

MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

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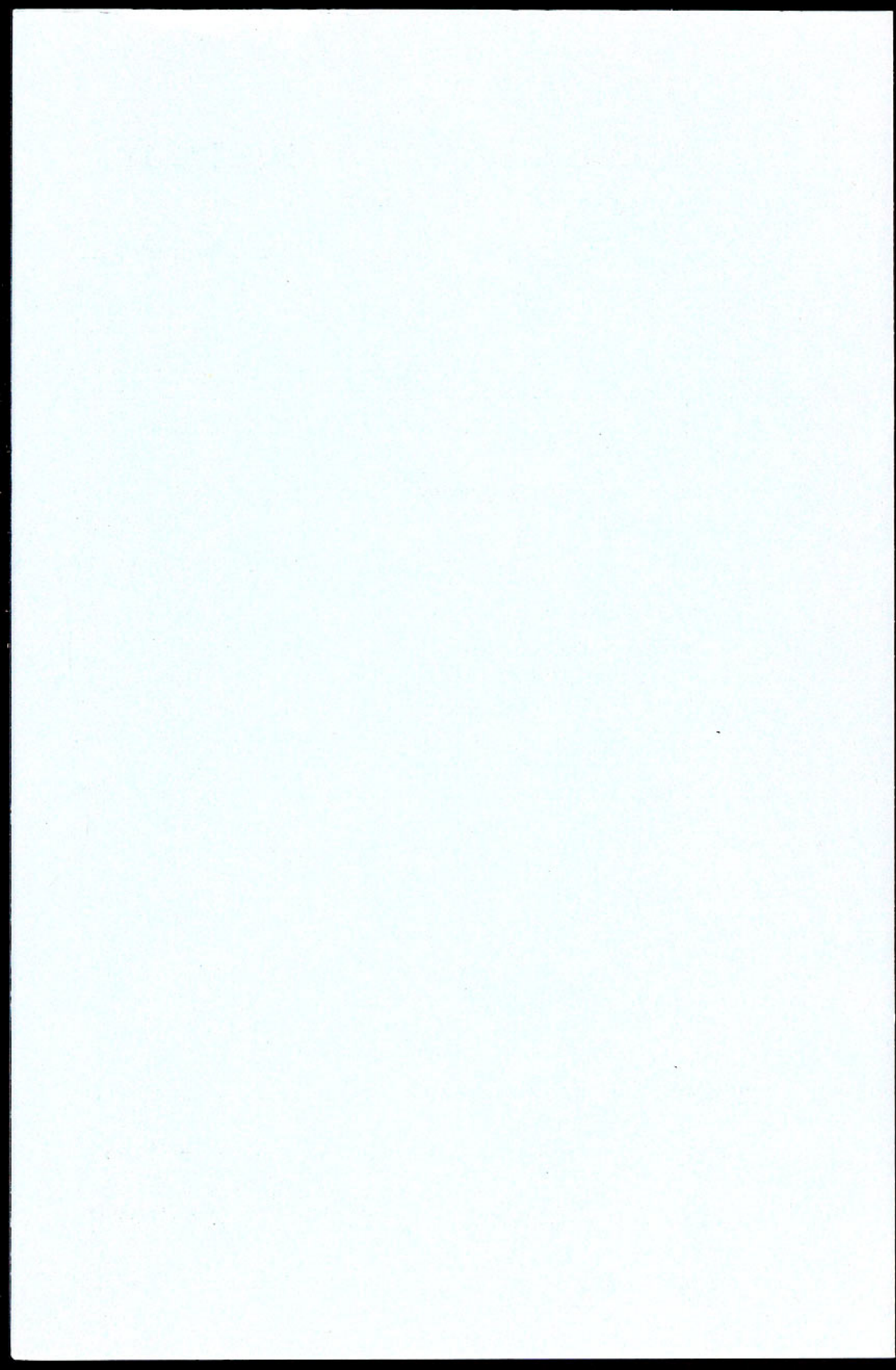
Eighteenth Anniversary Issue

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**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

Volume 18 January, 1978—Tevet, 5738 No. 1

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The Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, founded in 1959, promotes the study and research of Michigan Jewish history, publishes periodicals, collects documents and records, maintains a permanent depository for such documents and records at the Jewish archives of the Burton Collection of the Detroit Public Library, and commemorates sites of Jewish historical significance.

Categories of membership in the Society include Life Member (\$100), Sustaining (\$25), Contributing (\$15), Regular (\$10). Inquiries regarding membership should be addressed to Jeffrey N. Borin, Membership Chairman, 1010 Travelers Tower, Southfield, Michigan 48076; (313) 353-0023.

MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY: AN HISTORIC SKETCH

3

By ALLEN A. WARSEN

This issue of *Michigan Jewish History* marks an important date in the history of the magazine. Since its first appearance eighteen or *hai* years ago, it has been appearing semiannually, and contributing to the cultural enrichment of Michigan Jewry.

Throughout the years of its existence, the magazine has served as a link between the past and present, and reflected every aspect of Jewish life.

It is significant to note that at the founding meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan on June 21, 1959, the Society's founding fathers decided, inter alia, "to promote the study and research of Michigan Jewish history and to publish bulletins and periodicals for the purpose of recording and interpreting the life of Michigan Jewry. The tentative title of the chief bulletin will be *Pinkos*."

Instead, the name given the magazine was *Michigan Jewish History*.

It also is noteworthy that the seal of the magazine, designed by Frank Barcus, *alav ha'shalom*, a founder of the Society, consists of an outline of the state of Michigan and the Society's Hebrew motto, *Asher yishalum b'neykhem makhar et avotam*--"When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come" (Joshua 4:21). Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum selected the Scriptural passage for the motto.

Regarding the seal's Hebrew script, Mr. Barcus remarked: "The Hebrew letters are taken from the famous Prague Haggadah, published in the year 1526, considered one of the most beautiful Haggadas ever to be printed."

The first issue of the magazine appeared on Tevet 5720-March 1960. It contained the following articles: "Founding Our Society," Allen A. Warsen; "Greetings," Jacob R. Marcus; "Jewish Pioneers in Michigan," Irving I. Katz; "A History of Some Early Jewish Physicians in Michigan," Irving I. Edgar; "Remarks at a Memorial Service," Emanuel Applebaum; "The Arrival of the S.S. Tamar in the Port of Detroit," Paul Masserman; "The Seal of the Society," Frank Barcus; and "Freshwater Fury" by Frank Barcus, reviewed by Henry D. Brown.

Michigan Jewish History since its founding has been noted for its rich content, versatile projects and purposeful features. The projects included series of articles on various subjects, such as the ones on the Michigan participants in the Palestinian Jewish legion in the First World War.

In addition, *Michigan Jewish History* published brief histories of local Jewish organizations and Michigan Jewish communities. Many of the latter were written thanks to the encouragement of Dr. Henry Green, a past president of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan. For his efforts Dr. Green deserves the Society's gratitude.

ALLEN A. WARSEN is founder and honorary president of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.

The magazine, moreover, published biographies, memoirs and book reviews. The photographs, illustrations and the special feature, "From Our History Album," have added significance and meaning to the periodical.

Among the other features of the magazine are the resolutions and proclamations honoring the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan by state and local officials.

The editors of *Michigan Jewish History* have been:

Emanuel Applebaum. March, 1960 - June, 1963

Irving I. Katz. November, 1963 - May, 1965

Allen A. Warsen. November, 1965 - November, 1970

Irving I. Edgar. November, 1970-

THE JEWS OF MONTMORENCY COUNTY, MICHIGAN

By PHILLIP APPLEBAUM

Montmorency, one of northern Michigan's interior counties, owes much of its beginnings, as do the other counties of northern Michigan, to the lumbering industry. During the late 1800's, as Michigan became the lumber capital of the United States, the cutting of white pine extended deep into Michigan's frontier areas, and lumber companies probed into the farthest reaches of the state for the wood which was in such great demand. Scores of immigrants came to the state, and railroads were extended into the backwoods to reach the towns and villages of lumber country. Montmorency County benefited from this activity and attracted its share of Jewish merchants as well.

The first Jews on record in Montmorency County are B. Blumenthal and brother, dry-goods merchants, who lived in Lewiston around 1893.¹ Around 1895, an Ike Rosenthal, dealer in men's furnishings, also had a business in Lewiston.² However, these merchants did not stay long and had no real impact on the county. There were, however, a number of families who had businesses in the three major towns and villages of the county, who remained for many years, and whose influence can still be seen today.

