

Doctor Manuel Horwitz, who died in 1973, worked very hard in coordinating Troop 40 at Temple Beth-El. He was recognized as a very devoted scoutmaster and later member of the troop committee. "Manny saw scouting in its broader aspects—its potential as being valuable to young people. He tried very, very hard to reorganize the troop, much harder and for a longer period of time than others felt he should. He had a way of meeting and talking to others, getting them involved, and he was able to get den mothers for the cub pack all of the time. He got cub pack leaders who did a creditable job. What was lacking was the cohesive support of the parents."²⁶ "When Temple Beth-El moved over to the East Side,* Doctor Horwitz was appointed institutional representative (that is, key man between the unit and the organization, in this case, Temple Beth-El). He was in this post for about twelve years and involved some very capable men as leaders."²⁷

Alden Blackman, who died in 1977, was a third generation boy scout. At the time of his illness, which led to his untimely death, Doctor Blackman was serving as head of the Jewish Committee on Scouting.

Harold Silverman, who dates his first boy scout experience to membership in Troop 2, which was connected with the Sackett Street School, went to Camp Yawgoog as a camper. In 1927 he became a truck driver for the camp serving for two years. Chief Williams sent him to Briarcliff Manor Camp to learn the business end of scouting. This eventually led to his joining the staff at Boy Scout Headquarters. In all Silverman served sixteen years as a camper and staff member. His duties included organizing many of the Catholic and Protestant troops in the 1930s. He also organized troops in the junior high schools, especially in the early years of the junior high school movement. He worked with the school principals and would speak to parents on Parents' Night. Among his duties was the recruitment of personnel to fill scoutmaster vacancies. Silverman served on the professional executive staff of the Boy Scouts from 1931-1941.

Henry Wise was one of the very early Jewish Eagle Scouts. He entered the Scouts in 1919 and joined the First Pawtucket Troop. He became Senior Patrol Leader, a Life Scout and a Star Scout, and a Knight of Yawgoog. He eventually earned his Eagle Scout badge in Cranston's Troop 3.

Mark Hochberg, of more recent history, after becoming an Eagle Scout, joined the Explorer Unit, which Doctor Hoffman established at the Rhode Island Hospital. He became so interested in a medical career

*Its move from Broad Street to Orchard Avenue in Providence.

because of his exposure to this program that he changed his original intention of becoming an engineer. Hochberg received a number of honors in his Boy Scout years. He was awarded on one occasion the title of Rhode Island Scout of the Year and was the first Jewish boy scout to be Explorer Boy Scout of America. He was selected as one of twelve scouts in the United States to represent the twelve regions, in this case the New England area. This nomination led to a meeting with the then President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson. In this role he accepted speaking engagements in which he both promoted scouting and raised money for the cause.

BOY SCOUTING—WHAT CAN IT MEAN?

If it is no more than just helping the proverbial old lady across the street, what is it that has attracted so many thousands of boys into the Boy Scout movement? Why have so many adults devoted so much time to volunteer work with the Scouts during the 67 year history of the movement? There are many answers. Three Jewish men who grew up in the scouting movement and who still feel very strongly about their involvement in it provided an insight into what scouting can mean.

Doctor Melvin Hoffman: "If we redefine our character, and it is true that we are the persons we are going to be by the time we are five or six, then obviously scouting would have little influence. We broaden our character, we become more solid individuals, and we take into that the various concepts and precepts that are given to us. I think Scouting does a very positive thing in that. It has a persistent role. I think it teaches good citizenship. I think it teaches moral and upright behavior, and it teaches a youngster to be self-sufficient. It gives him attainable goals that he can reach by himself—that is, something that his parents don't have to do for him. They really have to provide for him the opportunity and support, that's important, but the goals are reachable out of it. For example, studies were done during World War II reflecting on Scouting. I think former boy scouts were found to have received more medals for heroism than people who had not been boy scouts. In the overall picture it is what we learn about human values, interacting with people, and learn about our opportunities to exert leadership—it is something we do carry over. It is a part of our formative years. I think it is very important."²⁸

Abbott Lieberman: "Without getting too maudlin, the Boy Scout Oath and the Boy Scout Law are as strong in me as the Ten Commandments. With the Scout Oath and the Scout Law and the Ten Commandments you

have a whole life. And this is everything. You know, we kid about the Scout Law—trustworthy, loyal, helpful—put it down in brass tacks, think about it—it's a way of life. When I went into the army, I went with no fear whatsoever because of my camping experiences, my being with strangers and non-Jews. I was with boys who had no scouting experience, and they were scared."²⁹

Aaron Roitman: "And the great thing about scouting, like the song, 'You've Got to be Carefully Taught (to Hate)'—well, some of my friends to this very day are kids whom I met at Yawgoog. Here we were living in the toughest part of South Providence, children of immigrants, and we landed at scouting camp to be greeted by a barrage of apples as a rookie, and we met boys from all walks of life, and we began to feel we were part of the whole community—not just 'sheenies', as the Irish used to call us in South Providence. If we are ever going to solve this problem with the blacks, we have to take the kids when they are young enough and integrate them into this society. Scouting is its own melting pot."³⁰

The fundamental purpose of Scouting is "to promote, through organization and cooperation with other agencies, the ability of boys to do things for themselves and others, to train them in Scoutcraft, and to teach them patriotism, courage, self-reliance and kindred virtues, using the methods which are now in common use by Boy Scouts—by placing emphasis upon the Scout Oath or Promise and Law for character development, citizenship training and physical fitness."³¹

The contribution of the Jews of Rhode Island to the Boy Scout movement has over the years been considerable. They along with their fellow scouts of other religious persuasions will most certainly continue actively to pursue the fundamental purposes of Scouting.

NOTES

¹*The Boy Scout Story* by Will Oursler, 1955. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York. Page 15.

²See Note 1. Page 16.

³*Scout Trail, 1910-1962* by J. Harold Williams, 1964. Published by Rhode Island Boy Scouts and Narragansett Council, Boy Scouts of America. Page 12.

⁴*Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, V. 2, No. 3, December 1957, "Jews in Medicine" by Seebert J. Goldowsky, M.D. Page 159.

⁵See Note 3. Page 6.

⁶See Note 3. Page 17.

⁷See Note 3. Page 15.

⁸&⁹Excerpted from publication entitled, *Rhode Island Radio*. Date unknown. Page 7.

¹⁰N. Russell Swartz, *Jewish Review*, April, 1922.

¹¹See Note 3. Page 60.

¹²*Providence Sunday Journal*, September 26, 1920, "Ten Years of Scouting".

¹³From interview with Herman Galkin, February 11, 1977.

¹⁴*Evening Bulletin*, May 31, 1924.

¹⁵See Note 1. Page 17.

¹⁶See Note 1. Page 64.

¹⁷See Note 1. Page 225.

¹⁸See Note 1. Page 227.

¹⁹See Note 3. Page 33.

²⁰*Providence Sunday Journal*. August 1, 1966.

²¹See Note 3. Page 27.

²²See Note 1. Page 171.

²³See Note 3. Pages 43 & 44.

²⁴*Jewish Review*. March 14, 1924.

²⁵Interview with Aaron Roitman, August 15, 1977.

²⁶Interview with Dr. Melvin Hoffman, August 31, 1977.

²⁷Interview with Abbott Lieberman, August 31, 1977.

²⁸See Note 26.

²⁹See Note 27.

³⁰See Note 25.

³¹See Note 3. Page 19.

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Walter Adler—Telephone interview, August 20, 1977

Herman Galkin—Interviews on February 11, 1977 and September 3, 1977

Seebert J. Goldowsky, M.D.—Interview on February 20, 1977

Robert and Gertrude Hochberg—Telephone interviews August 24, 1977 and September 17, 1977

Melvin Hoffman, M.D.—Interview August 3, 1977

Major General Leonard Holland—Telephone interview September 19, 1977

Dr. Norman Kahn—Telephone interview September 25, 1977

Fred Kelman—Telephone interview September 26, 1977

Abbott Lieberman—Interview August 31, 1977

Mary Sydney Ostrow—Telephone interview September 17, 1977

Aaron Roitman—Interview August 15, 1977

Benton Rosen—Telephone interview August 24, 1977

Harold Silverman—Telephone interview August 24, 1977

Harold Sydney—Interview August 26, 1977

Stanley Turco—Telephone interviews August 20, 1977 and September 24, 1977

CHILDREN, INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITY:
THE JEWISH ORPHANAGE OF RHODE ISLAND, 1909-1942

by SONYA MICHEL

The Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island was founded in 1909, just as the tide of collective wisdom in the field of child welfare was turning away from institutions and toward family care.¹ Philanthropists and professionals alike extolled the virtues of family life, regarding the typical 19th century orphan asylum, with its emphasis on regimentation and utilitarian education, as the antithesis of the type of setting they considered beneficial to children. Instead of removing children from widowed, impoverished, or otherwise distressed parents, they sought to preserve the family through casework and mothers' aid payments. For full orphans many child welfare experts believed that foster homes, rather than institutions, were better able to provide substitutes for family life.

