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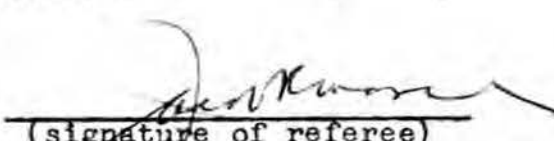
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SOME ASPECTS OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE OLD
SOUTHWEST IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

Richard E. Dryer

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of the requirements for the
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and Ordination.

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SOME ASPECTS OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE OLD
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by Richard E. Dryer

We have undertaken to study the religious life of Jewish communities in the states of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee, primarily during the period 1840-1860, although extending occasionally on both ends. Major sources of information were minute books of congregations. Other valuable sources of information included contemporary periodicals and correspondence.

The congregations studied turned out to be quite varied. There were Orthodox Sephardic, Orthodox Ashkenazic and Reform. There were old established congregations, and there were those just then being founded. There were those which were set in their ways, and there were those in transition.

Regarding the individual congregations, a major effort on the part of an insurgent group to wrest control of Mickva Israel Congregation of Savannah, Georgia, in 1849 and their eventual defeat in 1851, was uncovered. We saw here how the all-powerful parnas came to yield some of his power upon the arrival of a trained profession hazan.

In Memphis, a community in transition from Othoddoxy to Reform from the moment of its inception, we looked into

the case of Jacob J. Peres, who was discharged as hazan of Congregation Children of Israel for not properly keeping the holy days, and who then proceeded to organize a rival congregation because the old one wasn't observant enough for him!

In general, we noted the pattern of development of Jewish communities in that day. Congregations for divine worship were never the first object of organization of a Jewish community. The communities began with organizations concerned with burial, sick care or education, eventually branched out into general charity, and lastly organized for worship. The use of this last mentioned principle enabled us to solve the problem of the date of the founding of the Montgomery, Alabama, congregation, which was confused by a failure to understand completely the stages of the organization of a Jewish community.

Congregations almost unanimously used a system of fines to keep their members in order. Such fines might be employed to maintain decorum at services, attendance at meetings, and also the closing of businesses on the High Holy Days.

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SOME ASPECTS OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE OLD SOUTHWEST IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I. SCOPE AND SOURCES

The Old Southwest in the nineteenth century, as it is understood in this thesis, is the area comprising the states of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee. This study will be primarily concerned with Jewish religious life in these states in the period 1840 to 1860. However, there has been no hesitation to pursue data beyond 1860 when it was felt that a significant trend was beginning to show itself, and when the addition of later material would help to show major changes in the direction in which Jewish religious life was flowing. This was done in several instances. In one instance also, material bearing on the original establishment and conduct of a congregation was adduced from an eighteenth century document.

Three major sources have been utilized -- major in the same sense that that group of the ancient Hebrew prophets has been called major, that is, that we have a relatively large bulk of the material. These are the minute books of Congregation Mickva Israel of Savannah, Georgia, Congregation Beth Israel of Macon, Georgia, and the Congregation of the Children of Israel of Memphis, Tennessee.

In addition to these major sources, much valuable information has also been culled from numerous minor sources -- again, minor is used here in the sense that it is used with reference to a group of the ancient Hebrew prophets, that is, the bulk of the data is small, but no less important than the material found in the major sources. These minor sources include some smaller congregational record books, some minute books, some treasurer's books, some special anniversary celebration journals, and among the more useful periodicals, contemporary issues of The Occident and The Jewish Messenger.

Other publications utilized will be noted as they occur in the text and in footnotes and bibliography. Further, another type of source was found in scattered correspondence, some contemporaneous and some indicating the results of later research, which were found in the files of the American Jewish Archives and in the personal collection of Dr. Jacob R. Marcus.

II. THE ORGANIZATION OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE

Today, when we think of organized Jewish religious life, we naturally begin to think in terms of a congregation banded together for religious worship around a synagogue, and almost universally that congregation and synagogue will be conducting some manner of a religious school for the education of the children of the community. This is our modern conception of a going organized Jewish religious group.

But although this sort of plan may have been way back in the minds of the Jewish pioneers in the Old Southwest as an eventual and more or less long-range goal, the early organization of the Jewish community seldom, if ever, was along these lines.

Usually the impetus for the initial organization of Jewish religious life in a community would come from the illness or death of some member of that community, rather than from any felt need for gathering for religious worship. This fact regarding Jewish religious organization, of course does not preclude the possibility, or even the probability, of Jews gathering together on an informal basis for worship together, particularly on the High Holy Days. Of the ten communities upon which this study is based, five pretty definitely fall into the above described pattern. Of the remaining five, there is no evidence either way.

The Congregation of the Children of Israel of Memphis, Tennessee, was founded in 1854. In spite of clues to their one-time existence, no minutes have been able to be uncovered in recent years prior to late 1857 for this congregation. We are indebted, therefore, to Babette M. Becker for the story of the earlier Jewish communal life in Memphis, which she published in connection with the celebration of the congregation's seventy-fifth anniversary. She described the first organization of Memphis Jewry as follows:

In 1847, the brother of Joseph J. Andrews died. Mr. Andrews donated several acres of land to the Israelites of Memphis for a burial-ground, the property being situated on Bass Avenue. This caused his co-religionists to organize a Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1850, an organization that had for its object the dispensation of charity and the management and control of the new burial ground. Benjamin Emanuel was its president. Now, with an initial organization and a reason for congregating, the Jews held divine services together on the high holidays.¹

Note the pattern of organization, for it is one that will be seen to be repeated again and again in the organization of new Jewish communities. A man dies. A proper Jewish burial ground is needed and acquired. An organization is founded to administer the property for the community. That organization gradually expands its sphere of interest to include general charitable work. The members of the benevolent society begin to meet together informally for worship. Eventually the benevolent society is metamorphosed

¹Babette M. Becker, Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, 1854-1929: A Chronicle of the Congregation (Memphis: Congregation Children of Israel, 1929) p. 3f.

into a full-fledged congregation. In Memphis, this metamorphosis which began in 1847 with the death of the brother of Joseph J. Andrews, was completed in 1854 with the granting of a charter to The Congregation of the Children of Israel by the legislature of the State of Tennessee, which charter is reproduced by Babette Becker in her chronicle.¹

The Jewish community of Nashville, Tennessee, presents a strikingly similar pattern of development. For its story let us look at a contemporary letter written by a member of that community to Isaac Leeser, the famous Philadelphia religious leader. Wrote Isaac Garritson of Nashville:

It is also very gratifying to me, to be able to inform you that we have established here last year a Hebrew Benevolent Society (under the name of Magen David [Shield of David]), have bought three 1/4 acres of land within 1/2 miles from the city for a Bet Hayym (House of Life).² Our society is at present, very small yet, numbering only five families and about eight young men. Just like our strength are also our means, nevertheless, we try our best, not to be behind other cities, numbering more of our co-religionists than we do, and we are now about forming a Kehillah (congregation). As our holidays are now approaching we are very anxious to have a Sefer Torah (Scroll of the Law) and desire your aid in procuring one.³

Note how very closely the development of the Nashville Jewish community paralleled that of the Memphis community. First, a benevolent society was given charge of a burial ground. Next, although Garritson tells Leeser that "we

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²A euphemism for a cemetery.

