THE JEWISH WOMAN LIBERATED

A History of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association

by Eleanor F. Horvitz

The need for an organization in Rhode Island to provide women with a dignified loan service was first broached among a group of women meeting at the home of the late Mrs. Israel Sydney on Jefferson Street in Providence. From this discussion the idea of a women's loan association was germinated. The decision to set up such an organization was made later at the home of the late Mrs. P. Shatkin, the association's first president. Thus the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association came into being.

A woman's dilemma—worries about her relatives in Europe, for whom a few dollars for Passover would mean so much. Her daughter in the meantime needs a new coat for school. How can she afford both? With her husband in charge of the family's finances, she has no way of supplementing her "table" money. Her husband on the other hand has a source from which he can borrow, the Gemilath Chesed or the Hebrew Free Loan Association, as the name has been rendered in English. When the Providence organization was first formed in 1903 a man could borrow up to $25. As the capital of the Association grew, the upper limit for loans was increased.

In a paper concerning the organization, its activities were described in this way: "These loans are made without interest or any other charge whatsoever, on easy repayments, thus enabling those in financial distress to go into or stay in business, marry, continue their studies, bury their dead, celebrate the high holiday, in short, to live as self-respecting members of the community."[1]

There was no such opportunity over the years for the woman who was faced with similar financial problems. There were women, however, who were aware of the need for their own sex to have the same opportunity for borrowing as did the men. They realized that it was also important that a woman be enabled to borrow on her own, without endorsement from her husband, in whose name any possessions or property would likely be held.

In pursuit of this goal a group of concerned women met on June 15, 1931 for the purpose of establishing an organization to be called the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association. A loan fund would be made available from which women could borrow funds without interest and without

MRS. HARRY SHATKIN

Organizer and First President

their husbands' endorsements. Quietly and with the knowledge that the transaction would be kept in strict confidence, a woman could now obtain money to send to her poor relatives in Europe, or for buying a coat for her daughter. Her husband need not know. She could pay the loan back at a modest fifty cents or one dollar weekly. At the Association's inception she could borrow up to $25 (this sum increased in later years), an amount which she might never have been able to accumulate on her own.

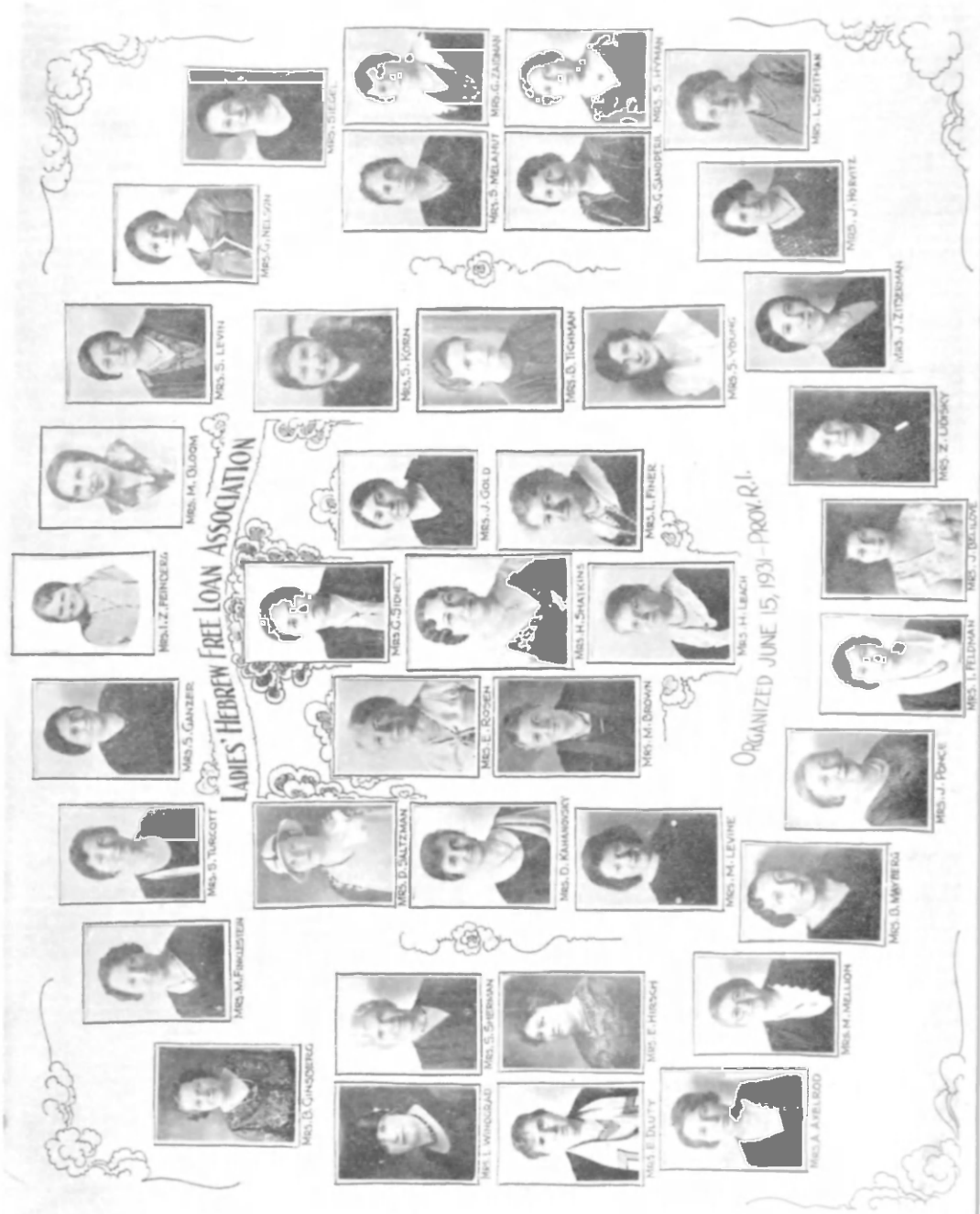
The concerned women who constituted the charter members of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association were: Mesdames A. Axelrod, J. Belilove, M. Bloom, M. Brown, E. Dluty, I. Feinberg, I. Feldman, L. Finer, M. Finklestein, S. Ganzer, B. Ginsberg, J. Gold, E. Hirsch, J. Horvitz, S. Hyman, D. Kahanovsky, S. Korn, H. Leach, S. Levin, M. Levine, B. Mayberg, S. Melamut, M. Mellion, G. Nelson, J. Ponce, E. Rosen, D. Saltzman, A. Samdperil, B. Seigel, H. Shatkin, L. Seitman, S. Sherman, G. Sydney, B. Tichman, S. Turcott, Z. Udisky, L. Winograd, S. Young, G. Zaidman, and J. Zitserman.

A copy of the loan application form is shown (on page 506).

Mary Sydney Ostrow (Mrs. Philip), who is the daughter of a charter member, Mrs. Israel Sydney, describes her home as a sort of "branch office" for those who sought to borrow. Mrs. Ostrow recalls that her mother attributed her knowledge of Jewish loan societies to her father, who had established a *gemilath chesed* in Europe.

A borrower was issued a book in which the loan was recorded. Loan payments were recorded in the book at the Sydney home. Located at 142 Jefferson Street, it was convenient for women of the North End of Providence either for making application for a loan or making the weekly payments. As documented in the old account books of the organization, Mrs. Sydney or her daughters brought the money which she collected to the Providence downtown office located in the Arcade Building. Mrs. Ostrow as a young girl was recruited to fill out the loan application forms for those who could not read or write English. Mrs. Sydney frequently acted as endorser. Very few borrowers failed to pay back their loans, perhaps one or two per cent. Her mother, or any of the other members who acted as endorsers, would make good on defaulted loans.

Another "branch office" for the convenience of those who lived in South Providence was located in the home of Mrs. David Baratz. She was a very active member and an officer of the organization throughout


LADIES' HEBREW FREE LOAN ASSOCIATION
ORGANIZED JUNE 15, 1931 - PROV. R.I.
MRS. I. Z. FEINBERG
MRS. H. OLOOM
MRS. S. LEVIN
MRS. S. GANZER
MRS. S. TURCOTT
MRS. M. FINKLESTEIN
MRS. D. GINSBERG
MRS. G. NELSON
MRS. S. SIEGEL
MRS. S. MELANUT
MRS. G. ZAIGMAN
MRS. G. GANOPEL
MRS. S. HYMAN
MRS. L. SEITMAN
MRS. J. HURVITZ
MRS. J. ZITZERMAN
MRS. Z. LIPSKY
MRS. J. DALLOVE
MRS. I. FELDMAN
MRS. J. PRICE
MRS. D. MAYBERG
MRS. H. MELLION
MRS. A. AVELROD
MRS. S. KOSEN
MRS. D. TIGHMAN
MRS. S. YOUNG
MRS. J. GOLD
MRS. L. FINER
MRS. H. SHATKINS
MRS. H. LEACH
MRS. G. SIDNEY
MRS. E. ROSEN
MRS. M. BROWN
MRS. D. SALTZMAN
MRS. D. KAHANOVITZ
MRS. H. LEVINE
MRS. I. WINOGRAD
MRS. S. SPERGAN
MRS. E. HIRSCH
MRS. E. DUTTY

its existence. Mrs. Baratz stated in an interview that among the accounts which she handled only one was not repaid. In that instance the woman had died. Her endorser refused to honor her commitment and consequently was never again asked to act as co-signer. Mrs. Baratz spoke of the enthusiasm and dedication of the women who served on the board. They held weekly meetings.

