On the Road to Unity:
The Union of American Hebrew Congregations
and American Jewry,
1873-1903

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Physical expansion, technological advancement, and a population explosion contributed to the development of the United States in the nineteenth century. The population explosion especially stimulated the Westward movement of Americans, a movement aided by new and improved means of transportation.¹ Much of the explosion was fueled by immigrants, among whom were European Jews. Although the first Jews in America were Sephardim, they were no longer the majority by 1720. Beginning in the 1820's German immigrants started to reshape the American Jewish community. By 1826, 6,000 Jews lived in America, twice as many as in 1818. This number increased to 15,000 by 1840, and by 1880 the Jewish population of America burgeoned to 250,000. Small Jewish communities grew up around the two largest Jewish centers, New York and Philadelphia, and American Jews followed the Westward migration of the American population, settling and establishing new Jewish communities west of the Appalachians.²

The influx of European Jewish immigrants produced a heterogeneous Jewish population in America. There were


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Spanish and Portuguese Jews, as well as Germans, Bohemians, Dutch, French, Polish, and Russian — each with their own customs and traditions. The divisions in the American Jewish community resulting from these divergent cultures were further exacerbated by the onset of Reform Judaism in America. In 1824 "The Reformed Society of Israelites" was founded as the first Reform congregation in America. Soon Reform congregations grew out of "Reform Vereine," societies formed by people seeking reforms in their Jewish practice. During the mid-nineteenth century Reform Judaism received theology and direction with the arrival from Germany of the most important early leaders of the movement in America: Isaac M. Wise, Max Lilienthal, Samuel Adler, Bernhard Felsenthal, Samuel Hirsch, and David Einhorn.3

At the same time there existed pressing needs in areas such as education and self-defense which could be met only by a united Jewry. The great influx of immigrants, their dispersion throughout the United States, and their cultural and religious divisions all presented obstacles blocking the union of America's Jews. A few individuals grasped the need for union, and these visionaries struggled unsuccessfully to establish an all-embracing organization to promote inner cooperation among the Jews of America: in 1841 Isaac Leeser called for an assembly to meet in Philadelphia; in 1848 Isaac Mayer Wise issued another call for union; in 1855 Wise convened the Cleveland Conference; in 1869 David Einhorn led a conference of rabbis in Philadelphia; in 1870 Wise held meetings in Cleveland and New York. None of these attempts at union were able to satisfy the divergent strains within the American Jewish community, and each failed to unify America's Jews.4

The only issue deemed sufficiently urgent to unite Ameri-


can Jewry was the need for self-defense and for the protection of civil rights for Jews living in the United States and abroad. Three cases brought this clearly to the attention of American Jews: the Damascus Affair (1840), the Swiss Treaty (1850-1857), and the Mortara Case (1858). Following the Mortara Case, Rabbi Samuel M. Isaacs, of New York, proclaimed that a "united" American Jewry would have been more effective in receiving action from the U.S. government on behalf of Edgar Mortara. Isaacs issued a call to the congregations of America to meet and establish a plan of organization. Under Isaacs' direction the Board of Delegates of American Israelites was created in 1859. The primary activity of the Board of Delegates was the protection of Jewish civil and religious rights; it did little, however, to further the cause of a general union of American Israelites.

Over the years the need for a national organization to promote Jewish education became more and more apparent. Synagogue schools throughout the country lacked text books, trained teachers, and curriculum. Furthermore, American Jews began to desire American-trained rabbis to serve them and their American-born children. Isaac M. Wise pushed for a Jewish college to train rabbis. In 1855, in Cincinnati, he opened Zion College, which soon became the hobby horse of the Reform Jewish community in Cincinnati, but nowhere else; due to a lack of funds and support Zion College was forced to close its doors in 1857. In 1867 Maimonides College opened in Philadelphia under the leadership of Isaac Leeser. This school also never received the full support of the American Jewish community, officially closing in 1875. Still other, even less successful attempts to establish a college were made; none came to fruition.

The desire for a Jewish college to train American-born rabbis, the need for educational aids for synagogue schools, and a growing influx of Jewish immigrants to the United States, all contributed to making the 1870's ripe for the establishment of a union of American Jews. Furthermore, many lessons were learned from the unsuccessful attempts

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at forming a union and a college. And by the 1870's, no longer just the rabbinic leaders of American Jewry sought a union; even the lay members of congregations throughout the country acknowledged the necessity for a union. All of these factors, plus the perseverance and determination of several individuals, led to the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (hereafter referred to as the UAHC).

PART I:
THE ESTABLISHMENT, GROWTH, AND STRUCTURE OF THE UNION

The Founding of the Union

Moritz Loth, a prosperous Cincinnati merchant, was president of Isaac M. Wise's Bene Yeshurun Congregation at its annual meeting on October 10, 1872. In the Annual Report of the President, Loth spoke of the great need of American Jews to have American-trained rabbis to teach, preach, and spread Judaism within America. To educate these rabbis Loth declared that a Jewish theological faculty was necessary, and he proposed that a committee of twelve members from each Cincinnati congregation meet to consider calling a conference of all congregations in the West, South, and North-West to form a union of congregations. The goals of this union, in Loth's opinion, were threefold: to establish a Jewish theological faculty, to publish books for Sabbath-schools, and to stem the tide of the radical reformers in America. The members of Bene Yeshurun unanimously approved Loth's recommendations and appointed twelve representatives to sit down with the other congregations of their city.\(^7\)

At the February 13, 1873, meeting of the Board of Trustees of Bene Yeshurun a letter was read from Henry Adler, who in 1873 had told Isaac M. Wise that he wanted to do something for Judaism and was willing to donate $10,000 for that purpose. Wise had suggested that Adler donate the

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Moritz Loth
(1832-1913)

Cincinnati merchant, one of the main founders of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and its first President.
1873-1889
money for the founding of a rabbinical college. Adler's letter to the Board of Trustees announced his belief in the necessity of a Jewish theological faculty and his willingness to donate $10,000 to endow such a college. This donation, to be held in trust by Bene Yeshurun Congregation until three or more congregations organized a college, had one significant stipulation — the Jewish theological faculty would have to be organized within three years or the entire sum of money would have to be returned to Adler. Adler's donation, with its three-year proviso, lent impetus to the establishment of the UAHC, which, in turn, would lay the foundation for a rabbinical college.

By March 24, 1873, each Cincinnati congregation had appointed twelve representatives to participate in a conference committee to form a union of congregations. This conference committee agreed to call for a convention of all the congregations in the South, West, and North-West. By June 17, 1873, following several meetings, the "Call for a General Convention and a Plan of Organization" had been issued, a committee was appointed to make arrangements for the delegates in Cincinnati, and the Conference Committee adjourned sine die.

The Call for a Convention was addressed to the presidents and members of congregations and was published in The Israelite and The Deborah to reach those congregations whose names and addresses were not available. The Call claimed that suitable agencies and a Jewish theological institute were required in America to promote Jewish education and to keep alive the eternal principles of Judaism. It further explained that in recognizing the need for united action to educate American Jewish youth for the ministry, the congregations of Cincinnati had resolved to call a congregational convention of all congregations in the West and South to form a so-called Union of Congregations. The "Plan of Organization," appended to the Call, outlined the major objectives of the Convention: the formation of a Union of Congregations; the adoption of a preamble, constitution, and bylaws; the election of officers; the adoption of other mea-

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* PUHCH, 1:v-xi.
* Ibid., 1:3-5.
sures beneficial to the interests of Jewish education and to the prosperity of American Jewish congregations.\(^\text{11}\)

Ninety-seven delegates representing thirty-four congregations gathered at Melodeon Hall in Cincinnati on Tuesday, July 8, 1873, for the General Convention of Congregations.\(^\text{12}\)
The administration necessary to begin the work of the convention was quickly completed. After the delegates had been registered, their officers elected, and rules for procedure adopted, they were ready to form a Union of Congregations. The delegates unanimously adopted the following resolution:

"Resolved, That the congregations represented in this Convention, in pursuance of the call issued to them, now form themselves into a 'Union' to carry out the purposes in said call named, and that a committee of ten be now appointed by the chair to draft a Preamble, Constitution, and Bylaws, as contemplated by the plan of organization appended to said call."\(^\text{13}\)

During the next two days the appointed committee prepared the preamble, Constitution, and bylaws, which were unanimously declared to be in full force on July 10, 1873. The first article of the Constitution set forth the name of the organization:

**Article I.** — The body hereby constituted and established shall be known as 'The Union of American Hebrew Congregations.'\(^\text{14}\)

The name of this new organization was probably carefully chosen. The word "Union" had certain connotations in the 1870's. The Civil War had recently been fought to preserve the "Union," and with the Northern victory the "Union" was intact. Furthermore the term implied the American Jews' need for Union — to act in united action for the advancement and preservation of Judaism in America. Moreover, as will be seen below, the term "Union" did not mean "uniformity" but rather "unity." The word "Hebrew" was chosen over the term "Jewish" possibly for several reasons. First, it avoided the negative nuances of the word "Jew" which to Gentiles implied usury or anti-Christianity. The word "He-

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 1:7-9.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 1:11.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 1:22.

"brew" also alluded to the ancient Hebrews of the Bible.\(^{15}\)

The objects of the UAHC as set forth in Article II of the Constitution were fourfold:

1. To establish a Hebrew theological institute
2. To advance the standard of Sabbath-school instruction
3. To aid young congregations
4. To establish and maintain other institutions for the welfare and progress of Judaism.\(^{16}\)

The rest of the Constitution and bylaws contained the rules and regulations governing membership, Council meetings, officers, and other administrative details of the UAHC. A resolution was approved asking all delegates to urge their congregations to ratify the Constitution and bylaws within ninety days and to begin raising funds for the UAHC and for the college.\(^{17}\)

The primary goal of the Convention was accomplished: the founding of the UAHC and the adoption of its constitution and bylaws.

"A New Chapter in the History of the American Israel" was the title of The American Israelite's lead article on July 18, 1873; the article joyfully greeted the establishment of the UAHC. The article pointed out that the new Union hoped to accomplish through united efforts what individuals or isolated congregations could not accomplish because of lack of means or influence. The American Israelite, edited by Isaac M. Wise, continually praised the new Union, advocating its cause and advancing its interests.\(^{18}\) Wise also called upon the entire American Jewish press to join together in support of the UAHC. A number of Jewish papers, however, spoke out against the UAHC. On July 18, 1873, an article appeared in The Jewish Messenger (New York) saying that "primarily this proposed union is disunion" because the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (BDAI) already existed. If the scope of the UAHC would be limited to improving the system of Hebrew instruction, the article continued, The Jewish Messenger would support the Union. But The Jewish

\(^{15}\) PUAHC, 1:22-23.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 1:19.
\(^{18}\) Israelite, 18 July 1873; see also 8 August 1873, 24 October 1873.
\(^{19}\) The Jewish Messenger, 18 July 1873. The Jewish Messenger, edited by Samuel Isaacs, continually supported the BDAI.
Messenger feared that the UAHC would "undertake to deride and to disturb rather than to unite and harmonize." On August 29, 1873, the newspaper again attacked the new union and restated its belief that the BDAI already served as the potential foundation for a Union of American Israelites:

"We are confident that the Board of Delegates will welcome as accession the twenty or more congregations represented at Cincinnati. We believe it is still possible to arrange that the next session of the Board shall be held at some convenient city where Western congregations can be fully and thoroughly represented by delegates. The hasty work of organization at Cincinnati can then be gracefully abandoned, and the solid foundation erected of cooperative educational movement among American Israelites."

