

BEYOND THE CATCHILLS

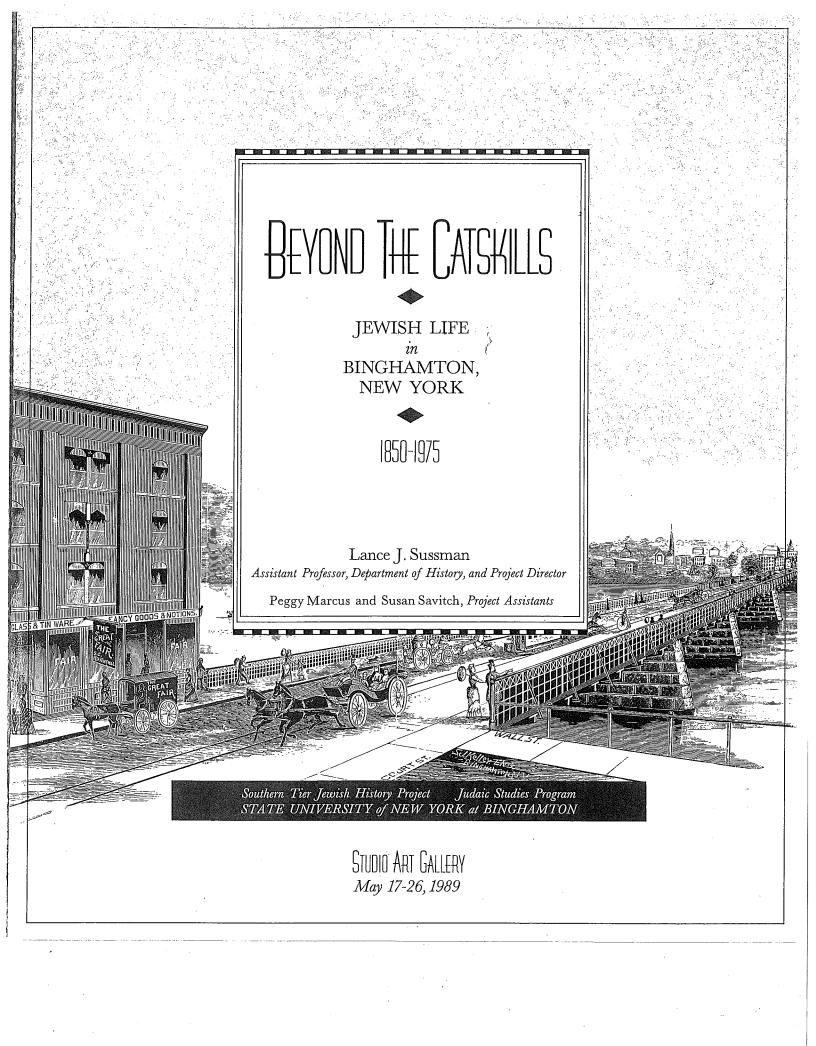
JEWISH LIFE in BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

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STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT BINGHAMTON

Front cover: Children at Garroll Street School, circa 1917-1918. Back cover: Possed before Benjamin Weltsman's scrap business on Depot Street, Owego, in 1939: his wife, Yedda, Eva Rubin, and his sister, Rose Weitsman Lundari.

Title page illustration:
"View of the full deck
bridge across the Chenango River, from Court to
Main Street, as it will
appear when completed."
From 1890s engraving.





Simon C. Rosenthal



Esther Rubin Rosenthal



Harry Rubin

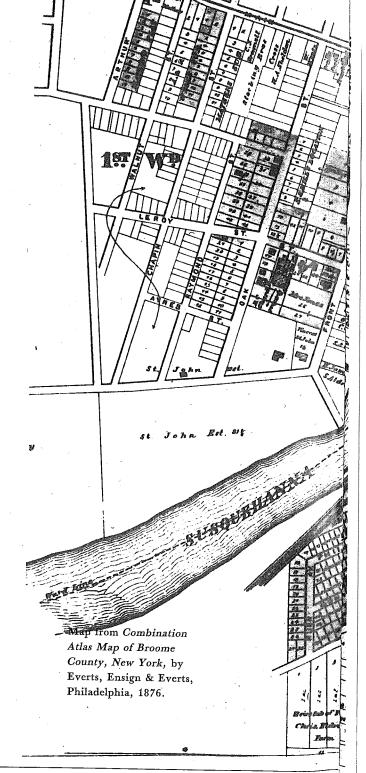
This catalog is underwritten with a gift from Ann and Charles Rosenthal, in tribute to and in loving memory of his parents, Charles and Marie Rosenthal, his grandparents, Simon and Esther Rosenthal, and great-uncle, Harry Rubin. For nearly a century, these members of the Rosenthal family were deeply involved in the growth and development of Binghamton and its Jewish community.



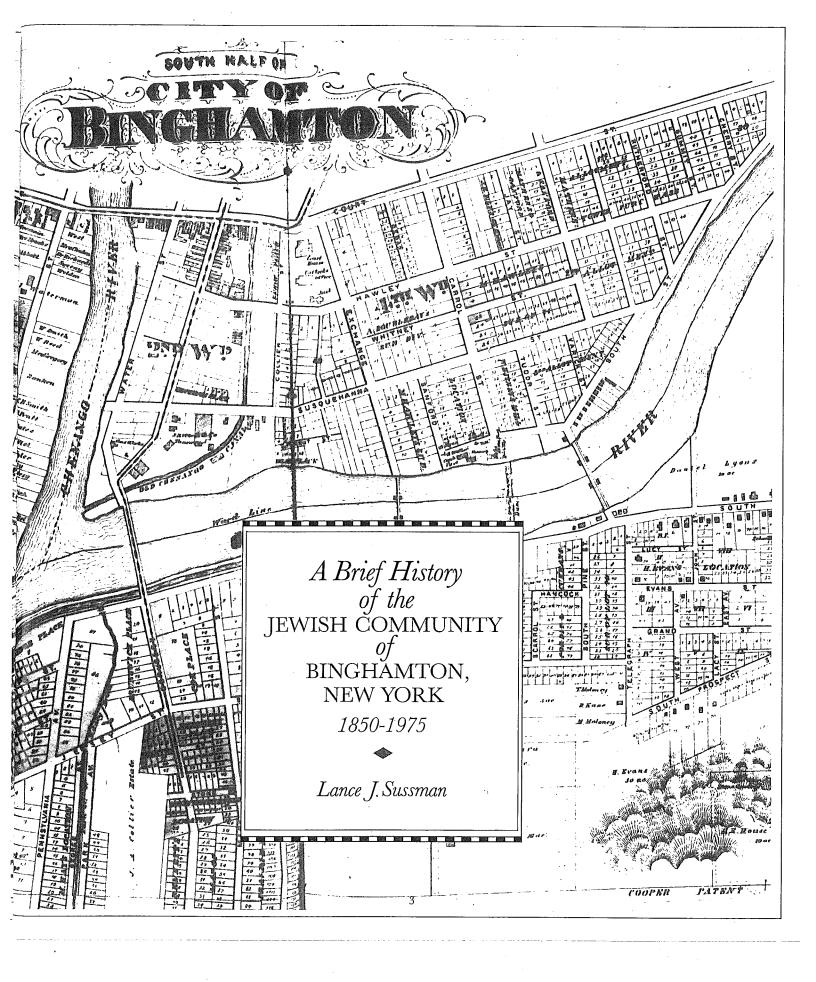
Marie L. Rosenthal



Charles R. Rosenthal



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Retailing was a dominant mode of economic activity for the Jewish community. Rubine and Nettie Levine in their shop, Ruby's Jewelry, 8 Washington Ayenue, Endicott, circa 1926.

INTRODUCTION

Ooon after arriving in Binghamton, New York, an undergraduate came to my office in the History Department at State University of New York at Binghamton. "I don't see how you're going to do it," she began. I asked her to continue. "You know," she said, "teach here and live in New York. It's such a big commute!" "What do you mean?" I replied, "I live here." "You do!" the student responded in disbelief, "I didn't know that Jews live beyond the Catskills."

My student, a young Jewish woman from Long Island, is not alone in her misperception of settlement patterns among American Jews. Not only is there a widespread notion that the vast majority of America's Jews live in metropolitan New York, but a great deal of the popular literature on the American Jewish experience reinforces this geographically skewed view. Perhaps the best known example is Irving Howe's book, *The World of Our Fathers* (1976), which actually required a sequel, *How We Lived* (1979), to help balance the picture.

By contrast, historians interested in the American Jewish experience have examined the development of a broad range of Jewish communities throughout the United States. The study of community construction among American Jews has become increasingly sophisticated and reflects many trends in contemporary historical research and theory. Indeed, the literature on American Jewish communal life has become so substantial that it is conceivable that a composite history of the American Jew could be written from the perspective of urban and community studies. ¹

To date, the Jewish community of Binghamton, New York has not found a historian to tell its story. Nor is the history of the Binghamton Jewish community referred to in the general literature of American Jewish history. Yet, it has an interesting story which, in many ways, typifies the American Jewish experience.

This essay represents only the first step toward the writing of a comprehensive, critical history of the Binghamton Jewish Community. Its principal goals are to describe the basic historical development of the community and to give some insight into the everyday experience of the first 125 years of Jewish life in New York's Southern Tier.²

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Jewish life in Binghamton, New York, from 1850 to 1975, has been distinguished by seven general characteristics. First, the size of the Jewish community in Binghamton and Broome County has never been impressive. According to the American Jewish Year Book, the Binghamton Jewish community, at its largest, claimed a population of only 4,800 or 2% of Broome County's total 1970 population of 240,000. Nationally, there are approximately 120 Jewish communities in the United States in the 1,000-5,000 population range. Highly urbanized, the majority of American Jews live in major metropolitan areas in Jewish communities of 50,000 or more.3

Second, the Binghamton Jewish community developed relatively late in the history of Jewish settlement in the Southern Tier. Binghamton's first synagogue, a modest structure on Water Street, was not built until 1899; Elmira had a synagogue by 1863. In fact, the Binghamton Jewish community did not grow significantly until after 1900 when its population began to expand and numerous Jewish institutions were founded. Made up of many different strands, the complex texture of Jewish life in Binghamton emerged as the third of the community's characteristics.

