350 years of American Jewish Life
Greetings from Home

RUTH BADER GINSBURG
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MILKEN ARCHIVE OF AMERICAN JEWISH MUSIC
JEWISH HISTORY SUMMER 2005
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The American Jewish Historical Society collects, preserves and disseminates materials that document the Jewish experience in America. It tells the marvelous story of American Jewish life: of immigration and adjustment, poverty and prosperity, discrimination faced and overcome, achievements and contributions in every walk of American life.

These themes reverberate through our most recent exhibition, 'Greetings from Home': 350 Years of American Jewish Life. This issue of HERITAGE introduces you to the exhibition.

Come visit 'Greetings from Home'

IT'S YOUR HERITAGE

Jewish time is usually measured in millennia. By contrast, American Jewish history is only three hundred and fifty years old. However, our history on this continent is virtually as old as that of the Pilgrims, and a century older than the American Revolution.

As this issue of HERITAGE goes to press, the American Jewish Historical Society is installing a wonderful exhibition, ‘Greetings from Home’: 350 Years of American Jewish Life, at the Center for Jewish History in New York. The exhibition will run until September 15, 2005 and then open at the Museum of National Heritage in Lexington, MA in November 2006. ‘Greetings from Home’ contains many unique, never-before-exhibited treasures in the Society’s vast holdings, along with items from the American Sephardi Federation, YIVO, the Yeshiva University Museum, the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the Library of Congress and the National Archives, all of whom are partners with the Society in celebrating this milestone in our national history. The essays in this issue of HERITAGE focus on the anniversary and this exciting exhibition.

In 1905 and 1955, the American Jewish community celebrated the 250th and 300th anniversaries of Jewish settlement in North America with mixed emotions. The 1905 celebration took place in the shadow of increasing anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiment among non-Jewish Americans, as a veritable flood of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe passed through Ellis Island. In 1955, American Jewry was still recovering from the scourge of Nazi genocide in Europe, and McCarthyism at home was still in its heyday.

Fortunately, we celebrate the 350th anniversary in better times for us, both as Americans and Jews. As Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg notes in these pages, Jews have benefited from constitutional protections and entered the American mainstream, no longer occupying token places reserved for members of disadvantaged minority groups. Jonathan Sarna’s essay traces both the increasing “at homeness” of Jews in America and the constantly expanding diversity of Jewish religious observance over the course of 350 years. As Americans and Jews, we have much to be thankful for, even as we remain alert to threats to our fellow Jews at home and abroad.

I hope you enjoy this issue of HERITAGE, attend the exhibition with your family and friends, and continue to support the American Jewish Historical Society through your membership.

Sincerely,

Sidney Lapidus
In 1790, President George Washington promised the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island that the newly formed government would protect the religious freedom of all its citizens. Washington pledged in his famous letter that the United States would give “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” Washington’s pledge to Newport’s Jews still protects the religious liberty and freedom of conscience of every law-abiding American.

In August of 2004, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg presented remarks at Touro Synagogue in Newport to accompany that congregation’s annual reading of Washington’s letter. The following is an abridged version of her remarks.

In preparing my remarks for the reading of Washington’s letter, I was drawn again to consider the significance that the rule of law has played in allowing American Jews, and all religious minorities, to help shape our nation’s history. There is an age-old connection between Judaism and law. For centuries, rabbis and scholars ceaselessly studied and interpreted the Talmud, producing a vast corpus of juridical writings. Jews have prized the scholarship of judges and lawyers in their own tradition, and wherever anti-Semitic restrictions lessened Jews entered the learned professions, and especially the law.

Law became and remains an avenue of social mobility in our society, one in which intellectual achievement is rewarded. In the United States, law also became a bulwark against the kind of oppression Jews encountered, and survived, throughout history. Jews in large numbers became lawyers in the United States, and some eventually became judges. The best of those lawyers and judges used the law not simply to earn a living, but to secure justice for others.

Seven American Jews served on the Supreme Court of the United States, and have thus been given the greatest opportunity to seek justice on behalf of others. The first Jew seated on the Court was Louis D. Brandeis, but he was not the first Jew offered the post. The man who might have preceded Brandeis by some 63 years, Judah P. Benjamin, rejected the offer. In 1853, President Millard Fillmore offered to nominate Benjamin, but Benjamin had just been elected U.S. Senator from Louisiana and preferred to retain his Senate seat. (His decision suggests that the Supreme Court was not then a co-equal branch of government, as it is today.) Benjamin later served the Confederacy as Jefferson Davis’s Secretary of State. As the Confederacy faltered, Benjamin became the target of anti-Semitism; political enemies called him “Judas Iscariot Benjamin.”

When the Confederacy was defeated, Benjamin feared being singled out for retribution and fled to England. To practice law in England, he enrolled as a student at Lincoln’s Inn and became an acclaimed barrister. In his obituary, the Times of London, alluding to Benjamin’s Jewish ancestry, described him as having “that elastic resistance to evil fortune which preserved [his] ancestors through a succession of exiles and plunderings.”
Thus it fell to Louis D. Brandeis to become the first sitting Supreme Court Justice of Jewish birth. Brandeis was sometimes called “the people’s attorney” in recognition of his activity in the progressive social and economic reform movements before joining the Court. Raised in Louisville, Kentucky, Brandeis showed early signs of greatness when he graduated from Harvard Law School in 1876 at age 20 with the highest scholastic average in that law school’s history. In Boston, he became a champion of the Progressive agenda: defending trade unions, advocating for women’s suffrage and promoting business ethics.

Brandeis helped found the American pro bono legal tradition. Spending half of his working hours on public causes, Brandeis reimbursed his firm when he devoted time to non-paying clients. He donated large portions of his income to good causes, while living frugally at home. A friend recounted that, whenever he went to Brandeis’s home for dinner, he ate before and afterward.

In 1916, after Brandeis helped President Woodrow Wilson formulate his “new freedom” economic doctrine, Wilson nominated him to the Court.

Brandeis faced opposition, not least because he was Jewish. Once on the bench, Brandeis won over many of his critics. Admirers, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, called Brandeis “Isaiah,” turning to Scripture to find words to describe his contributions to constitutional thought. At the Court itself, unfortunately, Brandeis encountered one openly anti-Semitic colleague. James Clark McReynolds left the room when Brandeis spoke in conference. There is no official photograph of the Court in 1924 because McReynolds refused to sit next to Brandeis, where McReynolds belonged based on seniority.

Brandeis was not religious but became an ardent Zionist, and encouraged the next two Jewish justices – Benjamin Cardozo and Felix Frankfurter – to join the Zionist Organization of America. Biographer Melvin Urofsky commented that Justice Brandeis brought three gifts to American Judaism: organizational talent; an ability to lead men and women to achieve goals; and an idealism that recast Zionist thought to captivate Jews comfortably situated in the United States.

