

# The Genesis of a Communal History: The Columbus Jewish History Project

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Early in 1974, in Columbus, Ohio, a unique partnership was consummated—one whose implications for the writing of local Jewish history, and thus for understanding the American Jewish experience, are significant. The Columbus Jewish Federation, whose fiftieth anniversary of organized activities occurs in America's bicentennial year, felt that a full history of Columbus Jewry would be a distinguished commemoration of the Federation's golden anniversary. Simultaneously, the Ohio Historical Society's Archives-Library Division, having decided to initiate an ethnic history project, was taking tentative steps towards exploring the resources of Columbus Jewry. Thus, when the Ohio Historical Society's oral historian met the Columbus Jewish Federation's executive director, it was immediately obvious that the goals of each party could be greatly assisted through mutual cooperation, and the Columbus Jewish history project was begun.

For its part, the Ohio Historical Society saw a splendid opportunity to collect large quantities of personal, organizational, and institutional documents, to have Jewish communal assistance in such a project, and to obtain cooperation in initiating a large-scale oral history program within Columbus Jewry. Toward this end the Ohio Historical Society agreed to supervise an acquisition program which would develop lead files and obtain materials, organize the inventorying and cataloging of all documents received, bring the skills of its conservation specialist to written and pictorial documentation needing cleaning, deacidifying, laminating, mending or binding before it could be utilized, microfilm especially valuable collections, and provide the equipment necessary for, and even typed transcripts of, the forty-five to sixty oral interviews it would supervise.

As for the Columbus Jewish Federation, it agreed to publicize

actively and continuously the attempt to locate, collect, and deposit in the Ohio Historical Society the records of Columbus' Jewish past. This meant not only the need to contact a wide group of persons and organizations, not only to encourage them to make public "lost," hidden, or confidential records, but also to convince these individuals and groups of the value in permanently depositing their collections at the Ohio Historical Society.

The Federation and Society next agreed to constitute a nine-person advisory board and sought to involve the Ohio State University in the project by proposing to the chairman of the Jewish studies program that he and two other scholars sit on the board. The shared purposes of inviting the Ohio State University into the project were advice on choosing an historian and guiding the collecting of documents, the infusion of academicians into the project, and the sense that university persons might help solve potential conflicts over scholarly autonomy.

The advisory board's first task was to hire an historian, and after completing the task by choosing this author, a detailed "flow-chart" was constructed. The collecting of documents, the completion of the oral histories, and the major portion of research were to be completed by the end of 1975. The following year was to be devoted to the writing of the *History of the Jews of Columbus, Ohio, 1840-1975*, with a completed manuscript to be submitted to the advisory board by the end of 1976. All the parties signed a contract which not only confirmed this but granted the author "absolute scholarly independence." The latter was the unanimous consensus of the advisory board.

Although at the time of this writing (spring, 1975) the project is not even half completed, several hopes voiced by the organizing groups have already been realized, while the completion of several more can be viewed with much optimism. In the first place, it was the hope of the Ohio Historical Society and the Columbus Jewish Federation that the document collection would be both quantitatively and qualitatively impressive. This seems to be indeed the case. Family photographs, diaries, scrapbooks and other memorabilia (a large portion from the nineteenth century) have been deposited with such regularity that the problem in writing family history, for example, is to decide upon which of the many possible families actually to focus. Large individual collections have also

been processed, ranging from the correspondence and records of a businessman to the manuscript sermons and other writings of local rabbis. And most valuable of all has been the vast accumulation of institutional and organizational records, including 126 linear feet of Ohio State University Hillel Foundation records, 10,600 items from the Columbus Branch of the National Council of Jewish Women, 64,000 items from the Jewish Family Service, the minute books of Temple Israel (1868-1955), and tens of thousands of items from the Columbus Jewish Federation.

Documents, alas, no matter how abundant, are only the stuff from which history is written. The advisory board, together with the historian, had to hammer out some of the objectives of the history.

