In recent years historians have written a number of useful studies about American Jewish life during the first decades of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, very little has been published about Southern Jewry during these years. Admittedly, Dixie’s Jews were few in number, but they constituted an important segment of the Southern population. According to the census records for 1920, nearly 5 percent of Atlanta’s residents were of the Jewish faith. Yet with the exception of one readable and well-researched congregational study, apparently the only aspect about the history of Atlanta Jewry of interest to researchers is the Leo M. Frank case. Certainly, this event was important, but it should not be studied to the exclusion of other developments which took place during the period.

Jews were not newcomers to Atlanta. In 1845, Joseph Haas and Henry Levy (Levi) established a general merchandise store in Marthasville, and this soon became the largest business in the village. Haas’s daughter Caroline was the first white girl to be born in the rapidly-growing town after it had been renamed Atlanta. Jews were well received in the community and played a prominent role in civic and social affairs. David Mayer, a Confederate Civil War hero and banker, was one of the men responsible for the formation of the Atlanta Board of Education in 1872; Aaron Haas was an alderman, a member of the city council, and in 1875 the first mayor pro tem of Atlanta; Dr. Henry Bak was a well-respected physician and linguist; Morris Rich was the founder of the famous department store which has borne his name since 1867; and Joseph Hirsch, who served as a councilman and in 1896 as mayor pro tem of the city, was instrumental in the erection and naming of Henry Grady Hospital. Jews were highly esteemed in the community, and Christians envied their thrift, generosity, and home life. In 1880, one Atlanta gentile

Professor Shankman received his Ph.D. degree in history from Emory University in 1972. He is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities grant in ethnic history, and is currently doing postdoctoral research at Harvard.

1 Janice Rothschild, As But a Day (Atlanta, 1967).

© Copyright 1978 by the American Jewish Archives
marvelled, "They are prosperous...because they work hard and save their money. And yet...no people give more willingly to public enterprises and to charities [than do the Jews]." ²

THE COMPOSITION OF ATLANTA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

The small Jewish community of the 1870's and 1880's, which numbered around 500 souls, was relatively homogeneous. Most of the men were engaged in business, selling dry goods, insurance, drugs, and building materials, or were in the professions. Nearly all belonged to the Masons, the B'nai B'rith, and the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple), the city's only synagogue. Though a fair number of the Jews were natives of the South, many—if not a majority—were Yankees or German immigrants.

As the city grew, so did its Jewish population, and after 1885 a sizeable number of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe moved to Atlanta.³ Finding their religious practices and social customs different from those of Atlanta's German Jewish community, they established their own synagogues and landsmanshaften, and congregated in a miniature ghetto near Hunter Street. The newcomers tended to be young and took jobs as peddlers and wholesalers. They resented assimilation and tended to intermarry within their own ethnic group. Apparently, the well-assimilated German Jews were ashamed of their Russian coreligionists, who were especially noticeable in the South. Although the German Jews contributed impressive sums of money to help the new immigrants, they discouraged the "Russians" from

³ Unidentified December, 1880, Atlanta Constitution article, reprinted in the Southern Israelite [SI] (Atlanta), December 17, 1948, p. 12; see also Rothschild, Day, pp. 25-26, 36-37; One Hundred Years: Accomplishments of Southern Jewry (Atlanta, 1934), pp. 16-18.

⁴ According to the 1880 Atlanta census, 1,381 residents of the city, only 3.7 percent of the population, were of foreign birth; of these immigrants 34 percent had come from Germany. In 1896, however, Germans comprised only 28.3 percent of the city's 2,214 immigrants. Natives of Russia, on the other hand, who were a mere 0.3 percent of Atlanta's foreign-born in 1880, represented 12.9 percent of the city's immigrants in 1896. Whereas nearly all the Russian immigrants were Jewish, many of the Germans were Christians. Ann Mebane, "Immigrant Patterns in Atlanta, 1880 and 1896" (Master's Thesis, Emory University, 1967), pp. 4, 37, 42-43, 47, 53; "Golden Wedding Anniversary of the Nathan Kaplans Recalls Memories of Early Days of Atlanta," SI, January 5, 1940, p. 3.
joining the B’nai B’rith and The Temple, and the two groups had comparatively little social intercourse. Proof that relations between members of The Temple and Ahavath Achim, the Russian congregation which had been founded in 1887, were strained came in 1891, when the newcomers had to ask for a burial plot in The Temple’s cemetery in which they wanted to bury an infant. Naturally the request was granted, but that the offer of a plot had not come spontaneously was significant.4

As time passed and the members of Ahavath Achim adjusted to life in the New World, they, too, took on some American ways and modified their ritual somewhat. When the synagogue’s spiritual leader, Rabbi B. Meyerowitz, began to deliver his sermons in English, the congregation gained in prestige. A non-Jewish historian, writing in 1902, noted rather clumsily that

its advance has been firm and sure . . . because all the members of this Congregation are harmonized and united with the sole object to strive and endeavor to enlighten and culture [sic] the old generation, also to implant and inspire in their posterity ideas of progress, enlightenment and intellectual advancement.5

In 1904 several Orthodox Jews founded on Hunter Street a new shul, Shearith Israel, but they were so poor that they had to purchase an old church for their sanctuary. The old structure, which dated back to the 1860’s, was dilapidated, and to make it usable the members had to buy building materials on credit. The congregation’s second spiritual leader was Rabbi Tobias Geffen, the first Orthodox rabbi to take up permanent residence in Georgia.4

Within a short time after the establishment of Shearith Israel, two more congregations were formed. Anshe S’fard was ultra-Orthodox, but its membership was too small to be able to afford an ordained rabbi. Beth Israel, a Conservative congregation, was founded in


4 Thomas Martin, Atlanta and Its Builders (Atlanta, 1902), II, 568–69. At the time this was written, Ahavath Achim was still an Orthodox synagogue.

