RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

VOLUME 9 NOVEMBER, 1986 NUMBER 4

FRONT COVER

Lena and Nathan Zurier, Fall River, 1900.

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

NOVEMBER, 1986
VOLUME 9, NUMBER 4

130 SESSIONS STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02906

Printed in the U. S. A.
by the William R. Brown Printing Co., Providence, Rhode Island

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Library of Congress National Serials Data Program (NSDP), Washington, D.C. 20540, which operates the U.S. Serials Data System, has assigned the following International Standard Serial Number *(ISSN)* to the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes,* a publication of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association: **ISSN 0556-3609**.

UNITED BROTHERS, BOWLING AND BAGELS IN BRISTOL: A STUDY OF THE CHANGING JEWISH COMMUNITY IN BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

BY STEVEN CULBERTSON* AND CALVIN GOLDSCHEIDER**

This paper is a study of the emergence, decline, and re-estabishment of the Jewish community in Bristol, Rhode Island. We examine the community through the changing character of its major institution, the synagogue, and through it the broader changes in the community. The location of Bristol, Rhode Island makes it an unlikely place for a synagogue; yet here in the midst of a predominately Catholic town on Narragansett Bay stands one of the older synagogues in Rhode Island. Chartered on June 11, 1900, the United Brothers Synagogue, Chevra Agudas Achim, provides the focus for understanding the migration of a predominately Eastern European Jewish community from Long Island to Rhode Island around the turn of the 20th century and its transformation to an Americanized third and fourth generation community a century later. This study illuminates the acculturation process of Eastern European Jews into American society and documents the historical foundations of a changing small Jewish community in Rhode Island.

We have used a variety of documents and methods to study the historical development of the community. These include an analysis of the 1915 Seating Plan of the synagogue and the records of the Bristol Jewish Community Center and Chevra Agudas Achim as they were recorded from the mid-1940s until the closing of the synagogue in the early 1960s. We have also studied the City Directories of Bristol, which, while not always complete (cf. Goldstein, 1955), provided insight into the residential and occupational patterns of the Jewish population. Visits to the current synagogue and discussions with some of the older members added an important qualitative dimension to the study.

Several aspects of the Bristol Jewish community are investigated, including the relation of the location of Bristol to the economic growth of

*Steven Culbertson is a graduate student in Urban Planning at the University of Pennsylvania.
**Calvin Goldscheider is Professor of Judaic Studies and Sociology at Brown University.

the community, the interaction of the Jewish community with the surrounding community, and the changing religiosity of the community. We show that the earlier semi-isolated location of Bristol, specifically its distance from Providence, Rhode Island, influenced the development of unique features of the community. The model for Eastern European Jewish acculturation in America traditionally follows the emergence of the community in a metropolitan context. It is the progressive and political reality of urban life that allowed Jews the opportunity to become a part of American culture and society relatively quickly. In Bristol, a different set of values, those of a small American town, guided its development. Many of the changes we document — changes from factory positions in the National India Rubber Company to real estate dealerships, from religious ecumenicism to competition, from Orthodoxy to Reform-Liberalism — symbolize the impact of "small town American" ideals and suburban lifestyles on Jewish religious practice in Bristol. The history of Bristol's Jews is linked therefore to other Jewish communities, where the small size of the Jewish population and limited economic opportunity are critical constraints on communal expansion or stability (Rose, 1977; Shoenfeld, 1977).

The small-town emphasis on personal economic success, rather than a cosmopolitan emphasis on education as a means to upward mobility provides a key insight into the development of the Jewish community in Bristol. As with other Jewish communities in America, Bristol Jews have also maintained a strong Jewish identity, even as the content and expressions of their Jewishness changed.

The Bristol Jewish community was influenced by the major historical changes in American society. Mass culture with its opportunity for communication and interaction among communities certainly diminished the former isolation of small communities in the nineteenth century. Technology and transportation changes linked Jews into a broader network of communal relationships. Bristol changed from a small isolated town to a distant suburb of Providence, forging new metropolitan ties and changing the nature of Bristol's religious institutions. World War II transformed the life of the Bristol Jewish community. Sustained contact with the cosmopolitan world brought about by the War changed the religious and ethnic identities of Bristol Jews and their pathway to upward mobility. Suburbanization, educational opportunity, and religious freedom lured the Bristol Jews away from their stable, perhaps provincial community.

The Formation of the Early Community

The development of the early Jewish community in Bristol centers on four major events; the formation of the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), the chartering of the United Brothers Synagogue, the move of the National India Rubber Company from Long Island to Rhode Island, and the building of the Synagogue in 1908. Location played a role in all four events. The distance of Bristol from the city of Providence motivated Bristol

Jews to form a YMHA and then to establish the United Brothers Synagogue. The Jewish families of Bristol "realized that to remain in Bristol they had to form their own synagogue since they were, at that time, an uncomfortable distance from the city" (Suzman, A., 1984, p. 1.). The location of Bristol along the Providence-Newport railroad and its proximity to the Newport seaport attracted the National India Rubber Company to Rhode Island. The building of the synagogue reveals the desire of Jews, who had settled in Bristol, to remain and to develop institutional roots.

The Jewish community in Bristol was founded by Eastern European immigrants to Rhode Island some of whom lived in Bristol in the last decade of the 19th century. They founded a Young Men's Hebrew Association in 1896 (Foster, 1985, p. 32). The pioneering Jews of Bristol were Louis Molasky, Joseph Suzman, Max Makowsky, Charles Goldstein, Nathan Marks, Aaron Markoff, and Isaac Eisenberg (Jewish Historical Notes, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1954). All of these men were naturalized in Providence county between 1893 and 1906. They had come from Eastern Europe and settled in Bristol (except for Nathan Marks who was from Germany and settled in Warren).

The formation of a YMHA, "for social and benevolent purposes," in a place where no synagogue existed seemed unusual (Foster, 1985, p. 32). The concept of a YMHA is a very American one, which appears anomalous as the starting point of a new Jewish community of European origins in a small American town. Yet, it is this anomaly which points to the early influence of "Bristol" culture rather than Eastern European traditions as the motivating ideology in the formation of the new Jewish community. The United Brothers Synagogue grew from the seed of the Bristol YMHA.

The Chevra Agudas Achim, United Brothers Synagogue, was formed by Eastern European Jews and organized according to Eastern European Orthodox tradition. The congregation met in the homes of members throughout the early part of the twentieth century; in 1908 a house on John Street was purchased and then moved to a site on Richmond Street (Souvenir Book). The present synagogue building on High Street was built in 1916. The influx of a large number of new Jews from Long Island transformed the community and led to the formation of a more traditional form of Jewish organization than the YMHA.

From the Seating Plan of the synagogue in 1915, it is clear that men sat on the "main floor" of the synagogue and women were removed to the "Ladies Balcony." "There was never any trouble getting a minyan," according to Arline Suzman a recent historian of the community. "The Brotherhood," of which most members were leaders of the synagogue, became the organizational elite. The Brotherhood appointed a Gabbai to lead the services, as there was never a large enough community to support a rabbi. According to the records, a "Sisterhood" also was formed. Since the men officially ran the synagogue and organized the prayers, the women assumed

a supportive role within the synagogue as charity and service providers to the Jewish community in Bristol. The "Sunshine" committee, which persisted until the mid-1950s, organized visits to sick Jews and helped the elderly Jews of the community stay in touch with the synagogue. The synagogue became the gathering point for the small community.

Many of the Jewish communities formed by Eastern European Jews in the early twentieth century began as Jewish burial societies. It was the need for burial of Jewish dead in Jewish rather than Christian ground which provided the impetus. By contrast, the formation of a Young Men's Hebrew Association in Bristol with ideals of Jewish brotherhood led to the formation of the Chevra Agudas Achim, the Fellowship of United Brothers in 1900. It appears that the group from Long Island brought with them a more traditional view of community. Thus, a strong Jewish community emerged in Bristol based on a combination of traditional ideas from Eastern Europe and on new ideas from the American YMHA. It was the life of the community rather than the burial of the dead which led to the chartering of the United Brothers Synagogue.

The synthesis of two communities, from the local YMHA and the newcomers from Long Island, led to some interesting patterns tied to the location of Bristol and the religious and economic opportunities provided in this small town. The United Brothers Synagogue contains a departure from the traditional seating plan of Orthodox synagogues. The original seating plan of the synagogue for the High Holidays in 1915 indicates the placement of a woman with the men on the "main floor". The woman was Mrs. Max Baron, who also held a seat in the Ladies Balcony. The Barons first appear in the Bristol City Directories in 1906 as rubber workers at the National India Rubber Company. Only Max and Jacob are recorded in 1906. Only Jacob is recorded in 1913 as a binder. The entire family is recorded in 1922: Eva as a clerk, Harry and Sadie as employees at the National India Rubber Company, Rebecca, as the widow of Max, presumably the Mrs. Baron recorded on the seating plan of the synagogue in 1915; Max, who is recorded as "Died", and Jacob as "removed to Springfield, Mass." The movement of the Barons, from blue collar workers in the National India Rubber Company to the binding business and to clerkships is typical for the Jews of Bristol.

The two communities of Jews which combined to form the United Brothers Synagogue came from different sources in the economic life of Bristol. The founders of the synagogue lived in Bristol prior to the arrival of the National India Rubber Company. They were Louis Bassing, a cobbler; Louis Molasky, a variety store owner; and Betsy Yarlselvetsky, who dealt in clothing and tinware. These men and women had already become a part of the Bristol economy in the sales professions in the late nineteenth century. As indicated earlier, among the founders of the Synagogue also were rubber workers in the National India Rubber Company which moved from Long Island to Rhode Island between 1897 and 1907. They had come as blue-

collar workers, but soon after moving to Bristol many of the Jewish men who stayed in the community changed employment. They became grocers, furniture salesmen, and jewelers, revealing prior knowledge of and connections to such occupations. This is evident in the movement of Abraham Eisenstadt from employment in the rubber works in 1906 and 1913 to working in "Dry Goods" in 1922, 1930, 1938, and 1947.

Seemingly, it would have been difficult for Eastern European Jews to break into new occupations after such recent immigration and recent naturalization in the United States. Yet, the opportunities materialized in Bristol after the move of the National India Rubber Company from Long Island. It was the economic growth of the town of Bristol in the first two decades of the 20th century that provided the opportunity for the newer Jewish immigrants to move into the "sales" positions. A major factor was the expansion of the National India Rubber Company during World War I. Rubber was needed for the war effort, and it came from Bristol. As the plant expanded, new immigrants, the Italians, were brought to Bristol. It was the location of Bristol, relatively far from other towns and cities, combined with the expansion of the economy and the help of fellow Jews already in services and sales, which provided an early opportunity for first generational upward mobility.

