

## **With a little help from my friends: Jewish mutual assistance in nineteenth-century Maine**

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PRE-PUBLICATION DRAFT (forthcoming in *Maine History*, hopefully by 2020)

The rabbinic phrase, “All Jews are responsible for one another,” became something of a mantra in the nineteenth century as Jews migrated to far-flung locales and became increasingly sensitive to their collective interconnectedness.<sup>2</sup> This phrase appears in the original logo of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, a French organization founded in 1860 to improve the conditions of Jews in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, the German Jews who in 1843 founded the B’nai B’rith fraternal organization adopted a similar, albeit Americanized, motto—“benevolence, brotherly love, and harmony”—to capture their commitment to fostering mutual assistance within the country’s rapidly expanding Jewish immigrant population.<sup>4</sup> *Landsmanschaftn*, mutual aid societies for Jews who emigrated from the same Eastern European hometown, emerged in every large American city by the late nineteenth century; New York City

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<sup>1</sup> This essay began as a research project by Kristin Esdale (Colby ’16), under the supervision of David Freidenreich, that ultimately stretched over a two-year period and became a collaborative effort. We are grateful to Jocelyn Thomas (also Colby ’16) for allowing us to make use of the research she conducted on the Jewish community in 1850s Bangor. The original versions of these (and many other) student essays on Maine’s Jewish history can be found at [web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/](http://web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/).

<sup>2</sup> The phrase first appears in a third-century CE commentary on Lev. 27.37 (*Sifra, Behukotai* 2.7).

<sup>3</sup> We are grateful to Aron Rodrigue for this detail.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A history* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 89; see further Deborah Dash Moore, *B’nai B’rith and the challenge of ethnic leadership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

alone was home to several thousand of these associations.<sup>5</sup> Jews in smaller communities also banded together to meet their collective needs through the establishment of synagogues and other communal institutions.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish commitment to mutual assistance, however, went beyond the formation of organizations and institutions: even Jews who lived in communities too small to support a lasting Jewish infrastructure cultivated ties to fellow Jews. These immigrants understood that mutual assistance was no less important than personal effort in their pursuit of the dreams that brought them to America in the first place. The informal networks cultivated by Maine's Jews exemplify the sense of collective responsibility that characterized small-town Jewish life in nineteenth-century America.

Most American Jews settled in urban areas. According to Lee Shai Weissbach's analysis of data collected in 1878, 71% of all American Jews lived in cities that had a Jewish population of over 1,000, a percentage that only increased in later decades. Weissbach observes that most histories of nineteenth-century American Jewish life focus on the experiences of Jews in these 26 urban communities; he rounds out the picture by studying patterns within the 136 towns that were home to communities of 100–1,000 Jews.<sup>7</sup> Maine was home to only one such community in 1878, namely Portland. In that same year, however, Jews lived in more than two dozen other towns in Maine, including several identified by the nineteenth-century demographers on whose work Weissbach draws.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Soyer, *Jewish immigrant associations in New York, 1880–1939* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish life in small-town America: a history* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish life*, 4, 352–55.

<sup>8</sup> *Statistics of the Jews of the United States* (Philadelphia: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1880), 6, lists Jews in Bangor (est. 80 Jews), Bucksport (16), Eastport (5), Houlton (14), Lewiston (65), Pembroke (6), Portland

Weissbach justifies the minimum cut-off for his study by explaining that "settlements of fewer than 100 Jews were unlikely to have attained the critical mass necessary to constitute full-fledged communities," which Weissbach defines in terms of "the presence of fundamental communal institutions" such as synagogues.<sup>9</sup> Maine's far-flung Jews also fostered a sense of Jewish community, but they did so primarily by means of informal networks with one another and with members of larger Jewish settlements rather than through institutions or formal associations. All they really needed to get by, as the Beatles' Billy Shears put it, was "a little help from my friends."<sup>10</sup>

Weissbach leaves unstated another important reason for his focus on communities with Jewish institutions: these organizations generate documentary evidence about small-town Jewish life. The absence of comparable evidence regarding smaller communities poses serious and often insurmountable challenges for historians. The present study draws heavily on the surviving records of Maine's nineteenth-century Jewish organizations: Congregation Ahawas Achim (Brotherly Love) of Bangor, active from 1849–1856, and the Portland Lodge of B'nai B'rith, active 1874–1880.<sup>11</sup> This material has long been familiar to scholars of Maine's Jewish history,

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(185), Sanford (2), and Waterville (43). How the UAHC demographers obtained these figures is uncertain. Several of these figures are likely to be inaccurate. A comprehensive analysis of Waterville's 1880 census identified 35 Jews; Paul H. Gottlieb, "The Lewiston, Maine Jewish community: A people in transition" (unpublished, ca. 1977; archived at [www.mainejews.org](http://www.mainejews.org)), similarly concludes on the basis of his analysis of city directories that the figure published for that city "appears to be too high" (p. 3). On the UAHC study and its shortcomings, see Weissbach, *Jewish life*, 13–15. In addition to the locations identified by these demographers, R.G. Dun & Co.'s records (discussed below) include credit reports from the 1870s and 1880s on Jewish businessmen in Bar Harbor, Bath, Belfast, Biddeford, Calais, Camden, Ellsworth, Gardiner, Hollis, Kittery, Limerick, Lisbon Falls, Machias, Old Orchard, Old Town, Rockland, Sacawrappa, Springvale, and Tenants Harbor.

<sup>9</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish life*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "With a little help from my friends," *Sgt. Pepper's lonely hearts club band* (1967).

<sup>11</sup> The records of Ahawas Achim, written in German, are located at the Bangor Public Library. We consulted a photocopy, transcription, and translation provided by the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati (SC-702; the transcription and translation are unattributed). We drew as well on William J. Leffler II, "A study of Congregation

although most studies focus either on Bangor or on Portland rather than drawing on both sets of records. This study also incorporates a data set that has not been used in prior studies of Maine's Jewish history: the credit reports of approximately 150 Maine Jews produced by R.G. Dun & Co. between 1841–1890.<sup>12</sup> These shorthand reports, written for and sold to prospective creditors, provide information about each merchant's estimated worth and creditworthiness. They often contain valuable clues regarding the business and social networks of Maine's Jews. In addition, we have drawn on local histories as well as census records and other sources searchable through Ancestry.com.

Jews constituted a tiny fraction of Maine's nineteenth-century population. As a result, their strategies for getting by, both individually and collectively, were quite different from those of that century's much larger, more controversial, and more commonly studied immigrant communities: the Irish and the Francos. Closer parallels in terms of population size are Maine's nineteenth-century Swedish and African American communities. Many Swedes, however, settled in the ethnic colony of New Sweden, where they preserved the language and culture of their homeland;<sup>13</sup> Jews did nothing of the sort. Swedes and other European immigrants also worked primarily in agriculture and the mills, whereas Jews primarily worked as peddlers and merchants.

