The Baptism of Four Little Roxbury Girls: Jewish Angst in America’s Religious Marketplace During the Interwar Period

Zev Eleff

Philip Cowen experienced much in American Jewish life from his birth in 1853 to when he published his memoirs in 1932. His involvement began early on in 1879 when he helped found and edit a leading Jewish newspaper in New York. His participation continued long after that, especially as an advocate for Jewish émigrés from Eastern Europe. Curiously, as Cowen took the time to reflect and compare the early epochs of his life with the interwar period, he could not say which one was better for America’s Jews. “The whole pattern of life has changed, for the community as much as the individual,” he wrote. Cowen noted that “the few synagogues of my day have grown into many score” and “the simple communal bodies into a complex organization.” In his final assessment, Cowen conceded that American Jewish life was more complicated than it had been earlier in his life but would not go so far as to say that those new institutions and infrastructures truly made matters better for Jews.

Cowen’s indecisiveness reflects the lack of scholarly consensus on this matter. Historians disagree on how to interpret Jewish life in America in between the two world wars. Some evaluated the growth of Jewish organizations and improved socioeconomic standing and determined that Jews at that time felt “at home in America.” Other scholars, taking note of rising antisemitism and the American Jewish tendency to cluster in insulated religious communities instead of with people of other faiths, questioned the more optimistic historical analyses. Rather than prove either side more correct than the other, this paper seeks to show just how unsure American Jews were of their mercurial social standing in America at this juncture by looking at the reaction to missionary activity in urban Boston in which four Jewish girls were baptized. Unfortunately, we must tell this story with almost exclusively Jewish sources. No doubt, our accounts from the Boston Jewish community contain some exaggeration and overstatements. That no Christian newspaper reported...
on the controversy is both an interesting omission and a frustrating predicament for a researcher. No doubt, missionary records and documents would help to expand upon the relationship between Christian evangelists and their target audiences. Still, Jewish reactions to the affair more than adequately prepare us to analyze our subject and prove our point: namely, that outside forces often reminded American Jews that the very openness that persuaded Jews to immigrate to America could also make them vulnerable to uncomfortable forces and uneasy situations. The result of all this fostered a complicated relationship between Jews and the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The Background

In August 1938, Boston Jews were outraged by the news that a missionary had baptized four of their daughters. The exceptional degree of shock and the sincerity of the subsequent communal reaction bespoke the historical moment of that interwar era. The actual missionizing, on the other hand, was a longstanding reality for American Jews. Especially in the early twentieth century, evangelical efforts in the working-class neighborhoods of Roxbury and the West End were by no means without precedent or warning. On 11 January 1907, Rabbi Charles Fleischer of Boston's Temple Adath Israel cautioned, “They are after us again.” Christian missionary work in the United States exposed a more irritable side of the typically amiable leader of Temple Adath Israel in Boston. “Even in America,” he warned, “there must be a Jew-hunt.” The renowned and enraged Reform rabbi compared targeting American Jews for evangelizing to the situation overseas, where, Fleischer contended, “The good Christians like, now and then, to slay the bodies of a few Jews.”

American evangelicals would have disagreed. From their point of view, missions to Jews were forms of philosemitism and part of the “divine drama of salvation” for all of humanity. For that matter, few American Jews shared Fleischer’s dread of missionaries in this Promised Land of America. On occasion, Boston’s Jewish press wished aloud that missionaries would “stop this nonsense of soul-snatching.” More often, though, they left those matters alone. It was not that New England Jews were in accord with evangelicals. To the contrary. Boston Jewry viewed these activities as antisemitic disregard for Judaism as a valid religion. Most American Jews just did not consider missionaries a viable menace.
Common wisdom dictated that those religious fundamentalists lacked the requisite levels of “both common sense and refinement” to achieve much success with Boston’s Jews. As one Jewish leader put it, “the only salutary effect by such sensational missionary enterprises might be the further re-awakening of the Jewish conscience.” Boston Jews certainly had some appreciation for European Judaism’s long history with conversion to Christianity, particularly during the nineteenth century. Yet, to
their minds, Jewish conversion to Christianity was inspired by socioeconomic mobility rather than faith. Now in America, the successes of Jews like Jacob Schiff and Julius Rosenwald proved for many individuals that anyone could thrive regardless of religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{13}

