

# MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

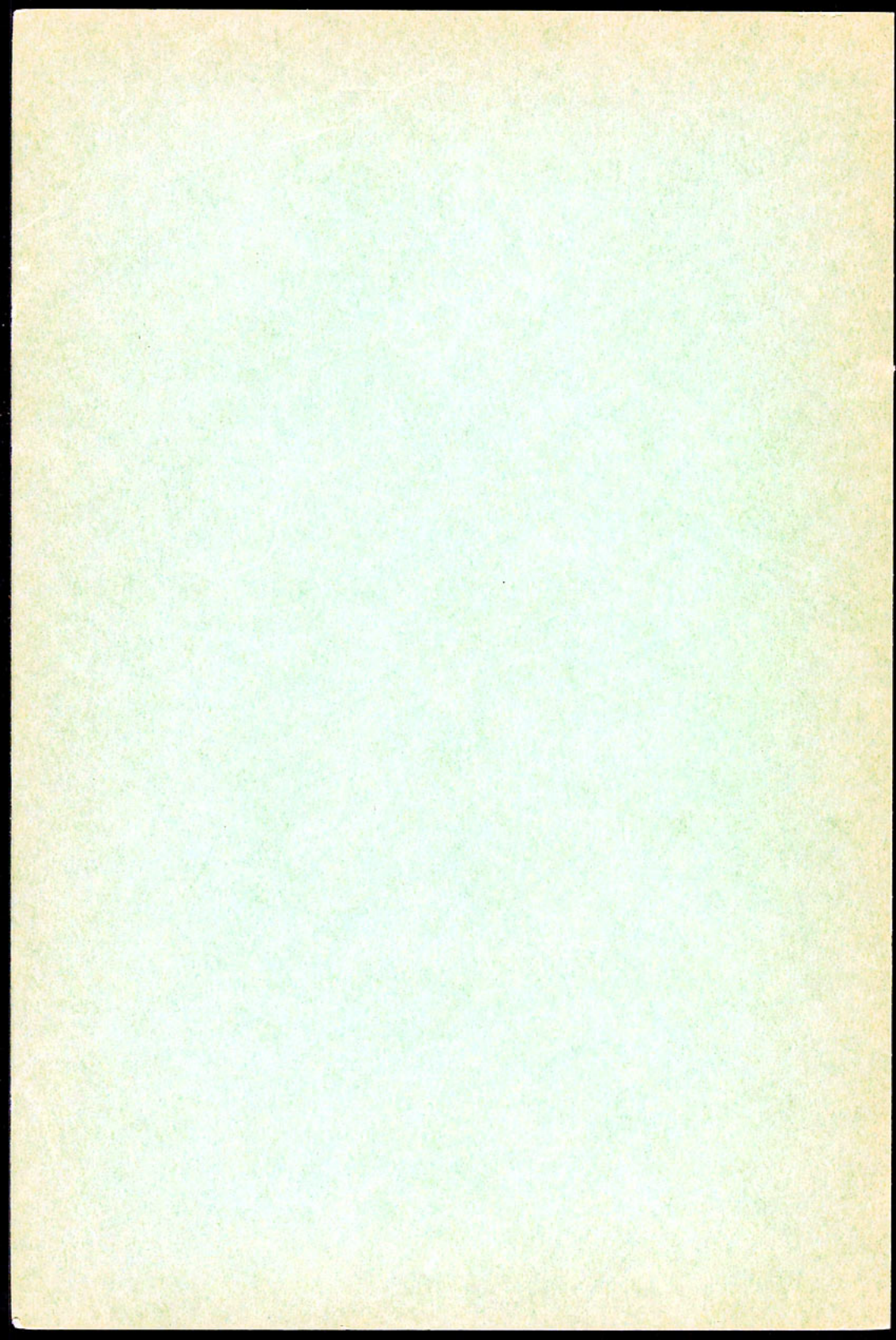


May, 1965

Iyar, 5725

**JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN**





# MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

... אשר ישאלון בניכם מחר את אבותם ... (יהושע ד: כא)

"When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come . . ."