Listed in the account books of the organization are the names of the members who were responsible for collecting payments on loans and for turning the money in at the main office or "branches." A professional collector, Samuel Tatz, also according to Mrs. Ostrow did some collecting for the group.

The Early Years 1931-1942

Esther Syndney Bloom (Mrs. Manuel), another daughter of Mrs. Israel Sydney, acted as treasurer of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association for the entire period of its existence. It is from her records that we have extracted the following information. The first check was issued on October 3, 1931 for the purchase of bookkeeping books at a cost of $7.15. Subsequent checks for expenses to set up the loan society included payments to Liberty Printing for receipt books and advertisements. Now that they were in the business of loaning money, they had to advertize this service. One of the vehicles for publicity was the Ladies' Hebrew Union Aid Association, which had been chartered in 1890 "to give aid and charity to the poor."[2]

In the first month of its existence the Association paid $3.00 to Zinn's restaurant for use of a meeting room. Expenses for setting up the organization were minimal.

From the forty members who organized the association and their modest dues and donations, the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association grew rapidly. After five years, according to an audited statement of condition on November 30, 1936, their assets were $2,590.74. This sum was made up of loans receivable of $1,490.65 and cash in banks of $1,100.09. Their income for the year 1935-36 was derived from dues, $501.65 (dues for members were $1.00 per year); donations of $24.86; luncheon, $381.71 and $9.80 from an accompanying raffle; sale of advertisements $56.00; and an item called "cards", $8.00. The total from all sources was $982.02. Expenses were kept very low, amounting to only $376.49, which included rent of $120.00 for the year, stationery and printing of $118.78, and office expenses of $89.90. Sixty-seven women borrowed from the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association that year.

APPLICATION FOR LOAN *No.*

FROM THE

Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association

Month.....Date .....Year.....

I, the undersigned, apply for loan of_____Dollars,

I promise to pay .....monthly.....weekly.

My Name is _____

I now reside at _____

Married..... Widow..... .....

Husbands Name _____

Occupation _____ Address _____

Indorser Name _____

Address _____

Indorser Name _____

Address _____

REMARKS: _____

Providence, R. I._____193___ No.

After date, for value received, I, we, or either of us promise to pay to the order of THE LADIES' HEBREW FREE LOAN ASSOCIATION

_____ Dollars

payable at the office of the payee at the rate of _____ Dollars per week until paid in full. Failure to pay four installments when due shall cause the entire unpaid balance to become due and payable at the option of the holder.

_____

_____

_____

_____

The total amount borrowed was $1,464.50. The majority (57 women) borrowed the limit of $25.00, but 3 women borrowed $15.00 or $10.00, and one only a dollar.

To celebrate their fifth anniversary the Association held a "Fifth Jubilee Loyalty Luncheon" at the Arcadia Hall on 109 Washington Street in Providence on March 18, 1937. The president at that time was Mrs. David Saltzman, who in her opening remarks said: "We may all admire, with pride, the wonderful strides that our organization has made in this short span of time. From a mere nucleus of an idea, it developed to embrace today a goodly portion of our Rhode Island Jewry. May I suggest that on this, our 5th anniversary, we represent a solid organization whose influence is felt for goodness and kindness in our Jewish community. It is a part of all of us, and I know that everyone who has come here this day had some part in lending a helping hand to this accomplishment. I thank you all for your kind co-operation and hope that we may all continue to strive for success, for our ideal, a Gemilath Chesed."

Chairman of the day, Mrs. Maurice Prager, added the following: "Our main aim, after all, is to make our organization not just another Jewish organization, but an outstanding institution for goodness and lending a real helping hand to those who need it in our Jewish community. I am confident that in the future, as in the past, you will all continue to lend your aid and support in this worthy cause".

The Seventh Annual Luncheon and Bridge was held at Zinn's Banquet Hall at 133 Mathewson Street, Providence, on March 22, 1939. Mrs. Joseph W. Strauss, President, greeted those present with these words: "By being present at this our Seventh Donors Luncheon you have been instrumental in furthering and helping to success a most worthy cause; a cause which has in its own way given to the Jewish people of this community the assurance of a brotherhood and sisterhood in their most trying times; a cause which stands ready to help those who are in need without humiliation or embarrassment; a cause which embodies one of the most sacred traditions of our Jewish heritage, Gemileth Chesed.

"The many hundreds of applicants that have been granted loans coupled with the increasing membership is ample proof of the worthiness of this noble work. For those who have already benefited and those who in the future will need its assistance, the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association will carry on with the motto, 'A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed' . . . ."

The chairmen of the program, Mrs. David Saltzman and Mrs. Benjamin Schuster, recognized the pressures on the Jewish community of Rhode Island to aid the troubled Jews in Nazi dominated countries: "None of us is unmindful of the fact that in these hard times, when the Jewish people are called upon to do so much to alleviate the suffering of our brethren overseas, it is quite an arduous task to call upon them further for local causes. At this time, however, we believe the Jewish community, as well as ourselves, have come to recognize the worthiness and great benefit of our work as a Jewish Ladies' Free Loan, for those in need in our own city.

"Even previously we were overawed with the willingness with which our workers took upon themselves their tasks, as well as their profound loyalty to the cause itself."

Tenth Anniversary

On March 31, 1941 the ladies celebrated their tenth anniversary with a luncheon in the Empire Room of the Crown Hotel on Weybosset Street in Providence. Mrs. Joseph W. Strauss, president, gave a history of the society relating its origins and its growth:

"Ten years ago a group of women gathered at the home of our honorary president (Mrs. Harry Shatkin) and conceived the idea that there was need in Rhode Island for an organization dedicated to the ideal of a gemilath chesed for women.

"Each member of this group contributed a sum of money to start a fund, and there was organized and consequently chartered the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association, whose main object is to loan small sums of money without payment of interest to women who are in need.

"Its early years were beset with many obstacles and oppositions, but this was soon overcome and by virtue of its character, that loans be made in strict confidence without embarrassment or humiliation, its necessity became apparent and it grew from a mere handful of women with a starting fund of about $190 to the organization of today, with a membership of over 600 women and a loan fund covering the distribution of many hundreds of dollars.

"At this tenth milestone of our existence we have granted $25.00 loans to over 1800 applicants."

The treasurer's annual report of 1942 showed assets which included $1,110 in bonds, $291.24 in a bank account, and $1,000.75 in accounts

receivable. In that year loans totalling $1,415.00 had been paid out. Expenses for rent, donations to other charitable institutions, luncheon, and printing totalled $707.34. One item of interest was the payment of $25.00 for purchase of a typewriter! They received $238.25 in dues and donations, $515.33 from the annual luncheon, and $1,577.85 repaid from loans.

In its short history the organization was not free of crises. At the Seventh Annual Luncheon there was reference to the "suffering of our brethren overseas". At the Fourteenth Annual Luncheon held on January 24, 1945 in the Narragansett Hotel on Dorrance Street in Providence concern was expressed about World War II.

In her presidential remarks, Mrs. Isadore Feldman stated: "It's my hope that this terrible and heartbreaking war will soon come to a victorious end and that our organization will continue the fine work it has been doing in our community."

They Share Their Money

The monies which were collected from dues, donor events, and other sources accumulated in the treasury. The members zealously raised more money than was needed for loans. As a result of the excellent repayment of loans, there was little loss through default. Mrs. Bloom's records documented donations to other charitable groups by the Association. These included the Jewish community servicemen's affairs, the United War Fund, the cancer drive, the Ladies' Hebrew Union Aid, the League of Jewish Women, the Community Chest, the Pioneer Women, the United Jewish Appeal, the General Jewish Committee, and Red Cross, among others.

As the general economy improved (and one can speculate about better access for women to the family financial resources), the loans became fewer and more of the treasury money went to other charitable organizations. In the Association's accounts of 1948, for example, a $100 contribution to the Brandeis University Library was noted.

On October 11, 1953 a ceremony took place at which the Association presented a check for $5,000 to the Building Fund of the Jewish Home for the Aged of Rhode Island. This is recorded in a news item in the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald* of October 23, 1953, illustrated by a photograph with the caption: "Hebrew Free Loan Association gives $5,000 to Home for Aged: Mrs. David Baratz, president of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association presents a check for $5,000 to Jacob I. Felder,

Mrs. Manuel S. Bloom, Treasurer of the Jewish Home for the Aged, receiving check from Mrs. David Baratz, President of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association.

president of the Jewish Home for the Aged. The money is earmarked for the Home's Building Fund." Watching the presentation ceremony were: Mrs. Manuel S. Bloom, treasurer of the Association; Jacob Licht, board member of the Home; Mrs. Jacob Licht and Mrs. David Saltzman, honorary vice-presidents of the Association; Mrs. Harry Shatkin, honorary president; Max Winograd, vice-president of the Home; Irving I. Fain, board member and co-chairman of the building committee; and Mrs. Joseph W. Strauss, honorary vice-president and chairman of the women's donation committee. (See illustration on page 510).

The Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association is Disbanded

The treasurer's records indicated that there was little activity in the organization after the $5,000 grant to the Home for Aged. On February 15, 1965 a memorandum listed the following assets: "Typewriter; cabinet with Mrs. Proger; cabinet with Mrs. Bloom." Another note listed Loans Receivable as inactive since April 1958. The office furniture had been given to a Mr. Snow.

On June 20, 1965 the final meeting of the organization was held, and minutes of that meeting were recorded as follows:

"A meeting of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association was called to order by the president, Mrs. Hannah Baratz, at her home, 29 Laura Street. The following facts were noted:

"The organization has ceased to function because the need for which it was originally formed no longer exists.

"The office in the Lederer Building was closed in June 1958.

"The few outstanding accounts receivable could not be collected.

"A motion made by Mrs. Bessie Shatkin and seconded by Mrs. Rose Licht, honorary president and honorary first vice president, to close the books and give the balance in the treasury to a worthy cause was carried.

"A motion was also carried not to renew the charter.

"Those in attendance at the meeting were: Hannah Baratz, President; Rose Bilsky, Vice President; Bella Tichman, Charter Member; Ruth Jurmann, Recording Secretary; Pia Lipit (Rubin), Mrs. Philip Ostrow, Member at Large; and Esther Bloom."

The minutes were signed by E. L. Bloom, Secretary pro tem.

As for the disposition of the funds to a "worthy cause," a memorandum dated July 20, 1967 read:

"The treasurer and president were authorized to donate $1,000 to the G.J.C. (General Jewish Committee) Emergency Fund. This cancelled $345.44 in the savings account at Industrial Trust Company and $654.56 from the account at Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company.

"With a balance on hand of $230.92 and a few small outstanding bills, Mrs. Shatkin and Mrs. Licht recommended that the remaining $200.00 balance be given to the Jewish Home for the Aged. This was approved by the following: Mrs. Shatkin, Mrs. Licht, Mrs. D. Baratz, president; Mrs. R. Bilsky, vice president; Mrs. B. Tichman, charter member; Mrs. P. Ostrow, member at large; Mrs. E. Bloom, and secretary, Ruth Jurmann."

The active life of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association was no more than twenty years, but in that short period it provided many women with a resource from which they could borrow for any purpose whatever with no more collateral than their own signatures. Organizations such as the Ladies Union Aid had always been available to charity in the Jewish tradition of anonymity, but it still was charity in the recipient's eyes. The Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association provided them with a vehicle for assistance which permitted them to maintain their self-reliance without, in their minds, the stigma of "handouts" or charity. Thus, along with such privileges as the right to vote, the privilege among the Jewish women of Providence to borrow on their own recognizance was an early step toward the goal of the liberated woman of today.

REFERENCES

1. Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes 1:129, Dec. 1954.
2. Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes 2:24, June 1956.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the gracious assistance of Mrs. Philip Ostrow, for interviews on March 31, August 14, and October 1, 1978.

Interview with Mrs. David Baratz on September 25, 1978.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS AMONG RHODE ISLAND JEWS: A STUDY BASED ON ORAL HISTORIES

By Sonya Michel

One of the richest sources for the study of Rhode Island Jews lies in the recollections of older members of the community. Many of them came as immigrants to this country about the turn of the century. They established themselves in the ensuing years and have contributed to social, cultural, and economic development both inside and outside the Jewish community for decades. Most of them have kept no systematic records of their activities, nor have they compiled autobiographies. Thus oral history becomes an important method for documenting their lives and at the same time increasing our understanding of the complexity of American Jewish social history.

Accordingly, in the spring of 1978 I began an oral history project at the Jewish Home for the Aged of Rhode Island on Hillside Avenue in Providence. I interviewed seven residents, four women and three men. Although they were chosen more or less at random, and although there are many differences among their lives, there is also a good deal of commonality, which I shall describe in this paper.

First, I should like to introduce my "subjects" in alphabetical order. None of them was actually born in Rhode Island, so it is interesting to trace the twists and turns of their individual lives which brought them here. Max Alexander was born in a small town in Germany in 1891. He fought in World War I, and then emigrated to America in 1923 when the dangers of Nazism became obvious in his home town. Mr. Alexander first went to Detroit, and then to Chicago. After a series of restaurant jobs, he worked in an orphanage and then in an old people's home in Chicago. He married in 1928, and his wife, Nadia, was active in many of the institutions which Mr. Alexander served. In 1940 the Alexanders came to Providence, where Mr. Alexander served as superintendent of the Jewish Home for the Aged until his retirement in 1963. After retirement he "loafed" and pursued painting. One of his early canvases, now hanging in the newly-renovated "old" wing of the Home, pictures that building when it was under construction in 1956.

Supported in part by a grant from the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

Bertha Brill was born in Austria in the 1890s (she is unsure of the date) and came to the United States as a small child. Her family lived in Brownsville, Brooklyn, for a while and then joined relatives living in Providence. As a young woman Mrs. Brill worked as a salesgirl at the Outlet Company department store and then as a chocolate dipper at Gibson's Candy Factory in Providence. She married in the 1920s and promptly had her first child. She returned to work in the candy factory during the Depression. Mrs. Brill remained close to her parents. She felt that it was important for her to care for them when they became aged. She and her sister went weekly to clean and shop for them, even though she had her own family responsibilities and many personal medical problems as well.

Caring for her parents also had an important value for Anna Frucht. She was born near Odessa in Russia in 1902, and came to Rhode Island at the age of three. Her father became a peddler in Central Falls and eventually opened a dry goods store in Pawtucket. Anna became a "mill rat," as she puts it, working as a bookkeeper at several of the textile mills in the Blackstone Valley. In 1949 the firm for which she was then working moved South. Anna was asked to go along, but she was unwilling to leave her parents. So she remained here. She became the bookkeeper at the Jewish Home for the Aged several years after Max Alexander took over as superintendent. Anna not only was in charge of the books, but also became an unofficial social worker (a function she continues to perform now as a resident of the Home.) She lived at home with her parents and cared for them until they both died in their eighties.

Jack Lapin arrived in this country as a young man of twenty after a trip from Byelorussia that lasted two years. In order to avoid conscription by the Bolshevik army in 1917, he was smuggled across the Russian border into Poland. He waited in Warsaw, first for a passport, and then for other members of his family who decided to join him. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was instrumental in channeling funds sent to Jack from members of his family who had already arrived in this country. They also helped untangle a good deal of red tape. Although Jack describes his bachelor days in Warsaw as a time for adventure and experimentation, once he married he upheld traditional commitments to family and religion, which have remained significant throughout his life.

Celia Parvey was exposed to both secular and Jewish influences, which she combined in a lifelong absorption with music of all kinds. Born

on the lower East Side of New York in 1892, Mrs. Parvey was trained in piano and singing from the time she was a child. She began early to share her talents and skills with others: as a high school student she taught music to children at the Educational Alliance, a settlement house in Manhattan. She began studying to become a kindergarten teacher at Normal College (now Hunter College), but left the program in 1913 to marry Doctor Harry Parvey, a dentist from Providence. She soon returned to her music, continuing her own training in singing, organizing a children's choir at Temple Beth-El and performing as a soloist at other Jewish temples around Providence. She was active in musical organizations such as the Chopin Club, the Rhode Island Federation of Music Clubs, and the Providence Community Concert Association. Jewish community services also claimed her time; she volunteered for the Temple Beth-El Sisterhood, The Miriam Hospital, and the Jewish Home for the Aged. Upon her husband's death in 1943 Mrs. Parvey had to give up much of her community activity and go to work as a supply clerk at the Quonset Point naval base. She held that job for 20 years, pursuing her other interests in the evenings and on weekends. She currently continues her community service as record secretary for the Residents' Council at the Home.

Minnie Rosenfield also came to Rhode Island as a bride. Born into a large family in Hartford, Connecticut in 1882, she left high school at midpoint to work as a salesgirl in G. Fox and Company, a prominent department store in the area. Eventually she became head of her department there. Minnie's brothers and sisters also continued to live at home after they went to work, contributing their wages to the family coffers. At the center of this lively household was Minnie's mother, who watched carefully over a number of real estate holdings while caring for her family. Minnie met her husband, Marcus Rosenfield, while visiting relatives in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. When she first came to live in that largely French-speaking community, she found herself as much at a loss as any "greenhorn." "It was anything but a Shangri-la to me," she recalls. "You went into a department store, they wouldn't say good morning or goodbye. If you didn't talk French, they wouldn't talk to you."* Minnie had two children and added to her family responsibilities a job at a children's clothing store in Woonsocket. She is now an avid reader and an enthusiastic fan of her farflung grandchildren.

Of the people I interviewed, Sam Saltzman is the most recent arrival in Providence, having pursued cultural and political activities for

*All quotations taken from taped interviews. See list at end of article.

many years in New York before coming here. He was born in a small town in Poland in 1893 and as a youth joined the Bund, an East European organization which attracted Jewish workers interested in the development of Yiddish culture and socialist politics. Self-taught except for his early religious education, Mr. Saltzman became a popular lecturer and teacher in Yiddish cultural circles in this country. Working in the needle trades in New York, he also participated in the progressive wing of the trade union movement. Mr. Saltzman removed to Providence to live near his son, who practices medicine here. He attends the daycare program at the Home.