Jewish life in the Southern Tier was characterized by a high rate of residential mobility. The majority of Jewish families who had settled in the area remained for a generation or less. Thus, while at any one time the Binghamton Jewish community was relatively small, the aggregate number of different Jewish families who resided in the area is quite large.

Another characteristic of the Bingham-

ton Jewish community was its largely middle class socioeconomic profile. The dominant mode of economic activity among local Jews was in retailing. Jewish businessmen, many of whom began their career as peddlers, were especially active in clothing, jewelry, furniture and scrap metals. However, during the 1920s and 1930s, the number of Jewish professionals increased significantly.

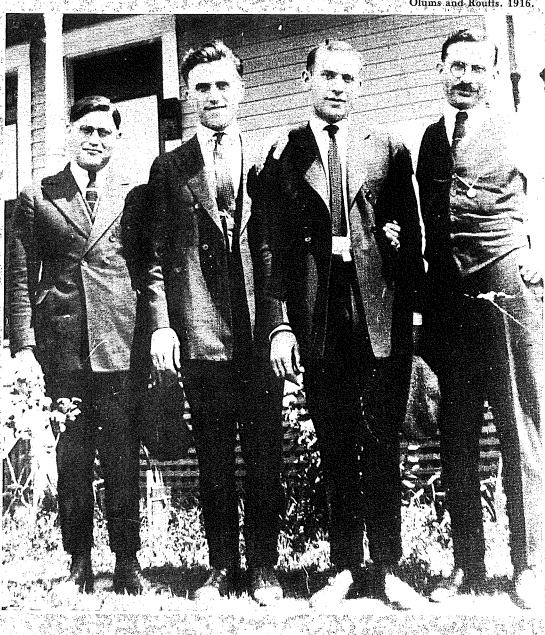
The Jewish community of Binghamton, was also shaped by the presence of other strong ethnic groups in the area. The growing industries of the Triple Cities - Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott-attracted large numbers of East European and Italian immigrants at the turn of the century. Relations between Jewish and non-Jewish ethnics were generally cordial, although there were some minor incidents. Many basic patterns of Old World economic interactions were re-established. Antisemitism was stronger among the older, upper classes of Binghamton society, especially during the period between the World Wars. Following World War II, both elitist and popular antisemitism declined.

The seventh characteristic of the Binghamton Jewish community is the important role women played in its development. Often excluded from the power structures of area institutions, women served as the basic work force of many local Jewish organizations. Women also played leading roles within their families as nurturers of Jewish identity. And, women formed a number of their own organizations including The Jewish Sisterhood, Ezras Torah, Hadassah and National Council of Jewish Women. ⁵

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Uiverse, mobile, largely middle class and occasionally discriminated against, the Binghamton Jewish community developed in stages. Four distinct periods can be discerned. The German Period begins in the 1850s with the arrival of Central European Jews in the Binghamton area. A second period, the Age of the East European Jew, starts in 1885 with the formation of Sons of Israel Congregation. The third period, The Americanization of Binghamton Jewry, symbolically began in 1923 with the construction of Sons of Israel's large, downtown sanctuary on Exchange Street. It also witnessed the development of a Jewish Community Center and the beginnings of a local Jewish Federation. The final stage in Binghamton Jewish history discussed in this study, Suburbanization, extends from the close of World War II to 1975. It was characterized by demographic growth, the relocation of several of the area's major Jewish institutions to new, suburban settings and the expansion of local Jewish religious and educational activity. Subsequent events and trends are too recent to be fully analyzed.

Frequently one family member brought others to the community to form a business. From right to left: Jacob Rouff brought his cousin Jacob Olum from Syracuse to Join him, and later sold the business to him; with them, Olum's brother, Allen, and Leon Grass, first cousin to both the Olums and Rouffs. 1916,



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GERMAN PERIOD 1850-1885

In October 1851, Isaac Leeser, the leading Jewish religious leader in the United States, reported in The Occident, his monthly Philadelphia-based journal, that "in Hudson there are several [Jewish] families. The same is the case at Troy, Schenectady, Watertown, Oswego, Binghampton [sic], and probably other places in the State of New York, of which we have no account." An enthusiastic booster of American Jewish life, Leeser added that "upon the whole, it will be seen, however, that the field of Judaism is extending, and this very rapidly in the Northern States, where not long since the face of an Israelite was but seldom seen, where our mode of worship was entirely unknown."6

In certain ways, Leeser's prediction was accurate. Just 25 years earlier, the total Jewish population in the United States in 1826 was estimated at 6,000. The majority of the American Jewish population lived in a few urban centers along the coast. By the 1830s, a rising rate of immigration and a new pattern of Jewish settlement was rapidly transforming the American community. By 1840,

during the next decade to 50,000. On the eve of the Civil War, the number of American Jews exceeded 120,000.

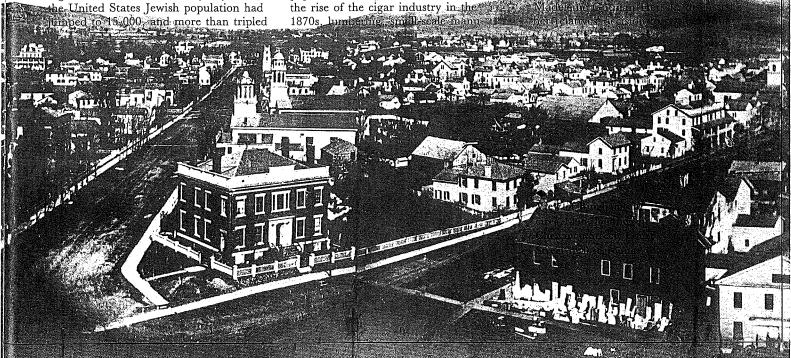
Unlike the earlier immigrants, the Sephardic Jews who clung to the East Coast, the German Jews pushed into the young country's interior creating scores of new Jewish communities in upstate New York, the Midwest, the South and California. However, Leeser was overly optimistic about the future religious behavior of the new immigrants, especially in small towns where Judaism generally fared poorly during the middle decades of the 19th century. Binghamton was no exception.⁷

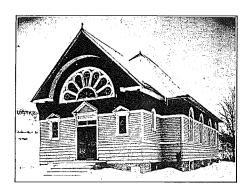
While the rapid growth of the American Jewish community during the antebellum period was part of a larger pattern of demographic and geographical expansion in the United States, Binghamton's general rate of growth lagged behind. In 1850, for example, Binghamton was still a village of 5,000 people. Five years later it was reorganized as a town. But it was not incorporated as a city until 1867. As late as 1890, its total population barely exceeded 35,000. Until the rise of the cigar industry in the

facturing and retailing made up the core of the city's limited economic activity. Thereafter, the population began to grow rapidly.⁸

It is not possible at present to determine who was the first Jew or Jewish family to settle in Binghamton. It is reasonable to assume that permanent settlement had been preceded by years of peddling activity. Permanent Jewish settlement in the area was linked to the completion of the first railroad line servicing the city in 1854, which greatly enhanced the prospects for the area's economy. By the time the first shot was fired at Ft. Sumter, approximately twenty different Jewish families had taken up residence in Binghamton. They stayed for varied lengths of time. Few of the original Jewish settlers remained in the area for more than a generation and most left after a few years.9

The first Jews listed in the Binghamton City Directory were Henry Goodman and Edward Goodkind who owned and operated the "Leading Dry Goods Store" at 32 Court Street. In an unpublished manning of descent the Coodmans.





Organized in 1885 and incorporated in 1887, the Sons of Israel congregation built Binghamton's first synagogue in 1899.

hamton and described their daily life in an idealized fashion.

Henry and his sister, Ricka, emigrated to America about 1850 [from Bavaria] in a sailing vessel that was enroute almost one month. They remained in New York City long enough for Henry to court and marry Elizabeth Koenig, who came from an educated, prosperous family. Because the Erie railroad had been completed in 1848 and it was thought Binghamton had good potentiality of becoming a metropolis, they settled there. They bought a house on Front Street and the opposite bank was like a park with flower beds, benches and a bandstand. Aunt Ricka described how lovely it was and that it was customary on nice evenings to promenade on the river bank path and listen to the band concerts. 10

Elizabeth Koening Goodman wanted to return to New York because of ill health and her desire to be near her family. In 1857, her husband sold his business to Sigmund J. and Frederick Hirschmann. Frederick remained with the family business until 1872. Sigmund continued to operate "Hirschmanns" until 1902.¹¹

Signund J. Hirschmann was widely regarded as the leading Jewish merchant of the city in the 19th century. Born in Fürth, Bavaria, on May 15, 1837, Hirschmann "was apprenticed to a mercantile and commercial house" as a boy in Germany before immigrating to the United States in 1854. He worked as a clerk in stores in New York and Syracuse before moving to Binghamton. Hirschmann married Pauline Markstein,

"a real Civil War belle from Mobile."12 Well known and widely respected in Binghamton, Hirschmann served as a director of the Susquehanna Valley Bank for over twenty years, sat on the board of the Binghamton Savings Bank, and was active with the public library. Late in life, he was also involved in real estate development, especially the German settlement on the city's west side. "He was elected an honorary member of the Binghamton City Club, which at that time, did not accept Jews," according to Madeleine Hersch. "He took no pride in the dubious honor and never used the club. He would have refused membership but felt by doing so he might jeopardize the chances of another Jew being elected to

full membership." On July 27, 1862, Hirschmann met with thirteen other Jewish businessmen, mostly clothing and dry goods merchants, to form Binghamton's first Jewish organization, the Hebrew Benevolent Society. They prepared a constitution in German which mainly dealt with procedural concerns. Subsequent bylaws discussed the organization of services for the High Holy Days, requested members to close their businesses for those days, and provided that "welfare purposes must not exceed \$25.00 per year."13 However, they did not build a synagogue and the society did not mature as an organization.

