

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS
A HISTORY OF THE AUSTIN JEWISH COMMUNITY 1850-1950

SENIOR THESIS FOR THE DEGREE
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS, PLAN II

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TERMINOLOGY

The term synagogue is used in this work to denote the building used for Jewish worship. Congregation refers to an organized group of Jews who worship together, although not always in a synagogue. Temple refers to a Reform congregation and may, on some occasions, refer to the synagogue of a Reform congregation. Shul, likewise, refers to an Orthodox or Conservative congregation or on occasion to its synagogue. However, whenever Temple or Shul refers to a building, the meaning will be clear from the context.

A word about Jewish holidays. The High Holidays, which occur in September or October, are Rosh Hashonah, the New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the most solemn festival of the Jewish religion. Pesach, or Passover, lasts for seven or eight days and occurs in March or April. It celebrates the Exodus from Egypt and the sparing of the children of Israel from the Angel of Death. The dates for the holidays vary each year because the Jewish calendar is lunar. The length of Pesach varies because traditional Jews celebrate it one day longer than do Reform Jews. The Seder is the ritual dinner that accompanies the first night of Pesach, and it is usually a big affair for family and guests. Traditional Judaism forbids the eating of grains and leavened foods during Pesach and requires

that houses be cleaned of all such foods for the holiday. Reform Jews do not usually follow this custom now.

There are three main branches of Judaism. Orthodoxy is the strictest of the branches, requiring absolute obedience to all the laws and customs of Judaism. Conservative Judaism is less strict, although adherence to the laws and traditions is still important. Reform Judaism embraces considerably fewer of the customs of the religion. It was developed as a modernization of the old ways that would appeal to Jews who saw no point in many of the laws. A Sephardic Jew is one of Iberian descent. The term traditional Judaism refers to the laws and customs observed by the Orthodox, many of which laws are also followed by Conservative Jews.

According to traditional Judaism, a quorum, or minyan, of ten men must be present to hold a religious service. The term Minyan, when capitalized, refers to the daily service of Orthodox and Conservative Jews. Reform Jews do not require a minyan for their services and do not hold daily services. Traditional Judaism also requires that one do no work on the Sabbath, which means that Jews must walk to Sabbath services. Reform Jews were the first to give up this custom, but virtually all the Jews in Austin now drive to services because they live so far away from the synagogues. Orthodox and Conservative Judaism require the head to be covered whenever one is inside a synagogue or is praying in the presence of a minyan. A skullcap known as a yarmulke is usually used to cover one's head, although any cap or hat will do. Reform congregations do not require the head to be covered now although early congregations retained this custom for some years.

A cantor is a man who leads the congregation in chanting or singing the different portions of a service. Orthodox and Conservative congregations have cantors, but Reform Temples usually do not. A choir and organ are used in most Temples and most of the service is recited and not chanted. A Shochet is a butcher who had been trained in the dietary laws of Judaism. Because Shochets had partial education in Jewish laws and customs, small Orthodox and Conservative congregations early in the twentieth century used them as spiritual leaders until they could hire a rabbi.

The Torah is the first five books of the Old Testament. In it are all the laws required of Orthodox Jews. Because it is the repository of the laws, it is the most important object in Judaism. In a synagogue, Torahs are kept in the Ark. Bar Mitzvah is the ritual a young man celebrates when he becomes thirteen. It enables him to read from the Torah and be counted in a minyan, signifying that he has become a man according to Jewish law. A boy studies for his Bar Mitzvah with Hebrew teachers and the rabbi. Confirmation marks the end of formal study in religious school and occurs after nine or ten years of school, depending on the preference of the congregation. The whole class is Confirmed together. Preparation for Confirmation takes place in religious school and in class meetings with the rabbi. Confirmation is celebrated on Simhat Torah, the holiday commemorating the giving of the Torah to the Jews in biblical times. Simhat Torah falls in May or June. Confirmation is a Reform ceremony that has also been adopted by Conservative Judaism.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The Jewish community of Austin, Texas, is similar to many Southern Jewish communities in many respects. However, there are some differences, many of which reflect the difference between life in Texas and life in the Deep South. The Jews who settled in small towns in the South were primarily peddlers and merchants. These men did business with tenant farmers and others whose main crop was cotton. Much of their business was done on credit, and a bad crop would create ill feelings towards the Jews who came to collect what was owed them. Many small farmers blamed Jewish peddlers and merchants for their economic reverses.¹ Central Texas never had the one-crop economy that was prevalent throughout much of the South; consequently the farmers were less likely to dislike the Jewish peddlers and merchants who settled in Austin after the Civil War. This lessened the basis for anti-Semitism in Austin and contributed to the early good relations between Christians and Jews. Many rural farmers in the South migrated to urban centers in search of a better economic situation to replace tenant farming and sharecropping. These farmers distrusted the small town Jewish merchants for being financially wily, and they brought this distrust to the cities with their migration of the 1890s.² This agricultural and economic situation was not prevalent in central

Texas, so there was no large migration to Austin at the end of the nineteenth century. The absence of this migration also helped Jewish relations with the Gentile community.

However, there are great similarities between the Jewish experience in Austin and in the rest of the South. Most southern Jewish communities were initially begun by German Jews, many of whom were peddlers at first and who later started their own stores.³ Although there are few records of German Jewish peddlers in Austin, most of the town's early Jewish settlers were from Germany and virtually all went into some kind of retail business. The general trend in small Southern towns was for Jews to move away from general merchandise stores and into specialty shops.⁴ This trend is reflected in the large number of men's clothing stores and liquor and tobacco stores that were operated by Jews in nineteenth century Austin. William and Emmanuel Moses sold men's clothes and shoes, Leon Seligman sold wholesale wines, liquors, and cigars with John H. Houghton,⁵ Isaac Stein sold china, glass, and crockery,⁶ Leopold Littman made and sold cigars, Joe Koen was a jeweler, Sam Hirschfeld and George Ash sold men's clothes, and Jake Hirschfeld also sold men's clothes in another store.⁷ Austin Jews believed that no doors were barred to them, an attitude that was expressed in the nineteenth century by Jewish leaders.⁸ With this attitude in mind, they joined many civic groups, and a few became involved in politics. Leonard Dinnerstein suggests that an active political life is accepted by Southern Jews,⁹ but Austin Jews have not been office seekers. Instead, they have been apolitical, as Eli Evans

suggests is typical of most Southern Jews.¹⁰ The Jews of the South generally believed that there was no difference between them and their Christian neighbors other than their religion, an idea espoused by Henry Cohen, long Rabbi at Galveston's Reform Congregation B'nai Israel.¹¹ This is also true of the Austin Jews, who made no attempt to separate themselves from the rest of the community in any way other than organizing Jewish groups and closing stores on the High Holidays.

As in the rest of the South,¹² there was no Jewish working class in Austin. Virtually the entire community was engaged in some form of retail sales, the only exception being a land broker named Phineas deCordova. Jews throughout the South have always striven for social acceptance and equality with their Christian neighbors, and they have usually been successful. Economic success was not enough, although it was frequently achieved. Instead, many Jews made every attempt to adopt all the requirements for becoming a good Southerner, short of converting.¹³ Jews increasingly conformed to middle class standards so they would be able to advance by erasing cultural differences.¹⁴ This advance may have been easier in Austin, because there were a good number of German settlers in central Texas who would share some of the culture and the native language of most of the early Jewish settlers in Austin. Germans were attracted to central Texas because of the good farm land there.¹⁵ "Quite a number" of Germans settled in Austin and helped build the city.¹⁶ The attempt to gain social acceptance encouraged widespread affiliation with social, civic, and philanthropic organizations, particularly the Odd Fellows and the Masons in

Austin. Eli Evans tells that his grandfather joined the Shriners and his grandmother became active in the Eastern Star, PTA, and Red Cross: "She was an American and no one could say that she was neglecting community obligations for Hadassah."¹⁷

Dinnerstein argues that the fear of anti-Semitism sets the tone of much of the behavior of Southern Jews in the twentieth century. Southern Jews are afraid to speak out on controversial issues, especially those that might divide the whole community.¹⁸ They have generally remained so silent on such issues that "Southern Gentiles have greatly underestimated their real divergence from Protestant thinking on public and social questions."¹⁹ Although there has been virtually no real anti-Semitism in Austin, many Austin Jews were raised and still practice a policy of not speaking out when they hold an unpopular or controversial view. This was especially true of the pre-World War II period, when children were raised in a homogeneous society and Jewish children particularly were taught not to upset the balance. This silence has been attributed by one Austin Jew to a Jewish state of mind,²⁰ but it may be an unconscious expression of the point Dinnerstein makes.

The early Jewish community in Austin was also internally stable, since it was primarily settled by German Reform Jews. Congregations established before the wave of German immigration that took place in the middle of the nineteenth century were usually Orthodox. The Reform movement began in Germany, and Reform Jews settling in the United States shortly before and after the Civil War created controversy as they attempted to

modernize the Orthodox congregations. Temple Beth Israel in Austin is not old enough to have been established as an Orthodox congregation, so there was none of the religious turmoils common in older Southern cities. A similar situation prevailed in New Orleans, which was settled by Sephardic and German Jews and had a strong Reform atmosphere,²¹ so Austin is not atypical of the Southern Jewish experience in this respect. In fact, this experience is probably common in Texas where most German congregations began late enough to be basically Reform-oriented from the beginning. Of course, this internal stability contributed early to the good face the Jews of Austin were able to put forth towards the rest of the community.

In the first half of the twentieth century, many Southern Jewish communities were divided between an older and a newer part of the community, frequently between German and eastern European immigrants and their descendants.²² Although that split did not always take place along lines of eastern European immigration,²³ and in some cases such a split was denied,²⁴ there was somewhat of a social division among the Austin Jews. Social separation, neither extensive nor very rigid, did exist. As in much of the South, and elsewhere, the Reform Jews' reluctance to associate with Orthodox Jews came from a fear of being identified with them and their much less assimilated and much stranger customs.²⁵ Over the years Reform Jews felt "subconscious pressures to assimilate into a region where differences were penalized." They wanted their services to look and sound less Jewish--stained glass windows, no yarmulkes, a choir and organ, and little Hebrew.²⁶ German Jews wanted to advance by

erasing cultural differences and therefore regarded the influx of eastern European Jews as a threat to their status.²⁷ Many social activities in Austin were separated along Reform-Orthodox lines, particularly after the organization of the Orthodox congregation. Each group had its own leaders, as was common elsewhere in the South.²⁸ However, this split was also a reflection of a cleavage between the Congress Avenue Jewish merchants, most of whom were Reform, and the East Sixth Street merchants, many of whom were Orthodox.

The entire Jewish community in Austin did share a Jewish identity, however. This can especially be seen in their tendency to unify to help those less fortunate on their way to make a home elsewhere, as well as to help new settlers in Austin. A split community sharing a Jewish identity has been found elsewhere in the South.²⁹

Thus in general the Austin Jewish community is fairly representative of Southern Jewish communities, although there are specific differences due to the nature of central Texas economy and the relative newness of Jewish settlement in Austin as compared with some cities in the Deep South.

IN THE BEGINNING (1850-1874)

The first Jews in Austin, as in most of the South, were primarily from the German states. These Jews were fleeing laws which, following Napoleon's defeat in 1815, removed many Jewish civil liberties. Jewish marriages were limited in Bavaria, and land ownership was restricted in Wurtemberg. A combination of unemployment and overpopulation encouraged many Europeans, especially Irish and Germans, to emigrate. Also, many Jews fled Prussia to escape conscription.

The Jewish immigrants were from small towns in Germany and were primarily shopkeepers and salesmen. Most settled in the northeastern United States, but some were attracted to the South, including Texas, because the region was quite similar to the farm country they had left in Germany.¹ In a small but growing town like Austin there were many opportunities for Jews to go into businesses similar to their old ones in Germany. That business opportunities were available in Austin is evident, since there were only nine stores in Austin in 1840,² when the population was 856. Ten years later there were eleven merchants serving a town of 628 inhabitants,³ but the first Jewish merchant had yet to come to Austin. Touters publicized the advantages of settling in Texas to Europeans in the hope of stimulating immigration to Texas.⁴ Also, a number of books were

published in the German states about opportunities in Texas. Many Jews may have read or heard about J. Val Hecke's Reise durch die Veringten Staaten von Nord Amerika (Travels Through the United States of North America). Hecke travelled in Texas from 1818 to 1821 and was greatly impressed with the land. He urged the Prussian government to buy Texas from Spain as a colonial venture, noting that it would make a good outlet for Germany's surplus population.⁵ The "glowing description" Hecke gave of Texas, estimating that fifty acres of farmland would make a man self-supporting, "created a great deal of interest throughout Europe, and especially among the German people."⁶ S. Hoermann's novel Tochter Tehuans (Tehuans's Daughter) was in wide circulation in the mid-nineteenth century. Hoermann romanticized Texas, and consequently his novel could easily have served to encourage settlement in Texas.⁷ German immigration was further aided by the rapid expansion of American railroads and the founding of two new Atlantic steamship lines, the Cunard (1839) and Hamburg-American Lines (1847).⁸ The ship lines brought few Jews to Texas directly, but the immigrants spread out from New York City via the railroads, horse, and wagon to Texas.

The typical Jewish settler was a young man without opportunity in his homeland who had a compulsion to find a prosperous new life.⁹ These men usually were unaccompanied in their initial journey to Texas; either they were single or had come in advance of their family. Yet for a Jew to maintain himself as a Jew, he needed fellowship with other Jews, so as soon as he had achieved moderate success, he called on friends and his

relatives to join him in his new land.¹⁰ Accordingly, their plans were usually to make enough money to bring the rest of their family over, if they were married, or to send for their brothers if they were single. Some complete families were able to come over, particularly if they were slightly more prosperous in their homeland. However, the pattern was usually that of a lone male, or perhaps brothers, coming over first and then sending for the rest of the family after they were settled and had made some money.