For Justice Brandeis, Jews abroad needing to escape anti-Semitism would find a home in the land of Israel, an open society that he hoped would reject prejudices and economic disparities. He foresaw Israel as embracing the prophetic teachings of justice, charity and loving kindness. Jews in the United States, he counseled, would have an obligation to help their kinsmen and women to build that new land. Brandeis’s stature attracted legions of others to the cause. Jews here would say, if Brandeis could be a Zionist, then it was OK to be one as well.

A question, frequently stated in various ways, indicates the large advances our people have made: “What is the difference between a New York City garment district bookkeeper and a Supreme Court Justice?” The answer: “Just one generation.” My life bears witness...
Felix Frankfurter, appointed by Roosevelt after Cardozo’s death, had been a Harvard Law School professor for 25 years. No cloistered academic, he ardently advocated for the rights of labor; helped found the American Civil Liberties Union, joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) advisory lawyers committee and defended the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti.

As a Justice, the onetime liberal crusader became a strong proponent of judicial restraint. Some criticized him as excessively restrained. Yet Frankfurter was the first Justice to employ an African-American law clerk, William T. Coleman, in 1948. Frankfurter was also the Justice who wrote, “Basic rights do not become petrified as of any one time ... It is of the very nature of a free society to advance in its standards of what is deemed reasonable and right.” Like Cardozo, Frankfurter believed in adapting traditional legal values to contemporary circumstances.

After Frankfurter retired in 1962, Arthur Goldberg joined the Court. A Kennedy appointee, Goldberg had been counsel to labor unions at a time when strikers were prey to armed thugs. A longtime advisor to the steel workers union, Goldberg helped architect the union merger that created the AFL-CIO.

Goldberg was the only Jewish Justice born into childhood poverty. His father, who died when Arthur Goldberg was eight, sold produce in Chicago from a wagon pulled by a blind horse. Goldberg was the sole member of his large family to continue his education beyond grade school. Unlike his predecessors Brandeis, Cardozo and Frankfurter, Goldberg held Passover Seders in his home, where he would relate the story of the Israelites in Egypt to the oppressed and outcasts of the contemporary world. Goldberg resigned in 1965 to become U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Some years ago, I came upon a story Goldberg told that illustrated the social differences between himself and the previous Jewish Justices. Goldberg was visiting his mother, who was active in several Jewish organizations. One morning the telephone rang for him. His mother answered the phone and asked, “Who is this?” The caller replied, “This is the President.” Goldberg, barely awake, heard his mother inquire, “Nu, president from which shul?”

Lyndon Johnson then appointed Abe Fortas to what had become the “Jewish seat” on the Court. Fortas was yet another champion of individual rights who steadfastly defended individuals smeared by Senator Joseph McCarthy at the height of the Cold War; and others with no place else to turn. Fortas’s successful pro bono argument in Gideon v. Wainwright secured his legacy as a shaper of individual rights. In Gideon, the Court agreed with Fortas that indigent defendants in criminal cases had the right to counsel paid from the public purse. In 1968, after Johnson nominated him to succeed Earl Warren as Chief Justice, conservative Republicans and southern Democrats filibustered Fortas’s nomination. A year later, apparent ethical lapses forced Fortas to resign.

Law as the protector of the oppressed, the poor, the minority, is the unifying thread in the work of Justices Brandeis, Cardozo, Frankfurter, Goldberg and Fortas. Frankfurter, once distressed when the Court rejected his view in a case, reminded his brethren that he “belong[ed] to the most vilified and persecuted minority in history.” I prefer Arthur Goldberg’s affirmative description of the link between his Jewish background and his social values. “My concern for justice, for peace, for enlightenment,” Goldberg said, “stem[s] from my heritage.”

Consider in that light President Clinton’s appointments in 1993 of Ruth Ginsburg and in 1994 of Stephen Breyer as the 107th and 108th Justices. Our backgrounds have certain resemblances: we taught law and then served on federal courts of appeals for some thirteen years. We are both Jews. In contrast to Frankfurter, Goldberg and Fortas, however, no one regarded Ginsburg or Breyer as filling a “Jewish” seat. Both of us take pride in, and draw strength from, our heritage, but our religion simply was not relevant to President Clinton’s appointment.

The security I feel as a Jew at the Court is reflected by the commandment from Deuteronomy displayed in artworks in Hebrew letters on three walls and a table in my chambers. They proclaim, Zedek, zedek, tirdof; “Justice, justice shalt thou pursue” ever present reminders of what judges must do “that they may thrive.” A large silver mezuzah is mounted on my doorpost, a gift from the super bright teenage students at the Shulamith School for Girls in Brooklyn, New York, which one of my dearest law clerks attended.

Jews in the United States today face few closed doors and do not fear speaking out. A question, frequently stated in various ways, indicates the large advances our people have made: “What is the difference between a New York City garment district bookkeeper and a Supreme Court Justice?” The answer: “Just one generation.” My life bears witness to the difference between the opportunities open to my mother, a bookkeeper, and those open to me. As vice presidential candidate Joe Lieberman famously asked, “Where else but in America could such a thing be possible.”

4 350 Years of American Jewish Life
IN EARLY NEW YORK, 1654 – 1825
TOLERANCE AND IDENTITY: JEWS AND THE MAKING OF AMERICAN SOCIETY
Tuesday – Sunday, 10 am – 5 pm
1220 Fifth Avenue at 103rd St, New York, NY
Presented by the Jewish Museum
646.437.4202 www.mjhnyc.org
MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE
36 Battery Place, New York, NY
OURS TO FIGHT FOR: AMERICAN JEWS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR through December
NEW YORK – CITY OF REFUGE, STORIES FROM THE LAST 60 YEARS through November 27
Presented by the Museum of Jewish Heritage
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THE JEWISH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York, NY
THE POWER OF CONVERSATION: JEWISH WOMEN AND THEIR SALONS through July 10
The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and their Salons examines the significant role played by the salons of Jewish women in the development of art, literature, music, theater, philosophy, and politics in Europe and America from the late 18th century through the 1940s. Presented by the Jewish Museum
212.423.3200 info@thejm.org

CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY
15 West 16th St, New York, NY
Monday 11 am – 7 pm; Tuesday – Thursday, 11 am – 5 pm; Friday 11 am – 8 pm; Sunday 11 am – 5 pm; free