The interaction of Bristol Jews with the surrounding community provides an interesting example of religious ecumenism and economic opportunity at the turn of the century. The founders of the Chevra Agudas Achim, having formed the YMHA in the late 19th century "to build the morality of young people" (Souvenir Book), interacted with the historic YMCA in Bristol, which had been formed in 1863. It is likely that they made connections with the formal Christian community through the YMCA. This ecumenicism among the various religious groups of Bristol represents a liberal trend which began in American religion during the Progressive era and was maintained until the Second World War.

The Jews of Bristol were also treated with kindness by the congregations of several churches in the Bristol area. St. Mary's Church (Catholic) donated the pews to the United Brothers Synagogue. The founders of the Synagogue were aided in their search for a building by Dr. George Lyman Locke, rector of St. Michael's Episcopal Church, who also donated his services in teaching Hebrew (Allen, 1975). Religion served to unite the Jews in their interactions with the community. It was as "Jews" that the newest community of immigrants interacted with Bristol people. Indeed, ecumenicism only served not only to develop relations between Jews and non-Jews, but also to keep the Jews "distinct" as a community. The formal religious institutions provided the framework for social interaction. Jews interacted socially with Jews, Protestants with Protestants, and Catholics with Catholics. Any inter-religious interaction occurred with this framework

in mind. Yet ecumenicism in Bristol helped develop some cross-religious friendships, such as that between Dr. Locke and the Chevra Agudas Achim.

The interaction between Jews and non-Jews was much more widespread for Bristol Jews than it would have been for metropolitan Jews, simply because there was less of a chance for Bristol Jews to remain isolated within the Jewish community. Jews lived close to the synagogue on High, John, Wood, and Catherine Streets, but they were not congregated all in one place. Only about forty Jewish families were members of the synagogue at one time, and therefore there were not enough people to form an entire Jewish community. This served to bring Jews into the mainstream of Bristol Jewish life much more quickly than Jews who were part of larger Jewish communities in and near to the major cities of the Northeastern United States. Religion and national origin formed the focus for the primary social network for the Jews of Bristol, but the greater society of Bristol formed a strong secondary network, based on economic relationships and residential patterns.

The Jewish community in Bristol was very stable from just after the in-migration from Long Island until the years after World War II. What was it about Bristol that allowed Jews to form a community and maintain that community for close to forty years at a time when most Jews were highly mobile in America? The answer in part relates to the range of local economic opportunities available; perhaps the continuing orthodoxy of Bristol Jews also played a role. In comparison to other Jewish communities, the Bristol Jewish community appears to have maintained itself institutionally as an Orthodox community at a time when many Jews were moving away from Orthodoxy. They continued to maintain the synagogue as the center of their community throughout the first half of the twentieth century. There is a preceived absence of anti-Semitism noted often in conversations with members of the Bristol Jewish community and repeated in the minutes of the Chevra Agudas Achim. This receptive behavior of the Bristol community to Jews was also an important factor in their stability.

The children who made up the Young Judea Sunday School in the late 1930s were for the most part the children of the men and women who were seated in the Chevra Agudas Achim in 1915. This is remarkable, since most synagogues at this time period could not boast of the same stability. On the one hand, there was little pressure to move beyond the family store or the seaside setting, as there would have been in a major metropolitan setting; on the other hand, the community had to contend with the limitations of a small town. There was no Rabbi; they had to send to Providence for Kosher meat, sabbath candles and bagels (Foster, ibid, p. 33).

Economic mobility, religious flexibility, and Jewish institution building characterize the early development of the Bristol Jewish community. The rapid mobility of both the first settlers and the migrant National India Rubber Company workers provided a firm economic base for the community to thrive and grow. Ecumenicism and women seated on the

main floor of an Orthodox synagogue provide evidence of religious flexibility. The establishment of the YMHA and the United Brothers Synagogue aided the formation of a small, yet vital, Jewish community. Finally, the building of the present synagogue in 1916 firmly rooted the community in Bristol. Based on these components, the Bristol Jewish community established itself as a permanent part of the larger Bristol community and a stable religious community within this larger context.

New Institutions; New Challenges

During the 1930s, the United Brothers Congregation attempted to maintain regular Sabbath services and developed a Sunday School for religious instruction. In the course of the 1930s, two new institutions were formed. The first was a bowling league, which eventually was transformed into the Bristol Jewish Community Center. The other was the Young Judea Sunday School. It is these second and third generation Jews who faced the option of either transforming the community or leaving for greater economic, social, and educational opportunities elsewhere.

The formation of the Young Judea, a Sunday School for Jewish children, in the 1930s marked another step in the institutional development of the Bristol Jewish community. The children of the original founders of the synagogue were the members of the Young Judea. Names such as Osofsky, Shusman, Marks, Myerson, Levitan, Levy, and Molasky appear both on the seating plan of 1915 and as members of the Young Judea. The leaders of Young Judea, with names like Shusman and Levitan, were likewise the children of leaders of the synagogue. The "Bristol Jewish Community Center" had been the original name of the "club", Young Judea, first formed in 1934. The motto of the club, "American Jew," was formally selected on Sunday, November 18, 1934. Young Judea in 1935 held a debate on whether to associate with Gentiles. The Bristol Sunday School children thus were interested in questions and ideas which many older Jews hesitated to ask or discuss openly. The debate was a foreshadowing of what was to come in the life of the Bristol Jewish Community.

The children who formed Young Judea were second and third generation Jews of Bristol. They were no longer identified as ethnically Eastern European. They were American, and they were Jewish. Their choice of slogans for their club reveals their desire to integrate the beliefs of their parents with their national identity. This tension between Americanness and Jewishness was at the heart of their identities throughout their lives. The education that these young Jews received provided the impetus for change within the Bristol Jewish communtiy.

The Jewish Community Center and the Young Judea movements were particularly American forms of Jewish communal expression, broader than the traditional synagogue. They provided the space and the resources for

Jewish cultural events, for Jewish education, and for other forms of Jewish expression.

BAGELS . . . AND THE BRISTOL JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

In the period following World War II the Bristol Jewish community was transformed in two ways: First, new ideas and opportunities were generated by greater contact with other Jews and with non-Jews during the war. Second, there was an increase in the geographic mobility of all Americans following the war. There was a significant out-migration of Jews from Bristol in search of greater economic, social, and educational opportunities elsewhere in the United States. At the same time, there was a small in-migration of Jews to Bristol from the late 1940s to the 1960s as part of the suburbanization of the Providence Jewish community. The out-migration of old families from the Bristol community and the in-migration of new ideas and some new Jews to the Bristol Jewish community resulted in the development of a new institution/organization, the Bristol Jewish Community Center and the reformation of the Chevra Agudas Achim. Location plays a role in the transformation of the Bristol Jewish community through this period, in conjunction with changes in the impact of economic, social, and educational factors influencing the community.

The writing of the Constitution of the Bristol Jewish Community Center in 1947 marks the transition of leadership in the Synagogue from those of the first generation to those of the second generation. Ira Stone, Herbert Eisenstadt, and Maynard Suzman formed the ideals that motivated the new Jewish institution in Bristol. These men, who had returned from the war with new insights about their religion, reshaped Judaism in Bristol. Recorded minutes of the Chevra Agudas Achim of September 27, 1946 was the following:

> On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, September 27, 1946, three men of our Bristol Jewish Congregation (saw) among themselves the situation prevailing of non-activity among the Jewish people of Bristol county and took upon themselves to try to stimulate interest and good will among us.

The concept of a Community Center appeared in the thirties, with the formation of a Sunday School for the children of the original immigrants to Bristol. It also served as a bowling league in the late thirties, but was not constituted as an organization until 1946. The Bristol Jewish Community was formed as a parallel organization to the Chevra Agudas Achim. It was a social center of the Jewish community. This marked a significant formal change, since prior to the war Jews in Bristol has been oriented to the traditional social life of Orthodox Jews, with the synagogue as the focal point of Jewish life. The shift away from this tradition is the result of the ascendency of the second generation of Jews in Bristol. The Constitution of the Bristol Jewish Community Center written in 1946 reflects the change (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Constitution of the Bristol Jewish Community Center

Preamble of the Constitution
Bristol Jewish Community Center

We, the peoples of Jewish faith of Bristol county, in order that we may be of greater service to our community and to each other, do hereby unite to establish a permanent organization.

Article I Section II

This organization is to be a religious, social, civilian, and nonpolitical group.

Article I Section III
Objects of the Organization

The objects of the organization shall be:

1. To unite socially all peoples, male and female of Jewish parentage and of good moral character.

2. To give all moral and material aid in its power to its members and those dependent upon them. Also to assist the widows and orphans of deceased members.

3. To assist Chevra Agudas Achim in the promulgation of its program in-so-far as it may be consistent with its rules and regulations.

4. To work toward and strive for increased interest in the synagogue and all things Jewish.

5. To elevate the moral and social standings of its members.

The formation of the Community Center implies that the synagogue was not meeting all of the needs of the Jewish residents of Bristol. The terminology of the Constitution is distinctly "American" rather than traditionally "Jewish". Though there are references to the Jewish faith, it is an American formulation of Judaism that was proposed in this Constitution. After World War II, Jewish veterans who returned to Bristol set about to make Jewish religious rituals more in line with what they considered to be the tenor of the times. Bristol Jews had, according to Maynard Suzman, become "restless" with the restrictions of Orthodoxy. Jewish war veterans stressed the moral, not the ritual dimension of Judaism. They wanted to integrate their heightened sense of American morality, which was formed in the service of their country, with their Jewish heritage. The appearance of a "Chaplain" position in the Community Center hearkens to the wartime experience of the returned Jewish veterans, as does the stated purpose of the Jewish Community Center: "This organization is to be a religious, social, *civilian*,

and *nonpolitical* group". Perhaps the tragic reality of Nazi anti-Semitism wrenched small-town Bristol Jews into a heightened acknowledgement of their heritage.

Discussions about Palestine, letters to Congress about international issues, buying Israel Bonds, and Jewish education classes for adults and children during the early years of the Community Center represent a successful attempt at integration of Jewish religious and moral values with American social institutions. The Bristol Jewish Community Center became the institutional symbol of the suburbanization of a small town, close to a large city. The Bristol Jewish Community Center took on the functions of the "Sisterhood" of the previous generation. Building improvements were undertaken by the Community Center rather than by the Synagogue. The "Sunshine Committee" became a part of the Community Center as did the Sunday School, fund raising, and moral education.

The first generation of Jews in Bristol with their ethnic heritage, their very foreignness, provided reminders of the differences between Jews and non—Jews. In the late 1940s and 1950s there were no such reminders. Judaism had become less of a lifestyle difference and more of a different system of cultural and social symbols within an American lifestyle. The repetition of a Jewish morality theme in the Constitution of the Bristol Jewish Community Center symbolizes the transformation of Judaism in Bristol. It was no longer identification with the Chevra Agudas Achim which defined the community, but rather identification with a sense of "Jewish" community institutionalized in the Bristol Jewish Community Center.