— Joshua 4:21

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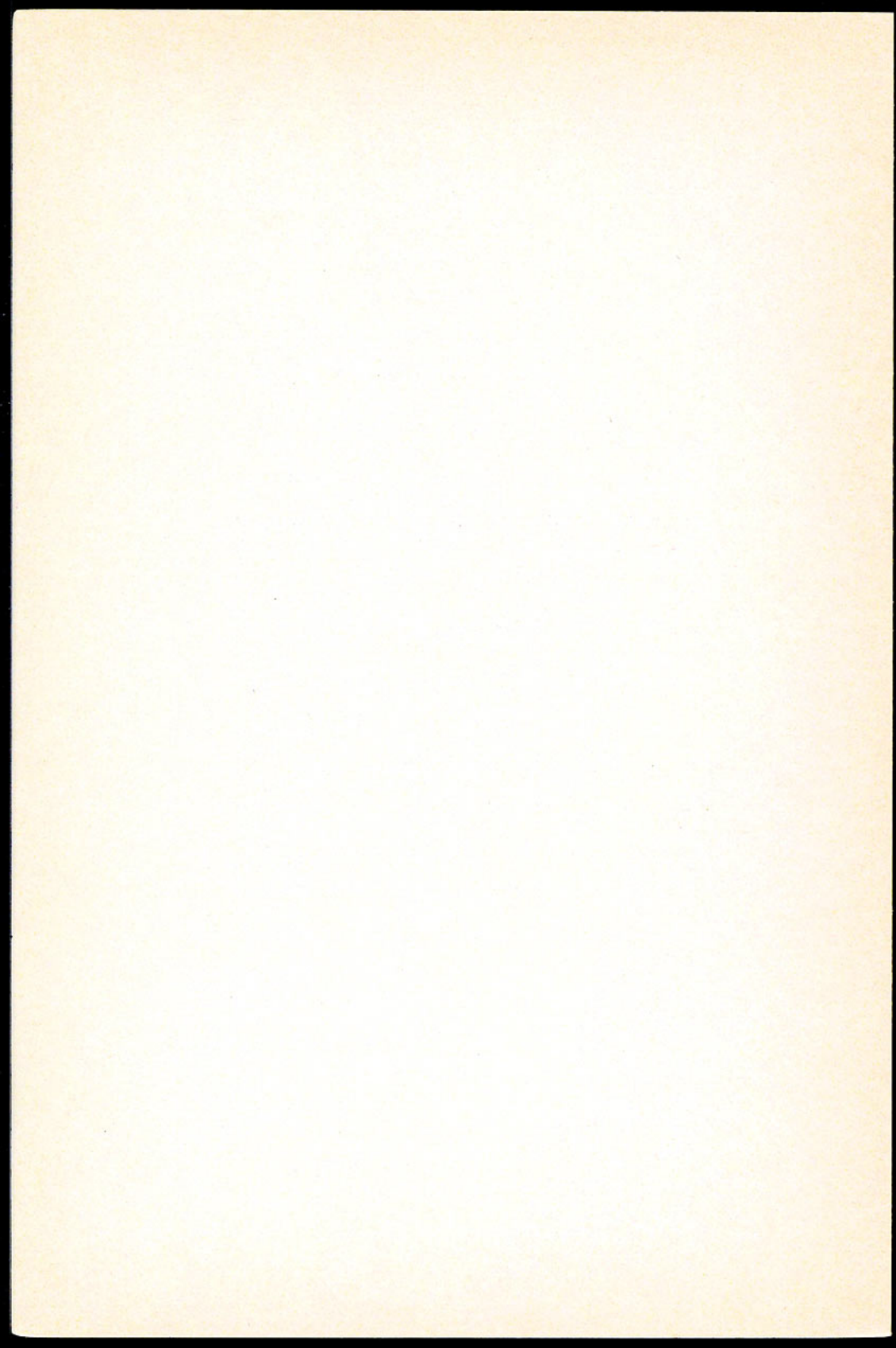
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# *The Development of Jewish Education in Detroit*

by MORRIS GARVETT

The development of Jewish education in the city of Detroit has quite naturally been influenced by the tradition of education which has always been so carefully nurtured by Jews for tens of centuries. The Jew is ever conscious of the precepts he received through Moses, who admonished him — "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children". This obligation to teach became more than the obligation of the individual — it became a community responsibility.

In Detroit, formal Jewish education began soon after 1850, when Temple Beth El was organized, one of its purposes being to provide Jewish education for its member families. At that early date, the system of public school education, as we know it today, had not yet appeared on the American scene, and the school which Temple Beth El established was a day school in which secular subjects were also taught, as was the case in the schools established by Protestant and Catholic groups.

## THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MOVEMENT

On the whole, Jewish education during the first half of the 19th Century was limited in content. Religious education was quite often supplied by the home, sometimes by private teachers or *mclamdin* or in supplementary congregational schools. There was considerable criticism of the prevailing low standards of Jewish education, and the activity of men like Isaac Leeser helped encourage the Sunday school movement in the United States. Rebecca Gratz founded the first Sunday school in 1838 to provide "free instruction in Jewish history and related subjects to the Jewish children of Philadelphia".

The Sunday school idea spread and there were almost 100 such schools by 1880. A number of Sunday schools were formerly the all-day schools which had changed in character, for between 1860 and 1880 the public school idea had already struck roots, and Jewish parents began sending their children to them. The all-day schools, which had combined secular and religious instruction, disappeared and were replaced by the two-day a week Sabbath and Sunday schools where it was considered adequate to limit lessons to religious education. The time when the all-day school flourished varied from city to city and depended upon when the German Jews settled there and when public schools began to be accepted there. In Chicago and Cincinnati, for example, they prospered in the 1850s and 1860s and closed

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in the 1860s and 1870s. Detroit's Temple Beth El day-school which began around 1850 discontinued its secular department in 1869 and held its religious classes on Sabbath and Sunday.

### THE TALMUD TORAHS

In 1880, the Jewish population in the United States numbered 250,000. By the time the main flood of the Eastern European immigration had arrived, 30 years later, about 2,000,000 Jews were here. The earlier settlers, mostly German Jews, well established in their communities, made strenuous efforts to assist the new arrivals. Schools were set up to "Americanize" these refugees from oppression and in many places this process was seen as an effort to wean the East European immigrant away from his Old World customs. The newcomers eagerly accepted the American public school for their children but many neglected their Jewish education. *Melamdin* dispensed a limited knowledge of prayer reading and Bar Mitzvah preparation and the afternoon "Cheder", ill-equipped and often run by unqualified men, led to further deterioration. The result was that in a few years, the Eastern European Jews adopted the Talmud Torah which in the 1880s and the 1890s became a permanent part of the American Jewish educational scene.

Talmud Torahs for generations were the communal schools provided for the children of the poor. In America they became semi-communal institutions whose leadership was drawn from the neighborhood and the wider community. Because these schools were community supported, they were able to attract enlightened and learned people as teachers and lay leaders. It was these leaders who were instrumental at the turn of the century in developing the Hebraic, nationalist philosophy which holds sway to the present day in the Talmud Torahs.

The modernizing of the Hebrew school was experienced in Detroit in this period. It is reported that in 1906 a small group of lovers of Hebrew, not satisfied with the mechanistic translation method used in Detroit's Jewish schools, organized an *Ivrit b'Ivrit* school, the first of its kind in the Middle West. One of the pioneering proponents of the modern Talmud Torah was Bernard Isaacs, subsequently of Detroit's United Hebrew Schools, who by 1910 had gained distinction in New York for his use of the *Ivrit b'Ivrit* method.

Near the turn of the century, as Eastern European immigrants increased the Jewish population in Detroit, the Talmud Torah Institute was created as a communal Hebrew school. It had a week-day

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department, later known as the Hebrew Free School, and a religious school which met on Sunday. The United Jewish Charities, forerunner of the Jewish Welfare Federation, gave its first support to Jewish education in 1900 by granting permission to the Hebrew Free School to use its meeting rooms.

A few years later the United Jewish Charities was granted permission by the Talmud Torah Association to use rooms in the latter's building for meeting purposes. This was prior to the construction of the Hannah Schloss Building in 1903. In the decade 1910-20 Talmud Torahs served small neighborhoods and many were affiliated with a synagogue.

### THE UNITED HEBREW SCHOOLS

In 1920, the Talmud Torahs on Division Street and Wilkins Street were consolidated. The latter school had opened the previous year under the leadership of Bernard Isaacs, and was an immediate success. It was a large school of over 600 children mostly attending after public school, the others being enrolled in the first Hebrew kindergarten in Detroit. The merged school was known as the United Hebrew Schools, and in 1921 the Ohel Moshe School at 29th and Michigan joined this school system. Orthodox Jews played a large part in establishing and promoting the United Hebrew Schools.

