

Jewish Women and Vocational Education in New York City, 1885–1925

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During the last years of the nineteenth century, a new kind of educational establishment began to appear among Jewish institutions in America: the privately run vocational school. These schools quickly became popular philanthropic projects among the established American Jewish community, which touted vocational education as a means of Americanizing the Jewish immigrants who arrived in the United States almost daily between 1880 and 1920.¹ Two of the most reputable of these privately funded vocational schools, the Hebrew Technical School for Girls and the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, served entirely female populations. Founded in New York in 1885 and 1897 respectively, these institutions represented one response to a major problem of the period: the question of how to reconcile the American middle-class ideology of feminine domesticity with the need among poor immigrant women to earn a living.² Vocational education for girls and young women helped Jewish reformers achieve the paradoxical purpose of acculturating arriving female immigrants by outfitting them for wage-earning employment while still preserving a social and class system based on gendered conceptions of work and home that the comfortably established Jewish community had no wish to see threatened.

The establishment of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls and the Clara de Hirsch Home at the turn of the century marked an important moment of transition in conceptions of women's work. The traditional ideology of feminine domesticity was beginning to show signs of wear in the face of new economic realities. As women began entering the work force in growing numbers, the notion of family as a system that required a woman's undivided attention to and presence in the home gradually shifted. Schools such as the Hebrew Technical School for Girls and the Clara de Hirsch Home attempted to stem the tide of this shift. By preparing girls for a limited range of jobs largely related to household work, vocational education trained them for the work force in ways that would not remove them too far from the home.

This article places the vocational education of Jewish girls, as

exemplified by the Hebrew Technical School for Girls and the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, in the broader context of the class and gender tensions so palpable in the relations between recent Jewish immigrants and Jews who had already lived in the United States for a generation or more.³ It also aims to contribute to a richer understanding of the vocational education of American women generally. Although numerous studies of vocationalism have appeared in educational and historical contexts since the early twentieth century, only recently have historians turned their attention to the more complicated history of women's vocational education. Yet even these recent studies of the subject do not consider important themes related to women's education and socialization such as the role of ethnicity, the relationship of reform and progress to women's education, and the tension created by changing gender-role expectations.⁴ The purpose here is to fill in some of these gaps.

The conflict between the feminine domestic ideal and participation in the waged labor force was particularly sharp for Jewish girls, whose orientation toward both family and work was intense. The centrality of family and home to Jewish life was emphasized by home-based religious and cultural practices that honored the role of wives and mothers in preserving and transmitting Jewish traditions. At the same time, conditions in Eastern Europe had demanded Jewish women's contribution to the family economy, and immigrant women had an understanding of their relationship to work that differed radically from the idealized American vision that sharply divided home from work. The question of how these women could be encouraged to enter the labor force and to cultivate a more Americanized domestic ideal was thus especially pertinent for Jewish reformers. A study of how vocational education aimed specifically at Jewish girls managed to respond to this dilemma offers insight into the work and domesticity issues already present in turn-of-the-century America and sharpens the broader history of vocational education for women.

Two Vocational Schools

The Hebrew Technical School for Girls and Clara de Hirsch Home accomplished the goal of melding women's waged labor and feminine

domesticity in a number of ways. First, the founders and administrators of the schools fostered school cultures that presented a universal standard of appropriate womanly conduct. Typically members of the established American Jewish community, these educators and philanthropists viewed the preservation of domesticity among poor Jewish girls not only as an effective strategy for encouraging their acculturation to middle-class lifestyles and American social mores, but also as a means to lessen tensions among Jewish groups differentiated by length of residence and economic status. Second, the curricula of the schools focused on skills linked to domestic work, restricting girls' employment opportunities and limiting their prospects for job advancement. Third, the schools encouraged their pupils to seek marriage and claimed that the very nature of vocational education was conducive to finding a husband. Both schools explicitly conceived of work as a temporary stage of women's lives and touted vocational education as an efficient and enjoyable way to ready each student not only for work, but also for the happy day when she could settle into the domestic bliss for which her training had so well prepared her. The deployment of these strategies in the two most prominent and successful Jewish girls' vocational schools in New York both shaped and was shaped by the fundamental need to reconcile domestic gender ideology with the growing participation of women in the waged labor force.

The oldest of the vocational schools for Jewish women, the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, originated during the 1880s as the Louis Downtown Sabbath School under the auspices of Temple Emanu-El and the direction of seasoned Jewish educator Minnie D. Louis.⁵ Reluctantly acknowledging that non-Jews seemed to make little distinction between the older American Jewish community and the new immigrants, Louis insisted on Temple Emanu-El's support for a Sunday School whose "prime object" would be to "inculcate habits of cleanliness" among the habitually unclean immigrant girls who gave all Jews a bad name. "Since the world has elected to regard us as a brotherhood," she noted with some asperity, "why shall we attempt to withstand the force of the ages?"⁶ Louis exemplified both the contempt with which large segments of the established Jewish community viewed the newcomers and the indefatigable efforts so many of these established Jews made to assist them.⁷ This uneasy mix of condescension and benevolence meant that from the outset,

strained ethnic and cultural relations characterized the Louis Downtown Sabbath School.

In 1885 the weekly religious school curriculum was supplemented with daily industrial training, and the school was renamed the Louis Downtown Sabbath and Daily School. By 1887 Louis discontinued the religious classes altogether in favor of expanding vocational courses. She justified her decision by comparing job preparation with spiritual vocation, asserting that "to teach the means to eat one's honest bread and wear one's honest dress is as high a religious duty as to teach the Ten Commandments." Her equation of vocational education with religious training revealed her concern with controlling her students' morality.⁸ She needed to guarantee concerned representatives of the established Jewish community as well as immigrant parents that vocational education would diminish the wayward impulses of immigrant Jewish girls by safely redirecting their energies first into skilled labor participation and later into domestic life. By assigning a religious dimension to domesticity, she justified the kind of vocational training that would prepare girls for home life as well as work life. Securing greater financial rewards, more glamorous jobs, and increased contact with potential husbands, vocational education became the practical expression of the school's constitutional mandate to elevate "the female children of Jewish poor of the City of New York."⁹

Not long before Louis stepped down from her position as head of the school, she identified the Jewish community's need for another kind of educational institution for immigrant girls. Louis suggested that several "moderate sized boarding-schools for girls of twelve years old up to thirty, conducted on a plan of study, just like ours, probably a little more extended," be built in the "benighted district" of the Lower East Side. Aware that the students at the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, which took its new name in 1895, came largely from demographically complete families, she believed that boarding schools might save single immigrant young women or daughters of broken Jewish families from the perils of dislocation.¹⁰ Give them a place "where they could regularly live and remain just as long as it took to fit them properly for one or another calling," Louis proposed, and the Jewish community might avert the disaster of women adrift.¹¹

Founded in 1897 by internationally prominent Jewish philanthropists Oscar and Sarah Straus and Baroness Clara de Hirsch,

the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls was purposely located far from the debilitating influence of “the benighted district” of the Lower East Side. Its dual function as boardinghouse and vocational school met Louis’s specifications, and it was originally established as a nonsectarian home and training school for working girls.¹² Sarah Lavanburg Straus, the founder who served as president of the board almost continuously from 1897 to 1945, visited existing working girls’ homes all over the East Coast before determining that the Clara de Hirsch Home should serve three different groups of girls.¹³ “Day trainees” were unskilled girls living with their families but taking classes at the Clara de Hirsch Home; “trainees,” unskilled girls over fourteen, lived at the home rent and tuition free while completing courses of industrial training; independent working girls, for whom the Clara de Hirsch Home served as a safe and orderly boardinghouse, paid their own room and board. The home’s most important administrator was the resident directress, later called the superintendent, who oversaw vocational education, discipline, recreation, meal preparation, curfews, and housekeeping. Clara de Hirsch girls were not only trained for trade, but also expected to help in the boardinghouse in anticipation of the day when they would put their domestic skills to use in homes of their own.

The Jewish girls vocational schools’ founders and administrators were attempting to train immigrant and poor Jewish girls to be the kind of domestic figures their students’ economic circumstances would rarely allow them to be. The patrons and pedagogues of the schools saw manual, industrial, and even commercial education as means of providing skills for the temporary employment the students might take during the brief period between formal education and marriage. This unrealistic assumption obstinately overlooked most immigrant Jewish girls’ working-class lifestyles, which required almost constant economic contributions from wives and mothers in addition to still unmarried daughters and sisters. While the Jewish girls’ vocational schools rhetorically positioned women’s work as temporary, the parent and student bodies affiliated with the school saw education as the temporary stage in a young woman’s life. Vocational training might have been a desideratum in the immigrant community, but economic need was a fact of life that would not always wait for education.