Nevertheless, doomsayers like Fleischer continued to warn against Christian missions, with due cause. Evangelization of America’s Jews increased at the beginning of the twentieth century as millions of European Jews sailed across the Atlantic. Newly published literature tailored for those intimately familiar with the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud signaled the growth of the “missionary impulse” directed at Jews in the United States.\textsuperscript{14} In addition, those monitoring missions to Jews could not help but associate their rise with growing antisemitism in the United States after the lynching of Leo Frank in 1915.\textsuperscript{15} Missionary groups published inflated figures that estimated 150–200 Jewish converts to Protestantism per year during the century’s first few decades.\textsuperscript{16} That rate, though, was not high enough to alarm most American Jews. Moreover, that no American Jewish agency kept records of Jewish conversions to Christianity demonstrated just how unconcerned Jews were of the missionaries’ efforts.

Now and then, missionaries did raise considerable attention. In 1920, Jewish leaders felt that evangelism deserved an afternoon’s discussion at their eighth annual convention of the United Synagogue of America in Philadelphia. Yet, little, if any, momentum from that session carried forward.\textsuperscript{17} By the 1930s, one communal leader believed that “the existence of missionaries to the Jews seemed to have vanished with the period of mass immigration to America.”\textsuperscript{18} Even if this was an overstatement, it accurately reflected the impression of American Jews during the first half of the previous century.

Whether or not they were afraid of missionaries, most Jews interpreted their activities as antisemitism. Further, Jews did not distinguish between some evangelical missionaries who earnestly advocated for Zionism and Catholics ones whose pre-Second-Vatican-Council missionizing commonly slammed Zionists and portrayed Jewish ritual in more denigrating terms than did other Christians.\textsuperscript{19} But then again, Jews were more likely to focus their fear on forms of religious and racial antisemitism that sought to strip them of their right to live as authentic Americans. Consequently, the venom espoused by those such as Henry Ford
and Father Charles Coughlin in the 1920s and 1930s gave Jews amply more reason to be frightened. Due to their efforts, if American Jews once felt at home in America, that sentiment was no longer entirely warranted. Antisemitic acts that presupposed Judaism as a second-class religion and its adherents as second-class citizens were greatly disheartening. Precisely for this reason, Jews resented American Protestantism’s cultural hegemony during the interwar years. The so-called Goodwill Movement led non-Protestants to feel like outsiders within the American religious landscape. As a result, in densely Catholic areas, cardinals and priests encouraged their followers to separate themselves from other Christians. Jews were also very concerned. For example, Jews took umbrage at the editors of the Christian Century, America’s leading Protestant organ, for repeatedly urging Jews to become “real Americans” by way of conversion. Religious unease fostered a most untenable situation. Conversion was not a real consideration for the overwhelming majority of immigrants and their children. No matter how religiously observant they were (or were not), these Jews placed ultimate value on the religious and social freedoms they perceived that America offered. This was certainly the sentiment of Mary Antin, who explained that she could “not abide a missionary” during her teenage years in Boston. “That was the Jew in me, the European Jew,” she explained, “trained by the cruel centuries of his outcast existence to distrust any one who spoke of God by any other name.” Accordingly, the very culture that allowed for a religious marketplace in America was for Jews their license to remain Jewish. Conversion was rarely considered, precisely because Jews cherished the choices they could make in the realms of social, economic, and educational life as unabashed Jews.

Other options were also unsatisfying. When Jews chose to behave more like Christian insiders, their rabbis chastised them for selling their faith short. The example of Christmas is illustrative. One Ohio rabbi told a reporter that “like all rabbis,” he had “denounced with all the oratorical fervor and fury at my command this celebration of Christmas by my own people.” While that spiritual leader had come around to embrace the “Christmas-Jew,” most rabbis refused to tolerate the practice. Responding to his counterpart in Ohio, a rabbi from Maryland rejected any Jewish association with the December holiday, even if those “suffering spiritual hernia” claimed to observe it in fully secular terms. Jews’
swelling discomfort living in the Christian-dominated United States heightened their anxieties when confronted with other religious tribulations, even those that had hardly registered in prior decades. That was certainly the case in 1938, when missionary activity plunged Boston's Jewish community into panic. This episode is useful to explore one of Judaism's most contentious periods in Protestant America and, as we shall see, to simultaneously test Jews' ability to coexist in a culture that guaranteed unprecedented religious freedom.

