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THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF LEWISTON

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To attempt an analysis of the Jewish population of any community it is essential to define at the beginning the characteristics that distinguish this group from the others, whether to go on the assumption that they are of a distinct race, religion, or national group. Since these controversial issues are still going on without any definite conclusions having been reached it would seem best to use a cultural differentiation on a religious basis.

In the general immigration surge from Europe to America from the eighteen-sixties on ~~brought~~ a large number of Jews were found, those with a pioneering spirit and the means, escaping from the pogroms that kept repeating themselves during economic instability or religious fervor in largely the Eastern and Southern parts of Europe. So many of these that persisted in their respective European localities were either too strongly attached by sentimental ties to move in spite of the intolerable situations they were forced to face so often, or felt that pogroms and discrimination were an inevitable part of the privilege of being God's chosen people. Others with a less fatalistic attitude emigrated.

Thus starting in about the eighteen sixties the Jewish portion of the Lewiston population began with a nucleus of about three leading families all successful merchants. Of these three two family names are still carried on, the third is for all intents, purposes and professions non-Jewish; the others have stayed within the fold contributing largely to the professional and business enterprises of the community.

A number of immigrants who left Europe Russia in the 1880's and 1890's made their way as peddler's into Maine from Boston and New York, a few settled in Lewiston. Between 1900-1910 the Jewish community of Lewiston grew from about thirty-five families to about one hundred and fifty. Many of the new settlers came directly from Russia to relatives and friends in Lewiston.

In 1895 a hall on top of the present site of the New England Furniture Co, on Lisbon St. served as the religious and social center of the community. By 1907 Congregation Beth Jacob was organized, but it was not until 1925 that a Synagogue^{ue} was built on its

There is NO GEOGRAPHICAL SEPARATION

present site on the corners of Shawmut and Sabattus Streets.

Conservative services are held, that is not strictly orthodox and strictly reformed; vestiges of both types are found and the service resembles very much that of the less formalized Protestant churches. Hats are worn by the men and an organ is not permitted. The ritualism and symbolism of the religion is expressed mainly during the high holy holidays such as the New Year and the Passover.

In 1895 a cemetery was acquired in Auburn.

According to the 1940 census there were 1,100 Jews in a population of about 35,000.

Although as far as actual numbers go they do not make themselves felt, they have in the economic life of the city owning several of the shoe factories and a good percentage of the stores in the downtown shopping district; however several of these are chain-stores the owners living outside the city.

Characteristic probably of Jewish life as a whole there are two main influencing factors used in moulding the Jew into the cultural distinction that he constitutes: one is the Synagogue and the other the family.

THE SYNAGOGUE

From early Hebrew history on down through the ages the Synagogue has been the vital cohesive force keeping the Jew together, emanating the traditions and customs that are basic to the religion. Its use was not only confined to that of religious purposes but was also used as a commercial center to a limited degree. The Rabbis were also both religious heads and sort of notaries at the same time. This perhaps can be best understood by reading of

parts of the Talmud in which is inscribed the Jewish law which covers every phase of life the ordinary individual carries on, having minute specifications on each subject; thus the religion is all pervading (or was), since the Talmud ^{was} such a part of Jewish life and the Rabbi the interpreter it was perhaps inevitable that he should become and the Synagogue should have both a religious and economic influence. This has broken down however where tolerance has been found along a religious and economic line and where modern methods have been both introduced and accepted. This is the case in Lewiston.

Administration

The Synagogue is administered by a board of directors with a chairman and president, (which is mainly an honorary function). The chairman of the board has general supervision of everything to do with the Synagogue including the Hebrew school, Sunday school, and the cemetery. The board is elected by members of the congregation once a year. The President, chairman, secretary, treasurer and eight members of the board are elected. There is a limit of six years tenure of office. Affiliated with the Synagogue is the Sisterhood which takes part in financing the upkeep of the Synagogue and takes charge of certain social functions.

The B'Nai Brith

An organization that is not directly connected with the Synagogue is the B'Nai Brith which is more of a service organization working along lines of public relations between Jew and Gentile, a cruder way of putting this would be to say it acts partly as an anti-defamation league, investigating establishments where anti-semitic discrimination is practiced and putting on pressure behind the scene to do away with this. During the war it has provided recreational facilities for soldiers in local training camps. It

helps set up organizations in the various colleges for Jewish students known as-Hillel. It also tries to get non-Jewish speakers to speak before local organizations trying to off-set anti-Semitism.

