

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

FRONT COVER

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL

NOTES

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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HARRY CUTLER: AN OUTLINE OF A NEGLECTED PATRIOT

BY STANLEY B. ABRAMS

High of purpose, keen of mind;
Ardent in his people's cause;
Rallying to all mankind;
Railing against unjust laws;
Yearning o'er the suffering.

Charity his highest goal,
Upward e'er his thoughts ascend;
Truth, Justice, Mercy rule his soul,
Loyal patriot, loyal friend,
Ever noble, ever true
Rings our

Harry Cutler.

Marion L. Misch1

In an article announcing the sudden death of Harry Cutler at the age of forty-six on August 28, 1920, the *Providence Journal* reported that he was one of the best-known jewelry manufacturers in the country, a former member of the Rhode Island General Assembly, and a prominent figure in world-wide Jewish affairs.² Of his funeral on September 16, 1920, *The Boston Jewish Advocate* noted: "The entire city of Providence turned out today to pay final tribute to the late Colonel Harry Cutler . . . a true American citizen of whom American Jewry and America was well proud." 3

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At a memorial tribute to Cutler held in March of 1921, Rhode Islanders thronged to the Strand Theatre in Providence to honor the memory of a noble humanitarian. "Jew and gentile, rabbi and minister of the gospel took part in the most moving tribute to any of her sons that Providence had witnessed in many years."

These panegyrics point to a man whose achievements and contributions to his people, his community, and his nation went beyond normal expectations. Although an occasional reference or document has found its way into this journal,⁵ historians have virtually ignored Cutler's role in the formation of national Jewish relief organizations and his activities in the arena of social justice. From 1905 until his death, Harry Cutler thrust himself into efforts to bring relief to the Russian Jews suffering from pogroms; fought for Russian recognition of American passports regardless of race or religion; opposed measures to restrict immigration into the United States; championed relief for Jewish soldiers and other Jews during World War I; represented the interests of Zionism at the Paris Peace Conference; and introduced a host of social justice legislation while serving in the Rhode Island General Assembly. Throughout, Cutler experienced the same pain and agony of accommodating his heritage to the pressures of American citizenship as befell his fellow Jews.

Harry Cutler came to the United States in 1882 from Czarist Russia, escaping at the tail end of another infamous pogrom that took the life of his father. Assisted by a Christian neighbor, eight year old Harry, his sister and mother joined thousands of others and escaped. Settling in upstate New York the young Cutler sold newspapers and ran errands while his mother labored in a canning factory. After a few years in New York City and a few more in Fall River, Massachusetts, the family settled in Providence. Here, as a sixteen year old, Cutler was hired as a shipping clerk by a jewelry firm. He advanced rapidly, first to the position of foreman and finally to general manager. At twenty-four he purchased a jewelry factory that was about to go bankrupt with a small sum of borrowed money. By the beginning of the 20th century the Cutler Jewelry and Comb Company developed into one of the leading firms of its type in the United States, and Cutler emerged as one of a handful of Jewish manufacturers in Providence. The jewelry industry recognized his leadership abilities and elevated him to the presidency of the New England Manufacturing Jewelers and Silversmiths Association in 1907. He was also named to the National Board of Trade.7

During his apprenticeship in the jewelry industry Cutler attended night school in Providence's public schools, acquiring the only formal education he was to receive. Limited exposure to schooling did not seem to handicap him. His command of the English language, both as a public speaker and in his written communications, was remarkable. This ability to articulate his

thoughts coupled with his financial success, national notoriety, and valuable business connections throughout the East Coast gave the thirty-one year old Cutler the essential requirements for a smooth transition from immigrant Jew to American Jew. Nevertheless, Cutler seems never to have forgotten the bloody murder of his father, the fate of all Russian Jews, and his deeply imbedded sense of service to community. These motivations led him to embrace Zionism, Jewish relief, and social legislation, activities which consumed a substantial amount of his energies for the next fifteen years.

The 1903 Kishinev pogrom and the two years of violence that followed triggered an unprecedented outburst of activity within the American Jewish communities. In Providence, Jews and non-Jews alike expressed shock at the deliberate killing of Jews, staged rallies, and began to raise funds for relief work. Undoubtedly because of Cutler's prominence among the business circle composed of German Jews, he received a telegram from Jacob H. Schiff and Oscar S. Straus, heads of the New York firms of Kuhn, Loeb and Company and R. H. Macy and Company respectively, to organize a local relief effort. Cutler assembled a conference of all Jewish organizations in Rhode Island, presided over its deliberations, and was elected premanent chairman of what came to be the United Jewish Relief Committee of Providence.8 The Committee functioned as an affiliate of the New York-based national relief effort.

Contributions collected in Rhode Island exceeded initial projections. Less obvious but equally important was Cutler's ability as chairman to organize and unify approximately forty-four disparate Jewish organizations into a single unit.9 Many of these organizations, founded by German, Polish, and other Jews, vied with one another for the support and allegiance of new immigrants and the contributions of established Jewish residents. The organizational network was an expected configuration and mirrored the geographical divisions within Providence. The first waive of immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s had established themselves in the North End, while the newest arrivals from Russia and Eastern Europe were settling on the South Side. A manifestation of this division based on nationality and urban geography was the formation of two separate Hebrew Free Loan Associations only three years apart.¹⁰ However, despite Cutler's efforts to create a permanent city-wide relief organization, the United Jewish Relief Committee fell apart, and the component societies resumed their separate activities. The emergency had been met and the disparate Jewish communities were not prepared to act as one.

In New York the call for a new representative body elected by *all* Jewish organizations prompted the German Jewish elite to preempt the more radical elements in 1906 to form the American Jewish Committee (AJC). Composed of Straus, Schiff, Julius Rosenwald, Louis Marshall and others,

the AJC retained an elitist inner circle while publicly supporting an ambitious program to defend the rights of the Russian Jew. Although the Russian Jews accepted the German leadership, they resented the notables and criticized their assimilationist philosophy. Harry Cutler had been invited to attend the organizational meeting of the AJC, did so, and was elected to serve on its executive council. As a policy-forming agency the council established the goals for the AJC: lobby against immigration restriction, work to abrogate the commercial treaty between Russia and the United States, and embrace overseas relief. Under its aegis, local community councils would coordinate all Jewish activities in their districts.

Cutler deeply immersed himself in all AJC causes. Aware that Russia had been discriminating against American citizens by refusing to grant visas to American Jews, Roman Catholic priests, and protestant missionaries, Cutler initiated potential remedies on the state level. Shortly after his election as a Republican from the 21st District to the House of Representatives of the Rhode Island General Assembly he introduced a passport resolution on March 30, 1909. This resolution, calling upon the president of the United States, the cabinet, and members of Congress from Rhode Island to secure from Russia full rights for United States passport holders, drew national attention to Cutler. The national AJC adopted the resolution and attached to it a clause that failure to grant these rights should be sufficient cause to abrogate the 1832 commercial treaty with Russia.¹²

The House took two years to consider the matter before the Committee on Foreign Affairs held hearings on the issue in December 1911.¹³ Most of the luminaries of the American Jewish Committee testified: Schiff, Straus, Cyrus Adler, Louis Marshall, Cyrus L. Sulzberger, and of course Harry Cutler. Although it is unlikely that one man could sway the Committee, Adler recalled in later years that one of the most dramatic moments of the hearing occurred when Cutler moved all those present with his statement regarding the travail of his own family as Jews in Russia.¹⁴ The outcome of this and other hearings was approval of a resolution calling for treaty abrogation and led to final annulment by President William H. Taft in 1913.¹⁵

As the tide of Eastern Europeans swelled American cities in the first decades of the 20th century, calls for some form of immigration restriction echoed throughout the nation. The AJC, as did so many other ethnic organizations, took up the cause and actively lobbied against any restrictions. Once again Harry Cutler, representing the American Jewish Committee, testified before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on March 11, 1910. Speaking on behalf of all immigrants, Cutler detailed his personal climb to success from humble beginnings as an immigrant boy. He noted that in Rhode Island the foreign born comprised a

greater percentage of employees than the native born and that these workers had immeasurably contributed to the industrial importance of Rhode Island. 16 Two years later, Cutler, Marshall, and Julius Rosenwald wrote President Taft, requesting that he oppose a literacy test urged by those in favor of a restrictive immigration policy. 17 Taft vetoed the bill the following year.