Other publications joined in the debate over the UAHC. The Jewish Times (New York) denounced the Union, while The Hebrew Observer (San Francisco) spoke out in favor of it. Within congregations, rabbis and congregants argued whether or not to join the Union. Rabbis such as David Einhorn, Samuel Adler, Gustav Gottheil, Samuel Hirsch, Marcus Jastrow, and Kaufmann Kohler opposed the UAHC.

When the First Annual Session of the Council met in Cleveland on July 14, 1874, eighty-seven delegates represented fifty-six congregations which had joined the UAHC and included Jews from seventeen states, primarily from the Midwest and South. The only Eastern congregation represented was Temple Beth Zion of Buffalo, New York. While the invitation to attend the Council meeting and to join the Union had been extended to all congregations throughout the U.S., the UAHC began virtually without the participation of the Eastern congregations.

The delegates to the First Council of the UAHC elected as its president Moritz Loth, who had also been chosen as president of the Executive Board during that year (July, 1873-July, 1874). Loth addressed the Council as its first president and then presented his report as president of the Executive Board. In this report Loth spoke of the beneficent

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*The Jewish Messenger, 29 August 1873. Numerous articles appeared in The Jewish Messenger attacking the UAHC. See, for example, 19 September 1873, 25 September 1873, 29 May 1874.
11 Jewish Times, 6 February 1874; and Hebrew Observer, 13 March 1874.
12 PUAHC, 1:29-32.
blessings of union, of Israel's mission to the world, and of the need to educate rabbis who would preach the lessons of Judaism to Jews and to all of humanity, who would teach the spirit of the Ten Commandments which lead to "the grand avenue of a correct life and conduct." Most importantly, Loth presented a series of suggestions on issues he felt the Council had to address: circuit preaching activities by rabbis; collecting funds to support the UAHC and the proposed college; assisting orphans and the children of poor parents in learning a mechanical trade; bringing all American congregations into the UAHC; designating where a Hebrew theological institute should be established; and promulgating the rules for its administration. Loth concluded by thanking the press, both Jewish and secular, and the individuals who had labored for the UAHC — "the only National Organization which had for its object the promotion of Hebrew education in America."\(^{23}\)

The Council delegates examined the proceedings of the Executive Board, read financial reports and correspondence received during the year, and appointed standing committees. During the three days of the Council meetings numerous resolutions were passed on issues such as circuit preaching, the publication of English Bibles, Sabbath-schools, finances, means to increase membership, and other administrative details. The most significant action taken by the Council was the establishment of the rabbinical college. On July 16 the Committee on the theological institute proposed the laws, regulations, and provisions under which the college should be established, opened, and maintained. The institution was named the "Hebrew Union College," provisions were set forth for the composition of the Board of Governors, and for the curriculum of the College. The committee further recommended that the Hebrew Union College (HUC) be established and permanently located in Cincinnati, Ohio. The report of the committee was unanimously adopted and HUC was officially declared organized.\(^{24}\)

Throughout the next year (1874-1875) the Jewish press continued to discuss the UAHC. The American Israelite spoke of the great good and blessings of the Union.\(^{25}\) The Jewish

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\(^{23}\) Ibid., 1:34-38.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 97-98.

\(^{25}\) See, for example, American Israelite, 31 July 1874 and 21 August 1874.
*Chronicle* (Baltimore) called the UAHC a "laudable enterprise" and further stated:

"The U.A.H.C. is a NECESSITY. — The necessity of unity is so apparent as hardly worth mentioning. — The end to be attained can only be arrived at by a unanimous action of the Israelites in America, and such action can only be had by the union of our congregations into a solid phalanx, presenting an unbroken front in defense of the right. The necessity for Union is demonstrated by every argument to its utility or its laudable character." 26

There still remained opposition to the UAHC, as illustrated by an article in the *Jewish Times* (New York):

"We regret very much the waste of energy, good intention, holy enthusiasm of the majority of the people engaged in infusing life into the Congregational Union. There are good and true men among them; their only fault is to be of too confiding a nature. . . . That much is certain, a union of American congregations with the large, wealthy and benevolent congregations of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Baltimore, and New Orleans left out, is the play of Hamlet, without Hamlet . . ." 27

When the Second Council of the UAHC met on July 13, 1875, the Union had grown to 72 member congregations which sent 94 delegates to the Council. 28 The most significant actions of the Council were once again related to HUC. The Council adopted the Code of Laws for the General Internal Government of HUC, the bylaws for the Board of Governors, and the laws establishing the faculty and curriculum of the College. With the passage of all these measures the College was ready to open its doors.

By the end of 1875 the UAHC was a functioning organization. On October 3, 1875, Hebrew Union College was dedicated. The UAHC had even received the attention of the European Jewish press. The *London Jewish Chronicle* wrote:

"A movement has been going on for some time in the United States which bids fair to become of considerable importance, but which had as yet not attracted sufficient attention in our country. This movement is the formation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations." 29

**East and West Unite**

Despite repeated attempts by the leadership of the nascent

26 *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 February 1875.
27 *Jewish Times*, 4 June 1875.
28 PUHC, 1:114-17.
29 Reprinted in the *American Israelite*, 3 September 1875.
UAHC to make it a truly national organization, representatives of Eastern congregations were conspicuous by their absence. One of the main obstacles preventing a complete union of all American congregations was the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, which was viewed by some as the natural basis for Jewish unity. By July, 1876, however, the BDAI announced the appointment of a three-member committee which would confer with the UAHC to "bring about as speedily as possible a complete Union of all Hebrew Congregations of the United States." The UAHC responded in kind by appointing its own committee to meet with that of the BDAI in order to pave the way for the unification of the two organizations.10

On July 10, 1877, at the Fourth Council of the UAHC, this joint committee recommended that the UAHC assume the functions of the BDAI and that once the UAHC Constitution was amended for that purpose the BDAI cease to exist. Furthermore, the committee urged that the UAHC establish a "Board of Delegates" to perform the functions which had been done by the BDAI.11 During this Fourth Council additional details were agreed upon and adopted by the UAHC on July 11, 1877, e.g., that the function of the UAHC Council would be legislative, not administrative; that the administrative functions of the UAHC would be exercised by the Executive Board; that the New England states would receive an equal representation on the Board; and that as soon as Eastern congregations representing two thousand members and seatholders agreed to join the UAHC, the proposed amendments would be adopted.12

On July 10, 1878, at the Fifth Council of the UAHC, the Committee from the BDAI reported that Eastern congregations representing over 2,000 members had signaled their intention to join the UAHC and that this number would be increased before the next Council meeting.13 On the next day, July 11, 1878, the UAHC Constitution was amended to reflect the expanded scope of the Union now that it had absorbed the BDAI. For example, changes were made in the "Objects of the Union, Article II of the Constitution":14

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10 *PUAHC*, 1:242-43. The BDAI proposed this union for several possible reasons: the UAHC firmly established itself as a permanent organization by 1876; several Eastern congregations had already joined the UAHC; the BDAI was facing financial difficulties.

11 Ibid., 1:345-48.

12 Ibid., 1:378-81.

13 Ibid., 1:537.
Point "A" included the Union's agreement to found a Preparatory Department of HUC in an Eastern city; Point "B" included the enlarged role of the UAHC in the defense of Jewish rights at home and abroad. This object was strengthened by the introduction of Article VII to the constitution which created a Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights to carry out these objectives (hereafter referred to as BDCRR). Additional constitutional changes included: that the Council meet biennially; that the Executive Board meet immediately after the Council sessions to elect officers and then semi-annually in the months of January and July, with sixteen members required for a quorum.

The BDAI, which primarily represented Eastern congregations, had now been absorbed by the UAHC and the struggle between the East and the West was officially over. *The Reformer and Jewish Times* (New York), *The Jewish Record* (Philadelphia), and *The Jewish Messenger* all received the news just prior to press time on July 12, 1878, and they all joyfully printed a brief announcement that the plan for Union had been agreed upon and was official. *The Jewish Messenger*, which originally opposed the UAHC, wrote on July 26, 1878:

"The Milwaukee Convention (July 1878) is a red-letter day in the annals of American Judaism and a step forward whose importance cannot be over-estimated. Our leaders and laymen have determined to pull together, instead of pulling apart; this is the significant result, and with this we are satisfied. . . . Too much praise cannot be awarded the delegates to the Convention for their harmonious and public spirited action, which has added to the *esprit-du corps* of American Judaism."

When the Sixth Council met in New York City, July, 1879, 104 congregations belonged to the UAHC, an increase of 18 congregations over the Council of 1878. This figure included 12 congregations from New York State, 1 from Rhode Island, 2 from the District of Columbia, and 8 from Pennsylvania. By the time of the 1879 Council there was one national religious organization representing the Jews of America — the UAHC.