Jewish agencies on the whole favored the move toward supporting mothers and providing foster care.² Large institutions such as the Hebrew Benevolent and Orphanage Society of New York allotted increasing proportions of their funds to family-centered programs and set up special departments to supervise them.³ Thus the decision of Jewish philanthropists of Providence to establish an orphanage at this time seems at first glance to be somewhat anomalous.

Circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Orphanage can in part explain this decision. Although child welfare experts had been debating the value of institutional care since before the turn of the century, the new wave of opinion was not widely expressed in public until the White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children held in January 1909. The Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island had its genesis in the spring of 1908, when members of the South Providence Ladies Aid Society began making plans for "the first Hebrew orphanage . . . in Rhode Island."⁴ Although this group obtained a charter the following September, they never actually opened a facility. Their idea was taken up by several other groups and a number of individuals who opened two small homes, which were finally combined and in July 1909 incorporated as the Jewish Orphanage of Providence.⁵

The men and women who were involved in the founding were non-professional philanthropists—businessmen and housewives, who were responding less to current welfare philosophy than to what they perceived to be the needs of the growing Jewish population of Rhode Island.⁶ They

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were mainly first-generation East European Jews, who were ambitious to become Americanized and upwardly mobile, but who tended to see charity in traditional terms.⁷ In Eastern Europe Jews had developed the *kehillah*, a structure which dealt with welfare and educational matters within their community, apart from government intervention. No doubt the impulse to “take care of their own”—to provide a facility specifically for Jewish orphans—was one of the chief motivations of the founders, since the other institutions in the state at the time were either non-denominational (the State Home and School), Episcopal (St. Mary’s Orphanage), or Catholic (St. Aloysius Orphan Asylum).⁸

Prior to the founding of the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island (or JORI, as it came to be called), there is some indication that Jewish groups occasionally made payments to widows with dependent children, but they had not established a systematic program.¹⁰ Nor was state-funded mothers’ aid legislation in effect at the time.¹¹ Institutional, rather than home care was the model immediately available to Jewish philanthropists concerned with the welfare of dependent children. Thus, by the time the White House resolutions recommending family care became widely known, sentiment in the Jewish community of Providence was heavily weighted in favor of an orphanage.

JORI was always privately run and largely funded through its own statewide fundraising efforts. In 1926 it became affiliated with the Providence Community Fund, through which it received a substantial annual sum. In 1936 it also began to receive an annual allocation from the City of Providence. The Home served an average annual population of about 42 children until 1942 when, because of the effects of the federal Aid to Dependent Children program and the “graduation” of a large cohort of residents, only eight children remained. Since it was deemed infeasible to continue operating the Home, they were placed in foster care.

Records of the institution—the minutes of meetings of the Board of Directors and Superintendent’s Reports—suggest that, while those responsible for making policy did not always follow current child welfare philosophies to the letter, they did manage to avoid creating most of the conditions experts found objectionable in highly regimented institutions.¹² Moreover, interviews with several former residents of the Home reveal that—for this small sample, at least—JORI provided them with security, warmth, guidance, cultural enrichment, and more.¹³ They all stated that they believed the care they received at JORI was equal, if not superior, to what they might have gotten in a foster home.

Thus the Orphanage stands as an exception to the collective wisdom of its day, an uninstitutional institution which provided large groups of children with many of the benefits thought to accrue only from family life. In addition, it provided some which were unique to a group living situation. Its success was due to a combination of factors, both accidental and intentional. JORI was supported by a concerned and generous community. Its size and structure were conducive to creating a non-regimented, flexible routine and environment. The personnel—professional, non-professional, and volunteer—were almost without exception, warm, well-meaning, and understanding of children. But the life of an institution cannot be fully evaluated only from “the top down”—from the point of view of its staff and policy makers; the clients—in this case, the children of JORI—must be considered as well. I shall discuss how all of these factors affected and contributed to the life of the institution.

AN INSTITUTION EMBEDDED IN A COMMUNITY

The Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island was physically, socially, and culturally embedded in the Jewish community of Providence, and it was integrated at many points into the life of the entire city as well. The locations of the facility paralleled the mobility of the Jewish population: after being housed temporarily in South Providence, where many of the East European Jewish immigrants had settled, it was established in 1911 on the East Side of Providence, in a neighborhood favored by Jewish families who could afford to move from the “ghetto.”¹⁴ JORI’s Victorian house at 1213 North Main Street looked like many others in the area. Although it was large, it did not appear forbidding to its young residents, nor did it seem to attract unwanted attention from passersby.¹⁵ The children could play outside in the yard, and apparently there was some interaction with neighborhood children, for one former resident noted that he began a lifelong friendship with a boy who lived next door.¹⁶

In 1924 JORI moved into new, much roomier quarters several blocks away on Summit Avenue. The new building had been designed and built especially for the Orphanage, and, while it could not be mistaken for a family home, it had the advantages of a modern gymnasium and large playing fields. The recreational facilities became a center for local athletics, with teams from the Home playing basketball and baseball against neighborhood children.¹⁷ Both boys and girls participated, and the games not only broadened their social contacts, but also exposed them to a different set of cultural values, since the population of the immediate neighborhood was largely Italian Catholic.¹⁸ In the ’30s tennis courts were added, built by labor the local WPA provided. A former resident recalls that there

was never any problem over sharing the courts with neighborhood children:

We wouldn't dream of saying, "You get off the courts because we want to use them." You just waited and you took your turn.¹⁹

Some orphanages, particularly large ones, contain educational facilities on their own premises.²⁰ While this arrangement protects inmates from being stigmatized as "the children from the home," it has the disadvantage of limiting their social experience.²¹ JORI children attended both Providence public schools and the Sunday School conducted by Temple Emanuel, a large Conservative synagogue with a well-to-do congregation. Inmates recall moments of embarrassment, such as when the superintendent of the Orphanage came to consult with their teachers (something most of them did regularly, as part of their concern with education), but they concluded that their awkward status had less to do with the actions and policies of the institution itself than with the response of their peers outside. To mitigate this response most of the superintendents allowed the children to exchange visits with their schoolmates. Outsiders loved to come to the Home, apparently partly out of curiosity or fascination and partly because there was always an enticing bustle of activity in the gym, on the fields, or around the piano. Under at least one superintendent JORI children were also allowed to stay overnight at the homes of their friends and invite them to sleep in the dormitory when space permitted.²⁴

Residents of JORI also had contact with various adults aside from the staff of the Home and their schoolteachers. Members of the Board of Directors and the Ladies Auxiliary were actively involved in daily life. They stopped frequently to look in (a habit superintendents did not regard with hostility, but welcomed and encouraged) and to play with the children. They took them in small groups for outings—picnics, movies, and the like—and also invited them to their own homes.²⁵ When the Board assembled for its meeting on the first Sunday of each month, the children often sang or performed skits for them.²⁶ Board members attended Bar Mitzvahs and Confirmations and joined the Passover seder which the children themselves conducted annually at the Home.²⁷ Former residents do not recall feeling like "charity cases" on these occasions, but rather remember enjoying the attention and affection they received. "I was almost always made to feel that they were proud of me, that I was a good boy," one man recalled.²⁸

Because the Orphanage was socially embedded in an upwardly mobile community, it enjoyed certain material advantages. To support JORI

financially or sit on its Board apparently carried a good deal of prestige; the annual Thanksgiving Ball to benefit the Orphanage was *the* event of the Jewish social season.²⁹ While the minutes of the meetings of the Board are seldom without reference to fund raising problems or new schemes, JORI seems to have attracted its share of charitable donations. It never failed to meet its annual budget, paid off the mortgage on its first building within 11 years, subscribed a \$125,000 building fund for the second structure within a year, and raised almost all the money needed for a summer camp within a few months' time. While the prominent businessmen who sat on the Board were responsible for giving or obtaining many large donations, it was through the steady efforts of the Ladies Auxiliary that the first mortgage was reduced. These women were also responsible for many "extras"—money and materials for special projects, music lessons, parties, trips, clothing, and the like.