Why They Came to America

All of the persons I interviewed were either immigrants or the children of immigrants. There were two questions regarding each family's emigration: why they left, and why they came to a specific part of the United States. However clear the immigrants' intentions, events often intervened so that things did not work out as planned. Sam Saltzman's journey to America can serve as a case in point. He left Poland in 1911 seeking economic opportunity. Trained as a tailor, he and several friends set out for Australia: "Australia was a very young country at that time. . . . So we thought—good tailors—we go together to the country." In order to enter Australia, they were first required to establish residency in England, but Sam never made it. Bureaucratic tangles prevented him from making connections with his friends. So finally, contrary to his intentions, he reluctantly sailed to the United States instead.

Jack Lapin's reasons for leaving, as already noted, were quite different. He had no sooner passed his induction examination for the Bolshevik army than his mother came up with an escape plan. She told him to hide himself in the corn in the garden behind their house. The day before he was to go into service

> My mother gave me a loaf of bread and a five-dollar gold piece. She say, "Son, go ahead." I say, "Where am I gonna go? I've never been away from home."

His mother had already arranged for him to travel with two other families to meet a man who would smuggle them over the border to Poland. His escape was successful, but he did not reach the United States until two years later.

Anna Frucht's father also left Russia to avoid conscription. His departure was complicated by the fact that he was already a family man,

and emigration meant a loss of economic stability. This was especially difficult for Anna's mother, who came from a well-to-do family and, according to Anna, "didn't even know how to boil water" when she arrived here. Mrs. Frucht had some household help, but made all of Anna's clothing herself. "Where she learned to do that is amazing," Anna recalls, "because she never did anything like that—she made all my clothes and washed the floors and did everything."

Max Alexander left for different political reasons: the rise of fascism in Germany in the early 1920s. His brother and sister had already arrived here, and his parents were willing to part with him, he recalls, "because they felt too that the brown horde of Nazis spelt nothing good. All those who joined the Nazi movement were usually . . . no good material for decent behavior—misfits and school failures. So, 1923, they were beginning to march in Germany." People in the Alexanders' town were divided: some joined the Brown Shirts, while others joined the opposition party, the Social Democrats. "They tried to protect us," Max said, "but. . . ." His parents remained behind.

Waiting on the Pier

The people I interviewed were a fortunate group, for nearly every one of them who arrived as an immigrant had a network of friends and relatives waiting. They were important in helping to secure housing, employment, and information to aid in adjustment to the new country. For example, Anna Frucht's father went to Central Falls, Rhode Island, because he had friends there. He brought over Anna and her mother, and then several nieces and nephews. Jack Lapin first lived with a married sister (who had already sent him funds while he was delayed in Warsaw) and worked in her husband's handbag business. He had trouble learning the trade and turned to upholstery. By living with his sister he was able to save enough money to establish his own business. Bertha Brill's father first came to Fall River, Massachusetts, where he had relatives who taught him the soda (soft drink) business. Max Alexander had a brother in the wholesale meat business, who secured Max's first job as a dishwasher in a roadhouse to which he made deliveries. Max's first job in social work also came through a family connection, a tenant in his sister's house.

These incidents suggest that family networks were closeknit and efficient. Relatives saw to it that newcomers were equipped to deal with circumstances in this country. The earlier arrivals shared skills, opportunities, and whatever resources were available. No one was left

to fend for himself or herself, or thrown on the mercy of anonymous agencies outside the Jewish community.

The experience of these immigrants indicates that family loyalties were paramount among their values, and that they would take care of their own, even at great sacrifice to themselves. Sam Saltzman described his early days living with a married sister on New York's lower East Side:

> She was on the first floor, the toilet was in the hall, there were four tenants. Now each tenant, like my sister, had three children of her own, and she and her husband, and her husband's brother, and the boarder. It was a very small kitchen you came in, very small little bedroom for the boarder, and living room where everyone opened beds for sleeping. And every week another one of the four tenants took care to keep the toilet clean. Others had the toilet outside—downstairs. The water was on the second floor, or on the ground floor. You had to go down to bring up water. You didn't have water in the kitchen—there was no plumbing.

While living quarters were often cramped, they enabled immigrants to stretch their low wages and accumulate some savings. Living with relatives also provided immigrants with a sense of security and a source of familiar culture in the new world.

One of the most remarkable stories about family ties was related by Minnie Rosenfield. Minnie's mother had five children of her own, plus three of her husband's by a former wife. One day a young man came to the house in Hartford, Connecticut, claiming to be yet another son of Minnie's father, also by a former wife. I asked her, "You mean your father had *two* wives before your mother?" "If not more," Minnie replied. "He couldn't remember. She was afraid to open the door after that for fear it would be someone else walking in." Despite her qualms Minnie's mother took in the newcomer and made him welcome. She sent him to night school to learn pharmacy and set him up in business afterwards. As Minnie remembers,

> My mother bent over backwards to see that he got attention. All the stepchildren, she favored them. She didn't want to be called a stepmother, and she wasn't. Sometimes we complained, because they got more attention, but they were nice, they were good. . . . She wanted the family to be together—family, family. . . .

Minnie's mother also found cousins, and brought them into the family circle as well.

Keeping Up Ties

The people I interviewed were more likely to live with relatives while they were single, but even after they married many tried to live close by other family members. Multiple-family dwellings—the familiar New England "triple-decker three family house—often housed several generations of the same family. Bertha Brill lived on the second floor of a triple-decker when she married; her mother lived on the first floor, and her older brother on the third. This arrangement worked well until tensions arose between Mr. Brill and his brother-in-law. Bertha decided it was "time to move away," but her decision made her mother so angry that she refused to talk to her until the flat had been rented again. Besides her immediate family, Bertha had an uncle who lived close by. Both families attended *shul** together, and, Bertha remembers, "We'd fill the whole row."

Jack Lapin's brother bought a triple-decker for their mother in South Providence. "My mother's already a princess—she's got a home," he said with a smile. As long as Mrs. Lapin had unmarried children living at home, she rented out two of the three floors. When Jack married, he and his wife lived in the house for a while, then moved to Pawtucket, Rhode Island to live near his wife's mother. Jack's wife saw these arrangements as economy measures. The young couple lived with their families until they had saved enough to buy their own triple-decker.

Anna Frucht described the allocation of floors in the triple-decker which her father had bought together with several cousins. Anna's family lived on the first floor, because they had four children; one cousin lived on the second floor, because they had two children; and a second cousin lived on the top floor, because they had no children.

Relatives provided help and advice, particularly at moments of family crisis. When Minnie Rosenfield had her first baby, a son, her mother came from Hartford, Connecticut to be with her and take care of her house. When her second child was born, her mother took her son to stay with her in Hartford until Minnie had recovered. When the baby was home a month, her mother brought her son Paul back. Minnie recalls Paul's reaction to his baby sister:

"I've got a little sister for you."

"She's awful little."

"But you're gonna love her, aren't you?"

"But she's little."

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*Synagogue, (Yiddish)

I kept apologizing, why she was little. She was such a tiny baby. . . .

Parents of that generation took it for granted that they would help their children as much as they were able, and children automatically assumed that they would reciprocate when their parents needed help. Bertha Brill's parents did not want to live with her when they became old. So they kept their own place, and Bertha and her sister came to do their housework and shopping every week. This became a source of tension between Bertha and her husband, which her sister-in-law exacerbated: " 'She comes here and does all her mother's work, and you have to pay all the doctor bills,' " the sister-in-law told Mr. Brill. When confronted with this complaint, Mrs. Brill replied, " 'I was taught to respect my parents, and I'll do that as long as I live.' " Celia Parvey also wanted her father to live with her after her mother died, but he refused because he "didn't think it was right." He chose to remain with friends of his own generation and maintain his independence.

To Anna Frucht, caring for her parents was a matter of supreme principle. She never married, for she felt that, even if she lived upstairs from her parents, "I couldn't have been as good a daughter. When you're married and have children, you cannot, as much as you want to, . . . devote your life to your mother and father. I had no difficulty—they were part of me." When Anna was working at the Home, Max Alexander, then superintendent, urged her, " 'Anna, it's just too much, working all day and going home—being with them—at night. . . .' " But, Anna recalls,

> I never resented one moment of it. . . . It was good to know that I was with them, and I was just part of their lives. My mother used to worry about my not getting married. I don't consider that at all a tragedy. I would have liked to have had a husband and children, but—that's how my life went, and I didn't regret a bit of it. In fact, my dearest friend said, when my mother died, "Now you can start to live again." I could have killed her at that time. I said, "That is not true." Having taken care of them, you learn to love them more. And when they both died, I just felt—there was nothing. I had no one to take care of—I just had to worry about myself, which I had been doing anyway. I really felt so bereft. . . . However, I'm not sorry for any of that.

Work, Family, and Community

The values surrounding Jewish families were closely intertwined with the work life of the people I interviewed. Some expressed their

desire to help others through social work, both paid and volunteer; others took extra jobs or worked in addition to shouldering household responsibilities in order to make life more comfortable for their families.

Although American mythology has it that women stay home while men work, my interviews revealed that women of the immigrant generation not only worked before marriage, but afterwards as well, often returning to the same kinds of jobs. Minnie Rosenfield, for example, drew on her experience as a salesgirl and then department head at Fox's when she went to work at the Roberts Children's Shop in Pawtucket. However, her motivation for working had changed somewhat. She worked before marriage because "I liked the work. I liked the money. I liked to have what I wanted. Selfish, you know." And after her children were born she worked because her daughter had begun to complain about her clothes, and while she was in the children's shop she could pick up nice dresses and put them away for her daughter. "She always looked beautiful," Minnie recalled proudly. Minnie seemed to have little trouble managing her home and job simultaneously. Her husband never complained because Minnie saw to it that

> he had everything that he needed, and everything went on just the same. And I wouldn't go in too early. I'd have time enough before I left. I'd go in maybe about 11 o'clock and stay until 4 or 5. . . .