Great Hall and YUM galleries

GREETINGS FROM HOME: 350 YEARS OF AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE
May 17 – September 15
‘Greetings from Home’ celebrates the 350th Anniversary of the first permanent Jewish settlement in North America in 1654. The American Jewish Historical Society has created a landmark exhibition featuring over two hundred objects from the collections of the Society and its partners, many never before seen in public. The exhibit explores the continually evolving forms of American Judaism and Jewish culture and their impact on American society.
Presented by the American Jewish Historical Society in cooperation with Yeshiva University Museum and the American Sephardic Federation with Sephardic House
212 294-6360 www.ajhs.org

Mezzanine Level

STARTING OVER: THE EXPERIENCE OF GERMAN JEWS IN AMERICA, 1830 – 1945
May 17 – November 15
Photos, letters, documents, sketches, paintings, maps, medals and other rare artifacts of German-Jews who settled across the United States. Many German Jewish immigrants played a significant role in shaping a wide array of contemporary issues, assuming an American identity that was enhanced by its German Jewish influence, much as the American culture was enhanced by the sensibilities of the newcomers. They became active in Hollywood, Broadway, in the arts, publishing and religion, especially in the Reform and Conservative movements. German Jews also established Hadassah, B’nai Brith, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the National Jewish Welfare Board that continue to flourish.
Presented by the Leo Baeck Institute
212 744-6400 www.lbi.org

Summer events and movies at AJHS visit: www.ajhs.org/about/calendar

Batkin Mezzanine
Constantiner Gallery
YIVO AT 80:
BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH ARCHIVES
April 6 – August 31
YIVO at 80, Triumphs and Treasures, showcases the Institute’s collections of more than 23 million archival pieces and 360,000 books related to Eastern European Jewry. On display are rare rabbinical texts, posters, sheet music, DP camp photos and unique Judaica.
Presented by
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research 947.606-8200 www.YIVO.org
Rosenberg/Winnick Galleries
PRINTING THE TALMUD FROM BOMBERG TO SCHOTTENSTEIN
April 12 – August 29
A fascinating exploration into the world of Talmud study, this exhibit illustrates how technological advances — the invention of the printing press more than 500 years ago and the impact of computers in recent decades — have transformed the ancient discipline of Talmud study into an accessible pursuit available to all. The exhibition features outstanding examples of early Talmud manuscripts and rare examples of early printed volumes.
Presented by
Yeshiva University Museum 212-294-8330 x8803 info@yum.cjh.org

Museum of the City of New York
1220 Fifth Avenue at 103rd St, New York, NY
Opening: Friday, January 20, 2006
June 10 – September 10
THE POWER OF CONVERSATION: JEWISH WOMEN AND THEIR SALONS through July 10
The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and their Salons examines the significant role played by the salons of Jewish women in the development of art, literature, music, theater, philosophy, and politics in Europe and America from the late 18th century through the 1940s. Presented by the Jewish Museum
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212.423.3200 info@thejm.org

MOAKLEY UNITED STATES COURT HOUSE
Northern Avenue, Boston, MA
Monday – Friday, 8 am – 6 pm
plus occasional evenings and Sundays

FROM HAVEN TO HOME: 350 YEARS OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY
September 15, 2005 – January 30, 2006
Based on the highly successful exhibition created by the Library of Congress for the Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, From Haven to Home features more than 180 treasures from the collections of the Library and its Commission partners: the American Jewish Historical Society, the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, and the National Archives and Records Administration. Highlights the changing role of the United States from a haven for Jews seeking freedom to the largest and most secure Jewish community in the Diaspora.
Presented by the American Jewish Historical Society
617-559-8880 info@ajshboston.org
For 350 years, Jews have made a home in America, growing from a tiny community of twenty-three refugees to a population that numbers some six million individuals. The long encounter of Jews with America, shaped by successive waves of immigrants and changing American conditions, nurtured a community that retained its traditions while adapting to new opportunities.

“Home” has come to mean belonging to American society on an equal basis with other citizens, a status Jews have rarely attained in other societies. It also means creating homegrown versions of Judaism and Jewish culture. Yet, while creating “New World” homes, Jews also retained ties to their places of origin. In every era, American Jewry stretched the bonds of family, friendship, religion, commerce, philanthropy, communal association and political activism to include Jewish communities abroad. A reciprocal flow of information, ideas, cultural forms, goods and individuals between the United States and foreign countries animated American Jewish life.

1654  Twenty-three Jewish refugees flee Brazil and the long arm of the Inquisition, and land in New Amsterdam.

1730  New York’s Shearith Israel dedicates its first synagogue building on Mill Street.

1742  Phila Franks (1722 – 1811), daughter of Abigail and Jacob Franks of New York, disappoints her parents by eloping with Oliver DeLancey, a Christian, and eventually moving to London. Hers was one of the earliest recorded “intermarriages” in American Jewish history.
American Jews both encouraged family and friends to immigrate to America and provided material support to Jews who chose to remain abroad. This exhibition explores this continual process of innovation, dialogue and migration that enabled Jews to make their homes in America and remain connected to their fellow Jews overseas.

**Home**

**THE EXHIBITION**

**AT HOME IN AMERICA: AMERICAN JEWISH LIVES, 1654 TO THE PRESENT**

How to be both Jewish and American? For 350 years, American Jews have been answering this question in diverse, resourceful and highly individual ways. Each answer has reflected both the circumstances of American Jewish life at a specific moment and the preferences and choices of American Jewish individuals. The profiles in this exhibition offer a glimpse at ways to define the balance between American and Jewish devised by nine individuals.

1761

First High Holiday prayer book printed in America is published in New York.

1763

The Jews of Newport, Rhode Island dedicate a Sephardic ritual synagogue designed by leading architect Peter Harrison.

1768

Circumcision register of Abraham I. Abrahams (1720 – 1796), mohel (ritual circumciser) of Congregation Shearith Israel, including the names of 81 adults, children and babies Abrahams circumcised in the late 1760s.
Prayer for the Government composed and delivered by Gershom Mendez Seixas (1745 – 1816), hazzan of Shearith Israel, calling on God to protect General George Washington and New York Governor George Clinton during the Revolutionary War.

Polonies Talmud Torah, the first Jewish school on record in the United States, established in New York City.

Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785 – 1851), politician, editor and playwright, appointed United States Consul at Tunis, the first major diplomatic post awarded an American Jew.
A proud descendant of early Spanish and Russian Jews, Solomon lifting to Israel between 1984 and 1991. His efforts, and those of other activists, bore fruit when the Beta Israel (Ethiopian) Jews were air-lifted to Israel.

In Philadelphia, Rebecca Gratz (1781 – 1869) establishes the first independent Jewish women’s charitable society and, in 1838, the Hebrew Sunday School, creating new avenues for Jewish women’s activism.