From its very beginning, the United Hebrew Schools followed the population movement of Jews from one neighborhood to another. In Ben B. Rosen's Survey of the United Hebrew Schools in 1930, enrollment of over 1700 pupils in nine schools is reported. "The United Hebrew Schools", he stated, "is one of the pioneer organizations in the direction of stimulating a community program for Jewish education . . . no friend of Jewish education can question the wisdom of having established a central agency for the promotion of intensive Jewish education in the city of Detroit".

In 1926, the United Hebrew Schools became a charter agency of the newly formed Jewish Welfare Federation, a natural step for an institution which was entirely community supported. It was Federation's assistance that enabled the Schools to weather the depression years. The roster of leadership of the United Hebrew Schools during the formative period and later contains well-known names, such as Esser Rabinowitz, Rabbi A. M. Hershman, Louis Duscoff, David Robinson, Maurice Zackheim, Robert Marwil, Jacob Friedberg, Aaron M. Pregerson, Hyman Goldman, Judge Harry B. Keidan, Rudolph Zueiback, David W. Simons, Louis Robinson, Harry Cohen, Joseph H. Ehrlich, Harry Sosensky, and many others.



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### THE CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Talmud Torah movement throughout the country reached its peak in the 1920s. In some cities its importance began to wane with the movements of Jews to newer neighborhoods. Many new synagogues at this time also provided Jewish schools for their members. These schools were modeled on the Talmud Torah except that the programs were less intensive. For a while these congregations could not or would not undertake the financial burden of properly conducting a week-day school and standards regarding the qualifications of teachers were lowered. Some parents, however, found even this attenuated form of intensive education too intensive and registered their children in Sunday schools.

In Detroit such a decline of Talmud Torahs did not occur, undoubtedly because the United Hebrew Schools was able to move with the Jewish population and provide school facilities with professionally qualified personnel in most sections of new Jewish settlement. Federation's role in financing the United Hebrew Schools system was another factor.

Many congregations have been pleased to invite the United Hebrew Schools to provide Jewish education for the entire neighborhood in school facilities furnished by the congregation. The solidity and strength of the United Hebrew Schools and its high standards are also the reasons that Detroit has not felt as keenly as other large communities the necessity of founding a formal Bureau of Jewish Education to instigate progress and foster minimum standards for Jewish schools. Detroit thus has secured most of the advantages of a central bureau without actually creating one and thereby is conducting an experiment which has value for other communities.

### THE YESHIVATH BETH YEHUDAH

Jewish all-day schools did not thrive during the early years of this century. Immediately after World War I there was only one such school in existence outside of New York City, where there were four with an enrollment of less than 1,000.

Most of the presently existing all-day schools and departments have been established since 1940. Yeshivath Beth Yehudah of Detroit traces its history as an afternoon school back to 1916 when a special class was organized by Rabbi Yehudah L. Levin in the Talmud Torah of the Farnsworth St. Synagogue. The Yeshivah remained in this location for seven years, during which time the Talmud Torah itself joined the United Hebrew Schools. From its inception the orienta-

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tion of the Yeshivah was more Talmud-centered than that of the Talmud Torah. The Yeshivah moved, and has continued to move, with the shift of Jewish population. It is basically an all-day school and its classes now meet in a building on Wyoming Avenue in Detroit, and in the Hebrew Academy in Oak Park. a new building in Southfield is scheduled to open in the spring of 1965.

### THE YIDDISH SCHOOLS

The Yiddish secular schools also have a respected tradition of service to thousands of youth in America during the past generation. The oldest such school in this country was opened in New York by the Poale Zion movement in 1910. The socialist-territorialist groups, too, played an important role in the pioneering period of the Yiddish secular schools. The Workmen's Circle movement after 1918 began supporting socialist Yiddish schools. One of the early differences among these schools was the part that Hebrew and Jewish tradition should play in the education of the young.

As time went on, the differences which led to the creation of separate schools by the Jewish National Workers Alliance, Workmen's Circle, and Sholem Aleichem groups began to dwindle. The cultural value of Hebrew was recognized and all schools, sooner or later, started to share a positive attitude toward the struggles of the Yishuv in Palestine. On the question of traditional observances, the schools also reached some degree of unity.