### **Anonymous Persons and Quantification**

As the collections of institutional records, newspaper clippings, and biographical materials grow in size, the historian finds it difficult to resist the temptation to write an "elitist" history—one which concentrates on the most articulate members of the community. Indeed, one wonders why it has taken so long for the general revolution in the writing of American urban and ethnic history to penetrate to American Jewish historical writing, for of the more than 125 published Jewish communal histories, not one has attempted to utilize sparse records dealing with hundreds of individuals to study the inarticulate rather than verbose elites recorded in the Anglo-Jewish press.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps to blame is smug confidence in the universal applicability of the style of intellectual and biographical approaches pioneered by the first generation of serious American Jewish historians, perhaps it is simply the feeling that "the really important things cannot be quantified," or perhaps it is the failure of writers of American Jewish history to learn new methods, for the rudiments of quantitative technique (until quite recently) were acquired by frustratingly slow self-teaching. Whatever the reason, the student of American Jewish life has now an exceedingly large number of models to consult if he or she

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier, and fuller, critique of elitist Jewish communal historiography, see Marc Lee Raphael, "American Jewish Local Histories: Deficiencies and Possibilities," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, Autumn, 1973, pp. 59-68.

is interested in quantitative analysis of social structure (internal family behavior,<sup>2</sup> geographic and social mobility,<sup>3</sup> intergroup relationships,<sup>4</sup> community structure,<sup>5</sup> demography<sup>6</sup> and biography).<sup>7</sup> It has been the expressed objective of the Columbus Jewish history project to devote serious attention to persons, trends, and events ignored by an exclusive concentration upon conventional documentation.<sup>8</sup>

### Neglected Sources

Conventional documents need no discussion, for they are the sources from which every Jewish communal history has been written and constitute the major focus of the combined efforts of the Columbus Jewish Federation and the Ohio Historical Society. The latter, however, is also the repository of a vast amount of little used public records potentially of great use to the local Jewish historian. Among the most valuable are Federal (manuscript popu-

<sup>2</sup> On family structure, see Michael Gordon, ed. *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> On mobility, see Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians* (Cambridge, 1973), and Howard Chudacoff, "A New Look at Ethnic Neighborhoods: Residential Dispersion and the Concept of Visibility in a Medium-Sized City," *Journal of American History*, LX:1 (June, 1973), 76-93.

<sup>4</sup> On intergroup relations see Ronald Bayor, "Ethnic Conflict in New York City, 1929-1941" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> On community structure, see Sam Warner and Colin Burke, "Cultural Change and the Ghetto," *Journal of Contemporary History*, IV (1969), 173-87; Warner, "If All the World Were Philadelphia," *American Historical Review*, LXXIV (1968), 26-43; and the valuable bibliography in Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass., 1973).

<sup>6</sup> For a guide to demography, use Judah Matras, *Populations and Societies* (Englewood Cliffs, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> On collective biography, see Robert P. Swierenga, ed., *Quantification in American History* (New York, 1970), pp. 345-47 (notes 13-19), and Richard Jensen, "Metropolitan Elites in the Midwest, 1907-1929; A Study in Multivariate Collective Biography," in Frederic Jaher, ed., *The Rich, The Well Born, and the Powerful* (Urbana, 1974), pp. 285-303.

<sup>8</sup> Our attempt to use the techniques of quantitative history on the totality of a nineteenth-century Jewish community is "The Early Jews of Columbus, Ohio: A Study in Economic Mobility 1850-1880," in *A Centennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. by Bertram W. Korn (Waltham, Mass., and New York, 1976), 435-52.

lation schedules of the United States Census, naturalization records, passenger vessel lists of persons), state (precinct and ward voting abstracts), county (tax duplicates, wills, voter registration lists), and city (student transcripts, public school registers, arrest lists) records, but much more is available.<sup>9</sup> The possible uses, moreover, when two or more types of records are linked, are almost without limit.<sup>10</sup>

