

Book Reviews

Abella, Irving, and Harold Troper. *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*. Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982. xiii, 336 pp.

Many, if not most, Canadians like to believe that their country is morally superior to the United States and that most forms of bigotry flower more luxuriantly south of the forty-ninth parallel. Many of the few Americans who have thought about the subject would probably agree: after all, Americans have been using Canada as a sanctuary for more than two centuries. Refugee American Tories went north after losing the American Revolution to become United Empire Loyalists; some American blacks have gone to Canada to escape American racism since early in the nineteenth century; thirsty Americans drank Canadian liquor during Prohibition; and during the Vietnam hostilities many thousands of young Americans went there to escape a war of which they did not approve. But, as one of the authors of this best-selling work told a *New York Times* reporter recently, some Canadian historians "are puncturing this holier-than-thou mythology."¹

Canadian historians Irving Abella and Harold Troper, who previously collaborated on a splendid article, " 'The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere': Canada and Jewish Refugees, 1933-9,"² here expand on that story and take it down to 1948. It is a dreary and depressing tale, and they have told it well. Their title comes from an off-the-record comment of a senior Canadian official, who, when asked in 1945 how many Jews would be admitted into Canada after the war, replied: "None is too many" (p. ix). For those who have read Morse, Wyman, Feingold, Friedman, and Dinnerstein on American policy toward admission of Jews, this seems in many ways a twice-told tale.³ The broader similarities are such that it almost seems as if a master computer had programmed a North American response. Despite differences in history, culture, and institutions, Canada and the United States, during the period of greatest peril to Jewish survival, behaved in essentially the same way. Yet the authors are convinced that "of all

the nations in the Western world, of all the states that could have received refugees, [Canada] has, arguably, the worst record for providing sanctuary to European Jewry" (p. x). It is not necessary to agree with this conclusion to appreciate the fact that this is a skillful and revealing work. Like most good books it answers questions as well as raises them. The chief unanswered question concerns the comparative factor: how was it that both great North American democracies behaved in such similar fashions?

In terms of immigration Canada had, even before Hitler came to power, a restrictionist policy that discriminated against Jews. Canada preferred British and American immigrants, and then, in declining order, came northern and then central Europeans, with "Jews, Orientals and blacks" at the bottom of the list. At the start of what Canadians call the "dirty thirties," Orders-in-Council were promulgated which first allowed into the country only those with enough capital to establish and maintain themselves on farms and then banned all non-agricultural immigrants unless they were either British or American. As in the United States, immigration policy prefigured refugee policy.

Those who have written about the relative powerlessness of American Jewry will find that Canadian Jewry was proportionally even smaller, politically even weaker, and that its protest, such as it was, even less effective than that of its American coreligionists. The three Jews in Parliament represented ethnic enclaves in Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg. None was effective politically. And although they had hopes, in 1935, when Mackenzie King's Liberals came in, that there would be a break with the policies established by Bennett's Tories, in Canada, as in the United States, there was a continuity in immigration policy from the 1920's into the 1930's and beyond.

Those most directly responsible for refugee policy were, in each country, anti-Semites. If anything, the Canadian Frederick Charles Blair, who was assistant deputy minister of immigration from 1924 to 1936 and then director of the Immigration Branch until his retirement in 1943, was an even more blatant defamer of Jews than the notorious State Department official, Breckenridge Long. Where Long would often use euphemisms, Blair was direct. In late 1938 he wrote (p. 9):

I suggested recently to three Jewish gentlemen with whom I am well acquainted, that it might be a very good thing if they would call a conference and have a day

of humiliation and prayer, which might profitably be extended for a week or more, where they would honestly try to answer the question of why they are so unpopular almost everywhere. . . . I often think that instead of persecution it would be far better if we more often told them frankly why many of them are unpopular. If they would divest themselves of certain of their habits I am sure they could be just as popular in Canada as our Scandinavians. . . . Just because Jewish people would not understand the frank kind of statements I have made in this letter to you, I have marked it confidential.

Blair, of course, would deny that he was anti-Semitic.