**Maye Hatch and Roxbury’s Jews**

Boston was particularly ripe for a missionary controversy.²⁶ For decades, thousands of missionaries that targeted Jews preferred to operate in Boston over many other cities. The number of Jewish organizations in Manhattan ready and willing to protect Jewish causes was reason enough for hundreds of evangelicals to select Boston over New York and its millions of immigrant Jews. They also reckoned that the city’s Jewish foreigners were more vulnerable than other Jewish communities that featured more first and second generation American Jews.²⁷ Between 1880 and 1940, Boston was the site of more than 115 Christian missions to Jews. Most of their work focused on the city’s large immigrant population and its first-generation American children.²⁸ Immigrants inundated Boston’s Jewish community after 1900. Fewer than twenty thousand Eastern European Jews lived in Boston at the turn of the century. That figure doubled by 1915. Also telling, Boston hosted just twenty-one synagogues in 1905. Thirty years later that number had increased to more than fifty prayer houses.²⁹

Whether missionary Maye Hatch knew these statistics is unclear. In
truth, apart from her mission to Jews in Boston’s West End and the Roxbury area during the 1930s, just a few facts are known about Hatch. She was young—probably in her early thirties—unmarried, and a member of the Baptist Tremont Temple, although she personally eschewed denominational designations. In her missionary circles at the West End Community Center, Hatch was known as the “Jewish Worker,” having previously studied Judaism and familiarized herself with Yiddish at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.31

How aware the Jewish community was of Hatch’s missionizing is a matter of dispute. Some parents in the working-class neighborhoods of West End and Roxbury, where Hatch operated, were cognizant of the missionary’s evangelical intentions. But most, it seems, were oblivious.32 On the whole, Hatch’s missionizing was far more covert than that of the very public David Goldstein, a convert from Judaism whose Catholic Truth Guild was very active in Boston during the 1920s.33 Hatch was also far less noticeable than a certain “Father Smith,” whose proselytizing took place at the same time as Goldstein’s operations. In the case of Smith, Boston’s Bureau of Jewish Education was very involved in breaking up his missionary group, but it did so without fanfare. The bureau preferred to squash the threat stealthily, in hopes that problems like this kind would somehow just go away.34 In contrast to Goldstein and Smith, Hatch patiently developed relationships with urban Jewish girls (she did not get involved with Jewish boys). At this point, none of her programs broadcasted Christian teachings. She was well received, in part due to the limitations of Boston’s Hebrew schools. During the first decades of the century, hundreds of Jewish students enrolled in daily Hebrew school classes in addition to their public schooling. Many of those weekday classes lasted four hours and stretched into the evenings, when parents retired from their own lengthy workdays. In the wake of the Great Depression, however, Boston’s Hebrew schools could no longer afford to pay teachers to work long hours, and many schools experienced teacher shortages.35 For working-class Jews, this meant fewer opportunities to keep children occupied. Therefore, most Roxbury and West End families whose children attended Hatch’s after-school clubs from 1932–1938 were just happy that their daughters—Hatch claimed to have befriended about 150 Jewish girls during that time—had someone who cared about them.
Perhaps it was due to her methodical secretiveness that Hatch caused so much commotion in 1938. During the summer of that year, reporter Carl Alpert revealed her business in the pages of Boston's *Jewish Advocate*. Hatch's missionizing struck a sensitive cord for Alpert, who was a native son of Boston. He was educated in the Dorchester public schools, the local Hebrew Teachers' College, and, finally, at Boston University. Alpert joined the *Advocate*'s staff in 1935 and held the post of associate editor until he left for Washington, DC, in 1940. His crusade against Hatch formally began on 5 August 1938, when the following headline appeared across the front page of his newspaper:

**FOUR LITTLE ROXBURY JEWISH GIRLS BAPTIZED**

Alpert's exposé described Hatch's Nest, a girls' summer camp directed by Maye Hatch in Manomet, Massachusetts, a seaside village about fifty miles southwest of Boston. Thirteen children between the ages of eight and twelve attended Hatch's Nest that summer. This was not the first year that Hatch ran her camp, and several girls were repeat campers. Most of these youngsters hailed from working-class homes, and, consequently, their parents enthusiastically signed up their daughters for the very reasonable charge of $5 (roughly $78 in 2013) for a month's duration. One parent complained after news of Hatch went public that her family did not "get any help from the welfare." Without the funds to send her daughter to a Jewish camp or after-school clubs, this mother confessed that "Miss Hatch has been the only friend my daughter has had. She is the only person who took an interest in her."

