I have long thought of the archives of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM) as a vast treasure trove. Stored in the Lyle Berman Archives at the Eloise and Elliot Kaplan Family Jewish History Center and in the caverns of the Elmer L. Andersen Library at the University of Minnesota is an enormous cache of materials illuminating the Jewish history of this region — its origins, its geographic stretch, and the development of its varied communities. This issue of the journal *Upper Midwest Jewish History* draws upon that wealth of information — much of it in the form of personal accounts — to animate the people, places, and issues that shaped our culture here.

The focus in these pages is on the following four areas, each of which illustrates, through specific examples, the challenges met by and accomplishments of Jews who settled in parts of Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Wisconsin:

— the movement of Jews into the region, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and their reactions to the environment, to their neighbors, and to economic opportunities;
— the various responses Jews encountered when they arrived in an area where institutions such as synagogues and trained Jewish professionals were often lacking;
— the creative ways Jews established communal institutions and then confronted the inevitable conflicts that ensued — conflicts that both caused fissures and allowed for eventual reconciliation; and
— the various attitudes toward and methods of dealing with anti-Semitism in the 1930s and 1940s, and with the challenge of settling and integrating Jews who began arriving from the Soviet Union in the late 1970s.

Needless to say, this issue of the journal is not intended to be a complete history of Jewish life in the region. Rather, it presents previously unpublished or little-known material — including memoirs, letters, oral histories, Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service correspondence and studies, and institutional minutes — all of which highlight Jewish development in the Upper Midwest. As guest editor, I have divided the material among seven chapters; each one speaks to the four general topics under consideration.
PRIVILEGED AND NOT SO PRIVILEGED
Myriad individuals — some well known and others forgotten, some wealthy and others scraping by, some acculturated and others living in a world between cultures — have contributed to more than one hundred fifty years of rich Jewish history in the Upper Midwest.

GREATER MINNESOTA
Experiences described here and in the following Dakotas section would no doubt seem exotic to many Jews living on the East or West coasts. Farming, peddling goods to lumberjacks, raising children in towns with few Jewish inhabitants, worrying about the proximity of forest fires — these hardly typify American Jewish life in, say, New York or Los Angeles.

THE DAKOTAS
This chapter, which examines Jewish life on farms and in small towns in North and South Dakota, introduces readers to three noteworthy German Jews. One recognized the value of offering credit for automobile purchases, another rescued numerous relatives from Germany before World War II, and the third was a shrewd, well-connected eccentric.

URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS
Although Minneapolis and St. Paul might have lacked the density and drama that once characterized New York’s Lower East Side, several Twin Cities neighborhoods served the same purpose — as way stations between shtetl life and suburbia. The largest was Minneapolis’s North Side, but there also were the smaller Romanian-Jewish enclave of the South Side as well as those of St. Paul’s West Side and Capitol City areas.

A significant difference between East Coast and Upper Midwest Jewish neighborhoods was that the latter were never so thickly populated as to preclude interaction with non-Jews. Furthermore, the Twin Cities Jewish population was not as singularly proletarian as that of the East Coast, which was a center, for example, of the garment industry. As a result, the socialist Workmen’s Circle failed to flourish in Minnesota’s main urban hub.

CREATING COMMUNITY
How did budding Jewish communities organize themselves for religious, philanthropic, educational, political, and social service purposes? How did they meet and fund emerging needs? This chapter describes how several institutions and organizations were established, mainly in the early and mid-twentieth century, to answer these and other pressing questions posed by growing and changing Jewish communities.

CONTESTING COMMUNITY
Conflicts inevitably arise as communities evolve. A little-known but most interesting example here was the post–World War II struggle between radical elements and the Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service over who would collect funds to support the largely Jewish Soviet Republic of Birobidjan and which organization should be trusted to distribute those funds. Another was the Federation’s long-running debate about funding and oversight of the Hachnosses Orchim, which provided temporary shelter for Jews passing through the area.

Controversy and conflict are endemic to all communities, so it is no surprise that we as a people continue to grapple with difficult, even divisive issues. Today, two of the most problematic questions are: Who should serve in the rabbinate? And, What constitutes support of Israel?

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO OUTSIDE FORCES
Over time, anti-Semitism, emanating both from beyond the Upper Midwest and within its boundaries, has profoundly affected our communities. The ongoing, seemingly intractable Israeli-Palestinian situation prompts heated debate among Jews, especially some younger ones who question various aspects of Zionism. A selection from the vast files of the Minnesota Action Committee for Soviet Jewry, included here to shed light on a different but equally complex issue, concludes this final chapter.
Although many of the sources I rely upon here brim with wonderful anecdotes and valuable information, they often also contain fractured English and, particularly in the oral histories, rambling commentaries. In the most unruly cases, I took the liberty of smoothing out the English and reordering the narrative so that readers could more easily follow the story being conveyed. I also added individual words or phrases in brackets but only when I felt doing so would improve readability. I did the same when it came to clarifying Hebrew and Yiddish terms and family relationships.

It’s my hope that readers will both enjoy and learn from this issue of the journal. Perhaps these pages will help them better appreciate the rich Jewish history of this region, how it differs from the corresponding histories of the East and West coasts, and how it involves much more than the familiar focus on anti-Semitism. I also hope that this issue of Upper Midwest Jewish History will encourage more people and institutions to donate materials to the JHSUM archives; this is the best means of guaranteeing that Jewish life in the Upper Midwest will continue to be recorded and remembered.

I owe considerable thanks to JHSUM Executive Director Katherine Tane, for allowing me to share these treasures with our readers; to Susan Hoffman and Julie Tarshish, for their tireless efforts in tracking down information, often following the barest of trails; and to Andrea Bergman, for tenaciously seeking the most appropriate photographs to illustrate the stories being told. Manuscript editor Phil Freshman (assisted by Susan C. Jones) asked probing questions and untangled my prose. Craig Davidson created the apt and appealing graphic design for this issue.

I am also grateful to Charles Gramling of Lindstrom, Minnesota, for unearthing the fascinating story of Isaac Bernheimer, early Minnesota’s largest absentee Jewish landowner, and sharing it with us. Thanks go as well to Dr. Brian Krasnow, for bringing to my attention the material on Moses Zimmerman, an important St. Paul entrepreneur around the time of World War I; and to Joe Rozenberg, for ably translating the Yiddish bylaws of St. Paul’s Agudas Achim congregation. Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use material for which the JHSUM does not hold clear title. Finally, I am ever mindful of all those who, through membership and other donations, have supported the mission of the JHSUM — to promote the vitality and continuity of Jewish culture in our region through preservation, interpretation, and education.

— LMS
Whether written in the third person or the first person, the following selections describe economic success and the problems that can accompany it. They also touch upon homesickness, discouragement, and personal achievement, and they offer us glimpses of immigrants’ efforts to become integrated into American society as well as into the Jewish community.

ISAAC BERNHEIMER

Through a diligent search of landholding records, territorial newspapers, and other sources, Charles Gramling, who became interested in the history of Chisago County, Minnesota, after moving to the area for business reasons, unearthed valuable information related to Isaac Bernheimer and shared his findings with the jhsum. Following is an excerpt from a pair of articles Gramling wrote for Town Topics, the Chisago City newsletter, in February 2005 and January 2006. Bernheimer, who was born in Jebenhausen, Wurttemberg, in 1813, immigrated to the United States in 1836, and died in New York City in 1893, owned a great deal of property in Minnesota and, as a result, played a role in the state’s economic development.

Although he never visited the state, Isaac Bernheimer was an important land speculator in Minnesota. He owned over 6,000 acres in Chisago County alone as well as significant acreage in Ramsey, Hennepin, Dakota, Anoka, Sherburne, Washington, Lake, Kanabec, Pine, and Goodhue Counties. His holdings totaled 15,000 acres.

Along with his brother-in-law, Simon Arnold, he developed Chisago City, building a hotel, grist and lumber mills and a general store. He was successful in his efforts to establish a post office in 1856, and his company, Bernheimer & Company, was responsible for early roads in Chisago County. Indeed he was so successful that in 1862 he paid almost 12 percent of the county’s taxes.

While there is no evidence that Bernheimer, a successful clothier and dry
good merchant in New York, ever traveled west, . . . Simon Arnold came here several times. Correspondence between Arnold and Ignatius Donnelly, [who was] an early populist and the founder of Nininger, a utopian community near Hastings, exists.

MOSES ZIMMERMAN

The following profile is based on material drawn from articles in the *St. Paul Dispatch* (January 18, 1912), the *Minneapolis Journal* (September 25, 1912), and the *St. Paul Daily News* (July 23, 1922).

Moses Zimmerman was born in Davenport, Iowa, in 1865. His family moved to St. Paul about sixteen years later. He started work as a bootblack and drifted into buying and selling horses, primarily in Minneapolis. His big break came when O. G. Goodrich, president of the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, hired him as a buyer of horses for the streetcar system. In 1894 Zimmerman formed a partnership with John D. Barrett, a dealer in horses and mules. Shortly thereafter, the pair moved to St. Paul, where they established a large stable at the intersection of University and Prior avenues.

An entrepreneur from an early age, Zimmerman made his first killing selling binding twine that he had purchased at a fire-sale auction in 1891. As he recounted, he had brought a horse to sell to the Minneapolis Fire Department. While it was being tried out by being hitched to a veteran fire horse, the alarm rang, and off Zimmerman and the fireman galloped to the scene of the fire. The blaze was in the warehouse where the twine was stored. At the auction, Zimmerman ascertained from a farmer that the twine was still perfectly good for binding grain. Knowing this was the harvest season and that the twine was needed, Zimmerman bid his entire savings of $1,800. He made $30,000 from the sale of the twine.

Horse-trading, however, was his main business. He and Barrett shipped horses and mules across the Northwest and into Canada to be used in lumbering and railroad building. During World War I, the firm sold animals to both the American and British governments, at one point earning $1,000,000 a month, according to Zimmerman. The firm invested some of this money in real estate, purchasing cutover lumber land in the Upper Midwest and farms in Montana.

In 1922 Zimmerman and several others invested in an oilfield in Montana, purchasing 320 acres for $5,200. According to the *St. Paul Daily News* in July of that year, he and his partners sold the option for $60,000.

Also in 1922, a spectacular fire wiped out the Zimmerman and Barrett stables and an adjacent lumberyard. All that remains of their establishment today is a
modest two-story building on the southeast corner of University and Prior bearing the Zimmerman name over its door.

A member of St. Paul’s Mount Zion congregation, Zimmerman lived on Summit Avenue.

BERNARD BECCHOEFER

The following account, focused on St. Paul in the early twentieth century, vividly portrays the schisms within the city’s German-Jewish community as well as the contempt German Jews often felt for Eastern European Jews. It also offers evidence supporting the notion that relations between St. Paul’s Jews and Catholics were amicable. The account is drawn from Bernard Bechhoefer’s tellingly titled 1987 reminiscence, “On the Periphery.” The author, who was born in 1904 and became an attorney, felt that his father never received the respect of local Jewish businessmen that, as a well-educated professional, he deserved.

In my childhood we were always the poor people on the right side of the tracks. We were supposed to cater to the wealthy families no matter how stupid they were. In those days in a demeaning way, they called my father “judge” until he actually became a judge, when they stopped calling him judge. As a child, I vowed to become the wealthiest member of “our crowd,” and except for Edythe Goodkind, who married Lessing Rosenwald, and Edythe’s mother, who as a widow married the widower Julius Rosenwald (both Rosenwald and his son served as chairmen of Sears Roebuck), I succeeded.

Rabbi [Isaac] Rypins [spiritual leader of St. Paul’s Mount Zion congregation from 1899 to 1921] had no use for East European Jews, and even refused to attend the dedication ceremonies of Temple of Aaron, only two blocks from Mount Zion [in 1916]. Rabbi Rypins had three sons: Stanley, Harold, and Russell. Stanley was brilliant and a Rhodes Scholar but politically a radical and vocal Socialist. Russell was less brilliant but equally an advocate of left-wing causes.

After many years, when Rabbi Rypins was an old man, the congregation refused to renew his contract — a terrible thing to do, which Rabbi [Gunther] Plaut deals with in his history of St. Paul Jewry [Jews in Minnesota: The First Seventy-five Years, 1959]. The reason for dismissing Rabbi Rypins was the fear that the radicalism of his children would disturb the close relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities. This was the same reason underlying the prejudices of the German Jews against the East European Jews.

The prejudices against [Eastern] European Jews continued until the advent of Hitler. My wonderful wife, [Estelle,] whose ancestors were German and Austrian,
while at Wellesley College developed an interest in art. She was particularly attracted to Georgia O’Keeffe and [Wassily] Kandinsky. We could not afford [to purchase works by] O’Keeffe at that time [, but] we could afford Kandinsky paintings. My stepmother forbade our buying Kandinsky because people might think Estelle was Russian.

My father, Judge Charles Bechhoefer, arrived in St. Paul on July 4, 1885. He was the first Jewish lawyer in St. Paul. At that time, there was a close relationship between the German Jews and the Catholics, largely due to two remarkable men: Rabbi Horwitz [actually, Rabbi Judah Wechsler] of the Mount Zion congregation and Bishop, later Archbishop, [John] Ireland. The two had raised funds for the immigration of impoverished Irish farmers and [of] persecuted Russian and Polish Jews to the United States, where they would establish homesteads in South Dakota. I do not know how successful the venture was, but the goodwill continued over the years . . . .

My father was the real estate attorney for the Catholic archdiocese. When he was named a judge, his most effective support came from Pierce Butler [, who was] later a U.S. Supreme Court Justice. When I returned from Harvard in 1929 to practice law, it was a foregone conclusion that I would become a partner in O’Brien, Horn, and Stringer, attorneys for the Catholic archdiocese. Since I had had a course in Roman law, which was practically the same as canon law, and the firm was bewildered when canon law problems arose, Judge O’Brien decided that I should deal with the priests. However, he insisted that I should have a thorough knowledge of Jewish history before I took that duty. I sat up until about two in the morning studying [Heinrich] Graetz and [Simon] Dubnow [both of whom wrote comprehensive histories of the Jewish people], and probably since my chief talents turned out to be as a historian, I managed to digest them. As Judge O’Brien predicted, the priests would take me to lunch and question me about Jewish history.

**BERTHA WEISKOPF**

Here a mother responds to her daughter (Annalee Weiskopf Wolff, Wellesley, Class of 1908), who evidently wrote about her troubles with perceived anti-Semitism at college.

*Minneapolis, Nov. [n.d.]*

My darling Annalee,

When I received your private letter the other day, I intended to answer immediately, as it troubled me a good deal, but something always kept me from it. . . .

I can see how unhappy these things make you, dearie, but in the first place you exaggerate them I am sure, and in the second place “what of it.” How trifling after all is the neglect of a few thoughtless girls when you consider the real and great things of life, the love and respect of your own dear ones and the staunch friends that you are sure of. You have your old friends from last year and your few Jewish friends. What do you care for the rest[?] But I am sure that things are not as bad as you believe them to be. You are over sensitive and the more you imagine that people are unfriendly to you the colder and more reserved you get.

I think you made a great mistake to room alone. Can you not try to get a nice room-mate yet?

*Your own dear Mother*

**THE JEWISH STUDY CIRCLE**

Benjamin M. Hirschman took these meeting notes in the fall of 1905 to record the founding of the Jewish Study Circle at St. Paul’s Mount Zion Temple. “Miss Hess” was Julia Hess, daughter of the temple’s former rabbi, Emanuel Hess, who had served from 1888 to 1899. Despite its collectively expressed wish “to bind the Jews of all classes” together, the study group was open only to young adults whose families were congregants. The second entry indicates that members of the group were studying the role of women in Judaism.

*St. Paul, Oct. 31, 1905*

Pursuant to call issued by Miss Hess, L. R. Frankel, Benj. Calmenson, H. D. Frankel and B. M. Hirschman, about forty-five young Jewish Ladies and Gentlemen assembled in the Sunday School rooms of the “Temple” to perfect an organization for the purpose of studying leading questions pertaining to the Jew of the past and present . . . .

Several ladies and gentlemen were called upon to express their views of the proposed organization. Uniformity of opinion existing that the time was ripe for such a gathering which would create a revival of interest in Judaism [sic] and tend to bind the Jews of all classes into a more perfect union of harmony and good fellowship.

*Nov. 14, 1905*

Miss Hess our worthy leader read a most interesting and valuable paper on “Women among the Jews.” After which various members joined in the talk taking different sides of the question.

A most delightful evening was spent to the great benefit of all present.
Howard Brin was born in Minneapolis in December 1919, to Fanny and Arthur Brin, both leaders in the local Jewish community. Although Howard’s mother had received a university education, his father, a successful glass manufacturer, had not. Here is one of the autobiographical sketches that Brin, who died in 1988, wrote over the years for his children and grandchildren and compiled in several notebooks.

**OFF TO COLLEGE**
In September of 1937 I set off by train on a momentous journey from Minneapolis to Boston for my freshman year at Harvard. My father conveniently found a meeting in Boston at that time which he obviously “had to attend.” I didn’t realize how much this adventure meant to him too but for different reasons. He had had to drop out of school in eighth grade in order to help support his family, and I think he always felt at a disadvantage among the people he normally associated with. . . . Then, too, this was a mark of his economic achievement to be able to send his son away to college — and not any college either! But Harvard! I’m sure he had other emotions surging through him, but being Arthur, he kept them pretty tightly bottled up.

In any event, we set off on the day train to Chicago, and had to change stations in order to continue our journey. When we got to the second station, Dad saw someone he thought he recognized. He said, “Isn’t that the little Firestone girl?” So we walked over to say hello, and the “little Firestone girl” introduced us to her Uncle Milford, who had been deputized to shepherd her from one station to the other. . . .

I was soon to be initiated into the mysteries of train travel . . . the protocol of the men’s room . . . [and] the mysteries of the dining car. . . .

Ultimately we arrived at South Station in Boston and somehow found our way to Harvard Square. . . . I remember standing at “my” entry to Hollis House with my father . . . who it . . . seemed to me with uncharacteristic aggressiveness, button-holed each student and extracted their name and introduced me and told them I was from Minneapolis and wanted to know where they were from. . . .

That night Dad talked the janitor into setting up an extra cot in my room . . . so that he could spend the next couple of nights with me. . . . This event made me acutely embarrassed, much more so than the episode in the entry. It seemed to me that it signified that my father couldn’t afford a hotel room and the $5.00 he slipped the janitor was a cheap way out.

Arthur was normally restrained and undemonstrative, and yet I could feel his unspoken excitement at being able to share this momentous event with me.
TUBA AND YISROEL AVRICK

Following are two letters from a large collection of correspondence left to Tamar Fenton, a great granddaughter of the Avricks. They illuminate the loving relationship of a married couple separated by circumstance and geography in the early twentieth century. Yisroel was born in Balfalye, Ukraine, and married Tuba, of Parnevka, Ukraine, in 1907. He immigrated to the United States in 1910, settling first in New York City and later in St. Paul. Here he frankly assesses his prospects as a peddler, while Tuba with equal frankness expresses her physical longing for him — an element rarely seen in such correspondence. Rokhele, the eldest of the couple’s two children, adds a message at the end of Tuba’s letter. Tsharne, Tsivye, and Enye — mentioned in Yisroel’s letter — were relatives who lived in America. Yisroel was able to bring his wife and children to Minnesota in 1914. Fenton had the letters that were written during their three years of separation translated from the Yiddish and compiled in a book for the family, Tracing Hands through Time, in 2004.