HILLMAN

One of the foremost merchants of Montmorency County was Louis Davidson, who ran Davidson's Department Store in Hillman for about ten years. Davidson, the first known Jew to have resided in Hillman, was born in Germany in 1861.³ He immigrated to the United States and went to Alpena, Michigan, where he went to work for Jacob Levyn, a cigar maker. Louis later married Sarah Levyn, and four children were born to the couple in Alpena: Ralph, Dora, Lena and Meyer (later known as Jack).⁴

In 1895 the Davidsons moved to the village of Hillman and Louis established a general store. The business grew to become the largest store ever in Hillman,⁵ supplying the villagers and the lumbermen of the surrounding area. During the year, all purchases at the store were charged, with bills paid in the spring when the lumber was sold.

An early advertisement for the Davidson store gives some idea of the type of goods carried and the prices charged:

PHILLIP APPLEBAUM serves as recording secretary of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, and is associate editor of *Michigan Jewish History*.

At Louis Davidson's Store you can be neatly dressed from head to foot. Latest plush hats and caps, ladies custom made wrappers and shirt waists all ready to put on. Mackintoshes and fascinators, turkey red prints worth 7 cents, only 3½ cents while they last.⁶

Davidson's success in business also spread to other areas, and for a time he served as treasurer of the Montmorency County Savings Bank.

While in Hillman, the Davidson family grew, and in 1900, a son, Leo, was born to Sarah and Louis. Family ties also extended from Hillman to Detroit, when the Davidsons had relatives by the name of Applebaum. For a time, Harry, a young member of the Applebaum family clerked in the Davidson store, and while in Hillman, Harry roomed with a French Catholic family named Kurtz.⁷

The Davidsons maintained a kosher home and meat was ordered in from Chicago.

In 1915, a fire began in the Hillman town hall and quickly spread, unhindered due to the dry conditions caused by a drought. Some 25 buildings were destroyed, including the Davidsons' store, home and garage (across the street from the store). Although there were no casualties in the family, the financial loss was heavy, and some time before 1917 the Davidsons moved to Detroit.



Members of the Davidson family in front of the Davidson house in Hillman, around 1906. (Front seat, left to right) Ralph Davidson, Meyer Applebaum. (Back seat, left to right) Meyer, Leo, and Louis Davidson.



Davidson's Department Store in Hillman, around 1910.

The second largest store in Hillman was, from 1897, owned by Abraham and Libby Mendelson.⁸ Little is known of the origins of the Mendelsons, but Abraham and Libby had two children, Lillian and Harold, both of whom graduated from Hillman High School.

Abraham was active in local politics, serving as postmaster from 1903 to 1909, and village president in 1911. Mrs. Mendelson was active in community affairs as well, even attending Episcopal Church guild meetings, and in June would go hear Bishop Williams of the Diocese of Michigan speak to the confirmation class. She was also a member of a card group, the Ladies' Flinch Club.⁹

Abraham seems to have been an enterprising businessman, as the text of one of his advertisements shows:

Mendelson's Store

\$15 Gold Watch Only \$4.65

Everyone buying \$5 worth of goods at my store will receive a watch coupon. Send this coupon and \$4.65 to the manufacturer and you will get one of these handsome gold watches, ladies or gentlemen. Don't fail to secure one. 36 styles to choose from. Prices lower than ever. Best school shoes on earth.

A. Mendelson, Murphy Block.¹⁰

In the fire of 1915 the Mendelson store was damaged; it was, however, repaired, and business continued.

In 1924 Abraham suffered a heart attack and died. Mrs. Mendelson and the children then left for Detroit. The Rebeccas ladies club gave a farewell party for the family.

Around 1931, Aaron Leventhal and family came to Hillman from Rogers City. They opened a general store, and a relative of theirs, Tillie Maranthal, clerked in the store. The Leventhals, however, stayed only a year, and then moved back to Rogers City.

LEWISTON

A Jewish family of Lewiston whose legacy still lives on in Montmorency County were the Gassels. In 1905 Gavil Gassel¹² and Michael Brenner opened a general store in Lewiston.¹³ Gassel and Brenner, immigrants from Russia, had arrived in the United States in the late 1800s. Gassel had come with his wife, Minna Esther, and their four children; Brenner was Mrs. Gassel's brother. The Gassels first settled in Bay City, but moved north to Lewiston, attracted by the opportunities which lumbering had opened.

By 1907 Brenner opened his own tailor shop and Gassel operated the general store by himself.¹⁴ Brenner soon left for Grayling, Michigan, and later to Flint.

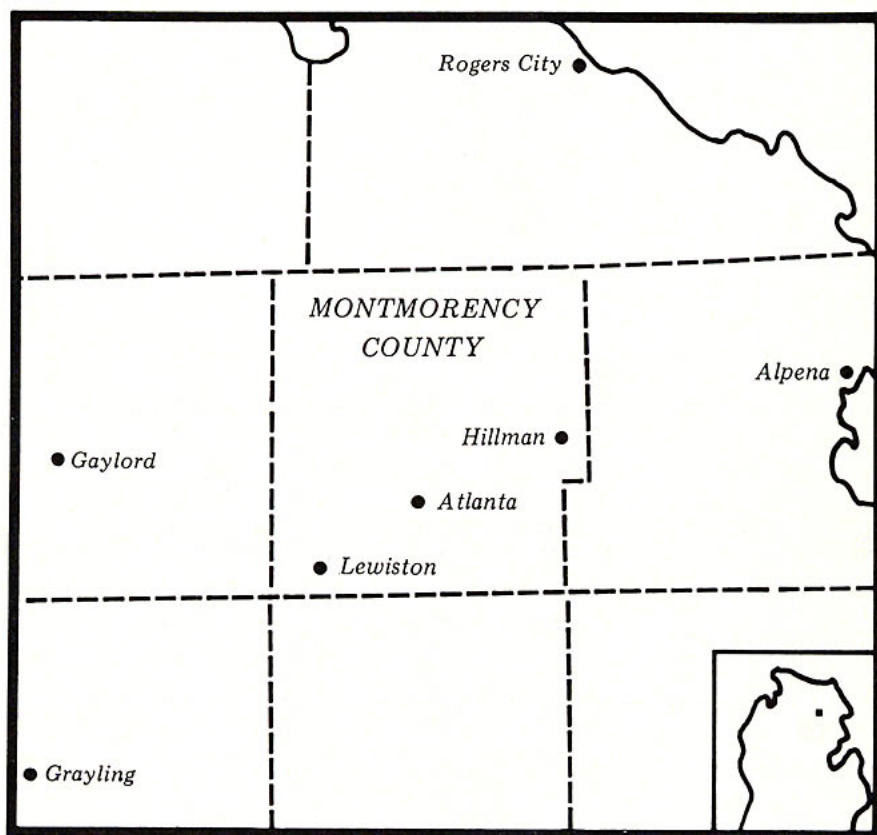
Gassel's business prospered, and as lumbering began to die out in the early 1900s, he capitalized on the fact that the loggers had only bothered to cut white pine (much sought after as a building material), but left standing large tracts of hardwoods. Gassel bought up three lumber mills and finished cutting whatever oak and jack pine that were left. He then bought a factory in Grayling and manufactured turpentine from the lumber. Gassel also purchased the Knee-Bigelow company store and several other stores in Lewiston, comprising an entire block.¹⁵

Six more children were born to the Gassels in Lewiston, and they received instruction in Judaism from Meyer Beckman (see below). The Gassels maintained a strictly kosher home, receiving kosher meats from Bay City, sent up by train. Gassel kept his business open on the Sabbath, but was closed for the High Holy Days, when services were attended in Bay City.

Faced with the grim prospect that their seven daughters and three sons would never find Jewish marriage partners in small-town northern Michigan, the Gassels decided to move to Detroit. Gavil took a train to Detroit to investigate the opportunities, and was successful in establishing a coal and lumber company on the city's east side. In 1916 the family joined him.

Around 1915, Ida, the eldest of the Gassel daughters, opened a millinery shop in Lewiston, which she maintained until 1918, when she joined her family in Detroit.