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34 Ibid., 1:421-33 (Constitution as proposed by Executive Board); 1:537-42 (changes made in proposed Constitution by the Council); and 1:546 (Constitution adopted).
35 *Reformer and Jewish Times*, 12 July 1878; *Jewish Record*, 12 July 1878; and *The Jewish Messenger*, 12 July 1878.
36 *The Jewish Messenger*, 26 July 1878.
37 *PUAHC*, 1:562-68.
The Founders of the Union

Organized as a lay institution, the UAHC was led by non-rabbinic members of American Jewish congregations. Not one rabbi was among the representatives of the five Cincinnati congregations who met to call for a conference to establish the Union. Out of the 97 delegates who gathered together at the 1873 founding convention, only five were rabbis.38

Prior to 1873 all attempts to unite American Israelites were made by rabbis. Having failed, the rabbis were forced to stand aside and allow the laity to proceed. The Jewish Messenger explained:

“...What the clergy have failed to do, the laymen are striving very faithfully to begin and to advance. A society has been formed, composed of delegates from forty congregations in the West ... If they succeed ... they will do a substantial service and awaken a lethargic and careless community.”39

The fact that the laity accomplished what rabbis had failed to do was repeated again at the opening of the First Council in 1874, held in Cleveland, Ohio. In his words of welcome, Sigmond Mann, the temporary chairman, referred to the unsuccessful Cleveland Rabbinical Conference of 1855:

I offer you all a hearty and cordial welcome to our ... City — famed ... for its Conventions, and where a similar convention, held nineteen years ago, failed to achieve its object. But that Convention consisted of rabbis only. Today the practical businessmen of this land are here assembled.40

In 1875 President Moritz Loth reiterated this theme, appealing to Israelites to join congregations and to bring those congregations into the fold of the Union, and commending every Israelite to support the UAHC:

Trusting that the elders of all congregations may meet annually in Council and work in harmony, let me beg of all the leaders in Israel not to manifest any indifference to this great movement because it was planned and brought into active existence by humble laymen, and not by a Rabbi or Rabbonim.41

All this was accurately summed up in Simon Wolf’s address to the Sixteenth Council:

The Council rightly named is largely composed of representative laymen,

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38 Ibid., 1:vii-viii; and 1:7-9.
39 The Jewish Messenger, 29 May 1874.
40 PUACH, 1:28.
41 Ibid., 1:122.
the Rabbis who act as delegates only, cheerfully yield to the practical judgement of those who after all have to furnish the sinews of war, and who form the central power for upholding the Jew and Judaism outside of the Synagogue and Temple.\footnote{Ibid., 5:3992.}

The most influential person in the UAHC between 1873 and 1903 was Moritz Loth, who may correctly be called the founder of the Union. Born in Austria, Loth came to the U.S. in 1852. Besides being a successful businessman, this Cincinnatian also wrote books, short stories, and editorials for local papers.\footnote{"Biographical Sketches of Jewish Communal Workers in the United States," \textit{American Jewish Year Book} VII (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1905), p. 83; and \textit{The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Ohio of the Nineteenth Century} (Cincinnati: Galaxy Publishing Company, 1876), pp. 73-74.} Loth was the first to propose the idea of a national Jewish religious organization to the Cincinnati congregations; he chaired the founding convention; and he served as president of the UAHC from 1873 to 1889. As president, Loth set the direction of the Union, constantly suggesting activities for the Union to pursue in order to increase its income, to encourage Israelites to observe the Sabbath and to join congregations, and congregations to join the UAHC. Loth pushed for the UAHC to oversee circuit preaching activities, the support of the Hebrew Union College, agricultural pursuits, a Young Ladies’ Hebrew Seminary, Ladies’ Educational Aid Societies, the publication of books, and the improvement of Sabbath-schools. While not all of Loth’s programs were instituted, he was involved in every aspect of the Union’s life. Loth’s dedication to the UAHC and to American Judaism was accurately expressed in \textit{The Menorah}:

(Moritz Loth) conceived the grand idea of welding into a Union the Jews scattered over the land, and (his) undaunted energy and executive ability surmounted the obstacles that obstructed its (the UAHC’s) way. . . . His name is . . . written with indelible letters upon the annals of American Judaism.\footnote{\textit{The Menorah}, 13:273.}

When Loth resigned as president in 1889, the UAHC elected Julius Freiberg to succeed him. Freiberg had served as vice-president of the Union since 1873 and was vice-president of the Board of Governors of HUC. Born in Germany,
Julius Freiberg
(1823-1905)
Cincinnati businessman and President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1889-1903
Lipman Levy
(1836-1918)
Prominent Cincinnati attorney and Secretary of the Union
of American Hebrew Congregations, 1873-1917
Freiberg came to the U.S. in 1852. In Cincinnati he, too, was a very successful businessman and active in both civil and religious affairs. He served as president of his congregation, Bene Israel, for nearly twenty-five years.45

Freiberg's leadership of the Union was far more passive than Loth's. His annual reports as president reviewed the Union's activities and offered words of encouragement and hope. During his fourteen years as president he introduced no new programs, but simply fostered the development of those already in existence. Freiberg's dedication to Judaism and the Union and his great sense of responsibility were captured in The Menorah:

"(Julius Freiberg) a staunch and warm adherent of our ancestral faith, is with heart and soul devoted to his sacred charge."46

Loth and Freiberg were assisted in supporting and maintaining the UAHC by men like Bernhard Bettmann, president of the Board of Governors of HUC from 1875 through 1903; Lipman Levy, secretary of the UAHC from 1873 through 1903; and Simon Wolf, who directed the Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights.

Isaac M. Wise played a very limited role in the UAHC. Although he was often called the "founder of the Union," The Menorah more accurately described Wise as the "Spiritual father of the Union."47 Even though Wise had advocated the cause of union almost since his arrival in America, he did not, in actuality, found the UAHC. Wise's only official position in the UAHC was that of an employee: the president of the HUC faculty. But even in that capacity Wise was responsible to the Board of Governors, who on occasion overruled his decisions. Wise supported the UAHC in The American Israelite, spoke on its behalf throughout the country, and made suggestions for the betterment of the organization.48

48 Wise did not sign the Call for a Convention in 1873, and at the First Convention was merely a delegate representing Congregation Zion of Shreveport, La. It is difficult to ascertain Wise's influence on Loth. On several occasions Loth went against Wise's opinions, clearly acting as an independent agent.
Wise may have refrained from taking an active part in the UAHC so that his opponents would not also oppose the UAHC. *The Jewish Messenger* referred to this in 1875:

“One gentleman who, with the best intention on his part, has been blamed for all the ill success of the 'Union' in the East, wisely refrained from taking a prominent part in the proceedings (of the 1875 Council) thus depriving his detractors from using their old arguments.”

To be sure, the UAHC was attacked on numerous occasions because of Wise. In 1884 Rodef Sholom of Philadelphia left the UAHC, ostensibly because of Wise. In 1887 *The American Hebrew* (New York) stated that the failings of the UAHC should be blamed on Wise:

“The blame for this failure (the UAHC) is placed everywhere except where it belongs — on the wrong spirit and rule or ruin policy of its real head, the editor of the *Israelite.*”

In many ways the members of the UAHC looked upon Wise as its founder and leader, and they constantly lauded his efforts on their behalf. As a sign of their esteem for Wise, the UAHC presented him with a new home at the public celebration of his seventieth birthday. When Wise died on March 26, 1900, a special meeting was held to discuss mourning procedures for HUC. The minutes of that meeting record that “the sorrow felt by the little community about the College building could almost be felt, so pregnant was the air with its crushing weight.” To perpetuate Wise's memory the UAHC created the Isaac M. Wise Memorial Fund to carry out the objectives to which Wise had dedicated his life. Wise’s direction and support for the UAHC was an important ingredient in its establishment and growth. It must be emphasized once more, however, that lay leaders founded the UAHC, organized it, ran its daily operations, and gave the UAHC its own character. Wise himself acknowledged this point when he wrote:

“I cast all my schemes upon the shoulders of working men, active laborers,
energetic and zealous pioneers; and they did what could be expected of
them. They built up a Union, and no rabbi and no petty scribes can destroy
it, for it is rooted in the hearts of the people.\textsuperscript{55}

The Structure of the Union

The UAHC was governed by its constitution from the time
of the First General Convention in 1873. This Constitution
set forth the name and objects of the UAHC, rules on
membership, rules governing the Council meetings and the
Executive Board, as well as provisions for amending the
Constitution. Every member congregation of the UAHC was
entitled to send representatives to the meetings of the Coun-
cil, its governing body:

"The Council is the highest authority of the Union of American Hebrew
Congregations — to make general laws for the government of all boards
and committees by the Constitution provided, not in conflict with any
provisions thereof."\textsuperscript{56}

As noted above, Council meetings were held annually until
1879, when the Constitution was amended so that the Council
met biennially. The Council elected officers and members
of the various boards, appointed committees, reviewed busi-
ness done during the year, decided on policy, and initiated
programs.

The Executive Board was responsible for administering
all policies decided upon by the Council and controlled all
funds and property of the Union. The Executive Board
corresponded with member congregations, collected dues and
other monies, appointed committees, adopted bylaws, and
made recommendations to the Council in all areas of the
UAHC.

The Executive Board, consisting of twenty members, began
in 1873 to meet on a monthly basis. The Board was expanded
to thirty members in 1879 when the UAHC absorbed the
BDAI. From then until 1903 the Board met briefly immedi-
ately after Council sessions and then held a formal semi-an-
nual meeting in January and an annual meeting in July.

The members of the Executive Board were elected by the
Council and they elected their own president, vice-president,
and treasurer from among their members. The Board also

\textsuperscript{55} Krauskopf, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{56} PUAHC, 1:423.
hired a secretary, the only paid employee of the UAHC (except for HUC staff) between the years 1873 and 1903. During the presidential terms of Loth and Freiberg, Lipman Levy functioned as the UAHC's secretary, from 1873 to 1903.

The Executive Board did much of its work through such committees as the Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights, the Committee on Circuit Preaching, and the Board of Governors of HUC. All committees reported to the Executive Board, which in turn was responsible to the Council, composed of representatives of the member congregations. Thus, in theory, the ultimate power of the UAHC lay with the congregations.

Membership in the Union

Any American Jewish congregation could become a member of the UAHC simply by declaring its intention to do so, by agreeing to be represented at the Council, and by paying dues of one dollar a year for each of its contributing members or seatholders. Between the years 1873 and 1903 membership in the UAHC fluctuated between fifty-six and one hundred and fifteen member congregations.

Though the UAHC was the only Jewish national religious organization until the late 1890's, it did not, in fact, represent the majority of the American Jewish population at any time between the years 1873 and 1903. One of the reasons was that membership in the UAHC was limited to congregations only. In December, 1878, The Jewish Messenger denounced this, stating "It is Judaism, not synagogism, which is to be advanced." The American Hebrew constantly derided the UAHC as not being truly representative of American Jews. In 1880 The American Hebrew observed that the Jewish population of the U.S. was around 250,000 and that the UAHC represented at most only 33,000 Jews, leaving 217,000 American Jews unrepresented in a national organization. In 1889, when the Union's membership had decreased to only eighty congregations, The Menorah wrote:

"From these (the UAHC's membership) figures alone it will be plainly seen that the Union represents a small portion of the Jewish communities in the

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57 The Jewish Messenger, 20 December 1878.
58 American Hebrew, 18 June 1880.
The UAHC constantly called upon congregations in America to join its ranks, and committees were appointed to increase the Union's membership. Articles were published in the American Jewish press, circulars were sent to congregations and rabbis, speakers were sent out around the country, and HUC graduates were urged to influence their congregations to affiliate with the UAHC. By January, 1903, the UAHC had 115 member congregations. The 115 congregations counted 11,176 contributing members, equalling approximately 55,880 Jews. But the Jewish population as reported in 1903 was 1,127,268, clearly indicating that the UAHC stood for but a fraction of the Jews in the U.S.60

The underlying principle in the relationship between the UAHC and its member congregations was expressed in the closing line of Article II of the Constitution, which declared that the objectives of the Union would be pursued "without ... interfering in any manner whatsoever with the affairs and management of any congregations."61 Legislation concerning the management of Sabbath-schools, the nature of the prayer-book, or rabbi-congregational relationships were rejected on the ground that the UAHC Constitution forbade any interference in the internal affairs of member congregations. This constitutional law was adhered to between the years 1873 and 1903. It alleviated many fears of congregations and individuals that the UAHC would assume religious authority, thereby undermining the practices of any single congregation. In many ways this principle originally identified the UAHC as a union of congregations in the U.S. irrespective of religious theology or practice.

