

Council chairman, Ben Wilson, and Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Harrison Lyseth. The building is scheduled to be ready for occupancy in the fall of 1955, thus opening a new chapter in the expansion of Judaism in Greater Portland. Establishment of a Portland Hebrew Day School has also enhanced prospects of an Orthodox revival and will be considered briefly in the following chapter. It is too soon to assess accurately the impact that the new Portland Hebrew School will have on the community. It does appear evident, however, that the old Jewish community, geographically speaking, will be but a relic within another decade or two. With the increasing movement of Jews to new sections of the city, signs are already evident that the old synagogues will soon want for regular worshippers.

The future, as we view it now, lies in Woodfords and it is likely that Portland Jewry, both Orthodox and Conservative, will be strongly organized there within a few years. We are now on the threshold of a new era for Portland Jewry.

#### REFERENCES IN CHAPTER XIV

<sup>1</sup>The dispersal of population was only one cause of the defection. Another was the inability of a section of Portland Jewry to acclimate itself to the Orthodox pattern, due to lack of Hebraic education or lack of interest in traditional Judaism. Until the early 1940's, for example, Congregation Shaarey Tphiloh did not look with favor upon the use of English-Hebrew prayer books. Only through the stubborn insistence of I. Edward Cohen, President of the Congregation in the mid-forties, were bi-lingual *Machzorim* purchased. But this concession did not obviate the impatience of many Jews with long services or their lack of identification with many synagogue practices.

<sup>2</sup>Succeeding presidents of Temple Beth El were James Stein, Edward J. Berman and Edward D. Sacknoff.

The original directors and associate directors of Temple Beth El were Edward J. Berman, Lewis Bernstein, Louis Bernstein, Dr. David Berlowitz, Dr. B. James Cohen, David Ebenstein, Mrs. Julius Elowitch, Mrs. Michael Field, Benjamin E. Finn, Mrs. Norman I. Godfrey, Mrs. David J. Lavin, Benjamin Lewis, Mrs. Maurice H. Packet, Jacob H. Potter, Myer H. Sacknoff, Irving E. Small, James Stein, Sidney W. Wernick, Lester M. Willis, Dr. Benjamin Zolov, Carl P. Zolov.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis H. Kriger and Gerald Slosberg succeeded him as chairmen of the school committee.

<sup>4</sup>Daily chairmen and programs were as follows: Jacob Citrin, Reconservation Sabbath, June 12; Harry Weisberg, Dedication Day, June 13; I. Edward Cohen, Open House, June 14.

## CHAPTER XV

### EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE

During World War II, destruction of Jewish communities and cultural strongpoints in Europe produced a reflex action in America, leading to a renewed interest in Jewish history and cultural values. It is one of the ironies of contemporary history that Nazism served as a rejuvenator of Judaism wherever it did not act as its grave-digger. Thus we note, as a result of the deepening European Jewish crisis during the war, a remarkable awakening among American Jews to long-neglected values of their heritage.

In Portland, during the early 1940's, grave was concern expressed over the lagging interest in the Jewish education of children and the lamentable fact that a large section of the young population was receiving no Jewish instruction at all. This was attributed not only to the dispersal of population into sections somewhat removed from the Portland Hebrew School but principally to lack of parental interest.

We have noted that efforts were made by the Portland Hebrew School in the early 1940's to establish a Woodfords branch. With the emergence of Temple Beth El Hebrew School in 1949, the geographical hurdle was overcome and the rapid increase in the student population of the Temple school may be partly attributed to its favorable location.

But education for children was only part of the problem; the increasing need for an organized community program of adult studies made itself felt. To this end, Rabbi Aaron Greenbaum urged formation of a Portland Council of Jewish Education, which came into existence in November 1943. With Dr. Benjamin Zolov as president, the Council prepared a comprehensive program of adult Jewish studies. The Vaad Hoir displayed immediate interest and granted funds to maintain its activities. Among the first projects of the Council were classes in Bible, the history of Zionism, Jewish law, Hebrew language and a Hebrew speaking circle. The last group met twice a week for the study of *Tehillim*, the Book of Psalms. The Council's program continued for three years until it was absorbed by the Jewish Community Center.