The manuscript population schedules of the United States census permit the reconstruction of nineteenth-century city wards and much detailed information about the Jews therein. They also make possible the tracing of families or individuals who move outside one geographic area, for Soundex indexes to the United States Census population schedules of 1880 (2,367 microfilm reels) permit the tracing and linking of persons from a variety of other records. It is easy enough, for example, to compile a list of all Jews married in Columbus between 1870-1879, and through the indexes and city directories to trace these couples and discover their city of residence, family constellation, occupations, and personal and property totals in 1880. Given the massive turnover rates in the American past slowly being demonstrated by mobility researchers,<sup>11</sup> as well as the paucity of available information on nineteenth-century American Jewish communities, we are concerned not only with using the census schedules to explore the demographic profile<sup>12</sup> of Jews who persisted in late nineteenth-century Columbus (their birth processes, economic relationships, family planning fertility rates), but also in determining how many chose to strike out for careers in new locations, where they settled if they left, and what their spatial relationship was to the parental generation.

<sup>9</sup> We have discussed elsewhere the variety of public documents available and their potentiality; see Raphael, "The Utilization of public local and federal sources for reconstructing American Jewish history: the Jews of Columbus, Ohio, in 1880 and 1912," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (in press).

<sup>10</sup> On linking persons, see Ian Winchester, "The Linkage of Historical Records by Man and Computer," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, I (1971), 107-25.

<sup>11</sup> On population turnover, see Howard Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans: Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha, 1880-1920* (New York, 1972), and Peter R. Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860* (New York, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> The best introduction to demographic models is *Demography*, a quarterly published by the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology.

### Oral History

"Doc," William Foote Whyte's principal informant for his classic study of Boston's Italians, said to Whyte: "If people accept you, you can just hang around and you'll learn the answers without even having to ask questions." Whyte commented:

I found that this was true. As I sat and listened, I learned the answers to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting information solely on an interviewing basis. I did not abandon questioning altogether of course. I simply learned to judge how and when to question.<sup>13</sup>

These reflections touch the two tracks being pursued by the oral history series of the Columbus Jewish History Project. In the first mode, the tape recorder and interviewer are passive listeners, attempting to preserve a permanent record of unfolding events. These have included:

- (a) Committee (long-range planning), board (monthly), and congregational (semi-annual) meetings of a small synagogue (100 families) trying to decide whether to build a new structure or purchase an existing building, and the implications of both choices upon the informality and quality of the current worship and education programs.
- (b) The heated community feud over the woman's role in the worship service, sparked by a local conference on the role of the Jewish woman, an Orthodox rabbi at the Ohio State University Hillel Foundation and a Conservative congregation in Columbus calling women to the Torah for *aliyot*, and the strong public denunciation of the above events by a popular Orthodox rabbi in Columbus.
- (c) Placing the recorder on a table in the midst of a group of elderly immigrant Jews as they tell stories, anecdotes, legends, and jokes about the transition from Europe to America and the shock which attended the transference of Old-World cultural patterns to the New World.

Secondly, the author of the *History* has conducted more than fifty full-length (one and a half to two hours) interviews with a

<sup>13</sup> William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, rev. ed. (Chicago, 1955), pp. 29-30.

“representative” group of Columbus Jews. These have included institutional and organizational leaders (secular and religious), immigrants (East European, German, Soviet), suburban housewives, and persons whose involvement in, or rejection of, the Jewish community was felt to be of significance. We were pleasantly surprised to discover how many men and women are well informed on themes of interest to us: decision making in a Jewish family and a Jewish community, controversy over the founding of a Jewish day-school (1950’s), intra-ethnic hostility (Germans vs. East Europeans, Reform vs. Orthodox), synagogue competition for members, quality of early Jewish education in Columbus, the role of the Jews in the city’s social and political life, and Jewish social life between the World Wars.

