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BOSTON — WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

An Historical Perspective of the Boston Jewish Community

by

ISAAC M. FEIN

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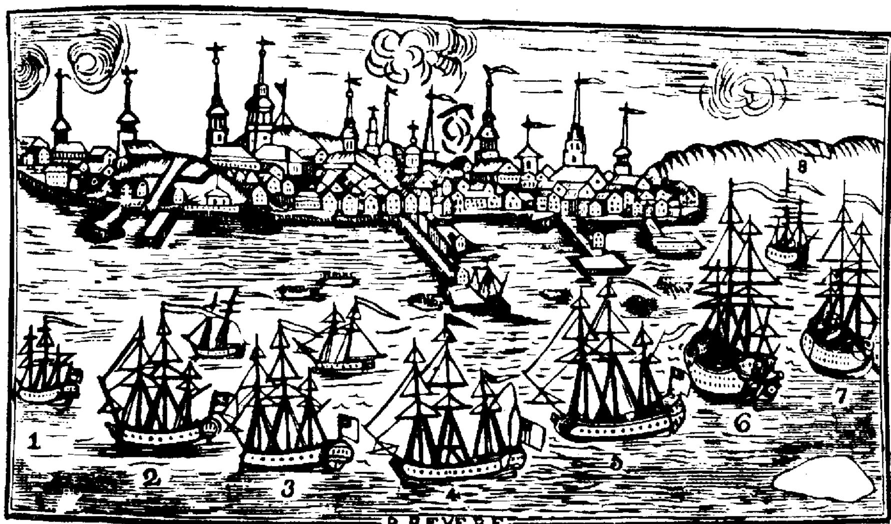

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Boston Jewish Bicentennial Committee
1976

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In Loving Memory of
Chaya

"Leaping across several centuries in time
as well as thousands of miles in space,
they left a seventeenth century pre-industrial,
Torah-regulated society for the twentieth
century machine culture of America.
The wonder is not that there was some friction,
but that there so was little."

Oscar Janowsky

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Preface

> "This town of Boston has become a Hell upon Earth, a city full of lies and murders and blasphemies, a dismal picture and emblem of Hell. Satan seems to take strange posession of it."

Thus wrote the eminent Boston divine, Cotton Mather (1663-1728), a religious fanatic, who was the chief instigator of the Witchcraft Trials.

Not so the Boston educational reformer and transcendental philosopher, Bronson Alcott (1790-1882), founder of the world-famed Temple School in Boston. Musing about his native city, he wrote:

> "There is a city in our world upon which the light of the sun of righteousness has risen . . . It is Boston."

The eminent poet and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), similarly believed in the greatness of his native town. Said Emerson:

> "Boston commands special attention as the town which was appointed by the destiny of nations to lead the civilization of North America."

Whatever Boston might have meant to different people at different times, there can be no dispute that this city was the cradle of both the United States and the organized American Jewish community. The Boston Tea Party in December, 1773 was a prelude to the shot fired on April 19, 1775, at Concord, the "shot heard round the world" with which the Revolution began.

In American Jewish history, too, Boston occupies a preeminent place. It was here that the first known Jew, one

Solomon Franco, landed in 1649, a full five years before the "first" 23 Jews landed in New Amsterdam (now New York) in 1654.

What is undoubtedly more important is that it was here that the American version of the old world Kahal (Jewish governing body), the *Federation of Jewish Charities* was born in 1895, an organizational pattern today commonplace wherever American Jews live.

What follows is a description of and reflections upon some of the important events in the life of Boston Jewry. It intends to be the biography of a Jewish community in the making. The accent is on the many, for it always was the "many" who struggled and built what their heirs now take for granted. Needless to say, there were outstanding leaders and some of those who made lasting contributions are dealt with in this essay.

Boston's vibrant Jewry presently has a considerable number of leaders of national and international repute. These, may they live and be active *biz hundert un tzvantzik,* (120, the proverbial age of Moses) are for obvious reasons, not mentioned by name.

This monograph is basically an attempt to examine historically two phases of Boston Jewish life, and for that matter, of American Jewry generally: the process of adjusting to the new country and eventually becoming Americans and more specifically Bostonians, and the process of retaining one's own identity and remaining concerned with local and national Jewish life and with the well-being of Jews the world over.

The godfathers of this essay are Ellsworth E. Rosen and Bernard Wax. It was their goading which broke down my resistance, and now that the work is completed, I am grateful to them for their endless urging: "Isaac, do it."

I am also grateful to Bernard (Bernie) Wax, Director of the American Jewish Historical Society, for reading the manuscript in its entirety and for making valuable suggestions.

Without Ellsworth (Al) Rosen there would be no photographs, which bring to life graphically what I was

trying to say with words. Al is also responsible for seeing this publication through print.

I am also grateful to the Jewish Bicentennial Committee of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Boston, and to the Hebrew Free Loan Society of Boston for making this publication possible.

The Boston Jewish community has achieved much. There is even more to achieve in the future. Pierre Samuel, the original DuPont, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson wrote: "We are but snails, and we have to climb the Andes. By God, then, let's climb."

Our sages said: "The day is short and there is so much to do."

This essay is dedicated to the doers of yesteryear, to those of our day, and to our children and children's children who will DO, and strengthen even further a strong Jewish community in Boston.

200th Independence Day
July 4, 1976
Boston, Massachusetts

Isaac M. Fein

Chapter I
The Pioneering Age

The First Jew in Boston

The basic rule is, or ought to be, that one is not to be considered a Jew unless there is hard evidence for it. Surely, the name of an individual is not sufficient to make a judgment one way or another, particularly in Puritan New England, where Biblical names like Abram, Sarah and even Israel were common.

However, there can be no doubt that Solomon Franco, who came to Boston in 1649 in charge of cargo assigned to the Major General of the Colony Edward Gibbons, was a Jew. He sued the General who refused to pay him the commission which he believed was due him. The "Great and General Court" disallowed Franco's claim. More than that, it decided to "allow the said Solomon Franco, the Ye Jew, six shillings per week out of the treasury for ten weeks for his subsistence till he could get his passage into Holland." In other words, the first known Jew to come to Boston was ordered to leave. To be sure, this order had nothing to do with Franco's religion. Jew or no Jew, if one was not a Puritan, he was not wanted.

The Puritans - A Closed Society

In 1607-8, a number of Separatists or Puritan secessionists from the Church of England fled from religious persecution in their homeland. They left for Holland where they enjoyed religious freedom. However, there arose other problems. It was difficult to eke out a living. But what worried the Puritans in Holland even more was the fear so common to

minorities, the fear of assimilation of their children. In the words of their leader William Bradford, later the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

> "That which is most lamentable, and, of all sorrows, most heavy to be borne, that many of (the) children . . . were drawn away by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous course, getting the reins off their necks and departing from their parents."

The fear of their future in a foreign country caused them to seek refuge in the New World across the ocean, where they hoped to create a new society based on their beliefs. On September 16, 1620, a total of 102 people boarded the small but sturdy ship "Mayflower." Their destination was Virginia, but due to stormy weather they landed in Plymouth.

It was there and then, before landing, that they drew up the famous "Mayflower Compact," which foreshadowed the independence which was to be their descendants' about 150 years later. In this Compact, they stated that they would "use their own liberty . . . none had power to command them."

In spite of the hardships of the first winter, which only 50 of the original 102 survived, other Puritans followed and, by 1634, there were about 10,000 of them in New England. In 1630, they established the Massachusetts Bay Colony as well as the City of Boston.

The rugged wilderness of New England was in need of this kind of hard working people. They lived by the maxim: "An hour's idleness is as bad as an hour's drunkenness," and they succeeded in subduing the wilderness. In those early, very difficult years, the entire community - all members of parishes - participated in all decisions. The town hall meetings established democracy in daily practice.

The fear of assimilation and fear of strangers did, however, also prevail in the new country where there was no one to set "evil examples" for them. Hardly a year passed following the establishment of the Colony before an order was issued that "no one could become a free man who was not a member of an approved Puritan Church." More than that, even the right of residence was denied to strangers.

Such who dared to come were "warned out." Boston, as all of the colony was to be, indeed became a committed and homogeneous community. Even as late as 1689, New England was described as a place of "a very home-bred people . . . exceedingly wedded to their own way."

It was, of course, much more bigoted in the earlier years. A man like Roger Williams, who, since his arrival in 1631, preached freedom of opinion and belief, was, naturally, considered one of the "False Brethren." In 1635, the General Court banished him from the colony. The plan was to ship him to England, but Williams fled to what later became Providence, Rhode Island.

A similar fate was in store for Mrs. Anne Hutchinson who committed the "crime" of holding meetings in her house during which matters of religion were discussed. She was found guilty of "disrupting the peace of the Commonwealth and the churches," and was banished in 1637.

On the positive side, one should remember that it was the Puritans who established the principle of compulsory elementary education. By a law of 1642, each town of fifty householders "should at once appoint a teacher of reading and writing and provide for his wages." And even a few years earlier, in 1636, the first college to train "learned clergy" was organized. Since 1638, it has borne the name of its benefactor John Harvard.

Whatever their mode of life, the outstanding characteristic of the Puritans was their intolerance to strangers. They did not even shun the burning of Quakers.

It is no wonder that "strangers," that is, non-Puritans, avoided the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The Puritans and the Jews

Of all "strangers," Jews occupied a special position. The Bible was the handbook of the Puritans and every event in their lives they related to the Israel of old. Speaking of their new home, which to them was Canaan, one Puritan leader,

Edward Johnson wrote, "The noble acts of Jehovah wrought his Israel redeem. Surely, this second work of his shall far more glorious seem." No wonder they adopted a code of laws based explicitly on the five books of Moses, which to them were "immutable and perpetual." The Bible was sacred and so was the language in which it was written. The first book printed in America (1640) was the Bay Psalm Book, translated from the original Hebrew. In the preface there were several Hebrew words in crude Hebrew type.

William Bradford, one of the original 102 of the Mayflower, expressed his sentiments toward Hebrew when he wrote:

> ". . . I have had a longing desire to see with my own eyes, something of that most ancient language, and holy tongue, in which the Law and Oracles of God were written, and in which God and angels spoke to the holy patriarchs of old time . . ."

All of this had no bearing on living Jews. They were not equated with the Hebrews of old. And though in the words of their leader John Winthrop: "The God of Israel (is) among us," Jews were treated, that is mistreated, as were the Catholics and Quakers.

As time passed, the attitude to "strangers" on the part of the general population, albeit not that of the clergy, underwent a change. The burning of four Quakers in Boston spelled the end of the power of clerics. Public resentment was strengthened by a royal order to end religious persecutions. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, which was a triumph of parliamentary authority over the "divine right" of kings had its counterpart in the colonies.

According to the new charter granted to Massachusetts, membership in the Congregational Church ceased to be a prerequisite for franchise. This is not to say that religious equality was established in the colony. Far from it. Catholics were still forbidden to hold religious services. As for Jews, they were simply overlooked. This was not a result of animosity, but rather demography. Their number was so

small that they were of no concern to the lawmakers. After all, at the time of the Revolution, there were no more than a couple of thousand Jews in all of the new-born United States.

For a long time Jews avoided the Colony generally and Boston specifically. Even as late as 1762, one Isaac Moses was "warned out" of Boston. This Isaac Moses became a well-known Revolutionary and a leader of the New York Chamber of Commerce.

Other Early Jews in Boston

There were a few Jews who somehow managed to live in Boston. According to offical records their number was extremely limited. One gets the definite feeling that Boston was not yet on the map of the small American Jewish community, and it remained this way for a long time, as a matter of fact until the middle of the 19th century.

Who were the few whose names appear in official records? The first who lived in Boston after Solomon Franco was "warned out" in 1649, was one Solomon. As in most cases, we know about this Jew thanks to court records. Solomon was arrested on a Sunday in the year 1668. The "crime": he travelled on Sunday. The record is not clear about the punishment meted out to him. What is clear is that Solomon was, according to court records, of all things, a "Malata Jew."

Then, there was one Rowland Gideon. He is listed in the earliest extant tax list of Boston. Alongside his name appear the words: "Ye Jew." Gideon appeared in court, demanded justice and reminded the court that God has commanded "our Father (Moses) that the same Law should be for the stranger and sojourner as for the Israelites" and predicted "you may see further (here) fathers of this scattered Nation."

There were a few other Jews, whose accomplishments were minor. There was, however, one exception worthy of greater detail.

102 דִקְדּוּק N.º 271.

לְשׁוֹן עִבְרִית

DICKDOOK LESHON GNEBREET.

A

GRAMMAR

OF THE

Hebrew Tongue,

BEING

An ESSAY

To bring the Hebrew Grammar into English,

to Facilitate the

INSTRUCTION

Of all thoſe who are deſirous of acquiring a clear Idea of this

Primitive Tongue

by their own Studies;

In order to their more diſtinct Acquaintance with the Sacred Oracles of the Old Teſtament, according to the Original. And Publiſhed more eſpecially for the Uſe of the STUDENTS of *HARVARD-COLLEGE* at *Cambridge*, in New-England.

נִחְבַּר וְהוּגַת בְּעִיּוּן נִמְרָץ עַל יְדֵי

יְהוּדָה מוֹנִישׁ

Compoſed and accurately Corrected,

By JUDAH MONIS, *M. A.*

BOSTON, N. E.

Printed by Jonas Green, and are to be Sold by the AUTHOR at his Houſe in *Cambridge*. MDCCXXXV.

First Hebrew grammar in America published in 1735.

Conversion - The Price for a Teaching Position at Harvard

This exception was a Jew in the early 18th century who became quite prominent, but did not reflect much honor upon Jewry. Born in Italy in 1683, Judah Monis wandered through Europe, lived in Jamaica, was a merchant in New York and finally settled in Cambridge, where he combined peddling with, of all things, the writing of a Hebrew grammar. On June 19, 1720, Monis submitted his manuscript to Harvard College. His work was well received and a degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon him. Thus, he became the first Jew to receive a college degree in America, although his grammar was "full of grammatical mistakes from the title page to end," as a more contemporary Harvard scholar, Prof. Harry A. Wolfson pointed out.

Enter a few Christian ministers and their most prominent leader, Increase Mather (1639-1723), whose hope, and that of his son Cotton Mather (1663-1728), was to be "blessed" by converting a Jew to the "true faith." The father prayed:

> "This day from the dust where I lay prostrate before the Lord, I turned up my cries for the conversion of the Jewish nation and for my own . . . happiness at some time or other to baptize a Jew."

The son prayed that he may "make ready the Jewish people for the Lord." Increase Mather, who in Monis' period served as president of Harvard College, his son and a few of their friends, "befriended" Monis. The result of this "friendship" was what they had intended it to be. In 1722, "Rabbi" (no less) Monis was converted in the Common Hall of Harvard before "as numerous an assembly as the place could admit." Upon his conversion he was appointed instructor of Hebrew, a post he occupied for nearly 40 years. His grammar, published in 1735, was the first work if its kind in America.

Writing about this affair, Hannah Adams in her *History of the Jews,* (Boston, 1810) says, "Before he (Monis) could be admitted (to teach) it was rendered necessary by the statutes that he change his religion." Monis paid the high price,

married a gentile woman, lived as a true Christian, although all his life he observed the Sabbath on Saturday. In the manner characteristic of converts of all ages, Monis too propagated his new "True Faith." The epitaph on his tombstone in Northborough reflects his life:

A native branch of Jacob see
Which once from off its olive broke,
Regrafted from the living tree,
Of the surviving sap partook.

The Revolution and Jewish Equality

The American Revolution was much more than a political struggle. It produced a social document according to which equality was declared a natural law, the inalienable right of all.