In exchange for the inexpensive tuition, Hatch demanded that parents withhold from visiting their children to avoid the girls' getting homesick. Hatch also shielded herself by censoring the campers' letters to their families before they departed for Roxbury and the West End. Isolation permitted Hatch to indoctrinate the trusting girls, several of whom had attended her programs for four years. As the weeks went by, Hatch drilled into the girls that "unless they followed Jesus they were doomed to dreadful lives in this world and the next." Her tactics worked with at least a few of the girls. After the entire episode was through and they were pressed to discuss Hatch's religious lessons, some of the children vowed that no one could "remove Jesus from their hearts." One girl
told her mother that “you may whip me and you may beat me, but you can’t take Jesus from my heart.”

The parents were not the only credulous ones. The children had little time to consider the missionary’s methods. Although Hatch no longer kept her religious faith and evangelism hidden once they reached camp, she blended her missionizing into long days of swimming, singing, and other fun activities. In addition, she further distracted the girls by providing much more food than they were accustomed in their modest households. One girl could not eat much at the camp, explaining that “I ain’t used to it. At home we used to get only crackers and milk.” Hatch spared little expense in giving her Jewish campers a comfortable if not luxurious experience. The funds for Hatch’s au courant camping equipment and the idyllic campsite came from an elderly benefactor who fervently felt that Jews would someday see “that Jesus is their ‘Anointed One,’ and that a new superhuman race has begun in Him.” Aside from significant financial resources, Hatch made use of her Yiddish training to speak the language that most of her campers spoke at home.

Truth to tell, not all of the girls felt at ease around Hatch. Three of the girls fled from the camp after a week. These were the campers who would return to their cottages at night and complain that Hatch’s preaching was “not fair to our religion.” Hatch dismissed the runaways as “slackers,” “ungrateful,” and “difficult and naughty girls.” To prevent word of her missionizing from spreading, Hatch wrote to one girl’s parent, presuming “that they all have told you lies, but you can believe them or not, it doesn’t matter.” We cannot know what that mother believed, but whatever her determination, it was not enough for her to alert the community about Hatch. No one knew about the nature of Hatch’s Nest for another three weeks. In any case, the runaways were the exceptions. Most of the girls stayed and rarely if at all raised objections to the Christian teachings. “Miss Hatch asked the children if they wanted to hear about Jesus,” recalled one girl about the first evening at the camp. “The children didn’t say anything. Maybe because they were afraid and maybe because they wanted to hear about him.”

All this made many of the girls feel at ease with Hatch and, more important, unsuspecting of her ulterior motives. These circumstances eventuated the ritual baptism of four campers. This is how one of those children recalled that morning’s activity shortly after her return to her parents’ home in Boston:
Miss Hatch picked out four girls, including me, and asked us if we would like to be baptized. The other girls said yes, so I said yes, too. This was my second year at camp. The other three girls had been there before, also.

We were told that the baptism would take place at six o’clock in the morning when the sun rose. Next morning it was raining and there was no sun, but we went down to the beach. All the other girls came down to watch.

We wore our dresses and beach shoes. Miss Hatch was also wearing a dress. We kicked off our shoes and walked into the water up to our waists. The water was not very cold. We knew just what to do because Miss Hatch had told us everything ahead of time.

We folded our hands in front of us. Miss Hatch asked us about Jesus. I think she said, “Do you believe that Lord Jesus is the son of God?”

We all said yes. Then she took hold of our hands, held her arms behind us, and ducked us backwards in the water. The water got into my eyes. When we got up Miss Hatch wiped the water off my face with a handkerchief.

She had told us to be very serious, but I laughed when one of the girls was being ducked. It looked so funny.

While she was ducking us she said, I think it was: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.”

Then we all went back on the beach again and sang hymns. I don’t know if anybody else was baptized besides us four.