March 24, 1911

To My Dear Wife, Mrs. Tuba, Long May You Live,

Today was the third day of my peddling. The season has not yet begun, so I am not yet earning much. Nevertheless, I don’t just want to sit around. Whatever we earn will be good. We have peddled for the last three days. In total we earned thirteen dollars. In the meantime, I’m a little short of money. Tsharne had promised to lend me several dollars. I was over there yesterday and I told her that I had already started peddling and that I needed some cash, but she didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to say anything about the money, so I just left. Instead I got the 50 dollars from Tsivye and Enye. That and my 50 dollars is still not enough, but I will see what I can do so that I don’t have to borrow any more. My cousin is a very good person.

I haven’t bought myself anything except for two pairs of underwear. Other than that, I’m still wearing everything that I brought with me. I will not be able to send any money until Pesach, because we still need a horse. A good horse here in America costs up to 200 dollars. At home it would only cost 100. But, with God’s help, by Pesach I will send you some money. Believe me, my dearest, that I don’t stop thinking about you for one minute. I constantly think that you need money and don’t have it.

I ask you to make me happy and have a photograph taken together with our dear children. I suppose that I shouldn’t even ask you to do that, since you don’t have any money. Perhaps you could ask my father? . . . It will be a lot easier for me here if I will be able to see you all the time. With God’s help, by Pesach I will also be able to have my picture taken and I’ll send it to you.

Dear daughters, tell your mother that she should give you 100 kisses from me, and you should give your mother 200 kisses also from me. If God will bring me home to you in peace, I will return all the kisses.

Your ever loving, Yisroel

The 20th of April, 1911

My Dear Husband, Yisroel, Long may you live,

My dearest, I ask you to write to me about everything if you feel that that would make things easier for you. Don’t be afraid that my father will read your letters to me. I don’t really hold very much back from my parents, certainly not that you love me and miss me. As a matter of fact, it makes me happy that my parents get pleasure from the fact that we love each other so much.

Oh my darling, when I think back about our great love for each other, I remember in the beginning that we didn’t want anyone to know. And now we can show our love for each other openly. It seems to me that if I had my Yisroel with me now, nothing else would matter to me. But I comfort myself with the thought that the time will come when we can be together again. And, with God’s help, you will save money from what you earn in America, and that’s when we will be together and be happy. When will God help us already so that we will be able to hold each other? You did once tell me that there are no miracles in America. But if God wills it, miracles can happen there too.

My darling, I thank you for your letter. You didn’t used to like to write letters when you were in Russia. I was very afraid that you wouldn’t write a lot when you arrived in America, but those times are passed and I thank you for your long letters. They really are long but no matter how much I read, I want more. Forgive me for the teardrops that stained the last letter: I was burning for you and I thought that the fire would, God forbid, never stop. But thank God, I am calmer now. My love for you is so great and that is why I miss you so . . .

My darling, you write me that at the time of your writing this week’s letter you will have paid off everyone. My dearest, how happy I am that we will no longer owe anyone anything. And with the money that I will receive from you I will also pay off my debts and not owe anyone any more. Thank God for your earnings.
Yisroel, please, my dearest, don’t be upset if more than 2 days go by before I mail my letter. We now have a lot of mud, and it could be that for two days the road will not be passable. I will do my best to send this to you as soon as I can, darling.

Stay well, my darling, and don’t worry. This is what I ask of you and wish for you.

Your Tuba

Father, I thank you for the dear regards that you send me. You wrote, “I send my dear little children regards.” When you write, “dear little children” it gives me great pleasure. You write to us separately and you write each of our names. Everyone else just calls us little children, so we like that you call us by name, and for that we thank you. From me, your dear daughter, Rokhele, who will now end her letter to you and doesn’t stop wishing that you would come home.

Yisroel, in another letter, asked Tuba to send him. She is shown with daughters Khanele (standing on chair) and Rokhele.

LETTERS OF ANOTHER SORT FROM EUROPE

FIRST LETTER TO SHOBSE KANER

Oscar (Shobse) Kaner of Duluth received the following letter from Eta Lea Pazol, an elderly cousin in his native shtetl of Kavarsk, Luthuania, sometime in 1931. It clearly illustrates how the web of obligations stretched back to the Old Country and extended not only to immediate family but also to other relatives. The parenthetical notes were added by the translator.

Dear cousin,

As soon as I received your letter and the eight dollars my eyes filled with tears. I did not know which people to pay off first. I got so mixed up in my head that I did not get till now to answer your letter. I cannot rush. I am sick. At my old age I sit in the cold and sleep in the cold and then I cannot get up in the cold.

Further, I have two daughters of age and this is my biggest concern (tsuris). Younger girls get married, and for my two daughters I don’t have the means to marry them off. What can I do? My woe is as big as the ocean. Basha’s daughter is 10 years younger and is already married. . . . My big worries! . . . Where shall I take the means to marry off my daughters? I do not have the money. From where can I expect help? Basha’s brothers and sisters did send her $400, and so she could marry off her daughter. What can I do? I know you are compassionate. Could I approach you my dears to help me out a little? I cry constantly that I am ashamed to show my face in the village, among people. I cannot help it; a woman, all alone. Only you are my hope.

The good Lord should bless you with good health and with a good subsistence (parnosseh) and you should be able to help us. You will have the biggest mitzvah to help me marry off my daughters. After all, we three are the only relatives here, in our need. . . . Again, the good Lord should bless you with good health and riches. From me, your cousin,

Eta Lea Pazol

SECOND LETTER TO SHOBSE KANER

Also written in 1931, this letter further indicates how dependent Jewish institutions in the Old Country were on the charity of those who had departed and so, presumably, were able to contribute. Although the correspondent uses flowery and rather obsequious language, he nonetheless makes a pointed comparison between Kaner’s donation and that of a more generous benefactor — and reminds Kaner of his past Passover–time contributions.
Purim 5691 (1931)

To the esteemed Reb Shobse Osher Kaner in America.

At this time, before Passover, we are used to get your (monetary) support for the poor people of Kavarsk for holiday expenses, which (support) is then dispensed by our rabbi, may he have a long life, and as per your instructions, part of this your support is also for the poor Kavarsk students of the local (Jewish) elementary school. There are many years that you are sending us such support and we are already so used to it like the Jewish people in the desert were waiting for manna, which was descending early every morning from heavens. . . .

With our letter, we, the teachers of the Kavarsk elementary school, express our esteem and deep appreciation for the big deed you did so far and which for sure you will continue in the future. You are special, one of a thousand and even more. Your (mitzvah) is with no doubt big and the Almighty shall give you a long life, that you should be able, for many, many, years to come to send (your support) for the depressed, poor landmen and poor students.

We can report to you that here, in Kavarsk, a large, magnificent school building has been erected with the help of our great landsman H. Rosenblum from America, who pledged for it a large sum of money and where now the students pray every day and study with delight our holy Torah together with secular studies.

With best wishes for a long life and good health . . .

Ch. Green [and] Moshe Leibovitch [on behalf of the teachers at the Kavarsk school]

FELICIA WEINGARTEN

Weingarten arrived in the United States in 1948, a survivor of several concentration camps. Born to a Zionist family in Lodz, Poland, she eventually became active in the St. Paul chapter of Hadassah and the United Jewish Fund and Council. Her greatest contribution was serving as a bridge between Jews from the Soviet Union, who began arriving in the late 1970s, and the settled Jewish community. Below are portions of an interview David Zarkin conducted with Weingarten in 1983 for the Jewish Community Relations Council’s Oral History Taping Project.

[Explaining why she remained in contact with Jews she knew in Poland:] These people remember me [from when] I was a child. Some of them knew my parents. I am not a nobody to them who suddenly arrived in this country as a refugee. I was not born a refugee. I was not born an orphan, and I was not born poverty-stricken. . . . And they represent the remnant of my people and of my culture — the culture of Polish Jews of which I am immensely proud.

I don’t know why some Jews in this country and in the Twin Cities look down on Eastern European Jews. . . . [W]e had a very great culture and a very old one. . . .

[After my husband and I became established in St. Paul] and my kids were in school . . . friends of mine invited me to go to a Hadassah meeting, [and] I quickly became Zionist chairwoman and [rose in the ranks]. And then when the first Soviet Jews began to arrive . . . I offered myself as a volunteer, remembering that the Jewish community in St. Paul was not overly organized or interested in us when we began to arrive from Germany, [except for] the Jewish Family Service. I felt I should do what I could as not to repeat the error, because it [had] hurt us very badly. . . . And I determined that I’ll do what I can to improve the situation. . . . I’d call up and say I was an immigrant myself. I could speak a broken Russian, and I understand it fairly well, and I speak Yiddish, and [said] let’s just get acquainted. Maybe I can help you. Maybe I can just inform you about things and so on. And pretty soon there was a group of Jewish women through the National Council of Jewish Women, and we began to teach them [through a] continuing education for adults. . . .

And then we formed a resettlement committee . . . and I became very involved with the Jewish Family Service. . . .

And I was approached by the Jewish Community Center sometime early in 1978 to . . . do cultural programming [, acculturating the new arrivals] into both the American fabric of life and into the Jewish community.

VOICES OF SOVIET JEWS

Jews who emigrated from the former Soviet Union were both gratified and discouraged by aspects of life in their adoptive Upper Midwest. Thanks to efforts of the Soviet Jewry movement, they were largely greeted as heroes, and many services were made available to facilitate their adjustment, including teaching them English. For example, they had access to programs pairing them with American-born families, and, initially, they received free memberships to synagogues and other Jewish institutions. Yet their new environment often felt alien, and they worried about how they would find appropriate jobs. The following observations, excerpted from interviews I conducted in 1991 and 1992 with funds from the Minnesota Historical Society, reveal that it can take up to a generation to become truly comfortable and fit in.
Well, it was a big culture shock for us, because in ’79 there weren’t a lot of people on the streets around here, mostly cars. If we would walk to the post office, people would just look at us. We had classes at the International Institute [in St. Paul] every day for three months. We had people from Jewish Vocational Service doing things for us and from Jewish Family Service. We were taken to every office we had to go to. We had extra money for the babysitters if we needed it, membership at the JCC, and the camp where [my daughter] Ann went free for the first year. It was wonderful.

GALINA DREYTSER
My first impression was surprise because I imagined America was like Manhattan — a lot of skyscrapers. When I saw a lot of little, little houses I said, “It’s a village, it’s not America.”

SIMA SHUMILOVSKY
American Jews would invite us for dinner, for Passover, but they live their own lives. We can’t communicate a lot because we have a completely different style of life. We are not poor compared to our lives before. We are fine, but we are poor compared to those American Jews that we know, and plus, they have . . . their friends. They are invited to lunches, dinners. We don’t belong there. We know our place. . . . It needs time.

NADIA SMIRNOV
I do not think I’ll fit in 100 percent for the rest of my life, but a lot is changing and probably I myself will change more. I can’t say in the Soviet Union we had normal human life. Of course, we have it now. We don’t have any of the same problems like in the Soviet Union, but we have a lot of different problems [now that] we did not expect when we came here.

I am sure 99 percent of people never think about the language, about differences of the culture. It’s one thing to understand it and another thing to live in another country. So I don’t think we’ll ever fit in . . . but we can get used to, we can adapt, and my daughter is already American.
The experiences of Jews who chose to live on farms or in small Minnesota towns were vastly different from those recounted by city dwellers, including members of Duluth’s vibrant Jewish community.

ADELINE TENZER FREMLAND
Fremland’s reminiscence illustrates a process that historians call chain migration — that is, a sequential bringing-over of relatives from their native countries and helping them adjust to the new land. Here Adeline vividly describes weekend life in a small town, where Jews were learning to cope with local mores. This excerpt is from an oral history recorded in 1978.

[My uncle Leon Salet] was a peddler, and he went from farmhouse to farmhouse with a pack on his back. [In] the process of traveling, he saw Mankato, and he liked it. . . . In Mankato he stocked farm clothes. There you depended on the farmer. For instance, Mankato would be a quiet little town during the week, [but] Saturday night there wasn’t enough room to walk on the sidewalk. All the farmers came in town to get their hair cut, to go to the bank, buy the things they needed for the kids, go to the movie. . . .

[As he got established,] he brought over the rest of the family, who opened stores in Albert Lea, Fairmont, and Faribault. All the small towns around here, each had one Jewish family that had a store.

At the High Holy Days, all of the Jewish families all around Mankato came into Mankato. My mother used to tell me they would order all the meat from St. Paul and hope to goodness it wouldn’t get rotten on the way. They would come and sleep on the floors, they would sleep in the bedrooms, everywhere, and all the women would pitch in and do the cooking. My Uncle Salet brought over Robb Wolf’s brother, Theodore, who acted as a combination *schochet* (ritual slaughterer), *melamed* (Hebrew school teacher), and *chazzan* (religious services leader). They formed their own minyan.
ARTHUR STONE
Arthur Stone e-mailed this account of his extended and immediate family’s experiences on the Iron Range to the JHSUM in 2005.

My family emigrated from Lithuania . . . about 1895, and probably came thru Canada to Superior, Wis. . . . As a matter of fact, my father and Bob Dylan’s grandfather were brothers. [Ben and Edward Stone were brothers. Ben Stone was Dylan’s maternal grandfather, and Edward was Arthur’s father. Their original] last name was Solomovitz. Ben Stone, . . . who lived in and around Hibbing most of his life and operated a small clothing store for working people, was my uncle. Ben Stone’s twin sister, Ida Solomovitz, was killed by a Gentile neighbor who wanted to date her. And of course, being Orthodox, she wouldn’t go, so in 1906 he killed her. [Their mother] died from grief six months later. The Superior, Wis., newspaper still has this murder in [its] records.

Ida Solomovitz's murder was front-page news in Superior, Wisconsin, on September 24, 1906.

My father, Edward, then] migrated to Alaska, where he lived for the next 10 years. He evidently joined the Army in Alaska, and served in WW I. He really never went to school. After the war, he moved to Cooley, MN, where he worked in the mine, and later was joined by Louie Deutsch, when Butler Brothers opened a company store . . . in order to have gloves, working clothes, and chewing tobacco for the immigrants. This was about 1919. . . . They also built boardinghouses [for] the immigrants they brought in from Finland, the Yugoslav area, Italy, Scandinavia, and Germany. My father became the manager of the boardinghouses as well, so he had to speak Finnish, Yugoslav (of which there were at least 6 different dialects), Swedish, Italian, and German.

There were several mining companies operating open pit mines on the west end of the [Iron] Range at that time [i.e., the late 1910s and 1920s]. In those days, the mining was done with steam engines on tracks along with steam shovels. As the steam shovels dug away at the hills of ore, [they] moved the tracks farther and farther from the shovel. In order to manage this, the mining company had 200 men on each shift with pinch bars to move the track closer to the hill in which they were digging the ore with the steam shovel. Most of the mines worked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so in order for the mine to work properly, each pit had 600 men working 7 days a week, 8–10 hours a day, to keep the ore flowing. . . .

We went to shul on the High Holidays. We didn’t have a car until the late ’30s, so traveling [from Nashwauk] to Hibbing . . . was a major event in our lives. We stayed with my uncle Ben Stone and his family. [He] had 2 or 3 children at home, and we had my parents and brother. [It] was crowded in a two-bedroom apartment above his clothing store. . . . I had my bar mitzvah at the Hibbing shul. . . . Bob Dylan had his bar mitzvah at the same shul [in 1954]. Other than that, we didn’t attend shul [because] traveling was too difficult.

As I was growing up, my mother worked only in the home. . . . My parents spoke Yiddish at home. Mother kept kosher until her mother died. At that time [the early 1940s,] we were the only Jewish family left in Nashwauk, so it was very difficult to continue keeping kosher during the war.

My parents were not religious. Actually, after my father’s sister was killed and his mother died, if anything he became a-religious.

TOM ROSE
Rose is a descendant of the founders of the Rose Brothers Fur Company, established in St. Paul in 1855. He grew up in Mahtomedi, St. Paul, and California. He taught sociology for some years at Montgomery College in Maryland. When his son attended a camp in northern Minnesota, he fell in love with the
area and built a cabin near Ely. He became interested in the Jewish history of that town and, during the 1990s, conducted considerable archival research and interviewed older Jews who had once lived there.

What follows is an excerpt from “Jews in Ely, Minnesota, 1900–1944,” the talk Rose presented at the JH SUM annual meeting in September 2001. The focus here is on three Jewish immigrants who started out as peddlers in the north woods — an area where, it seems to this editor, pursuing that occupation would have been quite difficult. Elsewhere in the talk, Rose asserted, “All the Jewish merchants bought and sold furs on the side, which was their major source of income.” The Bourgin and Burgin families he mentions apparently were not related. Rose assumes that Maletia was somewhere in Lithuania, the country from which most Jews in that part of Minnesota had come.

Most of the men began working in America as peddlers, walking to Indian reservations, calling on Indians who lived in the woods, loggers, iron miners, and immigrants at isolated tiny Minnesota farms. Simon Bourgin said, “My father started out like a lot of other people. He became a peddler . . . [hiking] between Tower and Ely, twenty miles. There was still no road then [i.e., in the early 1900s]. He used to carry all this stuff on his back and sell it on the way.” Harry Burgin worked as a peddler, saved his money, and opened the Travelers Hotel by borrowing money from his customers. His brothers and sisters had come first and settled in Superior, where Harry first settled. [He] then moved to Tower before settling in Ely and building his seven-room hotel.

Louis Gordon [the third immigrant peddler] was born in Maletia in 1867 and remembered hunting for firewood and helping to tan hides when he was five. He . . . worked in Duluth and Superior shipyards, and started peddling merchandise, making friends with customers who loaned him money to open his Ely clothing store. Louis saw Ely as a new city, small compared to Tower, which had 30,000, but ready for his store. Even though Ely was 20 miles north of Tower and twice that far from Virginia and Hibbing, there were opportunities waiting. After moving to Ely he would take a horse to Tower for the 4th of July and play his cornet in the orchestra, for which he was paid ten dollars. His younger brother Mike left Russia in 1900 at 14, traveled steerage to Ellis Island, and joined Louis in the shipyards. Mike went to Virginia [, Minnesota,] and got a job working for Yitzhak Milavetz in his clothing store. Later he moved to Ely to join his brother and opened his own clothing store in 1914.

MYRLE SOLOMON ERLICH

Erlich grew up in International Falls, Minnesota, in the 1930s. Here are two excerpts from Patchquilt, a book she self-published in 1995. The first excerpt seems more evocative of Jewish experiences in European shtetls than in America.

A few years after Zadee died, Bubbe moved [from Superior, Wisconsin,] to Virginia, Minnesota. With the little bit of cash she received from the sale of her Superior house, she was able to persuade a carpenter to build her a small house in Virginia. The cows moved to Virginia with the family. The milk route continued with new customers. Bubbe kept chickens and geese, and her garden provided vegetables and strawberries. She baked all her own bread, pies and cakes. To this day, Mama says she would like to have the recipe for Bubbe’s honey cake. Bubbe cleaned like a whirlwind, and the white pine kitchen floor was scrubbed every day. She cooked for boarders and had one or two roomers. She bought and sold junk (scrap metal) and sold Singer sewing machines. In her spare time in the evening, she mended sacks for a local grain dealer.