³Letter from Isaac Garritson, Nashville, Tenn., to Isaac Leeser, August 8, 1852 (original in the Leeser Papers of Dropsie College).

are now about forming a Kehillah," that is not in reality the next step that the Nashville community takes. The next real action is shown by the following sentence, in which Garritson asks Leaser's help in procuring a Sefer Torah so that the small community might properly observe the coming High Holy Days. Obviously, the only use for a Sefer Torah in connection with the holidays could be to read from it as part of the regular prayer ritual of the day. But there was still no congregation in Nashville. Isaac Leaser chronicled the development of the Nashville Jewish community for us in the pages of The Occident. Undoubtedly on the basis of Mr. Garritson's letter to him, which we quoted above, Leaser printed in an 1852 issue of The Occident that Nashville had five Jewish families and eight single men, that they owned a burying ground but have no congregation.¹ It was not until 1853 that he printed the news that Congregation Shield of David was organized,² and still another year later until he could write that Congregation Mogen David was incorporated, although they did not as yet possess a synagogue building.³ In 1857, the congregation rented a hall for services.⁴

Again, in the history of the Natchez, Mississippi, Jewish community, we see the very same pattern of develop-

¹The Occident, 1852, vol. 10, p. 318.

²Ibid., 1853, vol. 11, pp. 187, 533.

³Ibid., 1854, vol. 12, pp. 525-6.

⁴Ibid., 1857, vol. 15, p. 455.

ment, from burial society through informal meetings for prayer to the formal founding of a congregation.

Even before a temple had been erected, the Jews of Natchez, -- a devout & a determined little band, -- organized themselves into the "Hebrew Kodusha Society." Its earliest activities date from 1861. In 1872 by an act of the legislature of the state of Miss. the name of the Jewish organization was changed from "Kodusha" to Congregation B'nai Israel.¹

The name "Hebrew Kodusha Society" makes no sense. To borrow a leaf from our friends in the Bible Department, this is obviously a scribal error, and we must emend the text to get the true original meaning. This first organization of the Jewish community of Natchez was, in reality, a Hevra Kodusha Society -- the name commonly given to a Jewish burial society, that organization in a community which has charge of the details of burying the Jewish dead. A later copyist, unfamiliar with the word "hevra", substituted the word "Hebrew", which he knew, although it made absolutely no sense in the context.

Our quotation tells us that "in 1872 by an act of the legislature of the state of Miss. the name of the Jewish organization was changed from "Kodusha" to Congregation

¹"Natchez, Miss., Congregation B'nai Israel Historical Notes" (in the files of the American Jewish Archives). Also among these historical notes of Congregation B'nai Israel is a typewritten copy of an article from a Natchez newspaper of March 7, 1897, which states that "the first recorded evidence of an organization dates back to the yr. 1843." Unfortunately, our documents are too scanty, and we do not know what kind of recorded evidence was referred to, nor what kind of an organization it was. It is apparent, though, that the organization could not have been a congregation, and this does move the date of the founding of the Natchez Jewish community within our purview.

B'nai Israel." Of course, we can see that this was more than a mere changing of a name. This was the formal granting of a charter to a newly formed congregation, and represented a change in the character of the Jewish organization of Natchez. But something was left out of this particular account -- that is, a mention of some point between the establishment of the Hevra Kodusha Society in 1861 and B'nai Israel Congregation in 1872 when the Jews of Natchez came together for prayer. I believe that we may make inferences regarding the existence of meetings for prayer from two additional items among the "Historical Notes" in the collection. Both of these items refer to the year 1870, two years before the formal founding of the congregation. One mentions the fact that Dr. Isaac M. Wise gave the address at ceremonies for the laying of the cornerstone of the first temple in 1870. The other is a typewritten copy of a newspaper article from the Natchez Weekly Democrat of October 26, 1870, which carries the news that the Israelites of Natchez are running a fair to raise money for the completion of their new synagogue building. It is not too much to infer that if the Israelites of Natchez were building a synagogue, they were probably holding services somehow just prior to this endeavor, probably in a private home or in a rented hall.

Augusta, Georgia, is another community that illustrates our point, but in a slightly modified fashion. The Occident tells us of the establishment of a Jewish school in

1845 at Augusta, but makes no mention of a congregation.¹ The Jewish Encyclopedia offers the information that Congregation Children of Israel was not founded in Augusta until 1850,² which leads us to the conclusion that once more the first organization of a Jewish community was not that of a congregation for community worship, but of an organization for some other purpose, in this case for the purpose of the education of the children.

I believe that Montgomery, Alabama, also followed this pattern, but the situation there is highly complicated by seemingly conflicting records, documents and opinions regarding the date of the founding of that congregation. I shall endeavor to piece together the history of that congregation and to resolve these difficulties in a later chapter. For now, let it suffice to enter the name of Montgomery, Alabama, on the list of communities creating their first organization, not for public worship, but for caring for the sick or dead or educating their children. The documentation will follow.

¹The Occident, 1846, vol. 3, p. 211.

²JE, vol. 2, p. 310.

III. CONGREGATION MICKVA ISRAEL, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

The other congregations in this study of Jewish religious life in the Old Southwest had their beginnings in the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Congregation Mickva Israel of Savannah, Georgia, had its beginnings fully a century before any of them. It was either the second or third Jewish congregation to be founded in the United States when it was brought into being by a group consisting for the most part of Spanish-Portuguese Jews in 1733.¹ Dr. Jacob R. Marcus considers that this initial group was one of the most Sephardic of all of the continental colonies,² and so it is not surprising that they should choose a Sephardic minhag, a minhag which the congregation reconfirmed several times during the years, and which went unchanged until at least 1868, despite a steady influx of non-Sephardic Jews into the community.

Regarding the naming of the congregation, Dr. Marcus notes that a contemporary Jewish chronicler, one of the Sheftalls, wrote that the 1733 congregation called itself Mikveh Israel, but that he (Dr. Marcus) doubted it, feeling rather that that name came late in the eighteenth century

¹Jacob R. Marcus, Early American Jewry, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1953), II, 285f.

²Marcus, op. cit., II, 285.

after the community was resuscitated, and was then named in honor of the Philadelphia congregation where some Georgia exiles of the Revolution had assembled for worship.¹ I am afraid that I must disagree with the opinion of my respected professor, for not only do we have the statement of Mr. Sheftall, but there is also this statement from the by-laws of the resuscitated congregation, found in the minutes of the congregation and dated July 25, 1791:

Rule 1. That this Congregation be continued² by the former name of Mickva Israel³ and that the mode of worship be according to the Pourtuguese Minhage and that all offerings shall be made in Hebrew & that the money so offered shall be nominated in the name of the coin as named in the State.

It is apparent that in 1791, those who were drawing up the new rules for the continuation of the congregation were aware that its name had previously been Mickva Israel.