But Blair, like Long, was, for all his power—and Canadian civil servants probably had proportionately more discretion than their American counterparts—a subordinate. Mackenzie King, the Canadian executive, not only was reluctant, as was Franklin Roosevelt, to overturn the acts of his subordinates in immigration matters, but he also shared their notions about the dangers of a Jewish influx, however small. “We must . . . seek,” the Prime Minister wrote in his diary in 1938, “to keep this part of the Continent free from unrest and from too great an admixture of foreign strains of blood” (p. 17). Like FDR, he was aware of domestic anti-Semitism, most vociferous in Quebec but prevalent throughout anglophone Canada as well.

Canadian Jewish leadership in what struggle there was for refugee admissions was often foolish, feckless, and fractionalized. When, for example, a left-wing group of Montreal Jews protested publicly in 1938 against government refugee policy, one of the Jewish MPs thought that by breaking the rules of the game, the delegation had done “enormous damage.” There were, to be sure, a few individual Jews, like Saul Hayes, who fought the good fight in vain, and even some righteous gentiles who helped. In short, the names north of the border are different, the results largely the same. There are, of course, some differences. There seem, for example, to have been proportionately more decent people among Canadian diplomats—persons like Escott Reid and Hugh Keenleyside—than among their Ivy League American counterparts. But what comes through loud and clear to this reader is the essential similarity of the North American reactions, a similarity, confessedly, that I have found to exist with regard to other immigrants.⁴

I think it a mistake, although an understandable one, to try to compare collective guilt between the two countries. That Canada took

only some 5,000 refugees is a disgrace, as is the fact that the United States took, at best, only some 200,000. As Vice-President Mondale put it a few years ago, all the nations of asylum in the 1930's simply "failed the test of civilization."⁵ That caveat apart, this is an excellent book which documents, meticulously, the evolution and execution of Canadian policy toward the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. The book also points up one of the pressing tasks of contemporary Jewish historiography: to explain, not the minor differences, but the major similarities in the development of anti-Semitic public policy in the two countries. This book, together with the previously cited works on the American side, makes that task more feasible.

—Roger Daniels

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Notes

1. *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1983.
2. *Canadian Historical Review* 60 (1979): 178-209.
3. Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died* (New York, 1967); David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* (Amherst, Mass., 1968); Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970); Saul S. Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945* (Detroit, 1973); Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Victims of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982).
4. Roger Daniels, "The Japanese Experience in North America: An Essay in Comparative Racism," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9, no. 2 (1977): 91-100; *Concentration Camps, North America: Japanese Americans and Canadians during World War II* (Malabar, Fla., 1981); and "The Decision to Relocate the North American Japanese: Another Look," *Pacific Historical Review* 51 (1982): 71-77.
5. Mondale speech text, Office of the Vice-President's Press Secretary, July 1979, for release Saturday, July 21, 5 p.m.

Sofer, Eugene F. *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires*. New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1982. xi, 165 pp.

Where Latin America is concerned, we yanquis are myopic. We look at the southern Americas and think we are looking in a funhouse mirror. They represent themselves as republics, and their constitutions mimic ours; but power flows through army juntas, palace cabals, and guerilla clans, mocking legal norms while yet declaring allegiance to them. Why, to paraphrase Professor Higgins, can't the Latin Americans be more like us?

This sense of distortion intensifies when we look at Latin American Jewry. We tend either to see only those characteristics that are shared with Jews in other parts of the world (ignoring the Latin American component) or else to regard them as so small a fraction of the Latin American ethnic mix as to be without historical or political importance. A coherent portrait has not yet taken shape in our minds.

The truth is that these small and marginalized communities absorb the flavor of life in two dozen national entities, none of which has ever accepted the dogma of cultural pluralism. They therefore exhibit all the classic hallmarks of the Jewish exile, including the ability to cast an uncanny light on their host societies. The prison memoir of Jacobo Timerman, for example, contained no surprises for students of the Jewish condition; but it revealed caverns of the Argentine military mind that no one had looked at in years.