In November 1946, the Jewish Community Center sponsored

an Adult Institute, under the direction of Reuben Resnick and J. Lederman of Portland Hebrew School. This institute was continued until the spring of 1949, with classes in Hebrew, Jewish history and related subjects, conducted by the staff of Portland Hebrew School. Rabbi Morris Bekritsky joined the faculty in 1948 and Jack Weinstein and Leon Wengrowsky assisted during the last two semesters. The adult institute program was sponsored during 1949-50 by the Jewish Federation at the request of both the Center and Temple Beth El. Mrs. Casper Sutton headed the planning committee, and more than one-hundred and fifty persons participated.

In 1948 the Jewish Federation set up a Survey Committee, under the chairmanship of Joseph W. Larkin to study the operation of Portland Hebrew School in relation to educational needs of the community. Dr. Alexander S. Kohanski, executive director of the Maine Jewish Council, was engaged to gather and evaluate the pertinent data.

As a prelude to this study, two hundred and twenty-five families, or one-fourth of Portland Jewry, were polled as to the number and ages of their children, their educational background, the school curriculum and the length of schooling desired. A significant revelation of Dr. Kohanski's final report was that more than half of the children in Portland Hebrew School lived in Woodfords, whereas only twenty-three percent lived on Munjoy Hill and in other parts of the city closer to the school.

The organization of Temple Beth El Hebrew School in the fall of 1949 introduced a new element in elementary Jewish education. Since the Kohanski Report dealt with Portland Hebrew School alone, it was rendered inconclusive.

The Jewish Federation was brought into the picture again in November 1949, when Temple Beth El Hebrew School asked for Federation support. In December the Federation's board of directors authorized a new survey of educational needs, to be conducted by a consultant of the American Association for Jewish Education and by representatives of the Orthodox and Conservative movements. Pending completion of the survey, the Federation agreed to support both schools in accordance with their needs.

After several delays, the survey group arrived in March 1950. It consisted of Aharon Kessler of the American Association for Jewish Education, Isador Margolis of the Vaad Hachinuch Hacharedi, and Abraham Millgram of the United Synagogue of America. Previously, the Federation and both schools had agreed to be

bound by the unanimous recommendations of this group and to make every effort to implement them. The final report, containing several unanimous recommendations, was completed in June 1950 and accepted by Federation directors on June 29, 1950.

The first recommendation was that a Bureau of Jewish Education be created, representing both schools and the community-at-large. In the field of elementary Jewish education this agency should establish uniform standards for both schools in matters relating to personnel, curriculum, tuition and hours of study. It was further recommended that the Bureau engage a full-time or part-time educational director.

The surveyor's report also urged establishment in both schools of classes for children from the ages of five to thirteen. For those aged thirteen to fifteen, it recommended creation of a single junior high school department for both schools. In addition to these recommendations for the afternoon schools, the consultants favored a Jewish all-day school. It was recommended that such a school be organized, when feasible, by the Bureau, run as a community school and financed by the community in the same manner as the afternoon schools.

#### BUREAU OF JEWISH EDUCATION

On June 29, 1950, the directors of the Jewish Federation established a Bureau of Jewish Education of fifteen members, five to be appointed by the Jewish Federation and five from each Hebrew school. The first meeting of the Bureau was held on July 5, 1950 at the Jewish Community Center. Representing the Federation were Harold J. Potter, Edward D. Sacknoff, Myer Marcus, George I. Lewis and Israel Bernstein. The delegates of Temple Beth El were Lewis H. Kriger, Dr. Benjamin Zolov, Harold Halpert, Dr. David Davidson and Benjamin Lazarus. The Portland Hebrew School was represented by Jacob E. Rubinsky, David I. Rubinoff, Abraham Seigal, Jules Greenstein and Saul H. Sheriff.