But let us move on to Mickva Israel Congregation as it existed in the mid-nineteenth century. Being, by nature, a Sephardic congregation, Mickva Israel was composed structurally along Sephardic lines. The head of the congregation was called the parnas, and he was elected annually for a one-year term of office by the congregation. The parnas would preside at all meetings and would keep order at meetings and at services. He could dispense charity from the

¹Marcus, op. cit., II, 286.

²Italics mine.

³This is the spelling of the name of the congregation universally found in the minutes examined, and therefore the spelling used in this paper.

congregational funds without further authorization up to the sum of five dollars. He could call a meeting of the Adjunta¹ when he deemed it necessary; he had to call a meeting of the Adjunta whenever two of them requested one, and a meeting of the congregation when a majority of the members requested one. The parnas dispensed the various honors in the congregation. For example, he would choose the Hatan Torah and the Hatan Bereshith² from among the paid-up members of the congregation. According to the rules of the congregation, those men chosen would be obliged to notify the parnas of their acceptance of the honor within twenty-four hours. If they failed to accept, they were subject to a fine of two dollars, and the parnas would proceed to fill the vacancy.³

Fines were a favorite means of insuring proper behavior at congregational meetings and worship services, as well as full participation in congregational activities on the part of the members, at least so the rules would indicate. If one was elected to office and refused to accept the office, he was fined a sum of money, which sum varied with the office. One elected parnas or a member of the Adjunta was subject to a fine of two dollars if he refused the office, while one elected gabbai (treasurer) could be

¹Sephardic equivalent of a Board of Trustees.

²Men who would be called up to the Torah for the closing verses of Deuteronomy and the opening verses of Genesis respectively on the holiday of Simchas Torah.

³Minutes of Congregation Mickva Israel, Savannah, Georgia, Aug. 21, 1848 (in the American Jewish Archives).

fined five dollars. However, the congregation could excuse such a person from the fine if it wished. If one accepted a position and then neglected it, he could be fined up to twenty dollars by a two-thirds vote of the congregation, or even be expelled from membership. Similarly, one who violated the decorum at Services, or who wore improper clothing there, was to be summoned by the parnas to appear before the Adjunta, which could reprimand him, fine him up to ten dollars, or expel him from the congregation.¹

There was no equivalent of a vice-president in this congregation. The gabbai was a sort of combination of a vice-president and treasurer. His most important duties were connected with handling the finances of the congregation. It was his duty to keep the financial account books of the congregation -- in English. He had to collect dues, fines and donations within a month of their coming due. He had to balance the congregational books annually, report on finances at the annual General Meeting of the congregation, show his books upon request at any time, and hand over his accounts in good order to his successor. It was specifically forbidden to give money in the sanctuary, anyone wishing to make any sort of a donation being asked to send it to the gabbai. But the gabbai was next in line to the parnas as chief officer of the congregation, and it was he who took over his duties when the parnas was absent.²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

The secretary was the only other officer of the congregation. It was his job merely to take the minutes, transcribe them in English, and hand them over to his successor. He was not in the line of succession as chief officer of the congregation. If both the parnas and the gabbai were absent, then the Adjunta would choose anyone from their number to preside.¹

Regarding membership in the congregation, the by-laws state that one must be a Jewish male, twenty-one years old or over, and resident for at least six months in Chatham County prior to making application. Application is made by letter to the parnas, who lays the application before the Adjunta at their next meeting or at the annual General Meeting of the congregation. If the applicant then received a majority of affirmative votes, he was admitted to the congregation after he signed the rules and paid a five dollar fee. However, the Adjunta was not obligated to accept everyone simply because he met the above enumerated requirements. It could, and did, reject several applicants without any reason being stated in the minutes. It is possible that their reasons might have been matters of public notoriety at the time, but it is just as possible that this might have been a case of simple autocratic action.²

The administrators of Mickva Israel Congregation were strict legalists. The rules of the congregation were

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

the law, and they had to be applied strictly and without favor to all. The results of this strict interpretation of the congregational law at times became fantastic. Witness this occurrence recorded in the minutes of the annual General Meeting of the Congregation of January 2, 1854:

At an annual meeting of the Congregation held at the Synagogue . . . the following persons were not allowed to vote they having forfeited their membership in failing to pay their dues for one year . . . M. Sheftall, Solomon Sheftall, A. Abrahams, S. Morris, A. Epstein, Levy S. Hart, Waring Rapol [?]. M. Lowenthal not being a seatholder though having paid his annual dues was not entitled to vote.

What makes the above seemingly ordinary application of everyday rules worthy of more than passing notation, is that the men being disciplined were not just ordinary poor members of the congregation. M[ordecai] Sheftall was parnas of the congregation in 1849-50; it was he who had the honor of throwing open the doors at the dedication of the new synagogue building in 1841. Solomon Sheftall was also a former parnas of the congregation, serving in 1850-1. Levy S. Hart was on the Adjunta in 1849 and was secretary of the congregation in 1850. There is more to this simple application of the rules than meets the eye.

The minutes are very circumspect. They list bare facts. The reader must draw the conclusions himself. And the conclusion that this reader comes to is that during this period Congregation Mickva Israel was involved in one of the bitterest internal wrangles that has beset any congregation, and we further conclude that since there appear no signs of

issues or of policy changes, that the struggles were due to personality clashes, and/or struggles for power within the congregation.

Table 1 shows the officers of the congregation from 1840 to 1860. By the use of ditto marks to show continuations in office, this table may also serve as a graph demonstrating periods of calm and strife within the congregation. Areas of large white spaces in the chart denote peace and calm within the congregation, while the areas black with the print of constant changes in the names of the officers of the congregation point out the time of greatest strife. As can be seen from the chart, this period of bitter struggle was in the years 1848 to 1851. Then, what amounted to an insurgent group attempted to break into the ruling clique. They succeeded in gaining power and holding it for two years, and then the reins of leadership passed once more to the old clique, who held them for at least another decade.

Note that Isaac Cohen, Levy Hart, and Jacob DeLa Mot-
ta held the offices of parnas, gabbai, and secretary, respectively, for an uninterrupted period between 1840 and 1847. Sol. Cohen held a position on the Adjunta with them from 1841 to 1847, and in 1848 became gabbai with Isaac Cohen still parnas. In 1848, Levy Hart was on the Adjunta, still in an Isaac Cohen administration. P.M. Russell, a new name appears among the members of the Adjunta. He marks the beginning of the infiltration of the insurgent group. In 1849 a very odd thing happens. New names appear holding

TABLE 1

ELECTED OFFICERS OF CONGREGATION MICKVA ISRAEL, SAVANNAH,
GEORGIA, 1840-1860

Year	<u>Parnas</u>	<u>Gabbai</u>	Secretary
1840	Isaac Cohen	Levy Hart	De La Motta
1841	"	"	"
1842	"	"	"
1843	"	"	"
1844	"	"	"
1845	"	"	"
1846	"	"	"
1847	"	"	"
1848	"	Sol. Cohen	A. A. Solomons
1849	Mord. Sheftall	W. Barnard	P. M. Russell
1850	S. Sheftall	W. Barnett	Levy S. Hart
1851	De La Motta	Sol. Cohen	A. A. Solomons
1853	"	"	"
1854	"	A. A. Solomons	S. Cohen
1855	"	A. Minis	"
1856	Sol. Cohen	"	"
1857	"	"	"
1858	"	"	"
1859	"	"	"
1860	"	"	"