In few cases is it known why German Jews came specifically to Austin. However, their pattern of arrival encompasses all the types listed above. Leopold Littman came to America as a young boy of eight or nine years of age with his parents prior to 1860. He married in 1871 and moved to Austin from Chetopa, Kansas two years later because he had heard that there was a university in Austin and he wanted his children to have a good education.¹¹ Henry Hirschfeld came from Germany to join two uncles in Mobile, Alabama, who sent him out as a peddler. It is not known how or why he came to settle in Austin, but he arrived before the Civil War.¹² Simon and Jacob Mussina were two of the earliest Jewish settlers of Texas, arriving in the state in 1836. The next year they were joined by their mother and sister. They both originally settled in Galveston, an early center of Texas Jewry, where Jacob was in Mercantile pursuits. He later moved to New Orleans and then finally settled in Austin in 1885. He died there in January, 1892, leaving a daughter and a son, Dr. D. Mussina.¹³ Simon came to Austin after the Civil War but left before 1877. Governor Davis appointed Simon

a City Alderman for the term from February 1, 1871, to November 28, 1872.¹⁴

Before the Civil War there were only a handful of Jews in Austin, probably not many more than ten males, since the Jewish Cemetery was not founded until 1866.¹⁵ The founding of a Jewish Cemetery indicates the existence of at least ten adult males, since that is the number of men required by Jewish law to be present in order to hold any type of prayer service, including sitting Shiva, or mourning for the dead, and saying Yarzheit, the prayer said on the annual observance of a death. Austin was still a small town after the Civil War, with a population of only 4428 by 1870.¹⁶

The first Jew to arrive in Austin of whom there is any record is Phineas deCordova. He was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on March 28, 1819, to a family descended from Spanish and Portugese hidalgos or knights. He was the son of Raphael deCordova and the half-brother of Jacob deCordova, who was a prominent land agent in Texas. Jacob came early to Texas, and Phineas joined him in Houston in 1848 after spending thirteen years in Kingston, Jamaica, where Jacob was born. Phineas married Jemima Delgado, of the famous New Orleans Delgado family, in 1847. Jemima's uncle founded the famous New Orleans Delgado Art Museum. The brothers had a land agency and published the Texas Herald and Immigrant Guide semi-monthly to publicize Texas to Europeans in an attempt to stimulate immigration to Texas, with the hope that immigrants would purchase some of the deCordovas' land holdings. Jacob was elected to the second Texas

State Legislature, having campaigned on a platform of more families for Texas.

Governor Peter H. Bell invited the deCordovas to move to Austin, which Phineas did in 1849 and became the quasi-official immigration department of the Texas government. Beginning then, Phineas edited the Southwest American, which he published jointly with his brother. However, they sold the paper in 1852. Phineas' land firm in Austin was DeCordova and McKinney, but it became DeCordova and Company on September 11, 1879, following the death the preceeding day of Captain James P. McKinney, his partner. Phineas handled land transactions for many prominent Texans, including Governor Pease. Phineas became a good friend of the Pease family, and he managed the governor's estate for Mrs. Pease and their children after the governor died. Phineas had a son, Samuel D. deCordova, who was born on January 6, 1861, one of the first Jewish children to be born in Austin. He died on January 28, 1909, in Houston, where he was manager of the land department for the trustees of the T. W. House estate at the time of his death.

Austin Jews have long been active in civic affairs and as members and officers of various civic organizations. However, Phineas deCordova was the first and perhaps the most politically active of all Austin Jews. He was a member of the Texas State Democratic Executive Committee for six years, and his paper always supported the Democratic party. He served as Austin City Alderman from 1857 to 1858, and as Secretary to the State Senate for the Eighth through the Tenth Legislatures, as well as being a Notary Public for Travis County from 1851 to 1893. Governor

Pease appointed him a Justice of the Peace for Precinct Two, Travis County, from 1856 to 1860. Phineas served the Confederacy as Secretary to the Texas Military Board from 1862 to 1864 and was elected to the State Senate from Travis County from November 4, 1861, to November 15, 1864, serving in the Ninth and Tenth Legislatures. He assisted in the organization of the Odd Fellows Lodge in Austin on January 6, 1852, and was elected an officer. He was appointed a deputy Grand Master for the Fourth District of the Lodge at a meeting of the Grand Lodge of Texas in Dallas in 1859. He was also one of the founders and first Vice-President of Temple Beth Israel. His last public service was as United States Commissioner in the Western District of Texas, in Austin, from 1879 to 1885. Phineas was most especially proud of his part in stimulating railroad building in Texas, having a great deal to do with arranging financing through the General Land Office. Phineas deCordova died, perhaps of a painful gouty arthritis, on May 9, 1905, and is buried in Beth Israel Cemetery No. 1 in Austin.¹⁷

DeCordova is unusual as a Jewish settler in Austin for many reasons. First, he was a Sephardic Jew. The only other Sephardic family in Austin before 1900 was the Nunez family, who were in Austin by 1883.¹⁸ Also, he was not a peddler or engaged in any retail business but was a land broker, joining his brother's business. In addition, as noted extensively above, he was the most politically active Jew that has ever lived in Austin. His political activity may be due to Phineas' early arrival in Austin and that he already had a good means of support

in his brother's land business. In general, Southern Jews were apolitical in the nineteenth century and have continued to be so in the twentieth century. Jews were afraid of the reaction of Gentiles to any Jew with authority.¹⁹ Also, the Jewish community in Austin during Reconstruction was quite small, about fifteen families,²⁰ so that it would be unlikely for very many Jews to be involved in politics. Other early settlers, like Henry Hirschfeld, began as peddlers or small businessmen. Most of their time was taken up with running their fledgling businesses, leaving them little time for such extensive political activity.

Five or six Jews from Austin served with the Confederate Army after the Civil War broke out in 1861.²¹ Gabriel and Samuel Friedberger both served in Terry's Cavalry, and Sam later was elected a Trustee of Temple Beth Israel in 1877. Isaac Levy served in Company B., Light Artillery, and J. Melasky from Taylor, north of Austin, served with Company A., 26th Cavalry. B. Melasky, who was living either in Austin or Georgetown in 1861,²² enlisted early in 1862 in Company A., 32nd Texas Cavalry, Woods Regiment, Captain Storey's Company, in which he served until the end of the war.²³ Isaac Stein served in Colonel Marshall's regiment and lost his right arm at the second battle of Manassas. Henry Hirschfeld served in Parson's Brigade and returned to Austin to play a prominent role in the organization of the Austin Jewish community.

Henry Hirschfeld fled Germany when he was fifteen years old, about 1849, to escape general conscription at the age of

sixteen. He joined two uncles in Mobile, Alabama and made his way as a peddler to Austin when he was sixteen, or about 1850. He served in the Civil War and returned to marry Jennie Melasky, daughter of B. Melasky, in 1868, when he was thirty-two and she was only sixteen. They had eight children, six of whom lived to be adults. He initially had a dry goods store on the southeast corner of Congress and Pecan, which is now Sixth Street.²⁴

Hirschfeld was perhaps the leading figure within the Austin Jewish community as well as a prominent Austinite. In 1890 he was a founder and first Vice-President of the Austin National Bank.²⁵ He was instrumental in an ill-fated attempt to organize a congregation in 1874, serving as its first and only President,²⁶ and was the first President and founder of Temple Beth Israel in 1876.²⁷ Also, he corresponded with the American Israelite, the foremost magazine of Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century, describing the organization of Congregation B'nai Shalom in 1874.²⁸ Hirschfeld was early active in civic groups, and he was elected Treasurer of the Austin Lodge of the Masons in 1872.²⁹

B. Melasky, who also fought in the Civil War, came to the United States about 1854 and to the Austin area before 1860. Apparently he had no other name, for he was always referred to, in speech and writing, as B. Melasky. He was born in Russia in 1825 and perhaps fled to escape a pogrom. He went first to France, where his daughter Jennie was born, and two years after her birth he came to America and settled in New Braunfels, south

of Austin, about 1854.³⁰ According to one account, he was living in San Marcos when the war broke out and enlisted as described above. He was described by his fellow soldiers as being "as good a soldier as anybody" in spite of the fact that "Jews do not take to war much now."³¹ However, his great-granddaughter believes he was in Austin before the war, since an old family story relates that Henry Hirschfeld first saw Jennie climbing over a fence and said he would marry her, doing so only after he returned from the Civil War.³²

Melasky settled in Austin after the war and became a prominent citizen. He had eight children, including Jennie, Rosa, who married Elias Krohn, Lillie, who married Karl Bellish, and Harris, who worked with his father, all of whom lived in Austin for at least a while after they were married. Melasky was very active in the Jewish community, being a Trustee of the short-lived Temple B'nai Shalom in 1874³³ and a founder and one of the first trustees of Temple Beth Israel in 1876.³⁴ Like most Austin Jews of the immediate post-Civil War period, Melasky was a retail merchant. He ran a clothing store at 618 Congress.³⁵

Isaac Stein settled in Austin before the Civil War and served with great sacrifice and loss of limb in that conflict. He was born in Bourmont, France on September 5, 1832,³⁶ and was a prominent and active citizen of Austin. He was a Trustee of Temple B'nai Shalom³⁷ as well as a founder and second Secretary of Temple Beth Israel.³⁸ Stein had a wholesale and retail china, glass, and crockery store at 812 Congress in 1877 and had previously sold house furnishings in a store on Congress

between Pine and Pecan Streets (Fifth and Sixth Streets).³⁹ He was active in civic groups, serving as Scribe of Odd Fellows Lodge No. 5 and Treasurer of Odd Fellows Lodge No. 23.⁴⁰ Isaac Stein died on December 21, 1897, and is buried at Beth Israel Cemetery No. 2 in Austin.⁴¹

The Austin Jewish community before 1874 remained very small, having only fifteen families and about twenty-five young men, in addition to several families "half and half" not included in this count.⁴² The community was composed primarily of German immigrants who were in some sort of retail business, typical of Jews in small Southern towns. In addition to those mentioned above, by the 1870s Morris Gans and Herman Hellman were in business as Hellman and Gans, general merchandise, on the southeast corner of Pecan and East Avenue (Sixth Street and the Expressway).⁴³ These men were founders and, respectively, the first Treasurer and Trustee of Temple Beth Israel. Charles Goldbaum, who was also one of the first trustees of Temple Beth Israel,⁴⁴ was a merchant who lived on the east side of Brazos between Pine and Pecan Streets.⁴⁵ Other early settlers were Theo Philipson, Emmanuel and William Moses, Leon Seligman, and Leopold Littman. Philipson was born in 1840⁴⁶ and came to Austin, where he had many different clothing stores, before 1872.⁴⁷ He was the first Secretary of Temple Beth Israel.⁴⁸ Emmanuel Moses came to Austin before 1872⁴⁹ and his brother William joined him a few years later. They had a men's clothing store at 608 Congress.⁵⁰ Emmanuel was a Trustee of Congregation B'nai Shalom for its brief existence,⁵¹ and William was one of the first

trustees and the second Vice-President of Temple Beth Israel.⁵² Leon Seligman, an early B'nai B'rith Lodge officer, was a liquor dealer who became partners with John H. Houghton in Seligman and Houghton wholesale wine, liquor, and cigars at 620 Congress.⁵³ Leopold Littman made and sold cigars⁵⁴ and was the first Secretary of the Austin B'nai B'rith Lodge.⁵⁵ There were of course other German Jews in Austin by 1874, including H. Goldstein, Jacob Stern, and David Weinberger.

However, Austin early had a "mixed" Jewish community, one composed of Russian and Polish Jews as well as Germans. B. Melasky was originally from Russia, and his wife was Polish.⁵⁶ Jacob S. Davis was born in Augustova, Poland in 1837.⁵⁷ He was a businessman and an early officer of the B'nai B'rith Lodge.⁵⁸ Israel Malevinsky, who had a dry goods store at 518 Congress,⁵⁹ was certainly from eastern Europe, judging by his name. The presence of many eastern European Jews in Austin at this time would have been unusual, but the Jewish community was predominantly German, as was typical of Southern towns.

As the 1870s opened, the Jews of Austin made many attempts to found Jewish organizations. B'nai B'rith had been organized nationally in the 1840s, and by 1872 it was the largest, oldest, and most prominent of the Jewish charitable organizations.⁶⁰ On the first Sunday of December, 1872, the Jews of Austin met in the Mayor's office and organized a Hebrew Benevolent Association. B. Melasky was elected the first President. Occasionally men would come to Austin to raise money for Jewish institutions or settlements elsewhere. The Benevolent Association helped

these men, as well as any Jews who needed money to travel or settle with. Also, the Jews took actions towards purchasing land on which to erect a synagogue. A committee was organized to investigate a place and suitable price, but only five people attended a second meeting at which the committee was to report. In fact, there was no committee to report at this meeting, in spite of the fact that \$1,100 had been pledged at the first meeting towards the purchase of the land. Consequently, the whole scheme, Benevolent Association included, was dropped "in disgust."⁶¹

Two years later a similar attempt met with somewhat greater success. Early in February, 1874, the Reverend J. M. Chumaceiro of Charleston, South Carolina, visited Austin on his way to San Antonio and addressed the Jewish community. He delivered a short lecture to the assembled community and tried to persuade them to organize a B'nai B'rith lodge. However, those present decided to organize a congregation, probably because they felt a congregation would be more essential to the practice of Judaism than would a B'nai B'rith lodge. On February 8, the congregation was organized at a meeting in the Mayor's office. The members elected Henry Hirschfeld President, Herman Hellman Vice-President, Sam Friedberger Treasurer, Ben Hannet Secretary, and B. Melasky, Emmanuel Moses, and Isaac Stein Trustees. In addition, they collected \$1320 in subscriptions for the erection of a synagogue.⁶² This event was publicized in Germany and France, as well as in the United States.⁶³ The members hoped to affiliate themselves with the

Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the governing body for Reform congregations,⁶⁴ but this did not occur. The congregation lasted into the summer,⁶⁵ but it had completely disappeared by November, 1875. B'nai Shalom may well have disappeared because of business rivalries within the Jewish community.⁶⁶

The Jews of Austin had no trouble in their general relations with the Gentile community. Later in the 1870s many Jews served as officers in various civic and philanthropic groups; however, there are no records for the early part of that decade and one can only guess as to when such participation began. A. Biberstein, who was the Treasurer of the Odd Fellows Lodge No. 23 in 1872, was the only Jewish officer other than Henry Hirschfeld of any civic group that year, the only one for which records exist.⁶⁷ But it is unlikely that there was a sudden beginning of such participation, especially considering Phineas deCordova's wide range of political and philanthropic affiliations. DeCordova is but one example of the good relations that prevailed. Another is the courteous treatment afforded Rabbi Blum of Temple B'nai Israel in Galveston, at a reunion of the Masons at the Raymond House on February 11, 1874. He was called upon to deliver a toast at the meeting, "and the audience showed its appreciation of the same by long and loud plaudits at its close."⁶⁸ Also, the Mayor lent his office for the use of the Jews when they organized Congregation B'nai Shalom in 1874. In general, there appeared to be harmony between the Jewish and Gentile communities in Austin through the 1870s.