Bertha Brill's husband objected to her working, and she did so only when the Depression made it a financial necessity. She had worked in the candy factory for five years before her marriage. She loved the work and, "naturally," ate a lot of candy. Both men and women worked at Gibson's: the men made the candy, and the women dipped it. The men earned more money, but, according to Bertha, "in those days, it didn't bother me at all." There was no union in the factory. Most of Bertha's fellow workers were Italian, but everyone socialized and shared their skills. Bertha learned to dip from the other workers. When she returned to work, her children were still small, and she paid a neighbor to take care of them. One day she came home from work in bitter cold weather to find the children out on the street. She felt that she could no longer entrust them to her neighbor; so she quit and stayed home with them.

The phenomenon of married women working was really nothing new in Jewish culture. As Jack Lapin recalls, in the old country, "the women all worked. The women were the breadwinners. And the men, never. . . ." The women didn't resent this role because, according to Jack, "the man was the god. He was the boss—for the wife and for the

kids. She used to work like a horse, and he was the boss." In immigrant communities both men and women worked, and women were more likely to be recognized for helping to ensure that the family gained an economic foothold and were perhaps able to provide a boost for their children. Jack's wife took only a short time off work for the births of each of their three children, then left them in the charge of a Scottish woman who came in each day. At first, Mrs. Lapin worked so they could save enough to buy a house. But even after they had bought one, she continued working. Jack urged her to quit: "That's enough." But she replied, "No, that's not enough. The kids growing up, we gotta have vacation—we haven't had any—and money for the kids."

Celia Parvey also went to work to help put her children through college after her husband's death, but, in a sense, her 20 years as a supply clerk for the Navy was a second career. Previously, she had been a full-time volunteer, her husband's dental profession enabling her to donate her services to many community organizations. Most of her work was related to music. One of her first experiences was with the children at the Educational Alliance settlement house in New York. Her cousin, a social worker there, arranged for her to work with some of the children who came in. "I'd get them in a group and play piano and tell them what it was, and then some of them wanted to learn how to play the piano." After moving to Providence Mrs. Parvey was asked to start a children's choir at Temple Beth-El, and she taught music to residents of the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island, then located on North Main Street in Providence. Mrs. Parvey also raised money for the Jewish Home for the Aged in the traditional way: "I used to go around with a little box—a *pushke**—and I used to go up the steps, three and four flights, and collect quarters and fifty-cent pieces.

Anne Frucht was able to combine her social concern with her job when she came to the Jewish Home for the Aged. When she first went to work, there were about 50 residents. She describes the Home as it was then:

> I felt so bad, it was such a dingy place. . . . See, I was doing social work even then, because if one of [the residents] came down and said. "Anna, call up my son. I haven't heard from him today"; "Write a postcard to my daughter" . . . and so forth, I did it. I didn't even give it a thought. I was reprimanded for it by my boss. He said, "Anna, you don't do that. (We didn't have a social worker in those days.) I said, "Why? All I do is write a card or

*A small metal collection box. (Yiddish)

> make a telephone call." He said, "That's not your job." I said, "Well, there's no social worker here. How would you like it if you had a mother or father somewhere and someone couldn't sit and write a card for you? . . . Is my work satisfactory? Am I behind in my work?" He said, "No," so I said, "Then what do you care whether I do it? When my work is behind, I take it home to do it," which I did.

Anna's boss in those days, Max Alexander, had had professional training and experience, and, although he had altercations with Anna, he also had a record of making innovations in the institutions where he worked. When he went to the *Auldersine,* a German-Jewish home for the aged in Chicago, he tried to bring a "better Jewish spirit in there." Mr. Alexander said that his wife, Natalie, "deserves a lot of credit for bringing the spirit and congeniality to the Home. [The residents] were isolated in the Home when we came there. They didn't even have a telephone for the residents." (The former supervisor had not allowed one because she was afraid the residents would call friends and relatives to complain about the food.) But Mr. Alexander's philosophy was

> to individualize them, become a person, not just a number in the books. . . . I didn't mind whether they complained about the food or not, because we knew it was good.

Previously, while working in an orphanage in Chicago, Mr. Alexander had tried to reform the authoritarian discipline he found there. For instance, he had his own way of putting the children to bed:

> Now, I put it in the way of a game: "If you're done in three minutes or five minutes, you can have a story." So they went quietly, got undressed, got ready for the story hour. And they were very attentive to the stories . . . fairy tales, tales from their own Jewish background, King David and King Solomon.

Mr. Alexander did his own translations from German, and told the stories from memory.

He also did graduate work at the University of Chicago in family welfare and other subjects. At that time foster home care was being advocated as a replacement for the institutionalization of orphans. Mr. Alexander's opinion was, "It was a good plan to keep them in the family as long as possible. I was only worried that you couldn't find enough boarding homes for those children. It was a question of getting enough suitable parents." The philosophy of the Jewish orphanage where he worked was slightly different: "It connected with the family, tried to

reach out and put the boys and girls back into the family circle." Mr. Alexander himself was

> leaning more towards the family. . . . It also meant it would reduce our jobs. Still, we were working for the children's sake, to have them come through as a full citizen from the family, rather than from an institution. And there were some problems there. The children all couldn't find placement; especially when they were 16 or 17, it was difficult to be placed in a home. At a younger age, you could possibly break them in (more readily).

At the Jewish Home for the Aged in Providence Mr. Alexander fought for "higher standards and also for higher budgets—they went hand in hand. . . . The idea which I brought with me was to broaden the base of the Home and establish a membership to give it a solid foundation . . . so it would be a more regular income. . . . We succeeded in raising the funds to $300,000." The Home had 44 residents when he came in 1940, and 172 by the time he retired.

Mr. Alexander recalls that in both the *Auldersine* in Chicago and the Jewish Home in Providence the ladies' associations of volunteers often served as liaison between residents and the administration. "They visited often, and they brought back wishes to the board, and the board, in turn, could approach me to remedy the situation. . . . We didn't resent complaints because we were there to help them." Some of the volunteers had had social work training in college, and Mr. Alexander felt that all of them helped maintain the morale of the residents, in addition to making significant financial contributions to the Home.

At that time the superintendent had his own residence on the grounds of the Home, and, not surprisingly, Mr. Alexander's whole family became involved in the institution. His two daughters often went up to the "big house" to talk to the residents.

> . . . The younger one had a special friend, called her "Grandmother," . . . a woman who gave her a quarter each birthday. She accumulated about 13 birthdays from that woman. She took a good liking to that little girl.

Mrs. Alexander was also extremely active in the Home. Anna Frucht recalls that the Alexanders had worked out a division of labor;

> He took care of the office, the administration; she took care of every part of the kitchen, the laundry . . . the nursing department—she was the head of everything, although we had a head nurse.

She was paid a small salary, "not . . . enough to distinguish her from the other employees." Her motives for working had less to do with money than values; according to Mr. Alexander, "She spent so much time in the 'big house' . . . in order that we might have higher standards." Mrs. Alexander supervised painting and renovation, bringing the Home "up to date." Although the Alexanders' daughters also participated in the daily life of the Home, they sometimes resented the fact that their mother had little time to spend with them. But she tried to make them understand that her work made life better for the residents; so they finally agreed that she had to work "once in a while."

Carrying on the Culture

For Sam Saltzman community work took the form of preserving and spreading Yiddish culture. Yiddish literature was beginning to burgeon when Mr. Saltzman was a youth in Europe, and through Bund meetings in his home town he was exposed to politics and literature written, for the first time, in the "Jewish language." According to Mr. Saltzman, the Bund taught "why and what it means—all about revolution. And they brought in a new enlightenment in the mind of the Jewish people, why we have to always fight for justice and freedom for all people."

In New York Mr. Saltzman became active in Yiddish cultural groups. He belonged to one called, in English, the "Beggars," or "Beggars' Organization," which invited lecturers and speakers to their large meetings every Sunday. Sometimes the topic was political, sometimes literary. Poets and novelists came to read their work "a little bit to help us out and also to hear our discussion about it. It's not that they were just reading. They were reading, and they wanted us to discuss it and see, to improve it or not." Later, Mr. Saltzman himself became a popular speaker on cultural and religious topics, going around to some 35 or 40 cultural clubs in Manhattan and Brooklyn which had established a network. As Sam remembered,

> I didn't want to go to speak for money, I wanted to go to your club, give you a lecture, but you have good singers, you send them also to us, for nothing. Or, if I want from you to pay me for the carfare, if I took a taxi—you pay for the carfare. But it shouldn't be a business transaction—a cultural transaction.

After he married, work and family life curtailed his activity, but he continued to do as much as he could. Working in the needle trades, he was also active in union matters. Of the balance between paid work and scholarship, Sam said,

> I do it [speaking and writing] because I enjoy it. I didn't want to do it for money. I made up my mind, if the Jewish prophets, 90 per cent of them could work for their money or their livelihood, could I also work for my livelihood. And I didn't want to make a business out of it. I don't know so much.

