

MAKING IT IN MAINE: STORIES OF JEWISH LIFE IN SMALL-TOWN AMERICA

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A fundamental part of the experience of immigrants to the United States has been the tension between incorporating into a new country while maintaining one's cultural roots. In this article, the author describes the experience of Jewish Americans in Maine, where climate, culture, and remoteness from larger Jewish populations contributed to a unique process of Americanization compared with Jewish populations in more urban areas of the country. After successfully "making it" over the course of two centuries, Jewish Mainers face a new set of challenges and opportunities. The author is the director of the Jewish studies program at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. He is member of the religious studies department, where he teaches a wide range of courses on Judaism, Jewish history, and comparative religion.

ROBERT HAINS, who grew up in Waterville where his grandfather served as the rabbi, tells the following story:

Maybe until my grandmother passed away, for the most part we kept kosher, although I remember lobster in the house on occasion—it may have been on paper plates. Then we had company, some of my mother's family was visiting and wanted lobsters, and the phone rang and my grandparents would be there in five minutes so they could visit our company. It all got packed up and out and the windows open and the smell gone in the five minutes before they got there!²

This is a distinctly Maine variation on a classic story of American Jewish life. It captures dynamics of Americanization as well as the generational differences caused by those dynamics. It also reflects efforts to balance tradition and change: Robert Hains's parents served lobster at home – despite the fact that it is not kosher – but made a point of using paper plates rather than their kosher dishes.

There are countless stories of Jewish life in Maine, stretching back 200 years. These are stories worth telling not only for their enjoyment value

but also because we can learn a great deal from them. They reflect the challenges that confronted members of an immigrant community as they sought to become true Mainers, as well as the challenges this ethnic group now faces as a result of its successful integration. The experiences of Jews in Maine, moreover, encapsulate in many ways the experiences of small-town Jews throughout New England and the United States.³ Their stories offer glimpses into the changing nature of American-Jewish life and point toward significant continuities in life outside of America's major Jewish population centers.

This essay weaves together representative stories to trace the history of Jewish life in Maine and, by extension, small-town America. The stories collectively tell a tale of "making it:" an ongoing process of striving for success in the face of shifting obstacles and opportunities. Many of the stories recounted here were gathered by students involved in Colby College's Maine Jewish History Project, an ongoing research effort focused primarily on Colby's hometown of Waterville and on the surrounding Kennebec Valley.⁴

The First Jewish Mainers

There were a handful of Jews in the District of Maine during colonial times, but not many.⁵ Jews were not welcome in Puritan Massachusetts, including the District of Maine. Those Jews who lived in the District often converted to Christianity or at least attended Christian worship.

The earliest Jewish Mainer about whom we know any details was Susman Abrams, born in Hamburg. Abrams came to Maine as a clothes peddler after the Revolutionary War and ultimately settled in Union, where he worked as a tanner until his death in 1830. Union's mid-nineteenth-century historian, John Langdon Sibley, was evidently both fascinated and disturbed by Abrams. Sibley devoted a long footnote to describing this man and the inconsistencies of his religious practices. Abrams scrupulously removed all leaven from his dishes before Passover but enjoyed eating eel which, like lobster, is not kosher. He abstained from hard labor on Saturday but engaged in other kinds of business during the day of rest. Abrams made regular use of his Jewish prayer book and kept his business records in the Hebrew alphabet, probably using Judeo-German. He also attended church services regularly, like everyone else in Union, and married a local Christian woman. Susman and his wife Mary had no children. In short, Abrams sought both to preserve his Jewish identity and to participate fully in Maine's maritime Christian culture.

He balanced these competing interests in an idiosyncratic manner that nevertheless foreshadowed the choices made by many other Jewish Mainers. It appears that Abrams was also the victim of local anti-Jewish sentiments. Sibley wrote, "he was never much liked by the men [of Union], and was generally hated by the women."⁶

In the decades after Susman Abrams's death, more Jews found their way to Maine. Like Abrams, these Jews came to the United States from Germany seeking improved economic opportunities and often worked initially as peddlers. These highly mobile individuals drew on commercial experiences from the Old Country as well as Jewish connections in the New World. Most German Jewish immigrants ultimately settled in urban commercial centers with large Jewish communities. Lee Shai Weissbach calculated that in 1880, 71% of all American Jews lived in cities that had Jewish populations of 1,000 or more. Maine, a heavily rural state, attracted relatively few Jews during the mid-nineteenth century and was home to only one city, Portland, whose estimated Jewish population in 1878 exceeded one-hundred.⁷

One Jew who came to Maine during this era is Haiman Philip Spitz, who wrote an autobiography for his family.⁸ Spitz was born in Prussia in 1816, the son and grandson of Jewish merchants. By the age of twenty he moved to England, selling goods for the family business. At twenty-four, Spitz decided to come to America, where his brother already lived. Unhappy in New York, he set off for New Orleans, selling caps and other goods made by his brother's clothing firm. Spitz spent the next several years selling Northern goods in the South and he began making clothing as well. He moved to Boston in 1846 to rejoin his brother and there he met his wife. In 1848, after their first child died, the couple moved to Bangor, Maine, where Haiman set up a clothing business. The Spitzes were one of six Jewish families in town, and in 1849 Haiman was a co-founder of Ahawas Achim, the state's first synagogue.⁹ The Spitzes survived a cholera epidemic in Bangor but could not weather the depression of 1857. They moved to Baltimore and, eventually, San Francisco, to live with one of their children. The other Jewish Bangorians of that era left town as well, sending the synagogue's Torah scroll to Boston for safekeeping.

What is typical about Haiman Spitz's story? Like so many Jews of his era, Spitz was an entrepreneur engaged in the sale and manufacture of clothing and other dry goods. He was not committed to any one region of the country, but rather to making a living. Family connections helped Spitz succeed and kept him grounded: his autobiography focuses heavily on family members, especially children. Spitz devoted himself to Jewish

communal life, playing a major role in synagogues both in Bangor and Baltimore. Jewish life in a small community like Bangor, however, was precarious in part because integration into the broader society was difficult. Then, as now, Mainers were insular: they patronized locals, especially members of their own churches. Spitz made connections in Bangor through civic organizations like the Masons and Odd Fellows, and he ultimately gained a measure of acceptance in town, but evidently not enough to weather hard times. Also typical about Spitz's story was that he left Maine. Throughout Maine's history, far more Jews have left than stayed, but the total number of those who remained has steadily increased over the past 150 years.

The mere fact of continuing to live in Maine, however, is no guarantee of continued Jewish life. A second cohort of German Jews revived Ahawas Achim in 1874, but that congregation did not last long either. According to Judith Goldstein, these individuals "disappeared as Jews while staying in the city. This they did by means of intermarriage, conversion, or by not marrying at all."¹⁰ Ahawas Achim's Torah went back to Boston once more: Maine's Jews continued to view New England's metropolis as the place in which Jewish life was sure to survive.

Although Bangor was home to Maine's only synagogue in the mid-nineteenth century, Jews from Germany lived in other parts of the state as well. Census records from the Kennebec Valley, for example, reveal that about half a dozen Jewish families were present as early as the 1850s and remained for several decades. One of these Jews was Lewis Selbing, who had settled in Augusta by 1858. Selbing served in the Third Maine Infantry during the United States Civil War and was wounded at Chancellorsville. After the war, he sold fruit and candy from a stand near the statehouse always wearing his army uniform. He eventually became a state pension agent helping fellow veterans. Those who knew Selbing recalled that his standard greeting was "So vat do you tink the Thurd Maine?"¹¹ No one, unfortunately, recalled what Selbing or other nineteenth-century Jews in the Kennebec Valley did to express their Jewishness.

Maine's German Jewish population, always extremely small, had all but vanished by the early twentieth century thanks to out-migration, intermarriage, and low birthrates. Beginning in the 1870s, however, a much larger cohort of Eastern European Jews began to arrive in Maine: over 1,800 between 1890 and 1910 alone.¹² As one of these immigrants explained, "Every Jew in Russia knew that there was nothing left for him in the Old Country. For a young man there was no future to which he could look forward. America seemed to offer the only salvation."¹³

Many of the Jewish Mainers from Russia, Lithuania, and Poland were similar to German predecessors like Haiman Spitz: they were dry goods and clothing merchants who started out as peddlers. The choice to move to Maine, however, was especially unusual in the early twentieth century. In this era of industrialization, Americans in general were gravitating toward metropolitan areas and Jews in particular tended to congregate in places with sizeable Jewish communities. Lee Shai Weissbach, summarizing data compiled by the Bureau of Jewish Statistics in 1927, reports that 92% of Jews lived in communities of 1,000 or more fellow Jews. Maine, according to the Bureau's data, was home to only two Jewish communities of this magnitude, in Portland and Bangor.¹⁴

Nor was Maine a common destination for Jews who chose to live in smaller communities. Even the Industrial Removal Office regarded Maine as holding little attraction for Jews. This New York-based Jewish organization sought to relocate unemployed immigrants from big cities to small-town America in the hopes of facilitating the process of Americanization while reducing urban anti-Semitism. Of the 73,960 New York Jews resettled by the Industrial Removal Office between 1901 and 1917, only eighty-nine came to Maine.¹⁵ As a representative of the organization explained in a 1907 letter to the York Manufacturing Company of Saco, "thus far little or no success has attended our efforts to send families with more than one working member for employment in the mills of the smaller towns of New England. Neither the remuneration nor the life has proven sufficiently attractive to make them remain permanently."¹⁶ Indeed, very few of Maine's Jews worked in the mills.