The victory brought about more openness, more acceptance, naturally causing more immigrants to settle in this new Boston, a city much friendlier to outsiders. In the decade from 1821-31 a little over 11,000 people came. In the next decade, the figure more than doubled (over 28,000) and in the 1840's, the years of an increased Jewish immigration, the astronomical number of nearly 150,000 people settled in Boston. The majority of them were Irish, but 750 of those who came in the 1840's were from Germany and among these were a couple hundred Jews.

One must remember that while the Constitution proclaimed equality for all, the States did not. The problem of rights, which still plagues America is as old as the country itself. One example: While according to the Federal Constituition a Jew could be elected as "Chief Magistrate" of the country, Jews were barred from offices of trust in many states. It was a full century after the American Revolution before New Hampshire granted Jews equality in 1876.

To come closer home, Massachusetts' first State

constitution was adopted in 1780, a full nine years before the Federal constitution (1789). The document must be considered as liberal, since it gave equality to all Christians in the Commonwealth. No longer were there any restrictions placed upon "Papists" (Catholics), Quakers, or other Christian dissenters. Chapter VI, Article 1 of this document required the following oath of high government officials: "I . . . do declare that I believe in the Christian religion and have a firm persuasion of its truth." There was no provision made in the document for or against Jews. Most likely the absence, or the very small number of Jews in the state, brought about their neglect.

The form of the oath was changed by a Constitutional Convention in 1821. It did away with belief in Christianity as a condition for election to an office of trust. All it demanded was a declaration of allegiance to the State. It read: "I do solemnly swear that I shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and will support the constitution thereof. So help me God."

To be sure, the change was not made in order to accomodate the Jews of the state. There were still so few that the legislators could hardly be concerned with them. The entire tenor of debate deals with one's being a loyal citizen rather than other qualifications. Delegate Prince of Boston was the only one who used the word "Jew." His main point was: "Whether Jew or Gentile . . . ought not to require from his fellow man other and greater qualifications for an earthly office than is required from him, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice, for an admission into the Society of just men . . ."

While there was some opposition to any change, the new provision was adopted, however, on December 8, 1821. Although Jews were not the subject of debate, they were beneficiaries. The door was opened, if only on paper, for them to occupy the highest position in the Commonwealth. Practically, for the time being, it made no difference since there were hardly any Jews permanently residing in the state. There were only stray Jews coming and leaving.

Moses Michael Hays (1729-1805)
The First Permanent Jews in Boston

The most important of the founding fathers of Boston Jewry was Moses Michael Hays, who was eulogized in the Boston Bicentennial (1830) in true New England fashion with a Biblical quotation, as a man who "walked abroad fearing no man, but loving all," (Deut. 3:16).

Hays was a native American, born in New York in 1739 where he became a watchmaker. In his second home, Newport, R.I. he became a small merchant and while there, had a brush with the law in which he showed himself to be a proud Jew.

In June 1775, Hays along with others in Newport, subscribed to the declaration of loyalty to the Revolutionary cause. However, shortly thereafter he was summoned together with 76 Newporters suspected of being "enemical to the United Colonies in America." The 77 "suspects" were asked to sign a new declaration. Hays refused, demanding a confrontation with his accusers. He took this opportunity to express his grievances as a Jew, stating: "I am an Israelite and am not allowed the liberty to vote, or voice in common with the rest of the voters . . ." Finally, he yielded and swore "to heartfully assist in the defense of the United Colonies."

When Newport was captured by the British, Hays, like many of the city's Jews, fled. He spent six years in Philadelphia and in 1782, he came to a reduced and impoverished Boston. The population had fallen from 20,000 to 12,000, and commerce was considerably diminished, which for some was a blessing in disguise. The wealthy merchants who sided with the Tories left when Boston fell into the hands of the Revolutionaries, thereby offering opportunities to able, if poor, entrepreneurs. Hays was just the right type in the right place at the right time, becoming a leader in various important commercial enterprises.

In time, Hays became a wealthy man and entered Boston's "society." His home was frequented by high officials, including U.S. Senator Harrison Gray Otis, and other leading citizens. In 1768 he was appointed Deputy Inspector General

of Masonry for North America and for four years, (1788-1792) he served as Grand Master of one of the Masonic lodges in Massachusetts, with Paul Revere serving as his deputy. Hays' portrait, a copy of the original by Gilbert Stuart, is in the Masonic Temple in Boston. He was a benefactor of Harvard and an active member in a number of civic enterprises. When needed, he supported unpopular causes, which to him seemed just. At one time, he was the leader of 39 citizens who demanded the repeal of an Act of 1750 which banned theater in Boston as a "source of immorality." The case was won on October 8, 1791.

Old prejudices, however, lingered. A "society" friend of Hays who described him in pleasing terms did not forget to mention that his friend was the head of "one family of the despised children of Israel."

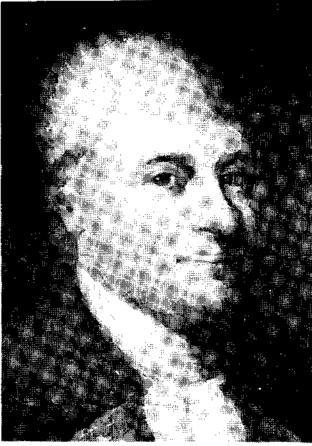
Moses Michael Hays did not have to be reminded that he was a Jew, for he was known as one who lived in accordance with the precepts of his religion, a forerunner of the American Jew who felt strongly about both integration and integrity.

In his "Memoirs" (Boston, 1874) Reverend Samuel Joseph May gave an admirable picture of the Hays household.

> "His house far down on Hanover Street, then one of the fashionable streets of the town, was the abode of hospitality, and, his family moved in what were then the first circles of society. He and his truly good wife were hospitable, not to the rich alone, but also to the poor. Many indigent families were fed pretty regularly from his table . . . Always on Saturday he expected a number of friends to dine with him."

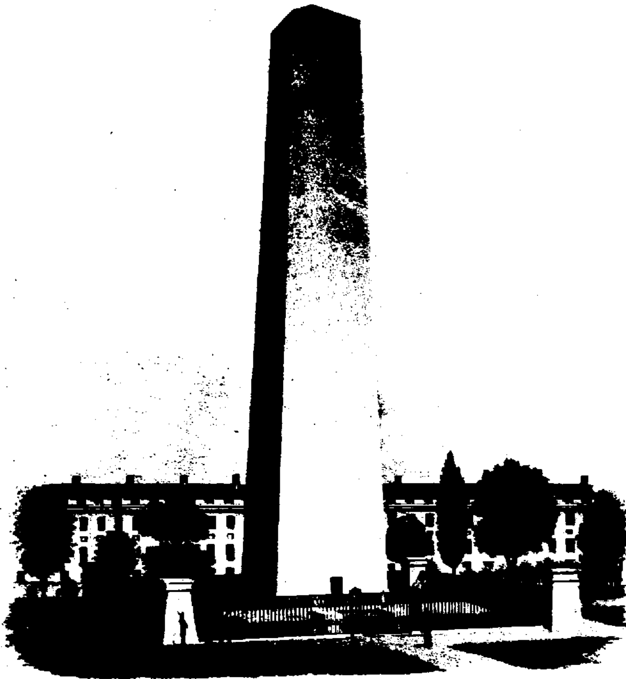
May further relates:

> "I was permitted to stay with them (the Hayses) several days, and even weeks . . . I was the child of Christian parents, and they took special pains that I should lose nothing of religious training so long as I was permitted to abide with them . . . I witnessed their religious exercises, their fasting and their prayers . . . of course, I grew up without prejudices against Jews, or any other religionists."



Moses Michael Hays

Judah Touro



Bunker Hill Monument

There is additional evidence of Hays' close ties to Judaism. Among the items listed in his will were twenty Hebrew books, a rarity for those days. Five of the books, only recently located, are the Five Books of Moses. What were the others? It is a reasonable assumption that these were *siddurim* (prayer books). It is also quite reasonable to assume that there was a *minyan* (prayer service of at least 10 men) held in his residence.

Perhaps the student who was permitted by Harvard "to attend services in Boston" in 1804 prayed in Hays' home. Where else would Hays' nephews, Abraham and Judah Touro, pray if not their uncle's home? Did Abraham Touro allude to this when he requested the Selectmen in 1816 that he be recorded as Jewish and that he "belonged to a synagogue of the Jews?"

Hays died in 1805 and like other Jews was buried in Newport. His son Judah was also active in general communal affairs. In 1805, he was elected fire warden of the city, in those days a position of importance. And much more importantly, he was one of the founders of the Boston Athenaeum, the first library association in the country. Like his father, his remains lie in the family plot at the Newport Jewish cemetery.

The Touro Brothers, Abraham and Judah

Among the early Jewish settlers, the most prominent were Hays' nephews, the two brothers; Abraham (1774-1882) and Judah Touro (1775-1854).

Abraham, a wealthy man, bequeathed $50,000 to various institutions. His portrait is hung in the Massachusetts General Hospital to which he left $10,000. Similarly, a tablet in the Newport synagogue to which he left $10,000, is a memorial to him.

The most complex of all the early Boston Jews was, no doubt, Judah Touro. Three cities claim him, Newport, where he was born in 1775; Boston, where he lived in the formative years of his life from 1783 until 1803; and New Orleans, where he lived from 1803 until his death in 1854.

In 1839 Touro matched a contribution of $10,000 by Amos Lawrence which made possible the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument in Chelsea.

It is interesting to note the change of attitude toward Jews in Boston which found its expression on the occasion of the celebration of the completion of the Monument. A poem attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes about Amos Lawrence and Judah Touro reads:

> 'Amos and Judah - venerable names . . .
> For though of different faiths . . .
> Each is in heart of man.'

Touro was for many years known as a great benefactor of churches and general charitable organizations and had nothing to do with Jewish institutions. Until the last years of his life, he didn't even join the only synagogue in New Orleans. Then, incomprehensibly, he came under the influence of a committed Jew, a leader of New Orleans Jewry, one Rabbi Gershom Kursheedt.

Under Kursheedt's spell, Touro began to show interest in Jewish life. Touro was a very difficult man and Kursheedt characterized him as a "crab whose progress (to use a paradox) is usually backwards." He was "exhausted" with Touro whom he had "to humor, or in one instance all may be lost." He knew, however, that much was at stake and conscientious man that he was, Kursheedt did his best, even when he was deeply hurt, to please Touro in the hope of getting aid for Jewish causes. All of this paid off.

In 1850, Touro presented the Jewish community of New Orleans with a synagogue, and in the last years of his life, he contributed $20,000 to the Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York.

Touro's will bears testimony of the formerly estranged Jew to things Jewish. While he left, as was to be expected, a substantial sum ($148,000) for Christian and non-sectarian institutions, he also left an even larger sum for different Jewish causes. Boston, naturally, was a beneficiary. Five thousand dollars was assigned to the Orphan Asylum, while

Massachusetts Female Hospital was a recipient of $10,000. There were at that time only two small congregations in the city, both with the same name, Ohabei Shalom. Touro's will provided $5,000 to Ohabei Shalom.

Touro, or rather Kursheedt, also did not forget world Jewry. He left $60,000 "to ameliorate the condition of our unfortunate Jewish brethren in the Holy Land." The executor of this part of the will was to be Sir Moses Montefiore. The money was used to build a number of homes in the first Jewish suburb outside the wall of the Old City of Jerusalem, the district which is known today as Mazkeret Moshe - Remembrance of Moses (Montefiore).

In death, Judah Touro served as a precursor of Jewish donors in this country, concerned about the welfare of the community and the country in which they live, yet ready to help Jews all over the world.

The First Jewish Cemetery

Most often whenever Jews came to settle, their first preoccupation was with the establishment of a burial place. The organization of a synagogue could wait since people could pray in private homes. But a burial place couldn't be delayed, and a Jew then, no matter how irreligious, wanted to be buried among his own. Boston was no exception to this rule. The first cemetery began as early as 1733, when there were very few Jews in the city. It is not known whether it started because of an immediate need or with an eye to the future. The records show that on February 22, 1733 two Jews, Michael Asher and Isaac Solomon, partners in a tobacco enterprise, bought a lot (now 15 and 17 Chambers Street), setting aside a section of this lot, 100 square feet, as a burying ground for the use by the "Jewish Nation" (a common appellation in those days.) There is no definite proof that it was ever used, although it remained intact until 1790.

All in all, it was a very humble beginning of what was to become in later years a flourishing Jewish community.

For the Journal.

THE JEWS' SYNAGOGUE, BOSTON.

MR. EDITOR:—I was informed this morning by a son of Abraham, that it was the "feast of trumpets" to-day, and was invited to accompany him to the synagogue. I was much surprised to learn that there was a synagogue in our city, for I have long felt great interest in, love to, and respect for *the ancient nation*—so interesting in their history; so wonderful in their preservation; so extraordinary in their present existence, yet until recently I have known but two Jews in Boston.

Their synagogue I found like that which we Christians were forced to use in their holy city, and within view of their glorious temple—viz.: "an upper room." It was *sad* to see the change—how truly "Ichabod" is written on all that belongs to them—yet it was *joyful* to reflect that this broken down, scattered, scathed nation, live now as distinctly, as really, as they did in the days, and amidst the glory of Solomon. Jesus seems to have said to that people, as they drove him from among them by crucifixion, "Tarry thou till I come," and they cannot die, they must exist, and they remain this day as numerous as when expiring he said "It is finished."

The service was performed with more solemnity, earnestness and apparent devotion, than I have seen in a far better synagogue. I was surprised that so many (there were about forty present) could read the Hebrew so fluently, and in most cases with a good degree of understanding, as appeared from their manner. Every man took a part in the service, and there was far more voice used than is often heard in the beautiful responsive service at Trinity or St. Paul's. They did seem to "lift up their voices to God with one accord," and I hoped their hearts to. But alas! they have not a comfortable or decent place for the performance of that service which thousands of years ago swelled through the arches of Solomon's Temple, and the object of my communication is to ask if we cannot in some way aid them to a synagogue?

Let it not be said they are opposed to Christianity, and *therefore* to aid them would be to aid opposition.—One great fault of the Jews in our country, is that they are too indifferent to their religion. If they would live up to it and *search* their Scriptures, their conversion would be quite hopeful. There are no people so hard to make Christians of, as those who believe nothing; such cannot be *converted*. Besides I think it will be found that a Jew was never converted during the times in which we persecuted them, nor until we began to treat them as brothers, as friends, as fellows. Is there then no one in Boston of whom the Jews shall hereafter say with gratitude, as they did of old, "He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue?" I am told that there are no rich men among the members of this synagogue. "Rich as a Jew," is now but a proverb.

E. M. P. WELLS.

September 14th, 1844.

Impressions of a Christian visitor to Boston's first synagogue in 1844

Chapter II
The Formative Years 1842 - 1880

The Economy of Boston

Religious intolerance and outright persecution kept Catholics, Quakers, Jews, and other "dissenters" away from Boston. However, an even greater deterrent impeded the growth of the city, Boston's poor economy which had deteriorated with the American Revolution. As a result Boston grew slowly. The first United States census in 1790 gave Boston's population as 18,320. Twenty years later (1810) it was only 33,787.

After the War of 1812, Boston began to come into its own economically, but progress was slow. In 1845, with a population of 165,000, it was still a town of small traders, petty artisans, a sprinkling of merchant princes, with only 10,000 industrial workers. Things began to change more rapidly with the arrival of the Irish. Unlike the immigrants before them, leaving Boston in search for greener pastures, the Irish remained in the city. They were extremely poor and a beaten lot, lacking both the money and the courage to leave. Whether they liked Boston or not, here they were and here they stayed. In 1846, there were already 24,000 of them and nine years later (1855) their number more than doubled to 60,000. The leading clergyman in the city, Theodore Parker called Boston "The American Dublin" and about a half century later Professor Barrett Wendell of Harvard had no comforting words for the Yankees of Boston. He considered them as "vanishing" whose "future is behind (them)."