During the third quarter of the nineteenth century Jews began to settle in Austin. They purchased land for a Jewish cemetery, but further efforts to organize the community were unsuccessful. However, the Jewish community was slowly growing in size, and the next twenty-five years would see it become firmly established with the successful organization of a B'nai B'rith lodge and a Reform congregation.

PERIOD OF ORGANIZATION (1875-1900)

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community of Austin slowly increased in size. In 1875 there were about thirty Jewish families and about eighty male adults in Austin. There were about thirty business houses, suggesting that the community was almost entirely engaged in some form of retail or wholesale business.¹ In 1877 the size of Austin's Jewish community was again reported to be about thirty families, with a total of about two hundred members.² Growth of the community was very slow, and it generally remained unified as to religious observance. The Jews were overwhelmingly from Germany and consequently were Reform. Only Reform services were held until 1900 or 1901, when there were enough Orthodox Jews from eastern Europe to hold their own Orthodox service.³

There was only a very slow influx of Russian and Polish Jews to Austin before 1900. B. Melasky, Jacob Davis, I. Malevinsky, and Abraham Biberstein were already in Austin in 1875, but few of their countrymen came to join them. One who did come was Alex Wiseman, who was born in Poland in 1840 or 1841.⁴ A Vasseck family moved to Austin before 1892, when Raye was Confirmed.⁵ There were few if any other identifiable Polish families in Austin before 1900. Another Sephardic family, the

Raphael Nunez family, came to Austin before 1883, the year their young son Duke died.⁶ They were only the second Sephardic family in the city. By far the majority of new Jewish settlers in Austin were from Germany or were of German descent.

Among the then prominent families, virtually all were German-American Jews. Isaac and Hermann Heidenheimer arrived in Austin in 1889.⁷ Isaac served as a trustee for Temple Beth Israel after 1900.⁸ The Heidenheimer family became one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Austin.⁹ That they were successful is attested to by Hermann's headstone, which is taller than any other stone in that section of the Jewish cemetery except Theo Philipson's.¹⁰ Philipson was also a prominent and successful man¹¹ who was the first Secretary of Temple Beth Israel. Sigmund Philipson, his brother, was Secretary of the Temple from 1882 to 1885.¹²

Other leading Jews took active roles in civic groups as well as in the Jewish community. D. Friedman served regularly as a trustee for Temple Beth Israel in the 1880s.¹³ He came to Austin before 1879 and was the proprietor of the Buckeye Barrel House Saloon in that year. In 1887 he became the proprietor of the Bank Saloon, 121 East Sixth Street, and sold groceries and had a beer garden at 2215 Guadalupe. In addition, from 1887 to 1890 he was Treasurer of the Knights of Honor Lodge No. 1015. In 1887-1890 he also served as Receiver for the Ancient Order of United Workmen Lodge No. 1.¹⁴ Henry Hirschfeld, who was instrumental in organizing Temple Beth Israel, was quite active in other areas as well. He served as Treasurer of Hill City Masonic Lodge No. 456, which was organized in 1876, from

1877 to 1882.¹⁵ In addition to being the first President of Temple Beth Israel, he was a frequent officer and trustee of the Congregation during its first fifteen years of existence.¹⁶ Also, he was one of the founders and the first Vice-President of the Austin National Bank, organized in 1890.¹⁷ In 1880 Benjamin J. Kopperl moved from Vaiden, Mississippi to Austin, where he became quite an "active worker" in the Jewish community.¹⁸ He served as a trustee for Temple Beth Israel in 1882 and was Secretary from 1886 to 1891.¹⁹ He was active in B'nai B'rith, being elected Treasurer, Vice-President, Monitor, and Trustee from 1881 to 1898. He joined the Royal Arch Masons Lodge No. 6 and was an officer. In 1885 he was elected Chaplain of Capitol City Lodge No. 1802, Knights of Honor, a post he held until 1894. Kopperl was a bookseller, stationer, and newsdealer at 822 Congress.²⁰

Morris Gans was born October 20, 1839,²¹ and came to Austin prior to 1876. He was a founder of Temple Beth Israel and was a trustee in 1876 and 1885-86. He served as Vice-President from 1886 to 1891.²² He was President of B'nai B'rith 1877-78, and later served as Secretary and Treasurer. He was a member of Knights of Honor Lodge No. 1015, which he served as an officer in 1889. He also was Receiver for the Ancient Order of United Workmen No. 1 from 1891 to 1892. Gans was a partner with Herman Hellman in Hellman and Gans, a general merchandise store on the southeast corner of Pecan and East Avenue.²³ He died on March 8, 1904, and is buried at Beth Israel Cemetery No. 1.²⁴ William Moses came to Austin before 1876, when he served on the first

board of trustees for Temple Beth Israel. He subsequently served as Vice-President, Trustee, and President from 1886 to 1899.²⁵ He served as Treasurer, Monitor, and Warden of B'nai B'rith and was elected Vice-President in 1881-82 and from 1889 to 1892. Moses belonged to the Knights of Honor Lodge No. 1802 and served as Treasurer from 1887 to 1894. William was a partner with his brother Emmanuel in Moses Brothers clothing store at 608 Congress. Emmanuel came to Austin before 1872²⁶ and was elected Trustee of Temple B'nai Shalom in 1874.²⁷

The whole Melasky family remained quite active in Austin Jewish and civic affairs. B. Melasky served Temple Beth Israel in many capacities as Trustee, Treasurer, and Vice-President from 1876 to 1882.²⁸ In addition, he was a member of the B'nai B'rith Lodge, serving it as Trustee in 1877-78. Melasky was elected Treasurer of the Capitol Encampment No. 71 of the Odd Fellows for 1877-78 and Tiler of the Masons Lodge No. 456 for 1881-82. Mrs. Melasky was active in the different Ladies Aid Societies which passed in and out of existence during the years following 1876. The group was originally organized in 1876, and Mrs. Melasky served as its Vice-President from 1877 to 1878. It was reorganized in 1883 and she again served as Vice-President from 1885 to 1890. Their son Harris was active in civic groups also, serving as Treasurer of the Austin Masonic Lodge No. 12 from 1877 to 1886. Harris worked for his father at B. Melasky and Son dry goods, clothing, boots and shoes store at 618 Congress.²⁹

On July 9, 1875, the first permanent Jewish group was organized in Austin. On that day the Jewish men of the city met and organized the Austin Lodge of the B'nai B'rith.³⁰ In all probability, the first officers were Herman Hellman, President; Nathan Meyer, Vice-President; and Leopold Littman, Secretary. At any rate, these were the officers as of November, 1875.³¹ Subsequent years saw a great deal of interest in the B'nai B'rith, as there were always enough men willing to take on the various responsibilities of being officers of the group. By November, 1875, the Lodge had "more than twenty members" from a community of about eighty male adults.³² By 1879 there were twenty-eight members, increasing gradually and with small fluctuations to thirty-eight members in 1889 and then decreasing slightly to only thirty-two members at the turn of the century.³³ Although the members were primarily German Jews, this was only a reflection of the composition of the community and had nothing to do with any prejudice against the Polish or Russian Jews. This is reflected in the fact that both B. Melasky and Israel Malevinsky were elected officers of the Lodge.³⁴

Prior to 1875 two attempts had been made to organize the Jewish community. Both being failures, there was no instruction for the children. There was even an article in the Daily Democratic Statesman on September 24, 1876, which mentioned the lack of any religious group for the Jews of Austin. The article publicized the lack of a Jewish synagogue in Austin and observed that, as all the other large Texas cities had synagogues, "we can see no reason why Austin should not keep company with them."

The article did not blame the absence of a synagogue on the Jewish community, and it noted that there was at that time discussion about constructing a synagogue. The article was further complimentary to the Jews of Austin, stating that "it is believed it [the Jewish population of Austin] embraces as intelligent a class of people as are to be found anywhere."³⁵ In response to the needs of their growing community for religious organization and instruction, the Jews of Austin met at 2:00 on September 24, 1876, in the Odd Fellow's Hall, and organized Congregation Beth Israel.³⁶ The new Congregation elected Henry Hirschfeld its first President and turned its attention immediately towards raising money for the purchase of land and the construction of a synagogue. The approximately thirty people present at the meeting pledged \$1680 towards this endeavor, which was to be paid in cash in four equal monthly installments beginning in November. An additional \$775 in pledges was raised shortly after the initial meeting. All monies were received from Jews, the Congregation having voted 13-12 not to seek any money from the Gentile community. This decision was probably made to show the Gentiles that the Jews were financially self-supporting and not a burden on the whole community. On May 26, 1877, the officers purchased a lot at the corner of Eleventh and San Jacinto Streets for \$2500 on which they planned to build a synagogue.

In 1877 a Dr. J. Gluck came to Austin to officiate at the High Holidays and remained for three months at a salary of fifty dollars a month. He began the first religious school, which

met on Sundays and was superintended by Sigmund Philipson. The Holiday services were held at the Odd Fellow's Hall, with a charge of \$2.50 to all non-members for tickets. However, this fee was waived for those unable to pay. The custom of Aliyos, calling up to the Torah and paying money for the privilege of reading from it or reciting a blessing over it, was followed at these services, and \$130 was raised this way. On March 18, 1878, the Congregation held Purim services at the Odd Fellow's Hall at 7:00 P. M. The Congregation met in Mr. Sampson's Hall to celebrate the Passover on April 17, at 7:00 P. M. and again on the 18th at 9:00 P. M. These observances were reported in the Austin Democratic Statesman and therefore were known to the public.³⁷

On June 7, 1878, the first Confirmation services were held, with Dr. Gluck officiating. The Congregation invited the public to the ceremony, which was held at the Odd Fellow's Hall. Dr. Gluck even went to a City Council meeting and personally invited the Mayor and all the Aldermen to the service, for which "the thanks of the council were tendered and the invitation accepted," although it is not recorded whether they did in fact attend. The newspaper published many articles listing the Confirmands and going into great detail about the service. The first Confirmands were Tina Cohn, Sarah Weinberger, Edwin Potosky, Joseph Weinberger, Al Davis, and possibly Rachel Gans and Isidore Moses, although they were not listed on all notices of the Confirmation.³⁸ During the early years of the Congregation, Confirmation could not be celebrated annually, since it depends

on the presence of a rabbi to instruct the Confirmands. The next Confirmation was not held until Dr. A. R. Levy came to Austin as a full-time rabbi in 1886.

On May 12, 1878, the successful completion of the first year of the Sabbath School was celebrated with a picnic at Seiders Spring, to which the entire Jewish community was invited. Isaac Melasky, Joe Weinberger, Louis Davis, and Isidore Moses formed the committee that took charge of this picnic.³⁹

The first Jewish wedding after the organization of the Temple took place on May 21, 1878, at the residence of D. Weinberger at 6:00 P. M. The ceremony, wedding Jacob Weinberger and Rachel Schlinger, was conducted by Dr. Gluck in German and English.⁴⁰

Congregation Beth Israel applied for a charter as a non-profit organization from the State of Texas on October 20, 1879. The charter was signed by seventeen men, including the first President, Henry Hirschfeld, the then-President Herman Hellman, Phineas deCordova, Jacob Davis, Moses Davis, and William Moses, who was to serve as president in later years. The charter states the purposes of the Congregation to be threefold: to erect and maintain a building for religious worship for Jews, to erect and maintain a religious school, and to own and maintain a private cemetery. Also in October the Congregation accepted the plans of Wharrenburger and Larmons, architects, for the erection of a synagogue and asked for bids on its construction. On February 25, 1880, a mask ball was held at Millet's Opera to coincide with the celebration of Purim. The money

raised from this affair was donated to the construction of the new synagogue. The Democratic Statesman reported that "They say they will spare neither time nor money to make it beyond all doubt the event of the season."⁴¹

B. J. Kopperl, who arrived in Austin in 1880, quickly became the second superintendent of the religious school. However, he took on this responsibility only on the condition that every child would bring with him to the school five cents each week. This practice continued well into the 1890s, with the sum remaining at five cents.⁴² A similar collection continues to the present. Dr. Sophar was engaged for the High Holidays in 1880 and remained for one year. During his stay he conducted a daily school for Jewish children, although it is not known whether this was a Talmud Torah, a religious school, or one merely for secular education. Under Dr. Sophar the Minhag America prayerbook and ritual were used.⁴³ Isaac Mayer Wise developed this ritual as a Reform ritual.⁴⁴

Although the Congregation was going full swing in these respects, the building project came to a halt for lack of funds. To raise more money the Purim Ball mentioned above was held, and several members of the Congregation raised money on a trip north, quite likely to St. Louis to buy merchandise for their stores. These efforts raised respectively \$325.65 and \$315.00. The Congregation overcame its reluctance to approach Gentiles for money, and \$640 was contributed by the Christian community. With this money the Congregation authorized the building committee to contract for the building of a synagogue on April 10, 1881.

However, the activities of the Congregation came to a halt for the ensuing thirteen months, until Rev. J. M. Chumaceiro, now Rabbi in New Orleans, again visited Austin and encouraged the Jews to "revitalize their Congregation." Thus inspired, those assembled raised \$150 immediately to procure a rabbi for the Holidays and reopen the religious school. As a result of this effort, Mr. Lowenthal arrived in September to officiate at the High Holiday services. Also, construction of the Synagogue was begun sometime in 1881.⁴⁵

Temple Beth Israel was early identified as a Reform Congregation, although it did not join the Union of American Hebrew Congregations until 1911. In 1883 members of the Temple corresponded with Dr. Isaac Mayer Wise, President of the Hebrew Union College where American Reform rabbis were trained. As a result, Joseph Silverman, a student at the College, came to Austin for the Holidays that year. He later became an eminent rabbi at Temple Emmanuel in New York City, serving there for thirty-four years. Services had some elements of traditionalism, such as the wearing of yarmulkes, but on the whole the Congregation followed Reform ritual. The Minhag America prayerbook was used, and the Congregation organized a choir in 1883. Isaac Mayer Wise devised the Minhag America ritual as a moderate reform and aimed it at the Jews of the West and South. It is likely that many Southern congregations used his ritual in preference to the more radical Tamid of David Einhorn, which was oriented towards the large settlements of Jews in the big cities of the Northeast.⁴⁶

Construction on the synagogue was completed in the summer of 1884 and the Congregation had the structure almost completely paid for by December. To complete the building, however, the interior had to be furnished with the necessities, including the religious symbols present in all Jewish synagogues. The foremost of those is the Ark, in which the Torah scrolls are kept. The Hebrew Ladies Aid Society gave the Temple \$120 with which the Ark was bought. Mrs. P. Goldbaum gave the curtains for the Ark. The reader's desk was paid for out of the building fund. Hill City B'nai B'rith Lodge paid the original insurance premium through an advance payment of ninety dollars to cover rent for the basement for three years of its meetings. In March, 1885, the Congregation contracted Mr. Lambic to build pews at a cost of \$245. Some pews were paid for in advance, and the Congregation auctioned off the remainder to the highest bidder, with the sale taking place on the first Sunday in August.