The publishers of *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* promise something the book does not even try to deliver—an explanation of the Timerman affair. This is unfair to the book and to its readers, who may be disappointed on finding that the book deals with the more limited topics of social mobility and place of residence, and that the data on which it is based begin in 1895 and conclude in 1930, when Timerman was seven years old.

On its own ground, this book is a worthy contribution to Latin American Jewish studies, a corrective to some of the distortions in our perceptions of Latin American Jews. At its core is the author's doctor-

al dissertation, which was a craftsmanlike study of the occupations of immigrant Ashkenazim in Buenos Aires who were registered with the Chevrah Keduscha of that city at six distinct points in time over a thirty-five-year period. The published version of the research is much condensed, providing the reader with somewhat less than the bare necessities for understanding the research plan (for example, the classifications of various occupations remain undefined in the book) and presenting the author's conclusions in narrative form.

These are important and arresting. "Until 1945, at least, Jews did not experience in Argentina the same degree of mobility that Jews are assumed to have enjoyed in the United States" (p. 128). Contrary to the popular view of Argentina as a land of unbounded opportunity, only the earliest of the immigrants, those picked up in the 1895 sample, showed overall improvement in their economic status. Later, as Argentina's plutocracy congealed, those who were at the bottom of the heap tended to remain there, until Peron's populist and industrializing policies shook up the class structure.

A second theme of the book is Jewish residential patterns in the city of Buenos Aires during the same period. Drawing on his previously published study (an occasional paper for the New York University Center for Latin America and Caribbean Studies, not acknowledged in the bibliography), Sofer traces the outlines of successive neighborhoods and the degree of mobility or persistence immigrant Jews displayed in their choice of residence. He concludes that, at least until 1947, the Jewish community remained far more segregated than other immigrant groups. Their preference for living in identifiably Jewish neighborhoods was shored up by economic realities, which reinforced "invisible walls" around the Jewish barrio.

Based on this research, Sofer offers a perceptive account of Jewish community life and of the political interaction between the community and the state, focusing on the period studied. His integration of Jewish with Argentine history during the years of heavy immigration is intelligently and sensitively accomplished—a noteworthy achievement in a field which suffers from chronic schizophrenia. Historians inevitably come at Latin American Jewish studies with either a Latin American or a Jewish emphasis. Sofer comes down on the Argentine side. His knowledge of general Jewish history is weak (on p. 66 he defines Sephardim as West European Jews), and his attitude toward

the immigrants he is studying falls short of being sympathetic. For example, in comparing a Jewish with a general Argentine *Who's Who*, Sofer remarks: "While the Chevrah recognized entrepreneurial success, Argentina rewarded less material accomplishments" (p. 131). Non-Jewish Argentines, of course, gained their education and the leisure to pursue spiritual quests at the expense of the peons and sweated immigrants that Sofer describes.

The author's aloofness from Jewish history extends to a failure to acknowledge the growing literature on Jewish immigrants to other Latin American countries. There are useful comparisons to be made with Brazil, Chile, and other countries of recent immigration, but Sofer eschews these, accepting instead the style preferred by Argentines, which is to compare their country with England. Also, since Sofer points to the error of assuming that the Jews of Buenos Aires have the same history as the Jews of New York, his argument would have been strengthened had he made use of existing literature contrasting the two.

Such omissions are an inevitable part of the effort to integrate vastly disparate fields of information. Sofer's study is a model of what can be done by the historian with a determination to assemble a realistic portrait of Latin American Jewry.

—Judith Laikin Elkin

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Sobel, Samuel. *Intrepid Sailor*. Philadelphia: Cresset Publishers, 1980. 121 pp.

Few characters in American Jewish history are so boyishly appealing as Uriah Phillips Levy (1792–1862). In the first place, he was a success. He rose from runaway cabin boy at age ten to become commodore in the United States Navy, the highest-ranking and most senior naval officer of his time. He was also a true naval hero, decisive and brave, a man who with equal fearlessness would attack superior British forces at sea or take on a barroom full of sailors ashore over an insult to the American flag. He was a man of reckless sensitivity where a point of honor was concerned, and he tended to be especially incendiary over his country and his religion.