A. Z. A.

The A.Z.A. is pre B'Nai Brith organization for the younger boys starting around the age of sixteen. Its purpose is to train them for active participation in the adult organization. The first one was founded in Lewiston about 1941 and has been suspended now for the duration. Its first and only President was killed in the Pacific last year.

The Zionist Organizations

The Zionist organizations have been very active in Lewiston combining both members of Lewiston and Auburn. It started as a philanthropic organization, now its main purposes are in maintaining certain institutions in Palestine and in bringing over refugee children to Palestine from Europe (Youth Aliyah).

The Pioneer women-a branch of Zionism- is mainly interested in preparing girls for agricultural work (Chalutzim) and in maintaining trade schools for this purpose.

The Jewish National Fund is a project of the Hadassah and Pioneer Women. Its main purpose is to buy land in Palestine for refugees. To do this boxes are distributed throughout the congregations during the year a certain quota of money to be put in the boxes are then collected at various intervals.

The Lewiston-Auburn Federation has a drive once a year to support Jewish people all over the world with the bare necessities of life. It also has the purpose of building up Palestine etc. Many of these organizations started merely as social organizations a purpose gradually developing from the purely social basis.

Zionism as a whole has been a very cohesive factor in the community, the idea of ^aJewish National homeland being in accord with the majority; however, those here who work for the cause do not entertain any ideas of emigrating there themselves. It is to be a place of refuge for homeless Jews, what the ultimate results will be are hard to ~~fortell~~. Characteristic of minority groups subject to discrimination there is this strong feeling of kinship for those like them, a glory in the achievements of members of the group and a sense of personal hurt when other members are affected adversely. There is this tendency to draw together for mutual protection and group self-enhancement. Thus the achievements of some become the personal ^{PRIDE} of all.

If any members of the group here would be questioned as to their opinion on being born a Jew with all the racial stigma attached to the name, an exceptional answer would be one of regret. The problem of anti-semitism is more and more regarded as a Gentile problem and not a Jewish one. Programs of inter-faith exchanges ~~have been~~ are being carried out. This has been the result of the problem of anti-semitism in general however but not as a community one. Personal prejudices against the Jews no doubt exist among the members of the whole community but not overt policy of anti-semitism is readily noticeable. The relations of the Jews and Gentiles are mostly on a business relationship and a limited social one where the two groups mix and come in contact with each other through such ^{COMMUNITY} organizations as the Rotary, Kiwanis, Shriners, Women's Literary Union, Hospital Patronesses, College Club etc. As for the primary social contacts and circles there is little intermixture between the two groups. This ^{is} probably the result of original discrimination which led to further withdrawal within ^a

themselves, a hard pattern to break. A common background, traditions and cultural pattern accentuate this inclusiveness. There is still the rather basic feeling that the Gentile won't mix with the Jew on a social basis but will on an economic one. How true that is in this particular situation I cannot judge.

As stated before the two basic factors of Jewish life are the Synagog and the family, both are undergoing drastic changes and the influence of both has been broken considerably. The waning influence of the Synagog is due to indifference by the younger generation and neglect by the older generations. Specifically in Lewiston the attendance at Friday night services is practically negligible. An added inducement such as a speaker or confirmation will usually draw large crowds but not the regular religious service itself. There is an incongruity between the amount of work the people are willing to do to support the Synagog and the simple expression of church attendance that is the logical outcome of this work. The congregation pays a generous salary to the Rabbi, ^{and} the Sisterhood of the Synagog work hard throughout the year in order to keep up the institution. Religion therefore has become ^{and static} a very formalized affair, certain aspects of it are kept up to act as a reminder now and then. The largest turnouts of the year are on the extremely high holidays. On these occasions the Synagog is not able to seat all those desiring to attend the services.

The majority of the children are given the usual Sunday School and Hebrew School education, the boys especially go to Hebrew School in preparation for their confirmation at the age of thirteen. Actual attendance at Services especially on Saturday mornings have been stimulated among the younger set through various rewards such

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as certificates of good conduct, some prizes and even movie tickets.