While Judaism remained "invisible" in Binghamton until the end of the 19th century, the business activity of its Jewish residents continued to expand. "The most important of the new industries," Lawrence Bothwell writes, "was cigar-making, which dominated Bing-

hamton's economy from 1870 to 1890." By 1890, the city had 50 factories which employed "nearly one-third of the city's manufacturing workers . . . most of them working in factories which employed more than one hundred people." A number of Jews, perhaps as many as a dozen families, were involved in the new industry. Heller and Rose, a leading cigar manufacturer, was owned by Jonas S. Heller and H. Fredric Rose, and Herman Whitelaw managed the Hull Cigar Co. 14

The cigar industry also attracted Jewish entrepreneurs and peddlers to the Binghamton area. In a published memoir, *The Pack Peddler*, W. Lee Provol recalled how his family came to the area.

Mother had a cousin Sam Light, who was foreman in a large cigar factory [Kent] in Binghamton, New York. While on a recent visit, he had suggested that we move to Binghamton where there were at least ten thousand cigar makers working, and new factories being established. He advised Dad that Binghamton would make a fertile field in which to pack peddle. 15

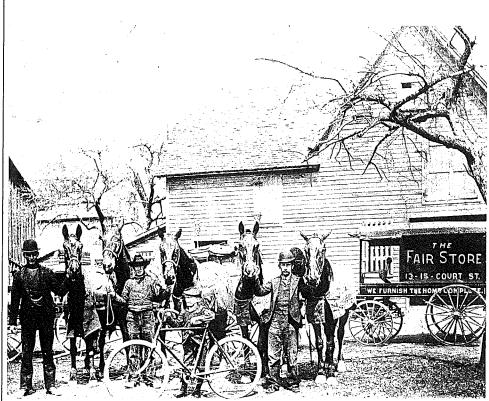
The Provols moved to Binghamton's west side and rented a cottage on Murray Street. His father "bought a horse and wagon, and began to sell dry goods and clothing to the cigar makers on the installment plan, a dollar down and a dollar a week." Although they met with some initial success, the Provol family did not feel at home in Binghamton. After stone-throwing incidents with neighborhood youngsters, despite the intervention of Father Ryan, a Catholic

priest at St. Patrick's, the family decided to leave town. 16

Another family attracted to Binghamton during the boom years in the local cigar industry were the Rosenthals who, unlike the Provols, prospered and associated themselves with the area's German-Jewish elites. Beginning his career as a peddler, American-born Simon C. Rosenthal arrived in Binghamton in 1888 where he was joined by his brotherin-law, Levi M. Algase, a Swedish Jew. They opened a retail business at 130 Washington Street and later moved to Court Street. A second family member, Harry Rubin, joined the firm in 1893 and helped build The Fair Store into one of the city's leading mercantile outfits. In 1902, Rosenthal and Rubin "opened a premium business on Railroad Avenue" with a distant relative of the Hirschmanns. Algase left Binghamton after two or three years.17

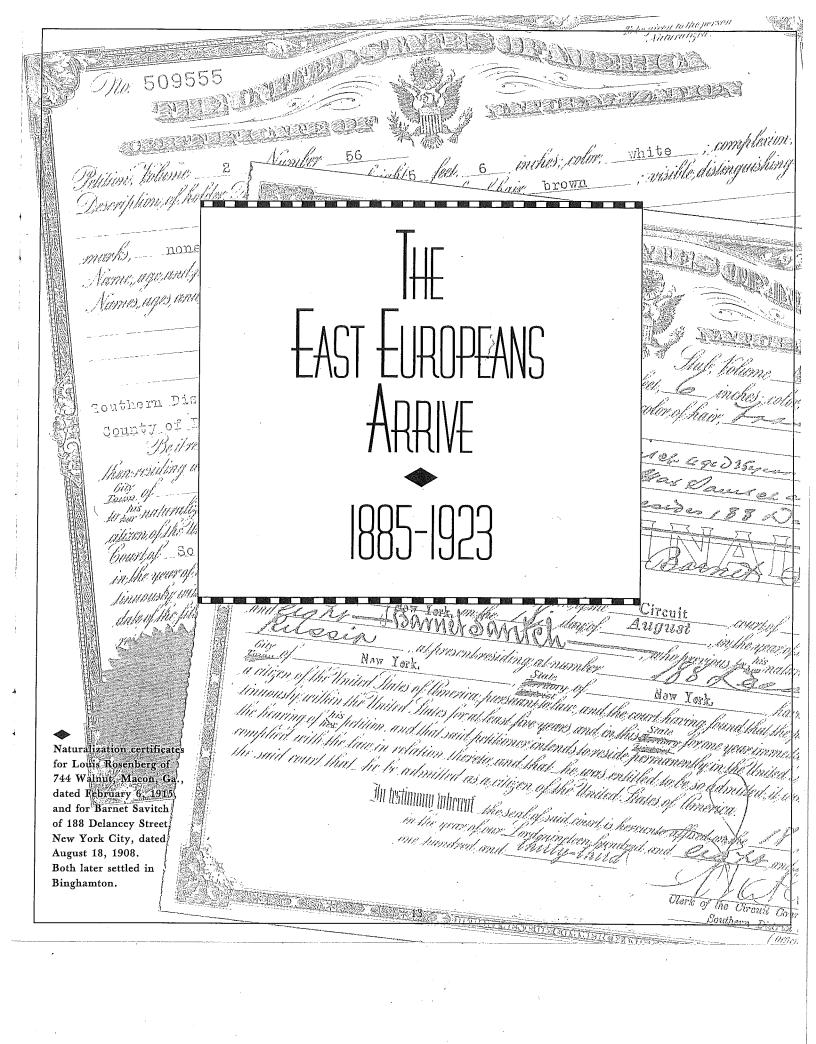
Advertisement for Hirschmann Brothers store from 1876 Combination Atlas Map of Broome County.

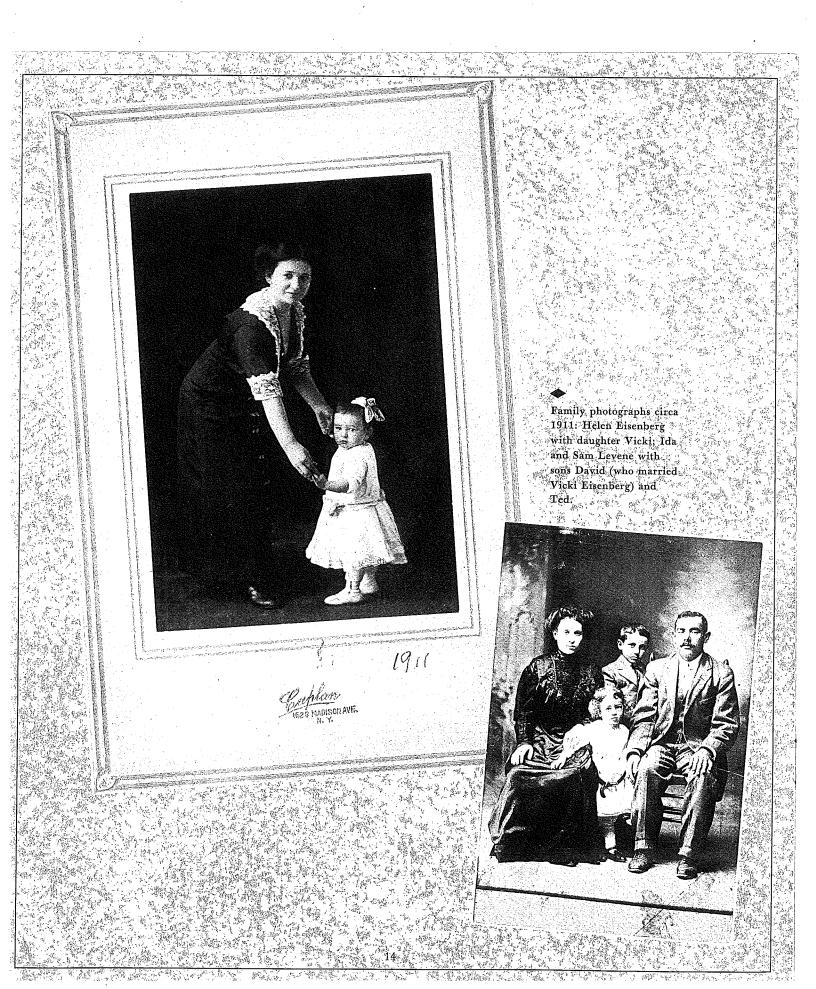




Fair Store wagon photographed near 134 Chapin Street, Binghamton, circa 1904. The boy with the bike may have been Charles R. Rosenthal.

Financially successful, highly acculturated and Reform in their religious orientation, both Hirschmann and Rosenthal took a paternalistic interest in the welfare of the large number of East European immigrants who began arriving in Binghamton during the 1880s. Both men subsequently helped fund the development of local organizations for the new Jewish immigrants. Hirschmann would be the single biggest contributor toward the construction of Binghamton's first synagogue in 1899. Rosenthal would help finance the first Jewish Community Center in Binghamton in 1927 by donating his home. Like Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall and other leaders of the established American Jewish elite, they sought to transform the East European Jew into an American Jew through institutional means. Although they failed to build a vital Jewish community of their own during the second half of the 19th century, Hirschmann and Rosenthal helped lay the foundations of the Binghamton Jewish community of the 20th century.