The Irish changed the physiognomy of Boston. They

produced a ready labor reserve, which made it possible for the city's incipient industry to compete with New York and the cheap labor of the hinterland. Slowly, the outlying industries moved to the city, and Boston went through an economic transformation. A small industrial town in the 1850's, it developed in the short span of two decades into the fourth largest industrial center in the country. It was during that period of rapid growth that Boston became a point of importance on the map of Jewish migration to this country.

Three Dimensions of American Jewish Life

Boston's Jewry went through a long - and at times painful - process before it found itself well adjusted to this strange city. Their experience reflected the birth pangs and growth of American Jewry as a whole.

While it is true that Jewish immigrants, who came from different lands, had in common one faith and fate, it is equally true that they were vastly different from one another.

They came from different socio-economic and cultural environments.They observed different customs, followed different rituals, and even prayed from different *siddurim.*

It was the first time in Jewish history that so many Jews from so many lands settled in one place. There were many misunderstandings, suspicions, and at times, an outright animosity. It took time before the common fate swept away the differences and the huge masses of strangers in the new land developed the first dimension of their lives - a unique phenomenon - the American Jewish community - one community in spite of all the differences.

A second dimension demonstrated concern for the universality of the Jewish people. The Jews are called *Am Olam; am* meaning people, *olam* meaning eternal and universal. The latter meaning reflects the concept that the lot of Jews in one place is the concern of Jews everywhere. The history of American Jewry generally and of Boston specifically is also the history of this dimension, the universal obligation of one Jew towards another.

The American Jewish coin has, however, a third dimension - loyalty to this country, which the immigrants from the very beginning called *die naye heim* (the new home). America was so different from the old country. Here everybody, Jew and non-Jew alike, had a "second chance." This was to be home. Again, what was true for American Jews generally came to be true for Boston's Jews. They took the city to their hearts, became part of it and it became part of them.

What follows is the working process, the development of these three concepts in the life of Boston Jewry.

First Dimension - Building a Community

There were Jews in Boston before 1840. Some, as we have seen, even achieved status in the community, but their number was always extremely small. Things began to change in the 1840's, when the number of Jews who wished to make Boston their home increased.

At the High Holiday services in 1842 in the home of a capmaker, Peter Spitz, at 5 Wendell Street, there was talk about organizing a congregation. In addition to the host, the *minyan* was attended by nine other local men and one who came from Worcester. Here was an embryo of a congregation. A few months later, on the auspicious occasion of the *bris* (circumcision) of Spitz's first born son, believed to be the first child born in Boston, attended by the same group, a decision was made to start a legally recognized congregation. With it came its concomitants: a cemetery, Hebrew school, a charity association and other institutions that make for a vibrant Jewish life.

Strangers in a strange land, these immigrants longed most of all for peace, and they called their congregation *Ohabei Shalom* (Lovers of Peace). On the whole, it was a poor group of people, unable to afford a synagogue building and holding services in the home of their "spiritual leader", a term, of course, unknown to them in those early days. The first

ISRAELITISH SYNAGOGUE,

WARREN STREET.

THIS building, which was erected in 1851, is a small wooden structure, tastefully decorated and pleasing in its appearance. It will seat about 500 persons, and has connected with it rooms for a school and for business meetings of the trustees of the society, and for other purposes. There are, also, in the rear, bathing rooms for the females of the society, after the ancient custom of the Israelites. The galleries of the church are set aside for the use of the females of the congregation, the body of the church being occupied exclusively by the males.

The Synagogue of Israelites were first organized in Boston in 1843, and consisted at that time of ten members with their families. There are at the present time belonging to the society about 120 families. The name which the Synagogue adopts and by which they are incorporated, is "Ohebei Shalom," which being interpreted is "Friends of Peace."

Connected with the church is a school for their children, where they are taught in the ancient Hebrew as well as in the English language.

There are, also, two charitable associations made up of members of this Synagogue, the one for males and the other for females.

The services in their church are all conducted in the Hebrew language and with all the ancient forms and ceremonies. They have the five books of Moses written on parchment, from which their Rabbi reads as part of their Sabbath service. At the present time the Rev. Joseph Sachs officiates as their religious instructor, and also as teacher of their children in the Hebrew tongue. They give him the ancient title of Rabbi. Their Sabbath commences on Friday at sundown, and ends at the corresponding hour on Saturday. Their numbers are quite rapidly increasing. They have a burial ground at East Boston.

Excerpt from the Boston Almanac of 1854

religious functionary, one Henry Selling, was brought from Albany, where he had been a *chazan* (cantor). In Boston he served in the same capacity, but he was also *shohet* (ritual slaughterer), *mohel* (one who performs circumcisions), teacher and performer of all other duties related to the religious life of the "community." For all of this activity he was to be paid $40 a year!

Soon more Jews joined the congregation. The High Holiday services in 1844 were already attended by 40 people and were held in a second floor room described by a visiting non-Jew as being "not a comfortable or decent place for the performance of the service, which thousands of years ago swelled through the arches of Solomon's Temple." There was not as yet a charter. This was obtained on March 22, 1845, establishing the first legally-recognized Jewish house of worship in Boston, and laying the foundation for a community.

One important act of these pioneers took place prior to the charter. On April 29, 1844, the congregation had petitioned the city government to set aside a lot of 100 square feet of the community's cemetery for its exclusive use. The petition was denied. Jews could live in Boston, but were to be buried elsewhere, as they had done for so many years using the Jewish cemeteries in Newport and Albany.

The set-back was, however, only temporary. A second petition for a lot of 10,000 square feet located on Byron Street at the corner of Homer Street, which the Congregation had bought for $200 was granted on October 5, 1844. Thus, the first legal Jewish cemetery was established in Boston.

As the economic status of the "Lovers of Peace" improved, they moved from a rented "room upstairs," their first place of worship, to a rented house. By 1847, the congregation numbered 70 and the quarters were becoming cramped. The more daring members started talk about building a synagogue, and by 1851, a campaign got under way. Boston Jews did what their forefathers so often did before them and what their grandchildren have done since. Some money was raised, with the rest of the cost secured by loans. With over

$7,000 on hand, Boston's first synagogue was built. On Friday, March 26, 1852, the consecration of the first Jewish house of worship in Massachusetts took place on Warren (now Warrenton) Street. From then on the synagogue was referred to as the "Warren Street Shul." The Puritan taboo against "other" religious institutions was definitely a thing of the past.

It was a modest, plain wooden building. While only about 90 families belonged to the congregation, the structure was built with an eye to the future and could accomodate 400. There was, a naturally, a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and in the rear, a school room. The consecration ceremony was attended by all Jews in the city, the Mayor, Aldermen, and clergymen of different denominations. The scroll was on loan from a New York synagogue, since in 1852, there were still few *Torahs* in the country. America, with its 50,000 Jews, was still Jewishly a wilderness. The first ordained Rabbi came only in 1840.

Hardly had the congregation settled in its new building when dissension set in. All were still relatively poor, but some of the members of the "Lovers of Peace" were less poor than the others. These were those who came earlier and they were the "real Germans" as contrasted with the "Polish Germans," those who came from the Polish province of Posen. The division was not along ideological lines, since all were Orthodox. Social cleavages were, however, no less disruptive than religious ones. About 25 members of "better" origin left the congregation, taking the *Chazan,* the *Sefer Torah,* and the original name of the congregation. Thus, Boston was blessed with two *Ohabei Shaloms* with very little "shalom" between them.

The issue over which congregation was entitled to the name was finally settled in a court of law. Not aware of the rift in Boston, Judah Touro, in far away New Orleans, bequeathed $5,000 to the Ohabei Shalom congregation. Both groups claimed this tremendous sum and since they could not — or would not — reach a settlement, the issue was handled by a judge, who decided in favor of the original congregation. The new congregation then adopted the name *Adath Israel,* later known as Temple Israel.

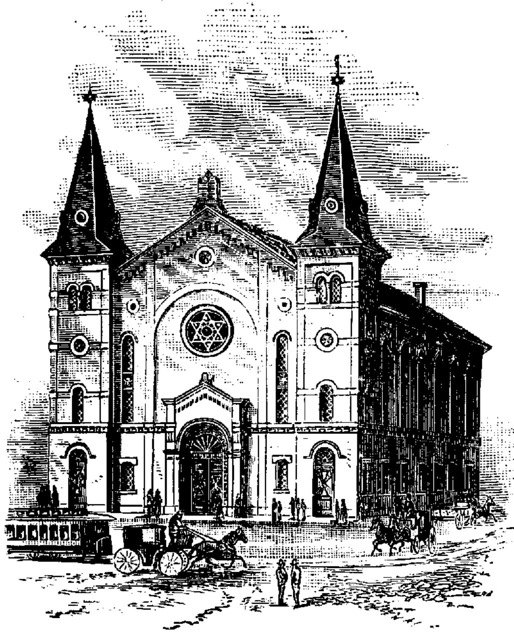
In the beginning — and for a full 15 years — there were no ideological differences between the two. Both observed the same rituals and services were conducted in the same traditional "Orthodox" manner (though the term "Orthodox" was not yet in vogue). The same prayers from the same prayer books were said in both. Men, of course, worshipped with covered heads and *tallith* (prayer shawl) and women were seated in a gallery separated from the men.

The congregations were Orthodox and yet not Orthodox enough for a small group of recent newcomers from Posen who had joined Ohabei Shalom. No doubt there were other reasons in addition to rituals that caused unhappiness in these *landsleit* (people from the same country). They were not at home with the "Americans", the old members of Ohabei Shalom, who by 1858 had already learned some English and had acquired American manners. The "Posens" wanted to be among their own kind. Later, this attitude would be repeated with other immigrants. The ambitions of would-be presidents and other synagogue officials may have also played a role in sowing dissension.

At any rate, for whatever combination of reasons, twelve members of Ohabei Shalom seceded in 1858 and formed their own congregation, *Die Israelitische Gemeinde Mishkan Israel,* later to become Mishkan Tefila, without, of course, any German in its name.

Ohabei Shalom continued to grow. In its report to the Board of Jewish Delegates (1861) it stated that it had 123 male members and 214 female members (very strange indeed). In 1863, it moved to larger quarters on the same street when for $15,000 it bought the building of the First Universalist Society, which, as was common in those days, moved because of a shift in population.

Slowly, changes were introduced in the synagogue. It started with "decorum." No more was the synagogue to be treated as one's own home. Cleanliness and quiet were to prevail in and around the synagogue. This was just a harbinger of things to come. What followed was far more basic. The length of praying was curtailed. For a while, even the position of the Cantor was abolished and a boy's choir



Temple Israel on Columbus Avenue and North Hampton St., in 1885

Rabbi Solomon Schindler

Rabbi Charles Fleischer

replaced the traditional *Chazan.* In 1872, came the big leap. Family pews and an organ were introduced. As happened in many synagogues then, objections to such extreme innovations were appealed to the court. The judge's decision was that the changes were legal. However, he gave the protestors a chance to produce an authoritative document proving that the changes contradicted established tradition. If so, the old order of things would be restored. But such a document was not produced. Instead a large number of members and seatholders left the congregation.

With the increase of the Jewish population in the city, the oldest congregation - as well as the two others - grew. Again a larger church was bought (1871), this time the congregation paying $57,000. Boston's Jews were doing well. With shifts of the population, all congregations were moving into larger quarters in "better" neighborhoods.

Despite its changes, the first congregation never became an example of extreme reform. It remained the synagogue of the middle class, Americanized Jews, in which radical change was avoided.

Not so the second congregation, Temple Israel. Although for a while it remained traditional, minor changes were met with few objections. The big break came in 1874, when the rabbi of the congregation, Solomon Schindler, introduced some radical changes. The innovations included an organ, family pews, praying in the vernacular, and removal of head covering and *tallith.* At this time the congregation had only 40 members, 15 of whom resigned in protest. The younger element, however, influenced by the predominantly liberal Christian Boston clergy of that period, were quite comfortable in the "lax" congregation. To them, such changes meant more Americanism, more openmindedness. Once the older elements left and they had a synagogue to their liking, they became enthusiastic supporters of their house of worship and of their spiritual mentor.

A few years later (1885), the Rabbi went one step further. While he did not abolish the Sabbath services (this came later under his successor), he introduced Sunday services. Propaganda for this innovation was vigorously carried on by

Rochester's *Jewish Tidings*, which by 1888 noted that

> "the sentiment of the majority of Jews today demands such a change in the day of worship of the Almighty . . . The change must come in spite of the coward croakers and in spite of the foolish veneration for an antiquated day."

With enthusiasm, Temple Israel members read these articles which were reprinted in Boston's *Jewish Chronicle*, a staunch supporter of this view. It no doubt pleased the congregation greatly that their rabbi, who served them for 19 years (1874-1893), was not only accepted but a recognized and welcome leader of the general community. He was the first person to be nominated by both political parties to the Boston School Committe. His lectures in the Temple were attended by many gentiles and he spoke in many churches, preaching liberal Americanism. All of this made the congregation very popular and it grew rapidly. The rabbi, in the meantime, continued to drift away from religious tenets and became a free-thinking socialist. In 1893, he finally left the rabbinate.

The next rabbi of the congregation was even more radical than Schindler. Charles Fleischer, who served the congregation for 17 years (1894-1911) was by nature an anarchist. He believed that men should "always (show) dissatisfaction with things as they are." He even exceeded Schindler in popularity in the general community. He was outspoken when he preached in churches, which he did quite often, and was open and honest with his own congregants. One Christmas, he preached from his pulpit that Jews must embrace Jesus and that Jews and Christians "will be reconciled and reunited through Jesus in love of God and service by man." He even advocated intermarriage as a means of producing a "new nation."

With all of this, members of the congregation not only suffered the Rabbi, but were proud of his achievement and of his prominence with the non-Jews. The congregants apparently believed that "the Rabbi knows best."

Then, unexpectedly, came the break. It happened in 1911, when the 69-year-old former radical, Schindler, delivered a sermon on "Mistakes I have made." In it he spoke of the meaning of being Jewish. He, who in his youth preached assimilation, pleaded with the congregants to maintain their own Jewish communities, to be more Jewish, to realize that Jews are not merely a religious sect, but a people.

In his reply, Rabbi Fleischer stuck to his guns. Assimilation, he insisted, is the only solution for the Jews. There can be no return to the ghetto, he stated.

The congregants responded to Schindler's argument. No matter how much they wanted to Americanize and to be a part of the general community, they also wanted to remain Jews — to be apart from the general community. Rabbi Fleischer's contract was not renewed.

In subsequent years, Temple Israel remained Reform, but there was a fundamental change in the approach to rituals, Jewish peoplehood, Zionism and other phases of Jewish life. There was no fear of new changes, neither were there any qualms about reintroducing rituals abandoned in the heat of battle.

The third congregation of those early years, Mishkan Israel, did not escape change even if it did not become Reform. Over the years, there too, mixed seating, an organ, and other innovations were introduced. Eventually the congregation joined the Conservative movement.

Jewish Education

From earliest times the synagogue was not only a *Beth Tefilah* (house of prayer) but also a *Beth Midrash* (house of study). *V'talmud Torah K'neged Kulam* (the study of the Torah excels all other *Mitzvoth*) has been the essence of Jewish life for generations without end. Not all Jews were scholars, far from it, but there was a great respect for learning. The hope of parents, as exemplified in a later popular cradle song *Rozhinkes mit Mandlen* (Raisins and Almonds),

had always been that the child *vet lernen Toire* (will study Torah). Those who came to the shores of the New World brought with them the tradition of learning. As with many dreams, many traditions were shattered by the stark realities of life in America, while other "impossible dreams" became a reality. Soon after their arrival, the immigrants realized the value of secular education. Often, Jewish education gave way to the one which held greater promise for getting ahead. Yet, at all times, there was a concern for transmitting to the children at least the rudiments of Jewish knowledge.