1906 and drew its membership from those who considered Ahavath Achim too Orthodox and The Temple too Reform.\(^7\)

Need for yet another synagogue became apparent in 1906, when scores of Sephardic Jews from Turkey and Rhodes, a Greek island, immigrated to Atlanta. At first the Greeks and Turks refused to cooperate with each other, and by 1910 there were two Sephardic congregations in the city, Or Hahayiam, which catered to the Turkish Jews, and Ahavath Shalom, which attracted the Greeks. Neither synagogue was on a sound financial footing, and in 1914 the two congregations agreed to merge and form the Oriental Hebrew Association, Or Ve Shalom. Around 1920 members of Or Ve Shalom were able to purchase a two-story, frame house for $5,000, and this served as their house of worship for over two decades. Though they lived on the south side of town, then the Jewish section of Atlanta, they were most reluctant to mix with their Jewish neighbors and established their own cemetery, talmud torah, and fraternal and social welfare groups. Until after 1940 intermarriage with the Ashkenazic Jews was most infrequent.\(^8\)

Most of the German Jews, Russian Jews, and Sephardim shared one basic trait: they eyed with great suspicion the small group of Jews who affiliated themselves with the socialist Arbeiter Ring (Workmen’s Circle). Members of the Workmen’s Circle rarely joined any synagogue, and many openly proclaimed themselves to be atheists or agnostics. Though Christians considered them Jewish, leaders of the Atlanta Jewish community thought of them as a people apart. One Atlantan, who grew up during the 1920’s, recently recollected that during her childhood she knew of some parents who were most reluctant to allow their sons and daughters to date the children of the socialists. Yet, she remembers, “Many times they [the Socialists] knew more about Jewish education and traditions than those who were considered more religious.”\(^9\)

---

\(^7\) “Anshe S’fard Congregation to Move into New Building,” *SI*, September 19, 1930, p. 23; “Musical Program at Beth Israel Temple,” Atlanta *Journal*, June 18, 1915, p. 15; *One Hundred Years*, pp. 55, 58.


\(^9\) Personal Interview with Mrs. Betty Cantor, November 20, 1968.
Perhaps the most notable manifestation of antisocialist prejudice on the part of the Jewish community took place after the Arbeiter Ring started its own library at the Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA). Though the members of the Workmen’s Circle purchased all the books with their own money, the JEA trustees demanded the right to censor all materials put into the library and all speeches delivered in their building. This caused an outcry, and in the end the socialists were limited in their use of the JEA building and its library facilities.¹⁰ (See Tables One and Two, infra.)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND CHARITIES

With the rapid influx of Jews into Atlanta, it became apparent that existing social and charitable agencies were unable to cope with the needs of the community. In 1906, a building was acquired for a Young Men’s Hebrew Association (YMHA), but it was too small to serve as a community center. On May 12, 1909, representatives of the major Jewish organizations in the city met in The Temple and agreed to merge the YMHA with the Free Kindergarten Association to form the Jewish Educational Alliance. Shortly thereafter a campaign was launched to raise funds for a modern and functional JEA building. Rabbi David Marx of The Temple agreed to spearhead the fund-raising campaign and exhorted members of his congregation to dig deeply into their pockets for this worthy cause. According to Heyman Jacobs, the first secretary of the JEA, after one Friday night service held early in 1910, Dr. Marx persuaded his congregation to pledge $20,000 for the project, slightly more than half the money needed. In November of that year, the rabbi laid the cornerstone of the building, and on April 9, 1911, the new structure was dedicated.¹¹

Designed to serve the needs of all of Atlanta’s Jews, the JEA


housed the Schoen Free Kindergarten, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, a gymnasium, a sewing club, arts and crafts groups, typing classes, Hebrew classes, a dramatics group, several discussion groups, and a library. But if the JEA's prime purpose was to serve the community as a whole, it was nonetheless expected to give special attention to the needs of the poor and the immigrants. Citizenship classes and a night school teaching English, typing, and shorthand were scheduled so that newcomers could prepare for naturalization tests and secure jobs, and someone was always available to handle problems facing the immigrants. Little coercion was used to promote Americanization since Edward Kahn, who was for many years the director of the JEA, believed that the newcomer's "physical adjustment is a mere matter of time. He assumes the uniform outer garb soon enough. As for his spiritual adjustment to the American environment... this is a process of give and take." Though caring for immigrants was a costly, time-consuming, and sometimes thankless task, Atlanta JEA officials strongly condemned literacy tests for emigrants from Europe or other restrictive legislation to cut off the flow of Jews from abroad.

Of special concern to immigrant women were the cooking classes conducted under the auspices of the JEA. The Council of Jewish Women, which organized these classes, hoped to acquaint the newcomers with vegetables not available in Europe. By teaching the women "American cooking and how best to use American products," the Council hoped to improve the diets of the immigrant Jews and help them stretch their food budget. The Council was also sensitive to the problems of immigrant children. Teaching their mothers how to cook the same foods other Southerners ate would help the youngsters feel less self-conscious than if they continued to be served only the foods they had eaten in Europe. These classes were conducted in private homes rather than at the Alliance. Kashruth laws were "respected so as to avoid any antagonism and... [to] enlist co-operation."

