed the soil. I wasn't afraid."

"I got on the boat and everyone was white. I came into New York and I saw colored people. I started looking to see if I was getting black too. I had never seen a black person. I saw people, especially women, chewing so I kept my tongue in my mouth. I thought, 'Were they sick or something?' I didn't know about chewing gum."

"We came on the Fourth of July and I told my relatives we left one war and found another. They were shooting here too!"

"I'll never forget — at Ellis Island we had to stay overnight. They put us to bed. They didn't care if we were a man or a woman. That night, the bedbugs were so bad — just eating me up. I couldn't go to sleep."

"It was a great disappointment. We had a much nicer house where I lived. We had a beautiful garden with all kinds of fruits and vegetables. In Europe, the saying is, 'In America, dollars grow on trees.' I didn't see any trees, much less dollars, not even an apple tree. I was very much disappointed for two or three years because I couldn't speak the language and I left all the family and many friends home."

"My cousin Dave got off in Hoboken, New Jersey, and I had to stay on the boat another day. I came to Ellis Island and my cousin brought my brother Harry Miller to meet me as I didn't remember my brother. I went to live with my brother. I stayed in New York City for four years and four days. My brother later got a good job and I had a job, but I got a wire from my cousin Dave Miller who was living in Omaha, Nebraska, and he told me I could have a steady job in Omaha if I could get there. When I told my brother I wanted to leave New York City he was very disappointed and he didn't want me to leave. He said that after having me with him he didn't want to lose me. I really didn't like



Baruch and Chayah Katz and Sarah (Katz) Walensky arriving in New York, 1906

New York because it was so big. My cousin told me to go to the Jacob Schiff Society. This was a society that helped people go to other areas of the states other than New York. He also said if I didn't have enough money, he would send me money."

"After arriving in the U.S., we lived for four and one half years in New York on the second floor. I particularly remember that my father's tailor shop was in the front. We lived in the back couple rooms. I know there was a kitchen because I particularly remember one Friday night. That night I nearly broke my neck falling down the fire escape. I was caught by a neighbor lady just below. The table was set between two windows, and the *challah* that my mother had baked and two candlesticks were on the table. My shoes always hurt me and my socks were always holey."

"We came to Galveston, Texas, and when they took us off the boat, we went into a beautiful hotel, and the tables were set with beautiful white linens. Beautiful, you'd think we were! My father took one look. He saw a plate of salami and little plates of butter, and he said, 'Everybody get up and walk out.' It wasn't kosher. The hotel people were so good. They found us other tables. Of course, they didn't know. And then some interpreter explained to them that my father could not sit at a table where there was meat and butter. Then, of course, we came to Omaha."

"Oh, I'll never forget it. The first thing we saw was all those lights. We had no electricity back home — we had lamps. We had a few relatives in Romania that already had electricity, but we said goodby to them. When we came into the Union Pacific Station, my mother looked up and said something in Romanian. And I thought, 'What is she saying?' Then I looked up and there was this old Dutch girl *(an electric sign)*. It was twice the size of a human being! We just looked with our mouths open. We never saw a mechanical object like that. We just couldn't believe it!"

Sometimes, the "right place" was hard to find.

"We were put on a train to Omaha with all the greenhorns. When the train stopped, all the greenhorns got off so my mother got off too. Everybody gave their address to a cab driver and a cab picked them up and took them to their destination. My mother gave her address to a driver, but everyone turned her down. She didn't know why. She had the money to pay for it. Everyone else was gone and we were back at the depot. We sat on one of those benches into the night. We waited and waited. We didn't know what to do. My mother cried. At about midnight, a boy who worked upstairs as a tailor saw us there. He couldn't figure out what we were doing there all night and he came to help us. He said he was Jewish and he talked Yiddish to us. My mother said, 'Well, they took everybody else, they just wouldn't take me.' He looked at the address and said, 'You're not in Omaha.' 'You got off at another place.' 'You were supposed to stay on the train.' He said he'd take care of it. He went to use the telephone. I thought that was strange. What was he talking about? What was that thing? Nobody else was there. He was talking on a telephone and I had never seen one."

"My mother said that we got off in Council Bluffs by mistake. We were all seated on the curbing — my mother, the baggage, my three older sisters, and myself. A man went by with a whole bunch of bananas. And in Yiddish or Romanian, I said, 'Mama, look what he's got. What is it? I've never seen anything like it in my life. Will it hurt us?' Anyway the man gave us each a banana and said it would not hurt us, that it was all right. So we sat on the curb in Council Bluffs until my father decided that we must have gotten off in the Bluffs instead of Omaha. Finally we got to Omaha and went straight to Mrs. Horwitz's house. She was a wonderful lady. At that time everybody wanted to live next to a synagogue. There was one on Capitol Avenue. It was called the Russian Synagogue. We were lucky enough to find a house right next door. That's where we lived for a long time — until we found

out that there was another house that was warmer — that had a furnace. Then we moved."

"When I left New York it was all night and then all day on a train. The conductor came over to me and started talking to me. I didn't know what he was saying. Finally, it bothered him so much that he went and got ahold of another Jewish man. In Yiddish the man said, 'The conductor wanted to know why he didn't see you eat anything.' I said, 'Oh, thank you. I have a package laying over there, but I'm so happy to be in this country that I don't feel hungry at all. I just want to take in all I can and sit by the window to watch.' I got off the train in Chicago and a woman came over to me. She said, 'Are you Gendler?' I said yes. 'Come with me.' I said where? She said, 'We have to put you on another train in another depot.' She looked honest, and she talked to me in Yiddish so I wasn't frightened. They took me over to the other depot, and they put me on the Burlington train for Omaha."



Downtown Omaha's lower Douglas Street, c. 1865. From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum

Beginnings

The packing houses of Omaha offered many of us a start.

"I settled in the South Omaha area, couldn't talk, no money. I saw a man with whiskers drive by in a lumber wagon. I contacted him and he took me into his home. I didn't know anybody in Omaha. I was just sent here on a train from Galveston. I went out to look for jobs. I went to 26th and G Street to one of the packing houses. I said, 'Job, job,' and finally the third day they gave me a job doing something that I couldn't stand. They asked me how old I was and how long I had been in the country. Well, I think I reversed the answers."

"When we came it was tough. I worked in the packing house. They gave me a job. I filled little boxes with washing powder. That's hard cause I was sneezing and choking. I filled it up and put it on a machine and caught the next box fast you know. Later on they gave me a better job. My husband worked at the packing house too."

"Our first home in Omaha was with a friend in South Omaha on 25th and P Street. The friend's name was Wortzel. He worked in the packing house too. Then I didn't want to live with them. We moved to 25th and Q — Kaplan's Junk Shop. We rented rooms upstairs. We stayed about a year. Then we moved to a house we rented. We couldn't buy a house. We made five dollars and twenty cents or six dollars a week — 10¢ an hour. What could we save to buy a house? It was no picnic — but you're in it — you've got to stick with it — that's all. After my husband worked at the packing house, he worked selling produce."

"We were tickled to death to be here. When we came over we had family, so after I rested up a couple of days, I walked downtown and bought a pair of overalls for fifty-nine cents. I got up the next morning early and I took the bus. I went to the packing house and I was still pretty good with rosy cheeks you know. I was in line and a man was looking and he took me out from the line and asked me in English what I wanted, so I told him. I didn't understand. He was a German so he says, 'Was wollen Sie haben?' It's just like Yiddish. It was German and I told him I want *arbeiten* which means work, so they put me to work to wash meat. I had a nice experience; maybe it's not good to tell? When they took me over there they examined me to see if I have got any disease. I couldn't wash meat if I did. The doctor took me in a room and unbuttoned my pants and belt and dropped them to the floor. I says to myself, 'What is he going to do? I'm circumcised already.' Then he looked me over and put me to work."

"I worked at the packing house for two years then I gave it up. My wife's brothers and a brother-in-law had a store in the Miller Hotel on 13th and Douglas. They took me in to open up a little store. That's when I had my start. It was a second-hand store. It was twenty by twenty. I had only five hundred dollars to start. So I went to a lumber yard and bought second-hand boards and made my own shelving. I sold second-hand clothing and jewelry."

Money was tight, but we could live on very little.

"The main thing was saving. We had to take care of each penny. We didn't buy a today's loaf of bread, we used to buy a yesterday's — two loaves for the price of one — ten cents."

"We had to live through hard times but everything was cheap at the time and thanks to God we made it. We sent for my two sisters and my husband's brother from Poland. We lived close together in South Omaha."

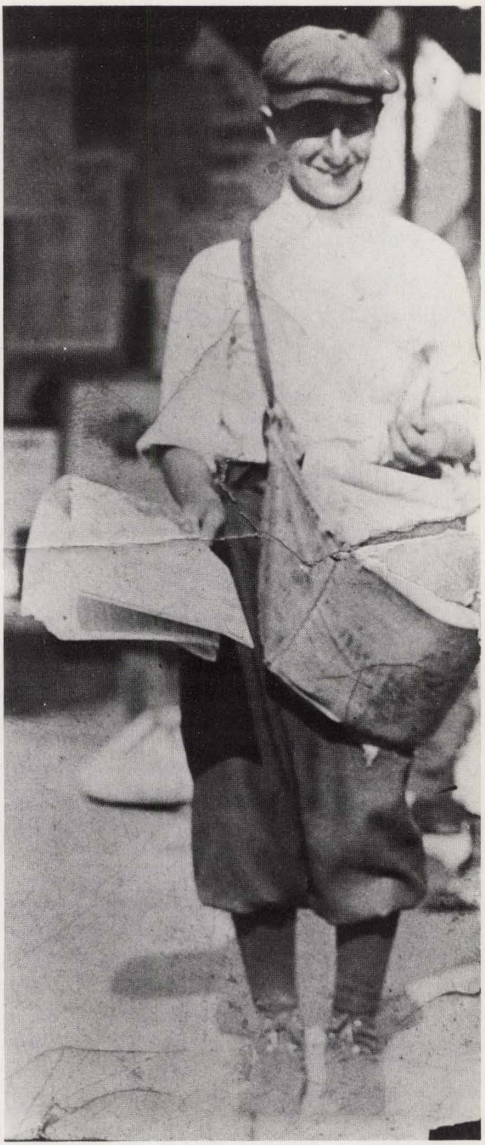
"Very few boys understood in those days. It was hard to survive. I was told there was a Jewish dairy man. He did not have his own dairy, but he used to buy milk and had a route of his own. I found out that he needed help, so I came and talked to him and he took me. I included my younger brother. We both worked and brought everything we made to mother — a quart of milk every day along with it."

"Dad Milder and a group of young men rented a large house on 10th Street between Capitol Avenue and

Dodge. Dad kept house, cooked, and cleaned thereby getting his room and board free."

"Well, I started earning money by shining shoes on the street. Then I sold papers. I was about seven or eight years old. I used to have a corner — 15th and Farnam or 14th and Douglas. Everybody had their own corner. Take the time that our President McKinley was shot. We sold a lot of papers. I remember I made twenty-five dollars that day selling papers. That's what made it worthwhile — the extras. Yes, you know, some people used to give me a quarter, and if I didn't have change 'Oh,' he says, 'Never mind. Give it to me the next time.' But anyway, we did quite a bit of business. Out of that money I bought a whole outfit, all for about five bucks — shoes, a pair of trousers, shirtwaist and all."

"I noticed that three children in our apartment actually helped their mother with expenses by selling papers. We didn't know whatever happened to their father. He just never showed up. He left home one day and they never saw him again. Those three boys held up the family. I didn't ask anyone but I thought, 'I'm going to find out how to sell papers!' I came home and said, 'Mama, I'm going to quit washing dairy bottles. It's a nasty job.' My mother gave me fifty cents. That night I bought thirty-five cents worth of papers. It didn't take but a few days to make it back. I stood on the corner and, at first, business was very slow. A young man came up to me and said, 'Do you want to take over my corner? I will sell it to you for ten dollars. You will make more money on 16th and Dodge than you will here. This is a slow corner. Mine is a busy one!' 'Yes, but I haven't got ten dollars.' 'Never mind, you will pay me when you make it.' I couldn't believe it! In about a week's time I made the ten dollars and paid for the corner. I stayed there and managed to support my family. My brother, the younger one, passed away. Until then my sister went to school. Then she had to leave in order to take care of us four boys. We managed though to keep our family able. Mother had died shortly after we arrived. Dad was never much of a provider."



Sam Freed selling papers, 1912

"When I came here from over there I never worked on a Saturday. When I came here I had to work on Saturday. I cried the first time I worked. They gave me a job which I had to do if I was to live. I had to work Saturday. I got used to it."

The Jewish peddler was often our father.

"My dad had what was called a peddlers' supply, but they didn't all have horses or wagons or pushcarts. Some packed on backpacks. They walked through the streets, and they walked into the little towns in the territory. My dad did. So many, many people of that time were peddlers. That's the way they made their living. Years ago, the people came to us. They had, oh possibly suitcases, full suitcases. They carried this and they carried that, and in those times we didn't fear strangers. And that made a big difference. They'd come into our home and we'd pick what we wanted and maybe we'd see them again and maybe we wouldn't.

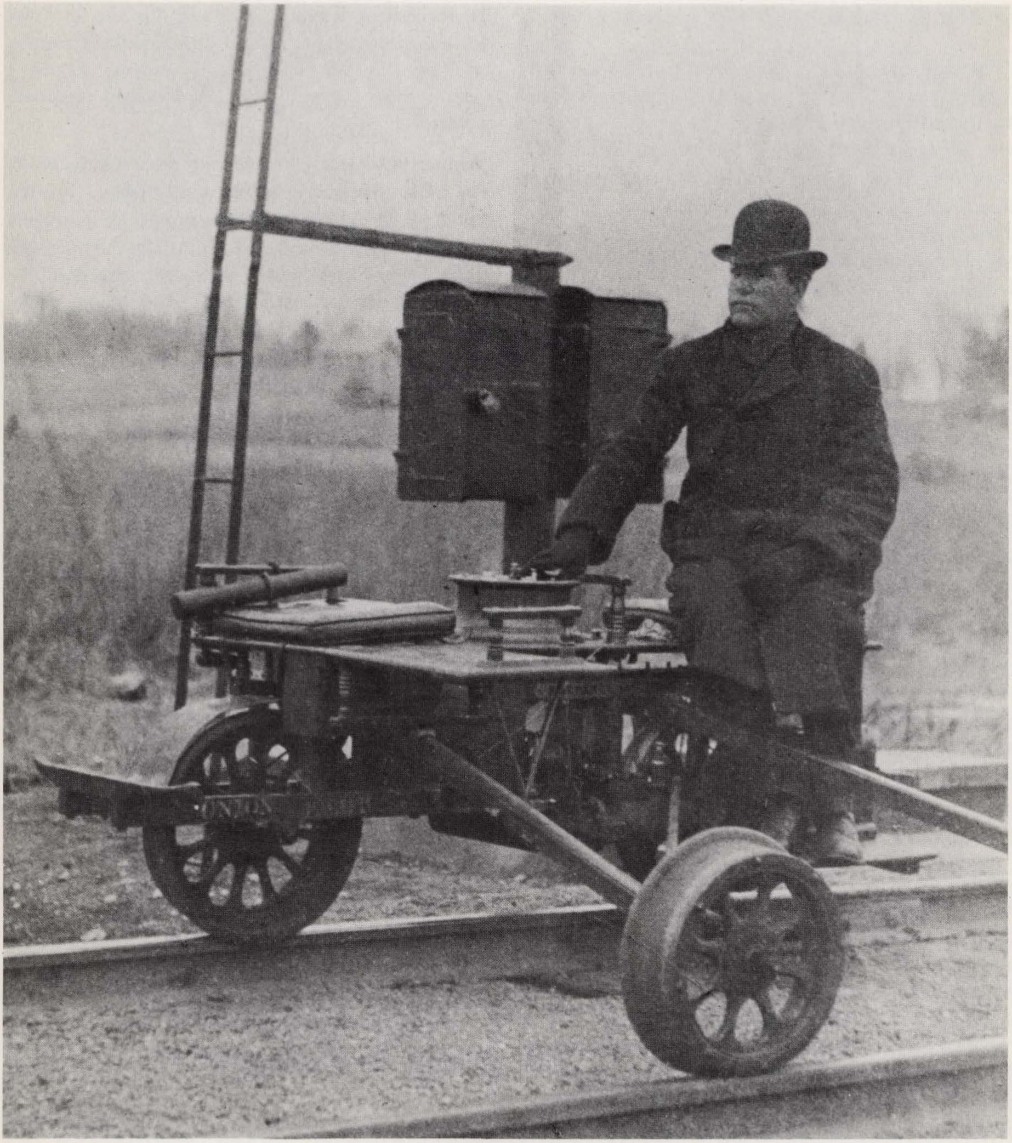
"My father, he had a horse and wagon. He sold utensils, stockings, shoe strings, different small items. And he traveled. He would leave on Monday and come back on Thursday. He traveled to Iowa, to Council Bluffs, to Honey Creek, and as far north as Sioux City and the surrounding community. The next week, he would take Nebraska, go to Fremont, and to what is now Lincoln, sixty miles by horse and buggy, with all the trinkets hanging from the wagon. It was like a housewares wagon. Dish pans, pots, tea kettles, shoe polish. He would sometimes sleep in the wagon. And sometimes a nice person would invite him in especially if they found out he was Jewish and they were Jewish."

"Dad never did anything but peddle. He used to go on South 10th Street in the morning. He used to load up bananas and apples and stuff like that. He was raised in Europe that way with fruit, lots of fruit. Then he would go out. He'd have his customers, and he would sell it to them."

"Papa started as a peddler and then he got into the antique business, then the furniture business."

"Dad, with pack on his back, sold tinware until he went into the fruit and vegetable business in 1897. During the great blizzard of 1888 all merchandise, some four carloads of potatoes and onions, were frozen and had to be hauled to the dump. He was completely wiped out. His partner was a Mr. Marx. Dad then borrowed the money to send for my mother, the three boys, grandmother, and mother's brother. Mother's brother did not want to come so mother sold his ticket to Morris Rosenblatt."

"Dad had a pushcart and he sold. People told him to come to Omaha so he came to Omaha. Of course they found enough room for him. They helped him. He had to work, he and his brother, in a packing house for about two months. Then he said, 'That's no place for me.' He borrowed the money from the Jewish Free Loan Society. At that time if you wanted to borrow one hundred dollars, two men had to sign — that were already members. They'd each have one hundred dollars in there — if you didn't pay they had to pay. My father borrowed, bought a horse, and he went out buying junk. He did well enough. We came and rented a house for $13.00 a month. The outhouse was a half a block away and all of us children, father and mother, had to sleep in one little room. There were in all, three rooms. Later things got a little bit better. My younger brother and I went to work. Every Friday afternoon we used to go through the alleys and find junk. What kind of junk? Newspapers, bottles, papers. We'd take them down to the junkyard and there we'd sell them, make a couple of dollars, and give it to my mother. She had it for *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* was the main thing. The Jews remember this. We remember who we are, what we are. The Jews set all stores by *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* had to be observed somehow, that was the main thing."



Samuel Friedman on first job as switchman for the Union Pacific Railroad, 1906

Learning the language was often the key to our success.

"The lady said to me in German, 'Do you speak any English at all?' I said, 'Not a word.' She took me down to the basement and showed me shoes, scattered everywhere, piles of shoes. They were on sale. They needed to be paired up. 'This should give you a couple days work,' she said. I got busy. I wanted to show them I was a good worker. I paired up the shoes, cleaned up, swept up, and put everything in little boxes. When the lady came down, she said, *'Wunderbar!* It's wonderful. I thought this should have taken you two days.' 'If you want me, I'll be glad to come tomorrow and do something else.' She said, 'I'm sorry, if you could only speak English, I'd give you a job selling.'"

"I found a job, I was lucky. It was hard to find a job, but I did find one, in the Kaplan hat factory. Oh, I hated it. Not because of the pay, the pay was the best. I decided, 'Sure I make good money, but what is the future?' I said to myself, 'I want to learn the language.' And working in a factory, I am not going to. So I began to look around. I found a job in a grocery store. After six months I made a good salary. Sam Kaplan was the owner, a very fine Jew. I paid about fifteen dollars a month for rent. It had six rooms! My mother used to always keep the home nice. It was a beautiful neighborhood. And the reason we liked it so much was because it was almost all Jewish."

The West was still wild.

"When I first arrived in Omaha I went to work in a factory, Novelty Skirt Company . I was seventeen years old at the time. My job was steady and I made fourteen dollars a week. I was able to pay off many of my debts, and I worked until a strike was called. Then I met a fellow-worker, Harry Segal, who was older than me. He told me about homesteading in Cherry County, Nebraska. He went with me to file for a homestead. He was going to help me get started, but as it turned out he was only using me. I filed for a homestead in Valentine, Nebraska. Then I came back to Omaha to work, but the strike was still on, so I went to work for Brandeis doing alterations. Then, a friend, Dora Berdetsky, called me and told me about a job in Sioux City. So, I went to Sioux City, got a job, and worked there one summer."

"Herman got me a job delivering groceries for B. A. Simon who had a store at 9th and Douglas . . . in the center of the red light district. Most of his customers were the madams and girls from the surrounding houses. I was to take orders and deliver groceries. One day I knocked at a door and was told to come inside. An inquiry from the next room questioned who was



courtesy of Carol Gendler

there, and I answered 'the grocery boy'. She told me to come in. I walked in, and found one of the 'ladies' lounging in the bathtub. I was still an innocent young man and decided that kind of life wasn't for me. I turned on my heels and quit the job."

"Our father, Jacob Milder, came to America in about 1885. He landed in Philadelphia and then came to Chicago. He found a woman from his hometown and lived at her home, working on the railroad in the yards. He made fifty cents a day. On the way home each day he would search the railroad cars for salvage fruits and vegetables and take them to his woman to cook for supper. He saved forty cents a day out of his wages. After a few months in Chicago, he went westward to work on the Rock Island Railroad between Chicago and Omaha. The holidays were coming and as the spokesman for the group of Jewish men that he worked with, he requested a two day lay-off. The foreman told him it could not be had. So Dad told the foreman that the entire gang would quit. The foreman said if they quit, he would kill them. So the entire gang left the job during the night. Father made his way to Council Bluffs and the Union Pacific bridge, at that time crossing the Missouri. The cost of crossing was twenty-five cents. Dad turned his pockets inside-out showing he had no money. He was not permitted to cross. He decided to swim the river instead. As he was undressing for the swim, he heard a train whistle and quickly dressed and waited for the train. As it passed, the trainman on the caboose reached out his hand and pulled Dad on. That's how he came to Omaha, Nebraska."

"We lived in Chicago for seven years and there was a Trans-Mississippi Exposition here in Omaha at that time. My uncle said that this would be a good time for us to visit and see the exposition. So, we did. We left Chicago. I was just twelve when we came to Omaha. My mother also had her oldest brother here who settled in Council Bluffs. My uncle from Council Bluffs was so happy to see my mother. He was a wonderful man. He was a *mohel* too. He circumcised every son of the Brandeis."

Name Changes

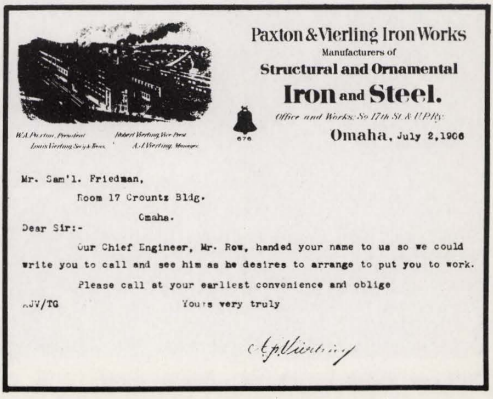
In the period of adjusting to a new country, city and work, many of our family names were changed.

"Dad always said, 'When you ask the foreigners what's their name, they can never pronounce them right, so whatever they pronounce — that's what they get.'"

Some only changed the spelling:
Neuman became Newman
Shrierman became Sherman
Fridman became Friedman
Grodzinsky became Grodinsky
Lazarsky became Lazarus
Freidman became Friedman

Some went to shorter forms:
Givotinsky became Givot
Trustenisky became Trustin
Selikovich became Seliko

Some through misunderstandings or choice at naturalization assumed new names.
Schneider became Miller
Coran became Cohn
Auerbach became Hertzberg
Zelinsky became Saylan
Auerbach became Albert



Paxton & Vierling Iron Works
Manufacturers of
Structural and Ornamental
Iron and Steel.
Office and Works: So. 17th St. & U.P.R'y.
Omaha, July 2,1906

Mr. Sam'l. Friedman,
Room 17 Crountz Blig.
Omaha.

Dear Sir:-

Our Chief Engineer, Mr. Row, handed your name to us so we could write you to call and see him as he desires to arrange to put you to work.

Please call at your earliest convenience and oblige

Yours very truly

4 Language and Learning

The goal for many of us was to get an education in order to succeed. To do either, we had to know the language.

"I couldn't talk English. When I started school, I remembered the teacher used to have a stick which she pointed when it was your turn to read. She pointed to numbers and I never could add them up. I could add them on paper and she couldn't figure out how I got the answers. She came to the conclusion that I was copying from someone in front of me. One day I remember the principal came in. She was German. I could talk German. She took the pointer. She had a column with seven's and eight's and six's, and you know for my age that was pretty hard. She pointed and I read it in German. I knew it and I got the right answer. The teacher found out that I wasn't so stupid! I just didn't know English."

"I spoke only Yiddish when I came — it was hard to work, we used signs like a dummy. I didn't go to school to learn English."

"Well, I went to Lincoln School, but of course I couldn't understand a word. But the teachers were just fabulous, and pretty soon I learned to talk, and I was in plays. But the first day, I remember, she said, 'Open the window,' and I just sat there like a dummy, and she went up and said, 'Open the window,' and I always remembered what 'Open the window' was."