Most Jews who moved to Maine did so because a family member or friend from the Old Country had moved there already. Many of the Jewish families that set down deep roots in Waterville, for example, are related to William Levine, who arrived as a peddler in 1889.¹⁷ Others also came to Waterville for family reasons. Sadie Green moved to Waterville with her four children to live near her brother, Nathan Berliawsky, after the death of her husband. A few years later, though, the Greens returned to Fall River, Massachusetts, and the Berliawskys left with them. Indeed, many of the Jews who came to Maine in the first decades of the twentieth century left, including dozens of families from Waterville alone.¹⁸

Making a Living in Maine During the Early Twentieth Century

The phenomenon of chain migration begs the question: what prompted the first members of a family to choose Maine and to stay in the

state? Susman Russakoff's story is typical. Raised in Russia, Russakoff arrived in New York City's Lower East Side in 1904 with skills as a watch repairer. "I hated the place like poison—the filth, the crowded tenements, the inescapable smell, the climbing of endless flights of stairs to reach my own uninviting quarters. All these things oppressed me." Russakoff persevered while saving enough money to bring over his future wife, Manya. Shortly after their marriage, an acquaintance living in Skowhegan, Maine, sent Russakoff a watch to repair: no one nearby could fix it.

That gave me food for thought. Here I was about to become a father. I must do something for my wife and child but have only three hundred and fifty dollars. What can I do with so little? How can I set up a business with so small a sum? I want to establish my family in a decent home. Do I have to remain a worker at the bench, depending on my week's pay? ¹⁹

In January 1907, Russakoff set off for Skowhegan to see if he might be able to open his own business. "When I arrived, the air was beautifully clear and frosty. The snow was as white as snow could ever be, and as one walked on it, it responded with a crispy clear singing. Its song was one of welcome to me." Satisfied by the business prospects and delighted by the weather, Russakoff immediately put down a deposit on a shop with upstairs living quarters.²⁰

As Russakoff's story illustrates, Jews came to Maine because they were dissatisfied with life in the big city, wanted the opportunity to work for themselves, and enjoyed the prospect of living in a place where the climate reminded them of the Old Country. Milt Adelman tells a similar story about his father, Hiram, who came to the United States from rural Russia around the year 1900.

[Hiram] arrived in New York and spent a year working in a hardware store. But he didn't like it because he wasn't used to the city life, and he asked everybody where he could go where it was more similar climate to where he came from, and they told him to go as far north as he could go, to Maine. So he took his savings and got on the train and went to Houlton, Maine, which was as far as the train went at that time.²¹

Hiram Adelman worked as a peddler in Aroostook County, first buying a horse and wagon and eventually opening a department store in Mars Hill. He also became a potato grower and merchant, participating in the signature economic activity of Maine's northernmost region.²²



Hiram Adelman, Mars Hill, ca. 1935. Although he initially immigrated to New York City from Russia, Hiram Adelman did not enjoy the climate of the city and decided to move north to Maine. After some time as a peddler and then retailer in Mars Hill, Adelman became a potato grower and merchant. *Courtesy of Abraham Peck.*



The Globe Yiddish Theater, Auburn, 1914. While many of the Jewish immigrants who settled in Maine did so in preference to its cold climate and rural lifestyle, cultural connections to urban Jewish populations remained. The Globe Yiddish Theater, for example, was a traveling troupe which performed for rural Jewish communities. *Courtesy of Barbara Shapiro.*

Even among Maine's Jews, potato farming is an unusual occupation and Aroostook County an unusual destination. Most Jews gravitated toward Maine's largest cities: Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor. In fact, the size of Maine's Jewish communities in 1930 correlates to the total population of Maine's cities: larger cities were generally home to a higher percentage of Jewish residents.²³ Adelman is, however, typical with respect to his start as a peddler and his transition into sedentary retail. Many of the less successful peddlers left Maine to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

William Levine, according to family lore, moved to Maine in the 1880s because its peddler's license was half the price of the license in Massachusetts. After a few years on the road, he established a men's clothing store that remained an anchor of Waterville's Main Street until 1996.²⁴ Other peddlers worked in even smaller towns. A non-Jewish Mainer recalled as follows the sight of one Jewish peddler standing in front of a fancy hotel in Wayne in 1887.

Oh look! There's Myer Sharraffiski, the little pack-peddler. He won't call here. The Howards, proprietors of the hotel, would object: their guests are hardly the type to patronize him. He's Russian—very polite and speaks English well, considering the time he's been in the country. How the children are crowding around! Just a few pennies will buy trinkets. He often gives to those who haven't any. (A few years later Myer drove through town in a shiny new vehicle filled with merchandise—a boon to busy stay-at-home housewives. A few years later still, the Sharraf. Bros. were doing a thriving business in a shiny store in Livermore Falls. Now, instead of Myer going to people, they came to him, remembering his courtesy and kindness of earlier years.)²⁵

This story illustrates both the eagerness with which Jewish peddlers were received when they came through town and the unwillingness of some Yankees to patronize Jews. Jewish peddlers were also objects of curiosity: A Jew from Bangor recounted to Lucille Epstein that "people on the street used to stare at his boots, perhaps snicker at the pack he carried on his back, but never failed to ask him . . . about life in Russia, the Czar's policies, or the meaning of some ancient religious custom of the Jews."²⁶ Some Yankees were eager to convert the Jews they encountered: the 1921 diary of Rose Billings records her efforts to share missionary tracts with Jewish peddlers and includes the addresses of most members of Bath's Jewish community.²⁷

In major cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago, many Jews worked in textile factories. By moving to the mill towns along Maine's powerful rivers, Jews could instead sell goods or provide services to la-

borers of other ethnic backgrounds.²⁸ Some butchers and bakers in Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor were even able to cater to primarily Jewish clientele.²⁹ By 1930, Maine's Jews had made it into the middle class. Census records for Maine's six largest Jewish communities indicate that Jews were more likely than their non-Jewish neighbors to own a house and that the median value of Jewish properties, owned and rented alike, was almost always higher than the overall median within their respective cities (see Table 2). Jewish houses were increasingly located in nicer neighborhoods than those in which Jewish and other immigrants initially settled.³⁰ The Jewish population in 1930 was also younger on average than the surrounding population (see Table 3).

The involvement of women and children was crucial to the success of many Jewish businesses. Lester Jolovitz, who grew up in Winslow in the 1920s and 1930s, described it this way:

My mother and the three of us, the children, if they got busy downstairs, we had a signal. My father would rap, knock on one of the pipes that came from the store upstairs, I guess a water pipe or whatever, and that was a signal that somebody should go down and help out, that we were busy. So, we all participated in the store; we didn't have certain hours or whatever. . . . As I recall, my mother, she was always busy doing something or working. She was—in Yiddish there's an expression, a *balebuste*. . . . My father was a hard-working man, good father, and a little strict, disciplined. My mother always tried to protect us.³¹

Jolovitz remembers his father, Barnet, carrying coal from the basement, through the first-story grocery store, and up to the family's apartment. His mother, Sarah, kept the fire going, spent all morning cooking, then cleaned and sewed and darned socks. She was constantly busy and always the last one to bed at night.