The oral history series has not only been strengthened by the advice, equipment, and facilities of the Ohio Historical Society, but, in addition, the Society is permanently storing all the tapes and transcribing the most valuable. It is the hope of the Columbus Jewish History Project that these tapes will both supplement what does exist and replace what does not exist in the written records.<sup>14</sup>

### Surveys and Questionnaires

With the severe limitations of time imposed by the assigned completion date of the manuscript, the advisory board urged the formulation of surveys and questionnaires designed to explore both past and present facets of Columbus Jewish life. Such tools have offered the opportunity to probe themes previously untouched by local Jewish historians as well as to contact a reservoir of persons who would otherwise be ignored. Some of the areas we are currently investigating might prove suggestive to students of Jewish communities in America.

- A. Jewish sorority life at the Ohio State University in the 1920’s  
 From *The National Jewish Blue Book: An Elite Directory of 1927* (Philadelphia, 1927), we were able to compile a list of Sigma Delta Tau alumnae and members at the Ohio State University.

<sup>14</sup>I have made a fuller attempt to develop a methodology, as well as to explore some of the pitfalls and advantages of this new craft, in my as yet unpublished paper, “Oral History in a Jewish Community: The Problems and the Promise.”

After eliminating the coeds from cities other than Columbus, we located twenty-five women to whom we sent questionnaires. Among our questions were: Detail your parents' occupational and educational backgrounds. Why did you choose your sorority? How did you pay for the sorority? Were you aware of any non-Jews in S.D.T. or any Jewish girls in a "non-Jewish" sorority? Were there any identifiably Jewish activities at S. D. T. (Sabbath meal and *kiddush*, programs with the Hillel Foundation, a seder)? Did you meet your spouse via your sorority? At the very least, the responses have enabled us to compare and contrast Jewish sorority life at the Ohio State University fifty years apart.

B. The "sexual revolution"

Some of our attention has been focused on the "sexual revolution," which we narrowly defined as a substantial sustained increase in nonmarital coitus. Sociologists typically place the significant beginnings of a sexual revolution for white American women during the 1920's and conclude that between the 1920's and the early 1960's no marked increase in premarital coitus occurred (although there was a liberalization of attitudes about, and an increase in, noncoital sexual activity such as necking and petting). During the 1960's, with a jump in the level of premarital intercourse, a new phase of the sexual revolution was initiated.

We have been testing this hypothesis by sending a questionnaire to every traceable Jewish high school graduate of the years 1918, 1928, 1938, 1948, 1958, and 1968, and asking for impressions, first-hand accounts, case studies, stories, and experiences. Not surprisingly, these anonymous recollections have not only been providing useful insights into changing patterns of premarital sexual behavior among Columbus Jewry, but have been stimulating reading as well.<sup>15</sup>

C. German Jewish refugees of the 1930's

The Living History series of Brandeis University made us

<sup>15</sup> A suggestive study of the same subject is that of Lena Thomas, "The Relationship Between Premarital Sexual Behavior and Certain Personal and Religious Background Factors of a Sample of University Students," *Journal of the American College of Health Association*, XXI:5 (June, 1973), 460-64.

aware of a substantial group of German and Austrian Jews living in Columbus, almost all of whom left Europe in the 1930's. Our questions, to these thirty-five persons, included: When, how, and why did you leave Europe? What were you doing prior to your departure? Why did you come to Columbus? Included as well were several queries about the processes of adjustment and Americanization in Columbus and in the midst of Columbus Jewry.<sup>16</sup>

D. Three generations of Jewish identity

One of our two most ambitious projects has been an attempt to discover how measurable indexes of Jewish identity have changed over several generations and the extent to which generational status (rather than parental patterns or life cycle influences) determines religiosity.