Thus, while most public and private institutions of the same period were restricted to austerity budgets, JORI seems to have served as a symbol for the collective pride of the growing Jewish bourgeoisie—and its residents benefited accordingly. Supporters of the Orphanage apparently thought it fit to provide these children with the same advantages they would provide their own offspring. "I was a snob," one former resident recalled. "I thought the other kids—the ones who lived in families [in the neighborhood]—were underprivileged. They didn't have tennis courts, or go to summer camp".³⁰

Jewish culture and education were emphasized throughout the history of the Home and served as another link to the community outside. In addition to Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation classes at Temple Emanuel, the boys received weekly Hebrew lessons from instructors who came to JORI. All the children participated in weekly Sabbath rituals, celebrated Hanukkah, and staged Purim plays. For most, these activities seem to have served as a source of identity and pride, a counterpoint to any sense of stigma they may have felt as wards of an orphanage. At the same time, however, the institution did not allow its commitment to Judaism to isolate the children or deprive them of other influences: like many American-Jewish parents, the administrators made their concession to gentile culture by taking the children downtown every Christmas to visit the department-store Santa.³¹

To varying degrees most of the superintendents of JORI recognized the need to bring the children into contact with the life of the community, to expose them to a variety of stimulating experiences—to help them lead "normal" lives. They were sensitive to the social problems of group life and tried to arrange outings so that the children did not have to

travel in large, easily identifiable groups. Lewis Morganstern, for instance, declined an invitation for the children to attend the annual outing of the Providence Chamber of Commerce because "that kind of entertainment . . . tends to expose the children to undesirable or unpleasant publicity."³² And Maurice Stollerman told the Board he had the children go to the beach in small groups both to insure their safety and so as "not to call attention to themselves."³³

It was also Stollerman who instituted the practice of bringing the children downtown to purchase clothes, not only so they could select what they wanted and be fitted properly, but also so that they could have the experience of handling money and making transactions in a store. He wanted to decentralize activities, "seeking in every way to make the Orphanage purely home, with activities outside the home."³⁴ He had the boys join an existing Boy Scout troop* instead of starting one just for them and had the girls go to the dancing teacher's house, instead of having her come to the Home. "It's quite apparent that with these little techniques we are going to deinstitutionalize and wipe out any remnants of institutionalism," he said in a report to the Board in 1935.³⁵

Stollerman was not the only superintendent who attempted to "deinstitutionalize" the Home, although apparently none of the others made as conscious and concerted an effort. Over the years, however, JORI never developed the structure and routine Erving Goffman identifies with a "total institution." In *Asylums*, Goffman describes the social and psychological pathologies which develop in an environment where "all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority."³⁶ The simple fact that JORI children attended public school would have prevented the formation of such a pattern. But in addition, the life of the Home permitted the children frequent interaction with outsiders and exposure to a variety of cultural activities and social settings. Thus, instead of isolating its residents from the community, as many institutions tend to do, it created a rich, stimulating environment for them. Since most of the children came from families of extremely limited means and social contacts (some of them were recently arrived immigrants), it is possible that their experience would have been far more limited had they remained at home.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

While the community stood ready to contribute to JORI, the Home as an institution had to be flexible and permeable enough to admit its

*For more on Jews in the Boy Scout movement see page 341 *et seq.*

influence. JORI was not, of course, monolithic. Under each of its administrators the philosophy, structure, and routine varied considerably, and, although the last superintendent was far more progressive than the first, the line of development between them was not unidirectional. The superintendents wielded a good deal of power, but they usually discussed major policy decisions with the Board of Directors at monthly meetings. In addition, they shared authority with other members of the staff and with volunteers, so policies, as they finally came down to affect the children, were often considerably mediated.

From 1909 to 1912 the Orphanage was run by two successive matrons.³⁷ The decision to hire a male superintendent was probably influenced by the superintendent of the Boston Jewish Orphan Asylum, with whom members of the appointments committee of the Board consulted in 1912. Henry Woolf, the first of five superintendents, was hired at a salary of \$1200 a year, plus quarters for himself and his family.

With one notable exception, all of the superintendents had had training and previous experience in the field of child welfare. Woolf was himself an alumnus of the Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Society of New York and took pleasure in comparing his own leniency with the highly regimented order under which he had grown up. Yet, by some standards, the regulations he set down were strict and, despite his disclaimers, bore a striking resemblance to those of the institution he had left behind.³⁸ He required morning inspection for clean hands and shined shoes and imposed silence at meals. These and several other practices were not abandoned until Maurice Stollerman came in as superintendent in 1933. Woolf also condoned corporal punishment, ranging from slaps to systematic spankings. One former resident adjudged that, while the punishments might not have been fair, they were at least meted out impartially.³⁹ Another recalled that, when school report cards were issued, Woolf would read them out before the entire group of children, administering slaps or praise to each child, according to his or her achievement.⁴⁰

Yet those who knew Woolf as a superintendent felt that his warmth, enthusiasm, and understanding offset some of the stringency of his methods.⁴¹ He enjoyed dramatics, working with the children to produce a number of plays. He had them start a vegetable garden and set up woodworking classes for the boys and sewing lessons for the girls. His superintendency was enhanced by the presence of his wife, who, although unpaid, seems to have participated actively in running the Home, tending the children when they were ill and providing much needed emotional nurture for many of the younger children.

The Orphanage records show that Woolf cooperated closely with the Board, seeking its help and advice in many matters. He repeatedly invited Board members to visit the Home, both to inspect his work and offer suggestions and to show their interest in the children.

Woolf died of pneumonia in 1926 and was succeeded first by Lewis Morganstern and then Reuben Koftoff, each of whom served for about a year.⁴³ Because of the short length of their terms, they seem to have left much of the procedure established by Woolf intact. Morganstern was, however, concerned with creating a homey atmosphere for the children (they had by then moved into the new building). "Though this building is beautifully constructed," he told the Board in 1927, "it does not give the atmosphere of home, but rather that of an army barracks."⁴⁴ His complaint reached the ears of the Ladies Auxiliary, who provided rugs, lamps, and other comforts.

Doctor L.B. Wolfenson, who took over when Koftoff left in 1929, had a PhD in Semitic languages, but apparently no experience in child welfare. Inmates who "served" under his term recall him as excessively strict and emotionally unavailable.⁴⁵

In 1933 Maurice Stollerman became Superintendent, bringing with him a series of innovations and changes which reflected the most progressive thinking of the period. He lifted the repressive measures which had survived from Woolf's tenure and encouraged autonomy by calling meetings of children and helping them set up their own council. To promote consistency among staff attitudes, he included the cook, laundress, and custodial workers as well as boys' and girls' supervisors in staff meetings and told them all that their jobs were not to maintain efficiency at the cost of individualism, but to help develop internal controls in each child, "not only for immediate purposes, but for his future conduct and development."⁴⁶

Stollerman saw himself as the children's advocate and intervened with the Board on their behalf. He recommended that guardians be appointed for full orphans, so that they could benefit from individualized attention even if they were too old to be adopted and would remain in the Home until they reached 16. He repeatedly advised the Board to establish systematic policies with regard to the children's future and set up the practice of planning for each child a year before he or she was to leave. Along with the Board, he would review the child's records, evaluate his or her potential, and make recommendations accordingly. Whether the child needed funds for college, or a job, or a place to live, he tried to see that they would be provided by the Board or other interested parties.

It was apparent that Stollerman not only had dozens of ideas, but was skillful in generating the enthusiasm and funds to execute them. He brought the notion of a Children's Band to the Ladies Auxiliary, who donated uniforms and instruments. He proposed building a summer camp for the children, a project which one of the Board members took over and completed within a year.

A REAL HOME

In a speech to the annual meeting of the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island in 1936, Harold Bucklin, professor of sociology at Brown University, praised the Orphanage for being "‘a real home, and not just another institution.’" He said he was

ever impressed that the orphanage had succeeded in avoiding regimentation of the children. That is an achievement in itself. . . . So many of our orphanages have regimented children, made them wear the same dress, and it was this type of orphanage which was criticized at the White House Child Welfare Conference in 1930.⁴⁷

While Bucklin's remarks were based on observations made while JORI was under Stollerman's supervision, it is not unfair to say that, despite the regimen set down by Woolf and perpetuated by his successors, other features of the institution—some quite incidental—mitigated its effect on the children it served.

For example, one of the primary concerns of participants in the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children was the physical structure and child/staff ratio of children's homes:

So far as it may be found necessary temporarily or permanently to care for certain classes of children in institutions, these institutions should be conducted on the cottage plan, in order that routine and impersonal care may not unduly suppress individuality and initiative. . . . Existing congregate institutions should so classify their inmates and segregate them into groups as to secure as many of the benefits of the cottage system as possible. . . .⁴⁸

Stollerman was the first superintendent to enact such measures consciously by having the girls' dormitory partitioned off to provide small cubicles for the older girls, but the size and structure of both its facilities lent many features of a cottage plan to the JORI plant.⁴⁹ The Conference recommended 25 as the ideal number of children in a cottage. JORI served between 35 and 46 children at a time, and they were housed in two dormitories according to sex. In addition to the superintendent and

his wife, the staff also usually included supervisors for both boys and girls, so the ratio of adults to children was equal to or better than that to be found in the typical cottage system, where one housemother and sometimes a cook or housekeeper would be assigned to each unit. Since staff members lived on the premises, they were readily available to the children at all hours. A former boys' supervisor recalls that his was a 24-hour-a-day job; at least one youngster would often crawl into bed with him for comfort.⁵⁰

Most child care experts also recommend that children be integrated by age and sex, so that family-like conditions can be reproduced within an institution.⁵¹ Although JORI boys and girls slept separately, they ate, played, and worked together. Once girls reached puberty, they were discouraged from participating in sports with the boys, but many apparently sneaked out to the playing fields anyway.⁵² The Orphanage accepted children from ages five to 16, and the population was usually distributed fairly evenly by age. As a result, the children often formed sub-family units, with older children acting as surrogate parents to younger ones. One former resident recalls being welcomed by the older girls, who showered her with attention when she entered at the age of seven.⁵³ Another noted that the older girls provided younger ones with information about menstruation (on the subject of sex hygiene, the institution was notably reticent). This same woman recalled that she enjoyed playing school with the younger children, many of whom she actually taught to read.⁵⁴ In the dining room some of the tables were headed by older children, who were charged with the responsibility of maintaining order and demonstrating table manners.⁵⁵ Older children could be depended upon not only to help supervise younger ones, but also to give them some of the attention and affection that they, especially as newcomers, needed. The structure of the Home was flexible enough to allow these relationships to develop, since children of all ages intermixed. Moreover, members of the staff did not see these ties as threats to their own authority.