Finances of the Union

Between the years 1873 and 1903 the UAHC constantly needed money. Although raised in a variety of ways, monies were never sufficient to accomplish all the Union wanted

59 The Menorah, 7:51-52.
60 The American Jewish Year Book, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1903), p. 163. All UAHC membership statistics are taken from the Annual Reports of the Congregations.
to do, or to support existing institutions and committees, much less to venture into new areas of activity.

The UAHC had two financial funds: the General Fund (GF) and the Sinking Fund (SF). The SF contained all donations, legacies, and bequests given to HUC, and the GF received all other income. The money in the SF, later called the Endowment Fund, was supposed to remain intact, and only the interest was to be used to maintain the College, while money in the GF was designated for all expenses incurred by the UAHC. Until 1879 the GF's income was adequate to meet the Union's expenses and the SF grew slowly. In 1880 the Union's expenses exceeded income by $499.65; in 1881 by $7,312.11; in 1882 by $5,317.01. With the exception of six years (1885, 1888, 1891, 1892, 1894, 1895) expenses continued to exceed income. The UAHC was forced to draw money from the SF to pay its bills, and by October 31, 1902, an overdraft of $36,852.12 had been accumulated in the GF, all borrowed from the SF.61

The activities of the institutions and committees of the UAHC were severely restricted due to the Union's lack of funds. The Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights suffered from a shortage of money and often claimed that it needed more funds to discharge its duties. As early as 1881 the Committee on Agricultural Pursuits blamed its lack of success on the financial straits of the Union and on the fact that the Union's primary project, HUC, was not financially secure.62 HUC also suffered from want of funds. In 1881, for example, the Board of Governors was forced to limit the number of scholarship students it could accept because of the Union's poor financial condition.63 Without additional funds the College could not admit more students, hire more faculty, or provide adequate supplies for both students and staff.

Throughout the first thirty years of the Union its leaders endlessly lamented their financial woes. Committees were formed to solicit funds, circulars were sent to congregations, appeals were published in the Jewish press, and numerous fund-raising plans were conceived. One of the most successful plans was adopted by the First Council (1874), incorporated

61 All calculations are based on the Treasurer's Annual Reports.
62 PUAHC, 2:1073.
63 Ibid., 2:1193.
into the constitution, and entitled “Privileges.” The structure of this system was fourfold: first, any person donating $500 or more to any UAHC institution was named a patron of that institution and made an honorary member of its board; second, any person donating $1,000 or more to any UAHC institution was named a patron of the UAHC and of the beneficiary institution and was made an honorary member of the Council and of the board of the beneficiary institution; third, any person donating $500 or more to any UAHC institution with the proviso that the anniversary of the death (*Jahrzeit*) of a designated person be observed, was inscribed in a book of memorial and on the *Jahrzeit* itself the *Kaddish* was recited at HUC (such a donor received no other privileges); fourth, any person donating $5,000 or more to a UAHC institution was entitled to all the above privileges.\(^6\) This system resulted in many donations to the UAHC, and hardly a year passed when some individual did not donate money to HUC to mark the *Jahrzeit* of a friend or relative. However effective, this system was not universally endorsed. An editorial in *The Jewish Messenger* severely criticized HUC for selling *Jahrzeits*:

> “The Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College might have hit upon a more intellectual method of raising funds than by promising what are really masses for the dead on receipts of sums given in memory of parents and assuring intended donors that the *Kaddish* will be said by students.”

The editorial called upon HUC students to refuse to participate in this activity, and it concluded by saying that this kind of religious business was unworthy of the College, and that other methods should have been used to maintain HUC “otherwise it becomes a cemetery not a seminary of Judaism.”\(^6\)

In July, 1876, the Third Council resolved to form auxiliary societies to raise money for indigent students at HUC. The resolution specifically asked Jewish women for their help. This led to the creation of the Educational Aid Societies which enrolled members for an annual fee of one dollar. Members of the UAHC were constantly summoned to join the Educational Aid Societies.\(^6\) In the fiscal year ending May

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\(^6\) Ibid., 1:427.

\(^6\) *The Jewish Messenger*, 16 May 1890.

\(^6\) *PUAHC*, 1:249; 1:385; and 2:1144.
31, 1878, 52 Educational Aid Societies raised a total of $1,353. Societies could be found in cities such as Omaha, Nebraska; Winona, Mississippi; Galveston, Texas; Kalamazoo, Michigan; and Chicago, Illinois. Although often called the Ladies' Educational Aid Societies, they were not restricted to women. Wheeling, West Virginia, had a Gentleman's Aid Society, and several other cities had Educational Aid Societies for all their Jewish citizens.67 Through 1903 the Educational Aid Societies successfully raised money for indigent students at HUC.

The Executive Board resolved on July 14, 1881, to set up a fund of one million dollars to promote the educational and agricultural pursuits of the UAHC. The Board proposed to sell 200,000 Educational and Agricultural Fund Certificates at five dollars apiece.68 This plan for raising money failed. By June 30, 1882, 792 Certificates had been sold for $3,960. In the following fiscal year $1,360 was raised, in 1884, $195, and after that only $20 more.69 On December 27, 1891, the Board ordered the secretary to destroy all the unused Certificates.70

One effective method of raising funds was the establishment of memorial funds. The best example of this is the Isaac M. Wise Memorial Fund. It was established on May 6, 1900 and $16,981.92 was contributed to the Fund by the end of that fiscal year. October 31, 1900.71 On January 16, 1901, the Seventeenth Council appointed an Isaac M. Wise Memorial Fund National Committee to take charge of raising money for the fund.72 By December 31, 1902, the Committee announced that $125,017.95 had been collected, in addition to $25,000 in subscriptions, making the grand total around $150,000.43

Dues from member congregations were a small but constant source of income for the UAHC. Congregational dues, in accordance with the Constitution, were one dollar for each

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67 Ibid., 1:442-44.
68 Ibid., 2:1129.
69 Ibid., 2:1159 (for the year 1882); 2:1293-1310 (for the year 1883); 2:1458-76 (for the year 1884); and 3:1889.
70 Ibid., 4:2869.
71 Ibid., 5:4151-53; and 5:4263.
72 Ibid., 5:4318-19.
73 Ibid., 5:4656.
contributing member of the congregation, and each congregation was to raise these funds in its own way. Occasionally the UAHC did give financial suggestions to its member congregations. The Constitution provided for the suspension of any congregation in default for two successive years, and on numerous, but not all, occasions this provision of the constitution was enforced.

Dues received between 1873 and 1903 totaled $189,774.21, a very small part of the Union's total income of $832,798.08. The difference of $643,023.76 was raised through solicitations, bequests, donations, and investments in U.S. bonds, 4% bonds, mortgaged securities, and stocks. Disbursements during these thirty years amounted to $830,259.66, leaving a cash balance in 1903 of $2,038.42 and $137,400 invested in securities for the Endowment Fund. Of the $693,359.66 actually paid out by the UAHC, $480,191.71 went to HUC for the purchase of a building, upkeep, salaries, support of indigent students, and other operating expenses. No other committee received as much support as did the College: the Board of Delegates spent $5,286.81; the Hebrew Sabbath-School Union received $1,403.74; and only $600 was expended on the implementation of Circuit Preaching activities. HUC was clearly the primary financial focus of the UAHC between the years 1873 and 1903.

PART II
ETHOS OF THE UNION

Reform, Orthodox, or Union for All?

Moritz Loth's 1873 report to Bene Yeshurun Congregation proposed three objectives for the intended Union. The first was the establishment of HUC, the second was the publication of Sabbath-school texts, and the third was:

To adopt a code of laws, which are not to be invaded under the plausible phase of reform; namely, that Milah shall never be abolished, that the Sabbath shall be observed on Saturday and never be changed to any other day, that the Shechitah and the dietary laws shall not be disregarded, but commended

74 Ibid., 1:22-26.
75 Ibid., 1:421-33.
76 All calculations based on the Secretary's Annual Report Showing All Money Received and Expended.
as preserving health and prolonging life. . .

And it shall be a fixed rule that any Rabbi who, by his preaching or acts, advises the abolishment of the Milah, or to observe our Sabbath on Sunday, etc., had forfeited his right to preach before a Jewish congregation, and any congregation employing such a Rabbi shall, for the time being, be deprived of the honor to be a member of the Union of Congregations.

Loth concluded his remarks with a further attack on Radical Reform Judaism, urging the Union to adopt “some safeguards against the so-called reform, which if not checked, may become disastrous to our cause.”

Wise responded to Loth’s statements by saying that the issues of Reform Judaism ought to be left to a conference of rabbis, since “congregational delegates . . . can only give utterance to the prevailing views of the time.” Wise further added that:

It ought to be officially known that the congregations West and South, with very few exceptions, have embraced the cause of reform, as far as it is subservient to the preservation, elevation, and Americanization of Judaism; to the conciliation of faith and reason, law and practical life.

The First General Convention, July, 1873, obviated the potential conflict between Reform and Orthodox Jews by conceiving of a Union for all American Jewish Congregations, regardless of theology or religious practice. The preamble and constitution adopted by the assembly contained no reference to Reform or Orthodox Judaism. There are, however, several possible allusions to Reform Judaism in Article II:

It is the primary object of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to establish a Hebrew Theological Institute — to preserve Judaism intact; to bequeath it in its purity and sublimity — to Israel united and fraternized . . . to provide, sustain, and manage such other institutions which the common welfare and progress of Judaism shall require . . .”

“To preserve Judaism intact” may have appealed to all religious factions, even the Orthodox, implying that Judaism would not be changed. More likely, “intact” connoted the preservation of Judaism as undamaged, unimpaired, at its original core or essence, as it existed prior to Rabbinic

77 PUAHc, 1:i-ii.
78 Ibid., 1:iii-iv.
79 Ibid., 1:22-23.
Judaism which contaminated its purity with rituals and practices. The Reformers viewed Rabbinic Judaism as detracting from Judaism's essence as formulated in the Bible. This may be further seen in the use of words like "purity" and "sublimity." These terms probably referred to the removal of all superstitions and ritual practices, to the stripping away of foreign elements, and to the return of Judaism back to its Biblical state. The "progress of Judaism" was a liberal shibboleth which implied the continuous process of change within Judaism. Reform Judaism was conceived as a part of the process of Judaism's evolution to meet the exigencies of the day — again, a veiled reference to Reform Judaism in the UAHC's first constitution.