To this end we devised a questionnaire which, among its items, asks about Jewish identity in the childhood home of the respondents and in their own adult home, and about Jewish education in their youth and their plans for their own children.<sup>17</sup> Our sample consists of every person confirmed in Columbus between 1945 and 1965 (there was, coincidentally, one class from each denomination during these years), and hence the need to trace more than 1,000 individuals in order to find their current addresses. Not only have changing patterns of Jewish identity emerged,<sup>18</sup> but the patterns of persistency and mobility for the overwhelming majority of Columbus Jewish teenagers over a twenty-year period are easily calculated, as well as intermarriage rates, fertility patterns, synagogue affiliation, and several other useful facts.

<sup>16</sup>For information on Brandeis University's national program of Living History, designed to record the recollections of European Jews now in America, write Executive Director, Brandeis University, National Women's Committee, Waltham, Mass. 02154.

<sup>17</sup>Thoughtful insights and warnings about age group cohorts are in Alan B. Spitzer, "The Historical Problem of Generations," *American Historical Review*, LXXVIII:5 (December, 1973), 1353-85. For a questionnaire, write to Columbus Jewish History Project, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio 43211.

<sup>18</sup>Intergenerational reflections on Jewish identity are skillfully presented in Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (New York, 1967).

### E. A Community Survey

For our most detailed questionnaire (sixty questions), a sample of 550 households has been selected by a random probability process from approximately 5,500 Jewish households in Franklin County. The master list of the Columbus Jewish Federation contains about 5,000 of these, and 500 or so have been added as a result of cross-checking membership lists from every secular and religious organization and institution, as well as from our own awareness of Jewish persons not on any membership lists.

Our survey is not only a general demographic profile, but also requires persons to rank their priorities for distribution of Jewish communal monies,<sup>19</sup> inquires about their perception of the power structure of the Jewish community,<sup>20</sup> asks about how one enters the "elite" of Columbus Jewry, about Israel, politics, Jewish books, and education, as well as several areas of Jewish communal discussion (*kashrut*, philanthropy, divorced persons, etc.).<sup>21</sup> We are hopeful that the data will enable us to document the texture and perception of a contemporary suburban Jewish community.

### Sports

"Unless you can play baseball, you'll never get to be a rabbi in America."—  
Solomon Schechter<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On allocating monies, see Paul Weinberger, "Conflict and Consensus around Jewish Welfare Fund Allocations: An Interpretation," *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXIV:4 (October, 1972), 354-64, and Jacob Neusner, "Jewish Education and Culture and the Jewish Welfare Fund," *The Synagogue School* (Winter, 1967), pp. 9-40.

<sup>20</sup> On the power structure, see Daniel J. Elazar, "The Decision Makers: Key Divisions in Jewish Communal Life," *Dispersion and Unity XIX/XX* (1973), 21-30, and *idem*, "Kinship and Consent in the Jewish Community," *Keynote Address: 41st General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds* (1973). See also Kenneth D. Roseman, "Power in a Midwestern Jewish Community," *American Jewish Archives*, XXI:1 (April, 1969), 57-83.

<sup>21</sup> Useful in constructing the questionnaire were Betty J. Maynard, *The Dallas Jewish Community Study* (Jewish Welfare Federation, Dallas, 1974); Robert Lazar, "A Study of the Jewish Community of Fargo, North Dakota" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1968); and Elaine Maas, "The Jews of Houston" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Rice University, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Bernard Postal, *Encyclopedia of Jews in Sports* (New York, 1965), p. 17.

While the history of sports has finally come into its own as part of the burgeoning social history movement, American Jewish historians have continued to direct their attention to the more traditional avenues of historical inquiry such as synagogue life, biographies, and intellectual pursuits. Yet, a careful study of the role of sports in a Jewish community, as well as of the Jewish athletes, might yield much information about Americanization and the impact of American culture upon the immigrants.