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Ahawas Achim, Bangor, Maine, from 1848 to 1856 from the minutes of the congregation," an unpublished 1957 essay, written at the American Jewish Archives while Leffler was a rabbinical student; a copy is now archived at [www.mainejews.org](http://www.mainejews.org). Benjamin Band, *Portland Jewry: Its growth and development* (Portland, Me.: Jewish historical society, 1955), draws on the records of Portland's first B'nai B'rith lodge. Unfortunately, those minutes have since disappeared. Portland's first synagogues were established in the 1880s, but no minutes from those institutions survive.

<sup>12</sup> R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, Baker Library, Harvard Business School. We are grateful to the staff of Baker Library Historical Collections for facilitating our use of this material and granting permission to use it in this essay.

<sup>13</sup> Katherine Hoving, "'You speak very good English for a Swede': Language, culture, and persistence in Maine's Swedish colony," *Maine History* 40.3 (2001):219–44.

African American settlement patterns resemble those of Maine's Jews: in both cases, the largest nineteenth-century communities were in Portland and Bangor, with much smaller concentrations in towns across the state.<sup>14</sup> It seems likely that the racial, occupational, and socioeconomic differences between Jews and blacks during the nineteenth century prompted the development of different approaches to mutual assistance. Perhaps, however, a future study of interactions and mutual assistance strategies among African Americans in nineteenth-century Maine will find parallels to the dynamics described below.

Just tryin' to keep the customer satisfied

A few dozen Jews reportedly lived in the District of Maine before it became a state,<sup>15</sup> but biographical information survives about only one of them. In his *History of the town of Union*, John Sibley devotes a lengthy footnote to Susman Abrams, a cooper and tanner who had in his younger days worked as a peddler trading in old clothes.<sup>16</sup> Abrams, originally from Hamburg, Germany, lived in Waldoborough and Thomaston before settling in Union at an unspecified date; he married a local widow, Mary Jones of Friendship, in 1810. Sibley recounts an occasion on which a fellow Jew spent Passover with Abrams, but otherwise provides no clues regarding the

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<sup>14</sup> H.H. Price and Gerald E. Talbot, *Maine's visible Black history: The first chronicle of its people* (Gardiner, Me.: Tilbury House, 2006), 16–18. This volume, unfortunately, contains no systematic study of African Americans in nineteenth-century Maine. Note that there were many more African Americans than Jews in Maine: Portland was home to several hundred black residents during the middle of that century, Bangor and Warren to about 100 each, and numerous other towns were home to at least 15. On African Americans in nineteenth-century Portland, see also Michael Connolly, *Seated by the sea: The maritime history of Portland, Maine, and its Irish longshoremen* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Band, *Portland Jewry*, 4–5.

<sup>16</sup> John Langdon Sibley, *A History of the Town of Union* (Boston: Mussey, 1851), 110. A copy of this footnote is accessible at [web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/](http://web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/).

composition of Abrams' social and business networks. He does, however, state that Abrams "was never much liked by the men [of Union], and was generally hated by the women." Sibley implies that this dislike stems from Abrams' Jewishness, which Sibley himself describes in ways that draw on biblically inspired anti-Jewish stereotypes. Susman Abrams died in 1830 without children or any known impact on the next generation of local Jews; he remains, quite literally, a footnote in Maine's Jewish history.

That next generation, like Abrams, hailed from German-speaking lands and came to Maine as peddlers and merchants, primarily of new and used clothing. They too sought to make a living by providing goods and services to customers who were unfamiliar with, and often suspicious of, real-life Jews. Hasia Diner offers a vivid depiction of the Jewish peddler experience which, she finds, "proved remarkably consistent around the world and across time":

He knocked, introduced himself to, almost always, a woman who opened the door. He asked her to look in his bag, or box, or pack. He had to figure out how to ingratiate himself to her, as every sale mattered, and to do so he had to guess what she might want, what message to deploy in talking with her, and how best to charm her into buying this or that. In this little drama played out on multiple continents, in multiple languages, he proffered a range of goods which represented a new, higher, and actually better standard of living. He did not carry food or fuel, life's basic necessities. Rather, from the depths of his pack he brought out for display sheets and pillowcases, pictures and picture frames, clothing and cloth, needles, threads, buttons, lace, bedspreads and tablecloths, eyeglasses, suspenders. The list went on and on, as this paradigmatic peddler moved up the ladder and managed to acquire a horse and wagon. Then the goods got bigger and heavier, stoves and bathtubs, still representing a cosmopolitan standard of consumption,

associated with cities, modernity, and the lifestyles of the better-off classes. The Jewish immigrant peddler educated the farmers, miners, loggers, plantation laborers, millworkers, and working-class families to crave these finer things in life, goods associated with their social betters. The peddlers brought these goods within reach of the more humble women whose homes they entered.<sup>17</sup>

Life on the road was often lonely and miserable, so peddlers usually transitioned to sedentary employment once they saved enough money to open a shop. While Susman Abrams opted for coopering and tanning, most of his successors remained in the retail sales business, usually selling clothing and other dry goods.<sup>18</sup>

Maine's Jewish peddlers and merchants were participants in a commercial network similar in many respects to today's Amazon.com. Like Amazon, peddlers provided customers with access to the latest consumer goods as well as home delivery, a major convenience for rural households given the poor state of nineteenth-century roads. Indeed, Jewish merchants worked closely with Jewish peddlers to sell goods to customers in the hinterlands. Merchants provided peddlers with merchandise on credit, with the expectation of being repaid when the peddler returned to town at the end of each week. Those merchants, in turn, received their goods from Jewish manufacturers and wholesalers in cities like New York and Boston, who also extended credit to the stores that sold their products. The wholesalers kept merchants abreast of current urban fashions, while the peddlers got to know their customers' interests and, in Amazon-like

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<sup>17</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Roads taken: The great Jewish migrations to the New World and the peddlers who forged the way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>18</sup> On the place of the clothing trade within the American Jewish economy of the nineteenth century, and its close relationship to the sale of dry goods, see Adam D. Mendelsohn, *The rag race: How Jews sewed their way to success in America and the British Empire* (New York University Press, 2015), esp. pp. 4–7.

fashion, provided valuable consumer data that flowed back to the wholesalers and manufacturers. This information gave Jewish businessmen a slight edge against their competitors. This Jewish ethnic economy, which depended on a high degree of mutual assistance, worked to the benefit of all of its participants, including the non-Jewish consumers.

Haiman Philip Spitz, among the founders of Maine's first synagogue, depicts the workings of this ethnic economy and the geographic mobility of its participants in his 1886 autobiography.<sup>19</sup> Born in 1816 in Posen, a Polish region within the Kingdom of Prussia, Spitz arrived in New York in 1840, following in the footsteps of his younger brother, Peter. The younger Spitz had already established a cap-making business in New York, and Haiman decided to set up a business in New Orleans to sell Peter's caps.<sup>20</sup> Spitz shared a market stall in New Orleans with a fellow Jew from Posen; this kind of mutually beneficial arrangement with a *landsman* was typical. Spitz split his time between the New Orleans store and the countryside, peddling on horse and wagon as far as Natchez, Miss. Haiman returned annually to New York to obtain goods from his brother and, eventually, to design his own clothes for sale in the South. When the Mexican-American War broke out, Spitz received an order for 1,500 uniforms and arranged for Jewish manufacturers in New York to make them. Peter Spitz, meanwhile, had moved to Boston, where he and Haiman founded a wholesale/retail clothier business called Spitz & Brother. Haiman continued to sell Peter's goods in New Orleans until he too relocated to

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<sup>19</sup> Haiman Philip Spitz, *Autobiography* (self-published, 1886; Cincinnati, American Jewish Archives, SC-11863). An abridged version of this work appears in *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775–1865*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 1: 289–301.