The duties of the first functionary of Ohabei Shalom included teaching children, and when the first synagogue was built in 1852, a room in the rear was assigned as a school. About 30 children came in the afternoon to study Hebrew and the "mother tongue" - German. Two years later, October 23, 1854, the congregation opened a day school. Tuition was rather high for those days, $24 a year. The congregation gave $500 - again a large sum - as an annual subvention to enable poor children to attend. In addition to Hebrew and German, the curriculum was the same as in the public grammar schools.

An advertisement in the magazine *Deborah* of August 22, 1856 tells much about the Congregation. The ad read: "Boston, the Polish Congregation has decided to take on a fine Preacher and Teacher; they will pay $1,000 to $1,200 a year." Only 14 years earlier, in 1842, the preacher, Teacher, *Mohel, Shohet,* etc. was paid $40 a year.

It is interesting to note that the congregation refers to itself as "Polish." Even more interesting, perhaps is that the preacher and *chazan* was also expected to be the teacher. In fact, almost the only teachers in congregational school then were the cantors, who also frequently served in lieu of rabbis. It was still the "cantorial age" of American Jewry.

The day school closed in 1863 and the children began to attend public schools. A supplementary Hebrew school was opened, to be replaced later by a one-day-a-week school, a Sabbath or Sunday School.

What happened at Ohabei Shalom transpired with

variations in the other two congregations. Not much Jewish knowledge was imparted, but almost all Jewish children learned to read some Hebrew, some Bible stories, and boys were, of course, prepared for *Bar Mitzvah*. This was America and this was considered enough to be a Jew in the New World.

Charity Work

In the hierarchy of Jewish values, *Tzedakah* was always regarded highly. The Governor of New Amsterdam (New York) admitted the first 23 Jews, who landed there in 1654 on the condition that "the poor among them shall not become a burden to the . . . community, but be supported by their own nation." Only a person who did not know Jews would impose such a condition on a people who lived by the Biblical injunction *not to shut your hand from your needy brother* (Deut. 15:7). Boston's Jews were no exception to the rule. They took care of the needy in their midst.

By the time the first congregation came into being - and according to some sources even before - the first charity society was organized. The name of this society tells the story. It was called *Ahavas Ahim* (Brotherly Love), for indeed, more was needed than just financial assistance. For that matter, even the "wealthier" - in this case just a euphemism - were in need of compassion and understanding.

The *Ahvas Ahim* was followed by a number of others, but even the purely social organizations also engaged in charity work.

The Young Men's Hebrew Association, founded in 1875, whose stated objective was "to care for the moral and intellectual advancement of the Jewish population" was nevertheless also engaged in "relief of the deserving poor," and even ran an employment agency.

BOSTON.—A letter from Boston, under date of January 16, to the editor says: "By giving publicity to the following you will greatly oblige the subscriber.

"On Sunday last, January 11, 1866, the city authorities were telegraphed to that the Barque *Fredonia*, Captain Burke, bound from Fayal to Boston with a cargo of oil and oranges, was below with the shipwrecked crew and passengers (amounting to three hundred souls) of the ship *Gratitude*, bound from Liverpool to Norfolk, and that they were in great distress.

On Monday morning it was found that there were twenty-two souls of our co-religionists amongst the unfortunates. The authorities of Warren Street Synagogue took them in charge, and provided for their immediate wants. Rooms were appropriated for them in the congregational building, baths prepared, and as no luggage could or was allowed to be saved, all of them were provided with comfortable clothing by our co-religionists, and rich and poor contributed largely, both in money and clothing, to alleviate their sufferings.

"Mr. S. Sternburg, the President of the congregation Ohabei Shalom, convened a meeting of the different Boards of Trustees, representing the congregations Adath Israel, Beth El, and Mishkan Israel, as also the President and Board of Trustees of the Hebrew Benevolent Association, on Monday evening, January 15, 1866, to take into consideration the raising of a fund for the relief of our unfortunate brethren. A committee of two from each congregation was appointed by the chair to take up a collection and report the following evening. Tuesday evening came, and with it the report that *seven hundred dollars* had been collected. This sum, with what clothing has been contributed, will amount to at least eleven hundred dollars. Too much praise cannot be given to Messrs. Benedix and Moss, D. H. Freadman and Elias Warshauer, Goldsmith and Segar, and Clark and Obst, the committee on collection, for their indefatigable zeal in obtaining subscriptions

CURACOA.—Sir Moses Montefiore sent to the congregation Mikvé Israel also the circular respecting the sufferings in Palestine, whereupon a collection was taken up amounting to 220 florins. Rabbi Chumaceiro took a deep interest in the matter, and addressed letters to the Israelites at Coro and New Granada. From the first a donation of 80 florins was received, which was transmitted with the above to Holland to be forwarded to its destination. On Sabbath Hanukkah, the choir instituted last year celebrated its first anniversary, for which occasion Messrs. Capriles and Curiel composed three very handsome and appropriate tunes for Hallel, Ane Kelohenu, and Adon Olam, which were given by the choir with solemnity and good effect. The Rabbi delivered an impressive sermon, which was listened to with marked attention by a large

The plight of early Jewish refugees.

The number of charity and pseudo-charity organizations was constantly growing and with it overlapping and chaos. In 1864, a few of the communal leaders organized the United Hebrew Benevolent Association. The "united" in its name gives the clue to its purpose; it was to serve as a clearing house for all charities. However, it accomplished this only in very small measure. It took decades before the individual groups were willing to accept direction and work together.

On the whole, Boston Jews in the 1870's lived a good life. Their economic condition was constantly improving. They felt less and less like strangers. Many moved from the cramped quarters of Boston's North End and West End to the open spaces of Roxbury. They had well-established synagogues. Their children were attending public schools and were already "real Americans" and at the same time were also getting some *Yiddishkeit* in their religious schools. Their relationship with neighbors, while not intimate, was quite correct, on the friendly side. Some of them were even elected to public office and a leading Jewish communal worker, Leopold Morse was elected to the House of Representatives.

Then, suddenly everything changed. A torrent of Jewish immigrants descended upon the United States and many came to Boston. With their coming the tranquility of the old-timers was disrupted. Everything was radically altered as a new Jewish Boston came into being. For a time, things became worse before they grew better.

A Jewish peddler in the North End at the turn of the century

Chapter III
Years of Dissension and Expansion 1880-1895

The Russians are Coming

On May 1, 1881 an event took place in far away St. Petersburg, then capital of the Russian Empire, that signaled a series of pogroms perpetrated with the blessing of the government. Within one year, more than 150 Jewish communities, including such large centers as Kiev, Odessa and Warsaw, witnessed the butchery of hundreds of Jews. Thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed and thousands upon thousands of people became homeless. The massacres were followed by the infamous May Laws, which dislodged tens of thousands of Jews who were driven out from villages and small towns into the overcrowded Pale. Life became a nightmare. The only salvation was escape.

By this time, the land beyond the ocean ceased to be a fantasy. Jews from Eastern Europe already lived in America. These *landsleit* (people from the same country) were sending glowing letters about life in the new land (many outright lies) and beautiful *"piktches"* (pictures). The "Lady with the Torch" beckoned to them from across the ocean. These poor, desperate people already knew in Yiddish translation the words engraved in the base of the Statue of Liberty:

> Give me your tired, your poor
> Your huddled masses
> Yearning to be free
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the Golden Door,

They heard the call and responded. The great exodus began.

There was, however, before this a small exodus in the 1870's. Epidemics and famine in Lithuania and Poland and the extremely difficult economic conditions in Galicia induced braver souls to leave in search of a better life. In the ten years 1870-1880, 74,903 Jews came to the United States. Some of these found their way to Boston. The irony of it - these desperate Jews, who escaped the hell of Russia became known as "the Russians." As a matter of fact, all immigrants from Eastern Europe, no matter where they came from became "Russians."

Entrance into the country was rather easy, although there was some opposition to the "undesirable foreigners." One of the most vocal groups that carried on propaganda against an open door policy was the Immigration Restriction League founded in Boston in 1884. In 1889, the U.S. Commissioner of Immigration, Eugene Schuyler, agitated against admission of Russian Jews, arguing that "one third of Jews in Russia own one-half of the property, although the ratio of Jews to Christians is only one to twenty." In other words, Russian Jews presented a danger to America.

Such propaganda was catching on. In 1891, a law was passed barring admission of "all idiots, insane persons, pauper, or person likely to become a public charge . . ." While nearly all immigrants came with meager funds, one of the main reasons that brought them to this country in the first place, the records of Jews who landed in Boston show them to be among the poorest of all. They had an average of only $9.00 per capita, as compared with the "poor" Irish, who had $15.00 per person, let alone the English who brought $40.00 each. Their extreme poverty made the Jews suspect of becoming public charges; hence the percentage of their debarment was the highest.

In addition to financial difficulties, the newcomers were at the mercy of the immigration inspectors in regard to the condition of their health. Many Jews were sent back because they supposedly had trachoma, while often the reason was simply a result of washing themselves with ocean water. Another obstacle to admission was the literacy test. This test

had a long history. A bill barring illiterates passed both houses in 1897. It was, however, vetoed by President Cleveland and his veto was sustained. The same thing happened again in 1913 when President Taft vetoed a similar bill.

On the face of it, Jews should not have concerned themselves with such a test. It is "well known" that all Jews are literate and that the most ignorant Jew can, at least, read the *siddur*, which would have been sufficient. The facts, however, proved that Jewish literacy, like proverbial Jewish wealth has been exaggerated. While it is true that Jews had a high percentage of literates, the record of those who landed in Boston in 1900 shows that 17.8 per cent could not read. This was obviously due to the fact that many Jewish girls in Eastern Europe were not given any education whatsoever.

It did not take long for American Jews to realize that the literacy test was a matter for concern. They became active in mobilizing public opinion against the test, with Boston Jewry following suit. In 1907, the Federation of Jewish Charities sent a sharp protest against it to the House of Representatives, as did many Jewish organizations throughout the country.

Such actions did help for 30 years. Finally, the restrictionists had their day when the Congress overrode President Wilson's veto in 1917 and the Literacy Test became law.

If, in spite of all the difficulties, large numbers of Jews entered the United States, it was partially due to the intercession of Jews at various ports of entry, including Boston. Here, the Hebrew Benevolent Society, in 1889, obtained a ruling from immigration officials that no immigrants could be deported before the representatives of this organization had the opportunity to examine all details of the case and, if appropriate, make an appeal.

The titanic immigration was on its way. In the decade from 1870 to 1890 some 200,000 "Russians" entered the United States. The next decade saw an increase of 50 per cent to 300,000, and in the 24 years from 1890 till the outbreak of the

first World War in 1914, a million and a half Jews came, comprising 8.8 per cent of all immigrants.

In Boston, too, the number of Jewish immigrants rose proportionally. In 1873, there were 2,500 Jews in the city, in 1875, 3,000; an increase of about 250 per year. But 20 years later, in 1895, the Jewish population was 20,000. Of these a full 14,000 were "Russians". In the next seven years, the Jewish population grew to 40,000 and by 1907 there were 80,000 Jews in Greater Boston.

The influx continued till 1914, the beginning of World War I, and resumed in 1921 after the war. Then it almost completely stopped with the introduction of the quota system (the Johnson Act) in 1924. There was a small influx from Germany in the 1930's and a larger one of concentration camp survivors after World War II.

There are a number of factors to be taken into consideration in connection with the increase of the Jewish population in Boston. In the first place, Jewish immigrants came to stay. They had no "homeland" to return to. Hence, more than other ethnic groups, they came in family units. Much has been written about Jewish workers saving up pennies from their starvation wages in the sweat shops in order to buy "shifscarten" (shop tickets) for the family, left behind in Europe.

While this is true, and it surely was tragic, the percentage of separated families among Jews was much lower than among other ethnic groups. To cite just one example: Government statistics for 1900 show that the number of Jewish children under 14 years of age was the second highest in the city, 23.4 per cent, exceeded only by the Portuguese (25.37 per cent). An even better indication of the family composition among the immigrants was the percentage of males. As was to be expected, it was higher than females, 53.7 per cent, but much lower than among other immigrant groups.

Family composition and tradition contributed to the high birth rate of Jewish immigrants. It was the second highest of all 14 ethnic groups in the city. While the birth rate for the entire country in the period of 1880-1900 was 16.40 per

thousand, Boston's rate (a predominantly Catholic city) was much higher, 29.31. As for the Russian-Polish (almost exclusively Jews), it reached the fantastic figure of 94.6 with only the Italians having an even higher rate of 104.60.

On the other end of the spectrum, that of mortality rate, Boston's general rate in 1895 was 23.12 while among the "Russians" it was an extremely low 6.09.

Clearly the number of "Russians" was on the increase not only because many were coming from abroad, but also through natural increase, births minus deaths.

It was stated earlier that the "native" Jews of Boston interceded on behalf of the immigrants. This is true. It is, also, however, true that there was very little of a favorable attitude at first and that frictions between the old-timers and the newcomers continued for a long time.

Natives and Strangers

Tradition has it that in the 1830's there were some Algerian and Moroccan Jews in Boston about whom, however, no records are extant. There was a small Dutch group in the city, commonly called "Hollanders," who in 1859 organized a Beth El Congregation. The "Dutch" is, however, misleading. For the most part, these were German and Polish Jews who for a while lived in Holland. This small group, in the course of time, became integrated with the bulk of the community, which consisted mainly of "German" nationals from Posen, a Polish province, which became part of Prussia after the second partition of Poland in 1793. Whatever the relative strength of the "German" Germans or the "Polish" Germans when the Eastern European immigrants began to arrive, all oldtimers thought of themselves as Germans. More than that, most of them, actually immigrants, considered themselves as "natives." The word "native" in this context had nothing to do with being born in Boston. It only

meant one who came to America earlier than the newly-arrived ones. This German "nativity" complex repeated itself later with Russian "natives" who looked down upon still newer "greenhorns." No one has a patent on this kind of a superiority complex.

As for the "Germans," the "Russian" invasion brought fear into their hearts, lest the non-Jews associate them with these "uncouth" immigrants. Their fears were quite justified, since from the non-Jewish perspective, they were all Jews. Fearing that their more or less secure position might be endangered, the first reaction of the "Germans" was to do all in their power to prevent the admission of immigrants. Their champion was Rabbi Schindler.

He was publishing articles and delivering sermons attacking admission of "Russians" to the country. He followed the line of the United Jewish Charity of Rochester, which declared: "The refugees are a bane to the country and a curse to the Jews." Z'ev Shur, the editor of the only Hebrew periodical in the United States, *Hapisgan,* published in Boston, editorially attacked Schindler. He issued an appeal "to the German Rabbis in America," calling upon them "to denounce Schindler and all enemies of the Russian Jews." Naively he pointed out that the East European Jews have many virtues: "They know the Bible and the Hebrew literature in the original and not through translation (as if this meant anything to the German Jews). You know the East European Jews, their character and qualities, because you had contact with them. Arise and state publicly your opinion of them." Three prominent "German" Rabbis: Kohut from New York, Szold from Baltimore and Felsenthal from Chicago sent in sympathetic replies. This, naturally, had little effect on Schindler and those whom he represented.

The bitter controversy reached its climax in the winter of 1882. A shipload of 415 "Russians" arrived in Boston and they were "promptly shipped back to New York as soon as they arrived." What followed was even worse, if this were possible. In the cold winter of 1882-1883 eighteen "Russian" families, comprising 75 individuals who were refused help by Boston Jews declared that they were "disillusioned with the

A North End market

A Kosher restaurant in the North End

promised land and want to return to Russia." The Emigrant Aid Society could not expect a better decision. However, it lacked the necessary funds for transportation. With no choice left, the refugees appealed for help to the general charitable society, the Provident Association, which, in turn, placed them in the Commonwealth Alms House at Tewksbury. The Massachusetts Board of Charities, also pleased with the refugees' decision, undertook to send back to Russia all those who would be recommended by Jacob Hecht, President of the United Hebrew Benevolent Association. This was too much for the "Germans". The whole affair became a public scandal.