Although the Friday evening services are conducted in English primarily, the high holidays are conducted along the traditional style (in Hebrew). The services are generally of some hours length and generally there is much coming and going of the congregation. Probably less than half the congregation knows what actually is going on and is able to follow the services in the prayer books. Among the younger generation, especially those of high school and college age, this produces some rather mixed feelings--deceided consciousness of being a Jew but not quite sure what it's all about. For some of the few of the teen-agers who have a real understanding of the ceremonies involved a deceided inspiration can be felt but for the majority the whole thing ^{is} rather out of place with the American background that most of the younger group have grown up in. This is particularly true during the high holidays mentioned above. And yet all go whatever the degree of understanding is. Actually the gathering together of the congregation usually ends up as a social gathering for the younger group. Religion of this type has little meaning nor is it a strengthening force. Along this line of thinking some of the far-sighted leaders of the community worked out a comprehensive educational program to be carried out in Sunday School and Hebrew School. The main objectives are to start the children off with a background of Jewish history progressing on to Jewish customs and ceremonies, holidays and festivals and the teaching of Hebrew in order to understand the prayers ^{+ general pre} during the services. For the adults a program of Jewish culture and the study of Palestine was encouraged. This program started

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about two years ago and has obviously been one of having people conform to the old ways rather than changing these old ways to be more in accord with the more Americanized pattern of living. Another new program has been the planning for a community center for the Jewish population patterned after the one in Portland. The place will house the Sunday School and Hebrew School, it will afford a place for the various club meetings and may have a gymnasium, it will also, most likely, be used for various social functions. This is^a furtherance towards inclusiveness, whether this is strictly a conscious process I'm not sure but probably the general anti-semitic behavior all over the world have made Jewish groups more conscious of their identity and more desirous to preserve it. It's difficult to predict what the outcome of the whole thing will be as far as as the present High School and College age groups are concerned, outside of being conscious of the fact that they are Jewish with a certain amount of racial pride there is very little else to put one's finger on. They will in all probability marry mates with similar leanings and join the reformed element of the faith or be rather non-descript in religious leanings. As for the younger age group is concerned a very active religious educational program might keep them within the fold of conservatism, but this is rather difficult especially in regard to the dietary laws. Nothing like a really active policy of this sort seems to be going on.

THE HOME

The second mainstay of Judaism is the home, a direct expression of Jewish law and custom. What differentiates the strict Jewish home from the non-Jewish one is mainly the dietary laws and

Sabbath observances. It is ^{hard} to estimate to what extent these traditions are kept up. Among the older generation especially the non-native born they are observed strictly, among their children however there is a split, some keeping it out of personal conviction, others for the sake of their parents solely, and others not at all. An incongruity difficult to explain is the keeping of a strict house and yet going outside the home and breaking all customs such as the eating of non-kosher meat etc. It isn't ^a very logical action and might possibly be explained psychologically along the line of logic-tight compartments.

The ^{OLD TYPE} family itself ^{WAS} traditionally ^{OF} along the patriarchal type and members are usually tied closely together identifying themselves with each other. This varies here naturally according to the degree of Jewish culture and tradition which is observed. Those families which you may call strictly Americanized show ^{ALL} the values and attitudes of the modern conjugal family.

One thing stressed almost without exception where there is any consciousness of being a Jew is the tabu against intermarriage and the majority of the children grow up accepting this and comply with it (despite a good number of broken hearts that result). A good number of boys have married non-Jewish girls, where this has happened ^{however} the Jewish traditions are usually carried even if only to a limited extent, the girl conforming to the husband's way of life. Where the girls are concerned hardly ^{ANY} over a long period of time, have married non-Jewish men and in the few exceptions where this has occurred she has given up her religion and accepted her husband's. This discrepancy in constancy along marriage lines may perhaps be attributed to the fact that the man is the aggressor

and usually has his pick while the poor girl has to wait to be picked (prejudiced view point of course). Besides the Jewish girls are usually much more conscientious about going out with Jewish boys then the latter are about the girls they take out (due possibly to a greater amount of parental supervision over the girls). There seems to be a rather prevalent attitude among the fellows that if one goes out with a Jewish girl matrimony is usually seen in the offing, thus there is an extremely prevalent trend to have one's fling with girls minus the "marriage look" before settling down, when this is accomplished the girl is usually acceptable along religious lines.