Concurrent with his activities on behalf of the American Jewish Committee, Cutler, as a member of the Rhode Island General Assembly, demonstrated his compassion for the working class and the ill. From 1909 to 1912 he served three consecutive terms in the House; however, he failed at two attempts to gain a seat in the state Senate thereafter. 18 His legislative agenda reflected Cutler's commitment to improve the quality of life. His concern for the control and treatment of tuberculosis led him to introduce a bill calling for the establishment of a state tuberculosis hospital and municipal tuberculosis centers in 1911.¹⁹ He initiated legislation to expand Rhode Island's technical training facilities and to erect a new dormitory at the state-run Home and School for Dependent Children. 20 However, his most notable legislative contribution was a bill providing compensation for employees injured on the job — the first workmen's compensation act introduced in the General Assembly.²¹ Although none of the bills proposed by Cutler was enacted exactly as intented, technical training was expanded, "fresh-air" schools were opened for tuberculosis children throughout Providence, and improved programs for dependent children evolved.

This brief legislative record reflects Cutler's concern for a better society, and at the same time hints at his assimilationist tendencies. While serving as president of the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David, Cutler was also on the board of St. Joseph's Hospital, a Catholic institution; he also served as director of Church House, a protestant organization. Additionally, Cutler's patriotism peaked as a member of the General Assembly, when in 1910 he introduced a resolution calling for a portrait of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry to be displayed in the State House.²² Cutler was rewarded in 1913, first by being named Auditor General of the Perry Centennial Commission which had been established to celebrate Perry's victory on Lake Erie in 1813, and then by being promoted to the rank of colonel in the First Light Infantry Brigade of Rhode Island,²³ a reserve unit Cutler had joined as a private some years earlier.

Cutler's rapid Americanization and his partial alienation from his ethnic heritage was a common experience among upwardly mobile Jews at the turn of the century. It did not escape the attention of young intellectuals and communal leaders who were advancing several theories of survivalism. The debate divided American Jewry into camps espousing cultural pluralism, Zionism, and secular nationalism, and it threatened the hegemony of the

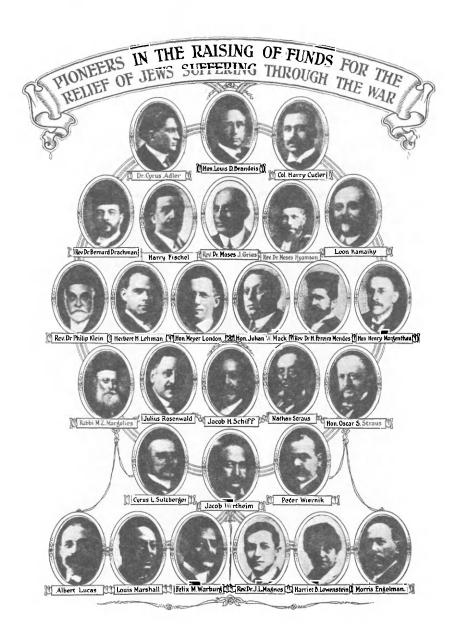
American Jewish Committee in its arena of politics and diplomacy. When the Zionists in early 1915, led by the able Louis Brandeis and Stephen S. Wise, called for a democratically elected central body, the American Jewish Committee regarded the movement with apprehension. Although the Zionists shortly formed the opposing American Jewish Congress, the outbreak of World War I and the fate of Jews all over the world led to an unprecedented collaborative effort to provide relief. However, with America's entry into the war, the fall of the Russian tsar, and Britian's Balfour Declaration calling for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the conflict within American Jewry intensified once again.

In the fall of 1914, shortly after the start of the war, the American Jewish Committee assembled in New York and formed the American Jewish Relief Committee to aid Jews in countries affected by the war. Under the chairmanship of Felix M. Warburg, son-in-law of Schiff and senior partner in the firm of Kuhn, Loeb, the Germans held the directorships but Orthodox and labor relief organizations became constituent members. Despite disputes over policy, the relief effort remained united, raised over \$16.5 million between 1914 and 1918, and distributed the proceeds to over 700,000 Jews through an umbrella agency known as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).²⁴

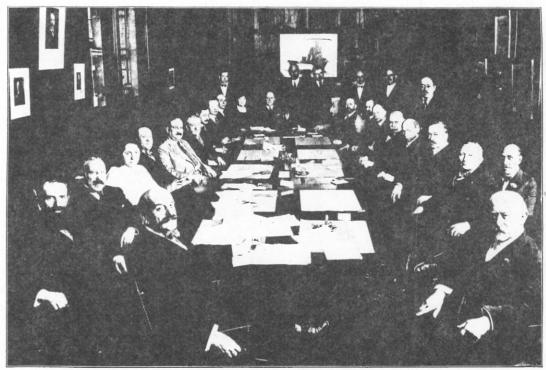
Colonel Harry Cutler participated in the organizational meeting of the JDC and served on its executive board for the next four years. In this capacity, he was involved in all major fund-raising efforts and relief programs sponsored by American Jewry throughout the war. In Rhode Island, Cutler served as chairman of the American Jewish Relief Committee and the Jewish War Relief Commission, both of which functioned under the aegis of the JDC.²⁵

The activities and importance of Jewish communal work took on added meaning after the United States entered the war in April 1917. A large number of American Jews were already serving in the army and navy and greater numbers were anticipated with the enactment of a selective service law. Since 1913 the Young Men's Hebrew Association had attended to the needs of Jews in the military. However, as the United States drifted into war, the YMHA was inadequately prepared to serve as mouthpiece and arm of the American Jewish community for the benefit of Jewish servicemen.²⁶

Once again the American Jewish Committee and Felix M. Warburg led the charge. Hosting a conference in New York City in April of 1917 it produced the Jewish Board for Welfare Work in the United States. As was the case with all of the AJC's organizations, another prominent German, Cyrus Adler, was named its chairman.²⁷ Cutler was not in attendance, presumably occupied as chairman of the Selective Service Board No. 5 in



A Meeting of the Joint Distribution Committee of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers, July 10th, 1918



Seated from left to right are:—Felix M. Warburg, Chairman; Anron Tritelhaum, Albert Lucias, Secretary: Mrs. F. Friedman, official stenographer; Boris D. Bogen. Executive Director; Leon Sanders, Harry Fischel, Sholem Asch, Alexander Kuhn, Jacob Milch, Miss Harriet B. Lowenstein, Comptroller; Colonel Moose Schoenberg, M. Z. Margolies, Israel Friedlander, Paul Baerwald, Associate-Treasurer; Julius Levy, Peter Wernik, Meyer Gillis, Harry Cutler, Cyrus Adler, Arthur Lehnnan, Treasurer; Jacob H. Schiff.

Standing, left to right:—Abraham Zucker, Isidore Hershfield, Meyer Berlin, Stanley Bero, Louis Topkis, Morris Engelman.



Louis Winnerman (1896-1950), drafted July 1918 for World War I; enlisted in 1941 for World War II. (Rhode Island Jewish Historical Society, Ruby Winnerman Collection).

Rhode Island.²⁸ Internal problems befell the organization during its initial months of operation, a predictable outcome considering its heterogeneous composition. In July of 1917 Adler "retired" as chairman and selected Cutler as his successor. There is some indication that Warburg prevailed upon Adler to resign in favor of Cutler because as a Russian Jew he might be better able to restore harmony to the Jewish Board for Welfare Work.²⁹ As Adler himself noted in his autobiography: "I thought this was the proper thing to do because Cutler had some military experience . . . and he represented what was undoubtedly the largest element of our boys in the army."³⁰

The agency, renamed the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB), underwent two reorganizations in the next nine months in an apparent effort to satisfy the Jewish secular and non-secular groups it represented. Cutler, however, rode out the storm and retained his chairmanship. On August 8, 1917 Cutler led a delegation from the JWB to a conference with the secretaries of the Navy and War in Washington, D.C. The officials assured Cutler that Jewish servicemen at home and abroad would have adequate facilities for religious services and social events, enough furlough time for the high holy days, and Jewish chaplains in the near future.³¹

On a request that the government recognize the JWB as the official agency for Jewish welfare work in the military sector the officials remained temporarily uncommitted.³² Cutler, however, persisted in his quest for official recognition. Throughout 1918 additional responsisbilities were shifted to the agency, with official formal recognition coming in November. From now on, the JWB exercised complete hegemony in the field of military welfare services. This was a major accomplishment for a national Jewish organization, and much of the credit belonged to Colonel Harry Cutler.³³

The success of Cutler's activities within the JWB did not go without notice. The American Jewish Congress, the major opponent of the American Jewish Committee, had embraced pro-Zionism at its founding in 1915 and renewed its efforts for Jewish self-determination throughout the world after America's entry into the war. Although Cutler had been involved in the Zionist movement since 1914 and had been named to the executive committee of the Zionist Organization of America in 1916, he was not an active member of the congress until he was named to represent Rhode Island at the May 1917 meeting of the organization. There, the delegates adopted a comprehensive pro-Zionist platform.³⁴ When the American Jewish Congress held another convention in Philadelphia in the following year, Cutler was the natural choice once again to head Rhode Island's Jewish delegation. The chief concern of the delegates was to formulate a bill of rights for minorities and to elect a delegation to represent