Yiddish schools have existed in Detroit since 1912, when a group of Poale Zionists followed New York's example and started a weekend school. The socialist-territorialist group organized a progressive I. L. Peretz School in 1917. By 1921, the Workmen's Circle organization had started its school and in the following year the Peretz school merged with it.

For a short period in 1926 and 1927 an "Umparteieshe" school existed on Kenilworth Avenue. This school was an attempt to find the point around which all Yiddishist labor ideologies could unite. When this school closed, the ensuing separation left a Sholem Aleichem Institute and School, and a Farband Folk School. Since 1927, the Workmen's Circle, Farband-Labor Zionist and Sholem Aleichem groups in Detroit have maintained individual Yiddish schools. About 25 years ago the three schools were able to get together and organize a United High School. This institution offered an advanced curriculum to graduates of all Yiddish elementary schools. Experience in the High School showed that there were no basic ideological conflicts among the schools.

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The Arbeiter Ring and Sholem Aleichem Schools now operate as the Combined Jewish Schools and have classes through the high school level. The Chaim Greenberg Hebrew-Yiddish School operates independently. Except for the latter school, which receives a subvention from the Jewish Welfare Federation, the Yiddish schools administratively are closely identified with the United Hebrew Schools and the Federation has a responsibility for their budgets.

### THE PRESENT OUTLOOK

The United Hebrew Schools is perhaps the strongest centralized Talmud Torah system in the country today. It is the educational arm of the Jewish Welfare Federation. It is now giving supplementary Jewish education to some 3200 pupils in Jewish neighborhoods. The United Hebrew Schools, in addition to fulfilling its responsibility of providing the basic elementary Jewish education for the community, also operates a pre-school nursery and offers post-graduate courses in its high school and in the Midrasha. The latter institution was organized in 1948 to give Jewish high school graduates the opportunity to continue their studies and to provide training for young men and women who wish to prepare for Hebrew school teaching.

The day schools are gathering strength. The Hillel Day School has operated for several years, and the Akiva Day School is now opening. Sunday schools are flourishing in the various Synagogues and Temples, and some of them also have mid-week classes.

Such, in bare and inadequate outline, has been the development of Jewish education in Detroit. Practically every educational category, except for professional scholarship, is available for the Jews of Detroit. All of the schools, however, in Detroit and elsewhere, are faced with the serious and growing problem of the shortage of qualified teachers, which should give all of us much concern.

### THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

An historical narrative could quite properly conclude with a recital of what has happened in the past and of existing conditions. Nevertheless, we all like to peer through the curtain that veils the future from us. It has not been my purpose to discuss the quality of prevalent Jewish education in Detroit or elsewhere, nor the relevant statistics. However, development embraces movement and it requires no prophet to point out that there is a strong and growing movement in America toward the all-day school. The necessity of the early and middle 19th Century is becoming the free choice of a

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growing number of Jews in the 20th Century. It seems inevitable that such a burgeoning movement will in some manner, not clear at the moment, affect all Jewish education in this country.

Let us all pray that whatever form or forms Jewish education may take in the future, it will make for better Jews and that we may continue to teach the principles of Judaism "diligently unto" our children.

## *Federation Presents Archives to Burton Historical Collection*



At the formal presentation of Jewish Welfare Federation Archives to the Burton Historical Collection, a part of the material is examined by (from left) Jewish Historical Society Honorary President Allen A. Warsen; James M. Babcock, chief of the Burton Collection; William Avrunin, Federation executive director; Hyman Safran, Federation president; and Dr. Irving I. Edgar, president, Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.

The Jewish Welfare Federation Archives, perhaps the most important collection of historical source material relative to Michigan Jewish history, was formally presented to the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library for cataloguing and safekeeping.

After the transfer is completed the records will be available for historical research and administrative use.

Arranging the transfer of the historical data was the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan. The many books and papers involved include material dating from 1899, the time at which the United Jewish Charities was formed, through 1926, marking the formation of the Federation, up until 1950.

At the formal presentation in the Butzel Memorial Building,

ARCHIVES PRESENTED TO BURTON HISTORICAL COLLECTION

were Hyman Safran, president of Federation; William Avrunin, Federation executive director; Dr. Irving I. Edgar, president of the Jewish Historical Society; the Society's honorary president, Allen A. Warsen; and James M. Babcock, chief of the Burton Historical Collection.