The "Chaplain" position in the Community Center provides an interesting study of the development and demise of this institution. The Chaplain was to read the opening and closing prayers and keep a record of all deceased members of the Community Center. The Chaplain position was a part of the Community Center for three years, after which time it was unanimously abolished. In these early years, women gained positions of leadership, and the men who had originally formed the Community Center moved into positions of leadership in the Synagogue. The "Chaplain" position was no longer viable, since the Synagogue retained the central ritual and traditions focus of Judaism in Bristol.

In addition to these new forms of Jewish expression in the Bristol Jewish community after the war, the out-migration of Bristol Jews had a major impact on the community. The efforts of the Bristol Jewish Community Center members to reshape the community can be understood as efforts to stop the decline of the once stable community. Change in the community is revealed in the names of the signers of the Constitution. The signers were mostly older Jews, new Jews who had moved to Bristol following World War II, and some returned veterans. The lack of second and third generation families on the Constitution roster is telling of the movement of these individuals and families away from Bristol to find greater economic, social, and educational opportunities. Maynard Suzman, one of those young

veterans who returned to Bristol, cited the G.I. Bill as the cause of the flight of young families from Bristol. Upward mobility through education was the result of the G. I. Bill. Jews could not climb any higher in the economic structure of Bristol, since there were limited occupational opportunities in such a small community. Interviews with older members of the community revealed that there were only "so many women in the Bristol Jewish community". Marriage to Jews from out of the community and intermarriage with non-Jews resulted in the migration of young men and women away from the community. The migration of young Jews away from Bristol resulted in the eventual closing of the synagogue in the early 1960s.

The Bristol Jewish Community Center had a life of just over ten years. Those ten years mark the ascendency, not only of the second generation, but of a distinctly "American" outlook in the Bristol Jewish community. Previously, Judaism meant Orthodox ritual, which was the norm in the Bristol Jewish community until World War II. After the war, it was Jewishness rather than Judaism which became the focus of the community for the Bristol Jews. They abandoned the Orthodoxy of their fathers and became "Conservative," a pattern that paralleled national trends (Sklare, 1955) as well as those in the nearby Providence metropolitan area (Goldstein and Goldscheider, 1968). The Bristol Jewish community maintained considerable contact with the Providence Jewish community, simply by virtue of their relative proximity. Both Jewish communities were transformed in the 1950's from mostly Orthodox communities to most Conservative. Women in positions of leadership in the Community Center and use of an English/Hebrew prayer book at High Holiday services mark this movement toward Conservative Judaism. As the Providence Jewish community moved from Providence to Riverside, Barrington, Warren, Cranston, and Warwick made Bristol closer to the suburbs of Providence. Suburbanization brought the Conservative movement to the forefront. Bristol's distance Providence narrowed by the development of the Providence suburbs and the expansion transportation networks around Providence with better roads and the automobile.

Thus, Conservatism from Orthodoxy, Community Center from synagogue, and ultimately, out-migration and decline from stability characterized this period. Small-town ideals were replaced by more cosmopolitan patterns of suburbanization. The growth of new religious institutions in Bristol reflect the geographical redefinition of Bristol. The future could only reflect the competition with other Providence suburbs for Jews and Jewish institutions. The Bristol Jewish Community Center and the remnant of the United Brothers Synagogue could not compete with the Barrington Jewish Center and other larger Conservative synagogues in the new suburbs of Providence.

The Breakdown of a Synagogue; the Renewal of the Bristol Jewish Community

The United Brothers Synagogue ceased to exist sometime between 1962 and 1965. The Bristol Jewish community became too small and too uninterested in their synagogue to maintain services there. Several attempts were made to attract new members to the synagogue in the 1950s but these attempts failed. There was some discussion of starting a Hebrew school for Jewish children in the Bristol community, but response was inadequate. With other synagogues in close proximity, there was no need to duplicate community services in the United Brothers Synagogue. A move to Barrington was discussed in early 1962, and in October purchase of the Trinity Episcopal Church building in Barrington was discussed. The cost would be $20,000. It appears that the matter was not pursued.

The growth of the Jewish community around Providence, appears to have overwhelmed the United Brothers Synagogue. It was now the *closeness* of Bristol to Providence rather than the *distance* that caused the destabilization and cessation of the Bristol Jewish community and the United Brothers Synagogue.

At some point the Levitan sisters, native residents of Bristol, became caretakers of the Synagogue during its dormancy. They kept it up as best they could. Some day-care services were provided in the building, but no Jewish religious services were held for over a decade. In November of 1953, an amendment was proposed to the United Brothers Synagogue Constitution stating that, "in the event that the congregation has less than ten members, all tangible assets are to be turned over to some Hebrew religious organization and they would act as trustees of the property." It appears that this was never carried out. The decline of the United Brothers Synagogue was quiet.

The closing of the synagogue, however was not the end of the history of the Jewish community of Bristol. The efforts of new Jews in Bristol to restore the United Brothers Synagogue in 1975 indicate the emergence of a new Jewish community in Bristol and the development of new ways to be Jewish. The Brodys, the Suzmans, Nancy Hillman, and the other families and individuals who helped to restore the United Brothers Synagogue highlight the desire of newer Jews in Bristol to worship as Jews in their own town. The heritage of the United Brothers Synagogue provided the focal point for a new community of Jews. The majority of the members of the new Bristol Jewish community are not relatives of the former residents of Bristol, but are recent migrants to the small seaside town. The new United Brothers Synagogue can only be understood as a completely distinct institution from the old Chevra Agudas Achim. Termed a "liberal-reform" synagogue by some of its members, it represents the formation of a completely new institution.

Efforts to rebuild a congregation at the United Brothers Synagogue were exerted in the early 1970s, but did not come to fruition until the restoration efforts of Nancy Hillman, a relative of the Hillmans who had been part of the

wave of suburban migration in the 1950s, and the Brodys, who were also new members. With the aid of a youth group from the Barrington Jewish Center and a local Scout troop, the restoration of the United Brothers Synagogue got underway in 1975. St. Michael's Episcopal Church and St. Mary's Catholic Church assisted in the process of restoration. An organ, panelling, and light fixtures were donated anonymously to the new United Brothers Synagogue. The re-opening party in 1975 brought many of the members of the old families from all over the United States back to Bristol.

The United Brothers Synagogue, traditionally without a rabbi, provided flexibility for Jews in Bristol to govern themselves. The institution is the people. By the nature of its size and location it had always been a "community" synagogue. The United Brothers Synagogue in the 1980s is wholly a result of the efforts of the congregants. Meetings once a month on Friday nights are attended by people as "far away" as Providence. Friday night is a social event in addition to a religious experience. Couples sit together. Guest speakers are invited to give a message. Friday evening services reaffirm in new ways the Jewishness of the congregants.

The new "historic" United Brothers Synagogue is a transformed insitution. Yet, the location of Bristol remains a pre-eminent factor in the development of the Jewish community in Bristol. The location of a community cannot be changed, and Bristol has remained a small American town. The new Bristol Jewish community completes a circle from the earliest Bristol Jewish community. It is the small town qualities that allow Bristol Jews to maintain their Jewish identity and still interact comfortably with the surrounding community. The values which made Bristol a prime site for the construction of a stable Jewish community in 1900 remain in 1980s.

The life of a small-town Jewish community is reflected in the development of its institutions. The YMHA, the Chevra Agudas Achim, the bowling league, the Young Judea, the Bristol Jewish Community Center, and the "historic" United Brothers Synagogue all serve to illustrate the development of the Judaism and Jewishness of Bristol's Jews.

At the turn of the century, Bristol was a half day's journey from Providence, Rhode Island. In 1986, Bristol is only a thirty-five minute drive. Between 1900 and 1986, the automobile, suburbanization, and mass communication have transformed Bristol from a small town, distant from Providence, to a suburb, close to Providence. While the location has not changed, the definition of its location in relation to other towns and cities has changed.

Jews in Bristol developed institutions similar to those in other Jewish communities in America. Bristol is a microcosm of the larger American Jewish community. Location played a major role in its development and transformation. Its adaptability facilitated its growth, development, and survival. The history of the Bristol, Rhode Island Jewish community

illustrates how a community can adapt to internal and external pressures, and to changes within the larger community. Judaism in Bristol is American Judaism; and new forms of Jewishness and Jewish community life are emerging in Bristol as it approaches the end of its first century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this paper was first prepared by Steven Culbertson as part of a senior seminar in Judaic Studies in the spring of 1986 at Brown University under the supervision of Calvin Goldscheider. A much more detailed report with greater documentation has been deposited in the archives of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. This paper is a substantially revised analysis of the highlights of that research project. We acknowledge the help of Deborah Glanzberg, Davis Guggenheim, and G. Bolton White, participants in the original seminar, for their constructive advice in the preparation of the original research. Our gratitude to Geraldine Foster, President of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, who facilitated the research and was instrumental in encouraging the scholarly use of materials on the history of Rhode Island. She was helpful in providing Steven Culbertson with a Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association research grant through which he became the Association's "Research Scholar" for the spring of 1986. Eleanor Horvitz was helpful in providing access to the materials and we are all grateful to her for her historical foresight in asking for and preserving all of the records of the United Brothers Synagogue.

NOTES

Allen, Douglas, "Judaism is Alive and Well in Bristol," *The Evening Bulletin*, Providence, Rhode Island. April 3, 1975.

Foster, Geraldine, "The Jews in Rhode Island; a Brief History." Rhode Island Heritage Foundation and the *Rhode Island Publications Society*, Providence, 1985.

Goldstein, Sidney, "The Use of City Directories as Sources of Demographic Data," *American Sociological Review*, 1955.

Goldstein, Sidney, and Goldscheider, Calvin, *Jewish Americans*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.

Kessner, Thomas, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City 1880-1915*, Oxford University Press, 1977.

Rose, Peter, "Small-Town Jews and Their Neighbors in the United States," in A. Lavender (ed.), *A Coat of Many Colors*, Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977, pp. 35-54.

Schoenfeld, Eugen, "Small-Town Jews' Integration into Their Communities," and "Problems and Potentials," in A. Lavender (ed.), *A Coat of Many Colors*, Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977, pp. 55-75.

Sklare, Marshall, *Conservative Judaism*, The Free Press, 1955.

Suzman, Arline, "A History of the United Brothers Synagogue." February 2, 1984. Souvenir Booklet, The 275th Anniversary of Bristol.