Jewish girls’ vocational education acted as a lightning rod for

competing conceptions of work, class, and culture among various segments of the burgeoning Jewish population in America as immigrants' realities collided with the American middle-class norms valued so highly by the established Jewish community.¹⁴ Middle-class Jews in America, worried that mass Jewish immigration would inevitably raise levels of American antisemitism, strove to instill in the newcomers an affinity for their own middle-class values and lifestyle. East European Jews often envisioned an entirely different American Jewish community, one predicated on a classless socialism as an alternative to a system of Jewish philanthropy deeply rooted in the willingness, duty, and ability of the "haves" to provide for the "have-nots." While the more-established Jews attempted to convince the newcomers to make success in America's capitalist society their goal, the immigrants made a strong case for clinging to their more egalitarian and sometimes more religious ideas about the way modern society should function. The combination of religious and cultural gaps with class divides created a climate of ethnic distrust and dislike. Jewish philanthropy took on sinister overtones for the new Jewish immigrants, who felt forced into economic and philanthropic patterns they resented. The teachers, social workers, and other agents of assimilation who served as the primary points of contact between the new immigrants and the established Jewish community constantly insulted the new immigrants' cultural and religious pride.¹⁵ The development of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls and the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, both institutions founded by the Jewish middle class for the express purpose of elevating working-class Jewish immigrant girls, can only be understood within this context of sometimes painful Jewish community development in America.

Such intra-ethnic tensions shaped writer Anzia Yeziarska's checkered experiences at the Clara de Hirsch Home, parts of which she recaptured in her fiction. As her novel *Bread Givers* demonstrates most clearly, Yeziarska was all too familiar with the struggles of immigrant children caught between the old world and the new. Only a child when she arrived in the United States, Yeziarska declared independence from her family in 1899 by moving to the Clara de Hirsch Home. Although she did not enjoy the rules and enforced decorum of the school, she impressed one of the board members and was eventually sent to Teachers College to study home economics at the postsecondary level.¹⁶

Yeziarska's mixed feelings about the Clara de Hirsch Home appear most explicitly in her novel *Arrogant Beggar* and in her short stories "How I Found America" and "Wings." In *Arrogant Beggar*, protagonist Adele Lindner rebels against the rigid rules and schedule but enjoys the sunlight, cleanliness, and good food at the home for working girls where she lives. After losing her job Adele is forced to accept the school director's offer to support her in the domestic service training course, or risk expulsion. It is a telling detail of Yeziarska's account: so few students in the home are interested in domestic service that the ladies of the board offer to forgive the rent of anyone willing to take the course and then work for them.¹⁷

In "How I Found America—Part II," Yeziarska's narrator experiences crushing disappointment when Mrs. Olney, the director of the School for Immigrant Girls, dashes her hopes for academic advancement, offering her sewing and cooking classes instead. "It's nice of you to want to help America, but I think the best way would be for you to learn a trade. That's what this school is for, to help girls find themselves, and the best way to do that is to learn something useful," Mrs. Olney says. "Thoughts require leisure. . . first you must learn how to earn a good living."¹⁸ Yeziarska's fury at the condescending, if well-meaning, Americanizing reformers who confined female education to domestic skills recurs throughout her fiction.

The combination of condescending control and genuine concern imposed by the schools' board members and administrators upon their students did not necessarily come to an end with the students' completion of their training course. At the Clara de Hirsch Home, the Follow Up (or After Care) Committee sent teams of board members and teachers to the homes of former Clara de Hirsch Home girls to check on their progress. The committee commented not only on the employment of the former students, but also on their family situations and living conditions. A 1919 report on Regina G. was typical: "Lives with grandparents and aunt. They occupy five nice, airy rooms. Family is very respectable. Regina doing very well at dressmaking." Even after the students left the Clara de Hirsch Home, the school was as interested in their appropriate behavior as in their successful employment.¹⁹ The attempt on the part of schools and their leaders to confine students to a particular sort of lifestyle at the same time that they were putatively educating them for greater economic opportunity resulted in curricula that were often out of step with students' needs

and usually slow to change.

Curriculum

During its earliest years, vocational training that would also provide housekeeping skills was clearly on the minds of the curriculum planners at the Hebrew Technical School for Girls. In 1898 the manual training course included three different types of sewing, millinery, dressmaking, art, needlework, drawing, and cooking. The school literature, perhaps inadvertently, revealed the intentions of the school administrators. The 1898 description of the dressmaking class, ostensibly a vocational training course, first pointed out the advantages of young women's abilities to make clothes for themselves and their children and then remembered to add that the class was, of course, "excellent training for professional dressmakers." Similarly, the description of the cooking class noted that "a marked improvement in table manners has been noticed," which presumably was of greater importance to the future social and family lives of the students than marketable culinary skills might be to their work lives.²⁰

To an even greater extent than the Hebrew Technical School, the programs of the Clara de Hirsch Home were suffused with class and gender values. Domestic service training was at the core of the first curriculum, and the ladies of the board were not reticent about expressing the hope that the graduates might solve their own servant problem.²¹ The three-month practical component of the domestic service training was designed not only to give the students experience, but also to allow wealthy Jewish families a trial period to test the capabilities of potential servants.²² In the first Institutional Report filed with the New York Board of Charities in 1899, the Clara de Hirsch board of trustees listed, in order of their importance, the "Branches, Special Features, and Departments" of their fledgling establishment. Cooking, serving, waiting tables, laundry, and chamber work topped the list, although the board also felt it worthy to note that the Clara de Hirsch Home had a "library for use of inmates."²³ The education offered by the school to boarding and day students as well as working girls was clearly designed to prepare them primarily for domestic functions. This training contrasted with the vocational education provided to Jewish boys by the Baron de Hirsch School, which had been established in 1891 to offer immersion programs in the

mechanical and building trades.

The founders of Jewish girls' vocational schools made no attempt to conceal their gender bias. "We have arrived at the incontrovertible conclusion that. . . boys should engage in 'mechanics,' and the girls be taught the more effeminate though equally lucrative employments," Minnie Louis declared in 1887.²⁴ Although Louis was referring to the school that she directed, she might as well have been describing all vocational education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her differentiation of the distinctive skills appropriate for boys and girls overlooked the great difficulty of finding "equally lucrative employments" for females in a discriminatory labor market as well as the challenge of convincing immigrants to accept gender roles foreign to their cultural background. Middle-class gender models defining certain types of work as "effeminate" constrained Louis's ideas about the content of vocational education for women, reflecting a primary emphasis on maintaining an American middle-class domestic ideal.

Despite the heavy-handedness of the schools' founders and faculty, the vocational schools for Jewish girls initially met with some success. The reputation of the Jewish schools spread throughout the immigrant community, although no more than a very small percentage of eligible students attended either school. Despite their initial doubts, immigrant parents were generally pleased to view their daughters as both economically useful and eminently marriageable. Vocational education still met some resistance in the business community, but Clara de Hirsch students earned a reputation for industry and skill. "A number of employers, when questioned as to the value of school training, say that they 'didn't think much of it in general,'" Superintendent Rose Sommerfeld told the board, but the employers had added that "'the Clara de Hirsch Home certainly trained its girls well'" and made a point of hiring the school's students.²⁵ The schools rarely lacked pupils, and the administrative and professional staff worked with secular women's educators and activists to improve women's vocational education in New York generally. An account of the Clara de Hirsch Home's early history even claimed responsibility for the proliferation of vocational schools for women in New York, asserting, "We were pioneers in trade training and it was the influence of our school and the good work we were doing that caused the Manhattan Trade School for Girls to be

established."²⁶

This early bravado notwithstanding, the ambivalent attitude of the employers cited in Sommerfeld's report corresponded with the deeply seated contradictions inherent in women's vocational education. In 1890 the vast majority of working women were in domestic service, which few could realistically argue required vocational education. Large numbers of women in urban centers worked in the garment industry, but the rate of their production did not appear to suffer from their lack of industrial training. Meanwhile, the schools' justification for their narrow curricula rested on a domestic ideal that was itself falling subject to criticism. In a society where increasing numbers of professions were opening to women, pronouncements that all girls' true profession was housekeeping rang hollow. As one critic asked, "Why. . .take for granted that all unskilled women have only a talent for two pursuits?" Cooking and sewing did not appeal to all women. Another student of women's education concurred, stating, "there is much evidence to show that large numbers of women have no liking and small ability for such work, even when they have acquired an intelligent understanding of food values, of textiles, and of sanitation."²⁷ Students themselves responded to these issues by voting with their enrollments. In public schools girls interested in being homemakers took home economics classes, but women concerned with obtaining other kinds of work did not.²⁸ Whether in private or in public school settings, girls' vocational education was compromised by the weak link between curriculum and objectives.