The Bureau was created as an autonomous agency, and it was agreed that its policies would be guided by the recommendations of the surveyor's report. In the preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Bureau of Jewish Education, adopted shortly after its formation, we read:

In response to the ever-growing demand for the creation in our community of an effective Jewish educational system to concern itself with all problems of Jewish education, and in the spirit and light of the "Principles and Recom-

mendations of the Surveyors' Report on System of Jewish Education in Portland" presented on June 25, 1950, we, the duly chosen representatives of the Jewish Federation of Portland, the Portland Hebrew School, and Temple Beth El, do hereby ordain and establish this Constitution and By-Laws for the Bureau of Jewish Education of Portland, Maine."

The purposes of the Bureau were enumerated as follows:

The promotion of the cause of Jewish education in the community-at-large.

The encouragement of cooperative effort among, and close relationship with, agencies for Jewish education.

The encouragement of community responsibility for Jewish educational endeavor.

At the first meeting, Saul H. Sheriff was elected president; Lewis H. Kriger, vice-president; and Myer Marcus, secretary. After a prolonged discussion of the surveyor's report, the Bureau voted in favor of a minimum of six hours of instruction for the children in both schools during the year 1950-1951. For the following years, pupils of ten to twelve years of age were to receive at least seven and one-half hours of instruction.

After this optimistic start, however, several members reversed their position. At a meeting on August 7, 1950 a vigorous debate on the validity of the survey recommendations resulted in a deadlock and a motion was passed to dissolve the Bureau of Jewish Education. This hasty decision was retracted at a special meeting on August 24, 1950 when the same delegates voted to reconstitute the Bureau and ratified all previous acts.

In the fall of 1950, the Bureau sponsored an Adult Institute of Jewish Studies. Under the direction of Sumner T. Bernstein, a curriculum of wide scope was prepared and presented almost exclusively by laymen. That year marked the peak of adult Jewish education in Portland. During the following year the Orthodox and Conservative groups were unable to work out an acceptable joint approach and the Bureau would not sponsor a program that was not the cooperative effort of both groups. Since 1951, there have been no community wide adult education institutes.

The Bureau functioned for the first six months without the services either of a full or part-time educational director. Its adult institute program succeeded in part because the Jewish

Federation staff lent its assistance. But the Bureau itself was lacking both in administrative direction and in its ability to render a consultative or supervisory service to the staffs of the two Hebrew schools. Financial considerations precluded the possibility of engaging a full-time educational director. The Bureau therefore did the next best thing. It requested the Jewish Federation in December 1950 to make available to it the services of its executive director, Jules Krems, and the Federation's office staff and facilities. The request was granted. Then in the fall of 1951 it engaged A. Hillel Henkin, director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in New Haven, Connecticut, to serve as part-time educational consultant. Henkin continued in this capacity until 1953 when he was succeeded by Elijah Bortniker, a staff member of the Jewish Education Committee of New York City.

With these staff additions the Bureau's program moved forward quickly and gained in stature. Although limited by budget to only four two-day visits a year, the consultants made a significant contribution to advancement of the Jewish educational services of the two Hebrew schools. A high point of the Bureau's program was reached in the Summer of 1954 when it sponsored a two-week teachers' training course for educators throughout Maine. Participants from Lewiston as well as Portland availed themselves of the opportunity of devoting a concentrated period of time to study of the latest pedagogic theories and techniques. The course was presented by Elijah Bortniker and Samuel Steinberg, principal of the Mamaroneck Jewish Center.

The Bureau also established uniform standards on hours of instruction, tuition fees, budgeting and encouraged cooperation between the schools on various projects. It sponsored a taxi transportation service for two years, then abandoned it because of its costliness. It purchased an audio-visual library which is utilized by the two schools.

Lewis Kriger was elected president of the Bureau of Jewish Education in 1951, and re-elected in 1952, being succeeded in 1953 by David I. Rubinoff.