The ancient (and present) public relations problem *Lama yomro Hagoyim* (what will the Gentiles say? Psalms: 79:10) came into play. Boston's Jews felt ashamed of public opinion which would no doubt be forthcoming if they did not help their "own". It was as simple as that. To Gentiles, a Jew was a Jew. It was this coupled with awakened compassion, that made them change their behavior. The Association took over responsibility for the refugees. There was no way out but to make peace with the situation.

From then on, the entire community threw itself into the work of helping the newcomers adjust themselves to their new home.

Many difficulties lay in the path. While the "natives" were thinking of the newcomers as if they were all of one piece of cloth, they were, in fact, different from each other. The "real" Russians snubbed the Litvaks, who in turn considered the Polish as "ignoramuses." These, in turn, thought the Roumanians to be thieves. And all were against the unmentionable Galicianers. The immigrants differed in many respects, even in language, although all spoke Yiddish. Dialect was a factor, the Litvaks pronounced the *SH* like S, ate *fis* on *Shabbes,* the Polish made every *ei* sound *ay*, they ate *ayer*, not *eyer* (eggs), etc. With their differences, however, they were as one in their antagonism toward the "Germans." They were grateful for the help they were given but were also full of resentment, the eternal strife between takers and givers.

The givers, naturally resented the resentment. They *knew* all the answers, hence they were prepared to do all they could for the poor. *For* them, but not *with* them. That rift lasted a long time and even later when the "natives" wanted the immigrants to join them in communal enterprises, the latter were reluctant to do so. They feared that they would be intimidated by those in power, by their wealth, by their English and by their manners. It took decades to consolidate the various Jewries of Boston into one. It is to these years of dissension and final consolidation of the creative forces in the community that we now turn.

The Socio-Economic Life of the Immigrants

The immigrants landed in Boston or came here from other cities in America with very few material belongings. The only thing they had in abundance was the hope that they would somehow make it, and if not they, their children would live a better life than they had lived in the old country.

They settled at first in the oldest part of Boston, the North End. Once a fashionable section of the city, it became Boston's slums. The well-to-do had moved out with their spacious homes converted into overcrowded apartments. It began with the Irish in the 1840's and continued with the Jews and Italians in the 80's. They were, in the eyes of Mary Antin who lived there:

> "Pitiful in the eyes of social missionaries, the despair of boards of health, the hope of ward politicians, the touchstone of American democracy."

As a matter of historical accuracy, the first Jews to "discover" the North End were those who came in the early 1870's. They were of the small exodus from Eastern Europe. As early as 1873, they had established a synagogue, *Beth*

Abraham, and true to the old tradition, also a *Chevra Shas*, a Talmud study society. Most of these pioneers were Litvaks.

At that time, the boundaries of the Jewish North End were Hanover Street on the south east, Endicott Street on the west and Prince Street (later Sheafe Street) and North Bennett Street on the north east. Here they lived in dilapidated, unsanitary tenements. In many of these, there were only two single sinks on the floor for the use of several families. A census of 1891 shows an average of more than two people per room. While there were many Irish and Italians in the North End, Jews lived on their "own" streets.

Living together meant good company and, what was perhaps of great importance in those days in an Irish neighborhood, protection from the gangs, who in the words of Sholem Aleichem would "leave the Jew alone and only pull his beard."

Writing about his visit to Boston, the famous preacher Zvi Hirsh Masliansky described it in the following words:

> "I could hardly believe that I was in America. The streets of Boston remind me of those of Vilna. Large synagogues, with truly orthodox rabbis, Talmudic study groups . . . almost all the stores are closed on Saturdays . . . Hebrew schools in the old style . . ."

In a word, immigrant Jewish Boston at that period was a copy of a *shtetl* in Eastern Europe.

A contemporary, Bernard G. Richards, indicated that the North End Jews "considered their quarters as the center of the universe. There are other places in the city, but they are only the outskirts, the suburbs of the Ghetto." It was for a while, indeed, a continuation of the *shtetl*, of which Mary Antin, speaking of her hometown Plotzk wrote:

> "The world was divided into two parts, namely Plotzk, the place where I lived, and a strange land called Russia."

All of this, however, was true only of the older elements, primarily those who came from the *shtetl*. However, not all immigrants came from *shtetlech*, (small towns). Far from it. At the time of the mass migration to America there was a large

inner migration in Russia and Poland proper. Younger people, who saw no chance for themselves in the confines of the small town, were moving to large industrial centers like Bialystok, Warsaw and Odessa, where they entered the cadres of working men and women. Many of these also came to America.

Among the immigrants there were all kinds of groups and splinter groups. In the 1880's Boston had a branch of the Socialist Labor Party composed entirely of Jewish immigrants. In 1887, there was a Jewish Workers' Educational Club. Later came the Bund, a strong socialist group, which was engaged in promoting Yiddish culture and fighting Zionism. There were the S.S. or Territorialists, who saw the solution of the Jewish problem in building a Jewish center someplace, not necessarily in Palestine. And the *Poalei Zion* (Labor Zionists), organized in 1904 by four members for the establishment of a Socialist Jewish homeland in Palestine.

These elements, *maskilim* (enlightened) trade union men and even revolutionaries, would not, of course, find their place in the Baldwin Street shul the center of the older Orthodox generation. They had their own center. Their gathering place was Bersowsky's book store, where they could read a modern Yiddish novel, a radical Yiddish newspaper and magazine and above all carry on eternal debates about changing (nothing less) the world. And, of course, they had their club rooms, each ideological group in its own locale.

Luminaries of various movements often visited Boston and lectured usually before large audiences of followers as well as opponents of the given movement. In 1895, the Socialist party was strong enough to establish a weekly, *Der Emes,* (The Truth) under the editorship of their most prominent leader, Morris Vinchevsky, the *zeide* (grandfather) of Jewish socialism in America. The most vociferous, though not the strongest, group were the Anarchists. Above all they were active atheists, albeit Jewish atheists. It would not occur to them to demonstrate in front of a church. This they did only in front of the synagogue. Their "specialty" was to

demonstrate on Yom Kippur evening when they would also arrange balls and lectures. The secretary of the Boston group proudly reported about one of these demonstrations in 1891 to the central committee in New York: "We really achieved something today. We replaced stupidity by enlightenment, superstition by conviction, darkness by light." Charity organizations retaliated, such as the Moses Montefiore Association which, in 1887, refused assistance to anyone who attended the Yom Kippur ball of the Anarchists.

What of the immigrant children? Whether children of Orthodox, Anarchists, or whatever, they all were attending public schools and before long became "regele Yankees" and took prizes for compositions about "the land where our fathers died." The parents, greenhorns, *"shepped naches"* (took pleasure) from their geniuses and pushed them no end to excel in their studies. To be sure, this was resented by non-Jews who attended the same public schools. Reminiscing about his school days one of the bona fide Yankees, Francis Russell (not at all an anti-Semite), wrote in 1964:

> "We hated the Jews because they worked so hard, because they were so relentlessly competitive, because their one thought was to force themselves ahead to win the prizes at the year's end. They hated us in return with the accumulated resentment of the past, and because they knew the way was easier for us."

Not only did the children "force themselves ahead". The parents, especially the fathers, also "pushed" and worked overtime in order to break away from misery and to gain economic stability. Many of them became peddlers, which required little investment to begin business - a basket, merchandise, shoe laces, bars of soap, thread and needles and similar notions — worth a couple of dollars. Above all a strong pair of legs. More Jews than any other ethnic group entered the trade. They were known as "egg eaters", on account of their observance of Kashruth. In the last decades of the 19th century and the first of the 20th they were known as "the Jew peddlers." It is unbelievable how the

"emasculated", "weak", "little Jew" of the *shtetl* walked for untold miles carrying his wares in a basket, or a lot of merchandise in the heavy pack on his back.

In addition to a strong physique one also had to have a lot of *chutzpa* (nerve). It was not uncommon to be cursed for knocking on the door of a gentile or for daring to put a foot in the door as soon as it opened. Even in the good periods of peddling, there were many more failures than successes. However, people in Boston naturally pointed to Jacob Hecht and a few others who started out as poor peddlers and ended as leading merchants, and paid no attention to the numerous failures. Some of the "Russians" opened "candy stores," where the whole family slaved long, long hours, often late into the night, and many entered needle trade factories.

The vast majority of the peddlers, as might be expected, were men. There were, however, also women among them. These, in a way, followed the old custom of the *shtetl* where many women tended small shops in the market place, while the husbands were spending their days in the *Beth Ha-Midrash* studying Talmud. One such Boston woman-peddler is described by her nephew as follows:

> "Auntie Rachel was an Amazon of a woman. An excellent *balebuste* (housekeeper) she had also been a real business woman . . . Upon their (that is, she and her family) arrival in America . . . she loaded up a pack of dry-goods and set out to peddle, mostly in the Irish parts of the town . . . By the time I came to America, the primitive days of peddling with a pack were over and done with. She had an established route, and supplied her customers with every item under the sun, from a pin to sets of furniture . . . After each Sabbath day had drawn to a close, and long into the night, the house looked like a tax collector's office: men, women and children would arrive to make their weekly payments." (In other words, she was also a peddlers' supplier of wares).

But this was America. Here the husband was not spending his days over folios of the Talmud. Here "Uncle Yankel (Rachel's husband) was contributing his bit to the family's upkeep by making suspender straps . . ."

Aunt Rachel's nephew, Samuel Slobod, the author of the autobiography, who came to Boston in 1883, had an equally checkered career. He started out in a most unusual occupation for Jews. He became a longshoreman in Charlestown (in Boston harbor), later a capmaker and, following his aunt's advice, a peddler, and then, of all things, on the side translated a book from English into Russian. He was doing well as a peddler and brought over a brother with his family from Russia. Disgusted with peddling, he went to work as manager of a capmaking factory. Later, he was one of the founders of the Jewish Educational Society, which eventually became the home of Boston's Jewish Anarchists. After trying his hand at such occupations as delicatessen store owner and editor of a radical magazine in New York, he established himself as a private banker and steamship ticket salesman, involved in insurance and currency exchange in the North End. This saga of one Boston family is also,with some variations, the saga of many a Russian immigrant family in Boston.

While peddling might have led to economic success, it often was the cause of disruptive family life. It often meant being away from home for many days. It surely meant that the husband learned English faster and became more assimilated than his wife. She remained the *Yiddene* (Jewish woman) in the *shtetl,* while he, the husband, was already a "gentleman." In addition, stable family life was endangered by the plague of having a "boarder" or even a number of lodgers in the cramped dwelling. Difficult as it was to accomodate additional people, it was necessary in order to be able to pay the rent. "Mishpochology," as Cecil Roth called the stability of Jewish family life, was shaken. It was not unusual for husbands to leave their families. In 1911, a National Desertion Bureau was established and the largest Yiddish newspaper, the *Forverts* (Daily Journal) introduced a column "The Gallery of Vanished Husbands" with photographs and detailed descriptions of the culprits. Like other large cities, Boston also had a committee of the Council of Jewish Women dealing with this problem.

The disruption of family life brought with it crime. In 1908

Life was very harsh in the sweatshops

the local authorities asked the Federation of Jewish Charities to provide rabbis who might help Jews committed to the House of Correction. Later, in 1913, a special Jewish Prisoners Aid Society was organized and still later, in 1919, the Big Brother League was established to deal with juvenile deliquency.

A number of immigrants opened small shops, primarily groceries specializing in Jewish foods. Those who knew a trade in the old country established themselves working in their specialty. There were shoemakers, carpenters and roofers, while some became dealers in second-hand merchandise of all kinds. The more educated worked as cigar makers, which was considered an "intelligent" occupation. The majority, however, found places at the *Katerimke,* (the sewing machine). By this time, Boston was an important clothing center. Howe's invention (Cambridge, 1846) did away with the fine points of tailoring, reducing it to a few simple operations. Jewish immigrants were transformed overnight into what was called sarcastically, "Columbus' tailors." They became hands in shops many of which belonged to Jews who preceded them and worked from dark to dark for starvation wages.

From the very beginning of mass immigration, women also became breadwinners. Government statistics show that in 1885, 86.61 per cent of all Jewish males were gainfully employed, but even that early, 15.30 per cent of all Jewish women were in the labor force. With time, the numbers naturally increased. There was no union, no appeal against the whims of the factory owners, and what was often a lot worse, the harshness of the foremen, in most cases, themselves Russian Jews. It reminded one of the Biblical saying that one of the things for which the "earth doth quake" is "for a servant when he reigneth" (Proverbs 30:21). It was a bitter life. As the troubador of the sweatshop, Morris Rosenfeld, described it:

Away rush the seconds,
The minutes, the hours,
Each day and each night,
Like a wind-driven sail.
I drive the machine
As though eager to catch them,
I drive without reason —
No hope, no avail.

(trans. Aaron Kaplan)

The stabilization of the industry, the establishment of unions, improved sanitary conditions in the shops, higher wages, shorter hours, and even pensions, all came later after long and bitter struggles.

As early as 1889 a committee of workers in Boston began organizing the Jewish workers in the clothing industry. To similar groups in New York and Philadelphia they proposed establishing a Tailor National Eight Hour League. The Bostonians were very careful about the word "union", fearing that the word, which to many was synonymous, of all things, with "disintegration" might antagonize people. On the other hand, people would hopefully understand a demand for an eight hour workday.

In the following year, representatives from Boston participated in the founding of the Congress of Jewish Labor Organizations of the United States and Canada, and in 1900 Boston Jewish workers took an active part in the formation of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The unions in the city conducted bitter strikes, made agreements and eventually became a force to reckon with. There was one Bostonian, who made a signal contribution to the stabilization of the needle trade industry. He was Louis D. Brandeis, who in 1910 with his "Protocol", introduced the principle of arbitration, which was to replace the ever-recurring strikes. This principle was to be adopted by all major unions in the country.

In time, there was economic improvement. Some of the carpenters and roofers became builders. Some of the

hands in clothing factories became small, even large shop owners. Some of the second-hand rag pickers became substantial - or not so substantial - junk yard proprietors. The accent here is on *some.* However, it was obvious that the North Enders were coming into their own if they could afford, in 1889, to build a new synagogue, *Beth Israel,* at a cost of $50,000.

An even greater sign of improved conditions was the number of those who were leaving the North End.

With greater income came mobility, a characteristic of all ethnic groups. They began to break out of the tenement district around the harbor. One ghetto was breaking up, and other, nicer ghettoes were being created. So it was with the South End, then the West End, still tenements but which, at least externally, looked much better. Then came the three deckers of Roxbury, an improvement over the old shabby looking tenement houses, but in truth still tenements. When the Jews came, the old inhabitants of the area tended to move out. Eventually Roxbury's main street, Blue Hill Avenue, became entirely Jewish. And from Roxbury they moved to beautiful, spacious Dochester and Mattapan. These, too, became the residences of the "Russians", and the area near Franklin Field was generally referred to as "Jewville."

As this was going, on, the more prosperous "Germans" were leaving the old neighborhoods and began to develop three new sections in the area: Brighton, Brookline and Newton.

The vestiges of old divisions were still there, albeit in smaller measure. "Germans" and "Russians" were meeting in business and at various communal affairs, but a residue of mistrust, of a feeling of "I am not of your kind," remained.

Not so with the younger generation. A "German" or "Russian" mother with or without an accent would gleefully speak of her "son the doctor." They were justifiably proud of their sons in professions, of their daughters as school teachers. School and college life brought the young together. To them all the talk about "Germans" and "Russians" was meaningless. Here lay the hope for a unified Boston Jewish community.