The Clara de Hirsch Home and Hebrew Technical School struggled with the definitions of women's vocational education, each considering the advantages of home economics, industrial training, and commercial education. The late-nineteenth-century movement to make education relevant and practical was stymied, however, by the question of women's proper place, making women's vocational education a charged issue outside the Jewish community as well. That more women were entering the work force was indisputable; in 1890 more than eight hundred thousand women worked in manufacturing, mechanical, and clerical jobs, and by 1910 the number had nearly tripled to more than two million.²⁹ The question of how schools should respond to the changing labor market remained unanswered.

Rose Sommerfeld supplied one answer when she took over as resident directress of the Clara de Hirsch Home in 1899. Although the

board still sponsored moralistic Friday evening talks on such subjects as “Ethics of Brown Soap and Water” and “Hygiene of Houses and Persons,” Sommerfeld observed the low enrollment in domestic service classes and worked to widen the school’s purpose beyond single-minded preparation for domestic service.³⁰ The new administrator captured the Clara de Hirsch Home’s position on vocational education when she wrote, “We will have better homes when every woman is trained to be a thoroughly competent cook, dressmaker, designer, milliner, or whatever it may be, because through this training habits of industry will be developed which will make a finer type of character.”³¹ The benefit of the Clara de Hirsch Home’s brand of vocational education would accrue to well-trained homemakers as much as—or even more than—to skilled wage earners. This emphasis on efficient, rational housekeeping was consistent with the new appellations of “home economics” and “domestic science” bestowed on housework at the turn of the century by women’s groups seeking validation for daily domestic activities.

At the Clara de Hirsch Home, because most of the girls came from very poor or broken families, the ladies of the board felt it their duty to supply an environment they considered nurturing and appropriate on their own terms. Compulsory physical culture classes for the trainees in the school and mandatory evening cooking classes for the working girls living in the boarding home reflected the Clara de Hirsch Home’s concern with producing healthy, accomplished students whose need to work would not preclude the practice of domesticity.³²

The Hebrew Technical School for Girls developed along somewhat different lines. Soon after Minnie Louis left the institution in 1897, community activist Nathaniel L. Myers took over as president and guiding force.³³ Myers was no less convinced of the higher moral purpose of vocational education than Louis, and he was not reticent about his belief in its importance.³⁴ As part of his conviction that the object of the Hebrew Technical School was to create independent women, Myers completely overhauled the curriculum. Whereas daily classes at the original Louis Downtown Sabbath and Daily School trained girls in dressmaking, sewing, millinery, bookkeeping, typewriting, business penmanship, and housework, Myers added more subjects to the course work than regular public high school students typically would have taken. He organized the school

program into an eighteen-month course that called for a school day from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon and allowed for no summer break. The Hebrew Technical School for Girls still offered two separate tracks in manual education and commercial education, but all the students took a minimum amount of academic classes as well. Commitment to preparing girls for their domestic responsibilities remained of paramount importance. No matter which track she chose, each student also took domestic science courses.

An examination of the school in 1909 demonstrates the range of educational opportunities available there. By then the Hebrew Technical School had been in its new building at Second Avenue and Fifteenth Street for several years. It boasted a gymnasium, ventilation plant, roof garden with basketball court, model kitchen and dining room, and typewriter room with sixty machines. The facilities could not have been more different from the modestly equipped Clara de Hirsch Home on Sixty-third Street between Second and Third Avenues. A large majority of students opted for the commercial department, which was subdivided into technical, physical, academic, and art education. The students spent most of their time in vocational classes, on subjects such as stenography, typing, bookkeeping, and penmanship. They took academic courses in literature, history, rhetoric, commercial arithmetic, commercial geography, physiology, and social ethics. All the commercial students also enrolled in mandatory cooking, physical training, and music classes. The smaller manual department offered vocational classes in sewing, dressmaking, millinery, embroidery, cooking, and penmanship. Manual students spent far fewer hours in academic classes and had more course hours in music and drawing. They took the same physical training class as the commercial students.³⁵

Commercial education, the most popular element of vocational education for both Jewish and non-Jewish girls, had not at first been considered vocational education at all.³⁶ The Hebrew Technical School for Girls initially offered only an incidental commercial training course, but as early as 1897 a list of the school's graduates since 1889 showed that more than half worked as typists, bookkeepers, and stenographers. By contrast, only ten of the eighty-seven students on the list identified themselves as dressmakers or milliners.³⁷ The popularity of commercial classes with Jewish girls was the despair of Jewish communal workers who wanted them to explore other

options. The 1897 report of the Hebrew Technical School for girls lamented, "Our girls do not make the same effort to obtain employment at plain sewing, or millinery, or dress-making as they do in stenography, type-writing, and Book-keeping; nor are there as many applicants to the Manual Training as the Commercial Course." This trend only grew stronger over time. Some years later another communal worker also noted the phenomenon, observing in frustration, "Left unguided, they all aspire to be bookkeepers and stenographers."³⁸ Bookkeeping and stenography, which had limited applications in the home, represented a serious threat to reformers' expectations that vocational education would transform immigrant women into models of domesticity. For girls who came to vocational education with different expectations, hoping to improve their job prospects, commercial education was attractive precisely because it offered a set of skills that could not be learned or applied at home.

High enrollments in the commercial track at the Hebrew Technical School underlined this point.³⁹ Manual training was all very well, but most industrial skills could be learned on the job. The rewards of typewriting, stenography, and bookkeeping fell only to the educated. For immigrant girls education was most valuable and most desirable when it included skills and knowledge that could not be learned outside of a school setting. Regina Haas Lifton remembered years later feeling that she was one "of the brightest children in...New York, because we had to take a test to get in" to the by then selective Hebrew Technical School. Feeling privileged was a new experience for a girl from a poor family. "We were very poor...we had no money," Lifton recalled. "So the only way I could get a high school education...was to go to the Hebrew Tech for two years instead of four years in a regular high school."⁴⁰

A 1915 Hebrew Technical School study found that there was a payoff for students like Lifton and their families. Out of 2,705 graduates to date, 1,863 were gainfully employed at an average of fifty-one dollars a month.⁴¹ The "best equipped technical school for girls in the United States" succeeded in turning out graduates whose reputation as hard working and well trained helped them find jobs fairly easily. In 1914 the Annual Report recorded with immense satisfaction that of all the schools' families, "up to date there is only one case where the charities had to continue their support after the graduation of the daughter."⁴²

As the demands of the American work place and the desires of their student body shifted, the women who shaped the policy of the Clara de Hirsch Home eventually found themselves forced to alter their vision for their school as well. The board members gradually acceded to some of the students' demands for change. The original domestic service training course, a year-long program of cooking, laundry, and serving classes, was finally discontinued due to lack of interest. Superintendent Rose Sommerfeld noted in 1905 that of the thirty-seven graduates of the domestic service course between 1900 and 1902, twelve were married and two were working as domestic servants. The others held a variety of other jobs, from nurses, cooking teachers, and seamstresses to actresses and factory forewomen. As student interest in a wider variety of vocational training grew, course work in areas beyond the basics expanded with an upholstery class, for example, beginning in 1903.⁴³ The school discontinued its cooking class by 1918 and in 1919 appointed a committee to investigate changing the sewing curriculum to more modern industrial standards. The Education Committee attempted to boost enrollment in trade training classes by opening Clara de Hirsch classes to public school students over fourteen years of age and advertising for trainees from outside New York. These strategies succeeded for a while, as enrollments in millinery, hand sewing, machine operating, and dressmaking remained fairly constant from 1918 to 1926.⁴⁴

Unlike the Hebrew Technical School, the Clara de Hirsch Home never made a serious commitment to providing commercial education. Because the students at the Clara de Hirsch Home generally came from poorer families who needed their daughters' economic contributions sooner rather than later, the administrators felt it would be unwise, if not actually impossible, to require the longer periods of course work necessary to master skills like stenography and typewriting. Dressmaking, cooking, and even upholstery, related as they were to domestic tasks the students already performed at home and at the boarding school, took far less time to teach thoroughly. Though the Clara de Hirsch Home and the Hebrew Technical School for Girls continued to share the basic justification for vocational education as supportive of domesticity, the methods and means of the two schools evolved in different directions. Both schools, however, participated in the cultural reconstruction of paid work—even work outside the home—as part of women's domestic obligations.