With the aid of high school records, private scrapbooks, community newspapers, and interviews, we have uncovered a great amount of information on local Jewish athletes, including Leah Thall (nine times U. S. Women's Singles table tennis champion), Moses ("The Rabbi of Swat") Solomon, and Mauri Rose (three-time winner of the Memorial Day 500 at the Indianapolis Speedway). They and the sports pursued by them and other local favorites suggest much about leisure time activities, changing sentiments and life styles, the dynamics of Americanization, and Jewish parental attitudes towards their children's athletic activities in the Columbus Jewish community.<sup>23</sup>

### Rabbinical Thought

More than sixty rabbis have served the six Columbus synagogues (three Orthodox, two Reform, one Conservative) during the past 125 years, and the Columbus Jewish History Project has made an exhaustive effort to locate, collect, and catalogue all their extant manuscripts and publications, as well as to record representative sermons and lectures. The sound recording is rather easy, and the search for published articles and books only moderately difficult (Rabbi Leopold Greenwald, who served in Columbus from 1925-1955, published more than 500 articles in several languages), but the attempt to discover unpublished manuscript collections has been both tedious and rewarding.

Only Louis Weiss, a Reform rabbi who served in Columbus during the 1890's, has his manuscripts in an archives; his more than 200 handwritten sermons, located in the American Jewish

<sup>23</sup>On the relationship between sports and American political, social, and intellectual history, see David Q. Voight, *American Baseball: From the Commissioners to Continental Expansion* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1970), and David Halberstam, "Baseball and the National Mythology," *Harper's*, September, 1970, pp. 22-25.

Archives, provide a rich source of rabbinical thought on the eve of the twentieth century. With Weiss's deceased colleagues, our efforts have been directed to identifying and locating their relatives (usually children), and attempting to persuade the latter to begin to search for, and then permit us to borrow (for copying) or accession (for permanent deposit) the collections. Here, the results of our efforts have been significant. Several dozen Hebrew sermons of Rabbi Morris Taxon (1912-17) have been preserved by his son Jordan; a similar number of radio broadcasts by Rabbi Jacob Tarshish (1922-32; "The Lamplighter") are in the possession of his son; and the son of Rabbi Mordechai Hirschsprung (1932-48) has kept several manuscript responsa. The youngest son of Rabbi Greenwald was even more resourceful, compiling a voluminous scrapbook of Hebrew, Yiddish, and English reviews of a large number of Greenwald's forty-five published books. Additionally, several sons and daughters have phonograph recordings of their father's sermons and addresses.

We are utilizing these manuscript and printed sources in several ways. One useful approach has been a comparative study of the sermons of a Columbus rabbi and a contemporaneous non-Jewish Columbus preacher (Rabbi Louis Weiss—the Rev. Washington Gladden); another method of analyzing the content of the writings has been to compare them with American rabbis of the same denomination and period; while a final thrust has been a careful investigation of the sources (rabbinic vs. Victorian poetry), themes (success; thrift; happiness vs. Torah, *mitzvot*, and Zionism), and message. Our hope is to advance our understanding of Jewish thought in one specific community, and to investigate the relationship between Jewish thought and American values.<sup>24</sup>

### **Business**

Students of American Jewish communal history have not ignored the rich field of business or, in general, economic life, but they usually overcome their readers with tedium by merely identifying the first peddlers and listing the Jewish businesses. This is a serious

<sup>24</sup> We undertook such a task earlier; see Raphael, "Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of San Francisco on Jews and Judaism: The Implications of the Pittsburgh Platform," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LXIII: 2 (December, 1973), 185-203.



Simon Lazarus  
The first volunteer rabbi of the Columbus  
Jewish Community



oversight, for marketing and distribution, to take but two examples of Jewish activity in American cities, have played important roles in the social and economic development of the United States. Jewish peddlers in mid-nineteenth-century American communities, Jewish-owned country, specialty, and department stores, as well as Jewish wholesalers, jobbers and manufacturers' representatives, rank high among the dynamic forces that have moved products from farm, and factories to consumers. With this and other aims in mind, the Ohio Historical Society has attempted to identify Jewish businesses, inventory their records, and advise the firms how to organize and preserve their documents.