One of the most successful Jews to have lived in Montmorency County was Meyer Beckman,¹⁶ who began his career in Michigan



as an itinerant Hebrew tutor in neighboring Iosco County.¹⁷ While staying in Iosco County, Beckman chanced to meet Abram Barkman of East Tawas, whose children Beckman taught. Barkman was an enterprising man, and he got Beckman interested in setting up a bank with him in Lewiston around 1907. Although partners, Barkman remained with his family and business in East Tawas while Beckman moved to Lewiston to run the bank.

The Lewiston Bank seems to have done well, for by 1909 Beckman expanded his activities to include fire insurance as well.¹⁸ Thus from humble beginnings Beckman found himself well established in banking and insurance.

Meyer Beckman was born in Courland, Latvia. His parents left for the United States, but Meyer remained in Europe until he completed his education at the Telzer Yeshiva in Lithuania, from which he received rabbinical ordination and training also as a *shohet*. He then joined his parents in the U.S. around 1900.

His parents had settled in Bay City, Michigan, but Meyer left Bay City to rove the lumbering towns of northern Michigan, tutoring the children of the Jewish pioneer merchants. Staying as he did among Jews, Beckman seemed to have little use for English, but once in East Tawas he encountered a Christian minister, who upon hearing that Beckman was a rabbi, expressed a keen desire to learn of Judaism. The minister offered to teach Beckman the skills of English if Beckman, in return would instruct him in the faith of Israel. Beckman agreed, and after a year's time, he had attained the equivalent of a high school education in English.

After establishing the partnership with Abram Barkman in East Tawas and setting up the bank in Lewiston, Beckman would often visit his mother in Bay City (his father had died by then). On one such visit he met Bessie Golden, whom he married in 1915. Meyer and Bessie then set up house in Lewiston.

A short while later, Bessie went to work in the bank, after Meyer was persuaded to fire his female bookkeeper who was rumored to have been carrying on an affair with the town's married drugstore proprietor.

About a year later, the Beckmans learned that the proprietor of a general store in town wanted to sell his business. The Beckmans bought the store and invited Bessie's brother, John, and his wife, Goldie, to come up to Lewiston from Rose City and take over the store, which they did. Two children, Irving and Virginia, were later born to the Goldenes in Lewiston.



The Lewiston Bank of Meyer Beckman and (right) the general store later managed by Mrs. Beckman, previously used by Gavil Gassel.

After the Gassel family vacated their store in town, Meyer and Bessie invited Bessie's brother John to take over the store for hay storage, in addition to their own business. John declined, and Meyer and Bessie were faced with a dilemma. The store, which was connected to the bank, was owned by the Beckmans. They however, stood to lose insurance coverage on the bank if the adjoining property was unoccupied. After much persuasion, Bessie consented to open a general store in the empty property. Storekeeping was not new to Bessie; she helped manage her brothers' former store in South Branch, and she gained much experience as a salesperson in Bay City, when she was a girl. In addition, Bessie was glad to get away from the full-time bank bookkeeping which she found very boring, but Meyer would still bring the books of the bank over for Bessie to do.

Not long after Bessie opened her store there was a fire that started in the drugstore on the corner, and practically the entire block was destroyed. Bessie was in the kitchen at the back of the store (where she would catch up on her day's cooking) when she became aware of the fire. Eight month's pregnant, Bessie barely escaped. After the fire, the only part of the Beckman property which remained standing was the bank safe, impervious to the flames. Meyer was an astute businessman, however, and undaunted, he set up a facade in front of the solitary safe and carried on business as usual amidst the burned-out rubble and debris.¹⁹ The bank was rebuilt on its original site, but the store was rebuilt in another part of town.

Two children were born to the Beckmans in Lewiston: Gerald Robert and Flora Shirley. The children received instruction in



Meyer Beckman standing in front of the Beckman house in Lewiston.

Judaism from their father, and needless to say, a kosher home was maintained. Meyer would slaughter chickens, but in the winter kosher meat was ordered in from Bay City. Meyer would keep the bank closed on Saturdays, spending the Sabbath studying Torah; Bessie, however, kept the store open. Nevertheless, she would not write, assigning that task to her clerk, a Gentile girl. The townsfolk would also bring their bank deposits to Bessie on Saturday, which she kept, until Meyer could make the deposits on Sunday. For the High Holidays, Meyer would attend services in Bay City, as Bessie stayed home to take care of the children.

The Beckmans' business relationship with Abram Barkman became somewhat strained in later years. Barkman had once asked for a share of Bessie's store but was refused. Although he valued Meyer's friendship highly, and came to visit Lewiston for a week every year, Barkman was dismayed by the denial. Barkman and Beckman collaborated on a number of enterprises and they at one point owned another bank in Mio, Michigan, which was sold soon after Meyer's marriage. When, however, Meyer and Bessie informed Barkman that they planned to leave Lewiston, he dissolved the partnership.

In spite of the Beckmans' success, Bessie was reluctant to have her children grow up in a totally Gentile environment, and advised Meyer that a move to Detroit would be best for the family. Meyer agreed and the family businesses were liquidated. Bessie's store was sold to the farmers' co-operative, and the next year the bank was sold. Around 1925 the family moved to Detroit. The Goldens had left Lewiston earlier, around 1922.

ATLANTA

Joseph D. Alpern is the first known Jew to have resided in Atlanta. He was probably born in Bay City in the 1870s, and lived in Atlanta by at least 1895.²⁰ By 1899 he was the proprietor of a general store in town,²¹ but he did not stay long in Atlanta, moving to Newark, New Jersey around 1900, after selling his store to his partner and brother-in-law, Jacob Cohen.²²

Jacob Isaac Cohen²³ was born in a village near Grodno, Poland in 1872. When he immigrated to the United States, he settled in Washington, Pennsylvania, when he was engaged in cigar making. He later moved to Bay City, where he married Mary Alpern, and moved to Atlanta in 1897.

Jacob and Mary Cohen had three children; Philip and Sarah, who were born in Bay City, and Harry who was born in Atlanta in 1897.

Around 1905 Mary took ill and Jacob decided to move his family to Detroit, where his wife died shortly thereafter. Jacob sold his store to his other brothers-in-law, Charles Earl and Edward Alpern, who had been working for him. (Charles and Edward, like their brother Joseph were born and reared in Bay City).

After his wife died, Jacob Cohen and his children moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. However, his two sons returned to Atlanta to

work for their uncles, with Philip coming in 1916, and Harry arriving a year later, and becoming the store's manager. Shortly after his arrival, Philip enlisted in the U.S. Navy, but upon his return, in 1919, he and his brother purchased the business from their uncles, who moved to Detroit.

The Cohen brothers maintained the general store until 1925, when they sold the business (to a Gentile couple), and moved to Alpena, Michigan, where they set up a wholesale candy and cigar business. The brothers remained in Alpena until their retirement in 1966, and then moved to Florida.

The Gassel family of Lewiston, with ten children, was one of the largest Jewish families in Montmorency County in the early 1900s. In 1916, the Gassel family left Lewiston for Detroit, but not all of the Gassels remained in the big city. One of the Gassel sons, Sidney,²⁴ graduated with a law degree from the University of Detroit in 1932, and moved back to Montmorency County, settling in Atlanta. Sidney immediately took up a legal practice and became well known throughout the county. At that time, Montmorency County did not have a prosecuting attorney, and Isaac Isaacson (a Jew), of Alpena, served as acting county prosecutor. Sidney was elected county prosecutor in 1936, an office which he then held for 14 consecutive terms (28 years).

In 1942, Sidney married Pearl Crantz, originally of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and took her back with him to Atlanta. In the same year the Montmorency County Court House burned down, destroying most of the county records; the remaining documents were transferred to the county school house, and that also was destroyed by fire. Sidney, who in the course of his law practice accumulated many legal documents, helped recreate some of the lost records, and was active in getting county residents to come to Atlanta and supply information with which records could be recreated.

Concerned by the tremendous loss of valuable legal documents through the caprices of fire — the scourge of northern Michigan — Sidney was instrumental in getting a law passed to recreate county records in the event of such a catastrophe; in fact, he authored part of the act himself. The proposed law was endorsed by the Michigan Bar Association, the Secretary of State's office, and Michigan Governor Harry Kelly. The Law to Recreate County Records was finally passed by the state legislature in 1944.