I’m sorry for what she taught me. I know it wasn’t right.  47

The next sequence of Hatch’s plot never materialized. The month-long session was at an end and the girls returned home to their Boston neighborhoods. Their vacancies made room for a new group of Jewish girls to attend Hatch’s second summer session. Several of the girls from the first crop returned home, militantly objecting to their parents’ Jewish way of life. These daughters passionately vowed to make their way back to Maye Hatch and her (as they understood it) more spirited religion. No longer stoked by Hatch, however, the girls’ fervor for Christianity cooled and vanished within a few days.  48 Other children, ones more confused than anything else, relayed to adults what had happened at Hatch’s camp. Now concerned, parents notified the Jewish Advocate.
At that point Alpert commenced “three solid weeks” of research and reporting. In his own words, “Day and night, all I did was dream and eat and sleep on the ‘Hatchery.’”

One week after Alpert’s exposé, Hatch agreed to an interview with the reporter. The journalist was pointed with his questions: “Now why do you do this work among Jewish children?” he asked. Hatch was equally candid in her reply. “I love the Jews,” she said. “I love the Jewish people and I want to do all I can for them. Jesus was a Jew, too. I want to bring into the lives of the Jewish people a truth, a great ideal, which was once offered to them, and which they rejected.” Alpert was unable to accept Hatch’s philosemitism as anything but a rejection of American Jewry’s right to worship freely. “You mean the belief that Jesus was the son of God?” he asked. “That’s it,” was all Hatch said in response.

Carl Alpert and the Boston Jewish Reaction

The editor’s numerous stories on Hatch generated wide discussion and prompted parents of that second group of campers to demand the return of their daughters. The Jewish community emptied Hatch’s Nest of all its campers by the middle of August. Parents arrived by bus to collect their children. Accompanying them was Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Known best as a preeminent scholar and educator, Soloveitchik was also extremely active in Boston Jewish politics during the 1930s, especially toward the end of that decade. He took his role in the Hatch affair seriously, refusing to indulge the missionary in one of her Bible riddles. As the girls boarded the departing bus, Hatch attempted to engage Soloveitchik in a debate over interpretation of the Bible. “This is

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not the time or place for such a discussion,” Soloveitchik responded dismissively. Instead, according to Alpert, Soloveitchik “gave Miss Hatch his address, inviting her to visit him at any time.”

On the return home, Soloveitchik asked about the girls’ welfare. The children were reportedly prepared by Hatch on how to respond: “Don’t talk to us,” one girl snapped. “We’re not going to tell you anything. Just wait till we get our hands on that Carl Alpert. He spoiled our good time.” The missionary’s influence waned soon enough, however. Hatch made several attempts to remain in contact with the children, but to little avail. To help with the girls’ transition and perhaps to keep them away from Hatch, the Associated Jewish Philanthropies of Boston arranged for the children to attend a nearby Jewish summer camp. The plan worked. One of the girls wrote to Alpert several weeks after Hatch’s Nest was shut down. “All and all we are having an enjoyable vacation and would love to extend it,” wrote the happy youngster. Regretful of how she and her friends had treated Soloveitchik, the writer asked Alpert to give “my love to the rabbi” and hoped that he “and the rabbi will come visit me this week.”

Aside from Alpert’s reporting, the *Jewish Advocate* attempted to shape public opinion through its editorial pages. The journalists’ initial fury raged against Boston’s Jewish institutions, specifically the synagogues. The newspaper called on rabbis to “tear down the synagogue doors” and permit “youth and enthusiasm” to “drive out of these buildings the dark, musty odors of decaying books that only septuagenarians pore over.” No matter the price, Alpert and his fellow editors declared, protection for the community’s youth was paramount. “Will it cost money to make over the basements into the club rooms? Then spend it! Will light, heat, janitor service, run into extra expense? Then spend it. The missionaries in our midst are spending that money, and are taking our own children from us.” The newspaper petulantly called for a doubling of Hebrew school enrollment and asked community leaders to take charge.

A week later, Alpert found a new target: Boston’s Christian establishment. His newspaper found it “impossible to conceive of genuine Christians condoning” Hatch’s work. The Jewish press hardly rejected Christianity’s place in what other scholars have described as America’s religious marketplace; competition, they believed, was a good thing for Americans and for strengthening Judaism in the United States. However,
piety peddlers needed to abide by certain ground rules. “If Christianity is to be offered as a religion it should be offered openly and without subterfuge,” contended the editors. “We have respect and admiration for religious folk who honestly believe that their religion offers the best spiritual comfort and attempt to convince others, openly, and aboveboard of this.” By contrast, American Jews could not countenance “those who work with innocent, defenseless, thoughtless little children, and instill in their impressionable minds ideas and concepts which are opposed to the faith of their parents, without once giving the parents an opportunity to determine whether they are agreeable or not.” In other words, Alpert’s newspaper accepted the terms of American religious life: for Judaism or any other religion to possess its considerable freedoms to worship and practice without limitation, there were risks that adherents may be solicited by other religious corporations. The Jewish Advocate accepted those conditions but requested that trade be regulated like any other transaction in the United States. The consumers, they stressed, must be capable of making the informed religious decision.