In the wake of the assassination of Russia's Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the May Laws and government sponsored pogroms, Jewish emigration from East Europe soared. During the 1880s, over 200,000 East European Jews arrived in the United States, nearly doubling the country's Jewish population. By 1900, the Jewish population of the United States approached one million and by the end of the 1920s, when anti-immigration legislation all but choked off the flow of Jews from East Europe, the American Jewish population had passed the four million mark. 18 In the course of forty years, the United States, which had been but a distant outpost of Jewish life, found itself host to one of the largest Jewish populations in the history of the Iewish people.

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The "new" Jewish immmigrants were different from both the German Jews who preceded them and the other Eastern and Southern European immigrants who began coming to America in large numbers at the end of the 19th century. The Yiddish speaking Jews of Eastern Europe generally came from a more intense Jewish environment and had a more highly developed sense of Jewish peoplehood than their German-Jewish predecessors. Unlike their Italian and gentile East European counterparts, the Jewish immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th century were mainly urban and often came from the rapidly growing Iewish towns and villages in Russia's notorious Pale of Settlement.

In contrast to the other new immigrants, East European Jews were generally skilled workers and readily employable in the American economy, especially in sewing and tailoring. Many had considerable marketplace experience. Moreover, Jewish immigrants were generally literate and usually valued education, an essential characteristic for

Children of Boruch and Bluma Rosefsky, 1907, left to right: Marion, Minnie, Alec, and Harry.

future economic mobility in the United States. Jews came to America to stay. Unlike other immigrant groups who experienced re-migration rates of 30% or more, only 3 to 7% of East European Jews chose to leave the United States. Jews generally migrated in family, groups, with no or little expectation of returning to their former places of domicile. 19

There were also significant differences between Jews who left Eastern Europe and those who stayed behind. Most importantly, religious Jews were wary of America's charms. Warned by the rabbis that America was a trefah medinah, an "unfit land" where a person might prosper at the expense of his soul and his children's allegiance to Torah, the deeply Orthodox tended to remain in Europe. Second, those committed to changing Russia, including both Bundists and revolutionaries, often sought to stay, that is, if they were not forced into exile. Others, in trouble with the law, including common thieves and young boys seeking to avoid conscription and up to 25 years of service in the Tsar's army, also left in large numbers. Remarkably, nearly one-third of East European Jewry sought safe haven and a new home in the United States between 1880 and 1920.20

But why would Jews from Berdichev, Minsk and Pinsk want to come to Binghamton, New York? Apparently, the primary initial reason for traveling beyond the Catskills was a family connection. Chain migration, as it is generally referred to, helped build Jewish communities throughout the diaspora. Many of Binghamton's older Jewish families, for instance, can trace their ancestry back to the tiny Lithuanian village of Butrimants (pronounced "Baltermontz" by many area Jews), which remained a source of Jewish immigration for almost three decades. After 1897, however, Jewish immigrants were often sent to locations in the interior, including Binghamton, by HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

A second major factor that explains Jewish settlement in Binghamton was the selective nature of the economic opportunity it presented. Except for certain skills related to shoe and clothing production, Jewish tradesmen were generally not attracted to the Binghamton market. The largest employer in the Binghamton area at the beginning of the 20th century, Endicott-Johnson, was totally opposed to unionization, while American Jewish union activity was peaking at this time. Thus, it stands to reason that Jewish laborers did not come to the

Triple Cities in large numbers. Instead, a steady stream of Jewish peddlers and would-be merchants worked their way to Binghamton, often via Scranton, Elmira or Syracuse, to sell their goods to E-J workers.²¹

By 1912, Binghamton's Jewish population had risen to 1,500 or 3% of the city's population of 48,000. The majority of the newcomers settled in the Susquehanna Street section close to the Susquehanna River and sent their children to the Carroll Street School. Typically Binghamton's Jews lived in two-family

pogrom in 1890 and his mother, Minnie, died a year later of heartbreak. Over the course of the next few years, Leibe brought his brothers, Maishe Yudah (Morris) and Boruch (Barney) to Binghamton. Leibe and Maishe later moved out of the area, leaving only Boruch in Binghamton.

In 1899, Boruch sent for Bluma (Bertha) Stasia, a young woman from Butrimants. The couple married the following year and rented a modest house on Butternut Street. During the course of the next ten years, the Rosef-

Hebrew school class with teacher on steps of Sons of Israel synagogue, Water Street, circa 1910.

houses. Although Jews never made up a majority of the neighborhood, their presence was clearly felt. Congregations, club rooms, kosher butcher shops and bakeries, grocery stores and other signs of Jewish settlement and activity quickly became visible.

The history of the Rosefsky family is representative of the East European Jews who made their way to Binghamton at the turn-of-the-century. Leibe (Louis) Rosefsky, the first member of the family to settle in Binghamton, arrived in 1892. Originally from Butrimants, his father, Reb Hirsch, was murdered during a

skys had seven children of whom five survived. They too left Binghamton temporarily, to join family in New England. Unhappy, Boruch and his family returned to Binghamton, and he opened a small clothing store on Chenango Street.

The family moved frequently until Boruch was able to purchase a two-family house in the ethnically and racially mixed neighborhood in which the majority of the new Jewish families settled. Typical of the time and place, the Rosefskys rented part of the house and took in boarders, some of them male relatives. During this period, one family

member recalled, there was "hardly a day that there wasn't somebody coming from Europe."

An unhealthy man, Boruch sold his Chenango Street store and returned to peddling in the vain hope that the fresh air would be beneficial for him. His route took him through the small country towns surrounding Binghamton. In November 1910 the weather turned unusually harsh and Boruch died of pneumonia. He did not have life insurance, and a relative who had promised to collect on Boruch's accounts failed to live up to his word. The family was left destitute and was forced to sell its horse and wagon. To survive, Bluma opened a grocery store in her living room on South Street. With the help of her industrious children, Bluma's financial condition gradually improved. All five of her children remained in Binghamton, prospered, and several became leaders in the Jewish community.22

Like many of the East European immigrants in Binghamton, the Rosefskys, a religiously observant family, joined Sons of Israel Congregation. Organized in 1885 by approximately 30 men, it was granted a certificate of incorporation on June 17, 1887 by the State of New York. It engaged a number of hazzan-shochets, unordained religious functionaries who led services, taught the children Hebrew and served as ritual slaughterers. One such individual, Rev. Louis Ginzberg, "died tragically when he was killed by robbers at his butcher shop." During its early years, the congregation also served as a focal point for the community's social activities. Annual Purim Balls were held as was a tenth anniversary celebration on November 30, 1895.23

Initally a poor but active congregation, Sons of Israel met in a variety of temporary locations for 14 years before raising the necessary funds to build the first synagogue in Binghamton in 1899. However, it did apparently maintain a mikveh



The Sons of Israel, congregation provided a focus for Jewish religious life and rituals, and for community social activities, such as this 1901 picnics.

By the 1920s, social and philanthropic activities were an integral part of Jewish community life. These YM-YWHA members participated in a 1922 "minstrel show" at Sons of Israel.



(or ritual bath) as early as 1894. That same year, it also acquired ground in Conklin near the Susquehanna River for a cemetery. Unfortunately, the area flooded frequently and the cemetery was closed by the state. Subsequently, a second cemetery, Westlawn, unconnected to the new congregation, was established in Johnson City.²⁴

In 1892, Sons of Israel Congregation acquired a lot on lower Water Street and began the arduous task of raising funds to build a synagogue. Work on the wooden structure did not commence until January 1899. Construction was completed in six months, and by July, the congregation was able to use its 300-seat sanctuary. Growing rapidly and attracting many of the community's upwardly mobile shopkeepers and entrepreneurs, the board of Sons of Israel began to

discuss the possibility of relocating its synagogue as early as 1914. The congregation remained on Water Street until 1923.²⁵

The congregation also maintained a fund for "the poor of our city." However, the majority of the synagogue's relief work was carried out by the Ladies Aid Society, organized in 1910 by a group of 14 women from the congregation. The society frequently made loans to peddlers to help them start their businesses. A second Hebrew Benevolent Society, established in 1903 by a small group of Jewish men, also attended to the needs of indigent and transient Jews in the Binghamton area. 26

Although successful in building itself as the leading Jewish institution of Binghamton, Sons of Israel Congregation was unable to bring the entire community

under its organizational wings. Diversity emerged as the hallmark of Jewish life in the area. For instance, the earlier immigrants, the German Jews, preferred a Reform service. Although numerically larger than Sons of Israel in 1900, the Reform Hebrew Society was unable or unwilling to build its own synagogue. Meeting at a variety of locations in the downtown area, it hired a rabbinic student, Abraham S. Anspacher, to lead services for the High Holy Days from 1896 to 1900. Rabbi Anspacher settled in Scranton and returned to Binghamton on numerous occasions. He represented the local Jewish community at the funeral of fifty victims of the Binghamton Clothing Company fire (July 22, 1913), among whom there were several Jews, 27

Anspacher also inspired the establishment of a Sabbath School in Binghamton in 1898 for the children of both German and East European families. According to the 1900 American Jewish Year Book, the Sunday School had 60 students and 7 teachers in 1900. Mrs. M. Gutman, a relative of the Hirschmanns, served as its superintendent. Seven years later, the Sons of Israel's school, which met weekdays, reported 40 students, divided into three classes, instructed by one teacher.²⁸

Relations with the Reform group were good compared to the problems Sons of Israel experienced with a second Orthodox group in town. Active as early as 1894, a group called Hebrew Brothers failed to negotiate a merger with Sons of Israel on several occasions. In July 1900, under the leadership of Jacob Shulman, Hebrew Brothers Congregation was formed. It received its charter from the state in 1905. Also known as the minyan (or quorum), it originally met at Susquehanna and Fayette Streets. An anonymous source described the early days of the congregation:

Most of the early members were peddlers who covered a wide radius in all directions from Binghamton, carrying in their packs everything from dry goods to eyeglasses. These men would spend all week out of the city peddling, and on Friday, by two's and three's, they would trickle back to Binghamton to settle accounts and dress for Shabbos . . . There is no doubt that the synagogue business meetings in those days served as the main source of entertainment for many members. The old-timers . . . still recall with a smile the "lively" meetings. 29

In 1908, the congregation purchased the house where it had been meeting (145 Susquehanna Street) from Samuel Pierson. The initial mortage was held by Abraham M. Pierson. A poor congregation, Hebrew Brothers engaged a cantor only for the High Holy Days during its early years.³⁰

In addition to its religious institutions and auxiliary group, several "lodges" developed in the Binghamton Jewish community around the beginning of the century. The first of these *Vereins* was the Independent Order Sons of Benjamin, Branch 129, which maintained close relations with Sons of Israel Congregation, three chapters of the Independent Order Sons of Abraham, and a B'nai B'rith Chapter. In part, these men's organizations were burial societies connected to the Westlawn Cemetery, and also provided their members with sick pay when invalided.³¹

In 1894, a YMHA was organized, thus setting in motion a long, complex series of events which ultimately led to the establishment of Binghamton's Jewish Center in 1927. Like the Hebrew Benevolent Society, Binghamton's Jewish Y remained homeless for many years. A communal house at 185 Washington Street existed briefly around 1919. Aaron

Tarsches served as its president. In a related development, a Jewish Sisterhood was organized in 1914 "by a group of women who felt the need for some coordinate [sic] Jewish life in Binghamton." Guided by the energetic Minnie D. Harris, the Sisterhood was initially concerned with charitable work. However, its main function was the maintenance of the Sunday School for all the Jewish children of the community. 32

Perhaps the most interesting of the Jewish organizations to take shape in Binghamton in the years prior to World War I was the Yiddische Nationaler Arbeiter Farband (or Jewish National Workers' Alliance), referred to locally-as "the Farband." Organized nationally by Baruch Zuckerman (1887-1970) in 1910 as a fraternal lodge associated with the Labor Zionist movement (Po'alei Zion), the local chapter (Branch 33) was established by Paul Holzer and B. Kipper. It was the first Zionist organization to be formed in Binghamton and its Gewirkschaften Campaign served as a basis for the subsequent development of the community's United Jewish Appeal.33

When it first started, the Farband had fewer than 20 members, but it expanded rapidly and reached its high point during the 1920s. It met the communal and cultural needs of Binghamton's secular, Jewish nationalists who represented a variety of socioeconomic levels in the local Jewish community. Initially, the Farband was also openly Socialist in its economic orientation. Later, it euphemistically referred to itself as a "group of idealists." The Farband was the only Jewish group in Binghamton ideologically committed to the perpetuation of the Yiddish language.

Assured by the British government's decision in the Balfour Declaration to support the idea of a Jewish homeland in



A Binghamton chapter of the Jewish National Workers' Alliance, the fraternal lodge associated with the Labor Zionist movement, was established prior to World War I. In 1917, the Farband (as it was referred to locally) organized a supplementary Yiddish language school. Classroom photo from mid-1920s.

Palestine, the Farband organized the Sholom Aleichem Folk Shule, a supplementary Yiddish language school, in 1917. Initially, the school met at 145 Susquehanna Street, upstairs from the peddlers' minyan. Shlome Edelheit served as the teacher. At its peak, the shule had nearly 50 students.

In 1917, the Farband also presented "a full four act drama in Yiddish at [Binghamton] Central High School," the first of its many public programs. Outgrowing its room above the minyan, the Farband set up a club room at 66 Susquehanna Street. It frequently moved its headquarters to various sites in the downtown area including 28 Collier Street, 32 Collier Street and 136 Court Street.³⁴

In a recent article, "The Origins of Organized National Jewish Philanthropy in the United States, 1914-1939," Marc Lee Raphael argued that during World

destruction to the Jews in Europe (millions of whom stood directly in the path of the contending armies), the precarious situation of the Jews in Turkish-controlled Palestine, the enor-

War I "the threat of death and

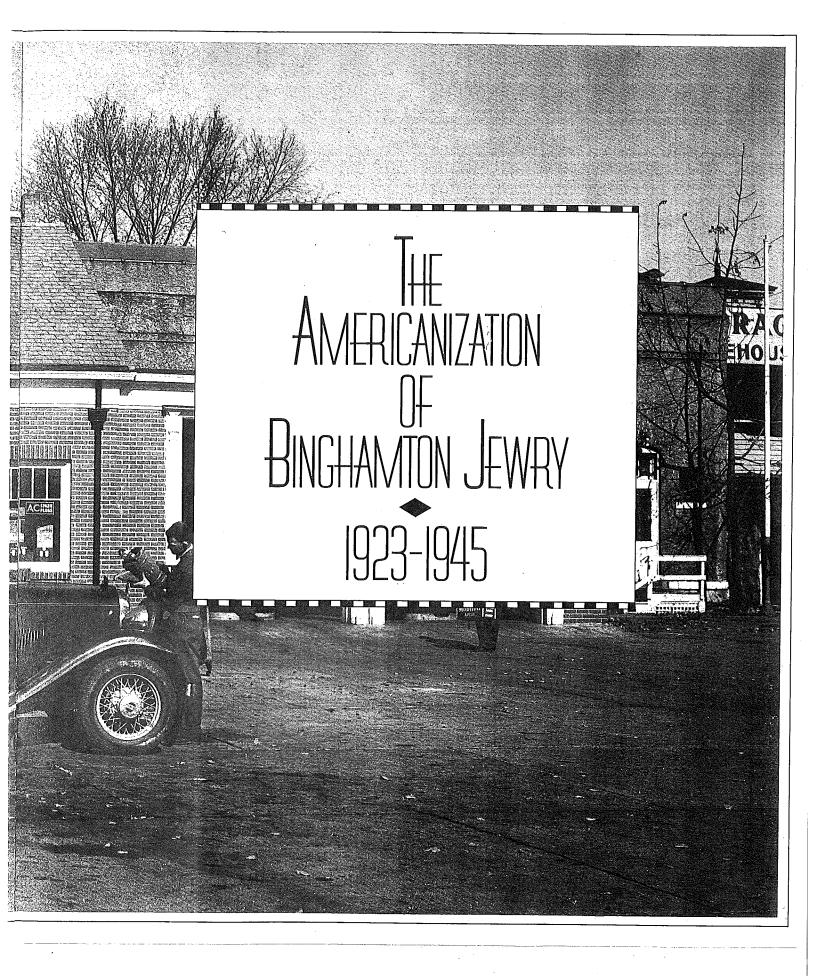
mity of the needs of eastern Europe, coupled with the critical problems of survival for Jews in London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin,

Amsterdam and elsewhere on the continent, led to the first massive nationwide fund raising efforts by American Jews." The Binghamton Jewish community was no exception.³⁵

Active in the Liberty Bond drive, Binghamton Jews organized community wide philanthropic organizations during World War I. A Jewish Welfare Board was active in town during the war years and, along with parallel bodies in the general community, ran patriotic advertisements in the local press. Immediately after the war, the Jewish community, led by Minnie Harris, agreed to participate in a 1919 campaign to aid Jewish war victims in Eastern Europe. The local goal of \$54,000 was easily met. George F. Johnson and his family donated more than half of the funds. However, neither philanthropic agency became permanent.36

Binghamton's Jews of all ages were active in the Liberty Bond drive, as in this photo at the Carroll Street School, circa 1917-1918.





he interwar years were generally a period of prosperity and growth for the Binghamton area. In Broome County, as in much of the nation, individual fortunes rose in the 1920s. During the 1930s, the Southern Tier was spared the worst effects of the stock market crash and the Depression, mainly because of E-J's stability during this difficult time. The local area was also the site of some of the most important technological developments in American industry in the years just prior to World War II.

For the most part, the Jews of Broome County benefited from Binghamton's economic well-being during the 1920s and 1930s. Typical of American Jews of the period, a shift in economic activity away from retailing toward the professions became evident. "Selling," however, remained the core of the local Jewish community's workplace activity and, in a few cases, fortunes were amassed. Thus, Binghamton Jews began to ride the socalled ethnic escalator up to suburban, middle class neighborhoods. Unlike other area European ethnic groups who generally remained concentrated in working class wards throughout the county's urban áreas, Binghamton Jews began leaving the Susquehanna Street enclave during the interwar years and resettled in the city's west side.

The generally favorable economic circumstances of the Binghamton Jewish community, from 1923 to 1940, proved to be a pull factor that attracted other Jews to the area. According to the American Jewish Year Book, the city's Jewish population in 1920 was still 1,500. It peaked in 1927 at 2,500, declined in the early 1930s to 2,000 but then slowly recovered and stood at approximately 2,400 in 1938. Although not scientifically determined, the numbers suggest a significant gain in the local Jewish population from 1920 to 1940. By contrast, the city of Binghamton showed only a

17% rise in population and the total American Jewish community grew by only 33% from 3.6 million to 4.8 million during the same period. In other words, the local Jewish community was growing at double the national rate of American Jewry. Still, it never became a major center of Jewish settlement in the United States.³⁷

The sociology of the Binghamton Jewish community was also changing during this period. As restrictive legislation increasingly cut off new Jewish immigration from East Europe, the percentage of nativeborn American Jews rose. Nationally, it is estimated that in 1940 half of all American Jews had been born in the United States. Native born American Jews, in turn, were different from their immigrant forebears in several respects. Most importantly, they increasingly understood Jewishness in mostly secular, ethnic terms, a trend that was evident in the general decline in the rate of religious affiliation in the United States during the late 1920s and 1930s. Locally, the shift toward ethnicity helped pave the way for the establishment of a Jewish Center but did not unite the community's leaders who remained committed to their synagogues.