In all likelihood, the first religious services held in the new Synagogue were those of the High Holidays of 1884, although the building was only partially completed by then. Tobias Schanfarber, a student at the Hebrew Union College who officiated at the Holiday service in that and the following year, was thus the first "rabbi" to conduct services in the Synagogue. Ordained in 1886, Schanfarber was from the first generation of rabbis born and ordained in America. He occupied the pulpit at Chicago's K. A. M. Temple for many years until his death in 1942.

There had been a fairly regular Religious School for the Congregation since shortly after its founding. This school met

at different times in different years, probably due to the wishes of its superintendent and those of the rabbi, when one was present. In 1885, when there was no permanent rabbi, the school met on Sunday at 10:00 A. M. This schedule continued for about five years. Dr. Aaron Levy arrived as Rabbi in 1892, and the next year a Sabbath School met at 11:00 A. M. Saturday as well as a Sunday School which met at 10:00 A. M. Sunday. This practice was followed for at least three years, although the records on this subject are scanty.⁴⁷ It is quite likely that the Religious School always met on Sunday mornings, as that was the most convenient for parents and children, since practically the whole Congregation was engaged in some form of retail business and consequently would be open for business on Saturday. There is no mention anywhere of any of the Jewish businesses closing on Saturday. Reform congregations generally held Religious School on Sunday because stores were open on Saturday, traditionally the day for religious instruction. It was easier to get both teachers and students on Sunday, when the stores were closed. Students in the Religious School studied the Bible and had a sort of catechism consisting of questions about the Bible and Jewish history which they had to learn.⁴⁸ Dr. A. R. Levy came to Austin for one year in February 1886, in response to an ad in the American Israelite in late 1885 for "An American Hebrew Minister who can deliver English Sermons, superintend the Sunday School, and conduct the choir." In June, 1886, he conducted the first Confirmation held in the new Synagogue. The Confirmands were Rosa Hirschfeld, daughter of Henry Hirschfeld,

Betty Kopperl, daughter of B. J. Kopperl, and Lilly Melasky, daughter of B. Melasky.

The first wedding in the new structure was held early in March, 1885, uniting Goldye Melasky, daughter of B. Melasky, and Elias Krohn, who was a travelling salesman.⁴⁹ The groom presented the Temple with carpets for the two aisles of the building. The second wedding was that of Mr. A. Alexander, held on the 13th or 14th of April, 1886.

As the Temple was celebrating these many joyous occasions, the members also found it necessary to purchase additional land for the Jewish cemetery. They bought one strip of land in July, 1886, for twenty dollars and another strip in November.

Temple Beth Israel lacked permanent spiritual leadership from 1887 to 1891. A Rabbi Eger of Detroit did conduct the High Holiday services in 1891. In April, 1892, the Congregation engaged Dr. Aaron Levy as a full-time rabbi at the annual salary of \$1350. Once more having a rabbi, the Temple Confirmed fourteen boys and girls in 1892. This large class--a class of fourteen is large even by the standards of 1974--included Laura and Jake Hirschfeld, children of Henry Hirschfeld, Perle Davis, Nanny Moses, Hattie Koppel, Bessie Goldstein, Bessie Littman, who married Sam Baum and lived in Austin until her death in 1961,⁵⁰ Cecelia Moses, Saul Davis, and Raye Vasseck. The following year the Temple Confirmed seven, including Leon Williams, Dave Nunez, Alphonse Stein, Katie Stern, Rosa Littman, who married Will Klee-man,⁵¹ Birdie Goldstein, and Blanch Malevinsky. By 1899 the Sunday School had grown to fifty pupils and met only on Sunday at 9:00 A. M.⁵²

Little is known about the Temple for the next thirteen years, since the minutes for those years have been lost. In 1899 Joe Koen was elected President of the Temple, a post he held until his death in 1944. Koen succeeded Henry Hirschfeld as the leader of the Jewish community, and he did so within a few years after his arrival. Joe Koen came from Russia to New York City in 1884. He was going to San Antonio to be a watchmaker, and en route he stopped in Austin. Koen so liked the city that he remained in Austin for the rest of his life. He probably came to Texas because he had relatives in Waco, although it is not known why he was going specifically to San Antonio.⁵³ He originally had a counter in Finklea and Walston's Drugstore on Congress Avenue in 1884.⁵⁴ In 1885 he was a watchmaker and sold jewelry at 723 Congress.⁵⁵ However, his family erroneously believes he came to Austin in 1888, perhaps because that is the year their business, Joe Koen and Son Jewelers, was founded.

Joe Koen was active in civic affairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He was a member and officer of the Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 34, the Odd Fellows Lodge No. 23, and the Sons of Herman Lodge No. 124.⁵⁶ However, he is most remembered for his leadership in the Jewish community. Visiting rabbis almost invariably were guests of the Koens, and the family was always ready to help any transients or professional fundraisers who came to Austin, either with their own money or by helping raise money from the rest of the Jewish community.⁵⁷ The strength of his leadership can best be seen in that he served the Congregation as President for over forty-four years: men seldom wanted

to run against him. His long tenure is sometimes criticized now as causing a stagnation of other sources of leadership within the Congregation.⁵⁸

Jews throughout the United States have always organized to accomplish almost every purpose imaginable. In addition to congregations and B'nai B'rith lodges, cemetery associations, Ladies Aid societies, philanthropic groups, literary societies, publication societies, and youth organizations are common features of the American Jewish experience. The first steps a small Jewish community takes are to get a cemetery plot and then organize a congregation. Austin is a little unusual in that the B'nai B'rith lodge was organized a year before the Temple. This may be due to the nature of the community: new immigrants, of which the community was primarily composed, were usually single or young married couples whose children, if they had any, were too young to go to school. In 1875, the children who were to be in the first Confirmation class in the Synagogue were only four or five years old, and one of the three, Betty Kopperl, had not yet moved to Austin. Thus, the need for a Temple, one of whose goals would be to educate the children, was perhaps less than the need for an organization to help transients, new settlers, and professional fundraisers in financial matters. However, the year following the organization of B'nai B'rith, Temple Beth Israel was successfully organized, and with these two groups operating on a permanent basis, many other groups were organized.

The Ladies Aid Society was initially organized in 1876,⁵⁹ probably shortly after the founding of the Temple. Its purpose

was to aid in the operating of the Temple by raising money, helping with Religious School, and planning parties for the Congregation. Little is known about this organization, and it passed out of existence, or at least into a hiatus, after a few years. The leaders of this group were usually the wives of the leaders in the Congregation. In 1877 Mrs. Fannie Moses was President, and Mrs. B. Melasky was Vice-President. Among the trustees elected that year were Mrs. Herman Hellman and Mrs. Henry Hirschfeld.⁶⁰ The ladies of Temple Beth Israel sponsored a masked ball in 1880 to raise money for the construction of the new synagogue, although it is not known whether this was an activity of the Aid Society or not.⁶¹ Just as activities in the Temple came to a standstill in 1882, so apparently did those of the Ladies Aid Society, because the Ladies Aid Society of Congregation Beth Israel was organized in 1883. By 1885 it had twenty-five members, and the wives of the prominent men of the community again took many of the leadership positions. The officers for that year were Mrs. B. J. Kopperl, President; Mrs. B. Melasky, Vice-President; Mrs. Sigmund Philipson, Secretary; and Mrs. Morris Gans, Treasurer. These ladies held their offices through 1890 or 1892.⁶² Early in 1885 the Ladies Aid Society gave the money for the purchase of the Ark for the new Synagogue.⁶³ It is likely that the organization passed out of existence shortly after 1890, or at least reorganized under a different name, since the Ladies Hebrew Aid Society organized on June 18, 1892.⁶⁴ This group was extremely active socially as well as being a fund raising organization, and it helped the

Congregation with its financial problems. One of its members gave the Temple its first cooking stove in 1907.⁶⁵ By the second year of its existence, the Aid Society had thirty-six members. Mrs. A. I. Haber, who was the first President, also served in 1893, along with Mrs. Morris Gans, Vice-President; and Rabbi Levy's wife and Mrs. Hirschfeld, Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. By 1895 the membership had increased to forty, with Mrs. A. Williams succeeding Mrs. Haber; all the other officers remained the same.⁶⁶ This organization remained active for some years, being succeeded by the Council of Jewish Women, which had no congregational affiliation.

The leadership of the women's organizations continued to parallel through marriage the leadership of the Jewish community and the Congregation. Although not true of all the presidents of the various ladies' groups, many have been wives of past or future presidents of Temple Beth Israel, and almost all were closely related to officers or trustees of the Temple.⁶⁷ This leadership pattern is a common experience among Jewish communities, where it seems that not just individual men but certain families are important and are recognized as leaders. This recognition appears both in B'nai B'rith, the Temple, and the various women's groups. Eli Evans relates how his father was a leader in business, the Temple, and his town, serving as President of his congregation for ten years and Mayor of Durham, North Carolina, for twelve. His mother was also important in the Jewish community. She worked with great devotion for Jewish causes, especially Israel.⁶⁸

The Jewish religion places great emphasis on the importance of the young and especially of Jewish and secular education. Thus it is common for some sort of group to be organized for young people in a community and for it to be directed at least partially toward Jewish education. The first attempt at such an organization in Austin came on September 27, 1880, when Herman Hellman held a party at his house and organized a Young Men's Hebrew Association.⁶⁹ This attempt at organizing a YMHA did not succeed, for no other note of it can be found, and a YMHA was organized in 1894, apparently a different group or at least a reorganization of the initial Association. By 1895 this group had forty members and must have included many of the young Jewish men of the community. George Ash, who was born in 1856,⁷⁰ was President in 1895, and the group elected S. W. Moses, Vice-President; Sam Hirschfeld, Secretary; and Henry Moses, Treasurer.⁷¹ Even in this organization the leaders were related to the Congregational leaders; in fact, Sam Hirschfeld later became a member of the Board of Trustees for the Temple.⁷² However, this YMHA was also short-lived, since no mention of it can be found after 1896. It is quite likely that it lost in its competition with the B'nai B'rith Lodge, because many of its members, like George Ash and Sam Hirschfeld, were of an age to belong to both groups. B'nai B'rith, being better organized, was certainly the stronger group.

Two other youth-oriented groups were organized in the 1890s in Austin. In February, 1893, twenty-five young ladies organized the Young Friends of Israel. The first officers were Misses

Sadie Davis, President; Annie Goldbaum, Vice-President; Birdie Goldstein, Secretary; and Mary Goldstein, Treasurer.⁷³ This may have been a Zionist group, although formal Zionism did not begin until 1897 with Theodore Herzl. It is much more likely that this was a social or educational organization.

That same month another group of young ladies organized the Young Hebrew Literary Society. Its initial membership was forty-two. The first officers were Misses Nannie Michelson, President; Nona Moses, Vice-President; Nellie Haber, Secretary; and Violet Michelson, Treasurer.⁷⁴ Nellie Haber's mother was the first President of the Ladies Hebrew Aid Society, and Nona Moses' father was William Moses, who served as an officer or trustee of the Temple for most of its first twenty-three years and was President from 1886 to 1899.⁷⁵ This organization was devoted towards educating the young Jewish ladies of the community, probably in the direction of either Hebrew or more generally Jewish-oriented literature. The parents of many of the officers of these two groups were quite active in the Jewish community, many having served as officers or trustees of the Temple or of the ladies group.

Both these two ladies groups and the YMHA were apparently short-lived, because no further reference to any of these groups can be found. It is quite likely that the two ladies groups brought about each other's downfall. There was certainly some overlapping of membership, and the community was too small and too unified at that time for it to be split along any definite lines, especially any as minor as those represented by these

two groups. Outside of this speculation, there is no indication as to why these groups did not last any longer than they did. Perhaps there was not sufficient interest in them due to other organizations that were school-oriented, or perhaps there was a lack of interest on the part of parents, so that there was no guidance or sponsorship for the organizations. At any rate, these attempts were premature, and a successful Jewish youth organization was not to be founded until 1952, when the B'nai B'rith Youth Organizations were begun.⁷⁶

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Jews of Austin had very good relations with their Gentile neighbors. Many Jews were members of various civic and philanthropic organizations other than B'nai B'rith, and a good number of them served as officers. Many of these have been mentioned already, but there were others.⁷⁷ Jacob S. Davis was an officer in the Ancient Order of United Workmen, Lone Star Lodge No. 1 from 1879 to 1882. He also served as an officer of Philip C. Tucker Chapter No. 1, Rose Croix Scottish Rite from 1885 to 1888. P. Goldbaum, President of B'nai B'rith from 1885 to 1886, also was an officer of the same AOUW lodge. Goldbaum sold dry goods and clothing at 203 East Pecan (Sixth) Street. Philip H. Stein, who worked for and was related to Isaac Stein, was Treasurer of the Odd Fellows Lodge No. 171 from 1887 to 1888. Isidore Malevinsky, who had a dry goods store at 113 East Sixth Street, served as Guard of AOUW Austin Legion No. 1 in 1889-90, the same year in which Isidor Michelson was also an officer. Michelson sold wholesale groceries, liquors, and produce with his

brother Morris at 223 East Sixth Street. Malevinsky also served as an officer both in Temple Beth Israel and the B'nai B'rith Lodge. A. I. Haber was born in 1851⁷⁸ and came to Austin in 1877. On April 28, 1880, he married Rosa Moses⁷⁹ and subsequently worked as a clerk at W. Moses and Son clothing store at 621-623 Congress. He served as Prelate of the Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 34 in 1895-96. Abe Frank was born in 1865⁸⁰ and came to Austin before 1891. He had a clothing store for two years and then was a clerk for I. Malevinsky. Frank belonged to the same Knights of Pythias Lodge as did Haber, and he served it as an officer from 1897 to 1899. The Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 25 elected him Treasurer from 1898 to 1899. Samuel D. deCordova, Phineas deCordova's son, was the Vice-President of the Austin Rod and Gun Club in 1898-99.