Bubbe never learned to read or write English. Her legal documents were signed with an “X.” Her word was always honored.

Here Erlich describes a harrowing event that threatened International Falls in September 1930

On the morning after my ninth birthday, I awoke with a start. The seven o’clock mill whistle was repeating the alarm signal, one toot — a pause — then four rapid toots. I rolled over and reached for my gum, which I had put on the windowsill before I fell asleep. I raised the window shade a peek. It was awfully dusky outside. . . I snapped the shade all the way up. The sun wasn’t shining at all. A smoky haze overshadowed everything. A horrible burning vapor wafted through the open window. I tumbled out of bed and ran into the kitchen.

“Mama, what’s wrong? The sun isn’t there, and everything is smoky!”

“It’s all right,” she comforted me. “There was a change in the wind during the night. The forest fire outside Blackduck has spread toward Littlefork.”

I knew nine years old was too big to cry, but I bawled anyway. “I’m scared. Will the fire burn up the town and all of us?”

Mama hugged me and told me to get my clothes on.

“I know, it is a school day!”

I ran to school with the neighborhood kids. We clustered with the other kids in our schoolrooms. About 9:30 a.m., Mr. Anderson, the principal, came into the room and dismissed us.
By noon on that day a hush fell over the town. A smoky haze hung in the air. We children sat on the front steps of the Kelly Flats [their apartment building] and exchanged “what if’s — ?”

What if the fire came into town?
What if we couldn’t run fast enough to the river?
And on a cheerier note: What if the fire burned the school down?
By one o’clock we were hungry and went home for lunch. But nothing tasted good.
I sat in the house after lunch, reading my favorite [novel,] Nancy Drew and the Grandfather Clock. But I couldn’t concentrate on solving the mystery.
By two o’clock I was outside with the kids again. One of the neighbors brought the good news — the fire was under control.

Well, the next morning the sun appeared, the town was secure, and the school still standing. Me? I got a piece of gum from the windowsill and settled into the comfortable routine of growing up in a small northern Minnesota town.

MORRIS FREEDLAND
This is one of just a few accounts about Jewish farmers in Minnesota contained in the JHISUM archives. The Freedland family had a dairy farm near Osseo from 1913 through World War I. It was close enough to Minneapolis for Morris’s father to sell his sour cream and cottage cheese on the North Side twice a week, weather permitting.

The farm where we lived was in a rural area where the population consisted mostly of Scandinavian and German immigrants who continued to speak their native languages even though their children had learned to speak English.

The nearest town was Osseo, a village of a thousand, located three miles away. There the surrounding farmers came to get their horses shod by one of the two blacksmiths, or to see the only doctor in the area, or to shop for sugar, coffee, or flour. In those days every farm housewife baked her own bread or pastry, prepared her own meat, and grew her own vegetables. There were no supermarkets, and the grocery stores sold mostly staples.

We were one of three Jewish families in all of rural Hennepin County, and didn’t participate much in the social activities around us because there were language, religious, and cultural barriers. At home we spoke only Yiddish. The few social activities in that area centered around the school or church. There were no theaters, no sporting events, and no musical performances.

We socialized a bit at school events or on rare occasions at a neighbor’s
home. We had no religious exposure at all. First of all, there was no synagogue any closer than Minneapolis, which was twelve miles away. I doubt whether we would have belonged to one even if it were available, in view of my parents' non-religious beliefs. Our neighbors belonged to the one Lutheran church in the area. There were a few Catholics, but they had to go to Minneapolis to worship. Although our family didn’t observe religious customs, they did retain many of the cultural features of Judaism. For example, they ate only kosher food, they subscribed to Yiddish newspapers, and they identified with the Labor Socialist movement, a very strong force in American Jewish life during that era.

Our farm was located in the flatlands of the Midwest. There were scattered clumps of trees and small lakes here and there, but most of the land was flat and covered with grass or crops. The farmstead consisted of a three-room house covered with tar paper and a barn accommodating twenty head of cattle, a converted stable that we used for a garage, a chicken house, and a fuel shed where we stored firewood and coal. The house had a large room that served as a kitchen, dining room, living room, and at times, an extra bedroom. There were two smaller rooms that were used as bedrooms. The floors were covered with linoleum. The only lights were kerosene lamps. There were no curtains. There was no indoor plumbing of any kind. In the back was a privy with two seats and a supply of Sears catalogs. All water for livestock and household use, as well as for cheese making, was supplied by a hand pump. In the summer we used an attached screened porch for social gatherings as well as for sleeping.

**ISADORE CRYSTAL**

For many years, Isadore (Iz) Crystal wrote a column, “Crystal Gazing,” for the Duluth *Jewish Fellowship News* in which he recalled the city as it had been during his youth. Here are excerpts of an oral history Rhoda Lewin conducted with him in 1988 and 1989.

We had bootleggers up and down the street. One fellow . . . had this overcoat with these great big pockets on the inside and he had pints of moonshine in there, and he would walk up and down the street selling them. His boss would say to him, “Now listen, don’t sell to any strangers unless you know them.” . . . Some of these people, for one reason or another, were kept out of the Covenant Club, but when [World War II] came along the bars were let down, because with the Nazi situation and the Jews, how could any Jewish community look upon any Jew in such a way that they wouldn’t even let them belong to a social club?

[U]ltimately [some] became the big successes and the big money-givers and
the big workers and the big everything! And the leadership was carried over to the young people due to the fact that their parents and grandparents were such great motivators.

We also had the *Gemilus Chesed* Society [literally, acts of loving kindness, but generally referring to a free-loan organization] and the *Arbeiter Ring* and the Socialists. . . . Rabbi [David] Aronson, by the way, was instrumental, when he was the rabbi at the *Talmud Torah* in Duluth, in getting all the stores to close on Yom Kippur one year. “All” meant stores like Freimuth’s, Silberstein and Bondy, and Orecks. These were the Reform, the *Deutsches Yehudim* [German Jews], because we are talking about the ’20s and the ’30s, the era when the so-called religiously inclined closed their stores on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but not the Reform. . . .

And then around the early ’60s, the community felt they needed a Jewish Center. There was a lot of discussion about whether it was really needed, but non-Reform Jews prevailed because they were in the majority, and the Jewish Educational Center was built. . . . But it began to falter and become less and less important as the exodus really began, in the early ’80s. Those young people started to go to the big schools to get higher education. This one went to [the] Wharton School of Finance, and my son was able to go to Northwestern, and this one was able to go to Michigan, and this one was able to go to Stanford. [The] outlook on those children coming back and staying in Duluth didn’t exist, because there were no family businesses. . . .

For many years our Covenant Club served the Jewish community. . . . We started out playing cards and didn’t have a golf club, and we would have banquets and invite the women. The Gershgol family was really instrumental in developing the Covenant Club. They had a store and rebuilt the whole structure, remaking the second floor to house the club. . . .

Duluth had a great, great [Jewish] Federation. The first Federation drive we had was about 1938 or ’39. And do you know who was one of the early real motivators for the Federation? . . . [The] Goldenberg family. They lived in Duluth: Jake — he was the father [of] David and Kokie and Harold — and his brother, Harry. . . . They always raised an awful lot of money per capita. And we still collect on Passover for matzoh. [The reference here must be to *Maos Chitin*, a fund for poor people that covers their matzoh expenses so that they can buy the other, relatively expensive Passover foods.] We have had a lot of poor Jews and a lot of organizations that took care of them. . . .

On Yom Kippur . . . at the synagogue they had a long table where there might be six or eight or ten men sitting around it, and each man represented some organization or charity, and they each had a little plate in front of them . . . *Bikur*
Joseph Papo

As executive secretary of the United Jewish Social Agencies in Duluth during the early 1940s, Papo oversaw a resettlement program that helped refugees from war-torn Europe. He later became director of the Duluth Jewish Federation.

April 21, 1941

I came to Duluth, Minnesota, on March 5, 1940, to assume the duties of executive secretary of the United Jewish Social Agencies, a family social service agency. The office was located in one room in the Moore Memorial Building. The office secretary shared the same room. It was difficult to carry out any intelligent interview with the clients when the typewriter was “pounding.” . . . [T]he telephone was on my desk, and I had to answer all calls. During the first two months, I was swamped with work. The caseload was over sixty. The resettlement program had just started. We had received one family in February, a second came in March, and a third one in April. It meant . . . finding rooms for these newcomers, furnishing them, trying to obtain work for them, obtaining affidavits for their parents and relatives. Although much of the work was done through committees, it meant seeing the members of the various committees, ok’ing the purchases of items of furniture, etc. Mrs. Harry W. Davis was most helpful and was in charge of most of the volunteers. She also helped me with problems pertaining to indigent clients, since she had held the same position for over two months prior to my coming.

The board, which was to meet on April 3rd, had to postpone its regular meeting to April 17th because of a snowstorm and sleet. At this board meeting, I presented a report indicating very briefly that it was not easy to be both an executive and a caseworker. I pointed out that, as an executive, one must attend all kinds of meetings and functions, and unless one did it, it would reflect on the good name of the agency. I also gave a short summary of the philosophy of Jewish social work from the Biblical times, with quotations to indicate that primarily, Jewish social work was interested in making a person become independent emotionally and financially and to help him help himself. I spoke of the unmet needs and lack of resources in the community such as: recreational facilities under Jewish auspices, vocational guidance, employment, etc. and the need for [a] coordinator [of] youth activities. . . . I suggested that a research committee be appointed to study the various problems enumerated.

After the meeting, Rabbi [Burton E.] Levinson asked several questions, which brought out facts from me which were never known to the members of the board. I stated that the average monthly caseload per case worker in 1939 in private family agencies was 29, and that the average monthly caseload of the Duluth Family Social Service was 27 in 1939 — while this agency’s caseload averaged more than 60.

All through my first period of adjustment, A. B. Horwitz, president of the agency, was a sympathetic listener and advisor. He, more than anyone else, helped me so much.

Janelle Bohrod

In 1992 Bohrod was asked by Melvin Gordon, a longtime Jewish resident of Albert Lea, to write an account of her family’s singular experiences as Jews there. It was not intended for publication but rather was created to help future historians get a sense of how Jewish life was sustained in that southern Minnesota town.

It is difficult to write about how it is that my husband and I came to be raising Korean-American Jews in a small town in southern Minnesota. . . . I acknowledge that some of our challenges have been unique, and perhaps a bit bizarre. Explaining to our local Hindu urologist the covenant of the bris was, to say the least, difficult. Explaining it to our seven- and eleven-year-old sons [who were adopted at ages six and ten] was excruciating. Still, what stands out most in my mind now is the minyan, which appeared in the hospital chapel the morning of the [bris]. Every Jewish
male living in Albert Lea left work on a weekday morning to be with us. Rabbi
[Sol] Goodman drove 70 miles from B’nai Israel Synagogue in Rochester, and after
respectfully and temporarily removing a cross and two pictures of Jesus, proceeded
with the service for the occasion. . . .

It does not seem to matter now how it was that two abandoned brothers
from Asia came to complete a family in Albert Lea. . . . My husband and I carried
pocket Korean-English dictionaries [], but within just six months of being adopted,
they were refusing to speak Korean. . . . For exclamations, they picked both “uf-da”
in the neighborhood and “oy” at home. And before they could figure out that learn-
ing Hebrew was not something that every American family does, I began to spend
Sunday mornings with them, drawing the old Aleph-Bet, letter by letter. . . .

[A] few months after our older son Samuel’s thirteenth birthday, he cele-
brated his bar mitzvah. He struggled in school to make the B honor roll with his
still-faltering English. He struggled . . . to make the transition to a Hebrew without
vowel sounds. In three years, an abandoned boy from Korea had become a Jewish
man in America. . . . [M]y husband passed to him the Torah that had been used in
the Albert Lea community for generations. The ceremony was held in our home,
where Samuel had been taught. The rabbi came from Rochester, and [Jews from]
Albert Lea, Austin, Rochester, and Mankato attended. . . .

[Mine] are the only children in the school system to miss school for reli-
gious holy days in September and October, the only ones who have to explain that
baseball will have to wait until Hebrew lessons are done. “No, my son, you will have
to be late for the football game. You are really needed for a yahrzeit tonight.” If our
whole family shows up, we are forty percent of the minyan. . . .

Meantime, for a religious peer group, the boys spend a month at a Reform
Jewish camp in Wisconsin. There they find themselves at services, “Twice a day,
Mom!” exclaimed our older son. . . .

Our second son [Joseph] is now bar mitzvah, too. . . . Fortunately, our little
community here in Albert Lea afforded a solution [for preparing him]. . . . Between
Rabbi [Elliott] Baskin, a Reform rabbi of B’nai Israel in Rochester, and Bert Cooper
[an Orthodox C.P.A.] of Albert Lea, our son persevered . . . [and the service] was
held at the Albert Lea Inn, in a meeting room . . . and how we got such a beautiful
ark—that is another story you should be so lucky to hear. . . .

My son’s friends from school were there. One boy has a Jewish grandfather.
. . . The day after the bar mitzvah, Joseph and his friends went out to play baseball.
When he came home, he said his friend with the Jewish grandfather said, “Maybe
I’ll have a bar mitzvah too.” Joseph wrote him a note, “If you decide to have a bar
mitzvah, I’ll help you with your Hebrew.”

Joseph Bohrod’s 1988 bar mitzvah took place at the Albert Lea Inn. Back row:
Stepbrother Bruce Bohrod, father John Bohrod, mother Janelle Bohrod, and grand-
father Milton Bohrod. Front row: Bruce’s wife, Nancy (holding young Nate),
brother Sam, and Joseph.
A Christian neighbor of the Bohrods fashioned the makeshift Styrofoam Ark of
the Covenant shown at rear.
Some Jewish settlers in North and South Dakota during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries eked out a living as farmers. Others became peddlers, and a few established successful businesses in the more populous towns.

**Anne Labovich Rosen**

The first account of Jewish life in North Dakota that the JHSUM acquired was Rosen’s undated five-page reminiscence, “Events on the Farm in North Dakota as I Remember Them”; it has remained one of my favorites. After all, it’s hard to resist a memoir containing phrases such as “reindeers ran rampant.” In this excerpt, Rosen recollects life on her family’s farm, which was sold in 1907, when she was five or six years old.

My father, Samuel Labovich, and his brothers Israel, Esidor, Abraham, and his sister Sarah and [our Zayde] Israel Altman came to Montreal, Canada, from Iassy, Romania, in . . . 1887 or 1888 and were given homesteads in North Dakota. . . .

The brothers pitched in and built one house; then they all lived there until each [built a] home of their own. The homes were built of sticks, straw and mud, and were whitewashed inside and out. . . . I remembered how the houses glistened in the sun miles away. . . .

We were not in want of food. [In] winter Zayde would slaughter a cow (he was a **schochet**), and it would be hung in the granary, which was a deep freeze considering the temperatures of forty degrees below and colder. [We also] had chicken, wild game and fish in the summer. We would put a net in the river, and within a half hour pull out a net full of large fish. Eggs and butter (home churned) were plentiful. . . .

In winter [my brothers and cousins] went trapping for muskrat and beaver. . . . The animals were skinned and placed on thin boards to dry. Then when 100 skins were ready for packaging, they were taken to town and sold. . . .
I remember at night going outside and lying down on the grass and looking up at the sky with the trillions of bright stars. . . . [W]hen the flax was planted and full grown, the entire crop had blue blossoms like a field of purple violets — a beautiful sight.

TOBETTE HALPERN DOROSHOW

Doroshow wrote this account of life in Hebron, North Dakota, for a family reunion held in 1993.

[After leaving Romania,] my family lived in Minneapolis for ten years before moving to North Dakota. In the spring of 1910, [my] dad decided to find a location in North Dakota and establish a general store. He took [his children] Ben and Anna with him to Hebron, where he was able to rent a store in the center of the town. They worked very hard, getting it ready and stocking it with merchandise. Later, the rest of the family followed, but Sam remained in Minneapolis so he could finish high school.

My family spent 11 years in Hebron, and they were good years for all of us. Several of my older brothers and sisters lived [elsewhere in North Dakota]: Ben in Golden Valley, Charlie in New England, Bessie in Belfield. On the High Holidays our store would be closed, and we would pack up and go to Dickinson, 40 miles away. . . . At first, services were held in a home, and later dad and all the relatives built the first Jewish synagogue in Dickinson. We would all stay at the St. Charles Hotel. What fun we had! I can remember as a child visiting and playing with all my nieces, nephews and cousins. We always had our pictures taken. I remember the time we all lined up in one big row, the tallest down to the shortest [see p. 50]. . . .

I can remember my mother baking loaves of bread in the big wood stove. On Friday noons my dad used to come home for lunch to eat the hot pletzel [a flat round bread] with schmaltz and bean soup. I remember helping [my brother] Maurice carry home buckets of fresh milk from Mrs. Hesse’s house down by the creek near the big green house we lived in. We didn’t have running water in the house or electricity or modern bathroom facilities. We had a water pump outside our kitchen door. In winter the house was heated by a big self-heater stove that stood in the dining room. There were vents in the ceiling so the heat could go up to the second floor.

Mother used to bake hundreds of hamantaschen each year [for Purim] and hide them in big flour sacks in the pantry before she sent packages of them to all the married children and those away at college. I remember Maurice pushing me up to the very top shelf to steal some from a sack. We were caught, and he ran away, leaving me hanging to the shelf. We were both punished. . . .
My parents were true to their traditions. They maintained the strict dietary laws all the years even though it was a hardship. Business was good in the store, and dad began to dabble in other enterprises. . . . Our family bought the Hebron Brick Company in the late 1910s and ran it for about a year. My father also had an interest in a grain elevator. He bought land, and before he retired in 1921 he bought a big farm, a whole section of land — 640 acres. . . . Father . . . also invested in a coal mine near Washburn, North Dakota, 40 miles north of Bismarck . . .

[After moving back to Minneapolis,] dad started going back to North Dakota during the spring and summer months to buy cattle. He would put them out to pasture to fatten them up. Then in the fall he would ship them to South St. Paul or Chicago. To keep from getting bored in the winter, he used to go down and watch the grain market, [and] sometimes he would dabble in [it].

**HUGO BACHENHEIMER**

This excerpt from Bachenheimer's obituary, which ran in the *Fargo (North Dakota) Forum* on February 7, 1954, describes his financial acumen.

Hugo Bachenheimer started as a Fargo store clerk at the age of fifteen and became one of Fargo's most prominent businessmen. [He] was president of his own financing company, which operated in thirty-two states.

[He was] born in Hessen Province, Germany, in 1873, arrived in Fargo in 1888, and went to work for his brother-in-law Ben Sternberg. . . . [In the 1890s, he] and his brother Herman [opened] a clothing store called The Hub in Moorhead. . . .

While living in Moorhead, Hugo started handling the credit end in “on-time” automobile sales. . . . He was the first man to put [this credit innovation] into practice in the Fargo-Moorhead area. In 1920 he incorporated the National Securities Company, and in 1922 he [created the lender-to-dealer connection that] provided the national springboard for his company. . . .