"My English has a little story about it. I lived right next door to a blind man. This old man was well educated. His wife had passed away and he was one of the rich Jews in those days. Around 1910 he had a carriage with two horses, a driver, and a beautiful home. His wife died, and he became poor. He lived with his sister. Anyway, that man couldn't read, couldn't see. He loved the Jewish paper. So, I read it for him. In return, he taught me. Whenever he heard me use improper English he corrected me."



Night school English class at Kellom grade school, c. 1922

"When I got married, I went to night high school. But I was always so tired. I used to fall asleep. When I went to Kellom School, where they had school for foreigners, they moved me from one class to another. I was too good. They put me in one class and when the principal came in there he started talking to me. He said, 'You don't belong here.' So he took me to another class, me and another fellow who was pretty smart too. Jake, yes, Jake Fellman. They kept moving us. We were the best students of them all."

"When I started school, I used to walk about 21 blocks to 24th and Ames. That's where I attended school. When the weather was bad, we went on the big farm wagon. One time I got caught in the rain, and I came to school all soaked. The teacher made me take my dress off and sit in a petticoat. Being as little as I was, I was embarrassed. I remember those crazy things."

"No, when I came here I didn't know English for nothing. I started school at Kellom and then went to Cass."

"I did not go to high school. We could not afford it. But the thing is, I was old enough and smart enough to have a job in a store."

"I took night classes. I was a success. The teacher used to run around to all the classes bragging about me. She wanted us to write about why we liked America. And, by golly, mine was the best, no kidding. I bet you Central High might still have it. There wasn't a mistake in it."

"I went to Central High. My sister took me there. The principal felt I knew enough English, after just one year in America, to enter Central High."

"I said to my father later, 'Dad, I've got to go to high school. I've got to have an education.' He said, 'All right.' So I went to high school. From there I went into the service. When I came back from the army I told my dad, 'I'm not going to be with you in the junk business anymore.' I helped him start it. I said I was starting to go with girls and I didn't want to be with junk."



Gym Club Exposition, May 4, 1915, at Central High School

"We went to night school — me and my wife together. But you know, I used to work 18 hours a day. I used to fall asleep in school. I couldn't stay awake. She got through right away. I'm glad she did. During the day she was busy taking care of our children and then at night she went to school. Oh, yes. She had some friends, you know, in the same apartment building. Some Jewish people. She'd catch a ride. But I was working. I went with them sometimes. But not too much."

"I learned mostly from work. In school we learned different things about the language. Mostly they taught us about the country, about the President, about all that stuff. At the same time we learned a little grammar and a little spelling. I wasn't too hungry for that because we learned quite a bit before we came. I learned quick and I was a good speller, but not to much of a talker."

"I went away to finishing school. It was called St. Mary's in Galesburg, Illinois. My mother chose the place. I wanted to go to the Conservatory of Music in Chicago. But anyhow, there was supposed to be a good musical background at this place. The professor came from the Conservatory in Chicago, but he died two days before my first lesson."

"I graduated from Long School, then from Central High School in 1924. I worked for a year and then



Gym Club Exposition, May 4, 1915, at Central High School. L to R: Rose Singer, Sarah Katz, Ethel Katz

started at Creighton's School of Pharmacy in 1925. I graduated in 1928. I was the only one in my family to go. Of course in those days you know the University wasn't expensive like it is now. I could make enough money working during the summer to pay for my tuition and books. Of course living at home I had board and room. I worked every Saturday at Central Market. I filled orders all day. That was my spending money for the week. Three dollars is what I got for twelve hours at twenty-five cents an hour. I walked to school and carried my lunch. We weren't ashamed. Nobody could afford cars in those days. You could ride a streetcar for five cents and we'd rather have a nickel to buy ice cream than ride. We walked; it was healthier. In the wintertime, I walked from 33rd and Webster to Creighton — the old medical school."

"I attended Central Grade School and used to ride the cable car up and down Dodge Street. Then I attended Central High School where I graduated. Then I went to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln where I graduated with a degree in Civil Engineering in 1906. I remember two other Jewish youths at the University with me. A Pepperberg boy from Plattsmouth and Minnie Hiller, sister of Louis Hiller."

"I was the first Jewish girl, and I think the first girl, ever to have been editor-in-chief of the *Register*, the high school paper. There was some bias. Mother



Max Givot's eighth grade graduation from Long School, 1920

wasn't so sure that she even wanted to let me run. She didn't want me to be hurt. I assured her that if I didn't get elected I would not be hurt. I won. I was the first girl to become editor-in-chief of the *Register.*"

"I went directly into Creighton Law School from high school when I was 17. Creighton Law School was held in a building called the Arthur Building on 18th Street, between Farnam and Douglas. It was not on the Creighton campus. The Arthur Building was sort of an office building. It wasn't a large building. But they had the law school there and as I remember, the Creighton Dental School was there also."

"After Saratoga School, I went to Central High School. Then I went to the University of California at Berkeley, and then to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor."

"In high school I skipped a class because my teachers thought I could learn more. My teachers were very good to me. They called me Mary Antin. Mary Antin wrote *The Promised Land*. She came here very much like I did. She lived in Boston. She felt that America was the promised land. Her book was very popular. All the teachers read it and recommended it because it told them what an American-born person couldn't appreciate. This Mary Antin appreciated what America was giving her and her family and her friends — liberty and the ability to grow. They just called me Mary Antin because I wrote well. I remember that they had a teachers convention here and they brought in Rabbi Wise, Steven Wise." *(Stephen S. Wise, 1874-1949, a national leader of American Jewry from the early 1900's until his death.)*

"This particular lecture took place at Brandeis Theater which is no more. They gave me a ticket to go there. I did and I'll never forget this man's speech. Among the things he said was that people looked down upon Jews. He said that our people gave the world the Ten Commandments. Our people had such and such laws which he enumerated when other's ancestors were still climbing trees like monkeys. I remember the pride with which he spoke about our people."


OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DIPLOMA

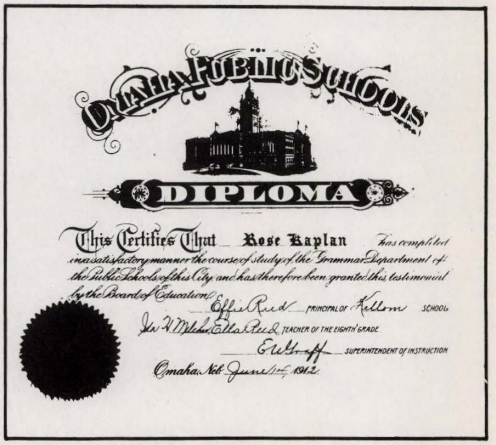
This Certifies That Lena Meyerson has completed in a satisfactory manner the course of study of the Grammar Department of the Public Schools of this City and has therefore been granted this testimonial by the Board of Education.

Martha Powell PRINCIPAL OF Long SCHOOL

Virginia Ellett TEACHER OF THE EIGHTH GRADE

E. W. Graff SUPERINTENDENT OF INSTRUCTION

Omaha, Neb. Jan. 31, 1913


OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DIPLOMA

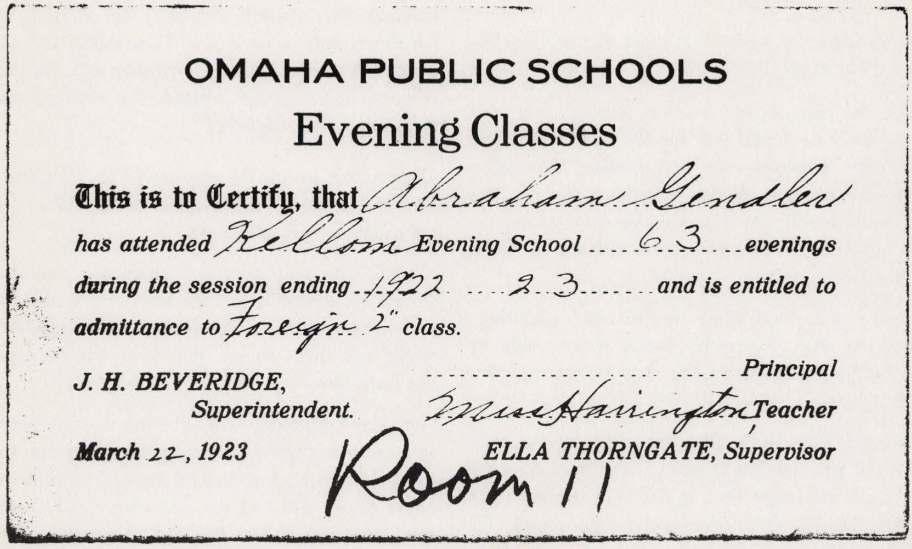
This Certifies That Rose Kaplan has completed in a satisfactory manner the course of study of the Grammar Department of the Public Schools of this City and has therefore been granted this testimonial by the Board of Education.

Effie Reed PRINCIPAL OF Fallon SCHOOL

Jessie Ellett Reed TEACHER OF THE EIGHTH GRADE

E. W. Graff SUPERINTENDENT OF INSTRUCTION

Omaha, Neb. June 25, 1912



OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Evening Classes

This is to Certify, that Abraham Gendler

has attended Kellom Evening School 63 evenings

during the session ending 1922 23 and is entitled to

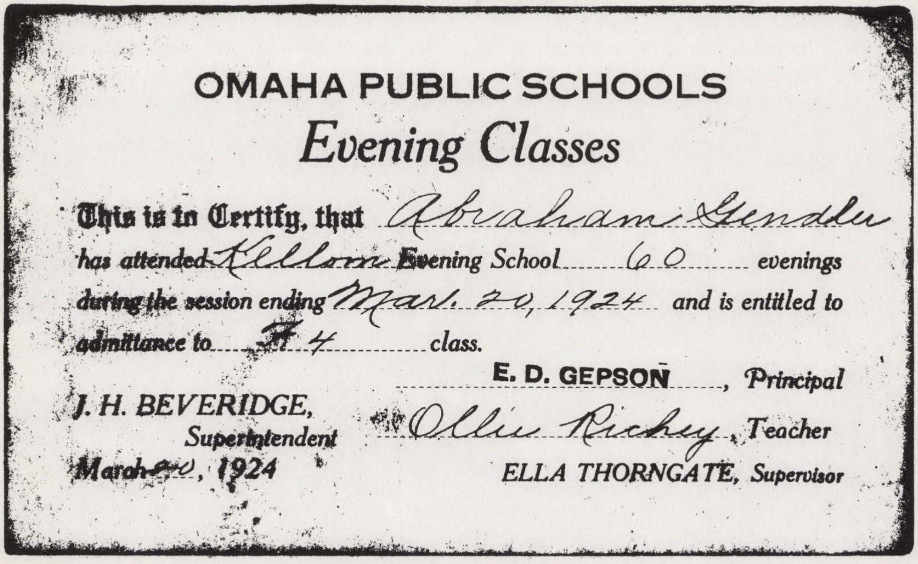
admittance to Foreign 2" class.

J. H. BEVERIDGE, Superintendent. ..... Principal

Miss Harrington Teacher

March 22, 1923 ELLA THORNGATE, Supervisor

Room 11



OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Evening Classes

This is to Certify, that Abraham Gendler

has attended Kellom Evening School 60 evenings

during the session ending Mar. 20, 1924 and is entitled to

admittance to 4 class.

E. D. GEPSON, Principal

J. H. BEVERIDGE, Superintendent

Ollie Richey, Teacher

March 20, 1924 ELLA THORNGATE, Supervisor

5 Being Different

Though its beacon of freedom had called us, America's liberty was not flawless.

"At first, the native-born Omahans wouldn't mix with us, but later, they found out that we were people, we were human. Sometimes we went to where they had a party or a dance and gradually they accepted us. We didn't have trouble. At first you know, I wanted to meet a girl, but girls wouldn't go out with me. It took a long time."

"When we came here, there was so much prejudice, you have no idea. Everytime Jewish people went to look for a job, in plain English they would say, 'We don't hire Jews.'"

"My brother was a little older than me. The teacher called on him for something and he was figuring on his hand, like a kid might do, figures, number work. He said, 'Oh, Morris, don't give your religion away.' I'll never forget that."

"I remember when I was going to high school and I wanted a job. I looked in the employment ads of the *World Herald, The Omaha Bee* and *The Daily News.* Column after column, ad after ad, it said, 'White Christians only need apply.' They didn't say no Jews wanted. It just said white Christians, white meaning no Negroes. Sometimes they would say white Protestants, if they were anti-Catholic."

"Papa would go on the wagon and they'd start calling him *sheeny* so you can imagine. My father was like an aristocrat — very religious."

"People who came to solicit funds for institutions in Jerusalem, walked down the streets with their beards and their long coats. People in certain neighborhoods would call them names, but there was no organized anti-Semitism."

"One day a little boy stepped down in school and kind of bumped me and I kind of bumped back and the first thing I know he told the principal. The principal got ahold of me and had the custodian stand nearby. He was afraid I'd attack. He said, 'Now you foreigners come here and right away you want to fight our American children!' I understood that pretty well. That was true enough. We had learned the hard way right away."



Kellom School 1914 *Courtesy of Ellen Rosen, teacher at Kellom from 1914 to 1946*

"Some of the scrap metal workers gave me trouble. Especially the Polish, because I knew their language. I knew what they were saying to each other. They were jealous because I got ahead. They were working for 15 years and here I came in and very soon was made foreman. They got mad, they didn't like it. They used to talk about me."

"My father went to a shoe factory in New York and applied for a job. The fellow who was in charge of hiring men was an Italian, a Roman Catholic, who did not like Jews. When my father told him his name, he said, 'Are you a Jew?' 'Yes.' 'Sorry we don't need any help today.' So Pa went across the street and went to a barber shop and had his mustache shaved off. He came back the next day and applied for the job. The man didn't recognize him. He hired him."

"I didn't understand the word anti-Semitism until I got into the Army in 1918. I was already eight years in the United States and I ran across it. The sergeant, before I became sergeant, was a mean guy. He made some kind of mean remark. I should have known better, but I said, 'You goddam son-of-a-bitch of an Indian, what the hell do you know?' He had made an awful nasty remark about Jews."

"I was just pretty confident about being a Jew. When I was in the eighth grade I had one physical altercation with a boy. At recess time, there was a group of boys standing against the building. I heard something about "a Jew". I turned around and said, 'What did you say?' He said, 'Oh, dirty Jew.' Well, I just hauled off and hit him right in the nose. Well, of course, there was a riot. The teachers came running, all the teachers were out there. I was sent to the principal's office. And her name was Agnes Harrison, one of the finest and brightest women that ever lived. I remember her with great gratitude. She asked me, 'What on earth happened?' After all, I was one of the model girls. I always behaved myself in school. So I told her what had happened. Well, she said, 'You go on to your room.' She called the boy in. She didn't report me to my father or anything like that. Nobody ever said anything to me of that kind again. I played with everybody and I paid no attention to it. I was just a part of the school."

There was also a mutual warmth.

"When we first came papa was a peddler and boys would throw rocks at him a lot, but our neighbors were so wonderful. We lived on 26th and Dodge in a duplex. We had generous neighbors. When we were packing one day, they invited us for lunch. They knew father would not eat non-kosher. They went to the dime store and bought paper plates and paper everything, so my father could eat lunch there. They were beautiful neighbors. They said we were the first Jewish people they ever knew and they couldn't get over it. They loved us and we loved them."

"We lived in an all Catholic neighborhood. Mom would not fix the furnace on Friday night and she would not turn off the lights. We had a Catholic family living next door to us and they came in and turned off our lights and stoked the furnace. That was before oil. The Murphys, another family, were religious Catholics. The Murphys had a daughter who was a nun and in the service as a nurse. They came to mama and asked mama to pray for her. They hadn't heard from her and they knew mama was a religious person. When she came back they thanked mama for helping to bring their daughter back."

"We are people of pride. I didn't have to take anything from anybody. I wasn't supposed to be treated better or worse by anybody. I wasn't afraid of anybody. I went to work and made my own living. I wasn't expecting somebody to treat me good or bad. I was one of the crowd. That's all. I was independent."

"My younger brother and I used to go through the alleys. A beautiful non-Jewish woman came around and handed us two suits of clothes. She said she didn't need them. That gave me my love for the United States. From that one action of that one woman, I wondered who would ever think where we came from of giving anything away?"

6 Valiant Women

Our roles were multiple. We managed in the face of divorce, sickness, and family deaths to hold our loved ones together. Even the youngest of us knew when it was time for her to "pitch-in". Survival was a corporate effort.

"My wife was the boss. She was the brains. She was my bookkeeper and my secretary. She took care of every nickel until she died. Actually, all those years I didn't know if I had any money or not."

"Papa used to come home and say, 'We'll starve to death. Nobody even comes into the store.' I said, 'I know how to make money. I'll hire somebody to take care of the kids and I'll come and show you. You buy a box for ten dollars, sell it for eleven dollars. You buy shoes for three dollars, and sell them for three dollars and thirty cents. Believe me. Follow my way. Everybody else makes forty to fifty percent. It's too much! I'll bet you we'll start to make a living. We're not going to starve to death. I know business. We started to live. I put out circulars and every year got better and better. Then I decided I want a furniture business. So I went to Chicago to buy furniture. I told them we didn't have much money. We got credit. It was good for two hundred dollars. One guy said to me, 'Talk to me, I'll get you anything you want.' I thought he wanted to get rid of me. But before I got home, he shipped the furniture. Then I couldn't pay! So I went and put an ad in the paper and sold out the whole house of furniture for eight hundred dollars. When the kids came home from the show, they cried. 'Why did I leave them an empty house?' I said, 'The guy was so nice to me, how can I



Rose (Kaplan) Wolpa's mother in front of their home and business at 20th and Burdette, 1898

lie to him? I had to do it.' We went and got a couple mattresses from the store and slept on them. The next day we brought in a refrigerator, a stove, and the kids quit crying, except for the bedroom. The kids cried for the bedroom all the time. 'Why are your doing this to me?,' I asked. Some day I'll give you everything. Now we have to pay our bills."

"Mother and father were divorced when I was two. I don't remember my father. Mom had to go out and do housework. My brother Frank was just like the father at home. He was eight years older. He took care of me and fed me. Mother didn't have an easy life, because at twenty-six, she was left with four children. She went into the restaurant business. She was a good cook. She started by herself. Her first restaurant was 416 South 10th Street. In was called Mrs. Tuchman's Restaurant. She was good at beef stew, roast beef, mashed potatoes, and vegetables. For twenty-five cents you could get a full meal. Coffee and dessert was included. When I was older, I was cashier there. And I helped set the tables. Mother could always count on the boys for help too. Whenever the cook would get drunk or quit, all mother had to do was call Frank, Mike, or Joe. They would come and prepare the food. In 1908 they bought the 18th and Chicago Street grocery. They called it Tuchman Brothers. Mother still kept the restaurant on 10th Street. It was then that she could afford piano lessons for me."



Aaron Rips' mother, Mary (Solzman) Rips



Eva Schwartz' mother, Bessie Schwartz

"Mother believed that women should have the right to vote, like men. She always had to do a man's job anyway, so why shouldn't she have something to say. Mother had the first suffrage meeting for the 8th ward at our home."

"My father couldn't make a living and my mother was the bread-winner in the family. She took in boarders and roomers. She made room for everybody in our small cottage. She washed on a board. She ironed and she cleaned and she cooked. I don't know how she managed, but she did. When winter came, it was hard to pay for the coal, but we did. We managed some way. I mean my mother managed.

"One day on my lunch hour I ran into Susan Paxton, my old Latin teacher. She said to me, 'Lena Meyerson, whatever happened to you? Why did you quit school.' I told her I didn't want to but it was a case of necessity. She said, 'Why don't you try to get a job just for afternoons. You are capable. You can do both.' I said maybe that was a thought. I started looking in the papers and saw that Jake Alexander Advertising was looking for a stenographer for afternoons. I called on him and he said, 'I shall hire you right away but you have to be here at twelve o'clock.' 'No, I want to go back to school. The school doesn't let out till 2:15 and I can get to your place in five minutes. From Central High to 10th & Farnam, I could run all the way.' He said, 'No, that wouldn't do.' I said, 'Listen Mr. Alexander,' and that is just the way I talked to him, I said, 'Who are you gonna get for six dollars a week working afternoons? If you think you can get an experienced stenographer like me, you're crazy!' I said, 'Let me take a letter.' He gave

SUFFRAGISTS ORGANIZE AN EIGHTH WARD CLUB

Group of Young Business Women Will Help Along the Ballot Cause.

An enthusiastic group of young business women of the eighth grade met last evening at the home of Mrs. T. Rubin and formed an organization to help along the cause of votes for women. Miss Mollie Corby was chosen chairman.

Mrs. W. C. Sunderland, Mrs. H. C. Sumney, Miss Dewey and Miss Daisy Doane, eighth grade chairman, are the suffrage leaders who spoke. Informal talks were also given by Mrs. Joseph Duffy and Miss Mildred Levy of South Omaha, and by Otto Gluck. Among those present were Misses Rose Goldstein, Eva Goldstein, Sarah Tuchman, Sally Adler, Malvina Newman, Mrs. H. Wolf and Mrs. David Gross.

World Herald, 1919



Goldie Trustin with her daughter, Edith (Trustin) Graetz, and her two grandchildren, Isabel (Graetz) Theodore and Marion Graetz, c. 1920

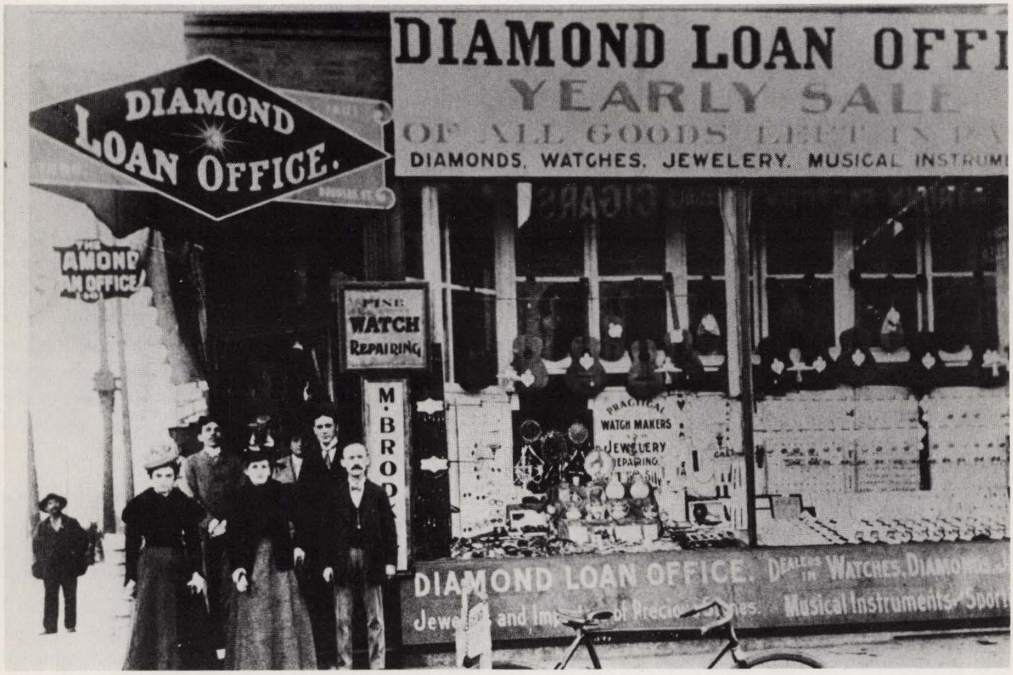
me a letter in his very, very poor English and I corrected it and put it the way it should be. He had a partner in the office, a gentile fellow. He showed it to him. The partner replied, 'Well I see you got yourself a stenographer. She's all right!' I did go back to school and worked in the afternoons.

Then my mother took sick. She had to go to the hospital and when she got home my brothers called a meeting. They said, 'What do you want, your mother or school?' When they put it that way, there was nothing I could do. I quit school. I kept my job. But I quit school to take care of my mother."

"I've worked since I was twelve years old. I used to come down and help my dad. I sold pocket watches to the farmers for about ten dollars. I always worked. I always loved the business, Brodkey Jewelry on 13th and Douglas. When I was one year old the exposition was here. Dad said that started him in business. People would not let him sleep. They would knock at the door. There was I think one and one half million people in Omaha for it and that's what started him. He was able to move across the street on 14th and Douglas and that's where we were a long time."

"I enjoy meeting the public and waiting on people. I've always done that and I like that. Very interesting things come up a lot of times and that alone is an education. I helped my father, I helped my husband. I helped my brother. That's some sixty years now I've been working."

"Yes, I had a job. I was in school and my sister was working for Jaffe's furniture place. They were trying to teach her how to use the typewriter. Every day after



Brodkey Brother's first store, 13th and Douglas. Morris Brodkey with employees, c. 1910

school I'd go into the place where she worked and do her work. No one ever caught on!"

"From March till June, 1913, I went to work for Martin Brothers Insurance Company at thirty-five dollars a month. I was a secretary for the Catholic Relief Services. I had full charge of the Catholic churches in Omaha. I corresponded with various churches outside of the city. Then, through my father's efforts, I was promoted to become a secretary at the court house. I was going on eighteen. I was there six and one-half years. The men didn't make much more than we did. I started out there at fifty dollars a month. From eight in the morning till five in the afternoon. An hour for lunch.

"When I first got to the court house I worked on records. I recorded legal cases such as divorces, murder, and child abandonment."