Training for Matrimony

Whether offering manual or commercial education, the Jewish girls' schools stressed marriage, not employment, as the ultimate goal for their students. Claims for vocational education as training for domesticity as well as remunerative employment were reflected not only in curricula and programs, but also in a fairly explicit emphasis on the desirability of marriage. The less explicitly stated goal was to infuse immigrant daughters with specifically middle-class Jewish values. Within the middle-class Jewish social milieu, marriage was "the foremost aim of the American Jewess as it was for her mother and grandmother" and wage work something to be avoided if at all possible.⁴⁵ For families that aspired to the economic security that would allow female departure from the work place, vocational education as defined by gendered skill sets served the dual purpose of reinforcing domesticity in young women who might have to work to support their families and fostering domesticity in young women whose families' support enabled them not to work. The Hebrew Technical School for Girls and Clara de Hirsch Home tempted immigrant families to send their daughters to vocational programs by playing on their desires for daughters who could act as both contributors to the household economy and as efficient homemakers. Vocational education could only improve future wives' and mothers' effectiveness, Minnie D. Louis argued. "While the girls may never enter service as cooks, they can render as valuable service to the community by keeping an attractive table at home for their fathers and brothers and future husbands."⁴⁶ If domesticity was women's social destiny, vocational education could improve women's abilities to serve the workers in their families.

To this end, vocational education at the Clara de Hirsch Home encompassed more than training in particular work skills. Vocation was interpreted broadly to include the whole of students' future lives, lives that would be best shaped by proper domestic and social training. The board members, a devoted crew of well-to-do Jewish matrons who came together on a monthly basis as well as in committee meetings, believed themselves to be the best models of appropriate behavior at the same time as they grudgingly recognized the difficulty of replicating their own lifestyle on a working-class income. The school administrators designed the program of the Clara

de Hirsch Home to make the opportunities of the students “such as can be found nowhere in this great city of ours, perhaps not even in the whole country” and earnestly believed that “only the best results will be achieved.”⁴⁷ As the emphasis of vocational education in general shifted away from manual training and toward commercial education, the school never lost sight of its original goal: the creation of explicitly American Jewish girls prepared for lives as respectable women whose skills could lead to paid employment, if necessary, but would best be put to use as American Jewish wives and mothers.

Jewish and non-Jewish women’s vocational educators alike were typically unaware of the gender and class assumptions underlying their work. Mary Woolman, principal of the Manhattan Trade School for Girls, saw the linkage between domestic labor and wage labor as ennobling for otherwise deprived working-class girls:

The qualities needed in trade are the same as those which elevate the home. Employers ask for workers who are reliable, who respect authority, who are honest in time, in work, and in word. The development of a sense of responsibility is a difficult task to accomplish, but it is not impossible, even though the poverty of the students necessarily limits the period of instruction. A trade school can develop character, and consequently the better homekeeper is born from the better trade worker.⁴⁸

Woolman was not unique in her opinion that the measurable social benefits of industrial training would appear in the home as much as the work place. Employment success validated the efforts of the ladies of the Clara de Hirsch Home board, but nothing gratified them like the marriage of one of the girls. Offering her explanation of the early demise of the domestic service program, board member Carrie Wise commented:

The main reason why Jewish girls don’t go into service, is that it lowers their social status in the eyes of their friends, and limits their opportunities of making good matches. Many of them come here with the ultimate object of marriage and are generally successful. We have witnessed most touching scenes where both groom and bride had saved enough money to get

up their own little household, and ask to be married at our Home. The bride with her tarlatan veil as the only extra adornment to her usual wearing apparel, the groom in his work-a-day clothes, listening reverently to the words of the Rabbi, signing the pledge of mutual helpfulness. . .with happy, beaming faces. . .⁴⁹

Weddings at the Clara de Hirsch Home were important events, for they signaled the success of another Jewish girl in fulfilling her matrimonial vocation. Even if the student never earned a wage again, a distinct possibility for a married Jewish woman, it was believed that the vocational education she received at the Clara de Hirsch Home enabled her to reach that stage of life. "It is gratifying to note that the training received. . .has not been in vain," the ladies felt, "as all the girls have made excellent housewives."⁵⁰

The dichotomy between marriage and work that the ladies of the Clara de Hirsch Home board took for granted in their own milieu was neither as neat nor as realistic for the immigrant girls who attended the school. No such extreme opposition between domesticity and labor was possible for most of the students. The relationship between gender and work was a major source of contention between the acculturated Jews, who espoused middle-class ideas about the separation of home and work, and the immigrant Jews, whose traditional culture made little distinction between home and work place. Economic opportunities for Jews in Eastern Europe had been so limited that women's work was essential to family economies.⁵¹ Women's labor had also played an important part in homes that doubled as work places.⁵² Supporting the participation of Jewish women in economic life was the widespread cultural and religious goal of Jewish girls to marry scholars. A scholarly husband brought honor to the family while his wife generated the family income. The ability to earn money remained a desirable characteristic of future brides even after the advent of a more modern sensibility made support of a scholarly husband seem less of a privilege.⁵³ This complex East European Jewish heritage allowed women free access to economic and public secular roles but excluded them from power in the public sacred sphere, an almost complete reversal of the middle-class woman's role common to Western Europe and the United States. Even after the Jewish Enlightenment began to alter the traditional

patterns of women's labor in Eastern Europe, a tolerance for female assertiveness, competence, and participation in public life remained a part of Jewish culture there. The still widespread acceptance of women's work continued to characterize immigrant Jewish women's experiences in the United States, as work was seen as a struggle to earn a family living rather than an individual choice or a means to personal advancement.

Even among more affluent Jewish immigrant families, the possibility of combining domesticity and work became important. The Hebrew Technical School for Girls continuously defended its success at inculcating domestic ideology within the context of vocational education. A 1915 study of the school's job placement record hastened to add that "a number of our girls. . .after progressing up to a certain point got married."⁵⁴ Nathaniel Myers continued to stress the equal importance of work and marriage as two sides of the character issue, insisting "the idea is to try to develop good homemakers and home keepers...as well as girls who earn their own livelihood and contribute their share to the advancement of the world."⁵⁵ Some Hebrew Technical School parents remained unconvinced and expressed concern about the school's mixed messages. Although few could doubt the Hebrew Technical School's success in graduating employable workers, there was apparently some question as to its success in graduating marriageable wives. The increasing distinction of the two goals among the parents indicated the spread of middle-class gender values among the more prosperous Jewish immigrant families.

At a special anniversary meeting in 1915, former President William Howard Taft startled the assemblage when he commented favorably on the low marriage rates of Hebrew Technical School graduates. "I rejoiced in that feature," Taft said. He went on to explain:

It is not that I am opposed to matrimony; I am very much in favor of it, provided. . .it brings happiness to those who adopt it as a mode of life. . .the trouble is that many women have to marry, or think they have to because otherwise their life is not to be a success. . .Now how are you going to avoid that? You are going to avoid it by making your women independent... That is why I like this school and all schools of this kind... any measure like this school that enables women to exercise a

judgment as to their future happiness is... a step a long way in the direction of relieving the entire community.⁵⁶

Adolf Lewisohn, the board member who had invited Taft to speak at the meeting, was so concerned about the effect of Taft's comments on the school's parents and patrons in the audience that he interrupted the former president to interject an explanatory note into the proceedings:

I want to make a little explanation in regard to the number of our pupils who get married. I don't want the idea to get out that children of this school are not apt to get married, otherwise we will not get pupils in the future. Now there were 2700 children who left the school, of which, it is true, only about two hundred and seventy have married, but there are about two hundred fifty or two hundred seventy more that have not reported or have not been found, and there are a great many who still have a chance. When the children leave the school they are only about sixteen years old or somewhere around there, and so you see there is plenty of time for them to think of marrying.⁵⁷

Disclaimer complete, Lewisohn returned to his seat and Taft resumed his speech. Lewisohn's assumption that many in the audience would hear in Taft's remarks the idea that vocational training and work might render women unfit for marriage reflected the middle-class values shaping the official philosophy of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls. The poorer Jewish families who sent their daughters to vocational schools were less likely to conceive of any such barriers of exclusivity between work and marriage. Still, exposure to the middle class attitudes and contradictions inherent in Jewish women's vocational education influenced even these families' ideas about the relation between women's waged labor and their domestic role.