Looking for additional car dealers to use his time-purchase plan, he visited Bert C. Gamble and P. W. Skogmo, who owned car dealerships in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Years later, Hugo recalled that when he dropped into Gamble’s agency there was a farmer who wanted to purchase a car, but the banks wouldn’t finance it, as cars were considered too much of a risk. Hugo offered to finance it. As a result of this transaction, Gamble and Skogmo used Hugo’s financing in all of their time-payment transactions. . . . [The] National Securities Company merged with the Gamble-Skogmo firm [in 1946].
Herman stern

Stern emigrated from Germany in 1887 and worked for a cousin in Casselton, North Dakota, for some time. In 1911 he opened a clothing store in Valley City, North Dakota, and lived there the rest of his life. Terry Shoptaugh’s book You Have Been Kind Enough to Assist Me: Herman stern and the Jewish Refugee Crisis (2008) provides a detailed account of stern’s role in rescuing relatives from Germany during the mid- and late 1930s. In 1974 Al Thal recorded Stern’s oral history, from which the following passage is drawn.

When asked about his activities during the Hitler period, Stern replied, “Well, I am sure I was not alone in that work, but naturally we were all sympathetic, and our hearts bled for the people in Germany, and many people made an appeal to come to this country, not [only] my relatives. . . . [T]he first relative that came over was a niece of mine in 1934. . . . and then a nephew came over, my brother came over, and then some distant relatives. . . . [My wife and I] feel that it is an accomplishment that gave us the greatest satisfaction in our lives, to save over 100 families, and the great dividends we [derive] from that [include] seeing . . . how well all these people have done. Not only that generation which came over but [also] a second generation [who] are giving a great account of themselves. . . .

Of course, you had to pledge yourself [to be] personally responsible . . . so they would not become a public charge in this country. So it was a great responsibility, and it seems to have [been useful to have] had a very good relationship with the American Consul in Stuttgart. If [it] hadn’t been for that, he would not have allowed us to sponsor as many as we did. When my limit was finally exhausted, I made trips all over the state and asked other Jewish people [to join the effort]. . . .

One thing I learned through those activities [is] that the [Eastern European] Jews and people from Poland were a great deal more sympathetic [to helping sponsor refugees] than many other people I could mention.

William stern

Alex and Bertha stern’s son William made his mark on North Dakota — through his numerous political and commercial connections. This brief biographical sketch is a compilation of several newspaper accounts that appeared after his death on New Year’s Day, 1964.

Alex [was] a pioneer businessman in Fargo, arriving in 1881 after clerking and becoming co-owner of a clothing store in Bloomington, Illinois. He owned the Alex stern and Company clothing store and a farm, founded the Dakota Trust Company, the Dakota Saving Bank of Fargo, and was a founder of the Kaufman-Stern Realty Company. He and his wife, Bertha, had four children.

William, the eldest, was born in 1886 and was described as a man who was “by turns shrewd, kind, humorous, generous, ribald, charming, conniving, eccentric and intuitive.” His friendships included “presidents of the United States, movie stars, generals, wealthy businessmen, bootleggers, ‘Madams,’ and carnival people, for whom he had a special affection.” . . . He also had numerous friends among famous political figures, including Democrats, though he was a lifelong Republican. One such was President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. As a favor to Roosevelt, Bill stern helped defeat [North Dakota Senator] Gerald Nye, a bitter foe of the president. . . . stern was part of a group that played poker in the White House [that] included President Truman, Speaker of the House [John] McCormack, Senator [Warren] Magnuson, and others.

stern was a friend of [North Dakota] Senator Usher Burdick, and every now and then would take him into the Alex stern and Company clothing store to pick out some new clothes . . . in an attempt to improve upon his habitually rumpled appearance, though never enough of course to ruin his political career. Another man . . . who later became a friend was [North Dakota Senator] Bill Langer. The tale is told of a mutual friend of theirs, a former [Minneapolis] bootlegger named isadore Blumenfeld (Kid Cann), who was convicted by the IRS on income tax charges. Langer, then chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, offered to get their friend the best corner room in the newest federal penitentiary. . . .

Mr. stern had a number of what could be called mild eccentricities. For example, he wore long underwear winter and summer, and wasn’t reluctant to [discretely] hoist a pant leg high enough to prove it to a skeptic. When flying, he had a certain hat he always wore, and when traveling, he used a set of old luggage held shut by binder twine, refusing offers of new luggage. On his travels, he always carried a number of [clothespins] with which to make sure the drapes were always tightly closed at night. He lived in the same house that his parents had occupied and felt no need to modernize any of the furnishings, including those in the kitchen.

Bill stern was one of the leading businessmen of Fargo, serving as an officer of Dakota National Bank, of the Alex stern and Company store, and of various real estate enterprises. His primary interest was the bank, and he worked tirelessly promoting its interests. Through his wide contacts among the famous and wealthy, he acquired savings accounts from many people one would not expect to see conducting any of their business in Fargo. . . .
Another of his special interests was Northwest Airways, founded in 1926 by a friend and former schoolmate of his, Croil Hunter. In 1936 he was elected to the board . . . and through his influence with the North Dakota legislature, and also through influential friends in the United States Congress, Mr. Stern was frequently able to have legislation passed favorable to [what became] Northwest Airlines. In earlier days he traveled to China and negotiated with Chiang Kai-shek for air routes, [and] during World War II he directed operations of the Northwest Aeronautical Corporation, a subsidiary of Northwest Airlines, which manufactured gliders for the army.

In 1992 Stanton, of Rapid City, South Dakota, wrote an essay titled “Following the Jew Peddlar Trail,” as part of a history of the Synagogue of the Hills, to which she belongs. In this excerpt, she relates a conversation she had with an elderly man who recalled a firsthand boyhood encounter with a Jewish peddler.

[While doing my research,] I found references to something called “The Jew Peddlar Trail” in Watson Parker's 1981 book, Deadwood, the Golden Years. It was also referred to in Irma Klock's 1986 book, The Central Black Hills. The name caught my eye and captured my curiosity. Watson referred to a trail in the hills between Mystic and Canyon City that was used as a shortcut by Jewish peddlers to save a three-mile walk along Rapid Creek as they came westward from Rapid City, carrying 100-pound packs of wares on their backs. . . . Part of the trail is reasonably level and easily hiked, [Parker] said, but part of it slopes downward toward Rapid Creek at a very steep angle, making for rather difficult footing.

[Stanton asked a resident of Mystic, Russell Frink, to hike the trail with her and explain its geology and history.] . . . For a trail that is known to only a very few people these days, during the 1870s and 1880s — those years surrounding the [Dakota] Gold Rush — this area of the Hills was a very busy place, and this trail saw a lot of commerce. According to Russell, there is barely an inch of ground in the vicinity of Mystic that has not felt the imprint of the human foot. Miners prospecting for gold in the Black Hills needed provisions delivered to their camps, and it was the peddlers who would travel out into the countryside to fill those needs. Jewish peddlers would originate from businesses in Rapid City and Deadwood, carrying packs [on their backs] loaded with overalls, socks, boots, and other necessities . . . visiting camps along the way. . . .

Russell said to me, “The Jew peddlars [sic] were pretty near all gone before I came onto the earth, but once in a great while one would go through. I remember one coming up to home to Mystic when I was just a little boy, I would guess around 1926 . . . . He came to the house, and he asked Dad if he could find some kind of lodging, and my Dad said, “Sure, we’ll put you up and feed you supper and breakfast,” and this gentleman who I think would be around the same age as my Dad, roughly around 40, was sitting on the old davenport. After supper they were talking, and once in a while he’d look at me, and he said, “In appreciation of your putting me up, I’m going to give your boy some overalls,” and he did. And wonder of wonders, they were for a kid. On the brass buttons that held up the suspenders, there was a little locomotive headlight . . . . You could see the little headlight, raised, embossed,
emanating from the button. I always liked those headlight bib overalls, because that was the brand name for them.”

[The peddlers would visit mines, such as the large Calumet Mine and the ones around Keystone, as well as the prospectors seeking gold along innumerable creeks.] I told Russ I just could not imagine a person doing all that with a great, heavy pack on his back, in one trip. He replied, “Well, he’d probably be gone for a week, maybe even two weeks. It’s not so difficult. The secret is that you don’t go fast. You go steady and you just plug along, and you get to where you’re going.”

And what motivated any of them, the peddler and prospector alike? Russell’s answer: “The dream — the pay streak is just ahead! A lot of sweat, but there are rewards — you can listen to the creek go past, you’re drinking good water, you can take a shot at a deer once in a while, and everything’s nice and quiet, just you and the pick and shovel.”

One can only imagine the difficulty of negotiating precipitous mountain trails under the burden of heavy loads [in order] to begin to appreciate the stamina it must have demanded of the traveler. The peddlers provided goods to the prospectors and stayed overnight as the hospitality of the trail afforded. A difficult and lonely life, but it provided a living, an opportunity to prosper.

Jewish peddlers shouldered heavy packs of wares over the rugged terrain around Black Hills gold-mining towns such as Keystone (shown here) during the late nineteenth century to sell provisions to prospectors.
A generation or more of Eastern European Jews settled in certain Twin Cities neighborhoods where children were often exposed to unsavory activities. From the firsthand accounts here, we learn how Jewish young people adapted to the gritty facts of urban life as well as how their parents steered them in a more wholesome direction.

MAX LOWENTHAL
Max Lowenthal was born in 1888 in Minneapolis, where his parents were active members of the Kenesseth Israel congregation. He attended Blaine and North high schools and received his undergraduate degree from the University of Minnesota. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1912. At Harvard, Felix Frankfurter, who was on the law faculty, befriended him. He made a name for himself by exposing fraud in interstate commerce and in 1934 was appointed legal counsel to the U.S. Senate's Interstate Commerce Committee, where he met and became friends with committee member Senator Harry Truman. In 1948 Lowenthal was among those Truman advisors pushing for official U.S. recognition of the new State of Israel. Here he recalls his early brush with gambling and stint as a newspaper boy during the 1890s.

[It] was a perilous time, and which way we would turn out was not wholly sure. Across the street from our store lived, when we were very young children, Rabbi Jaffe, who was our first rabbi, from Lithuania. One of his children, Faifkie, in time was sent to prison. Hyme Loss (one of my two closest boyhood friends, who lived a block away on 4th Street North, just north of 6th Avenue) had a brother, Maxie, who got into the gambling game. I don’t know what became of him. Another of the older lads, called John Two-Punch, once left a card or dice-playing game near the corner where we were playing to follow a drunk who was headed south to the bridge over the railroad tracks, two blocks away. Someone said John Two-Punch was going to “roll him.” . . .
My mother was the one who kept her eye principally on what was going on in the extra-familial relations of my brother and me. But my father was on the job, too. I had been, so had my brother been, forbidden to go downtown to sell newspapers — that was a favorite occupation of boys from our community. None of us had settled locations; you just picked up a bundle of Journals or Tribunes in the afternoon, when they came off the presses, and marched or ran down to the principal downtown streets to sell them. My brother and I got into that game. It was not a good atmosphere. There were dice games in the newspaper alley before the paper came out. I remember one colored chef who lost a dollar or more in one game I was in. I made some money, cached it — maybe I won altogether not more than a dollar — and drew on that cache to buy candy, bit by bit.

At some time . . . I had a newspaper route, the afternoon route. I did not realize that my route included the red light district, but it did. I was too ignorant to know what these flannel-wrapped ladies were like, one or the other of whom would come to the door of their little frame dwellings to receive the paper at my hands. This enterprise did not last long . . . not an entire summer, I think. All this newspaper tycoonery was before my high school period.

SARA BASHEFKIN RYDER

Sara Bashefkin was born on St. Paul’s West Side in 1906 and attended St. Cloud Teachers’ College (now St. Cloud State University). She graduated in 1928 and taught in the St. Paul public schools, retiring in 1975. This excerpt from her self-published memoir, Of Thee I Write (1989), provides a grim reminder that poor women lacked resources for dealing with unwanted pregnancies a century ago.

THE DUMP

The fabulous State Street dump near the West Side hills [was] a genuine dumper’s dump, a Paul Bunyan open-faced sandwich on which anything unwanted or wanted could be spread, left, or taken — an enormous repository to which the small, the old, the pious, the crippled, the hungry all went in search of something particular or anything in general. The magnetic pull of the dump was felt by all, appreciated by all, but thrilled the children and frightened some of the older pious Jews whose feelings were mixed; they were intrigued but fearful — this could be a Pandora’s box . . .

One sultry morning in July, my gang and I went to the dump out of sheer boredom; we wanted nothing in particular, except to go to look and to seek. With my many sizes too large canvas gloves and the old umbrella rod, I poked and pushed

A squatter being evicted from St. Paul’s State Street dump, 1935. The dump’s “magnetic pull,” wrote Sara Bashefkin Ryder, was “felt by all.”
around parts of an old iron bed [, and] the rod pushed up a new cigar box. It was a pity to see a new box in a dump, but the lid was tacked down so I couldn’t open it. After several unsuccessful attempts, I tried open the lid with a rusty fork. Pfhui — very uninteresting to see a white linen napkin as a wrapper on something. Disregarding the protests from Rosie, my polio-victimized friend, to chuck it, I turned the box upside down and poked off the white napkin with three red X’s on it. My goodness, such a funny thing.

“Sara, it’s a baby pig,” yelled Rosie. “Throw it away; it’s trefé (not clean).”

“It’s a rubber baby doll,” shrieked Gertie, "give it to me.”

“Wait a minute,” said I with all of my seven years’ maturity, “let’s turn this thing over and see what we can see.” I turned it over with my umbrella rod and was horrified.

“What’s the matter, what kind of an animal is it?” yelled Edith.

“You know, kids, I think it is an unborn baby. Look, its neck is cut, from ear to ear.”

“It can’t be,” snarled Edith, “if it’s not born how could it be here, dummy. It’s a baby pig!”

“Look, it has five toes on each foot, and five fingers on each hand; it’s a baby human being.”

After a short discussion, we took the cigar box and its contents to our grocer, who took one look at it and went to his phone, the only phone in the block, and called a number. About an hour later, a large black hearse drawn by two horses appeared in front of the store. A man jumped off the “dead wagon” and asked the grocer who found it and where. My name and address was given this man; I felt like a heroine until I saw this man open the back door of the hearse and put the little box into it. I was bewildered and frightened, so I ran into the house to tell my mother and to get consolation and an explanation.

“Sorke (Sara), why do you tzitter (tremble) so? Come here, and I’ll wash your hands and face; you’ll feel better, then tell me, and I’ll tell you.”

I dated the events in proper sequence while I huddled close to her bosom as she rubbed her fingers on my scalp and through my hair to console me. She moved me an arm’s length from her and said, “So why are you scared? You didn’t steal anything, you didn’t hurt anybody. You tzitter (tremble) because you don’t understand what you found, so I will tell you. Sit down.” I sat.

“Sorke, you know what zeit means?” “Yes, it means time.” “Everything God creates has to take a certain amount. You planted radishes in the yard, yes? Now they are about 1½ inches above the ground. If you pull them up now, you’ll have only roots, they are not done, they are not ready, they are not finished. When they get taller and ripe, you can pull them up and eat them. Everything in its own time. It has to be or else it’s no good.”

“But . . . what about the poor little baby? It was born, but it’s so little.”

“Yes, it’s a little baby born many months before it was fully developed, before it was a ‘done’ baby, why I don’t know. Maybe it had a sickness and was weak.”

“Is that why the neck was cut?”

“No, I don’t think so — that part I do not know how to answer because I do not have the answer. Come now and have a glass of milk and a cichel (egg cookie). You’ll feel better.”

**MARVIN SMITH**

Between 1999 and 2004, Smith typed up several hundred pages of childhood reminiscences, as well as commentaries about contemporary Jewish life in St. Paul, for his family’s benefit. His account here of a scandal on the city’s West Side indicates that Jewish immigrants were sometimes victimized by their own people.

**SCANDAL HITS THE WEST SIDE**

When I was seven years old . . . it was a balmy [spring] Sunday, and my Bobbe and Zade [grandmother and grandfather] took my brother Harold and me to a celebration on Fillmore and Eaton [streets on the] lower West Side. It seems that all the shuls got together to build a new bood, a bathhouse that could be used for public bathing, a steam sauna, and a combination mikvah that was required by the Orthodox congregations [that] demanded that a new one be built to accommodate all six shuls on the West Side.

They had fundraisers and different promotions and finally came up with enough, but they needed one more affair to put them over the top. The contractor received enough funds to put up three walls, and this particular affair was held within the confines of these three walls. They had speakers and raffles and sandwiches for sale, and on top of that everyone was so eager for this Sunday to be a big financial success that they donated additional funds.

The general manager of the entire project was a man named Froyim Taitelbaum. He was a shomer Shabbas [observed all Sabbath laws], well respected, and no one would ever doubt his honesty. He made the deposits and paid out all the bills, and since three walls were already erected, he was trusted implicitly.

Everybody assumed things were going along great when the contractor went over to Taitelbaum’s place to pick up a check. He soon learned that Mr. T [had flown] the
He and his wife [had] packed up and left for Palestine. A committee was soon formed to investigate, [and] they found that Taitelbaum had purchased his passage ticket sixty days previously. . . . They tried to make his son Anshel make good for his father’s transgression, but nothing doing! A scandal had hit the West Side! What a shanda [shame] to think that they were duped by one of their own. It went down very hard. If you think the Enron scandal was huge, it was peanuts compared to the bood that was never built!

**DR. SAM SCHWARTZ**

Even as a youngster during the early 1920s, Schwartz, who came of age on Minneapolis’s North Side, had a well-developed sense of fairness — as is evident in this account of the injustice perpetrated on movie-theater owner Saul Lebedoff; it’s a selection from Schwartz’s manuscript, “Legacies from Jewett Place and Other Memoirs,” which he penned for his family in 1996.

Mr. Saul Lebedoff owned a small movie house, the Liberty Theater, on 6th Avenue [North], between Jewett Place and Dupont Avenue. For the kids in the neighborhood, Saturday afternoons were special times, because the usual 10-cent price of admission was then reduced to 6 cents for us. That was still a lot of money, but by saving some of my 1 cent per day allowance and begging for a little more on Saturday, I was able to see a couple movies during most months. My big heroes, and those of most of us, were the brave and talented cowboy Tom Mix and his fast and beautiful horse, Tony. Another cowboy, Hoot Gibson, was also very special.

On the fateful afternoon, the movie was not about cowboys. The advertisement pictures in front of the theater were all about skillful sword fighters in a movie called (as I recall it) *The Fighting Heart*. It looked very, very exciting! But I didn’t have, and couldn’t “negotiate,” the necessary 6 cents.

In those days, lacking the 6 cents was not necessarily a problem. In back of the theater was a heavy door, which could be opened only from the inside. In difficult times, a few of the gang would accumulate their needed 6 cents, get into the theater, go to the men’s room, pass through a little “tunnel” to the door, and push it open for the others to come in. One of the insiders, of course, would keep a sharp lookout for Mr. Lebedoff or one of his employees who were on to this trick.