Even his weaknesses recommend him. He fought a number of duels of honor, always remorsefully, always swearing he would never be goaded into one again, always winning effortlessly with grace and style. What more could a romantic hero offer? Not for nothing did Jacob Rader Marcus, in a national radio broadcast, call Levy his “favorite American hero.”

But Samuel Sobel is not a hero worshipper. While capturing Levy’s panache and flair, he has shown an officer who often mistook his limits, who sometimes went dangerously out of control, but who somehow, because he was a child of grace, survived every tumble on his feet. It is a thoroughly endearing picture from a seriously researched and altogether scholarly study.

Two duel challenges in Levy’s life show contrasting views of the dashing hero. The first one was in 1815, at the Patriots’ Ball in Philadelphia. One Lt. William Potter, a Naval Shipyard officer in the 1812–15 war, passed an anti-Semitic remark to Levy when they collided on the dance floor. Levy promptly knocked the man down, and was next day challenged. Now Levy had been in the thick of the fighting during the war and pointed out that he was a sure shot. It would be wise, he offered, for Potter to forget the whole matter. Potter refused. When the duel commenced, Levy gallantly shot into the air, not once but three times, but Potter continued to press for satisfaction. Potter’s seconds

became unable to restrain their principal as he reloaded for a fourth try at Levy, and Levy was compelled to kill him. A hearing was held and Levy emerged justified. The tale is romantic, and gallantry pervades it. Less gallant is the event in Paris at the Independence Day Dinner, July 4, 1833. Levy proposed a toast to President Jackson, who was unpopular in France, and the toast was rejected. He repeated it, with the same result. Then the furious young lieutenant stomped around the room, flinging his gloves again and again, and shouting his challenge, "Tomorrow morning on the Champs-Élysées," but no one would accommodate him. When Jackson heard the story of this spectacle, the part that impressed the President was that Levy had stood up for Jackson's honor: the child of grace had landed on his feet again.

The special excellence of Sobel's book is enhanced by two things. First, it is meticulously researched. All the germane personal papers and diaries are cited and referenced, many of them illustrated by photographs or line drawings. (An example of Sobel's scrupulous accuracy: when Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro I offered Levy, then a junior lieutenant, a full captaincy in his navy with command of a new 60-gun frigate, Levy said, "Sir, I would rather serve as a cabin boy in the American Navy than as captain in any other service in the world." The word he used was *captain*, not *admiral* as it is usually misquoted.)

Second, Sobel has brought to bear on his subject the methods of modern psychohistory, but he has avoided jargon and one-sidedness in the presentation. Sobel carefully shows how Levy patterned himself on Thomas Jefferson both consciously and unconsciously. Levy bought and refurbished Monticello and made it his home. He also unthinkingly began to imitate Jefferson's life-style, cultivated people who had had contact with Jefferson, and increasingly professed Jefferson's ideals to be his own. Levy underwent six (!) courts-martial and innumerable personal challenges, most based on his religion. He triumphed in all of them, and one wonders if his growing commitment to Jeffersonianism had its roots in his struggles for religious equality. Sobel suggests as much, but does not develop the theme. The book is a splendid, sober piece of scholarship, and a welcome full-length study.

Sam Sobel is uniquely qualified to undertake such a work. A career Navy chaplain, Sobel partly designed and dedicated the Uriah P. Levy Chapel at Norfolk when he was chaplain at that base. It is the first permanent Jewish chapel ever built by the U.S. Armed Forces. Sobel

himself is the first rabbi in the history of the Chaplain Corps (founded November 28, 1775) ever to be accepted into the regular Navy. His struggle in that regard must be as fascinating a story as the one he has written.

—Allen Podet

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Brief Notices

Angel, Marc D. *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982. x, 220 pp. \$15.95

Between the years 1881 and 1924 approximately two and one-half million Jewish immigrants came to America. Almost all of them were from Eastern Europe, but there were exceptions. About twenty-five thousand came from such exotic places as Turkey, Greece, Syria, Bulgaria and Rhodes. Many of them lived on the Lower East Side of New York and believed that dollars grew on the streets of America.