Because the Home was integrated by age and sex, sibling groups were also able to maintain more contact than they could in institutions where children were rigidly classified, or in a foster care system, where they might have been divided among several families. Although one former resident recalls feeling closer to her peers in the Home than to her own brother, who was several years younger, most sibling groups seem to have preserved and enjoyed their attachments.⁵⁶ Applications for admission were often made on behalf of an entire group of siblings, and the Home usually admitted all of them, unless one was too young. In such

cases the younger child would be admitted as soon as he was old enough. In one instance the superintendent made a special effort to locate the brothers of two JORI girls who had repeatedly expressed concern and loneliness for them. The boys were found in an orphanage in New York and, after a good deal of red tape had been cut, happily reunited with their sisters at JORI.

Most JORI children were not, in fact, full orphans, but had one or both parents living, for one reason or another unable or unwilling to care for them. Many parents still wished to maintain close ties with their children, however, and the regulations of the Home permitted them to do so by allowing frequent visits from relatives. In some facilities, parental ties were regarded as disruptive to both child and institutional order and were thus curtailed. The Hebrew Orphanage and Benevolent Society of New York, which permitted only four visits per year, was not atypical.⁵⁷ But in keeping with the new emphasis on family bonds, child welfare experts came to recommend that institutions encourage family visits as a way of preserving them.⁵⁸ In fact, some authorities believed that institutions were more conducive to fulfilling this function than foster homes, since the relationships institutional staff formed with children resembled parent-child relationships less than those developed between foster parents and children and were therefore less likely to threaten the child's original bond or cause him to feel guilty or ambivalent.⁵⁹

Throughout most of its history JORI did nothing to stand in the way of parent-child relationships. In an exceptional instance a superintendent arbitrarily informed a mother that she could see only two of her four children at once. This woman, a widow who had placed her children in the Home only with great reluctance, never missed a Sunday visiting hour, often trudging miles through the snow when trolley cars failed to run. She refused to accept the superintendent's edict and appealed to a member of the Board, who overrode his decision.⁶⁰

For the most part the Board honored parents' rights to their children, although as years went by they came to feel that their responsibility to each child did not end when he or she left the Home. At first, admissions and discharges seem to have been made largely at the behest of parents or referring agencies, but later members of the admissions committee of the Board undertook to do casework themselves, refusing to discharge children before they had investigated the situation into which they would be released. In many cases it was clear that parents would be financially unable to provide all the material and cultural benefits

available in the Home, but the Board did not regard this as sufficient reason to keep children from their own parents.

Whether it intended to or not, JORI served as an agency for assimilation and upward mobility, particularly for the children who remained in the Home through adolescence. With its emphasis on education and culture it instilled in many the desire to attend college or professional school, and for some it also provided the financial means to do so. The Board often arranged for business courses or found jobs for those who showed little academic aptitude. Although this might be regarded as a form of "tracking," the Board and superintendent were so well acquainted with all the children that they could accurately appraise their skills and potential and advise them accordingly. While other institutions during this period had also begun to take responsibility for the future lives of their charges (having abandoned the 19th century practice of indenturing or apprenticing them willy-nilly, with no regard for aptitude or desire), what distinguished JORI was the individualized attention its children received. In part this was made possible by their small number, but it was also a product of the community's pride in the institution.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, their experience at JORI sometimes created rifts between children and their own families. According to Myra Tieder, a veteran child welfare worker, this was not unusual among the children of Jewish immigrants, because

the institutional care they received enriched them beyond what most of their families could do for them. The Americanization process taking place in these children created vast differences between them and their parents. The niceties stressed in institutional living were not valued in their homes.⁶¹

Several former JORI residents recall feelings of disappointment and deprivation when they "graduated" and returned home. "I cried when I left," one woman said. "I didn't want to leave a place where there was no worry about a roof over my head. I knew my mother couldn't afford the cultural things—a piano, piano lessons—that we had in the Home."⁶² Another woman also burst into tears when she saw the Brooklyn tenement where she was to live with her mother and sister, both of whom were on relief.⁶³

Institutions like JORI were not alone in creating intergenerational conflict; schools, factories, and other social institutions also contributed to this phenomenon. Life in an orphanage did, of course, intensify the differences between parents and child, since it increased his exposure to American

ideas and ways and drew him more rapidly away from the values and manners of his parents. Mothers' aid programs might have slowed this process by keeping the child in his family, but as long as he attended school and worked outside the home, some cultural erosion was inevitable. Foster homes would of course have a similar effect, the degree depending upon the social status of the foster parents. While JORI may have put distance between parents and children, it also gave them impetus toward upward mobility, something many immigrants sought both for themselves and their children.

In a recent study of life in a large orphanage the sociologist Howard Shuman notes that the institution did not provide children with a substitute home, but a substitute *for* home.⁶⁴ This distinction implies that an orphanage should not be compared only with the family, against which it will always fall short, but evaluated as one of several possible alternatives for rearing, nurturing, and educating children. As one former resident put it, JORI was like a "low-class boarding school."⁶⁵ Indeed, like prep school and college alumni, JORI "graduates" returned to visit year after year. In 1969 over 80 of them gathered for a reunion. Their ties were not only to the institution and its administrators, but to one another.

When the Jewish community of Providence chose to establish its orphanage, contemporary child welfare experts who advocated foster care and family support would very likely have been critical. Yet there is no guarantee that such programs would have been preferable. Foster homes might have been difficult to locate and supervise adequately and would have interfered emotionally with children's attachments to their own parents. Family support probably never would have been sufficient to enable parents to provide children with the cultural and educational benefits available to them in the Home. In the early part of this century child care experts shared with their non-professional counterparts an unquestioning faith in family life which turned them almost automatically against all types of institutions.⁶⁶ Such faith may have blinded them to the values of communal life which, in the proper setting and with the assistance of interested adults and an involved community, children can create for themselves.

NOTES

¹Robert Bremner et. al., eds., *Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History* (Cambridge, 1971), Vol. II, Parts 1-6, pp. 247-248. See also excerpts from *Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, 1909* in Bremner, pp. 357-359; and Henry W. Thurston, *The Dependent Child* (New York, 1930), especially Ch. X. Thurston was an early president of the Child Welfare League and active in the field for many years.

²Thurston, pp. 313-317.

³*Annual Reports* of the Hebrew Benevolent and Orphanage Society of New York (hereafter cited as HBOS), 1909 ff.

⁴Seebert J. Goldowsky, "The Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* (hereafter cited as *RIJHN*), 3, 2 (October, 1959), p. 39.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶For estimated rate of growth see Beryl Segal, "Jewish Population Studies in Providence," *RIJHN* 6, 1 (November, 1971), p. 51.

⁷Mania Kleinburd Baghdadi, "Community and the Providence Jew in the Early Twentieth Century," *RIJHN* 6, 1 (November, 1971), pp. 56-75.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 57. See also Arthur A. Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment, 1908-1922* (New York, 1970).

⁹Henry J. Crepeau, *Rhode Island: A History of Child Welfare Planning* (Washington, D.C., 1941), p. 278.

¹⁰Eleanor F. Horvitz, "The Years of the Jewish Woman," *RIJHN* 7, 1 (November, 1975), pp. 152-3.

¹¹The first mother's aid law was passed in Rhode Island in 1923. For a discussion of the history of this legislation, see Crepeau, pp. 33-51.

¹²See Bibliography for complete listing of records available.

¹³See Bibliography for listing of former residents interviewed.

¹⁴Goldowsky, p. 91.

¹⁵Interview with C.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Interview with George Katz.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Interview with B.

²⁰For example, this was true of the State Home and School in Rhode Island, and the Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Society in New York.

²¹For a discussion of the problem of using neighborhood facilities, see Howard W. Hopkirk, *Institutions Serving Children* (New York, 1944), pp. 59-62. Hopkirk was executive director of the Child Welfare League in America; his study was commissioned by the Russell Sage Foundation.

²²Unless otherwise noted, the description of the Orphanage here and below is based on archival materials of the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island (see Bibliography).

²³Interview with C.

²⁴Interview with B.

²⁵Interview with Elizabeth Guny.

²⁶Interview with C.

²⁷Interviews with B and C.

²⁸Interview with C.

²⁹Interview with Joseph Galkin.

³⁰Interview with B.

³¹Interview with A.

³²*Minutes of the Board of Directors*, Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island (hereafter cited as JORI), June 3, 1926.

³³*Superintendent's Report*, JORI, September 4, 1935.

³⁴*Superintendent's Report*, JORI, December 4, 1935.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), p. 6.

³⁷Goldowsky, p. 98.

³⁸Interviews with C and George Katz.