In 1880 the Endowment Rank, Knights of Pythias, Section No. 635 was organized. This is an unusual organization in two respects, one being that it met only once a year, on December 21. Also, beginning in 1893, almost all its officers were Jewish, although it was not officially a Jewish organization. In that year the officers were Henry Moses, President; Joe Koen, Vice-President; Abe Frank, Secretary and Treasurer. These men served in these offices through 1896. For the next four years, Joe Koen was President, Abe Frank Vice-President, and E. T. Houston Secretary and Treasurer. Membership in this organization increased from twenty-four in 1893 to thirty two years later,⁸¹ and probably grew as the century closed. This may have been an honorary group, since it met only once a year.

It could have used that meeting to elect and install new members. Also, the group's purpose could have been to administer insurance policies or investments of other Knights of Pythias. However, this is only speculation, as nothing else is known about it. It is unlikely that it was an all-Jewish organization, since E. T. Houston more than likely was not Jewish. Also, such an organization would have been some competition for B'nai B'rith, especially if this lodge was held in high esteem and therefore many Jewish men tried to gain entry.

There are no records or memories of any anti-Semitism in Austin in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The newspaper article pointing out the absence of a synagogue in Austin did not blame the Jews for this lack. The story was a mixture of boosterism and concern for the Jewish community.⁸² The Jews were accepted by many of their fellow citizens and were especially respected for their fiscal abilities: many civic groups elected Jews as treasurers. Their acceptance into these organizations may well have been aided by their German origins, since many of the early residents of Austin were also of German descent. Also, there were very few Jews in Austin, even in 1900, and in general any racially-oriented prejudice does not appear until there is a fairly substantial number of the minority group present in the society and it begins to appear as a threat to others. There was probably some Jew-baiting and a few restricted clubs, both of which are common to Southern Jewry. However, there were no outbreaks of violent anti-Semitism. It is likely that then, as now, "Most Jews in the South

live[d] in a relaxed atmosphere without fear for their safety or worry over their future."⁸³ If some clubs were anti-Semitic, the Jews accepted it and joined those groups open to them. They felt that to be accepted by Gentiles they had to accept Gentiles' restrictions without serious objection.

Southern Jews have traditionally been joiners of civic groups and frequently officers of the groups. They join for many different reasons, including a striving for acceptance by the Gentile community. Jews everywhere in the United States, particularly those of German origin, have wanted to show the rest of their community that they can be as good or even better Americans than can Christians, thus hoping to dispel any anti-Semitism that might be based on their slow assimilation. Also, it was somewhat easier for Jews than other immigrants to fit into an urban society because they had largely come from cities in Europe: there were very few Jewish farmers in Europe, and many countries even prohibited Jews from owning land. Some of this very attempt at gaining acceptance was to cause friction in the twentieth century, both in Austin and elsewhere in the South, between the German Jews and those from eastern Europe, because the background of Orthodox Jews was more different from the American culture than that of the German Jews. The Orthodox were apparently less interested in adopting American customs and the American way of life, perhaps because they came from ghettos where they lived a religiously segregated life and thus were more intent on preserving their religion. These problems will be discussed in the next section.

One other incident of interest occurred during this period, and this is the murder on December 12, 1877, of Elia Olenick.⁸⁴ Elia was apparently in Austin visiting the Capitol Store, the business establishment of his brother, M. L. Olenick. At the regular auction in December held by the business, George Harris agreed to buy a shirt and some material for a pair of pants, although he paid only for the shirt on the day of the auction. Harris agreed to return the next day to pay for the material and pick up his goods. However, the next day he wanted only the shirt, which Elia would not let him have unless he paid for the material also, according to the terms of the auction. Harris became so incensed by Elia's refusal to change his mind that he returned about 5:00 P. M. on December 12 and shot Elia in the head. Harris successfully escaped, and the Governor offered a \$500 reward for his arrest. The Austin Jews offered private rewards exceeding \$1000.

Olenick died about 5:00 the next morning, and the Coroner's Inquest ruled his death as due to murder by George Harris. The Daily Democratic Statesman reported that "there was but one expression of opinion, and that was the severest condemnation."⁸⁵ Olenick was buried on December 13 by the Odd Fellows in Beth Israel Cemetery No. 1.

On January 4, 1878, M. L. Olenick announced the closing of his store because of the murder of his brother. He was determined to sell all his inventory within thirty days, no matter what the price. By the end of that month, Harris had been arrested and put in jail, where he awaited trial. On February 1,

1878, the Jewish community paid a reward of \$550 for Harris' arrest, although the recipient was not identified.

Harris' trial began on February 27, 1878, before Justice Tegner and finished on March 6. Harris was convicted and sent back to jail without bail because of the seriousness of his crime. Harris' lawyers sought bail, but their appeal was denied by Justice Turner, and on April 20, they argued their case before the Court of Criminal Appeals, the highest criminal court in Texas. Four days later the Court affirmed the decision of Justice Tegner. However, no mention of sentence can be found.

Although the newspaper accounts of the murder and the trial are almost completely factual, the quote cited above indicates that there was a good amount of sympathy for the victim and his family. At least publicly, this may well indicate the solidarity of the Austin community in the face of such a tragedy and the lack of open hostilities between the Jewish and Gentile communities.

From 1875 to 1900 the Jewish community became firmly established in Austin. Temple Beth Israel was organized, and it moved into its Synagogue in 1884. By 1900 it had permanent rabbinic leadership and a regular religious school. Many Jews were active in civic as well as Jewish groups. A good relationship between the Christian and Jewish communities was founded partially on this civic activity. With a strong Jewish community, Austin was ready for the flow of eastern European Jewish immigrants after 1900 that would so change the nature of the Jewish community.

THE COMMUNITY BECOMES COMPLETE (1900-1930)

The turn of the century saw the real beginning of the influx of Russian, Polish, and other eastern European Jews to the United States. Although there had always been some eastern European Jews in America, the major rush of immigration began late in the nineteenth century and got into full swing in the twentieth. This impact was felt in Austin largely in the early 1920s, although some families came over earlier.

Wolf Meyerowitz was one of the earliest Polish Jews to arrive in central Texas after 1900. In 1902 he left a small town about twenty miles outside Warsaw for Texas.¹ He sent for the rest of his family two years later, after he had settled and made some money. They entered the United States through Galveston in 1904 and settled in Kyle, south of Austin, a few years later. Meyerowitz had three sons, including Louis, who still lives in Austin. The whole family moved to Austin after World War I. Meyerowitz was a butcher and grocer in Kyle, and he also acted as Cantor from 1916 to 1922 for the services of the Orthodox Jews.² The Meyerowitz family fled Poland to escape anti-Semitism and for the better opportunities which existed in America.

Morris Ginsburg was born on August 15, 1884,³ in Russia. He left there in 1913 when his uncle, who worked for Sanger

Brothers in Dallas, sent for him. Ten years later he sent for his wife and four children. They escaped from Russia and joined him in Austin on September 1, 1923. His family entered the United States at Ellis Island and went to New Orleans by boat. From there they took a train to Houston and on to Austin. Morris' uncle had just been married in Russia and came to Texas to escape conscription into the army. He came to Texas because he heard that it was a good state in which to settle; he had no relatives in Texas. The Ginsburgs left Russia mostly because of the anti-Semitism there and that there was no future in Russia.⁴

Sam Winetroub's parents arrived in Austin from Russia in May, 1921. They came to Austin because his mother had a brother and two sisters in Texas, one of whom lived in Austin. The family that was already in Texas provided financial ties for the newcomers, but it is not known why Texas was the destination of his mother's family. The Winetroubs left Russia, as did so many Jews, because of the pogroms and anti-Semitism. They came to America for "social reasons," since there was little or no anti-Semitism in the United States.⁵

Louis Novy was born as Leiser Nowordworski on March 12, 1891, at Kenschin, Poland, which was then part of Russia. He left Russia in 1912 with his brother Sam and entered the United States through Galveston.⁶ They came to Texas because there were more opportunities there, and there had been bad crops in Russia.⁷ After he had gained some success, Louis sent for his younger brother Jim, who joined him around 1920. Jim also came to Galveston, and he initially went to Ennis, where he became

partners with Louis, who was in the salvage business. Louis previously had worked in a candy factory in Dallas. After Sam died, Louis moved to Temple, where he became interested in the theatre business when the oil boom hit Granger. In 1917 he managed the Hancock Opera House in Austin with Charles E. Marsh as a partner. Later he gained full control and changed the name to the Capitol Theatre. Louis married Minnie Lown of Austin.⁸ He died on August 5, 1958,⁹ and was survived by a daughter, Lena, and a son, Harold C., who lived in Dallas.¹⁰

Jim was very active during his life, being a member of many civic groups, including the University Masonic Lodge No. 1190, Austin Scottish Rite, Ben Hur Shrine, Odd Fellows, and the Rotary Club. President Johnson appointed him as a representative to Israel many times.¹¹

Leopold Cohn was born in Russia in 1882¹² and came to the United States after he became Bar Mitzvah, about 1895. He had an older brother, Israel, who was already in Texas. Leopold settled in Galveston before 1900 but left after the 1900 Flood, vowing never to return. He kept his vow.¹³ Leopold and Israel were very instrumental in organizing the Orthodox Jews in Austin, and Israel was elected the first President of the Orthodox congregation.¹⁴ Leopold is fondly remembered as one of the pillars of the Austin Jewish community. He was very active in the Jewish Federation, which took care of financial needs of Jewish settlers and professional fundraisers.¹⁵

Of course, many other eastern European Jews came to Austin after 1900, but these families were among those who were

to play a leading role in the community. The Austin Jewish community was generally unified at this time, especially in the face of external threat, of which there was actually very little. The main split in the community began to appear along the lines of the East Sixth Street merchants. Most of these men were Orthodox Jews who were new to Austin, and they were slower to adopt the ways of their new country. Consequently, there was a tendency among some of the German-descended Reform Jews to look down on the immigrants, or at least not to socialize to any great extent with them. In general, however, the community was still pretty much a whole, since the Orthodox Jews still celebrated the Sabbath at the Temple. High Holidays were celebrated separately, and after there were enough Orthodox Jews in Austin, daily Minyans were held in people's homes.¹⁶ This tendency towards a split community was to become more exaggerated in later years, a pattern which occurred in other Southern Jewish communities.¹⁷

Although there was an influx of Orthodox Jews to Austin early in the twentieth century, the Jewish community remained quite small during this period. In 1907 there were about two hundred Jews in Austin,¹⁸ about the same number as in 1877.¹⁹ By 1918 the Temple had sixty-five members and the total Jewish population was about three hundred. In 1928 there were only 490 Jews in Austin, or 1.28% of the total population of 38,387.²⁰ In the 1920s there were at most fifty Orthodox families, and the total population was only 150-60 families at the outbreak of World War II. The great spurt of growth, which was due to

the influx of large numbers of young people from elsewhere in the United States, did not occur until the 1950s.²¹ This too is typical of Southern Jewish communities in small towns, for there was little in the way of industrial activities to attract large numbers of Jews, and the growth of the University of Texas and other colleges into large schools did not take place until the 1950s and 1960s.

These three decades saw the development of many new leaders among Austin Jews. Henry Hirschfeld's sons, especially Morris, Sam, and Jake, came into prominence during this time. Sam went into the clothing business when he bought the interest of Theo Philipson in the store in which Philipson was a partner with George Ash. That store went out of business on January 5, 1905. Morris started work at the Austin National Bank in June, 1892, although he never finished high school. He moved up to Vice-President in 1919. Jake was in the clothing business as Hirschfeld and Anderson.²² All three men served as trustees for Temple Beth Israel. Sam served from 1908 to 1918, Morris from 1920 to 1922, and Jake from 1926 to 1928.²³

As mentioned above, Joe Koen was elected President of Temple Beth Israel in 1899 and served until his death in 1944. As President he ran the business meetings of the Temple and of its Board of Trustees. He also represented the Temple at meetings of other Jewish organizations local, statewide, and national in scope. Koen was very active in the community and had a lot to do with the Jewish Federation. After he died, his son William took over some of his role as a leader of the community. Koen

was well known outside of Austin for his prominent role in the local Jewish scene. The very fact that he served as President of the Temple for forty-four years says a great deal about his role as a leader of the community; in fact, he was considered the leader of the Reform community, perhaps paralleled in the Orthodox group only by Leopold Cohn and Jim Novy.²⁴

The other prominent Orthodox Jew in Austin besides Leopold Cohn was Jim Novy. Novy became President of the Orthodox Congregation for two years in 1938 following the death of Israel Cohn. After Cohn died the Congregation decided to limit the term of their president to two years "to insure a continuous flow of leadership and progress."²⁵ It is possible this was partially a reaction against the long tenure of Joe Koen as President of Temple Beth Israel, but this is only speculation. Jim Novy met Lyndon Johnson while Johnson and Senator Buchanan were friends, but it is not known how they met.²⁶ Novy made many trips to Israel as an official representative both of Texas and the United States. He represented Texas in 1958 at the tenth celebration of Israeli Independence and was chosen by President Johnson to deliver a special message to the Twenty-sixth World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in 1964.²⁷ Jim Novy died on June 31, 1971,²⁸ and was greatly mourned. Louis Novy was also active in the Austin Jewish community, and he helped many University students with loans, scholarships, and jobs at his theatres.²⁹

Isaac Labovitz was quite active in the organization of the Orthodox Jews into a separate congregation. His home was used

for Friday evening Sabbath services from 1915 to 1922.³⁰ His home was a refuge for all those in need: "Their doors were always open to the stranger, the traveler, the hungry, and the weary; to provide a home away from home."³¹

Dr. Hyman Joseph Ettlinger arrived in Austin in 1913 to teach pure mathematics at the University of Texas, having just completed his Ph.D. at Harvard. He immediately affiliated himself with Temple Beth Israel and became quite active, teaching Sunday School for about ten years³² and serving as an officer and trustee many times. The Congregation elected him Trustee in 1918 and Secretary from 1927 to 1945. He was elected President for 1948-49. Dr. Ettlinger served as a lay rabbi, beginning after the High Holidays in 1924, when a replacement could not be obtained for the departing Rabbi Nathan Barasch. He "faithfully and diligently discharged these duties" until the fall of 1925, when Rabbi Walter Peiser assumed the pulpit.³³ Dr. Ettlinger was quite outspoken in his battles against whatever anti-Semitism there was, although it was mostly limited to personal incidents.³⁴

The most observable reflection of the influx of eastern European Jews can be seen in the organization of the Orthodox Congregation Agudas Achim. Agudas Achim was organized as a result of the desires of the new immigrants to conduct services according to their own traditions rather than from a rebirth of Orthodoxy among the Jews who had been in Austin since the nineteenth century.