The Waning Influence of Jewish Women's Vocational Education

Shifting employment patterns for women and changing methods of vocational education altered the economic and educational

foundations on which Jewish women's vocational schools depended. By the 1920s many of the potential students were second-generation Americans who did not look to ethnic institutions for opportunity. The closing off of immigration after 1924 contributed to a lessening of hostility among the elements of the Jewish community in America, and the earlier unspoken agreements to live with the paradoxes of the Jewish women's vocational schools no longer seemed superficially coherent or even necessary. Middle-class Jews, including a large number of successful immigrants, who ostensibly believed in a separation between home and work, no longer needed to provide women with education for work on the same scale as before. Immigrant Jews whose backgrounds accustomed them to working women no longer needed to rely to the same degree on philanthropic community institutions to train women for employment. Increasing rapprochement between the two groups exerted a particularly strong influence on Jewish educational establishments. Emanuel Gamoran, a supervisor for New York's Board of Jewish Education, expressed appreciation for immigrant contributions to American Jewish culture, writing in 1925 of the importance of recognizing "that many of the immigrant groups bring with them a rich past, many elements of which are worth preserving both for their intrinsic value and for their enrichment of American life."⁵⁸ At the time the Clara de Hirsch Home and the Hebrew Technical School were founded, such a positive appraisal of immigrant Jewish culture would scarcely have been conceivable. Although new immigrant Jews often adopted the middle-class gender ideology espoused by the established Jewish community as well as middle-class American society, a syncretic American Jewish culture began to take shape after World War I.

As Jewish immigrant families consolidated their positions in American society and in many ways began to adapt to the western model of assimilation that Paula Hyman posits, women's vocational education grew less important as an economic strategy.⁵⁹ With commercial courses firmly in place as the prime exponents of vocational education for women, the Hebrew Technical School served an increasingly successful body of immigrant Jewish families and their daughters, many of whom now joined the Jewish philanthropic community in idealizing employment as a temporary stage of life for unmarried women. Not even the success of the Hebrew Technical School, however, in adapting to its students' needs could protect it

from the appearance and growth of vocational education in public schools—a development that threatened the existence of private vocational educational institutions.

The Hebrew Technical School for Girls and the Clara de Hirsch Home increasingly lost direction as public schools, supported by the Smith-Hughes Act, became the major providers of vocational education for boys and girls. In 1922, 35 percent of New York high school students were enrolled in commercial classes either in separate commercial public high schools or through the commercial departments of regular schools. Commercial classes ranged from traditional bookkeeping and typing to newer subjects like salesmanship. Many New York public schools offered intensive vocational education to graduates of regular high school programs in evening classes or part-time day courses.⁶⁰

The growth of vocational education in public schools threatened the very existence of private vocational educational institutions, particularly schools segregated by gender. In 1926 the Clara de Hirsch board discontinued the trade school “due to the change in social and economic conditions and the gradual establishment of Trade Training Schools as part of the regular program of the New York Board of Education.” The Clara de Hirsch Home sent the younger residents of the school to public high school and offered individual industrial training in the evenings. Rose Sommerfeld, who retired in 1924 after twenty-five years, was replaced by Bess Spanner. Whereas Sommerfeld’s experience before coming to head the Clara de Hirsch Home had been as a social worker at a similar institution in Baltimore, Bess Spanner’s background was in institutional management. For her, even the reduced trade training offered at the Clara de Hirsch Home was no longer necessary, although she did admit that in times of economic austerity unskilled girls were the first to lose their jobs. By 1933 Spanner had phased out the last remaining vestiges of the Clara de Hirsch Home’s original vocational education, and the school became strictly a home for independent working girls at least eighteen years of age. The Clara de Hirsch Home continued to serve as low-cost housing for working girls, with a brief interlude as a shelter for Jewish refugee children from Germany, until its merger with the Young Women’s Hebrew Association’s residence for working girls and eventual reappearance as the modern-day de Hirsch Residence of the 92nd Street Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association.⁶¹

The Hebrew Technical School maintained its vocational education for Jewish girls a few years longer than the Clara de Hirsch Home, largely because of its superior infrastructure. A 1928 letter from Adolph Lewisohn, one of the staunchest supporters of the Hebrew Technical School, asserted that there was no mortgage on the school's building and that "a large balance on hand in good securities" supported the school's maintenance.⁶² By the end of the year, though, a survey committee working in conjunction with the Bureau of Jewish Social Research had hired Professor F. G. Bonser of Teachers College to investigate the continued viability of the Hebrew Technical School. Dissatisfied with Bonser's report, Hebrew Technical School leaders appointed a new committee to issue a supplementary survey.⁶³ That training for domesticity was still a vital part of the vocational program was clear in the second committee's suggestion that, were the school to continue in similar form,

The curriculum of every pupil, regardless of the character of vocational training she is receiving, be enriched by systematic and graded work in home keeping. Plain cooking, home nursing, home sanitation, fundamental principles of simple home furnishing and decoration, should be taught all pupils because more of the graduates of this school will become wives and mothers than permanent wage earners.⁶⁴

Despite a simultaneous report that two hundred Hebrew Technical School girls had found employment between June and September, large numbers of the parents and educators associated with the Hebrew Technical School emphasized, as 1928 graduate Ann Neirenberg recalled, that "they taught us how to be housewives besides commercial people."⁶⁵ Even as the Hebrew Technical School tried to adapt to new understandings of women's work, the administrators clung to the idea that it was temporary and of secondary concern in girls' vocational education.

At first the Hebrew Technical School resisted the Jewish community's suggestion that there was no reason to support a Jewish women's vocational school when the public school offered such comprehensive industrial training. For a while board president Adolf Lewisohn's conviction that the Hebrew Technical School should "continue to be a leader in providing for the Jewish community

opportunities which are useful and not to be procured elsewhere” held sway. The Hebrew Technical School replaced the physical plant, added new courses in jewelry making and manicuring to remain up to date, and hired a new principal with vocational education experience. With the Depression beginning to affect Jewish families’ ability to keep their children in school, however, enrollments dropped and employment statistics plummeted. The discussion of whether the Hebrew Technical School was an important Jewish communal institution or merely an unnecessary duplication of public school services began again in 1931.⁶⁶ By 1932 the Hebrew Technical School’s board was inquiring whether the New York City superintendent of schools would like to annex the Hebrew Technical School building to the Manhattan Industrial High School as part of the public school system. The Hebrew Technical School’s final graduation exercises were held in 1932. Shortly thereafter the residual monies and assets of the school were incorporated into a scholarship fund to help provide grants, loans, and scholarships to Jewish women of limited means. Known today as the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women, the scholarship fund has expanded its original mission to a nonsectarian applicant base, still professing careful attention to all the varied educational needs of women.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Although particular issues of immigration and acculturation made Jewish women’s experience of vocational education unique, the ideological inconsistencies and practical difficulties of Jewish women’s vocational education represented the inchoate nature of all women’s vocational education. The Clara de Hirsch Home and the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, like other women’s vocational schools, struggled to define their purpose and set meaningful goals for students whose personal decisions were constrained by economic conditions, social expectations, and cultural standards. The relationship between education and work or education and socialization was never as neat as social critics hoped it would be, offering instead a complexity evident in the development of vocationalism and expressed most clearly in women’s vocational education. The contradictory nature of a vocational movement that purported to offer women more choices but instead trained them to

assume naturalized positions in a gendered industrial society seriously compromised education's claim to offer limitless growth and opportunity.

Reconstructing women's work as an integral part of family participation while sustaining domestic ideology was the overriding goal of women's vocational education in general. Neither the Clara de Hirsch Home nor the Hebrew Technical School escaped the ideological and practical inconsistencies endemic to girls' vocational education. An examination of the two schools reveals an ongoing struggle to reconcile ideas about women's work, education, and social roles. Although they approached vocational education differently, with the Clara de Hirsch Home offering mostly manual and industrial training and the Hebrew Technical School turning primarily to commercial training, both institutions responded to their students' desires for a way into the labor market by remaking domesticity from a family-centered attribute into a set of work-oriented skills. This transformation was not irrevocable, however, and the culture of the Jewish girls' schools reflected larger social pressures for women's work to remain temporary, episodic, and always related to domesticity.