Judah Touro (1775 – 1854) bequeaths several hundred thousand dollars to Jewish and non-Jewish charitable institutions and civic causes, making him one of America’s first major philanthropists.

Sabato Morais (1823 – 1897), rabbi of Congregation Mikvah Israel in Philadelphia, denounces the evils of American slavery from his pulpit.

American Jews from the colonial era through the late twentieth century.

For these women and men, an awareness of the freedoms and opportunities that America afforded them coincided with a sense of connection to their fellow Jews at home and elsewhere in the world. Some endeavored to extend the rights and securities they enjoyed to Jews in other countries. Others labored to help immigrants adjust to realities in their new American homes.

Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785-1851) spoke for many generations when he insisted that, for Jews, America was their “chosen country,” yet reminded his coreligionists the world over that “we are one people.”

**CELEBRATING FREEDOM: PASSOVER IN AMERICA**

The Passover holiday has resonated throughout the course of American Jewish history.

As a celebration of freedom from slavery and an affirmation of Jewish peoplehood, the holiday has been both a happy and solemn one for American Jews, free from the anti-Semitic oppression experienced in other lands. The Passover Seder dinner has also become a kind of “Jewish Thanksgiving,” where far-flung family members gather for a yearly reunion.

The Haggadah (the written account of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt used during the Seder ceremony) embodies another aspect of the American Passover: the diversity of the American Jewish community in the past and present. Early Jewish settlers brought or imported American Haggadot (plural for Haggadah) from Europe. The first American Haggadah was published in 1837 by Samuel Jackson Jackson in New York City. In the decades to follow, American Haggadah expressed a wide range of Jewish ethnic traditions, immigrant experiences, languages and liturgical variations or revisions, all the while adhering to a fundamental text.

With its call for the remembrance of bondage and the need to cherish freedom, the Haggadah has also become a manifesto adapted to support a variety of political and social causes, ranging from anti-Nazism to the American civil rights struggle, feminism, vegetarianism and gay rights, among others. The selection of American Haggadot displayed in this exhibition range from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day and evoke the diversity and shifting patterns of American Jewish life.
In September 1654, twenty-three Jews, fleeing the Portuguese conquest of Dutch Brazil, arrived in New Amsterdam (now New York City) and established the first Jewish community in North America. Over the next century, other Jews migrated to New York, Newport, Savannah, Charleston, and Philadelphia. By 1775, perhaps 2,500 Jewish men, women, and children called the American colonies their home.

American Jews sought to fulfill the age-old requirements of Judaism: To keep the Sabbath, eat only kosher food, have their infant sons circumcised and provide Jewish burial. They founded a synagogue congregation in each of the five cities. Unlike Europe, where state-sanctioned rabbis prescribed and enforced religious observance, identifying with Judaism in America was voluntary. Individuals defined the meanings of being Jewish for themselves to a degree unknown elsewhere.

A significant proportion of American Jewish men made a living as merchants and their employees, participating in maritime trade networks that connected the Americas to Europe and Africa. Trade routes served as vital links between the small American Jewish communities and their coreligionists around the world. Jews in America, the Caribbean and Europe were in constant contact, relying on each other for information, advice, ritual objects, advice and funds. Such mutual dependence helped American Jews share a sense of identity with their kin across the seas.
PRESENT AT THE FOUNDING: 1776 – 1820

Like other Americans, Jews took sides—and took up arms—during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). While some became Tories, many joined the patriot cause. Jews evacuated New York, Newport, Savannah and Charleston when the British seized those cities. About one hundred Jews served in the Continental Army and state militias. American Jews remained proud of having “bravely fought and bled for liberty,” in the words of Jewish Philadelphian Jonas Phillips.

By fostering religious freedom, the Revolution confirmed Jews in their belief that they were truly at home in America. The Bill of Rights and several state constitutions affirmed their liberty to worship as they chose. In 1790, when the nation's Jewish congregations sent letters of greeting to President George Washington, he assured them that the United States government “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

American conditions justified the patriotic enthusiasm of Charleston’s Myer Moses, who proclaimed that July 4th, 1776 marked the date when “the Almighty gave to the Jews what had long been promised them, namely, a second Jerusalem!”

AMERICA FEVER: 1820 – 1870

In 1820, American Jews numbered about 3,000, most of them descendants of immigrants who arrived in the colonial period. They remained concentrated in the cities of the Atlantic seaboard. By 1870, over 200,000 Jews could be found spread throughout the nation, in small Southern and Midwestern towns, in Far Western mining camps, in New Orleans, Cincinnati and San Francisco. A prolonged wave of immigration from the German states, Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania had brought tens of thousands of mostly young Jewish men and women to America.

Attracted by the booming commercial economy of the United States and its religious freedom, most of these newcomers settled in large cities, especially the great immigrant port of New York City. But thousands of others became peddlers on the back roads of rural America. For such itinerants, “home” was often a place to which they returned only briefly after nights spent sleeping in inns, barns, or along the roadside. Yet those who succeeded planted roots in towns and cities, creating businesses and establishing synagogue congregations and Jewish communities.

Remaining members of the world Jewish community remained important to the new immigrants. In many cases they sustained links with their hometowns in Central Europe, returning there to bring back brides and relatives. Along with members of “old” American Jewish families, they increasingly saw it as their duty to defend the rights of Jews around the world, and to promote American freedom as the best guarantor of communal defense for their coreligionists abroad.

TEEMING SHORES: 1870 – 1924

More Jews emigrated to the United States between 1870 and 1924 than in any period before or since. While their
numbers included 20,000 Sephardic Jews from the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans and a steady stream from Central and Western Europe, the vast majority—some 2.5 million—fled poverty and anti-Semitism in the Russian Empire, Rumania and Austria-Hungary to come to America.

These Eastern Europeans transformed American Jewish life. They created dense Yiddish-speaking districts in New York and other major cities, reinvigorated traditional religious observance and, by fostering the rise of a Jewish working class in the garment trades and other industries, reshaped the labor movement and left-wing politics in America. By 1930, these immigrants and their children had raised the Jewish community’s numbers to over 4 million, or about 3.5% of the American population.

Like others before them, the immigrants made new homes for themselves by crafting identities that were both Jewish and American. They also remained in contact with their family and friends in der Haym (the Home, the Old Country). Many devout immigrants looked back to Eastern Europe to recruit rabbis, cantors and teachers. The Jewish labor movement drew much of its fervor from revolutionary activity in Czarist Russia and Poland. A vast flow of letters, remittances, tickets and postcards crossed the Atlantic, making America a very real presence throughout Eastern Europe while enabling Americans to keep their fingers on the pulse of events in their home village or city.