In his annual report for 1951, Mr. Kriger indicated the expansion that had taken place in elementary Jewish education, as follows:

In 1948, ninety-five children attended the Portland Hebrew School at a cost of \$13,600 to the Jewish Federation. In 1949, \$17,000 was spent on one hundred twenty-five children attending the Portland Hebrew School and the

Temple Beth El Hebrew School. In 1950, this rose to \$24,000 for one hundred eighty-five children. This year, 1951, two hundred thirty-five children are attending the two schools at a cost of about \$29,000. Although total costs have risen from \$13,000 in 1948 to \$29,000 in 1951, per capita costs have dropped from \$143 per child to \$123 per child.

In 1953 about two hundred and seventy children were enrolled in both schools, the overwhelming majority in Temple Beth El Hebrew School (two hundred and five.) As a result of this disparity, a grave problem arose, for the extremely high per capita cost of education in Portland Hebrew School threatened that school's future. Therefore, Portland Hebrew School made plans to move to the Woodfords section, where the largest concentration of Jewish families is found. In consequence of this decision, it is likely that a more equitable distribution of Jewish pupils between the two schools will be forthcoming during the next few years.

A new feature on the local educational scene is the Portland Hebrew Day School, under the leadership of Rabbi Morris Bekritsky. As an idea, the Jewish all-day school was one of the oldest dreams of Portland Jewry. More than fifty years ago, Jacob Judelsohn, one of the founders of the old Portland Hebrew School in 1884, urged the creation of a Jewish all-day school as the only solid foundation for a well-educated Jewish community. In the early 1920's, Mark Sulkowitch offered to advance money for such a school if others would join him, but his gallant gesture brought little response. It was felt that the Portland Hebrew School was sufficient for community needs.

On April 2, 1951, Rabbi Bekritsky reminded the Bureau of Jewish Education that the Surveyors' Report called for the organization of a Jewish day school. Rabbi Bennett of Temple Beth El concurred. Both favored a day school, sponsored by the community to accommodate a first grade class in the fall of 1951.

The Bureau appointed a committee to meet with the rabbis, Commissioner Ladd of the State Department of Education and Dr. Lyseth, Superintendent of Schools in Portland.<sup>1</sup>

On May 31, 1951, the committee recommended establishment of a Jewish day school, under the Bureau of Jewish Education, with both rabbis participating in its direction. It reported that fifteen children were ready to enroll in the first grade, and that the initial cost to the Bureau would be \$3700. The matter, how-

ever, was tabled. Finally, after a year of inaction on the part of the Bureau, Jacob E. Rubinsky announced that the Orthodox community would establish an independent day school.

In the fall of 1952, the Portland Hebrew Day School began its career with a first grade class of eight children, using facilities of Portland Hebrew School, but functioning as a separate entity without Federation support. Mrs. Benjamin Hagai, a native of Jerusalem, taught Hebrew subjects during the morning period and Mrs. Bernice Lothridge, a former teacher in the Portland public schools, taught English subjects in the afternoon.

In the fall of 1953, the Jewish Day School added a second grade and a sub-primary class and in 1954 a third grade with a total enrollment of twenty-seven in all grades. The school raises funds throughout the state and relies on gifts, scholarships and tuition income.

#### JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

The lead taken by the Jewish Federation in effecting a co-ordination of activities in elementary Jewish education was soon followed by a similar effort in the field of Jewish social service.

On June 19, 1948, the United States Senate concurred with the House of Representatives in passing the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, calling for the admission to this country of 205,000 displaced persons and refugees during a two-year period. Although President Truman described the measure as "flagrantly discriminatory" he nevertheless signed the bill a few days later in order to avoid further delays. The first contingent of homeless Europeans admitted under the new law arrived in New York on October 30, 1948.

Prior to this period, social welfare activities in the Jewish community of Portland were the separate concerns of the United Hebrew Charities and the Social Welfare Committee of the Council of Jewish Women. Because of the new responsibility for refugee settlement, the need for a central coordinating welfare agency became pressing. Thus, on September 22, 1948, the Jewish Federation appointed a Social Service Coordinating Committee representing the United Hebrew Charities, the Council of Jewish Women, the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Home for Aged and the Jewish Federation.<sup>2</sup>

The need for an organized community approach to the complex problems of resettlement was underscored by Mrs. Louis Black speaking for the Council of Jewish Women. She recognized that the Council was unable to undertake the task of resettlement

which involved guarantees of employment and housing. There was a real need, she said, for a professional organization, with special committees dealing with housing, employment, medical and hospital problems, and an experienced social worker to assume responsibility for organizing and implementing the program.