- ³⁰See *Annual Reports*, HBOS, *passim*.
- ⁴⁰Interview with C.
- ⁴¹Interview with B.
- ⁴²Interviews with B, C, Elizabeth Guny, and Sarah Webber.
- ⁴³Goldowsky, p. 96.
- ⁴⁴*Superintendent's Report*, JORI, March 3, 1927.
- ⁴⁵Interviews with A, B, and C.
- ⁴⁶*Superintendent's Report*, JORI, December 6, 1933. For rationale, see Hopkirk, p. 129.
- ⁴⁷*Providence Journal*, February 27, 1936.
- ⁴⁸*Proceedings of the Conference*, loc. cit. (see n.1.), p. 366
- ⁴⁹*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰Interview with George Katz.
- ⁵¹See, e.g., Hopkirk, pp. 19, 119. For negative effects of sex and age segregation, see Howard Shuman, *Social Structure and Personality Constriction in a Total Institution* (unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1961).
- ⁵²Interview with B.
- ⁵³Interview with A.
- ⁵⁴Interview with B.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷*Annual Reports*, HBOS, *passim*.
- ⁵⁸See Hopkirk, pp. 130-132.
- ⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 134. See also Shuman, p. 100.
- ⁶⁰Interview with D.
- ⁶¹Myra Tieder, "Thirty Years of Innovation in Foster Care," *Children XVIII* (1971), 179-182; in Bremner, Vol. III, Parts 1-4, p. 656.
- ⁶²Interview with A.
- ⁶³Interview with B.
- ⁶⁴Shuman, p. 96.
- ⁶⁵Interview with B.
- ⁶⁶For a discussion of the emphasis on nuclear family life during this period, see Christopher Lasch, "The Family as a Haven in a Heartless World," *Salmagundi* 35 (November, 1976), pp. 42-55. See also David Kennedy, *Birth Control in America* (New Haven, 1970), Ch. 2, "The Nineteenth Century Heritage: The Family, Feminism, and Sex," esp. pp. 41-46.

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THE DECLINING USE OF YIDDISH IN RHODE ISLAND

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Perhaps no other people in world history has functioned in so many languages as have the Jews. As a result of two thousand years of wandering, Jews have lived among a large number of peoples whose languages they learned; and in at least three instances they not only learned the local language, but also adapted it to their own needs: Aramaic was used from the time of the Babylonian Exile until the Spanish period; the Jews of Iberia spoke and carried Ladino with them to other parts of the Mediterranean world when forced to migrate during the Inquisition; and Yiddish grew out of the languages used in the Rhine Provinces of Germany between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Although stifled in Germany as a result of the Enlightenment and emancipation, Yiddish developed extensively among the large Jewish communities in Austria-Hungary, Poland, and Russia, becoming the language of the largest segment of the Jewish people.¹

Yiddish-speaking Jews lived in the United States in some numbers throughout the nineteenth century, but it was the large wave of immigrant Jews arriving from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1920 who brought with them the Yiddish that was spoken in the East European ghettos. Yiddish flourished in the United States for a number of decades, reinforced by the flow of immigrants and the settlement of Jews within ghetto-like areas in the New World. The significant reduction in immigration and concomitant reduction in the proportion of foreign-born, the movement away from areas of first settlement, and the increasing Americanization of the Jewish population all point to the virtual disappearance in the United States of Yiddish as a spoken language, except among a small segment of the American-Jewish population.

In this respect the experience of the Jewish community in Rhode Island is quite typical. The 1963 population survey of the Greater Providence Jewish community clearly showed the decline in Yiddish-speaking with distance from the immigrant generation.² Whereas two-thirds of the first generation lived in households where Yiddish was spoken, the proportion declined to 36 per cent for the second generation and to 13 per cent among the third generation. The use of Yiddish thus reflects not only the linguistic assimilation of Rhode Island Jewry,

but also the decline in the number of immigrants from the countries of Eastern and Central Europe who settled in the state.

Data from a sample survey can be only suggestive of the changes that have taken place over the course of half a century. A more useful source of information for analyzing the historic trend is the information on mother tongue included in the United States census of 1910 through 1940, and in 1960 and 1970. Care must be exercised in using these data for comparative purposes over time, however, because the census questions and tabulations of the information about mother tongue changed markedly in the course of the 60 years. The censuses of 1910 and 1920 determined the "language of customary speech in the homes of the immigrants prior to immigration" for all white persons who were foreign born or who had one or both parents foreign born.³ The 1930 and 1960 censuses asked a similar question, but only of persons who were themselves foreign born.⁴ In 1940 and 1970, the question was changed to refer to the language spoken in the home in earliest childhood.⁵ As a result it was asked of all persons, regardless of generation status. No question on mother tongue was asked in the 1950 census.

The available information thus refers to different segments of the population, depending on the census year. The only data that are comparable for all six censuses are those referring to the foreign born, since language spoken in earliest childhood for the foreign born would be similar to language spoken prior to immigration. The data available for second generation Jews (1920, 1940, and 1970) and for third generation (1940 and 1970) can, however, provide some indication of the extent to which Yiddish continued to be used in the home even after some distance from the immigrant generation.

Just as the various censuses differed with respect to the type of question on mother tongue, so too were there variations in the kinds of tabulations made of the collected data. In these years differing information was available on age, sex, country of birth of the foreign born, or size of place of residence in various combinations. In general the data published for individual states or cities were not extensively cross-tabulated. The censuses of 1920 and 1930 included breakdowns for individual states by sex; and those for 1930, 1940, and 1960 indicate rural-urban status of place of residence. Such a paucity of information seriously limits the amount of systematic analysis that can be undertaken. The only tabulations that are consistently available over the entire 60-year period for Rhode Island are simple counts of the number of foreign born who list Yiddish as their mother tongue.

The data for the United States as a whole have been analyzed by Ira Rosenwaike.⁹ He reported in 1971, based on analysis of the available census data, that the number of foreign-born persons in the United States reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue had declined to only 0.5 million by 1960, after rising from 1 million in 1910 to a peak of 1.2 million in 1930. The 1970 census showed a still further decline to 0.4 million. In fact by 1970 the number of foreign born persons reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue was far exceeded by the number of native born, about 1.2 million, and of these just under 1 million (986,000) were children of immigrants and 170,000 were third generation. In 1920, when the census first presented data by age, just over half of the foreign born population reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue were under 35 years old, and only 10 per cent were age 65 and over. By 1960 Rosenwaike reports, only 4 per cent of the foreign born of Yiddish mother tongue were under age 35, and 40 per cent were 65 years and over. This reflects in large measure, of course, the cut-off in immigration and the consequent aging of the foreign born population. By the 1970 census the situation had changed even more; only about 8 per cent of all foreign born with Yiddish as their mother tongue were under 35 years of age, and 60 per cent were 65 and over. Even among the native born persons of foreign parentage in the United States whose mother tongue was Yiddish, there is a clear pattern of decline by age. Only 6 per cent of such persons were under 25 years of age in 1970 in contrast to the 13 per cent aged 65 and over; an additional 57 per cent were between ages 45 and 64. Moreover, it must be reemphasized that these statistics refer to use of Yiddish as a spoken language at home when these individuals were children. Although there is no way of ascertaining from these data the extent of current use (in 1970) of Yiddish, the percentages are undoubtedly well below those cited above. Clearly then, these data point to a very considerable reduction and eventual virtual elimination of Yiddish as a spoken language in the United States.

But interest here focuses not so much on the United States as a whole, for which the situation has been well documented, but on Rhode Island. Consistent with national patterns the number of foreign born Jews in Rhode Island has declined substantially; by 1963, the date of the latest survey, only 17 per cent of the Jewish population were immigrants. About 43 per cent were the children of foreign born or mixed native-foreign born parents. Most striking, and perhaps most significant, 40 per cent of the Rhode Island Jewish population were native born

Jews of native born parents. Since 1963 this distribution has undoubtedly accentuated despite the influx of a small number of immigrants in recent years. In short, an overwhelming majority of Rhode Island Jews, as of American Jews generally, are American born, and a significant proportion are actually third-generation Americans. In fact, a growing but still small number are fourth generation.

The changing effects of immigration become quite clear when age is related to nativity. In 1963, of the foreign born, almost 85 per cent were 45 years of age and over, and half of this group was at least 65 years old. By contrast, over half of the third generation were under 15 years of age and less than 5 per cent were 45 or over. Relevant, too, for this analysis of Yiddish as a mother tongue is the observation that at least 70 per cent of the foreign born population came from Eastern Europe; this percentage rises to 78 per cent if Austria is included in Eastern Europe, reflecting the fact that many of those saying they were born in Austria probably refer to the Austro-Hungarian Empire that included Galicia. The picture changes very little if the nationality background of the American born Jews is examined. About eight out of every ten had parents or grandparents who were of Eastern European origin, places where Yiddish was the lingua franca of the Jewish population.

Turning to the extent to which Yiddish has actually been the "mother tongue" of Rhode Island Jews and the patterns of change since 1910 shown by the census data, it is important to stress that persons reporting Yiddish as mother tongue do not constitute the total Jewish population, even among the foreign born. Not only did immigrants arrive from countries where Yiddish was not spoken, but a substantial number who did come from Eastern Europe erroneously reported "Russian" in answer to the mother tongue question.