Immigrant parents like Barnet and Sarah Jolovitz worked hard so that their children would be able to enjoy the riches of life in America. Some of the children of Eastern European immigrants "made it" by succeeding in the occupations that their fathers established. Louis Rosenthal of Waterville, for example, began working in his father Hyman's junk business at the age of nine, when his father fell ill and needed to spend several months in New York for treatment. Instead of returning to school when Hyman returned, Louis stayed in the business, developing a specialty in wool waste. Louis was so successful that during the Great Depression he was able to purchase several bankrupt woolen mills.³²

Louis Rosenthal succeeded despite his lack of formal education. More



Captain Harold H. Gordon with 'Flying Torah,' Bangor, 1945. Many Jewish-Americans expressed their "Americanness" through military service during the world wars. In this picture, Jewish chaplain Captain Harold H. Gordon shows off the "Flying Torah," donated by the Beth Israel Synagogue in Bangor to comfort Jewish servicemen in the North Atlantic Division of Air Transport Command. *Courtesy of the Bangor Public Library.*

commonly, immigrant Jews and their children saw education – especially higher education – as the key to making it in America. In 1950, 37% of Jewish adults in Greater Bangor had at least some college education.³³ This rate reflects the fact that nearly half of the Jews who came of age in Maine during the interwar years attended college, a percentage far higher than that of non-Jewish Mainers (see Table 4).³⁴ Lewis Lester Levine, born in 1900, was one such child, as his daughter explains:

My father's parents had come from outside this country but he was their youngest child and he was born here. They were very poor, and he worked from the time he was twelve years old. He was selling newspapers on the street in Waterville, and every Sunday morning one of his

customers was President Roberts from Colby College who always bought his newspaper from him. My father was a very strong student and a football player for Waterville High. So as he was approaching senior year of high school, President Roberts said to him one day, or at least this is the story he always told us, "Now Lewis, you're going to go to college, aren't you?" And my father said, "I'd like to, but it costs a great deal to go to college, and my parents don't have any money." He said, "If you work hard, and you do well in school, Colby will make it possible for you to come." There were no financial aid papers to fill out, he simply came, and it was because he got to know President Roberts from selling him newspapers on the street. And he always felt extremely indebted to Colby College because education was, in his mind, the way he was going to be able to have a better life. His parents were a hundred percent for education but couldn't help him with it, so he always thought Colby made it for him. The building where he stood, on Main Street, is the place that says Judy's Salon now, but that was a bank building, it was a flourishing part of Main Street in those days. He stood there and when his feet would get cold he would kick the back of the building just to keep them warm, and after he was a lawyer for many years and was successful, he bought that building.³⁵

Libby Goldman of Auburn, born in 1908, recounted that she and her two brothers each saved ten cents a week toward their college education. In the end, her brothers gave her their savings so that she could attend Bates College, which also provided much needed financial aid. Libby went on to become a teacher in the very public schools that inspired her to pursue further studies.³⁶

As the stories of Lewis Lester Levine and Libby Goldman illustrate, access to higher education depended not only on the interest of Jewish students and their parents but also on the decisions made by presidents and other university officers. The latter factor cannot be taken for granted: beginning in the 1920s, colleges in Maine and around the country designed their admissions policies so as to severely limit the number of Jews on campus. At Bowdoin College, whose total enrollment in the 1920s rose from 400 to 550, the total Jewish population on campus remained stagnant throughout the decade, at approximately thirteen students each year. Bates College, in keeping with a policy formulated in 1923, sought to limit its Jewish population to about 3% of the student body. These policies, however, do not appear to have had a significant impact on the ability of Jewish Mainers to pursue higher education. Some attended Bates and Bowdoin, able to slip in under the quotas in part because both colleges gave preferential treatment to local applicants.³⁷ Many more went to out-of-state schools or the University of

Maine, which did not discriminate against Jews. Others attended Colby College, whose trustees limited Jewish enrollment to 10–12% of each freshman class; in fact, Jews constituted 7–8% of Colby's 600-member student body in the 1930s.³⁸ A significant percentage of Jewish Mainers who graduated from college during the interwar years went on to pursue careers as doctors, lawyers, and other white-collar professionals after World War II.³⁹

American and Jewish in the Mid-Twentieth Century

A scandal broke out in Waterville in 1973 when the rabbi, asked by the local newspaper for a reaction to the Yom Kippur War, declared "We are Jews first and Americans second." As Sam Shapiro recalls, "It was one of the first times the synagogue moved at a fast pace. At 8 o'clock that morning we had a board meeting and he was gone because most of the board members were former veterans themselves and we are certainly *not* Jews first and Americans second!"⁴⁰ Shapiro, like many other Jews in Maine during the twentieth century, was openly and actively Jewish: he served for many years as treasurer of Waterville's synagogue, brawled with anyone who uttered an anti-Semitic remark, and took great pride in the fact that his children grew up with a strong sense of Jewish identity.⁴¹

Being American, however, was the top cultural priority of these Jews. In the words of a report issued by the Jewish Community Council of Bangor in 1951, "The individual American Jew is identified with every phase of American life and is politically, economically, culturally and intellectually a part and parcel thereof. In addition, he recognizes certain aspects of life which concern him as a Jew. For him, the Jewish Community Council is an agency with which he identifies himself voluntarily to satisfy such needs."⁴² Maine's Jews may choose, as an add-on, to identify with the Jewish community, but they identify as Americans as a matter of course. For much of the twentieth century, however, many Mainers refused to accept Jews as fully American.

Maine's Jews expressed their Americanness in countless ways during the twentieth century, including their heavy involvement in sports, their active participation in dances and other aspects of youth culture, the pride they expressed in veterans of the two World Wars, and their contributions to civic affairs on the local and state levels. Already in 1937, Rebecca Friedman was able to identify six Jews who were current or former members of Maine's Legislature, two former mayors, and several active

judges and members of various governmental boards.⁴³ Jewish organizations themselves furthered the goals of Americanization: Portland's Jewish Community Center sought "to provide and foster a sound and basic understanding of American Democracy, to promote good citizenship, to participate in civic activities, and to establish a neighborly attitude in our community."⁴⁴

Experiences of Anti-Semitism

Not all Mainers, however, approved of the ways in which Jews sought to participate as equals in American life. Portland's Yankee elite went so far as to rewrite the city's charter in 1923 to diminish the electoral power of Jews and other minorities. Jews were unable to obtain jobs in Bangor's banks, hospital, or prominent law firms. Many of Maine's gentile clubs and fraternal organizations barred Jews from membership. Some prominent clubs continued to exclude Jews until 1969, when the state began denying liquor licenses to organizations with discriminatory policies.⁴⁵ Jews met resistance when they sought to move into upper-class neighborhoods.⁴⁶ Similarly, according to the Anti-Defamation League, well over half of Maine's hotels and resorts routinely refused to accommodate Jews in the 1950s, the highest rate of resort discrimination in the United States. Signs that read "No Dogs, No Niggers, No Jews Allowed" were commonplace.⁴⁷

Many Jews who grew up in Maine during the 1920s and 1930s recounted being called "dirty Jew" or "Christ-killer" and being excluded from pick-up games in the schoolyard. "I had a next-door neighbor, an Irishman, who didn't go by the house without saying, 'Hey, you goddamn Jew,' or words to that effect," recalled Daniel Epstein, who was born in Portland in 1911. "Oh, I was very, very aware of [anti-Semitism.] I still have a hole in my backside! I got picked up and hit with a pellet gun because three or four kids down on Waterville Street knew who I was."⁴⁸ Others of the same generation, however, do not recall experiencing anti-Semitism personally, and far fewer stories of schoolyard discrimination are told by baby boomers. Julie Miller recounted her experiences looking for a summer job in 1970:

That summer, many of my non-Jewish friends were going to get summer jobs in Bar Harbor. It had changed by then, I thought—the signs weren't there, at least. My blond, blue-eyed friends that would fit in beautifully in Wilton, Connecticut, were going to get jobs in Bar Harbor. Whether they were chambermaids, waitresses, whatever, they

wanted to be at the coast for the summer. I remember telling my mother, though, "I'm going with Robyn. We're going to Bar Harbor, and we're going to find a place to live. We're going to get a waitress job, or a bus-girl job, or whatever for the summer. It'll be really fun!" And she looked at me and said—and I'll never forget this because I thought she was nuts—she looked at me and said, "Robyn will get a job; Nancy will get a job; Sherrie will get a job; you will not get a job." I was like, "What are you talking about?" And she goes, "They won't ask you if you're Jewish, but you will not get a job." And I thought, "She's crazy. That doesn't happen." She was 100% right: all three of my friends got jobs, and I did not.⁴⁹

It is telling not only that Julie Miller encountered discrimination of this nature but that she had no reason to expect such discrimination on the basis of her own childhood experiences in Waterville.

Jewish Communal Life

When rebuffed by their gentile neighbors, Jews established parallel organizations and institutions so as to engage in the same pastimes as other Mainers. Jews operated resorts and summer camps that catered to Jewish patrons but in many cases were otherwise indistinguishable from their non-Jewish counterparts. Maine's largest Jewish communities had enough members to support multiple social and cultural organizations, including community centers, debating societies, fraternal organizations, youth groups, and country clubs, as well as several synagogues. A survey of Greater Bangor conducted in 1950 found that 84% of Jews over the age of eighteen belonged to at least one Jewish organization; 46% belonged to three or more the region's sixteen organizations.⁵⁰ As Julia Lipez explains regarding Portland's Jews, "They had succeeded in providing themselves with everything their non-Jewish neighbors had" despite the pervasiveness of social discrimination.⁵¹ Smaller communities sufficed with a single synagogue and perhaps a social organization or two, like B'nai B'rith or Hadassah, often with overlapping membership. Jewish fraternities were established at Colby and the University of Maine; by mid-century, these schools, along with Bates, also hosted chapters of Hillel, the national organization for collegiate Jewish life.