"When I was fourteen I graduated from grade school. Then I went to business school. I learned typing and shorthand. I started to work when I was there only a couple of months. I did pretty well with my work. So they used to send me where they needed a stenographer. I made ten dollars a week. I was so happy. I thought I was a rich woman. My next job was working for the first big automobile dealer in Omaha. His name was H. E. Fredrickson. He had a place on 15th & Capitol Avenue. When I started to work for him, he had farm wagons and some old cars that he used to sell. He was a real businessman. He got the first big automobiles that were in Omaha. They were called Wintons. There I made twelve dollars a week."

"My folks rented a store on 24th and Hamilton and that's where we started. I remember that by the time we trimmed the windows there was nothing left to put on the shelves. It was a general store, mostly dishes, notions, and stuff like that. At that time there was a need for dishes. You know so many people were coming here — immigrants. They often got married at the hall on 23rd and Harney Street. They needed kosher dishes. So my folks went into that business. They used to rent out plates, forks, knives, and spoons. Nobody else had ever thought of this rental business before. Haydens was one of the big department stores here and of course they sold dishes, pots, pans, and everything. They were a little cheaper than Brandeis. They were geared to a class of people who had less money to spend. The rumor was that Haydens washed their dishes with soap. Somebody that worked there told us. The dishes were packed with straw, loose straw, and so you really did need to clean them. Well, we used to wipe them off with a rag. I worked in the store from the time we started, and that was one of my jobs, just to dust the dishes. People came and they used to buy all their dishes from us.

"At Passover it was like a marketplace. Sometimes we used to stay open until midnight. People kept coming in. I still remember those big chopping bowls, wooden chopping bowls. We used to sell them by the dozen. My folks used to buy stuff from the Omaha Crockery Company. Well, whenever the Omaha Crockery Company had a bargain they used to call us and my mother would go down there and make arrangements and we would buy the stuff and lo and behold I have to tell you. One time, one of these barrels came in and they were supposed to be creamers and sugars. Everybody was buying creamers and sugars and they were very pretty. They were made in China or Japan. But when we started unpacking them, we learned they were only creamers. We then had to buy another barrel which had only sugar bowls. We had sugar bowls and creamers till the cows came home! We used to sell them for maybe ten cents apiece. And they were beautiful, hand painted stuff."

"I would have liked more education. I wanted to be a nurse, but you remember years ago, people had a silly notion that nurses were wild, and you know my folks. They talked me out of it. Nurses were supposed to be very promiscuous. There was a time when they had a terrible reputation. I don't know how that ever got started. In fact, I have always been terribly frightened of rodents, so one of my uncles tricked me. He said,

'Well, Fannie, you can be a nurse OK, but you know one of the tests — they put you in a room and they turn out a lot of mice and you can't scream and you can't do anything.' He scared me out of it. There used to be a hospital called Doctors Hospital. They had a big pool for the nurses. Two of my girl friends did go, but you know my mother, she didn't think it was the right thing for a girl."

"My husband was a fine tailor and I waited trade. We had a shop on 31st and St. Mary's. At 7:00 A.M. I was out there. There was a line of cars you know. They were coming from the west. All the rich people would come and they liked it when they didn't have to get out of the car to bring their clothes in. I was right there with a table, a round table with an umbrella over it. I would take their name, what they wanted done, and when they wanted it ready. I'd mark it down and take it in the shop. They knew just what to do and when to come after it. We did very well."

"I taught school three and one half years. Albert always said he saved me from being an old maid. First I substituted. Whenever they had a difficult class, Miss Ryan, who was assistant superintendent at Central, used to send me out to all these difficult schools — grade schools. Then I finally landed at Benson East, and I taught the fifth grade."

"My first husband was a lawyer in Omaha for sixteen years at the First National Bank building. I lost him at the young age of 47. I started to make a living for myself. I wanted to keep the family of four children together. So I started to make egg noodles for a living. I had many, many fine customers in Omaha, Council Bluffs, and Lincoln, including such fine places as the Union Pacific Railroad. They served my noodles on their diners from here to California."

"At thirteen I worked for the Central Market. My sister Rose did also. I worked in the fruit department. My sister, in the grocery. They had a Central Market on 16th Street near Penney's. The Kulakofskys were the best people, second Blumkins. Every new American



Edith (Pinkovitz) Schneider in her kitchen in back of her husband's tailor and furrier shop, 31st and St. Marys

got a job there. I worked before I was thirteen at a dry-goods store at about Maple Street. Three dollars a week at Blumenthal's. All the Jewish kids worked. If they did not work, they were newspaper boys. Because at that time they sold newspapers on the street.

"While I was going to Central High, I asked the principal if there was any kind of work I could do, even if I had to stay a little longer. She said, 'Yes, you could help in the cafeteria.' Actually, I didn't know at that time what a cafeteria was, but I said, 'I'd like to learn that.' They said I could. I worked and I enjoyed it. I always liked cooking, which I never did in Europe, because we had maids to do the cooking. But I enjoyed seeing how they got the salads ready."

"I worked in the summertime. That was when I was in high school, of course. I had an uncle who was the station agent for the American Express Company down on 15th and Webster. He needed some help in the office writing bills of lading and things of that kind. I got very well paid. Don't forget, that was during the War. There was a shortage of people."

"I used to work for McCorden-Brady, a wholesale grocery on South 13th Street. Then I worked at Hayden Brothers on North 16th, downtown. I used to work as a salesgirl. All the girls downstairs had little baskets. After they made a sale, they used to put the money and the sales ticket in a basket. It used to go up a line. I used to sit in the office, and take the baskets in, take the money out, and mark it. There were certain things to mark. Like a cashier. Well, I was educated. I graduated from Kellom School. Seven dollars was my first paycheck. We had to work Saturday. There were certain times that we had to come in. We never



The Newman Sisters, Top row: Ethel Berkowitz, Rose Lipp, Malvina Greenspan; bottom row: Freida Swartz, Berta Stern, Lena Somberg



Four generations: Soramara (Simon) Gross, Lena (Gross) Meyers, Rose (Meyers) Muskin, Dorothy (Muskin) Silver

had to punch a clock or anything, but there was always somebody at the door."

"A friend of mine and myself went looking for work around Christmas time. It was usually a good time to get a job. It was a very cold December day. We started with the candy factories down on 10th Street. The laundries, the biscuit companies. We were turned down wherever we went. They already had enough people. We were short for our age, you know. We looked like we were ten years old when we were maybe thirteen. Finally, my little friend got tired. When we got to 15th and Farnam she said, 'I'm not going anymore. I'm tired, I'm hungry, I'm going home.' I said, 'Well, I'll go into this one place, that was the Nebraska Clothing Co. at 15th and Farnam and then I'm going home too.' Well, I realized the reason nobody hired us — when two go and they only have one job to place, they would not take one and leave the other. The Nebraska Clothing Co. hired me right away. I think I was in the 8th grade then. I worked there all during my high school days. I was a wrapper and a cash girl.

"After I graduated, I got an office job with Republic Steel Corporation, one of the three biggest steel companies in the country, doing secretarial work. Then I wanted more money. They couldn't pay me more. So, I wanted to take a civil service test to get government work. I was walking to work one morning. I met a woman who was waiting for a bus. We got to talking. We got acquainted that way. She was working for the government and I told her what I wanted. She said, 'Well, go ahead and take the test. Maybe you'll get in.' So I took the test and three months later I made it! I went to work for the civil service up until the time I came here to the Sher Home."



Party at the Rosenstock home, 3506 Harney. L to R, bottom row: Lillian Meyers, unidentified, Martha Hadia, Lorene Rosenstock; middle row: Mildred Kramer, Ruth Arnstein, Henrietta Bergman, Fanny Livingston, Myrtle May; top row: Jessie Rosenstock

7 Getting Together

"That was one of the things Jews did. They always helped other Jews."

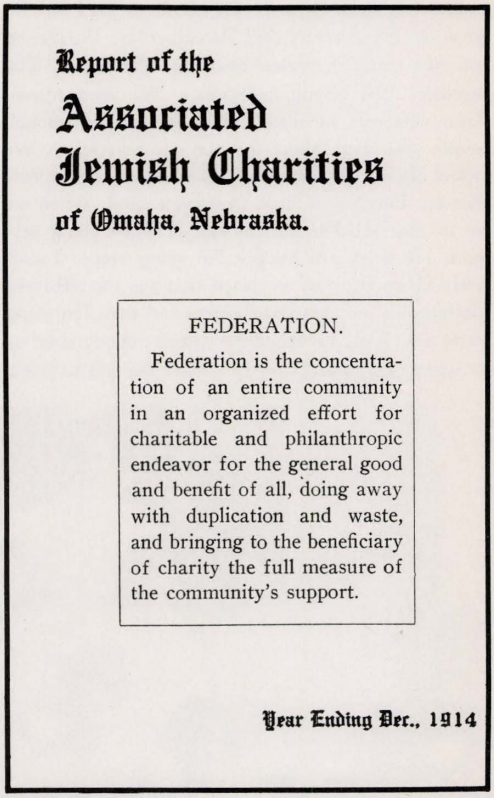
"Years ago the Jewish people had a downtown club called The Metropolitan Club. It was on 22nd and Harney Street almost across the street from the Temple. It provided evening entertainment for adults and everything from holiday parties to birthday parties for kids."

"Sis Kaplan, Ann Slosburg and Esther Simon were the group that started the Harmony Club. It was the beginning of all this Federation. We used to have the most beautiful dances. We made money on them. The money would go to charity."

"There was an awful lot of that. We had what we called Jewish Charities. That started real early. They built an office in the Brandeis store building, which at one time had offices. I think that my sister was the first professional to work out of that office. They used to render social services to the needy and poor."

"My mother belonged to the Ladies Relief Society. Once at *Pesach* time there was a family my mother took in. The father was a peddler. Some boys struck him in the head. My mother took him in and watched over him and his family. There were two good women that would help her, Mrs. Tatle and Mrs. Ravitz. They were very good to poor people."

"Mother was on the board of every fine organization in the city, and believe me, she was wonderful. She worked hard for the Visiting Nurses, and the Red Cross."


Report of the
Associated
Jewish Charities
of Omaha, Nebraska.

FEDERATION.

Federation is the concentration of an entire community in an organized effort for charitable and philanthropic endeavor for the general good and benefit of all, doing away with duplication and waste, and bringing to the beneficiary of charity the full measure of the community's support.

Year Ending Dec., 1914

Courtesy of Carol Gendler

"The first old peoples home was on 25th and Charles and the *mikveh* was right there. Mama and Mrs. Anna Ravitz were the founders. In those days, mama and Mrs. Ravitz used to give balls to raise money for the home. And because papa was so well known and had so many rich customers, mama and Mrs. Ravitz used to take the streetcar and go down to the insurance companies and banks and sell them twenty-five and fifty tickets at a time."

Application for Admission to the Home of the Daughters of Israel Aid Society for the Aged

בית מושב זקנים

Omaha, May 13 1919

The undersigned hereby applies for admission as an inmate into the ....., and promises, if admitted, to observe and comply with all the laws, rules and regulations now in force, and all others which the Board of Directors may hereafter adopt.

My name is Sam Max man

I reside at Omaha Neb.

I was born in Russia on the 14 day of Apl., 1855

I have resided in the United States since 1882.

I have resided in Omaha since 1882

I lived, prior to coming to Omaha, at Russia

I am Married, ~~Single, Widow, Widower~~ not living with wife.

My wife, husband lives St. Louis Mo.

I have been a Widow, Widower since .....

I have 3 Sons.

5 Daughters.

Their names, ages, residences and occupations of the sons and the husbands of daughters, are:

Theodore Max man St. Louis - Occupation Unknown
Sa Waxman St. Louis - clerk Loft
Hymie Waxman St. Louis - Occupation unknown
Rose Davis - Omaha - Husband sells a grocery
Mary Harris - St. Louis
Sara Max man St. Louis
Ella Max man St. Louis

My 4 Brothers and Sisters, with their addresses, are 19th & Locust St.

Have you ever been an inmate of or made application to any other institution? If so, state when and where. No

My other relatives and their addresses are: X

My means of support are $55-0

I carry Life Insurance to the amount of $ None in .....

Company, payable X

I am a member in good standing in the following orders: None

I agree to pay to the Home, $..... per month, and .....

by his signature hereto guarantees the payment of said amount, immediately when due.

The Board of Directors reserves the right at any time in its discretion it is deemed advisable to dismiss the applicant from the home. The agreement by the applicant this reservation is made a condition, precedent to the acceptance of the application.

I make the following statement as to property or income of every description, either in my possession at present, or held by others for my benefit, or in which I may have an expectant interest.....

I shall furnish all such further information as the Board shall require.

..... (Signed) Sam Max man

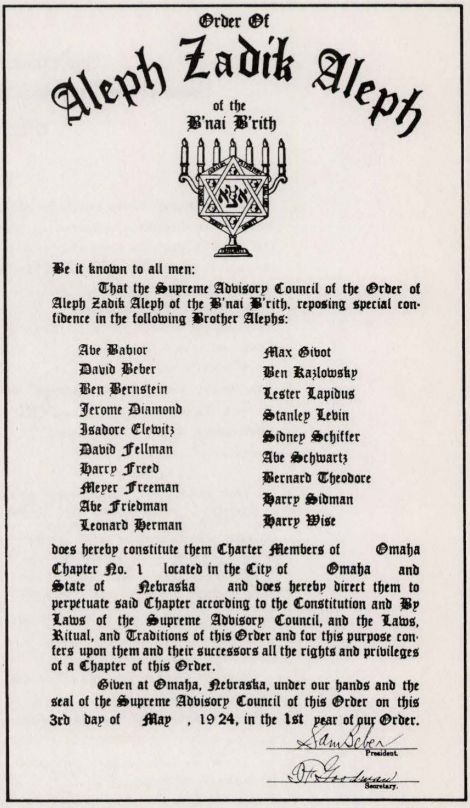
Guarantor. Applicant.

Courtesy of Carol Gendler

"Dad belonged to what was called the Omaha Hebrew Club. They helped the new Jewish immigrants who came and had no one. They were always helping each other with loans."

"The Omaha Hebrew Club took an interest in helping people. We had some Jewish attorneys. If there were any serious cases that came along where Jews were being mistreated, they helped out."

"We held our AZA parties in different places. It was a Jewish youth fraternity we started in Omaha. Well, at one time we had a dance at Sommers Hall at 28th and Farnam upstairs of Sommers grocery. Later on we had them where they had the community center when they built it in 1925. Then we held all our affairs there. We had different halls around town that we'd rent. I remember when they laid the cornerstone for the community center. I even pledged twenty-five dollars. That was a lot of money in those days from a single fellow. Of course we started the AZA in 1923. There were seven other boys. My cousin Abe Babior, Mike Friedman, Harry Freeze, Harry Sidman and Leonard Herman. That was before they became international. We had a club, but later our advisor had to leave because he was transferred so we got Sam Beber as our advisor. By 1924 we had four chapters already organized in Omaha, Lincoln, Kansas City, and Des Moines. At our first convention we had those four cities represented."



Order Of

Aleph Zadik Aleph

of the

B'nai B'rith

Be it known to all men:

That the Supreme Advisory Council of the Order of Aleph Zadik Aleph of the B'nai B'rith, reposing special confidence in the following Brother Alephs:

Abe Babior	Max Givot
David Beber	Ben Kazlowsky
Ben Bernstein	Lester Lapidus
Jerome Diamond	Stanley Levin
Isadore Elewitz	Sidney Schiffer
David Fellman	Abe Schwartz
Harry Freed	Bernard Theodore
Meyer Freeman	Harry Sidman
Abe Friedman	Harry Wise
Leonard Herman	

does hereby constitute them Charter Members of Omaha Chapter No. 1 located in the City of Omaha and State of Nebraska and does hereby direct them to perpetuate said Chapter according to the Constitution and By Laws of the Supreme Advisory Council, and the Laws, Ritual, and Traditions of this Order and for this purpose confers upon them and their successors all the rights and privileges of a Chapter of this Order.

Given at Omaha, Nebraska, under our hands and the seal of the Supreme Advisory Council of this Order on this 3rd day of May, 1924, in the 1st year of our Order.

Sam Beber
President.

Secretary.

courtesy of Carol Gendler

"There was a Young Womans Hebrew Association, to which many of us belonged. It was social mostly, but they also did other things."

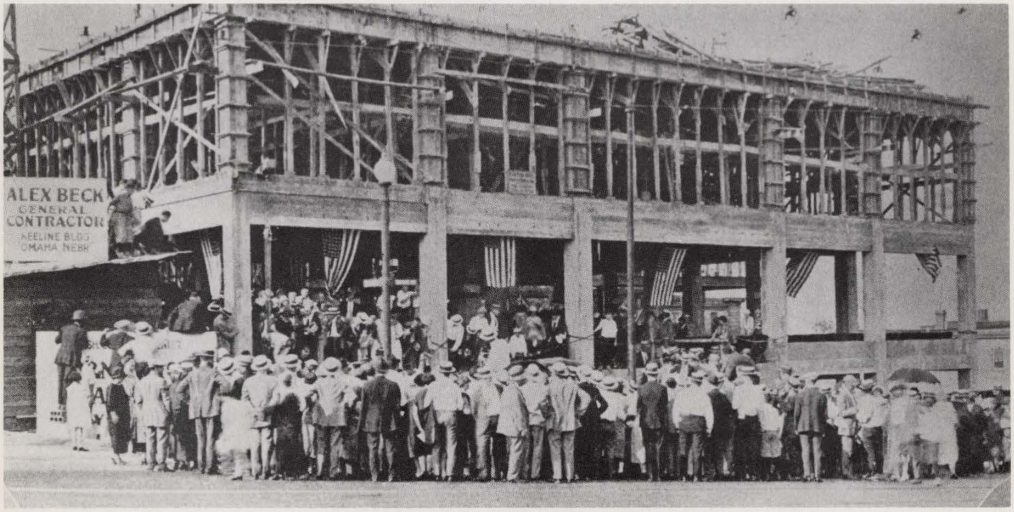
"We belonged to the 'Friendly Circle.' It was a group of about ten couples. We celebrated birthdays and anniversaries. We'd go on breakfasts with our kids. We'd have New Year's parties. We used to meet every week or every two weeks."

"We belonged to the *'Auflabung'* group. It is a Jewish word that means 'To bring back to life, a new life'. We called our group the Live It Up Club. We used to put on concerts, and when the Jewish Center was built, they gave us the main room there. They gave us the auditorium to have dances. As soon as I was able, I joined the B'nai B'rith. I managed to get acquainted with some real nice people. They were teachers, and the reason I liked them was because they were Zionist. I wanted to go to a Zionist party."

"The Sisterhood was very popular. Of course, it wasn't what it is now. In those days, we worked hard. We just slaved to give entertainment in the evening. We'd make two-hundred dollars and we thought that was simply marvelous. Well, it was. In those days it was."



Leaders of the community: Kate Lena Tatel, Anna Ravitz, Milly Wolf, Sarah Cohn, Vi Greenberg, Rose Malashock, Millie Summers, Toby Steinberg and Mrs. Friedel



Crowd watching the laying of the cornerstone at the Jewish Community Center, 20th and Dodge Street, 1926

Jewish Community Center Dedication Book, 1926, courtesy of Carol Gendler

"There's always been a Hadassah. But, I think the Council was more or less a melting organization, you know what I mean, from both factions of the Jewish community. Yes, both factions went to the Council. In those days it was quite divided, well, the orthodox and the Reform."

"Hadassah was in my opinion the most active and the most influential group in the city. Our programs were so very good we used to put on skits that we would get from the national group and then change them to suit our own tastes and our own people."

"Oh, yes, I was responsible for the first fund-raisers in Hadassah. I wrote and directed original shows for them. That's what I used to do. I wrote a show named 'Lillie'."

"This aunt of mine, who was principal of Central School, was quite a worker in various women's activities. She was the first president of the Omaha Womens Club. She was a darn good business woman."

"My father belonged to the Workmen's Circle. It was a group for social and cultural activities. He was very active. He and a few other men started what they called the Mutual Loan Society. They had their headquarters down on 22nd and Clark Street."

"In high school I was active in forming the debating society, at the old Commerce High School. Now it's Tech High. I was interested in politics as such, and did campaigning and that sort of thing."

"When I was in high school, the girls never had a chance to debate. The debaters were always boys. So I organized the first debating society at Central High."



Hadassah women boarding bus for conference in Kansas City, 1920. Mesdames Goldner, Margolin, Kaplan, Ross, Kaufman, Arbeitman, Rosenberg, Frohm, Meyers, Zevitz, Lintzman, Fromkin

"There was the Jewish Brigade, have you ever heard of that? This was during World War I. What is now Israel was under the auspices of the British Government and they used to send soldiers to fight in order to keep Germany out of Africa. If Germany had gotten a stronghold in Africa, that would have changed the history of the world. There were a number of Jewish fellows that wanted to fight for that part of the world and I remember some of them being from Omaha. One of them was Kaplan. I remember, he was very active. There were a number of them from Omaha."

"I never went to Hebrew school because my folks couldn't afford it. And I always felt bad. But I belonged to Young Judea and of course I belonged to Hadassah. But because the children were so small, I kind of dropped out. Anything I could do to help out at the synagogue, that came first. I used to decorate the *sukkah,* and my sister had charge of the kitchen when it was on 18th and Chicago. The synagogue was always my main interest."

"The Young Judea was a Zionist group and the kids used to come and learn songs and dances and stuff like that. We'd collect money which was sent to Israel, but it was mostly social. We'd try to teach something about the Zionist movement. At one time we had as many as 300 children in it. Then when the Jewish Community Center was finished, we had programs there for all the high Jewish holidays. We used to pack them in. In the summer we used to go on picnics to the park. In winter we'd also have parties. I found a picture of a hard time party where we were dressed real crazy. I'll never forget this particular party because I asked an aunt of mine for a dress to wear. She had a really beautiful dress, with lace and ribbon all around. I wore it and one of



Zionist meeting, 1916



Kitchen at Jewish Community Center, 20th and Dodge, 1926

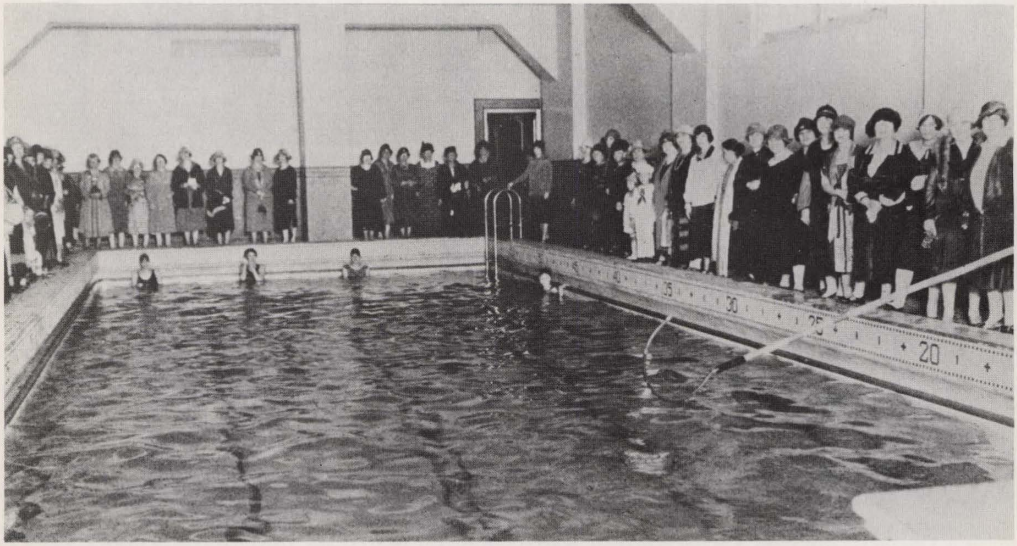
Jewish Community Center Dedication Book, 1926, courtesy of Carol Gendler

the boys started picking at it on the way home. We used to just walk home from wherever. We'd start out and drop off the first person and so on. By the time I got home I only had a slip on because they had unraveled the whole thing!"

"Well, when I was growing up — eleven or twelve years old — we had what we called the Zion Fairies. Jenny Gordon was our sponsor. She was quite a religious person and a strong Zionist too. We met at a big, old rambling house. I remember the porch all the way around the outside, at 21st and Burt Streets. We had our little programs and our get-togethers."

"Omaha did play a very important part in the Zionist movement, far beyond its number and wealth. There was a man by the name of Kneeter who must have been the oldest one among them. There was also a Mr. Fellman. He was a Zionist. These men brought Zionism from Europe. Then Tretiak, the old man, Tretiak was always active. He was always a Zionist. Later on there was A. B. Gendler.

"Brandeis explained in a book that he wrote which I have and I should have given it to more people to read than I did. He said, 'You can be loyal to your family. You can be loyal to the school from which you graduated. You can be loyal to the city in which you live. You can be loyal to an organization that you belong to, a fraternal organization, and that doesn't mean that you are disloyal to anybody else.' He said, 'You can be a loyal Jew and still be a loyal American. You can be a loyal American and still be loyal to the Zionist cause.' I mean one loyalty doesn't mean that you are a traitor to another loyalty. He wrote a whole book about it and it was his influence that made people realize that Jews could be loyal to Israel if and when they would be a state, and still be good loyal Americans. This was a concept that somehow or another was lacking in our civilization."