DOCUMENTS

1. Ledger of the United Brothers Synagogue, Accounts from 1903 to 1912.
2. Seating Plan of the United Brothers Synagogue, 1915.
3. Cash Book of the United Brothers Synagogue, Receipts and Payments, September 23, 1923 to July 12, 1925.
4. Letter of the United Brothers Congregation concerning the "Building Improvement Fund," 1934.
5. Minutes of the Meetings of the Young Judea, 1934-1941.
6. Minutes of the Meetings of the United Brothers Synagogue, 1935-1937.
7. Minutes of the Meetings of the United Brothers Synagogue, 1937-1940.
8. The Constitution of the Bristol Jewish Community Center, October 8, 1946.
9. Records of the Meetings of the Bristol Jewish Community Center, 1946-1952.
10. Records of the Meetings of the Chevra Agudas Achim, 1947-1962.
11. Exerpts from Bristol City Directories of 1897, 1906-1907, 1913-1914, 1922, 1930, 1938, 1947, 1954, and 1963.
12. Map of Bristol, Rhode Island, circa 1870.

THE *RHODE ISLAND ISRAELITE*: A BRIEF GLIMPSE OF JEWISH LIFE IN THE STATE IN THE 1890s

BY LINDA LOTRIDGE LEVIN

As Eastern European Jews fled the discrimination and pogroms of Czarist Russia and settled in this country during the 1880s and 1890s, they desperately needed information to help them understand and adjust to this new culture.[1] It was in response to this need that a Yiddish press was born and flourished in the urban areas, particularly in New York City, where the best-known and most influential were the *Jewish Daily Forward* and *The Yiddishes Tageblat*. Similar papers sprang up in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and even in Los Angeles. And from Aug. 1, 1894, to July 1, 1896, Rhode Island could boast its own Yiddish newspaper, the *Rhode Island Israelite*. In fact, it probably was the first Jewish newspaper ever published in the state.

These early Yiddish newspaper were fragile publications, often irregular in appearance, reflecting old-country rythms and tonalities.[2] The *Rhode Island Israelite* was no exception. Like the other newspapers of its time, the Yiddish newspapers lacked the sophistication we associate with the newspapers of today. Headlines topped stories that lined up like grey soldiers across the pages. Instead of photographs, not widely used in the press until the 20th century, there were line drawings to break the monotony of the columns of type. Even the writing style in the articles published in these late 19th century newspapers lacked polish and appears to us now as naive, even crude.

Most Jews who came to America in the late 19th century arrived with no money, few skills, and little education. The newcomers were also victims of a language barrier which hindered economic development.[3] Their newspapers were written and published with this in mind. The *Rhode Island Israelite*, for instance, often was as much as 50 percent or more advertisements for goods and services. The "news" was a melange of religious and political

---

*Linda Lotridge Levin is a former reporter for the *Providence Journal* and assistant professor of Journalism at the University of Rhode Island.

articles, club and personal items, homilies, and even scraps of world news as it pertained to Jews.

Some issues of the *Israelite* were printed almost entirely in Yiddish with only the occasional English word appearing in an advertisement. Other issues came off the press with an English translation of the Yiddish front page. And some issues of the paper were bilingual, with about half the articles written in Yiddish and half in English. At best, the planning of the contents of the *Israelite* could be termed haphazard. But in all likelihood, the contents reflected the demands and needs of the paper's readers at any given time.

Reading this publication, which appeared first as a monthly, then as a weekly and finally again as a monthly during its brief two-year run*, must have been a joy to the state's Jews, especially those of Eastern European origin. The *Israelite's* office was located appropriately in the city of Providence, where by 1900 between 75 and 80 percent of the city's nearly 8,000 Jews were of Eastern European ancestry.[4]

The first issue of the *Rhode Island Israelite* is dated Aug. 1, 1894, and its eight pages, written in both Yiddish and English, leave a reader with a vivid impression of Jewish life in the state at that time. The newspaper cost three cents a copy, although later, when it became a weekly publication, the price dropped to one cent.

The front page of this first issue was printed in Yiddish, but a replica of the page appears at the end of the paper and this is in English. The publisher (or publishers) informs the readers why the *Israelite* was conceived and what its purpose was. (In later editions, the names Mason and Levin appear as publishers.) A poem, titled "The Object of the *'Israelite'* A Brief Explanation," explains that the newspaper will "visit monthly every Jewish home," and will "defend the interests of over 10,000 R.I. Israelites." In verse, it continues, "I will keep you informed of all the news, regarding Mohammedans and Christians as well as Jews."

The remainder of the front page is devoted to three articles, none of which would appear today on page one of a newspaper. The first is headed "Editorials," but it is merely a collection of jottings or thoughts from the editor. They include an announcement that the next issue of the paper will feature a letter from Mayor Frank F. Olney of Providence, "which will be of interest to all citizens." Another notation states, "We are pleased to see the rapid increase of Jewish institutions in this city. The establishment of several Educational and charitable societies is a credit to the Hebrew race."

The editorials column closes with a thank you to all the local businessmen

*A complete run of the *Rhode Island Israelite* is on microfilm at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library in Providence.

who are advertising in the paper and urges readers, "Be sure and send in your subscription before the next copy is issued."

Following the editorials is a column titled "Personals," and in the close-knit Jewish community it must have been carefully scrutinized. We learn here that "Edward A. Davidson has taken the management of the Metropolitan Clo. Co. New store at Newport in which he is personally interested," and that "Mr. J. Goldberg, one of our downtown Society leaders, will be married about the 1st of September to Miss Clara Chase of New York city." Other personals mention that "Mrs. C. Levi and her charming daughter, Esther, both of New York city, are the guests of Mr. and Mrs. J. Rose," and that "Mrs. Davis and her daughter, Rose of New York are at Bullocks Point being entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Cohen." What the paper lacked in editing and accuracy it made up for in prominently placed gossip items.

The third front page story that today would be relegated to the inside pages of a newspaper was the account of the marriage of "Mr. Henry Lein and Miss Lena Peril, both of this city." The headline reads "A Pretty Wedding."

Pages two and three of this first issue of the *Israelite* are written in Yiddish with the exception of some advertisements which utilize English to describe briefly their products or services. The news stories, in Yiddish, tell of club activities, a lodge convention in St. Louis, Missouri, and the tariff bill before Congress. The later article ends with a plea from the *Israelite's* editor, "When is the government going to do something about this mess?" Another note from the editor claims, "There are 120 advertisements on the Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn Bridge and 130 advertisements on the New York side, but they don't bring in as many customers as one ad in the smallest newspaper." He is, of course, referring to his own paper, the *Israelite*!*

Other tidbits on these pages include a romantic poem about a young man having a daydream of a girl with beautiful eyes, a breakdown of expenditures in the federal budget, and a brief descriptive piece of life on North Main Street in Providence in which the writer struggles to find the appropriate translation from Yiddish to English of New World words, such as baby carriage and sidewalks. He talks of the danger of women wheeling the baby carriages and children playing in the street from the electric street cars "that run through every five minutes."

Who were some of the advertisers in that first issue? Many gave addresses on North Main Street in Providence, which, with the North End of the city, formed the early nucleus of immigrant Jewish settlement in Providence.[5] Harry Goldsmith was a merchant tailor at 330 North Main Street; S. Lubesky had hairdressing rooms at number 351; Law and Luxnousky sold

*All Yiddish translations in this article were graciously made by Mrs. Edys Marcovitz, president of the Yiddish Club of the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island in Providence, R.I.

bottled lager and soda at number 363; Moses Frank was a purveyor of groceries and provisions at number 364; J. Braverman was a news dealer at 373 North Main Street; George Davis had an auctioneering business at number 286; and John Nelson sold jewelry on the same premises.

South Main Street businessmen were frequent advertisers. Joseph Goman, who sold travel tickets at 29 South Main Street, was one. Other advertisers came from Chalkstone Avenue, such as Goldberg and Fischer, who sold wines and liquors, and from Westminster Street in downtown Providence, such as Bellin and Co., photographers, and the Singer Manufacturing Company, which sold sewing machines and often included line drawings of their wares in their advertisements.

Advertisements in a local newspaper often tell us a lot about the community itself — what kind of people live there, how affluent they are, and what their needs and desires are. Perusing the advertisements in the *Israelite* gives a reader a fascinating glimpse into the economic life of the Jews of Providence.

In addition to informing its readers about available goods and services in the community, another function of the Yiddish newspaper was to attempt to teach its readers the English language. The *Israelite* made sporadic and valiant efforts in this direction. Occasionally a feature titled "The Educator," a story followed by a list of vocabulary words from the story, showed up in the columns of the paper. By today's standards, these features seem an odd, even childish way to teach a foreign language. But they give us an insight into the struggles and frustrations of the immigrant Jews in the late 19th century.

On page six of the first issue of the *Israelite*, next to the advertisements and news columns in Yiddish, is a poem titled "The Little Dog Under the Wagon." In its simplicity, it is the newspaper's first attempt at English instruction. The poem tells the story of a farmer and his wife who are going to market for the day, and reluctantly they must leave behind their dog Spot. But Spot has other ideas. He follows under the wagon. And a good thing, too. A thief attacks the farmer and his wife on their way home, but Spot catches the thief, the farmer binds his hands, and loyal Spot is a hero. The poem ends this way:

> And now a hero grand and gay,
> A silver collar he wears to-day;
> And everywhere his master goes —
> Among his friends, among his foes —
> He follows, upon his horny toes,
> The little dog under the wagon.

For the historian reading that first issue of the *Israelite*, page seven is a gold mine of information about the activities of the local Jewish community, for here is a listing of the Jewish institutions in the city of Providence. Three

are religious: Congregation Sons of Israel and David at the corner of Friendship and Foster Streets, the Congregation Sons of Zion on Orms Street, and the Russian Congregation of Israel on State Street.

Nine are fraternal organizations, complete with addresses, the name of the secretary of each, and the dates each holds meetings. Four charitable societies are listed, three for women and one, United Hebrew Charities, for everyone. There were two beneficial societies, the Rhode Island Hebrew Men's Association, and the Providence Workingmen's Beneficial Association, and two educational societies, Young Men's Moses Montefiore Society, and the Young Sons of Israel. It is quite probable that the *Israelite* was the only source of information available to its readers about these Jewish organizations so vital to the life of the immigrant community.

The second issue of the *Israelite* came off the press on September 1, 1894, and its format was similar to the first issue. A few new advertisers show up. J. Hotchner was involved in "fine sign printing" at 413 Westminster Street, and a reader could purchase tinware and crockery from B. Fain at 35 Mill Street. Jacob Feinstein sold leather and cut stock at 281 North Main Street, and H. Ginzberg was doing business as a boot and shoe repairman at 18 Steeple Street.

Again much of the news and the other articles are printed in Yiddish. In this issue, however, a reader of English would find foreign news. From Germany, we learn that "The Historical Seminary of Berlin University received the literary property of Dr. S. Lowenfeld," and, perhaps a more pertinent piece of news from Germany, "Prof. Assman, president of the Berlin Yacht Club, and other members of the committee have resigned, owing to the members of the Club having twice blackballed a Jew who had been nominated for election."