Ironically, the movement toward greater Jewish acculturation was checked by the rise of American antisemitism during the interwar years. The notorious publications of Henry Ford, the Ivy League quotas, the resurgence of the Klan and the radio career of Father Charles Coughlin are well-known examples of American antisemitism during the Jazz Age. Binghamton Jews were not spared the effects of this animus. During the mid-1920s, the Klan operated openly in Broome County, won the 1925 Binghamton Republican mayoral primary, and nearly captured City Hall.³⁸

Exclusion of Jews from a variety of adult and youth social clubs intensified

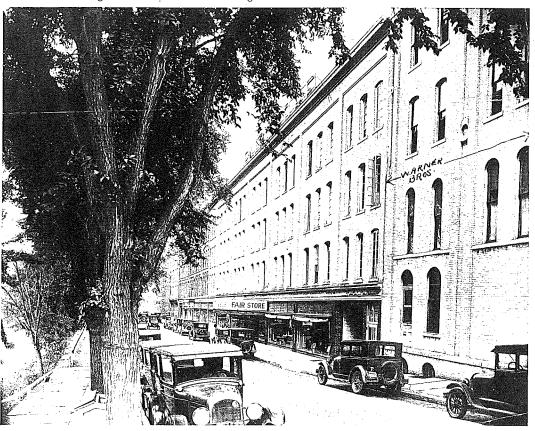
during the 1930s, and two of the area's rising new industries, IBM and Link, like many engineering firms across the country, often discriminated against Jews in their hiring practices. However, it was the rise of Hitler in 1933 that had the greatest effect on the Binghamton Jewish community. As the Nazi threat to European Jewish security grew, Jewish communal, philanthropic and Zionist activity in the United States, as well as in Binghamton, increased dramatically.³⁹

Jewish religious activity, on the other hand, flourished only briefly in the 1920s, in part as a public display of the community's rising prosperity, but then quickly declined. On Sunday, March 11, 1923, the Jews of Binghamton celebrated their success in America in a grand fashion. According to an article in *The*

Binghamton Press, "nearly 1,000 members of the Jewish race and their friends" participated in the dedication of Sons of Israel Congregation's new synagogue building on Exchange Street. Led by its recently appointed rabbi, Bernhard Reicher, and the president of the congregation, George Gilinsky, the crowd gathered in front of the original Water Street synagogue. The torahs were removed and transported by automobile to the new temple. Binghamton's mayor, Thomas Wilson, was the principal speaker. The great event concluded with a chicken pie dinner for 500, prepared by the Hebrew Ladies Aid Society. 40

The new building was impressive. Made of brick, its front was dominated by a hugh arch framing a round stained glass window with a Star of David at its

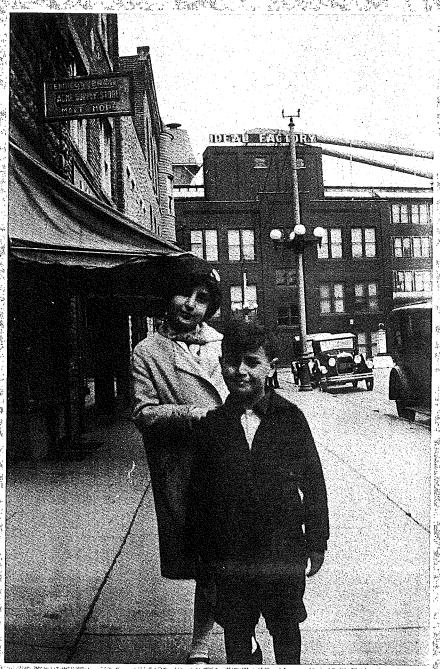


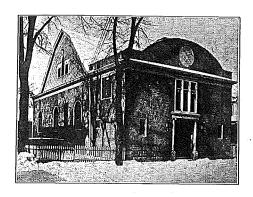


Above: Sons of Israel
Congregation's Exchange
Street synagogue,
circa 1945.
Left: Many of the founding
retail merchants prospered,
and by the 1920s the Fair
Store had relocated to
larger quarters in this
building along Wall Street.

Naomi and Buddy Lachman, whose father Joseph helped organize Jewish services in Endicott; photographed on Washington Avenue in 1928:





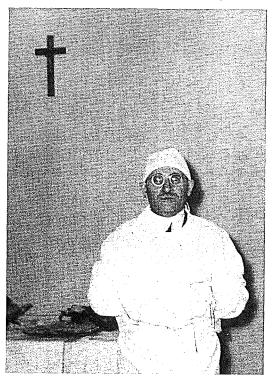


center. The sanctuary held 700 worshipers, including the seats in the women's balcony which ringed the interior on three sides. However, the building did not have a mikveh. Apparently, a dispute over the mikveh had polarized traditionalists and modernists within the congregation before the construction of the building began, and then almost compromised its completion. Beginning in the late 1930s, a second dispute erupted, this time over mixed seating. The modernists' second victory clearly signaled the congregation's break from orthodoxy. But it was not until 1948 that Sons of Israel officially joined the Conservative movement.41

The gradual liberalization of Sons of Israel, in response to second-generation pressure, left the minyan on Susquehanna Street as the last bastion of Jewish religious orthodoxy in Binghamton. To shore up its position, the traditional congregation engaged Moses Margolis as its spiritual leader in 1923. A former student at the highly regarded Ponevezh Yeshiva in north-central Lithuania, Margolis was a skilled hazzan, shochet and mohel (ritual circumciser) who quickly endeared himself to the entire Jewish community. However, the synagogue was unable to pay him, and Margolis left Binghamton for positions in Bayonne, New Jersey, and Bradford, Pennsylvania, before returning to the congregation in 1933.⁴²

By 1929, the Hebrew Brothers congregation had outgrown its home on Susquehanna Street, and purchased a four-family house at 53-55 Carroll Street. In 1931, the synagogue was officially renamed United Hebrew Brothers Congregation but it was widely referred to as the "Little Shul," a comparative reference to the large Exchange Street synagogue. A previously organized Ladies Auxiliary supported the synagogue during financially difficult periods, which apparently were increasingly frequent during the course of the Depression and the years following World War II.⁴³

During the early years of the 1920s, Jewish men from nearby Endicott frequently traveled to Binghamton to worship in the city's synagogues. On the High Holy Days, the visitors would stay



Top left: The United Hebrew Brothers Congregation erected this synagogue after they had outgrown the fourfamily house originally on this Carroll Street lot. Photo circa 1935.

Lower left: Rabbi Moses Margolis prior to performing a circumcision at Lourdes Hospital, circa mid-1930s.



The Americanization process gave rise to several secular organizations, including a women's Junior Guild whose members appear in this 1931 photograph. The first Jewish Center, organized in 1927, was housed in this building on Front and North Streets, photographed in 1960.



at downtown hotels leaving their wives and children at home. A number of the Jewish women in Endicott objected to this practice, and in 1927 High Holy Day services were first conducted in Endicott, led by Louis Schreiber and Joseph Lachman. Jews had been living in Endicott since 1903 when Max Levinson, a peddler from Elmira, settled there. The 1930 Jewish population of Endicott was approximately 125.

In 1933, the Endicott Jewish Community Circle was organized and met regularly at the Odd Fellows' Hall, the Hotel Frederick, and each others' homes, especially at the Lachman and Levinson residences. Orthodox services were conducted. Harry Sallerson was elected the congregation's first president. He was succeeded by Jacob Y. Becker. In 1935, the United Hebrew Schools of Binghamton opened a branch in Endicott. The Endicott school had 12 children. However, the community grew only slightly until after the war. 44

Like the Endicott group, the evolution of Binghamton's Reform congregation was limited during the 1920s and 1930s. In part, the local situation reflected general conditions in the American Reform movement which only grew from

278 Temples in 1924 to 293 in 1938. Binghamton's Hebrew Reform Society continued to meet in rented halls for the holidays during the early years of the 1920s. For instance, in 1920 it listed the Merlord Building as its address in the American Jewish Year Book. Simon C. Rosenthal served as President and Sigmund S. Gutman as Secretary. After the Jewish Center was organized in 1927, the Reform group began to use the center's facilities at 155 Front Street on a regular basis, an arrangement probably worked out by Rosenthal. 45

Meeting at the center gave the Hebrew Reform Society a greater sense of permanence, but the organization made only limited progress during the Depression years. In 1929, it was reorganized as the Emanuel Religious Society and began to expand its services. The center's third Director (1930-1937), Russian-born Julian L. Greifer, a graduate student at New York University who later earned a PhD in Sociology, served as the first resident Reform rabbi in Binghamton. In 1937, it was reorganized again, this time as Temple Beth El (no connection to the congregation which developed subsequently in Endicott) and engaged its first full-time rabbi, David Sherman, who remained for two years. He was succeeded by Emmanuel Honig, who served for only one year. The temple continued to use the center's building for its meetings and services until its fourth and final reorganization in 1950 as Temple Concord. 46

The mixed condition of institutional religion in the Binghamton Jewish community during the 1920s and 1930s stands in marked contrast to the rise of a number of active secular organizations. Two men's groups, the Philetus Lodge, a fraternal Masonic body, and the Goodfellowship Club were organized in 1923 and 1928, respectively. Several women's groups were also organized including

Haddassah in 1924, the Junior Guild in 1929 and, four years later, both the Farband's Ladies Club and Junior Hadassah. Only the Jewish Education Association and Ezras Torah, both founded in 1934 to support the United Hebrew School, had an explicitly religious purpose. 47

The two outstanding secular Jewish organizations that developed in Binghamton during the interwar years were the Jewish Community Center and the forerunner of the current Jewish Federation. From the beginning, the Community Center and later, the Federation, understood themselves to be the central Jewish agencies in Binghamton as well as the local Jewish community's link to the larger Jewish world. Writing in 1936, on behalf of the Center, its secretary, Morris Gitlitz, claimed that "not only has the Center been the medium through which Binghamton Jewry has reached the greatest degree of unity it has ever enjoyed, but it has also been the means of the community playing its part in the larger unity of the Jews everywhere."48