Boston’s Jews disagreed with this final point. The community was divided on who was to blame for the results of Hatch’s operations, but the vast majority was unwilling to point fingers at American Christians. Christian proselytizing was an unavoidable condition for a minority religious group like Jews, whether in Europe or in the United States. It was not a matter, then, of freely competing in the religious marketplace. Rather, as was the case for so long in Jewish history, Judaism was a minority religion, this time in Protestant America. Like their parents and grandparents before them, Boston Jews submitted that they could never fully trust their host country to conduct matters fairly. Instead, Jews needed to toughen up their own organizations to prevent conversion from the outside.

Given that reality, many leading Boston Jews upbraided the parents for not protecting their children. “The indifference of the parents, however, is appalling!” commented one outraged layperson. The head of a local Talmud Torah also aimed his crosshairs at the girls’ parents, faulting them for their lack of Jewish identity and religious observance. Similarly, the leader of the local Young Men’s Hebrew Association called on parents to affiliate with Jewish community centers. As well, a Conservative rabbi asked: “Will the Jewish parents now take advantage of this tragic lesson?
Will they awake to their Jewish duty and responsibility? Will they determine to give their children a Jewish education?”

Another Jewish Bostonian hoped that parents would learn from this episode by enrolling their “spiritually ‘dead-end’ youth” in Young Judaea and Young Israel youth programs.

Others asserted that the parents were culpable, not because they did not enroll their children in Jewish schools, but because they did not foster Jewish observance in their homes. Accordingly, the superintendent of Boston’s Bureau of Jewish Education promised to increase funds and programming at synagogues and Hebrew schools but cautioned that the real issue lay with a dearth of “real home influence.”

A leader of an Orthodox group lamented, “We cannot hope to insulate our children from Christian contacts” but “in our homes and through the influence of our example we can give our children positive Jewish values.”

Not everyone agreed that blame stopped with the girls’ parents. An officer at the Young Men’s Hebrew Association blamed the community and its leaders, who showed a “lack of interest” in the Roxbury neighborhood and pulled its institutions from that area.

Soloveitchik’s assessment of the ordeal ran along those lines. While he asked parents to be more circumspect with their children’s “recreational pattern,” he expressed greater disappointment in Boston’s educators. Soloveitchik begged them to “apply themselves more seriously to the task of supplying planned social and recreational endeavor on a broad scale” and to “strengthen their Jewish spiritual content.” Further, although he found the Christian threat “unscrupulous,” like so many other writers, Soloveitchik accepted that his was a minority faith in Protestant America. Jews needed to accept that point and figure out ways to protect themselves from religious assimilation and conversion.

Interestingly, as heated as the Hatch affair was for Boston’s Jews, the Jewish press beyond New England did not report it to their constituencies. Perhaps America’s Jewish journalists were too preoccupied with New Deal legislation and escalating tensions between Japan and Russia. Or, perhaps they heeded the advice of a highly syndicated editorial by the influential managing editor of Fortune magazine (a gentile), who urged Jews to avoid serving as “exponents of their group” to ensure that “an anti-Semitic movement could never arise” in the United States.

Whatever the case, two exceptional examples were the Yiddish Der Tog of New York and The Sentinel of Chicago. Like the consensus among
Boston Jews, these newspapers also understood that the “large lesson” of the episode was for Jewish parents, and not for Christian missionaries with sights on Jewish youngsters.⁷⁴

Certainly, the dearth of national coverage in the Jewish, Christian, and general presses did not prevent Boston Jews from taking stock of what had transpired.⁷⁵ Public meetings were held in the wake of the Hatch affair to raise awareness and fortify the community.⁷⁶ In effect, Boston Jews took the advice of their communal leaders, namely, to strengthen from within rather than push Christian intruders out, as Alpert and the Advocate suggested. More than a year later, Alpert returned to the affair to update his community. Hatch was “still in operation” but with severely “depleted influence.” The newspaper retreated from its prior position, its editors now content with Boston Jewry’s added religious security as a main defense against Christian interlopers. Thankfully, Alpert noted in his review of the Hatch chapter, a barrage of youth groups like Young Judaea, B’nai B’rith, and Young Israel “grasped the opportunity, so that today in the West End there is being reared a generation of young Jews who are learning to appreciate their own heritage and the values of their own people.”⁷⁷