If the UAHC constitution was to be a selling point, to be used for public relations and to help bring congregations into the Union, then these words might have been purposefully written in an ambiguous way to appeal to both Orthodox and Reform constituencies. The closing clause of Article II, "without interfering in any manner whatsoever with the affairs and management of any congregation," might have been included to eliminate any congregational objections to the implications of this point.

The third "Article" of the constitution stated that any Hebrew congregation in the U.S. could join the UAHC. The UAHC existed on paper as a union for all American Jews; it was to be neither a synod for fixing religious principles nor a dictator of congregational religious practices. Between the years 1873 and 1903 the UAHC never imagined itself an official arm of any branch of Judaism, and it constantly sought membership from all congregations, whether Reform or Orthodox.

"Let the Position be Defined" was the title article of The Hebrew Observer on September 12, 1873. This article, attacking Reform Judaism, demanded that the UAHC detail its position on the religious issues of the day and clearly state its alignment with the Orthodox or Reform elements in Judaism. The Jewish Record put the Union's official position quite concisely when it wrote that the UAHC "knows no orthodoxy; it knows no reform." The Fifth Council of the UAHC, 1878, amended Article

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80 Hebrew Observer, 12 September 1873.
81 Jewish Record, 2 July 1875.
To promote the religious instruction of the young by the training of competent
teachers, and generally encourage the study of Scriptures, and of the tenets
and history of Judaism.

This paragraph may be the work of the Reformers within
the Union. The objective mentions only the teaching of the
Bible and ignores the Talmud, Commentaries, and Shulchan
Aruch. Once again, this was a possible indication of the power
of the Reform element in the Union, although at that time
membership consisted of both Reform and Orthodox congrega-
gations.

In 1881 *The American Hebrew* identified the UAHC as
a Reform institution saying that it was “composed mainly
of the representatives of ‘reform’ congregations.” The first
real break, however, between the Reformers and the Ortho-
doxx within the Union occurred in 1883, at the first HUC
ordination ceremony. The menu of the ordination banquet
listed clams, crabs, shrimp, and other non-kosher foods.
When the food was served, several rabbis and guests walked
out of the room, and the evening later became known as
the “Trefe Banquet.” Jacob Marcus has pointed out that
the “historic importance of this ‘Trefe Banquet’ is that the
Orthodox-minded were now convinced that they could not
work with the Reformers.” The *Proceedings of the Union
of American Hebrew Congregations* (PUAHC) does not make
any mention of the “Trefe Banquet” or of its after-effects.

The antagonism of the more Orthodox Jews towards the
UAHC was further aggravated by the Pittsburgh Conference
of November 16-18, 1885. Led by Kaufmann Kohler and
Isaac M. Wise, the Conference adopted a set of principles
which severed all connections with Orthodox Judaism and
laid out the platform for Reform Judaism. Wise called the
principles set forth by the Conference a “Declaration of
Independence.” The Pittsburgh Platform, coming so soon
after the “Trefe Banquet,” opened an even greater gap

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41 PUAHC, 1:538; and 1:541.
42 American Hebrew, 1 July 1881.
between the Reformers and the Orthodox in the UAHC. *The American Hebrew* called upon the more conservative rabbis and congregations to sever their connections with the UAHC as a protest against the radicalism of Pittsburgh, and against Wise who was president of the Conference and HUC.86

The Executive Board of the UAHC tried to disassociate the Union from the Pittsburgh Platform and from the activities of Wise. On July 12, 1886, in response to a letter received from a member of the Executive Board who complained of Wise’s participation in the Pittsburgh Conference, the Executive Board considered it “timely and proper” to publish the following disclaimer:

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations is now, and has always been since the hour of its formation, a real Union of American Hebrew Congregations united for the purposes set forth in the Preamble and Article II of the Constitution, and no attempts looking toward an abandonment of the principles therein set forth have been made or would be tolerated, as any action to the contrary of these expressed ideas on the part of any officers of this Union we consider as endangering its future welfare and interests.

The Executive Board requests, as a simple act of justice, that the Union be held responsible only for its own acts, as shown by the doings of its Council and Executive Board, and not for the acts, opinions and utterances of any man or body of men, unless the same be officially endorsed by said Council or Executive Board.

Bernhard Bettmann, president of the Board of Governors of HUC, introduced a statement into the minutes of the Executive Board meeting which was also a disclaimer of the activities of Wise and the other Reformers.87 These disclaimers were not fully accepted, and four days later, July 16, 1886, *The American Hebrew* demanded that the UAHC take action against Wise:

The responsibility cannot be shaken off by merely disavowing it. The Union must decide that the public utterances and conduct of the President of the College is in conformity with the propriety, just principles and the tenets of Judaism, or it must relieve itself of responsibility in the only manner that can be done, viz.; request the resignation of the President of the College.88

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86 *American Hebrew*, 27 November 1885 and 4 December 1885.
88 *American Hebrew*, 16 July 1886.
The UAHC did not refer to this issue again, and no official rebuke was given to Wise or to any other participant in the Pittsburgh Conference. The official policy of the UAHC was sustained — it was a union for all congregations.89

During the 1890's the UAHC gravitated more and more towards the Reform branch of Judaism, although its ideal of being a Union for all Jewish congregations did not officially change. At HUC's sixteenth ordination, Rabbi Max Landsberg of Rochester, New York, in his Laureate Oration stated: "Reform is the demand of all who take an enlightened interest in their religion. . . . The whole instruction you have received here (at HUC) is in the line of Reform."90

At the Union's Fourteenth Council in December, 1895, Leo N. Levi unleashed a vehement attack upon what he considered the destructive nature of Reform Judaism. He said that Reform Judaism suffered from a lack of system, a great leader, unity, and standards. Levi concluded:

There is no religion, and can be none, that does not embrace both doctrine and rites. In every religion there must be contained a doctrine or belief, a command, as well as a model of life.

According to Levi the acceptance, obedience, and conformity to doctrine and beliefs were the *sine qua non* of any religion and "those who do not recognize such requirements place themselves beyond the pale of religion."91 Although the Council voted to thank Levi for his address and agreed to print it in the proceedings of the meeting, a motion was adopted stating that the printing of the address was in no way to be deemed as an endorsement of the views set forth in it.92 The officers of the Central Conference of American Rabbis submitted a protest against Levi’s address, which said that Levi’s conception of the Reform movement in Judaism was erroneous, that his conclusions were arrived at without

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89 It should be pointed out that in 1883, before the "Trefe Banquet," 102 congregations were members of the UAHC, and by the year 1886, following the Pittsburgh Conference, membership dropped to 86 congregations, and by the year 1887 the UAHC had only 81 members. Although this was the time of the 1883-1885 recession and no mention is made in the *PUAHC* that any congregation left the UAHC for anything but financial reasons, the question must be asked as to how many congregations left the UAHC because of the "Trefe Banquet" and the Pittsburgh Conference.
90 *PUAHC*, 3:2770-88,
91 Ibid., 4:3394-3416.
92 Ibid., 4:3374-75.
Delegates at a meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, circa 1890
(pictured with Isaac Mayer Wise, front row, second from left)
a thorough study of the topic, and thus his sweeping generalities were unjust.93

Immediately after the Council, the Executive Board met and resolved that at least six months before a Council meeting the president had to submit the name of the Council's main orator for Executive Board approval. This resolution was a reaction against Levi's remarks. The Board asserted its power so that future speakers would be individuals whose opinions would be in harmony with Union ideology. In this context it may be assumed that because the UAHC was leaning in the direction of Reform Judaism, the Executive Board would not approve a speaker opposed to the movement.94

In The American Israelite Isaac M. Wise dissented from Levi's address and argued that Council speakers should be "in full sympathy with progressive Judaism." To The American Hebrew Wise's editorial was a clear indication of the Reform element within the Union:

This is indeed a notable admission that the U.A.H.C., which by its title professes to be a Union of American Hebrew Congregations, without any reservations except that the congregations are of Hebrews and are in America, has no room for anyone or anybody that is not 'in full sympathy with progressive Judaism.'

In the same issue The American Hebrew poked fun at the Reformers in the UAHC:

The telegraphic reports of the New Orleans meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations described the members as listening to an 'eloquent' prayer with uncovered heads reverentially bowed. Query: How many delegates were present whose early training would have prevented them from being reverential with covered heads?95

The opening of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in 1887 and the establishment of the Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America (OJCUA) on June 8, 1898, were perceived as a protest against the Reform tendencies within the UAHC and a direct challenge to it. HUC was no longer the sole rabbinical seminary in America, and the UAHC no longer the only national organization for congre-

93 Ibid., 4:3416.
94 Ibid., 4:3392.
95 American Hebrew, 21 December 1895.
gations. At the Council meeting of December, 1898, Simon Wolf reprimanded the Orthodox congregations for organizing their own Union and for not participating in the UAHC:

I cannot imagine how any Orthodox congregation can be injured either in its principles, its aims, or its objects by contributing materially to the success of the Union.

Wolf went on to say that the UAHC had never dictated the form of worship, or the prayerbook that a congregation had to use; all these matters were left to the individual congregations. Wolf concluded, “I have never conceded, nor do I today, that this ‘Union’ was to cement the Reform element only.”

Wolf and the other leaders of the UAHC notwithstanding, the Union had by 1898 become identified with the Reform movement. In 1898 the Circuit Preaching Committee reported that one obstacle standing in the way of success was that the dominant population in many small towns was “of the Orthodox type.” In the American Jewish Year Book for 1900 Charles Bernheimer wrote an article entitled “Summary of Jewish Organizations in the United States,” in which he explicitly called the UAHC the congregational union for Reform Jewish congregations in America.