The Orthodox Jews first began to meet separately from Temple Beth Israel for High Holiday services around 1901. In that year they met in the Knights of Pythias Hall at Seventh and Congress for Rosh Hashonah services. The sermon was given by Rabbi Ben Nathanson of San Antonio. They also met there for memorial services a few days later, probably in conjunction with Yom Kippur. Again Rabbi Nathanson conducted the services.³⁵

In 1914 the Orthodox Jews of Austin and the surrounding small towns met in the home of I. Frank at First and Brazos Streets for High Holiday services.³⁶ The next year the community rented a hall at Seventh and Congress, probably the Knights of Pythias Hall, for services. Only Rosh Hashonah services were held there, due to a misunderstanding with the owners. Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Laibovitz invited the group to celebrate Yom Kippur in their house at Seventh and Neches. Their home was used for Friday night Sabbath services until 1922. Prior to 1915, the Orthodox Jews usually celebrated the Sabbath at the Temple, although they did hold daily Minyans at different people's homes. From 1916 to 1922 Orthodox High Holiday services were held in a rented hall in the 100 block of Congress. Members frequently held daily Minyans in the backs of their stores, which were usually on East Sixth Street. There was never any problem getting together a minyan, since those wanting to hold the service could simply walk up and down the street and get enough men from their own stores.³⁷ These Minyans, as well as Sabbath services, were conducted by the members in the Orthodox tradition. Mr. Saffer, who was from Temple, Texas, about sixty

miles north of Austin, conducted High Holiday services. Mr. Wolf Meyerowitz, who then lived in Kyle, performed the duties of a Cantor. In an attempt to encourage the Jews of the surrounding small towns to come to Austin for worship, Orthodox Jews opened their homes for overnight visits.

By 1922 there were enough Jews of the Orthodox tradition in Austin so that an Orthodox congregation was needed. Two years later, on February 16, 1924, Congregation Agudas Achim was chartered with the State of Texas as a non-profit organization, some forty-five years after Temple Beth Israel was chartered. The original officers were Israel Cohn, President; Jim Novy, Vice-President; Abe Schwartz, and Sam Dochen. Although these men are now dead, their families still live in Austin.

The first structure housing the new Congregation was a one-story house at the corner of Seventh and San Jacinto, just four blocks from the Temple. All the partitions were removed from the building to make a hall suitable for holding services. The Congregation held Board of Trustees meetings in this building which lasted "half-way through the night." The Congregation could not obtain a rabbi during the early part of its existence, so it sought the services of a Shochet, or Kosher butcher. These men frequently were knowledgeable in the Orthodox traditions and laws and could conduct services. By 1929 Bernard Tannenbaum had moved to Austin³⁸ and was retained as the first spiritual leader of Agudas Achim. Although not an ordained rabbi, he served as spiritual leader, cantor, and teacher. A Hebrew School, or Heder, was organized to instruct the children

in the language of the Bible and in their traditions, but the Congregation held no Sunday School. Because there were not enough children to make it feasible to have two separate religious schools, a joint Religious School met at Temple Beth Israel. Young men in the Shul became Bar Mitzvah, a practice which had been discarded at the Temple.³⁹

The members of the new congregation tried to attract more Orthodox Jews to Austin by offering homes and financial assistance. Soon these efforts became more successful, and in 1930 the Congregation sold the Synagogue property at Seventh and San Jacinto and bought new land for the construction of a larger building. Two locations were available, one at Eleventh and Red River, and the other at the southeast corner of Tenth and San Jacinto, just one block from Temple Beth Israel. With the help of the Women's Auxiliary, Agudas Achim chose the latter location. On April 10, 1930, the Congregation signed a contract for the purchase of the land on San Jacinto for \$12,500. Two months later, on June 30, a contract for \$17,353.50 was signed for the construction of the new Synagogue. The building committee for this structure was composed of Jim Novy and Joe Sandgarten, who lived in Elgin, northeast of Austin. Under their supervision, the new Synagogue was completed, and on September 6, 1931, the Congregation dedicated the two-story building. Congregation Agudas Achim again elected Israel Cohn President.

During the first three decades of this century, then, great strides were made towards the development of a full Jewish community, one composed of Orthodox eastern European Jews as

well as German and German-descended Reform Jews. An Orthodox shul had been founded, and shortly after its inception it had built its first permanent synagogue, thus becoming a firm part of the Austin Jewish community.

A great many changes and advances also took place at Temple Beth Israel in the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Several rabbis served the Congregation during these three decades, among them being Emil Ellinger, who was Rabbi at Congregation Gemiluth Hassodim in Alexandria, Louisiana prior to serving in Austin; Nathan A. Lubin, who served for one year beginning in September, 1906, and had recently graduated from the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary; and Dr. A. P. Drucker, who succeeded Lubin. Drucker came in 1907 and promptly advised the Congregation to adopt the Union Prayerbook. The Union Prayerbook developed out of David Einhorn's Tamid and became the standard ritual for Reform congregations throughout America.⁴¹ Wise's Minhag America, though aimed at small town Jews in the South and West, was replaced by the Union Prayerbook. The members voted unanimously to adopt the new ritual, but "outside pressures" from those not at the meeting prevented its adoption until 1911. That same year the Temple became affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The yarmulke was still worn during this time, although there was much debate on whether its use should be required. The debate centered around the usefulness of the custom and whether it was wise to set the Congregation apart from Gentiles by requiring one's head to be covered during worship. The Congregation did not discard this custom until the

1920s. While Drucker was Rabbi, services were held evening and morning for the Sabbath and holidays. The Religious School had thirty-five pupils arranged in four classes.⁴²

Rabbi G. Grad succeeded Dr. Drucker in 1908. His hobby was carpentry, and he converted the basement of the Synagogue into the Vestry room. He bought the materials himself and built an office in the basement, later converting other parts of the building into a meeting room. In 1911, while he was still Rabbi, the building was wired on both floors for electric lighting, replacing the old gas lights. Various families offered to pay for the new fixtures, and Mrs. Morris Gans, who then lived in St. Louis, contributed money to buy the Menorahs, or Candelabras.

In 1911 Rabbi David Rosenbaum was installed in Austin by Rabbis Henry Cohen of Galveston and Henry Fox of Fort Worth. He served the Temple as Rabbi for twelve years, longer than any other rabbi until Louis Firestein, the present rabbi. While he was Rabbi, the Congregation made many improvements in the Synagogue. Prayerbook brackets were put on the back of the pews in 1914, and gas heaters were installed the same year. The next year cement walks and curbs were layed on the west side of the property fronting San Jacinto, and in 1916 new front doors were put in place. In 1918 the Congregation purchased the "most important of all" new addition, the new pipe organ, from the Muller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. These and other improvements were financially possible because of the generosity of the Council of Jewish Women. In 1923, when it was forty years old, the Temple was completely remodeled.

Rabbi Rosenbaum was quite popular in Austin and was instrumental in making many changes in the Temple. He urged the adoption of the Union Prayerbook, although he continued to wear a hat during services "to keep harmony in the Congregation." He also began the regular Sunday School picnic held in May at the end of the school year. By 1919 the Sunday School had grown to fifty pupils and there were five classes.⁴³ Rosenbaum was also instrumental in helping Dr. Ettlinger organize the Menorah Society on the University campus.⁴⁴ The members of the Temple accepted his resignation in 1922 with "genuine regret" and drafted a resolution stating that the Rabbi had won the "love, respect and esteem as well as the undying gratitude of our entire membership."⁴⁵

During Rosenbaum's tenure, a number of individuals made gifts to the Temple. In 1919 Nelson Davis donated a marble slab in memory of his parents for the members to commemorate their deceased by placing their names on the slab. Mr. Hyman Daum left a bequest of \$200 to the Temple in 1921, and Jacob Stern gave \$100 to the Temple when he died in 1926. Mrs. Jonas Silberstein left \$250 to the Temple in her will. Joe Koen presented a Torah scroll to the Temple in 1926. Because the Torah is the most important object in any Jewish Synagogue, the gift was entirely fitting for the man who was, at that time, the most important member of the Temple in many respects.

Rabbi Nathan Barasch succeeded Rabbi Rosenbaum for two years, and he was succeeded by Dr. Ettlinger when no rabbinic replacement could be found. Rabbi Walter Peiser assumed the

pulpit in the fall of 1925 and instigated a new practice. He asked the entire Congregation to rise for the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. According to traditional Judaism, only those who are actually mourning a death, either during the year following the death or on the annual observance of the death, rise for the Kaddish. However, Rabbi Peiser's innovation was so successful that the members voted to continue the practice, and today everyone rises to say Kaddish. In 1927 Rabbi Peiser left Austin to become the Rabbi at the Temple in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and his departure "caused much sorrow among the congregants."⁴⁶ Rabbi Peiser still lives in Baton Rouge, although he no longer has a pulpit.

Rabbi Jacob I. Meyer came to Austin at the end of 1927 and served Temple Beth Israel as its Rabbi until 1929, when the Hillel Foundation was organized on the campus of the University of Texas. Due to the small size of the Congregation and the small number of Jewish students on campus, both organizations were put under one rabbi. These groups shared this bond for sixteen years until each could support its own rabbi or director. Rabbi Jacob Weinstein, who later became rabbi of K. A. M. Temple in Chicago, was the first dual rabbi. Rabbi Weinstein was a "brilliant man" who appealed to the students. He was an adherent of the humanist doctrine and was involved with the labor movement. Weinstein's involvement in secular matters was unusual among rabbis at that time.⁴⁷ Rabbi Weinstein remained in Austin only one year, although he was not forced to leave. He was succeeded by Rabbi Samuel Halevi Baron, who

served for five years both as Rabbi of the Temple and as Hillel Director. Baron later served as Rabbi in Lincoln, Nebraska.

As in other Southern Jewish communities,⁴⁸ the Austin Jewish community was split between Orthodox and Reform Jews. The new immigrants from eastern Europe were different in many respects from the more settled and largely German-descended Reform Jews. The Orthodox Jews spoke neither German nor, at first, English, and kept apart from the Reform Jews. They held separate religious services for many years prior to the organization of Congregation Agudas Achim, and their businesses tended to be on East Sixth Street, away from the Reform Jews' stores on Congress Avenue. However, there was no friction between the groups⁴⁹ and the separation was not very rigid. The community did remain unified for specific purposes, such as raising money for charities.⁵⁰ The Austin Jewish Federation was led by both Reform and Orthodox Jews and appealed to both groups for donations.

Although the original division of the community resulted from religious differences, some social activities subsequently split along the same lines.⁵¹ Some Reform Jews considered the Orthodox socially inferior because they were newer to America and had not adopted the customs of their new land. Reform Jews put a high value on adopting the American way of life and becoming accepted socially by the Gentile community. Since they had been in Austin longer, the Reform Jews were more Americanized. They felt the influx of Orthodox Jews threatened their social acceptance because they would be identified with those strange

new people. The "problem" was common among Southern Reform Jews.⁵² Naturally, the Orthodox Jews resented the Reform Jews' attitude towards them, for they, too, wanted to become more Americanized. There is no indication that any of the Orthodox Jews did not want to adopt the life-style of their new home. However, being from a more traditional branch of Judaism, they were less willing to part with their customs, many of which set them apart from the rest of the community, Gentile and Jewish.

Many members of Temple Beth Israel considered themselves an elite and had little to do with Orthodox Jews in normal social intercourse.⁵³ The two groups came together socially primarily for activities dealing with their children. Because there was only one religious school, Confirmation, Purim balls, and Sunday School picnics and parties were affairs attended by the whole community.⁵⁴ Outside of these functions, there was not much organized social intermixing between Reform and Orthodox Jews.

Much of the day to day social life centered around the neighborhood. People spent evenings with the neighbors, and children played with other children who lived nearby.⁵⁵ These social activities were not restricted by religion or religious customs, there being no particular neighborhood settled by Reform or Orthodox Jews. School-age children made friends with Gentiles and Jews, whether Reform or Orthodox. In fact, most of their friends were Gentiles because there were so few Jews.⁵⁶ There was some interdating, but parents looked on it with disfavor.⁵⁷ However, there were so few Jewish children that dating

only Jews would have seriously curtailed one's social life. This situation is common even today in small towns in the South.⁵⁸ Intermarriage was rare and certainly was not publicized.⁵⁹ A great deal of the social life of young people revolved around the University, both for those of college age as well as younger girls who could go out with college men. The University of Texas was the social gathering point for the Jews of the whole state, and many marriages were made from relationships that began on campus.⁶⁰

Much of the unorganized social life centered around visiting friend and relatives. The visiting circle for the Jewish community was limited to other Jews.⁶¹ This visiting was sometimes on a casual basis, and other times it was more formal, either a call on a new member or a lengthy visit with relatives from out of town. Daughters were sent around the state, both to visit their relatives and to meet prospective husbands: relatives were confident that the rest of the family would take good care of their girls and would be sure to introduce them to the right type of boys.⁶² Visiting also frequently occurred between families with children of about the same age, because the parents would be involved in the same activities, both religious and educational, centered around their children.⁶³ In general, the Jewish community was a closeknit group,⁶⁴ although the social lines were somewhat separated along those of religious tradition.