TABLE 1 - ContinuedAdjunta

Shef. Sheftall,	D. Levin,	Isaac D. Lyon,	M. Sheftall
"	Octav. Cohen,	"	Sol. Cohen
"	"	"	"
"	"	Judah Isaacs,	"
"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"
Sol. Sheftall,	"	A. A. Solomons,	"
"	"	Levy Hart,	P. M. Russell
Isaac Cohen, ^a	W. Barnett,	" ^a	W. Russell
Sam Goldsmith,		Levy S. Hart	
Sol. Shaftall,	C. E. Byck,	P. M. Russell,	"
Isaac Cohen,	S. Cohen,	L. Solomons,	A. Einstein
"	M. S. Cohen,	"	"
"	"	S. Berg,	"
"	Sol. Cohen,	"	"
"	De La Motta,	"	"
"	A. A. Solomons,	"	"
"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"

^aResigned very shortly after election.

every one of the the major offices of the congregation. Not only this, but the only two men who had been part of a previous administration who were elected to the Adjunta this year, Isaac Cohen and Levy Hart, resigned almost immediately after their election! In the 1850 election, the same men made up the administration, although they shifted some of the positions around. In 1851, the "old guard" returned to power, and remained in. In 1851 it was voted to change the date of the Annual General Meeting of the congregation from August to January, with the result that there was no election held in 1852, and the officers elected in August of 1851 remained in office for a year and a half. It strikes me that it is not impossible that when the "old guard" found that they had regained enough support to win this election, they wanted to postpone another election for a little longer in order to have more time to regain additional strength.

So far we have tried to prove our case merely by reference the election records of the congregation. What else do the minutes contain that would shed light on this matter? On September 20, 1849. shortly after the annual General Meeting at which the insurgents were elected, the Adjunta met and asked Levy Hart if he would be Reader for the congregation for the next twelve months. Hart was one of the "other side" and he shared his conflicting thoughts with the Adjunta in his reply. He did not really want to take the job, but he felt that if he declined the synagogue

might have to close permanently and "our children grope in darkness. Should I accept, it may be the means of permanently opening the building, and in that way, allay all feeling, unite all interests, and bring together our now divided people. With the ardent hope that I may be the instrument of uniting all interests and classes into one brotherhood, induces me to accept the call made." (*Italics mine.*)

The minutes of November 17, 1849, show that Mr. Hart was not successful in his wish. Again, all that the circum-spect minutes record is the seemingly odd fact that the senator from Chatham County had introduced a bill in the Georgia legislature to incorporate the Trustees of the Permanent Fund of the congregation, a fund which had been set up a little over a year previous, whose monies could only be used to hire a hazan for the congregation, and whose trustees, once elected by the congregation, would be self-perpetuating. The Adjunta passed resolutions saying that this bill was drawn up without the permission or authorization of the congregation, that they see no need for it, that the congregation's charter is protection enough for the funds, and that they protest the passage of this bill. The insurgents were successful in defeating the separate incorporation of this fund of the congregation. A look at the names of the self-perpetuating trustees of the fund is enough to explain the reason for this curious action: Jacob De La Motta, Levy Hart, and Octavius Cohen -- the "old guard".

There were those who recognized that bringing the congregational troubles into the public arena was a dangerous thing. At the next annual General Meeting after the fiasco in the legislature, P. M. Russell offered the following resolution:

There is at present existing among the members of this Congregation a feeling calculated to injure the standing of this Congregation in the eyes of the public, and for the purpose of reconciling matters and bringing about a friendly feeling, resolved that a committee be appointed by the Parnas with a view to arrange if possible the existing difficulties or misunderstandings.¹

This resolution was discussed, but at least according to the minutes, never brought to a vote. And, at that same meeting, the insurgents were returned to office for another year.

Now let us proceed to the story behind the refusal to allow Levy S. Hart and his friends to vote in the election of January 2, 1854. The minutes show that the insurgent group was victorious in the elections of 1849 and 1850. We may assume, therefore, that Levy S. Hart and his friends had their dues paid up in order to vote in the election of August 18, 1851. At this election, however, the minutes tell us that the "old guard" came back into power. One of the first things that the "old guard" administration did was to pass a resolution at this very same annual General Meeting proposing a change in the rules of the congregation so that membership in the congregation would be lost by the

¹Ibid., August 19, 1850.

failure to pay dues for one year. Under the existing rules of the congregation, changes in the rules must be proposed at one annual General Meeting, and then laid over to the next such meeting for a vote. The next such meeting was held on January 5, 1852, but no election was held at that time for reasons already explained in this paper. However, this new rule was passed then. In August 1852, Levy S. Hart's dues would have come due. Although there is no documentation for the specific occurrences, I believe it probable that in August 1852, Levy S. Hart was still smarting at the defeat of his group at the last election, and since there was no election coming up, refused to give the "old guard" the satisfaction of having him pay his dues to them. There is no record of anyone not being permitted to vote at the election held on January 3, 1853. I submit that this was probably due to the fact that that date was two days short of being one full year after the passage of the new rule, and that the new rule could therefore not be applied at that time. In August 1853, Levy S. Hart was suspended from membership for non-payment of dues.¹ He apparently was not troubled by this at the time, but in December 1853, with new elections coming up the following month, he wanted to vote, and offered to pay up his back dues. The Adjunta, sticking very strictly to the rules, informed him that they were not able to do this under the rules of the congregation.²

¹Ibid., May 14, 1854.

²Ibid.

And so we find that in the elections of January 2, 1854, Levy S. Hart and other members of the insurgent group were not allowed to vote, "having forfeited their membership in failing to pay their dues for one year." On May 14, 1854, Levy S. Hart wrote another letter to the Adjunta, asking for reinstatement as a member. Once again, the Adjunta turns him down, "under the rules." On August 17, 1854, Hart asks for a reconsideration of his case. Apparently the Adjunta feels that Hart has been sufficiently punished by now for his defection, and they reinstate him to membership.

Although we know from the minutes of election meetings that the Messrs. M. and Solomon Sheftall were also part of the insurgent group, and from the minutes of January 2, 1854, that they presented themselves to vote at that time but were not permitted to do so, only Levy S. Hart is mentioned in the minutes as appealing so many times to the Adjunta for reinstatement, and as finally being accepted.

So it would seem that Jewish religious life in Savannah, Georgia, in the nineteenth century was pretty stormy. But it was not always like this. Let us look in upon more happy occasions. Let us examine the dedication of the new synagogue building. The new synagogue building had been completed some time in 1840, but it was not formally dedicated until February 24, 1841, the delay being caused by difficulty in getting a proper person to come to Savannah to do the dedicating. On August 17, 1840, the parnas reported to the annual General Meeting that "the new Synagogue has not

yet been consecrated, we waited with the hope that Mr. Poznanski could have made it convenient to have come up owing to our application to him some time since for that purpose."