HOME GROWN: 1924 — 1960

After Congress ended mass emigration from Eastern and Southern Europe in 1924, for the first time in its history the American Jewish population became predominantly native-born. The children and grandchildren of immigrants entered the mainstream of American life, succeeding in commerce and industry, higher education, the professions, sports and popular entertainment. Increasingly they moved out of immigrant neighborhoods such as New York’s Lower East Side or Brownsville and Chicago’s West Side to more prestigious and “American” districts and suburbs.

Benjamin Peixotto (1834 – 1890) appointed U.S. ambassador to the newly formed nation of Romania with the hope that, as a Jew, he could persuade Romanian king to suppress local anti-Semitic outbreaks. Peixotto resigns in 1876 after his efforts bore no fruit.

Statue of Liberty unveiled in New York harbor. In 1903, Emma Lazarus’s sonnet “The New Colossus” (1883) is added to its pedestal. It welcomes all immigrants with these words: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”
The rise of Nazi Germany in 1933 reinforced their consciousness of belonging to world Jewry as well as to America. Jewish organizations in America tried, often in vain, to arouse indignation about the plight of Europe’s Jews and to get the United States government to liberalize its restrictive immigration laws. While some six million Jews ultimately died in Nazi-occupied Europe, only about 250,000 Jewish refugees and survivors were allowed to enter this country during the 1930s and 1940s.

The disaster of the Holocaust confirmed the Zionism of many American Jews and converted others to the cause. Most Jewish Americans greeted with enthusiasm the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. They also found themselves in an unprecedented position: By 1950, American Jewry, with five million individuals, was now the largest and most influential Jewish community in the world.

TURBULENT TIMES: 1960 – 2004
The late twentieth century found Jews more ensconced in the American mainstream than ever before. Their position in the professions, business, politics, and cultural and intellectual life was increasingly secure. The turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, however, saw young Jews bring an American tradition of questioning authority and a Jewish concern for pursuing social justice to the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, feminism and gay rights.

Jews brought the era’s student, civil rights and anti-war militancy to bear on their own movements in support of Israel, and for the liberation of Soviet, Syrian, and Ethiopian Jews. As had been true for American Jews for three centuries, their efforts were grounded in the Talmudic injunction that “all of Israel are responsible for each other.”

The Sixties counterculture also fostered an increased diversity in religious observance. Rejecting the traditional synagogue, some young Jews created the Havurah and Jewish Renewal movements, which sought personal spiritual fervor in informal settings. Others, seeking a return to roots, embraced traditional Orthodoxy or Hasidism. Feminism prompted the ordination of the first female American rabbis, while dividing Jews over the proper role of women in Judaism. Revised federal immigration laws in 1965 enabled ex-Soviet, Middle Eastern and Central Asian newcomers to arrive and practice (or rediscover) their distinctive Judaic traditions.

Today, despite concerns about intermarriage and declining observance, about four million out of six million American Jews have synagogue affiliations. For most of the officially non-observant, their sense of being part of American and world Jewry remain defining traits of their identities. The freedom to choose or create one’s own way of being Jewish and American remains vital after 350 years.
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The American Jewish Historical Society is the world’s leading institution for communicating the history of the Jewish people in the United States. This is so important because the Society’s critical mission is not duplicated by any other organization.

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> Acquiring and preserving the records of the American Soviet Jewry movement, including the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry.

> Saving the records of the Ethiopian Jewry movement and those of the American Jewish Congress, the Council of Jewish Federations, the National Jewish Welfare Board, and hundreds of organizations, synagogues, movements and initiatives that have shaped American Jewish life.

Your support directly enables us to continue our important work. Whether in business and finance, politics, education, science, arts, human rights, sports, entertainment to the everyday activities of family life—AJHS has ensured that the record from 1654 to the present is kept, that the stories are told, and our shared history is not forgotten.

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HOME COOKING
For American Jews, food has been a marker of religious devotion and ethnic identity. The obligation to keep a kosher home was a core of religious duty for observant Jewish women from the earliest years of American settlement. The difficulty of obtaining kosher meat in frontier areas, and angry disputes with butchers and shochet (ritual slaughterers) over the purity and price of meat and poultry became a recurring problem for observant Jewish housewives. Many American Jews chose to observe the kosher dietary laws only selectively, while others abandoned them entirely. In the nineteenth century, many American Reform Jews rejected kashrut as unnecessary and irrational, earning them the disdain of the Orthodox, for whom the laws of kashrut remained at the center of Jewishness.

Whether or not they kept kosher, American Jews valued the foods they associated with their communities of origin. Especially in cities with large Jewish populations, vendors of food and beverages became important fixtures in the local Jewish economy. By the late nineteenth century, what we now think of as “Jewish” cuisine — Central European delicatessen meats merged with Eastern European borscht, blintzes, and smoked fish as well as Sephardic treats like halvah and dried fruit — evolved from the urban mingling of Jewish immigrant groups.

In the twentieth century, homemakers sought innovations that permitted them to keep a kitchen that was both Jewish and American. National distributors obliged them with kosher or parve (neutral) processed foods, along with cookbooks that explained how to prepare ritualistically “safe” versions of popular Yankee dishes. Meanwhile, bagels, kosher hot dogs, and chicken soup for body and soul “crossed over” to become as American as apple pie, pizza, and egg rolls.

AMERICAN JUDAISM
During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American Judaism divided into three major branches—Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative. Each responded to American conditions and ideas borrowed from European Jewry.

The American Reform movement started during the 1820s and gained momentum in the 1840s and 1850s, when immigrant rabbis such as Isaac Mayer Wise and David Einhorn arrived from Germany. Reform Jews...
experimented with shorter Sabbath services that included English sermons, organ and choir music, permitted men and women to sit together, and allowed men to uncover their heads during prayer.

Traditionalists maintained the immutability of halachah (Jewish law). By the 1840s, Philadelphia's Isaac Leeser used the term Orthodox to distinguish himself from the reformers. Orthodox congregations initially conformed to Sephardic and German rituals, but the arrival of Eastern European immigrants expanded Orthodoxy. By the early twentieth century, it ranged from ultra-Orthodox Hasidic sects such as Lubavitch to the Modern Orthodoxy developed at Yeshiva University.

The Conservative movement emerged in the early twentieth century, guided largely by Solomon Schechter and the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Conservative Judaism attracted the Americanized offspring of Eastern European immigrants seeking a middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform. By the mid-twentieth century Conservatism was Judaism's most populous branch.

Reconstructionism, pioneered by Mordecai Kaplan in the 1930s, stressed Judaism as a coherent cultural and spiritual civilization for the Jewish people. The Reconstructionist movement, with its own congregations and rabbis, gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, but remains comparatively small.