Swimming pool at Jewish Community Center, 20th and Dodge, 1926 Jewish Community Center Dedication Book, 1926, courtesy of Carol Gendler



Ida Sarah Tuchman and Arthur N. Rubin on their wedding day, August 1, 1920



Ketubah of Molly Gilinsky Tuchman, December 6, 1903, on her marriage to Henry Rubin

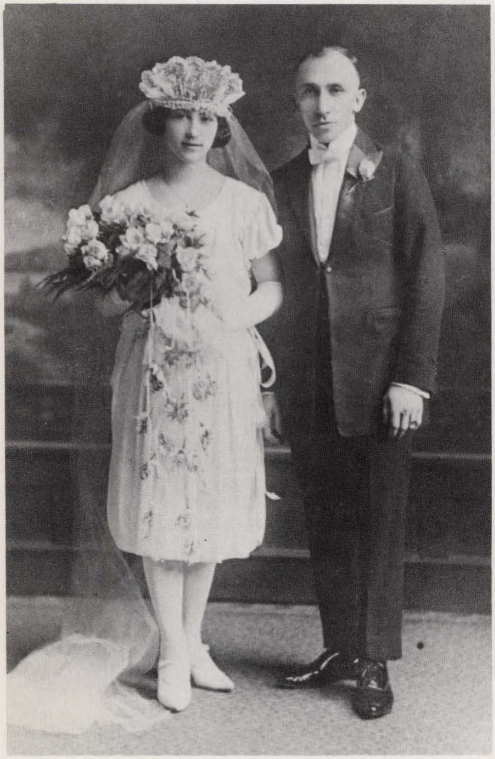
8 Young Love

"I met my husband on a blind date. When he saw me he wouldn't go away for anything. He was very handsome. We married in 1914."

"I worked at Postal Telegraph. My husband was a butcher for Omaha Steaks International. He was also a terrific salesman, but he always came home so tired. During our dating days we only got together once a week — Saturday night or Sunday night — we'd just sit on the swing, and swing — you know those double seated swings? We'd just spend the evening like that."

"It was at one of those dances where I saw my husband. I paid no attention to him, but later on we were married. He told me whenever he had seen me he would tell one of his friends. 'I'm going to marry that girl.' He always came courting on a motorcycle."

"I started to go with Eddie Kirschner and he was my steady boyfriend. We had a lot of fun although we didn't have much money to spend on a date. We would get a nickel ice cream cone and go to a nickel movie. It was fun and we walked all over."



Minnie Faier and Aaron Levine's wedding, September 4, 1921



Dora Moreno and Meyer Kirshenbaum's engagement in Russia, 1913

Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Brandeis request your presence at the marriage ceremony of their daughter, Sarah, to Mr. Herman Cohn, at three o'clock, Tuesday, April fifteenth, Eighteen hundred and ninety, at their residence, 724 South Nineteenth St., Omaha, Neb.



J. L. Brandeis

The Cohen Reception.

Everybody knows that what is done by the Metropolitan club in a social way is done gracefully and with good taste. Last Tuesday evening the club tendered a reception to the newly mated pair, Mr. and Mrs. Herman Cohen, which was more than delightful. From 8:30 'till 9:30 the guests kept arriving, and little groups collected in the handsome club parlors and gossiped the time away 'till summoned to the banquet at 10 o'clock. There is not much to be said of banquets. They are either sparkling and spiced with merriment and enjoyment or they are unutterably dreary and miserable. This was after the sparkling sort and the room was kept melodious with the strains of the Musical Union orchestra, the tinkling of glasses and rippling of careless laughter. The tables were arranged in horseshoe form with the bride and groom at the head, the former looking very charming in a costume which one of the ladies described as simple but elegant. The banquet was prolonged to near midnight, when Dr. Rosenau, in a few well chosen words, proposed the toast of the evening, the bride and groom, and the company adjourned to the ball room above.

The decorations of both the reception and banquetting room were tasteful and elaborate. In the reception room the couple sat under a beautiful canopy, and in front of them and on all sides were graceful floral designs in roses, liiies and smilax. In the banquetting room the most noticeable feature in the decorations was a magnificent horseshoe in pink, yellow and white roses. The supper room presented the appearance of an immense horseshoe of white arms, fair faces, flowers and glittering glassware. The menu which follows was served by a competent corps of waiters who were careful to see that no glass or plate was long empty:

MENU:

Bouillon.
Speckled Trout. Egg Sauce.
Parisian Potatoes.
Radishes. Olives. Pickles. Celery.
Spring Lamb. French Peas.
Young Pigeons. Baked Apple.
Snow Flake Potatoes.
Chicken Salad, a la Mayonaise.
Cakes. Maccaroons. Kisses.
Metropolitan Ice Cream.
Fruit.
Cafe Noir. Cafe au Lait.
Champagne.

Omaha Bee, April 22, 1890

"My parents met on South 10th Street. At that time Jewish people lived there. My father was a very handsome young man, and that is how he met my mother. She was very beautiful. They both lived on South 10th Street. That is how their romance started. They were married in 1894."

"I went to the wedding of a friend of my sister. There was a young lady there, a stranger in town. She looked very, very nice. She asked for an introduction from some friends. They told her, 'Don't ask for an introduction. He won't even look at you. He doesn't go out with Jewish girls.' She asked for an introduction from somebody else. They brought her over and introduced her to me. We got to talking and we fell in love."

"After I got acquainted with this girl that I was attracted to, I bought a Maxwell. I think Jack Benny and I were the only ones with Maxwells. I wanted to impress her. But I hardly did. One time we went for a ride on North 30th. I switched into the wrong gear. We went in reverse, and went fast. It's a good thing we didn't have as many cars on the road as we do now. I stopped and said, 'I'm going to call up somebody and see what is wrong with the car.' In those days there weren't any garages. I did get hold of a blacksmith. When he came along, I said, 'Be careful the way you touch the car because as soon as you turn it on ... The blacksmith put the car in the right gear and it started. 'There's nothing wrong with the car, Mr. Cohn. It's you. You've got to learn how to drive a Maxwell."



Lorene Rosenstock and Loyal Cohn



Fanny and Carl Lagman on their honeymoon

"Jack happened to be there. He ate dinner there. We met and did not like each other. That was in 1918. I had told the girls in the record room what had happened. I worked there in the court house. And they wanted to know what does he look like? I said he was very handsome and on the blondish side and wearing a velvet hefty coat. And they said, 'Well, there is a guy like that walking back and forth outside the drug store to Harney Street and back again.' We always quit at twelve or twelve thirty, so I said, 'Try and keep track which end of the street he's on because I am going out the opposite entrance. If he's on Harney Street, I'll go out Farnam Street and if he is on Farnam Street, I'll go out the Harney Street door.' It must have been fate. As it happened we ran into each other. He said, 'Isn't this quite a coincidence?' I said, 'Yes, when you have walked the block for over an hour, it is quite a coincidence!' He said he had tickets for the Orpheum. I told him I was not going with him because my father was ill and I had to go home. It was *Shabbat*. I said, 'If you want to come home with me you can.' So he came home with me, and that is how he met my parents. He joined the military and after the war we got married."



Wedding of Fanny Weinstien and Solomon Cohen, 1894. Parents of Anna (Cohen) Kaufman



Bessy Marowitz and Harry Gross's wedding, 1892

"When I went to work in the morning, she was walking to school. I said to myself, 'Oh, if only I could get a girl like that to go out with me on a date. Maybe sometime we'll get acquainted.' I was given some circus tickets, so I called her. I said, 'Would you like to go to the circus with me?' She said, 'Not tonight, it's *Shabbas.*' 'Well, we can go tomorrow night. Saturday night.' 'No.' All kinds of excuses followed. Once she bawled me out and kicked me out of the house. She said, find some other girl. Well, I was persistent. We were married when I was 24. We had a beautiful Orthodox wedding in the synagogue on 19th and Burt. Rabbi Grodzinsky married us."

"While working in Indiana, I met Goldye Kahn whose family were German immigrants. We eloped on September 30, 1908 and were married by a rabbi. I brought my bride back to Omaha where Dad purchased a house for us on 31st Ave. and Davenport for $6,000. Dad lived with us until his death. We lived in that house for over 25 years."



Freeda Mendelson and A. B. Gendler's wedding, 1926



Blanche and Harry Rosenfeld on their honeymoon, 1913

"We met on the steps of Louie Hiller's house, that's Richard Hiller's father. They had a party there. We were both invited and I met my wife-to-be there. She was from Council Bluffs. We were married in the Cornhusker Hotel in Council Bluffs. It was a small wedding. My mother was there. My wife's grandparents and her mother were there. Her father had passed away. Dr. Cohn performed the ceremony."

"One day I got a call from him telling me that Hadassah was having a dance at the Argon and would I like to go. I said, 'Yes!' From then on we started seeing each other quite a bit. Then I did not hear from him for about a year. And I didn't care because I was having a ball. My sister knew so many people and there were so many Omahans there. They were dating me up with this one and that one. But it was, just, you know, to go

A GRAND

CO-OPERA-TION

ENTITLED

"THE NEWLYWEDS"



The Star--Boarder



The Leading Lady--Cook

WEDDING OF

FLORENCE HILLER AND SELWYN S JACOBS

WEDNESDAY. DECEMBER TENTH.

NINETEEN THIRTEEN.

S X P M. OMAHA AT HOME

Florence Hiller's wedding invitation, 1913

WANTED

Competent Girl for General Housework, apply at once to
J. L. JACOBS.

MUSICAL PROGRAM
CONTINUED

A Rising Toast
"Sung to "Oh, Maryland"

Oh Bride and Groom
Oh Bride and Groom
We have a Toast to offer you
A Life of Bliss
This is our wish
May all your fondest dreams
Come true

Sung to Chorus of "When Dreams Come True"

When fiirst he met her and liked her and then began for Selwyn
Chasing and racing from city and back again to see her
How he did linger, erecting tall towers
Just as long as he could, in this old town of ours
Then to Chicago that city
With lights so brightly gleaming
There she did follow and tarry and ever in her dreaming
She was still wachting and waiting to say
I'll marry you some fine day

DIRECTORS

Stage Manager -- Rabbi Kopald
Musical Director -- Henry Hiller
Scene Shifters - Jas. Stewart & Co
Property Master - - - F. Hiller
Advance Agent - - S. S. Jacobs
Advertising Manager - L. Hiller
Wardrobe Mistress - Miss Davis
Carpenter - - Richard H. Hiller
Scenery by - - Hiller Liquor Co
Costumes by - Michael Berg & Co
Hats by - - Mortine Hiller, Paris

TAKE NO CHANCES, *Have your Eggs tested. I test 'em while you wait. Satisfaction guaranteed or Eggs refunded.*
HENRY HILLER.

Florence Hiller's wedding program, 1913

on a date. It was just before New Year's Eve . . . I got a wire at my place of work. It said, 'Coming in for New Year's. Want to see you.' I had a date with someone else. I hadn't seen him in such a while. So I went to the phone to call up my sister and I told her the story. But I had a date with Joe. Joe did not mean anything to me. He had a Cadillac and in those days he used to take me to the opera and sports events. She said, 'You make an excuse to Joe and you're going out with Sam,' and that's the way it all got started."

"We met at one of the dances. He was a good dancer. In our day if a girl liked someone, she did not date anyone else. I had my chances. But I did not date anyone else. I didn't mind. I loved him and I loved my work too. I hated to leave it. We were married over



Wedding party of Selwyn S. Jacobs and Florence Hiller, December 10, 1913

seventy-five years ago in 1905. He used to love the theater. The Boyd Theater. We used to go to the most beautiful shows. They used to have the Philadelphia Orchestra. It used to come to Omaha. Before the show began, they always had beautiful music. And my husband loved the theater. And I loved it too!"

"I had a beautiful white wedding dress. We had everything. We dressed upstairs and walked down the steps, me and my bridesmaids. They my brothers, they went out and got tree limbs and covered up the wire chicken coop. My mother always had chickens out in the back. They set out tables in the yard. Mother cooked all the dinner. Beth Greenberg and the Haniky girl were my bridesmaids. We had our reception at home. Ida Bernstein and Lena Miller helped make my dress. They were friends, like part of the family."

"Dave Stein was in pre-med at Creighton when I met him. He wanted to marry me, but papa said he'd have to quit school. He'd have to go out and work before he could marry me. Papa had a little bread store, a bakery. Delivering bread for him is how I met Dave. We had a big wedding."



Lena (Meyerson) and Morris Grossman on their honeymoon, 1919



Ida Auerbach and Dave Stein wedding, 1917

"May had moved to Council Bluffs and was living with our Uncle Boruch Simon. I used to take the streetcar over there on Sundays to visit her. It was a mighty long trip from South Omaha. We wanted to get married. However, my mother was the matriarch and real boss of the family. We never did things without getting her advice. So when I told her about May and my plans she said it would not look good for me to marry before Herman. So that was that! Well, Herman finally met Mary and 1909 was the year of the weddings. Herman and Mary were married early in January, and May and I followed suit later that month. Later, Goodman and Betty were married. We were married at a public hall on January 31, 1909, by Rabbi Grodzinsky. I had been living above the store . . . but in honor of my marriage, rented a little house on South 40th, about a block from the store. It had all the comforts . . . a coal stove to keep you warm, if you stayed in the kitchen, and a short walk outside to the privy. We walked home from the wedding. They were building the bridge on Q Street at the time, so we had to walk under the tracks. We finally got settled in our new home with the old furniture rented with the house and we were awakened by a knock on the door. It was my



Ethel and Morris Brodkey wedding, 1896



Sarah Brodkey and Isador Dansky's wedding, 1916

young friend Jim Donovan. They had come for the chivaree ... and asked for supplies to celebrate my marriage. I got dressed and went to the store, gave them food and money to buy a keg of beer, and anxiously went back home."

"I was introduced to a young man, Mathias Levenson. As I looked at him, he said, 'You're Ethel Katz. You know I'm going to marry you.' Just like that! I thought he was crazy! I had never met him before. He insisted. I said, 'You don't even know me!' 'I know all about you.' He had gotten acquainted with some friends of mine here and they had told him about me. He made up his mind that he was going to find me and marry me. Well, my wedding, this was something you wouldn't believe. I didn't like the idea of all Jewish weddings taking place on Sunday because Sunday was a Christian holiday, and why should Jews be married on Sunday? I just didn't like the idea. So I decided to get married on a Friday. That created all kinds of problems."

"Well, there was a group of us in Council Bluffs who used to come to Omaha every Sunday when there was a dance. Jewish dances were often at Alpines Academy which at that time was on Farnam Street. We went stag most of the time. Sometimes we brought dates. The first time I had ever seen my wife-to-be dancing



Sarah Wohlner and Louis Albert's wedding, 1920



May Wolfson and Sam Meyerson's wedding, 1909

there I said, 'Gee, that's a pretty girl. I wonder who she is.' One of the boys in our group said, 'I know her. Her name is Ruth Brown.' 'I have to find out where she lives and take her out if I can.' I called her and asked her for a date. She said, 'I don't know who you are.' So I said, 'I think you know my sister, Frances.' She said, 'Yes, I know Frances.' So, she accepted the date. The first date we had was Decoration Day, 1920, and in May of 1921, we were engaged. In March of 1922, we were married."

"I was on a date. We went to a very beautiful movie theater, The Rialto, it seems to me on Douglas Street. When we went in, there was a young man standing and talking to somebody else I knew. We stopped and talked, and were introduced. Then I met him again the next day. I had gone over to a friend's house, and there he was. That's how we met. I was 22 when we were married. It was a wedding at home. And just family. There was only one couple of outsiders. They were not part of the family, but the rest were all family. It was in August, so the house was all open. No air conditioning, very hot, but it was a lovely wedding. The chandelier was all draped. And I still remember the palms. I remember as I came down the steps to be brought over, I thought to myself, 'What am I doing here, why am I doing this?' I still remember that."



Joe Gotsdiner on his wedding day, September 18, 1921



Leona (Hormel) Gotsdiner on her wedding day, September 18, 1921

"We met on the ship. We're both from Russia, but from different cities. When we came to Omaha, we got married, and moved to Council Bluffs."

"He bought a car to impress me. He told me that afterwards. He bought a Ford, I think. The kind you had to crank. He had a lot of trouble with that. Then he bought a regular car, but it had no top. When we would drive, I had to put out a stick with a rag on it. It would wipe the windshield, because they didn't have wipers in those days."



Wedding party of Fanny Rosenstock, August 10, 1915, including her sisters, Lorene, Hortense, and Jesse

9 Preserving Tradition

The butcher, the baker, the grocer, the shul . . . these became central to our lives. We struggled to surpass the minimal comforts we left behind. The neighborhoods we started in often provided humble beginnings.

"Well, here was the difference between my people. Most of the people that came here were very poor in Europe and so their main effort was put into making a living, getting rich if possible. Not all of them remained religious. Now my parents observed *Shabbat* all their days. The store was always closed, not only on Saturday, but on every Jewish holiday. But that was not true of all Jews."

"First papa rented a house on 13th and Pacific where there was a little synagogue. The place was so full of bedbugs that we had to find another place to live. Everyone in that area was an immigrant. People by the name of Cohn lived above us and I know the Weinsteins lived in the area. The Finkels were there too. The whole area had a lot of Jews."

"We were greeted in Omaha by my brothers and taken to a beautiful little cottage. It seemed like heaven. Everything was furnished. Indoor plumbing. Mind you, this was 1907. My brothers at that time worked for Reuben Kulakofsky. The store was just a few blocks from our house. They respected my father so much. They wouldn't drive past our house on *Shabbas*. They would stop a block before and carry the groceries to the different customers. But in spite of that, my father was very, very unhappy. He didn't have the synagogue close. So we moved. First, we moved to 24th and Douglas where the Masonic Temple is today. It was a little bit of a shack, no plumbing. But of course, it was a little closer to the synagogue. My father could then walk."

"My aunt lived at 13th and Williams. It was a Bohemian neighborhood, but there were quite a few Jewish people around there. In fact, I think one of the first synagogues was on 13th Street. I was born on South 10th Street. Around Mrs. Davis' yard there was a small Jewish community. Mrs. Davis was a midwife and her daughter Anna was a music teacher. As I got a little older, she taught me piano. From 10th Street we moved to 22nd and Pierce Street. From there we moved to 13th and Dorcas. There my father bought a grocery store and a feed store. Then we were a little bit on the better side. We lived upstairs, with hot coal stoves. And it had big stove ovens. We had the water boiler on the side of the stove. And we brought in the coal."

"My mother used to buy on 24th Street at the Star Store. It was a Jewish store where they could speak the language."

"Muskin had the meat market on 24th Street, and Flax had the fish store."

"Oh, yes, we always lived in the neighborhood around 27th and 30th on Chicago Street, and also on Capitol Avenue, and there was always a grocery close by."

"I remember that mother used to send me to buy cracked eggs. Cracked eggs were only five cents a dozen and they were always fresh. We got them the day they came in from the farmer. Mother used to make cookies with them that were just delicious. Yes, the place down the street always had cracked eggs for five cents a dozen!"

"The first home I remember was at 25th Street and Douglas Street, before Douglas Street was cut through."

"See, we settled right in the middle of the Jewish community. A lot of Jewish people lived in that area; in fact, they all lived there. You know, in those years there wasn't very many, but they kept coming in. Naturally they spread out. But the community was between from either 9th or 10th and west to about 13th Street, and from Douglas over to about oh, I'll say to Davenport."

Those of us whose families arrived in the "land of promise" earlier were already able to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

"It was a rather nice neighborhood because the city in 1905 didn't have very much then. I remember the Brandeis family lived a block and a half away, and the Colpetzer family. Senator Millard's home was nearby. Bob Millard, who was president of the Omaha National Bank also lived about six blocks away, so it was a pretty good neighborhood."

"We moved to 22nd and Chicago, 321 North 22nd, in a big house. We were just a block from Central High School. We had a ballroom on the third floor. About 1914, we moved to 2534 Cass. My brother Ben used to have parties for the boys in the garage which they didn't call a garage. Papa had a buggy and a carriage. The carriage was solid mahagony. I think Papa paid $10,000 for the house. There were Jewish people in that neighborhood.

When there were disputes or problems, we tried to settle them privately and quietly . . .

"No Jewish person sued another Jewish person. If we had any difficulties, we always either called in Rabbi Grodzinsky or several other people who had more money than we did. We would have a meeting and settle our arguments between ourselves. And nobody went to jail. We didn't go to court to settle anything either."

Our diversities were as numerous as the countries we came from. This new land provided us the freedom to pursue our dreams, and new opportunity to preserve our traditions. Keeping kosher and participating in the daily minyan helped us to hold on to our identity.

"The *Litvishe* Jews didn't like the *Russishe* Jews so we had one synagogue for the *Litvishe* Jews and another one for the Russian Jews. The Hungarian Jews didn't want to belong to either. They used to have a *minyan* only for the high holidays. They used to hire a hall, a cantor, and a rabbi which they didn't have. This is how they conducted their holidays."

"Dad was a member of the Russian Synagogue. Services were held in a building at 10th and Farnam on the 2nd floor. In 1887 a building was built at 12th and Capitol Avenue and later 18th & Chicago."

"Of course at 18th and Chicago, they had the wealthiest Jews. They had the Lithuanian Synagogue at 19th and Burt so on the holidays the women would parade dressed in their finery from one to the other. We called it the Easter parade."

"It was delightful. Women sat upstairs and the men sat downstairs. I loved that because we would come there on the holidays. I would not have loved it if I had come there with my husband. We used to go there on the holidays and come in and we would kiss all our relatives, even though we saw them every day. This was a ritual. Everyone had their own seat there. No one would dare sit in anyone else's seat. Nobody was ever assigned to a seat. But everyone knew that this was Dora's seat and so on . . ."

"I belonged from the time I was married. I became a member which meant I had to pay for two seats. One up above for the woman and one for myself."



B'nai Israel, 18th and Chicago

From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum



Litvishe Shul, Beth Hamedrosh Hagadol, 1916. Jake Frieden, Ida Hoffman, Edward Brodkey, Barney Drevich, David Sher, Fred Levey, Bertha Siegel, Edith Siegal Courtesy of Carol Gendler

"I went to *cheder* until I was sixteen and I can still read and write Hebrew. In those days we wrote in Yiddish. We belonged to the *Litvishe Shul* at 13th and Pierce. Rabbi Grodzinsky and his family lived across the street from the synagogue. The synagogue was on the east side and on the south side were the Kubjenskys."

"You know, the young people never really attended services. They used to mill around the synagogue during the high holidays. We got dressed up and we went, everybody got new clothes. I remember as a child, we got new clothes twice a year — for Passover and for the high holidays. God forbid if our parents couldn't afford to buy us new white shoes for Passover. We really felt like an outcast then. For the high holidays, everybody got dressed up to kill. We used to march in groups from one synagogue to the other, mostly outside. We'd go in to say hello to the parents and to the older people and then mill around outside."

"In the early days, to my recollection, the orthodox synagogue was the center of social life, at least, as far as the adult male Jewish population was concerned. Most attended morning services and then evening services. And frequently, those who could get away came to the synagogue and studied. On Saturday, between the afternoon service and the final concluding evening service, a third meal was served which was not an elaborate meal, but a little refreshment. And there would be a lot of discourse and discussion and sometimes little talks by the rabbi. The women did attend the morning services on *Shabbat* just like the men. Then they socialized among themselves at home, while the men's social life was mostly at the synagogue."

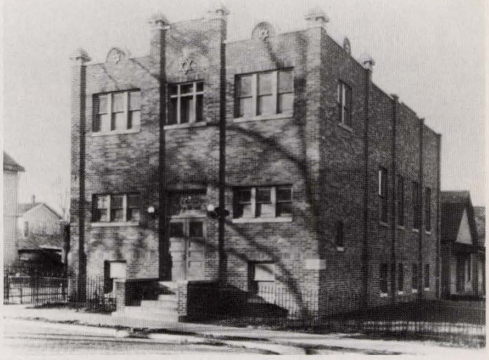
"My father and mother were first members of a synagogue that was on the corner of 24th and Nicholas. That was formed by people who had come from an area in southern Russia. It was called the Kapulier. That building was moved, physically, and now sits at 30th and Cuming, across from Tech High."

"There was one on 24th and Nicholas, which has now moved to 3028 Cuming Street called B'nai Jacob. Then they merged with the one that was on 25th and Seward. But there was a bunch of people from Kapulier, which is a little town in Lithuania — quite a group of them in Omaha. They organized their own congregation. They bought the church on 24th and Nicholas, and converted it into a synagogue."

"They used to sell tickets for the holidays. We went to that little synagogue on 24th and Nicholas. For two dollars we bought a ticket."

"The Reform Temple, I remember, was on Harney Street, the north side of Harney Street between 22nd and 24th. The next Temple was at Park Avenue and Jackson Street. I attended services there several times, not as a participant as much as a spectator. There was very little ritual, at least, ritual as I, an Orthodox Jew, was familiar with."

"The Temple was not like it is now. If it would have been as nice as it is now, we would never have left. At that time there were so many people there. Most of them had been here a long time and they looked down on the immigrants. They looked down on all of us. We really didn't feel comfortable."



Russian Synagogue, 25th and Seward

From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum



Rabbi Henry Grodzinsky, Omaha's first ordained orthodox rabbi, came to the city in 1891. Educated in Lithuania, Rabbi Grodzinsky served as many as four synagogues simultaneously and supervised ritual slaughter. A relative of the Chief Rabbi of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, Rabbi Henry Grodzinsky himself was the author of numerous published works on Jewish law. His volumes dealt with the laws of ritual baths, family purity, and the reading of the Torah and included reference works on portions of the Talmud and Codes. When he died at about ninety in 1948, Rabbi Grodzinsky was eulogized as one of the "greatest scholars of his generation" by leading authorities in the United States and Israel.

"For Ben we had a teacher come to the house. They often used to have rabbis that came to houses. I always went to *cheder* which was in the synagogue on 18th and Chicago."

"We were charter members of Beth El. I didn't feel at home in the orthodox synagogue. It wasn't to my liking, especially the one that my parents belonged to, and even the others. I wanted more freedom and a change from the way the orthodox synagogues were run. They were always run by a small group of men who were dictators. You couldn't deviate very much. They ran the show and that was it. There was no room for young people really to join and to be active in the synagogue, so we were looking for something else."