The Seventeenth Council, January, 1901, elected Bernhard Bettmann as its president. Bettmann turned his attention to the recent convention of, “as they themselves call it,” Orthodox congregations. The convention had criticized the UAHC and declared opposition to it a necessity so that “everything Jewish should (not) be permitted to pass away.” On behalf of the UAHC, Bettmann protested against the charges, asserting that there could be no “purer, more enabling and elevating Judaism than the one taught and practiced in the congregations belonging to our Union.” Bettmann closed this section of his speech with an expression of the Union’s views towards the Orthodox Jews and of the Union’s view of its own role in the future of American Judaism:

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96 PUAH. 5:3983-98.
97 Ibid., 5:3956.
We seek no quarrel with our orthodox brethren. ... We know that the differences between us are mostly external ... and we rest content in the conviction ... that time, the great evolutionist, is steadily at work and that the future of American Judaism is irrevocably ours.99

**Attitude Towards America**

The Jews belonging to the UAHC saw America as the land of opportunity and of religious freedom. When Julius Freiberg opened the First General Convention in 1873, he welcomed the delegates who had come from "our glorious new 'Land of Promise,' the land of religious liberty." The Union, he continued, would be established to spread the light, knowledge, and the spirit of religion "among the Jews of this our adopted country."100 The themes of religious liberty in America and of America as the adopted homeland of the Jews were a constant refrain in the words of speakers at Union sessions. Often referred to as "the land of promise" and as "the fatherland," America was also described with religious fervor as the Union's members' "Zion." Simon Wolf said that the Union brought "the children of Israel out of the European desert into the promised land, the only Zion to which we swear allegiance."101

When the U.S. celebrated its Centennial birthday in 1876, the UAHC participated in two ways. First, the Union joined with the Independent Order of B'nai Brith in commissioning the American Jewish sculptor, Moses Ezekiel, to create a statue to "perpetuate the testimony of our love and recognition of liberty and freedom of conscience in this blessed land," for the American Centennial Exposition.102 Secondly, the UAHC selected Washington, D.C., for the site of its 1876 Council meeting. Important parts of this Council included ceremonies at Mount Vernon and at the tomb of George Washington. The day's activities included the recitation of Kaddish at Washington's tomb, and the planting of a tree near the tomb so that it would be "remembered forever that the representatives of the American Israelites have felt here, to-day, the presence of the noble spirit of the great patriot,

99 *PUAHC*, 5:4288-90.  
100 Ibid., 1:6.  
101 Ibid., 5:3993.  
102 Ibid., 1:88-89.
and have expressed the gratitude which they owe him and his compatriots."\textsuperscript{103}

The UAHC was also involved in political action in America, primarily through the activities of the Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights. It fought to maintain the separation of church and state, protested against Sunday laws, spoke out on U.S. treaties, intervened in special immigration cases, and safeguarded the civil and religious rights of Jews in America and abroad. Much of this was accomplished with the help of U.S. presidents, the State Department, and several congressmen.

Simon Wolf, at the Sixteenth Council (1898), accurately summed up the attitude toward America prevailing in the UAHC:

> It is so pleasing to feel that you live under a flag that protects one and all, and that the Jew as an American citizen occupies the same place as any other American. ... Patriotism on the field of battle has no sectarian bias, but is the outcome of the love of and for the Institutions under which we have lived so happily, and to which we cling with loyal affection.

> God bless and preserve the United States.\textsuperscript{104}

**Zionism**

Various social, economic, and political factors during the 1870's and 1880's led to the rise of pre-Herzlian Zionism. As early as 1876, at the Third Council of the UAHC, a committee urged the Council to regard all movements, whether independent or collective, looking to colonization in Palestine, as impractical and futile ... (and) ultimate Jewish colonization in Palestine is erroneous and wholly without favor of serious consideration among American Jews.

On motion of the Council, this section on Palestine was stricken from the report before it was adopted.\textsuperscript{105} It nevertheless reflected the majority view. Most UAHC members saw post-Herzlian Zionism as a threat to their own security and well-being in the U.S., fearing accusations that the Jews could not be good and loyal citizens of America while supporting a nationalistic movement in Palestine.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 1:265-76.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 5:3992.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 2:1418-19.
At the Sixteenth Council, July, 1898, the UAHC clearly and loudly proclaimed its anti-Zionist stand. In view of the "active propaganda being made at the present for the so called Zionistic movement" the UAHC deemed it to be "proper and necessary" to proclaim officially their opposition to Zionism:

"We are unalterably opposed to political Zionism. The Jews are not a nation, but a religious community. Zion was a precious possession of the past . . . it is a holy memory, but it is not our hope of the future. America is our Zion. Here . . . we have aided in founding this new Zion, the fruition of the beginning laid in the old. The mission of Judaism is spiritual, not political. Its aim is not to establish a state, but to spread the truths of religion and humanity throughout the world."\(^{106}\)

In spite of some opposition, this resolution of 1898 stood as the official anti-Zionist position of the UAHC.

**East European Immigrants**

In the late 1870's and early 1880's immigrants from Eastern Europe began to flood the shores of America seeking political and economic refuge. American Jews founded immigrant aid societies, such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the Industrial Removal Office, and organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women also came to the immigrants' assistance. Through the year 1903, however, the UAHC did very little for the East European immigrants. The only arm of the UAHC actually to aid the immigrants was the BDCRR. The BDCRR petitioned the American government to help the Jews in Roumania and Russia, and it tried to expedite immigration procedures for those arriving here, while fighting against any discrimination by the non-Jewish American society against these immigrants.

The main activity of the UAHC was the adoption of resolutions signaling its support of the East Europeans. On several occasions the UAHC called upon American Jews to contribute money for the relief of the immigrants. In 1891 President Freiberg encouraged Jews to do everything possible to assist Jewish immigrants in becoming acquainted with the

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 5:4002. The phrase "active propaganda" may refer to the establishment of the World's Zionist Congress in August, 1897, and the Federation of American Zionists in July, 1898.
language, laws and customs of America, in making them fit "to discharge the duties and enjoy the privileges of American citizenship."\textsuperscript{107}

The single activity that the UAHC constantly considered was the formation of agricultural colonies. President Loth first introduced this idea in 1875, but it was not until 1879 that the Council resolved to purchase a tract of land for fifty families to establish a model farm school.\textsuperscript{108} For the next twenty-four years (through 1903) the UAHC continued to discuss agricultural pursuits, pass resolutions, adopt plans for colonization, and give support to the Hebrew Union Agricultural Society. No concrete results, however were ever forthcoming from the UAHC.

**Women in the Union**

Women played a very limited role in the UAHC. It was, however, recognized that the success of the Union depended in part on the support from Jewish women in congregations and communities. At the First Council meeting (1874) a resolution was unanimously adopted requesting Jewish women to aid the UAHC:

"We invite the co-operation of the women of Israel in behalf of the cause represented by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and we urge upon them the exercise of that influence which has always characterized them as among the pioneers of efforts that have tended to the elevation of Judaism."\textsuperscript{109}

Although Jewish women supported the UAHC, not one woman served on the Executive Board, on the Board of Governors, or on any committees of the UAHC during its first thirty years. The primary activity for which the UAHC solicited Jewish women's help was in fund-raising.

An area in which the UAHC could have made progress, but never took any concrete action, was in the formation of a Young Ladies' Hebrew seminary. Beginning in 1875 President Loth constantly advanced the cause of such a seminary. In 1876 Loth proposed that societies be established to raise funds which would be set aside until the necessary

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 3:2675.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 1:720.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 1:96.
$10,000 had been raised to found such a seminary. The committee appointed to consider Loth's suggestion called it a noble cause, but stated that the Union could not give the attention or support which a Young Ladies' Hebrew seminary deserved. Despite substantial support from the American Jewish press, the Council rejected the idea of a Young Ladies' Hebrew Seminary which Loth reintroduced in 1877, 1878, and 1879.

Four times during the first thirty years of the UAHC women were delegates at the meetings of the Council: one participant in 1896, two in 1898, seven in 1901, and four in 1903. In 1898 Simon Wolf in his address to the Council acknowledged the presence of these women delegates:

I am delighted to see that we have Jewish women as delegates, for I am sure that every cause is strengthened by their presence and their sincere, unselfish work. There is every reason why this radical departure from precedents should be followed in the future. The women in Israel are the heart and soul of religious life not only in the home, but in the Synagogue and the Temple. . . . There is no reason why the Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations would not be enriched by a large attendance of cultured Jewish women who will bring many 'gems of purest ray serene' to add to the bright coronet of religious life for the home and for the Temple.

In 1896 the Council adopted a committee report lauding the National Council of Jewish Women. The report expressed the Union's view of the Jewish woman's place in society when it claimed that the influence of the mothers and daughters in Israel, in the work of the NCJW, "must ultimately be felt in the home, the sphere of women." In the conclusion the report urged the rabbis and leaders of member congregations to give the NCJW all possible assistance to establish branches of the organization in their respective cities.

The UAHC's attitude towards women was clearly a product of the times. The Young Ladies' Hebrew seminary would have been the first institute of higher learning for Jewish
women in America had the Union acted upon Loth’s recommendations. That there were women delegates representing congregations was, as Simon Wolf pointed out, a departure from precedent. In general, however, the UAHC did very little to further the condition of the Jewish woman in America.

PART III:
ENDEAVORS OF THE UNION

The Hebrew Union College

The establishment and maintenance of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) was the main activity of the UAHC between 1873 and 1903. HUC was the motive for the establishment of the UAHC and most of the Union’s energies and finances were channeled into the College. It became a source of pride and accomplishment for the UAHC. As mentioned, the goal of establishing a rabbinical seminary was first set forth in Moritz Loth’s proposal to Bene Yeshurun Congregation, then in the “Call for a Convention” issued by the Cincinnati Conference Committee, and again in Article II of the UAHC Constitution adopted in 1873:

It is the primary object of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to establish a Hebrew Theological Seminary.

Much of the support the UAHC received initially was due to its intention of establishing a College. Several letters read to the First General Convention (1873) unequivocally indicated the corresponding congregations’ support of the Union for the sake of a College. The First Convention also received several offers of land for the College.

The First Council (1874) declared the College to be officially organized, the Second Council (1875) adopted the laws governing the College, and HUC duly opened on October 3, 1875. On April 24, 1881, the first permanent home of the College was dedicated. But the first real mark of the

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15 For a history of HUC see Michael Meyer. “A Centennial History,” Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion At One Hundred Years (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1976).

16 PUAHC, 1:i; 1:4; and 1:22.

17 Ibid., 1:12-21.
UAHC's success occurred on July 11, 1883, when four young men completed the course of study at HUC and were ordained as "Rabbis in Israel." The first ordination ceremony also coincided with the tenth anniversary of the UAHC. When Julius Freiberg welcomed the delegates to the 1883 Council (during which the ordination took place) he spoke of the highlight of the Union — its pride and joy, HUC:

We have established a seat of learning, the main object of the Union, the Hebrew Union College, and for the past eight years have maintained it at no inconsiderable expense. We have been very fortunate in purchasing ... a magnificent home ... and have collected a library of 10,000 volumes ... We have reached the pinnacle of success at last, being about to witness to-morrow the conferring of the degree of rabbi upon the students of the head class. We have the honor of having educated the first American rabbis, instilled with the American ideas and principles, who are able to teach and preach in the English language, who are ready to promulgate and explain the tenets and principles of our simple and beautiful religion to Jews and Gentiles. ..."18

Following the ordination of five more rabbis in 1884, Moritz Loth emphasized the great accomplishments of HUC:

"HEBREW UNION COLLEGE. This the first object of the Union has demonstrated ... that its success in attaining the objects sought by its institutions is beyond question. Nine teachers in Israel, fully equipped for their sphere of action, have been sent forth prepared to assume the functions of rabbis of our congregations."119

Through the year 1903 the UAHC completely supported HUC. As already mentioned, more than one-half of the funds spent by the UAHC went to the College. The Union appointed committees to review the curriculum at HUC, to examine the students, and to hear the reports of the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors and the president of the College constantly praised the UAHC for all its support. As Isaac M. Wise described it in June, 1898:

It (HUC) had but one rock upon which to stand and build beside the grace and help of God, and that was the zeal, the enthusiasm, the prompting inspiration of that noble band of brothers that established the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, an act inscribed with indelible ink in the Book of Eternal Memory.120

118 Ibid., 2:1278-79.
119 Ibid., 2:1454.
120 Ibid., 5:3903.
The Jewish press frequently supported the UAHC because of HUC. In March, 1887, *The Menorah* urged its readers to respond generously to a UAHC appeal for funding of HUC and affirmed that in its first twelve years the College “has borne good fruits which are spread in all directions.” In September of that year *The Jewish Messenger* wrote that because of HUC, “the Union has become an educational factor in American Judaism . . . Its services, its practical work, has won recognition.”