Who was this Mr. Poznanski, and why didn't he go to Savannah for the consecration? We believe that we can answer these questions, although the Mickva Israel minutes give no further information. Dr. Jacob R. Marcus wrote the following about Charleston, South Carolina: "The Savannah Jews were always traveling to the Carolina capital. It was their metropolis, the business, social, and religious center of the hinterland in which they lived."¹ Concerning the visits of Sheftall Sheftall to Charleston in the late eighteenth century, Dr. Marcus wrote that "when in town, he boarded with the Mottas."² The Occident tells us that Dr. Jacob De La Motta moved from Charleston, South Carolina, to Savannah some years after the close of the War of 1812, and became active in the congregation there.³ We may judge from this that when De La Motta moved to Savannah, he certainly did not fail to keep in touch with his friends and associates in Charleston. He must therefore have known, or known of, the hazan of the Charleston congregation, Revd. Mr. Poznanski. What he did not at the time of the invitation, I am sure, know, was that Revd. Mr. Poznanski had decided Reform lean-

¹Marcus, op. cit., II, 371.

²Ibid.

³The Occident, 1845, vol. 3, p. 358.

ings, although Poznanski did not publicly reveal his affinity for Reform until July 26, 1840, or after the time when he must have received the invitation from Mickva Israel Congregation.¹ As for the reason why Poznanski did not come to Savannah for the dedication, I believe that the answer is the very simple one that he, as a Polish immigrant, did not consider himself well enough qualified as an English speaker! The same sort of problem arose for him in his own Congregation Beth Elohim in Charleston, when he was asked by his own Board to deliver an English address at the consecration of their new synagogue. Poznanski then told his own Board that "he is exceedingly anxious to have a qualified English lecturer for the service to share his duties; that one person cannot do justice to both Hebrew and English."²

But Mickva Israel Congregation would not be put off indefinitely, and on February 24, 1841, they did have the consecration of their new synagogue -- without Mr. Poznanski.

The building committee reported that having obtained the services of the Rev. Isaac Leeser, Hazan of the Congregation Mikva Israel at Philadelphia (who was on a visit to this city) to officiate in the consecration of the Synagogue completed some few years since, that interest-

¹Minutes of Congregation Beth Elohim, Charleston, South Carolina, July 26, 1840 (in the American Jewish Archives). See also, Richard E. Dyer, "The Culture, Practices and Ideals of an Early Nineteenth Century Southern Acculturated Congregation as Reflected in the Minutes of Congregation Beth Elohim of Charleston, South Carolina, 1838-1842" (unpublished paper in the files of the American Jewish Archives), p. 7.

²Minutes of Congregation Beth Elohim, Charleston, South Carolina, Nov. 29, 1840. See also, Dyer, op. cit., p. 4f.

ing ceremony took place on Wednesday the 3 Adar 5601, corresponding with the 24th February 1841, in the presence of a large number of persons of both Sexes and of different denominations, and also of our own congregation. Rev. Isaac Leaser proceeded followed by Levy Hart and Isaac D Lyon carrying under a white silk canopy (which was borne by four of the younger members) the two Sepharim, the Parnas, Secretary and congregation present following also in rotation, the procession arriving at the door it was thrown open by Mordecai Sheftall Senior, . . . and several of the Psalms of David chanted, the Tamid being first lit by Solomon Cohen Esq., the whole ceremony being under the direction of J. De La Motta Jun of the building committee. The ceremony concluded by a suitable impressive . . . discourse pronounced by the Rev. Mr. Leaser, the committee as well as the audience being highly gratified with the address.¹

What of the ritual practices of Mickva Israel Congregation? We have already mentioned that it was Sephardic Orthodox from its inception, and so it continued through the period under study, although shortly after, on February 4, 1868, a discussion on Reform began.² Two of the ritual objects used by the congregation were mentioned in the above description of the consecration ceremony of their new synagogue -- Sepharim, Hebrew scrolls containing the Pentateuch, which were read as part of the worship service on Sabbaths, festivals, Mondays and Thursdays; and a Tamid, the Eternal Light. One of the rules drafted for the government of the Shamas was that "he shall light the lamps and pay particular attention to the Tameed, so that the same may be kept continually burning."³ The globe of the Tamid that was lit by

¹Minutes of Congregation Mickva Israel, Savannah, Georgia, August 16, 1841.

²Ibid., February 4, 1868.

³Ibid., April 10, 1853.

Solomon Cohen Esq., was purchased in New York by Jacob De La Motta around August 1840.¹ It was replaced in 1852 by a "beautiful Tamid of plate and stained glass" presented to the congregation by a Mrs. Grace Abendane of New York. The Adjunta was truly thrilled by this gift, and their reply of thanks to Mrs. Abendane casts light on another aspect of the congregation's ritual practice: "Resolved that the Parnas do address a letter to Mrs. Abendane assuring her how highly the Adjunta appreciated her munificent gift and that a front seat in the ladies gallery will be purchased for her when she will favor us with her presence in the Synagogue."² Separate seating was enforced in this congregation, although this practice was not without its difficulties. In the minutes of June 19, 1853, "it being found that all of the seats in the Gallery had been disposed of it was moved and carried that the Parnas have chairs placed between the benches when there may be sufficient space." At the same meeting, it was "resolved that the Parnas do make arrangement for ventilating the ladies gallery in the Synagogue immediately." If the ladies were uncomfortable then, wait until they stuffed more chairs between the benches!

At any rate, not to be outdone by Mrs. Abendane, at the same meeting when her Tamid was presented to the congregation (June 13, 1852), Parnas Jacob De La Motta presented the congregation with a silver pointer for use in the

¹Ibid., August 17, 1840.

²Ibid., June 13, 1852. Italics mine.

reading of the Torah. The Adjunta "resolved that the beautiful present of a silver pointer to the congregation be accepted . . . and that his name be engraved on the pointer at the expense of the congregation."

Sepharim require mantles, and the proper coverings for the Sepharim of Mickva Israel Congregation were provided by the gift of two ladies of the congregation, the Misses R. DLyons and P. Sheftall.¹

Candlesticks were needed, and these were purchased for the congregation by Jacob De La Motta on his trip to New York around August 1840.² At the same time, he tried to procure proper paper for the lining of the ahal,³ but was unsuccessful in his efforts.

The congregation owned its own shofar, one having been purchased for it by Parnas Jacob De La Motta while on another trip to New York in 1852, and costing eight dollars.⁴

In the orthodox tradition, weddings were conducted under a special canopy. Repairs to Mickva Israel's "Hooparr" cost it \$7.50 in 1854.⁵

There is no record to show that the current practice of listing names of deceased members on a Memorial Tablet in

¹Ibid., August 15, 1842.

²Ibid., August 17, 1840.