"That's why we started the Conservative because the children were on the sidewalks and didn't know what was going on. As children we dressed up for the boys and we went upstairs and kissed our mothers and grandmothers and then we went outside. When we got married and had our families, we recalled what happened to us. We did not want that to happen to our children. We had no formal religious training, except for the Temple which was very little."



Hebrew School (1905, established by Harry Gross). 1st row seated: Harry Kulakofsky, Louis Kulakofsky, David Brodkey, Max Wright, Carrie Fogel Heiten, Essie Brodkey Dann, A. Robinson, Eva Alpien Stein, Goldye Feder. 2nd row: Sadye Kahan, Mary Wolf Leon, Hattie Slosburg, — two sisters, and Ruth Gross Malashock, Agnes Wolsky, Hurwich, Fannie Wright, Sadye Marowitz Waller, Marion Marowitz Leon. 3rd row: a Robinson boy, Arthur Marowitz, Louie Nathan, Arthur Marowitz, Rabbi Peser, Spiegel boy, unidentified, Max Slosburg, Sam Ferer. 4th row: Joe Levine, Henry Hakan, brother of Henry Hakan, Elliot Robinson, Arthur Robinson, Meyer Marowitz, Morris Robinson, Joe Fogel, Babe Slosburg, Sydney Lewis, Morris Ferer, Manuel Gross, Harry Gross

"We went to different synagogues and most of them in those days lived further north and most of the Temple members lived more in the south and central part of town."

"There weren't that many German Jews in those days. There were so many more of the Russian Jews. They weren't necessarily Russian, they came from all over and the German Jews weren't necessarily from Germany. They came from all over too, from that area."

"At that time there was no school for girls. If a Jewish girl wanted any kind of religious training, she had to go to the Temple. And they hated it. Then Dr. Sher decided that we ought to have a Sunday School for Orthodox children, so he organized one and we met on 18th and Chicago."

"We never had a Sunday School so my father insisted that I go to the Temple and every time Sunday would come I'd cry my eyes out. Why? They would not recognize me because I lived on the other side of the tracks. There was one good boy. He would say hello to me and he recognized me."

"There was a teacher named Berman and he decided to do something for the youngsters in high school. He thought that the high school kids weren't getting any kind of Jewish education. There were about twenty or twenty-five of us who used to come in every Saturday afternoon and we really learned a great deal about the Jewish religion. He was an excellent teacher and he knew what to teach us. That's when I became a real Zionist."

"My parents came here from Devil's Lake, North Dakota. My mother said she saw buffalo bones and carcasses all over the place. They finally came to Omaha. The Jewish people didn't want to have anything to do with my folks because they came from God-Knows-Where. They had homesteaded. What kind of Jews could they be? They couldn't be strict. They couldn't be orthodox."

"Our folks, they were strict in keeping kosher. And of course, we wouldn't dare go out and eat. I still don't eat meat out and my boys don't. My brother Louis never did."

"We had to read everything on the package to be sure that it was strictly kosher. And my father's father who lived with us said that everything in this country was *treyf*."

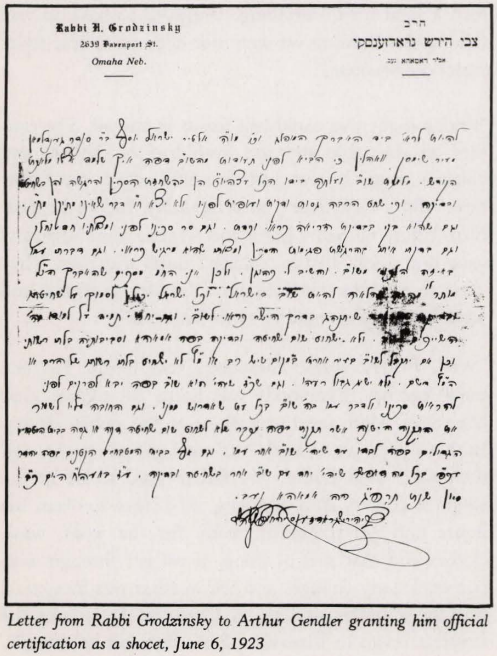
"Friday night we always had a *Shabbat* table. My mother always lighted her candles and put a little shawl on her head. And she said the blessing on the candles, and I did too."

"When we were first married we lived at the Blackstone and we moved back to mama's every Friday. We had a regular *shabosdicke* dinner. Homemade fish and chicken soup. None of us were ever allowed to turn a light on or anything. We used to have to tear toilet paper because we were not allowed to tear toilet paper on *Shabbas*."

"Friday night you could just feel it in the air. The candles on the table and the fresh loaf of *challah*, and chicken soup. It was just beautiful. And my father never did a day's work on a Saturday. Before he peddled, before he had a horse and wagon, some company gave him a job. It was making church windows. They used to let him come in on a Sunday morning and work because he couldn't work Saturday."

"Well, Friday night, everybody was home. No one made excuses. Everybody was home for dinner. And Saturdays, Mom used to walk us to the public library. In those days, we walked. And we'd get our books, and then we'd walk home. My father used to be in the shop, of course. And Sundays, we'd have to clean the house and get things all ready for the week, wash clothes and that sort of thing. If we got through with our work early enough, and the weather was nice, we'd pack up a basket and go to Elmwood Park, take the streetcar down to Riverview Park, that sort of thing."

"When I came here, I didn't know what to do because my head was for business, but I'd have to work on *Shabbas*. So what can I do? I can't start to work on *Shabbas*. In fact my father-in-law was a very religious man, so I used to go with him to Beth Israel at 18th and Chicago. That was 59 years ago and there I met Rabbi Grodzinsky. He asked me a couple of things and I told him what I had in mind. I told him I had a family to support, but I don't know how. I had to work *Shabbas* and this was not for me an easy thing to do. He said, 'I would like to see you. Give me a couple hours.' I came over and he told me, 'Well, I would like to have you know more as a *shochet*.' I told him, 'How can I get a job? I know nothing. I don't even know how to kill a chicken.' He says, 'Don't worry, the chickens somebody else will kill. You will learn.' *(Mr. Arthur Gendler eventually won the only official certification as a shochet given by Rabbi Grodzinsky).*


Rabbi H. Grodzinsky
2639 Davenport St.
Omaha Neb.

Letter from Rabbi Grodzinsky to Arthur Gendler granting him official certification as a shocet, June 6, 1923

"Grandma used to keep the dinner warm from Friday night until Saturday lunch. All the grandchildren had to be there too. There was no such thing as a date or a football game. She kept the food heating on the stove, all night and Saturday because we couldn't light anything on *Shabbat*."

"Mama always read her prayer book. She was very religious. Every night she used to pray. I used to kid her once in a while, 'Mama, why are you *davening* every night?' She'd say to me, 'Well, some of these prayers you have to say the day before you die, and you never know when your day will be next.' We were raised in a very orthodox family. But very modern. Mama became very modern. She loved clothes. She loved beautiful hats. She had young friends and old friends. She even belonged to the sisterhood at Beth El even though she didn't belong to Beth El. Everyone would come to see mama. They came to her for business advice and love affair advice."



In death as in life we struggled to maintain our traditions.

"In 1905 at the time my grandmother, Esther Gittel, was buried, we did not use caskets. There was just one. I remember very vividly grandma was taken out of this casket and handed to the undertaker and placed in the ground and her face was covered with sticks. The earth was thrown upon her as she lay in her grave. That was the way we buried Jewish people until 1910 when the city passed an ordinance requiring caskets."

Jewish dead were normally buried in simple white shrouds, but often without caskets.



Addie Gladstone's confirmation certificate, 1871 Courtesy of Temple Israel

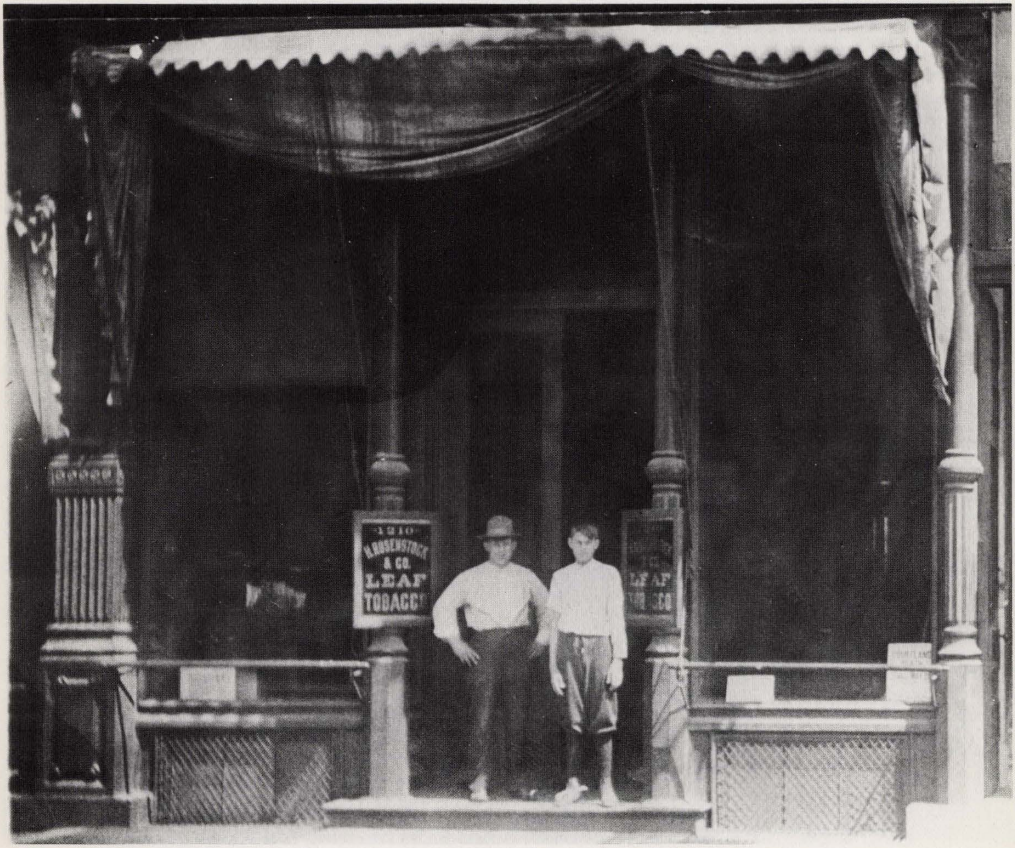


Emil Brandeis, A. H. Gladstone, Julius Meyer, c. 1880

10 Making It

For many of us the chance to succeed began within the trades of our fathers. For others opportunities took new directions. New inventions of the century offered new work. Our concern for each other was still very real. Eventually we all made it.

"My grandfather had a bakery at 24th and Ames. It was not a Jewish bakery. He was president of the synagogue, but the bakery was not kosher. He didn't bake. He hired bakers, and it was a wonderful place. Papa had a grocery store right next to the bakery, and of course we became the most popular kids in Saratoga School because after school we'd go to the grocery store and then we'd go to visit grandpa."



Tobacco store, 1210 Douglas, belonging to Lorene (Rosenstock) Cohn's family, c. 1900

"In those days there were streetcars and there was a great big car barn right across the street. The Saratoga School was on one side, and the car barn was on the other. It was very lucrative because those are the kind of people that traded in the grocery store."

"There was a fellow named Rosenberg. He was in hardware and sporting goods. It was on 16th and Cass. He was a very fine man. He was a very learned man. His wife was such a wonderful lady. She was a leader in Hadassah. He gave me a job. I got nine dollars a week, working from seven in the morning till eight in the evening. I made a deal that three days a week I could go to school. He said that was okay. I was happy to get that little bit of money, just for the chance to go to school. I stayed with him for two years. Then I was managing the store. I'll tell you why. He was paralyzed in one of his arms and legs. He couldn't put in many hours. The only time he used to come down was about noon, so I could get something to eat. He would stay another hour or so and leave. I used to close up. He trusted me because I was a good worker. So I was a salesman most of my career. I learned that meeting the public was the best thing for me. Hardware, sporting goods, I sold that most of my life."



Carl Lagman as a young business man

"In my shop it was thirty-five cents for a haircut. That was around 1914."

"I learned how to grind lenses by just going to work and doing it. When I came to Omaha I went to work for Columbia Optical Company on 16th Street. It's right on the corner of the alley between Douglas and Farnam. I worked for them for about seven years. About 1910 I brought over my mother and two younger brothers. They gave me $20 a week. I was only making $6.00 a week. Yeah, a lot of people only made $7.00 and $8.00 a week. Twenty dollars was a lot of money then. That's what they paid me the first week that I started to work. And in 1913 I was making close to $40 a month. I was foreman there . . . June 29, 1919, we got married. Then I opened a little jewelry store in South Omaha for about six years. Then I started my own optical business in the back of the jewelers, Commercial Optical. I started in South Omaha, then moved to 13th and Farnam, then to 15th and Harney, and the the present location — We've been there for fifty-two years."

"After peddling, Dad opened his own store. It was a furniture store. It was a second-hand furniture store. It was on Seventeenth and Nicholas. City Furniture. He always used the same name throughout the years. He was pretty successful. We always said that my mother and dad could stretch a dollar more than elastic."

able to pay off my debts. I had high hopes that from then on business would be good. It was."

"Dad, he was in the liquor business at that time. Then he was in the poultry business. It was finally sold to Swanson. Then prohibition came in . . ."

"Dad worked in the tailor shop on 14th and Douglas."

"We used to call my brother Ed, 'Eats', because he always had bread in his pockets. He worked for Meyer's Drug Store . He delivered drugs. It was at 16th and Farnam."

"Dad and Mr. Waxford went into a fruit stand business on 16th and Capitol Avenue. He stayed in that until 1898 and then went into the junk business. He retired from business in 1918."

"Dad was a clock and watchmaker, a repair man."

"He liked the way I ran it. In those days, hats were selling for two dollars apiece, except for Stetson hats. Anyways, I stayed in the hat department until 1917 when the fire came. They had a fire that spread down the whole block. The whole building just went down. The Hartman Furniture Company was right next door, east of us on Douglas Street. We had the floors above



Exterior of Rosenfeld liquor store, Council Bluffs, Iowa, c. 1895

"My husband was an architect. His brother Saul was sort of the dean of the Brodkey family. He actually ran the jewelry business."

"I bought machinery from the Saxe-Freeman Company. The machinery cost was about $1,200, and I hoped they would give me some credit because I needed to buy material so I could get merchandise ready to sell. Everyone wanted cash and I had none. But, my mother went to some of her relatives and got some money for me. I made up some stock (overcoats and raincoats) with the cloth I purchased and a friend of mine, Harry Segal, took me to a place called Burgess Nash to sell my merchandise. Every day I went out to call on different businesses. Hayden Bros. a department store, was one — and many others, but I couldn't seem to sell to anyone. I was frantic. I owed so much money and had all this merchandise that I couldn't sell. One day my wife brought two suitcases to the shop and said, 'Pack up the coats and go out and see what you can do. Go down on the price a little and see if you can't sell some.' I went back to Burgess Nash and told the man there I wanted to show him some raincoats. It was a rainy day, I remember. He did me the favor and took four coats. That afternoon he called my place of business and said he had sold the four coats and wanted more. Within a short time he bought every coat I had. Things started to go better and I was



Brodkey Boys. L to R, top row: Dave, Hyman, Morris, Ben, Aaron; bottom row: Harry, Great-Grandma Eve, Sol

that. They had doctors up there, offices, and the whole thing went up in flames. No, nobody was hurt. It happened during the night. We left that night and everything was OK. The next morning, it was all gone. My older sister was married to a grocer. They had a store in Council Bluffs. She said, 'Why go to work for someone, and just work for a wage? Why don't you go in the grocery business?' I said, 'What do I know about groceries? I don't know one thing from the next.' She said, 'You can learn. You got a brain.' So my brother-in-law, Harry Krasne, and I went into the grocery business. The Ideal Grocery. I stayed there for 61 years."

"In 1917, I went back to Council Bluffs and went to work for a paper mill. I also went in with some men in the grocery business that were in a chain store. They had three stores and gave me an interest to work one of them. I did until my brother, who was in business graduated. He had a couple of years experience selling. He had a very very high rating as a salesman with Swift Company. So I asked him if he would like to go into business with me. He said, 'Yes, I would be glad to. That is how we started Nogg Brothers. We started our company in Council Bluffs. We were only there a few months, it was a small place. We grew fairly well and came to Omaha — in Omaha since June 1, 1925."



Interior of Rosenfeld liquor store, Council Bluffs, Iowa, c. 1895

"There were two kinds of peddlers. One dealt with junk. The other they called scrap. There were two big dealers at the time — Aaron Ferer and A. B. Alpirn."

"There were also a lot of individual junk peddlers that would go and pick up items from the city and also from the farmers, scrap metal. They would bring it to Alpirn or Ferer and sell it to them. They, in turn, would sell it to the mills in the East, to the big steel companies, because they used this stuff to make new steel. Then there were vegetable peddlers. There were a lot of them. They would buy fruits and vegetables from where the Old Market is now, and go around and peddle it on streets. They would yell out on the streets, and of course later, they had their regular customers. The peddler used to come to the door. We might just call him a fruit and vegetable vendor instead of peddler. Of course, we bought everything to eat from kosher meat markets. And then we had slaughterers that sometimes we'd buy live chickens and ducks from."

"Dad had a junk business. Metal and junk. And then when papa died, my brother took it over. The first was on 12th and Capitol, and then they made the highway and he had to sell it to the city. My brother built a plant on 16th under the bridge. It was a very nice lucrative business."

"We started with a feed store. While we were growing up, dad later added on a couple of lots and opened up a scrap-iron metal yard."

"Dad was in the mirror manufacturing business on 16th and California, Omaha Mirror Manufacturing. He even made mirrors for the Exposition when it was in Omaha in 1898."

Mirror Maze — On the East Midway in a gaudily painted structure is the Mirror Maze, and behind the mirrors is a large amount of fun for those who attempt to explore its recesses. No illusion on the Midway is more delightfully confusing and amusing.

These mirrors were made by Julius Sherman of the Omaha Mirror Manufacturing Co., and father of Dora (Sherman) Rosenblatt. (Official guide book to the Trans-Mississippi International Exposition of 1898. p. 114. Published by MeGeath Stationary Co., 1898.

"My father was a blacksmith. He went to work for Swift and Company. After I got married, the only job I could find was in Lincoln, Nebraska, so I took it. I worked for $18.00 a week. I was glad to have a job in those days. Then I came to Omaha and went to work at Baum Drug Store, 16th and Douglas. Then I went to work for Brandeis — stayed as their pharmacist for nineteen years. Several times I had opportunities to go into business for myself, but I passed them up. I don't know, I just didn't have enough nerve, I guess. I could have got into a business and possibly been more prosperous, but maybe I wouldn't have been as healthy. I might have been a sick man worrying, but I never worried. I was always happy, kind of like my father, content with what he had."



Max Givot, the pharmacist, at Y-B Drugs

"My oldest brother Lou had the Katelman Hardware store."

"Dad was a fine tailor. He made all our clothes. He was excellent. He was what we called the carriage trade tailor. As a child, I remember people used to drive up with their chauffeurs and they would wait. My mother didn't work with my father in the shop until World War I. He couldn't get any help then so she had to pitch in and help out. He sewed for the elite of Omaha. Riding habits were one of his favorites. His real specialties were the ones with the skirts. And he was one of the first ones to make jodhpurs."

"I was a good worker at Central Market. They did for me everything they could. I was loyal to Louie. Other butcher shops offered me more money. But I stayed with Louie. I had the best lamb chops, and the best steaks in the world! We used to bone ten beef a day for ground beef. Ten beef a day. Special beef. Six hundred pounds of cattle. We worked six days a week, ten to twelve hours a day."

"My husband had his first grocery store on 24th and Minne Lusa. It wasn't built up then because this was many years ago. That was really in the country then. We lived out that way five years. Then we bought a building — 38th and Pinkney — we were there nineteen years. There is a drugstore there now."



Joe Gotsdiner in his grocery, 3340 W. Broadway, Council Bluffs, Iowa



Daniel Klein's grocery store, near 9th and Capitol

"Mrs. Babior's husband was a kosher butcher. First one in Omaha I think. He had a grocery meat market on 24th and Grace."

"I had a grocery — I was partners with Albert Fellman. We had a store on 29th and Spaulding. I was the butcher. We stayed there forty-five years. We accumulated a few properties between the two of us, I became a handyman. For about seventeen years I worked as a handyman, repair and what not. I learned a trade because I figured out in America a trade was more important than anything else in the world."

"Pa had a little store in South Omaha. He did a nice little business. When I grew up, I used to deliver groceries. I think we had a horse and buggy and later an automobile. I remember — 32nd Avenue and Oak Street. They had bought the duplex before that. We used to deliver sugar, coal, oil, and vinegar."

"The Tuchman Brothers began as newspaper boys in 1908. Frank, Joe and Mike had a chain of nine grocery stores."

"In my childhood, my father used to buy horses for the fire department and police department. Later on, he worked for Ames Brothers. He was a salesman and then he was in the grocery business for years and years. The first grocery business he had was in 1912 in Council Bluffs. Berstein's Grocery. It was general merchandise. Because there were farmers, he had feed. Then he sold out there and came to Omaha. His first grocery store in Omaha was 16th and Locust. Then the tornado hit."

"My first grocery store was a little store on North 20th Street. My wife and I, we used to run the store. She would take care of the groceries and I would take care of the meat. I had a store on 2010 Lake, and one on 33rd and Parker. It was a big business but in a couple of years, the Hinky Dinky across the street took all of my business — took all of my cash customers. All I had left was the credit. It was not too good so I got mad and I moved away from there. I left the store empty and moved to 24th and Harney. I took care of the meat. My wife took care of the groceries."



Mike Tuchman and George Roffman in the first Tuchman Brothers Grocery Store, 19th and Chicago, 1912



Sam Freed with his partner, Albert Fellman, and a friend at their grocery and butcher shop, 29th and Spaulding

Announcement

We beg to announce to the neighboring public that we have opened a **Pure Food Grocery Store at 25th and Harney Sts,** and will be known as

TUCHMAN BROS. STORE NO. 4

Groceries and Meats
Good Things To Eat

Our courteous treatment and Prompt Delivery throughout Omaha, gives us an opportunity to open a First-Class and Up-To-Date Store in your vicinity.

Phone Us Your Orders For Prompt Delivery.

Yours truly,

Tuchman Bros.

25th and Harney Sts. 4 Phones - Doug. 6770



Louis Micklin's home at 1828 North 21st Street, where he started selling scrap lumber



Save Your Home!

NOW IS THE TIME TO HAVE REPAIRING AND REMODELING DONE

CALL

Micklin's Home Improvement Dept.

ONE OF OUR REMODELING SPECIALISTS WILL GLADLY GIVE YOU AN ESTIMATE

See Our Display at the Better Homes Exposition

HERE IS A PARTIAL LIST OF THE MANY JOBS WE ARE PREPARED TO HANDLE:

A few dollars spent now is better than a few hundred dollars spent later. Put your home in A-1 condition NOW. Check over the list below.

Rooms in Attic
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Porch Enclosures
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Remodeling

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New Porches

Insulation
Additions to House
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TERMS
$10 DOWN
TWO YEARS TO PAY

A Word About Micklin-Built PORCH ENCLOSURES

A Micklin built porch will not only make your property more salable, but you will get every dollar you now spend for the porch at the time you sell. Enjoy now the extra room comfort and luxury, the added health which is yours from a Micklin-built porch.

Evenings and Sundays Call WE 6439

MICKLIN LUMBER CO.

24th and Burdette Sts.
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Micklin PERMANENT GARAGES $10.00 DOWN 2 Years to Pay

CLIP AND MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY!

Garages ☐ *Porches* ☐ *Attic Lining* ☐ *Remodeling* ☐

MICKLIN LUMBER CO., 24th and Burdette Sts., Omaha, Neb.

Gentlemen:

Please have your remodeling specialist see me regarding the item I have checked above.

Name .....

Address ..... *Phone* .....



Micklin Lumber, 19th and Nicholas, 1925

"About that time, Herman and Goodman bought a store at 27th and N Streets. I was anxious to go into business myself, and one day I saw an ad for a store at 39th and Q. Mr. Osborne, the owner, wanted to go to California by covered wagon and wished to sell his little store. I took the streetcar there and found a narrow little store about twenty foot by sixty foot. He was willing to sell for three hundred dollars for the fixtures and dollar for dollar on the grocery inventory. He told me he did $1,100 a month business. I took a look at the stock and offered him $1,100 lock, stock and barrel. He accepted, if he could have what was in the register at the moment. I think we wrote our agreement on the back of a paper sack. Who knew from lawyers! I did know that the bulk sales law made it mandatory to wait fifteen days to complete a sale. I gave Mr. Osborne $100 on the spot, and asked if he would wait for the balance for two weeks. He agreed, and stayed with me to introduce me to the customers. I hoped that within the two weeks I could sell enough to pay the other $1,000 In order to do this, I asked for credit from all of my suppliers; had a flyer printed with the first bargains the neighborhood had seen; and managed to do a lot of business. At least, enough to pay off the balance, and the store was mine. I was in business.

"It was a tough neighborhood, mostly Irish and Belgians who worked in the packing house. A gang of kids broke into my store and took candy and cigarettes. I found the leader of the gang, Jim Donovan, an eighteen-year-old I told him that I would like to supply the gang with some athletic equipment, and in exchange, would like him to keep an eye on my store. It cost me $5.00 a month to pay for the baseball equipment and uniforms, but I got fine protection.

"In 1915 I bought my first car, a Dodge touring car. We would load the car with my kids and Herman's kids. I got a kick out of it. My family and business both grew. By the end of 1919 when I left South Omaha to go into business in Council Bluffs, I was worth forty thousand dollars. I felt on top of the world."