In my younger days I had joined the others once or twice in this daring escapade, but for the past year or so I had refused to go along. It just wasn’t honest, I said. But temptation on this Saturday afternoon was just too much! Our Jewett Place gang had a Robin Hood club and archery was our first love, but so-called sword fighting wasn’t far behind. So now I joined the others, snuck around the Saul Lebedoff’s Liberty Theater, on Minneapolis’s North Side, 1920s. Note the ad for a Yiddish film and the streetcar tracks running along Sixth Avenue North.
back, got through the door and past the “tunnel” and men’s room and then into the theater.

The movie was as exciting as I had imagined, but that night my pangs of conscience began their attack. By sneaking in, I had stolen 6 cents from Mr. Lebedoff. He had never done anything to hurt me, and I had no reason to steal his 6 cents, as I had. No movie, not even *The Fighting Heart*, was worth it! Eventually, I cried myself to sleep, vowing never to sneak in again.

I didn’t sneak in again, but that didn’t solve the problem. I knew that I would have to give Mr. Lebedoff back his 6 cents. I thought of it every time I saw him then and later, when he replaced the Liberty Theater with the larger and more elegant Homewood theater on Plymouth Avenue. But I never got up enough nerve to approach him and give him his 6 cents plus accumulated interest. Then, one day, I learned that Mr. Lebedoff had died. I was doubly distressed; now I would never be able to repay him.

**MORRIS FREEDLAND**

Freedland sold newspapers — probably on Minneapolis’s North Side — while in high school during the 1920s. He learned several of the facts of life while doing so. This account is drawn from Freedland’s unpublished, undated memoir, *From Potatoes to Penicillin*.

There was no such thing as sex education in the public schools, and I certainly didn’t learn the facts of life at home either. But I did, nevertheless, get a good sound education in the biology and sociology of human sexual behavior in quite an unusual way. On one of the stops on my paper route, there was a suite of rooms upstairs of a rather inconspicuous-looking store. Whenever I climbed the long stairway, I was greeted with the pervasive odor of Lysol. The door at the top of the stairs opened into a large living room, furnished with overstuffed furniture in tasteful colors. There were always two or three scantily clad young ladies, heavily covered with cosmetics, who would sit around and smoke cigarettes. Sometimes an older, fully clothed woman would appear to take the paper since I didn’t look like a likely client! The younger ladies were always sullen looking and had empty facial expressions. At times, laughter and giggling were heard in one of the back rooms. When I came down into the street, I could always see a Cord or Auburn parked in front of the undistinguished-looking store. It was not necessary to take a course in biology to understand what was going on!
Freedland's memoir goes on to show how the atmosphere of the Great Depression infected the graduation ceremony at Minneapolis's North High School in June 1932, and affected the speech given by senior class salutatorian Louis Guttman.

Louis had been coached and prepared for his speech for weeks. But what his teacher didn’t know was that he had two speeches — the one which he practiced over and over, and another one, which his teacher didn’t know about. When his turn came, he gave the second speech, which sounded like several pages from Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*. Mr. Hobbs [the school’s principal] apparently had none of the risk factors for a stroke or a heart attack, nor did Mr. Gates, the vice-principal. Their faces were pale and cadaverous looking. They were both speechless as Louis talked on and on about the working classes and how civil disobedience can be a positive factor in society. Before he finished, there was a nervous shuffling among the audience, and when he sat down there had descended a deathly silence over the audience. There was no applause.

After a few more short talks by Mr. Hobbs, who said the usual “Sorry to see you go, but glad to see you leave,” the commencement was over. There were no parties or celebrations. Nobody could afford to celebrate. We departed into the dark, warm and humid night to face more poverty, uncertainty and chaos.

**DR. STANLEY TROUP**

The first excerpt here from “One Man’s Madeleine,” Troup’s 1985 reminiscence of growing up on Minneapolis’s North Side, tells what happened when one Jewish boy took a flyer at a sport at which the Finns in the neighborhood excelled.

A small pocket of Scandinavian families, for the most part Finnish, lived along Glenwood Avenue. Their children were handsome and blond, and formed the nucleus of North High School’s ski team, particularly the jumpers. This sport was not too popular with Jewish mothers (or their sons, for that matter), with the single notable exception of Marvin Benjamin.

Marvin . . . whether on a dare or perhaps in a moment of temporary insanity, borrowed a pair of skis, fastened them on with rubber binders cut from automobile inner tubes — and took off down the run of the 100-foot-high ski jump [at nearby Glenwood Park]. My brother Shy, witness to this adventure, reports that all systems were “go” as Marvin arched through the air, honking like one of the geese that wintered on the ponds of Glenwood Park, until he lost balance as he descended toward the steep landing area.

Marvin’s ruptured spleen was removed surgically several hours later, and no one from our neighborhood challenged the Pukema family or the Juntilla offspring for mastery of the hill ever again.

**Troup’s affectionate account of his father’s career in the garment business introduces us to the irrepressible Max Liman.**

As a teenage immigrant, my father made his way to northern Minnesota, the Iron Range, where rich iron ore was readily scraped from the open-pit mines of Virginia, Eveleth, and Ely. Unlike the immigrants from Finland and Norway, who worked the pits, Dad found a job in a clothing store operated by a distant relative from the old country. His life for the next 55 years was woven into the fabric of the clothing industry, from clerk to proprietor of a small menswear shop in Minneapolis — closed in the depths of the Depression, but not by bankruptcy, he always proudly pointed out: he paid his bills and closed the door — to traveling salesman for several small clothing manufacturers to reluctant retirement. . . . [O]ne of . . . my father’s ways of identifying people: If we were seated at the supper table discussing someone, and he couldn’t remember the name, he would say, “You know the fellow with the dark hair and glasses, a perfect 42 long”? . . .

Within a few days of closing Leo’s Toggery, his clothing store, in 1933, my father went to work as a salesman for Max Liman, a long-time friend from the same part of Eastern Europe from which my father had emigrated alone at age 15. Max Liman manufactured winter wear for women and children, not too promising an enterprise in the depths of the Depression. Max had started his clothing career as a cutter, long before the days of laser devices that cut precisely through multiple layers of fabric to some electronically designed pattern. He worked in an apron with a large, sharp scissors, and on his judgment and skill rested much of the prospects for success or failure. He was short, rather pear-shaped, and a man of unusual generosity of spirit, as well as substance. His brief, but not infrequent, bursts of an incendiary temper never seemed to produce any lasting alienation.

Liman, who lived just down the street from us, on the fashionable side of Queen Avenue south of Plymouth Avenue, was the only person I know who ever invented a holiday. At least I think he did. I never heard anyone else lay claim to its origin. To appreciate the holiday, one must understand that clothing manufacturers had to borrow large sums of money to get them through the various seasons — from when they had to pay for fabrics and before they received revenue from retailers for the finished products. The Hebrew word for evening is erev, and since the new day begins at sundown, the evening that begins a holiday is known as EreYom Kippur is the eve-
ning of the Day of Atonement, and so forth. Max Liman’s holiday was *Erev Machoolah* — the evening of bankruptcy, before he went to the bank to arrange for the annual loan.

**AMIGOS CLUB**

This passage was written in the early 1930s, when Minneapolis’s South Side Neighborhood House was located at Twelfth Avenue South and Ninth Street. Partially funded by the National Council of Jewish Women, this center attracted young adults, who enjoyed a range of social, cultural, and philanthropic experiences there. Excerpts from an Amigos Club scrapbook paint an appealing picture of a vibrant Jewish-community resource.

In this first release of “Sketching the Clubs” we present to you one of the oldest and [most] well-known clubs of the [South Side Neighborhood] House — the Amigos. The Amigos have gained city-wide recognition and more, due to the fact that, as a mixed group, they have continued for so long and so successfully. . . . [T]hrough their varied activities, they have brought much credit to the name of the South Side Neighborhood House. . . .

Samuel D. Finkelstein, house worker, took over the leadership [of the Amigos] approximately two years after their origination. Under Mr. Finkelstein, their initial big affair was their first semi-annual inaugural banquet, which was held in 1932 at the Ritz Hotel. . . . Perhaps the most outstanding of their affairs have been their dances, which, through the course of the season, attracted many hundreds of people to the House. The main attractions at these dances were prize waltzes and popular orchestras. During the last few seasons, however, the former boys and girls, now young men and young ladies, have turned their attraction more to the cultural and educational side of life.

The Amigos have purchased two season tickets for the Sunday afternoon Pop Concerts of the Minneapolis Symphony, two members, each week-end, making use of them. A cultural committee functions to look after activities coming under that head.

Noted for their generosity in the field of organizational philanthropy, they have made the House a gift of a radio and have constantly contributed generously to the [South Side Neighborhood House] camp, the Jewish Federation, and the Community Fund.
As newcomers to the Upper Midwest, Jews laid the foundations for institutions that remain the bedrocks of our communities. Their initial responsibilities included learning to abide by Robert's Rules of Order, studying Hebrew as a living language, and taking care of those in need — using modern social service techniques.

**AGUDAS ACHIM BYLAWS**
Early members of St. Paul's Agudas Achim synagogue sought to adopt American modes of conducting meetings, which differed radically from Old Country customs. Here are three of the congregation’s forty-eight bylaws, written in Yiddish and translated by Joe Rozenberg in 2008; they convey the context and tone of the entire document. Many of the words used in the pre-translation version of the document actually were English ones — transliterated into Yiddish.

**AGUDAS ACHIM**
In the Month of Adar, of the Jewish year of 5679
February 15, 1919, St. Paul, Minnesota

*Special Meetings*
When a person applies to become a member of Agudas Achim, he must be recommended by a member in good standing. A committee of three members should be appointed, two by the President and one by the vice President, and the committee should find out if the prospective member is worthy of membership in the society of Agudas Achim. The committee must report it to the next meeting. In case the committee brings in a favorite suggestion, then a vote should be cast. Three black balls, the candidate is rejected, and two black balls, the President must ask for the reason. When he finds out why and deems [the vote unfair], then the candidate is accepted.
Responsibility for Conducting the Meeting
A member who wants to speak at a meeting must get up from his seat, and ask the President for permission. When 2 or 3 members want to talk at the same time, the President decides who talks first. Every suggestion by a member must be [seconded] by a second member, and then the President must explain the suggestion to all members. When the majority of members [are] for it, then it [will] be accepted, and no more debate [will be allowed].

Disciplining a Member
All members must behave in an orderly fashion at the services, at the reading of the Torah, and at the meetings. In case a member does not behave, the President has the right to call on that certain member to behave. The President has the right to penalize that member with $1 for not behaving. The second time a $2 fine, and the third time with a $3 penalty. . . . When a member offends the whole Society, a fine of $5 should be his penalty.

M ARVIN SMITH
Marvin Smith, who grew up in St. Paul’s West Side Hills during the 1920s and early 1930s, wrote several volumes of reminiscences for his family. Here is what he remembered about the synagogue that served his area of town.

[Beth David Synagogue] was located on Clinton and Isabel Streets. . . . It was a wonderful structure with extra high ceilings, and the trusses that supported the roof were made of mahogany. . . . On both sides of the [bimah] there was a large chair where the President and Vice President sat during the High Holidays. On the wall was a painting of a Stag and a Lion, to denote strength and swiftness. The main sanctuary contained a series of pews formed like the United States Senate, facing the center. There was an adjoining room in the rear to accommodate the women, since they were not considered equal during those days. Seats were sold to members, or rented to unaffiliated folks. . . . On Simchas Torah, when they had the Hakafot [Torah procession] for the men, the children marched with paper flags on a stick with an apple on top and a candle inserted in the apple. Kids received bags of candy, and adults were treated to beer and peanuts. There was no phone at the Temple, but [the] Garelicks, who lived across the street, gladly accommodated any emergency.

SAM FINKELSTEIN
Finkelstein served as a youth worker at the Minneapolis South Side Neighborhood House in the 1930s, joined the board of the Jewish Home for the
Aged later in the same decade, and became president of the home in the early 1960s. Renamed the Sholom Home in 1971, it was located on Midway Parkway in St. Paul from 1923 to 2008, when it moved to a new facility on Kay Avenue, just off West Seventh Street. In 1988 Irving Nudell interviewed Finkelstein about the home, which originally accepted only elderly individuals who were in reasonably good health.

[The place was run by] a husband and wife team... The wife was in charge of housekeeping and kitchen. This was the only way they could operate because they didn't have the money. Of course, the budgets were very, very small... The capacity at that time was about 50 people. There was that number of beds, and the philosophy at the time was that you didn't take sick people, that you take only people who were able to move around, and this was one of the problems, of course, that I had as a young guy. I couldn't see this. It seemed to me the people who needed it most were the people who were getting old. For example, they had one guy we took in who was so restless to do something. [H]e was well, so he wanted the Home to buy a horse and wagon, so he could go out peddling and [earn money to give] to the Home, and it was really quite a problem... So... people would just sit around and really do nothing.

People were called inmates rather than residents, which I changed it to. They meant no harm, you know. This was just the terminology of this type of care and community activity at that time. They never threw anybody out of there, no matter what happened or what their condition was. If they got sick, even. [B]ut they wouldn't admit a person when he was sick...

There was an old man from St. Paul — a very tiny man, but he had a beard almost as long as his height, a very nice guy... He was sitting there with his chin practically hanging down on the floor. I said, "What's the trouble?" "I wanna see the superintendent," he replied. We go into the office. The old man asked, "How long do you keep people?" He was then 98, 99. So the super says, "Bz a buntred und tsvantzik" [until 120]. The guy lighted up... He was, like, taller, and he walked out. Fine. Maybe one half an hour later, three quarters of an hour later, I'm coming out of the building... and there he's sitting with his chin down on the ground again. I said, "What's the problem now?" He said [that he had another question]. So we go into the office, and the superintendent says, "Nu? What is it now?" And he says, "What do I do after 120?" So the superintendent of course says, "[You can live here] as long as you are alive!"
At the Talmud Torah, located on Minneapolis’s North Side, Hebrew was taught as a living language. The institution was a hub for many recreational activities in the years before the Emanuel Cohen Center was built, in 1924, and it also housed a well-baby clinic. Here are several of Schwartz’s memories of this beloved institution, drawn from the manuscript “Legacies from Jewett Place and Other Memoirs,” which he penned for his family in 1996.

The Talmud Torah on Fremont and Eighth opened in 1914. I attended the decrepit building on Bassett Place just a year before the great new building was opened. This must have been a Talmud Torah unique in the world, with a swimming pool — not a mikveh, but a swimming pool. I recall the big auditorium with various lines drawn on the floor and baskets at either end that indicated its double duty as a gymnasium. Elijah Avin was the principal all of the ten years I was a pupil there, and my chief recollection of him is as a little man wandering the halls with a finger to his lips gesturing sheket, shah, quiet. He is reputed to have been a good teacher, but I cannot vouch for this. . . . I recall Mr. Zemach . . . and Mr. Margolith. Every grade school Jewish youngster passed through the classes of “Mar” Kass. What little enthusiasm I developed for Hebrew was probably due to the great teacher Menachem Heilicher.

My keenest recollections about the Talmud Torah [have to do with getting there and then] going home. In the winter two-horse sleighs plied up and down Eighth Avenue, delivering ice cut from the unpolluted Kegan’s Lake out in the country to the icehouse [at] Lyndale and Fifth. . . . These sleighs would go east slowly, burdened with a load of ice, speeding up slightly on the hill from Elwood to Irving, and we would hook onto the runners and catch our ride at four in the afternoon to the Talmud Torah. Coming back at six o’clock, we had to be nimble to grab hold of the sleigh, deadheading back and the horses eager for supper.

Although he did not live in the Jewett Place neighborhood, Dr. George Gordon was a vital part of it, as Schwartz recalled.

[My] dad was hospitalized frequently by Dr. Gordon during the early years of my life. I knew, too, that Dr. Gordon often visited our home to see my parents and the children. Years later, mother told me about the remarkable circumstance of these visits. Dr. Gordon knew they had no money to pay medical costs, so every time he left a prescription, he included enough cash to pay for it! In addition, he never once billed them for his services. In discussing this with others, I have often heard that their parents, too, told them the same story. Here, indeed, was a saintly physician!
Years later I was to meet Dr. Gordon under quite different circumstances. As a student in the Talmud Torah, I learned that Dr. Gordon had been Chairman of their Education Committee for many years, and had been instrumental in attracting an extraordinary faculty and developing a Hebrew curriculum, which was the envy of Jewish educators in America. Ultimately, he gave up his medical practice to devote full time to the Talmud Torah as its Education Director. Of special significance to me was the fact that he also became the Talmud teacher in the Bet Midrash [college department] about the time I entered [it]. He thus became...my third Talmud teacher, after my dad and Rabbi [Moses] Romm. He had a knack for relating the ancient Talmudic discussions to modern times. While students sometimes joked about his pronunciation of “shoshal justice,” all recognized his unique passion for the observation of real social justice, his passion for scholarship, and his passion for the preservation of an educated Jewry.

As a doctor, teacher, friend, and human being, Dr. Gordon was indeed unique, and we who came from the Jewett Place neighborhood were fortunate to share him with the wider community.

Dr. Gordon’s twin passions, for scholarship and for preserving an educated Jewry,” are captured in the June 16, 1938, letter he wrote to Harry Friedman on his graduation from Talmud Torah.

Dear Harry:

The Board of Directors of the Talmud Torah, the Faculty and the Student Body congratulate you on this momentous occasion in your life.

Do not fall into the vulgar idea that [the] mind is a warehouse and education but a process of stuffing it full of goods. “Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no enemy alienate, no despotism enslave. At home, a friend; abroad, an introduction; in solitude, a solace; and in society, an ornament. Without it, what is man? A splendid slave and reasoning savage.”

Whatever life may hold in store for you, do not forget the “rock whence you have been hewn.” Jewish knowledge, attitudes, ideas and ideals may be the only comforter in your future life that you will need most.

Many years of your life have been spent in the Talmud Torah. You have received much information; you have established different attitudes — please do not cast that off as one would cast off an outworn garment.

We hope that you will be successful and prosperous in every undertaking in the future.

MINNEAPOLIS TALMUD TORAH SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT

In his 1949 book, Jews in Transition, Rabbi Theodore Gordon wrote that the social service department of the Minneapolis Talmud Torah had been created in 1914 in order to serve as “an educational and recreational agency.” In the following selections from the monthly minutes of this department, one can read of the impressive scope and growth of its programs, which in 1924 began operating at the new Emanuel Cohen Center. As Gordon wrote: “The purchase (of a building) was made possible by the transfer of funds left...by the late Emanuel Cohen to establish a recreational and social agency. In recognition of this assistance, the name of the institution was changed from the Talmud Torah Social Service Department to the Emanuel Cohen Center.”

October 2, 1919

Mr. Arthur Brin, chairman, reports that the work in the social service department is progressing favorably. The Director, Miss B. Cohen, reports that two classes, senior and junior for sewing [and] aesthetic dancing and athletics, have been formed, also that classes in home economics, Hebrew for adults, and a mother’s club for Americanization have been organized. Miss Cohen further reports that the Dental clinic will open up Monday.

December 30, 1919

The Friday night lectures [are] fairly successful, but it is hoped that with a new method of publicity our attendance would be very much increased.

Our Americanization classes very well attended, and it is planned to give a party to the pupils on Wednesday, Jan. 7. A program will be provided and refreshments served by the Ladies Auxiliary. . . .