Religious Life

When the big wave of immigrants reached Boston there were four synagogues: *Ohabei Shalom, Temple Israel, Mishkan Israel,* and the "Russian" synagogue, *Beth Abraham.* Before long there arose many more people from the same *gubernia* (province), and if there were enough *landsleit* (people from the same town) they organized themselves into a *chevra, anshei* . . . (people from . . .) and started, depending on their means, a small or large synagogue.

These houses of worship were of course Orthodox. The oldest Orthodox synagogue in the city was Mishkan Israel, which was organized by a small group that broke away from Ohabei Shalom in 1858. For a while, services were held in a tenement in the South End Five years later, the congregation moved to a hall and in 1873, built its own structure at a cost of $5,600. This was the first building to be constructed as a synagogue in the city. In 1894 it amalgamated with a recent immigrant congregations, also Orthodox, Shaarei Tefila and became known as Mishkan Tefila. In 1897, it moved to the new Jewish center, Roxbury, where it acquired and rebuilt a church at the cost of $47,000 and - as many others - underwent major changes in ritual. In 1914, by a vote of 67 to 54, an organ and mixed seating were introduced. Mishkan Tefila was the first synagogue in the city to join the Conservative movement.

It is impossible to establish the exact number of synagogues in any given year. What is known is how many were registered, but in addition, there were many *minyanim* in private homes and even in halls. And, of course, there were many places of worship used only during the High Holidays.

Stringent measures were taken that no changes would be introduced in the ritual at some future date. One congregation was sued because it passed a by-law "providing that divine services shall be rendered strictly in accordance with Ashkenazic ritual, and this enactment may not be changed save by unanimous consent obtained at a special meeting of the congregation." The claimant, a Mr. Saltman, objected to the word "unanimous" in the by-laws and won

the case. This and many similar cases show how very serious these people were about established ways of life. Mr. Saltman, though victorious, was in the minority. Court decisions surely had little effect upon the majority.

With the growth of the community there was a growth in the number and size of the synagogues of different ideological leanings. A Boston feature was that all of them became known as "Temples." The relationship among them was, generally speaking, a correct one, but no more. It was only as late as 1941 that synagogues of all "denominations" joined to form the Associated Synagogues of Massachusetts.

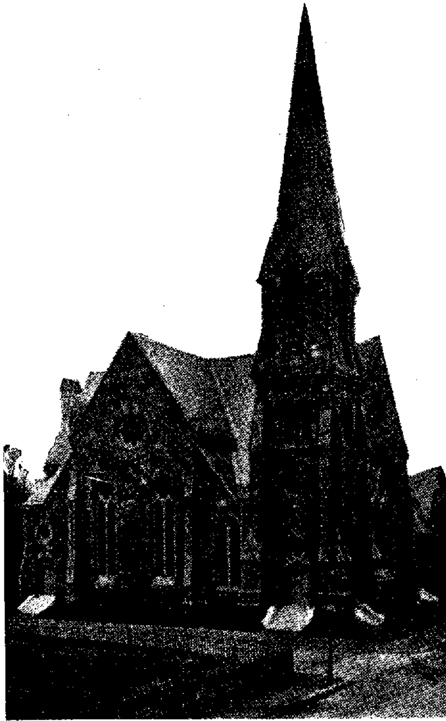
Boston had a considerable number of prominent rabbis, who carried weight not only with the members of their own congregation, but also with the entire community. For a time there was even a Chief Rabbi. The eminent scholar, Morris S. Margolies served as Chief Rabbi in the city for 17 years (1889-1906). Again, in the voluntaristic atmosphere of America, the title had little bearing on the realities of life.

One of Boston's rabbis gained national and even international prominence. An eminent teacher and radio preacher Joshua Loth Liebman (1907-1948) attained great fame with his volume *Peace of Mind*, which encouraged a closer working relationship between religion and psychology.

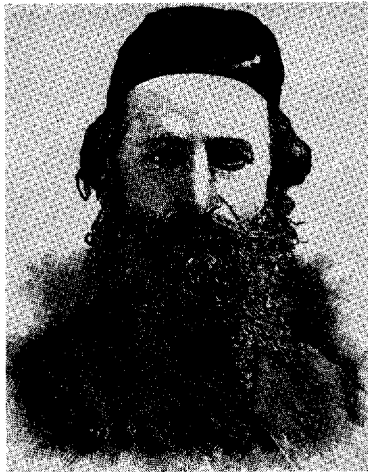
He was also a rarity for his time a Reform rabbi, a graduate of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and an outspoken Zionist. His views had a considerable influence upon the community.

The majority of Boston's Jews were affiliated with one congregation or another. That was not yet the time when one belonged, for a variety of reasons, to more than one congregation, often of different ideologies. There was, however, a sizable group of immigrants, especially among those who came after 1905, many of whom were radicals, who either stayed away from any religious activity or were even fighting the "clericals."

In those good old days, which were really more old than good, there were very few non-religionists in the city. People either belonged, and took their belonging seriously, or were anti-religionists. The Anarchists, discussed above, were not



Temple Mishkan Tefila on Moreland St., dedicated, 1907



"Chief Rabbi" Morris Z. Margolies

the only secularists. There were a considerable number of them in all intensely Jewish radical groups.

Divided in religion, Boston Jews found other areas where cooperation was possible. Even in these they had to go through a long, often a very long, involved period of dissension, before real mutuality was finally achieved.

Not by Bread Alone

The records for 1895 show that Ohabei Shalom's Sabbath School had 120 pupils, while Temple Israel in its Sunday school had 91. Things underwent a swift and complete change with the arrival of the refugees. These brought with them no, or few material goods. However, they brought with them their past which did not die during the long voyage in steerage. The tradition of "teach them diligently" (Deut. 6:7) had deep roots, and one of the first things the immigrants did was to engage *melamdim* (teachers) for their boys. This too was the tradition, girls could live without education.

But this was America. It was a new life and many a tradition changed. Jewish education was one of these. In the first place there arose a class of "American *melamdim.*" These were often neer-do-wells with little knowledge, who, since they could not apply themselves to anything opened *haderim* (Hebrew schools). Their cultural baggage was meager and so was their curriculum: reading prayers and a bit of *humash* (Bible) was considered by them and by the busy parents as sufficient. There was one worse factor in this picture. The immigrant fathers to a large degree abdicated their role as head of the family. They were busy working as peddlers or in shops. All home problems, including education of the children were left to poor overworked mothers. Not having any help from the fathers, they proved to be too weak to fight the boys who refused to go to "Hebrew" after long hours in the public

schools. Result - not even a *heder* (Hebrew school), but a substitute. In the North End and later in the West End, one could see in the afternoon and on Sundays a man with a *siddur* (prayer book) in his hands knocking on doors. This was the *siddur peddler,* who for a few pennies taught for a few minutes. This was "Jewish education" in Boston at the very beginning of the immigration period. This was the lost Jewish generation, the effects of which were felt for a long time.

Education came into its own in Boston in 1883 when a communal *Talmud Torah* was established in the West End.

The *Talmud Torah* was a forerunner of a modern Hebrew school, *Ivria,* which opened in 1904. Here the accent was on Hebrew as a spoken language. The method was the one used in Palestine, *Ivrit B'Ivrit* (Hebrew through Hebrew). No other language but Hebrew was used. In addition to the language, there was an intensive course given in Bible and something new was added, something that today is taken for granted, but was revolutionary in those days, a course in Jewish history. The success of this school led to the establishment of a Hebrew high school, in 1907, one of the first in the country.

The teachers in these schools were for the most part autodidacts, but what they missed in their formal pedagogic training was more than compensated for by their devotion, and their enormous faith in Jewish education generally and in the importance of the Hebrew language specifically.

In 1914, the Labor-Zionists, by this time a strong organization in the city, opened their first school. This was the greatest revolution of all in Jewish education, for this was a school with an entirely new concept-a secular Jewish school. Here the pupils were taught Hebrew, Bible, Zionism, but no religion. The latter was considered the private affair of the parents. And something else was new - the language of instruction was Yiddish, the language spoken in the immigrants' homes. The *Poalei Zion,* (Workers of Zion) subsequently opened a few more of such schools. The other secular group, the *Arbeiter Ring* (Workmen's Circle) followed suit with its secular schools. In these, however, not only was Hebrew not taught, but also Zionism was taboo. The accent was entirely on Yiddish culture.

Jewish education prospered, but it was disorganized. There were no standards, neither for students nor for teachers, and since there was no central agency that concerned itself with the problem, there was no outside, objective supervision and evaluation. Finally, this came about. After many heated discussions and negotiations a Bureau of Jewish Education was established in 1921. While such a Bureau had been formed in New York in 1910, Boston's was the first to be completely maintained by the local Federation which, naturally, meant that it could wield more influence.

The period of *melamdim* was ended with the opening of the doors of the Boston Hebrew Teachers College in 1921. Here, professional Hebrew teachers were to be trained in all branches of Jewish lore. The institution gained the respect of the community and in 1927 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts gave full recognition to the College and granted to it the right to confer undergraduate and graduate degrees.

In 1875, a North End banker, Baruch Isaac Reinhardt, in an article published in a periodical in Vienna, commented on the state of Jewish education in Boston. He wrote: "In spite of their differences, the five congregations coincide in one regard - their dire neglect of Jewish education. No native born lad from 5 to 20 can read Hebrew, or pray in Hebrew." Reinhardt, in his desire for more Jewish education, no doubt, painted too dark a picture. All records show that the congregations did care, even if their achievements were meager. But whatever the situation was in 1875, by the end of the 1920's all congregations were maintaining schools, there was supervision, there were standards, and there were professional teachers. There was an awareness that there was much to improve and much was done, particularly in the field of adult education.

Of special importance were the famous lecturers and representatives of all ideologies who attracted large masses of people. The "lecture" was an event for the group which organized it. The "lecturer" was treated with great respect, even reverence, the old Jewish trait of paying homage to a *Talmud Chacham* (sage).

Along with the formal education, much was being done in the area of informal education for the young. Communal and private camps where Jewish education in one form or another was an integral part of the summer program, were being established. Jewish courses were introduced in the Community Centers and, of course, in the many temples.

In 1875, the Young Men's Hebrew Association (Y.M.H.A.) whose objective was "intellectual advancement" was also engaged in "relief of the deserving poor." In time the process reversed itself. Societies which had organized for the sole purpose of raising funds for different causes also became involved in various study groups, in "intellectual advancement."

An integral part of the education process were the many periodicals in different languages that made their appearance in the city. Their long history began in 1882 with the publication of a weekly, *The Jewish Watchman.* This was followed by a large number of other weeklies and several monthlies. The high point was reached with the founding of the weekly, *The Boston Advocate* in 1904, later renamed the *Jewish Advocate* which is still being published.

There were also seven newspapers published in Yiddish, beginning with *Der Yiddisher Citizen* in 1893. Some of the English publications had a column in Yiddish, while the Yiddish had a column in English and one of them, *Der Israelit* also introduced a Yiddish-English dictionary.

Another cultural outlet began in the 1890's when a permanent Yiddish Theatre was established in the city. New York troupes played here, quite often before packed houses.

From Discord to Unity

In a letter in *The Asmonean* (Oct. 24, 1849) a correspondent observed: "In Boston . . . where there is a congregation exceeding one hundred members, there is not a solitary

Israelite who receives permanent or occasional charity." This description might have been too rosy, but as long as the number of immigrants was small, charity work was a minor problem. It became acute by the 1870's and assumed enormous proportions beginning with the 1880's. The community became a beehive of charity organizations whose chief characteristic was complete chaos. Everybody "belonged," everybody "contributed," and everybody was busy with some kind of a "project." The goal seemed to be to take care of whoever was in need literally from cradle to grave. This required money, loads of it, and this was not easy. The number of wealthy was limited and the community relatively young. In addition to financial difficulties, there was another critical issue, the psychological barrier between the natives and the strangers.

The first problem to resolve was between the two approaches to charity. Was it to be charity pure and simple - that is solving the immediate needs of the poor by providing food, shelter, clothing, etc. or by providing the means for making the needy self-sustaining? An either/or approach could not, of course, be applied in this complex situation. Instead, both were used in a most haphazard fashion.

At the port, the immigrants were met by a committee of the United Hebrew Benevolent Society, the old well-established society, organized "way back" in 1864. As the immigrants more or less - usually less - adjusted, the immigrant women of the North End organized their own Women's Society Sheltering Home in 1891. They too would also meet the refugees at the port and provide them with temporary - usually four days - lodging and food. Question - why could not the two organizations, both concerned with the same problem, work together? Here the psychological difficulty entered. The "Germans" from the very beginning had a "know-it-all" attitude. They might not know what the immigrants wanted, but they "surely knew" what these poor refugees needed. They were willing to do everything *for* the poor, but nothing *with* the poor. There was no common language between the "German ladies" and the "Russian women." True, while it might have been an honor for the

immigrants to work together with the "natives", they feared that in such a case they would lose their identity. It took a long time to develop communication, to feel equal, or at least nearly equal. In the meantime, each group was doing its own charity work, each in its own way, often duplicating the work and at times, in spite of the best of intentions, working at cross purposes.

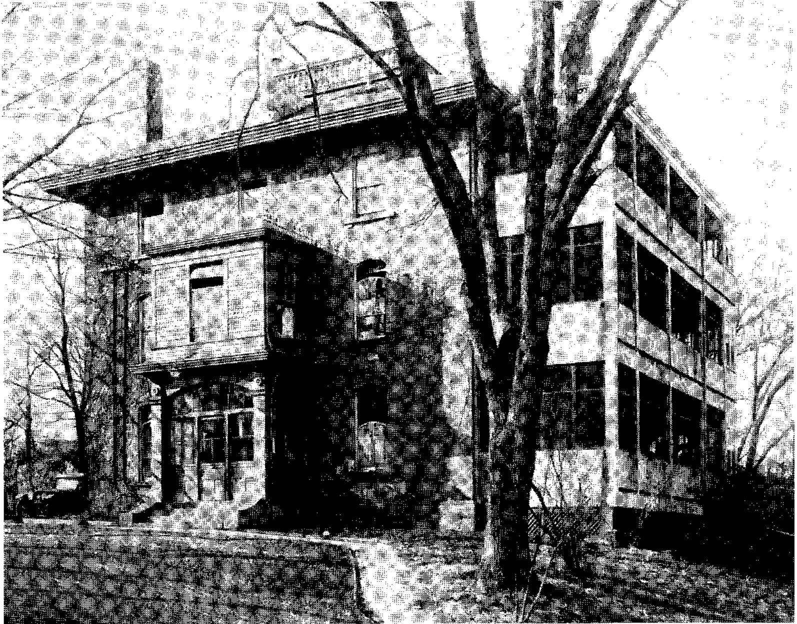
In the beginning the poor refugees - and they were almost all very poor - were given some kind of housing and two dollars a week per person to buy the essentials, coal and groceries. And because the work was not centralized and there was no control, there were some who found it easy to get assistance from several organizations.

The sick, and there were many, needed a Jewish hospital. They feared the strange atmosphere of a general hospital, wanting a Jewish physician and a Jewish nurse with whom they could communicate more easily. Above all, they feared, perish the thought, that in case of death a general hospital might arrange for a funeral in a non-Jewish cemetery. These anxieties gave birth to a semblance of the first Jewish hospital in Boston in 1892 (Jewish Dispensary for Men and Women) located, of course, in the North End where the bulk of the Jews lived at the time. One of the physicians was a Dr. Cecilia Shershevsky. A graduate of Tufts Medical School, she was the wife of an Orthodox rabbi of *Congregation Anshe Poland,* very unusual for a wife of an Orthodox rabbi in those days and to a degree even in our days.