In Lewiston the social life of the younger people could be alot better. Apparently the Jewish population in the city is replacing itself very inadequately or those of the reproductive age are in the minority. The families tend to average around 2.5 (very rough estimate). Those of college age now are a very small number the girls outnumbering the boys. The same group mainly have gone through school together from kindergarten up, very few additions being made to the group through new families moving in, not only school (Sunday and Hebrew School included) but various social organizations included up through High School. After High School the majority disperse to different colleges, new individual circles of acquaintances resulting. As a result very few marriages will take place within these two potential "mating groups". As a result of this situation the girls while still at home had the worst end of the bargain in regard to social life, being subject to the whims and conceit of a limited male supply. Although both groups participated in school affairs with others in their primary contacts they kept pretty much to themselves, the girls more than the boys.

There is a definite trend for the younger generation to go away from home after completing their education since opportunities are limited for the unmarried girl (both in acquiring a husband and maintaining a career), and the boys usually establish themselves in larger cities. The parental home generally stays here however and families are united at intervals, the children that do drift away have a place to come back to. This is not doubt a good thing to those who ^{MOVE OVER} ~~avoid~~ the degeneration of the family.

The Jewish population as a whole in the city would be classified as middle-class. It is made up mainly of those engaged in business enterprises: retail stores of various sorts, shoe factories, junk-dealers, professionals (mostly doctors and lawyers, about two teachers)..

Among this rather homogeneous population social classes exist along an occupational and economic basis. Three can be differentiated: (1) those owning small retail businesses, (2) those owning larger retail establishments, or having managerial positions in them, fairly successful professional people, and (3) those engaged in shoe manufacturing and the more successful and well-known professionals.

Descriptive of these three groups would be the word cliquey, since most of the people are either natives of the city or have lived here a long time it is hard for a newcomer to really "get in with them". Many ^{NEW} people are discouraged into moving away from here due to this factor. The values of these groups are somewhat along a hedonistic line, economic and superficial gains being stressed rather than any true meaningful values. Charity and donations are given rather generously but more from an ostentatious motivation

than a general desire to give.

It should be noted however that most of the successful people have come up the hard way inherited ^{wealth} playing very little part. In general the standard of living is high, the birthrate low, and the educational level among the younger generation is mostly of a college level. Although most of the parents did not go to college it is the accepted thing that the children will. Thus both economic gains and educational attainments have a high value among the standards of the people.

Property ownership runs high both in summer and winter homes. A good majority of the people owning both or one (and not the other) In either case the majority go away to one place or another for the summer months, the favorite haunt being Old Orchard.

In the past a small number of boys were sent to Prep. school in about their third or fourth year of High School in order to get better preparation for college. The percentage of boys sent has increased and now the trend has been started to send the girls to boarding school, this will no doubt increase once the pattern has been set. The affects of this continued absence from home will accentuate the emigration of the younger people from the community.

Since, as stated above, anti-semitic discrimination is seldom felt in the community at large a period of readjustment must be gone through by some of those that go away to schools where certain discriminations are practiced, especially among sororities and fraternities (Bowdoin fraternities have recently relaxed their restrictive policies). A fatalistic attitude tends to develop from contacts such as these.

In regard to the leadership of the Jewish community it is rather concentrated in a few people who take an active interest in what is happening and what will happen to the community. Their leadership is very active as is necessary in order to prod a rather apathetic congregation. Among the leaders are included the most successful people including several shoe manufacturers and several lawyers. This leadership has continued over a number of years and tends to run in certain families.

Although I have kept mentioning Lewiston in this analysis Auburn is just as integral part of the whole thing and there is a continuous interrelationship between the two Jewish communities in all aspects of social ~~relationships~~ ^{CONTACTS}. Two differences may be noted: first, the Synagog is more towards the orthodox side of the fence and second, there tend to be more of the older population residing there ~~and~~ (the younger ones in Lewiston) which explains the orthodoxy.

Since I belong to the group which I have attempted to analyze it has been a little difficult to elevate myself from a subjective position to one of sociological objectivity. In trying to maintain this objectivity perhaps I've been overcritical in some places and in others my own personal prejudices have not doubt entered into the whole thing.

Any prognostication attempted would be a purely personal opinion. As the older generation dies out so do the customs and traditions that have differentiated Jews from others. True they will still be kept alive by some but the vitality is gone. This does not mean the death of Judaism but rather a new and different

emphasis on religious values. This of course doesn't mean that anti-semitism will end as the religion changes since differences are not usually the direct cause of discrimination but rather are looked for in order to rationalize some majority group's behavior or are pointed to as a cause for some social maladjustment.

The population (Jewish) will probably decline or increase in proportion to the other groups in the city depending whether or not the resources of the community warrant a change in either direction.

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