From Austria-Hungary, we learn that an editor "of an anti-Semitic paper in Prague was sentenced to hard labor for insulting Jews and their religion." From Morocco comes word that "a deputation of the Hebrew community recently waited to present gifts to the new Sultan," and from Turkey, "The chief rabbi of Turkey was received warmly by the Sultan on a visit to Yildiz Palace."

This issue of the *Israelite* also ran a separate front page in English, and again one of the major features is editorials or jottings mostly to do with the publisher's gratitude to the Jewish community for subscribing to the new paper. A three-stanza poem titled "The Result of Love," a homily about courtship and marriage, graces the front page.

A feature that eventually becomes a staple of the *Israelite* shows up for the first time in this issue on page one. It is a two-column listing of new state laws, in this case those that came out of the January, 1894, session of the General Assembly. Today local and state government listings or advertisements are a lucrative source of revenue for a newspaper. We can only assume the same was true for the *Israelite*.

Some of these laws would be of interest to the readers of the *Israelite*, assuming they were acquainted with a variety of English words. One law printed in the November, 1894 issue dealt with women and children in the workplace and ordered employers to install "water closets, earth closets or privies in places where women and children work." Other laws, such as the one that related to coroners and medical examiners, were probably bypassed by all but the most careful reader.

Like many foreign language newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the *Israelite* had no scruples about "lifting" articles from other publications when they thought such materials would appeal to their own readers. One example of this is an excerpt from the *Jewish Chronicle* on the death of Tsar Alexander III that appears in the December 1, 1894 issue of the *Israelite*.

It is an unusual article, not because it is about a Russian czar, obviously a topic of some interest to the recent victims of that country's discrimination, but because it is an analysis of his rule written in the flowery prose of the late 19th century. It begins "Alexander III's sun has set in the firmament. The evening bell has tolled: the 'bar' is crossed, the Tsar has 'put out to sea.' " It then goes on to portray him as "an evil dictator" who "crushed the joy and the life of thousands of his fellow men." His reign is described as "a failure." It notes that "the liberal work of Alexander II has all been undone," and concludes, "To the Jewish community, the Tsar has bequeathed a heritage of woe."

By May 1, 1895, the *Israelite* had become a weekly publication and would continue so until January 1, 1896, when it reverted to a monthly until it ceased publishing after the July 1, 1896, issue. As a weekly, the paper had fewer pages, usually four, and it cost one cent. It contained more advertising than news and feature articles, and fewer of the stories were printed in English. The frequency of publication at times took its toll on the quality of the *Israelite*. As a weekly, the paper occasionally came out with crooked lines of type and misspelled words.

Throughout its brief life, the *Israelite* published little information about its owners, the people who wrote and edited the paper, and those who sold the advertising. There are two probable explanations. First, the Jewish community, in particular those of Eastern European origin, presumably the principal readers of this Yiddish newspaper, was small and concentrated, so everyone probably knew who owned and operated the paper. Second, as noted earlier, newspapers in the late 19th century, especially the unconventional papers such as those written for immigrants or other minority groups, tended to be lacking in polish and refinement. Their job was to introduce immigrants to American politics, culture, and society quickly and cheaply.[6] Sometimes the amenities we take for granted today simply were overlooked or lacking then, like publishing bylines on stories or names of owners or editors in each issue.

For the first year of the newspaper, the only names to appear regularly on an inside page were those of Mason and Levin, but without first names. The address of the *Israelite* in the premiere issue in August, 1894 was a post office box number in Providence. Then, it changes to 25 Mill Street, Providence, and by the May 17, 1895 issue, the office is at 286 North Main Street, Providence, with a printing office at 38 Shawmut Street in the city.

With the August 2, 1895 issue, the *Israelite* added a Boston office at 100 Salem Street to its operations. Now the masthead over the top of the front page reads "Providence and Boston," and the name of the paper has been altered slightly to *The (Rhode Island) Israelite*. Earlier the state's name had not been in parenthesis.

The editorial staff shows changes, too. Samuel Mason (presumably the aforementioned Mason) and George Davis are the editors; A. Alpert is the literary editor, and Lewis Levin (of the Mason and Levin team?) is the assistant editor. In the following November 15 issue, George Davis and Lewis Levin are the editors; C.H. Enovitz is the literary editor, and E. Gavrielov is the assistant editor. By now, the *Israelite* is claiming to be "the only Hebrew paper published in New England."

Throughout the summer and fall of 1895, the paper remained a weekly, publishing lists of new laws from the General Assembly session earlier in the year, advertisements from Boston as well as Providence, including such regular advertisers as the Dudley Street Opera House in Providence, and Sam Benjamin, a notary public and collector with an office at 286 North Main Street.

"The Educator" shows up sporadically to teach the new immigrants some rudimentary English. One column tells the readers it is "a condensed novel," but omits the name of the work. It gives the word condensed new meaning. Chapter one is boiled down to one paragraph, while chapter two is four paragraphs. The remainder of this "literary masterpiece" is missing altogether except for chapter thirty-one, which is described as "the last." It is two paragraphs and ends with "So the hero gets his title and the heroine is free, and they marry and live happily everafter, don't you see." We never learn the names of the hero, the heroine or the villian, or exactly where this takes place other than "on the moors." The vocabulary list that follows is almost as long as the novel condensation itself and includes such words as abounds, bleak, chum, haunted, lunatics, and villain, not words the average newly-arrived Jew in Providence would find especially useful in conversation.

Mayor Frank F. Olney is an often-seen name in the *Israelite*, either as the author of letters to the editors congratulating them on their newspaper or in stories about activities in the city. In the September 1, 1894 issue, one of the briefs under the page one heading "Editorials" states: "As the letter we expected from the Hon. Frank F. Olney was to be on the Filtration question and that matter has been so complicated that he does not care to express his

opinion on the subject at present. So we have to dispense with the expected letter." That was the letter the first issue of the paper announced it planned to run the following month. But that early disappointment did not flag the editors' enthusiasm. On page one of the November 8, 1895 issue of the *Israelite*, they ran a line drawing of the mayor.

When the paper reverted to monthly publication at the beginning of 1896, it once again contained 16 pages and was three cents a copy. It continues to call itself "the only Hebrew paper published in New England," and its owners appear to be growing prosperous from the advertising revenues. It costs one dollar for one inch of advertising a month. Of the 16 pages, about eight are filled with advertisements each issue.

In the May 1, 1896 issue, the publishers announced, "The *Israelite* will now and here-after be published in English as well as Jewish for the benefit of the younger readers. By request of the Majority of our readers."

Two items are examples of what the editors considered "worthwhile" news for the readers of English. One is labeled an excerpt from the *Boston Herald* and it tells about a Springfield, Massachusetts woman who saved her cat from being killed by a poisonous centipede. The other is titled "A 12,000,000 Franc Diamond." It reads:

> One day in strolling through the Louvre, says a Paris correspondent, I stopped to examine and admire the wonderful diamond known as the Regent, which, with a few of the remaining crown jewels — including the Crown of Charlemagne — is exhibited in a glass case under the watchful eyes of a guard. It was originally purchased by Phillipe d'Orleans for 2,500,000 francs. It is nearly 11.4 inches square — *Paris Correspondence*.

From January 1896, until July 1, 1896, the *Israelite* appeared regularly each month. Then it suddenly ceased publication, or it appears to have done so, despite there being no indication as to why it was going out of business. A check with the Boston Public Library showed that, according to the Library of Congress microfilm listings for newspapers, the July 1, 1896 issue was indeed the last. And the Rhode Island Historical Society Library is unaware of any issues beyond what it has, on microfilm.

That final issue of the *Israelite* gives no real clue to its imminent demise. Like the previous six issues, it runs 16 pages, including seven pages full or partly full of new laws. Fewer pages than in the past are devoted to local advertising, and the last page of the paper is a full-page "house ad" urging merchants to advertise in the *Israelite*. Perhaps a sudden financial reversal caused the owners to close shop.

Except for the reprints of the general laws and portions of some

advertisements, this last issue of the *Israelite* is written in Yiddish, which is odd considering the announcement from the publishers in the May issue.

A translation of some of the material in this final edition of the *Israelite* reveals a hodgepodge of articles. One of the more unusual is a page one account of a sermon by a minister at the First Baptist Church in New York City who described the future of the Jews, predicting that "the day will come shortly when an opponent of Christ will come amongst the Jews and who will make trouble for the European nations and Palestine will emerge a powerful nation. This Jewish king will sit in Jerusalem, and from there will beat the enemies of the Jews in Europe, and will scare them." Is the opponent the Baptist minister talks about meant to be the Messiah? It is not explained.

So, after two years and 49 issues, the *Israelite* apparently closed its doors. It was a short-lived periodical, but in reading its columns, we are given a remarkable, if somewhat disjointed and unsophisticated at times, insight into Jewish life in Rhode Island at the turn of the century.

> "What is essential is not that everyone shall speak, but that everything worth saying shall be heard": Alexander Meiklejohn, First Amendment theorist.

NOTES

[1]Kessler, Lauren, *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA, 1984, p. 88.

[2]Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976, p. 519.

[3]Kempner, Brian, *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, "Jewish Immigration into Providence: A Comparison of the Settlement of Soviet Jews, 1970-1982 with that of Russian Jews, 1881-1924," p. 10, Nov., 1983.

[4]*Ibid.*

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]Kessler, Lauren, *The Dissident Press*, p. 93.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SELF HELP ORGANIZATION OF RHODE ISLAND

BY STANLEY B. ABRAMS

America has witnessed through the years the arrival of many thousands of immigrants. It was, however, only in the years following the arrival of Jewish refugees from Hitler's repressive anti-Jewish policy in Germany and Austria that a thorough pogrom of settlement throughout the United States and integration into American life was put into operation. This involved the activities and interactions of numerous individuals, organizations, and government agencies. Three major steps were necessary in the actual immigration process: 1) politics, legislative activities, lobbying, and organized assistance to immigrants prior to their arrival; 2) the resettlement, which included the reception of immigrants, locating them geographically and providing all forms of social assistance; 3) the acculturation process, involving the activities of local organizations and individuals, including the immigrants own organizations, relating to linguistic, economic, social, religious, and professional integration into American society. The scope of this essay will focus on an immigrant organization — Rhode Island Self Help — that for over forty years perfomed a vital service to Jewish refugees who settled in Rhode Island.[1]

Rhode Island Self Help (RISH)[2] was formally established in 1944. It was affiliated with the founding chapter in New York City, which had been incorporated in 1936 as "Selfhelp of Emigrés From Central Europe, Inc." Other self help groups had been created in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Dallas. The first members of RISH were the same individuals who had been meeting informally since the late 1930s at the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island. They were recent refugees from Germany and Austria who had settled in Rhode Island to start their new lives in America.