Involvement in Jewish organizations subsided in the latter half of the twentieth century as gentile organizations opened their doors. "The price of integration," Lipez observes, "was the eventual decline of the robust institutions the Jewish community had worked so hard to build."⁵² Jewish country clubs folded, Jewish fraternities pledged increasing num-

bers of non-Jews, and Jewish service organizations merged. Another crucial factor in the decline of Jewish organizations was the increasing involvement of women in the workforce and thus the decrease in time available for volunteer activities. Myrtle Wolman recalls that “at one point Waterville had three organizations [Hadassah, B’nai B’rith, and the synagogue’s Sisterhood], meaning the same people would go to three meetings a month, and that was ridiculous because of the pressures of work, the family, and other social work. Eventually we formed one meeting for all three: it was just too much, too much going on.”⁵³

Maine’s Jews expressed their dual commitment to the Jewish community and the communities in which they lived through their volunteer activities and charitable contributions. Waterville’s Jewish women, for example, were not only involved in Jewish organizations but also volunteered at the local hospital, public school, and art museum. Bangor’s Jewish community raised funds for the American war effort and for the Zionist cause with equal vigor.⁵⁴ Indeed, Bangor’s Jewish Community Council set out “to help individuals realize their maximum potential as Americans and as Jews. . . . The Center and Hebrew School should stimulate interest in its members and pupils to participate actively in Jewish life and in general community life.”⁵⁵

Generation Gaps

Jewish children attended Maine’s public schools, where they were frequently the only Jews in their classes. Most of them also attended supplementary Jewish schools, often complaining about the authoritarian immigrant teachers, dull lessons, and rote memorization.⁵⁶ “The Hebrew school was the institution which clashed most violently with the American institutions with which the second generation came in contact,” Lucille Epstein of Bangor observed in 1940.⁵⁷ The culture gap between immigrants and their children manifested itself in the home as well, as Beth Hillson captured in her memoir of growing up in Old Town during the 1950s.

Sometimes I feel like Grandma Sophie and Grandpa Benny are still living in that other world. I separate myself from their traditions, their foods, their thick accents that come from deep in the throat and pepper every sentence. I am not like them. I have a collection of single records like Ain’t Nothing but a Hound Dawg and Hot Diggity, and I wear a wide felt skirt with a black and pink poodle on it. I do not speak Yiddish when I want to keep secrets. I don’t even understand it. I do

not eat bagels slathered with cream cheese and draped in slices of pink smoked salmon. I do not savor the kishke Grandma makes—cow intestine stuffed with schmaltz [chicken fat] and bread crumbs—the stuff that causes my father to grunt with pleasure when he bites into one of those sausage-like delicacies.

I am not that kind of Jew. . . . I am part of the Wonder Bread generation. I am processed and homogenized just like all the other kids in the third grade.⁵⁸

The immigrant generation continued to use Yiddish for their shop records, avidly read copies of the *Forverts* newspapers sent from New York, and patronized touring Yiddish theater groups on their visits to Maine. Their American-born children had little interest in the language of the Old Country and created their own theater productions in English. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most of the Jews who lived in places with synagogues were affiliated during the early and mid-twentieth century, but that those who attended services on a regular basis were primarily European-born elderly men. Until World War II, all but one of Maine's synagogues was Orthodox. After the war, however, most synagogues in Maine introduced mixed-gender seating and a more modern style of worship; many abandoned traditional Orthodoxy entirely and affiliated with the more liberal Conservative movement, the most popular American denomination in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁹

The decline in adherence to traditional Jewish practices is especially apparent in the dietary practices of Maine's Jews, a point that Hillson emphasizes in her memoir. Most members of the immigrant generation, as well as many of their children, kept kosher. Jewish peddlers were known to bring their own food with them on the road and to eat selectively when offered food at the farms they visited.⁶⁰ Bangor's Jewish community, which had trouble finding and keeping qualified kosher butchers in the early twentieth century, sent a desperate telegram to Boston: "Situation is open. Have no meat. Send shohet at once."⁶¹ Goldie Singer recalls that nearly all of the Jewish families in Brunswick, where she grew up during the Great Depression, were "very Orthodox. It wasn't until, I think, when I grew up that there were other ways to eat. . . . We wouldn't go in a restaurant and order anything—oh my goodness, that was *treyf* [non-kosher]!" A highlight of her trips to Boston, to visit an aunt, was going to a kosher restaurant.

First of all, they'd bring a basket of breads—rolls and breads and everything. Then they give you a big bowl of soup. I always never forgot that. We didn't have any money in those days! And so we had that,

after that there was chicken, steak. You should see the meal we had for fifty cents!⁶²

Practices had changed by the 1950s. As the lobster anecdote with which this essay begins indicated, keeping kosher was often something that one's grandparents did. Upon the death of Waterville's kosher butcher in 1953, almost all of the Jewish families in that town simply switched over to non-kosher meat. Many, however, continued to abstain from pork.⁶³

Marriage and Inter-marriage

In one respect, however, Maine's Jews were fairly traditional during the early and mid-twentieth century alike: marriage to gentiles was frowned upon. Molly Zeitman of Portland, a teenager writing to Teddy Levine of Waterville in 1912, insisted that "I never go to every Tom, Dick or Harry dance. I only go to nice dances given by Jewish clubs."⁶⁴ This remark reflects an embrace of anti-intermarriage sentiments by Jewish youth. Both Teddy Levine and his two brothers were lifelong bachelors: they never met Jewish girls they wanted to marry. The close-knit Levine family would not condone marriage to a gentile during the 1920s and 1930s, although they looked the other way when the boys spent time with "*shikses*" (a derogatory term for non-Jewish women) outside the house.⁶⁵ Analysis of 1930 census records suggests that the couples intermarriage rate in Portland stood at 2.3%, with Jewish men twice as likely to intermarry than Jewish women.⁶⁶

The attitudes of Jewish Mainers toward intermarriage began to shift in the 1940s. Toby Shafter, writing about Rockland at the end of the decade, reported that:

Nearly every "old" Jewish family with children of marriageable age has been affected in one way or another by intermarriage. Although there is always much sadness on the part of the immediate family and much sympathetic clucking of tongues from friends, the announcement that a young man is about to marry or has already secretly married a *shiksa* hardly creates a sensation by now. The few Jewish girls who have married gentile men have, on the other hand, been subject to vehement criticism, coffee-hour gossip, and unending speculation. In all cases except one, they have not remained in town. The one girl who did marry a native state-of-Mainer is completely divorced from the Jewish community. On the other hand, the Jewish men who marry outside the fold retain some semblance of attachment to the Jewish community. They generally attend the high holiday services and send their

children to the synagogue for Sunday school lessons even though they and their wives do not mingle socially with the Jewish “crowd.”⁶⁷

Intermarriage, while still roundly disapproved, was becoming increasingly commonplace in small towns like Rockland. In the much larger Jewish community of Bangor, it seems that mixed marriages remained relatively rare. A survey of Greater Bangor in 1950, striking for its failure to specifically address the phenomenon of intermarriage, found that only a handful of individuals affiliated with the Jewish community, predominantly men, were married to non-Jews.⁶⁸

Jews who intermarried, especially Jewish women, often left the Jewish community or found themselves excluded from it despite a desire to become involved. United States Senator William Cohen, who as a child sought permission to have a bar mitzvah, penned the following about himself and his Irish mother, Clara:

How many years
you held your golden head
high in silence,

Amid those whispers
and jaundiced looks,
the epithets hurled
at the flesh of your flesh
that struck like stones.

There was no harbor, no sanctuary, not
in the ranks of Christ or
Maccabee
for being half of each
they fell beyond
the reach of conformity.⁶⁹

Even as Maine’s Jews sought full integration into American life, they insisted upon keeping the line between Jews and gentiles clear. Shafter, however, depicts an awareness that this line would not hold. “There is a certain restraint in the comment of Jewish families on the subject of intermarriage. ‘You can never tell when it will happen to you,’ they explain sadly, placing it much in the same category as cholera.”⁷⁰

Responding to communal attitudes regarding intermarriage, Maine’s Jewish youth groups and summer camps sought to create op-



William S. Cohen speaking at Israel bonds fund-raising dinner, Bangor, ca. 1970. Intermarriage was often a divisive topic in the Jewish community, something experienced by William S. Cohen as he grew up with a Jewish father and Irish mother. Here he is pictured speaking at a Bangor fundraiser for Israel bonds. Cohen, either Bangor city councilman or mayor depending on the date of the image, was elected to Congress in 1972. He went on to serve as Senator and then ultimately Secretary of State. *Courtesy of the Bangor Public Library.*

portunities for Jews from different parts of the state to socialize and, hopefully, find romance. Old Orchard Beach, which attracted Jewish vacationers both from around the state and from as far as Boston and Montreal, was the site of countless first dates. Many more of Maine's Jews found marriage partners out of state. During the interwar years, women often moved to Boston after high school, attracted more by the number of Jewish bachelors than the metropolis's educational or occupational opportunities; many of those who stayed in Maine did not marry.⁷¹ Men from Maine often met Jewish marriage partners while earning professional degrees in Boston and other large cities or while serving in World War II. A significant number of these men returned, wives in tow, to establish careers in their hometown and raise the next generation of Jewish Mainers.