<sup>20</sup> Mendelsohn, *Rag race*, 136–41, provides a broader perspective on the New York–New Orleans axis of the Jewish clothing trade during the antebellum period.



Boston in 1846. Finally sedentary, Haiman got married the following year.<sup>21</sup> Haiman and Henrietta's marriage was life-long, but their stay in Boston proved brief: after the death of their first-born child in 1848, the couple relocated to Bangor. Haiman and Henrietta were among the dozens of Jews who made Maine their home during the 1840s and 1850s, seeking to sell goods to workers in the state's booming natural resources industries and growing manufacturing sector.<sup>22</sup> Peter and his family also moved to Bangor sometime before June 1850, when they appear in the census records. In that year, 99.5% of Mainers were either native-born Americans or immigrants from Britain and its colonies.<sup>23</sup> As native speakers of German, let alone as Jews, the Spitzes were part of a tiny minority.

### Lean on me

Haiman and Peter Spitz exemplify the ways in which Jewish family members assisted one another in their business endeavors. The R.G. Dun records reveal several additional examples of wives, sons, and brothers stepping in when their help was needed most. Moses Silber of Bangor received his first credit report in October 1849: "A German, means not kn[own] here, d[oin]g fair bus[iness]" in his "Dry + Silk G[oo]ds" store. The July 18, 1851, report describes Silber as "Reputed here the best of the Germans + pretty well off." In February of 1852, however, Moses died. His wife, Hannah, and son, Augustus, took over the firm seamlessly, suggesting that both had been deeply involved during Moses' lifetime as well. Hannah appears to

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<sup>21</sup> Curiously, Spitz's autobiography never names his wife, who is listed as Henrietta in the 1850 Bangor census (p. 59).

<sup>22</sup> R.G. Dun records from the 1840s–1850s include credit reports for Jewish businessmen in Bangor, Lewiston Falls, Rockland, Saco, Searsport, Skowhegan, Waterville, and Winthrop; several of these reports continue into the 1860s.

<sup>23</sup> *Historical atlas of Maine*, ed. Stephen J. Hornsby and Richard W. Judd (Orono: University of Maine Press, 2015), plate 24.

have been the driving force in the business after Moses' death—and, perhaps, before then as well. According to the report of Sept. 18, 1856, "The mother is active + energetic + the firm is considered the best of that class [i.e., dry goods stores] here."<sup>24</sup> While Hannah Silber is one of only two women described by name in the R.G. Dun reports about Maine's Jewish merchants, these surely were not the only wives to play an active role in their husbands' businesses.

Lewis Kaufman first appears in the R.G. Dun records as the proprietor of a dry goods store in Rockland in 1855: "Is a German Jew. All we can say of him is that he keeps a g[oo]d looking shop, d[oin]g consid[erable] bus[iness], nothing known of him here, buys at N.Y. auctions." For the next several years, his reports remain about the same. The Oct. 27, 1857, report, for example, reads: "German, can't learn his means. d[oin]g f[ai]r am[ount] of bus[iness]. g[oo]d hab[it]s. young man. no visible p[ro]p[erty] except stock. keeps mod[est] stock. is risk on short here." According to the 1860 census, Lewis (age 32) and his wife Rebecca (25) had a 3-year-old daughter and two boarders who worked as clerks in Lewis' store.<sup>25</sup> On March 4, 1861, however, R.G. Dun's representative reported that Lewis was "in poor failing health." A month later: "He has just let his bro[ther] 'Joseph' in who was for a while keeping a little shop of light goods [in Boston], but sold out and quit last fall." Joseph, in other words, moved from Boston down to Rockland to support his brother and family by keeping the business afloat. Reports from the remainder of 1861 and 1862 indicate that the business "seems to be doing well," but Joseph too fell ill in early 1863, while Lewis was reportedly crippled for life. They were out of business by September of that year, but were able to resume their sales two years later, once Joseph recovered. "Their means must be small after so long a sickness, living out of bus[iness] all the

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<sup>24</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 22:106.

<sup>25</sup> 1860 census, Rockland, p. 127.

time," remarked an R.G. Dun reporter on April 1, 1865. One can only imagine how Lewis, Rebecca, and Rose would have gotten by without Joseph's help.<sup>26</sup>

Family relationships not only saved businesses from closing, they also helped businesses to thrive. The most successful Jewish firm established in Maine before the Civil War was run by Jacob Peavy of Waterville. Peavy, born in Prussia in 1819, immigrated to America in 1848; following a shipwreck, he "landed after much hardship possessed only of his life, his determined purpose and his signal business ability."<sup>27</sup> Jacob's much younger brothers, Isaac and Louis, arrived in New York as teenagers in 1850.<sup>28</sup> In early 1856, the three opened "J. Peavy and Brothers," a men's clothing house in Waterville, after first trying their hands at a store in Augusta; Louis opened a Belfast branch store in 1862.<sup>29</sup> In 1858, Waterville's R.G. Dun reporter described the Peavy brothers as follows: "Young men, married, they appear to be doing a good bus[iness], are active and enterprising with good capacities for bus[iness]." Subsequent reports continue to highlight the firm's success: "They do a pretty large business, and are prudent + economical, are estimated worth from 25 to 50 [thousand] \$. I should not be surprised if they touch the latter figure" (1866); "They do a g[oo]d bus[iness], are reputed v[er]y well off + are in

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<sup>26</sup> R.G. Dun, *Maine* 5:144; *Maine* 3:258. By 1867, Joseph and Lewis had both relocated to Boston, where they bought an existing business; Joseph died in 1870, and Lewis continued to operate the store until he sold it in 1872 (R.G. Dun, *Massachusetts* 78:362).

<sup>27</sup> Edwin Carey Whittemore, *The Centennial History of Waterville, Kennebec County, Maine, 1802–1902* (Bowie: Heritage Books, 1998), 530.

<sup>28</sup> *Index to New England naturalization petitions, 1791–1906 (M1299)*, accessed via ancestry.com.