What is notable about the community work of people such as Sam Saltzman, Anna Frucht, Celia Parvey, and the others I interviewed is that they combined traditional values, concerns, and culture with "modern" or American forms. Even American education did not eradicate the traces of a Jewish background: those who attended colleges and universities brought new methods and information back into the community. Celia Parvey and Max Alexander, for instance, were both trained in American schools. Mrs. Parvey attended what is now Hunter College in New York, learning the Montessori method of early childhood education. Later, she felt that this training helped her in teaching music to children and directing the Temple choir. At the University of Chicago in the '20s, Max Alexander studied with some of the leading welfare experts of his day, including the director of the Child Welfare League of America. He worked briefly with the public welfare department in Chicago, but spent most of his career serving Jewish agencies and institutions, applying what he had learned to bring about the kinds of improvements noted earlier.

Old Values . . . and New

In their personal lives, these people also combined old and new values. Although none of them had the formally arranged marriages common among Jews in Eastern Europe, most of them met their future spouses through family or friends. The women I interviewed were generally kept under closer surveillance than the men and felt more susceptible to parental influence. There was a double standard at work here. Young people of both sexes were ultimately controlled by the community, since young men who wanted to date Jewish women had to run the gauntlet of their families first.

Minnie Rosenfield's courtship illustrates how this occurred. When she went to visit her relatives in Rhode Island, they told her, "We've got a man for you." The match was so successful that Minnie "got a little excited," and she and Marcus Rosenfield went off to a judge and got married immediately. "I went home the next night and my mother gave 'what-for' because she had planned a nice garden wedding," Minnie remembers. Her mother said, " 'You're married, but you're not married. I didn't see you.' And she had a beautiful wedding for me."

Bertha Brill's future husband came from New York to Providence to attend a party for a niece who was engaged to one of Bertha's brothers. Her mother urged her to marry Harry Brill, even though they had not known each other very long. Bertha accepted her mother's authority. Anna Frucht's mother also attempted to influence her daughter's social choices, and Anna, too, was somewhat responsive—but she also had a mind of her own when it came to certain issues. "I wouldn't think of going out with a gentile fellow—I wouldn't do that to my folks. . . . But *caste* meant nothing to me. You know how they say in Jewish, 'a *shuster,* a *shneider*'—that always irritated me."*

These values once brought her into serious conflict with her mother. Anna had gone to an *Arbeiter Ring*** concert with the son of a weaver and a group of other young people. Her parents also attended the concert. When Anna came home, she found her mother waiting up for her. Mrs. Frucht confronted Anna:

> "You disgraced me, you absolutely disgraced me. Papa and I felt terrible. . . . How do you dare go out with this fellow?" I said, "Mama, we came in a group, he's a very nice fellow. I like him. . . . She said, "But his father's a weaver." I said, "So what?" She looked at me, she said, "Don't you realize you're above that sort of thing?" I said, "No!" I was so utterly, utterly stunned.

Anna's father attempted to be conciliatory, although he really took his daughter's side in such matters. He told her: "Look, Anna, you and I think one way, and Mama unfortunately thinks another way. But don't argue with Mama, don't make her unhappy." Anna replied, "Well Papa, I can't help it. I'll go out with anyone I want to, unless he's known to be bad or something."

Although some of the men I interviewed met their future wives in public settings, the accounts of their courtships revealed that these young women were closely supervised by their families. Sam Saltzman, for example, met his wife at the opera. She had obtained her ticket from a friend of Sam's who couldn't attend, and sat a few seats away from him. During the first act she annoyed one of the other men in the group by asking him questions about the plot. At intermission, Sam changed seats, and took over the explanations:

> "It's so this—and this—up 'til now; the second act, you'll see this and this." So she wouldn't have to ask me. "But, if something is

*" shoemaker, a tailor"—a Jewish saying denigrating these trades. (Yiddish)
**Workmen's Circle. (Yiddish)

> still not clear, I want you to ask me." I don't want her to be mixed up. . . . And that's it. When we finished, goodbye, she didn't ask me anything, I didn't ask her anything. But I know who she was—I knew she was from the family with six girls. I never cared to go up to the house—six girls! And that's all.

But the next day, Sam ran into her walking in Central Park with one of her sisters, who indicated that he had met with the family's approval. "She told me all about you—fine man," the sister said, "and I would like you to be invited to our house, come up to us." Sam replied, "All right, I'll come up some time. But I want to take your sister next Friday to the opera." Sam had already bought tickets. Fortunately, the sister gave her permission.

Jack Lapin ran into more opposition from the family of his bride-to-be, but he also behaved more boldly. When he first spotted her in Roger Williams Park, it was a case of love at first sight. He told his pals, " 'That's gonna be my wife.' " He went up to her and introduced himself. She told him her name was Chaya Goldstein, and invited him to a party that night at her home in Pawtucket. True love was nearly foiled at this juncture, because when Jack got off the trolley car, he found himself in *Pawtuxet*.* When he finally arrived at the party, he took advantage of his hostess's obvious relief to see him by stealing a kiss while they were alone in the pantry. As Jack tells the story,

> She was the *libling*** in the family—she was the youngest—and she couldn't go out with nobody except the brother used to go out with her. . . . The brother saw [the kiss]—I'm no good to kiss a girl the first day, you can't be any good.

For six months Chaya's family forbade her to see him, until one day Jack ran into her walking with her mother and brother and proposed on the spot. Her brother was still opposed, but Jack was allowed to call at the house, and Chaya's father took a liking to him. Mr. Goldstein believed he could tell about a man's character by playing cards with him, so he challenged Jack to a game of "21." Knowing nothing about cards, Jack lost the game, but won the father's approval. But it was another year before Mr. Goldstein found the proper day, according to the Jewish calendar, for them to marry. Thus, although the young men of this generation formally had more freedom than the women, the

*Pawtucket is north of Providence and Pawtuxet is south of Providence, a source of confusion for generations.

**Darling. (Yiddish)

actions of both were determined by the constraints exerted by the women's families.

Parental influence did not always end with the wedding ceremony. As noted above, many young couples continued to live with or near one set of parents or the other and turned to them for advice (or sometimes received it unasked). Again, it was often through women that traditions were transmitted. Of the three mothers I interviewed, two felt that they followed their mothers' childrearing practices fairly closely. Bertha Brill said she never read any books on child psychology. "That came naturally," she felt. She was not too strict and didn't try anything "modern." Minnie Rosenfield never read any childrearing guides either, but "learned from experience." Her mother's presence during the births of her children meant that she did not have to be isolated during periods of uncertainty or difficulty. Celia Parvey felt that she raised her children as her parents had raised her. Yet she also incorporated advice from articles on childrearing, which she read because she "thought it was a good thing to know." She also talked over certain things with friends. At the time her children were born child experts advocated "scientific mothering," and Mrs. Parvey seems to have accepted this philosophy to some extent. For, when I asked her whether she nursed her babies on demand or on schedule, her reply was emphatic: "Oh no, regular schedules and everything, just the way they should. I never did just because they were hungry or anything." She said that she was not permissive, but "kept them pretty much under the line." Although Mrs. Parvey felt that she had not strayed far from her parents' influence, her recollections suggest that she also credited the thinking of childrearing professionals, probably because of her own training in normal school. Mrs. Brill and Mrs. Rosenfield depended solely on their own experience, and that of their mothers and friends in these matters.

In terms of Jewish custom, these women followed tradition somewhat selectively. All of them came from kosher homes, but neither Mrs. Rosenfield nor Mrs. Parvey followed those rules strictly in their own households. Mrs. Rosenfield began married life keeping a kosher house, but once when she had gone to Hartford for a few days, her "kosher went haywire, because [her father-in-law, who lived with her,] says, 'Its clean, it's kosher,' " and spoiled her system. She never re-established it, although she continued to cook Jewish dishes, and Friday night dinners and holiday meals became important rituals she shared with her children and grandchildren. Celia Parvey never established a kosher kitchen, but she also cooked traditionally and bought her meat from a kosher butcher. I did not ask Mrs. Brill directly about how she ran her home,

but the interview suggests that she did not follow her mother in observing kosher rules. She performed chores for her aging parents and shopped for them, but her mother continued to do her own cooking.

This selective following of tradition is not uncommon among Jewish immigrants of this generation. While they did not always follow customs strictly, they did perpetuate—through cooking, holidays, literature, and other activities—a culture that is distinctly Jewish. It allowed them to maintain continuity with a way of life they had left behind, while living in the midst of a very different, and sometimes hostile, environment. Some of the persons I interviewed had lived in homogeneous Jewish neighborhoods in large cities such as New York and Chicago. But in Rhode Island they were more likely to live in mixed neighborhoods and to meet people from other ethnic groups through work and school. Although relationships with gentile neighbors and co-workers were friendly, they did not lead to intermarriage or a loss of Jewish identity for any of my subjects.