In 1965 Gassel was elected for a six-year-term as County Probate Judge, and in 1971 he was re-elected. After his second term expired, he resumed his private law practice and his dealings in the Gassel Realty Company.

As one of the few attorneys in the area, Gassel was much sought after, and in typical small-town fashion, he once took payment for his legal services in the form of an antique organ. The record also shows that Gassel was a stern, but fair judge. However, before he became well known for his legal expertise, Sidney was popular as a band leader in the county. In fact, Sidney had been active in music

while still in Detroit: he organized the first band at the University of Detroit, and as a youth, he led dance bands throughout the Detroit area. In Atlanta, Sidney organized a dance band -- playing many of the instruments himself -- and appeared at local taverns and social gatherings.

As prosecuting attorney, Sidney was the first to get the annual prosecutors' convention to meet at Mackinac Island, where it has been held ever since. Sidney also served as government appeal agent for the Selective Service System, and received certificates of appreciation from every president since Truman for his services (the office was terminated in 1976).

In early 1940's Sidney's brother Louis moved to Lewiston and built the Gassel Lodge at East Twin Lake. Louis sold the vacation spot in 1976 (now called the Lewiston Lodge) and moved to Grayling, Michigan. Louis remained unmarried.

Today, Sidney and Pearl Gassel remain the only Jews in Montmorency County. The Gassels are childless. Although they spend the winter months in Florida, they are active in community affairs and well known throughout the county.

NOTES

1. *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory* (Detroit: R.L. Polk & Company, 1873-1931).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Internment Record, Clover Hill Park Cemetery; gravestone of Louis Davidson, Clover Hill Park Cemetery, Royal Oak, Michigan.
4. Interview with Mrs. Ralph Davidson, Mrs. Leo Davidson, Mrs. Dorothy Gerson, Mrs. Fanny Saulson, Birmingham, Michigan, August 14, 1977.
5. Letter to the author from Pearl R. Smith [resident of Hillman since 1899], January 3, 1977.
6. Pearl Rea Smith, *Hillman's 90 Years 1882-1972* (n.p., 1972), p. 62.
7. Smith letter.
8. *Polk's Directory*.
9. Smith letter.
10. *Hillman's 90 Years*, p. 47.
11. Smith letter.
12. All information regarding Gavil Gassel, unless otherwise indicated, was derived from letters to the author from Sidney Gassel, April 26, 1977; June 30, 1977; August 5, 1977; an interview with Mr. Gassel, Atlanta, Michigan, August 29, 1977, and a telephone interview with Eleanor Gassel Gard, November 22, 1977.
13. *Polk's Directory*.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Montmorency County Record*, December 26, 1974.
16. All information regarding Meyer Beckman, unless otherwise indicated, was derived from a telephone interview with Mrs. Meyer (Bessie) Beckman, August 4, 1974, and a personal interview with Mrs. Beckman, Oak Park, Michigan, November 20, 1977.
17. See also, Phillip Applebaum, "The Jews of Iosco County, Michigan," *Michigan Jewish History*, Vol. 16 (January 1976): p. 22.
18. *Polk's Directory*.
19. Gassel interview.

20. Telephone interview with Irwin Alpern, August 26, 1976; letter to the author from Charles Alpern, September 13, 1977.
21. *Polk's Directory*.
22. Letter to the author from Sadye Kahn [niece of Charles E. Alpern] November 29, 1976.
23. All information regarding Jacob I. Cohen and family was derived from letters to the author from Harry Cohen, November 3, 1976; November 19, 1976; November 30, 1976.
24. All information regarding Sidney Gassel was derived from aforementioned sources (see notes 12 and 15).

ADDENDA TO

"THE JEWS OF IOSCO COUNTY, MICHIGAN"

(MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY, JANUARY 1976)

In the course of conducting research into the history of places and people of Michigan, it is gratifying to come upon either an original resident of the locale in question, or a descendent of the early settlers. However, to depend upon an informant's memory as a source of information can prove unreliable, for facts can become clouded by the passage of time — which in many cases spans more than half a century — and the resultant published account may stand to be disputed by those (of whom the researcher had no previous knowledge) who have personal familiarity with the persons (r places in question. Such is the case with details concerning the historical sketch of a family in the East Tawas portion of "The Jews of Iosco County, Michigan."

Mr. Mortimer Grunauer of New York, a nephew of Regina Grunauer Myers, has brought to the attention of the Society a number of details which he believes stand to be corrected in the above-mentioned article. According to Mr. Grunauer, "Myers" is the correct spelling of Abraham Meyers, mentioned first on p. 19 of the journal. The Myers' had eight, not seven children, as mentioned in the article, and Libbie Myers (p. 20) was indeed one of the Myers daughters. She later became a registered nurse and served with the U.S. Armed Forces in Europe, 1918-20.

Mr. Grunauer also asserts that the Myers family did not move to Tower, Michigan in 1897, based on the fact that he visited them in East Tawas in 1910. Instead, Mr. Grunauer states, the Myers family moved to New York around 1908.

On the section "Other Jews" in the same article (p. 33), it has been discovered by the author that indeed much information can be found on the Rothschilds mentioned. For a biographical sketch of Sigmund Rothschild, see *Michigan Jewish History*, Vol. 13, June 1973, pp. 16-18.

THREE IMPORTANT EVENTS

As we celebrate our *hai* year we are especially happy to note the unprecedented occurrence of having three separate commemorations take place this year.

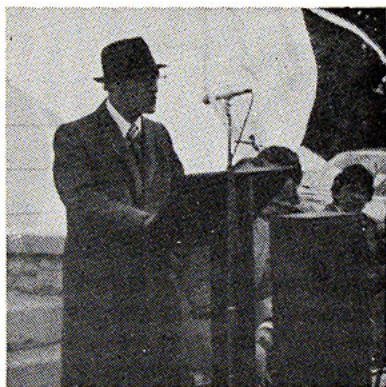
On October 16, 1977, an official Michigan state historical marker was dedicated at Congregation Beth El in Traverse City. The marker commemorates the fact that Beth El now occupies the oldest synagogue continuously used as such in Michigan. The one-room school house type structure was built in 1885, and has housed the congregation since that year to date. Although the JHSM had no direct hand in establishing the marker, members of the Society were invited to attend and participate in the dedication ceremonies.

Two weeks later, on October 30, 1977, the Society had the pleasure of participating in the dedication of another state historical marker, which in this case, commemorated the first Jewish religious services held in the city of Detroit, in 1850. In that year, a group of German Jewish immigrants gathered at the house of Isaac and Sarah Cozens, near the corner of Congress and St. Antoine, and formed the first minyan in the city, with services led by Marcus Cohen. That group later formed Congregation Beth El, which is still in existence, now commonly known as Temple Beth El, one of the foremost Reform congregations in the country. The marker itself was commissioned by the JHSM, Temple Beth El, and Congregation T'chayah, recently formed by Jews living in downtown Detroit. The marker was erected on the lawn of the Blue Cross-Blue Shield building, on E. Congress, facing St. Antoine.

A long-delayed dedication took place November 20, 1977, as the Society dedicated a plaque commemorating Detroit's first known Jewish resident, Chapman Abraham. The bronze wall plaque was installed in the library of the new Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. The plaque is entirely the product of the Society. Chapman Abraham came to Detroit in 1762 from Montreal. He was captured by the Indians during the Pontiac uprising, and the story of his seizure and release has been recorded in a number of historical works, including our own Michigan Jewish History (see issues of March 1960, and May 1969). The dedication ceremonies were attended, in addition to about 25 Society members, by officials of the Jewish Community Center, and author Bernard Postal, whose lecture we had co-sponsored (along with the Jewish Parents Institute) earlier that morning, as part of the annual Book Fair activities.

It is with great pleasure and pride that we see these commemorations reach fruition after years of diligent work. With the continued support of Society membership and the community, we shall continue our dedicated work, and look forward to other significant accomplishments in the future.

Doris Passell Easton
President



Michigan Jewish History Editor Dr. Irving I. Edgar (*left*), and Michigan Governor William Milliken (*right*) spoke at the dedication ceremonies.



Cantor Harold Orbach of Temple Israel, Detroit, (*front center*) was invited to participate in the dedication ceremonies. Behind Cantor Orbach stands Devera Stocker, JHSM board member and granddaughter of Julius Steinberg, a founder of Congregation Beth El of Traverse City.