The UAHC was also excoriated because of the College, and sometimes by the same papers which supported it. The most common criticism was that the College had become the total center of attention for the UAHC. An article in *The Jewish Spectator* pointed to this in 1889:

> It is to be deplored that the Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, in its biennial sessions, makes the government and financial support of the College the Alpha and Omega of its transactions.

In 1901 *The Jewish Messenger* cautioned that the upcoming Council must consider some effective means by which the UAHC could be “more than merely a biennial convention for the purpose of auditing the accounts of the Hebrew Union College. It should be a Union in fact, not merely in name.”

HUC was the greatest accomplishment of the UAHC in its first thirty years. President Loth best summed up the UAHC’s attitude toward the College:

> If the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had no other object in view than to provide the Israelites of America with spiritual leaders and educators such as have already graduated from the College and those who are now preparing to do so, then its mission has been a glorious one and will mark an epoch in our history to which future generations will point with pride.

**Sabbath-School Education**

The second objective of the UAHC, according to Article II of the Constitution, was:

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111 *The Menorah*, 2:142-43; and *The Jewish Messenger*, 13 September 1887.

112 *Jewish Spectator*, reprinted in the *American Hebrew*, 16 August 1889.

113 *The Jewish Messenger*, 4 January 1901.

114 *PUAHC*, 2:1600.
To provide for and advance the standard of instruction of the young in Israel’s religion and history, and the Hebrew language.125

The UAHC tried to improve Sabbath-schools in two ways: first, it made suggestions to its member congregations, and secondly, it published Sabbath-school texts.

Beginning in 1874 the Committee on Sabbath-schools corresponded with teachers and supervisors of 70 religious schools in order to report on possible improvements and on the unification of the schools. Based on its findings, the committee made several recommendations. First, regarding studies to be taught in the Sabbath-schools, the committee suggested a curriculum which would include Hebrew in all classes; Biblical history in all lower classes; catechism in classes preparing for confirmation and in confirmation classes; and, finally, singing, especially religious songs. Secondly, the committee suggested that the majority of the time be devoted to instruction in Hebrew and that the remaining time be equally divided among the other studies. Thirdly, the committee recommended that biblical and post-biblical history textbooks be prepared. Fourth, concerning a probable union of Sabbath-schools, the committee reported that only professionals could act upon this matter. Furthermore:

As the Union has no right nor power to interfere . . . with the internal affairs of any congregation, we do not consider it advisable to make to that effect any plan whatsoever.126

The UAHC took no action on the above suggestions (except texts) other than to pass them on to member congregations.

Over the years the UAHC made additional suggestions for Sabbath-school improvements. In 1875, for example, the Council urged congregations to establish a three-year post-confirmation class from which assistant teachers could be elected.127 Among the suggestions of 1876 was that congregations hire only competent teachers fluent in the English language.128

The above suggestions were just that — suggestions to

125 Ibid., 1:23.
126 Ibid., 1:142-44.
127 Ibid., 1:157.
128 Ibid., 1:251.
member congregations for the improvement of their Sabbath-schools. The only other area into which the UAHC ventured was the publication of text-books. In 1874 the Union offered financial prizes to individuals who submitted the best text in biblical history, post-biblical history, and catechism. By July, 1876, the Committee on Sabbath-schools reported that no manuscripts worthy of the prizes had been received. The Committee, however, examined two published texts and endorsed them for the financial prizes: Dr. S. Deutsch's Biblical History and Dr. Cassel's Post-Biblical History. The Council awarded prizes of $200 to each author and obtained the right to re-publish the texts.

In 1877 the UAHC offered a prize for the best hymn-book for Sabbath-school use. There is no evidence that a hymn-book was ever published, and it can be assumed that none worthy of the prize was ever submitted.

In 1883 the Eighth Council recommended that member congregations establish a Sabbath-School Union which would be affiliated with the UAHC. Organized in 1886, the Hebrew Sabbath-School Union (HSSU) assumed all the work and responsibility for Sabbath-school improvements and for the publication of Sabbath-school texts. The idea for the HSSU was probably modeled after one in the Christian community. Christian Sunday schools had organized themselves on local levels, first in Philadelphia and then throughout New England, but a national need for literature and educational materials required a larger organization, and in 1824 the American Sunday School Union was organized. This Christian Sunday School Union dealt primarily with the publication of Sunday School literature.

The main accomplishment of the HSSU was also the publication of textbooks. By 1889 the HSSU had published the "Book of Proverbs"; "Selections from the Book of Psalms"; "The Ethics of Hebrew Scriptures"; "Plan of Religious Instruction for Post Confirmation Classes"; and a "Course of Studies and Plan of Religious Instruction of the...

129 Ibid., 1:95-96; and 1:124-25.
130 Ibid., 1:126-37; and 1:241-42.
131 Ibid., 1:389-90; and 1:527.
132 Ibid., 2:1420-21.
Hebrew Sabbath-School Union." This last booklet outlined the topics to be taught in the various grades of religious schools. The four major areas of instruction were: History (Biblical and Post-Biblical); Judaism (Holidays, ethics, religious doctrines, practices, and customs); Hebrew (reading and translation exercises, and grammar); and Biblical readings (from various books of the Bible). By the year 1894, the HSSU published one more booklet entitled "How to Organize a Sabbath-School."134

In December, 1894, the HSSU decided to prepare and publish Sabbath-school leaflets on Biblical history and on ethical and moral religious lessons. The HSSU borrowed this system from the Christian schools which had distributed leaflets, known as tracts, since the early 1880's if not earlier.135 By January, 1901, the HSSU reported that it had disseminated a total of 109,400 leaflets to 120 schools which were paid subscribers. This figure included a series on Biblical history and one on religion. The HSSU supplied free leaflets to some schools and orphan asylums, and distributed about 1,000 leaflets for home use to Jews living in small towns with no congregation or school.136

Although the HSSU was founded because of the UAHC, it is likely that the UAHC founded the HSSU to carry out educational activities which the UAHC was unable to do without violating the Constitutional clause forbidding interference in the internal affairs of member congregations. When the HSSU requested incorporation into the "aims and objects of the UAHC" the Union rejected the idea.137 The UAHC, however, supported the HSSU both institutionally and financially; in 1894 President Freiberg called the HSSU one of the "offspring" of the UAHC.138

Publications

The only literary piece the UAHC published between the years 1873 and 1903 was the English edition of the "Leeser" Bible. Christians had created societies for the purpose of publishing English Bibles as early as 1808, and in 1816 the

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134 PUAHC, 3:2469; 4:3064-69; and 4:3418.
135 Ahlstrom, pp. 424-25.
136 PUAHC, 5:3958-9; and 5:4291-2.
137 Ibid., 5:3717; 5:3665; and 5:3669.
138 Ibid., 4:3363.
American Bible Society (ABS) was organized. The English Bible published by the ABS contained the New Testament and was found of little value for the Jewish Sabbath-school and the Jewish home. On February 10, 1874, the Executive Board appointed a committee to determine how inexpensively the UAHC could publish an English Bible for Jewish homes and Sabbath-schools. By August, 1874, the Union came to terms with Dr. Abraham De Sola, owner of the copyright to the Leeser Bible, for a special UAHC edition of the English Bible. On August 2, 1874, the Executive Board ordered 500 Bibles at 95¢ per copy and began selling them at $1.00 a copy, the five cents difference covering the Union’s shipping and handling costs. The American Israelite praised the action of the Union when it wrote:

This is the right step in the right direction, and thousands of these Bibles ought to be sold, in fact they should be in every Jewish home. Let the young and old read and reflect on the wise proverbs of Solomon, the sweet and inspiring hymns of David, and the inexhaustible philosophy of Job, which will do genuine good to all.

The printing and distribution of English Bibles was a success for the UAHC. In August, 1875, 500 more copies of the Bible were ordered, in July, 1877, another 500, and in 1880 500 more. By publishing this inexpensive English translation of the Hebrew Bible, the UAHC filled a void in Jewish Sabbath-schools and homes.

Circuit Preaching

In the late 1880’s many American Jews lived in small towns, earning their living as merchants, and could not afford the services of a permanent rabbi. The absence of easy transportation prevented these Jews from traveling to larger cities for religious services or religious education. A number of individuals involved in the UAHC were merchants who had dealings with the small town Jews and had even lived in small towns themselves. These Jews knew, from both first and second-hand sources, that a system had to be devised

139 Ahlstrom, p. 424.
141 American Israelite. 21 August 1874.
to provide the small town Jews with religious services and education, to keep them in touch with Jewish life, and otherwise to fulfill their needs as Jews. The UAHC hoped to solve this problem by introducing circuit preaching, a scheme whereby rabbis would visit the small towns to lead services, to give lectures, and to help with the education of the young. The project for circuit preaching was first introduced by President Loth on July 14, 1874.\textsuperscript{143} For 21 years the UAHC discussed but never implemented circuit preaching plans. In April, 1895, \textit{The American Hebrew} accurately charged that circuit preaching “has been the theme of many discussions, resolutions, and reports. But it had never gone beyond any of these three stages.”\textsuperscript{144}

In December, 1895, the first successful circuit preaching plan was given to the Executive Board. The Committee on Circuit Preaching appealed to all American rabbis, asking them to visit a limited number of towns once every eight to ten weeks. The Committee furnished rabbis with copies of the regular weekday evening service from the Union Prayer Book and a letter which the rabbis could utilize in corresponding with the communities they were to visit. The Executive Board appropriated $100 for the Committee to implement this plan.\textsuperscript{145}

On December 1, 1896, the Committee on Circuit Preaching described its first successful endeavor: 19 rabbis made 154 visits in 53 towns in 19 states; 30 towns counted 618 members, with 862 students in their Sabbath-schools; 3 Sabbath-schools were organized through correspondence; 1,000 copies of the evening service from the Union Prayer Book were distributed and put into use. Difficulties with both rabbis and the communities confronted the committee. Some of the rabbis had physical limitations, others were preoccupied with their own duties, and refused to take the initiative, and many ignored the work out of indifference. More problems were caused by the small towns themselves. Social barriers and national differences often prevented unions for religious purposes. The committee noted that due to the greater percentage of native-born Americans in the South, Jewish

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 1:36.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{American Hebrew}, 15 April 1895.