Maine's Jewish Storylines, Past and Present

In certain respects, the experiences of Jews in Maine today differ significantly from those of Jews who lived in the state in the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. There are, however, a number of storylines from earlier years that carry on through the late-twentieth century and into the present. Awareness of these common threads – which are by no means unique to the Jews of Maine – can help us to better understand contemporary dynamics within Maine and within American Jewish communities more broadly.

The vast majority of American Jews continue to live in major metropolitan areas: 95% in all, with four out of five Jews residing in only ten population centers.⁷² As a result, Maine remains on the margins of American Jewish life. Within Maine itself, Jews replicate national patterns to a significant degree. Most Jewish Mainers live in and around Portland; the next largest concentration of Jews is in the Bangor area.⁷³

Today's Jewish Mainers are American-born rather than European immigrants, but it remains the case that the majority of Jewish adults in the state are not native Mainers.⁷⁴ Jews continue to find their way to the state in search of economic opportunities. Some of these occupations are traditional – Jewish Mainers continue to operate retail businesses – and a few are idiosyncratic to Maine, like working on a lobster boat.⁷⁵ For the most part, however, Maine's Jews are employed as white-collar professionals, working in the very careers to which the children of immigrants aspired when they pursued higher education during the interwar years. Indeed, Jewish Mainers display especially high rates of college and graduate education. According to a 2007 demographic study of Southern Maine, 81% of adults in Jewish households held college degrees, and a striking 42% had graduate degrees. By contrast, only a third of all adults in Southern Maine earned college degrees in 2005, and only 11% held graduate degrees.⁷⁶ Southern Maine's Jews report significantly higher household income than their non-Jewish neighbors, a phenomenon also apparent in 1930.⁷⁷

Quality of life appears to be a more significant factor shaping the decision to move to or remain in Maine than it was a century ago, when Hiram Adelman and Susman Russakoff left New York for someplace as cold as their hometowns in Russia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the Jews who live in Maine today do so in large measure for reasons related to its natural beauty and laid-back lifestyle; the latter factor in particular is commonly cited by those who relocate from the New York City area. Jewish retirees with no family ties in Maine and Jewish

back-to-the-landers exemplify the significant role that quality-of-life considerations have played in recent years. Linda Tatelbaum describes the latter group as follows:

The 1960s and '70s brought lots of disaffected young Jews to Maine, stirring a streak of borscht into the beanpot of small-town Maine. We were going back-to-the-land, not back-to-Judaism, though driven by the same pioneering spirit that transformed Israel from a desert to a garden. But we didn't see ourselves as part of the tradition. We invented the idea of living on the land, building shelter, gardening, and forming community with like-minded folk, didn't we?⁷⁸

Tatelbaum alludes to the fact that most Jewish back-to-the-landers – indeed, most Jews who have chosen to move to Maine – did so for reasons unrelated to their Jewishness. “Driving a second-grader to Hebrew school is not something I ever thought I'd do,” Tatelbaum observes while recounting how she did just that, traversing the distance from her homestead in Appleton to the synagogue in Rockland. “My cousin David says I was the least likely person in our extended family to raise a Jewish child.”⁷⁹

A number of Jewish Mainers, like Tatelbaum, unexpectedly made Jewishness a priority and found ways to integrate their Jewish and Maine identities. As Michael Hoberman observes, “Jews who have come to rural New England since the 1960s did not, for the most part, come with the express intention of fomenting a Jewish revival in that area. In many cases, however, their arrival and involvement have done just that.”⁸⁰ This development has contributed to a rise in nontraditional ritual practices. To cite only one example, Linda Tatelbaum and her husband, Kal Winer, use a “lulav and etrog” set for the fall harvest festival of Sukkot comprised entirely of Maine species – pine, lilac, cedar, and apple – rather than the four listed in the Bible (Leviticus 23:40).⁸¹ Reform synagogues, which did not exist in Maine until the 1980s, are now the largest congregations in each of the regions where they exist: Greater Portland, Bangor, and the Kennebec Valley. Most Jewish Mainers, however, are not affiliated with any synagogue, and a relatively high percentage of Jews in Southern Maine do not engage in any religious practices.⁸²

Maine's Jews continue to look to Boston as their religious metropolis. Shopping trips to Brookline to purchase Passover supplies or ritual objects are commonplace. Statewide Jewish youth organizations have come and gone over the years, but Boston has remained a place to which parents and synagogues bring teenagers for youth events.⁸³ Today, Jew-



Teachers of the Portland Hebrew School, 1926. Hebrew Schools have long been an important source of imparting Jewish culture and values to young generations of Jewish Mainers. As intermarriage becomes a more common experience within Maine's Jewish community, an increasing percentage of students at Hebrew Schools have a non-Jewish parent. *Collections of the Maine Historical Society.*

ish Mainers also rely on the Internet to connect with fellow Jews, obtain Jewish goods or information, and train for bar mitzvahs. There remains, however, a significant difference between Jewish life in large American communities, whether real or virtual, and the lifestyles which many of Maine's Jews regard as accessible and appealing.⁸⁴

The greatest discontinuity between Maine's Jewish past and its present relates to the very high rate of intermarriage within the state. In 2007 Southern Maine, intermarriage was a pervasive phenomenon, with an estimated intermarriage rate of 61%. This rate, Ira Sheskin observes, is the highest of about fifty comparably-sized Jewish communities nationwide and well above the 48% national average.⁸⁵ The high rate of intermarriage reflects both the sharp decline of anti-intermarriage sentiments within the state's Jewish population and also the dwindling to insignificance of anti-Jewish discrimination within Maine. Jews and gentiles alike now think nothing either of socializing with or of marrying one another. The degree to which Maine's Jewish communities are embracing non-Jewish spouses and their children is unprecedented. So

too is the extent to which intermarried couples are choosing to raise Jewish children, a practice that was quite rare before the middle of the twentieth century. The Southern Maine study found that nearly half of the children in intermarried households are being raised as Jews.⁸⁶ In Bath, all but two of the children enrolled in Hebrew school in 2010 had a non-Jewish parent.⁸⁷

In a sense, the state's high intermarriage rate reflects merely the latest in an ongoing series of challenges and opportunities for Maine's Jews and Jewish communities. Their history of overcoming challenges while seizing opportunities bodes well for the future of Jewish life in the state. Today's challenge, however, stems directly from past successes and thus calls for a different kind of response. Jews "made it" in Maine, socially as well as economically, by insisting that "we are *not* Jews first and Americans second," as Sam Shapiro of Waterville put it. Prior generations of Jewish Mainers, like Jews throughout the United States, successfully won full acceptance as Americans even as they remained Jews. The challenge facing Maine's Jews today is to embrace and transmit their Jewishness even as they remain thoroughly American.

Appendix: Jewish Mainers in the 1930 Federal Manuscript Census

Data culled from the 1930 U.S. census offers a valuable snapshot of Maine's Jewish community.⁸⁸ The census-takers, of course, did not identify anyone's religion, but their records often provide clear evidence of Jewish identity. The manuscript census (the original spreadsheets on which census-takers recorded their data) reports the native tongue of every individual born outside the United States; for many Jewish immigrants, that language is listed as Yiddish, Jewish, or Hebrew. Less conclusive but nevertheless compelling evidence of Jewish identity can be gleaned from considering a combination of distinctively Jewish surnames and given names within a household, parents' places of birth, and occupation. Analysis of this nature works especially well in Maine, where virtually all Jewish households present in 1930 contained either immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe or the children of such immigrants.⁸⁹ Jews, moreover, tended not to live in the same neighborhoods as non-Jews from Central and Eastern European countries. Where possible, other sources of information, such as cemetery records, marriage certificates, and oral histories, were consulted to confirm the Jewishness of individuals listed in the census records.

Members of the research team analyzed the complete manuscript

census records from every Maine town known to have had at least twenty Jewish residents; all but one of these towns was identified by using Harry S. Linfield's 1927 survey of the American Jewish populations.⁹⁰ Table 1 summarizes the overall findings; the right-hand column offers Linfield's estimates for comparison purposes.⁹¹ We identified a total of 5,247 Jews in these fifteen towns; non-Jewish spouses and the children of intermarried households are included in the tally. I would guess that there were about 5,500 Jews living throughout the state in 1930 (approximately 0.7% of the state's total population).