Most organized social activities centered around the congregations.⁶⁵ The Purim Ball was an annual occasion with a program presented by the Sunday School children, many of whom would

come dressed in Biblical or contemporary costumes. These balls were usually held in a rented hall, and later they were held at the two synagogues. The Temple held congregational dinners once a year for some years. These dinners were basically social events, occasions when the whole membership could come together and enjoy themselves. The Sunday School picnic was held through the twenties, although it was later dropped because the parents did not want to take the time to organize the outing.⁶⁶ In later years the picnic was revived, although it was much less a community-wide event. Also, the B'nai B'rith held its own social events, as did the various Ladies' Guilds, Associations, and Sisterhoods.⁶⁷ Most of the parties that the Jewish families gave, whether for themselves or their children, were given mostly for their Jewish friends, and frequently for those of their own congregation.⁶⁸

Information for statements about the social life of the Jewish community is sometimes contradictory, because the statements are based on personal experience. Everybody grew up with different experiences, and subsequent events and trends, and the passage of time have altered what they remember. But it is safe to say that Austin is representative of the general Southern trend towards a social split within Jewish communities, although it perhaps was more unified socially than cities with much older Jewish communities. Many towns in the Deep South were settled by Jews in the eighteenth century. The Jewish communities in these towns were more inbred than in Austin and perhaps felt themselves to be better accepted by Gentile society.

Thus they resented the eastern European Jews more, for they saw the Orthodox as a greater threat to their well-established position with their town. Unifying aspects of the Austin community included many dual memberships in both congregations, the B'nai B'rith Lodge, the Benevolent Association, and the single Sunday School, which brought both congregations together for its affairs.⁶⁹ These factors resulted in a social life that was separated between congregations for many affairs and unified for others. Thus there was a pull in both directions, towards unity as well as cleavage in the social life of the Austin Jewish community.

Little was barred from the Austin Jewish community's social life because the Jews of Austin always had good relations with their Gentile neighbors.⁷⁰ There has never been any overt anti-Semitism, and most instances of any bad feelings have been Jew-baiting.⁷¹ As Jew-baiting was almost always purely on a personal basis and usually between children, it was not seen as a threat or serious problem. More than one person recalls not knowing the meaning of such words as "sheeny" and other similar derogatory names.⁷² Of course, many of the families, particularly those from eastern Europe, fled their original homeland to escape persecution, so such instances would seem like nothing to them. Many people remember experiencing no problems with anti-Semitism in their life.⁷³ There was some social anti-Semitism in Austin; however, most of this was to occur later, particularly after World War II. Social anti-Semitism was accepted, though not liked, by the Jewish community simply as something that had to be tolerated in order to be accepted by the Gentiles. It was not widespread.

The lack of anti-Semitism is attributed to the small size of the Jewish community,⁷⁴ which would seem to pose no threat to the much larger Gentile community. Another source of these good relations with the Christian society may have been that some of the Jews had been in Austin for some time and were integrated into the larger community. There were old businesses and prominent families that were well established and well thought of. The Jews were not a burden for Austin but were enterprising and at least modestly successful.

Perhaps the largest contributing force to the lack of overt anti-Semitism in Austin is the tendency for the Jewish community to remain silent and not get involved in controversy with Gentiles. Many Jewish children were taught by their parents not to speak out on controversial subjects, more than likely out of a desire to fit in better with the whole community. The underlying force behind this reasoning was the desire to avoid any anti-Semitic incidents, especially since relations with the non-Jewish community were so good.⁷⁵ Such a fear of anti-Semitism does not imply that anti-Semitism existed. Rather, fear of anti-Semitism is always part of the Jewish experience, probably due to a long history of prejudice and violence against Jews. This reluctance to speak out is a common experience among Southern Jews.⁷⁶ It has been attributed by some members of the Austin community to a Jewish state of mind, a general fear of rocking the boat.⁷⁷ Although none of these reasons alone explains the good will between Jews and Gentiles, together they helped create and maintain these good relations.

The Austin Jewish community had few business dealings with Gentiles other than in retail stores. During the first three decades of this century there were no Jewish doctors and probably no Jewish lawyers in Austin. This lack is due to the difficulty Jews faced getting into the necessary professional schools. Anti-Semitism may have entered into the picture here,⁷⁸ although economic reasons were perhaps more prevalent. Austin was a small town with a small market for professional men. Doctors and lawyers were more attracted to larger cities, where they could make a better living.⁷⁹

However, even before the twenties there were a few Jews on the faculty at the University of Texas. As mentioned above, Dr. Ettlinger came in 1913. At about that time there were four other Jewish faculty members. Dr. Aaron Schaeffer was in the Romance Languages Department. He came from Baltimore, Maryland and was on the faculty about thirty years. His widow still lives in Austin. Dr. Darby Klein was in the Psychology Department and married Dr. Schaeffer's sister. Klein was active in Congregation Agudas Achim but later took a position at the University of Southern California. Dr. Sam Gideon was from an old Louisville, Kentucky family. He was a member of the Department of Architecture and also was an artist. Dr. Harry Leon was from Harvard. He met his wife, Isabella Franklin, a Latin scholar from New York City, at a meeting of the American Classical Academy. Leon later became chairman of the Classics Department⁸⁰ and was active in Temple Beth Israel, serving as a trustee from 1927 to 1929, in 1941-42, and from 1946 to 1949.⁸¹

These men all belonged to one of the congregations, although none was as active in the Austin Jewish community as was Dr. Ettlinger. He served as lay Rabbi in 1924-25 and held many offices in the Congregation, including that of President of Temple Beth Israel in 1948-49.⁸²

In 1913 Dr. Ettlinger and Rabbi Rosenbaum organized the Menorah Society at the University, and Leah Koen, daughter of Joe Koen, was its Secretary. This group was quite active, with an estimated 80-90% of the thirty Jewish students on campus attending its bi-weekly meetings.⁸³ In 1917 Hebrew was taught at the University, probably by Rabbi Rosenbaum. By that year Jewish enrollment had increased to sixty-six, or 2.7% of the total enrollment of 2434. By 1920 this figure had decreased to forty-two, or 1.3% of the total enrollment of 3216.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, these students had a good amount of contact with the Austin Jewish community. Many of the Jewish families had students to dinner, especially those who could not return home for the holidays. The students were welcome at any time in either synagogue and attended services at Temple or Shul occasionally, particularly if they were in Austin for the High Holidays. Seders almost always found some of the Jewish students as guests of Austin families, especially if the family had a child of its own at the University.⁸⁵

The Hillel Foundation succeeded the Menorah Society in 1929⁸⁶ and dedicated its first home in March, 1930. This building was a big brick house located at 1712 Rio Grande, south and west of campus. In January, 1932, this building burned and

the Hillel moved into some rooms above the Texas Theatre in the 2200 block of Guadalupe, on the west edge of the campus.⁸⁷ The Hillel was organized as a joint project of Temple Beth Israel and the B'nai B'rith, with the rabbi of the Temple to serve also as Director of Hillel. Rabbi Jacob J. Weinstein was the first Hillel director, and although he served only one year, he was quite popular with the students.⁸⁸

Most of the Austin Jews of college age went to the University of Texas, primarily for financial reasons. Only the very rich or the very brilliant could afford to go away to school.⁸⁹ It was a goal for most Jewish families to send their children to college;⁹⁰ indeed, Leopold Littman came to Austin because he had heard that there was a university in the town.⁹¹ Many of the children of Jewish families, including those who had recently arrived from Poland and Russia, went to the University at least for a while, and many graduated. Most of the men went into the School of Business and later joined their fathers in the family business. Women frequently studied to be teachers or went to business college, as did some of Leopold Littman's daughters.⁹²

There was a very active social life at the University, and much of it centered around the Jewish fraternities and sororities, once they were organized. Most of the Jewish students from Austin pledged such an organization, as did most Jews at the University, primarily because it was the thing to do.⁹³ By 1927 three Jewish fraternities, Phi Sigma Delta, Sigma Alpha Mu, and Tau Delta Phi, and one sorority, Alpha Epsilon Phi, had

been organized.⁹⁴ Jews were not allowed to join Gentile fraternities or sororities, but this restriction was accepted as an extension of social anti-Semitism and something to be expected. There were many parties given by the different groups, and it was not until the 1930s that the Hillel Foundation became the center for the social life on campus.⁹⁵

In general, both the students and the faculty at the University of Texas were much closer to the Austin Jewish community in this period of time than they were to become later, particularly after World War II.⁹⁶ This is a general trend, and it reflects the fact that Jews observed more of their religious traditions then and consequently would seek out the company of other Jews to celebrate the holidays. Also, the lack of a Hillel Foundation until the very end of this period meant that the students had no place to go to celebrate religious festivals that was affiliated with the University. Therefore, if they wished to meet to worship, either for the Sabbath or other holidays, they had to go to the Temple or the Shul or to congregants' homes if they could not return to their own homes.

In addition to Congregation Agudas Achim, the Menorah Society, and the Hillel Foundation, a number of minor Jewish groups were organized between 1900 and 1930, most of which lasted only a short while. In 1906 the Harmony Club was organized. It was probably a social club for men, because all the officers were men, although nothing is known about it. In 1907 Sol Davis was elected President, Max Davis Treasurer, and M. Berman Secretary. That same year the Jewish community organized a Zionist group,

the Workers of Zion, which was affiliated with the Federation of American Zionist Societies. The Workers of Zion elected Lydia Littman Secretary in 1907.⁹⁷ In 1907 the Benevolent Society was organized. Its purpose was to help Jewish immigrants in Austin who needed money to travel to their new homes. Dues were fifty cents the first month and twenty-five cents each following month. Joe Koen and Moses Davis took care of all such cases. In 1914 this group became affiliated with the United Hebrew Charities, a national group to consolidate all such efforts.⁹⁸

By 1908 a Jewish Students Literary Society had been organized, but nothing else is known about this group. It might have been a University organization. By 1910 the Talmud Torah Society had been formed, with Marion Levy as President. The next year Nathalie Dalkowitz of San Antonio is listed as Secretary, an indication that this group was based on campus. San Antonio had a larger Jewish community than Austin, and it is unlikely that anyone from San Antonio would be involved with an Austin organization unless she were a student at the University of Texas. In 1915 the women of the community organized the Ladies Guild. By 1919 it had forty-nine members, and that year Mrs. Henry Michelson served as President and Della Koen, daughter of Joe Koen, as Secretary. In 1919 Mrs. Emil Seelig was elected President, and Mrs. Sam Greenburg Secretary-Treasurer of the Ladies Cemetery Association.⁹⁹ By 1930 the Women's Auxiliary of Congregation Agudas Achim had been organized, although the founding date is unknown.¹⁰⁰

There is little evidence that any of these groups lasted more than a few years. There is no further record or memory of any of the groups besides the Benevolent Society, the Ladies Guild, the Menorah Society, and the Women's Auxiliary. Out of the Benevolent Association developed the Austin Jewish Federation,¹⁰¹ which subsequently became the Jewish Community Council of Austin and devoted much of its efforts towards raising money for Israel and other charities.¹⁰² The Council of Jewish Women superseded the Ladies Guild sometime before 1924.¹⁰³ The Menorah Society was active for a number of years and eventually gave way to the Hillel Foundation.¹⁰⁴ The Women's Auxiliary developed into the Sisterhood of Congregation Agudas Achim. It is characteristic of Jews to try to organize for any and every purpose imaginable, a tendency which accounts for the plethora of Jewish organizations across the United States. Austin has a long history of diverse Jewish groups, often more groups than the community can support. The small size of the community is probably the reason these organizations lasted such a short time. Another contributing factor may well have been that their purposes sometimes overlapped with other groups. For example, the Ladies Cemetery Association had as its main goal the maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery, but that task was also taken care of by the Temple with assistance probably from the ladies group at Beth Israel. A town with only five hundred Jews, which means approximately one hundred twenty-five families, could not support two congregations, two ladies groups affiliated with the congregations, a B'nai B'rith lodge, and five or six other groups.

There simply were not enough people to go around, and above all there were not enough people willing to take roles of leadership and responsibility to run all these groups. Consequently, the groups of lesser importance fell by the wayside of necessity.

In general, the Jews of Austin observed more religious customs during this period than they would after World War II. Most of the Jews attended all Sabbath and holiday services, and many of the Orthodox went to Minyan frequently. Also, many Jews practiced most of the home rituals associated with Jewish holidays. The services in both congregations were very similar to those of the 1970s, although a higher percentage of people came to each service then than now.¹⁰⁵ Most people, including those who belonged to the Temple, walked to Sabbath services.¹⁰⁶ Of course, it was much easier to do this then because everyone lived fairly close to the present downtown area and both synagogues were located in that area. Families were assigned pews in the Temple with their name on them. The Temple would threaten to take away peoples' pews if they had not paid their dues by the High Holidays, but it never did this.¹⁰⁷ The Temple had Saturday morning services regularly during this period,¹⁰⁸ a practice which has since been discarded due to poor attendance. Everyone went regularly to the Temple every time anything went on there, whether it was a religious observance or not.¹⁰⁹ The Temple did not have Bar Mitzvahs during the early part of the twentieth century¹¹⁰ because Bar Mitzvah was not a ritual adhered to by Reform Judaism then. Confirmation was celebrated every year in May or June. Most families, including the Reform

families, cleaned house for Pesach. This is just one example of the greater observance of ritual in the home that was prevalent then. Sabbath candles were always lit, and most Orthodox and some of the Reform families kept Kosher.¹¹¹ The Reform families tended to be less strict about keeping the dietary laws, and their efforts were usually limited to eating no pork and other prohibited food; little attempt was made to procure Kosher meats by most of the Reform Jews.¹¹²

Congregation Agudas Achim had Saturday morning Sabbath services as well as daily Minyans. They had no trouble getting the required ten men for any service because the men could be gathered from their businesses on East Sixth Street. The Orthodox congregation did celebrate Bar Mitzvah,¹¹³ but they had no separate Confirmation because the only religious school met at the Temple. The Orthodox Jews were more religiously observant then than now, and of course they observed more traditions than the Reform Jews of that period. The major reason for their higher degree of observance then than now was the fact that most of the Orthodox families were fairly recent immigrants from Europe. Consequently they were much closer to the Shtetls with their intensely Jewish society and culture.¹¹⁴ Services in the 1920s were much the same as they are now, although there was more Hebrew and in all likelihood more of the congregants understood the Hebrew.¹¹⁵ There was no ordained rabbi at the Shul until after 1930, and Bernard Tannenbaum served as its religious leader during some of this period. Originally, people held Minyan in their homes and businesses; but with the purchase of a permanent building, the services were transferred to the Synagogue.¹¹⁶

By the end of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Austin Jewish community had changed its nature to that of a complete community. Enough eastern European Jews had come to Austin to organize their own Orthodox congregation. Temple Beth Israel joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and adopted many of its present customs and rituals, including using the Union Prayerbook, having everyone rise for the Kaddish prayer, and not wearing yarmulkes. Jewish student life at the University of Texas had become organized: fraternities and sororities satisfied the social aspects of campus life, and first the Menorah Society and then the Hillel Foundation took care of the cultural and religious aspects. Although a rift appeared between the Reform and Orthodox Jews, the community remained unified for many purposes and continued its good relations with the Gentile community. This situation was to remain largely unchanged for twenty years.