---

Since the immigrants were poor, many lacked the funds necessary to send their children to religious school classes held at local synagogues. Everyone acknowledged that this was a problem, but not until 1912 were the dangers of this situation fully exposed. In that year some of the German Jewish families discovered that a few of the immigrant children were attending summer Bible classes at the Wesley Memorial Methodist Church. The parents of these children were sharply denounced for their negligence, and the JEA immediately expanded its summer activities to include Jewish history classes. Christian evangelical groups continued to be a problem even in the twenties. A number of churches were located near the Alliance, and one offered free refreshments to Jewish children during the summer months. After an afternoon of strenuous physical activity at the JEA, many a child who lacked the nickel needed for a soft drink was tempted to stop by the church.

While the JEA was responsible for social and cultural activities for the Jewish community, the Federation of Jewish Charities was in charge of coordinating all charitable activities. Founded in 1905, when most of the city’s Jewish relief agencies agreed to merge, it hoped to “eliminate overlapping fund raising campaigns and duplication of relief giving.” Its duties were to collect money and to give allocations to constituent agencies and to determine the needs of the community. Moreover, it collected funds for charitable groups outside of Atlanta once it had determined that their activities and needs were legitimate. One Atlanta rabbi explained how this differed from what had been done in the past:

It used to be that meshulochim or collectors of charity for the many Jewish schools, orphanages, and other agencies outside of the local community would come to see me to secure a letter of approval before they would start to make their rounds of the Orthodox Jewish group. Now I give no letters, for permission to solicit funds must come from the Welfare Fund and the Federation who exercise a tight control over the charitable

---

16 Personal Interview with Adolph Rosenberg, November 8, 1968.
work of the community. The Welfare Fund now is supposed to collect funds for these outside groups without the necessity of solicitation by the old-time meshulochim.18

Because the Federation did not provide medical care for the indigent, Jacob Hirsch and his sisters endowed the Morris Hirsch Clinic, which was first opened in an old house on Capitol Avenue in 1911. In the beginning, the small clinic functioned only on Sunday mornings, but soon more beds were added to the clinic and a nurse was hired at an annual salary of $500.19 In 1915, dental care was provided at the Ben Massell Clinic, which was affiliated with the Hirsch Clinic. According to Max Gettinger,

The Morris Hirsch Clinic . . . provided many medical services on a non-sectarian basis such as pediatrics, eye, ear, nose, and throat diseases, a special clinic for tonsillectomies, minor surgery, gynecology and diseases of women, and chronic illnesses. It conducted dental clinics for children and adults. As each service became available elsewhere, especially under public auspices, the Morris Hirsch Clinic discontinued the department in question. The dental department remained as the major service of the clinic.20

In 1929, the clinic treated 2,000 patients. There were 197 eye examinations, 386 nose and throat examinations, 392 women’s disease examinations, 154 dental treatments, and 150 home visits. Only 30 percent of its patients were of the Jewish faith. A nominal fee of twenty-five cents was charged for a patient’s first visit; ten cents was charged for subsequent visits.21

The Montefiore Relief Association, which dated back to 1890, was the predecessor of the Jewish Family and Children’s Bureau and gave “direct relief and loans geared toward helping an individual become self-supporting.” This replaced voluntary groups that offered


19 Minutes of the Meeting of the Social Service Department of the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation, May 29, 1968” (mimeograph), p. 3; Branch, “Atlanta,” p. 79.

20 [Max Gettinger,] “Service Information Outline, Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation: Ben Massell Dental Clinic” (mimeograph), n.d., passim.

specific relief for new immigrants in the form of commodities such as coal, clothing, or food. Closely related to the Montefiore Relief Association was the Lichtenstein Free Loan Association, which lent sums of money ranging from $50 to $150 for emergencies.

In 1924, the Montefiore Relief Association, the Hirsch and Massell Clinics, and the JEA merged with the Federation of Jewish Charities so that they could better serve the community and become a charter member of the Atlanta Community Chest.

In general, the Federation concerned itself with local matters, but it also provided funds to enable Rabbi Abraham Shusterman, of Athens, minister to the needs of Atlanta Jews attending the University of Georgia, to assist Jewish soldiers stationed outside of Atlanta during World War I, to take care of transients, and to relieve war victims in Europe. Caring for transients was an especially vexing problem and a very costly one. Occasionally the transient was a young Jew in search of employment or travelling to visit relatives, but more often than not he was a drifter or a father who had abandoned his family. Since transients were most frequent in the city during the winter months, Federation leaders concluded that they came "South for the sunshine and warmth" and that in most cases "the prospects of work scare [d them.]" Neither wishing to give encouragement "to professional schnorrers" nor desiring to ignore the obligation of helping the poor, Federation officials contributed clothing, food, and lodging to transients for up to three days. Attempts were made to send young boys and elderly men back to their homes or to contact their relatives. Files were kept on suspected "fakers" and deserters, and lists of names of charlatans were circulated to Jewish agencies throughout the country.