<sup>29</sup> In 1868, Louis handed over the Belfast store to David Peavy (relation unknown); see R.G. Dun, *Maine* 25:57, 83, 157. A certain David L. Peavy lived in Lewiston in 1860: his naturalization record of that year (see prior note) lists him as a native of Prussia, and the census (p. 116) reports that he worked as a merchant tailor and lived in the home of a fellow Peavy, presumably his brother, from the Prussian region of Posen. *Greenough's Directory of Rockland, Belfast, and Camden* in 1877 (p. 130) and 1882 (p. 213) lists David L. Peavy as a clothing merchant at 7 Phoenix Row in Belfast. He appears in the *Belfast and Camden Directory* of 1890 selling "hats, caps, and furnishing goods" at the same address (p. 77) despite what the final entry in the R.G. Dun records describes as a catastrophic fire in 1887.

excellent credit" (1869); "Can[']t estimate their worth. Jacob lives here, stands high + can get out of the bank any am[oun]t he wants without an endorser" (1871). Isaac and Louis, meanwhile, relocated to New York, with all three brothers sharing equally in both clothing houses. By the 1880s, the brothers reportedly owned "cons[iderab]le p[ro]p[ert]y" in New York City and Hoboken, N.J., as well as a clothing house in Boston and branch stores across Maine. In 1885, Jacob, who remained in Waterville, informed a New York-based R.G. Dun reporter that the firm's market capitalization exceeded \$250,000.<sup>30</sup>

The familial nature of Peavy's business extended to the next generation as well. Jacob's four sons all entered the firm.<sup>31</sup> According to the R.G. Dun records, Julius Waterman, who ran the Bangor branch store, married Jacob's daughter Rosa; R.G. Dun reporters speculate that Jacob Peavy bankrolled his son-in-law's business.<sup>32</sup> Morris N. Meyers of Lewiston, formerly a peddler for Peter Spitz's cap company, reportedly married another of Jacob Peavy's daughters and received significant financial backing from Peavy Bros. for his own "Androscoggin Clothing Co."<sup>33</sup> Edwin Whittemore reports that Rebecca Peavy, the oldest of Jacob's American-born children, married Mark Gallert, another Waterville Jewish merchant who specialized in boots

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<sup>30</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 4:348, 356, 367, 454; R.G. Dun, New York 205: 870, 900a/2, 900a/56, 900a/85, 900a/150.

<sup>31</sup> Whittemore, *Centennial history*, 350.

<sup>32</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 23:363. According to the 1880 census report, Rosa was born in Prussia in 1848, the year Jacob left for America. Rosa is not listed as a member of Jacob Peavy's household in the 1860 Waterville census, however; it may be that she is the child of a wife whom Jacob left behind in Prussia.

<sup>33</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 4:16, 286. According to the final entry on Meyers, however, the Boston branch of J. Peavy & Bros. states that they and Meyers have nothing more than a commercial relationship. Meyers is not listed among Jacob Peavy's sons-in-law by Edwin Whittemore (see following note). Either the R.G. Dun reporters' frequent assertions that Meyers was married to one of Jacob's daughters are incorrect or Meyers married and then divorced Jacob's daughter Esther. It is possible that Meyers married a member of the Lewiston branch of the Peavy clan: a Jacob P. Peavy appears, with two unmarried daughters, in the 1870 census (p. 88). We have been unable to track down information about Meyers via ancestry.com.

and shoes; a younger daughter, Esther, married an unnamed Jewish businessman in Boston.<sup>34</sup> It seems that business relationships among Maine's Jewish merchants proved fertile ground for the establishment of marital relationships, and *vice versa*.

Julius Waterman was most likely not yet a member of Jacob Peavy's family when he began working for Peavy in Bangor in 1868. It is no coincidence, however, that Peavy hired a fellow Jew for that job. Jewish merchants regularly employed Jews as clerks or peddlers, often providing them with a place to live as well. Hiring recent immigrants was, in part, an act of kindness—a way of ensuring that fellow Jews could support themselves—but the relationship between employer and employee was also one of enlightened self-interest. An R.G. Dun reporter observed that Hannah and Augustus Silber "sell many g[oo]ds to German [Jewish] peddlers."<sup>35</sup> According to the 1850 census, Peter Spitz housed three German Jewish peddlers in his Bangor home; these peddlers probably sold Peter's caps, among other goods, to rural customers without easy access to Bangor. At least one of the peddlers, Julius Harris, was a *landsman* of the Spitzes and may have obtained Peter's name through a mutual acquaintance from Prussia. By 1860, Harris had earned enough money to open his own store in Rockland.<sup>36</sup> There, he surely knew Lewis Kaufman, who in the same year boarded two clerks in his home, including the fellow Prussian Henry Meger.<sup>37</sup> The 1870 census reports that a certain Gustavus Waterman, perhaps

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<sup>34</sup> Whittemore, *Centennial history*, 350.

<sup>35</sup> R.G. Dun, *Maine* 22:106.

<sup>36</sup> 1850 Census, Bangor, Maine, p. 58; 1860 Census, Rockland, Maine, p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> 1860 Census, Rockland, Maine, p. 127.

related to Julius Waterman, lived in Peavy's Waterville home and worked as a clerk in a dry goods store, possibly the one operated by another local Jewish merchant, Emanuel Blumenthal.<sup>38</sup>

Maine's Jewish merchants not only provided employment opportunities to more recent immigrants, they also enabled Jewish manufacturers and wholesalers to sell more goods. Jacob Gunst and Isaac Bache, who lived in Bangor in the early 1850s, sold goods supplied by Jacob's brother, Abraham, whom R.G. Dun records from New York City describe as a "dry goods jobber."<sup>39</sup> J. Peavy & Brothers sold clothing made in New York and Boston not only in their own Maine stores but also those of Susill A. Isaacson, who reportedly had businesses in Bath, Gardiner, and Waldoboro before establishing his long-lasting "Blue Store" in Lewiston in 1886.<sup>40</sup> In 1887, Massachusetts-based William Filene, founder of the department store chain Filene's, opened the "Boston Branch Clothing Store" in Bath.<sup>41</sup>

Adam Mendelsohn captures the broader dynamics that are evident in the commercial relationships that Maine's Jews cultivated. Immigrant business networks, he observes, "thrived in the interstices of an incompletely integrated and imperfect economic system that was expanding geographically and growing in complexity. Ethnic networks bridged city and countryside... at a time when these were not otherwise seamlessly joined. These relationships were particularly advantageous in an industry where fashions changed quickly."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 1870 Census, Waterville, Maine, pp. 70, 76.

<sup>39</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 22:123, 209; R.G. Dun, New York 210:177-78.

<sup>40</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 4:279, 351, 407, 428, 489.

<sup>41</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 19:485.

<sup>42</sup> Mendelsohn, *Rag race*, 13-14.