In addition to the confused purposes and pronouncements common to most providers of women's vocational education, the Jewish schools' development was further complicated by a number of issues unique to the Jewish experience. These included serious cultural and religious conflicts between the established Jewish community and the new immigrants; a nearly dichotomous notion of gender roles as played out through the processes of acculturation; and a divergent conception of class influenced by East European traditions. As sites where issues of gender, class, ethnicity, acculturation, and education all came together within a specific American Jewish immigrant setting, the Jewish girls' schools provide rich ground for the study of women's vocational education as it developed within a particular community.

The primary reason for the gradual demise of the Jewish girls' vocational schools was the newly emerging conception of women's work as complementary rather than in opposition to domesticity. Although the Clara de Hirsch Home and Hebrew Technical School succeeded admirably for a while in offering vocational education to a particular group of girls as a means of resolving the conflict between work and domesticity, once that conflict faded away in the face of new

social and economic roles for women, the *raison d'être* of the schools vanished. By the mid-1920s few educators or parents felt it as necessary to constrain women's desire for work by channeling it through gendered vocational education to domesticity. Although domestic life remained of paramount importance to most American families and the American Jewish community in particular continued to emphasize religious domesticity, domestic ideology had expanded to include women's work in ways unforeseen by the educators of the 1880s. The Jewish girls' vocational schools had adapted in some ways during the period of transition that began in the 1890s, but there was no way for them to adapt their fundamental commitment to supporting domestic ideology through vocational education once the parameters of domestic ideology changed so dramatically.

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NOTES:

1. "Established Jewish community" is used throughout this article to refer to Jews whose families had lived in the United States for at least a generation and were already at least partially acculturated to American social values. Many, though not all, of these Jews were descendants of immigrants from Central and Western Europe, particularly Germany; many, though not all, of these Jews were members of the upwardly mobile American middle class. "Immigrants" is used throughout this article to refer to Jews newly or recently arrived from Europe. Many, though not all, of these Jews originated in Eastern Europe; many, though not all, of these Jews were economically challenged members of the working class, although their upward mobility was also notable. Common providers of vocational education in Jewish communities included Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations, the National Council of Jewish Women, community centers like the Educational Alliance in New York, the Jewish Educational Alliance in Baltimore, the Chicago Hebrew Institute, and synagogue brotherhoods and sisterhoods.

2. For a comprehensive history of this struggle, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

3. Older histories of American Jewry tended to schematize the groups involved in intra-ethnic tension as "German Jews" versus "Russian Jews." More recent scholarship has amply demonstrated that the period between 1820 and 1924 was one of continual Jewish immigration to the United States, with successive generations of immigrants acculturating to various degrees and then expecting their successors to do likewise.

The length of time a Jew and his or her family had been in America was more important in determining his or her relationship to American society and Jewish newcomers than place of origin. For an accessible summary of the standard, "German versus Russian" historiography, see Gerald Sorin, "Mutual Contempt, Mutual Benefit: The Strained Encounter Between German and Eastern European Jews in America, 1880–1920," *American Jewish History* 71 (September 1978): 34–59. Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) provides a still valuable case study of the communal conflict in New York. An example of the historiographical shift may be found in Gerald Sorin's new treatment of Jews in America, *Traditions Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). The 1992 five-volume series on American Jewish history published by Johns Hopkins University Press in conjunction with the American Jewish Historical Society is a fine example of the newer, more nuanced thinking about the American Jewish experience.

4. John L. Rury, "Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women's Education in the United States, 1880–1930," *History of Education Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1984): 21–44; John L. Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870–1930* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); Jane Bernard Powers, *The "Girl Question" in Education: Vocational Education for Young Women in the Progressive Era* (London: Falmer, 1992); Nancy B. Sinkoff, "Educating for 'Proper' Jewish Womanhood: A Case Study in Domesticity and Vocational Training, 1897–1926," *American Jewish History* 77 (June 1988): 572–600; Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Saving Souls: The Vocational Training of American Jewish Women, 1880–1930," in Jeffrey S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael, eds., *An Inventory of Promise: Essays on American Jewish History in Honor of Moses Rischin* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1995); and Jenna Weissman Joselit, *Aspiring Women: A History of the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women* (New York: Jewish Foundation for Education of Women, 1996).

5. Minnie Dessau Louis (1841–1922) was the daughter of an established German Jewish family in Philadelphia and moved to New York after marrying businessman Albert H. Louis. She worked as a lecturer and district inspector for the New York Department of Education, but the bulk of her time was spent occupying a number of Jewish community positions, including vice president of the National Conference of Jewish Charities, field secretary of the Jewish Chautauqua Society, Sunday School teacher at Temple Emanu-El, and founding board member of the National Council of Jewish Women.

6. Report of the Louis Downtown Sabbath School December 3, 1880–June 8, 1881, Box 4, Jewish Foundation for Education of Women Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, New York (hereafter, JFEW).

7. Louis was one of the more outspoken denigrators of the new immigrant Jewish population. She circulated a poem encouraging members of the established Jewish community to participate in the Americanization movement. Opening with a negative depiction of East European Jewish immigrants—"To wear the yellow badge, the locks/The caftan-long, the low-bent head/To pocket unprovoked knocks/And shamble on in servile dread/'Tis not this to be a Jew,"—the poem's concluding stanza praised the new American model of a Jew: "Among the ranks of men to stand/Full noble with the noblest there/To aid the right in every land/With mind, with might, with heart, with prayer/This is the eternal Jew." Minnie D. Louis, quoted in Rischin, *The Promised City*, 100.

8. Report of the Louis Downtown Sabbath and Daily School, October 1886–June 1887, Box 4, JFEW. Joselit expands on the point that “the threat of female deviance... subtly informed the campaign for women’s industrial education.” Joselit, “Saving Souls,” 157.

9. All instruction took place in English, even at the price of losing students whose parents insisted on the use of Hebrew for prayers. Report of the Louis Downtown Sabbath School, October 1886–June 1887, Box 4, JFEW.

10. Minnie Louis left the Hebrew Technical School for Girls with plans to move to Chicago, probably to take up greater responsibilities for the National Council of Jewish Women, but ended up staying in New York. She was invited to early board meetings of the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, the school that brought her suggestion to life, and served as the first resident directress of the Clara de Hirsch Home in 1897 and 1898. Board Minutes, May 18, 1897, August 8, 1897, November 21, 1897, January 30, 1898, Box 1, Folder 1, Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls Collection, Record Group 6, Bittenwieser Library, 92nd Street Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association, New York (hereafter, CHH).

11. Annual Report of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, 1890-1891, Box 4, JFEW.

12. Oscar and Sarah Lavanburg Straus, members of the elite Jewish community in New York City, and Baroness Clara de Hirsch Gereuth, scion of an important European Jewish family of philanthropists, were the primary founders of the Clara de Hirsch Home. Baroness Gereuth first discussed the project with Sarah Straus during the latter’s trip to Paris in 1895. Baroness Clara de Hirsch Gereuth, Paris, to Mrs. Oscar Straus, New York, April 6, 1897, reproduced in Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Board Minutes, May 12, 1897, Box 1, Folder 1, CHH.

13. Straus visited other working girls’ homes in the United States both before the Clara de Hirsch Home first opened in 1897 and later in her role as board president. She was also instrumental in establishing a downtown facility, the Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls, in 1906. The Home for Immigrant Girls was one of several “receiving homes” set up in the United States to prevent immigrant girls from “falling into the hands of persons engaged in the white slave traffic” and, equally important, to “preserve the good name of Jewish women.” Baron de Hirsch Fund, New York, to Jewish Colonization Association, Paris, May 17, 1912, Baron de Hirsch Fund Papers, Box 16, I-80, American Jewish Historical Society (hereafter, AJHS). The Home for Working Girls made minimal financial contributions to the Home for Immigrant Girls, but the different purposes of the two institutions resulted in development along different lines, and the relationship between them was limited. Carrie Wise, New York, to Jewish Colonization Association, Paris, May 23, 1912, Baron de Hirsch Fund Papers, Box 16, I-80, AJHS. The Home for Immigrant Girls struggled financially throughout its existence, and in 1915 Sarah Straus helped reorganize it into the Hannah Lavanburg Home, named in honor of her mother. The Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls differed in kind from the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, as the former institution provided housing and aid to very new immigrants but not the vocational education or training offered by the latter institution. For this reason, the Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls does not figure in this study of vocational education.

14. The concept of Americanization was never monolithic. Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Role and Representation of Women*

(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 94-95, argues that there were at least three competing doctrines of Americanization. These included an insistence that immigrants abandon all their Old World mores and completely assimilate into American culture; a recognition that American society and culture would itself be transformed through the integration of assimilating immigrants; and a theory of cultural pluralism that viewed American society and culture as a federation of ethnicities retained by immigrants as aspects of their originating cultures.