American Jews to present it at the Paris Peace Conference. Among the nine men elected, only Cutler and Louis Marshall had served on the American Jewish Committee; Julian W. Mack, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Jacob De Haas, Rabbi B. L. Levinthal, Nahum Syrkin, Joseph Barondess, and Morris Weinchevsky represented a cross section of the American Jewish community.³⁵

Undoubtedly, this was one of the high points of Cutler's career. As one of nine spokesmen for the 3.5 million Jews in the United States and indirectly over 14 million Jews in the world, Cutler felt proud that he was able to span the gap between the assimilationists and traditionalists. Aware of the significance of Cutler's position both the Jews of Rhode Island and state officials honored him at separate banquets in January 1919. Leaving for Europe, Cutler made his mission clear: "We ask that in the treaties to be enacted by the nations of the world there will be included provisions which will give equal rights — political, civil, and religious — to the Jews of all lands." 37

Cutler attended those sessions of the Paris Peace Conference for which authorized participation for his delegation had been granted. In time, he expressed mixed feelings about the progress made at the conference. Although optimistic on universal Jewish rights and the British trusteeship of Palestine, Cutler was distressed over the outbreak of pogroms in Poland and over the failure of world leaders at Versailles to protest these actions. 38

When word arrived that his wife had taken seriously ill, Cutler interrupted his work and returned to the United States. The remaining months of 1919 were spent with his ailing wife, making occasional speeches on behalf of Zionism, and working as closely as possible with his organization, the Jewish Welfare Board. On June 17, 1919 Secretary of War Newton D. Baker awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross in an elaborate ceremony in Washington, and Rhode Islanders honored Cutler with a reception at the Strand Theatre.³⁹ He accepted these and other honors on "behalf of my helpmate, who is making the sacrifice and has been making it in order that I may be a servant of the people."⁴⁰ Colonel Harry Cutler's helpmate, wife Ida, died on February 2, 1920 at the age of forty.

Cutler grieved deeply at his loss, and this undoubtedly contributed to the minor stroke shortly afterward that limited his activities for several months. Nevertheless, when Secretary of War Baker asked him officially to represent the JWB on the new War Memorials Commission, Cutler accepted.⁴¹ While in Paris, Cutler had traveled through the French countryside to inspect United States military cemeteries. Improper identification and markings on Jewish graves troubled him and his new appointment gave him the opportunity properly to honor the Jewish soldiers buried in Europe.⁴² One

of the responsibilities of the War Memorials Commission was to develop a plan to concentrate all the American dead in a few large cemeteries in Europe. Despite the warnings of his personal physician, Dr. William F. Flanagan, Cutler volunteered to conduct on-site inspections for possible cemetery locations in both France and Belgium and sailed for Europe with Dr. Flanagan on August 12, 1920.⁴³ Less than a week after arriving in London, Cutler suffered another stroke and died on August 28, 1920.

Cutler's body arrived sixteen days later in New York City. A full military honor guard escorted the body on the train to Providence, where it was immediately taken to Temple Beth-El to lie in state for twenty-four hours before the funeral.⁴⁴ Rabbi Samuel M. Gup of Beth-El spoke eloquently in praising the life and in mourning the death of Harry Cutler, and Dr. Henry Englander, a close friend of the deceased, and former Rabbi of Beth-El, began his eulogy with the words of King David — "Know ye not that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?"⁴⁵

Whether Harry Cutler truly deserved the accolate of "great man" is questionable. What is far more certain is that Cutler's achievements and contributions to his people, his community, and his nation went beyond the expectations of Judaic service to community. He had realized his boyhood dreams of individual freedom, social equality, and economic security only as a citizen of the United States. This overwhelmed him, as it did so many other prosperous Jews, with a sense of patriotic duty and obligation to his new country, "My activities," he once remarked, [are] "simply an attempt to pay back a little of the debt I owe to the United States." While this commitment was certainly a guiding force, so too, was his sense of obligation to his fellow Jews, be they in the United States or in other parts of the world. Thus he immersed himself in the fight against immigration restriction, relief for Russian Jews suffering through pogroms and war, relief for Jewish soldiers and proper identification of the Jewish dead, and the cause of Zionism. In all of these endeavors, Cutler was overshadowed by Louis Brandeis, Louis Marshall, Jacob H. Schiff, Oscar Straus, and many other Jewish luminaries. Nevertheless, Cutler was perhaps better equipped by virtue of his personal experiences as a Russian Jew to bridge the gap between assimilationists and traditionalists. His life might represent an answer to the dilemma faced by some American Jews: how to express loyalty to America while at the same time retain ties to their heritage — of Eretz Israel, the land of Israel. Additionally, Harry Cutler truly emerged as the most notable Rhode Island Jew among national Jewish circles between 1905 and 1920.

NOTES

- ¹This poem was written by Marion L. Misch in honor of Harry Cutler on January 5, 1919. Original in Temple Beth-El Archives, Providence, R.I.
- ²"Harry Cutler," Providence Journal, August 29, 1920.
- ¹Boston Jewish Advocate, September 16, 1920.
- ⁴Providence Journal, March 7, 1921.
- ⁵See, Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, vol. 2: 104-107, 194-207; vol. 3: 162-163; vol. 5: 148-152; vol. 6: 50-51, 130-135; vol. 7: 362-363, and individual mention on many other pages.
- 6"Office Boy Who Made Good," Providence Sunday Journal, April 6, 1913.
- ⁷The Manufacturing Jeweler, 41 (October 1907), 664, 666.
- *Beryl Segal, "The Year 1905 in Rhode Island," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 5 (November 1968), 147-148.
- Beryl Segal, "The General Jewish Committee The First Quarter Century, 1945-1970," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 6 (November 1971), 7.
- ¹⁰David C. Adelman, "Gemilath Chesed: Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 1 (December 1954), 129-133.
- "Fiftieth Anniversary Observance of the American Jewish Committee, April 10-14, 1957 (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1958), 295.
- ¹²Rhode Island, House of Representative Reference File, Legislative Bill Reference Drawer, 1909. Resolution H179.
- ¹³U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Reports*, 1 (62nd Cong., 2nd sess.), 1911-1912.
- ¹⁴Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered The Days* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1941), 293-294.
- ¹⁵U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Documents, 85 (61st Cong., 3rd sess.), 1910-1911, SD 839. ¹⁶Adler, I Have Considered The Days, 294.
- ¹⁷Letter cited in Charles Reznikoff, ed., Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty. Selected Papers and Addresses (Phildelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), vol. 1, 119-121
- ¹⁸ Providence Journal, October 27, 1911, and November 2, 1912.
- ¹⁹Legislative Bill Reference Drawer, 1911. Resolution H180.
- 201bid., 1910. Resolutions H23 and H52.
- 211bid., 1911. Resolution H139.
- ²²Ibid., 1910. Resolution H28. The portrait is hanging in the governor's reception chamber of the Rhode Island State House.
- ²¹Providence Journal, July 15, 1911.
- ²⁴See, Morris Engelman, Four Years of Relief and War Work by the Jews of America, 1914-1918 (New York, 1918).
- 251 bid., 9-11.
- ²⁶Oscar I. Janowsky, The JWB Survey (New York: The Dial Press, 1948), 47-49.
- ²⁷I bid., 45.
- ²⁸ Providence Journal, May 10, 1917.
- ²⁹Janowsky, The JWB Survey, 49.
- 30 Adler, I Have Considered The Days, 301.
- 31 Providence Journal, August 10, 1917.
- ¹²At this conference Cutler introduced items not on the agenda. For example, he suggested to the military secretaries that the United States dispatch troops to the Eastern Front to fight "shoulder to shoulder with the soldiers of the newest democracy..." Also, that American soldiers of Russian background "would cheerfully go to fight for the land of their nativity, while simultaneously fighting for the land of their adoption" Ibid.
- 33Janowsky, The JWB Survey, 52-53.

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<sup>34</sup>Providence Journal, May 16, 1917.
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³⁵Ibid., December 19, 1918.

³⁶Ibid., January 6, 1919.

³⁷Ibid., February 14, 1919.

³⁸Ibid., June 3, 1919.

³⁹lbid., June 23, 1919. Cutler also received the French Medal of Honor on October 3, 1919. Both medals with citations are in the Harry Cutler folder, Temple Beth-El Archives, Providence, R.I.