Jewish merchants were inclined to trust fellow Jews. This trust manifests itself not only in the merchants' preference for hiring Jews as clerks and peddlers but also in their willingness to extend credit to one another. In 1854, for example, Peter Spitz mortgaged his stock to two local Jewish merchants, Hannah Silber and Jacob Gunst, ultimately repaying the loan in full. The next year, Gunst mortgaged his own stock to Jewish creditors, defaulting in August 1856.<sup>43</sup> Hannah and Augustus Silber defaulted badly on their own loans, primarily to New York- and Boston-based suppliers, in November 1856; they closed the business in Bangor and moved to New York.<sup>44</sup> "As in all ethnic niches," Hasia Diner observes, "a culture of trust within the group underlay these business transactions. Because all players shared their Jewishness and all maintained connections to and through local Jewish communities, often sustained by family ties and common premigration hometowns, they, whether the peddlers or suppliers, risked social exclusion and censure if they betrayed the confidence the others had placed in them."<sup>45</sup>

This culture of trust left Jews vulnerable to the rare confidence man. Peter Spitz fell victim to one such swindler while in Boston in the 1840s, losing both money and the creditworthiness of the "Spitz & Brother" firm in the process; the event was unusual and traumatic enough that Haiman Spitz recounts it in his autobiography 40 years later.<sup>46</sup> The R.G. Dun records, quoting the *New York Mirror* of Nov. 14, 1857, reveal that Bangor's Jewish community apparently had a swindler of its own. Augustus Silber was indicted for obtaining \$1,700 worth of goods as a confidence man, and was alleged to have stolen goods worth over

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<sup>43</sup> R.G. Dun, *Maine* 22:71, 123.

<sup>44</sup> R.G. Dun, *Maine* 22:106, 139.

<sup>45</sup> Diner, *Roads taken*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Spitz, *Autobiography*, in Marcus, *Memoirs*, 296.

\$100,000 from various wholesalers in New York City and Boston.<sup>47</sup> Jews in Maine, and their suppliers, relied on mutual trust despite the risk of falling prey to swindlers like Silber: they needed one another's assistance to succeed.

One reason that Jews were so dependent on one another is that they faced skepticism and even exclusion by Christian neighbors. Haiman Spitz describes his experience in Bangor as follows:

In the beginning it was dull. The people there did not encourage newcomers until they became acquainted. It was an English custom. They generally asked to what church you belonged; they would patronize church members. It was a poor chance for me, being an Israelite. I found out I would have to become acquainted in order to make a living. I liked the place and the style of the people; so I tried to make friends. ... My wife having been raised in this country, she made many friends; we were respected by those with whom we had dealings, my business improved, and we were perfectly satisfied with our surroundings.<sup>48</sup>

Lewiston's French newspaper *Le Messenger* ran an article in 1892 that depicts Jewish peddlers as unscrupulous and occasionally violent misers who undercut Franco-American merchants: "it is best to take the poker and hit these penny-pinchers as you would hit a dog that has soiled the carpet."<sup>49</sup> Jews in nineteenth-century Maine suffered from several stigmas: they were

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<sup>47</sup> R.G. Dun, *Maine* 22:139. An earlier report about Augustus Silber (22:106) warned that "people do not seem to confide much in his integrity."

<sup>48</sup> Spitz, *Autobiography*, in Marcus, *Memoirs*, 296–97.

<sup>49</sup> *Le Messenger* (Lewiston), April 15, 1892. On April 29, the paper published a letter to the editor by Solomon Robitschek who, in excellent French, depicts Lewiston's "fifteen or twenty" Jewish peddlers as paupers who generously offer credit to poor consumers and whose sales are in any case so meager as to have no impact on Franco merchants. We are grateful to James Myall for drawing this material to our attention; his transcription and translation are available at [www.mainejews.org](http://www.mainejews.org).



newcomers, immigrants, and Jews. Some, like Jacob Peavy of Waterville and William Engel, who became mayor of Bangor in 1902, overcame these stigmas; many others did not.<sup>50</sup> Haiman Spitz, it seems, was only partially successful in this regard.

According to Hasia Diner, agents for R.G. Dun and Co. "emphasized the negative when it came to Jews. They repeatedly used pejorative language about Jews, pointing out their flaws, and attributing those flaws to their Jewishness."<sup>51</sup> R.G. Dun's Maine agents, however, were less negative than Diner's general characterization suggests. They often identify merchants as Jews (although sometimes instead use the labels "German" or "Polish"), but in most cases do not accompany that ethnic label with any descriptive adjectives. Entries that employ arguably pejorative language are actually less frequent than those that offer positive assessments of successful merchants. An example of the latter appears in a report about Mark Gallert of Waterville: "Has had over 10 y[ea]rs exp[erience] in bus[iness]. a 'Jew' hon[est,] thrifty + reliable"; similarly, Benjamin Kalish of Bucksport is a "German Jew indus[trious] + of good h[ab]i[ts]."<sup>52</sup> The most frequently repeated observation about Jews, however, is also the most telling: "They appear to be German Jews of whom I know [nothing] + prob[abl]y shall never learn anything reliable."<sup>53</sup> To quote Diner once more, "Since Jewish merchants operated within the closed realm of the Jewish economy, reporters for R. G. Dunn [sic] could ascertain little

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<sup>50</sup> Engel, according to an 1881 credit report, arrived in Bangor in 1866 (R.G. Dun, Maine 23:470). He played an active role in Maine Republican politics, representing Bangor in the State House (1887–1891) and Senate (1895–1899) and campaigning for future President McKinley in both Maine and Michigan. See Rebecca Friedman, "Jewish settlers in Maine," 2–3; this 1937 report, prepared for the state's Executive Department, is accessible at [www.mainejews.org](http://www.mainejews.org).

<sup>51</sup> Diner, *Roads taken*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Gallert: R.G. Dun, Maine 3:112, Oct. 19, 1878; the March 31, 1881, entry adds the adjective "closefisted." Kalish: R.G. Dun, Maine 4:468, Mar. 31, 1880.

<sup>53</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine 22:139; Nathan A. Son + Co, Oct. 12, 1855.

about their business transactions."<sup>54</sup> This oft-repeated ignorance reflects the tendency of Jews in Maine to rely on mutual assistance rather than banks and Christian creditors.

### We are family

"For those who constituted the smaller Jewish communities of the United States," writes Lee Shai Weissbach, "a sense of communal cohesion depended in part on factors such as shared history and family ties, but even more so on the establishment of congregations. ... Jews in small towns tended to establish synagogues as soon as a minimal number of their coreligionists were present."<sup>55</sup> Ten adult men are required for a traditional Jewish prayer quorum, and the only Jewish community of that magnitude in mid-nineteenth century Maine was in Bangor. For a brief period, that city was the world's most productive lumber port, and contemporaries observed that dealers in cheap ready-made clothing were among the beneficiaries when lumbermen came to town.<sup>56</sup> A number of these merchants were Jews. On July 20, 1849, thirteen men gathered at Haiman Philip Spitz's home to establish the congregation they called "Ahawas Achim, or Brotherly Love."<sup>57</sup> The name these men chose for their congregation is telling: Bangor's Jews hoped that organized communal life would express and foster their already strong sense of familial solidarity.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Diner, *Roads taken*, 88.

<sup>55</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish life in small-town America*, 155.

<sup>56</sup> Richard W. Judd, "Maine's lumber industry," in *Maine: The Pine Tree State from prehistory to the present*, ed. Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1995), 270–71.