When Sidney W. Wernick announced the appointment in October 1948 of Jules Krems, an experienced social worker, as executive director of the Federation, Mrs. Israel Bernstein reported that the Social Service Coordinating Committee could at last come to grips with its problems.

In the meantime, the Jewish Federation set up a Refugee Resettlement Committee, headed by Mrs. Barnett I. Shur and Mrs. Louis Black, to devise procedural policy for handling cases of displaced persons. The committee recommended on January 9, 1949 that the Federation assume responsibility for settling twelve refugee families a year, and allocate a minimum of \$10,000 to finance the program. Directors of the Jewish Federation accepted these proposals and delegated responsibility to the Refugee Resettlement Committee.

Proceeding with its work, the committee notified the United Service for New Americans concerning its program and offered the necessary job and housing assurances. To assist the committee in implementing the new program, the Federation authorized Jules Krems to serve as case worker.

The minutes of the Federation meeting of February 19, 1949, record that "it was made clear that the Federation is being requested to extend its services to a new area of social planning, that is, case work to individuals and families . . . . It was therefore recognized that the request was being made because there is no agency in the community, including the Council of Jewish Women and the United Hebrew Charities, capable of providing such service to the community at this time."

During 1949 the Council of Jewish Women and the United Hebrew Charities continued to serve local families. However, on numerous occasions they turned to Mr. Krems for guidance and assistance. Toward the end of 1949, the first refugee units were settled in Portland with the assistance of the Refugee Resettlement Committee and Council of Jewish Women.

The need for closer cooperation between the several agencies was becoming more urgent and the Social Service Coordinating Committee reported a greater desire on the part of the interested agencies for a unified community approach to social welfare. In this connection, Mrs. Israel Bernstein insisted that better results

were being achieved through a professional service at a noticeable financial saving. Above all, she reported, a professionally directed program was geared to rehabilitation rather than to relief alone.

By March 1950, ten displaced persons units had already been settled in Portland and financial assistance and other services had been extended to six non-sponsored units. The Case Work Committee, under Mrs. Lester M. Willis, worked directly with the Federation's executive director and served as a policy formulating group.

Later in 1950, the Social Service Coordinating Committee explored the general problem of social work in the Jewish community to determine whether the present service could be improved. The result was a unanimous decision on the part of the separate social service groups to form a single over-all social service agency. On December 20, 1950, Federation directors approved formation of an over-all Jewish service agency, to be called the Jewish Family Services. This agency was to be autonomous but the Federation agreed to make available to it the services of its executive director who would administer the program of the agency. In addition, the clerical staff and other facilities of the Federation would be put at the disposal of the Jewish Family Services. The aims of the new agency were declared to be:

To provide a skilled social service to Jewish families and individuals in need of financial assistance and counselling service.

To bring together under a single and efficient administration the variety of services to families and individuals now being rendered by the Jewish Federation, the United Hebrew Charities and the Council of Jewish Women.

To represent the Jewish community in welfare planning councils on the local, state and national level.

Then on February 15, 1951, Mrs. Israel Bernstein, active in welfare work in Portland for nearly thirty years, was elected president of the new agency. Elected with her were Jacob E. Rubinsky, first vice-president; Mrs. Ben Troen, second vice-president; Mrs. Aaron Blumenthal, secretary; and Leo Golodetz, treasurer. Jules Krems assumed the duties of executive director of the Jewish Family Services.<sup>3</sup>

The ambitious program of the Jewish Family Services was implemented through an extensive network of service committees. The Refugee Service Committee under the direction of Mrs. Bar-

nett I. Shur assumed responsibility for the more than sixty-five displaced persons who had come to Portland. In this connection, many of the practical problems entailed in the work of resettlement were solved by the Case Work Committee, headed by Mrs. Lester M. Willis.