⁴⁰ Providence Journal, January 6, 1919.

⁴¹¹bid., May 28, 1920.

^{42&}quot; Jewish Interests in Army and Peace Terms," Providence Sunday Journal, April 20, 1919.

⁴³Providence Journal, June 12, and August 10, 1920.

⁴⁴Ibid., September 13, 1920.

⁴⁵Ibid., September 17, 1920.

ORGANIZED IMPULSES OF RESISTANCE AND ASSIMILATION WITHIN THE PROVIDENCE JEWISH COMMUNITY, 1880-1921

BY PATRICK JANSON

Even as the 19th century's final two decades turned, a new stream of Jewish immigration poured across the Atlantic and into the United States. Ushering in a new century as well, this tide of hopefuls became more a flood than a trickle. Fleeing homeland civil disorder as well as social and economic hardships, the largest segment of these "new" immigrants journeyed to this country from Eastern Europe, particularly Russia, Poland and the Slavic regions. Escaping Russia's bloody pogroms of 1881-82, some 10,429 Jews set foot upon American shores during the period's initial years. Still other volatile socio-economic forces prompted the migration of an additional 107,710 Jews in 1892 from the Russian Pale alone, and just five years earlier thousands of Romanian Jews had fled persecution to seek a more tolerant climate in America. Yet another outburst of anti-Semitic violence in Russia, culminating in the 1903 Kishinev massacre, sparked further immigration. By 1920 more than four million Jews had swelled the nation's population.

Mostly youthful and relatively poor, the earliest arrivals were often unskilled in trade or craft; others new but modest merchant professions. Hence, the initial Eastern European Jewish current reaching American shores offered little to industrial America beyond a pool of cheap, blue-collar labor. The majority of Jewish arrivals — atypical of some earlier immigration patterns — journeyed as family units rather than individuals seeking prosperity. Most came to stay. Certainly all were different — these Eastern Europeans — quite unlike any preceeding immigrant group traveling to America. Carried with them was a culture wholly alien to their new hosts, largely based upon the unique Yiddish language and shtetl traditions. Moreover, these European outcasts resembled no western races,

hence they met near immediate resistance in their new land from those who scorned even their mere appearance. Often clad in long, tattered coats, odd-looking hats, and sporting "untamed beards," these Jewish immigrants at best were a curiosity to most Gilded Age Americans. At worst, they were perceived as threats to idealized Anglo-Saxon, western society. Even their religious brethren of Germanic origins — who had themselves arrived but a generation before — did not readily accept these destitute people; through their "backward" ways and strange appearances the East European Jews proved an embarassment to their already assimilated German counterparts.²

The greatest swell of new immigrants swept onto East Coast shores, and numerous ethnic communities sprang to life in the East's urban industrial centers where low-paying jobs and cheap housing might be secured. This trend was especially pronounced during the years spanning 1899-1910, when 86 percent of all Jewish immigrants settled in the North Atlantic states.³ Among the cities receiving a sizeable number of displaced Jews was Providence, which witnessed the growth of two modest but viable ethnic enclaves: one contained within the city's North End triangle, the other southward off Elmwood Avenue.⁴

More dynamic social pressures faced these new immigrants as the centuries turned, most prompted by vocal nativists whose racist sentiments generated a strong pulse that beat consistently across the nation for a number of years. Combined with other social and economic externalities, such impulses created a formidable American hurdle for most urban Jewish communities. Language barriers hampered Jews in all intra-ethnic circumstances, employment of any significance — even for qualified workers — was difficult to attain, and basic problems in assimilation presented the Jews with a serious dichotomy as they struggled both to "fit in" to the larger society and maintain their cultural heritage as well. While such pressures weighing upon Jews in larger ethnic ghettos set in cities like New York were not, perhaps, as pronounced in smaller urban areas like Providence, New England's new residents were hardly free from these forces.

While evidence suggesting overt local discrimination is slight, prevailing national impulses — coupled with the Jews' own recent history — served to unite Providence Jews into a relatively cohesive ethnic community. Rising from this unified homogeneity were various and diverse mutual assistance organizations and societies founded upon fraternal and charitable impulses. These groups gained impetus as a means of fostering ethnic security, primarily mirroring — like the larger ethnic community — traditional family life and the responsibilities inherent within Eastern European Jewish tribalism.6

During these formative years, the local Jewish community was largely comprised of folksmasn — "ordinary" or common Jews deeply mired in family and cultural traditions that extended to the greater community. Echoing the sense of mutual obligation developed in their homeland, shtetl experience, these people placed community responsibility above individual concerns. Hence, in the throes of America's difficult social and economic realities during the 19th century's concluding decade — and partly as an attempt to slow acculturation — several mutual assistance societies emerged as a natural step in the development of Providence's Jewish enclaves.

Among the first mutual aid, or benevolent, societies appearing in Providence was the Ladies Mutual Assistance Association, organized as early as 1880 for the express purpose of promoting mutual benefit and charity in the Jewish community. The subsequent surge of Jews to Providence was later reflected in the sudden emergence of four additional organizations of similar intent during the years 1887-1890: the Young Mens Mutual Assistance Association, the Providence Hebrew Assisting Association, Moses Montefore Association, and the Ladies Hebrew Union Aid Association. Chartered by the Rhode Island General Assembly, all professed to offer assistance or "mutual benefit" while engaging in charitable activities directed toward the community's less fortunate.8

Jewish immigration to the United States peaked during the 1890s, with more diverse elements landing in New York to disperse along the eastern coast. This influx, which particularly influenced the make-up and character of Providence's ethnics, was generally comprised of people possessing more advanced cultural and educational backgrounds. Members of Europe's "Jewish intelligentsia," these newcomers had been especially active in political and religious movements across the ocean. Further, greater numbers of more skilled workers entered the country at the outset of the 20th century, and the influence of these newly arrived elite soon was felt within the local Jewish community.

Promoting increased political awareness, as well as displaying a determination to secure better jobs, these active, better educated Jews likely accounted for the dramatic increase in Jewish naturalization. During the decade 1881-1890, only 84 Jews were naturalized in Providence; however, 1,328 Jews received American citizenship in the decade immediately following. These figures also mirror the community's steady population growth over this latter period. Still, the rates of naturalization seem even more striking when viewed as a percentage of Providence's total Jewish population, which by 1900 stood at 1,996. Hence, fully 66.6 percent of the region's Jewish community was naturalized during the 1890s, corresponding with the arrival of the educated, politically-oriented "intelligentsia." ¹⁰

This is a critical factor in further examining the development of subsequent local Jewish institutions intended both to ease assimilation and, in some respects, to foster an intrinsic resistance to cultural erosion. As the local ethnic community expanded, so, too, did the General Assembly's list of petitioning organizations seeking state charters. Bouyed by the new arrivals, the breadth of such societies broadened as well. While assistance groups continued to emerge in response to community needs, another trend clearly developed wherein the nature of chartered Jewish organizations in Providence began to undergo a slow but steady transformation.

Increasingly, Jewish organizations reflected Providence's altered makeup and shifting priorities within the ethnic enclaves as labor-oriented societies, literary groups, and cultural-based organizations became more prevalent. Naturally the worker-oriented groups emerged in response to the influx of local Jews into the area's workforce, which maintained its essentially blue-collar character. However, as skilled labor permeated the Providence community, artisan-related societies followed as well, these somewhat patterened themselves after old craft guilds. In 1894 the Rhode Island Shoe Makers Aid Association organized to provide aid for its artisan members; the Cooperative Union of Cigar Makers followed in 1896, focusing upon the promotion of the social and commercial interests of its respective skilled members.

Growing cultural diversity indeed was apparent, also, for many societies were formed with the express purpose of forwarding social and literary impulses in the Jewish community. The Hebrew Dramatic Club (1895), the Young Men's Hebrew Association (1898), and the Oxford Club (1901) all appeared in Providence and were fairly typical of the Jewish enclaves' fraternal inclinations. Several women's groups emerged as well, perhaps following the example of the National Council of Jewish Women which organized in 1893 to encourage social service. A wide array of such societies occupied local Jewish women, including the Ladies Friendship Lodge (1897), the Providence Charitable Society (1904), and the South Providence Ladies Aid Association (1908). Interestingly, while noting some deviation, most women's groups continued to organize along charitable lines and did not display the diversity of men's groups, perhaps indicating the altered persuasion of the community's male laborers and leaders.