Since assisting transients consumed 10 percent of the Federation's relief budget, Jewish authorities were upset that officials at Orthodox and Conservative synagogues often furnished itinerant Jews with

---


bus and train tickets to another city whose Jewish charitable groups they were likely to plague. Edward Kahn, executive director of the Federation after 1928, did not object to rabbinical assistance for unemployed rabbis, cantors, and shochtim, but made it known that he wanted no aid given others. Under no circumstances, he insisted, should transients receive help from any group other than the Federation. Rabbi Harry E. Epstein, of Ahavath Achim Synagogue, thought that Kahn was unduly insistent about this, and the two publicly quarrelled about the proper method of dealing with the problem.25

Less controversial were campaigns to raise funds for needy Jews in Europe. In 1916, Atlanta Jews contributed over $80,000 to help victims of World War I. Six years later Georgia Jews were asked to raise $250,000 to help war sufferers, and this they did in record time. Though Jews contributed nearly all of this money themselves, the Atlanta Georgian and the Columbus Enquirer-Sun exhorted their Christian readers to support this worthy charity. The Georgian proposed that gentiles donate the entire $250,000 and that the Jews "be entirely excluded from participation in this fund." Similar statements appeared in the Enquirer-Sun, which declared that since the Jews of Columbus liberally contributed to every worthy charity, the Christians of Muscogee County should consider it a privilege to help them raise the money.26 Other drives for foreign relief were held in 1925–1926 and 1929, and Atlanta Jewry generously responded to both of these fund raising campaigns.27

SPECIAL CHARITIES: THE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY AND THE ORPHANS' HOME

One special charity that Atlanta Jews voluntarily assumed was ministering to the needs of Jewish prisoners at the Federal Peniten-

25 Information about this came from an interview with a prominent Atlanta Jewish leader in November, 1968. He asked not to be identified.


tiary located in the city. Rabbi Marx held services for the prisoners on the second day of Jewish holidays, and arranged for a Seder to be conducted during Passover. Apparently, the inmates enthusiastically responded to these activities, for before long they expressed interest in weekly religious services and Sunday school classes. The Temple paid all expenses involved in these activities, but in 1914 the warden suddenly rescinded the privileges of Jewish inmates to participate in religious services. Dr. Marx suspected that anti-Semitism had prompted this decision, and he and others complained to the office of the attorney general in Washington; before long the warden was forced to restore privileges of the Jewish prisoners.28 (See Table Three, infra.)

Though inmates could again attend Seders and religious services and classes, covert anti-Semitism continued to exist. Whereas the prison library stocked 259 books relating to Jews in 1910 when there were only thirteen Jewish prisoners in the jail, it had a mere 360 volumes on Jewish subjects in 1915 when the Jewish population of the prison was fifty-eight.29 Apparently cognizant of this discrepancy, the warden and the chaplain began to omit library figures from subsequent reports.

Just as the penitentiary brought to the city non-Atlanta Jews who required assistance from local charities, so did the Hebrew Orphans' Home, which housed children from five states and the District of Columbia, place a heavy burden upon the Federation. Help from the B'nai B'rith,30 which had been responsible for founding the orphanage in March, 1889, grants from foundations, interest from endowments, and a concerted drive to raise funds from communities eligible to send orphans to the Home eased this financial drain on Federation

\[28\] I have based this paragraph entirely on Rothschild, Day, pp. 67–68.


\[30\] From 1889 to about 1899, the B'nai B'rith contributed the bulk of the money needed to maintain the Home, and controlled the institution. In 1900, the Atlanta Jewish community assumed responsibility for supporting the orphanage. The B'nai B'rith continued to consider the Hebrew Orphans' Home a pet charity, and it held annual picnics for the orphans. “Activities of the B'nai B'rith,” SJ, September 19, 1930, pp. 30–32, 37.
funds somewhat, and after 1924 money from the Atlanta Community Chest contributed as much as one-third of the annual operating budget.

From the very beginning, the Home was such a model institution that its directors feared that “imposters” would seek to place their children and relatives there. Under no circumstances did they want the orphanage to become a “make-shift” boarding house. At first tutors taught the young children both secular and religious subjects, and music lessons were provided for those displaying talent and interest. Later, children attended public schools, but continued to be taught Jewish subjects at the Home. Older children were offered training so that they could eventually become self-supporting; boys, for example, were apprenticed to printers and plumbers, and girls were taught shorthand and typing. By 1901, the director reported that of the forty-one “graduates” of the Home, several were teachers, stenographers, shop foremen, medical students, printers, and salesmen. One lad he sadly confessed “to be candid is a worthless fellow.” (See Tables Four and Five, infra.)

Maintenance of a home able to accommodate as many as 140 orphans was a costly venture. As early as 1910, land and equipment needed for the job were valued at more than $100,000, and salaries for a director, doctors, nurses, cooks, and others required the expenditure of several thousand dollars each year. Though the Home tried to live within its income, it frequently had to dip into endowment funds or seek emergency help to make ends meet.

By 1910, officials of the Home decided that good as their care was, it would be better if orphans lived in private homes. In the past the orphanage had accepted fatherless young children whose mothers could not support them without working full time. Now it began to subsidize these women so that they could defer taking jobs.

---

81 Report for 1891 in the Combined Annual Report for the Hebrew Orphans’ Home, 1891–93 (Atlanta, 1894), p. 13. As time passed, however, an increasing number of residents of the Home were children coming from broken homes. Report for 1914 of Hebrew Orphans’ Home, passim.

82 Report for 1901, p. 63. A “graduate” was a youth who had attained the age of eighteen.

until their children were of school age and, in many cases, until they were teenagers. Moreover, whenever possible, children were sent to foster homes, and the Home paid their board and lodging charges and supplied them with all necessary clothing. No child was placed in a home failing to keep a kosher kitchen, and all foster children were to attend Hebrew classes in the afternoon. Those living in Atlanta were expected to participate in Friday night Shabbat services at the Home unless they preferred "to attend the Shule with which their foster parents are affiliated." Social workers visited each child between two and four times per month to insure that "no place was selected where the payment of $25 per month was the major consideration or where the child would be expected to do menial work." So many acceptable homes were volunteered in 1930 that no orphan lived full time at the Home. Eventually the Jewish Children's Service supplanted the Board of Directors of the Home, and the orphanage was abandoned.