At last Monday's meeting a great deal of discussion took place as to the demarcation line of Social Service work. It was decided that any activity for T[almud] T[orah] children exclusively should be considered as school work, but anything that is open to the community should be considered as [social service] work.

February 26, 1920

Mrs. I. Kurtz, superintendent, reports that the Infant Welfare Society is now conducting the baby clinic in the Talmud Torah on Mondays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. A full time nurse visits the homes of those mothers who attend [the baby clinic and assists] with the preparation of the diet. The nurse also visits those homes where new babies have come and urges the mother to attend the clinic. Dr. Noran, who is a child disease specialist and who has been Dr. Knappe’s assistant, is the Doctor in charge.
January 25, 1922
Social Service Committee Rabbi Heller, director, reports that the club work is progressing very favorably. There are thirty-four separate groups meeting in this building. The gym is being used to full capacity, particularly now when two new classes for women have been opened.

The Senior alumni have been organized into a study class for the purpose of studying Jewish history.

The Director . . . hopes that ways and means can be found either to rent a new building or to enlarge this one.

October 10, 1923
Mr. Weisberg reported that no Organization Committee has been appointed by the Associated Jewish Charities, to meet with our committee, in regard to making plans to buy and remodel the new proposed Social Service House at 929 Elwood Ave. No., and all the power to act in regards to funds.

Discussing the Social Service report, Mr. A. N. Bearman made the following motion, which was seconded and carried. That the Board of Directors of the Minneapolis Talmud Torah agreed to relinquish the work and management of the Social Service Department to such a body at such a time as is found expedient.

April 10, 1924
Mrs. Alex Berman, chairman, reports that the board to govern the Social Service dept. at 909 Elwood Avenue has been organized to include directors from all the active Jewish organizations of the city, namely; the Talmud Torah, Ladies Auxiliary of the Talmud Torah, Jewish Family Welfare, the B’nai Brith, Gymal Doled, Council of Jewish Women, Talmud Torah Alumni, Leaders Council of the Social Service Dept. and three from the city at large. In all the Board consists of 33 directors. The chairman announced the dedication of the building at 909 Elwood Ave. on Sunday April 27th. All the directors were cordially invited to attend.

Supplementing Mrs. Berman’s report, Mrs. Fink stated that we have 58 clubs, 17 classes in dancing, cooking, sewing etc, and three clinics. In January approximately 12,000 people came under the influence of the Social Service Dept.

JEWISH WELFARE ASSOCIATION DIFFICULT CASE COMMITTEE
These excerpts from the files of the Difficult Case Committee of the Jewish Welfare Association (JWA) in St. Paul describe some of the daunting problems immigrants faced in the early 1930s. After World War II, the association’s name was changed to the Jewish Family Service.
April 2, 1930
Case discussed of couple who have been sentenced to prison for bootlegging and what should be done with their children.

Case came to attention of J.W.A. in 1930. Danger of woman and children being deported. Have well-to-do relatives but are uncharitable. Man denied citizenship. Budget of $75.00 required for family. Ten dollars given monthly by West Side Club. Man has tuberculosis and is very ill. Consensus was to see relatives.

March 2, 1932
Miss [Helen] Grodinsky [the agency director] . . . reported that the man had served a ninety-day workhouse sentence for using and peddling narcotics. . . . They also learned that the two boys are not their own; they are the man’s brother’s children. Their father has also served [time] for the same offense and has completely disappeared the past three years. Wife deserted him while he was in prison, and our clients have had the children since.

The woman was discharged from the hospital a few days ago, and they are anxious to go east. The man’s brother urges them to come. . . .

After considering all phases of the situation, the committee came to the conclusion that sending the family to join the brother would probably be the best solution for the family, particularly for the children.

November 2, 1932
This is the case of feeble-minded mother who has had periodic attacks of insanity, living alone with her 11-year-old boy. Problem being whether home should be broken up. Dr. Lippman had seen mother and boy at the Child Guidance Clinic, where boy had been previously studied while father was still alive. It was Dr. Lippman’s opinion that boy and mother should not be separated, as discussion brought out that boy seems well adjusted both at home and at school.

ST. PAUL JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER
This 1926 letter to the administration of St. Paul’s Jewish Educational Center Association announces a munificent building-fund bequest from the Calmenson family. With the onset of the Great Depression a few years later, completion of the building mentioned here became uncertain. In order to receive funding from the Community Chest, successors to the trustees changed the association’s name from the Jewish Educational Center to the Jewish Community Center.

November 29, 1926
To the Officers and Directors of the Jewish Educational Center Association:

This letter is being written to you on behalf of the trustees of the Calmenson Memorial Fund . . . created by the children of Moses and Bessie Calmenson, after the death of their parents, for the purpose of establishing a memorial to their parents, and to their deceased brother, Benjamin, [as well as] brother and sister Cain and Annie Calmenson. . . .

The trustees of this fund have been apprised of the fact that your organization is about to construct a $100,000 Jewish educational center, for the purpose of housing therein a Hebrew school and other Jewish educational and communal activities, as set out in the constitution of your organization, which has been adopted. It has been announced that there is to be an auditorium in said building with a seating capacity of not less than 500 persons. . . .
The St. Paul Jewish community has been able to help the Russians make the transition to American society. For English language training, vocational counseling and job placement services will be received the necessary vocational adjustment services. The additional time provided an environment for nine pre-school-aged children, will permit their adult parents to become integrated into the work force.

The Russian Child Care program, by providing a sheltered supportive services to become integrated into the work force. The proposed service will enable the parents of these youngsters to take advantage of economic opportunities so that they can become self-sufficient within six months and contribute to the economic health and vitality of the St. Paul community.

The number of Russian refugees settling in St. Paul has dramatically increased since 1973. From 1973 to 1979, approximately 300 individuals immigrated to St. Paul — 80 of whom arrived during the last year — and an additional 120 are expected in 1980. The Russians arrive here with no material resources. They have fled from a totally different social, economic and cultural system and, while highly motivated, they need extensive English language training and vocational adjustment services to become integrated into the work force.

The Russian Child Care program, by providing a sheltered supportive environment for nine pre-school-aged children, will permit their adult parents to receive the necessary vocational adjustment services. The additional time provided for English language training, vocational counseling and job placement services will ease the integration process and speed their absorption into American society.

The St. Paul Jewish community has been able to help the Russians make a successful transition so that the immigrants have not had to turn to public assistance. The cost of the resettlement program to the Jewish community was approximately $200,000 in 1979 and is expected to reach $300,000 in 1980. The St. Paul Jewish community is proud of its ability to provide these services through voluntary efforts, but with numbers and costs increasing steeply, the Jewish Community Center is seeking a partnership with Ramsey County to benefit both the Russians and the community alike.

A ST. PAUL JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER PROGRAM FOR RUSSIAN JEWS

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Jewish Community Center sponsored numerous programs to aid Russian immigrants to the Twin Cities. Here is the summary statement from a 1979 grant proposal submitted to the Ramsey County Welfare Department for immigrant child-care funding, a proposal that proved to be successful.

The St. Paul Jewish Community Center is requesting that Ramsey County award a $14,256 purchase-of-service contract for a Russian Child Care program for immigrant youth. This program will provide day care services for nine children, five days a week for nine months in 1980.

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THE FOUNDING OF UNITED SYNAGOUGE YOUTH

United Synagogue Youth (USY) was the brainchild of several members of Minneapolis’s Beth El Synagogue. The idea quickly caught on in other Twin Cities Conservative congregations and spread throughout the region, as Shirley Abelson, the wife of Rabbi Kass Abelson, related in this oral history recorded by Bonnie Heller in 1983.

We came [to Minneapolis in 1948] full of idealism, a newly married couple, anxious to get started. One of the things, of course, that we were primarily interested in was working with the young people. There was no really well-organized young people's group, so [one] of the first things we did [was] to start an LT [Leadership Training Fellowship] group. There was [already] a National LT, and we met with them on Shabbos afternoon, and then through the encouragement of the Women’s League . . . and with the encouragement of Rabbi [David] Aronson, a convention was called of the young people of all the synagogues in this area. [It was held] over the Thanksgiving weekend of 1948 in Omaha, Nebraska. . . . At this convention, . . . the name USY [United Synagogue Youth] was given, and three years later the national organization accepted this name. . . .

One of the activities I remember was a beautiful mothers’ and daughters’ dinner that the girls prepared and invited their mothers to. Then, as our groups became stronger, we also had special-interest groups. Merle Morris helped us to set up a darkroom, and we had a photography interest group. We had basketball groups, we had a dance group, and, at that same time, organized a junior congregation — or it might have been organized at the synagogue. . . . The vice-president of USY was the president of the Junior Congregation, and so there was a close linkage. The Saturday morning services were an integral part of USY. In addition to knowing that young people were with their friends and hung around in groups, we organized what we called the TCYC — Twin City Youth Congregation. . . . [There were] youth groups from all of the congregations, including the Reform and Orthodox. And we used to get together about once a month for a dance or some kind of social event,
Berman has over the course of nearly eight decades been actively involved in the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) at local, regional, and national levels; the Minneapolis Jewish Federation; and the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. Here are excerpts from a 1992 interview with Berman that was conducted by Idell Silberman on behalf of the NCJW’s Minneapolis Section, which created several innovative social service programs for Minneapolis public schools, nursery schools, and community centers. Her comments have been slightly rearranged to help readers follow the chronology of projects and events more easily.

I was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on October 10, 1912, and I went to the University of Minnesota from 1929 to 1933. I have lived here ever since. The first year I was married, a friend and I were invited to a meeting [of the NCJW]. It was an active group; it had a purpose, and the leadership and the people involved were attractive. . . . I’ve been an active member for almost these 59 years since. . . .

I was vice president of Community Services from 1946 to 1950 and then president of the Minneapolis Section from ’50 to ’54 . . . . and we’ve sponsored community-wide action programs with other women’s groups through the years.

[The Section usually] decided on social service projects [by surveying] the needs in the community. In the case of the Golden Age Club [begun in 1947 at the Emanuel Cohen Center], we started it because [we were told] of a similar [NCJW project] . . . in Cleveland. . . . I thought, “Well, if they could do it, why couldn’t we?” [After our success with the Golden Age Club,] we organized a Council House for Senior Citizens [in downtown, in 1952] to serve the entire Minneapolis community.

WISE [Women in Service to Education] and GISE [Guys in Service to Education] [begun, respectively, between 1964 and 1967] worked in the public schools. [Their] aim was to offer reading tutors. It was a very successful program. . . .

Another memorable program was Tot Talk. This was started [in 1969] in the [American] Indian neighborhood over on Franklin [Avenue in Minneapolis] to encourage children [of Indian background] to engage in conversation with adults and increase their vocabulary. We started with three- and four-year-olds, and later started a second group for two- and three-year-olds. It was a three-year demonstration project and was held in churches. . . . Another opportunity the Section had . . . [arose when] Gladys Davis left NCJW a fund of $10,000, and the section [used] it to found the Jewish Historical Society [of the Upper Midwest] in 1984. I think [that in the future] there will be less opportunity for innovative programs that identify NCJW as the sole sponsor. I think we will be operating with other organizations in every area. . . . NCJW was my training ground. . . . I wouldn’t have been president of the Minneapolis Federation if I hadn’t been trained within Council. I probably wouldn’t have been active in the Jewish Historical Society if I hadn’t been trained within NCJW.
Not surprisingly, differences of opinion and even outright conflicts have affected, and sometimes afflicted, Upper Midwestern Jewish communities from the time they were initially established. Such is human nature. In this chapter, men and women air their grievances about a variety of issues.

**Paul Blumberg**

This letter is Blumberg’s response to an inquiry from Rosalind and Mike Baker in February 2004, asking him to identify his maternal grandfather — a committed Jewish socialist — in a number of undated photographs showing members of the Minneapolis branch of the Workmen’s Circle that the Bakers had sent him. Mike Baker, who grew up in New York, came from a similar Jewish socialist background. Receipt of the photographs loosed a flood of memories. Blumberg recalls here that his parents’ ideology was quite different from that of most Jews in their North Minneapolis neighborhood during the mid-twentieth century.

Dear Roz and Mike,

Thanks for your note and the pictures of the Workmen’s Circle group. Unfortunately, my grandfather, David Shier, is not in them. I don’t know when these pictures were taken. My grandfather, who worked for the *Daily Forward* all his life, was transferred from Minneapolis to Chicago about 1929. It’s possible those photos were taken some time after that. As I was a small boy when these pictures were taken, I don’t recognize anyone [in them].

My mother, Ruth Shier, was born in Mpls. in 1910, and the family lived at 612 Newton North. She married my father, Irving Blumberg, in 1929. For several years in the 1940s we lived on 53rd and Irving South. In 1943 we moved to 1224 Russell North. At that time it was a solidly upper-middle-class Jewish neighborhood. I remember very well Plymouth Avenue, which, to a young boy, seemed like
a really big downtown street. Every Saturday I went to the Homewood Theater for the 11-cent matinee. When the movie price went up to 12 cents, I thought the world was coming to an end — what inflation! We often ate at the delicatessen across the street; was it Malcoff’s? Corned beef sandwiches I remember were something like 35 cents. A few blocks up toward our house on Plymouth was Desnick’s Drug Store, where we would sometimes hang out after school (Lincoln Jr.). Near Desnick’s was the S&H Delicatessen [, which] had a couple of pin ball machines, which the older kids would play after school, and us younger kids would stand around and watch and admire. I graduated from Lincoln Jr. and then went on to North High.

My parents were socialists and naturally secular Jews. I was the only kid in the neighborhood who didn’t have a bar mitzvah, much to the shock and dismay of all my friends. They were very disapproving. . . . [M]y parents were very active in the NAACP, and I remember as a boy they frequently went to meetings at Phyllis Wheatley [House]. Mike [Baker] mentioned Cecil Newman, a name very familiar to me. I don’t remember if he was the editor of the black newspaper in Mpls. There were others I remember fondly. The president of the Mpls. NAACP in those days was a man named Albert Allen, an intelligent, talented man who, because of discrimination, could only get a job as a porter at the Mpls. airport. In those days the great fight was for a fair employment law in Mpls., which was a struggle. We were friends with Bill Leland, a great man who fought long and hard for civil rights.

Often my parents would invite their black friends over to our house, and I believe our neighbors were aghast. I think our family was quite the curiosity on the north side. It was a very conservative, insular community of observant and quite narrow-minded provincial (and in many ways arrogant) people, smug in their self-satisfied little world, intolerant of change.

In high school I had a big crush on a girl named June Davis, but I sensed a little tension at her house because I think her father was in the CP [Communist Party], and my parents were anti-Soviet socialists. My father died prematurely at age 39 in 1948, and a couple of years later, my mother moved us out to California. That was the end of my Mpls. days, which, however, I remember very fondly, despite often feeling out of place and a rebel in that community.

Paul

MINNEAPOLIS SUPPORT FOR BIROBIDJAN
The following series of exchanges between representatives of the Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service (now the Minneapolis Jewish Federation) and several members of the local Jewish community relate to a postwar effort
to raise funds supporting the resettlement of Russian Jews in Birobidjan, a remote, sparsely inhabited area in the Soviet Union’s far east. Set aside by the central government as an autonomous Jewish republic in 1928, it was a place where Jews were free to run their own institutions and use their own language, Yiddish, while ceding final authority, of course, to Moscow. Naturally, the very existence of this republic presented a challenge to Zionist dreams of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. Advocates of Birobidjan believed that a “new” Jew would emerge there, one who had risen to the challenges presented by its rugged, heavily forested environment. The pace of migration to Birobidjan picked up right after the war with the arrival of Soviet Jews who had been displaced during the conflict.

The Federation was intent on becoming the sole entity authorized to solicit funds locally for the ambitious resettlement project. In this, as the communications here suggest, it met resistance from several quarters.

Two American organizations had been established to help promote Birobidjan among Jews outside the Soviet Union. The first, formed in 1924, was the working-class-oriented Association for Jewish Colonization in Russia (Yiddish acronym: ICOR). The second was the American Committee for the Settlement of Jews in Birobidjan — familiarly known as Ambidjan — which targeted a middle-class audience; it was created in 1934. The two merged in 1946, under the name Ambidjan, only to disband in the early 1950s in the depths of the Cold War. It is difficult to determine how much independence ICOR and Ambidjan exercised with respect to the American Communist Party. Indeed, most scholars believe that the organizations were formed as a cynical ploy by Josef Stalin to wring money from American and Canadian Jews who wanted to aid their coreligionists in Russia.

The first item here is a December 4, 1946, letter from Louis Locketz, a supporter of Ambidjan, to Federation president I. S. Joseph. His comments about Palestine suggest that support for the nascent Jewish state was at that time not a given among secular radicals. Note that Locketz did not belong to the working class but was, instead, the owner of a garment-manufacturing company. Replying on December 20, Joseph expresses agreement with several of Locketz’s sentiments but insists that organizational channels (i.e., the Federation) should be respected and utilized.

Next is a memo to Joseph written nearly a year later by Charles I. Cooper, the Federation’s executive director. Although sympathetic to American aid for Jewish resettlement in Birobidjan, Cooper is leery of sending funds via Russian Jewish organizations, which he clearly suspects of being...
under the sway of Communists. Consequently, he wants to channel Federation-approved donations to the resettlement effort via the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The final document, from April 1948, is a summary by a Federation-appointed committee of the tense relations between the supporters of Ambidjan and those of the Federation. Notice that despite the divergence of political opinions voiced in these communications, the various correspondents maintain a distinctly civil tone.

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**December 20, 1946**

Dear Louis,

I subscribe wholeheartedly to your statement that the people of America, including Jews, must promote a better feeling of friendship towards our War Ally — Russia, and we must learn to understand their problems and their economic ideologies, just the same as we want them to understand our pattern of living and our capitalistic system. I also fully agree with you that Russia has done a great deal to help save the remnants of European Jewry...

You must understand, however, that in this community... our Federation must be guided by majority opinion of its Board of Directors [who] have never turned down a request from a worthy institution... I do, however, dissent from your statement that I made any promises of a stipulated amount of money for Ambidjan...

Our Budget Committee has never been able to get any authentic information as to the number of Jewish children housed in the Ambidjan project, how much money is spent there, and whether any more children continue to move [there]... [E]ven your own [Ambidjan] representative... could not answer the questions with regard to the number of children and the expenditures.

Sincerely,

I. S. Joseph

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**November 21, 1947**

Memo to: I. S. Joseph
From: Charles I. Cooper

In clarifying our relationship to the Birobidjan project, it is necessary, in my opinion, to set down certain basic principles, which are to my way of thinking fundamental:

1. The project for the establishment of a Jewish autonomous region of Birobidjan deserves the support of American Jewry.
2. American Jewry ought to be willing to give reconstruction and economic aid to the project without insisting upon religious or other ideologic [sic] indoctrination.
3. However, it is not practical to render such aid through the sole instrumentality of Russian Jewish organizations.
4. Obviously, such organizations have as their prime objective the advancement of Communist political aims.
5. Obviously, when we send money through Ambidjan, we are entrusting our funds to an out and out Communist organization.
6. Aid to Birobidjan and to kindred projects in Russia should come from American Jewry through the Joint Distribution Committee.
7. The Joint Distribution Committee has in the past shown its interest in helping Russian Jewry. The J.D.C. does its work through its own officials and agents. Only in that way can American Jewry effectively participate in the project in Russia.
8. This Reporter has followed the progress of the Birobidjan experiment for many years. Here is a territory with untold physical resources which can be exploited for the benefit of our brethren in Russia by the investment of initial capital for houses, roads and machinery. This capital the Russian government has not supplied, Russian Jewry is too poor to supply, and only American Jewry can and might be willing to supply.