\textsuperscript{145} PU AHC, 4:3431-35; and 4:3656-59.
communities in this region responded more kindly to circuit preaching than those in the North. The committee stated that in the North, especially in the New England states, "the field is very infertile, owing to the fact that these communities are made up of foreign born, who desire a 'Shochet' or a 'Mohel' in preference to a Rabbi, and who are prejudiced against the Rabbis of the reform school."\(^{146}\)

The Circuit Preaching Committee established one other successful program — the publication and distribution of sermonic pamphlets to be used on the High Holydays. Within one year, by December, 1899, 300 pamphlets were printed, 200 sent out, of which 125 went directly to small towns. The response was overwhelming and the committee received requests for weekly discourses. In 1901 and 1903 the committee reported on the continuing success of the High Holyday sermons, and requested monies to publish weekly sermons. By 1903, however, the publication of weekly sermons had still not been approved.\(^{147}\)

The Committee on Circuit Preaching brought the problems of the small-town Jew to the attention of Jews in larger communities. In 1903 the committee stressed two points: first, the duty which rural Jews owed to themselves to provide for religious observances and for the religious education of their children; second, the duty that large and wealthy city congregations owed to their country brethren to strengthen and aid them. To best achieve its goals, the committee proposed that a full-time circuit preaching rabbi be engaged. The Council agreed to engage a full-time field secretary, and directed the Executive Board to hire such a person whose duties would be the following: to gather statistics of all Jews in all communities; to organize rabbis to carry out circuit preaching activities by state; to appoint rabbis in each state to oversee circuit preaching rabbis; to raise funds for circuit preaching activities and for the Isaac M. Wise Memorial Fund. The employment of a national field secretary was the last proposal of the Committee on Circuit Preaching between the years 1873 and 1903, and it established an organizational structure still utilized today in the institution of UAHC regional rabbis.\(^{148}\)

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 4:3653-56.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 5:4125-26; 5:4145; 5:4268-70; 5:4317-18; and 5:4473.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 5:4624-28; and 5:4735-38.
Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights

As mentioned the UAHC absorbed the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (BDAI) in 1878. In an effort to continue the BDAI’s activities the UAHC created the Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights (BDCRR). Throughout its history the BDCRR announced that it carried out its responsibilities as American citizens and it did not seek special consideration as Jews. Simon Wolf, who chaired the BDCRR from 1885 through 1903, repeated this message time and time again. In 1895 he said:

"We do not ask for any protection on account of race or faith, but simply that in demand for redress of wrongs, inflicted on any people, equal and impartial justice shall be accorded to all who are oppressed, irrespective of sectarianism." 149

"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" was the watchword of the BDCRR. 150 In America the BDAI fought against anti-Semitism, Sunday Laws, and attempts to make America a Christian country. In 1890, for example, the BDCRR reported that attempts to insert a clause in the U.S. Constitution recognizing Christianity as the supreme law of the land had monopolized its attention. Sectarians wanted the Constitution to recognize Jesus Christ as the ruler of nations and America as a Christian country. Wolf stated that in his opposition to such movements he had confined his arguments to the "inalienable rights of American citizens," which would be denied Jews if ecclesiastical bodies had control of the United States. Through 1903 the BDCRR continued to fight any legislation whose intention was to make America a Christian nation. 151

Overseas the BDCRR sought aid for Jews in Russia, Roumania, Turkey, Morocco, and Palestine. Most of these activities were inherited from the defunct BDAI. 152 In many of their overseas activities the BDCRR cooperated with the defense organizations of other nations, e.g., the British Board of Deputies and the French Alliance Israélite Universelle.

The BDCRR was extremely active through 1903. It is,

149 Ibid., 4:3461.
150 Ibid., 3:2129.
151 Ibid., 3:2636-37; and 4:3354-57.
152 See Allan Tarshish, "The Board of Delegates of American Israelites."
however, difficult to ascribe its success to the UAHC, since the BDCRR carried on the activities begun prior to its absorption into the UAHC. It is to the UAHC's credit, however, that it supported the BDCRR in all its endeavors and in this sense the UAHC shares in the achievements of the BDCRR.

Other Ventures of the Union

Among the activities of the UAHC are two others which deserve notice: the Union published the first census of Jews ever taken in the U.S. and played an important role in the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. In 1876 the BDAI invited the UAHC to participate in the collection and publication of statistics on American Jews. By 1877 the Committee on Statistics presented a condensed statement of statistics to the Council, including the tabulation of states, institutions, societies, members, value of property, children in religious schools, teachers, and the Jewish population. The committee recommended that the work be discontinued for three reasons: information was unreliable and probably inaccurate; the expenditure of funds for any purpose not strictly required by the UAHC constitution was considered unwise; and congregations belonging to the UAHC already furnished this information in their annual reports and, furthermore, other congregations could be incorporated by joining the Union. The Council did not ratify the committee's conclusions and ordered the work to be continued.\(^{153}\)

In 1879, after the UAHC absorbed the BDAI, the work continued under the auspices of the Union. In 1881 the Committee on Statistics reported that the work of collecting and publishing statistics of Jews in the U.S. had been completed. Before the close of 1880 the statistics were published in pamphlet form, and by July, 1881, over 4,000 copies of the work had been distributed. The committee believed that its approximation of 250,000 Jews in the U.S. was accurate. This publication by the UAHC was the first systematic effort to compile statistics on Jews living in the U.S., and the Union reported "numerous complimentary com-

\(^{153}\) PUAHC, 1:245-46; 1:349-57; and 1:374-75.
ments and letters of approval...

In December, 1892, the UAHC decided to participate with the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in the preparation of a presentation of Judaism at the Chicago Congress of Religions. The subjects to be treated included history, ethics, polemics and apologetics, archaeology, and anti-Semitism. In addition to the CCAR, the UAHC cooperated with leading Jews such as Jacob Schiff and Oscar Straus, and with the National Council of Jewish Women.155

Following the World Parliament of Religions, the UAHC published all the presentations and papers in a work entitled "Judaism at the World Parliament of Religions." The Menorah wrote that American Judaism need not "feel reticent in sending these addresses out, as they are all well worth a place in the literary history of American Israel."156

Conclusion

The UAHC was the first successful national Jewish religious organization in the U.S. The founders and leaders of the Union hoped to unite all American Jewish congregations to perpetuate and improve the quality of Jewish life in America.

The foremost goal, and the most significant accomplishment, of the UAHC during its first thirty years was the creation and subvention of HUC. Indeed it was the need for a Jewish college to train American rabbis which led to the founding of the Union. Henry Adler's $10,000 donation to endow a Hebrew College provided the impetus for Moritz Loth to call for a convention to establish a national union of all congregations, under whose auspices the college would be opened. Prior to this time all attempts to build a Jewish college had been local, and Loth knew that only with the support of a nationally united American Jewry could a rabbinical college be successfully maintained. From 1875, when HUC opened, through 1903, most of the UAHC's time, energies, and finances were directed towards HUC. Only after the success of HUC was firmly secured did the UAHC venture...
into other endeavors. Julius Freiberg confirmed this when he declared:

The founding and maintaining of the College was the prime object of the Union, the other subjects being added afterwards.\(^{157}\)

Aside from HUC, the UAHC achieved very little in its first thirty years. Its few accomplishments came very slowly and only on a limited basis. One of the UAHC's goals, as set forth in 1873, was to advance the standards of religious school instruction. The Union did very little in this area until the HSSU was organized as an affiliate of the UAHC in 1886. In 1874 Moritz Loth introduced circuit preaching activities. Twenty-one years later, in 1895, the first successful circuit preaching program was finally initiated. Loth also first proposed agricultural pursuits and a Young Ladies' Hebrew Seminary in 1875, neither of which was ever implemented. The one activity, aside from HUC, which the UAHC quickly and efficiently accomplished was the publication and distribution of an inexpensive English Bible. The UAHC did not initiate two of its most successful endeavors. The organizational and programmatic structure of the BDCRR was conceived by the BDAI, whom the UAHC absorbed in 1878. The BDAI also first formulated the idea of taking a census of the American Jewish population.

The founders of the UAHC built an organization open to all American Jewish congregations irrespective of theology or religious practice. The Union, however, grew slowly and was never truly representative of American Jewry. There are several possible, interrelated reasons for this. The majority of the Union's leaders and members between the years 1873 and 1903 came to America from Western Europe during the "German" period of immigration. Their congregations followed the German minhag and many were Reform temples. Most of the immigrants arriving in America after 1873 came from Eastern Europe, and their religious thinking and practice was more amenable to Orthodox Judaism. As the UAHC became more and more the representative organization for Reform Judaism, the East European Jews had less and less to do with it. This situation was exacerbated by

\(^{157}\) PUHAC, 5:3963.
the fact that, with the exception of the BDCRR's activities, the UAHC did nothing to assist the Eastern European immigrants. Newly formed associations met the social and religious needs of the immigrants and in turn received their support. Furthermore, as the UAHC became a Reform institution, the more Orthodox American Jews founded their own organizations. In addition, because Union membership included only congregations, the UAHC did not represent, nor did it receive the support of, Jews who did not join a congregation.

Although the UAHC had few accomplishments, never truly represented American Jewry, and constantly struggled to remain financially solvent, the Union's influence can be seen in several areas. HUC was the first Jewish college to train American rabbis to fulfill the needs of the American Jewish community. Secondly, the UAHC was a lay organization, founded and directed by lay leaders who firmly believed that the strength, integrity, and future of American Judaism lay with the congregations and their members. The UAHC also focused the attention of American Jews on the challenges confronting them, provided a forum for Jews to discuss issues, and established an organizational pattern for subsequent Jewish institutions. Lipman Levy, secretary of the UAHC for over thirty years, understood this as early as 1901:

The fact is . . . that the organization of the Union has done much to arouse the true spirit of fraternal cooperation among the Jews of the United States, and its good efforts are to be seen almost daily: for instance, the opening of the Jewish Theological Seminary . . . the organization of the Orthodox Union of Congregations, and possibly others that I cannot now recall.158

During its first thirty years, 1873-1903, the UAHC planted the seeds which would in the twentieth century blossom in such areas as education, youth activities, programmatic aid to congregations, and political action protecting the civil and religious rights of both Jews and non-Jews. Due to the efforts and struggles of its founders during the years of its birth, 1873-1903, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations stands today as an integral part of American Jewish life in a number of important areas.

158 The Jewish Messenger, 11 January 1901.