Yet these Jews, from these exotic places, have not earned a place in the nostalgic world of our fathers. Indeed they have fallen victim to what we might call the blinkered approach to American Jewish history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is the history of Ashkenazic Jewry, written for Ashkenazic Jews by Ashkenazic Jews. These "invisible" twenty-five thousand were, of course, eastern Sephardic Jews from the region we call the Levant.

It is to the credit of Rabbi Marc Angel that he has finally spoken out in protest of such a state of American Jewish historical affairs in the manner best possible—by producing the first effort to understand that experience through the pages of perhaps the most important American Sephardic newspaper of the period, *La America*, and the activities of its editor, Moise Gadol. Indeed, in Angel's book, Gadol emerges as a figure whose efforts on behalf of the Sephardic community rival those of an Isaac Leeser, an Isaac Mayer Wise, or an Abraham Cahan on behalf of the American Jewish or the East European Jewish communities.

Unlike Isaac Mayer Wise, however, Gadol, like the immigrant community he represented, met failure at almost every juncture of his career. Part of the problem was the invisibility of the Levantine Sephardim within the greater American Jewish community. But perhaps an even greater problem were the Sephardim themselves and the recurring conflicts between the older and more established western Sephardim and the Levantine group or the struggles between the Judeo-Spanish speakers and those Levantine immigrants who spoke Greek or Arabic or were of Ashkenazic ancestry.

Indeed, it is Marc Angel's honesty in attributing the failures of the Sephardic community in America to both external and internal forces that is the most important feature of his book.

Applebaum, Phillip. *The Fishers: A Family Portrait*. Detroit: Harlo Press, 1982. xi, 153 pp. n.p.

This volume tells the story of the Fisher family, from its humble origins in White Russia to the fabulously successful career of its reigning head, Max M. Fisher of Detroit.

Edgar, Irving I. *A History of Early Jewish Physicians in the State of Michigan*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1982. 249 pp. \$15.00

The author of this volume has written nearly three dozen biographical sketches of some of the most notable Jewish physicians who practiced medicine in Michigan during the past two centuries.

Elwell, Ellen Sue Levi, and Edward R. Levenson, Edited and compiled by. *The Jewish Women's Studies Guide*. Fresh Meadows, New York: Biblio Press, 1982. 110 pp. \$6.95(paper)

This small volume is an important introduction to the growing field of Jewish women's studies. It contains fifteen syllabi and bibliographies which have been used in universities and adult education programs. The approach is interdisciplinary, and one can find useful sources for history, theology, literature, psychology, and other academic fields. Especially important for the field of American Jewish history is the syllabus designed by Maxine Schwartz Seller on women in the American Jewish experience.

Goren, Arthur A., Edited and with an Introduction by. *Dissenter in Zion: From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982. xv, 554 pp. \$30.00

There has never been a more complex figure in American Jewish history than Judah L. Magnes. There was no mold into which he fit. He was an all-American boy who wanted to become a rabbi; a Zionist in an anti-Zionist rabbinic seminary; a Reform rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in New York, "the cathedral temple of Reform Judaism," who befriended Orthodox rabbis and secularistic Jewish socialists; a member of the intensely patriotic American Jewish Committee who became an outspoken pacifist and opposed America's entry into World War I; and, finally, a lover of Zion who lived out the last part of his life in the land of Israel committed to the creation of a binational state of Jews and Arabs without the presence of political Zionism.

Arthur A. Goren has stated these complexities with skill in his introduction to this volume of one hundred and forty documents—letters, journal entries, memoranda, notes and essays—which highlight the thought of Judah L. Magnes.

Jewish Book Annual. New York: JWB Jewish Book Council, 1982–83 (volume 40). 299 pp. \$17.50

The 1982–83 edition of the *Jewish Book Annual* includes articles by Mervin Butovsky on Canadian Jewish writers and Faina Burko on Abraham Goldfaden and the Yiddish theater, as well as detailed bibliographies on new books in American Jewish fiction and nonfiction.