It required an entire decade before a real hospital was established. Mt. Sinai Hospital, founded in 1902 was manned by a large staff of 36 accredited physicians. It also ran two clinics, one serving the North and West Ends, the other the South End and Roxbury. From the very beginning the hospital was non-secretarian and was extremely popular among both Jews and non-Jews. In 1908 it served 11,000 patients, and in 1913 over 24,000. Its success brought about its downfall. The extremely large number of patients which the hospital could not handle properly brought about the condemnation of the building by city authorities that year.

However, as early as 1909, a group of North End women

The first Mt. Sinai Dispensery, Chambers St., Boston



The first Beth Israel Hospital on Townsend St., Roxbury, later Jewish Memorial Hospital

realizing that Mt. Sinai could not possibly serve all who needed help began talking about building a new hospital. Poor as they were, they literally started with the collection of pennies. Two years later, they organized themselves into an orderly fund raising society, Beth Israel Hospital Asociation. The group was incorporated in 1915 and in 1916 a site for a hospital was bought in Roxbury, then Boston's largest Jewish center. A building was erected and the new Beth Israel hospital replaced the old Mt. Sinai. Later, in 1928, it was moved to Brookline Avenue, closer to the Jewish centers of Brookline and Newton as well as to Harvard Medical School with which it was affiliated.

In addition to Mt. Sinai, there also existed since the 1880's a small hospital, Bikur Holim. In 1929, it became an important institution for the chronically ill, the Jewish Memorial Hospital

As for the aged and the orphans, they were taken care of in the Leopold Morse Home for the Aged and Infirm Hebrews and Orphanage, founded in 1889 and in existence until 1911.

Nor were the dead neglected. The obligation to assist in burial, which is known as *hesed shel emes* (a "true kindness" for which one expects no reward) was carried out by the *Hevra Kadisha* (the Holy Society, organized in 1891). The Free Employment Bureau (established in 1892) sought out jobs, while the Free Loan Society, started in 1912 by four individuals with an initial capital of $2,500 provided loans from $25 to $300 without interest to those who planned to enter business.

Of great import was the Hebrew Industrial School. Founded in 1889, it was at first for girls only and started with 20 young children. Classes were conducted in millinery, hand sewing, machine sewing and cooking. In 1892, the school became co-ed. Students came from all parts of the city, as well as from Chelsea. Hundreds learned different trades and became skilled workers. In five years, 1,200 graduated the institution. This was the first vocational school in the city and indeed served as a model. In the 1920's, the school became the Hecht Neighborhood House, located for 13 years in the West End and later in Dorchester. As many other

institutions before and since, it served cultural needs as well as welfare ones.

One of the most important organizations at that time which had its "fingers in every pie," was the Baron de Hirsch Fund. It was founded by the wealthy banker, Baron Maurice de Hirsch:

> "To remove them (the Jews) from the soil to which they are rooted (Russia) and to transport them to other countries, where they will enjoy the same rights as the people among whom they live and where they will cease to be pariahs, and become citizens."

In 1894, the Fund established a branch in Boston to help in every possible way those who escaped from Eastern Europe. It supported virtually every major Jewish project in the city. The Industrial School was supported as late as 1918. Realizing that the immigrants' adjustment depended upon knowing the language of the country, the Fund together with other organizations, especially the Council of Jewish Women (organized 1897), conducted classes in English. In addition, they were taught American history and mores. Those who feared — and there were many — that all education would keep Jews from being "real" Jews, looked with scorn upon the "Americanization" as these classes were generally called. Obviously, this view did not prevail.

One activity of the Fund was its Industrial Removal Office (IRO). Fearing a rise of anti-Semitism as a result of overcrowded ghettos, the IRO sought to relocate immigrants and to scatter them all over America. This activity began in 1901 and continued until 1922. During those years, new homes were found, mostly in small towns, for 79,000 immigrants, including 2,500 from Boston.

Into this whirlwind of activities, entered Rabbi Solomon Schindler, who played a major role in shaping the community. Active as he was in the affairs of Boston's Jews, he also had a keen interest in the general life of the city. Boston's non-Jews were also plagued with the problems of pauperism, poverty, unskilled labor, unemployment, etc. In 1879, the Associated Charities was created changing the

accent from "handouts" to constructive help. The new organization also strove for more cooperation and avoidance of duplication among Boston's many charity groups.

Schindler took his cue from the Associated, Boston's central charity organization. He did not follow the Christians' methods blindly, but upon critical examination of the situation in the Jewish community, he came to the conclusion that what the Jews needed was to bring order to their operations by establishing an association similar to the one which was performing so well in the general community. In 1883, at the annual meeting of the largest Jewish philanthropic organization, the United Hebrew Benevolent Association, Schindler introduced a radical proposal that, at least, some of the leading organziations unite. He expressed his belief that: "If their alliance gives satisfaction . . . the other societies will also join in the course of time." Realizing that the organizations were extremely jealous of their independence he made it clear that he was not advocating an amalgamation, but only united action, not to "take one iota from the autonomy and sovereignty of any corporation."

However, jealousy and habit proved to be stronger than common sense. The suggestion was at first rejected, but slowly, the idea of cooperation won more and more adherents until finally a full 12 years later, in January 1895, three organizations, the United Hebrew Benevolent Association, the Hebrew Women's Sewing Circle, and the Leopold Morse Home for Aged and Infirm Hebrews and Orphanage decided to federate and formed the Federation of Jewish Charities. In April of the same year two more organizations, the Free Employment Bureau and the Free Burial Society, also joined the new body. The last one was a real breakthrough. It was the first immigrant Orthodox group that was ready to join "those" Jews. This was, however, an exception. On the whole, the Russians who by this time had already learned in their *landsmanschaften* and fraternal orders the niceties of parliamentarianism, how "to take the floor", "to make a motion", "to second a motion" etc. were still reluctant to join the "also Jews". It was because of this that the action of the Free Burial Society was of such importance,

as if it were saying *men meg shoin,* it is already "kosher" to work hand in hand with the "Germans."

While remaining dedicated to the basic principles of its founders, the Federation changed its name several times. In 1908 it became the Federated Jewish Charities, in 1930 it became the Associated Jewish Philanthropies, and in 1961 it became the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, the name by which it is known at the time of this writing. The "combined" in its name signified that Boston's campaign is conducted for local as well as for overseas needs. Again Boston showed the way. It was the first community in the country to conduct a combined appeal in 1940.

As Schindler anticipated, more organizations did indeed join, more order was established, more people were educated to give larger sums for Jewish causes.

Chapter IV
A United Community 1895-

The preamble to the Constitution of the newly created organization to be called The Federation of Jewish Charities, the first of its kind in the United States, explained both the failures of the past discordant actions and the high hopes for building a stronger community by united action. It read:

> Whereas, the Jewish charities of the city of Boston are now administered by a number of different organizations, each acting independently of the others, resulting in imperfect investigation and a duplication of charities, and believing that a union of interests for a common cause will tend to a more systematic administration of the charities, will avoid duplication and the making of paupers, will establish a more perfect system of investigation and registration, will render moral as well as material aid and will receive a more generous support from the community, therefore be it RESOLVED, that a federation be established, to be called THE FEDERATION OF JEWISH CHARITIES OF BOSTON.

In time the high hopes of the founders of the Federation became a reality. In 1895, 489 persons responded to the appeal and the highest contribution was $750. There was also one for $600 and one for $500. Sixty-eight individuals contributed $1.00 each, 26 $.50 each and some even $.15 and $.10. The total was better than expected, but left much room for improvement. The moving spirit of the newly formed organization was Jacob Hecht. He was the personification of what poor immigrants could achieve in America. Born in Bavaria in 1834 he came to this country at the age of 14. He

Jacob H. Hecht

Louis E. Kirstein

The Hecht House, a major center of Jewish life in Dorchester.

began as a peddler of shoe laces and notions and worked himself up to become a substantial wholesale shoe jobber. He was involved in many charities and served as President of the Federation for its first six years (1895-1901).

The superintendent and the real organizer of the entire enterprise was the ever-active Solomon Schindler, who by this time was no longer serving as a rabbi. The Schindler of old, who carried on propaganda against "Russian" immigrants, had become a changed man. The "Russians" were now in Boston, and what was needed was to make it possible for them to establish themselves here and now. Schindler, more than anyone else, brought together various organizations and succeeded in enlisting a larger number of volunteers, the backbone of the Federation.

As for the essential ingredient for successful communal work - money - this too was forthcoming in ever larger amounts. People learned not only to give but, as the saying goes, "until it hurts." There were, nevertheless, ups and downs. A leap forward, a fundamental change in the growth of the Federation took place under Louis E. Kirstein, President of the organization from 1922-1924 and again from 1930 to 1934. Here was a man of great vision. He insisted on professionalism. Volunteers were important, but they were to be coordinated by those who made social work their life vocation.

Kirstein had little sympathy for "cardiac Jews," those who claimed concern for Jews but did little and gave even less. He was an excellent campaigner and quite often not too "polite." He had no qualms about reminding people of their own, or their forbears' humble beginnings. He was accepted by both sectors of the community, in the exclusive Elysium Club crowd, as well as by the masses to whom he appealed by being a Zionist. The results of his campaigns were phenomenal. In his first campaign there were 5,000 new contributors. As for money, income had risen from $46,436 in 1912 to $225,860 in 1917 and to $440,698 seven years later. In time the number of contributors reached tens of thousands, and the level of contributions reached as high as $17,000,000 in 1974 following the Yom Kippur War.

Charity became socially not only acceptable but expected. Everybody who was somebody was expected to attend annual charity Purim Balls. Balls were held since 1869, but only from 1897 did they become the great yearly event of the classes. These were held at first in the Music Hall and later in Horticultural Hall. The balls were a very formal affair, opening with a grand march led by the governor or another notable. There was a concert, a formal dance and midnight dinner. The main purpose, charity, was never forgotten and the proceeds were usually substantial. In 1900, for instance, receipts were $5,894.80, a large sum for those days.

Absenteeism from the event attended by the "big givers" could even affect the credit standing of any individual.

Jewish tradition holds that the poor have a right to demand assistance and the rich have an obligation to give it. There was a degree of social pressure that worked on those able to give. The Federation had no legal authority to impose taxes, or even to *demand* a contribution. The only weapon the leadership had was to tell the "refuseniks" *es past nit,* (it is not becoming) for a Jew not to be part of the community, and one who does not contribute to the community can not be counted as part of it. On the whole this social pressure worked and Jewish philanthropies in Boston brought in not only money, which to be sure was important, but also an awareness of belonging to *am ehad* (one people indivisible).

On the National Scene

Am ehad obviously does not begin or end in one city. From the very beginning Boston's Jews were in one way or another involved in the affairs of the Jews of the entire country. The first involvement took place early in American Jewish history. In 1729, the first American congregation *Shearith Israel* of New York was about to build what was to become the first Jewish house of worship in North America, the *Mill Street Synagogue.* Being short of funds they followed an ancient custom, turning to other Jews in other communities for

assistance. At that time, there were no more - and probably less-than 1,000 Jews in all 13 colonies. How such a message was sent remains a mystery. Most likely in this case, as in many others, Jewish antennae performed their function. Be that as it may, in the annals of *Shearith Israel* are recorded the names of Michael Asher, Isaac Solomon, Judah Levi, and Simon Bazulas, four Boston Jews who sent in their contribution. Who knows, they may have constituted at that time the entire Jewish population of Boston. As cited earlier, two of the four, Michael Asher and Isaac Solomon, were the ones who, in 1733, bought a plot to serve as a burial place for "the Jewish nation."

Another appeal was issued by *Shearith Israel* in 1817 when they needed funds to rebuild the synagogue. This time, a rather large sum, $666.43, was received from the Bostonian Abraham Touro. While there is no proof, it is reasonable to assume that this represented a collection rather than an individual gift.

When the yellow fever epidemic struck New Orleans in 1850, the Jews of that city - again in proper Jewish fashion - followed the principle *kol Israel arevim zeh bazeh* (all of Israel are responsible for one another) and issued a call for help. Boston naturally responded.

Boston was there when the problem was financial. It was, moreover, to be counted upon on occasions of an entirely different character. In 1859 a meeting was called in New York regarding the creation of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, an early attempt to establish a representative body for the Jews in the country. Boston was represented at that meeting by a delegation from Temple Ohabei Shalom.

Proliferation of Organizations

Participation in the conclave for unity on the national scene did not imply local unity. Far from it. Witness the proliferation of fraternal orders. Their common

denominators were insurance policies, sick aid, etc. The first on record, organized in 1894, was the *Order of the Free Sons of Israel.* It was followed by two lodges of *B'nai B'rith* in 1859. Also in 1859 came the *Order Brith Abraham,* in the 1870's *Kesher Shel Barzel,* in 1883 *The Free Sons of Benjamin,* in 1903 the socialist *Arbeiter Ring,* in 1915 the Labor Zionist *Farband,* to mention only some of the most important ones. The latter two had ideological bases as well as "benefits."

What was true of fraternal orders was also true of clubs and cultural organizations. But a warning! One is not to be deceived by the title of an organization. Those whose names might imply that they were concerned only with "pleasure" were, in fact, concerned also with social problems, usually charity. On the other end, those with the word "culture" or something like it in their name were involved in pleasurable activities, which by no stretch of imagination had anything to do with "pure" culture. Again, to mention only a few of these: The Harmony Club (the New York *Harmonie Club* had as its motto: "More polish, less Polish"), the Pleasure Club, the Sunlight Pleasure Club, etc. As for "purely" cultural organizations, the first on record is the Hebrew Literary Society, organized in 1846, shortly after the organization of the first congregation. Next came the Mendelsohn Verein in 1856, the Progress Cultural Society in 1864, the Hebrew Educational Society in 1868, and the YMHA in 1875. Most of these were in existence only a few years, dwindled, died, only to be followed by others similar in purpose, but with different names, often even with the same officers.

Boston Jewry was finally coming into its own, forming a vibrant community engaged in all phases of Jewish life.

Second Dimension
Concern With Jews Abroad

"A man is a Jew, because whatever happens to the Jews happens to him."

Abba Eban

Boston Jews were not Abba Eban and could not express as eloquently as he did the idea to which they always adhered. Indeed, what happened in 1859 in far away Bologna, Italy, to the little Jewish boy, Edgar Mortara became their business, as if it had happened to them. The boy was kidnapped by the Papal police and baptized. The only weapon that world Jewry had was to protest. This they did. Boston Jews, few in number, responded to the call. They held a "mass meeting" on November 21, 1859 and issued their strong protest. Unfortunately in this case, as in many subsequent cases of a similar nature, right was weaker than might. Edgar Mortara was not saved.

Boston's Jewish Voice
In International Affairs

There were many occasions to protest against atrocities. The largest and most imposing demonstration was the one in 1903 against the pogrom perpetrated by the Russian government in which 47 Jews were killed, hundreds wounded, 1300 homes and shops plundered and 2,000 families made homeless (there were times when such numbers made one's blood boil). By this time, there were about 25,000 Jews in Boston. They considered it their duty not only to show their pain, but also to arouse public opinion against the atrocities. This they did with a meeting on May 19, 1903 in historic Faneuil Hall. Not only Jews but many non-Jews attended, including the most distinguished members of the clergy. The high note was struck by one of the latter, Dr. Charles A. Ames, who said in part:

> "I am sick and tired of the religion that does not restrain human vice and hatred. I am tired and sick of the religion that rolls its eyes to heaven and does not care who it steps on down here."

The resolution called upon "the United States government to raise its voice of protest against Russia, and to intercede on behalf of our suffering brethren."

Sharp articles of protest were published in all Boston newspapers. Their general tenor was aptly expressed by the *Globe* on May 28, 1903 which read, in part:

> "It is said that this republic cannot do anything in the way of retaliation, because American interests are not involved. This is true, but there is no law which prevents human beings in one part of the world from sincerely sympathizing with . . . men, women and children in another country, and letting them who are responsible for misery know that their acts are deplored and censured."