<sup>57</sup> This phrase appears in the German-language records of this meeting in Hebrew characters, in German transliteration of the Hebrew (hence the spelling "Ahawas" rather than "Ahavas"), and in English translation.

<sup>58</sup> On the symbolic significance of nineteenth-century synagogue names, see Sarna, *American Judaism*, 53, 87–88.

Ahawas Achim soon purchased a burial ground and a Torah scroll. The congregation also hired a cantor, Samuel Heinemann, to care for and support the synagogue's members.

Heinemann slaughtered poultry and meat for any member of the congregation free of charge. He was also available to provide religious guidance or services upon the request of any member.<sup>59</sup>

Ahawas Achim never had more than about 30 adult male members. For such a small community to thrive, each member needed to participate actively in Bangor's Jewish life. The congregational by-laws include strict attendance policies backed up with fines. These policies reflect the notion that Bangor's Jews need to remain accountable to one another and engaged in the organized life of the community. The by-laws also contain provisions to expel "immoral" members, apparently a reference to those who are not married in accordance with Jewish law. In one case, the congregation's board did just that and, in addition, threatened to force the offender to leave Bangor if he failed to regularize his marriage.<sup>60</sup>

Ahawas Achim's members worked together to provide their children with Jewish educational opportunities. The congregation's education committee sought to open a school that would teach German, English, and Hebrew.<sup>61</sup> Although the school never came to fruition, the desire to establish it speaks volumes about the aspirations of Bangor's Jews to foster German Jewish identity and a strong sense of community among American-born youth.

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<sup>59</sup> Ahawas Achim records, Aug. 20 and Sept. 22, 1849.

<sup>60</sup> Articles IX–XII. On Nov. 24, 1851, the congregation expelled Mr. S. Garland, apparently because Garland cohabited with a woman he called his wife without properly (religiously?) divorcing his previous wife.

<sup>61</sup> Ahawas Achim records, Aug. 23, 1852; Nov. 25 and Dec. 10, 1855. These efforts were in line with similar synagogue-sponsored day schools established in larger Jewish communities during the 1840s and 1850s; see Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 142–43.

Perhaps most significantly, Ahawas Achim sought to ensure that its members would care for one another in life and death alike. Trustees were all expected to visit members who fell ill.<sup>62</sup> Synagogue funds paid for the cost of the hearse, grave digger, and carriage, a valuable membership benefit. All available members of the synagogue were expected to follow the funeral procession to the outskirts of town, and from there ten men were required to proceed to the cemetery and participate in the burial ceremony.<sup>63</sup> The importance of that cemetery is apparent in the Ahawas Achim minutes. The decision to purchase a plot of land was made at the June 1849 meeting that established the congregation, a 1/10-acre plot was secured before the next congregational meeting in August, and members erected a fence around the plot by the September meeting. The cost of the land was \$50 and the fence up to \$25. Each of the congregation's 13 members contributed \$2 toward these costs at the June meeting and \$2 more in August (total: \$52); the records are unclear as to who paid the remainder, although a private mortgage on the land seems likely. To put these figures in perspective, when the congregation then purchased a Torah scroll in September for \$50, the directors voted to bill members for its cost in two separate installments: \$2 immediately and another \$2 due the following April. This arrangement seems to indicate that a single payment of \$4 would have been burdensome to some members.

The desire to provide mutual assistance and Jewish funerals similarly motivated the founding of Portland's first Jewish organization in 1874. This organization was not a synagogue, however, but rather a lodge of the International Order of B'nai B'rith. The founders, who hailed from across Central and Eastern Europe, may have opted to establish a fraternal organization

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<sup>62</sup> Ahawas Achim records, June 25, 1851.

<sup>63</sup> Articles XIII–XIV of Ahawas Achim's constitution, passed Dec. 16, 1849.

rather than a synagogue in order to serve a diverse, statewide population. More than a quarter of the lodge's 33 initial members did not live in Portland, including by-now familiar individuals such as Julius Waterman of Bangor and Mark Gallert of Waterville. More striking is the fact that almost every man who joined the lodge subsequently hailed from a town well outside the city: Lewiston, Hallowell, Waterville, Bangor, or Houlton. It seems that at least half of the Portland Lodge's members were not themselves Portlanders.<sup>64</sup>

Jewish men from across Maine may well have appreciated the elements of B'nai B'rith that Deborah Dash Moore captures in her history of the organization: "With its offer of brotherhood and mutual aid, its promise of friendship and collective solidarity, B'nai B'rith appealed directly to those suffering from the isolation and insecurity of immigrant life." Moore emphasizes the "socioeconomic and psychological security" that lodges provided when accounting for B'nai B'rith's commanding position in American Jewish life during the 1870s.<sup>65</sup> That security took an appealing tangible form: upon the death of any member, B'nai B'rith paid \$1,000 to the widow or legal heirs.<sup>66</sup> This insurance benefit may well have been the primary motivation of the Portland lodge's far-flung members.

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<sup>64</sup> Band, *Portland Jewry*, 116–17, provides a comprehensive list of B'nai B'rith members, drawn from the lodge's records. Band indicates the place of residence of some of these individuals, but he dramatically understates the size of the lodge's non-Portland contingent, apparently due to incomplete and inaccurate information. Using R.G. Dun records and Ancestry.com, we were able to confirm the residences of 39 of the 48 listed B'nai B'rith members.

<sup>65</sup> Moore, *B'nai B'rith*, 9, 33. In private correspondence, Moore observed that national leaders of B'nai B'rith were eager to expand the organization in the 1870s. Indeed, representatives of the First District Grand Lodge were on hand to install the new lodge in Portland, which was the 218th to join the organization; see Band, *Portland Jewry*, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Edward E. Grusd, *B'nai B'rith: The story of a covenant* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), 72. By the 1880s, it was clear to B'nai B'rith's national leadership that many men joined solely for the life insurance: see Grusd, 86–87; Cornelia Wilhelm, *The Independent Orders of B'nai B'rith and True Sisters: Pioneers of new Jewish identity, 1843–1914*, trans. Alan Nothnagle and Sarah Wobick (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 165–69.

B'nai B'rith members who lived in Portland prioritized a related goal: the establishment of a local Jewish cemetery. Much like Ahawas Achim 25 years earlier, the lodge resolved at its initial meeting to purchase a suitable plot of land for Jewish burials. It secured a 0.15-acre site in Cape Elizabeth in 1875 and established Maine's first formal *hevra kadisha* (Jewish burial society). The *hevra kadisha* was often the first organization established in small Jewish communities.<sup>67</sup> That was not the case in Maine, however, perhaps because the founders of Ahawas Achim and Portland's B'nai B'rith lodge aspired to provide mutual assistance in life as much or more than in death. The lodge offered sick benefits to disabled members and financial assistance to needy brethren. In its early years, B'nai B'rith sponsored high holiday services and a Purim festival gala in Portland (the latter to raise funds for the cemetery); it also directed local charitable and social service activities. "In addition to uniting the local community," observes Benjamin Band, "Portland Lodge was in constant contact with other lodges and, through it, Portland Jewry was bound up with the fortunes of American Jewry." Band observes that the lodge responded to numerous appeals for assistance from other B'nai B'rith lodges by sending sixteen cents per current member; in many cases, it seems, these funds helped to pay for the death benefits described above.<sup>68</sup>

### You're my home

Both Ahawas Achim and the Portland Lodge of B'nai B'rith dissolved within 7–8 years. In each case, the reasons are now obscure. Bangor's synagogue closed because nearly all of the city's Jews chose to leave town in 1857, but the Ahawas Achim minute book lacks any reference

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<sup>67</sup> Weissbach, *Jewish life*, 39–42.