TABLE 1: MAINE TOWNS WITH MORE THAN 20 JEWS

Town/City	Number of Jews	Total population	% Jewish	Linfield data (1927)
Auburn	357	18,571	1.92	480
Augusta ⁹²	59	17,198	0.34	45
Bangor	981	28,749	3.41	1,500
Bath	72	9,110	0.79	300
Biddeford	167	17,633	0.95	325
Brunswick	34	6,144	0.45	35
Gardiner	45	5,609	0.80	120
Lewiston	369	34,948	1.06	650
Old Town	61	7,266	0.84	64
Portland	2,686	70,810	3.79	3,500
Randolph	22	1,377	1.60	---
Rockland	102	9,075	1.12	100
Rumford	38	8,726	0.44	231
Saco	80	7,233	1.11	76
Waterville	174	15,454	1.13	150

The manuscript census indicates whether the head of household owned or rented the household's residence and provides either the value of the property (if owned) or the amount of the monthly rent. In the absence of information regarding annual income or household net worth, this data provides the only means of gauging the relative affluence of Maine's Jews in 1930. Table 2 compares the data we collected about Jewish households in communities of one-hundred or more Jews with published data on median property values and rents in these cities.⁹³ It shows that Jews were consistently more likely to own property than non-Jews and that Jews generally lived in homes of higher value than non-Jews in the same city.

TABLE 2: PROPERTY VALUES IN CITIES WITH LARGE JEWISH COMMUNITIES

City	Number of Jewish households	Owner families (Jewish)	Owner families (all)	Median property value (Jewish)	Median property value (all)	Median monthly rent (Jewish)	Median monthly rent (all)
Auburn	77	59.7%	53.0%	\$7,000	\$5,341	\$26	\$24.39
Bangor	218	68.8%	51.8%	\$5,000	\$5,290	\$30	\$25.24
Biddeford	37	56.8%	37.3%	\$5,000	\$3,867	\$28	\$18.06
Lewiston	91	39.6%	33.9%	\$10,000	\$6,144	\$50	\$25.14
Portland	612	46.7%	35.0%	\$7,000	\$6,245	\$30	\$30.51
Waterville	37	81.1%	45.2%	\$6,000	\$5,446	\$37	\$23.38

Tables 3 and 4 provide information about youth, especially in cities with large Jewish communities. Maine’s Jewish population was disproportionately young, and Jewish teenagers were far more likely to complete high school and to pursue college education than their non-Jewish peers.⁹⁴

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION BELOW AGE 20

City	Jewish	Total
Auburn	36.7%	32.9%
Bangor	37.6%	31.5%
Biddeford	45.5%	40.0%
Lewiston	40.7%	37.6%
Portland	40.1%	32.1%
Waterville	38.5%	39.0%
All	39.0%	37.3%

TABLE 4: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AMONG TEENAGERS, AGES 16–20

City	Jews age 16-17	in school (Jewish)	in school (all 16-17)	Jews age 18-20	in school (Jewish)	in school (all 18-20)
Auburn	17	100%	61.5%	27	63.0%	29.2%
Bangor	54	94.4%	71.6%	76	42.1%	31.7%
Biddeford	12	100%	36.3%	8	25.0%	10.4%
Lewiston	16	100%	44.9%	23	60.9%	13.1%
Portland	136	89.7%	71.2%	180	36.7%	27.0%
Waterville	9	88.9%	57.1%	11	54.5%	22.9%
All	260	92.7%	59.8%	360	44.7%	23.1%

NOTES

1. This essay is based on talks delivered in communities throughout Maine in 2010; several of the stories it contains were shared during these events. I am grateful to all of the individuals who shared their stories and to the student members of Colby's Maine Jewish History Project research team who conducted many of the interviews cited below. Support for student research was provided by the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement at Colby College. I am grateful as well to the Legacy Heritage Jewish Studies Project, directed by the Association for Jewish Studies and supported by Legacy Heritage Fund Limited, for making possible the events at which earlier versions of this essay were delivered.
2. Robert Hains, interview by Jena Hershkowitz, January 7, 2010. This and other interviews cited below are archived at Colby College Special Collections, Waterville.
3. See Michael Hoberman, *How Strange it Seems: The Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
4. The results of this research, along with short essays on Jewish life from around the state, may be found at web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/. Another invaluable online resource for Maine's Jewish history is the website of Documenting Maine Jewry, a grassroots historical and genealogical organization: www.maine-jews.org. Citations below frequently refer to these websites.
5. Rebecca Friedman, "Jewish Settlers in Maine," a 1937 report prepared for the state's Executive Department, reports that a handful of Jews of Sephardic ancestry settled in Bangor and along the coast during the eighteenth century; some contemporary Maine families, she adds, descend from intermarriages between these Jews and Yankees (1). Benjamin Band, *Portland Jewry: Its Growth and Development* (Portland, Me.: Jewish Historical Society, 1955), reports that 44 Maine residents presumed to be Jewish appear in the 1790 U.S. census; he also observes that this estimate has been deemed excessive by some (5). Both of these works are accessible at www.mainejews.org.
6. John Langdon Sibley, *A History of the Town of Union* (Boston: Mussey, 1851), 110. A copy of this footnote is accessible at web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.
7. Lee Shai Weissbach, "The Jewish Communities of the United States on the Eve of Mass Migration: Some Comments on Geography and Bibliography," *American Jewish History* 78 (1988): 83, 85. *Statistics of the Jews of the United States*, published in 1880, reports 185 Jews in Portland. As Weissbach observes, however, the accuracy of this data is suspect: *Statistics* erroneously reports the presence of a synagogue in Portland, whose first synagogue was in fact founded in 1884 (p. 82). How *Statistics* obtained its population figure for Portland when it received "no returns" from the non-existent local synagogue is unclear.
8. Haiman Spitz, *Haiman Philip Spitz: An Autobiography* (1886; SC-11863, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati), accessible at www.americanjewish

archives.org; extensive extracts appear in Jacob Rader Marcus, ed., *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775–1865* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 1: 289–301.

9. See further William J. Leffler, II, “A Study of Congregation Ahawas Achim, Bangor, Maine from 1849 to 1856 from the minutes of the congregation” (unpublished paper, 1957), accessible at www.mainejews.org.

10. Judith S. Goldstein, *Crossing Lines: Histories of Jews and Gentiles in Three Communities* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 45.

11. Anthony Douin, “Augusta’s Jewish Civil War Hero,” *Capital Weekly* (Augusta, ME), May 31, 2007. accessible at www.mainejews.org.

12. This is, of course, a tiny fraction of the more than 1.3 million Jews who arrived in the United States during this period. Maine statistics: Goldstein, *Crossing lines*, 4, citing a 1910 Senate Immigration Committee report; national statistics: Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880–1920*, *The Jewish People in America*, vol. 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992), 58. Although the era of Eastern European Jewish migration to the United States is typically said to begin in 1881, when a wave of pogroms occurred in Russia, the presence of Jews from Eastern Europe is already evident in Bangor and Portland several years earlier.

13. Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 43.

14. Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 4. Analysis of the 1930 census, however, suggests that Bangor’s Jewish community was actually somewhat smaller than 1,000 and certainly smaller than the Bureau’s estimate of 1,500; see Table 1. This census survey corresponds with information provided by Judith Goldstein, who reports that Bangor’s Jewish population, which “grew by over a hundred families from 1930 to 1940” (*Crossing Lines*, 111) stood at approximately 1,200 in 1941 (p. 117). On the problematic nature of the Bureau’s data, as reported in the 1928 and 1929 volumes of the *American Jewish Year Book*, see Weissbach 21–22.

15. Jack Glazier, *Dispersing the Ghetto: The Relocation of Jewish Immigrants Across America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 196.

16. Unsigned letter to Elmer E. Page, April 16, 1907; Industrial Removal Office Records, Series V, Maine 1904–1919 (191/5/43/2), American Jewish Historical Society, New York.

17. Between 30–40% of the Jewish heads of household in Waterville in each census from 1900–1930 were related in some manner to William Levine. Fourteen of the eighteen households present in both 1910 and 1930, and five of the six households present in both 1900 and 1930, are part of the extended Levine clan.

18. Over 40% of the thirty-eight Jewish households listed in Waterville’s 1910 census are absent from the 1920 census; a similar percentage of the Jewish households listed in 1920 were gone by 1930. The total size of Waterville’s Jewish community remained stable, however, as departing Jewish households were replaced by new ones. This pattern is commonplace in small-town Jewish communities during the early twentieth century: see Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 78–87. The census conducted by Bangor’s Jewish Community Council in 1950, however, finds less fluctuation in the Jewish population at mid-century: only 26% of adult Jews in the Greater Bangor region had arrived within the last ten years

("Final report of the Jewish Community Council self-survey committee" [Bangor, 1951], 42, accessible at www.mainejews.org).

19. Susman Russakoff, *Memoirs*, ed. Ida Russakoff Hoos (unpublished, 1965), 141–43, accessible at www.mainejews.org.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Hoberman, *How Strange*, 23. I am grateful to Michael Hoberman for sharing the complete transcript of this interview; this citation is based on that transcript.