The *Globe* returned to the subject on July 7, when it editorially demanded the government to lodge its protest against Russia quoting President Benjamin Harrison, who on a similar occasion had said "The suppression of humanity furnish ample ground for the remonstrances which we have presented to Russia." The Jewish voice was stifled when the Premier of Russia Von Pleve let it be known that His Imperial Majesty would not deign to receive any protests. Yet demonstrations of this kind had accomplished much. Russian Jews were made aware that they were not alone. It also had its value for Boston Jews. In the face of persecution, all divisions were forgotten. This was still 1903, the period of the great chasm between the "natives" and the "strangers," the "Germans" and the "Russians," yet in Faneuil Hall they were drawn closer to each other. Jewish suffering was breaking the wall of separation.

Boston Jews showed their greatest unity in their relation to Palestine (Israel). Unlike the case of pogroms, which united all Jews, there was a strong ideological cleavage between Zionists and anti-Zionists. The so-called *Pittsburgh Platform* of the Reform Movement (1885) which proclaimed

clearly "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect (no) return to Palestine . . ." had its adherents in Boston. As a matter of fact, Rabbis Schindler and Fleischer denounced the idea of a restoration of Palestine even before the adoption of this platform. However, many of Boston's Jews were "Zionists" well before the term was even coined in 1897.

The story of Zionism in Boston began as far back as 1846, when a Palestinian *meshulah* (messenger) Yehiel Cohen came to the city to collect for "the poor and scholars in the Holy Land." He and the next messenger, Aaron Selig, who came in 1850, were assisted in their work by the leading members of the only existing congregations, Ohabei Shalom and Adath Israel. In a later period, Boston had one of the first *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) societies in the country (organized in 1889). There was a strong group of *Shavei Zion* (Returnees to Zion) among the Russian immigrants in the 1890's. These intended not only to work *for* Palestine, but also to "make aliyah" and work *in* it. In 1891, the forerunners of the Zionist movement (the first Zionist Congress did not take place until 1897) acquired a home for themselves, Zion Hall, a forerunner of the present Zionist House. In the same year, the Zionist flag was designed by two members of the Askowith family of Boston.

With the birth of the international Zionist movement, activities for the cause grew immensely. There were strong organizations of all shades of Zionism: General Zionists, Labor Zionists and Religious Zionists. Young students under the leadership of Horace Kallen and Harry A. Wolfson established the Zionist Menorah Association at Harvard and in the 1920's came the *Avukah*. The *Hashomer Hatzair* had its strong group in the city, some of whose members settled in kibbutzim. Since 1915, the women's Zionist organization *Hadassah* was a strong force in the city.

The strength of the Zionist movement in Boston was demonstrated when a number of young men joined the Jewish Legion in 1917 to fight for the liberation of Palestine from the Turks. After the war, some of these remained and settled in Avihal, a colony of former legionnaires, mostly Americans.

Horace M. Kallen

Louis D. Brandeis

In later years, Boston's Jews contributed much to the purchase of the famous ship *Exodus,* used for illegal immigration of Jews to Israel. It was again in Boston in 1951 that the first drive for the sale of Bonds for Israel was launched.

Much was done and much was accomplished. Thousands were involved in small daily projects, while top leaders stood guard for Zion's sake in the places of those in whose hands rested vital decisions. An inspirational role in all this was played by Herzl's one-time secretary, Jacob de Haas, who settled in Boston in 1905. He and the then young instructor of philosophy at Harvard, Horace Kallen, exerted their influence upon the prominent lawyer, later Supreme Court Justice, Louis D. Brandeis who was to become a recognized leader of the Zionist movement.

A special role in promoting the recognition of the, independent State of Israel was played by two Bostonians, Elihu D. Stone, who was at home equally in Lithuanian society as well as in the councils of the state's political leaders, and David K. Niles, a special assistant to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman.

Boston Jews were and are a part of world Jewry.

Third Dimension
A Part of the General Community

Boston Jews were fully involved with Jewish affairs, local, national and international, and one could get the impression that they lived in isolation, apart from the general community. This, in fact, was the case only for a short period at the beginning when the immigrants kept to themselves. They wished to be left alone to eke out their miserable living. These refugees also brought in their hearts fear of the non-Jew. In time, however, they understood that "this is America," and America is different."

The first area in which they began to play an "American" role was politics. Initially they were satisfied with small favors shown to them by ward politicians. It pleased their ego

when these "real Americans" showed them some friendship and they gladly cast their votes for "friends of the Jews." Soon, both the politicians as well as the Jews realized the power of the ballot box. Most Jews, as other ethnic groups, lived near each other. Just as there were Irish, Italian and other ethnic districts, so there were Jewish districts. The political parties were obliged to pay a price for the "Jewish vote" and many positions of trust were given to the Jews. Thus began the era of "Jewish politicians," which is not to say that they were not deserving of the position they came to hold. This was and still is an aspect of American politics: service to one ethnic group offers the opportunity to serve the community at large.

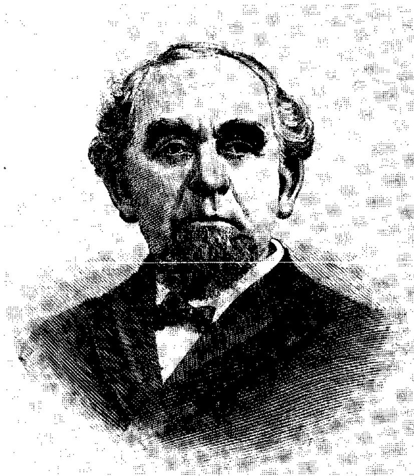
The breakthrough in politics came as early as 1875 when Godfrey Morse was elected to the Boston School Committee. A far more important event took place a year later when his older brother Leopold was elected to the House of Representatives, the first Jew from Massachusetts to hold a national office. He served six consecutive terms. Godfrey Morse moved up from the School Committee to the City Council, and in 1897-1898, was the State Chairman of the Democratic Party.

The Morses paved the way. One Boston Jew, Abraham Captain (Cap) Ratchevsky was even appointed (1930) by President Hoover, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia and Harry D. White, author of the Bretton Woods World Monetary Plan, served as Asst. Secretary of the U.S. Treasury. Two other Boston Jews, Louis D. Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter served as Associate Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the course of time many Boston Jews served in different positions both as elected and appointed officials on local, State, and Federal levels.

Anti-Semitism in Boston

In the beginning were the attacks by Irish gangs in the North End, which continued in Roxbury and Dorchester. In 1892 it was German and Negro gangs. These stopped only



Leopold Morse

Leopold Morse Home for Aged and Infirm Hebrews and Orphanage in Mattapan

when the Jews organized a self-defense group. In the same year, a bill was introduced in the General Assembly "to keep Chinese, Negroes, and Jews from neighborhoods where they are not wanted." The bill was defeated, but discrimination continued.

Anti-Semitic propaganda became especially vicious decades later in the 1940's. The rabble-rouser Father Charles E. Coughlin delivered his anti Jewish speeches over the radio. His magazine *Social Justice* had its counterpart in Boston's Catholic *The Boston Pilot.* The local German Bund, the Silver Shirts, and others were spewing poison against Jews. It was no longer possible to depend on national organizations to carry on the daily struggle against the ever-increasing number of local enemies. The American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and others were geared to carry on national and international activities. The local problems could be better handled by a local organization. In addition, a special organization could take care of innumerable disputes between synagogues, complaints against fraternal orders especially in regard to problems of cemeteries, as well as combat local anti-Semitism. In 1944 such a body was created. The Jewish Community Council, the membership of which was to consist of many organizations, became the communal arm dealing with inter-group and intra-group conflicts.

One is pleasantly surprised to read the names of Jews, mostly from poor families, who were able to overcome all obstacles and attain high positions in academia, in arts, in business, etc.

Difficult as it was to overcome antagonisms in government, academia, business and other areas, it was particularly difficult to find acceptance among the "Brahmins." One did not even have to be a "real" Brahmin to snub Jews. As for the Jews, they felt the insults. At issue, however, was not membership in an "exclusive" club. To this there was a solution - Jewish clubs. Not so when the fate of "their" city was at stake. The United Way, the Symphony, the Library, the Museum and other communal activities

were not to be "exclusive" and Jewish leaders - that is leaders in the Jewish community - became prominent in the general life of the community. What is described here in a few words took many years and is not fully resolved even today.

This monograph was intended to present a kaleidoscopic overview of the beginnings of Boston Jewry. Only a detailed history can explain the complexity of the process of how the few became many, how rifts gave birth to unity, and, above all, how a group of strangers in a strange land adjusted themselves to live harmoniously as Jews and Americans.

Hopefully, it succeeds in sketching the essentials of the past and providing the contours of the future of the Boston Jewish community.

What of the Future

The sage of Boston, Ralph Waldo Emerson dreamt of a *uniform* America. He prophesied that: "The energy of the Irish, the Germans . . . and all European tribes and those of the Africans and the Polynesians will construct a new race, a new religion."

This hope for uniformity was echoed by others, most forcefully, perhaps, by Theodore Roosevelt. Said the President:

> "We welcome the German, the Irishman, who becomes an American. We have no use for a German, or Irishman, who remains such. We do not wish German-Americans and Irish-Americans . . . We have no room for any people, who do not act . . . simply as Americans and as nothing else."

Their hope was "melting." The first to introduce this word was the French-American writer Michel St. Jean de Crevecoeur, who in 1782 wrote: "Here in America, individuals of all nations are melted into the race of men."

The idea was made popular by the British-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, who in his play *The Melting Pot* (1907) wrote: "America is God's crucible. He is making the American."

The "we" about whom Roosevelt spoke included also Jewish assimilationists. Their most eloquent spokesman was the prominent Boston lawyer, Louis D. Brandeis. Addressing a *Jewish* meeting in 1905, on the occasion of a celebration of the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the first Jews in the country, he said: "Habits which keep alive differences of origin are inconsistent with the American ideal of brotherhood and are disloyal." Like Roosevelt, Brandeis preached uniformity, the doing away with "old habits." The ideal American was one who had no past.

The big change in America's thinking about "hyphenated Americans" was a result of the teachings of another Bostonian, Horace Meyer Kallen. He was the spokeman for millions of "ethnics" who longed to be Americans and at the same time to retain "old habits."

Kallen, the son of a poor Orthodox Rabbi,was brought to this country at the age of three, in 1885. In spite of extreme poverty, Horace, the oldest of eight children, graduated Harvard in 1903 and became an instructor of philosophy at his alma mater. He had a distinguished career as professor of philosophy and psychology in a number of leading universities and authored major works in these fields. At the same time he wrote extensively on Jewish subjects. Much of his writing was devoted to the problem of ethnicity in the United States. His central concept was that "equality is not sameness." Time and again he returned to the problem of "hyphenation" as a fact of life. "Everybody has many loyalties: occupational, family, recreational, communal, state, nation. Hyphenation does not divide, it unites." Speaking about Jews he said: "The term Jew is like the term soldier. Soldier presupposes army. One can not be a soldier in abstraction. 'Jew' denotes a people called Jews.

Anybody is a Jew who of his own free will calls himself by that name or feels compelled to answer to it when others call him by it."

Kallen succeeded in recruiting many "soldiers" to his idea of an America, which in his words was to be "an orchestra of many instruments (peoples)." His teaching became known as *cultural pluralism.*

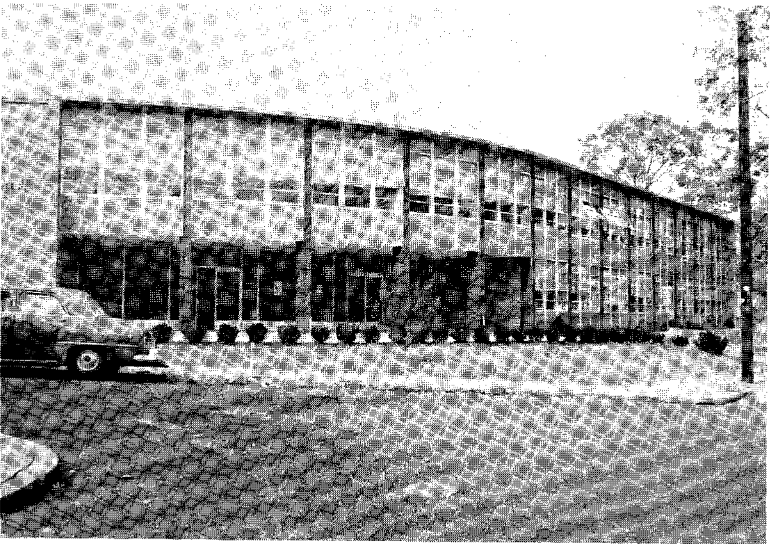
One of these "soldiers" who in time became a general, was Louis Brandeis, a leading proponent of Kallen's ideas and ideals. Under the latter's influence, Brandeis moved from his assimilationist position to that of appreciating the rights of all ethnic groups in the country to continue to exist as such and to retain their own special culture. He, who in 1905 demanded to do away with "old habits" one decade later, in 1915 on the occasion of the Fourth of July celebration said in Faneuil Hall:

> "America . . . has always declared herself for equality of nationalities as well as for equality of individuals . . . America has believed that each race had something of peculiar value which it can contribute to the attainment of those high ideals for which it is striving. America has believed that we must not only give to the immigrant the best that we have, but must preserve for America the best that is in the immigrant . . . America has believed that in differentiation, not in uniformity, lies the path of progress . . ."

One can almost hear Kallen speaking. Not only Brandeis went along with Kallen. Whether they studied his books or not, whether they even had heard of his name, the overwhelming majority of Boston Jews became "Kallenists." They were Jews, they were Americans, taking pride in their dual heritage. Their gut reaction was: Adaption - Yes, Adoption - No. Integration and integrity do not come easily, but this the "Kallenists" decided was the only way to live a decent life in America and this they tried to do.

As Kallen believed in one America consisting of many parts, so Boston Jews believed in one community consisting of many parts. The Federation of Jewish Charities, which was orginally organized merely as a more efficient method of

Hebrew College in Brookline



Brookline-Brighton-Newton Jewish Community Center

collecting funds for various charitable causes became in the course of time the representative body of Boston Jewry.

Currently a community of about 180,000 it is no more divided into "natives" and "strangers." A majority of Boston Jews are native born, with a high percentage of third and even fourth generation American born. Old animosities among the different "Jewries" are a thing of the past. Many differences remain. There is the generation gap, there are differences in attitudes toward religion, economic differences, various attitudes to civil rights problems, and many, many more. All of this is quite normal in any society.

But with all these differences, Boston's Jewish community represents on a small scale what Kallen hoped for America at large, namely "Unity in Diversity." There is unity of purpose to build a stronger community on the foundation of "old habits."

Prognostications are always dangerous. Yet there is a lesson of history. The history of the Boston Jewish community proves that it never committed the sin of indifference. As a group it has always shown a remarkable degree of dedication to moving forward. Armed with a wealth of experience, the community is strong enough to face up to the remnants of assimilation as well as to the young of the "New Left," both of whom wish to shut the door on history.

There is a growing number of the third generation, who in the words of Marcus Hansen "want to remember what the second wanted to forget."

If history is any measure, there is little doubt but that Boston Jewry will continue to see challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities and will provide an even greater future for its great past.

About the Author

ISAAC M. FEIN, Professor Emeritus of History at the Baltimore Hebrew College, earned his M.A. degree in philosophy at the University of Vienna and his Ph.D. in history at the Dropsie University in Philadelphia. Professor Fein is the author of *The Making of An American Jewish Community* and many articles on American Jewish history in scholarly journals as well as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the *Hebrew Encyclopedia* and *Encyclopedia Judaica*. He is a member of the Academic Council of the American Jewish Historical Society.