The data for Rhode Island show a steady decline in the number of foreign born persons whose mother tongue was Yiddish. From a high in 1910 of 7,548, their numbers shrank to only 1,443 in 1970. In large measure this change reflects the decreasing levels of foreign born Jews in the Rhode Island population to the low level noted above for 1963. Between 1910 and 1970 the total number of foreign born in Rhode Island also decreased, from 178,025 to only 73,374. Yet, relatively, the decline among the Yiddish speaking was sharper: In 1910 they constituted 4.2 per cent of the total foreign born population in Rhode Island; but by 1970 their proportion was only 2.0 per cent. Thus Rhode Island ceased to attract Yiddish speaking foreign born to a greater extent

than it did other language groups. At the same time the state also experienced a decline in the number of Yiddish speaking who lived here in comparison to the total number in the United States. By 1970 only 0.3 per cent of those foreign born in the United States who indicated Yiddish as their mother tongue lived in Rhode Island, compared to 0.7 per cent in 1910.

The relative decline in the number of foreign born who spoke Yiddish in Rhode Island is also reflected in the prevalence of Yiddish compared to other languages spoken. In 1910 Yiddish ranked third among the languages reported by the foreign born (excluding English), preceded only by Italian and French. Thereafter, Yiddish declined in usage with each successive census, so that by 1930 it ranked fourth and by 1960 sixth. By 1970 it held seventh place; Italian, French, Portuguese, German, Polish, and Spanish were all spoken by larger numbers of foreign born than was Yiddish.

Table 1: FOREIGN BORN PERSONS OF YIDDISH MOTHER TONGUE IN THE TOTAL UNITED STATES AND RHODE ISLAND, AND TOTAL FOREIGN BORN IN RHODE ISLAND, 1910-1970

Census Year	Yiddish Mother Tongue U.S.	Yiddish Mother Tongue R.I.	Total Foreign Born R.I.
1910	1,051,767	7,548	178,025
1920	1,091,820	6,270	173,499
1930	1,222,658	6,377	170,720
1940	924,440	4,140	136,320
1960	503,062	1,918	85,974
1970	438,116	1,443	73,374

	R.I. as Percent of Total U.S. Yiddish Mother Tongue	R.I. Yiddish Mother Tongue as Percent of R.I. Foreign Born
1910	0.7	4.2
1920	0.6	3.6
1930	0.5	3.7
1940	0.4	3.0
1960	0.4	2.2
1970	0.3	2.0

Table 2: PERSONS REPORTING YIDDISH AS MOTHER TONGUE BY NATIVITY STATUS, RHODE ISLAND, 1910, 1920, 1940, 1970

Census Year	Foreign Born	Second Generation*	Total	
			Percent	Number
1910	62.8	37.2	100.0	12,014
1920	51.2	48.8	100.0	12,257
1940	47.2	52.8	100.0	8,780
1970	23.9	76.1	100.0	6,031

*Includes native born persons who had foreign born or mixed parents. It does not include native born persons with native born parents who reported Yiddish as spoken in their homes (240 in 1940 and 743 in 1970).

Although the number of Yiddish-speaking foreign born dropped precipitously during the 60-year period, it is interesting that the number of native born persons of foreign or mixed parentage who reported Yiddish has remained relatively constant. In part this pattern may be the result of the difference in the way the question was phrased from one census to the next. Moreover, neither the indication that Yiddish was spoken in the overseas homes of parents (1910, 1920) nor that Yiddish was spoken in the United States home during earliest childhood (1940, 1970) necessarily means that the individual respondent used Yiddish personally. It does, however, show a certain amount of exposure and, presumably, familiarity with the language.

The data also serve as indicators of the shifting generation status of Rhode Island Jewry. In 1910, 4,466 second generation persons in Rhode Island reported Yiddish, as did 4,588 in 1970. In addition, in 1970, 743 native born persons with native born parents also reported Yiddish as being spoken in their homes during their early years. Thus, whereas in 1910 the Yiddish component of Rhode Island's population consisted of almost twice as many first generation as second generation Jews, by 1970 the pattern had been dramatically reversed: almost three times as many second generation as first generation persons reported Yiddish.

At all times during the forty years during which census data are available by place of residence (1920-1960), persons in Rhode Island who reported Yiddish were concentrated in Providence. But again, the changing patterns over time of the distribution between the city of Providence on the one hand and the remainder of the state on the other parallel the shifting residence patterns of Rhode Island Jewry as these

were identified by Goldstein and Goldscheider.⁷ In 1920 and 1930, 80-85 per cent lived in the city of Providence; this proportion dropped to 72 per cent in 1960, reflecting the exodus of Jews from Providence to the suburbs. In part, of course, the changes in residential distribution of persons with Yiddish as their mother tongue also reflect the changing patterns of age distribution of the Jewish population. The fact that the percentage living in Providence did not decline more results from the disproportional number of older Jews who continued to live in Providence.

The censuses of 1920, 1930, and 1960 also provide information on the residence in selected cities of persons reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue. Since the data for 1920 include both foreign born and second generation persons whereas those for 1930 and 1960 refer only to the foreign born, the three sets of data are not exactly comparable. Nonetheless, they do indicate the shifting importance for Jews of the attractiveness of various cities in the state. In 1920, after Providence, Woonsocket was the most important center of Jewish residence; it encompassed 5.6 per cent of those reporting Yiddish in Rhode Island. Its popularity for Jews dropped rapidly however, to 3.1 per cent in 1930 and to only 1.9 per cent in 1960. Just the opposite pattern characterized the proportion reporting Yiddish who lived in Cranston and Pawtucket, with the former showing an increase from 0.9 to 8.0 per cent during the forty years, and the latter from 2.6 to 9.9 per cent. The growth of these two cities clearly reflects the suburban movement of persons out of Providence. This pattern is further reinforced by the growth of Warwick and West Warwick, which in 1960 together accounted for 2.7 per cent of the Yiddish speaking. Throughout the period the proportion in Newport remained the same at 3.7 per cent. Thus, although Providence declined somewhat in its importance as the city of residence for persons reporting Yiddish, in 1960 as in 1920 these Jews continued to be residentially concentrated in only a few cities in Rhode Island. Unfortunately, the data for 1970 were not tabulated separately by specific cities, so that it is not possible to determine the extent to which the trend toward greater dispersal which was already noted in 1963 has affected this segment of the Jewish population.

Table 3: DISTRIBUTION IN RHODE ISLAND OF PERSONS REPORTING YIDDISH AS MOTHER TONGUE, 1920, 1930, AND 1960

Place of Residence	1920 [†]	1930	1960
Providence	80.2	84.9	71.6
Cranston	0.9	1.0	8.0
Newport	3.7	3.6	3.7
Pawtucket	2.6	4.3	9.9
Warwick and West Warwick	*	*	2.7
Woonsocket	5.6	3.1	1.9
Remainder of State	7.0	3.1	2.2
Total per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number	12,257	6,377	1,918

[†]The tabulations for 1920 refer to "foreign stock," i.e., foreign born and second generation; those for 1930 and 1960 refer to foreign born only.

*Not listed separately in 1920 and 1930.

In sum, these census data on the population reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue, despite their limitations, provide some indication of the changing generation status and residential patterns of Rhode Island's Jewry. At the same time they document clearly the decline in Rhode Island, as in the United States as a whole, of Yiddish as a spoken language. Its greatest importance in the daily lives of Jews coincided with the great waves of immigration from Eastern Europe around the turn of the century. With the increasing Americanization and greater residential dispersal of the Jewish population, the use of Yiddish in daily life naturally declined. Given the small influx of new residents who are familiar with Yiddish, its continued use as a spoken language is likely to characterize an ever smaller proportion of the population.

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JEWISH SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS IN METROPOLITAN PROVIDENCE—THE FIRST CENTURY

by BERYL SEGAL

In the year 1854 the first minyan*¹ was established in Providence, Rhode Island. This initiated a continuous public service for the Jews of the metropolitan area which has continued uninterrupted to the present time. At the same time instruction of the Jewish children in the faith of their fathers became an integral part of the system.

CONGREGATION OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL AND DAVID

The first Jewish teacher, as far as we know, was Reverend Joseph Raphael Spiro. He appears to have served as *shohet* (ritual slaughterer of fowl and cattle), *mohel* (official circumciser of Jewish male infants), *hazzan* (the cantor, a person who reads the prayer and the Torah wherever ten Jews assemble for worship), and a teacher of little children.

With all of these functions his wages were pitiful, and this is what saved Reverend Spiro from oblivion. In 1855 he addressed a pathetic letter to Rabbi Isaac Leaser, dean of Orthodox rabbis in America, asking for help in finding a better position than the one he had in Providence.² He could hardly keep his family alive, he complained. In his letter Spiro listed his qualifications. He could translate the Bible from Hebrew into both German and Portuguese; he was proficient in the Talmud; he was both *shohet* and *mohel*, but he had a preference for teaching.

Reverend Spiro was not unique. Before rabbis were available to American congregations then in their infancy, men such as Spiro performed all of these functions, without which a congregation could not exist. They were teachers as well. What was unique about Spiro was his preference for teaching, that he was primarily a teacher.