³Ark, where the Torah is kept.

⁴Minutes of Congregation Mickva Israel, Savannah, Georgia, November 5, 1852.

⁵Ibid., January 1, 1855.

the synagogue was practiced as a normal thing in this congregation in the nineteenth century. Upon the deaths of three very important men, special individual memorial tablets were put up in the synagogue, which leads me to the belief that there was no such normal procedure for ordinary members of the congregation. When death claimed Sheftall in 1847, Judah Touro in 1854, and Jacob De La Motta in 1857, the Adjunta voted to place tablets of marble, with proper inscriptions, in the synagogue as a memorial, and to have an "Escobah"¹ said in the synagogue for them on every Sabbath during the year of mourning and on Yom Kippur.²

Burial of the dead also was attended to according to orthodox custom. The congregation either had, or looked forward to having, a "Mataw house" in its cemetery. Such a place is a building in a cemetery where the body is prepared for burial -- washed, annointed, wrapped in cloth and kittel. Another of the rules governing the duties of the Shamas was that:

The Shamas shall have the exclusive charge of the Beth-Hyem or burial ground of the Congregation, keep the same free from weeds, attend all funerals of deceased members of the Congregation, and see that graves are only dug in such parts of the burial ground as shall be designated by the Parnas. The Shamas shall have charge of all of the articles necessary for washing and shall have charge of the Mataw house as soon as one is erected.³

¹A memorial prayer for the dead, the Sephardic equivalent of the El Mole Rahamim.

²Minutes of Congregation Mickva Israel, Savannah, Georgia, August 16, 1847, April 4, 1854, January 16, 1857.

³Ibid., April 10, 1853.

But "the rules" sometimes created problems. On February 2, 1850, Solomon Cohen came before the Parnas and Adjuntas and, as is the normal custom, requested permission to bury Mr. T. Minis in the Hebrew Cemetery. However, permission was denied on the grounds that Mr. Minis "was not circumcized and therefore not entitled to burial in the cemetery of the Hebrew Congregation." But it was agreed to present the problem to the Congregation after services that evening, at which time the Congregation voted permission for the burial to take place. This seems to have been an odd situation, and an even odder solution to what should have been a simple halachic problem. In a question of law like this, it does not seem that the Congregation should come up with a different answer than its Adjunta. Perhaps this was just another ramification of the power struggle within the congregation. The insurgents were in power in 1850; Solomon Cohen and the Minis family were of the "old guard". (They served together in the same administration from 1855 through the end of this study. See Table 1.) This could have been a rather bizarre touch of meanness on the part of the insurgent administration.

Another thing that an orthodox community needs is Kosher food. And, in order to have Kosher food, they must have a shochet, or Jewish ritual slaughterer. Shochtim came and went in rapid succession to and from Mickva Israel Congregation. The fluctuating salaries paid to them could hardly be expected to encourage permanent settlement. It was on

August 21, 1848, that the Congregation first resolved to get themselves a shochet. Not that they didn't want one before; it was probably that it was at this time that they felt that they could afford one. At any rate, at this annual General Meeting they resolved to "endeavor to obtain a suitable person to officiate as Shochet at a salary of \$200." In November of that year they found someone, and L. Goldman was hired at that rate. We don't know what happened to Mr. Goldman, but in August 1850 the Congregation was looking for another man to hire at \$100 a year. They found one, a Mr. A. Simpson. In January 1852 the annual General Meeting decided that they would like to have a Shamas in addition to a Shochet, or at least have someone fulfil the duties of a shamas, and so they decided that the current term of the shochet expired in the Fall, they would hire someone to handle the combined jobs of shochet and shamas at a salary of \$400 a year. In August of that year, out of two applicants, Mr. Lewis Hershberg of New York was hired to begin work in October. In the meantime, the old shochet, Mr. Simpson, had had a fire in his establishment and was burned out. The Ad-junta decided to pay him his final quarter's salary anyway. When Mr. Hershberg was hired, it was with the proviso that he agree to abide by the congregation's rules governing the shamas and shochet. However, at the time, the congregation didn't have any rules governing the shamas and shochet. In February 1853 they proceeded to formulate some. We will come back to these rules later. However, when these new

rules were laid down and presented to Mr. Hershberg, he declined to be bound by them. Eventually he agreed, but he did not last long with the congregation after that, being asked in September of that same year if he could find a successor for himself. In October, a Mr. Hersh is elected, but he resigned only two months later. At that time, S. Sternheimer is elected. Apparently he did well his first year, because in February 1855 his salary was increased to \$480 a year plus 5% of all collections that he made. Alas, there is no accounting for the vagaries of a congregation with its servants. Only four months later they cut the salary of the office of shamas to \$50, and that of shochet to \$200. Within a year, S. Sternheimer left for greener pastures. The two offices were then split, with a Mr. Zacharia taking over as shochet at \$250 a year in November 1856, and a Mr. Millhausen taking over as shamas at \$150 a year plus 5% of his collections in December 1856. In November 1858, Mr. Zacharia was re-elected as shochet. There is no mention of Mr. Millhausen, but apparently he was still serving as shamas, because there was no mention of a successor, and in January 1859, the Congregation at its annual General Meeting voted to charge anyone getting married in the Synagogue five dollars, half going to the shamas and half going to the congregation, and to allow the shamas to charge two dollars for his services to individual families.

Some of the duties of the shamas and shochet in this congregation have already been alluded to in this paper.

Among the other rules laid down for these offices by the committee appointed on February 27, 1853, and which reported back on April 10th, are the following:

It shall be the duty of the Shochet to kill small meats and Beef every day in the week Saturdays and Holydays excepted -- when practicable, and he shall use every exertion for that purpose, so that Kosher Meats may be provided for the Congregation, he shall also kill such Poultry as may be sent to him between such hours as he may designate.

The Shochet and Shamas shall attend to and obey all directions given to him by the Parnas, or in his absence the Treasurer or acting Parnas, and for a violation of or non-performance of any of these rules, or orders given to him by the Parnas, or in his absence the acting Parnas, he shall be reported by the Parnas to the Adjunta, who may fine, suspend, or expel said Shochet & Shamas as may be deemed just and proper, and the Parnas shall have the power of suspending said Shochet & Shamas or either of them for any violation of these rules until the action of the Adjunta is had.

It shall be the duty of the Shamas to have the Synagogue kept clean and attend and open the same for public worship during the Sabbath and holy days and on the eve of those days and also to open the Synagogue and attend on such other days or nights as the Hazan or Parnas may direct.

On June 25th of the year 1855, the rules were amended to provide that:

The two offices may or may not be united as the Adjunta shall determine.

The Shochet shall be at home every day from 9 to 10 A.M. to kill poultry.

The salary of the Shamas shall be fifty dollars per annum and he shall be furnished a man to light and extinguish the gas whenever the Synagogue is open at night and to sweep out, dust and scour the building, the sweeping to be superintended by the Shamas. The Shamas shall attend the Synagogue whenever open for divine worship, and summon the Adjunta where required and shall attend to the perpetual lamp.