NEW BEGINNINGS
Since 1654, the wedding—emblematic of the creation of new households and families—has symbolized American Jewish continuity and renewal. This meaning continues today in an American Jewish population more diverse than at any previous moment in its history. The Jewish wedding ceremony, repeatedly adapted to changing American conditions over the course of 350 years, will no doubt be the source of new Jewish beginnings for future generations.

1909

Henrietta Szold (1860 – 1945) founds Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America.

1912

1915
Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York basketball team. Most residents of the H.O.A. were not orphans, but children whose families could not afford to have them live at home. H.O.A. provides discipline, education and community for tens of thousands of Jewish boys and girls.

architectural fragment
BETH HAMIDRASH HAGADOL
Brockton, Massachusetts
Early 20th Century
Wood with gilt
American Jewish Historical Society

“MERRY HANNUCAH” PROGRAM CARD, 1907
K. K. Mikve Israel (Philadelphia) Collection
American Jewish Historical Society
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The Milken Archive of American Jewish Music is an unparalleled collection – 50 superbly recorded CDs of Jewish music created in America over the past 350 years. This abundant and remarkably diverse repertoire reflects the history, evolution and variety of the Jewish experience in America.

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See reviews and awards at www.milkenarchive.org

Contribute to the American Jewish Historical Society, and you will discover the joy of American Jewish music in this unique 50-CD collection, including: world-premiere recordings of rare Jewish works by Leonard Bernstein and Kurt Weill's stupendous Jewish epic The Eternal Road; cantorial and choral music for prayer and meditation; favorite American Yiddish stage songs like “Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn” in all-new recordings; festive music for Hanukkah, Passover, and the High Holy Days; klezmer concertos; and Jewish symphonies by world-famous composers.

“IT ILLUMINATES THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE” – The Forward

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1917
National Jewish Welfare Board founded to care for the religious needs of American Jewish military personnel in World War I.

1919
Jewish educational summer camping is launched in the United States with the founding of what came to be known as the Cejwin Camps.
All recordings are new and performed by internationally famous artists including cantors Alberto Mizrahi and Benzion Miller; conductors Gerard Schwarz, Yoel Levi, and Sir Neville Marriner; the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and the Seattle Symphony orchestras; Yiddish star Bruce Adler, klezmer-clarinetist David Krakauer, the Broadway stars Tovah Feldshuh and Theodore Bikel, the Vienna Choir Boys, the Juilliard Quartet, jazz legend Dave Brubeck, and many others. More than 250 artists and ensembles are featured in over 500 new recordings of American Jewish music, including hundreds of world premieres. The 50 CDs are accompanied by comprehensive liner notes and essays by award-winning author Neil W. Levin.

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- Visit www.ajhs.org, or
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1920

Henry Ford’s newspaper, The Dearborn Independent, begins publishing anti-Semitic propaganda, including the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.”

1924

Congress places national origins restrictions on immigration, drastically lowering the number of Central and Eastern European Jews entering the U.S.

1930

Molly Picon (1898 – 1992), international star of Yiddish theater, film, radio and television performs as “La Muchacha del Circo.”
Evolving American Judaism

JONATHAN D. SARNA

IN SEPTEMBER 1654, the Ste. Catherine (St. Catrina) sailed into New Amsterdam with “twenty-three souls, big and little.” Expelled from Recife, Brazil when the Portuguese recaptured the colony from the Dutch, the bedraggled Jewish refugees were now seeking a new home.

The refugees differed from the few identifying Jews known previously to have visited North America because they sought to settle down permanently, to “navigate and trade near and in New Netherland, and to live and reside there.” Helped by fellow Jews in Amsterdam, they overcame opposition from the colony’s anti-Jewish governor, Peter Stuyvesant, and won the right to “travel” “trade” “live” and “remain” provided that “the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation.”

New Amsterdam’s Jews extended the boundaries of American religious pluralism. Stuyvesant promoted Dutch Calvinist orthodoxy and discouraged competing faiths. He worried that “giving them [the Jews] liberty, we cannot refuse the Lutherans and Papists [Catholics].” In 1663, the Dutch West India Company advised Stuyvesant, who had been persecuting Quakers, to “Shut your eyes, at least [do] not force people’s consciences but allow every one to have his own belief, as long as he behaves quietly and legally, gives no offense to his neighbor and does not oppose the government.”

A year later, the British took New Amsterdam from the Dutch and renamed it New York. Small numbers of Jews migrated to the colonies from Europe, the West Indies and even the Iberian Peninsula, where individual Jews had lived as crypto-Jews for centuries. Colonial Jews never exceeded 1/10 of one percent of the American population, yet they established patterns of future Jewish communal life. First, most Jews lived in port cities where opportunities abounded, and people of diverse faiths lived together. Second, Sephardic Jews and the institutions they founded maintained cultural hegemony in Jewish life into the early 19th century, even though Ashkenazic Jews were by then more numerous. Third, Jews organized themselves into synagogue-communities.

Savannah, Charleston, Philadelphia, New York and Newport each had only one synagogue that assumed responsibility for all Jewish religious and communal needs.

The American Revolution marked a turning point in American Jewish history. As many as one hundred Jews fought in the Revolution; three attained high office in the Continental Army; and other Jews served as “suppliers, bill brokers, money-lenders, shopkeepers, blockade-runners and even ‘manufacturers’ on a small scale.” Haym Solomon, Broker to the Office of Finance, was personally generous to Jew and Gentile alike.

The Federal Constitution (1787) and the Bill of Rights (1791) outlawed religious tests “as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States,” and forbade Congress from making any law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Still, Jews had to fight for their rights on the state level and overcome social prejudice. Having shed blood for their country, Jews felt more secure than in colonial days and asserted their rights vigorously. Justice Ginsberg’s essay in this issue describes President George Washington’s famous letter to the Jews of Newport in 1790, which reassured Jews of their place in the new nation.

The great question that Jews faced in the wake of the Revolution was whether Judaism as they had known it could be reconciled with America’s new spirit of freedom and democracy. Could Jews maintain the traditional structure that bound them together and promoted group survival and yet at the same time also accommodate new political and cultural and religious realities? In the 1820s, detecting a spirit of “apathy and neglect” pervading Jewish life, young Jews in Charleston and New York moved to revitalize Judaism, just as they saw Protestantism revived by the Second Great Awakening. Charleston’s young Jews sought to introduce English-language prayers, regular sermons and an abbreviated service. The young Jews in New York sought less formal worship with time for explanations and instruction. They wanted no permanent leader and no “distinctions” among members. When the established leadership rebuffed their initiatives, the young Jews of Charleston seceded and founded...
“The Reformed Society of Israelites for Promoting True Principles of Judaism According to its Purity and Spirit” – a forerunner of Reform Judaism. In New York, they opened the city’s first Ashkenazic congregation, B’nai Jeshurun. With these two actions, which were emulated elsewhere, the young Jews overthrew the monolithic “synagogue-community” that had dominated Jewish life and created a new American Judaism that was much more democratic, free, diverse, and competitive. American Judaism, as later generations knew it, was shaped by this revolution.