Since the advisory board has urged the consideration of both Jews and Judaism in our research, those areas of non-Judaic activity pursued by Columbus Jews active in Jewish life are also of interest to us. Simon Lazarus, who nineteenth-century sources claim was the founder and first "minister" of Congregation B'nai Israel (established in 1851), expanded his small clothing store during the 1860's and 1870's until, upon his death in 1877, F. & R. Lazarus & Co. had \$15,260.40 worth of merchandise, \$33,528.60 in assets, and only \$1,436.88 in liabilities. His sons were certainly to take advantage of his healthy start; by 1914 annual sales were to pass \$1,000,000.<sup>25</sup> The story of the unfolding of Columbus' most important retail store and its significance for the city must be as integral to our project as the deep involvement of the Lazarus family in Columbus Jewish life.

### The Family in Historical Perspective

Complete and fully developed family histories—covering three generations or more, exhausting available oral and documentary sources, describing "anonymous" persons as well as a community's elite, and demonstrating an awareness of secondary literature—add greatly to our understanding of social history. We are in the process of writing several such histories, giving particular attention to questions that are critical to an understanding of American Jewish

<sup>25</sup> *Westbote*, December 24, 1879; La Vern J. Rippley, "The Columbus Germans," *The Report: A Journal of German-American History*, XXXIII (1968), 35; *Day-Book No. 1, F. & R. Lazarus & Co.*; William Diehl, Jr., "Lazarus," *Cincinnati*, I:3 (December, 1967), 32; Tom Mahoney, *The Great Merchants* (New York, 1947), pp. 103-5.

history. Such areas include those moments, decisions, and turning points in a family's history that were marked by movement from Europe to America, from state to state, country to city, and city to suburb; the organization, decision making, leisure time, and life cycle experiences of the family; educational and occupational mobility; religious and political affiliations and expressions; husband-wife relations, child-rearing, and the roles of women and men.<sup>26</sup>

This field of research lends itself to satisfying the strong interest among many Columbus Jews to help with the Project. They have been kept busy collecting family trees and, after we have made the decision about which families to interview, doing preliminary research on the family (vital records, city directories, local newspapers, etc.). Then, our lengthy questionnaire and a tape recorder in hand, they are prepared to interview the members of the family. Our preliminary emphasis has been on German Jewish families who have resided in Columbus for over a century, and on East European Jewish families who have been in Columbus for three-quarters of a century. But this certainly does not exhaust the possibilities for family history.<sup>27</sup>

### Women

No matter how intensive the search for documents is in a community, it is inevitable that it will yield sources almost exclusively by or about males. Rare is a diary from the pen of a woman, a scrapbook about a prominent female, a biographical essay about anyone other than a distinguished man.<sup>28</sup> Even the availability of long ignored public records (directories, tax duplicates, lists of property acquisitions and sales) proves of little use, for women without occupations are absent from directories and almost all legal documents are in the name of the husband. Additionally,

<sup>26</sup> For copies of a guide to writing the social history of a family, write to Anonymus Family History Project, Department of History, Clark University, Worcester, Mass.

<sup>27</sup> The most sophisticated published history of a Jewish family is Richard D. Brown, "Two Baltic Families Who Came to America: the Jacobsons and the Kruskals, 1870-1970," *American Jewish Archives*, XXIV (April, 1972), 39-93.

<sup>28</sup> An exception in Columbus was Elma Ehrlich Levinger (1887-1958), the author of more than two dozen volumes of Jewish content; see Raphael, "Portraits Out of the Past," *Ohio Jewish Chronicle*, March 6, 1975, p. 2.

the fact that women change their names upon marriage makes them virtually impossible to trace and thus excludes them from studies of residential, occupational, and educational mobility.