April 12, 1948
Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service

Mr. Chairman:

During the first part of 1945, the local committee of icor (who have since been merged with Ambidjan) started a fund-raising campaign for 15 thousand dollars. They claimed that the money was needed to assist in transferring 3,000 orphans from Stalingrad and other parts of Russia to Birobidjan.

After raising over $4,000.00, they were approached by some board members of this Federation, asking them to discontinue the solicitation of funds because 1945 was the year when this Federation promised the Jewish people of Minneapolis that we would conduct only one fund-raising campaign. The local Ambidjan committee agreed to comply with the request, providing that they would be admitted as beneficiaries to the Minneapolis Federation. . . .

A subvention of $3,000.00 was granted them for the year 1945 and $4,000.00 for 1946.

The information we received regarding the Birobidjan budget and their activities in general is very vague. All the information we received came from their New York office. Not a single letter or request did we receive directly from Birobidjan, where the supplies and materials are actually used.

During the year 1946, the Office of the Council of Federation and Welfare Funds tried to get detailed information about the Birobidjan project, but the infor-
mation they received was similar to what this Federation received from the Ambidjian headquarters in New York. In the August, 1946, report of the Council, it stated that cables are received periodically from Birobidjan, acknowledging receipt of machinery and supplies.

After meeting several times with the local Ambidjian Committee last year, and after numerous discussions about getting some kind of a report directly from Birobidjan, we reached an understanding with them; whereby, they agreed that they will try to get satisfactory information direct from Birobidjan regarding their program before this Federation makes any subventions to them for the year 1947.

Your committee drafted a suggested letter with instructions that it be submitted by the local Ambidjian committee to their New York headquarters. . . . We are now waiting for a reply. . . .

In conclusion, I would like to say that your committee is of the opinion that the Jewish people of Birobidjan do need our assistance, and that the local people who sponsor the Ambidjan project consist of a group of individuals who firmly believe that Jewish people who struggle for survival should be helped no matter where they are, regardless of their religious beliefs or ideological differences. These people feel that they made substantial contributions to this Federation, and in view of the fact that they did not have a general fund-raising campaign of their own last year; they are entitled to some consideration. They also stated that our president, Mr. Joseph, promised to some members of their committee that they would be given proper consideration and that they would be treated fairly, if they will cooperate in the 1947 U.J.A. [United Jewish Appeal] campaign.

To comply with Mr. Joseph's request, they not only dropped the idea of their own fund-raising campaign, but they also increased their pledges to the Federation substantially. In addition, they assisted us in the fund raising.

In view of all of these circumstances, your committee recommends that we grant a subvention to the Ambidjian Committee of $4,000.00 for the year 1947.

Ambidjian did not survive the sharp early-1950s escalation of the Cold War. Its members could not successfully refute charges that they were either dupes or agents of the Soviet Union. Nor could they publicly rationalize the Soviet-sponsored anti-Semitism that intensified in the postwar years. Indeed, it was during Stalin’s anti-Jewish purges of 1948 that all Soviet-Jewish institutions in Birobidjan, such as its Yiddish theater, publishing house, and newspaper were shut down. Federation subventions in support of Ambidjian apparently ended in 1948. Given the absence of adequate documentation, questions about whether or not the funds raised in America ever aided the Jews of Birobidjan lack definitive answers. In any event, such questions were effectively rendered moot not only by the creation of the State of Israel but also by the outbreak of the Korean War, which was a proxy conflict between the USSR and the United States. According to Henry Srebrnik’s 2010 book, Dreams of Nationhood: American Jewish Communists and the Soviet Birobidzhan Project, 1924–1951, in 1950 “a message sent to Ambidjan, purportedly by the leadership of the Jewish Autonomous Region, declared that Birobidjan no longer required nor wanted any outside help.”

Birobidjan itself continues to exist. Although its Jewish population is unsurprisingly small, Yiddish flourishes there, with radio and television programs broadcast in the language. In addition, a synagogue was dedicated in 2004, its congregation led by an Israeli-born Lubavitch rabbi.

**HACHNOSSES ORCHIM**

When the Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service was created, in 1930, the majority of its overseas donations went to yeshivas (Orthodox schools and seminaries) in Eastern Europe, mostly in Lithuania and Poland. By the 1950s, the wishes — indeed, the needs — of Minneapolis’s Orthodox community appear to have yielded to the strictures of social-work efficiency, as the following chronicle indicates. The sources I have used to create it include extracts from Federation memos and local studies as well as from a national report; all come from the Federation’s collection and roughly encompass the period 1954–64. Taken together, they convey the organization’s management approach to *hachnosses orchim,* or “welcoming visitors.”

The term alludes to the warm hospitality Abraham offers the three strangers who appear unannounced at his tent (Genesis 18:3–5). In the Old Country, wayfarers were often put up in the synagogue or Talmud Torah building if there was no other shelter available. In America, visitors typically found a bed and ready access to kosher food in a house set aside for this purpose or attached to a Talmud Torah. Such was the case in Minneapolis, where, starting in the early 1920s, the Hachnosses Orchim was located in a home at 1017 Logan Avenue North and called the Hebrew Sheltering Home. The Hebrew Free School was also housed there. Both were supported by the Orthodox community. The home was run by the Hachnosses Orchim Society (HOS), which raised money through solicitations and appeals in Orthodox synagogues, and by a ladies’ auxiliary, which sponsored an annual picnic and annual dinner.

In 1931 the HOS successfully applied for financial assistance from the year-old Minneapolis Federation. As the HOS’s members aged and its fund-raising abilities decreased, the amount of the Federation’s subvention grew.
The Hebrew Sheltering Home, which had six bedrooms, employed a caretaker couple who made meals and kept the rooms clean. The number of people served yearly varied as time went on; most of them were adult males. Generally, two nights’ lodging and two kosher meals per day were provided. In 1930 the HOS accommodated 550 guests/wayfarers. In 1941, as the Great Depression came to an end, the number dropped to 350. The home put up a number of European refugees during World War II. In 1945 only seventy to eighty people used the facility. In the early 1950s it began serving guests/wayfarers from St. Paul, bussed in under the auspices of that city’s Jewish Family Service (JFS). By 1954 the number of people using the home had increased to about 240 per year, all of them men.

During the three decades in which the HOS was a beneficiary of the Federation, constant tension existed between the two in several key areas. To the HOS, which represented the Minneapolis Orthodox community, preserving the Hebrew Sheltering Home was a primary mitzvah. Although the Federation was basically sympathetic to that view, it also wanted up-to-date bookkeeping methods to be followed — the home, in the Federation’s view, was lax in that regard — and it wanted modern social-work procedures to be applied regarding the “intake” and “discharge” of guests/wayfarers.

A 1936 Federation memo reflected the organization’s basic respect for the ancient custom: “The care of transients is imbedded in Jewish tradition,” it read. “While nonsectarian facilities are available, this does not affect the necessity or the existence of a Hachnosses Orchim. Community opinion requires the continued functioning of such an agency, particularly since the size of the problem appears to be relatively small.”

Yet the Federation also wanted the JFS to be given responsibility for intake. By contrast, the HOS and those local Orthodox rabbis who weighed in pointed out that “they could not question the reasons the men came; they came and they needed help.” The HOS and rabbis maintained, furthermore, that it was too much to expect that the guests/wayfarers, many of whom had psychiatric problems, to go downtown, where the JFS office was located, for intake and then back to the North Side, where the home was. As one rabbi put it, “The mitzvah is to care and take care, not be an investigative agency.” As the years wore on, the conflict between old attitudes and modern sociological approaches remained unresolved.

Evidently, the question of how to treat Jewish wayfarers was one that stirred general attention. In 1958 the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds — the larger organization to which the Minneapolis Federation belonged — issued a nationwide study, titled “Interim Report on Community Experience and Concern with the Problem of Transiency,” assessing the situation. (Note its use of the term transient instead of either guest or wayfarer.)

There were two kinds of Jewish transients, the report noted: meshulochim (emissaries, typically those collecting funds on behalf of a national or international Jewish charity) and “migrant transients.” The report bemoaned the absence of “accepted best casework practices” and boldly declared its authors’ readiness “to question Jewish community practices regarding migrants and to suggest alternatives.” On the other hand, the report acknowledged the existence of “several very strong community attitudes about both meshulochim and migratory transients.” Moreover, it asserted, there was a feeling in Jewish communities that “Jews take care of their own. In the case of meshulochim, the ancient tradition of tzedakah (charity) required that they be housed and fed and [that] their organizations be contributed to.” The report further expressed the fear that “certain problems [would arise when] . . . communities . . . stop serving transients.” Transients might visit community leaders, who would be incensed by having such individuals call on them for help when they, the leaders, had contributed to Federations in order to avoid having to deal with personal appeals; this the report termed the “nuisance value” of the transient. A second fear noted was that special groups would arise to serve transients and “engage in separate fund-raising appeals,” thus impairing the potential of Federation campaigns.

The committee’s temporizing recommendation was that “if communities feel, perforce, that routine assistance to transients must be continued, perhaps a lay committee or a member of the clerical staff of the Federation might so handle transiency.”

The Hebrew Sheltering Home on Logan Avenue met its demise in 1963, when its furnace failed and the Federation declined to pay for repairs. The building was sold to a private party the following year. According to a 1965 Federation document, “Notes on Local Agencies Sub-Committee Budgeting,” transients (as the document called them) were now to be given “a night’s housing at a low cost hotel and up to $3.00 cash,” presumably for meals and incidentals. Under “extraordinary circumstances” an individual could get two nights, “but the burden of proof should be on the transient.” Those who sought accommodation had to pick up their hotel chits at the Jewish Family Service downtown. If the JFS happened to be closed, rabbis were authorized to offer one’s night’s lodging at no charge. It appears to this editor that, in Minneapolis, straightforward Abrahamic hospitality had lost the battle with modern bureaucratic systems.

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NEW JEWISH AGENDA

The Twin Cities chapter of New Jewish Agenda was formed in 1988, eight years after the national organization had been founded. The national organization's purpose was to promote “progressive values in the Jewish community and to raising sensitivity to Jewish concerns among progressives.” Among the causes it espoused were “peace with justice in the Middle East and Central America, feminism, nuclear disarmament, and economic and social justice [as well as] reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinian people based on mutual recognition of the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to national self-determination, renunciation of violence, and a negotiated settlement.”

Locally as well as nationally, the organization faced hostility from mainstream organized Jewry for its critical views on Israeli government foreign policy. Perennial financial difficulties and the defection of some members to other, usually single-issue progressive Jewish organizations, such as the New Israel Fund, led to its demise in 1992. The brief history of New Jewish Agenda illustrates the conflict between many mainstream Jews, who were loathe to question the wisdom or morality of official Israeli responses to Palestinian arguments, and those Jews who actively encouraged such questioning.

Here are passages from two mass-mailed letters aimed at attracting new members to New Jewish Agenda.

December 1988

Dear Friend,

Over the past year, Twin Cities New Jewish Agenda became revitalized and has organized many events.

Under our own banner, we joined marches for Mother’s Day, for May Day, and for Central American Solidarity. We participated in weekly vigils with a coalition of women’s groups at the Minneapolis Federal Building as a protest against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We cosponsored visits by Mubarak Awad and Chaim Shur. We had Martin Sampson give a lecture and study session on Israel and the Palestinians.

On three Friday nights we have had potlucks for socializing, celebrating the Sabbath together, and having discussions on Israeli/Palestinian issues and other New Jewish Agenda topics.

Sincerely,

Howard Schneider
For the Steering Committee

[circa 1992]

New Jewish Agenda is a twelve-year-old national organization dedicated to promoting progressive values in the Jewish community and to raising sensitivity to Jewish concerns among progressives. Tikkun Olam, the just repair of the world, is the guiding principle of New Jewish Agenda.

Some 5,000 members in 48 chapters celebrate Jewish religious and secular culture and work for peace with justice in the Middle East and Central America, feminism, nuclear disarmament, and economic and social justice. . . .

We care deeply about Israel. In our Middle East work, we believe that the just repair of the world requires reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinian people, based on mutual recognition of the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to national self-determination, renunciation of violence, and a negotiated settlement.

A SYNOAGOGUE DISPUTE

Discord among members of the same synagogue or temple sometimes results in the establishment of a new congregation. In the late 1980s, Associate Rabbi Stacy Offner’s homosexuality was the prime factor in a quarrel within the ranks at St. Paul’s Reform-movement Mount Zion Temple about terminating her contract. In an effort to avoid a schism, temple board member Paula Pergament wrote the following general letter to all members, pointing out the admirable qualities of both Offner and the congregation’s senior rabbi, Leigh Lerner. Pergament’s letter and the Special Concerns Committee, formed in January 1988 to investigate the breakdown of cordial relations between the two rabbis, were of no avail: Offner resigned that February, and a number of congregants broke with Mount Zion and went on that same year to found the Reform-movement Shir Tikvah congregation in Minneapolis; Rabbi Offner was hired as its religious leader.

December 22, 1987

Dear ____________,

As a congregant and member of the Board of Trustees, I perceive a dynamics emanating from our pulpit that says “complete.” Rabbi Lerner brings a casual ambience that means approachability, warmth, and a realness that speaks of “human-being” and “Rabbi” as one. Rabbi Offner brings a fullness and richness, a dimension that deepens our pulpit experience. I am excited by the blending of characteristics and abilities our senior Rabbi and associate Rabbi bring together. When I recognize the combination of Leigh and Stacy at their best, I rejoice. I have always felt that some-
thing good and exciting can come from the stability of an on-going relationship and association that shares a history of time. The guidelines for rabbinical “flow” are just that — guidelines. There are allowances for congregations to settle into the stability and consistency of a continuing rabbinical association. I have witnessed a young man — Leigh Lerner — stretch and grow into the seasoned rabbi that he is today. Our congregation is familiar with this process. In the same vein, I am looking forward to watching a young woman — Stacy Offner — grow here at our Temple into the mature rabbi she is on her way to becoming. We have loved Rabbi Lerner from the beginning of his young years and we have loved Rabbi Offner from the beginning of hers. 

Differences between a senior rabbi and an associate rabbi can be mediated, modified, and understood. Growth is a moving thing that sometimes hurts, sometimes feels good, and sometimes is puzzling, but when done with the understanding and support of people who care, always brings people to a better place.

The three irreconcilable ingredients in a relationship are: 1) a coup for power; 2) a lover spurned; 3) a money scam. These are not here in this rabbi relationship. Other misunderstandings, however, can be mediated and worked out.

The fear of misunderstandings about sexual orientation can be re-educated, and myths can be replaced. Mount Zion Temple has always been in the forefront of issues concerning the community:

1. Interfaith marriages
2. Black/white relationships
3. Abortion rights
4. Women’s rights

We are one of the first congregations to have a Rabbi with a wife developing her own business which deals with a previous “taboo” issue — children of chemically dependent and alcoholic parents.

Sisterhood, the Critical Issues Committee, and the Social Action Committee have openly addressed timely issues which other congregations have been slow to face.

One of the most ancient and most current issues needing to be faced is at our doorstep — homosexuality. Our general society has homosexual leaders in visible places — politics, the arts, the sciences. The issue is here. It behooves us to look at it, to educate ourselves, to educate our community, and to allow positive leadership roles to surface. The quality of leadership is based on one’s merits, not one’s sexual orientation. Historically as Jews, we have known what it is like to be on the fringe of acceptance within the general community — full of potential yet misunderstood. We should be the last to do this to our own gay and lesbian people.

Please don’t be willing to let the dynamics we have seen emanate from our pulpit — the strengths of Rabbi Lerner and Rabbi Offner — disintegrate into something it need not be.

There are those who would like to see us lose the strength of the Lerner/Offner association.

I would like to see us emerge as a piece of coal which, when under pressure, becomes a diamond.

Paula Pergament
Mt. Zion Board Member
Chairperson, Arts and Décor Committee

A POLITICAL DISPUTE
This letter, signed by dozens of Twin Cities Jewish leaders, urged members of the local Jewish community to reelect Rudy Boschwitz to the U.S. Senate in November 1990. It castigated Boschwitz’s opponent, Paul Wellstone, for not raising his children as Jews and strongly implied that he shared Jesse
Jackson's support of Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. Minnesota's predominantly Christian population, as well many of the state's Jews, were appalled by the letter when it was made public — and it was clearly a factor in Boschwitz's defeat.

People for Boschwitz
215 S. 11th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403
338-7878
Tom Mason, Director
Nov. 1, 1990

To Our Friends in the Minnesota Jewish Community:

The United States Senate race is an extraordinary event for our community this year. Both candidates were born as Jews and historically this may be a first. But from there on the difference between them is profound.

One, Paul Wellstone, has no connection whatsoever with the Jewish community or our communal life. His children were brought up as non-Jews. He represents a disturbing element in American politics. He was Jesse Jackson's Minnesota State Co-Chairman in the 1988 presidential campaign. Jesse Jackson has embraced, literally and figuratively, Yasir Arafat and has never repudiated that embrace. Jesse Jackson has never disavowed the support of the notoriously anti-Semitic Louis Farrakhan. Jesse Jackson has recently, on national television, equated Saddam Hussein's brutal invasion and occupation of Kuwait to the Israeli presence in the West Bank. Wellstone has never disassociated himself from any of Jesse Jackson's policies.

The other candidate is Rudy Boschwitz, whose sense of our people was deeply imbued into him by his parents. They brought Rudy to the U.S. at the age of five, just ahead of the Holocaust, in which many of his family perished. His grandfather was a Rabbi as were six preceding generations of Boschwitz. Because of his intense interest in things Jewish, Rudy is known as the “Rabbi of the Senate.”

People with problems find their way to Rudy, including Minnesotans and Jews from all over the U.S. They know he is a “mensch.”

Rudy, as the only Jew on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has become a vital link in U.S.-Israeli relations. In his tireless efforts to strengthen American-Israeli ties, Rudy has worked very closely on a bi-partisan basis with Senators Howard Metzenbaum, Frank Lautenberg and others who are Democrats. Rudy has become a principal negotiator and player on the national scene in every aspect of Middle East-American relations, including Israel and its neighboring countries. This is evidenced by the extensive national support from the pro-Israel community which Rudy has received.

Within the last two weeks in the Senate two efforts were made to severely reduce aid to Israel. Both were endorsed by the senior Democrat in the Senate (Sen. Byrd). They were rejected by 90-10 (approximately) on the first vote and 98-1 on the second. Rudy was at his post on the floor of the Senate, helping to create those results. The change of voting patterns in the Republican caucus toward a pro-Israel stance since Rudy was elected to the Senate is remarkable.

Much has been written of Rudy's activities as a “shadchan.” He holds four parties for Jewish singles each year in Washington and helped to get a Jewish singles group organized in the Twin Cities. Over 1000 people sometimes attend his functions and dozens of marriages have resulted. Why does Rudy do it? He believes that it is essential to the survival of our people and he says that young people should know that it's not only their parents and grandparents who care, but a United States Senator as well.

