



PORTLAND JEWRY

Its Growth and Development

by

Benjamin Band



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Portland, Maine

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Portland, Maine

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FOREWORD

For many years, Walter G. Davis, president of the Maine Historical Society had urged upon his Jewish friends the desirability of a recorded history of the Jewish community of Portland; but the idea lay dormant until announcement was made of the Tercentenary Celebration of 1954, to commemorate the three hundred years of Jewish settlement in the United States. Local attention was then focussed upon the need, as well as the desirability of bringing the idea of Mr. Davis into fruition. Such history of Portland Jewry would be a fitting and opportune implementation of the Tercentenary Celebration.

On January 14, 1953, a request was made of the board of directors of the Portland Jewish Federation to sponsor and finance a preliminary study to ascertain the availability of source material for a historical study of Portland Jewry. This request was received with enthusiasm and the necessary funds were appropriated. Benjamin Band, a scholar whom we were fortunate to have in our midst, was engaged to make the introductory study. A month later he reported to the Federation that sufficient, hitherto unexplored material had been uncovered to provide the basis for, and to justify, a thorough study of the religious and communal life of Portland Jewry from its earliest beginning, ninety years ago.

With the imprimatur of the Federation, the Jewish Historical Society of Portland, Maine, was organized under the laws of the State of Maine, as an educational corporation, on June 17, 1953. Its purposes are, as noted in the certificate of incorporation, to stimulate interest in local Jewish history through the collection and publication of materials bearing on the growth and development of the Jewish community; and to encourage the preservation of all community records and source materials, for the edification and guidance of future generations.

Mr. Band was then engaged to continue his research and write the story of the birth and growth of the Jewish community as nearly accurately as was possible from the available material. In the winter of 1953, he submitted his first draft of the manuscript to the Society. Copies were submitted to a few of the oldest Jewish

settlers for comment and suggestions. In the fall of 1954, revision was begun by an editorial committee consisting of Lewis H. Kriger, chairman; Edith Briggs Meyers (Mrs. Harold), and Earl Aronson. Assisting them at the weekly meetings were Mr. and Mrs. Israel Bernstein, Abraham S. Levey, Arthur M. Waterman, Mr. Band, and Jules Krems. Mr. Krems assisted Mr. Band in further efforts to search and record historical data. The text was edited, rewritten in part and prepared for the printer.

By the very nature of the project, it was necessary to set an arbitrary deadline for the inclusion of historical data in the text. December 31, 1954 was established as the closing date.

The study owes its successful completion not only to those who helped prepare the manuscript, but also to the many persons who financed the work of the Society and graciously consented to sponsor the publication of the book. Their devotion to this work is also a part of the history of Portland Jewry.

With the completion of its first project, the Society enters upon a new phase of its existence. Its historical interest in Jewish life will continue with the publication of future supplements to this book. The assistance of all interested persons in this worthy endeavor will be welcomed.

ISRAEL BERNSTEIN, *President*
Jewish Historical Society
of Portland, Maine

PREFACE

It is almost impossible to reproduce on paper the life of a community with all its color, detail and imagery. Just as an artist creates with lines, patterns and dabs of color, relying on the peculiar structure of the human eye to translate them into a total picture, so the historian, no matter how complete his source material may be, can only point out the salient features of his subject and arrange them in such a manner as to convey a picture of a fragment of social life.

The present attempt at a history of Portland Jewry is a direct result of the recent Tercentenary Celebration of Jewish settlement in America. As part of the program of this celebration, all Jewish communities were urged to compile the record of their settlement and growth, thus furnishing historians of American Jewry the bricks and mortar for a more elaborate synthesis of Jewish experience in this land.

We acknowledge with thanks the assistance rendered by many local organizations and individuals, and the guidance offered us by the American Jewish Historical Society and its librarian, Dr. Isadore Meyer, the American Jewish Archives, the Maine Historical Society and the Portland Public Library.

A special note should be made of the invaluable assistance rendered by Jules Krems, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Portland. During the period of original research and especially when the manuscript was being revised, Mr. Krems helped in gathering and checking the information dealing with community life.

There are several lacunae in the present record which are due to the lack of authentic records for certain periods, organizations and activities. It is to be hoped that future historians, basing their efforts on the present pioneer work, will succeed in filling the gaps, recovering material that was not accessible to the present researcher and correcting and amplifying the present record.

If the present study, defective as it may be in parts, will serve to create a greater interest on the part of Portland Jewry in the past and present experience of the community, it will have

fulfilled its task. And if it will encourage others to continue in *this field*, to search out new sources and to preserve present records, experiences and memories for the historians of the future, the labor entailed in the compilation of this study will have been doubly rewarded.

December 31, 1954

BENJAMIN BAND

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