**Social Organizations and Clubs**

As had been the case in 1880, the most prestigious Jewish fraternal order in the city was the B'nai B'rith. Composed primarily of the old German Jewish families who were members of The Temple—and who frequently also belonged to Rotary and Kiwanis—the B'nai B'rith was prominent in most charitable drives. Not only did it found the Orphans' Home, but it also sponsored the Aleph Zaddik Aleph (AZA), a social service fraternity for teenagers to encourage their "mental, moral, and physical development." Though a number of its members were opposed to Zionism, the Atlanta chapter occasionally contributed funds to organizations in Palestine. Until the 1930's, the B'nai B'rith was reluctant to recruit members from the Sephardim and the "Russian" Jews, but with the onset of the Depression, it gave up its exclusiveness.

---


85 *Report for 1929–30*, pp. 4–5, 9, 13; see also "Children's Home in Fifty-First Year," *SI*, September 8, 1939, p. 3.

In terms of prestige, the Atlanta chapter of the Council of Jewish Women was a female counterpart of the B'nai B'rith. It was formed by seven women who met in The Temple on October 10, 1895, a mere two years after Hannah Greenebaum Solomon had founded the national group at the Chicago World's Fair Parliament of Religions, and its avowed purpose was to assist in community services, giving special attention to care for the elderly, the promotion of education, and assistance to Jews in foreign lands. Nearly all its members belonged to The Temple, and until 1912, when the congregation established a sisterhood, Council women often served as hostesses at Temple social functions.

The Council worked with the JEA in assisting immigrants to adjust to Atlanta, but did not limit its talents to helping its coreligionists. Its members adopted a ward at the Atlanta Veterans Hospital and visited the soldiers, for whom they did sewing, collected cigarette money, and donated bed lamps, magazines, and ashtrays. In addition, they took it upon themselves to make clothing for flood victims, to send volunteers to the local crippled children's home, to assist the Red Cross, to feed hungry school children, and to help in other similar activities. By 1931, the Council had achieved an Atlanta membership of 264.

A rival group was the Jewish Women's Club, which had junior divisions for young girls and teenagers. Like the Council, it sent volunteers to the Veterans Hospital and collected cigarette money, and it took disabled soldiers out for automobile rides. It also raised funds for its pet Jewish charity, the National Jewish Hospital, in Denver, but, unlike the Council, it maintained a headquarters with banquet facilities. The Club was active in civic affairs and included registering voters among its activities. One of its goals was to establish a Jewish hospital in Atlanta, but none was ever constructed.

A third group was the Atlanta chapter of Hadassah. Since most "German" Jews were outspoken foes of Zionism, Hadassah drew its

---


88 Atlanta Federation of Women's Clubs, Report for 1927-29, pp. 22, 42; Report for 1929-31, pp. 11, 22.

89 The writer can find no information about the founding of this group or any indication of the size of its membership. Ibid., Report for 1927-29, pp. 22, 40-41.
Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple)
Atlanta, Georgia
membership from the "Russian" Jews. It held fairs and luncheons to raise money for hospitals and educational projects in the Holy Land, and distributed Jewish National Fund pushkes to collect money for the purchase of land in Palestine. Hadassah also did charitable work at the Veterans Hospital. Affiliated with other Zionist groups in Atlanta, Hadassah sponsored a culture club at whose meetings Rabbi Epstein lectured on Jewish history.40

Socially, "German" and "Russian" Jews did not mix. In fact, in 1915, the Federation of Jewish Charities found it necessary to pass a resolution stating that it "knew" of no differences based upon ancestry.41 Though the JEA was for all, many German Jews rarely participated in its activities. They had their own club for social events, the Standard Club, which for several decades blackballed applicants of East European background. The Standard Club, which traced its history back to 1867, the year The Temple was founded, purchased a clubhouse on Washington Street in 1905. The clubhouse had a dance hall, a pool room, and other recreational activities. By 1929, the neighborhood was on the decline, and a new headquarters was erected on fashionable Ponce de Leon Avenue. The $250,000 building, a fine example of nineteenth-century "Italian" architecture, featured tennis courts and an outdoor swimming pool. Most of its members also belonged to the Ingleside Club in Avondale Estates, which had a golf course.42

Less exclusive was the Jewish Progressive Club, which was founded in 1914. Its organizers, who had previously been meeting at the JEA, set up a holding company with a capitalization of $25,000 to invest in real estate. In 1916, they constructed on Pryor Street a clubhouse which included a hall for dances, a billiard room, and a swimming pool. Since membership dues were a mere three dollars per month, it was quite popular with the "Russian" Jews, who were

40 Ibid., pp. 33–34.
welcomed as members. By 1924, membership surpassed 500, and the building had to be expanded.43

LEADERS

Undoubtedly the most important leader of the Atlanta Jewish community was Dr. David Marx, a native of New Orleans and a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College. Rabbi of The Temple for fifty years and the only Reform clergyman in the city, he, more than anyone else, was the man who represented Atlanta Jewry at interfaith gatherings. Known for his “walrus-style moustache,” Marx had briefly served a Birmingham, Alabama, congregation before he came to The Temple. Though elected rabbi by the close margin of thirty-seven votes to thirty-four, he did not hesitate to lead the synagogue away from Orthodox Judaism—or those remnants of Orthodoxy still apparent at The Temple—and into the Reform Movement. Under his leadership, the *Union Prayer Book* was adopted, the bar mitzvah ceremony was eliminated, the *yarmulke* was no longer worn during religious services, and traditional rabbinical garb was abandoned. Rabbi Marx was an organizer par excellence, and he spearheaded the formation of the Free Kindergarten Association, the Federation of Jewish Charities, the JEA, and the Council of Jewish Women. Like many other Reform leaders, he was an outspoken antagonist of Zionism.