Between 1820 and 1840, America's Jewish population increased approximately five-fold to 15,000. Between 1840 and 1860, it increased another ten-fold, to 150,000. By 1877, the American Jewish community had ballooned to 250,000. America's Jewish population had increased at a rate almost fifteen times greater than the nation as a whole. Most immigrants came from Bavaria, Western Prussia and Posen, part of a larger stream that deposited millions of Protestant and Catholic immigrants on America’s shores. Jews, because, in addition to the general causes of emigration, Jews also faced severe residency, work and even, in the case of Bavaria, marriage restrictions.

Jewish immigrants spread out across the country, wherever rivers, roads or railroad tracks took them. Cincinnati became the first Jewish “boom town” west of the Alleghenies. Its Jewish population zoomed from 16 in 1820 to as many as 10,000 by the Civil War. By then, 160 organized Jewish communities in thirty-one states and the District of Columbia had at least one established Jewish institution.

Between 1820 and 1860, America developed a nationwide, market-driven economy. Peddlers, many of them immigrant Jews in their teens or twenties, helped to create this transformation by selling notions, dry goods, second-hand clothing and similar products while learning English and accumulating capital. As they crossed the country, they carried Judaism to frontier settings where Jews were unknown before.

In these new settings, the peddlers attempted to replicate the Judaism of their European homelands. Isaac Mayer Wise presumed that Judaism itself needed to change in order to survive, urging Jews to adopt innovations to make Judaism seem more appealing and spiritually uplifting: shorter services, vernacular prayers, organ music and mixed gender seating.

Still a third preservation strategy rejected the synagogue altogether and focused on peoplehood as the unifying element in Jewish life. For example, B’nai B’rith, established in 1843, argued that fraternal ties – the covenant (b’rit) that bound Jews one to another – could bring about “union and harmony,” while synagogues divided Jews and alienated some of them altogether.

The history of American Judaism is replete with oscillations among these different strategies. Proponents of each checked the other’s excesses, and together they accomplished what none might have accomplished separately: they kept American Judaism going. Yet this benefit came at a steep price. Often, American Jewish religious life has seethed with acrimonious contention, the unseemly specter of Jews battling Jews.

Central European Jewish immigrants were the chief builders of several philanthropies and of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (1859-1878), which fought for Jewish equality; separation of church and state; protection of overseas Jewry; and supported Palestine relief. Jewish leaders established a thriving periodical and book press in German and English and the first significant American rabbinical seminary, the Hebrew Union College, in 1875.

Over the next fifty years, a much larger immigration from Eastern Europe brought some 2 million Jews from Russia, Romania, and Austria-Hungary to America’s shores. Bloody pogroms from 1881 onward sparked many a decision to leave the Old World behind, but the root causes of mass migration lay in overpopulation, oppressive legislation, economic dislocation, forced conscription, poverty and despair; coupled with tales of wondrous opportunity and cut-rate steamship tickets. Jewish immigration virtually
stopped during World War I and then resumed, but quota legislation then drastically restricted it in 1924.

With the opportunities available to Jewish immigrants, especially in the clothing trade, and the comforting presence of other Yiddish-speaking Jews nearby, large numbers of East European Jews saw no need to travel further than New York City. They mushroomed the city’s Jewish population from about eighty thousand in the 1870s to almost 1,400,000 in 1915, nearly twenty-eight percent of the city’s total population. East European Jews also settled in other communities from Maine to California, sometimes thanks to ambitious organized efforts. One notable project drew ten thousand immigrants to the port of Galveston, Texas, in the hope of alleviating overcrowded conditions on the east coast.

East European Jewish immigrants had to make a leap from the religious and cultural self-sufficiency of their European background to an industrialized America that emphasized individualism and devalued Old World traditions. For the culturally bewildered and economically exploited Jewish slum dweller, the Americanization process was rapid and difficult, ultimately successful, but not devoid of tragedies, family breakdown, unemployment, illness, conflict between parents and children, and escapism from Jewish life.

Predominantly factory workers when they arrived, East European Jews pioneered in trade unionism and industrial relations. They developed community centers, lodges, *landsmanshaftn*, Yiddish and Hebrew literature and newspapers, publishing houses and cultural organizations, Yiddish theaters, Talmud Torahs, day schools, Yiddish schools, and academies of higher learning.

The devastation that World War I wrought upon Jewish communities drew the different segments of American Jewry together to relieve the suffering of Jews in Europe and Palestine especially through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), founded in 1914.

Zionism became a significant force in American Jewish life on the eve of World War I. The conversion of the nationally famous “people’s lawyer” and future Supreme Court justice Louis D. Brandeis to Zionism in 1914 catalyzed American Zionism’s growth. Thanks to his charm, prestige, and passion Zionism’s ranks and treasury swelled. In 1917, Zionists and non-Zionists, religionists and secularists, joined in the first American Jewish Congress to press for rights for the Jews of Europe and a “Jewish National Home” in Palestine.

In decades following World War I, Jews numbered among the many immigrants and their children who benefited from new opportunities in higher education, wartime prosperity and post-war investment. They bounded into “white-collar” positions as professionals and clerks, and moved to better neighborhoods. A few East European Jews became millionaires; only a minority remained wage laborers. American-born children of immigrants came to outnumber their parents during the 1930s. Finally, those born or raised in the country, especially those who served in the war, felt equally “at home” as Americans and Jews.

Yet, American Jews had cause for apprehension. In response to the postwar “Red scare,” many Americans lashed out at immigrants, “Bolsheviks,” and apparent nonconformists. Some thought the Jew embodied capitalistic materialism, while for others he carried anarchistic ideas. Even Jews whose American families went back generations felt the sting of prejudice. In 1915, an Atlanta crowd lynched Leo Frank amidst a frenzy of anti-Semitism. After he was falsely accused of murdering a thirteen-year-old employee in the factory he managed. Beginning in 1920, the *Dearborn Independent*, Henry Ford’s widely-distributed newspaper, purported to describe an international Jewish conspiracy. In 1927, under intense pressure, Ford publicly apologized, but the damage was done. The 1930s added economic depression to this scalding brew. With Hitler in Germany and domestic anti-Semites like Father Charles Coughlin ranting on the airwaves, Jews had good reason to be nervous.