Allen A. Warsen
and Doris P. Easton.



Carl Levin,
president,
Detroit City Council.



(Left to right) Allen A. Warsen, founder and honorary JHSM president; current JHSM President Doris P. Easton; past President Dr. Abraham Rogoff; Hugh Greenberg, president, Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit.



(Left to right) Allen A. Warsen; Doris P. Easton; past JHSM President Dr. Irving I. Edgar; Dr. Abraham Rogoff; past JHSM President Dr. Henry Green.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF METROPOLITAN DETROIT: THE ORGANIZING YEARS

By WALTER E. KLEIN

Forward

In 1977, the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit reaches its fortieth year as an agency of our community. It is historically convenient — and historically correct — to cite 1977 as the fortieth anniversary year because the first official meeting of the delegates to the Council was convened on September 29, 1937. However, the movement toward the creation of the Council, the incubation of the idea, the considerable efforts of a number of people, the resolution of some thorny conflicts, preceded the formal organization of the Council by a significant period of time.

The purpose of this article is to examine the organizational phase of the Council, to chronicle the events leading to the official launching, and to attempt to relate these developments to the historical setting in which they occurred. This may be the appropriate place, incidentally, to note that "Metropolitan" was added to the title of the agency some years later (and not without debate).

A Background View

The Council was a product of its times in American Jewish community life, and in that community's search for and experimentation with methods of community organization that would prove to be effective. Briefly stated, the community council concept was an effort to broaden participation in communal affairs. Within that concept, the varying interest groups of the community, as represented by organizations, would be brought together in a common forum and in common functional committees, to discuss and act upon Jewish problems of common concern.

By the 1930's, the great tide of Jewish immigration to the United States had already peaked and vanished. There was to be additional immigration, but not even remotely to approach the numbers arriving between 1881 and 1924. In terms of national origin, the profile of American Jewry was established, and it was predominantly Eastern European. A thriving organizational life, supported by the Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European community, had come into being: synagogues, landsmanshaften, cultural, insurance, self-help, charitable, burial, labor-oriented, political, and Zionist groups.

WALTER E. KLEIN, a native of Cleveland, Ohio arrived in Detroit in 1945 and joined the staff of the Jewish Community Council. In 1960 Mr. Klein was appointed executive director of the Council, a position which he held until his retirement in 1973.

The importance of these developments, from the point of view of the background which gave rise to the Council movement, is that the immigrant generation was now sufficiently rooted in the American scene to assert its own interests and sense of priorities in Jewish communal life. The developing tragedy in Europe in the 1930's, together with severe domestic problems of anti-Semitism and discrimination added urgency to the need to do so.

In assessing the "tone" of the times, it is important to make more than passing reference to the dreaded sub-climate of anti-Semitism which prevailed. The problem was a real one, and understandably provoked great anxiety. The nation was still in the throes of the Great Depression; the legacy of the "anti-alien" sentiments of the 1920's remained; the memory of the elder Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* and its publication of the pernicious and harmful *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was still a recent one; respected educators had given their sanction to Jewish quotas in colleges and universities; a hodgepodge of pseudo-scientific Anglo-Saxon race superiority theories had been published. Add to this the widespread economic insecurity which existed and the exploration from Hitler's Germany of money and personnel to foment anti-Semitism in the United States, through such groups as the German-American Bund, and the reasons for uneasiness were clear. Inevitably, some segments of the population were responsive to the appeals of demagogery and bigotry.

And these appeals come in abundance. Literally scores of organizations began to dot the landscape from coast to coast: some with economic panaceas, such as Huey Long's "Share-our-Wealth" movement, or Dr. Francis Townsend's "Revolving Pension Plan." Others, many others, in crude or sophisticated ways, identified Jews as "the problem." Jews were variously singled out, with no pretense at or need for consistency, as the "Wall Street money managers" or as "Bolsheviks" or as the "invisible rulers" with a stranglehold on the media, the banks, and the government itself. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal became the "Jew Deal" in the vocabulary of the bigots and their publications, and even FDR himself was declared to be of Dutch-Jewish descent ("Rosenfeldt to Roosevelt").

Detroiters of an earlier generation will recall that this city was home to some of the more prominent anti-Semitic activists, notably the famed "radio priest," Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, and that ill-famed rabble-rouser-on-the-make, Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith. Coughlin's handiwork included the disruptive and threatening National Union of Social Justice and the street-corner mischief of the Christian Front. Smith was to found the Christian Nationalist Crusade, and at one time was a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Michigan. An interesting footnote to the history of the times is that these two skilled manipulators, Coughlin and Smith, joined forces with a befuddled Dr. Townsend to take advantage of the strength of his pro-pension forces in mounting the Presidential campaign of the Union Party in 1936.

From the point of view of Jewish feelings of security, the period was not a reassuring one.

While the observaton would have had unequal application to the various American Jewish communities, and certainly to individuals, there is consensus that, by and large, the Jewish "establishment" of the 1930's - the central agencies of the organized community - was headed by Jews of Central European (mostly German) ancestry, identified religiously with Reform, and assimilationist in tendency. It was they who carried the burdens and responsibilities of Jewish philanthropy, community service, and overseas aid; and that they did it with heart and conscience is not to be denied.

The movement toward the creation of community councils, in Detroit and elsewhere, reflected ideas and sentiments, however, that were still alien to the establishment leadership: Jewish nationalism; more intensive Jewish education; Jewish cultural activities; more outspoken and overt defenses against anti-Semitism; action against job, housing and school discrimination; and a representative apparatus for involvement in Jewish community affairs. The ultimate success of those who pioneered the Council idea demonstrated the timeliness and appeal of the goal they sought; it demonstrated also the capacity of the establishment to accommodate to change.

This brief background view is useful to an understanding of *why* the Council was formed at a particular juncture in American Jewish community evolvment, and with the assistance of all ranks of Jewish community leadership. It is worth noting, incidentally, that a *kehila*, something of a predecessor-in-spirit to the Council, existed for a short time in Detroit in 1911 (apparently not connected with the then-prominent New York Kehillah headed by Dr. Judah Magnes), and that a form of the Council idea, an association of organizations, was being advocated in the 1930's by the American Jewish Congress. The Detroit branch of the Congress, in fact, represented a membership of sixty organizations.

The Emergence of the Council Movement

The impetus for the establishment of a Council in Detroit, interestingly, developed from the effort to erect a new building for the Jewish Old Folks' Home, as it was then called. The Home, which was then located at Edmund Place and John R, was unsuitable and unsafe. Organized in 1905 by the Hevra Kadisha of Congregation Beth Jacob, the Home received its major organizational support from Orthodox and Yiddish-speaking groups. The Home had not become a member agency of Detroit's Jewish Welfare Federation until 1931, five years after Federation was incorporated. The leadership and the groups supporting the Home represented elements of the community which were not, at that time, closely involved with Federation.

According to S. D. Weinberg¹, the *Jewish Daily Forward*, in the latter part of 1934, invited reader correspondence on whether a

new Old Folks' Home or a Jewish hospital was a more pressing necessity for the Detroit Jewish community. The clear consensus of the responses received placed a new Home as the higher priority.

With this, and other evidence of the need for a new building for the Home, Federation made a move which created a landmark date in the evolution of the Council. The so-called "mass" organizations were the principal supporters of the Home; and at the initiative of Federation and its director, Kurt Peiser, a Conference of Jewish Organizations was convened on January 27, 1935, at the Statler Hotel. The purpose of the meeting was to generate support for a community-wide campaign, under Federation auspices and as part of the regular campaign, for funds for the erection of a new Home.

A few days before the conference, Mr. Peiser had reported to the Federation's board of governors that there was "considerable agitation" on the part of Yiddish-speaking groups regarding the Old Folks' Home situation. He felt that the conference presented a good opportunity to bring these groups together and anticipated a discussion of "general philanthropic goals instead of one specific piece of work."

The sought-for cooperation was achieved at this meeting, and funds for a new Home were ultimately included in the 1935 campaign. Of significance to the Council story, however, is that this conference authorized the formation of the important Committee of Twenty-One. This committee maintained on-going liaison with the Federation in the interest of the successful execution of the campaign for the Home, and its agenda included the creation, in Detroit, of a Jewish Community Council.