The rabbi quickly gained the admiration of his Christian colleagues, and he was one of five clergymen who organized the Unity Club, which promoted interfaith understanding and interracial cooperation. Local politicians admired him as much as the Protestant and Catholic clergymen did, and whenever they wished to have a Jewish representative at a community function, they were more likely than not to select Rabbi Marx. Thus it was he who was selected to address soldiers at the 1923 Fort Benning Armistice Day celebration, to deliver an opening prayer before the state legislature, to greet Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft when they visited Atlanta, to serve on the Civic League which investigated the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, to represent Georgia at a national conference on immigration in 1905,

and to minister to Jewish troops stationed near Atlanta during the Spanish-American War and World War I. But the rabbi refused to tolerate anti-Semitism in the city and used his influence with Christians to combat this deadly evil. Not only did he lead the protest when Jewish prisoners were denied religious freedom in 1914, but was also the Jewish spokesman who went before the Atlanta School Board and the Georgia Legislature to demand that they excuse Jewish pupils absent on religious holidays, that they refrain from teaching *The Merchant of Venice* in high school classes, and that they stop requiring that a chapter of the Bible be read in public schools each day. In most of his crusades he emerged victorious, and scarcely a Jew in the city was not in his debt for some favor.  

Perhaps second in importance in the Jewish community was Harold Hirsch, one of the outstanding lawyers and philanthropists in the state. Graduating in 1901 from the University of Georgia, where he had played on the football team, he was so devoted to his alma mater that the *Red and Black*, the campus paper, once called him "Georgia's most loyal living alumnus." The love affair was two-sided, for he was named a trustee of the university and was given an honorary LL.D. degree from Georgia in 1927. When the Lumpkin School of Law moved into a new two-story building in 1933, it named its new home Harold Hirsch Hall and hung his portrait in the lobby. In Atlanta, Hirsch served as a director of the Trust Company of Georgia, the Coca-Cola Corporation, the Municipal Opera Association, the Atlanta Art Association, and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association. As president of The Temple from 1930 to 1934, he involved himself in a number of worthy Jewish charities.  

Others of importance in the community included Morris Rich, who died in June, 1928; Victor Kriegshaber, who was elected president of the JEA, the Hebrew Orphans' Home, and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Lee Ben Clarke, president of the Fulton

---

44 For the sketch of Dr. Marx the writer has relied almost entirely on Rothschild, *Day*, chapters 3 and 4.


46 Kriegshaber was elected head of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce in December, 1915, just a few months after the lynching of Leo Frank. Walter Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County* (Atlanta, 1934), pp. 373–74.
County Medical Society, the Georgia Pediatric Society, and the Southern Medical Association, and professor of pediatrics at Emory University; and Isaac Schoen, JEA trustee and founder of the Schoen Free Kindergarten. When Dr. Joseph Jacobs, a prominent druggist who had once refused to pay $30 for the Coca-Cola formula—he never forgave himself for this—died, local dignitaries and even Governor Lamartine G. Hardeman were present at the funeral. David Meyerhardt, an Atlanta attorney, was elected state adjutant of the American Legion in 1922, and scores of others also held prominent positions in local affairs.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Prejudice against Jews occasionally showed its ugly face in Atlanta. The very words used to praise them could often be turned against them. Lucian Lamar Knight extolled their generous contributions to Christian charities and public relief drives, their exemplary lives, and their high standard of morality. But anti-Semites found it easy to misinterpret his praise. For example, they noted that he wrote the following:

[The Jew] opens his workshop on the corner and soon begins to flourish like the hillside cedars of his own Forest of Lebanon. In the hardest of times he has money to lend if not to burn and before he is ready to execute his will he owns the grocery-store, the meat market, the grog-shop, the planing mill, the newspaper, the hotel and the bank... the roll-call of the whole Hebrew population can be made from the tax-books.

Undoubtedly it was not Knight’s intention that his book should offend Jews. Dr. Edwin M. Poteat, the president of Furman University, was less worried about making enemies in the Jewish community. Addressing the Southern Sociological Congress in Atlanta on April 28, 1913, he declared that Jews were no longer in a position of religious leadership since they had “rejected the lead of [their]...
greatest leader, [Jesus.]” Poteat also had a few unkind words for the Catholic church, and many of the Congress delegates were visibly upset that he had used its sessions to promote intolerance.50

Two days before Poteat delivered his controversial speech, Mary Phagan had been murdered. The Leo M. Frank case is familiar to students of American Jewish history. Frank, a graduate of Cornell University, a member of The Temple, and president of the Gate City B’nai B’rith, was one of the leading Jews in Atlanta, and his arrest encouraged the expression of latent anti-Semitism. The Reverend Luther Bricker, the murdered girl’s pastor, wrote in 1943 that “when the police arrested a Jew, and a Yankee Jew at that, all of the inborn prejudice against the Jews rose up in a feeling of satisfaction that here would be a victim worthy to pay for the crime.” 51 Men like Tom Watson alleged that Jews were engaged in international plots and that they secretly lusted after Christian girls. One lady was prompted to write the Atlanta Georgian that this was “the first time a Jew has ever been in any serious trouble in Atlanta and see how ready is everyone to believe the worst of him.” 52

Although the evidence against him was flimsy, Frank was found guilty of murder and was sentenced to death. Governor John Slaton, however, commuted the sentence to life imprisonment, which greatly enraged many Georgians, who now called for the impeachment of the governor.53 A few weeks after one attempt on Frank’s life failed,54 a mob seized the hapless prisoner and lynched him.