We have no inkling of his methods or of the content of what he imparted to his pupils. The fact that he had the ability to translate the Bible into German and Portuguese tells us that he taught the traditional subject matter of the *heder*:** *siddur*,† Scriptures, and the essence of being a Jew. He had no knowledge of Yiddish and could not translate the Bible into that language, since the congregation consisted largely of Jews from

**Minyan*. Minimum quorum of the ten adult males required for liturgical purposes. (Hebrew)

***Heder*: Elementary religious school. (Hebrew)

†*Siddur*: Prayer book, contains the entire liturgy used at the synagogue and in the home. (Hebrew)

Prussia (Germany), England, and Western Europe in general, where Yiddish was not spoken.

There followed a succession of *shohtim*, *hazzanim*, and teachers, who left no trace of their activities for posterity. From 1871 until 1874, Providence had two Hebrew congregations, Sons of Israel and Sons of David, which in 1874 merged into one congregation, the Sons of Israel and David. The new joint congregation adopted the Moderate Reform ritual of prayer after a visit to Providence in 1877 of two men prominent in American Jewish religious life. Honorable Benjamin F. Peixotto and Doctor S. H. Sonneschein, eminent rabbi of St. Louis, were invited to Providence to address the united congregation, which was struggling for existence. The two visitors recommended that the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David secure a suitable plot of land for a synagogue of its own, and that the synagogue provide a separate room for a school for children, "where in addition to our religion the Hebrew language shall be taught".³

A circular inviting all of the Israelities of Providence to a convention at which Peixotto and Sonneschein spoke was composed by Reverend Myer Noot. We do not know where Noot came from nor when he came to the community, but his name was destined to be closely associated with the early Jewish community⁴

Reverend Noot, who served as teacher, acting rabbi and rabbi, and dues collector, was also a businessman, dealing in crockery. He organized the Redwood Lodge of Masons, No. 35 A.F. and A.M., and he was the first Master of the Lodge. He delivered a lengthy oration on the "Hebrews of Providence" before the Rhode Island Veteran Citizens Historical Association. In the address he showed himself to be a master speaker and scholar, and in some respects the first historian of Providence "Israelites".⁵

But here we are interested in Reverend Myer Noot as teacher. The congregation in 1877 was still worshipping in a rented hall in a building at 37 South Main Street. At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the congregation the secretary read a letter from Noot asking permission to use a room adjacent to the synagogue as a school for children. The Board agreed provided that Noot read the Torah* every Sabbath, and provided he would be responsible for any damage the children might do to the place. The Board demonstrated its foresight. At the

*The law (Hebrew), referring to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Scriptures.

next meeting it was reported that a water faucet was broken by the children in the school, and Noot was obliged to repair it at his own expense.⁶

It thus appears that Meyer Noot was the first teacher in a formal school-room setting in Providence. With all of Noot's prowess in writing and speaking he did not leave for posterity a formal curriculum. Thus we must speculate that he followed traditional Hebrew school routines.

The advice of Peixotto and Sonneschein eventually materialized in 1889 when the congregation purchased land at the corner of Friendship and Foster Streets. Here it built a synagogue with space for a school for children. In 1890, some 36 years after the congregation of the Sons of Israel and David was organized, the first synagogue building in Providence was finally dedicated, in the presence of eminent Rabbi Isaac M. Wise and Rabbi Lasker of Boston. The full story of the dedication ceremonies, as well as a description of the synagogue, its exterior and interior, was printed in the *Providence Daily Journal*, but not a word about schoolrooms.⁷ Only Rabbi Morris Sessler, who was credited with collecting funds from Jews and Christians alike, mentions a Sunday School. He invited any who were interested to enter the doors of the synagogue and to listen to its teaching both from the pulpit and in the Sunday School.⁸

Doctor David Blaustein, rabbi of the congregation from 1892 to 1898, directed a school in the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David consisting of six classes. For the first time we have an account of the subjects taught. They were Hebrew language, Biblical History, Religion, and Bible Ethics. The teachers were, besides the rabbi, Gertrude Lederer, Hedwig W. (Hattie) Lederer, Mattie J. Pincus, Relia Goldsmith, and a physician-teacher, Doctor Max B. Gomberg. The post-confirmation class undertook the formation of a library.

So far the story of the Jewish community of Providence has been concerned with immigrants from Germany and Western Europe, and the transformation of their ritual from Orthodox to Moderate Reform. But soon the Moderate Reform residents were joined by immigrants from Eastern Europe, who came in large numbers and settled in the North End of Providence.

FREE HEBREW SCHOOL

They formed an Orthodox minyan, the Sons of Zion, in 1875. Eventually they built a *shul** of their own on Orms Street, opened in 1892. Simultaneously they provided rooms for a Talmud Torah, a Hebrew School. But the true Talmud Torah did not find favor in the eyes of some of the members. In Eastern Europe that name was reserved for a community-sponsored school for children of the poor who could pay no tuition. To remove that stigma the school was called the Free Hebrew School. The director of the school was George Brauer, and the principal teacher was James Rose, known for his great scholarship and for innovations in the field of Jewish education. He was credited with being the originator of the Free School as well as with the novel idea of admitting girls to the school. In general the Free School was conducted on the principles of the public school system. The subjects taught were: Hebrew Language, Jewish History, and Jewish Religion, including celebration of holidays.⁹

The Free School prided itself on abolishing Yiddish altogether as the means of translating the Hebrew texts and certainly as a language of instruction, in spite of the fact that the pupils came from homes where Yiddish was the mother tongue.

The Free School held public examinations twice a year, and many people considered this an event in the life of the North End. It should be noted that the *Organ*, a periodical published in the community by the Reform synagogue, praised the Free School and its achievements. Rabbi David Blaustein of the Reform synagogue together with Rabbi Nathan Yehudah Leib Rabinowitz of Sons of Zion served on the examination committee.

We find no records of the progress of the Free School nor why it disappeared from the scene in Providence. But at the turn of the century new teachers came to Bnai Zion (Sons of Zion). Hyman (Hayim) B. Lasker and Mayer Gereboff and a large committee of North End *balebatim*,** among whom was Reverend David Orliansky, a giant among scholars of his day, formed the Talmud Torah on Orms Street.

For thirty years Charles Lasker taught in the school. The name Talmud Torah apparently did not bother him, and that name was honorably applied to the school, where at one time there were over three hundred

**Shul*, synagogue. (Yiddish)

***Balebatim*, persons of high standing in the community. (Hebrew)

pupils, attending six times a week. He was known as a disciplinarian in the classic sense of the word. He did not put the fear of the Almighty into his charges, but attracted them to study through stories of great men in Israel and holding them up as models of modesty, fortitude, and thirst for knowledge, virtues which he tried to instill.

The Talmud Torah taught the pupils Hebrew, *Tanach*, the name for the three parts of Scripture (Torah, Prophets, and Holy Writings),* and Talmud for the older students. Yiddishkeit ** was the key word in the Talmud Torah, and Yiddish was the means by which he made the Hebrew subjects understood, because Yiddish was still the language of the home in those days (1900 to 1940).

CHESTER AVENUE TALMUD TORAH

South Providence never had strong congregational schools, though it had four *shulen*, three on Willard Avenue and one on Robinson Street. only a stone's throw away from Willard Avenue, which was the main street of the neighborhood. But the neighborhood had a Talmud Torah on Chester Avenue, separate and apart from the *shulen*.

The trademark of the Chester Avenue school was Zionism. In contrast to the North End Talmud Torah, where the children were imbued with a love of Zion through stories of great men in Israel who walked the streets of Jerusalem, the Chester Avenue Talmud Torah tried to endear Zion through the writings of men like Judah Halevi, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Achad ha Am†, and other luminaries in Jewish literature. The school prided itself on being a "modern" school and dwelled on Hebrew grammar and Jewish history. Bat Mitzvah‡ was unheard of, and Bar Mitzvah was taught by special *melamdin*.‡‡

The teachers changed too often, and unlike the North End Talmud Torah, it did not leave a lasting impression on the pupils. The North End Talmud Torah overshadowed the South Providence school.

TEMPLE BETH-EL

Rabbi William G. Braude came to Providence in 1932. As spiritual leader of Temple Beth-El (Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David) on Broad Street, he set two goals for himself: to establish a school for chil-

*Hagiographa.

**Literally "Jewishness". In this context "the use of Yiddish".

†Pseudonym of Asher Ginzberg, meaning "one of the people".

‡*Bat Mitzvah*, the equivalent of *Bar Mitzvah* for girls. (Hebrew)

‡‡*Melamdin*, teachers. (Hebrew)

dren worthy of the name, and a library for adults and children. Matilda (Mattie) Pincus became the librarian and devoted her life to weeding out books and adding to the collection with a view to making it the storehouse of Judaica for the community that it is today.

The school was fortunate in acquiring as director Rabbi Mordecai Soloff, the author of many textbooks on Jewish history that are still being used in many schools in America.

After him came Rabbi Albert T. Bilgray, Beryl Segal, and Miriam Makiri, who developed the week-day Hebrew School, which operated in addition to the Sunday School and in which none but trained teachers with degrees in Education could teach.

TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL

The first Conservative synagogue in Providence with a school for children was Temple Beth Israel on Niagara Street, organized in 1921. It was fortunate to obtain a graduate of the David Yellin Teachers Seminary in Jerusalem. The graduating class of that year was sent to America to do "missionary work" among American Jews. Morris W. Shoham was sent to Providence. He remained there and in Woonsocket for 30 years, until he went back to Israel.

Temple Beth Israel had a school of about two hundred pupils learning modern Hebrew from an Israeli teacher. After Shoham came many distinguished teachers such as Seymour Krieger, Fania Gross, and Isaac Klausner, who still teaches there.

TEMPLE EMANUEL

Temple Emanuel, the second Conservative congregation in Providence incorporated in 1924, opened its doors in 1927 on the East Side. That year its religious school was opened. It was the objective of Rabbi Israel M. Goldman that it would be neither like the old fashioned Orthodox schools, nor the current one-day-a-week of the Reform Sunday School. The school immediately adopted the three-times-a-week program and was dedicated to utilizing textbooks and methods in keeping with the principles of Progressive Education.

Applying modern methods of Progressive Education together with deep-rooted traditional Jewish living were two teachers, husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Klein. They were both graduates of the Teachers College of the Rabbinical Seminary in New York, where teaching was a calling. They were teaching at Temple Emanuel when the

Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Providence was established in 1953. They are still active in the educational field. Other teachers of note who are still with Temple Emanuel are Lea Eliash and Fania Gross. Both of them brought traditions from East European modern schools.

SONS OF ABRAHAM

The last Orthodox *shul* to open in South Providence was Sons of Abraham on Prairie Avenue. Rabbi Abraham Chill was deeply concerned with the school. He personally taught the older classes and supervised the younger children. He and Chaya Segal, who is now teaching at the Beth-El school, fostered a generation of South Providence youngsters who have tender memories of the school. The atmosphere in the school was as important as the subjects they taught.

The *shul* was abandoned after a change in the neighborhood. Rabbi Chill retired to Israel, while Chaya Segal transferred her teaching activities to Congregation Ohave Shalom in Pawtucket, which had an excellent school. It was housed in an adjacent building, a luxury few schools enjoyed. The school attained its height during the tutelage of George Marcus, who is now at Camp Tel Noar in nearby Connecticut, and Chaya Segal. The school was no longer in existence when the Bureau of Jewish Education came to Rhode Island.

OTHER SCHOOLS

South Providence pioneered in forming many institutions in the community. What was begun in South Providence often became established in the North End and the East Side. Such was the case with the Hebrew Day School in Providence. The first parochial school was opened as the Chester Avenue Talmud Torah in South Providence by Rabbi Joshua Werner. Two posters describing the school are in existence. One announced the opening of the school and begins with a *Mazel Tov** to the Jews of Providence on the opening of an all-day Hebrew school in their midst. That was in July 1939. In January 1940 the community was invited to attend a mass meeting at the Bnai Yaacov (Sons of Jacob) *shul* on Douglas Avenue in the North End, at which the financial situation of the parochial school was to be discussed. The school is no longer in existence.

In 1945 two brothers, Rabbis David and Joshua Werner, one in the North End and the other in South Providence, announced the opening of a modern general and Hebrew day school. The name of the school

**Mazel Tov*, good luck. (Hebrew)

was to be Yeshiva Achei Temimim (Academy of Brothers Who Strive for Perfection), with teachers to come from New York. The school was to be housed in the Talmud Torah Building at the Bnai Zion *shul* on Orms Street, the same place where a glorious chapter in Jewish education had been written in earlier days.

The Yeshiva Achei Temimim was known, however, in the community as the Lubavitcher Yeshiva with emphasis on the strict observance of *dinim* (precepts). Examination of *tzitzit* (fringes)* and *broches*** for every occasion was more important than studying.

Not all parents were prepared for such a yeshiva, following the Lubavitcher Hasidic*** way of instruction, and the Achei Temimim closed its doors in 1946.

Still another group sought to open a day school using the name of Judah Touro, to be housed in the Community Center building. Very little is known about this enterprise. It appears to have closed as suddenly as it began.

The parents of the children who separated from the Lubavitcher Yeshiva founded their own school, adopting the program of Torah Umesorah.† They bought a building on Waterman Street and engaged as Rosh Yeshiva‡ Rabbi James I. Gordon, a graduate of the Yeshiva University of New York, an excellent educator. The Yeshiva is still in existence under the direction of Rabbi Nachman Cohen in a modern school building at 450 Elmgrove Avenue, now the Providence Hebrew Day School chartered in 1946. Instrumental in opening the Hebrew Day School on Waterman Street were Isaiah and Anna Segal, Louis Korn, and the late Archie Smith.

WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

In the 1920s the Workmen's Circle opened Yiddish schools in many cities in America. The Providence school was opened in 1924 at the Workmen's Circle Lyceum on Benefit Street. While the schools were not anti-religion, they did not include religious subjects in their curricula.

**Tzitzit*, fringes at the corners of the prayer shawl, meant as reminders of one's duties to the laws of Judaism. (Hebrew)

***Broches*, blessings recited on various occasions. (Hebrew)

***The Lubavitcher Hasids were a very pious sect of Orthodox Jews, named after a Russian town which was the seat of its leaders. They are now centered in New York in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

†The National Society for Hebrew Day Schools. The Providence Hebrew Day School is a constituent member.

‡*Rosh Yeshiva*, head of the academy. (Hebrew)

The subject matter was uniform in all of the schools. Yiddish was the basic language of instruction. Yiddish literature and the classic Yiddish writers were as familiar to the pupils as their own names. Jewish history was taught in the light of modern interpretations, and God had no place in the shaping of history. It was a naturalistic approach to the past and present in Jewish life. Music and dance were integral parts of the school curriculum, as were creative drama and recitations. Labor and the struggle of working men and women for their rights were espoused by the children as they were by the parents who were all members of the Workmen's Circle, a fraternal order which served as the Red Cross of the laboring classes. These were the days of Eugene V. Debs, Morris Hillquit, Meyer London, and Norman Thomas. Their pictures were all displayed on the walls of the school rooms, as they were indeed on the walls of the meeting rooms and halls of the Lyceum.

There were in fact two branches, one on Benefit Street and one on Willard Avenue in South Providence. The teachers were Rose Ash of New York and Beryl Segal. The war years played havoc with the Workmen's Circle and with the schools. In the 1940s the school closed its doors in Providence.

The Congregation of Ahavath Sholoam on Howell Street, now completely erased for the University Heights development complex, had an Orthodox school with the usual subjects of a religious curriculum. The school attained its height during the years when Mark Hanopolsky, now deceased, was director-teacher.

Woonsocket, though a community small in numbers, nevertheless had a school worthy of a larger city. Charles Miller was a teacher in the fullest sense of the word. Cut off from associations with other teachers, he had to devise methods of his own. He of all teachers insisted on *Ivrith BeIvrit*,* as the natural method was called. He was a disciple of Ben Yehudah,** speaking only Hebrew. When Miller became ill Woonsocket brought Morris Shoham from Providence to take his place, and thus the school once again was in good hands.

HEBREW EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE

The Hebrew Educational Institute, the forerunner of the Jewish Community Center, operated an Orthodox school unaffiliated with any congregation. Rebecca Miller and Abraham I. Shoham were the teachers in

**Ivrit*, the Hebrew language. (Hebrew)

**Eliezer Ben Yahudah (1858-1922), father of the modern Hebrew language.

this five-times-a-week school. With the passing of the Institute and the rise of the Community Center the school was reduced to a Sunday school.

Temple Beth Sholom, at the corner of Rochambeau Avenue and Camp Street, was an offshoot of the old Ahavath Sholom. The new synagogue had a school building that might have been the envy of many a school. It had a succession of teachers, but the school had to close because of insufficient children.

On Sunday, June 20, 1920 the citizens of Phenix and Arctic, Rhode Island were witnesses of an unusual parade. A procession of Jews marched from the town of Phenix through Arctic, carrying a Sefer Torah to be installed in the synagogue and Talmud Torah just founded, the congregation to be named Ahavath Shalom (Lovers of Peace). Rabbis and Cantors from Providence participated. Cantor Smith and his choir from the Bnai Zion *shul*, Cantor Keller from the Robinson Street *shul*, and a band of musicians from Boston provided the music. This was duly advertised in a handbill printed in Yiddish and English inviting one and all to join the festivities.*

This was the picture of Jewish Education until mid-century. Though the schools pursued the same goals, there was little coordination among them.

With the advent of the Bureau of Jewish Education an effort was made to unify them and to give them a sense that they were not alone. The community now watches over them and is ready to help them solve their problems.

NOTES

¹Adelman, David C.: Early days of the Providence Jewish Community. *RIJHN* 3:148-159, (Dec.) 1960.

²*Ibid.*

³Adelman, David C.: Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David, the Early Years. *RIJHN* 3:195-239, (May) 1962.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David. Laying of the Cornerstone and Dedication. *RIJHN* 3:240-261, (May) 1962.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Documentation of much of the information is difficult to come by. Many of the facts herein have been obtained by the writer through personal communication from individuals who attended these schools or remember them.

*For more on this synagogue see page 410. As noted in a footnote to Mrs. Twersky's paper, it was known locally by its Yiddish designation Avas Sholom. Ed.