22. See Hoberman, *How Strange*, 80–83.

23. In the five cities with a total population of 5,000 – 10,000 and a Jewish population of at least fifty, Jews constitute somewhat less than 1% of the population; the Jewish communities of these cities consist on average of seventy-five individuals. In the three cities with a total population of 15,000 – 20,000 and a Jewish population of at least one-hundred, Jews average about 1.3% of the population. In cities with a total population of 25,000 or more, Jews constitute over 3% of the population in Bangor and Portland, but only about 1% in Lewiston, most of whose residents worked in the city's factories; Jews are somewhat overrepresented in the population of Lewiston's sister city, Auburn. See Table 1.

24. Sara Miller Arnon and Julie Miller-Soros, "The history of Levine's: The Store for Men and Boys," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

25. Rena Leadbetter McIlroy, in the *Lewiston Journal Magazine Section* (1957), quoted in W. Dennis Stires, "In Pursuit of 'The American Dream,'" in Eloise R. Ault and Edward L. Kallop, Jr., eds., *A Happy Abundance* (Wayne, Me: Wayne Historical Society, 2008), accessible at www.mainejews.org.

26. Lucille M. Epstein, incomplete master's thesis, University of Maine, 1940, cited in Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 50.

27. Diary of Rose Billings (unpublished, 1921; S-7366, Misc. Box 257/12, Maine Historical Society, Portland.). Diary entries include: "Sent a gift to the Jewish Mission NY" (Oct. 11); "Got a large package of Yiddish papers to distribute" (Oct. 15); "A Jew called today to buy egg or hens. We had neither to spare but I gave him a Yiddish paper and he got sociable" (Oct. 17); "I sent a request for... tracts... and some Jew papers. May they bear fruit!" (Oct. 19).

28. In 1930 Waterville, there were thirty-three Jewish businessmen (59% of the working Jewish population), ten professionals, and no laborers. See Miles de Klerk, "The Jews and Lebanese of Waterville: A Comparison of 1930 Census Data," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/. Judith Goldstein reports similar data from 1930 Bangor: 153 Jewish shopkeepers, twelve professionals, and over sixty in clerical work (*Crossing Lines*, 104). In 1950, half of the employed Jewish population in Greater Bangor worked in retail trade ("Final Report of the Self-Study Committee," 46). A survey of Portland's 1930 census data suggests that approximately 1% of the city's employed Jews were factory laborers.

29. Zack Barowitz, "The Middle Merchants: Portland's Jewish Mercantile Community," and Phyllis Graber Jensen, "The Jewish Merchants of Lewiston's Lisbon Street," both accessible at web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/. On Bangor, see Judith Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*.

30. A 1948 study found that more than half of the children enrolled in Portland's Hebrew School lived in the semi-suburban Woodfords neighborhood, while only a quarter lived in the first area of Jewish settlement near Portland's downtown; see Band, *Portland Jewry*, 90, 83. Similar dynamics are attested in Bangor and Waterville; on the latter, see Kimiko Kossler, "Moving In, Moving Out, and Moving Up: Jews in Waterville in the Early Twentieth Century," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

31. Lester Jolovitz, interviewed by Sam Levine, January 10 and 21, 2010.

32. Bob Rosenthal, interviewed by Becky Muller, Jan. 19, 2010. Jews were heavily represented in the junk business. Louis Rosenthal's business was one of five Jewish-owned waste companies in Waterville during the Great Depression years; Waterville was home to only one non-Jewish junk dealer during this era. See further Yichen Jiang, "Waterville's Jewish Retailers during the Depression," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

33. "Final Report of Self-Study Committee": this percentage was obtained by dividing the total number of individuals with college or graduate education on page 45 by the total number of individuals over the age of twenty-one on page 42.

34. I am currently preparing an essay devoted to the subject of college education among Maine's Jews during the interwar years.

35. Judy Brody, interviewed by Jena Hershkowitz, January 19, 2010.

36. Libby Goldman, interviewed by David Freidenreich, November 11, 2010.

37. Bates, located in Lewiston, educated approximately 20% of the college-age Jews of Lewiston and neighboring Auburn (over sixty students) during the interwar years. During the same period, Bowdoin educated nearly half of the college-age Jewish men from its hometown of Brunswick. I plan to address these admissions policies and their limited impact on Maine's Jews in a forthcoming article on college education among Maine's Jews during the interwar years.

38. Colby's quota: personal correspondence of Dean Ernest Marriner to Elmer Hussey, Jan. 27, 1939; Elmer Horace Hussey Materials, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville. I am grateful to Hubert J. Merrick for spotting this correspondence and drawing it to my attention. Jewish students at Colby: see David M. Freidenreich and Desiree Shayer, "A Tale of Two Colleges: Jews and Baptist Institutions in Maine during the Interwar Years," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/. Note, however, that this paper was written before we discovered evidence regarding Colby's quota.

39. Of the eighteen Jewish men from Waterville who graduated Colby during the interwar years, for example, four became lawyers, three became doctors, and two entered other white-collar professions. The others went into business, often one started a family member.

40. Sam Shapiro, interviewed by Kimiko Kossler, July 27, 2010. Sam clarifies as the interview progresses that the dismissal of the rabbi, while inspired by this incident, was not as instantaneous as this quote implies.

41. Sam and Carol Shapiro, interviewed by Adam Thompson, January 9 and 19, 2011; see also Adam Thompson, "Key Factors in the Transmission of Jewish

Identity during the Postwar Years,” web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

42. “Final Report of the Self-Survey Committee,” 8.

43. Friedman, “Jewish Settlers in Maine,” 3–5.

44. Policy committee report, 1938, cited by Julia Lipez, “A Time to Build Up and a Time to Break Down: The Jewish Secular Institutions of Portland, Maine,” B.A. thesis, Amherst College, 2002, 23–24, accessible at web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

45. Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 99–101, 131–36; Lipez, “A Time to Build Up,” 61–88; Abraham J. Peck, “Is it Good for the Jews? Is it Good for Everyone? Maine Jewry between Civic Idealism and the Politics of Reality,” *Diversity at the Ballot Box: Electoral politics and Maine’s Minority Communities, Post-WWII to the Present* (Portland: University of Southern Maine, 2008, accessible via web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/), 16–20.

46. For anecdotes from the Portland area, see Lipez, “A Time to Build Up,” 19 (referring to the 1930s), and Barowitz, “Middle Merchants” (referring to the 1970s).

47. “National Survey of Resorts,” *Rights: ADL Reports on Social, Employment, Educational and Housing Discrimination*, 1.7 (July–August, 1957), 1. According to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (“Anti-Jewish Discrimination Widespread among Summer Resorts in Maine,” July 21, 1958), the survey found that 63% of Maine resorts discriminated against Jews; I was unable to verify this figure in ADL publications, which consistently group Maine with New Hampshire and Vermont. The JTA also reported that Maine was the worst state in the union with respect to resort discrimination against Jews (“Discrimination Against Jews in Resort Places High in Michigan,” June 18, 1957). “No Dogs...”: Julie Miller-Soros, interviewed by Hannah Dhonau, January 10, 2011.

48. Daniel Epstein, interviewed by Konnilyn Feig, cited by Julia Lipez, “A Time to Build Up,” 18. See also Miles de Klerk, “Change over Time: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Waterville,” web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

49. Julie Miller-Soros, interviewed by Hannah Dhonau, January 10, 2011. See further Amy Eklund, “Jews in Vacationland,” web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

50. “Report of the Self-Survey Committee,” 47. By contrast, fewer than half of Greater Bangor’s Jews belonged to even one general community organization (p. 48).

51. Lipez, “A Time to Build Up,” 52.

52. Lipez, “A Time to Build Up,” 13. Lipez details the decline of Portland’s Jewish Community Center and its affiliated organizations on pp. 94–106.

53. Myrtle Wolman, interviewed by Hasan Bhatti, January 21, 2010. The Sisterhood absorbed Hadassah and B’nai B’rith (which in Waterville was a women’s group) before eventually dissolving into the synagogue itself. See further Hasan Bhatti, “Jewish Participation in Waterville Civic Organizations,” and Becky Muller, “A Community Apart: Women’s Experiences in Waterville, Maine, 1945–1970,” both accessible at web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.

54. See Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 86–88, 107, 125.

55. “Final Report of the Self-Survey Committee,” 9.