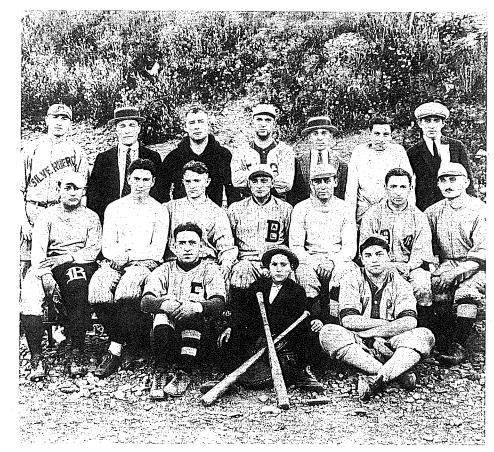
The general history of the Jewish Center movement is not widely known. Indigenous to the United States, YMHAs (Young Men's Hebrew Associations) first began forming in the middle of the 19th century as cultural and social organizations. With the increase of East European immigration in the 1880s, the Ys increasingly focused on Americanization programs. An independent national council was formed in 1913. It was absorbed by the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) in 1921. A National Association of Jewish Center Workers was organized in 1918.49

Aided by JWB staff members, the Jewish Center movement began to grow throughout the United States during the 1920s. In 1921, 207 centers and Ys were affiliated with the Jewish Welfare Board. By 1946, "301 centers were regarded as

affiliates." However, affiliation guaranteed neither "unity of purpose nor quality of programming during the 1920s and 1930s." 50

A movement to organize a Jewish Center in Binghamton grew during the 1920s. The movement was stimulated locally by an intensification of evangelical activities at the Binghamton YMCA making both Jewish parents and children uncomfortable at that facility. Although fund raising efforts, including the production of a mock vaudeville show, "The Fables of 1925," failed to generate sufficient capital to buy or build a Center,

What is more American than baseball? The Jewish community had its home team, the Millville Sluggers, in 1922.



Though it failed to generate a building fund The 'Fables of 1925' broadened support for a permanent home for the YM-YWHA. The Spanish dancers, below, were Milton Weiss and Mina Johnson.



THE AVERICAN AMERICAN

"BILL"

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Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations

"THE FABLES OF 1925"

A TWO ACT MUSICAL COMEDY
AND
TRAVESTY ON LOCAL EVENTS

KALURAH TEMPLE

THURSDAY EVE., MARCH 19由

BENEFIT OF BUILDING FUND Tickets Now On Sale, Obtainable From Club Members

they did help broaden popular support for the idea of a permanent home for a Binghamton YM-YWHA.

In April 1926, Simon C. Rosenthal, inspired by the famous Marshall family in Syracuse, who recently had given a family home to their Jewish community to be used as a Y, announced that "he would like to turn his home at 132 Oak Street over to the Jewish community to be used as a communal home." His offer was accepted by an ad hoc group of Jewish leaders who subsequently decided to sell the Rosenthal property and buy a house at 155 Front Street. The Front Street location stood approximately midway between the Susquehanna Street enclave and the growing number of Jewish families who were moving to Binghamton's West Side.51

Dedicated in December 1927, the new Jewish Center adopted a set of lofty goals:

To cultivate and improve the mental, spiritual, moral, social and physical welfare of its members.

To help in every way possible the Young Men's Hebrew Association and the Young Women's Hebrew Association and all other organizations that strive for the culture and welfare of the Jewish Community of the City of Binghamton, New York.

To endeavor to bring that Jewish Community into harmony and union and to foster and develop the highest ideals of American citizenship.

To teach the Hebrew faith and to teach the history of Jewish speaking people. [sic]⁵²

The leaders of the Center were also careful to note that "the relationship between the Center and Synagogue has always been of the finest. Each has recognized the legitimate functions of the other and that those functions are not in



Friedland, who taught an entire generation of Binghamton children at the Jewish Center, with their daughters Ruth and Joan in 1937.

Below: Harry and Billie Koffman, who headed the women's drives of a dozen centralized fundraising campaigns. 1940.

Left: Esther and Isidore

conflict." David Cohen served as the Center's first President; he was succeeded by Morris Resnick, who served during the 1930s.⁵³

The character of the early center was shaped in no small measure by two of its executive directors, Julian L. Greifer and Isidore Friedland. Greifer started publishing both a regular newsletter, The Center Reporter, and a yearbook. He also revived the Center's failing Sunday School. Enrollment quickly increased from 45 to 170. Moreover, Greifer organized the United Hebrew Schools of Triple Cities and hired his friend, Isidore Friedland, to run it. In 1937, Friedland temporarily succeeded Greifer as the director of the Center, but then received a regular appointment and remained with the Center until his retirement in 1954. Fluent in Hebrew and Yiddish, Friedland was a poet, musician, translator and playwright. He and his wife instructed an entire generation of Jewish children in Binghamton, where he died in 1988.





Preserving traditions and reflecting prosperity: Victor Rozen, far left, who was the last arrival in Binghamton from Butrimants in the early 1920s, gathered his family for the Passover seder in 1939.

Greifer and Friedland also helped foster the idea of a centralized Jewish fund raising campaign in Binghamton. In 1932, Greifer had organized the Binghamton Federation of Jewish Welfare, which briefly functioned as a free loan society. In 1934, David Levene, a young attorney and Center board member (he served as the Center's president, 1935-1936), began to advocate the creation of a Jewish Community Council. The idea was adopted in 1937 and Levene was named president of the council's first campaign. Billie (Mrs. Harry) Koffman was appointed head of the women's drive, a position she held a dozen times. However, the Binghamton campaign remained under the organizational umbrella of the Center for almost 40 years until an independent Federation finally emerged in 1975.54

The formation of a Jewish Council in Binghamton in 1937 reflected a widespread trend in American Jewish life during the mid-1930s. The Jewish Federation movement in the United States had begun in 1895 with the establishment of the Boston Federation of Jewish Charities. Initially, it served as a central fund raising operation for existing Jewish social service and charitable organizations. By 1917, 23 other American Jewish communities "federated" on the Boston model. In 1932, the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds was organized as an administrative and research body to help coordinate Federation activities on a national basis. The following year, in response to Hitler's rise to power and the spread of his virulent antisemitism, the nature and size of the American Federation movement began to change dramatically. More than a hundred American Jewish communities organized federations during the course of the next seven years (1933-1940) and firmly placed fund raising for overseas

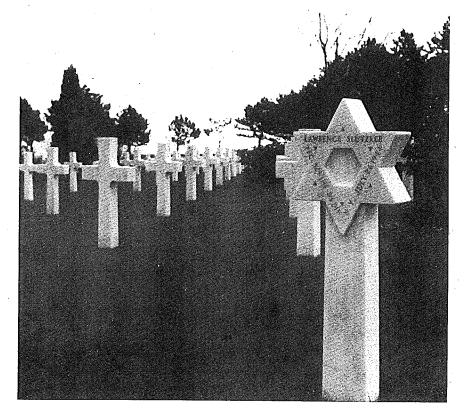
purposes on their agendas. Most important, in this regard, was the formation of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) in 1939 following Kristallnacht, the Nazi pogrom in which 1,000 German Jews died and nearly every synagogue in Germany was destroyed. UJA and Federation campaigns were immediately linked although the two organizations remained distinct. 55

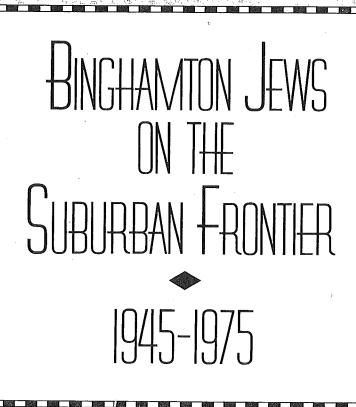
The organization of both a Jewish Community Center and a Federation movement in Binghamton was part of the larger process transforming the American Jewish community of the 1920s and 1930s. Both the Center and the Federation proved to be enduring institutions which reinvigorated Binghamton Jewry and helped prepare it for the major institutional changes in local Jewish life that occurred with amazing speed in the postwar period. Unfortunately, nothing in organized Jewish life in America proved adequate to the task of meeting the pressing needs of European Jews on the eve of World War II.

American Jews, overwhelmingly FDR supporters, were convinced that the best way to save their European cousins was to defeat Hitler. Thus, as the 1940s began, Binghamton Jews, like millions of their fellow citizens, prepared for the second major war in a generation. By 1945, over 400 of Binghamton's Jewish men and women were enlisted in the service; seven were killed in action. 56

Right: Between the wars, the focus of Jewish religious and language instruction was the Jewish Community Center; this serious group was the 1932 confirmation class. Below: Memorial marker in the American cemetery in Normandy, France, for Pfc. Lawrence Slutzker, who was among seven Binghamton Jewish men and women killed in action in World War II.







uring the postwar era, the American Jewish community emerged as the largest, most affluent and, perhaps, most secure Jewish community in the history of the Jewish people. During this period, American Jews finished moving out of their old, inner city ghettos and largely resettled in suburban rings around the country's major urban centers as well as in new suburban cities in the south and southwest. The trend toward careers in the professions also continued to intensify in the postwar era, and large corporations began to open their doors to Jewish managers and engineers. Within the Jewish community, organized religion experienced an awakening in the 1950s and, by the mid-1960s, Jewish ethnicity also enjoyed a resurgence. Finally, the community broadly united around three consensus issues: support for the new state of Israel, anti-defamation work at home, and Jewish philanthropy, the undisputed "heavy industry" of American Jewry.