15. It is worth pointing out that despite frequent expressions of contempt, the established Jewish community in America spent a great deal of time and money on providing a wide array of services for the new immigrants, including vocational education. For the gradual effect of Horace Kallen's model of cultural pluralism on Jewish community relations, see Ronald Kronish, "John Dewey and Horace M. Kallen on Cultural Pluralism: Their Impact on Jewish Education," *Jewish Social Studies* 44 (Spring 1982): 135-48.

16. Yezierska attended the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls under the name Hattie Mayer, the name given to her during the immigration process. See Louise Levitas Henriksen, *Anzia Yezierska: A Writer's Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 17. This biography, written by her daughter, is the single best source for details about Yezierska's life.

17. Anzia Yezierska, *Arrogant Beggar* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1927).

18. Anzia Yezierska, "How I Found America," in *Hungry Hearts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 281-82.

19. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Report of After Care Committee, October, 1919, Box 2, Folder 2, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Report of Follow Up Committee, November, 1916, Box 2, Folder 2, CHH.

20. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, 1898 Curriculum, Box 4, JFEW.

21. This attitude was not unique to Jewish women. For a discussion of other women philanthropists and their attitudes toward domestic service training, see David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

22. For the first few years the Clara de Hirsch Home also offered English classes to help future domestic servants improve their communication skills. "The purpose of the English class," Sarah Straus explained, "is to make the girls appreciate American ideas and institutions which can only be done through an understanding of the language. To give them such knowledge will make them work more intelligently and therefore better." Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, President's Report, 1899, Box 4, Folder 7, CHH. Sinkoff points out that the 1890 census showed that of the one hundred thousand German Jewish families in New York at the time, 40 percent of them had at least one servant. The preference of Jewish families to hire Jewish servants made the German Jewish ladies' "servant problem" a real issue. See Sinkoff, 575, 582-83.

23. The Institutional Report to the State of New York Board of Charities, December 1899, Box 4, Folder 5, CHH.

24. Report of the Louis Downtown Sabbath and Daily School, October 1886-June 1887, Box 4, JFEW.

25. Rose Lisner Sommerfeld (d. 1927) arrived in New York with several years of related experience at Daughters of Israel, a Baltimore home for Jewish working girls. She soon became a recognized authority on the subject of working girls and young

women's education, speaking frequently at National Council of Jewish Women and National Conference of Jewish Charities meetings. Sommerfeld's predecessor was the short-lived Miss Asche, whose six-month trial period began in June 1898, at one hundred dollars a month. See Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Board Minutes, June 28, 1898, Box 1, Folder 1, CHH. The resident directress or superintendent delivered a report at each board meeting and made almost all of the daily decisions concerning the school, but the middle-class Jewish women who held the purse strings also controlled the policy. As a result of board meetings, teachers' salaries were raised, money was allocated to install a laundry in the school's basement, and the curfew was set. The board also reported on the school's curricular successes, which in 1906 included millinery, hand-sewing, dressmaking, and machine operating as the most popular courses. See Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Board Minutes, March 17, 1905, January 19, 1906, November 23, 1906, Box 1, Folder 1, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, General Report, 1910, Box 1, Folder 19, CHH.

26. Rose Sommerfeld, "Twenty-Five Years in the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls," 1924, typescript with hand notations, Box 3, Folder 22, CHH.

27. Hannah B. Einstein, "How to Help the Unskilled Women With Children," *Jewish Charity* 3 (June 1904): 203; Willystine Goodsell, *The Education of Women: Its Social Background and Its Problems* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 110.

28. Rury, *Education and Women's Work*, 166. Merely establishing women's vocational schools proved difficult; in 1910 only twenty-six out of one hundred ninety-three trade schools in America served a female student body. Maxine Seller, "The Education of the Immigrant Woman, 1900-1935," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (May 1978): 313.

29. Powers, *The "Girl Question,"* 10.

30. Only thirty-seven girls graduated from the domestic service course between 1900 and 1902 despite the close to one hundred girls living at the school at the time. See Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, President's Report, 1899, Box 4, Folder 7, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, General Report, 1905, Box 1, Folder 19, CHH. Domestic service was never popular with Jewish women. In 1900 only 15 percent of the wage-earning daughters of Russian immigrants worked as domestic servants; by 1920 only 7 percent of Yiddish-speaking wage earners were domestic servants. Two-thirds of Jewish girls placed in domestic service jobs by agencies left their positions within a year for other work. Kathie Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women in New York, 1870-1924* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 163; Donna Gabbacia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, & Immigrant Life in the United States, 1820-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 47; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 127.

31. Sommerfeld claimed that for most Clara de Hirsch students, particularly the trainees who lived at the school, "coming to the Home is the turning point of their lives, which by reason of heredity and environment are not all they should be." In fact, Clara de Hirsch students were far more likely than Hebrew Technical School students to come from immigrant families suffering disease, desertion, and extreme poverty. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Superintendent's Report, 1900, Box 2, Folder 45, CHH; Rose Sommerfeld, "Trade Training and Conditions," in *Proceedings of the Sixth Triennial Convention of the Council of Jewish Women, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 11 to 19, 1911*, 274.

32. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Superintendent's Report, Summer 1917, Box 2, Folder 46, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Superintendent's Report, May 1918, Box 2, Folder 47, CHH.

33. Nathaniel L. Myers (1848–1921) was active in a number of Jewish institutions in New York after moving there from St. Louis in 1881. Although he was a lawyer by profession, he spent a great deal of time at the Hebrew Technical School for Girls. His obituary explained, "He was always interested in helping the less fortunate to help themselves, but his particular interest was for girls. He often said that there were hundreds interested in helping boys, but there were few to help girls to an education." His hands-on management style shaped the policies and practices of the school from the time of his first involvement in 1897 until his death. *New York Times*, August 31, 1921.

34. On the difference between vocational education for boys and girls, Myers commented, "A boy has some natural aptitude for entering commercial and industrial pursuits unaided; a girl has not. A boy has a very great variety of worthy vocations open to him; a girl has not." Quoted in Joselit, "Saving Souls," 163.

35. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, 1909, Vertical File, Jewish Museum of Maryland (hereafter, JMM).

36. In 1908, when the National Association for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NAPIE) called for the development of a comprehensive program of vocational education, the organization planned to equip young men to work after leaving school. Uncomfortable with helping young women achieve the same goal, as women's employment was largely perceived as a threat to the family, the NAPIE decided to work with the new American Home Economics Association (AHEA) to educate women for their proper jobs—caring for family and home. Commercial education was not part of the NAPIE/AHEA coalition's original program for either boys or girls. Powers, *The 'Girl Question,'* provides a detailed history of the eventual integration of commercial education into vocational training.

37. The balance of the students either did not supply their present occupations or were listed simply as "married." Hebrew Technical School for Girls, "Pupils who have Graduated from the Technical School since 1889, and their present occupations," 1897, Box 4, JFEW.

38. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, 1897, Box 4, JFEW; Jennie Franklin Purvin, "The Chicago Woman's Aid," *Jewish Charities* 5 (April 1915): 233.

39. After 1900 there were typically four times as many commercial students as manual students at the Hebrew Technical School for Girls. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Reports, Box 4, JFEW.

40. Just prior to World War I so many girls wanted to attend the school that entrance requirements involving literacy, family size and neediness, and "mental make-up" of the students had to be instituted to determine which of 1,759 applicants would receive one of the less than five hundred openings. Joselit, "Saving Souls," 167; transcript of interview with Regina Haas Lifton, February 25, 1989, Jewish Foundation for Education of Women, New York.

41. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, January 16, 1915, Box 3, Folder 11, JFEW.

42. Minnie D. Louis, "Mission-Work Among the Unenlightened Jews," in *Papers of the Jewish Women's Congress* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1893), 183; list of credentials for graduating from the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, 1920, Box 16, Folder 1, JFEW;

Hebrew Technical School for Girls Board Minutes, January 17, 1928, Box 2, Folder 1, JFEW lists five hundred twenty-eight out of six hundred twenty-two total students enrolled in the commercial track; "Hebrew Technical School for Girls," *Hebrew Standard*, April 5, 1907, 20; "Vocational Work for Jewish Girls: Annual Meeting of Hebrew Technical School for Girls," *American Hebrew*, January 26, 1914, 368. Louis had always intended the students trained by the Hebrew Technical School for Girls to be the salvation of their families. Not only the industrial skills, but also the middle-class refinement and values taught at the Hebrew Technical School could aid a graduate with a decent job and salary in becoming "the fairy godmother, who transplants the family from the odious tenement house to the inviting apartment of some pure-odored locality." See Minnie D. Louis, "The Industrial Education of Jewish Girls," *Hebrew Standard*, April 5, 1907, 34.

43. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, General Report, 1905, Box 1, Folder 19, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Board Minutes, February 20, 1903, Box 1, Folder 1, CHH.

44. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Superintendent's Report, Summer 1917, Box 2, Folder 46, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Superintendent's Report, May 1918, Box 2, Folder 47, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Education Committee Meeting Minutes, January 1917, February 1918, February 1919, February 1920, March 1921, February 1922, February 1923, February 1924, February 1925, February 1926, Box 2, Folder 10, CHH.

45. *The American Jewess*, January 1898, 208; Joselit, "Saving Souls," 163, 169; Joselit, *Aspiring Women*, 31.

46. First Annual Report of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, 1889–1890, Box 4, JFEW.

47. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Report of the Training and Education Committee, January 24, 1900, Box 2, Folder 40, CHH. The Training and Education Committee was one of several standing committees. Other important committees were the Finance, House, Building, Employment, and Executive Committees. They seem to have issued reports rather sporadically.

48. Mary Woolman, "Trade Schools and Culture," *Educational Review* 37 (February 1909): 184.

49. Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls, Report, 1904–1910, Box 4, Folder 13, CHH.

50. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, General Report, 1910, Box 1, Folder 19, CHH. Married Jewish women may not have remained in the waged labor force, but they often contributed to the family income in other ways, such as taking in boarders and doing homework. See Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985); Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*; Gabbacia, *From the Other Side*; Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Jewish Immigrant Experience in the United States," in Judith R. Baskin, ed., *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, 2d ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); and Sydney Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

51. Economic conditions for Jewish women in America were more familiar in many ways than they were for women of other ethnic groups. Restrictions and

prejudice had almost always barred Jews in Europe from farming or working the land, so Jewish women were already accustomed to involvement in the marketplace and found it more natural to join the labor force. Like married Italian women, though, married Jewish women were also far more likely to work at home. They contributed to the family economy by taking in boarders or doing industrial home or piecework. Paula E. Hyman, "Culture and Gender: Women in the Immigrant Jewish Community," in David Berger, ed., *The Legacy of Jewish Migration: 1881 and Beyond* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983), 158–59; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*; Judith E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900–1940* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 23–24; Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, 121–23; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 123–24; Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 135; Boris, *Home to Work*.

52. Single Jewish women in Europe entered the paid force to contribute to their parents' households and continued the pattern of adding to the family economy as wives by supplementing their nonwaged domestic labor with factory wages, petty commerce, and peddling. By the end of the nineteenth century, women and girls formed more than a third of the Jewish industrial labor force in Russia. Although it is unclear how often Jewish girls took advantage of the opportunity, or even if they were allowed to do so, some vocational education for girls was available even in Russia. Ten trade schools offering training in millinery, basket weaving, dressmaking, and occasionally salesmanship operated in various government localities. Charlotte Baum, "What Made Yetta Work? The Economic Role of Eastern European Jewish Women in the Family," *Response* 18 (Summer 1973): 32; Neil M. and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *Our Parents' Lives: The Americanization of Eastern European Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 53–57; Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, 60–61; Paula E. Hyman, "East European Jewish Women in an Age of Transition, 1880–1930"; Corinne Azen Krause, "Urbanization Without Victimization: Italian, Jewish, and Slavic Immigrant Women in Pittsburgh, 1900–1945," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (May 1978): 297; Emanuel Gamoran, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 194.

53. Although most East European Jewish men had neither the requisite talent nor education to be scholars, ideas about male scholarship combined with a strong family work ethic to create the competent businesswoman as the cultural ideal of East European Jewry. Ironically, the *maskilim*, or representatives of the Jewish Enlightenment, criticized female labor in the marketplace because they linked it to the traditional idea of male Torah scholar married to female breadwinner, an ideal they believed outdated if not actually perverse. As a consequence of the *maskilim's* great influence during the second half of the nineteenth century all over Europe, the more "enlightened" a Jewish family, the less likely the wife and mother to work. Gabbacia, *From the Other Side*, 19–20; Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 5–6; Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, 67–69.

54. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, January 16, 1915, Box 3, Folder 11, JFEW.

55. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, 1908, Box 4, JFEW. Myers lost no opportunity to demonstrate that the students themselves understood the relevance of their vocational training to their characters and future lives as wives and mothers. At the 1914 annual meeting, a letter from a grateful alumna was read, stating, "The education that I received at the Hebrew Technical School for Girls

enabled me to make many friends; it gave me the power of sending forth vibrations of joy to all those who needed encouragement. It helps me now in my position as the wife of a professional man, and mother of two children." "Vocation Work for Jewish Girls: Annual Meeting of Hebrew Technical School for Girls," *American Hebrew* (January 26, 1914).

56. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, January 16, 1915, Box 3, Folder 11, JFEW.

57. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Annual Report, January 16, 1915, Box 3, Folder 11, JFEW.

58. Gamoran, *Changing Practices in Education*, vii.

59. Paula Hyman has argued that the differences between gender models in the amorphous but distinct Jewish communities not only exacerbated the hostility between the groups, but also shaped their very processes of acculturation in America. The earlier Jewish model of acculturation was based on the degree of civic equality that Western European nations offered Jews from the early nineteenth century forward. Jews seeking social mobility and economic freedom accepted prescriptive middle-class gender roles as a means of acculturation into their host societies. The later Jewish model of acculturation emerged from the political and cultural environment of multiethnic East European countries that rejected any civic equality for Jews. Large populations of working-class East European Jews retained their communal identity through a Yiddish-dominated culture and more traditionally oriented religious observance. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, develops these points at length. See especially chapters 1 and 2 for discussion of the differences between the West and East European models of assimilation as they appeared in the American context.

60. Cloyd Heck Marvin, *Commercial Education in Secondary Schools* (New York: Holt, 1922), 64–67.

61. Mrs. G. E. Hoffman, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Lowenstein, New York, to Mrs. Josephine Rennau, New York, June 5, 1926, Box 1, Folder 6, CHH; Mrs. Ira Leo Bamberger, New York, to Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations, New York, May 1, 1927, Box 1, Folder 7, CHH; Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, Superintendent's Report, January 1930, Box 3, Folder 1, CHH; "History, etc—Clara de Hirsch Residence," photocopied typescript, 1953, in Box 3, Folder 22, CHH.

62. Adolph Lewisohn, New York, to Mrs. Jacob Wertheim, New York, February 18, 1928, photocopy, Box 1, Folder 1, JFEW.

63. Report of Hebrew Technical School for Girls Survey Committee, October 18, 1928, Box 1, Folder 1, JFEW.

64. Report of Hebrew Technical School for Girls Survey Committee, October 18, 1928, Box 1, Folder 1, JFEW.

65. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Board Minutes, October 19, 1928; transcript of interview with Ann Nierenberg, February 25, 1989, Jewish Foundation for Education of Women, New York.

66. Hebrew Technical School for Girls, Board Minutes, January 15, 1929, Box 2, Folder 1, JFEW; Joselit, *Aspiring Women*, 39–40; Jesse H. Newlon, "Report of a Study of the Hebrew Technical School," October 28, 1931, Box 4, Folder 1, JFEW. The pressure to close the Hebrew Technical School for Girls grew stronger in 1931 partly in reaction to the Jewish community's struggle to cope with the unprecedented relief demands occasioned by the Depression. When so many families were starving and without

work, it was imperative to identify the communal activities least necessary for survival, thus the emphasis on deciding whether or not the work of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls was redundant. See Beth S. Wenger, "Government Welfare and Jewish Communal Responsibility: The Evolution of Jewish Philanthropy in the Great Depression," in Jeffrey S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael, eds., *An Inventory of Promises: Essays on American Jewish History in Honor of Moses Rischin* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1995), 307–24.

67. Maxwell Steinhardt, New York, to Dr. William J. O'Shea, superintendent of schools, New York, January 5, 1932, photocopy, Box 1, Folder 2, JFEW. At various times the corporation was known as the Hebrew Technical School Scholarship Fund, the Educational Foundation for Jewish Girls, the Jewish Foundation for Education of Girls, and finally the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women.