Simultaneously, economic advancement and community well-being did continue as a prevailing, if altered, theme and the promotion of business steadily gained increased emphasis. The South Providence Enterprising Association (1899) and the Workingman's Money Saving Association (1896) were organizations launched to promote and encourage thrift and investment among members. Also, along with organizations like the United

Hebrew Assisting Association (1907), these groups reflected the urge to forward the cause of aspiring businessmen in need of guidance and modest financing. Closely allied to this impulse was the Gemiloth Chasodin — or Hebrew Free Loan Association — chartered in 1903. This benevolent organization dispersed interest-free loans to needy local Jews desiring to "earn an honest living without recourse to charity." While not specifically concerned with easing the path toward enterprise, this important Providence-based association assisted many Jews in initially establishing themselves in the city, enabling them to retain their dignity and look to the future without seeking direct charity.¹²

The incidence of labor-related organizations grew markedly, then, with the arrival of skilled workers to Providence. While only five such organizations existed locally in 1903, ten others were chartered between 1906 and 1915. This also reflects the increasing presence of Jews in the workforce, representing various occupations, suggesting perhaps that a diverse economic foothold was gained rather early.

Culturally spawned groups displayed steady growth as well, particularly those associations seeking to preserve traditional values. Only two organizations of this mold served local Jews in 1903, but this number increased five-fold during the ensuing twelve years. The Agidath Achin, chartered in 1904, is but one ready illustration of this impulse; the Workman of Zion (1904) is yet another union which proposed advancing Jewish cultural awareness, largely through Hebrew education. Clearly a variety of Jewish institutions and organizations emerged during this period in response to internal and external pressures. Moreover, the distinction is easily drawn, for the most part, between those groups seeking to ease and assist the assimilation process and those, conversely, desiring to slow acculturation.

Equally contrasting was the area's most significant trend, if not the most numerically dramatic. This was the eventual evolution of societies focusing upon politics, Zionism and education. These elements grew critical to the pervasive issues of assimilation, community survival, and the volatile question of unrestricted immigration to the United States in general. These organizations likely were derived from the local Jewish community's strong determination to respond with verve to both local and national pressures.

Although Jews venturing to Providence by the century's turn seemed to integrate a broad cultural milieu in the local ethnic community, they were faced with the problems related to pluralism in that they, like their brothers elsewhere in America, clung to their traditional culture while also attempting to penetrate American society.¹³ The need to "fit in" was especially pronounced in the realms of economics and politics which became

the effective battlegrounds of assimilation. As such, it was difficult for Jews to fully retain their true cultural identity, particularly among the second generation as it slowly but certainly compromised some elements of its heritage to become more "Americanized." This caused much consternation among the more rigid traditionalists in the local Jewish community. Many of the later arrivals to America bore an acute awareness of Jewish consciousness, and this became commonly reflected in Zionist tenets. Hence, largely in reaction to evident acculturation, organizations such as the Patriots of Zion Chonevey Zion 1 of Providence (1901), the South Providence Hebrew School (1911), and the Providence Hebrew Institute (1907) appeared and worked with other local religious associations to propogate the eroding Jewish ethos. These attempts at education were intended to serve as vehicles for the continued transmission of Jewish values, history and traditions to subsequent generations, even as they integrated into the larger society. 15

Yet, education in general was to play a larger, more important role for Jews, national and local. In particular, programs emerged and groups organized to promote literacy in English. A heightened awareness of the American political process quickly became crucial to Jewish communities the land over, and Providence was no exception.

Between 1890 and 1904 only one organization — the Wendell Phillips Educational Club — was chartered specifically to promote education and assimilation in the capital city. However, from 1905 to 1919, a consistent pattern developed wherein twelve such groups formed in Providence, with the largest incidence of growth occurring in 1910. Among these were the Twenty-third District Republican Club and the Hebrew American Club, ostensibly chartered to "promote better citizenship," among other principles. Hence, rather than organizing to resist the power of the assimilationists, by the centuty's first decade Providence Jews were in several instances instead striving to instill themselves into society's mainstream.

Although still clinging to their inherent sense of ethnicity, local Jews had nonetheless realized at least the modest fruits of their new environs and desired a larger harvest. Slow economic advancement eventually gave way to more consistent progress, with merchants and a scattering of professionals more readily emerging from the community. Moreover, as the local Jewish population base expanded, so, too, did the number of skilled workers: after 1900, nearly 70 percent of all local Jewish workers were skilled. Occupational diversity also followed, with peddlers, jewelry workers and assorted independent craftsmen growing numerous. 17 However, despite these evident gains — and the increased efforts toward naturalization — the

nation's Jews on the whole continued to be subjected to harsh nativist attacks.

As a growing nationalism swept the country at century's turn, raciallymotivated invectives echoed about Washington's congressional halls. While much of the anti-Semitic sentiment remained based upon ages-old and tired stereotypical views of Jews as greedy and immoral people, most of the new prejudicial current was sparked by continued Jewish immigration and the striking pattern of swift upward Jewish mobility. The nationwide emergence of a new Jewish middle-class, sprinkled with clothing manufacturers, realestate speculators, and a variety of other ascending businessmen, while not entirely typical, transcended accepted barriers established in and around the ethnic ghettos. Born of this trend was a native resentment of Jewish dynamism and ability, which also spawned a creeping xenophobia of irrational proportions. As this "ethnocentric aversion" spread, doors that had at last been opening to Jews were suddenly slammed shut. Excluded from social and business clubs, private schools and resort areas, Jews also found themselves falling victim to a tightening employment market where white collar jobs were commonly withheld from qualified individuals. While this heightened social and economic discrimination was not restricted to Jews alone, these were the people who appeared to bear the brunt of racial resentment, even as they struggled finally to escape the bondage of the textile machines and the peddler's cart. 18

From 1905 to 1915 revived nativist sentiments reflected a volatility rivaling the 1890s furor. Hence, even during the reform-minded progressive era, racist-motivated legislators strove to frame new legislation in Congress intended to implement restrictive immigration policies. A particularly strong effort was forwarded in 1906, with literacy laws much the heart of the legislative movement.

Viewing mounting immigration as a threat, to so-called racial purity — as well as a potential political lever — racist groups like New England's decade-old Immigration Restriction League became particularly vital in spreading anti-immigration propaganda during the period of 1905-1906, with Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge a key sympathizer. Related propaganda was personified by odious literary efforts eminating from several popular and respected periodicals of the time, which continued to hurl their poisonous barbs through the First World War. Kenneth Roberts, writing in the Saturday Evening Post, decried immigration as a factor threatening to "engulf" the white race. Roberts referred directly to Polish Jews as "human parasites" and loudly clamored with other vocal restrictionists for a halt to immigration. Madison Grant, in his book The Passing of the Great Race (1916), targeted the influx of Polish Jews to New York, contending that race was the "detriment of civilization and that only

the Aryans had built great cultures." No more a respected figure than historian Henry Adams, of Boston's great patrician family, took to spreading this curious venom; he perceived Jews as the embodiment of capitalism's ills and expressed a desire to "put every money-lender to death." 19

Organized labor joined the chorus, with the nativist-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) lobbying actively for restriction and literacy tests. Naturally labor viewed the immigrant as competition for jobs, and unions long schemed to thwart the continued infusion of foreign elements into the American labor market. Amid such cumulative pressures, restrictive legislation was narrowly defeated in 1906, but the message was clear: Anglo-Saxon nativism was taking root nationally and Jews across the country should be concerned.²⁰

Members of the local Jewish community recognized the need to respond to such palpable acts of discrimination as did their brethren elsewhere. While nativist barriers were not so visible in New England as in other regions, the threatening posture confronting Jews could not be ignored. In Providence, the North End Political Club (1906) was among the first organized responses. Established to strengthen the Jews' minority-status political foundation, the society sought to mold greater cohesion within the local community and electorate while protecting people's "equal rights... in their enjoyment of citizenship." Hence, in attempting to secure their social, economic and political status from external forces, local Jews adopted traditional democratic methods to bridge ethnic gaps, encourage voter participation and awareness, and provide the additional education needed to assure their future. There existed power in unity and concerted efforts.²¹

A small but active Socialist party was founded in South Providence during this period by Joseph Shore and Jacob Lavlow, but this political impulse achieved little.²² Most local Jews genuinely preferred to respond not through overt patterns of resistance but, instead, by attempting to work within the traditional political system. The United Hebrew Citizens of Rhode Island (1905) and the Samuel H. Zucker Hebrew Educational Association (1914) followed over an extended period with intentions similar to those professed by the United Hebrew Citizens: to promote assimilation and political participation by qualifying "men of the Hebrew faith in the highest duties of citizenship" Combined with the Twenty-third District Republican Association and the North End Political Club, such organizations served as effective conduits through which a broader flow of education might be achieved and eventual political benefits could also be accrued. Not only was political awareness fostered through participation in the programs of these groups, but a keener sense of patriotism and a thrust toward naturalization, registration and voting also were promoted. Interestingly, a glance at the names of charter members of these organizations provides a kaleidoscopic image of the local Jewish community's activists, with all manner of occupations represented. Tailors, jewelers, peddlers, merchants, attorneys, janitors, grocers, clerks and physicians all united to forward their common cause.²³

Federal legislation directed at devising literacy tests hit closest to home since at least 19.8 percent of the the 5,652 Russian Jews residing in and about Providence in 1905 were classified illiterates. In wards exhibiting the greatest concentration of Jews (Ward 3 in particular), the second highest degree of illiteracy was also found, exceeded only by Ward 9 which contained the city's heaviest concentration of foreign-born Italians.²⁴ Had the literacy requirements been in effect at the time these people emigrated, few would have found access into the country. As reflected by Ward 9 configurations, the question affected ethnics other than Jews. So long as America remained weary of its asylum role, literacy tests and all other restrictive legislation forwarded by immigration foes posed a serious threat to continued immigration. Not surprisingly, such legislation would affect family and friends of already established Providence ethnics, especially Jews who displayed a protracted inclination toward immigration well into the twentieth century.