New problems and challenges also developed for the postwar community. After working for decades to Americanize the East European Jew, American Jewish institutions now needed to redefine their goals in terms of "rejudaizing" a highly Americanized Jewish population. Untutored in Judaism, Jewish parents of the baby-boom generation turned to institutions to strengthen their children's Jewish identity and provide them with requisite Judaic skills. A second problem involved the rising rate of mixed marriages, which, by the 1960s, began to fuel speculation about the survival of Jews and Judaism in America, an anxiety heightened by a growing awareness of the Holocaust's magnitude.57

All the strengths and weaknesses of postwar Jewish life in the United States were evident in Binghamton from 1945 to 1975. According to the American Jewish Year Book, the local Jewish population grew from approximately 3,000 in 1948 to 4,800 in 1970, an increase of 62.5%.

Included in this expansion were nearly sixty new German-Jewish families, refugees from Nazism, who operated farms, modest summer resorts and children's camps in the area. Within the city limits, the old Susquehanna Street East European enclave was almost completely emptied of its Jewish population during the 1940s, as area Jews continued to resettle on Binghamton's west side and south of the Susquehanna River. In the 1960s, they also began moving to the developing nearby suburban community of Vestal. The local Jewish community also enjoyed an unprecedented boom in new synagogue construction and built a large, new suburban Community Center as well.

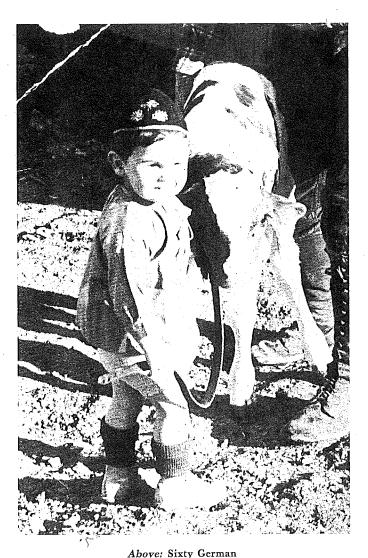


Postwar years sparked outreach efforts by Binghamton's community to help Jews around the world. Charles Pierson, right, welcomes Julia and Eugene Weinreb (United HIAS Service button on coat), refugees from the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

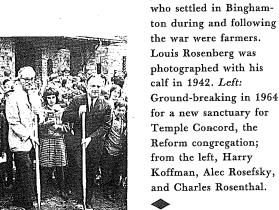
There were some conflicts in the community in the years following World War II. Around 1946, Benjamin F. Cohen, president of the JCC, influenced by the philosophy of Mordecai M. Kaplan, began advocating the idea of one large Temple-Center which would house all the Jewish organizations in Binghamton, including the different synagogues, under one roof. For many people, Cohen's Reconstructionist ideas were appealing. A large sum of money, perhaps a quarter-million dollars, was raised and the large grassy lot across from West Junior School, in the middle of Binghamton's most dense Jewish settlement, was purchased. Joint services were held in 1948-1949 and, plans were made to bring the Orthodox community under the wing of the Temple-Center.

After the High Holy Days, the Cohen Plan quickly unraveled as tension between the Conservative congregation, now known as Temple Israel, and the growing Reform group came to a head. Cohen and his supporters had failed to distinguish between unity and uniformity and the community was left badly divided. Ironically, the Jewish Community Center was badly but not mortally wounded in the fray. The principal casualties were the Center's educational programs and auxiliary organizations which were replaced by parallel programs and groups in the synagogues. The decline of the Jewish Center was reversed around 1960 when initial plans were proposed for a new building with extensive recreational facilities.58

In the wake of the Temple-Center breakup, new patterns of Jewish communal organization began to appear. Temple Israel decided to start its own religious school, a very successful operation which instantly attracted over 200 students. Led by its new rabbi, Jacob Hurwitz, who was engaged by the congregation in 1948, Temple Israel built an annex to the Exchange Street synagogue in 1952. It included classrooms and an auditorium. Ordained at the Jewish



Jewish refugee families





Theological Seminary, Rabbi Hurwitz also quickly persuaded the congregation to join the Conservative movement's umbrella organization, the United Synagogue of America. In 1968, Temple Israel built an impressive modern structure in Vestal near the Binghamton city line, 59 and left the Exchange Street building.

The Reform group also took bold action and reorganized itself as a permanent congregation in June 1950. Initially led by Charles R. Rosenthal, the new synagogue first adopted the name Sholom Congregation but then changed it to Temple Concord, perhaps after Syracuse's Temple Society of Concord. In 1950, Temple Concord joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the parent body of the American Reform movement. The new temple bought the famous Kilmer Mansion at 9 Riverside Drive as its congregational home. In 1953, after having been served briefly by Rabbi Murray Blackman and Professor Fred Krinsky of Syracuse University, the Liberal-Reform synagogue engaged Elihu Schagrin, a 1946 graduate of Stephen Wise's Jewish Institute of Religion, as its rabbi. Under Schagrin's guidance, Temple Concord grew rapidly and, in 1965, added a modern sanctuary, auditorium, and library to the Kilmer Mansion, which now houses the religious school.60

In 1964, Temple Concord was joined on Riverside Drive by the city's one Orthodox congregation. In 1956, the Little Shul (United Hebrew Brothers) adopted a new name, Beth David, and engaged J. Bernard Merzel as its rabbi at the urging of Rabbi Schagrin. Rabbi Merzel and the congregation's president, Jack Ferber, dedicated themselves to revitalizing the Orthodox synagogue. Four years later, a building committee was organized and on February 9, 1964, the congregation's new buildingdesigned by Werner Seligman and a winner of a 1963 Progressive Architecture Award—was dedicated. The revitalization of the Little Shul continued to accelerate under the stewardship of Raphael Groner, who was engaged as the congregation's rabbi in 1971.61

The resurgence of Orthodox Judaism in Binghamton was not limited to Beth David. Led by A. M. Pierson, Rabbi Merzel and Rabbi Maurice and Nechama Weisenberg of Endicott, a Jewish day school, associated with the Torah Umesorah movement, was opened on Clayton Avenue in Vestal in September 1961. Two years later, this school, the Hillel Academy, was invited to use the facilities at Temple Israel and gradually began to attract non-Orthodox students to its program.⁶²

The revival of organized religion during the late 1940s also transformed the tiny community in Endicott. Incorporated in 1948 as the Endicott Jewish Community Center, the small congregation immediately began to discuss constructing its own building. Working quickly, they raised sufficient funds to build the following year. However, the first full-time rabbi, Asher Schapiro, was not engaged until 1956. The congregation, which officially adopted the name Temple Beth El in 1951, flourished during the 1960s and early 1970s, especially under the leadership of its last Orthodox rabbi, David Boros. 63

By the mid-1960s, the expansion of organized religion in general in the United States began to flatten. At the same time, interest in ethnicity began to rise, a development that greatly strengthened Binghamton's two principal Jewish secular organizations, the Center and the Federation. Urged by the Jewish Welfare Board to relocate, the Jewish Community Center finally moved to Vestal in 1968. Dr. Mike Melamed, Robert Rosefsky, Robert Schwab and Maurice Finkelstein, the Center's executive director (1963-1969), led the movement to revitalize the Jewish Center. The large,

new facility quickly became Binghamton's Jewish town meeting hall as well as a major recreational facility for Jews and non-Jews alike.⁶⁴

The Broome County Jewish Federation had continued to evolve during the postwar years. Gifts to the UJA, especially during the critical years of 1948-1950, grew significantly and the Federation was legally incorporated in 1959.65 The early 1970s witnessed another dramatic rise in the Federation's campaign. In 1971, the Federation took over and upgraded the publication of the Center's modest newsletter and expanded it into a tabloid-size newspaper, The Reporter, which would serve as an interface between the local Jewish community and the world Jewish polity. In August 1975, Helen Pierson, who later served as Federation president, led the movement to separate the Federation from the Center. The following year the Federation hired its first full-time director and professional staff. Like the Center of the late 1920s, the restructured Federation sought to establish itself as the voice of a united Jewish community in Binghamton: and by 1975 was running a very successful campaign.66

In 1973, at the height of the expansion of Jewish Studies in the American university system, a Judaic Studies Program was established at the State University of New York at Binghamton. The program attracted a small group of distinguished Jewish scholars to the area. Trained in various critical approaches to the study of Jewish history, languages and thought, the university professors often served as cultural bridges between the world of advanced, modern Jewish research and the local community. Moreover, through the Federation, the local community also sought to enrich the cultural and religious life of the university's sizable Jewish student population by partially underwriting the campus-based Jewish Student Union. 67

CONCLUSION

Dy the mid-1970s, the organized Binghamton Jewish community had hit a highwater mark. It had invested heavily in its local institutions and created an impressive organizational infrastructure. It was busy, diverse and strongly committed to its own survival as well as to helping Jews around the world, particularly those in Israel. After 125 years of settlement, a lively Jewish community had developed beyond the Catskills.

The broadened outlook and liveliness of the Binghamton Jewish community is evident in activities like the annual Temple Israel Sisterhood's interfaith tea, attended by more than 500 area churchwomen of all denominations in 1971.

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- 1. On recent trends in American Jewish community history, see Deborah Dash Moore, "The Construction of Community: Jewish Migration and Ethnicity," The Jews of North America, Moses Rischin, ed. (Detroit: Wayne Street University Press, 1987), pp. 105-117. More broadly, see Kathleen Neils Conzens, "Community Studies, Urban History, and American Local History" in The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States. Michael Kammen, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 270-291.
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- 63. See note 44. In 1981, the Endicott congregation affiliated with the Reconstructionist movement.
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With the assistance of the SUNY-Binghamton Foundation, the STJHP received its initial funding from the Horowitch, Olum and Selkowitz Foundations. A generous grant was also received from the American Council for Judaism. Marcia Friedman, the council's executive director, has been especially supportive of the project.

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Lange J. Sussman State University of New York at Binghamton May 17, 1989 *Lyyar 12, 5749*