Meketa, Jacqueline Dorgan. *Louis Felsenthal: Citizen-Soldier of Territorial New Mexico*. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1982. xvi, 152 pp. \$15.95 (cloth); \$8.95 (paper)

Louis Felsenthal (1832–1909) spent forty years in the New Mexico Territory of the nineteenth century. He was a lawyer, businessman, and Union officer in the Civil War. He was also an immigrant Jew from Prussia who became a close friend of the leading figures of the New Mexico society of the time and a founding member of the Historical Society of New Mexico. Jacqueline Meketa has produced a well-written and highly interesting biography and a useful contribution to the history of American Jewry.

Sarna, Jonathan D., Translated and edited by. *People Walk on Their Heads: Moses Weinberger's "Jews and Judaism in New York."* New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982. 137 pp. \$19.50 (cloth); \$9.75 (paper)

In 1880, Rabbi Moses Weinberger arrived in New York City, a twenty-six-year-old immigrant from Hungary. He was, as Jonathan D. Sarna describes him, "staunchly Orthodox," a man with an obvious religious chip on his shoulder. No doubt fearing the worst about his new surroundings, Moses Weinberger was not disappointed. All that had been good for Jewish life and learning in Hungary had been turned upside down in America: the rabbi had lost his power and his authority to crass laymen; the synagogue was no longer the small house of

intense worship as a group experience; the bar-mitzvah rite had become a theatrical performance led by a well-paid cantor who performed less for piety than for the hope of a full house; Torah study was pitiful; kosher meat scandals were commonplace. Weinberger's final judgment was clear: pious Jews of Europe, stay home!

We are fortunate that Jonathan Sarna has done more than simply translate Weinberger's volume (published in 1887) from the Hebrew. Instead, Sarna has written an important introductory essay which places this volume within the broader context of American and Orthodox Jewish life. And Sarna is surely correct when he writes that "no matter what they [the various immigrant Jewish groups to America] thought of the outside world, they had somehow to come to terms with it." Indeed, in 1906, even Moses Weinberger let the chip fall from his shoulder long enough to become an American entrepreneur involved in the *matsah* business.

Smolar, Boris. *In the Service of My People*. Baltimore: Baltimore Hebrew College, 1982. 294 pp. n.p.

Boris Smolar is a legendary name in the world of American Jewish journalism. For nearly fifty years he was the chief correspondent and editor-in-chief of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. He was also a roving correspondent for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, and his dispatches appeared in the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, and the *New York World-Telegram*.

Smolar, perhaps more than any living journalist or historian, witnessed the final erosion of Jewish life in Europe and understood its consequences. During the 1920's and 1930's he constantly traveled to Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, as well as to Nazi Germany. He reported to the American Jewish community the growing outrages against the Jewish communities of several European nations. The episodes in this volume bring those outrages to life. They are convincing evidence that the destruction of Jewish life in Europe was a collective aim of many nations. Nazi Germany only happened to be the best-organized vehicle to that end.

Toll, William. *The Making of an Ethnic Middle Class: Portland Jewry over Four Generations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982. xii, 242 pp. \$39.50(cloth); \$12.95(paper)

The Jewish community of Portland, Oregon, is a very fortunate one. It has the distinction of being the first Jewish community in the United States to be studied by a skilled social historian. That historian is William Toll, and his volume on Portland Jewry over four generations has changed forever the manner in which American Jewish communal history will be written.

Toll's mastery of social historical techniques has allowed him to ask new and exciting questions about the sources of social and cultural change within Portland Jewry; to examine the signs of cultural continuity and social mobility within the community in its steady evolution to a middle-class ethnic group; to evaluate the relationship of men and women in the workforce to changes in the pattern of Jewish family life; and, finally, to understand the role of voluntary associations in Jewish political behavior. These are just some of the new and fruitful directions that William Toll has taken in this path-breaking history of Portland Jewry.