56. The 1950 Bangor community census found that 62% of Jews in the Greater Bangor area (excluding those under age) had formal Jewish education, predominantly through Hebrew school. "The overwhelming number without Jewish education consists of women," presumably members of older generations. "Final Report of the Self-Study Committee," 46.
57. Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 66. The Bangor Jewish Community Council self-survey committee stipulated in 1951 that Hebrew school teachers "should be well-integrated American Jews" (p. 23), implicitly acknowledging that the culture clash Epstein describes still existed. See also Nicole Mitchell, "Religious Education in Kennebec County," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.
58. Beth Hillson, *Well-fed: How I Hungered for Love and Got Brisket, A Jewish Girl Comes of Age in Rural Maine* (unpublished, 2010), 53–55.
59. See further Michael R. Cohen, "Adapting Orthodoxy to American Life: Shaarey Tphiloh and the Development of Modern Orthodox Judaism in Portland, Maine, 1904–1976," *Maine History* 44 (2009): 172–95.
60. Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 48; see also Hoberman, *How Strange*, 104.
61. *Congregation Beth Israel Diamond Jubilee, 1888–1963*, ed. Henry H. Segal (Bangor, self-published, 1963), 46.
62. Goldie Singer, interviewed by David Freidenreich, June 7, 2011.
63. See further Madeline Kurtz, "Food and Jewish Identity," and Beth Hillson, "Judaism with a Downeast Flair," both accessible at web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/. The site also contains a recipe for mock lobster salad used by a family that sought to enjoy a Maine delicacy while still adhering to Jewish tradition. See also Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 127–28.
64. Molly Zeitman, personal correspondence with Teddy Levine, February 25, 1912, cited in Becky Muller, "Dating and Marriage Trends in Small-Town Jewish Communities," web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/.
65. Glynce Miller Kaplan, interviewed by David Freidenreich, August 4, 2010. Glynce (b. 1925) and her unmarried uncles all lived in the home of their grandparents/parents, William and Sarah Levine, during Glynce's childhood.
66. Of the 523 married couples containing at least one Jewish member, eight included wives without a parent born in Central or Eastern Europe, and four included husbands without such a parent. The census, of course, provides no indication as to whether any members of these couples converted. On the process of compiling the database from which this data was drawn, see the Appendix below.
67. Toby Shafter, "The Fleishpots of Maine: Portrait of a Down-East Jewish Community," *Commentary* 7.1 (Jan. 1949): 63. On the significance of gender in shaping attitudes toward intermarriage, see Keren R. McGinity, *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America*, who cites a portion of this passage on p. 14.
68. "Final Report of the Self-Survey Committee," 43. This survey was not designed to capture data about intermarriage. It counts of 1375 individual members of the Greater Bangor Jewish community, including 367 married men and 353 married women. A note explains that "This apparent discrepancy here is due to

expressed desires in intermarriages where the non-Jewish spouse was not included in the count” (p. 43). It is possible that additional non-Jewish wives, matched by an equal number of non-Jewish husbands, also opted out of the count. Lucille Epstein counted thirty-one intermarriages among Bangor’s Jews in 1940 (Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 105).

69. William Cohen, “Clara’s eyes,” reprinted in Goldstein, *Crossing Lines*, 129–30.

70. Shafter, “Fleshpots of Maine,” 63.

71. Shafter, “Fleshpots of Maine,” 62–63.

72. Stephen J. Whitfield, “American Judaism: Their Story Continues,” *Jewish Life in America: Fulfilling the American Dream* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1983), reprinted in Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *The American Jewish Experience* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 285–86.

73. A 2007 study found 4,425 Jews in Portland and its immediate vicinity and 3,925 Jews in the rest of Southern Maine (defined as York and Cumberland Counties). Local informants solicited by the American Jewish Year Book estimate 3,000 Jews in Bangor and far less than 1,000 in any other municipality. The total estimated Jewish population of Maine is about 14,000. See Ira M. Sheskin, *The 2007 Jewish Community Study of Southern Maine: Main Report, Vol. 1* (Portland: Jewish Community Alliance, 2007, accessible at www.jewishdatabank.org) pp. 3–12.

74. Ira M. Sheskin, *The 2007 Jewish Community Study of Southern Maine: Summary Report* (Portland: Jewish Community Alliance, 2007, accessible at www.jewishdatabank.org), 24, finds that only 24% of adult members of Jewish households were born in Maine. A review of the current mailing list of Waterville’s Beth Israel Congregation and anecdotal evidence from Bath’s synagogue suggests an even lower percentage of native-born Mainers within those communities.

75. On the latter: Sam Kestenbaum, “Yom Kippur at Sea,” op-ed, *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2010.

76. Sheskin, *Summary Report*, 40. Sheskin observes that the rates of higher education among Southern Maine’s Jews are also very high relative to other comparable Jewish communities.

77. The median 2006 household income was \$87,000 among Jews in Southern Maine, in contrast to \$52,000 for all households in the region. Sheskin, *Summary Report*, 44.

78. Linda Tatelbaum, “The Apple Doesn’t Fall Far from the Tree,” *Woman who Speaks Tree: Confessions of a Tree Hugger* (Appleton, Me.: About Time, 2009), 52. On Jewish back-to-the-landers in New England, see also Hoberman, *How Strange*.

79. Tatelbaum, “The Apple,” 51. Deena R. Weinstein, “Planting Our Roots and Raising Our Children as Back-to-the-Land Jews,” web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/, offers a different perspective on this subject.

80. Hoberman, *How Strange*, 35.

81. Tatelbaum, “The Apple,” 55.

82. Sheskin, *Summary Report*, 63, 49–50. “Among the comparison Jewish

communities, Southern Maine has the lowest percentage of households who keep a kosher home (3%), the second lowest percentages of households who have a mezuzah on the front door (50%) and always or usually light Shabbat candles (13%), the second lowest percentage of respondents who keep kosher in and out of the home (3%), and the third lowest percentage of households who always or usually participate in a Passover Seder (60%)” (p. 49).

83. Since World War II, there have been at least three different statewide organizations: the Maine Jewish Young Adult Council (founded in 1949, disbanded in 1950s), [Jewish Community] Center Youth (1950s–1960s), and Maine Jewish Teens (1990s). See further Weinstein, “Planting Our Roots.”

84. The Conference on Judaism in Rural New England, an annual gathering established in the 1980s, is sorely missed by many of the Mainers who attended it regularly; I have found no anecdotal support within Maine of Michael Hoberman’s suggestion that this conference dissolved because it “is no longer needed” (*How Strange*, 232). On the early years of the conference, see R. D. Eno, “Vermont,” in Steven Feldman, ed., *Guide to Jewish Boston and New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Genesis2, 1986), 168–71.

85. Sheskin, *Summary Report*, 58–60.

86. Sheskin, *Summary Report*, 62.

87. Personal conversations with members of Beth Israel Synagogue of Bath (which lies outside the area covered by the Southern Maine study).

88. Much of the data presented below was collected by the author and his research assistant, Andrea Birnbaum. I am also grateful to my parents, Philip and Harriet Freidenreich, for volunteering their time and expertise to collect data from these census records. Spreadsheets containing the complete data summarized below may be found at www.mainejews.org. The original manuscript census records were consulted on www.ancestry.com. For a more detailed discussion of the manuscript census as a resource for information about small-town Jewish communities, see Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 315–23.

89. When examining census data from Portland, members of the research team took special care to identify on the basis of distinctive Jewish names Jewish households with no members whose parents were born in Central or Eastern Europe. We found only two such households (out of more than 600), one whose head was born in Jerusalem and a second whose head was born in Chicago; in both cases, the spouses appear to be non-Jews. The Chicago native, who claimed his parents were also born in Chicago, may have misrepresented his ancestry to the census-taker: someone with the same name and a similar year of birth appears in the 1900 census with Russian parents in a heavily Jewish neighborhood of Chicago. Bangor and Rockland were each home to one Jewish household whose members’ parents were all born in the U.S.

90. Harry S. Linfield, “The Jewish population of the United States, 1927,” *American Jewish Year Book* 30 (1928): 185. The exception is Randolph, located directly across the Kennebec River from Gardiner. The two towns shared a single synagogue (in Gardiner) in 1927, so Linfield’s data for Gardiner probably includes the Jews of Randolph.

91. In addition to the towns listed below, Linfield reports that Hallowell was home to 147 Jews. This number is absurdly high (equal to 5.5% of the town's population). A review of census records found only six Jews. The only explanation I can offer for Linfield's data is that his informant estimated the total population of Jews in nearby Augusta, Gardiner and Randolph as well as Hallowell itself. As the table shows, however, this is not the only instance of significant discrepancies between Linfield's data and the results of our census research. While the census analysis may well undercount the Maine's Jewish population, I believe that this approach nevertheless provides a more accurate demographic portrait of the state's Jewish communities than the figures presented by Linfield.

92. Thirteen of the Jews found in Augusta's census records (22%) are patients at the Augusta State Hospital for the Insane, comprising about 1% of the hospital's 1,225 patients. Excluding all hospital patients, Jews constitute 0.29% of the capital city's population. (Jews also constitute roughly 1% of the inmates [*sic*] at the Bangor State Hospital; these inmates comprise 1% of Bangor's Jewish population.)

93. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population, vol. 6: Families*, 569.

94. Jewish population figures reflect the data summarized in Table 1; "all Jewish" reflects the fifteen communities with twenty or more Jews. Total population figures by city: *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population, vol. 3, part 1: Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 1026, 1029; "all total" reflects the statewide figures on pp. 1016, 1019. School attendance among eighteen to twenty year-olds does not necessarily indicate pursuit of college education, but more detailed analyses of select Jewish communities during the interwar years make clear that many Jews did just that; I plan to present these data and analyses in a forthcoming study.