The maintenance of Portland's transient shelter and program became the responsibility of the Transient Committee, directed by Myer Lerman. A Medical Committee arranged for professional services to those in need and mobilized medical personnel under the leadership of Drs. Gisela Davidson, Benjamin Zolov and Henry Pollard. The Free Loan Committee, headed by Jacob E. Rubinsky, carried on the tradition of the old Gemileth Chasodim under Jewish Family Services auspices.

A trust fund, called the Hebrew Free Loan Fund, embodying assets of the United Hebrew Charities and Free Loan Association was established. The fund, administered by the Free Loan Committee, makes available interest-free loans up to five hundred dollars to deserving applicants.

Special attention should be directed to the Volunteer Committee, headed by Mrs. Aaron Blumenthal, which coordinated activities of the Jewish Family Services and other groups, in the areas of refugee service, citizenship and English instruction. In this connection, the Council of Jewish Women proved to be a reservoir of volunteer workers, sparked by its Committee on Service to the Foreign-Born, directed by Mrs. Harry Geller and Mrs. Ben Troen.

This bare recital of facts, unfortunately, omits many individuals whose devotion and energy made possible the realization of the aims of the Jewish Family Services. One such devoted worker was the late Leo Golodetz who was active for many years in the United Hebrew Charities. Until his untimely death in 1952, Leo Golodetz was chairman of the Employment Committee of the Jewish Family Services. It was to his credit, and the credit of the agency he represented, that employment was found for more than sixty persons applying through the Jewish Family Services, without recourse to the Maine Employment and Security Commission. The committee also assisted applicants, principally displaced persons, in acquiring further training and new skills, in order to adjust themselves more satisfactorily to their new environment.

Supplementing its work in the Jewish community, the Jewish Family Services is active on the Portland Council of Social Agencies. It cooperates with other organizations in dealing with wider

community problems, such as care of dependent children, adequate housing and slum clearance, and the provision of day nurseries for children of working mothers. Two of its directors, Mrs. Lester M. Willis and Dr. Henry Pollard served as chairmen of the Council's Case Work Division and Health Division.

Viewed as adjuncts of the Jewish Federation, both the Bureau of Jewish Education and the Jewish Family Services have enhanced the stature of the Federation, in addition to bringing the benefits of efficient organization to their respective fields.

There are few Jewish communities of Portland's size that can boast of a Jewish Federation with such comprehensive and highly specialized agencies.

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#### REFERENCES IN CHAPTER XV

<sup>1</sup>The committee consisted of David I. Rubinoff, chairman; Jacob Rubinsky, Benjamin Lazarus and Lewis H. Kriger.

<sup>2</sup>The Committee consisted of Mrs. Israel Bernstein, chairman; William Goodman, Irving Rothstein, Myer Karlin, Silas Jacobson, Harold J. Potter, Rabbi Morris Bekritsky, Rabbi Ephraim Bennett, Mrs. Lester M. Willis, Mrs. Frank Laben, Mrs. Harold P. Nelson, Mrs. Ben Troen, Mrs. Barnett I. Shur and Joseph W. Larkin.

<sup>3</sup>Original directors were Mrs. Israel Bernstein, Louis Bernstein, Mrs. Aaron Blumenthal, Mrs. Saul G. Chason, Mrs. Samuel J. Cohen, Dr. Gisele Davidson, Mrs. Harry Geller, Leo Golodetz, William Goodman, Myer Karlin, Mrs. Samuel Kates, Myer Lerman, George I. Lewis, Dr. Saul Polisner, Dr. Henry Pollard, Philip Reuben, Mrs. Ralph Ross, Irving Rothstein, David I. Rubinoff, Jacob Rubinsky, Jacob Sapiro, Abraham Seigal, Samuel J. Shatz, Mrs. Barnett I. Shur, Mrs. Oscar Tabachnick, Mrs. Ben Troen, Mrs. Lester M. Willis, Sidney W. Wernick and Dr. Benjamin Zolov.