<sup>68</sup> Band, *Portland Jewry*, 10–13.

to this mass exodus. Rather, the minutes cut off without warning after recounting a November 2, 1856, meeting in which the ten men in attendance debated and voted against hiring a new cantor. The record book, along with Ahawas Achim's ritual objects, was subsequently deposited at Boston's Ohabei Shalom synagogue.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, the dissolution of the B'nai B'rith lodge by unanimous vote of the membership was duly recorded in that organization's minutes, and the former members generally remained in Maine (in some cases transferring their B'nai B'rith membership to a Boston lodge, thus retaining their insurance benefits). These records, however, have disappeared since Benjamin Band consulted them in the 1950s, leaving us with little direct information about the circumstances surrounding the organization's decline. We can, however, make reasoned guesses as to why Maine's nineteenth-century Jewish organizations proved to be unsustainable despite the demonstrated commitment of Maine's Jews to mutual assistance.

Haiman Spitz provides the only nineteenth-century account of what happened to the Ahawas Achim community:

In 1856 and 1857 business became very dull; a panic prevailed all over the United States. Maine was a great sufferer, as nearly the whole trade was lumbering, which was entirely stopped. I kept a wholesale and retail clothing store and furnished the lumbermen with their outfit when going to, and returning from, the woods. As this trade was lost to me, and having a large family to support, I contented myself with the retail trade; but business was getting worse and worse, and no prospect of it getting better, I concluded to break up business and leave Bangor with my family and go to Boston. We arrived there in 1858.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Leffler, "Study," 17, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Spitz, *Autobiography*, in Marcus, *Memoirs*, 297.

The eminent American Jewish historian Jacob Rader Marcus simply echoes this statement when explaining why Spitz left Bangor.<sup>71</sup> There are, however, some flaws in Spitz's account, written nearly 30 years after the events it describes. Most notably, the Panic of 1857 took place during the second half of that year, while R.G. Dun records indicate that the businesses run by Spitz and several fellow Bangor Jews failed in January or, in some cases, in the second half of 1856.<sup>72</sup> This would not be the only chronological error in Spitz's memoir: in the previous paragraph, for example, he reports that Ahawas Achim was established in 1852 when, in fact, the date is 1849.

We can nonetheless confirm the broad contours of Spitz's account. Bangor's lumber industry entered a period of decline in the mid-1850s, due in part to several years of bad weather, the overcutting of Maine's pine woods, and an increase in competition from other regions. Lumber shipped through Bangor declined from 1855 to 1856 and fell even more sharply the following year.<sup>73</sup> These declines, however, cannot fully explain why Bangor's Jewish businessmen pulled up stakes. Of the seven Jewish merchants whom R.G. Dun reporters covered at the start of 1856, six were out of business by January 1857; the last holdout, Albert Myerson, switched to peddling in 1857 and left town the following year. In sharp contrast, most of the non-

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<sup>71</sup> Marcus, *Memoirs*, 289.

<sup>72</sup> H. P. Spitz mortgaged stock in July and August of 1856 and failed in January 1857 (R.G. Dun, Maine 22:102). Peter Spitz was reportedly closing up his business in August 1856 (22:71). Jacob Gunst sold his stock by mortgage in August, was succeeded in business by "Jas. R. Hagan" in October, and the business failed in January 1857 (22:123). Mark Levy was reported "going or gone to Boston" in September 1856, confirmed as "gone from here" in January 1857 (22:128). Hannah and Augustus Silber's creditors laid claim to their stock in November 1856; the store officially failed in January 1857 (22:106, 139). An additional community member, Louis Wangersheim, is last reported in the R.G. Dun records in February 1856 (22:109). Note as well that the Panic of 1857 seems to have had less of an impact on Maine businesses than those in Boston and Baltimore, to which Spitz moved: somewhat more than 1% of businesses in Maine failed in that year, in contrast to over 3% in Baltimore and over 5% in Boston. See D. Morier Evans, *The history of the commercial crisis 1857–1858* (London: Groombridge, 1859; reprint New York: Kelley, 1969), 136.

<sup>73</sup> James Elliott Defebaugh, *History of the lumber industry of America* (Chicago: American Lumberman, 1907), 2:58; Richard G. Wood, *A history of lumbering in Maine, 1820–1861* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1935), 135.



Jewish clothing merchants listed in the R.G. Dun records continued to operate their businesses as usual during this period.<sup>74</sup> It seems, therefore, that Bangor's Jews made a collective decision to close up their shops and seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Although there appears to have been a mutual decision to leave, Bangor's Jews all went their separate ways. Hannah and Augustus Silber moved to New York City (where Augustus was later arrested), as did Jacob Gunst and his wife, Mary. Both families had existing connections in that city. Augustus remained in New York and, it seems, married the daughter of a skirt manufacturer whose business he ultimately took over; in 1872, an R.G. Dun reporter recounted multiple business failures and warned that Silber "should be avoided: has not an enviable reputation and is thoroughly tricky and unreliable."<sup>75</sup> Jacob Gunst and his family, however, moved to Georgia sometime before 1861; sometime after 1863, Jacob opened a store in Chambers County, Alabama.<sup>76</sup> Jacob's departure from New York may relate to the failure of his brother Abraham's business. Abraham and, it seems, Jacob, worked as a peddler and merchant in the South during the 1840s, which likely explains why Jacob and his family moved there.<sup>77</sup> Haiman Spitz returned to Boston, following in his brother's footsteps, although Haiman quickly moved on to Baltimore where he sold liquor and cigars in addition to clothing; he joined the synagogue led by Rabbi Benjamin Szold. Spitz's sons all moved to San Francisco, and Haiman

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<sup>74</sup> R.G. Dun, Maine vol. 22. Myerson's January 1857 report reads, "Been hard up; engaged in peddling principally. Had a store in Calais, which is said now closed." (22:29).

<sup>75</sup> R.G. Dun, New York 349:1079.

<sup>76</sup> 1870 Census, Beat 7, Chambers Co., Alabama, p. 31. Jacob died in Atlanta in 1879: *Federal mortality schedules*, 1880, Atlanta, p. 22; see also [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).