51 Quoted in Harry Golden, A Little Girl Is Dead (Cleveland, 1965), p. 225.


53 The evidence that Frank was innocent of the murder of Mary Phagan is so overwhelming and persuasive that almost no one still believes he was guilty. Dinnerstein, The Leo Frank Case, passim.

54 Tom Watson, who used the Frank case to promote anti-Semitism and further his political career, wrote in his newspaper, The Jeffersonian, about this unsuccessful attempt to kill Frank: “The butcher knife . . . used had been in operation during the day killing hogs. Nathan Straus can make a memorandum of that. ‘Kosher.’ ” Quoted in Golden, Little Girl, p. 287.
The Frank case showed Atlanta Jews that they were not free from anti-Semitism. Among the groups springing up after Frank's trial was the Knights of Mary Phagan, whose members circulated such handbills as the following: "Buy your clothing from Americans. Don't give your money to save a Jew sodomite." Jewish merchants in Marietta, a town near Atlanta, received this notice:

You are hereby notified to close up this business and quit Marietta by Saturday night, June 29, 1915, or else stand by the consequences. We mean to rid Marietta of all Jews by the above date. You can heed this warning or stand the punishment the committee may see fit to deal out to you.

Jews feared mob action after Slaton commuted Frank's sentence. One Jewish girl had gone to a movie on a date when word of the commutation was made public. She later remembered that in the middle of the picture her uncle came down the darkened aisle of the theater with a flashlight searching for them. He had come to take them home. The rumor was abroad that the governor would sign Frank's commutation sometime in the evening, and such was the temper of the city that a young Jewish boy and girl might not be safe downtown when the announcement came.

After the lynching of Frank, scores of Jewish women and children were sent to visit relatives or friends in Birmingham, Memphis, and other cities outside of Georgia. Many homes were temporarily abandoned, and their occupants took up residence in local hotels; Jewish businesses closed for several days; and one Jew who had the misfortune of looking like Frank was unable to appear in public for more than two weeks.

On October 16, 1915, less than two months after Frank was murdered, a band of men gathered at Stone Mountain and organized a secret group, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, named for a fraternal order which had terrorized Blacks during the Reconstruc-

---

55 Ibid., p. 223.

56 Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*, p. 131.


tion era. By 1924, the second Klan was a major force in American politics, and Atlanta was the capital of the so-called "invisible empire." Clifford Walker, the governor of Georgia, Walter Sims, the mayor of Atlanta, and most of the city's judges were Klansmen—which prompted one man to write, "Fulton county is the stronghold [sic] of the Klan in Georgia—the Ku Klux absolutely control Fulton county and Atlanta." 59

Since the Klan credo was anti-Semitic, it might be thought that Atlanta would have been one of the worst cities in the United States for Jews to be living in during the 1920's. That, however, was not the case. To be sure, Jews shunned politics, 60 but they seemed to have little direct contact with Klansmen. Both Colonel William Simmons and Dr. Hiram Wesley Evans, the "Imperial Wizards" of the Klan, professed to have Jewish friends and insisted that they sympathized with the plight of Jews in Europe. 61 In 1934, when the KKK—or the tiny remnant of it still in existence then—began to attack Fascism and Nazism as dangerous to America, it actually invited Jews to join the Klan. 62 As might be expected, few—if any—did.

Though the Klan forced the Atlanta School Board to discharge a teacher solely on the ground that she was a Catholic, it made no efforts to have Jewish teachers dismissed, and Mrs. Annie Wise was allowed to serve as principal of Commercial High School. 63 In December, 1925, when Atlanta Jews held a fund raising dinner for

59 W. W. Rainey to William T. Anderson, November 4, 1924 (copy), Julian Harris Mss., Emory University.

60 There was a notable exception to this in 1922, when Max Wilensky, an Atlanta attorney, seriously considered being a Congressional candidate in the Fifth District (Atlanta), but later changed his mind. "Wilensky," Columbus Enquirer-Sun, October 14, 1922, p. 1. John Cohen, editor of the Atlanta Journal, was also involved in politics, but though some of his grandparents had been Jewish, he was a Presbyterian. Max Cuba, a Jewish community leader, was active in Atlanta politics in the 1930's.


the United Jewish Campaign at the Biltmore Hotel, Governor Walker and Mayor Sims attended the affair as guests of honor.  

One of the favorite stories of Edward Kahn concerns the Klan. Around 1922, the KKK had an office next door to the headquarters of the Federation of Jewish Charities. One day a well-dressed young man, obviously unaware of where he was, came into the Federation office and asked the secretary-receptionist for directions to the Klan. The woman calmly gave him the information he wanted and went on with her work. As he left the office, the man finally became aware of where he was, reentered the room, walked up to the receptionist, and somewhat apologetically declared, "No offense intended, ma'am." Then he went on his way.