In its first years RISH fulfilled many of the functions necessary to integrate the refugee into a strange environment. Chief among them was the building of the morale of the newcomer by providing a link to the past and a guiding hand into the future. Among the members of Self Help the newcomer found people with a common cultural background, a common language, similar interests,

Stanley B. Abrams is vice president of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

Dedication of

MEMORIAL PLAQUE

by

RHODE ISLAND SELFHELP

✡

Wednesday, November 11, 1953

at

JEWISH HOME FOR THE AGED
Providence, R. I.

Memorial Services will be held annually
on or about November 11.

and a deep understanding of their concerns. Simply stated, the people of RISH aimed to give the displaced Jewish refugees from German-speaking countries a feeling of being at home. Once the settling-in process had been achieved, Self Help then introduced the newcomers to their new social milieu in Rhode Island. From their own experience, the people of Self Help knew that the refugee had to quickly learn to live with new people and, in time, become a part of the economic, social, and cultural life of the Rhode Island community.

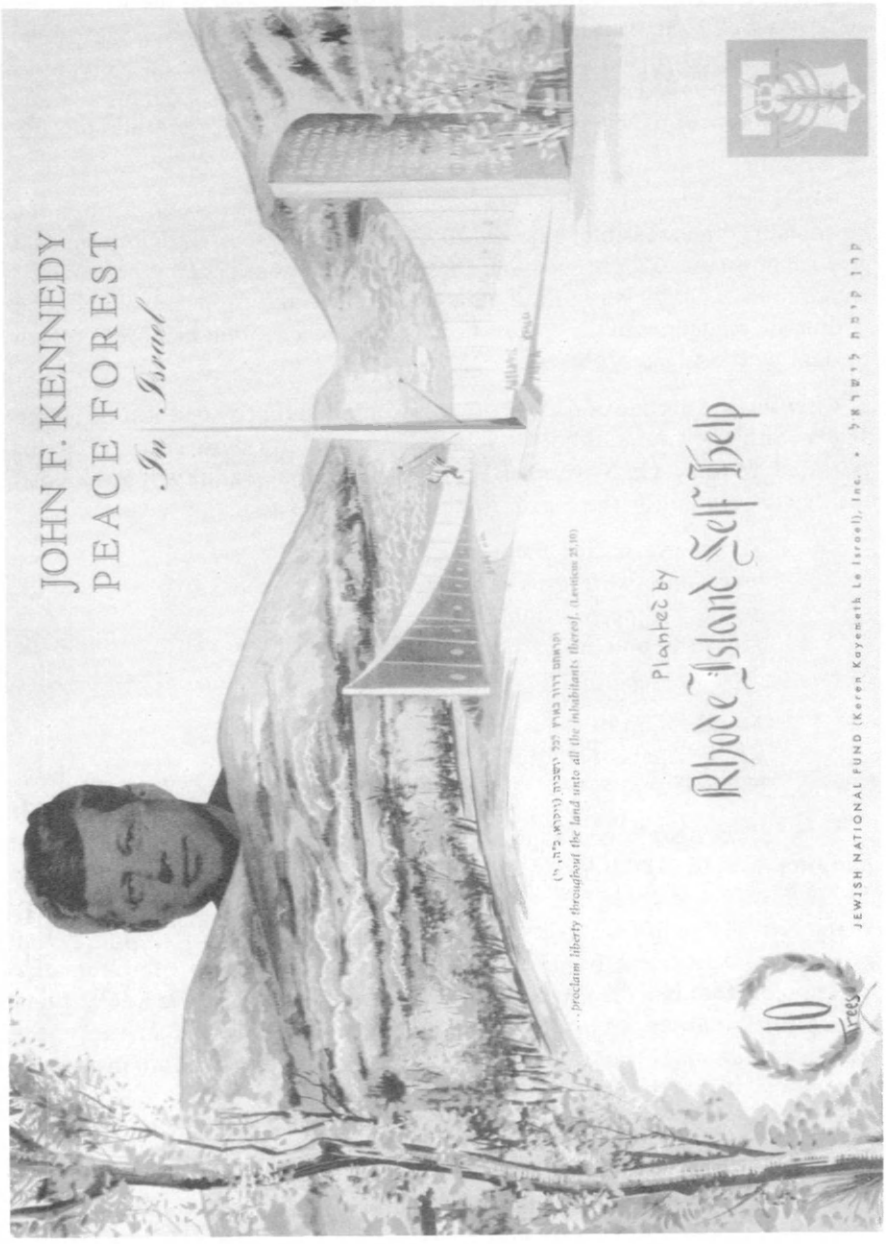
RISH was primarily concerned with the social problems confronting the newcomer. When feasible, it helped to secure employment, find housing, and give small financial assistance, but these were functions generally beyond its capabilities. Though very proud of its independent status, Self Help operated within the guidelines of the established Jewish agencies, that had been created to deal with refugee problems.

After its first decade of formal organization, RISH provided Rhode Island Jewry with the first symbol of remembrance of the darkest years in the twentieth century. On November 11, 1953 a memorial plaque was unveiled at the Jewish Home for the Aged of Rhode Island. The plaque reads:

> To the everlasting memory of our
> loved ones who lost their lives
> during the persecution of the
> Jewish People in Europe 1933-1945.
>
> Dedicated by
> Members and friends of
> Rhode Island Self Help
> November, 1953.[3]

Many of the people in attendance at the memorial service had witnessed (or had been victims of) the Nazi desecration of Jewish synagogues on November 11, 1938. Most of them had lost close relatives and friends during the Nazi years. Self Help chose this day, the fifteenth anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, a most significant event for German Jews, as the time to memorialize the catastrophe that befell all European Jewry. Every year since 1953, RISH has held a memorial service on November 11 at the Jewish Home for the Aged. The memorial plaque with its eternal light now has a place of honor in the new synagogue at the Home.

In retrospect, the year that RISH dedicated the memorial is meaningful. Eight years after the defeat of Nazi Germany very little information had been made available for popular consumption about the annihilation of one third of the world's Jewish population. In 1953, the Rhode Island Jewish community was fulfilling its responsibility to assist those survivors who settled in and around the state. The time to memorialize would come years later. But, for the members of RISH who were so close to the tragedy, a memorial was indeed one way of expressing their grief.


JOHN F. KENNEDY
PEACE FOREST
In Israel
Planted by
Rhode Island Self Help
10 trees
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND (Keren Kayemeth Le Israel), Inc.

While RISH set aside one day every year to honor and remember the past, its major concern was to influence the present and future for the members. The calendar of events for the year 1958 is representative of the range of social and educational activities sponsored by RISH. In January a 'game night' (bridge, chess, and other activities) was held at the South Side Jewish Community Center. On February 22, members and guests were invited to hear a mezzo-soprano sing arias and songs by Schubert and Gluck at the Florentine Room of the former Crown Hotel. In March there was an evening of square dancing. As part of the April gathering, which featured a Jewish comedian, a bon voyage party was held for members Herta nd Bruno Hoffman, who were soon to leave on a trip to Europe and Israel.

The annual meeting for 1958, the fourteenth for RISH, took place on June 9, at Johnson's Hummocks Grille. A full-course dinner with a choice of either Yankee pot roast or boiled halibut was offered at a cost of $2.50 per plate (including tip). The agenda for the meeting included normal business matters, a report by the Hoffmans on their recent trip abroad, a book review by Self Help President Ludwig Regensteiner, and a social hour.

The major summer event for many years was an outing and picnic. In 1958 it was scheduled to be held on June 14 at Camp Centerland of the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island, but heavy rains forced the cancellation. After numerous requests the outing was held on August 30. During the fall of 1958 RISH sponsored a gala dance affair, an annual event which followed the Jewish High Holidays. In November, the memorial service was held. Hanukkah was celebrated on December 6, with Cantor Jacob Hohenemser, a member of Self Help, lighting the first candle and singing festival songs.

The same basic format of social and educational events was followed by RISH over the next two-and-one-half decades. Those changes that did take place reflected the aging and contraction of its membership. Whereas the major fall event had been a dinner dance, by the mid-1960s it was replaced by different types of entertainment. In 1963, the actress Barbara Orson presented scenes from contemporary American theater, and in 1976 the members enjoyed a performance by the Young Rhode Island Shakespeare Theatre. It was a great pleasure for member Bertha Engelman to hear her granddaughter address a Self Help gathering in October 1964 about her recent experiences in Israel.

The performance of any small tightly-knit volunteer group depends in great part on the efforts of its leaders. This was especially true in the case of Rhode Island Self Help. Igo Wenkart, a president in the early years, expressed his feelings about RISH when he wrote:

> The many pleasures derived from participating in the uncounted gatherings, and also the many purely social meetings will never be forgotten . . . Our common background and interests have formed an indestructible bond between us, that has kept us together — in good and bad times — almost like

> members of one family. I cannot think of any group that has been closer to my heart in all these years.[4]

The one individual who stands out as the dominant personality of RISH is Ludwig Regensteiner. With the exception of a short period in the mid-1950s, Regensteiner was the president of RISH from its inception to 1971. His organizational and leadership skills made these years the most active, creative, and productive in the history of RISH. His correspondence (in English and German) with prospective speakers and performers, or with members over matters of RISH, and to those who assisted him through the years is evidence of a man with true humanistic values.

The level of success achieved by Ludwig Regensteiner was perpetuated by Bruno Hoffman, who became president in 1971. Bruno Hoffman had been a founding member of RISH and for many years had served as its vice-president-treasurer. On assuming the presidency he proudly noted that over the years RISH had the largest percentage of active participation of any local Jewish organization, He acknowledged the fact that the average age of the membership was "growing up" and for this reason pledged to keep RISH a vibrant and significant group. Bruno Hoffman kept his pledge. He engaged a steady stream of speakers that included Ernest Nathan, Lotte and Morris Povar, Greta Steiner, and David Newman, all of whom were members of RISH.

During the years of Hoffman's leadership the annual memorial service at the Jewish Home had far greater meaning for the Jewish community as a whole than solely for the sponsoring organization. While the format of the service remained unchanged, Bruno Hoffman realized that the event should be made as poignant and meaningful for Jews in the 1980s as it had been for the survivors in the 1950s. Besides memorializing the Jews who lost their lives between 1933 and 1945, the memorial service in 1981 was dedicated as well to the memory of those Jews who sacrificed their lives in defense of the State of Israel. Also, the date of the service, November 11, was associated with the national holiday, Veterans Day.

As Hoffman and his gentle wife Herta guided RISH into the 1980s, it became his obligation to consider the future of the aging group. And so it was with the pride befitting the forty-one year old organization that its president announced in September 1985 that the decision had been made to liquidate RISH. In his final notice Hoffman assured the membership that the organization 'Holocaust Survivors of Rhode Island' had promised to continue the annual November Memorial Service. And faithful to its tradition of cultural involvement, the last statement in the notice of liquidation mentions a series of lectures to be given by member Bertha Engelman about the life of the famous German Rabbi Leo Baeck.