All of this, of course, is true as well in Jewish-oriented research, and perhaps even more true, for we have noticed in one communal history after another how men dominate every area of communal elite activity, from synagogue to federation boards, from scholarship to education.<sup>29</sup> Since no non-elitist Jewish communal history has so far appeared, it is not surprising that no serious attention has been devoted to Jewish women. And yet, opportunities for such emphasis abound. For nineteenth-century discussions, the Federal manuscript census provides abundant information on women (including literacy), while indexes to birth, marriage, divorce, death, and will records make badly needed collective feminine biographies realistic.<sup>30</sup>

In the twentieth century, organizational records and the tape recorder combine to tantalize us with previously ignored possibilities. Hadassah, the Council of Jewish Women, Brandeis and B'nai B'rith Women, Federation Women's Divisions, and sisterhoods all offer extant record collections and hence the opportunity to discover what it means for a woman to be Jewish in America. Madame Hadassah president is potentially as banal or as important as Mr. Temple president; since "joining" an organization is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of being Jewish today (joining means paying dues—providing sufficient funds so that other people may be hired to carry out the purposes of the organization), and since Jewish women join more organizations than Jewish men, Jewish women may be even more significant for the student of recent Jewish life in America.

Not only do written records provide the possibility of exploring how contemporary women express their Jewishness, but the availability of oral history makes inexcusable any longer the general neglect of the role of women in the writing of Jewish communal

<sup>29</sup> It is not only a qualitative matter, but one of quantity as well; 841 men and 208 women are listed in the index to B. G. Rudolph, *From Minyan to a Community: A History of the Jews of Syracuse* (Syracuse, 1970).

<sup>30</sup> For a brilliant and challenging utilization of censuses, vital registration reports, and cohort life tables to study women, see Peter R. Uhlenberg, "A Study of Cohort Life Cycles: Cohorts of Native Born Massachusetts Women, 1830-1920," *Population Studies*, XXIII:3 (November, 1969), 407-20.

history. Women leave fewer written records of their own, but there are scores of women in any Jewish community whose recollections are at least as important as those of men. A Sunday school teacher for eighteen years in the same institution may say more about the quality of Jewish education than the rabbi of the synagogue, while suburban housewives may hold the key to decisions (and their implementation; don't underestimate the carpool!) about participation in much of Jewish family and communal life. At the very least, Jewish women deserve the same consideration that we have all previously brought to the study of American Jewish men.

### **Conclusion**

It is safe, I believe, to suggest that the writing of serious American Jewish communal history is still in its infancy. Major centers of Jewish life in the United States still lack historical studies (Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, and San Francisco are notable examples); the number of university-trained historians with graduate degrees in history who have written Jewish communal histories can be counted on one hand; and the utilization of the methods, conceptual tools, and concerns of students of American urban, ethnic, and religious history has been generously ignored.

Furthermore, there has yet to emerge a Jewish historian who has attempted a synthesis of the American Jewish past. Possessing no survey of American Jewish history, we cannot determine the role of communal histories in such a synthesis. Will they be the stuff from which a history will (or should) be written? Are they, indeed, "universal history writ large?" And if not, why? Are local historians asking the wrong questions, avoiding the crucial questions, or not asking questions at all? To ask questions is to determine the focus of a study, and local history demands that hard questions not be subordinated to lists of facts.

Finally, I think it is unnecessary to justify a local study by pointing to its representativeness. It seems to me that such studies are valuable for the insights they offer into particular historical processes, for the information they offer indirectly about a society, and for the questions they raise about similar cases.

Nevertheless, we search for the meaning of the *American* as well as the Columbus Jewish experience, but few models, if any, offer any guidance for our dual investigation. It is imperative that both American Jewish as well as local Jewish historians begin to ask the kinds of questions that will make possible tentative answers. We are not only without answers but virtually without questions.

#### ARCHIVES POSTERS

The latest addition to our popular series of multi-colored posters dealing with the Jew on the American scene focuses on the adoption of the first constitution of New York State on April 20, 1777. Article XXXVIII of this document completely emancipated a segment of Jews in the Diaspora for the first time in history.

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Inquiries should be addressed to the Director of the American Jewish Archives, Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220