The Aftermath of Baptism

As time went on, the Boston newspaper seldom reported on missionary activity in the area. That was not for a lack of news on that front, however.⁷⁸ Those in the know recognized that Boston’s Jews were powerless to respond with judicial action against evangelism. By 1946, the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) New England Regional Office, Boston’s leading agency to combat antisemitism, crafted a prepared, pithy statement to respond to letters complaining about “antisemitic” missionaries in their neighborhoods: Those missionaries “have the right to proselytize in any community.”⁷⁹ The ADL strengthened its rhetoric a few years later. In response to requests to shut down activities conducted by the American Board of Missions to the Jews, ADL officials offered language that bespoke its broader mission to protect all groups and religions in America: “Inasmuch as this is a proselytizing effort in a country in which freedom of religion is a basic doctrine, we feel that nothing more can be done in such a matter.”⁸⁰ Missions to Jews, they argued, were acts of philosemitism and not antisemitism, no matter how much it disturbed America’s Jews.

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The ADL grew more comfortable with this stance as Americans began to embrace their country’s so-called Judeo-Christian identity. The popular term emerged as a slogan for many invigorated Catholics and Jews in the post-World-War-II era who sought to widen America’s religious canopy and break up Protestant’s monopoly on American moral values. Eventually, Protestants embraced this sort of religious pluralism, too. Published in 1955, Will Herberg’s bestselling Protestant-Catholic-Jew served as something close to a religious creed for millions of Jews in America. Herberg, a well-known Jew and popular writer, did more than anyone else to create the impression that Judaism and its adherents were an impeachable part of American culture. The impact of this belief was transformative. Religious leaders preached inclusivity and beseeched congregants in the pews to forget past misgivings and consider commonalities instead. With these developments in American religion, the ADL’s refusal to take on any cases of missionary work became even more adamant. Now, fully convinced that Judaism had been inserted into American culture, Jewish leaders were very resistant to step in the way of anyone else’s religious freedom. The ADL’s leaders therefore defended their position in 1957 on the grounds that “America encourages religious freedom.” In addition, in this new era the Jewish press virtually never raised the issue of missionaries in connection with antisemitism.

At the outset of the 1960s, the ADL told one anti-missionary petitioner that “as long as we believe in the Constitution, we must give the various religious groups free opportunity to seek converts.” This was hardly a nod toward religious conversion. The ADL once again asked American Jews to reconsider their view of missionary work from the point of view of the evangelicals. If in the past, Jews had perceived attempts at conversion as a form of disrespect toward Judaism, the ADL entreated its constituents to perceive attempts at conversion—no matter how devious or underhanded—as a well-intentioned expression of philosemitism. At the very least, the ADL asked American Jews to understand that missionizing was a small negative consequence relative to the benefits brought about by religious pluralism. But Jewish membership in Judeo-Christian American society did not mean that Jews must act passively toward missionaries. Just as Boston Jews intuited when they faced off with Maye Hatch, the ADL recognized its community’s right
to defend itself internally. Toward the end of that final letter, the ADL executive offered a more sympathetic hope that his people’s institutional and educational defenses would yet persevere: “While what is said may be abhorrent to us, we must, I think, have enough faith in our wonderful creed to give us the strength not only to withstand these invitations to desert our faith but also to give the aggressors free rein to ‘peddle their wares.’”\footnote{87} His advice bespoke the curious nature of the American Jewish experience on the arena of religious pluralism. Drawing from various experiences, Jews have negotiated in the marketplace of American religion with hope in one hand and caution in the other.

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\section*{Notes}

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\footnote{2}{Philip Cowen, \textit{Memories of An American Jew} (New York: International Press, 1932), 15.}


\footnote{5}{For some of the earliest incidents, see Jonathan D. Sarna, “Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions,” \textit{Journal of American History} 68 (June 1981): 35–51.}


13See Naomi W. Cohen, Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 108.