<sup>77</sup> See the reports on Abraham Gunst in R.G. Dun, New York 210:177-78.

and wife did the same upon his retirement in 1880.<sup>78</sup> Louis Wangersheim and his family moved from Bangor to Chicago for unknown reasons and lived there at least through 1870.<sup>79</sup>

These examples reflect the willingness of Jewish merchants to set down roots—as the members of Ahawas Achim sought to do in Bangor—but also a willingness to move repeatedly in pursuit of opportunities to make a living. What remained constant, apparently, was a commitment to family and to participation in networks of mutual assistance. Were they to quote Billy Joel, they might explain, “Wherever we’re together, that’s my home.”<sup>80</sup>

Migration cannot explain the demise of the Portland Lodge: most of its members apparently remained in Maine during the 1880s. Even so, with so much of its membership hailing from outside of Portland there were relatively few members who could participate actively in lodge affairs or even attend meetings, which were supposed to occur at least twice a month.<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Band, who consulted the original lodge minutes, supposes that economic pressure led to a decline in dues payments and that personality clashes contributed to a decline in meeting attendance.<sup>82</sup> Maine’s B’nai B’rith members were not alone in their reluctance to pay annual dues of \$15: Cornelia Wilhelm reports that this was an issue across the East Coast at the turn of the 1880s.<sup>83</sup> Band, unfortunately, was unaware of quite how many lodge members lived outside of Portland; it would be instructive to know whether local or more distant members were

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<sup>78</sup> Spitz, *Autobiography*.

<sup>79</sup> 1860 Census, Chicago Ward 8, p. 41 (listed Wangerheim); 1870 Census, Chicago Ward 18, p. 146. Louis and Bertha’s children born in ca. 1854–57 were all born in Maine while a son born ca. 1858 was born in Illinois.

<sup>80</sup> Billy Joel, “You’re my home,” *Piano man* (1974).

<sup>81</sup> Grusd, *B’nai B’rith*, 73, citing the organization’s 1868 constitution.

<sup>82</sup> Band, *Portland Jewry*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Wilhelm, *Independent Orders*, 167; the dues figure comes from Grusd, *B’nai B’rith*, 86.

inclined to be lax in their payments or to participate in the clashes to which Band refers. Those who lived outside of Portland, however, probably had no objection to transferring their membership to a lodge in Boston: they valued the insurance benefits associated with belonging to B'nai B'rith, not the fellowship of lodge meetings. Members from Portland, meanwhile, seemed less interested in meetings than in securing a burial ground. Upon the dissolution of the lodge, they transferred its assets to a newly formed Portland Hebrew Benevolent Society, whose officers were all Portland-based lodge members.<sup>84</sup>

Although neither Ahawas Achim nor the Portland B'nai B'rith Lodge lasted for very long, each had a lasting impact on Jewish life in Maine. The lodge's enduring legacy was its cemetery and associated burial society. Former members of the lodge also founded a pair of competing synagogues in Portland in 1883; in 1904, one of these congregations became Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue, which remains active today.<sup>85</sup> Descendants of some Eastern European lodge members still live in Maine. Julius Waterman and other Jews who settled in Bangor beginning in the late 1860s eventually retrieved Ahawas Achim's Torah scroll, ritual objects, and record book from Boston, reestablishing that synagogue and reactivating its cemetery in the 1870s or 1880s.<sup>86</sup> According to Louise Epstein, these German Jews offered "benevolent interest and protection" for Eastern European Jews who arrived in Bangor in the late nineteenth century but largely remained aloof from the newcomers. Jews from Eastern Europe went on to establish their own synagogues

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<sup>84</sup> Band, *Portland Jewry*, 13, 15; the records of that organization had already disappeared by the time Band conducted his research.

<sup>85</sup> Band, *Portland Jewry*, 19–21, 24. It is tempting to speculate that the personality clashes to which Band alludes when discussing the demise of the B'nai B'rith lodge foreshadow the rift between these synagogues, but Band himself says nothing on the subject.

<sup>86</sup> Julius Waterman corresponded with Ohabei Shalom in 1874 about obtaining Ahawas Achim's belongings (Leffler, "Study," 20), but it is unclear when he in fact did so. The new leadership only began to keep its minutes in the old record book in 1889.

and communal organizations, including some that remain active. German Jews, however, disappeared from Bangor by the mid-twentieth century: those who remained in town converted to Christianity or, in many cases, had no children.<sup>87</sup>

A similar changing of the guard is evident in Waterville, where German Jewish merchants like the Peavys and Gallerts supplied Eastern European Jewish peddlers and ultimately sold their businesses to the newcomers. The year 1890 is symbolically significant in this regard, as that year's census lists both Jacob Peavy, founder of the most successful Jewish clothing store of the nineteenth century, and William Levine, a peddler who would soon establish his own major clothing store that endured until 1996.<sup>88</sup> We can be sure that Levine began his career in Maine selling goods provided by Peavy or other local Jewish merchants. Peavy himself retired to Boston later in 1890, dying there in 1894.<sup>89</sup> By 1910, no German Jewish families appear in the Waterville census, while many of Waterville's Jewish residents were related by blood, marriage, or hometown to William Levine.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Judith S. Goldstein, *Crossing lines: Histories of Jews and gentiles in three communities* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 44–46. On p. 46, Goldstein cites Lucille M. Epstein's incomplete 1940 master's thesis on Bangor's Jewish history; we have not been able to consult the original.

<sup>88</sup> The 1890 census for Waterville survives in partial form thanks to a handwritten copy, in the archives of the Waterville Public Library, prepared before the original records burned; we consulted the 1988 typescript prepared by the Taconnet Falls chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society. On William Levine and his store, see Sara Miller Arnon and Julie Miller-Soros, "A history of Levine's: The store for men and boys," [web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/](http://web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/).

<sup>89</sup> Whittemore, *Centennial history*, 530. Whittemore's biographical sketches of Peavy and Mark Gallert (p. 517) suggest that the businesses both established were still active in 1902.

<sup>90</sup> On the Levine family, see David M. Freidenreich, "Making it in Maine: Stories of Jewish life in small-town America," *Maine history* 49 (2015): 31 n. 17. Jacob Peavy's son Gustavus was apparently the first Jewish student at Colby college (Class of 1875); several of Mark Gallert's sons and daughters (Jacob Peavy's grandchildren) also attended Colby in the 1880s and 1890s. During the early twentieth century, nearly half of the Eastern European Jews who reached college age in Waterville, including many members of the Levine clan, followed in their footsteps. See further David M. Freidenreich and Desirée Shayer, "A tale of two colleges: Jews and Maine's Baptist institutions during the interwar years," [web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/](http://web.colby.edu/jewsinmaine/).

Jews of Jacob Peavy's generation, who settled in Maine during the mid-nineteenth century, could rely only on assistance from fellow immigrants. Those of William Levine's generation, who arrived near the end of that century, also benefited from the support of established individuals, businesses, and communal networks. This dynamic of intergenerational mutual assistance helped the later cohort to achieve goals that eluded earlier Jews in Maine, including the establishment of enduring Jewish communities and institutions. Perhaps more importantly, however, these Jews transmitted the value of intergenerational mutual assistance across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, making it easier for still later cohorts of Jewish newcomers to feel at home in Maine.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See further Freidenreich, "Making it in Maine."