In connection with this last, there is an item in the minutes of August 17, 1854, which may shed some light on the attitude of this Jewish community toward the institution

of slavery. It is the only mention of the institution of slavery or of slaves in all of the minutes of the period studied:

On motion of Mr. Isaac Cohen Resolved that Twenty Five Dollars be paid to Henry, a Slave, for his gratuitous lighting and cleaning the Synagogue for the past Fourteen months, and that the sum of Fifty Dollars be paid him annually to perform the same duty to commence from the time of his again commencing the same duties. Mr. C. stated that he had offered these last two resolutions without the knowledge or consent of the owner of Henry, but as an act of gratuity to the Boy Henry and for his benefit alone.

Slavery is not condemned here, and yet there is an unmistakable disdain, at least for some of the conventions connected with it. Imagine! A slave is actually being hired for wages, and his master is not to know about it. And the amount to be paid is no trifling sum either. It is the equal to that which the congregation's shamas is to receive!

One last position remained to be filled before the congregation could consider itself reasonably complete, and that was the position of hazan, or reader of the congregation. When a congregation reaches the point where it is financially able to do so, it hires a professional hazan, who reads the worship service, teaches the children, and carries on other functions which will be fully enumerated shortly. Before a congregation reaches this point of financial capability, the functions of the hazan are usually performed with varying degrees of ability by lay members of the congregation. During the earlier years of this study, in Mickva

Israel Congregation, the lay hazan was Levy Hart. He served for a goodly number of years gratis, and in 1849, the Adjunta, in addition to thanking him for his past services, offered him a token salary of \$200 a year, which he accepted.¹ However, as early as 1843, the congregation was taking steps toward the goal of hiring a professional hazan. In that year, the ladies of the congregation held a fair and raised \$1,522.33, which they gave to the congregation to establish a "Permanent Fund", which was to be added to and invested, and the income of which could only be used either to reinvest and enlarge the fund, or to pay for the support of a suitable reader and teacher.² The parnas, Isaac Cohen, invested the money in bonds of the Central Rail Road of Georgia, which turned out to be a very wise investment. In the five months from the time that the money was initially invested until the time of the annual General Meeting the following August, the bonds had increased in value by over one-third!³

From time to time, suggestions were brought before the Adjunta regarding the hiring of specific people for the position of hazan, but always the decision had to be that the fund was not yet large enough to support such a move at that time.

¹Ibid., September 20, 1849.

²Ibid., March 17, 1843.

³Ibid., August 21, 1843.

In 1848, the congregation felt that it was ready to hire a hazan, but alas, now no hazan was ready to come to them! At the annual General Meeting of August 21, 1848, the following resolutions were passed:

Resolved, that the Parnas be requested to advertise in the "Occident", a periodical published in the city of Philadelphia, and "Voice of Israel" in London, for a Ha-zan.

Resolved, that the salary shall be \$800 per annum, and the applicant shall be able to perform the service according to the Portuguese Minhag and shall deliver at least two English discourses each month.

But, there were no takers, and Levy Hart continued as lay reader for the next three years. Then, on a trip to New York, Parnas De La Motta heard about a Rev. A. de Sola, who was then serving a congregation in Montreal. De La Motta succeeded in convincing his congregation and Adjunta that de Sola was the man they were looking for, and on January 25, 1852, the Adjunta elected de Sola as hazan and preacher at a salary of \$1,000 a year, to remain in office as long as the congregation was satisfied with him, the congregation having to give him six months notice if they wish him to leave, and he extending the same courtesy to the congregation should he desire to leave. But all this to-do was in vain, for de Sola was quite satisfied with his job in Montreal, and his congregation there was likewise satisfied with him. He toyed with the idea of coming down, but unable to find a suitable successor for his Montreal congregation, he declined the offer that June. Then, on June 13th, the Adjunta decided to advertise once more, adding two new jour-

nals and raising the salary above that previously advertised. The advertisement would appear in the Occident, Asmonean and London Jewish Chronicle, and would offer a salary of \$1,000 a year. The election would take place on the first Sunday in November, and applicants were to send references. On November 5th, three applications were read, but as none of them were accompanied by the required testimonials, all were rejected. Two other men had been solicited by the parnas, the hazan who was then leaving New Orleans, and a Rev. Mendes of Birmingham, England, both of whom turned down the congregation's offer. The Adjunta then decided to offer \$1,200 for the job, and proceeded to elect Rev. Jacob Rosenfeld of Cincinnati to the position. Exactly where his name came from is not clear, since it was not mentioned that an application had been received from him, nor was it mentioned that he had been previously solicited by the congregation. Nevertheless, this was the man who was to be Mickva Israel's first professional hazan. For Rev. Rosenfeld did accept, and on December 10th his letter of acceptance was read to the Adjunta. On May 22, 1853, a letter was received from a committee of K.K. Bene Jeshurun of Cincinnati highly praising Rev. Rosenfeld, and finally, after several delays, on June 6th, 1853. Rev. Rosenfeld himself arrived in Savannah.

We have already seen that Mickva Israel Congregation could not let itself function in any phase of activity without a proper set of rules to govern that activity. Accordingly, with the election of a hazan, the congregation set

about to lay down the rules for his conduct. On February 5, 1854, his salary was increased to \$1,500 a year, and a committee set up to determine how he would earn it. They reported back on April 4th, when the following rules were adopted:

1st. He shall attend at the Synagogue on every Sabbath eve and morning, and in the afternoon if required, and on all Holy days and Festivals, and read the prayers in the original Hebrew, according to the Portuguese Jews, except the prayer for the government which may be read in English and also deliver English discourses, on the Sabbath and first-day of the Holy days, or other good cause.

2nd. He shall attend, and officiate at, all funerals of Jews buried in Savannah, and shall also attend the families who may desire his services during the days of mourning.

3rd. He shall record in a book to be furnished by the congregation, and be its property, all births, deaths, and marriages in the congregation, and also all other congregational matters that he may deem of interest, from the commencement of his ministry.

4th. He shall not perform any marriage ceremony in the Synagogue without the consent of the Parnas, or the Adjunta.

5th. He shall superintend the Sunday School of the children of the congregation, and aid and advise in their religious instruction whilst there.

6th. He shall obey all lawful orders of the Parnas for the time being so far as they may be consistent with the Jewish laws and usages.

7th. He shall abide by and support the charter and bye laws on the congregation, and obey them, so far as they may be properly applicable to him.

A change in Rule No. 6 was made on May 14th at the request of the hazan, so that it should read: "He should comply with all wishes of the Parnas provided he deems them consistent with Jewish laws and usages." This is a most interesting change. The parnas has been taken down a peg from his position of absolute autocrat over the congregation. The parnas will not "order" the hazan; he will express his

"wish" to him. And it is not the parnas who will be the arbiter of Jewish law and usage, but the professional hazan. Rev. Rosenfeld was destined to remain with the congregation for nine years, not at all a short time, after which he was requested to leave in a dispute over the examination of a shochet, this in 1862.