TWO DECADES OF SLOW GROWTH (1930-1950)

In the period roughly from the beginning of the Depression to the beginning of the Cold War, the life of the Austin Jewish community changed little. The number of Jews slowly increased, but there were no dramatic gains until the last few years of this period, particularly since immigration had been curtailed, both by law and by the Depression. The population of Austin grew from 53,118 in 1930¹ to 153,459 in 1950.²

Social life remained much the same as it had been before 1930.³ Especially because of the Depression, visiting became a very important part of the social scene, since it was inexpensive. Relations between the two congregations remained about the same, with the split in their social activities also remaining unchanged for the most part. The social scene was still religiously mixed in some areas, especially for the children, whose friends from school were largely Gentile. Social life in this respect still centered around the neighborhood.

Religious observance remained much as it had been earlier in the century.⁴ There was a strong emphasis on observance, sparked by the closeness of many of the Orthodox Jews to the strongly Jewish culture of Europe in which they were raised. People still walked to services, both at Temple and Shul, and regular attendance was the rule. The community had not grown

enough to support more than one Sunday School until after World War II, and the Temple remained the major formal source of Jewish education in Austin until then. The Temple still did not celebrate Bar Mitzvahs, but only Confirmation, while the Shul, not having its own religious school for most of these twenty years, celebrated Bar Mitzvahs but not Confirmation.

Rabbi Samuel Halevi Baron was the first Rabbi at the Temple in the 1930s, arriving at that pulpit in the first year of the decade.⁵ Baron was a scholarly man and was elected President of the Texas Kallah of Rabbis in 1933.⁶ He was active as the Director of the Hillel Foundation. The Board of Directors of the Austin Community Chest elected him Chairman in 1933 while he was serving as Vice-President of the Central Council of Social Agencies of Austin.⁷ Rabbi Baron championed the cause of equal rights for minority groups.

In 1935 Temple Beth Israel had a monthly pulpit exchange program whereby Rabbi Baron and another rabbi exchanged congregations for one Sabbath service. It is not known how long this lasted or how many other rabbis were involved in the exchange. However, in April of that year Rabbi Rosinger of Beaumont, Texas conducted services in Austin while Rabbi Baron went to Beaumont for the Sabbath.⁸

Rabbi Abraham Vossen Goodman succeeded Baron in October, 1935. Goodman served for six years and "profoundly impressed the young men and women of the University and the Congregation."⁹ In the summer of 1938, the Colonial Dames of Texas awarded Goodman a \$300 prize for several chapters of his thesis "Jewish

Rights in Colonial America." Goodman prepared this thesis for his Ph. D. degree from the University of Chicago.¹⁰ In 1940 the women's organization formally became the Temple Sisterhood when it affiliated itself with the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.¹¹

In the fall of 1941 Rabbi Newton Friedman, from Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, came to Austin. At this time the Temple had eighty-nine dues-paying members. Since most members were men with families, the total membership was 360 to 400 people. The Shul was still very small at this time, so it is easy to see that there had been little growth in the community since the end of the 1920s, when there were about five hundred Jews in Austin.¹² The outbreak of World War II caused a drop in the Jewish enrollment at the University and the entrance of a number of Austin's Jews into the armed forces. The whole community was active in the war effort. Jews loaned a Torah to Camp Hood in Killeen, north of Austin, bought war bonds for the Temple as well as for private citizens, and furnished hospitality for Jewish soldiers from the many bases in central Texas. The Jewish Welfare Board was especially active in this work, with Milton Smith as its chairman. Mrs. Sam Greenburg and Mr. and Mrs. Morse Fichtenbaum were also active in these efforts.

In 1943 Joe Koen presented the Congregation with an Ark in memory of his wife Justine. Koen died on February 3, 1944, and his death is recorded in the Temple minutes as a "grievous loss." Mr. Louis I. Goldberg, who had served as a trustee from 1932 to 1941, Second Vice-President until 1943, and then First

Vice-President, was elected to succeed Joe Koen as President. While Goldberg was President, the Temple adopted a new constitution to meet changed conditions. By this time the Temple had grown to ninety-five regular members, twenty-three cemetery members, and thirteen members in the armed forces. This made a total of one hundred thirty-one members, or between four and five hundred people.

In the spring of 1945 Temple Beth Israel had grown so large that it could no longer share a Rabbi with the Hillel Foundation, and everyone considered it best to separate the two organizations. In this year Rabbi Baron returned to the pulpit at the Temple. Elconan Saulson, who had been head of the United Service Organization-National Jewish Welfare Board in Austin, was appointed temporary Hillel Director. He remained a very popular and outspoken director for about fifteen years. He was very active in the field of civil rights for Negroes. Saulson retired at the age of seventy and still lives in Austin with his wife.¹³ In 1946 the Temple elected William Koen, son of Joe Koen, President. The next year Rabbi Bertram Klausner came to Austin, where he was Rabbi of Temple Beth Israel for five years.

The slow growth of the Temple eventually made it necessary to add rooms onto the religious school portion of the structure. David Bassist and Milton Smith obtained bids on the necessary construction. With the help of Dr. Ettlinger, who was Religious School Chairman at the time, and "a large number of willing workers," they raised \$5000 and the additional rooms were constructed.

The Sunday School first used these rooms in the fall of 1947. In that year Congregation Agudas Achim decided to operate its own religious school. The decision was based on the increasing number of children in their Congregation. Thus the long years of a shared religious education for all Jewish children in Austin came to an end. This was the situation when Rabbi Klausner came to Austin. The community and the Temple were posed on the brink of a dramatic increase in size and membership. From 1947 to 1951, Temple Beth Israel increased its membership by about twenty-five per cent, adding fifty-seven new families to its rolls.

During the last years of the forties, Temple Beth Israel greatly expanded the curriculum of its Religious School to include the study of Hebrew through the prayers, the use of audio-visual equipment, and a program of Jewish arts and crafts. The Temple purchased a sound movie projector and a turntable. The Bernice Marks Frank Memorial Fund contributed a portable record player and slide projector in 1948. That year Joel Simon and Mrs. Louis Hirschfield presented the Temple with the Bella and Mose Simon Memorial Library in memory of their parents. This library was originally designated as a childrens' library. In the school year 1950-51, the Temple established the Joe Koen Nursery School for three and four year old children. Equipment for this school was bought with funds bequeathed to Temple Beth Israel in the will of Joe Koen.¹⁴

From 1930 to 1950 Congregation Agudas Achim also continued to grow. The main task facing its members was to pay off the

mortgage they had on the Synagogue.¹⁵ The Congregation formed committees to solicit funds, and they contacted parents of University students who used the Synagogue on the holidays and the Sabbath. They obtained the final pledges in the fall of 1937 and paid off the mortgage on January 21, 1938. Rabbi Harold Katz arrived in the 1930s and became the first ordained rabbi at the Shul.

In 1933 Agudas Achim took one more step to provide complete religious services to its members and purchased a tract of land in the Austin Memorial Park for its own cemetery, with the option to buy more land at a later date. Early in October, 1938, this land was sadly put to use when Israel Cohn, who had served as President of the Congregation since 1924, died.¹⁶ Agudas Achim elected Jim Novy, the charter Vice-President, to succeed Cohn, and the members voted to limit their presidents to a two year term "to insure a continuous flow of leadership and progress."¹⁷

Congregation Agudas Achim responded to the challenge of the World War much as did the Temple. They loaned Bergstrom Air Force Base, just south of Austin, a Torah, and the Congregation held a continuous open house at the Synagogue to make the servicemen feel welcome. On September 1, 1946, Joel DeKoven became Rabbi of the Shul. DeKoven graduated from the Hebrew Theological Seminary in Chicago in 1940. He was an "ardent Zionist" and conducted services in a Conservative manner with youth participation and readings in English.¹⁸

The Congregation felt the pressures of growth throughout this period, especially with an increasing number of young people in the Congregation. In order to provide a service that would be more attractive to these young members, and perhaps liking DeKoven's services, in 1948 the Shul voted to become a Conservative congregation and affiliate itself with the United Synagogues of America, the governing body for Conservative Synagogues. That year Rabbi Benson Skoff came to Austin as Agudas Achim's first Conservative rabbi. Skoff served for five years.¹⁹

The major area of growth for the Austin Jewish community came at the University. The Hillel was established in its first quarters in March, 1930, at 1712 Rio Grande. In January, 1932, this structure burned and temporary quarters were set up above the Texas Theatre in the 2200 block of Guadalupe.²⁰ At this time three Jewish fraternities and one sorority were on campus. Zeta Beta Tau was organized by 1932 but lasted only a few years.²¹ By the end of the decade another fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi, and two sororities, Delta Phi Epsilon and Sigma Delta Tau, had been organized.²² Three hundred twenty-five Jews were enrolled at the University in 1933.²³ Many activities went on at the Hillel, everything from stunt shows, plays, and meetings of Akuvah, the American Student Zionist Federation, to athletic teams for intramural competition and semi-annual fund-raising dances. In the spring of 1933 Dr. Leon conducted Hebrew classes twice weekly and Rabbi Baron conducted a Bible class Monday evenings. In 1929, when the Hillel at the University was organized, there were only seven other Hillels in the United States.²⁴

A great deal of social activity centered around the Hillel early in the 1930s. However, later in the decade the Greeks, who have been described as somewhat snobby, began to boycott the Hillel and it became the gathering place for the out of state Jewish students, whom the Greeks looked down on.²⁵ The majority of Austin Jewish students joined a fraternity or sorority, but no one group particularly attracted Austinites.²⁶ One ex-student has characterized the fraternities as to the general types of people they attracted as members. Tau Delta Phis were the best dancers and gave the best parties, although they were the poorest fraternity. The Phi Sigma Deltas were from the good, old families and were very starchy. The Sigma Alpha Mus were just good old boys.²⁷ This description compares favorably with the analysis of fraternity membership in the South done by Theodore Lowi in his study of Iron City entitled "Southern Jews, the Two Communities."²⁸ He states that Zeta Beta Tau and Phi Epsilon Pi attract members from older, upper class families. Phi Sigma Delta, a much smaller fraternity nationally than Zeta Beta Tau, which explains why Lowi did not mention it, attracted similar members. Tau Delta Phi and Alpha Epsilon Pi were for the newer Jewish families and the Yankees, while Sigma Alpha Mu and Pi Lambda Phi were for the "nice Southern boys and the better class Yankees." That Tau Delta Phi was the poorest fraternity fits in with its members being from newer families and from the North, since it was cheaper for some out of state students to attend the University of Texas than their own home state universities.

University students still went to the Temple and Shul for the Sabbath and holidays, since the Hillel did not hold services.²⁹ In fact, Temple Beth Israel held all-student services annually, beginning in 1932. These services were usually held in April to coincide with Hillel Week on campus,³⁰ although it is not known how long this practice continued. Orthodox and Conservative students still attended Agudas Achim for services. The practice of inviting students into homes for holiday meals and the Seder continued during the 1930s and 1940s. Families often gave invitations to fraternity brothers and sorority sisters of their children.³¹ Until the Hillel Foundation got its own director in 1945, a close tie existed between the Jewish students at the University and the Austin Jewish community. This tie was especially close with the Temple because it shared its rabbi with the Hillel.³²

After the Hillel separated from the Temple, the quarters over the Texas Theatre became inadequate for the increasing number of Jewish students on campus. Dr. Ettlinger and others raised about \$225,000 around the state to build a new Hillel Foundation. They purchased land at 2105 San Antonio, west of campus, and in 1950 the new structure was completed. Members held services in the lobby of the building around pipes and lumber while the building was still being erected.³³

In general, very little happened in the Austin Jewish community in the thirties and forties to affect people's lives. The community increased in size slowly, but the Depression and then World War II effectively put a damper on many activities of the

congregations. But the stage had been set for the spectacular growth that was to come to the Austin Jewish community in the quarter century following the World War. The Temple added rooms to its religious school, an action that foreshadowed its eventual decision to leave that structure and construct a new Synagogue in 1957.³⁴ The Shul had started its own Sunday School and had become affiliated with the Conservative branch of Judaism, thus completing its evolution towards its present status. It, too, was to find it necessary to move to newer quarters, making the move in 1963.³⁵ The Hillel had its own director and a new structure and was prepared for the large number of Jewish students that were to come to the University of Texas. The separation of the Hillel from the Temple was a forerunner of the general separation of the University Jewish community from that of Austin, signified by the decreasing percentage of professors who are active and even affiliated with either congregation,³⁶ as well as a drift away from home hospitality for large numbers of Jewish students for the religious holidays.³⁷

During the first century of the Austin Jewish community, first the German and then the eastern European Jews got settled in Austin and began their own congregations. Each congregation adopted many changes in an attempt to stay modern and retain its appeal for new members. The community recognized early the importance of a Jewish environment and education and established a religious school at the Temple. This step was mirrored by the many student organizations at the University, culminating first in the Menorah Society and then in the Hillel Foundation.

In general, the Austin Jewish community remained a typical Southern Jewish community. As one member of the community stated, the Austin community is and has always been "non-descript."³⁸

NOTES

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4. Interview with Sol Ginsburg, March 6, 1974.

5. Interview with Sam Winetroub.

6. Headstone of Louis Novy, buried in Agudas Achim Cemetery; Jim and Louis Novy, Biography file, Austin-Travis County Collection, the Austin Public Library.

7. Interview with Dave Novy, April 17, 1974.

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13. Interview with Mrs. Ted Lipson, April, 1974.
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15. Interview with Dave Novy.
16. Interview with Sam Winetroub.
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19. The American Israelite, 28 September 1877.
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30 (1928-29):109.
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26. Interview with Dave Novy.
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32. Interview with Dr. H. J. Ettlinger, February 12 and 28, 1974.

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