Yet it was clear that the old culture would not be preserved or reproduced here intact, not only because there were structural and cultural impediments inherent in the American environment, but also because, to many immigrants, this was not a desirable goal. For some, like Sam Saltzman, the break with Orthodox Jewish tradition had begun even before he arrived in this country. As he saw it, two influences created change in the Polish Jewish community in the 19th century, before emigration had even been considered: Hasidism, and Jewish socialism. "A very new spirit came into the Jewish people in Poland," he believes. "It started with Hasidism, the group that did their prayers in a different form, in a different way, with a happier way for praying. Not just 'Give me, give me hell, give me bread, give me this, give me that,' but just with happiness praying. And in a much shorter way." Although the Hasidic transformation remained within the realm of religion, it opened the way for secular developments in Jewish culture. Yiddish literature began to flower, and, according to Mr. Saltzman, " in a very short time we find a very fine literature in the Jewish language. Just to mention a few would be enough: Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, and Asch, and many, many others that enriched the language through their writing of this literature." The profession of Yiddish writing at the turn of the century bespeaks the intensity of a pent-up need among Jews for secular cultural expression. The Bund affirmed these cultural developments and linked them to socialist politics—also popularized in Yiddish.

Exposure to this combination was a powerful experience to Sam Saltzman as a young man. "I was raised under this influence. . . . When I was about eleven years old, I joined up with the Bund . . . where they gave me to read their proclamations and their other literature, so I informed myself a lot about the progressive movement. And I remained in the progressive movement in the Jewish language all my life. . . ." At age 13 Sam moved to the industrial city of Lodz, where he continued his association with the Bund. His mobility and exposure to urban secular influences made him a likely candidate for emigration.

As we saw earlier, Jack Lapin's emigration was motivated by an imminent crisis; but he, too, was exposed to city life while waiting in Warsaw, an experience which probably eased somewhat his transition into American life. Jack's father was also a Hasid, but his piety made him less worldly, rather than more. In name, his father owned a hardware store; in fact, his mother ran it. "He didn't care for his store," Jack recalls. "Just went to synagogue all the time, you know. That was his life." It didn't make much sense to Jack, but he had little choice.

> You can't say nothing. Your father and mother, they're something like God, you know. You got to keep your mouth shut. . . . When your mother said, "You sit up here," you sit up here with your father. . . . You got to—anything they say, you do it. Europe is different.

Jack picked up some new ideas from working in the store;

> People coming in the store, . . . and this one talks and this one talks. . . . I never told my father this, never told my mother this. My mother, she was more religious than my father. She never told him anything that was going on in the world. My father, he didn't care. All he know was the books, that's all. He was a good learner.

Jack's father died on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, and he left the *shtetl** a few years later.** Although he was initially frightened to leave, once he was freed from the constrictions of his parents and the enclosed culture of his home town, Jack explored other customs. In Warsaw, he had money to burn (relatives in the United States had sent him funds through HIAS), and he spent it on finery:

> I never had anything. I dressed up to kill, and with a cane. Everybody walked with canes up there, you know. And the canes had monograms. I didn't know what it means. To me it was a big thing.

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*Village. (Yiddish)

**At that time, the Bar Mitzvah was not the elaborate ritual we know today; a young man was simply called to the pulpit to read from the Torah scroll.

When the rest of his family came from Byelorussia, his brother said, "We are hungry, you're dressed up like a king." But then Jack helped him buy an outfit as well, and he was appeased.

Although Jack displayed outward signs of secularization (he also shaved his *payess** when he came here), the effects of his earlier training were strong, and he has retained his commitment to Jewish ritual to this day. Bertha Brill's history also indicates that changes in appearance do not always signify total acculturation. She recalls that, when her father first came here, he was teased whenever he took the streetcar to work in Cranston. Children would pull his beard and call him "Santa Claus." So after a while he shaved it off. He also wrote to his wife, who was still in Austria, telling her to let her hair grow. When her mother's older sister heard this, she screamed and said, *"Shloime sgven a goy in America."*** But her mother kept other traditions, remained kosher, and attended *shul* with the rest of the family. Thus it seems that Bertha's parents, like many other Jewish immigrants of that period, made certain adaptations in order to make life more livable for themselves, but preserved other customs which, for them, represented the core of their cultural and ethnic identity.

Taken together, the histories of the people I interviewed suggest that the Rhode Island Jewish community stems from a multi-faceted background. People came from many different countries in Europe, with stopovers at dozens of points both here and abroad. They came at different times and for different reasons, with no one set of religious or political commitments. They responded differently to cultural influences according to sex, age, and class.

Yet, even in this small and varied picture, we can detect certain commonalities and the texture of a distinctly Jewish culture, which these people have created and perpetuated. In each of the histories commitments to family and community have played an important part. At first, networks of relatives helped newcomers settle and find jobs. Then once the immigrants were established, they in turn began to help build a community for themselves. Their contributions took cultural, social, institutional, and financial forms. These immigrants did not produce carbon copies of Jewish life in the "old country"—nor was this their intention. The multifarious effects of the American context are evident

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*From the Hebrew *peot,* "Side earlocks" or "curls", the long unshorn ear-ringlet hair and sideburn—locks worn by very Orthodox Jewish males. (Yiddish)

**"Shloime has become a gentile in America". (Yiddish) *Schloime* is Yiddish for Solomon.

in many aspects of their lives. But when elements of American culture were introduced into the Jewish community, its members often adapted or translated them, giving them a distinctly Jewish flavor. The community itself provided a subcultural context in which traditional values could be expressed, customs and rituals maintained, and an American-Jewish identity formed. By hearing about this process from some of the people who participated in it, we begin to comprehend its richness and complexity.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

All interviews took place at the Jewish Home for the Aged of Rhode Island in Providence in May and June, 1978. I wish to thank the following people, who generously gave me their time, and shared with me the details of their lives: Max Alexander, Bertha Brill, Anna Frucht, Jack Lapin, Celia Parvey, Minnie Rosenfield and Sam Saltzman.

Tapes of the interviews, along with typed transcripts of their contents, are on deposit in the archives of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. All of the subjects have kindly consented to make their oral histories available for scholarly and educational purposes.

I should like to add a final note: Although I came to this project as an historian, with specific scholarly goals in mind, I came away from it feeling more strongly than ever my own sense of identity as a Jewish woman, the granddaughter of immigrants. I could not listen to these people recount their lives without feeling deeply moved by the courage and determination they showed, the kindness and loyalty they expressed, throughout their long and often difficult lives. The abstractions of the typical historical article cannot begin to capture the emotional richness of their experiences. I have tried in this paper to let these people speak in their own voices about their individual and collective histories, so that we can all learn about our history from the people who made it.

SOME REMARKS ON THE FRAGILITY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

by WILLIAM G. MCLOUGHLIN*

In celebrating the eloquent exchange of sentiments between Moses Seixas and George Washington, we honor an ideal which has yet to became a reality for many people in the world. Wars of religion, bigotry, and persecution are being waged today with increasing fury and devastation in Ireland, Africa, and the Middle East. But while celebrating our peace and freedom here, we ought to remember that true religious liberty and equality were not realities in the United States in 1790 and in some respects have not been fully achieved even today. Major battles had yet to be fought after 1790, and significant battles are still being waged in our courts and legislative halls today to preserve, sustain, and enlarge the rights of freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state.

Here in Rhode Island we are justly proud of the fact that Roger Williams was among the first to set forth the ideal of liberty of conscience and to put it into practice. But those who have studied Rhode Island's history know that Williams's ideal was not respected in the neighboring American colonies and was sometimes delimited even in his own. Most of you will recall that in 1761 the colony of Rhode Island declined to grant citizenship to two respectable Jewish merchants who applied for it, and from 1719 to 1783 the colony specifically exempted Roman Catholics from religious equality.

The views of Roger Williams were not generally honored in colonial America, and he had almost no impact upon our founding fathers during the Revolution. Insofar as the leaders of our Revolution favored separation of church and state, they appear to have done so from principles diametrically opposed to those of Williams. And for many who lived in the colonies in 1776, religious liberty meant little more than "toleration" for non-Protestants. The United States avoided having an established church system largely because the different Protestant groups could not agree upon which particular denomination should be *the* established church.

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Roger Williams, you recall, believed that church and state should be separated in order to preserve the purity and holiness of the church from the corrupting power and tyranny of the state as he had seen it in Europe and England. But Thomas Jefferson and our founding fathers believed that church and state should be separated in order to preserve the purity and sanctity of the state from the corruption and tyranny of the church. I know of no instance in which Thomas Jefferson (or any other founding father) ever quoted any work of Roger Williams in order to support the principles of religious liberty and separationism. Williams, except among a few outcast Baptists of that day, was an almost forgotten man by 1776.

Hence it is not surprising that, when we declared independence from England, we did not mention liberty of conscience or separation of church and state as among the principles for which we fought. There is no mention of religious liberty either in the Declaration or in the Articles of Confederation, which constituted our first constitution. On the contrary, in most state constitutions written after 1776 there were specific statements denying liberty of conscience—or at least denying equal rights to those who professed religious views contrary to those of the majority. Most of our state constitutions, it is true, contained some phrase honoring the liberty of conscience in principle, but most of them also denied the right to hold political office to persons who did not conform to the prevailing religious opinion in that state. The state of South Carolina declared in its constitution in 1778 that, "The Protestant religion shall be deemed, and is hereby constituted and declared to be the established religion of this state." The constitution of Maryland (a state often cited for its heritage of religious freedom) declared in 1776 that "the legislature may, in their discretion, lay a general and equal tax for the support of the Christian religion." Maryland also (like many other states) required all officeholders to be Christians. Delaware's constitution included an oath of office requiring belief in the Trinity; and many state oaths of office, including Vermont's (1779), specifically required belief in the divine inspiration of both the Old and the New Testaments. Not only did such oaths deny religious equality to Jewish citizens, but several states had oaths which excluded Roman Catholics from office. For example, oaths of office in New York and New Jersey required duly elected or appointed officials to deny allegiance to any foreign authority in either civil *or ecclesiastical* matters—a measure obviously designed to undermine *spiritual* allegiance to the Pope in Rome.