Since little of significant measure could be effected to frustrate social ostracism, Jews — as previously demonstrated — sought to work on their own behalf in the more critical arena of American politics. There, at least some recourse might be initiated to counter potentially pernicious discriminatory legislation at the state and national levels. The supplemental education and information provided by the various political and educational societies gave impetus to Providence Jews to penetrate political circles. Their entrance into politics was often easier than gaining employment, since urban political machines, anxious to accumulate votes in exchange for favors and patronage, were generally willing to embrace Jewish activists seeking to carve out their own niche within the system. Most political bosses reasoned that, like it or not, these new immigrant-citizens would in time represent an influential segment of the electorate; therefore, both major parties, whether in Providence or New York, admitted Jews to their ranks, albeit to modest, inconsequental positions at first.²⁵

Locally, most politically active members of the Jewish community sought to profess loyalty to that party which appeared to best serve particular needs and interests; hence, ethnicity bridged party gaps. Issac Hahn, the first Jew elected to public office in Rhode Island, was a local manufacturer who found Republican policies favorable; his son, Jerome, later served as the state's first judge of Jewish origins. Also loyal to the Republican standard was Third Ward representative Jacob Eaton, a Romanian Jew naturalized



J. Jerome Hahn

J. Jerome Hahn (1868-1938), b. Albany, N.Y., moved to Providence in 1870, attended public schools; B.A. and law degree (1889) from Boston University. Second Jew to pass Rhode Island bar examination, Hahn became Associate Justice of Superior Court in 1919 and an Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, 1931-1935. He was an Honorary President of Temple Beth-El.

in 1899. He was a significant component of local patronage systems controlled by political strongman Charles Brayton. Eaton, much involved with Providence's Jewish organizations, sat eleven years in the General Assembly, served on several state committees, and was selected Rhode Island's first State Jury Commissioner in 1918. A prominent figure for North End Jews, Eaton was counted on by local Republicans to "deliver the vote" each election day. Consequently, Eaton counted as his allies Rhode Island political luminaries like United States Senator LeBaron Colt and Governor Emery J. SanSouci. 27

Emerging from local political tidepools, and inspired by early leaders like Hahn and Eaton, a solid core of Jewish political fugures rose within the city's political mechanisms to serve their community. Rivals or allies, men like Issac Moses, Harry Bachrach, Phillip Joslin and George Helford all achieved some prominence in local party politics. Moses eventually became the first Jewish state senator in 1930, a Democrat serving the North End's Second District.²⁸

This injection of Jewish political influences into the mainstream should not be overlooked, for by 1905 the Providence Jewish community did comprise a sizeable portion of the local electorate (though by no means in a position of power). Although Jews represented but approximately 3.8 percent of the city's total population, a thick ethnic concentration in particular wards allowed Jews to at least wield some political clout in citywide elections. For example, in Eaton's Third Ward, Jews of Polish, Russian and Slavic origins constituted 12.8 percent of the population in 1905; coupled with a viable Italian population, the immigrant presence in that ward soars to a meaningful 27.9 percent — a sufficiently large ethnic bloc capable of influencing any election. While not so pronounced elsewhere as in the Third Ward, it is clear that the expanding Jewish community, bolstered by other ethnic elements, was gaining political currency during this critical period.

Local political influence, while initially modest, was enveloped by a more significant aura eminating from national impulses. Generally, the nation's Jews were traditionally strongest politically in the urban Northeast during the new century's first two decades, if only because Eastern European Jews constituted such a swelling portion of the electorate. In the ensuing struggle over literacy tests and immigration restriction, then, it is scarcely surprising that the most potent and unified opposition to such measures was generated by urban-North representatives, despite the influence of virulent Brahmin Yankees like Lodge. Consequently, with marginal House of Representatives support, enough pressure was brought to prompt President William Howard Taft's 1912 veto of a Senate proposed anti-immigration bill. Heavy

Jewish pressure thwarted yet another such effort two years later, with the American Jewish Committee undoubtedly receiving support from sympathetic senators like LeBaron Colt. President Woodrow Wilson also vetoed a similar bill in February, 1915.³⁰

To the chagrin of local and national Jews, as well as other ethnic genus, legislation restricting the flow of immigration into the United States was finally enacted in 1917 and strengthened in May 1921, with the establishment of illiteracy clauses and a quota system the foremost features. Hence, American nativism, aided by the resistance to post-World War I tide of renewed immigration to this country, culminated in the enactment of the nation's first quantitative restrictions. Still, this development need not necessarily be viewed as being reflective of eroding Jewish influences or activities. Rather, the success of anti-immigration forces is best tied to the nation's post-war disillusionment and, significantly, the natural maturation and consolidation of second and third generation ethnics as they more securely found their place within the larger American society. This consolidation was also reflected within the structure of Providence Jewry.

By 1916 the incidence of new Jewish organizations chartered solely for beneficial and mutual aid purposes in Providence had diminished markedly. In their place were more literary, social, trade and professional organizations concerned with projecting local Jews into more prominent social and economic roles within society. The South Providence Junk Peddlers' Protective Union (1916), the Keystone Athletic Club (1916), the Star Social and Literary Association (1917), and the People's Forum (1917) typified the Jews' new endeavors to forge ahead rather than maintain the status quo. Resistance to external impulses like immigration restiction. while still common, lessened as did the need for certain specific Jewish organizations of earlier origin, thus mirroring the pronounced incidence of Jewish integration into American society.³¹ The level of maturation and assimilation achieved illustrates the effectiveness of the community's diverse organizations and societies in helping Providence Jews internalize the demands of patriotism and citizenship, while concurrently adhering to the history and traditions of their forefathers. The emerging cultural pluralism made it possible for Jews to penetrate every sector of activity within Providence, and within each make substantial contributions.*

^{*}For a similar conclusion, although approached from a different perspective and environment, see the condensed version of Lawrence H. Fuch's lecture elsewhere in this volume. Ed.