How is the contribution of Rhode Island Self Help to be judged and what is its legacy to the Jewish community of Rhode Island? Even though RISH opened its heart and doors to displaced persons from Eastern Europe after

World War II and to Jewish refugees from other lands in the following years, it was basically a honogeneous organization of German-speaking people from a German-Jewish cultural background. A new-comer to Rhode Island from a similar environment found an immediate and natural affinity with the people in RISH. After the much-needed comfort and security provided by RISH, a person's quest for identity, self-determination, and economic security was indeed more attainable.

RISH considered the tedious process of acculturation and integration into American society as a dual objective of primary importance. At the same time it was committed to retaining those aspects of life in Central Europe that meant so much to the individual members.

Being part of RISH was an enriching experience. Many members made notable contributions to the business, cultural, and religious affairs of their new community. Besides those individuals already cited, any paper on RISH would be incomplete without mention of Peter Bardach and his fund-raising efforts for Self Help, the Manfred and Frederick Weil families, Mr. and Mrs. Julius Epstein, the Carl Passmans, Edward Scherz, Lily Sussman, Lola Schafranick and many others who derived a certain identity and pride from their involvement in RISH. These people are the legacy of Rhode Island Self Help.

The program for the final meeting of Self Help of Rhode Island was held on October 28, 1985. It read as follows:

Dear Friends:

We cordially invite you to the annual Memorial Service which will be held .....November 10 at 11:30 A.M. at the
Jewish Home for the Aged
99 Hillside Ave,Providence,R.I.

P R O G R A M

Invocation.....Rabbi Richard Ben Leibovitz
of Temple Am David, Warwick,R.I.

Greetings.....Mr.Ellis S. Waldman,
for the Jewish Home of the Aged

Remarks.....Mrs. Helen Schwarz,
Vice President,Holocaust Survivors of R.

Address.....By Professor Michael Fink
"Ethiopian Jews in Israel-A Status Report"

Selected Readings--Exerpts from "Crystal Night" book written by
R.Thalman & E.Feinermann

Poem--"Night Of The Broken Glass" from Book of Poems
by E.Borenstein
Narration by..Francine Fink,
Second Generation Holocaust Survivor

El Mole Rachamin.....Joseph Schwartz

Kaddish in memory of the fallen Martyrs and of our fellow Jews who sacrificed their lives in the defense of the State of Israel.

Closing Remarks.....Rabbi Richard Ben Leibovitz

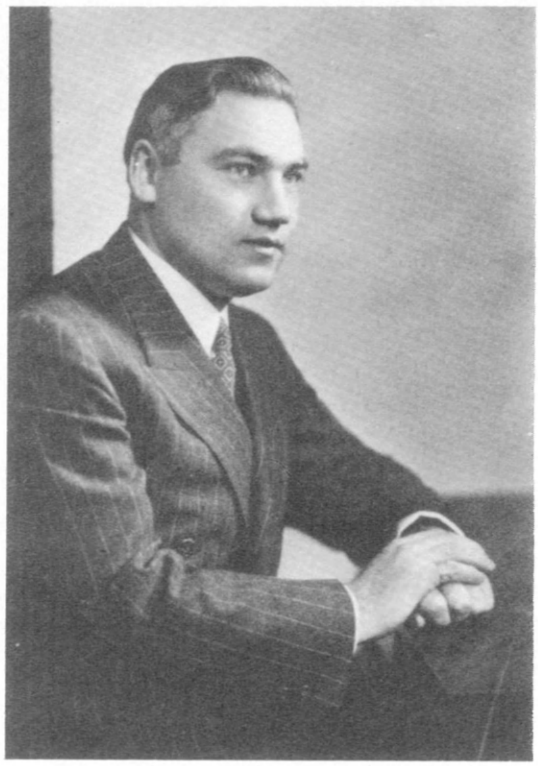
NOTES

[1]The source material for this paper is from the files of Rhode Island Self Help. From 1953 to 1985 the records are fairly complete. They include organizational structure, membership lists, correspondence, and records of social and cultural activities. Prior to 1953 there is very little to work with. The files are presently in the hands of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association awaiting final disposition. Raymond Eichenbaum also provided valuable information and assistance.

[2]Hereafter cited as RISH.

[3]The memorial plaque can be seen in the new synagogue of the Jewish Home for the Aged of Rhode Island. A picture of it appeared on the rear cover of the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, volume 9, number 3, November 1985.

[4]Letter from Igo Wenkart to Ludwig Regensteiner, 13 October 1970.



Cantor Jacob Hohenemser

JUDAH TOURO'S JERUSALEM LEGACY

BY ELEANOR F. HORVITZ

On January 6, 1854 Judah Touro a native son of Rhode Island, made out his will in New Orleans, Louisiana. This generous man bequeathed large sums of money to many charitable organizations in the United State. He also designated that money be donated to Jerusalem, Palestine. He stipulated as follows:

> 26. I give and bequeath to the North American Relief Society, for the indigent Jews of Jerusalem, Palestine, of the city and State of New York (Sir Moses Montefiore of London, their agent), ten thousand dollars.
>
> 27. It being my earnest wish to co-operate with the said Sir Moses Montefiore of London, Great Britain, in endeavoring to ameliorate the condition of our unfortunate Jewish Brethren, in the Holy Land, and to secure to them the inestimable privilege of worshipping the Almighty according to our religion, without molestation, I therefore give and bequeath the sum of fifty thousand dollars, to be paid by my Executors for said object, through the said Sir Moses Montefiore, in such manner as he may advise, as best calculated to promote the aforesaid objects; and in case of any legal or other difficulty or impediment in the way of carrying said bequest into effect, according to my intentions, then and in that case, I desire that the said sum of fifty thousand dollars be invested by my Executors in the foundation of a Society in the City of New Orleans, similar in its objects to the "North American Relief Society for the Indigent Jews of Jerusalem. Palestine, of the City of New York," to which I have before referred in this my last will.[1]

On July 4, 1986 there appeared in the *Jerusalem* (Israel) *Post* an article by David Geffen[2] titled, "An Enduring Legacy", in which he refers to the bequest of Judah Touro to Jerusalem, Palestine.

Eleanor F. Horvitz is archivist of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

Dr. Geffen has been collecting data about Judah Touro for several years and he feels that an injustice has been done, that Touro has not received the recognition he deserves in Israel.

The following excerpts from his article illustrates his interest in this subject:

> Years will roll on, another generation will succeed us, many a name now shining in the meridian of its glory will be forgotten and unknown; yet the name and memory of Judah Touro will ever live in the hearts of posterity.
>
> Unfortunately, these words, delivered at Touro's 1854 funeral in Newport, Rhode Island, are far from true in Israel, where Touro, for all the legacy he bequeathed over 130 years ago, is basically a forgotten man.

David Geffen lists the many institutions to which Judah Touro gave material and moral encouragement. About his bequest to the land of Israel, Touro was the first American Jew to contribute on such a large scale.

What were the circumstances which were responsible for this large donation? Geffen cites reference to this question in a book written in 1871 by novelist, Moses Wasserman, titled *Judah Touro*. Wasserman wrote: ". . . Touro's wrestling with the question of whether to include aid to the Holy Land in his will. A lay leader in the New Orleans Jewish community and Touro's unofficial adviser on Jewish affairs, Gershom Kursheedt, told Touro about the noble work of Montefiore." Paragraph 27, as cited above, was thus included in Touro's will.

What happened to the funds left by Touro which were earmarked for Israel is narrated by Geffen:

> In 1855 while visiting Jerusalem Sir Moses purchased, with a portion of Touro's legacy, a piece of land outside the walls of the Old City intending the site for the construction of a hospital. Kursheedt had accompanied Montefiore on this mission helping to insure the fulfillment of Touro's last wishes.
>
> The project then lay dormant for several years. During the interim another hospital was built in Jerusalem, so the funds were to be used by Montefiore for a different type of facility . . . in the fall of 1860, this new structure with apartments for Ashkenazi 'scholars' was ready. A plaque placed in the centre of the building's facade mentioned Touro as well as Montefiore.
>
> The houses became known locally as Sir Moses Montefiore's Jewish Hospice, or colloquially as Montefiore's cottages. Their official name was Mishkenot Sha'ananim.[3]

According to Geffen, Montefiore felt remorse that Touro did not receive

the recognition he deserved. Montefiore stated in the *Jewish Chronicle of London* during an interview which covered his last trip to Palestine, that Touro's role should be better reflected in some way even through re-naming the building:

> In spite of his larger-than-life reputation, Montefiore could not convince the people to alter their impression that he had not only built the hospice, but financed it as well.
>
> So the sad fate of Judah Touro in Jerusalem has continued.
>
> Modern Jerusalem can thank Touro for his prophetic gift by affording him better recognition in the Holy City's academy of honourees. Then, as he was eulogized, 'Touro will ever live in the hearts of posterity,' even in Israel.

NOTES

[1]*Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Page 279, "Life and Times of Judah Touro" by David V. Adelman, Esq.

[2]David Geffen, Ph.D. from Columbia University, New York; Director of the Wesleyan University (Connecticut) Israel program, and a fellow of the America-Holy Land project of Hebrew University.

[3]*Jerusalem, Rebirth of a City* by Martin Gilbert, Viking Press, 1985.

AN UPDATE ON THE COLONIAL JEWISH CEMETERY IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

BY BERNARD KUSINITZ, M.A.

In the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* of November 1985, we wrote of the various problems that have arisen out of the unique juxtaposition of the history of the Colonial Jews of Newport, Rhode Island and the history of its miniscule cemetery located at the juncture of Kay Street and Bellevue Avenue right above Touro Street. Both the community and its cemetery have been memorialized by innumerable historians in the case of the former and by poets (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Emma Lazarus) in the case of the latter. It would seem that mortality has begotten immortality. And if that be the case, it is only proper that any mistakes and omissions in the previous paper be corrected, and the on-site events of the summer of 1986 be added and recorded.

First, we made the unintentional error of stating that the monuments in the cemetery were suffering from well over *two hundred years* of neglect, dirt, grime, moss, sap, current maintenance abuse and a late nineteenth century attempt at a restoration of questionable value. Except for the last portion dealing with the restoration of questionable value, we were mistaken.[1]

Now research reveals that in 1889 the surfaces of the gravestones were "cleaned and polished" together with "the granite foundation and posts of the fence and the massive stone gateway".[2] The iron portions of the fence were also painted. The work was done by the Messrs. P. Stevens & Sons about whom more will be written below. In retrospect, then, we were wrong by about one hundred years, but we were not wrong about the deplorable conditions that recurred in the ensuing ninety-seven years.

In 1898 additional work was done. And it was this work that now has to be considered, for it countered the prevalent conventional concepts, much as other beliefs were dispelled under the probing eye of our restorative research.

Bernard Kusinitz is chairman of the Cemetery Restoration Committee of the Society of Friends of the Touro Synagogue.