Rudy speaks to at least 100 Jewish groups a year from coast to coast. Even when he travels abroad, he meets with Jewish communities, including those in such unlikely places as Thailand and Japan. Everyone who knows Rudy knows that he is very family oriented and justly proud of his family. Rudy, Ellen and their four sons are a credit to our community and to the State of Minnesota.

CONCLUSION

Our support is with Senator Rudy Boschwitz. We don’t agree with him on all issues, and we don’t expect to. However, when we talk to him he listens.

Rudy is making important contributions to the survival of our people. We ask that you contact as many of your friends as possible to urge them to also vote for Rudy. We simply cannot afford to lose the vital presence of Rudy Boschwitz from the United States Senate.
This concluding chapter offers illustrations of how Minnesota’s Jews have responded to anti-Semitism over the years, both local and international; to the activities of the Labor Zionist movement in Minnesota; to Minnesota’s Farmer-Labor party (which became today’s DFL); and to the plight of Jews in places as far flung as Ethiopia and the Soviet Union. One positive result of the long-running conflict between the United States and the USSR — the Cold War — was that it catalyzed the Soviet Jewry movement. Beginning in the mid-1960s on the East Coast, the movement advocated freedom of emigration for Jews who wished to leave their native lands and the cessation of harassment for those who wanted to remain behind the so-called Iron Curtain.

**NAHUM GUTTMAN**

Following is an excerpt from a reminiscence Guttman wrote for the March–April 1987 issue of the New York–based Labor Zionist newspaper *Jewish Frontier*. Note that the Pro-Halutz Club, whose aim was to foster immigration to Palestine, was founded by Minneapolis natives.

“GOLDA, AN ARAB PRINCE, AND A NAZI AGENT: A MINNESOTA MEMOIR”

It is a simple notebook such as any schoolboy would use in class, but time — more than fifty years of time — has made its pages brittle. One must handle it with supreme care, or the minutes of the Pro-Halutz Club on the campus of the University of Minnesota will fade into oblivion. Despite its fragility, I have preserved this precious compendium of collegiate thoughts and deeds from our undergraduate years at a great mid-western university.

They were years of ferment and excitement and even optimism, despite the ravages of the Great Depression all around us. . . . In 1932, when Norman Thomas came with his rhetoric and dreams, we campus socialists “elected” him president of the United States at a mock convention. . . . Among the ringleaders were Eric Sevareid, later a well-known television personality, and Dick Scammon, a huge hulk.
of a man, who carried banners sky high with élan in our various demonstrations. [Scammon, who became a political scientist and elections scholar, was director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census from 1961 to 1965] . . .

[On campus, we, a group of young Labor Zionists, were intent on establishing a Zionist foothold, and on October 20, 1932, we founded the Pro-Halutz Club. As secretary of the club, I wrote the minutes . . .

The broad purpose of the Club was to inaugurate an “intensive study of Zionism.” Our first guest speaker was Dr. Moses Barron, an eminent Minneapolis physician and acknowledged leader of Zionism in the community. Since the meetings were cramped into the lunch hour, and students had to hurry off to classes, sessions were brief, and this first one had to be continued the following week . . .

But the more exciting meetings were those addressed by our own members. Shlomo Katz, later an editor of Jewish Frontier and founding editor of Midstream [a pro-Zionist quarterly that, as its name implies, took a less than radical stance] had recently returned from Palestine, where he spent several years at hard pioneering labor. He spoke on the “historical, psychological and social aspects of the Kvutzot.”

In those days, the kvutza/kibbutz was a fascinating subject but familiar only to the cognoscenti . . .

But the moving spirit behind the Pro-Halutz Club was its official faculty adviser, Dr. Moses N. Levine, a world-famous expert on wheat rust . . . He was also our adviser when we started the Hechalutz training farm at Anoka, a Minneapolis suburb.

Though the Pro-Halutz club was small in numbers, [with] attendance at regular lunch-hour meetings between 20 and 30 . . . we arrange[d] a lecture on campus by Goldie Myerson [Golda Meir, who was] then on a tour on behalf of Pioneer Women [a Labor Zionist organization] . . . A nice crowd of some 50 students and faculty turned up, and Goldie gave her report from Palestine in her usual stirring way. But during the question period, fireworks started. A Transjordan prince, who happened to be in my French class, rose to challenge her, his point being that if Jews would stop immigrating to Palestine, the Arabs would make peace with them. Goldie let him have it! . . .

Yet another important phase of Pro-Halutz activity, not recorded in the minutes but in the Minnesota Daily, was our anti-Nazi endeavor. The larger Jewish organization on campus was the Menorah Society, with which we had cordial relations. Its impact within that society was to steer its program into Jewish cultural spheres, beyond the socials and dances that were its principal concern. Sheldon Karlins, one of our members, was elected Menorah President. We joined forces to face the growing Nazi menace early in 1933.
JEWISH U STUDENTS PROTEST NAZI ACTS was the headline one day in the Minnesota Daily. “Resolutions protesting the anti-Semitic action of the Nazis in Germany were sent yesterday to the two Minnesota senators, the Secretary of State and the German ambassador to the United States by members of the Pro-Halutz club and the Menorah Society, Jewish student organizations on the University campus,” read the lead paragraph. . . .

Those were the early days of Adolph [sic] Hitler, and we were quick to sense the dangers. We were not quiet, although our voices did not reach very far. Those who now condemn American Jews for passivity should take another look at college students in that pre–Holocaust period, for we did take Mein Kampf seriously!

As an epilogue: In the spring of 1934, shortly before my graduation from the University of Minnesota, there was another guest lecturer on campus. He was a full-fledged diplomatic emissary of the Third Reich. Somebody had sponsored his appearance, and there was a large audience, perhaps 500. I went to hear this lieutenant of Hitler. He gave a “moderate” speech. In the audience I spotted my former German-language high school teacher, a Miss Holtz. During the question period, I rose, and in a strident voice asked him how he could justify the Nazi treatment of German Jews. He replied that it was a German internal affair. The audience gave him an ovation, and Miss Holtz was leading the pack!

Here, in the heartland of liberal Minnesota, the virus of Nazism had taken hold. Ten years later, in army uniform, I reached the Rhine and crossed into Siegfried territory.

AIDING DISPLACED SCHOLARS

Perhaps more effective than confrontation were the little-known behind-the-scenes efforts to aid German scholars during Hitler’s early days in power. Amos Deinard was a founder of the Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service and also was active in numerous other organizations. When Deinard received the following letter, Fanny Brin was serving as president of the National Council of Jewish Women and was on the executive board of an antiwar group, the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War.
September 15, 1933

Division of Agricultural Biochemistry
Mr. Amos Deinard, Andrus Building
Minneapolis, Minn.

Dear Mr. Deinard:

Mrs. Arthur Brin has turned over to the University of Minnesota a sum of $1275, donated by a group of American-Jewish citizens of the Twin Cities, to provide a scholarship for some one of the younger German-Jewish intellectuals who has been dismissed from his place, or denied the privilege of continuing his education in a German university.

Mrs. Brin transmitted, together with the moneys collected, a complete list of all contributors to the fund. You are listed as having contributed $50.00.

May I express to you my sincere appreciation for the part which you have had in this undertaking and to assure you that every effort will be made by the University Committee charged with the appointment of this scholar to see to it that the award is fully deserved.

It may interest you to know that a considerable sum of money has been granted the University of Minnesota by The Rockefeller Foundation and the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars, New York City, to enable us to bring to the University some one of the outstanding German-Jewish savants who has been dismissed from his post in Germany by the Nazi government. We expect that Professor Hans Pringsheim of the University of Berlin will accept appointment to this guest professorship.

Again expressing the appreciation of the Administration of the University of Minnesota for your part in making the scholarship available, I remain

R. A. Gortner, Chairman

SAM BELLMAN

In this selection from an oral history I conducted in 1989, Bellman, a lawyer and former state legislator, begins by talking about the Jewish socialist organization called, in Yiddish, Arbeiter Ring and, in English, the Workmen’s Circle. The Labor Lyceum he mentions was located off Sixth Avenue South (now Olson Memorial Highway) in Minneapolis. He notes how members were drawn to support the founding of the Farmer-Labor Party, which merged with the Minnesota Democratic Party to form the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party (DFL).
in 1944. Finally, Bellman talks about his experience running for reelection to the state legislature and the anti-Semitism he encountered when campaigning.

When it comes to chronology, oral histories are often unreliable. The remark by Governor Floyd B. Olson and the Lowry Avenue steer roast that Bellman mentions both most certainly date to earlier in the 1930s than he recalls. Nonetheless, the stories bring back the period so vividly that they beg to be shared.

[By 1923, the Arbeiter Ring] was petering out. It had two branches, and then there was one, an amalgamation of the two. . . . Actually, the Workmen’s Circle had a philosophy, but they didn’t have many workers here. Most of them went into business. . . .

The Arbeiter Ring had no direct association [with the Farmer-Labor Party,] but every Farmer-Labor meeting that we had was over at the church on Sixteenth and Emerson. . . . We’d have the meeting there and . . . the Workmen’s Circle would be the bulk of the members. Then, they would have the Communist element there, and then there would be the non-Jewish group. . . .

[When] Floyd Olson was governor . . . [the Farmer-Labor] platform was as close to socialism as you could get. I remember Emil Youngen [, a county commissioner, asking] the governor, “Did you get elected on that [platform]?” He said, “What the hell is the difference? I can get elected on any program.” . . . When the banks closed and everything else, you could talk and preach any kind of liberalism. We had a meeting on the bridge on Lowry Avenue, and there were 20,000 people there that day. We had [Henrik] Shipstead, the senator, there. We had the governor there. The only reason we had a large crowd like that was the fact that [the Farmer-Labor Party] had gotten six steers or cows or whatever . . . given to them because the farmers couldn’t sell them. They baked the bread. They got flour. They served sandwiches, and people came to eat. . . .

[I served in the state legislature] from 1935 to 1939. The first [time I ran I won by] 311 votes. The second one was 129. The third time I ran, I got beat by 98 votes. That was out of about 22,000 to 23,000 [votes]. Floyd Olson [, when he ran, carried the same] district by 22,000 votes. But for a Jew to be elected, it was a different thing.

We made [the rounds of] the saloons the last night of reelection. Usually, we’d pass drinks and whatnot. I remember going in one, two, three. [Another candidate] and I were two pictures on one card. . . . They cut off [my picture] and said, “We don’t want no goddamned Jew.”

DR. SAM SCHWARTZ ON A NORTH SIDE NEIGHBOR WHO MADE GOOD
In this selection from “Legacies from Jewett Place and Other Memoirs,” written for his family in 1996, Schwartz offers his memories of a towering figure in Minnesota politics, Floyd B. Olson, who served as governor from 1931 until his death in August 1936.

Olson comes close to being an all-time favorite of Minnesota, but he left the [North Side] neighborhood before the days of these stories, and achieved the status of “greatness” only later. A key founder of the Farmer-Labor [Party], . . . a potential United States senator and even president-to-be to those who knew and loved him, he had an enormous impact on his times. Certain events also made him especially dear to me.

As a youngster, Floyd Olson lived almost next door to the house of my birth, his house and mine being separated mainly by the short alley which ran from my house to 11th Avenue. He was also especially dear to the Jewish community in the midst of [which] he had lived. Stories I heard often told of his many Jewish friends and of his frequent work as a youngster in neighboring Jewish homes as . . . a “shabbos goy,” that is, a non-Jew . . . who performed activities that were forbidden to Jews on the Sabbath — i.e., on Saturday [from dusk Friday to dusk Saturday], and on other holidays. Thus, he would light lights, keep oven and furnace fires burning, carry items from place to place, etc. Because many of the Jews were recent immigrants and spoke little English, Olson was forced to learn their language, Yiddish. The rumor was that he actually understood and spoke Yiddish as well as many of us second-generation kids.

When I was 13 or 14 years old, I had occasion to confirm the above rumor. Rabbi Moses Romm, the rabbi of our major Orthodox synagogue, [Knesseth Israel] was being honored at a banquet, and Governor Olson was to be the principal speaker. Because I was a member of a special group of youngsters that met with Rabbi Romm in the synagogue every Saturday afternoon . . . I was also asked to speak as a representative of the synagogue youth. I don’t remember what I said, but I vividly recall Governor Olson beginning his talk in what seemed a fluent and flawless Yiddish! After a few minutes, he shifted to English for the major part of his address. So the rumor was true! . . . And he was also very understanding of the special problems faced by the Jewish and other minority communities.

Tragically, Olson was taken from us in 1936 . . . He was then only 44 years old, [a] victim of pancreatic cancer. . . . I was later overjoyed when 6th Avenue [South] was renamed Olson [Memorial] Highway, with his statue near Penn Avenue. It’s always a thrill and a pleasure to wave and say, “Hi, neighbor” as I ride past.
Insurance companies were not alone in manifesting anti-Semitism. Both before and after World War II, Jews were barred from buying homes in various neighborhoods, and their employment opportunities were limited. Shown here is a flyer from one of many resorts, both in the United States and Canada, that tried to restrict clientele to the “right people.”

To the Company

I cannot address you as Gentlemen, as that word would not imply what I think of your concern after being advised of what you wrote to Mr. Haagenstad, your agent here. In the first place we did not ask you to be insured. Your agent solicited our business, and being he lives in our community, thought it the proper thing to do to give him the business instead of going out of the community.

Why any American, being in business, should turn down a policy to a well-respected clear-record citizen, just because he is a Jew, certainly ought not to be living in a civilized country like ours. A Jewish man had our store 11 years prior to us, and am sure you will have to look a long time before you would find a man with a cleaner record than he has, or a better record than I have. I am glad to know I don’t have to do business with a concern as narrow-minded as yours.

[This draft of Braufman’s letter is neither dated nor signed.]

THE PRO-FALASHA COMMITTEE

Long before Operation Solomon in 1991 and operations Moses and Joshua in 1984 and 1985, respectively, transported Ethiopian Jews to Israel, American Jews were aware of and attempting to aid Ethiopian Jews by providing vocational-training schools similar to those pioneered by the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT). Early in 1942, once the Italian army had been routed from Ethiopia and the British army had taken charge there, the American Pro-Falasha Committee lost no time in reopening its school, as this memo prepared by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in February of that year makes clear.

2/13/42

American Pro-Falasha Committee
5080 Broadway
New York City

The American Pro-Falasha Committee was organized 1922 to carry on the work of the secular, cultural and religious education among the Falashas, an ancient people adhering to the Jewish faith who dwell in the interior of Abyssinia. During the Italian domination of Abyssinia, the school supported by the organization for training students and teachers had been closed.

Since the British re-occupation of Abyssinia, the organization states that it is negotiating with the United States State Department to enlist its offices with the British authorities in order to enable the field director of the organization, Dr.
Jacques Faitlovitch, who is now in Tel Aviv, Palestine, to enter Abyssinia, and re-establish the school in Addis Ababa. The organization is “also waiting to receive a report from Dr. Faitlovitch as to the present status of the Falashas and ascertain what we can do in their behalf.”

During this period, [Italian occupation and British re-occupation] no appeal has been made for funds.

SOVIET JEWRY MOVEMENT

The American campaign to demand freedom of emigration for Jews in the Soviet Union, as well as freedom to practice their religion within the Soviet state, began among Jewish college students on the East Coast in the mid-1960s. Here were young Jews who aimed to rescue coreligionists trapped in a totalitarian state. On the other side of the Iron Curtain were Jews who were inspired by Israel’s resounding victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 to clamor for their right to live as Jews at home or to start anew in democratic countries.

The campaign’s first manifestation in Minnesota may have been the October 1970 Simchat Torah Mobilization at Hillel House, an event that included a march to Northrop Mall on the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus. During the following year, the Jewish Community Relations Council, which had provided support for the Simchat Torah rally, created the Minnesota Action Committee for Soviet Jewry (MACSJ), which was aimed at garnering widespread community support for the effort.

Over the following twenty-five years, the MACSJ sponsored rallies, art exhibitions, concerts, Freedom Seders, an adopt-a-family program, programs through which a bar or bat mitzvah teenager was symbolically twinned with a Soviet teen unable to partake in that coming-of-age ceremony, phone calls and letters to refuseniks (Soviet Jews who had been denied exit visas), and even meetings between visiting Jews and refuseniks in the Soviet Union itself.

The MACSJ eventually engaged the participation of women’s groups, synagogues’ social-action committees, politicians, and a range of local religious leaders. In June 1974, Marcia Yugend, then serving as the committee’s chair, wrote the following memorandum recapping events related to Freedom Sunday, an ambitious Twin Cities-wide protest mounted earlier that month to raise awareness about religious restrictions Soviet Jews had to endure. As the document indicates, Yugend skilfully cast a wide net to include both Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of the movement, and she brimmed with ideas about how to capitalize on the energy sparked by Freedom Sunday.

“"The Romance of the Falashas," a brochure from the early 1940s, pictured Dr. Jacques Faitlovitch, who styled himself "Explorer of the Falashas." Faitlovitch founded Jewish schools in the land then called Abyssinia.
Pre-publicity for June 2 was attempted by a meeting with the Governor, having him sign the proclamation for Solidarity Day, and introducing him to two new Russian residents. . . . Channel 5 news carried pictures of his signing on both their six o’clock and ten o’clock news broadcasts [, and] St. Paul papers carried the entire proclamation.

Sister Ann Gillen, Executive Director of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, arrived in town on Thursday. She spoke Friday morning at a breakfast gathering sponsored jointly by the Minnesota Rabbinical Association and the Minnesota Council of Churches. . . .

From the breakfast meeting we traveled to St. Paul for a meeting with the Archbishop. . . . [Sister Ann] was in complete control of the meeting with him — she is most remarkable; strong and persuasive, and he was amenable and tired. I found him much more sympathetic this time than on my previous visit with him. . . . She suggested to him programming on Soviet Jewry in the Catholic elementary schools, with the emphasis on the children writing to Soviet Jewish children. . . .

Sister Ann solicited his support for a statement on behalf of the Bishops Conference in the United States. . . .

The media aspects of Freedom Sunday were successful in terms of television coverage — all TV [stations] were there. . . . I felt that the Student Action Committee’s bit of “guerilla theatre” was very effective. . . .

Conclusions and thoughts for future programming: . . . Bringing Sister Ann here was brilliant. She made many contacts for us, which must be followed up soon. . . . Suggestions: We begin working on a brochure to go out in August to at least the churches in the Mpls. and St. Paul area, if not a wider radius, describing our speakers’ bureau and materials available for presentation. Books should be attempted to be displayed at the Minnesota Council of Churches office. . . . Father Hunt from the Newman Center must be met with in an attempt to find or develop a core group who can approach the proper people in the Archdiocese in terms of elementary school programming. Such a core group should be represented with a “seat” on the Steering Committee and be part of US! Possible all-day seminar for Christians, Dec. 10, Human Rights Day program with Ukrainians, Latvians, etc. . . . We need more solid, in-depth education for our own people, with perhaps stress on the long-term aspects of the struggle.
The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest is grateful to the individuals and institutions listed here for providing illustrations that supplement those drawn from the JHSUM’s own archives.

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