NOTES

- ¹Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 60-61; Maldwyn A. Jones, American Immigration (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 201-202; Samuel Joseph, Jewish Immigration to the United States (New York: Arno Press reprint edition, 1969), 43, 99, 109; Judith E. Smith, "Our Own Kind: Family and Community Networks," Radical History Review, 17 (Spring 1978), 99-103; Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider, Jewish Americans: Three Generations in a Jewish Community (Englewood Cliffe, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 34.
- ²John Higham, Strangers in the Land (New York: Atheneum reprint edition, 1973), 66, 160; Howe, World of Our Fathers, 51, 55-56; Brian Kempner, "Jewish Immigration into Providence: A Comparison of the Settlement of the Soviet Jews, 1970-1982, with that of Russian Jews, 1881-1924," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 9 (November 1983), 13. ³Joseph, Jewish Immigration, 149.
- ⁴This triangle is, roughly, a geographic delineation framed by Orms, Chalkstone and North Main streets. By 1906 the Providence Jewish community was overwhelmingly Eastern European in character, with 72.9 percent of Russian origin. Sidney Goldstein, *The Greater Providence Jewish Community: A Population Survey* (Providence: The General Jewish Committee of Providence, Inc., 1964), 11.
- ⁵Maxine Sellers, *To Seek America* (Englewood, California: Jerome S. Ozer, 1977), 164; Goldstein and Goldscheider, *Jewish Americans*, 27.
- 6Smith, "Our Own Kind," 106-107, 110-111.
- 71bid., 110-111; Howe, World of Our Fathers, 11; Higham, Strangers in the Land, 65.
- 8From 1885 to 1900 the Providence Jewish community grew from an estimated 250 to 1,607 residents. Sidney Goldstein, "The Greater Providence Jewish Community after 25 Years of Development," Rhode Island History, 25 (April 1966), 51-52; "Chartered Organizations," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 2 (May 1956), 21-84.
- ⁹By 1914 nearly two million Jews had arrived in the United States, most falling within the age range of 14-44. Howe, World of Our Fathers, 5-6, 27, 55, 60-61; Higham, Strangers in the Land, 37-38.
- ¹⁰Statistics extracted from the following sources: Alice Goldstein's Rhode Island state census work as reported in "Mobility of Providence Jews," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 8 (November 1978), 62-93; Marvin Pitterman, "Some Casual Observations," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 3 (November 1958), 46-47.
- ¹¹"Chartered Organizations," 21-34; Lois Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 102.
- ¹² Chartered Organizations, 21-84; Benton H. Rosen, "The Gemiloth Chasodin of Rhode Island: The Hebrew Free Loan Association," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 5 (November 1969), 275-288; Pitterman, "Some Casual Observations," 98-108.
- ¹³Howe, World of Our Fathers, 128.
- 141bid., 61; S. Goldstein, "The Greater Providence Jewish Community," 51-52.
- 15Efraim Inbar, "The Hebrew Day Schools The Orthodox Communal Challenge," The Journal of Ethnic Studies, 7 (Spring 1979), 13.
- ¹⁶Goldstein and Goldscheider, Jewish Americans, 25, 77-78.
- 17S. Goldstein, The Greater Providence Jewish Community, 11; see also Rhode Island Bureau of Industrial Statistics: Advance Sheets of the 1905 Rhode Island State Census (Providence: E.L. Freeman, 1907), Part 4, Table III, 176-196.
- 18 Higham, Strangers in the Land, 160-162; Howe, World of Our Fathers, 405-406, 423.
- ¹⁹Higham, Strangers in the Land, 158; William E. Leuchtenberg, Perils of Prosperity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 206-207; Howe, World of Our Fathers, 53, 406.

- ²⁰Also organized were various national fraternal orders, like the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, which was originally chartered in the 1870s as an anti-Catholic group. See Higham, Strangers in the Land, 163, 173-174.
- ²¹ "Chartered Organizations," 21-84; S. Goldstein, *The Greater Providence Jewish Community*, 12.
- ²²Eleanor F. Horvitz, "Old Bottles, Rags, Junk! The Story of the Jews of South Providence," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, 7 (November 1976), 238.
- 23"Chartered Organizations," 21-84.
- ²⁴The Rhode Island State Census of 1905 lists 7,974 Providence Jews, some 71 percent being of Russian origin. Of these, ages 15-50, 1,118 Russian Jews were listed as illiterate in 1895. Given the steady influx of immigrants, even with the changing character of post-1900 arrivals, it is unlikely that this number decreased. Moreover, figures from the Bureau of Industrial Statistics indicate a still sizeable portion of both Jewish and Italian immigrants as being functionally illiterate at the time of the 1905 state census. Henry E. Tiepke, comp., Census of Rhode Island, 1895 (Providence: E.L. Freeman, 1898), 276, 328-340; Rhode Island Bureau of Industrial Statistics, Part 4, 260-265.
- ²⁵For a sound and cogent examination of the Jewish entrance into the American political system see Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 371-404; also see Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The Political Behavior of American Jews* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1956).
- ²⁶Erwin Strasmich, "Issac Hahn Pioneer Jewish Textile Manufacturer," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 6 (November 1972), 308; Melvin L. Zurier, "Jacob Eaton: A Biographical Note," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 5 (November 1965), 289-295.
- 27Unpublished materials maintained in the archives of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, including political leaflets and personal papers.
- ²⁸Melvin L. Zurier, "Issac Moses: A Colorful Figure," Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, 4 (November 1964), 116.
- ²⁹ Rhode Island Bureau of Industrial Statistics, Part 4, Table XIV, 228-340.
- ³⁰Higham, Strangers in the Land, 191-192.
- 31S. Goldstein, "The Greater Providence Jewish Community," 52.

THE JEWS OF NEW ENGLAND: ANYTHING SPECIAL?*

BY LAWRENCE H. FUCHS, Ph.D.

Growing up in the Bronx in the 1930s, I had a parochial New Yorker's view of Jewish life in the United States which was not changed until I entered the U.S. Navy in World War II. I sensed that there was a bustling, dynamic Jewish existence in Chicago, and that there were many Jews in Hollywood, most of whom had come from New York. I was also vaguely aware of a smattering of Jews scattered throughout the rest of the United States, some in Boston, others in Philadelphia, Detroit and places west and south, expecially Miami Beach where some Jews went for vacations and retirement.

But Jewish life was for me New York City. Irving Howe has given us a glorious account of the evolution of the vibrant, extraordinary creative variety of Jewish existence there in *The World of Our Fathers*: Yiddish culture, Zionism, Jewish socialism, Jews in politics, Jews in universities, and for a young boy Jews in mainstream American sports and entertainment. New York had become the premiere musical interpreters and expositors of Americana to Americans and the world. George Gershwin had become the most authentic musical genius the United States had produced; Irving Berlin's superpatriotism had been reflected in a half-dozen pop tunes, including "God Bless America;" Jerome Kern had given us *Show Boat* in 1927; and Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* was about to be conceived in January 1940, the month of my bar mitzvah. But of Aaron Copland, Manhattan's quintessential musical interpreter of Americana, we primitives of the Bronx had heard nothing.

Then there was New York West, also known as Hollywood. There Louis B. Mayer, who had moved to Los Angeles in 1918, joined with Marcus Loew

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^{*}This is a condensed version of the author's lecture before the membership of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association at their Annual Meeting, April 21, 1984, prepared by George H. Kellner, Ed.

and Sam Goldwyn to found MGM. Danny Kaye, John Garfield, Barbara Stanwyck, Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson, the Marx Brothers, Eddie Cantor, George Burns, and George Jessel made us cry and laugh in film and radio. Each of them adapted Jewish themes in blazing displays of American pastiche.

So where did Boston Jewry fit in? Not in the world that mattered to me most: big-time sports. Hank Greenberg, born and raised in the Bronx, had just won the American League's Most Valuable Player award, and Sid Luckman quarterbacked the Chicago Bears to the first of four National Football League championships. Later, I would learn that another Brooklyn boy, Arnold "Red" Auerbach, had become the most successful coach in basketball history in, of all places, Boston, where the Celtics won the championship nine times during his coaching tenure from 1950 to 1966. But in January of 1940 I still thought that the Boston Celtics were exclusively Irish and that Boston was Irish and Yankee — and certainly not Jewish.

The fact is that one out of every ten Bostonians was Jewish and there were about 100,000 Jews in the Boston metropolitan area. Another fact is that Jews from Boston had already contributed more significant thought—often translated into social action—about the relationship of Jews to American society than had the Jews of New York City or any other community in the United States.

Such thought and action was badly needed in the United States of 1940. In that year, revivalist preachers such a Gerald B. Winrod and Gerald L. K. Smith and the Catholic priest Father Charles E. Coughlin spread hatred for Jews throughout the land. Coughlin preached that the Jews were responsible for the Great Depression, and there probably was no city in which he was more popular than Boston. The Irish Catholics upset the Yankee protestants, who believed Popery meant superstition at best and anti-Christ at worst. The Jews were threatening because beneath their squalor lurked a restless energy searching for wealth and power. The travel writer and illustrator Joseph Pennell, in The Jew at Home, published in 1892, warned: "Make him an Englishman or an American, break up his old customs, his clannishness, his dirt and his filth — or he will break you." Geologist Nathaniel Shaler of Harvard wrote that the Jews, like the Aryans, represented a superior people who would not be amenable to succumb to Christian influences. It was better simply to keep them out. Robert A. Woods, the head of the South End Settlement House, was ambivalent about the immigrants he observed in Boston's North and West Ends. Writing in 1903 Woods asserted that "the rise of the Jewish master tailor presents an instructive instance of the evolution of the capitalist. He works endlessly At first, he makes less than his employees; but perseverance, by quick

perception as to organizing and subdividing the industry into specialties... he gradually develops his business...." Frederick A. Bushee, a statistician and economist, blamed the Jews for anti-Semitism. Yet, he could also admire their drive for education, and remarked: "Their death rate is remarkably low, and at the same time their birth rate is very high.... They have also the smallest number of defectives of any one nationality.... In addition to their strong physical characteristics, most of the Jews have keen intellects."