Keeping in mind that (1) there were no visible monuments on the northwest or Kay Street side of the cemetery, that (2) tradition and the on-site evidence combined to shout aloud that the two mounds at either end of that side covered the crumbled fragments of the earliest Jewish settlers, these facts could lead to no other reasonable conclusion but that the northwest side, showing no visible monuments, had to be the original cemetery site of the earliest settlers.

As reported in the November 1985 issue of these *Notes*, despite all of the above "evidence" and conjecture, our research determined that it was all wrong. The location of the original 1677 purchase turned out to be southwest not northwest — not on the Kay Street side, but a portion of the Bellevue Avenue side. The cemetery is on an angle, and the only true points on the compass, that is north, south, east, and west, are the four corners of the cemetery, not the sides.

If the beliefs about the original site were wrong, what of the beliefs about the fragments in question? Were they wrong too? The belief had been that the fragments, because they were supposedly buried in the original site, had to be the fragments of the seventeenth century gravestones. Now we have determined that the evidence leads to the conclusion that the fragments that were buried — the very fragments that had not been discovered by radar — were not of the mysteriously departed seventeenth century group, but were of the later famous eighteenth century group. This is the story.

In response to a letter written to her in 1957 about Touro Synagogue by Julius Schaffer, Mrs. Rydia Schreier Cass, a prominent leader of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, wrote:[3]

> I know that he had the crumbled stones which lay buried in a heap in the old Cemetery deciphered and many restored.

The "he" she referred to was her father, Eugene Schreier, president of Congregation Jeshuat Israel in 1898. Mrs. Cass's recollections are lucid and coincide with the facts. What are the facts?

Item One. News reports of 1898 had the following to say about the additional work that had been done:[4]

> During the year all the ground tombs were rebuilt and stones reset and the monuments and the walls surrounding the grounds were painted.

Item Two. The buried crumbled stones that Mrs. Cass stated were deciphered and restored had to be the same "ground tombs" that were rebuilt and reset in 1898. As further proof, these are the same stones that had been deciphered earlier by Rabbi Abraham Periera Mendes, spiritual leader of Congregation Jeshuat Israel. He wrote about the results of his work in a paper which he read before the Newport Historical Society on June 23, 1885, and then had printed in the *Rhode Island Historical Magazine* of October 1885, Vol. 6 No. 2.

Fragments that were dug up, deciphered, rebuilt, and reset could not have been those of the seventeenth century, because what one sees today is of the eighteenth century. This I believe is the reason, in addition to the complex nature of the soil in the cemetery, the radar study revealed no fragments of either seventeenth century or eighteenth century stones in the northwest side of the cemetery or in any other side. They had already been dug up.

We were deceived by what appears to be physical evidence pointing to seventeenth century burials in the northwest Kay Street side of the cemeteray. We were confused when the radar investigation was inconclusive.

Nevertheless, we still stand by our opinion that early restorative efforts were of questionable long-range value. Our reasoning is further explained below.

The restoration work done in the summer of 1986, for want of a better term, may be called Phase I. Twelve of the forty-odd visible monuments and gravestones were fully restored.

The most important work, it should be understood, was below the surface of the earth or within the four walls where "chest" monuments were the subject. The lack of proper foundations was the primary cause of all the splitting, leaning, sinking, and capsizing in the first place. Hence, first priority in almost all of the cases was the laying and leveling of new and proper foundations, utilizing cinder blocks, slabs of granite, cement, and epoxy. All of this was in the hands of concientious, master craftsmen. Vertical slate monuments were taken down and rebuilt, as were marble ones. Three horizontal ledgerstones that had been jammed together and distorted were separated, raised, and leveled with new granite bases above the surface.

The Moses Seixas slate stone which had been broken in two was set into a piece of the original Quincy granite, and the legend in the front, which is badly worn, was reinscribed in the new granite back. The Aaron Lopez chest monument (he whose career almost epitomizes the golden commercial age of Newport before the American War of Independence) was the only one that had complete collapsed into a heap. Hence, it was the only one that had to be completely rebuilt. Fortunately, all the pieces were intact on site, and the marble stone was completely rebuilt, using nothing but the original marble.

The Rachel Lopez ledgerstone, resting on four beautifully sculptured legs that had sunk twelve inches below the surface because of the weight of the monuments and the inadequate foundations, was raised on top of new solid underpinnings.

The four monuments within the Hayes enclosure were the most difficult to restore, requiring the most work and the most money. Of those that had not already collapsed, they were the ones suffering the most from the lack of proper foundations. Hence, one was learning more and more to the point

that total collapse was relatively imminent; two others were splitting at an undetermined rate; one other, a ledgerstone, was off center. Now they are all in perfect condition, never to be threatened again because of imperfect workmanship.

The Israel Jacob Polock ledgerstone was a perfect example of the questionable restoration effort of 1898. Although obviously rebuilt in the past, the stone had once again broken completely in two, after our original inspection which just showed imperfect patching. In fact, it was not scheduled for restoration at all in Phase I, but the new complete break persuaded us to give it preference over other scheduled work. Hence, it was taken back to the Bonner Shop, the top reset upon a new granite slab, and the whole reset upon new granite slab foundations.

Other work was done on several stones in the rear of the cemetery, including the righting of several foot stones. To finish Phase I, the fifty year old unattractive wooden sign affixed to a metal pipe was removed. A new attractive granite sign with a more complete legend was installed on top of a stable base sunk well below the surface. Several final observations on Phase I are in order.

First, under the careful supervision of both the author and Mr. Comoli, the project manager, the religious integrity of the cemetery was not compromised. Second, the appearance of the monuments was not compromised. What one sees is what the monuments were supposed to look like originally. Third, the workmanship, both visible and invisible, was impeccable and meticulous. It was what one would expect from conscientious expert craftsmen who take great pride in their work. Fourth, the granite used to make the sign and all the renovations above the surface came from the original Quincy granite used in the 1850s when the present Egyptian-style fence was installed. When the fence was repaired in recent years, the replaced portions were saved. It was these portions that were used in the current restoration effort. This, too, adds to the authentic ambience of the cemetery. Finally, the sum total of all of our efforts and all of the above factors combined have created an historically authentic site.

When the restoration process was under way and the work was in progress, the gates to the cemetery were of necessity open. Many people were able to enter the cemetery grounds and look around. Two questions visitors raised deserve an answer at this time. The first was whether or not coffins were used at the time, and the second whether the makers of some of the monuments are known.

The answer to question one is "yes".[5] There is sufficient documentary proof that coffins were used. Obviously, we cannot vouch for every interment. The answer to question two is more complex and incomplete. The research is an ongoing one with no time limitations, and indeed results often are forthcoming when least expected.

Of the eleven visible monuments in the original 1677 site, seven were produced by the prolific John Stevens II. He had his own identifiable style, featuring sure strong carving with distinctive borders and cherubs. One other came from Amsterdam.[6] Another was a Connecticut brownstone with both interred body and stonemaker unknown. The source of the remaining two are unknown at this time.

One monument just beyond the 1677 area was distinctly the work of John Stevens III. Three others, scattered to the left, were the work of either John Stevens III or John Bull, one of his craftsmen, with the possibility that they were recut at a later date. It is also quite possible that identical plaques identifying the various ledgerstones also came from the Stevens shop and were affixed probably during the 1898 restoration work.

The source for the above information is Mrs. Esther Fisher Benson, widow of John Howard Benson, who took over the John Stevens Shop in 1927, and their son John Benson, the current master proprietor. Both were extremely helpful in our on-site research effort.[7]

To begin with, there had been three John Stevenses in a row; father, son, and grandson. The next owner was Philip Stevens, youngest son of John III. He had four sons, two of whom, Lysander and Philip, operated the shop as "P. Stevens and Sons". They were followed by Edwin Burdick, brother-in-law to the last Stevens, who died in 1900. After the death of the stone-cutter, Martin Burke, John H. Benson took over. Today the shop is being worked by his son, John, another master craftsman.[8]

The John Stevens Shop is considered to be America's leading stone shop, offering hand-carved lettering at its best. Referring back to the work done in 1889, it was the same "P. Stevens and Sons" shop that did the actual "cleaning and polishing". An interesting continuity of history is to be seen here, for, before them, it was the colonial Stevens Shop which did so much of the eighteenth century work. An interesting juncture of history and *yichus*, (prestige).

What remains to be done in the future can be termed Phase II. This would involve ten additional monuments of several styles and varieties — four within the Touro enclosure, four ledgerstones near the gate, plus two additional ledgerstones which we believe were inadequately restored in 1898. The work would be of a similar nature as Phase I with correction of improper foundations again being a prime objective.

More specifically, new foundations would be installed under all the targeted monuments. The vertical monuments would be taken down and rebuilt. The ledgerstones would be raised and reset with new granite bases. The improperly restored ones would be removed to the Bonner shop where they would be bonded to new granite slabs before being reinstalled on top of new foundations on the site.

An interesting and perhaps foreboding statement made at the time of the

1898 work should be seriously considered at this time: "Some of the marble tombs in this ground should be carefully taken down and rebuilt".[9] In view of the fact that the rate of deterioration is unknown, it is hoped that action will be taken before it is too late. It should also be kept in mind that marble is much softer and less durable than granite. The complete collapse of the Aaron Lopez stone is a case in point.

The Phase II proposal is to be studied in depth by both the Society of Friends of Touro Synagogue and Congregation Jeshuat Israel of Touro Synagogue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Benson, Esther Fisher, "The History of the John Stevens Shop", Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society, Number 112, October, 1963.
2. Kusinitz, Bernard, "The Enigma of the Colonial Jewish Cemetery in Newport, Rhode Island", *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* Volume 9, Number 3, November 1985.
3. Ledger Book of Tounsend #504 1750-1798 Newport Historical Society.
4. Letter from Rhydia Schreier Cass to Julius Schaffer, 1957.
5. Manuscript letter from John Turner & Son in Amsterdam to Aaron Lopez in Newport September 23, 1765, Box 650, Folder 622 No. 69, Newport Historical Society.
6. *Newport Daily News*, November 11, 1889.
7. *Newport Daily News*, February 4, 1898.
8. *Newport Journal & Weekly News*, February 12, 1898.
9. On-site interviews with Mrs. Esther Fisher Benson and John Benson.

NOTES

[1]Kusinitz, Bernard, "The Enigma of the Colonial Jewish Cemetery".

[2]*Newport Daily News*, November 11, 1889.

[3]Letter from Rhydia Schreier Cass to Julius Schaffer 1957.

[4]*Newport Daily News*, February 4, 1898.

[5]Ledger Book of Townsend #504 1750-1798 Newport Historical Society.

[6]Manuscript letter from John Turner & Son in Amsterdam to Aaron Lopez in Newport.

[7]On-site interviews with Mrs. Esther Fisher Benson and John Benson.

[8]Benson, Esther Fisher, "The History of the John Stevens Shop".

[9]*Newport Daily News*, February 4, 1898.