ENTER THE 1930's

As the 1920's drew to a close, one could detect several changes in the Atlanta Jewish community. With the passage of restrictive immigration legislation, Atlanta Jews found that helping newcomers from Europe adjust to the South was becoming an ever-decreasing problem. Also as "Russian" Jews cast off their East European garb and familiarized themselves with American ways, barriers between them and the "German" Jews began to crumble. Membership in The Temple would no longer guarantee that one would automatically be a part of the city's Jewish elite. It became increasingly common to find the names of Jews of East European origin on the rosters of directors of community organizations and as the leaders in charity drives. Furthermore, local Jewish organizations were becoming professional and were being staffed with college-educated administrators.

Change was also apparent when the Jewish community began deserting the Hunter Street ghetto and moving to the fashionable northeastern and northwestern sections of town. By 1929, Jews were being welcomed to the Druid Hills section of Atlanta, an area which had previously excluded them. Personal Interview with Max Gettinger, November 24, 1968; interview with Edward Kahn, November 29, 1968.

64 "What the South Has Done for Its Brethren Across the Seas," SI, March 29, 1929, p. 4.  
65 Personal Interview with Edward Kahn, November 29, 1968.  
67 By 1929, Jews were being welcomed to the Druid Hills section of Atlanta, an area which had previously excluded them. Personal Interview with Max Gettinger, November 24, 1968; interview with Edward Kahn, November 29, 1968.
Ve Shalom, The Temple, Anshe S'fard, and Ahavath Achim followed their congregants to the new neighborhoods, and between 1921 and 1935 each of these synagogues dedicated a larger and more functional house of worship. All of the congregations organized religious schools, and Shearith Israel provided the community with its first mikveh.

Occupationally, Atlanta’s Jews were distinguishable from their gentile neighbors. Though there were no Jewish debutantes and though Jews were then—as now—excluded from the fashionable Piedmont Driving Club, members of the Jewish community tended to make more money and to be better educated than most Christians. Virtually no Jews held blue-collar jobs; almost all were professionals, proprietors of small dry goods and grocery stores, shoe repairmen, office managers, or clerical workers. Married Jewish women seldom took jobs unrelated to the family business, and those who did work tended to be teachers. Other women workers were immigrants from Eastern Europe, Turkey, or Rhodes.

Statistics on the economic status of Atlanta Jewry during the 1920’s are unavailable, but in 1935 the Southern Israelite noted that of its readers 67.7 percent paid income tax to the government, 84.3 percent were independent businessmen or professionals, 49.4 percent owned one or more automobiles, 64.8 percent were homeowners, 81.2 percent had $10,000 or more life insurance, and 96.9 percent owned radios. Many subscribers of the paper lived in Augusta, Birmingham, Charleston, Columbia, Macon, Nashville, and Savannah, but it is doubtful that their standard of living was radically different from that of Atlanta Jewry. It is probable, however, that the poorest Jews in Atlanta were not as likely as their well-to-do coreligionists to subscribe to the Southern Israelite.

Few ethnic groups have made as important a contribution to Atlanta history as have her Jewish citizens. Nonetheless, historians writing about the South during the early years of the twentieth century have all too often assumed that Dixie was populated only by white Protestants and Blacks. Perhaps this neglect can be traced to

---


the fact that during the period 1900–1930—unlike the 1970's—few Atlanta Jews held high political office. But the history of a city is more than an account of mayoralty races, congressional elections, and bond referendums; it is also the story of the people who live and work within its confines. Scholars are busily writing histories of the Jewish communities of Detroit, Milwaukee, Syracuse, Los Angeles, and several other cities in the North and West. It is time for attention to be turned to Atlanta.\footnote{In 1972, for example, the mayor of Atlanta was Sam Massell, Jr. In addition, Elliott Levitas and Sidney Marcus, two of metropolitan Atlanta's representatives in the Georgia Legislature, are of the Jewish faith.}

An extremely perceptive article on Atlanta Jewry is Stephen Hertzberg, "The Jewish Community of Atlanta from the End of the Civil War Until the Eve of the Frank Case," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, LXII (1973), 250–85. Unfortunately it appeared in print too late to be consulted by me.

\footnote{An extremely perceptive article on Atlanta Jewry is Stephen Hertzberg, "The Jewish Community of Atlanta from the End of the Civil War Until the Eve of the Frank Case," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, LXII (1973), 250–85. Unfortunately it appeared in print too late to be consulted by me.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1875</th>
<th>1905</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1935</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population of Atlanta</td>
<td>31,000</td>
<td>105,000</td>
<td>155,000</td>
<td>201,000</td>
<td>285,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Population</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,220</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1,014</td>
<td>1,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table Three: Jewish Prisoners at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1908</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1912</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jewish Inmates</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Inmates</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>1,424</td>
<td>1,406</td>
<td>1,322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>1922</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1926</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jewish Inmates</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Inmates</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>2,334</td>
<td>3,250</td>
<td>3,214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: various annual reports of the prison, copies at the Emory University Library.]

### Table Four: Number of Children at the Hebrew Orphans' Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>91*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures for 1931 include four orphans attending college, thirty-two boarding in private homes, and fifty-six living with some relative and being subsidized by the Home.

[Source: various annual reports of the Home; United States Department of the Census, *Census of Benevolent Institutions, 1910* (Washington, 1913), pp. 94-95.]

### Table Five: Sources of Orphans at the Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1892 (the number = 54)</th>
<th>1931 (the number = 91)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: *Report for 1892*, p. 115; *Report for 1929–30*, p. 6 (lists statistics as of January 25, 1931).]