The Committee of Twenty-One

The Committee of Twenty-One, created by the Conference of Jewish Organizations, laid the groundwork for the Jewish Community Council in its subsequent deliberations with representatives of the Federation. Acting on behalf of the Conference, Hyman Altman of the Jewish Radio Hour; Joseph Bernstein, *Jewish Daily Forward*; and Jacob Levin, president of the Jewish Old Folks' Home, selected the Committee. The Committee of Twenty-One was designed and intended to be representative of the Yiddish organizations. As a later membership roster showed, the membership of the Committee was obviously enlarged as time went on.

The first meeting with Federation was held at the Old Folks' Home on February 4, 1935, and was, indeed, attended by twenty-one persons representing the Conference of Jewish Organizations. Since this meeting took place within a few days after the Conference, the following list is taken to be that of the original membership of the Committee. The names are listed along with the organizational affiliation of the members. In addition to Messrs. Altman, Bernstein and Levin, mentioned above, those in attendance were:

Henry M. Abramovitz, Pisgah Lodge, Bnai Brith; Irving E. Adler, First Galician Society; Mrs. Hyman Altman, Jewish Radio Hour;

Mandell Bernstein, Congregation Beth Abraham; D. Bolotnikoff, Pinsker Society; David J. Cohen, Bnai David; Mrs. George Cohen, Eva Prenzlauer Maternity Aid; Charles Driker, Odessa Progressive Aid Society; Mrs. Abraham Ferar, Jewish Old Folks' Home Auxiliary; Mrs. Ada Gorelick, Workmen's Circle, No. 111; Mrs. J. Harvith, Zedakah; Joseph Heideman, Workmen's Circle, No. 156; Rabbi A. M. Hershman, Congregation Shaarey Zedek; Myron Keys, Jewish Old Folks' Home; Harry Levine, Yiddish Folks' Verein; Mrs. Max Oberfield, Eastern Ladies Auxiliary; William Sandler, Congregation Beth Tephilo Emanuel; Mrs. A. Weisman, Home Relief Society.

Mr. Peiser was present on behalf of Federation, and acted as temporary chairman. As a first order of business, the Committee of Twenty-One selected a permanent chairman, Myron Keys being unanimously elected.

After a discussion of the campaign for funds for the Home, the Committee, at this first meeting, addressed itself to the question of the creation of a Jewish Community Council. "It was brought to the attention of the group," according to the minutes, "that in the immediate future Mr. Peiser hoped to organize a Jewish Community Council which would have proper representation of all groups in the city and which would act as an open forum for the discussion of all Jewish causes and the adoption of such principles and policies as would be acceptable to the Jewish community of Detroit."

The Committee then resolved to recommend to the Conference of Jewish Organizations, which was scheduled to convene again on February 17, ". . . the development of a Jewish Community Council, representing all Jewish organizations in the city. Further, that this recommendation, if accepted by the meeting, be forwarded to the Jewish Welfare Federation for immediate action."

The foregoing resolution was approved at the February 17 Conference, but specific actions to implement it were delayed for the better part of two years. One compelling reason for the delay was that the major focus of the Committee of Twenty-One was upon the successful completion of the campaign for the Home; another reason, cited by Mr. Peiser, was that a staff person had to be engaged to handle the Council project.

The construction of the new (and re-named) Jewish Home for the Aged, at Burlingame and Petoskey, was started in 1936. In the latter part of the same year, Mr. Peiser announced that an executive secretary, William Boxerman, had been engaged by Federation to help organize and to work with the Jewish Community Council.

The Committee of Twenty-One met for the last time on January 3, 1937. The Federation, by this time, had designated a committee of ten members to work on the organization of the Community Council, and at the insistence of Myron Keys, had agreed to ask the Committee of Twenty-One to designate an equal number to serve on the Organizing Committee. A nominating committee, consisting of Henry Abramovitz, Charles Driker and Nathan R. Epstein, had been named to select the ten representatives of the Committee of Twenty-One.

Mr. Keys explained that the eventual form of the Community Council would be determined after meetings with the Jewish organizations. Indicative of the rift which existed, a question was raised as to why the Council was being organized under Federation sponsorship. Mr. Keys dealt with the question by an assurance that there was no intention by Federation to dominate the new organization, that it was meant to be an organ of all groups in the community, and that since someone had to get it started, the Federation, as the most centralized of the community institutions, was the logical body to do so.

The Committee of Twenty-One acted to ratify the following to serve on the Organizing Committee of the Jewish Community Council: Irving Adler, Henry Abramovitz, Maxwell Black, Charles Driker, Isaac Finkelstein, Joseph Pevin, Joseph Bernstein, Isidore Sosnick, Mrs. J. Harvith, and Samuel Lieberman.

It is at this point in the Council story that the historic role of the Committee of Twenty-One comes to an end. The negotiations and discussions shifted to another area.

The Role of Federation

Through most of 1935 and 1936, the subject of a Jewish Community Council for Detroit was an agenda item for the executive committee of Federation, the board of governors and the Detroit Service Group. The time lapse, apparently, was due to two factors already mentioned: (1) the preoccupation with the campaign for the Home, and (2) the lack of professional staff to see the project through. In addition, Mr. Peiser required time to make inquiries to other cities which had formed councils.

The expressed commitment of Mr. Peiser to the creation of the Jewish Community Council remained a consistent one.² In a report to the Federation board of governors of June 10, 1935, he stated that his experience in trying to involve Jewish organizations in the 1935 campaign made him aware of the need for a council where organizational representatives would have a voice in certain policy formations. By September of the same year, he was able to report that plans were being developed for a council; and subsequent to this he announced that as a result of inquiries, information was at hand about the status of the councils already functioning in Cleveland and Cincinnati. (While out of chronological sequence, it is noted that when the constitution of the Detroit Council was submitted, Federation and the Detroit Service Group immediately ratified it and named delegates.)

With the employment of Mr. Boxerman in the latter part of 1936, plans for the organization of the Council took specific form. A committee on the Jewish Community Council was appointed, consisting of (a partial list): Simon Shetzer, Mrs. Joseph Ehrlich, Henry Wineman, Samuel Levin, and Myron Keys. Mr. Boxerman served as secretary of this committee. Mr. Peiser and Esther Prussian, the director of the Detroit Service Group, also met with the com-

mittee when it convened for the first time on December 17, 1936.

The general directions of the Council and the composition of an organizing committee were discussed. Mr. Peiser recommended a "flexible" constitution and the involvement of the "Yiddish groups," whose representatives were to be selected from the Committee of Twenty-One. It was at this meeting and, as previously mentioned, at the urging of Mr. Keys, that the decision was reached to have equal representation (10 each) from the Committee of Twenty-One and the Federation. There should be no appearance, Mr. Keys argued, of an attempt to Federation to dominate the Organizing Committee. It was pursuant to this decision that the ten members named in the preceding section were chosen by the Committee of Twenty-One to sit on the Organizing Committee.

The Organizing Committee and the American Jewish Congress

Consisting of ten members each from the Committee of Twenty-One and from the Federation, the membership of the organizing committee was yet to be augmented. The American Jewish Congress in those years, as indicated earlier, was committed to the creation of democratic Jewish assemblies under the aegis of Congress, ideologically pro-Zionist and supportive of intensified Jewish education.

On January 14, 1937, representatives of the Detroit chapter of the AJ Congress met with Federation leaders and officials involved in the organization of the Council. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the role of the AJ Congress in the embryonic Council. Those present at this meeting, which was chaired by Philip Slomovitz, were: Joseph Ehrlich, James Ellmann, Sadie Feldstein, Joseph Haggai, Aaron Kutnick, Mrs. Maurice Landau, Benjamin Laikin, Elconin Saulson, Simon Shetzer, and Mr. Peiser and Mr. Boxerman.

As is so often the case, it is likely that the record of this meeting omits more than it includes, particularly in terms of nuance. Even in a mini-manner, however, the minutes are a remarkable and fascinating reflection of some of the tensions that beset Jewish organizational life throughout the country at this period. The AJ Congress faction, it was asserted, represented the nationalistic, Yiddish speaking, and Zionist elements as distinguished from the "Yehudim" or from the unaffiliated. Suspicion of Federation as not being either representative of or interested in these forces in Jewish life was voiced. Federation was referred to, interestingly, as the "American Jewish Committee." While the inaccuracy of this statement was pointed out, the doubtless inadvertent reference reflected a sentiment which has been noted by observers of the Jewish scene, and which was often expressed by identifying the American Jewish Committee as the "establishment" of that period.