According to a 1938 survey, even with reports of Nazi atrocities, fewer than 5 percent of Americans expressed willingness to raise immigrant quotas to accommodate refugees, while two-thirds insisted, “We should try to keep them out.” A bill to admit twenty thousand refugee children outside the quota failed in Congress. Eventually, America accepted over 200,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1945, more than any other country, but only a small fraction of those needing rescue.

Could American Jewry have done
more to rescue the Jews who fell under Nazi rule during the 1930s and early 1940s? Some blame Jewish leaders for doing too little too late, condemn Jewish organizations for their inability to unite in time of crisis, argue that American Jews should have applied greater pressure on the government to help save Jews, and point accusingly at missed opportunities—actions that if taken might have made a difference. Others conclude sadly that little more could have been accomplished given the realities of the day. Anti-immigrant sentiment within the United States, persistent isolationism, burgeoning antisemitism, and the politics of expediency, coupled later with the President’s firm insistence that the best way to save Jews was to win the war, would have rendered even the most zealous Jewish rescue campaigns largely futile. By all accounts, Adolf Hitler’s maniacal determination to annihilate the Jews greatly exceeded the American Jewish community’s power to stop him. Yet nagging doubts remain, for Jews know that had they been even a little more successful in opening up America’s gates, bringing government pressure to bear on Great Britain to admit more Jews into Palestine, or in shaming the world to find some other haven for the Jews of Europe, many more of their brothers and sisters might have been saved.

Some 550,000 Jewish men and women served in America’s armed forces during World War II. While many faced anti-Semitism, the central command worked to promote religious harmony through an interfaith message, using phrases like “Judeo-Christian” and “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews” that rapidly gained ground in the postwar era.

With the terrible destruction of European Judaism, America became the most important Jewish community in the world. Fueled by postwar prosperity, American Judaism strengthened institutionally, building synagogues, religious schools and community centers, particularly in suburbia and the sunbelt. Holocaust refugees, among them illustrious rabbis and scholars, contributed to strengthening and revitalizing American Jewish religious life. This, they came to believe, was the transcendent purpose for which they had survived.

During the 1960s universal causes like world peace, civil rights, interfaith relations and the war in Vietnam dominated the American Jewish agenda. Jews played an active role in the civil rights movement, lobbied for a revised Catholic position on relations with the Jewish people, and many participated in anti-war demonstrations. The late 1960s, however, witnessed a shift from Jewish universalism to particularism. The Six Day War in June 1967 changed the way many Jews thought about Israel and themselves leading to a new focus on strengthening Israel and themselves, and many participated in anti-war demonstrations. The late 1960s, however, witnessed a shift from Jewish universalism to particularism. The Six Day War in June 1967 changed the way many Jews thought about Israel and themselves, leading to a new focus on strengthening Israel and themselves, and many participated in anti-war demonstrations. The late 1960s, however, witnessed a shift from Jewish universalism to particularism. The Six Day War in June 1967 changed the way many Jews thought about Israel and themselves, leading to a new focus on strengthening Israel and themselves.

Young American Jews also focused on revitalizing Judaism in harmony with the 1960s counterculture. The havurah movement, the Jewish Catalog and a substantial “back to tradition” movement affected all streams of Judaism. Jewish education and Jewish culture strengthened markedly, leading some to suggest that American Judaism was experiencing a “renaissance.”

Feminism and spirituality also transformed Jewish life. The ordination of women by the Reform (1972), Reconstructionist (1974) and Conservative (1985) movements symbolized feminism’s impact on late twentieth-century American Judaism. Women also assumed new roles in Orthodoxy as high-level Jewish education, including Talmud study, became available to Orthodox women. Meanwhile, spiritual and emotive religious experiences incorporating music, dance, mystical teachings and healing brought a renewal of spirituality across the spectrum of Jewish religious life.

Questions still confront American Jews as they mark their 350th anniversary. Should they focus inwardly to enhance Judaism, or focus outwardly to increase the number of Jews? Embrace intermarriage as an opportunity for outreach, or condemn it as a disaster for offspring? Build religious bridges, or fortify religious boundaries? Strengthen religious authority, or promote religious autonomy? Harmonize Judaism with contemporary culture, or uphold tradition against contemporary culture? Compromise for Jewish unity, or stand firm for cherished Jewish principles?

Today, Jews witness two contradictory trends operating in their communities: assimilation and revitalization. Which will predominate? That will be determined day by day, community by community, Jew by Jew. For the full text of this essay, go to www.celebrate350.org.

1948

United States Army in Occupied Germany publishes a 19-volume Survivors’ Talmud for use by Jewish Displaced Persons and Holocaust survivors, the first time in world history that a national government published these sacred texts.

United Palestine Appeal publishes its Yearbook to commemorate its “Night of Stars” gala celebrating the birth of the State of Israel.

1948

United States Army in Occupied Germany publishes a 19-volume Survivors’ Talmud for use by Jewish Displaced Persons and Holocaust survivors, the first time in world history that a national government published these sacred texts.

1950

As American Jews move to the suburbs, they build hundreds of new synagogues even as they become increasingly indistinguishable from other middle class Americans. Joining a synagogue becomes the chief expression of Jewish identity. In 1930, a mere 20 percent of American Jewish families belong to a synagogue; by 1960, nearly 60 percent do in a search for community as well as spirituality.
EMMA LAZARUS SONNET  
“THE NEW COLOSSUS”

The stirring words of “The New Colossus” are almost as familiar to most Americans as the national anthem. These words were penned in November 1883 by American Jewish poet Emma Lazarus, in her ode to the Statue of Liberty. Today her sonnet is considered one of the classic documents of American history. In 1976, the original handwritten version of the sonnet traveled across the nation as part of our Bicentennial celebration.

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<th>1950s</th>
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<td>The movement of Jews to the suburbs leads to the emergence of the American Jewish community center, the hybrid “shul with a pool” that balances religious and recreational elements. The National Jewish Welfare Board provides programming, design and management prototypes to its member JCC’s.</td>
<td>The Jewish “Counterculture” emerges with an emphasis on gender equality, small self-directed congregations (havurot) rather than large, rabbi-dominated synagogues, renewal of spirituality by attaching religious meaning to social action.</td>
<td>Sandy Koufax, Los Angeles Dodger pitcher, sets a baseball record when he pitches his fourth no-hitter in four years.</td>
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With unique images drawn from the extensive archives of the American Jewish Historical Society, this beautiful timeline poster (with text by Professor Pamela Nadell) will entertain and educate. From the first settlement in 1654 to the nomination of Joe Lieberman for Vice President of the United States, you will find fascinating incidents and developments that made the American Jewish experience. A must for every home, school and library. 24” x 36”.

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