Dr. Edgar expressed the hope that other organizations with historical materials relevant to Michigan Jewish history will follow the example of Federation in arranging for similar transfers of archives to the Burton Collection.

## *Gentlemen on the Frontier*

*A Pictorial Record of the Culture of Michilimackinac*  
by Eugene T. Peterson

Reviewed by ALLAN A. WARSEN

Dr. Eugene T. Peterson, the author of *MICHELIMACKINAC—ITS HISTORY AND RESTORATION*, is our foremost authority on Fort Michilimackinac. Thanks to his devotion, idealism and scholarship, our knowledge of this Northwest frontier outpost has taken on new dimensions.

His new book *GENTLEMEN ON THE FRONTIER* is a "gold mine" for lovers of Americana. It falls into two main parts: the narrative, which includes the "Introduction," and the pictorial. The latter is divided into four sections, plus an appendix which complements the text. The sections are: "The Soldiers and Their Fort," "The Inhabitants and Their Homes," "The Traders and Their Business", "The Inhabitants and Their Religion."

In the lucid and well balanced introduction, the author relates the fort's history — its social, cultural and religious aspects. The fort's religious life is portrayed thus:

"The fort also was a principal center of French missionary activity. Hardy and dedicated Jesuit priests brought the gospel of salvation and the message of Christianity to the heathen Ottawa and Chippewa. In most cases they learned the language of the Indians, and some even translated the Church's message into the native tongue. But they brought more tangible evidences of the European Church, which the Indian could see, feel, and wear. These are the crucifixes, religious medals, rings, and rosaries . . . ."

And the author adds, "We wish we knew more about the role of the Church at Michilimackinac in the eighteenth century. That it played an important part in the lives of the inhabitants is well documented. In 1778, the fort's traders, including *Michigan's First Jewish Citizen, Ezekiel Solomon*, (italics mine), petitioned General Frederick Haldimand to send a permanent priest to the post." In similar manner the other aspects of the life in and around the fort are depicted.

The pictorial and main part of the book is a treasure house of countless archaeological artifacts which were left by Indians, soldiers, priests, traders and fort inhabitants. On the basis of the artifacts and other documentary evidence, the author reconstructs and recreates an entire historical period of a famous site.

## GENTLEMEN ON THE FRONTIER

The home and family objects are the most interesting of the pictorial reproductions. They include such items as scythes, sharpening stones, shovels, hoes, picks, axes, springs, tacks, scissors, table legs, drawer pulls, ice creepers, bottles, glasses, spigots, knives, forks, spoons, candlesticks, trivets, sieves, buttons, cuff links, chains, pottery, ceramics, chess pieces, dice, and many more.

The author's comments and quotations taken from primary sources accompany the pictures. Characteristic is the following comment:

"Some of the hardware used in the buildings at Fort Michilimackinac has survived to tell us something about those long-departed structures. The heavy hinges and fasteners are of the kind commonly associated with Early American or colonial architecture. They suggest a solid, sturdy type of construction, that the fort's inhabitants felt a need to protect themselves and their valuables from intruders and thieves."

All the other comments are just as interesting and relevant.

Appropriate and zest giving are the quotations. We will cite one

"Now to Michilimackinac  
We soldiers bid adieu,  
And leave each squaw a child on back,  
Nay some are left with two.  
When you return my lads, take care  
Their boys don't take you by the hair,  
With a war-whoop that shall rend the air,  
and use the scalping knives."

Dr. Eugene T. Peterson, the author of GENTLEMEN ON THE FRONTIER is the Director of Historic Projects of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission. He has recently been on a research trip in Europe.



## *Jewish Historical Society of Michigan*

The Jewish Historical Society of Michigan was organized for the following purposes:

1. To foster the collection, preservation and publication of materials on the history of the Jews in Michigan.
2. To encourage all projects, celebrations, and other activities which tend to spread authentic information concerning Michigan Jewish History.
3. To foster all effort to create a wider interest on the part of Michigan Jews in the growth and development of their respective Jewish communities.
4. To cooperate with national Jewish historical societies.

Annual membership dues to individuals, libraries, and institutions are \$5.00 per year. Dues and contributions to the Society are deductible for income tax purposes.

*Michigan Jewish History*, a semi-annual journal, is sent to each member. Contributions are invited. Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor, 8801 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Michigan 48202.