The "political wisdom" of including the AJ Congress in the formation of a Detroit Council was pointed out by one of the participants in this meeting, it being argued that other communities were having difficulties because they had ignored the AJ Congress in the process

of creating their own Councils. This point, incidentally, was debated by Mr. Shetzer. While agreeing that the AJ Congress must be included in Detroit's planning because they had a program for community councils, Mr. Shetzer asserted that AJ Congress-sponsored Councils had not been effective elsewhere.

The issue which confronted this meeting, viewed in retrospect, was a significant one. Because of the AJ Congress' particular experience and interest, there was general agreement that it ought to be involved in the creation of the Detroit Jewish Community Council. There was at the same time a reluctance to give special status to the AJ Congress, as distinguished from a multitude of other organizations which might then make similar claims.

A compromise proposal was initiated by Mr. Peiser and won acceptance. Under Mr. Peiser's plan, the AJ Congress was invited to add seven members to the Organizing Committee, with the understanding that these individuals were to be from AJ Congress-affiliated organizations, and not from the AJ Congress itself. Accordingly, the following were added to the organizing committee: James Ellmann, Benjamin Laikin, Mrs. Maurice Landau, Joseph Haggai, Philip Slomovitz, Rabbi A. M. Hershman, and Mrs. Sarah Levin.

The Organization Proceeds

The composition of the organizing committee finally settled, the actual mechanics of creating a Council moved along fairly rapidly. On January 17, 1937, the newly constituted organizing committee convened for its first meeting. By unanimous vote, Simon Shetzer and Myron Keys were elected chairman and co-chariman respectively. A constitution committee was selected: Maxwell Black, chairman, Mrs. Joseph Ehrlich, Henry Abramovitz, Joseph Bernstein and Philip Slomovitz. As an aid to the constitution committee, the members of the organizing committee were canvassed at this meeting for their suggestions as to the aims of the Council to be incorporated in the constitution. The results of this canvass, as reported in the minutes, could not have offered the constitution committee a clear and consistent mandate; they augured, in fact, some of the difficulties that the constitution committee encountered in resolving upon a final document.

There were, for example, directly contradictory suggestions that (a) the Council should be concerned with local problems only, and, (b) the Council should concern itself with national and international problems and exclude local matters from its consideration. The problem of how to respond to the thrust of Jewish Communist organizations toward participation in the Council — a serious problem at that time — was met by the suggestions that (a) membership should be limited to organizations with a definite Jewish program, excluding all political groups, and, (b) in the interest of establishing a thorough democratic and representative structure, Communist

groups should be included in the membership.

Other suggestions offered to the framers of the constitution were that the Council ought to "encompass all activities of Jewish life," and on a more limited scale that it should serve as a fund-raising instrument, that it seek to eliminate undesirable solicitations, that it not interfere in the internal affairs of member organizations.

Developing a Council Constitution

The constitution committee faithfully pursued the task with which it was charged. Representational problems had to be solved: how, for instance, to allocate voting delegates as among the branches and the central body of the larger membership groups; how to determine the distribution of delegate strength in an organization with several sub-groups or auxiliaries; how to involve the Federation-affiliated social agencies.

The larger problem of the constitution committee, however, were philosophical ones. In earlier discussions about the formation of the Council, Simon Shetzer, arguing a strong Jewish survivalist viewpoint for the Council, warned against the inclusion of Communist — or assimilationist — groups. His views with respect to the Communist groups had previously met with some resistance and were considered by some as relating to a "minor problem." The constitution committee, however, saw fit to include in the draft document a clause denying membership to organizations that were "primarily political in nature." (This clause in the constitution was invoked and tested, incidentally, when the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, in the immediate post-World War II years, sought and was denied Council membership at what became a memorable delegate assembly.)

The other stumbling block of noteworthy philosophical importance was posed by the problem of Jewish nationalism. In the context of the times, this issue was not easily disposed of. Zionism did not yet enjoy popular support, especially among the "establishment" leaders; and concepts of a Diaspora nationalism — such as the creation of a "Jewish government" or of an international body representative of all world Jewry — were fiercely opposed by those who felt that such separateness would diminish their status as Americans.

The constitution committee had accepted a preamble, written by Mr. Shetzer, which included among the objectives of the Council ". . .the national and spiritual aspirations of the Jewish people. . ." The recommended draft constitution, including this phrase in the preamble, was brought back to the organizing committee. There was an objection to it. The arguments of those in opposition were that the statement on nationalism would make the Council unacceptable to some elements in the community. The matter was debated at three recorded sessions of the organizing committee.

The controversy was finally settled at a meeting of the organizing committee on March 17, 1937. A motion by James Ellmann that this

language be retained in the preamble was passed — by a one vote margin! At the same meeting, the constitution as a whole was approved for submission to the organizations which would be invited to form the Council.

Final Procedural Steps

A copy of the constitution, as recommended by the organizing committee, was sent to each prospective member organization, was published in the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* and the *Forward*, and publicized by radio. On April 25 and June 6, 1937, special assemblies were convened of the representatives of prospective member organizations for a line-by-line discussion of the proposed constitution, and as a consequence of this process, a final draft was unanimously approved. This final document, in turn, was submitted to the organizations, along with membership application and ratification forms, with the understanding that when one-third approved it and named delegates, the first meeting of the Detroit Jewish Community Council would be convened. A committee was selected to examine and pass upon organizational applications for membership: Maxwell Black, Joseph Bernstein, Julian Krolik, Samuel Lieberman, Henry Abramovitz, Simon Shetzer, and William Boxerman.

In an article³ about the Jewish Community Council, Mr. Boxerman presented interesting details concerning the constitution ratification process. The April 25 meeting, he stated, was attended by three hundred people representing 180 organizations:

So intense was the interest in this meeting, that the delegates began to arrive before the scheduled hour. The proper psychological setting was provided for the occasion by seating the delegates at long tables in parliamentary manner. Members of the organizational committee were seated at the head of the auditorium, so that they might be readily available for clarification of various points in the Constitution. Numerous questions were raised. Perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of this conference, which lasted for more than three hours, was the variety of organizations gathered together through their representatives.

Mr. Boxerman also reported of this conference that the most heated debate related to the clause of the constitution excluding political organizations from membership, and that the clause was sustained by a large vote.

The First Delegate Assembly

On September 29, 1937, two hundred delegates representing 155 member organizations met at the Jewish Community Center in the first delegate assembly of the Jewish Community Council. As chairman of the organizing committee, Simon Shetzer presided. He referred to the occasion as an "historic event" in the life of the Jewish community:

For many years there has been a strong desire on the part of isolated individuals for a central organization representing democratically the entire community. Until now this has not been possible of achievement. But now the psychological moment has come and we are about to bring the Jewish Community Council into being.

No one, Mr. Shetzer stated, anticipated that all community problems could be solved through a Council; however, the Council offered the opportunity for a more intelligent approach to many of these problems. Mr. Shetzer cautioned that the Council ought to confine itself to a limited number of activities:

If we undertake less at the beginning, our chances of success will be much greater. We will thereby establish techniques and learn how to cooperate on matters of collective concern.

The range and representativeness of the Council's charter constituency was noted by the secretary in his report to the assembly. The Council's 155 member organizations, he stated, included a membership of 40,320 Jews, or about three-fourths of the total adult Jewish population of Detroit. By category, the membership in the Council consisted of: 50 philanthropic, fraternal and benevolent organizations; 30 synagogues and affiliates; 22 social service agencies; 18 Zionist groups; 12 social groups; 11 lodges and auxiliaries; 8 educational agencies; 4 councils of organizations.

In presenting the report of the nominating committee, Mrs. Joseph Ehrlich, the chairperson, noted that the committee had tried to include every shade of opinion among its nominees. The officers nominated and elected at this meeting were: Simon Shetzer, president; Joseph Bernstein, James Ellmann, Julian Krolik, vice presidents; A. J. Lachover, secretary; Joseph H. Ehrlich, treasurer.

In recognition of his many years of unselfish service to the Jewish community, Fred M. Butzel was elected honorary president, a position which he held until his death.