15On this pivotal moment, see Steve Oney, And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

16Ariel, Evangelizing the Chosen People, 165.

17“Record of Events in 5680,” American Jewish Yearbook 22 (1920–1921): 143.


20For the most recent scholarship on Henry Ford’s contribution to American antisemitism, see Victoria Saker Woeste, Henry Ford’s War on Jews and the Legal Battle Against Hate Speech (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).


Kristen A. Petersen, “Contested Bodies and Souls: Immigrant Converts in Boston, 1890–1940,” in _Boston’s Histories: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. O’Connor_, ed. James M. O’Toole and David Quigley (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 144. However, Petersen points out, missionaries were more successful with women and men closer to their thirties.


Ibid.


For the individual names of the girls, see “List of Names of More Girls Who Worked With Miss Hatch,” _Jewish Advocate_ (12 August 1938): 5. Different articles report between thirteen and fifteen girls at Hatch’s camp. My figure is derived from the _Jewish Advocate’s_ latest tabulations in its coverage of the episode.


Ibid.


Ibid.

“Miss Hatch Was Our Only Friend, One Mother Says,” _Jewish Advocate_ (19 August 1938): 2.

Ibid.


Jacob, “Brave Little Girl.”


51 Most parents appreciated Alpert’s attention to the story, although one mother threatened to “come up here and break every window in the place” if the newspaper printed her daughter’s name. See “One Mother Proves Exception and Threatens Editor,” *Jewish Advocate* (12 August 1938): 2.


55 Alpert, “Parents Remove Last Group of Children.”

56 “Miss Hatch Still Keeps in Touch With Children.”

57 Alpert, “Parents Remove Last Group of Children.”


59 On declining support for the older sections of the Boston Jewish community at this time, see Gerald H. Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 211–214.


61 See also “For Parents Who Care,” *Jewish Advocate* (2 September 1938): 4.


69 Hurwich, “Must Recreate the Jewish Home.”


Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Challenge to Parents and Organizations,” *Jewish Advocate* (12 August 1938): 2. It is both interesting and understandable that Soloveitchik did not take the opportunity to push parents to consider the day school he founded just a year prior. On Soloveitchik’s Maimonides School, see Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston’s Maimonides School* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004).

Russell W. Davenport, “Does Anti-Semitism Exist in America?” *Jewish Exponent* (9 September 1938): 10. Davenport’s essay was published in major newspapers, such as the Philadelphia *Exponent*, above, as well as in newspapers in much smaller Jewish enclaves. See, for example, *Omaha Jewish Press* (9 September 1938): 3.


The editors recalled the event later as “one of the greatest news stories ever printed by the Advocate, and one of the finest services ever rendered by a Jewish newspaper to its community.” See Carl Alpert, “Dramatic Headlines of the Past Year Come to Life Again,” *Jewish Advocate* (23 September 1938): 8.


“Sequel,” *Jewish Advocate* (2 February 1940): 4. Hatch continued her focus on Jewish missionizing as late as 1957, when she served as editor of *Israel’s Friend*, a missionary pamphlet published by Tremont Temple Baptist Church in Boston. See copy of a November 1957 edition of that bulletin in Boston Jewish Community Council Activities I–123 Box 82, Folder 3, American Jewish Historical Society (hereafter AJHS), New England Archives, Boston, MA.

For several instances, see “Missionaries Spend More Than Jews,” *Jewish Advocate* (20 October 1939): 1; Leah M. Hurwich, “Missionaries in Roxbury-Dorchester,” *Jewish Advocate* (26 June 1942): 4; and “Curious Plea By Catholic Publication,” *Jewish Advocate* (17 July 1942): 1. An interesting case took place at Soloveitchik’s school in 1949. Then, a non-Jewish child (the first and last to attend) enrolled in Maimonides School’s kindergarten. The child was found out to be the daughter of a missionary. See School Committee of Maimonides Elementary School Minutes, 10 September 1949, Page 50, Maimonides School Archive, Brookline, MA.


Robert E. Segal to Leo Sadow, 8 March 1948, Boston Jewish Community Council Activities I–123 Box 82, Folder 3, AJHS, New England Archives, Boston, MA.


86 Robert E. Segal to Ethel Snyder, 9 May 1960, Boston Jewish Community Council Activities I–123 Box 82, Folder 3, AJHS, New England Archives, Boston, MA.

87 Ibid.