"When the boys got out of the army, Albert went to night school and took up optometry. He even had a diploma! He worked for Rev's Optical in the Medical Arts Building and he worked with Aaron Rips. But Albert says the only eyes he ever tested were his mother's. He worked there before I even knew him. Henry bought a store in Benson. He ran it. Jules kept his job at Union Pacific. Albert then opened a store in Council Bluffs — 8th and Broadway. Then they decided they wanted to open more stores. How were they to get a name? All the boys had been in the army. So they decided, "Hinky-Dinky parley vous." Jules had been over in France. Albert was in Des Moines and Henry was down in Kansas. I don't know where cousin Ben Silver was. So they opened the first store on 24th and Vinton. Henry still ran the Benson store and Albert ran the Council Bluffs store until they decided to come together. Ben became secretary-treasurer, Jules became president, Henry was in charge of supervising, Albert had the fruits and vegetables. Albert's father was the originator of the self-serve because dad would sit down, and when someone came into the store he would say, 'It's over there.' His father had a store on 26th and Pratt. Dad and mother helped him in the store. Then dad gave up the little store. As Albert got more stores and a warehouse, his father came down to the warehouse, as sort of an overseer. Albert's parents were married in Omaha. A Newman married a Newman, but they weren't related."

"While I was in the grocery business, people would say, 'I wish there was something better' — at that time Kraft only had Miracle Whip and a gooey French dressing. So it kind of gave me an idea. I bought a one gallon mixer and started mixing. It would break down and I would go home and try to figure out what I did wrong. And started over, and over again. I finally made an Italian. You see a lot of Italian dressings out, but I'm the originator. I'd add a little of this and a little of that. Then I'd test them on my best customers. When eight or ten would say, 'Just right', I would start on another

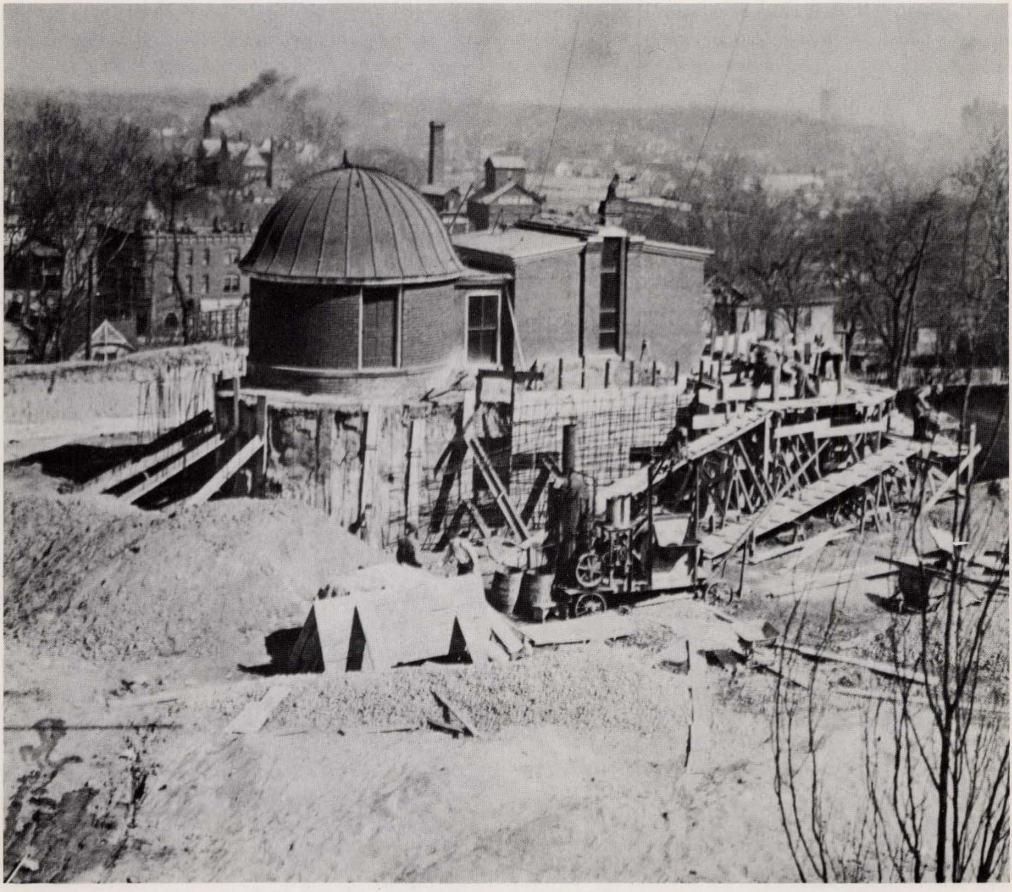
one. Russian dressing. In Russia, who ever heard of dressing? Finally, I got Thousand Island. People who used to trade with us at 36th and Leavenworth said, 'We wouldn't have to go to Albert's if you would handle it here.' So they'd order some and put it under the counter. If the customer asked for it, they'd give it to them. So it just grew. It gave me an idea, so I sold the store, and I got into a little room just about the size of this, and started it there. It wasn't as easy as all that. It was definitely for retail and wholesale. I didn't know anything about advertising, and by not having an education, I struggled. I only went to night school two weeks. Making, selling, everything — worked eighteen hours a day. But anyway, in those days they had so many family stores, and you could reason with them and they would give you a break."

"I told my father that I wanted to go into the automobile business. And I bought a lot and built a building. I borrowed $18,000 from the Omaha National and I opened up a garage business just to fix cars. Prior to 1920's when you had a car, whatever you needed for the car, there was one place to go. A garage. After 1922, a man opened up a store to sell nothing but tires. A man opened up a store to sell nothing but batteries. We built a garage, my father and I, and put a mortgage on it. The day before we were supposed to open up, July 1, a priest came to me, a Catholic priest. 'Meyer,' he said, 'Before you open that building garage, will you let us use that building for a benefit dance. It is the finest building around.' I said, 'Certainly.' He said, 'It will get you a lot of goodwill in the neighborhood. It's a good Catholic neighborhood.'"

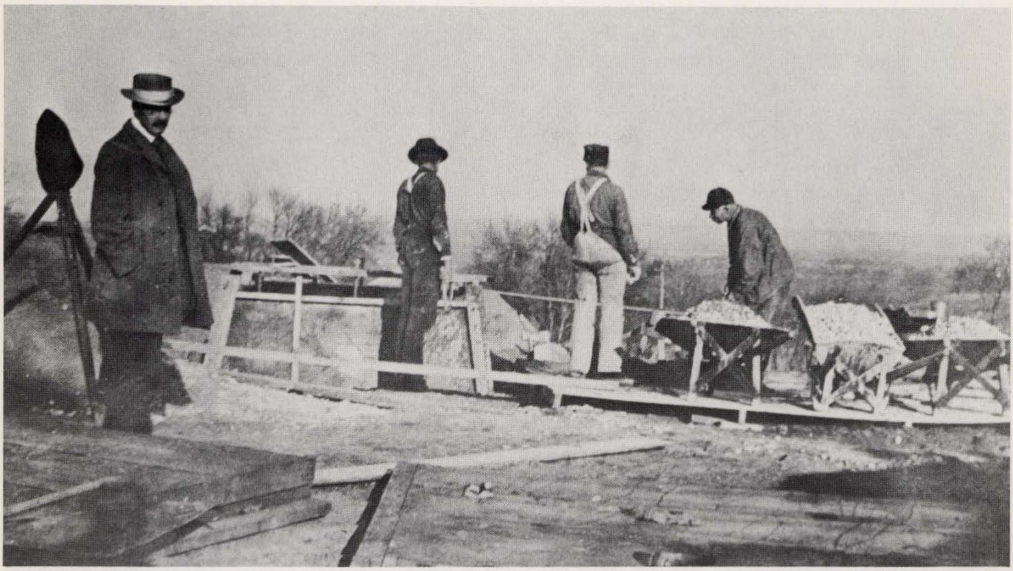


Wonderbread promotion outside Gross' grocery, 24th and Ames, c. 1925

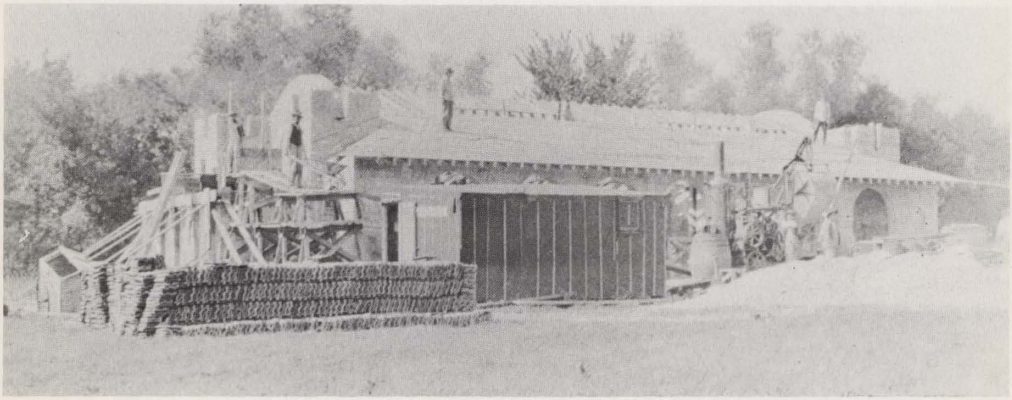
"After graduating from the Univesity of Nebraska, I was employed by Arnold C. Koenig, civil engineer, and was his general superintendent. I was paid $60.00 a month. Among the jobs I worked on were the foundation for the Christian Science Church at 24th and St. Mary's Ave. We laid the water pipes from the Willow Springs Distillery to the river. We did the foundation work around the church when Dodge Street was regraded. I was then sent to Indiana for a job in 1908. When I went into business for myself, I did mostly concrete work and paving and built Creighton's reinforced concrete retaining wall for the Observatory. In Elmwood park we put up the first concrete building in the city, the park pavillion."



Reinforced concrete retaining wall built for Creighton University's observatory by Samuel Friedman's construction company, c. 1910



Working on the Southeast pier, Fort Omaha, November 23, 1907



Construction of the Elmwood Park Pavillion, Omaha's first concrete building, c. 1910



Paving of Douglas County Court House, 1907



Paving project in Miller Park

"I was an office boy at fourteen for Byrne-Hanmer Dry Goods Company at 9th and Howard Street. I made fourteen dollars a week. I couldn't get a raise. I think if I had gotten fourteen dollars and twenty-five cents I would have stayed, but I couldn't get a raise. My mother, being a school teacher, never liked the idea of my quitting school in the first place, but I wanted to make some money because in those days we didn't think it was right for women to work. I wanted to help her. I went back to school for a year, but only one year, then I quit again and I never went back. I did take shorthand and typewriting at night and went to Van Sant's Business School where they taught reading insurance policies. It gave me practically a college education. I got a job then as an office boy for an insurance company. I stayed in the insurance business the rest of my life. I went with Mr. Grace and later we had the Grace Mayer Insurance Company."

"My real law practice began when I joined the firm with Henry Monsky and Carl Katelman in 1919. Henry Monsky was later international president of B'nai Brith, among other things."

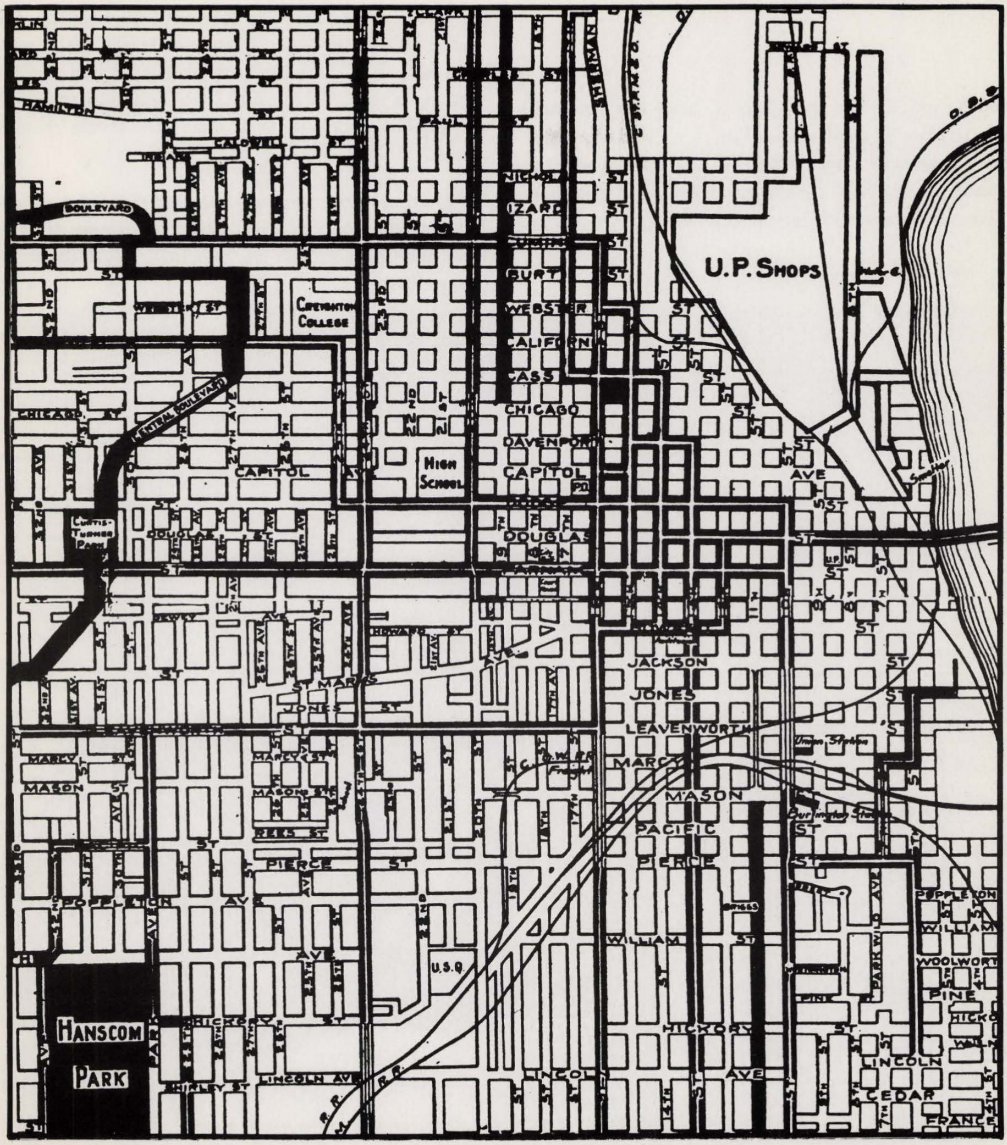
"I held down three jobs. The scrap metal, the gas station, and I was selling insurance too. I needed money!"



Paving, 25th Ave. and Pierce, July 28, 1914



Laying curbing, 19th and Bancroft, July 21, 1914



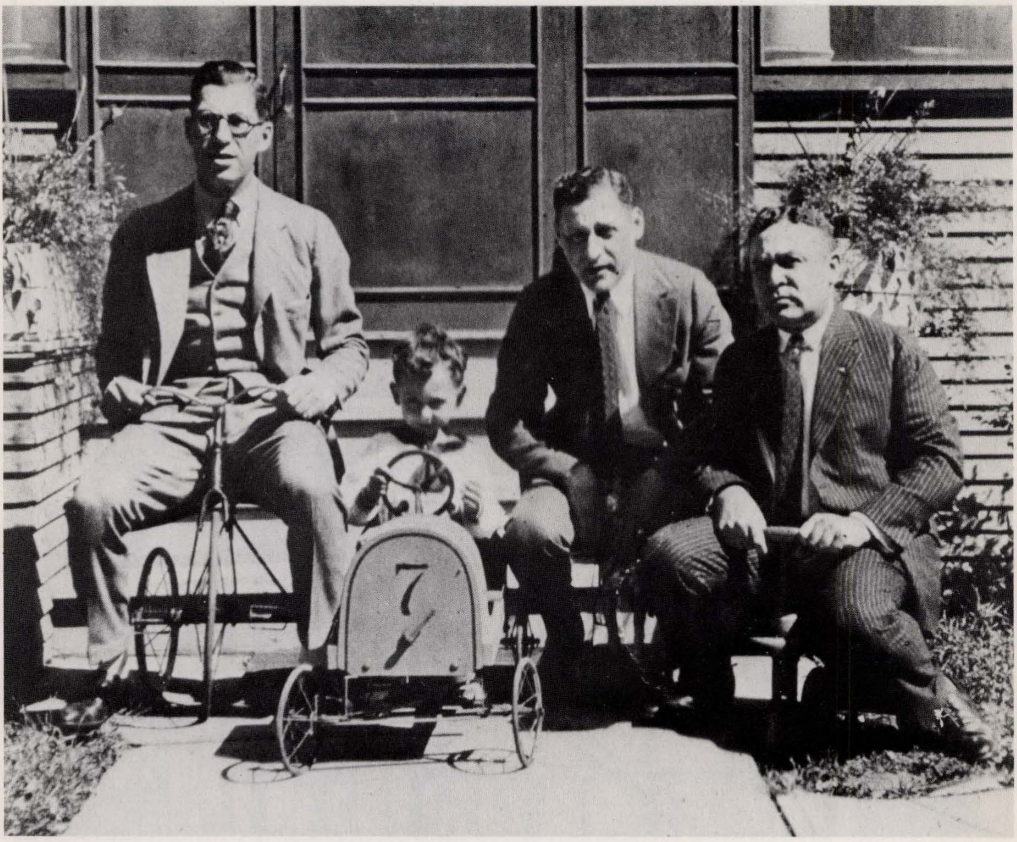
Map of Omaha drawn by Towl Engineering Co., 1912, showing the downtown area *Courtesy of the Omaha City Planning Department*

11 Good Times

"At the old theater they used to have live entertainment. They brought in musicals. It only cost a nickel. Across the street, where papa had the bakery, was the movie house. This was down on 24th and Hamilton. Them were the good days; believe me!"

"I liked a good time. My specialty was dancing. My husband's was the same. That's one reason that I married him. We liked the same things. I won a prize dancing a waltz at Hibblers Park. That was where all the popular people went at that time. I won an umbrella."

"Many times when business was not so good my husband would say, 'Oh, heck with the business, let's go out, have dinner, and go dancing!' We'd dance at Peony Park."



Loyal Cohn, Delvan Becker, Jr., Milton Livingston, Delvan Becker

"We had Jewish dances every Sunday night. At 24th and Farnam and at Chambers Dancing Academy. It was right where the Hamilton Hotel is now."

"We danced quite a bit. We danced at the Metropolitan Hall and the Sherman Ballroom on 26th and Farnam. We just invited all our friends, served refreshments, and danced right in the house."

"My brother loved to play golf. He also played baseball. He and Peter Kiewit were best of friends. We were neighbors. He lived across the street from where we lived. They were on the same baseball team and everything. When my brother went into the building material business, Kiewit bought stuff from him. And a lot of times, he could hardly pay for the stuff. But they got through all right."

"We were lucky enough to get the very first place on 20th and Burdette right across the street from the regional AkSarBen Colliseum. Once a year they built floats with lights for the wonderful electric parade. The



Bull Moose float for the AkSarBen parade, decorated by the Cadillac Company and driven by Blanche (Cohn) Rosenfeld, 1912

whole school built floats. They got power off the trolleys. Those things made for exciting times. I even shook hands with Buffalo Bill, when he came with his circus, riding that little horse of his."

"We had card parties, a few girls over. We played Whist — mostly Whist. We gave prizes, silver spoons. I still have some. We had a Candy Kitchen on 16th and Capitol Ave. And we would meet there and have ice cream sundaes and sodas. We would congregate and visit. We had a Candyland on 15th or 16th and Farnam. There was a confectionary store and food. They had a balcony where we met. Once in awhile, if we were fortunate enough, we got a date. Then we went to Chambers Dancing Academy. We could take lessons or dance. They had dancing parties too."

"We played croquet. We made candy in the afternoon."

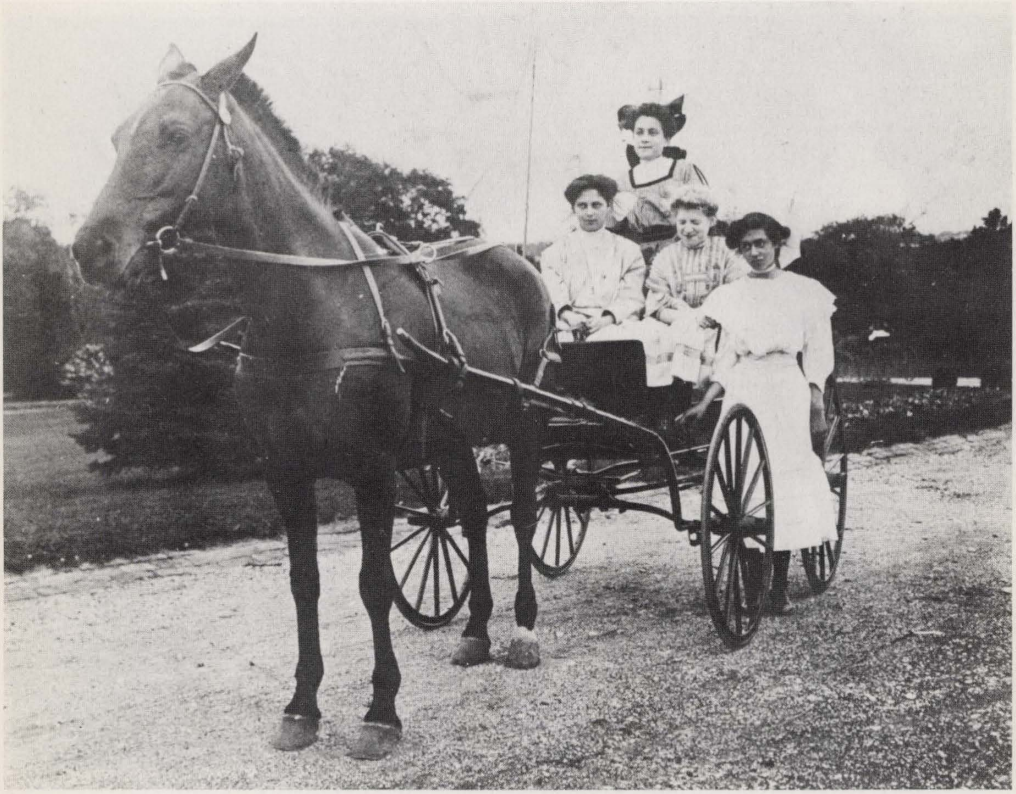


Rose (Cherniss) Goldstrom's slumber party, 1912. L to R, top row: Rose (Rubin) Marfisi, unidentified, Sarah (Tuchman) Rubin, Esther Nathan, Hazel Cooper, unidentified, Elizabeth (Casselman) Rubenstein; middle row: Miss Cherniss, Rose (Cherniss) Goldstrom , unidentified, Malvina (Newman) Greenspan; bottom row: unidentified, Freda (Trustin) Bramson, Fanny (Gilinsky) Pirsch, Berta (Newman) Stern

"Oh, we had a lot of Jewish picnics here and everything. My dad opened up Peony Park for the Omaha Hebrew Club picnics. Also there was Hibbler's Park on Leavenworth. It was below 30th and Saddle Creek. And we had dances and picnics there, Jewish affairs. We used streetcars to get around. Nobody had cars. We had a horse and buggy. I had my own horse. Oh, yes, I drove myself in the buggy. I started riding when I was ten or eleven years old."

"Sunday night the kids got together. Girls went with girls. Boys went with boys. We had a real good time. Maybe a boy would bring you home or maybe girls would come home together. We never thought of violent things. We got all dressed up."

"I belonged to a group. We used to have parties in the winter in different people's homes, and in the summer we used to go to parks and have picnics. This was a lot



Leola Brandeis and Fanny Livingston, seated; Jessie Rosenstock, in rear; and Ruth Arnstein, standing, c. 1913

of fun. The girls used to bring sandwiches and the boys would buy either pop or ice cream. One time we went to Riverview Park. We played ball and all kinds of games. When we were going home — none of us had cars in those days — one of the young men who was a very good friend of mine, pulled me to one side and said, 'Do you have a nickel? I took two nickels with me. But we had ice cream and we had pop and I'm left with only one nickel. I haven't got a second one for car fare!' I loaned him the nickel so he and Lena could take the street car home."

"We had Elmwood Park, that was at the end of Omaha. We used to call it a place where we would meet our friends. There was spring water there. We would come down there and drink and take a bottle home. A number of times I would drive to Elmwood Park at night and sleep there all night. It was so much cooler on a hot night. The house wasn't insulated and I couldn't sleep when it got really hot. I never heard of anything happening there. I always felt safe."



Picnic in Elmwood Park. L to R: Dave Greenberg, Joe Greenberg, Yetta Nathan, Rose Newman, M. Jacobs, Harry Duboff, Julius Newman, Leah Ginsberg, Fanny Brodsky, Esther Nathan, Berta Newman, Louis Nathan, Elsie Duboff

"I was good friends of Jenny Resnick — Henry's gone but he was married to Jenny. Jenny and I were very close friends. Johnny Rosenblatt's sister was also a friend of mine. His father was a baker. In those days he delivered bread in a basket. I played the piano at that time so often the kids came over to our house. We danced, sang, had a good time!"

"The Live It Up Club had masquerade balls. We used to have dancing every Saturday or Sunday night. We always had something going. We presented plays. I was an actor in one of those plays. I'll never forget. I came out on the stage, once, acting as a peddler. I said, 'What can I get for this? What can I get for that?' Boy, did they laugh! They all cheered on! I thought the world was gone!"

"On Saturday my sister and I were not far from the public library on 19th and Harney. We'd walk down there and we'd stay all afternoon. We'd read and look at the museum. Many times we'd go to the movie pictures when they were only five cents."