The Council's first executive committee, also elected at this meeting, consisted of: Hyman Altman, Theodore Baruch, David J. Cohen, Mrs. Ralph Davidson, Nathan R. Epstein, Henry Fenster, Rabbi Leo M. Franklin, Ben F. Goldman, Rabbi A. M. Hershman, Frank A. Hoffman, William Hordes, Myron Keys, Dr. Shmarya Kleinman, Benjamin Laikin, Louis Levine, Samuel Lieberman, Max Nusbaum, Charles Rubiner, Philip Slomovitz, Isidore Sobeloff, Abe Srere, Mrs. Herbert H. Warner, Henry Wineman.

Isidore Sobeloff, who had just succeeded Kurt Peiser as the director of the Jewish Welfare Federation, addressed the assembly. He characterized the Council as "a departure from the usual Jewish practice in America."

What you are doing here tonight has never been done before in America on so large a scale. If successful, it will be a model for other Jewish communities.

Rabbi Leon Fram appealed for cooperation with the League of Human Rights in its boycott of German merchandise.

At the invitation of the chair, the delegates present at this assembly were asked to state their own views as to specific activities which the Council might undertake. The variety of suggestions included a plea for more recreational facilities for Jewish youth and an attack upon the youth delinquency problem; action on discrimination in rentals and employment; a plan for Jewish "self-education" to assist Jews "to realize their own failings;" a community calendar of organizational events; a conciliation and arbitration service; a control over the frequent solicitations for funds; and a concern that the Council might interfere with organizational fund raising.

In Summary — And in Tribute to Simon Shetzer

The decade of the 1930's witnessed the creation of community councils in several cities throughout the country. However, in his article in the *Reconstructionist*, previously cited, Mr. Boxerman stated that the Detroit Council differed from those in other communities, because of its much broader scope, entailing a wide range of activities over a long period of time. As a second, and "more important" distinction, Mr. Boxerman pointed to the fact that eligibility for membership in the Detroit Council was (and still is) limited to organizations displaying "a constructive interest in the preservation of some aspect of Jewish life." No other Council, he continued, defines eligibility in this manner. "This is a far cry from the assimilationist tendencies apparent among certain groups in the Jewish community not so many years ago!"

No single individual, in the history of the Council, stands more clearly as the architect and persistent protagonist of this "Jewish survivalist" philosophy than does the Council's first president, Simon Shetzer. To a remarkable degree he understood and accepted the diversity of viewpoints that made up the totality of Jewish organizational and community life. He displayed a profound ability to sense the limitations that must surround any process of voluntary cooperation, but did not allow this to deter his expression of his vision and goal of an ever more united Jewish community.

He was firmly rooted in Jewish life, and just as firmly respectful, regardless of personal sympathies, with the legitimate Jewish objectives of any element of the community. He knew — and demonstrated that he knew — how to manage and resolve the tensions that were inevitable to the creation of a new central agency which in so many ways paralleled in function and scope the existing Jewish Welfare Federation. He had the historical perspective and breadth of vision to detect the moment for action, for doing what needed to be done, for accomplishing that for which the time called. His approach reflected an abiding patience with the sometimes fractious elements of the Jewish community of the 1930's and a tactical flexibility.

In one respect, however, he was unyielding. From the beginning of the discussions about the Council, and throughout his association, he insisted that member organizations:

. . . must have a constructive interest in the preservation of some aspect of Jewish life and that they must dedicate themselves faithfully to pursue among other aims and purposes that of helping to maintain the dignity and integrity of the Jewish people.

The imprimatur of Mr. Shetzer's influence is probably the Council's most treasured legacy.

Acknowledgments and References

Extensive use was made of records in the offices of the Jewish Welfare Federation and Jewish Community Council. Irving I. Katz, executive secretary of Temple Beth El, was helpful in suggesting sources, and in overcoming this writer's deficiencies in Yiddish by translating some important background research material. In addition to the publications cited, the writer made frequent reference, for corroborative data, to the following:

Community and Polity, Daniel J. Elazar, Jewish Publication Society.
The Political World of American Zionism, Samuel Halperin, Wayne State University Press.

A Heritage Affirmed, Harry L. Lurie, Jewish Publication Society.
Nor By Power, Morris Waldman, International Universities, Press.

NOTES

¹*Jewish Social Services of Detroit* (Detroit: Jewish Welfare Federation, 1940).

²In his recollection of the organizing period contained in *Memoirs of a Practical Dreamer* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1971), Benjamin Laikin puts a different emphasis on this commitment. Mr. Peiser had to be persuaded, he states, to support a Council based on organizational representation rather than on individual membership.

³*Reconstructionist* (November 19, 1937).

REPORT OF THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

The 18th annual meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan was held June 26, 1977, in the Sheraton-Southfield Hotel, Southfield Michigan.

The late-morning brunch was attended by 54 people, after which President Green called the business meeting to order at 1 p.m. Dr. Green called upon Sarah Friedman to deliver the invocation, after which he asked all to rise in silent tribute to the memory of Rebecca Panush Saks, a life member recently deceased.*

A motion was made and seconded to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting. Reuben Levine, treasurer, then gave his annual report (see below).

Guest speaker for the annual meeting was Mrs. Morris (Goldie) Adler. In order to give everyone an opportunity to hear Mrs. Adler, the remainder of the business meeting was dispensed with temporarily, and Dr. Green called upon Dr. Rogoff to introduce the speaker.

Mrs. Adler delivered a talk, entitled "Why We Came," a personal, sometimes amusing view of American Jewish history.

Upon the resumption of the business meeting, Dr. Green called upon Jeffrey Borin, membership chairman, who reported a total of 240 paid members in the Society.

Dr. Edgar, Mr. Satovsky and Mrs. Friedman each gave short reports on the publication, constitution, and program committees, respectively.

Dr. Rogoff, chairman of the nominating committee, read the suggested new slate of officers and board members for the coming year; Goldie Adler and Bette Schein were added to the original list of board members by motion from the floor. The new slate was then unanimously elected.

Dr. Rogoff, immediate past president, presented a plaque to outgoing President Green from the Society in recognition of his services. President Green then presented a gavel to incoming President Easton, from himself and Mrs. Green.

Honorary President Warsen then discharged the old officers and installed the new officers. On the occasion of our *hai* (18th) year, Mr. Warsen read the minutes of the founding meeting of the Society, of June 21, 1959.

Past President Green then turned the meeting over to incoming President Easton, who made a few remarks, and then the meeting was declared adjourned.

*See Necrology elsewhere in this journal.



Outgoing JHSM President Dr. Henry Green presents a gavel to incoming President Doris P. Easton at the annual meeting, as guest speaker Mrs. Goldie Adler (*center*) and past JHSM President Dr. Abraham Rogoff (*right*) look on.

Treasurer's Report

Covering period of June 1, 1976 to June 25, 1977.

Assets

Cash in checking account 06/01/76	\$1,051.56
Savings account 06/01/76	<u>734.64</u>
	\$1,786.20

Receipts

Dues, contributions, brunches, interest	\$4,036.52
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Disbursements

Printing, postage, meetings, brunch, book fair, markers and plaques	\$4,174.17
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Balance in checking account 06/25/77	\$876.49
Balance in savings account 06/25/77	<u>772.06</u>
Total balance 06/25/77	\$1,648.55

REBECCA PANUSH SAKS, died May 27, 1977, Oak Park, Michigan. Mrs. Saks joined the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, August 2, 1976, as a life member. Mrs. Saks was the mother of four sons, one of whom, Bernard, and his wife, Ann, were active members of the Society until their recent retirement to Florida.

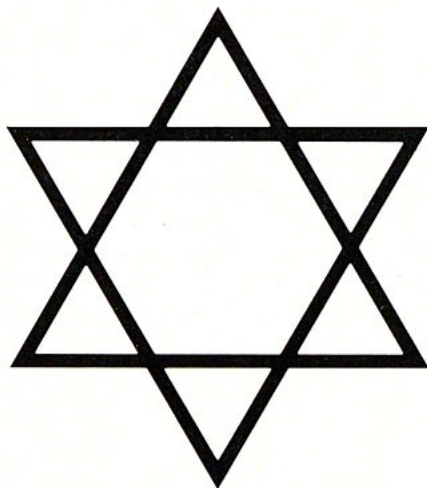


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