Thomas Jefferson, of course, opposed all of these test oaths, but in order to be consistent he had to argue that the United States of America was not a Christian nation. For saying this he was roundly denounced by most church-going Americans, and the most distinguished jurists in the new country flatly denied Jefferson's claim. In the famous case of New York *v.* Ruggles in 1811 Chancellor James Kent of New York sentenced a man to jail for blaspheming against the Christian ideal of God, saying that to do so was "to strike at the root of moral obligation and weaken the security of the social ties." The new nation, it appeared, could not be secure if its courts did not prosecute non-believers. As late as 1836 a man in Massachusetts was sent to prison for two years for printing a statement the courts there considered blasphemous.

It is ironic that, when Thomas Jefferson sought to dis-establish the Episcopal Church in Virginia and to establish his now famous statute of religious liberty, he was opposed by many of the leading citizens and church people, among them Patrick Henry, John Marshall, and George Washington. These Virginians believed that unless churches were supported by compulsory religious taxes, the community would suffer grave moral damage. So in 1778 Patrick Henry proposed a religious tax, the proceeds of which would be distributed proportionately among all existing denominations. To many this seemed both wise and tolerant. When George Washington was asked how he felt about Henry's bill for religious taxation, he made a statement which is, fortunately, not so well remembered or so celebrated as the statement he made here at Touro Synagogue five years later: "Although no man's sentiments are more opposed to any kind of restraint upon religious principles than mine are," he wrote, "yet I must confess that I am not amongst the number of those who are so much alarmed at the thought of making people pay towards the support of that which they profess." James Madison's famous "Memorial" in 1785 was directed expressly against this statement, and rightly declared that the power to tax is the power to destroy or to persecute. Yet today we are still struggling over this very same principle, not in regard to explicit church support, but in regard to the much more subtle church-state question of compulsory education.

It is sometimes forgotten that one of the great compromises entered into among the framers of our federal Constitution in 1787 involved this very same question. In 1787 all of the states in New England, except Rhode Island, still laid compulsory religious taxes for the support of religion. Had Jefferson's ideal of religious liberty prevailed in 1787, the

Constitution might well have undermined this religious establishment of the old Puritan churches in New England. Out of deference to New England the framers said nothing whatever in the Constitution about religious liberty or the separation of church and state (beyond prohibiting any religious test for federal officeholding). When Washington wrote to Moses Seixas in 1790, the First Amendment had not yet been adopted. And as we know, the first amendment was never ratified by some New England states because they were not yet ready to grant the principle of religious equality. Not until 1818 did Connecticut finally abandon its system of compulsory religious taxes; Massachusetts continued the practice until 1833. Not until the twentieth century did the United States Supreme Court, making use of the 14th Amendment, begin to apply the religious liberty clauses of the First Amendment to the states.

When Washington and Seixas in 1790 praised the new nation for having "a Government which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance," they referred of course to the absence of explicit *federal* laws discriminating against religious belief or practice. They did not, and could not, have been referring to state laws; the various states of the Union still had far to go before they fully understood the principles of Roger Williams or of Thomas Jefferson. Throughout the nineteenth century this struggle continued.

We are all familiar today with the acronym WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant). There is no doubt that the vast majority of Americans until well into the present century considered this to be a WASP nation—a nation, that is, dedicated to the principles, beliefs, and practices of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Public leaders (North and South, East and West) proudly said on public platforms, "This is a white man's country" and "This is a Protestant country." They meant, as the noted British observer, Lord Bryce, pointed out in 1886:

> In most States there exist laws punishing blasphemy or profane swearing by the name of God . . . laws forbidding trade or labour on the Sabbath . . . . The Bible is (in most States) read in the public State-supported schools. . . . The matter may be summed up by saying that Christianity is in fact understood to be, though not the legally established religion, yet the national religion. . . . They deem the general acceptance of Christianity to be one of the main sources of their national prosperity and their nation a special object of Divine favour.

Because America was "a chosen nation" in covenant with God to uphold Christianity—and particularly evangelical Protestant Christianity—"Americans conceive," Bryce said, "that the religious character of a government consists in nothing but the religious belief of the individual citizens and the conformity of their conduct to that belief."

The conformity of conduct is, of course, only partially a matter of law. In fact, by far the most powerful force of social conformity is public opinion. Where public opinion is strong and united it will sometimes even sanction the abridgment of its own laws and its own principles. Nowhere was this more flagrant than in the frequent disregard of Washington's famous words throughout the course of our history by local mobs and public opinion. The law might give to bigotry no sanction or to persecution no assistance, but sometimes the law was strangely unenforced or even unenforceable against outraged public opinion and self-righteous efforts at religious conformity. The state of Rhode Island was a scene of constant bigotry against Roman Catholic immigrants—Irish, French-Canadian, Italian, Portuguese. Politically this persecution was evident in the property qualifications for voting which were designed—and which effectively worked— for a century specifically to exclude the foreign-born from exercising the franchise. In Massachusetts in 1834 a mob burned a Roman Catholic convent, and in Philadelphia mobs stoned Catholic churches and church-goers while the local law enforcement agencies sat by and did nothing. In the Middle West the Church of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) was driven by mobs from Ohio to Missouri, from Missouri to Illinois, and finally, after their township there was sacked and burned and their religious leaders murdered in 1844, they were driven out of the country to what was then the territory claimed by Mexico.

Both by law and by so-called "Gentlemen's agreement" Americans excluded Chinese and Japanese from entering the country on the grounds that they could never assimilate to the WASP way of life. There was a distinct belief that Oriental religions were inferior, as well as Oriental peoples; this was evident in the enormous amount of time, money, and energy which went into foreign missionary activity in Asia in these years to save the souls of "benighted heathens."

Probably the most callous disregard of religious liberty occurred in our treatment of the American Indians. Not only were these native Americans forcibly driven from their land and put on reservations, but they were denied the right to testify in court because they were pagans. A pagan people was assumed to deny the truth of the Bible, and there-

fore their word could not be trusted even in cases where they were direct witnesses to illegal actions or were themselves subject to illegal persecutions. What was worse, after the Civil War their children were forcibly taken from them and placed in missionary schools on the reservations, where they were compelled to speak only English and were taught by missionaries who indoctrinated them, against their parents' wishes, into the Christian religion. They were not only forced to pray and sing Christian hymns but punished for practicing their own religion. This religious persecution was sanctioned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, supported by public tax money, and condoned by Christian churches until the middle of the present century.

I do not wish to belabor the point, and I have promised to talk no more than half an hour. But anyone who reads the daily newspapers must be aware that our heritage of religious liberty and equality is neither a fixed and settled matter, nor a secure and certain right. It is, rather, a fragile and tenuous ideal which is threatened every day by apathy, ignorance, and conflicting group interests. We can see this in the current debate in Congress over tuition credits for children in religious elementary and secondary schools; in the debate over the exemption of church property from public taxation; in the litigation over the Sunday closing of places of business and the rights of workers to take Saturday as a day of worship. We can see it in the effort to amend our constitution to overrule the Supreme Court decision against required prayer in public schools. We can see it in the persecution of young adults who join new cults such as the Hare Krishna, the Children of God, and the Unification Church; and we can see it even in Rhode Island where angry citizens and the *Providence Journal* denounced a suggestion by the American Civil Liberties Union that public school officials should show more concern at Christmas and Easter time for children whose faith does not include these as religious holy days.

No rights are ever secure. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. Among the nations of the world the United States has achieved a notable record for its commitment to religious liberty and equality, but even here there have been dangerous tendencies at work from time to time which threaten to undermine those ideals. We live today in such threatening times. It is questionable whether the First Amendment could be ratified today if we did not already have it. Though we have it, it could be easily eroded. We do well, therefore, to honor those who in the past and over the years have worked steadfastly to uphold those

principles. There is no more fitting time or place to do so than here in Touro Synagogue today.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Because this was written as a public address, I did not feel it necessary to include the usual scholarly apparatus of footnotes. However, for those interested in reading further in this subject, the incidents and quotations in the talk can be found in the following works: Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972); Thomas I. Emerson, *Toward a General Theory of the First Amendment* (New York: Random House, 1966; Evarts B. Greene, *Religion and the State* (New York, New York University Press, 1941); Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York, Garden City Press, 1955); Milton R. Konvitz, *Expanding Liberties* (New York, Viking Press, 1966); Milton R. Konvitz, *Fundamental Liberties of a Free People* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1957); Milton R. Konvitz, *Religious Liberty and Conscience* (New York, Viking Press, 1968); Philip B. Kurland, *Religion and the Law and Church and State* (Chicago, Aldine Press, 1962); Gustavus Myers, *History of Bigotry in the United States* (New York, Random House, 1943); Leo Pfeffer, *Church, State and Freedom,* rev. ed. (Boston, Beacon Press, 1967); Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States,* 3 vols. (New York, Harpers & Co., 1950); John F. Wilson, *Church and State in American History* (Boston, D. C. Heath Co., 1965).