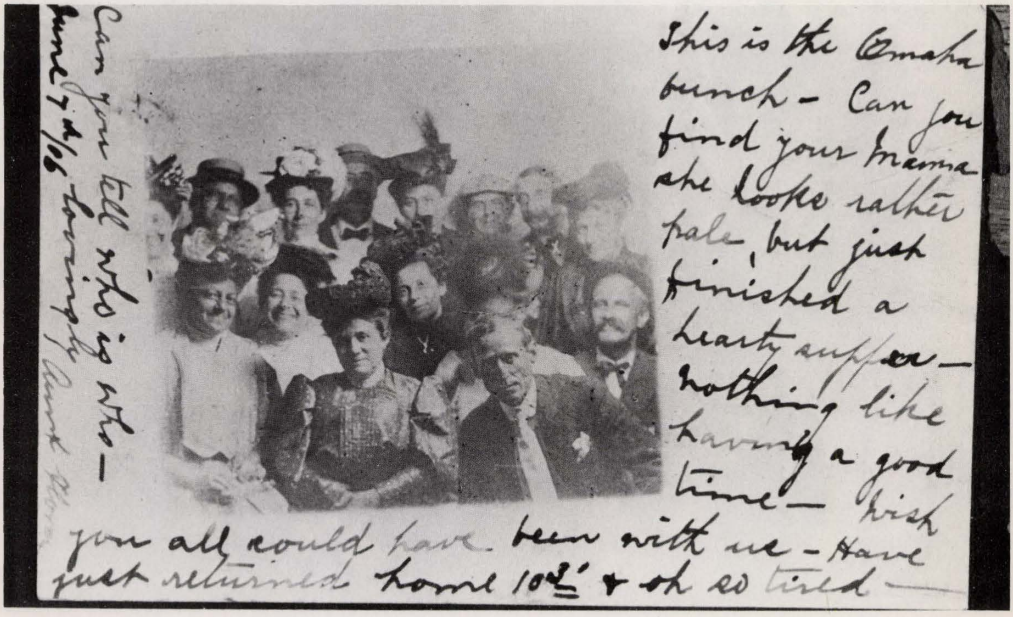


Rose (Kaplan) Wolpa, first row center with hat, at costume party with co-workers, c. 1924

"We went to Lake Manawa. We went to Peony Park. Highland Country Club was organized about 1922. I didn't become a member until about 1925. Then that became the center of my social life. Prior to that we went around — different places — to a dance or to a movie. The Orpheum Theater only cost fifteen cents up in the gallery. We saw some marvelous shows. Some of the great stars came to the old Orpheum Theater. It was at 15th and Harney Street and a bottle of pop would only cost a nickel. You could be a big man for sixty cents. This was kind of fun. If we were fortunate we'd get on a streetcar and go to Lake Manawa. We'd have a picnic over there. It was a nice lake — small, pretty well kept. In the winter time we lived near Hanscom Park and we'd go ice skating. We never had shoe skates because they were too darn expensive. We had skates that you clamped on your shoes over the back of your heels.

"When I was 17 I started to bowl. Few Jewish boys were bowling then. As time went by I became city champion, state champion, and interstate champion. Our five man team established a record which lasted for four years. We established a record of 3,428 which were the highest scores that had ever been shot in Omaha by a five man team in three games. I think that record was only broken last year. I was high with 776 and our low man was 640."

"All the fellows would go down on Farnam Street. There was a place there where we played pool. The only time we'd have a date was if there was a dance. On New Year's Eve, of course, I'd get a date. That was a big night!"



Flora Rosenstock's photo letter, Krug Park, June 7, 1906

"I started playing tennis when I was around twelve or thirteen and the hub of tennis in those days was the old Omaha Field Club at 36th and Woolworth Avenue."

"We went swimming. My mother practically threw us in the water and told us we could swim, which was very unusual in those days. I think it was Carter Lake where we got our initiation. Mother was so advanced. I really didn't want to be thrown into the water. Mother said, 'Don't be ridiculous; you'll be able to swim.' And, gosh, we all swam. She was just remarkable."

"We played on the street. That was our playground. We did all our playing on the street because when we'd see a horse and wagon a block away we weren't scared of it."



Grandpa Martin Trustin fishing with his grandson, Julie Slavin, c. 1910



Ruth (Gross) Malashock at a swimming party in Krug Park, July, 1919



David Miller with the team — Alliance Sports Day celebration, July 1, 1916



Joseph Cohn, Leon Graetz, and Harry Trustin, c. 1912

"We played ball, and we even had a colored fellow with us at that time. He talked better Jewish than some of the Jewish people themselves. Yes, that colored fellow was very good, and he was entertaining. He helped teach a lot of the Jewish kids the American way of doing things. He was very, very good, he was."

"In Omaha, men belonged to the Omaha Hebrew Club. They had dinners or we'd go to the park on Sunday. When I got married, we began to have a social life — play cards. We did everything. We were beginning to be more like Yankees."



Al Mayer, "Boy Wonder of the Alleys," Omaha Daily News, *1925*



Fanny (Rothenberg) Denenberg , c. 1920

12 Bad Times

The tornado of 1913 was by far the worst natural disaster we suffered. There were, however, many other difficulties individual families had to bear as a result of accidents.

"I can remember the tornado of 1913 when the whole north end of town was destroyed. I can remember seeing the fires. The newspaper extras took several hours to get out. We had no radio or television so we had to wait for the newspapers to get the details."

"It was extremely hot and still. By the time we got off the streetcar, it had started to blow. We had no sooner walked into the house than a large tree fell across the porch, demolishing it. I thought the world was coming to its end. We found out later . . . it was a tornado. Herman and Mary and their baby Millie were there. After it quieted down, Herman and I walked around the corner to 24th Street. It was ablaze. Then it started to pour. We felt helpless, but thankful."

"In March of 1913, my mother's youngest sister was engaged and we had an engagement party all set up at my aunt's house on 27th and Grant. That's the night the tornado hit. Of course, we had no party, and luckily we were saved. I remember they took all of us kids to a colored lady's house on the corner of Erskine. Her house wasn't damaged at all. She let all of us kids go to her house and sleep that night on the floor. Our parents, of course, stayed up all night after the fires broke out. My aunt had a grocery store right across the street. It was a wooden building and the tornado just pulled all the bottles and stuff off the shelves; it was a mess. The next morning they had to put up great big planks to hold up the wall."

"Oh yes. The sky was yellow. It was eerie yellow, no air, you could tell that something was going to happen. I was eight years old and I saw that cloud come across Omaha. There was a theater and a lot of people were buried in it on 24th and Lake, The Diamond Theater."

"We were right in the midst of it at 24th and Lake. We were not home that day or we wouldn't be alive to tell about it. It was demolished. A tree came up through the basement, up through the kitchen, and my bedroom, and stuck out the roof. It looked like all of Omaha was on fire. They had lots of fires. And around the corner off of 24th and Lake, possibly three or four blocks down, was a Jewish baker, and they had seven or eight children; they were all killed."

"We were to move into a new house that was being built and they called and told us not to move on Friday. It wasn't quite finished. We were to move Monday. Sunday was the tornado. If we had moved into that house, we would have been killed. The Red Cross came to ask my father if he wanted any help. He said, 'No, it took everything I have but left my family, so go help those that lost some of their family.' There were so many people killed. We had to start everything all over."

"The tornado of 1913, I definitely remember that because on that day, it was a Sunday, and very hot, and my father took the three of us girls down to the Elite Theater to get us out of my mother's way. She was preparing a dinner party for my father's sister who had come to visit us from New York. When we got home, it was just boiling hot. The three of us girls were always dressed alike. The folks had made white serge coats with sailor collars trimmed in white braid, silk braid, and we had big leghorn hats. And here we were, on this boiling day, all dressed up to the nines. Dad hurried us home from the streetcar as we got off on Farnam Street, because he could see that it was very ominous. The sun was shining and still it was dark. It was very strange. After we got home, in no time at all, the storm broke. Home was 2730 Capitol Avenue. I was always interested in storms. I went out of the house to look. I saw a chair sailing over our house. Our area was missed. We were very fortunate."

"Gee, things were flying in the air, it was terrible. Everything got pitch dark, and the fire, there was a fire station several blocks down on North 30th. And we could hear them clanging away and clanging away. Nobody slept all night. Next morning it turned quite cold. There was lots of snow on the ground. We went out, we walked way down to 24th and in the basement there were dead people. They had been gambling, or whatever. They had a place under the stores there. They were partying and there were children. Oh, it was terrible, I'll never forget that sight."

"My sister-in-law was in the house alone. The tornado picked up the house and turned it around completely, then set it back down on the foundation. She was terrified!"

"The only thing it had done to our house was tear the chimney off. That's the only thing. We were very lucky. Further north, there was a pool hall. The colored people had gathered together to play cards, to play pool, and you know, that building, a little small brick building, was torn down. It killed every one of those



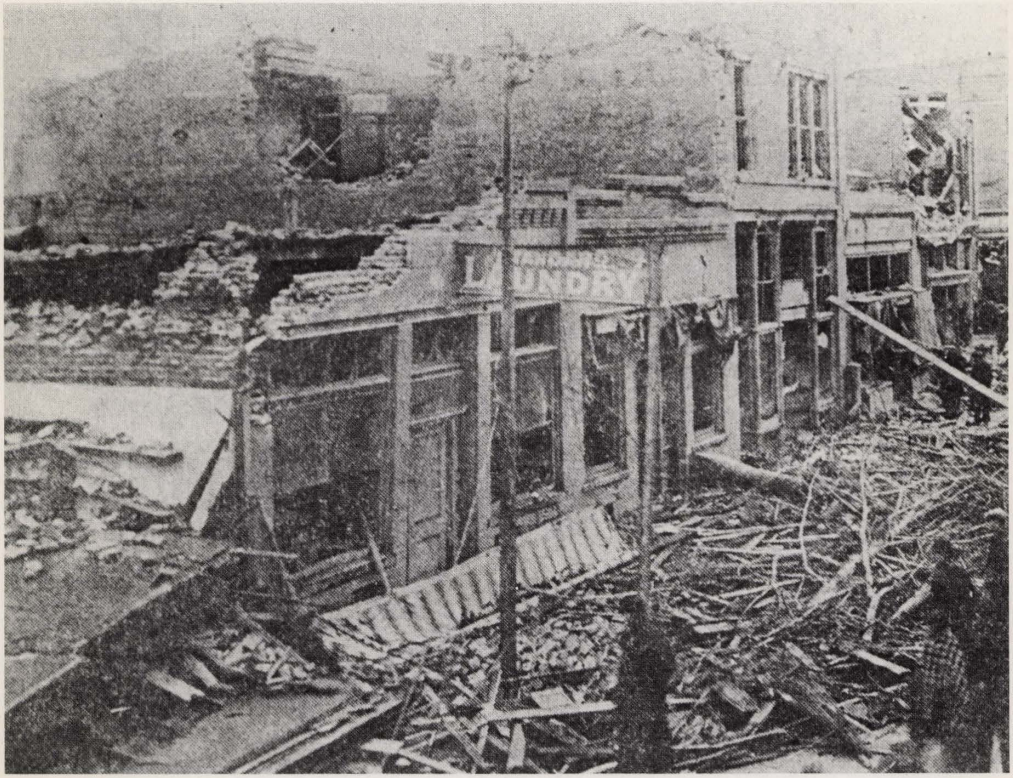
Tornado destruction on the corner of 24th and Lake, 1913
From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum

people. There must have been, I'd say close to 150 people in that building. Then the tornado went out north where it crossed the river and struck Manawa. You know, that was a summer resort for the people around here. And it destroyed it. It tore a lot of things down. Manawa belonged to the Street Railway Company."

"It was utter devastation. It was absolutely dreadful. We used to sit on the corner of 24th Street and watch funeral processions go by. We'd sit there by the hour, because they went to Forest Lawn Cemetery and they had to pass that way. It was pretty ghastly."

The tornado was not our only catastrophe.

"I had a boyfriend, and we each liked to dance. He suggested, 'Let's go to Lake Manawa, and we'll dance there.' I said, 'Fine.' He came for me about three in the afternoon. We went on the streetcar. In those days the streetcar company owned Lake Manawa. It was an amusement park. When we arrived we realized there was no dancing on this side of the lake, so we crossed to the other side. We took a little boat that carried



Tornado destruction, 24th and Lake, 1913, in front of a pool hall where twelve people died
From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum.

about twenty or twenty-five youngsters. Right away, we asked, 'Where's the dance hall?' They said, 'Well, this is Fourth of July, there's no dancing.' We were terribly disappointed. We said, 'Well, let's go back across the lake.' We stood on the pier quite a while, and waited for the boat. There were maybe one hundred people waiting. Anyhow, we laughed and joked and carried on. Eventually the platform gave away. We were all dumped into the lake. There was quite a commotion and the policemen came. Anyhow, I was pulled out of the lake. I had one shoe on. The other one was lost. Someone hollered, 'Oh, there's Frieda Newman. She's dead!'"

"They went on to pull others out. Well, the girl, Lena Rosenblum, that stood next to me, was drowned. There were five other girls drowned. It was lucky that not more were gone. Anyhow, they came back to me and revived me. A policeman came to me and said, 'I'll give you my coat, and take you to the streetcar.' My grandmother used to tell us, 'If you do something bad, a policeman will get you.' So I said to the police officer, 'I didn't do anything bad. What makes you give me your coat or come near me?' He said, 'Don't worry, I'm going to take you home.' So I had nothing more to say. My sister had company that evening and they were worried that I wasn't home yet. They heard the newsboys shouting, 'Extra! Extra! Lake Manawa accident!' Anyhow, that's how they knew. By the time I got home, it was one o'clock in the morning."

"He was drowned. Louie went swimming and never came back."

Occasionally, the hard times evolved into good times.

"One day Herman saw an ad for a small grocery in the Sunday paper. We decided to look into it. However, we had no sooner boarded the streetcar on Ames, when it passed over the Missouri Pacific tracks at the same time a train came along. Herman and I were thrown from the open streetcar and bruised somewhat. However, neither of us were seriously hurt, and we considered it an omen to bring the folks to America. Not only that, the streetcar company settled for our injuries with a couple of hundred dollars, so we used that for the folk's passage. In 1907, we brought the folks, Arthur and Lena, to Omaha. We rented a house for them at 19th and Douglas."

13 Real Americans

We were now American. We cherished our right to vote. It represented our belonging. We were excited for the opportunity to participate in the choosing of our leaders. We were also proud to serve our country when the need arose.

"When I got my citizenship papers, I told the judge, 'I already have a son, an American-born son.'"

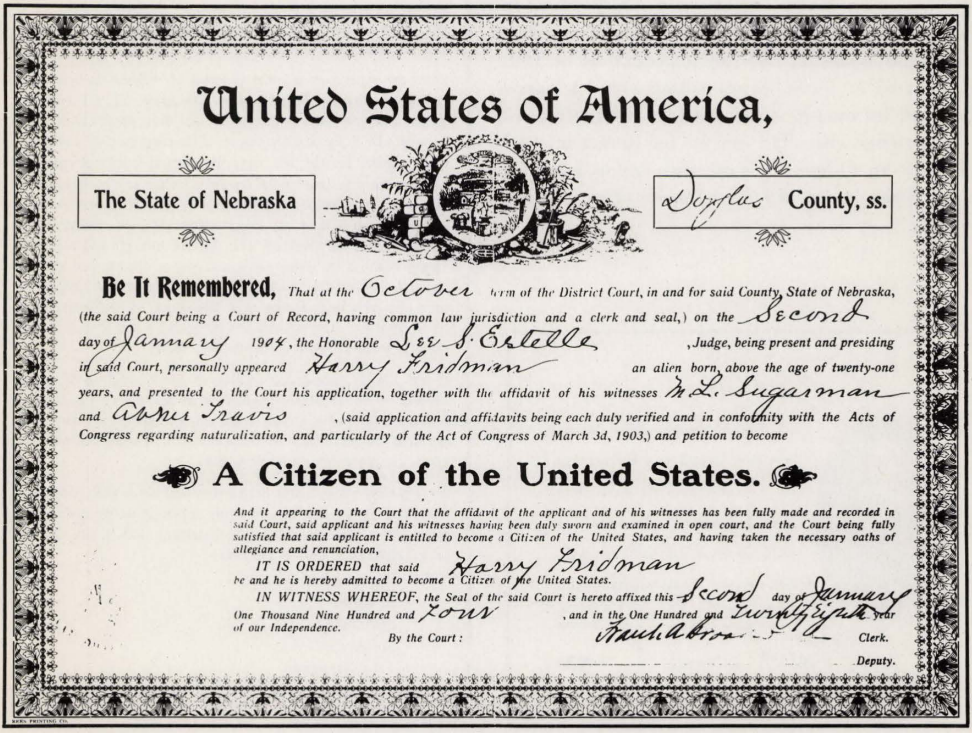
"It was through the government. The clerk of the district court had charge of issuing naturalization papers. We could not vote on a first paper. We had to be a full citizen. We had to be in this country for five years before we could become a citizen, before we could vote."

"I had to renew my citizenship because when my husband was sixteen years old, he forgot to register and when we got married, he was not a citizen. That meant I was not a citizen. I had to take my citizenship test at the old post office even though I was born here. That was the law then. I do not know the law now, but that's what it was then."

"I joined the Socialist Party because I was a working man and that seemed right for me."

"I was always a Republican."

"I was a Democrat because my father was. That's why. My father was very interested in politics and great dis-



United States of America,

The State of Nebraska

Douglas County, ss.

Be It Remembered, That at the October term of the District Court, in and for said County, State of Nebraska, (the said Court being a Court of Record, having common law jurisdiction and a clerk and seal,) on the Second day of January 1904, the Honorable Lee S. Estelle, Judge, being present and presiding in said Court, personally appeared Harry Fridman an alien born, above the age of twenty-one years, and presented to the Court his application, together with the affidavit of his witnesses M. L. Sugarman and Abbie Travis, (said application and affidavits being each duly verified and in conformity with the Acts of Congress regarding naturalization, and particularly of the Act of Congress of March 3d, 1903,) and petition to become

A Citizen of the United States.

And it appearing to the Court that the affidavit of the applicant and of his witnesses has been fully made and recorded in said Court, said applicant and his witnesses having been duly sworn and examined in open court, and the Court being fully satisfied that said applicant is entitled to become a Citizen of the United States, and having taken the necessary oaths of allegiance and renunciation,

IT IS ORDERED that said Harry Fridman be and he is hereby admitted to become a Citizen of the United States.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Seal of the said Court is hereto affixed this Second day of January One Thousand Nine Hundred and Four, and in the One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth year of our Independence.

By the Court: Frank A. Brown Clerk.

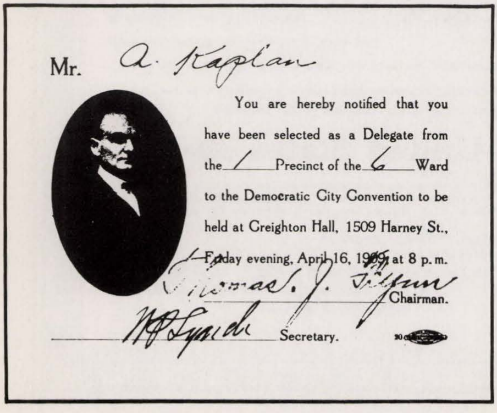
Deputy.

cussions were always held on everything that was current, women's suffrage and everything else. The conversations around the dinner table turned into battle royals, sometimes."

"As far as I was concerned, the Jewish population in Omaha was not interested in politics. There were some, a lot of people know about them. They were interested in politics because politics meant a way for them to make a better living. But as a rule the immigrant Jews, or people of our type, even myself, were not much interested in politics."

"I stayed away from politics. But I always voted. Oh yes. That's a privilege I wouldn't give up."

"I can remember Bryan. I think I was in high school at this time. He was coming to speak here. He was running for the presidency. We had an auditorium on 14th and Howard or Jones. Bryan talked with his hands more than his mouth. It was such an exciting time! I also remember when Taft ran for the presidency and Taft came to Omaha. I remember seeing him. Of course, Bryan never did get elected, never became President."



Mr. A. Kaplan

You are hereby notified that you have been selected as a Delegate from the 1 Precinct of the 6 Ward to the Democratic City Convention to be held at Creighton Hall, 1509 Harney St., Friday evening, April 16, 1909 at 8 p. m.

Chairman.

Secretary.

Omaha, Neb., March 5th, 1900

Dear Sir —

Every good American citizen regardless of political affiliations is now studying over the position he should take tomorrow at the ballot box. By too hasty a stroke of the pencil in the election booth he might make a blunder and vote for a man who is entirely unfit to become our representative for the next three years.

In order to cope with the great problem of municipal ownership of the waterworks, which means a great deal of saving to the taxpayers, we have to be very careful in our selection and try to elect a municipal ticket composed of good, honest and clean men. Especially must we deliberate, whom we should support by our vote and influence for mayor. Now we have before us two candidates, who are aspiring for the office of municipal executive. One is Frank E. Moores who was re-nominated by the Republican party, and the other is William S. Poppleton, the fusion candidate for the same office. The question arises, which one of them is worthy of our confidence, vote and support. While some of us may not be property owners, and therefore lack the interest of others in regard to the municipal ownership of the water works, but as loyal American citizens we all desire to have a man for mayor whose heart beats in sympathy with his fellow men and who treats all citizens alike without partiality.

From the experience we had of Frank E. Moores as mayor, we fail to see why we should support him again. You all remember the promises he made us three years ago, how good and generous he would be to the Jewish people, if they would only tender him their support for election. Has he adhered to his pledges and fulfilled his promises? What has he done for any of us to entitle him to our vote and influence for re-election? Whenever we came to him asking a favor for some unfortunate one among us, he gave us a deaf ear. We had S. L. Morris, a bright and honorable young man, on the police force and Mayor Moores had him discharged without any cause. We had H. Brown, an unfortunate poor man of a large family, who was trying to gain a livelihood for himself and starving children by getting a position on the city force as a street sweeper, then he was fired.

If the Jewish people are so low in the estimation of Mayor Moores as not to entitle them even to the honor of handling a broom on the public streets under his administration, why, then, not drop the party lines and support W. S. Poppleton, who is a good, clean and honest business man.

Mr. Poppleton has always been a friend of the Jewish people and if elected for mayor will show his appreciation by giving us a good and clean municipal administration. Let us all use our united efforts and help to elect him.

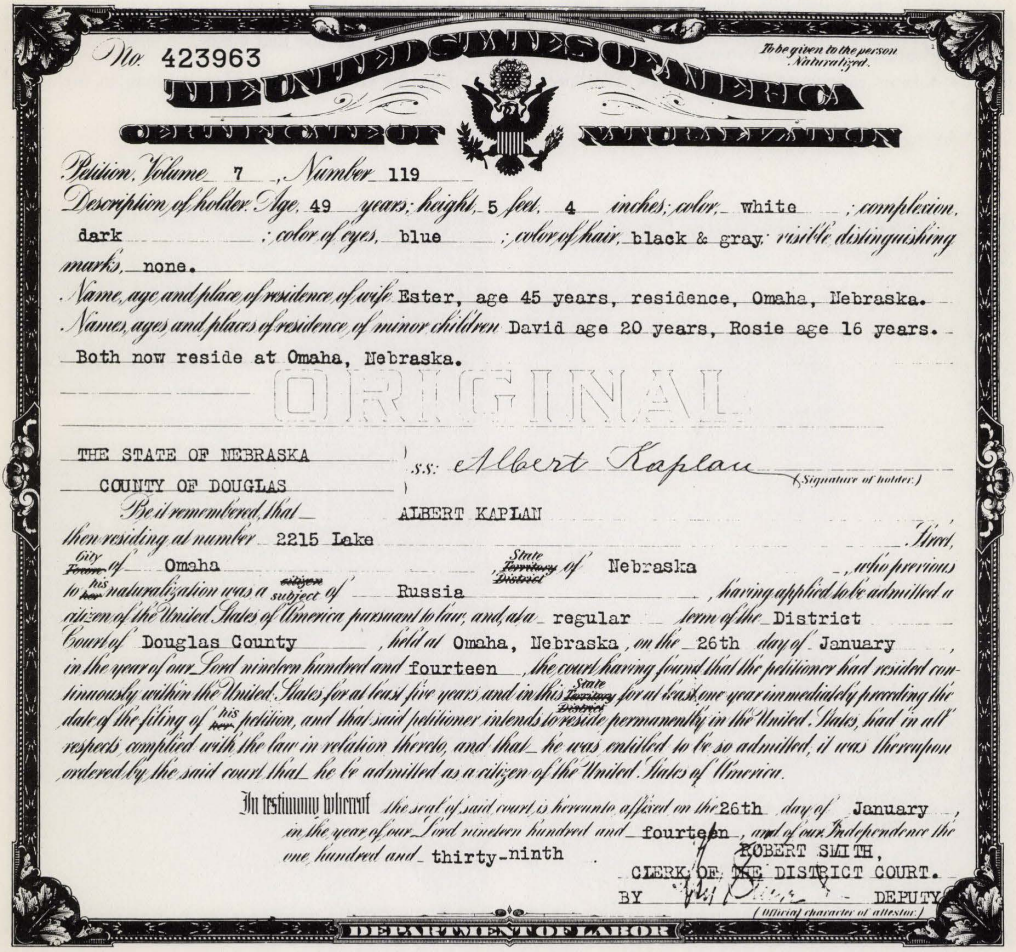
Yours respectfully,
H. Rubin
John Simon
Sol Prince
J. D. Nathanson

Courtesy of Carol Gendler

Legal problems were few, but we had help when we needed it.