Both Woods and Bushee believed that it was the Jewish obsession with the special practices required by their religion that made Jews as a group disliked. If only Jews would stop being so special, so different, and would accept the tenets of Christianity, they would be welcome by others. Bushee concluded that Jews "cannot become a very valuable element in any society" as long as they remain Jews. "The change in attitude must come from them, tor no nation can assimilate an element which consciously holds itself aloof." From the descriptions of Wood and Bushee, one would have a hard time distinguishing the Jews of Boston's North and West Ends from those on the Lower East Side in 1903. What then made them special? In what ways, if any, did the Yankee assimilationism and Boston parochialism shape Jewish life in the city? Was there some particular chemisty of acculturation that led to a distinctive Boston Jewish product?

Many Jews have heard of Mary Antin, the young Jewish woman who lived and breathed American ideals on Union Place in Boston's West End. Antin saw the same neighborhoods as Woods and Bushee, but understood much more than they about the people who lived there and the nature of American democracy. About the immigrants she wrote in the Atlantic Monthly in 1911 "they are the hope of ward politicans, the touchstones of American democracy." She knew the distaste which native Americans felt for the Jews but added: "What if the cross-legged tailor is supporting a boy in college who is one day going to mend your state constitution for you?" What never ceased to amaze Antin was that she — just as much as the children of families who had lived in America for generations — was entitled to claim the myths, heroes, and symbols of America as her own. Bubbling with patriotism, she repeatedly mentioned her feelings for George Washington in her book, The Promised Land. When writing a poem about George Washington the patriotic volcano exploded.

I could not pronounce the name George Washington without a pause. Never had I prayed, never had I chanted the songs of David, never had I called upon the Most Holy, in such utter reverence and worship....

Mary Antin always capitalized the word Citizen, and through

naturalization she had become one — a fellow citizen of George Washington. She wrote: "One could say 'my country' and *feel* it as one felt 'God' or 'myself.' For the Country was for all Citizens, and *I was a Citizen* and when we stood to sing 'America' I shouted the words with all my might."

Undoubtedly, teenage girls in New York City were having comparable experiences. But this was Boston, where the United States began. It was unquestionably the most self-consciously patriotic metropolis in the United States. It was also the most self-consciously education-minded, intellectual hub of the United States, and at the center of that intellectual hub was the great Harvard University. Mary Antin desperately wanted to go to Radcliffe but her plans were frustrated when her father decided to leave for New York City in 1901.

Other struggling Boston Jews, however, were more fortunate. One of them, the journalist Theodore H. White, begins his personal autobiography. In Search of History, with the statement: "I was born in the ghetto of Boston on May 6, 1915. No one ever told me it was a ghetto America was the open land We were of the Boston Jews." As much as for Mary Antin, American history was loved by young White, and opportunity was the quintessential American ideal, and it was to be seized through education. As White put it "Harvard had the keys to the gates . . . [and] all that laid there was to be looted." The way to Harvard was clear to him: listen to the teachers, read the books, and otherwise be a model student. Still on his way to Harvard, White went to the prestigious Boston Public Latin School, founded a year before Harvard itself. The sheer power of an education there for a young Jewish boy from Dorchester may be difficult to imagine today. White writes, "In our Latin School assembly hall, the frieze bore proudly the names of boys who had graduated to mark American history. From Franklin, Adams, Hancock, on to Emerson, Motley, Eliot, Payne, Quincy, Sumner, Warren, Winthrop — the trail blazers pointed the way "

White, who was a Zionist and taught Hebrew school after hours while at Harvard, brings us close to what is special about Boston in relationship to its Jewish community. Boston, as no other city did, provided two traditions—the patriotic and the intellectual—which, in combination, made it possible for Jews to resist the city's other powerful traditions—the assimilationist and the ethnically parochial—and to conceptualize in wholly American and Jewish ways the relationship of minority groups in general and Jews in particular to the American experience.

Foremost among the young conceptualizers was the young philospher of Harvard, Horace Kallen. Arriving in the United States as an immigrant boy of five from Germany in 1887, Kallen grew up terribly poor. Still, he set his sights on Harvard and graduated in 1903, the year of Wood's and Bushee's publications. At Harvard, where he also was a Zionist, he was impressed in a general way by William James's teaching about the concept of pluralism the possibility of multiple loyalties existing in harmony. Later, Kallen believed that the equal dignity of individuals could be protected only insofar as men and women were permitted to be different. The son of an Orthodox rabbi, he had faced assimiliationist pressures growing up in Boston. Sensitive to these influences on various immigrant communities, Kallen in 1915 wrote an article on cultural pluralism for the Nation magazine. He argued that the United States should not only permit but should value its mosaic of people, as a "cooperation of cultural diversities . . . a commonwealth of national cultures" Rejecting the concept of the "melting pot" made so popular in Israel Zangwill's 1907 play by that name, Kallen compared the United States to a symphony orchestra. He wrote that each ethnic group has its own "theme and melody" to contribute to the American symphony.

Another Bostonian and Harvard man, Louis Dembitz Brandeis, was strongly impressed by Kallen. He found particularly appealing the way in which Kallen reconciled Zionism with Americanism. One could actually become more American by becoming more Jewish. One could be a Zionist supporter and ardent American patriot living in the United States, amplifying those ancient Hebrew values of social justice, freedom for the individual, and respect for differences as an active American citizen. Cultural pluralism assured that Jewish Americans could continue to strengthen the United States through Jewish ethics and that American Jews could plant seeds of Americanism in a reborn Israel.

Brandeis, generally recognized as the most brilliant lawyer in the United States, had already demonstrated that he was everything the anti-Semitic Jews tended to think Jews could not be. Like some of the Brahmins on State Street, he was abstemious, almost ascetic. He appeared to care little for money and much for virtue. Capable of commanding enormous fees from corporations, Brandeis decided in the 1890s, long before his appointment to the Supreme Court in 1916, to implement his view of the good civic society by devoting his efforts to being a "people's attorney."

As a counsel for the Massachusetts Board of Trade he fought against gas utility increases. Later, he represented policy holders and advocated a system whereby savings banks would offer life insurance policies at economical rates. In 1907 he successfully argued a case before the Supreme Court that upheld an Oregon law limiting the working day for women laundry workers to ten hours. Beginning in 1908, Brandeis worked to prevent the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad from acquiring a monopoly in New England, and in 1910 and 1913 he argued before the

Interstate Commerce Commission against rate increases because railroads were being mismanaged.

It is not clear that Brandeis was uncomfortable with his Jewish identity in his earlier years, but there was no question that he was comfortable as an American. His biographer in the *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, Alfred H. Kelly, saw Brandeis as emerging as a lifelong champion of an open, libertarian, democratic society. Who can say how much of that result was due to his father's influence, who fell in love with the United States when he first arrived in 1848 and immediately applied for citizenship papers, or to other factors — such as Boston, where he lived from his 20s to his early 50s? It was in Boston that he met Kallen, that he attended Harvard, and that he put his ideas of social justice into practice.

It was in Boston's Faneuil Hall, as a Fourth of July celebration in 1915, that he declared that America had always believed that each people had something of peculiar value that it could contribute to its high ideals. Brandeis said, "America has believed that we must not only give to the immigrant the best that we have, but must preserve for America the best that is in the immigrant America has believed that in differentiation, not in uniformity, lies the path of progress" In the milieu of assimilationist and parochial Boston, where the great bulk of Jews still struggled for a decent life and respectability, Brandeis and Kallen said it was all right to be Jewish and American, too.

That the immigrant Jews of Boston were extremely poor at the turn of the century has been well documented in The Other Bostonians, a study of social mobility by Stephen Thernstrom. But Thernstrom shows that by 1950, three out of four of the sons of Russian-Jewish immigrants had entered middle-class occupations, far more than for any other immigrant group, including those from England, Wales, Sweden and Germany, Fortyfour percent of the Jewish second generation men had at least one year of college while the male children of no other group were above thirty-one percent. Of course, Jews are notorious for the investment which they make in education, stemming in large measure from their own deeply held Jewish values. But was the gap between the fathers and the children as great in other cities as in Boston, where the intellectual tradition was so strong? Perhaps, but without comparable studies for other cities we do not know. My guess is that both the intellectual and patriotic traditions of Boston had a special power for Boston Jewry. Boston produced few Jewish moguls, tycoons or even magnificent entrepreneurs in the decades before World War II, and no Hank Greenbergs. The special contribution of Boston Jewry was to produce American patriots who became true believers and apostles of an old American ideal — that every person can rise regardless of background and a new American idea that celebrates ethnic and religious diversity within the frame-work of an embracing, individualistic civic culture.