"My mother had a very good friend, Mrs. Benjamin Baker, and her husband was one of the top Omaha lawyers, and we, of course, didn't have very much money, so we didn't need much legal advice. But whenever she had any kind of a problem, she'd go to see Judge Baker. He was a very capable influential Omaha lawyer, and he was always very helpful. We were never charged anything for his services."

"There were two or three Jewish lawyers that I remember from the real old times. One was Isadore



No. 423963

To be given to the person Naturalized.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION

Petition, Volume 7, Number 119

Description of holder: Age, 49 years; height, 5 feet, 4 inches; color, white; complexion, dark; color of eyes, blue; color of hair, black & gray; visible distinguishing marks, none.

Name, age and place of residence of wife: Ester, age 45 years, residence, Omaha, Nebraska.

Names, ages and places of residence of minor children: David age 20 years, Rosie age 16 years. Both now reside at Omaha, Nebraska.

ORIGINAL

THE STATE OF NEBRASKA)
COUNTY OF DOUGLAS) S.S.

Albert Kaplan
(Signature of holder.)

Be it remembered, that ALBERT KAPLAN then residing at number 2215 Lake Street, City of Omaha, State of Nebraska, who previous to his naturalization was a subject of Russia, having applied to be admitted a citizen of the United States of America pursuant to law, and at a regular term of the District Court of Douglas County, held at Omaha, Nebraska, on the 26th day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fourteen, the court having found that the petitioner had resided continuously within the United States for at least five years, and in this State for at least one year immediately preceding the date of the filing of his petition, and that said petitioner intends to reside permanently in the United States, had in all respects complied with the law in relation thereto, and that he was entitled to be so admitted, it was thereupon ordered by the said court that he be admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of said court is hereunto affixed on the 26th day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fourteen, and of our Independence the one hundred and thirty-ninth.

ROBERT SMITH,
CLERK OF THE DISTRICT COURT.
BY [illegible] DEPUTY
(Official character of attestor.)

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Zeigler, who practiced, and was a very distinguished lawyer. And then there was another, Martin Sugarman, and his brother, George. They were the only ones I remember."

"Well, we didn't have to have very much, really. My father had Henry Monsky. Once or twice my dad had to do something as far as getting people to pay him, or to straighten out something on a contract. Then, in later years, it was Max Fromkin, who did some of his work for him, because Max Fromkin was the attorney for the Arbiter Ring here in Omaha, the Workmen's Circle."

Going into the service for the American cause was a sharp contrast to our co-religionists who fought World War I for the Russian cause.

"My brother was called into the service, but we didn't care, because in America anybody will fight for America, but in the old country they suffered."

"When the war years came, we helped out at home all we could through the Red Cross."

"During the war, mother sold everything in the world for bonds."



Samuel Friedman, World War I



Meyer Katzman, World War I

"Well, my oldest brother joined not the army but the National Guard. He did that to get a few extra dollars. He did not give the right age in order to get in. He was eighteen and he said he was twenty. When the war broke out they took him the next year. He put in three of the hardest years a boy could."

"My brother had been trained at the balloon school here at Fort Omaha. He was in the service overseas. In fact, he was shot down overseas. However, he was able to get back. And we had a large contingent of men from here go overseas. So few people remember that balloon school. He observed. The people in the balloons observed over the enemy lines, and of course, the enemies were looking out for them. We had no airplanes. They had no other way of observing. He was shot down but managed to escape."

"I tried to join the army at that time, but you know what they told me? They told me, 'You go home, and when we need you, we'll call you.' Of course, both of my boys were here already. We got married in 1912, and my first son was born the same year. We were married in January, and he was born November 30, 1912. Then my other son was born in 1916."



Lorene (Rosenstock) Cohn and her sister, Jesse, as Red Cross volunteers, c. 1918

"It was just terrible. My brother, the only brother we had, we all loved him, and he enlisted. He wanted to serve his country. He thought this country was the best in all the world. And my mother loved it too. So she said, 'All right, if you want to go, then go.' And he went in. He went in the engineers unit, a very active one. He was in one of the terrible battles in France. He was picked up for dead. They took him to the hospital in France. He was full of shrapnel. You know, he came out of it. He wasn't dead at all. And this happened just a few days before the Armistice was signed. And we did not know where he was, or if he was still alive. So, a lot of time went by, then we got a letter from his nurse. She told us about his injuries, about his getting better. He still had to be taken care of, he was in bed, but he was going to make it. They took very good care of him, and sure enough, he got well. After my brother was married, and Bess was already pregnant, he started getting pains in his leg. After the doctor looked him over he said, 'He'd better go to the hospital.' But, before he goes, put hot packs on his legs. And you know what it was? It was a piece of shrapnel that they never got out. It kept running through his blood system. If it would have struck his heart, it would have killed him. He lived to be eighty-five years old. If he wouldn't have gone to that war, he would have lived to be one hundred, because in that war he got a very bad lung from gas."



Harriet (Rosenfeld) Speier and Frances (Rosenfeld) Goldner in Red Cross uniforms, c. 1918

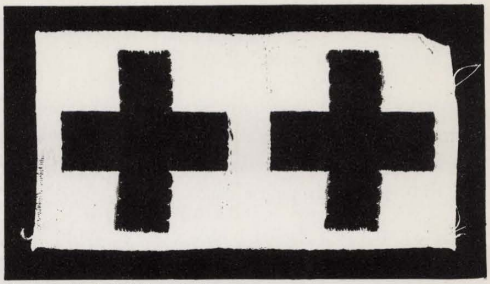
"I was stationed in Fort Texas where they formed the 100th Infantry Division. I was part of the medical corps. When the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, they kept us to help with the discharges. The returning soldiers from Europe had to go through a physical examination before they would be allowed to leave for home, so I stayed in for a little bit longer."

War on the Russian front did not have the same patriotic motivations.

"They put us in the army and they sent us about 1500 miles away from our home near Moscow to train us. They trained us only for six weeks. Then they sent us back to the first lines. Over there, at that time, they didn't have passenger cars. It was nothing but cattle cars. When we got twenty-five miles from the front line, it started raining like nobody's business and they didn't give us any clothes. We still had our home clothes. I had a jacket from home, but the cloth on the outside and the inside was cotton. Water got into my shoes. They tore and they used to squeak in the water.

The food was rotten. They used to give us a pound of bread a day. The bread was like a chunk of nothing. So I used to take it and split it up in three to keep it for the day. I was hungry, so before the morning was over, I was done with the bread. Now one time they gave us herring soup, but it was nothing but black dates and a few bones."

"Yes, the Russians were fighting the Polish and the French, so naturally, when they found out that we were coming, they opened up fire on us, but we were gone. They gave us an order not to cough. If we wanted to cough, we had to cough in our sleeves, so nobody would know that we were coming. When we got to the front line, the enemy was over there across the river. We had to cross the river. They gave us an order to cross with our guns over our heads. It was a big fight that started. We were driving pretty near all day until evening. And in the evening we came to a big town. They had machine guns on the roof and they opened up a big fire on us. We all laid down. A bullet hit me right here in the arm. Here is the mark. So I had to crawl back. I had a pack on my back and a little bucket for some bullets. But I crawled through and then they picked us up. They didn't have any hospital over there. They took us to our train and a doctor came and bandaged up my arm. It was a cattle train too. When I woke up in the morning the thing was loaded with flies, about a million of them. Of course, we were laying on the dirty floor. Then they took us again close to Moscow to the hospital. In the hospital was the same thing. They used to give us bread and herring soup. Money I had, so I found out, when I got a little better, that not far from where we stayed, there was a little town where they sold horse meat. I didn't know if it was from dead horses or live horses. Nobody knew. I used to go every day and buy a chunk of horse meat. To me it tasted like a million dollars. After my arm healed up a little bit, they released me and I came home."



Lorene Cohn's Red Cross badges



Dora (Sherman) Rosenblatt with her brother, Morris, May 18, 1918

14 Living Free

Our lives as children were full and free.

"We lived in just a little frame house. No one else lived in anything more elaborate. In this area, one house was almost like another. Everyone visited everyone else. You did not have to pick a day.

"When I was very young I took a street car to South Omaha and a man gave me two dogs. Ever try to get on a street car with two dogs? I didn't know what I had gotten into. I ended up walking from far out in South Omaha to the middle of Omaha carrying the dogs. My mother was very strict. But one thing I'll never forget: if I would have brought a dozen dogs home, she would've welcomed them. That's what I loved. Mama always took care of our dogs, puppies, and everything else.

"The red-light district and Miss McGee's was right next door. The girls from the red-light district used to walk up to Addie Fog. She was a dance instructor here. Her father had a drug store on the corner of Capitol Avenue. As kids we used to play on the corner there. Anyway, the prostitutes lived right next door to the City Mission, and they used to walk up to Fog's Drug Store which was about three blocks from my street, and my older sister and my mother would see them. One day my mother told my older sister that when they got some money, she could look like these women too.



Lorene (Rosenstock) Cohn playing with a friend, c. 1904



Jennie (Katelman) Bear between two playmates, c. 1912

You know, they had beautiful clothes! When I stop to think of days when I was young, I think to myself, how things have changed! We played with the black kids. And we thought nothing of it. It didn't matter to us anything in the world. We didn't get embarrassed. We played with the black kids, and I remember I had a black chum named Nan, and oh, I thought the world of her. How did I know the difference between a black girl and a white girl? It was wonderful. Everybody went to the City Mission. All the Jewish kids went too."



Francis (Blumkin) Batt, 3 years old

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam. A sunbeam, a sunbeam, I'll be a sunbeam for him!'

"Brandeis women came down and had beautiful clothes that they gave to the mission kids. I wanted some, so I got in line and oh, I got the most beautiful velvet coat with a cape collar. The lining was white satin. And I got hell from my mother!"

Our innocence protected us from danger.

"We lived across the street from the old Midway Saloon. And that's where there used to be a lot of murders. People who used to go to the Midway Saloon got into a lot of fights. As kids we could sit out and watch them, enjoy them. At first, I didn't know the difference and my mother didn't know the difference. I remember once two black fighters came, Jack Johnston and another fighter. Anyway, they were beating each other up and we stood on the corner and watched them nearly kill each other. What did we kids know? We thought, well, this is supposed to happen in the United States. There was a Chinese who was named Hockey Dewey. He loved our family and Hockey Dewey used to bring us special fish. He never came in the house, but he would have pockets of fresh fish all wrapped up for us. So we had fresh fish all the time. Once in a while we'd give him something to take. There were only Jewish people that lived around us, and all these Jewish people thought they were highbrows. There were Jewish butchers. One was named Adelson and the other's name was Mushkin. A Chinese lived right next door to them. Everybody was friendly. In our neighborhood there were Blacks, Jewish, and Chinese. Something of everybody. Then I remember when big boxes came to the Midway Saloon. Big wooden boxes. The police were not there and not looking. Those big boxes were opened and Chinese men came out. They had them in these wooden boxes. I think they shipped them that way — to get them into the country.

"We used to go down to the basements of Chinese stores and there would be two rows of cots. There would be men and women there smoking pipes. And now I feel it must have been pipes of opium. We used to walk through and talk to them. We were just grade school kids. We were very innocent."

"Back at the time of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in 1898, streetcars did not go any further than Park Avenue. There were carryalls, horse-drawn carriages, that took us down to picnic grounds in the country. I remember the time when the streetcars were pulled by cable from underneath. Dodge Street between 16th and 20th used to be an awful hill. They cut the hill down, and then they had these cables underneath which pulled the cars up the hill. It didn't go any further west than 20th. It went up to 20th and came back."

"One day I went with my friend to see the Exposition. We walked out there. It was a long way from where we lived, out to where it was up north. From 24th, it started at about Miami south and then went on north maybe over to Wirt or Spencer, and then from 16th to 24th east and west. We went out there and we enjoyed ourselves, but we got lost. You know, at that time, if you got lost there were no telephones around. The best we could do was to go to a saloon. We knocked on the door. You know they had those half doors in those days. We knocked on the door, and the bartender came over and said. 'What's the matter, boys?' I said, 'We got lost. Would you notify the police to get us back home?' 'Sure,' he said, 'Where do you live?' We said, 'Right across from the police station.' In those days the patrol wagon was pulled by horses. It took about an hour or an hour and a half for the patrol wagon to come from the station clear to where we were at. We got home about midnight. What didn't our parents say? You know, in the old days, first thing, the old man takes off his strap. It's a good thing my mother was there. otherwise, I'd of got a hell of a good licking."

"It was on tenth and Capitol. I don't remember who the holy-roller was, but they had a tent right across the street. And we used to sit on the porch and we used to hear the holy-rollers. It was sort of entertaining."



Trans-Mississippi Exposition, Omaha, 1898 *From the Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum*



Surprise birthday party for Goldie (Alpirn) Feder. Ethel (Newman) Berkowitz, Goldie (Alpirn) Feder, Rose (Rubin) Marfisi, Molly (Corby) Tully, Sarah (Tuchman) Rubin, Fanny Hart, Marion Marawitz, Fanny Rosenblum, Elizabeth (Casselman) Rubenstein, Malvina (Newman) Greenspan, Eva Alpirn, Nellie Rothholtz

We also looked out for those who had less than we did.

"As poor as we were, my mother made baskets of chicken or roasters and a few vegetables and left it at the door of someone poorer than we were. And she said, 'You run after you leave the basket so that nobody will see you.'"

"Although we were poor, I attended everything. I was at a picnic and shared my food with some of the others, and this Willard said, 'I would like to stay in a house where I could get food like that.' So I told him we had an empty room and my mother took in roomers."

"And mother would go down on North 24th. Now that was the section of the Jewish people, Muskin's butcher shop, Flax's fish place, and Turner's bakery. My mother kept strict kosher. She'd always take along her little basket, not for herself, but she was always looking out for the poor."

"Whenever one of us had a birthday party, it was given at the Hattie B. Munroe Home so all the children could have it. The Hattie B. Munroe Home was mostly for crippled children, and mother was on the board."

"I think because I was so interested in helping others, that's why I decided to do so much volunteer work."

Our doctors were more than medical men. They were good personal friends — concerned about all the aspects of our well-being.

"The doctor told me, 'You want to go to Lincoln for Thanksgiving, but if you go you will come back in a box. Instead, I went to the Swedish Memorial Hospital where, later, my mother, my father, and my brothers came. There was quite a few of us having the flu then. But my father was in the hospital for another two weeks. Then he begged to come home. He was an asthmatic. He caught the asthma when he was helping some children in Latvia. He fell in the snow and was laying there for three hours. Since then he had asthma. So the asthma and the flu didn't go together very nicely. He died on November 15, 1918, just after the Armistice."

"My brother and I had pneumonia when we were youngsters. We weren't expected to live. In fact, they said prayers at the Temple for us. We had a Jewish doctor. And they changed us over to a specialist. He really saved our lives."

"I think the doctors were very conscientious, and you felt that they were giving you their best. As a baby, I burnt myself pretty badly. My folks were so worried. They said that Dr. Grossman saved my life."

"Most of the people used homemade items. My mother had her own ideas, and we knew that after taking one of her remedies, we would be well. We already knew that they would help us. Then there were other little homemade remedies that the old timers had."

"I kept putting it off, and putting it off, until one day I decided I had to go to see the doctor to make arrangements for the delivery of my baby. I went to the library first and got myself four or five books. When I walked into his office, he asked me a few questions and said, 'Young lady, you'll never finish those books before your baby's born.' That Friday night I ate a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables. I had a stomach ache and I was sure it was because I had eaten green apples. I didn't know what labor pains were but I'm sure that was what my stomach ache was all about. That night I couldn't sleep so the next morning, Saturday morning, I called the doctor's home. He wasn't there, but his wife was. She said, 'I think you'd better go to the hospital and the doctor will come and see you there. I again procrastinated, and finally, that afternoon. I walked over to the hospital. It was maybe a mile or so but I was a good walker. My daughter was born that evening at 6:00 P.M."

"You went to your private doctor and if you had the money to pay him, you paid him. If you didn't, he wasn't able to collect. The doctor would make a house call for two dollars and an office call for a dollar-fifty."

"Poor mama had the baby on the dining room table. Dr. Smith came to the house. She was a woman doctor."

"We had the Wise Memorial Hospital named after Rabbi Stephen Wise, head of the Reform Movement, at 24th Avenue and Harney Street. But as years went by, we were not able to keep it open."

"We never had a Jewish doctor. When I had my appendix out, I was about eighteen. It was at the Swedish Memorial Hospital. It was spotlessly clean; it was beautifully clean. I was well taken care of. But they kept me in the hospital too long."

"When I was in New York City, before I came to Omaha, I had something wrong with my throat. The doctor didn't know what to do. I went to work anyway because I needed the money. My brother took me to a doctor but he didn't seem to help me. My brother took me to a European doctor and he told me to buy some little sacks with flax seed in them and wrap them around my neck, that that would make the swelling go down. The doctor charged fifty-cents for the office call."

"Dr. Charles Rosewater was our doctor. He was the brother of Edward, editor of the *Omaha Bee.*"

"In the 1920's, I had a very large operation. It was a hysterectomy. I went to six doctors before I let them do it. At that time, it was a very, very major operation and I was in the hospital for three weeks. But I came out of it all right and started to help my husband in the store."

"I remember Dr. Sher. He was our doctor and not only our doctor, but our lawyer. Anything that came up, Dr. Sher had to be in on it. His wife was one of my dearest friends."

Home was a good thing to come back to even though its style varied for all of us.

"After we kissed mom goodbye in the morning on our way to work, she would always ask us, 'What would you like for supper, my *kinderlach?*' Our answer was always, 'Bake some cinnamon rolls, mom.' What could be better than returning from work to the smell of freshly baked cinnamon rolls? One whiff of that aroma and we knew we were home."

"Home was a two-story white frame house. We had a dining room, living room, and sitting room where, if you were bad, you used to be spanked. We had a big



Dr. Philip Sher. Jewish Community Center Dedication Book, 1926, courtesy of Carol Gendler



The Faier Family, 1914. Top row: John, Mother Etta, Minnie; middle row: Rose, Father Max; bottom row: Anne, Abraham, Tillie

kitchen and then we had like a sunroom upstairs. And I think that's where we had Passover and we made our *sukkah* It was not a built-in sun room, but like a porch."

"Home was a little cottage. We had about five rooms, no bathroom. In the deepest snow we had to go about a half a block away to the ladies room. We had water. Saturday nights my mother would heat up the bathtub, the washtub, and we would take our baths in there."

"Our house had a front porch with glass. It was the showplace of the street. My mother used to always say that for every brick that went into the house, a wish went with it."

"Papa used to sell furniture from the house. Our living room was as big as two complete living rooms. He had plush velvet furniture there, pink on one side. There was a bell on the floor where you could ring for the maid. We had built-in cabinets, a built-in safe, and a great big double kitchen. And then there was the red library. Papa went to Chicago and bought everything. You see, he was in the furniture business. He bought the complete house. He would sell anything in the living room and the dining room, but nothing from the red library. We had a red library with oak floors. The chairs were upholstered with red, red leather seats. That furniture he wouldn't sell and he wouldn't sell any of my bedroom furniture. In that house, when you



The Selicow family in front of their home on Harney Street. L to R: Byrdie, Lottie, Anne, Mother Eve, c. 1910

opened the door the light would go on. Mama and papa's bedroom had a dressing room with built-in drawers and shelves, all of mahogany."

Some of us were lucky enough to have dads that were expert tailors or moms that were expert seamstresses. Then there were those of us who shopped for the best bargains we could find.

"We used to go to Riverview Park on Sundays. We all dressed alike. Mama made all of our clothes, our coats, even our underwear, everything but our hats and shoes and stockings."



Three German children: Gertrude, Esther and Sarah, for whom Ethel Katz made clothes, 1914

"I remember when I was about 15 years old, I always knew how to sew and I had to make my own clothes. I remember making a dress for a cousin of mine who lived here. The belt was way down here, around the hips."

"My grandmother made me a little dress by hand, a little jumper. I remember it, red plaid with a little white blouse. She used to sit on the chair and I'd sit by her and she'd teach me to say my morning prayers. She would sew, and I would practice my prayers."

"My dad made my suits and coats. My mother made our dresses. Not until I was married, in 1925, did I ever buy any of those things. All my trousseau was handmade, everything."

"Well, we had short pants when we came here. Most kids my age all had short pants here too. Then the short pants went out of style and we had long pants."

"When I was a young girl our skirts went down to the sidewalk with high top shoes. I got married in high top shoes. They were beautiful. I had a pair that were beaded."

"Well, we would go to Hayden Brothers and we would buy the cheapest things we could find."

"Our clothes were plain clothes but nice clothes. The boys got theirs at the Marcus Clothing store and my mother and I, we girls, got our clothes at Joe Smith's. That was one of the better stores in Council Bluffs."

"I wore knickers as a youngster and we bought them at Browning and King. We bought our shoes at Drexel Shoe Company and we paid five dollars a pair. That was exorbitant in those days. We didn't have very many clothes. We had one good suit."

"Well, there was Brandeis, and there was Hayden's, and there was a store for children's beautiful clothes, called Benson & Thorinton."

"When I was eight years old, my mother used to send me shopping downtown for the kids. I bought all their clothes. And I got so that I knew materials better than

a lot of people. My mother depended on me a great deal with the younger children. My sister is ten years younger than I. I never played with doll clothes. I started making dresses for her."

"There were plenty of stores but the main buying was done at Brandeis."



Dora (Sherman) Rosenblatt with her little sister, Jannette, c. 1906



Mr. and Mrs. Louis Hiller with their son, Richard, 1912



Sarah (Brodkey) Dansky with her cousin Sarah (Brodkey) Arkin, c. 1907

"My father always did the shopping. Oh, I wouldn't go without my father to buy a dress. Oh, we had the nicest scheme. I'd always come home with two dresses, and well, we just couldn't decide which one, so we had to take both."

"Dad took my brother to Nebraska Clothing Co. and me to Brandeis. I did that for myself the rest of my life until they closed. But there was one place that I used to go with my father and I think that's when I became a consumer advocate. We used to go to a place called Gorrato and Catania. It was an Italian importing place, and every week or so we'd go to 16th and Cass and buy a gallon of mazola in a tin can. Once when we were in there, there were baskets of beans and rice and macaroni, and there was a cat that was going in and out of those baskets — in and out — I pulled papa's leg. I would never go back there again.

"Ideas of honesty and integrity, that type of thing was taught at home and if we didn't get it at home, we didn't get it any place."



The Abraham Muskin family, c. 1905. L to R, standing: Mollie (Muskin) Gross, Arthur Muskin, Susie (Muskin) Kaplan; seated: Rose (Muskin) Malashock, Father Abraham, Grace (Muskin) Simon, Mother Judith, Hanna (Muskin) Simon; youngest, Nathan Muskin

You want to hear more? Well, you know, we can't tell it all. Although our recollections have been diverse, we are proud of our heritage. Some of us came here to find freedom, while others were born in this free land, but for each of us, Omaha is home. For this we are grateful. Our Story *is an attempt to preserve some good memories of our early years. Perhaps it will also inspire the next generation to tell their story.*



The Jacob Milder family, 1912 . L to R, back row: William, Morris, Ben, H. B., Sarah (daughter-in-law), Harry, Hymie. Front row: Emma (Cornblatt) Milder, Abe, Father Jacob, Ann (Milder) Taxman



The Mayer Bercovici family arrived in Omaha, 1902. L to R, standing: Rebecca, Moses, Jacob, Ida (Bercovici) Zoorwill; seated: Father Mayer, Israel, Mother Yetta

Volunteers:

Louise Abrahamson
Frances Batt
Ann Belmont
Genevieve Bornstein
Lee Burstein
Molline Cassman
Carol Chamberlain
Rose Davis
Eunice Denenberg
Amy Friedman
Lois Friedman
Saranne Gitnick
Ellie Gordman
Deborah Greene
Caryl Greenberg
Bennett Greenspan
Pauline Guss
Sarah Harding
Cookie Hoberman
Toby Kagan
Evelyn Kaslow
Peggy Katchen
Barbara Kushner
Jan Lund
Linda Luttbeg
Roie Meyers
Ducky Milder
Harriet Miller
Dan Miller
Lyra Ann Monasee
Betty Muskin
Gigi Osten
Ellie Penner
Vicki Perlmeter
Dottie Rosenblum
Tami Rubin
Jan Schneiderman
Claudia Sherman
Esther Simon
Marion Slosburg
Susan Tretiak
Gloria Wagner
Lee Wigodsky

Glossary of Foreign Terms

challah — traditional Shabbat bread
cheder — Hebrew School; Jewish religious school
davening — praying
kashrut — observance of Jewish dietary laws
ketubah — marriage contract
kinderlach — children
landsleit — countrymen
litvishe — Jews from Lithuania and adjacent areas
mikveh — ritual bath
minyan (pl. minyanim) — a quorum of ten males required for public worship
mohel — ritual circumciser
Pesach — Passover
rebbitzen — wife of rabbi, often with authority of her own
russishe — Jews from Russia and surrounding areas
Shabbas/Shabbat — Sabbath
shabosdicke — prepared specially for Shabbat
shochet — ritual slaughterer
shtetl — Jewish town
shul — synagogue
sukkah — booth, for holiday of Sukkot
tallis — *tallit* — prayer shawl
treyf — forbidden food; unkosher
tsadakah — charity
Was wollen Sie haben? — What do you want?
zemirot — Sabbath songs

Further Reading

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ncjw

The National Council of Jewish Women, the nation's oldest Jewish women's volunteer organization, operates over 1,600 service projects in the United States and Israel. Founded in 1893 by Hannah G. Solomon, its 100,000 members in 200 communities across the country are committed to a broad program of education, social action and community service. NCJW's aim is to improve the quality of life for individuals of all ages, races, religions, and socio-economic levels, and to strengthen the spirit of Judaism.

The Omaha Section has been serving the community since its establishment in 1896. Section members work to implement programs and projects which reflect the national priorities of NCJW.

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