Thus we have charted the stormy, yet progressive, course of Mickva Israel Congregation from 1840-1860, truly a period of great expansion.

IV. BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION, MACON, GEORGIA

In our examination of Beth Israel Congregation of Macon, Georgia, we are privileged to look in upon a congregation just as it is being brought into being. We can note the methodology of this process, the straightforward manner in which committees are assigned to get necessary tasks done, the formulation of rules, the setting down of principles, and the quaint homey touch of real people revealing their personalities. For the most part, the minutes of this congregation do such a beautiful job of telling the story, that we shall permit them to tell a large part of the narrative.

An informal meeting of several Israelites of the city of Macon, Geo., was held at the house of E. Brown, Esqr., on Sunday October 30, 1859.

Present were Messrs. E. Einstein, E. Isaacs, E. Brown, R. Einstein, H. Goodman, M. Landauer, L. Landauer, A. Dessau, I. Weil, E. Feuchtwanger, J. Herzfield.

E. Isaacs was called to the chair and A. Dessau was requested to act as secretary. The chairman explained the object of this meeting to be to form if possible a congregation. Whereupon on motion of E. Einstein it was Resolved that the Chairman appoint a committee of Three to inform the Israelitish community of this city, that a meeting will be held on Sunday November 6, to act on the above proposition. The Chairman appoints Messrs. E. Einstein, I. Weil and A. Dessau to be such committee.

In pursuance of the above call, a Meeting was held at the house of E. Einstein, Esqr., on Sunday November 6, 1859.

Present were: E. Einstein, E. Isaacs, A. Dessau, E. Brown, M. Isaacs, M. Landauer, I. Pfaumlocker, A. Abraham, H. Goodman, M. Joseph, I. Felleman, H. Crone, D. Goldsmith, G. Rosenberg, G. Landauer, W. Wordlinger, J. Herzfield, L. Cohn, S. Isaacs, I. Weil and I. Morris.

E. Einstein offerered [sic] the following resolution: Resolved that every Israelite desirous to become a member of the congregation to be formed shall pay for Three successive years; if he have an open business and married Fifty Dollars per Annum. If he be a dayly [sic] laborer or clerk Twenty Five Dollars per Annum. A single man with open business Twenty Five Dollars per Annum. All dayly laborers or Clerks, single men Twelve Dollars per Annum, which will and shall entitle them to full membership and all the privileges of the congregation, which was unanimously adopted.

On motion it was

Resolved, That the name of this congregation be

בית ישראל

House of Israel.

On motion it was

Resolved, That the Minhag be "German orthodoxy."

מנהג גרמני

On motion it was

Resolved that a committee . . . be appointed by the Chairman to advertise in at least Three Jewish papers for a Hasan (Reader) who is also to be Shochet and capable to teach Hebrew, also capable to give lectures in English; if also in German preferred. For which the yearly salary shall be Seven Hundred Dollars, exclusive of the school.

On motion it was

Resolved. That the Chairman appoint a committee of Five to procure a location for a Synagogue, and get every thing necessary for worship in order, as speedily as possible.

Eleven men met informally and decided that it was time to form a congregation. Democratically, they wanted the whole community to be able to have a part in the founding of this new venture, and so adjourned for a week to inform their brother Israelites of their intentions. The following week, although a few of the original number were absent, thirteen new Jewish men showed up to join them. Part of the flavor of these meetings is captured in a reading of the actual minutes, where one sees that the first order of business is a motion setting up the dues structure. Follow-

ing this, they get around to naming the congregation. And only third do they decide what kind of a congregation they want to have. A glance at the names of the men attending these meetings is sufficient to show why this congregation was established as "German orthodoxy" rather than the Portuguese orthodoxy of the previously studied congregation. It is interesting to note the speed with which these men set about bringing their project to full fruition once it was launched. At the very first meeting, two committees were formed, one to procure a "Hasan" for the congregation, and the other a place of worship. Both of these committees set about to do their assigned tasks with a speed that promised to lose none of the momentum of the original gatherings.

At another meeting held on December 4, 1859, the Committee on Correspondence reported that they had advertised in the Occident, the Jewish Messenger, and the Israelite for a "Reader, Shochet, according to the German orthodox Minhag, and Teacher for the children of the congregation." They offered a salary of \$700, and stated that "a single gentlemen is preferred." Also, replies should be sent to the committee "postpaid". These boys were watching their pennies! They wanted a reader, shochet and teacher all rolled into one. They were offering a salary less than half of that which their sister Georgia congregation in Savannah was offering to their hazan, at the same period. They preferred a single gentlemen, because he could, of course, live much more cheaply than a man with a family to support. And

make no bones about it, the committee wasn't even planning to pay any postage expenses of the applicants either.

Further reports of this and the Building Committee were heard the following week. But first, let us consider some pertinent extracts from the Constitution and By-Laws adopted at the December 4th meeting. From the Constitution:

Art. 1, Sect. 5. There shall always be *הגבאי* and *גמיר* either separately or both offices united in one person, to be chosen by the congregation whenever occasion requires, and the congregation shall stipulate the salary of the above offices.

Art. 4, Sect. 2. The income of the congregation shall be derived of yearly contributions, assessment of seats, freewill offerings, donations and fines. (The mitswoth shall not be sold.)

It is interesting that this congregation should rebel against the custom, apparently prevalent at the time and still prevalent today in many traditional synagogues, of auctioning and selling the "mitswoth". Rather, they look upon the "mitswoth" as honors to be freely dispensed by the chief officer of the congregation. In this respect, they follow the custom observed in the Sephardic congregation Mickva Israel in Savannah.

Art. 5, Sect. 1. The fixed prayers, the *תורה* and *פסוקים* shall always be read in the original Hebrew according to the *אשכנזי* *מנהג*.

Art. 5, Sect. 2. Lectures may be given in English or German.

Art. 6, Sect. 2. [The Constitution may be amended] provided that the Minhag as aforesaid in Article 5 Section 1 shall never be altered or reformed.

Many are the jokes that have been told of the so-called "Jewish Standard Time", of the propensity for affairs of Jewish organizations to start considerably later than

scheduled. But up until now, I had always considered that strictly in the realm of humor, although unfortunately true in many instances. However, in the case of Beth Israel Congregation, we actually have a Jewish organization, a provision written into its By-Laws that its meetings shall start thirty minutes late! From the By-laws:

Art. 1, Sect. 1. Thirty minutes after the appointed time for meeting, the Parnas or in his absence a Chairman shall take the chair and the business shall then commence, if a quorum be present.

Art. 2, Sect. 3. [The Parnas] shall observe that the service in the Synagogue is properly held and that all the religious rites and ceremonies are performed in strict accordance with the tenets of our holy religion.

Art. 2, Sect. 4. He shall preserve strict order and decorum during divine service and may fine any member or seatholder from Fifty cents to Five Dollars who shall infringe the same.

Art. 2, Sect. 5. He shall dispense all honors in the Synagogue. *לשון וז'ל*

Art. 2, Sect. 6. He shall have the superintendence of the *לשן* and *לשן*. (Reader and clerk) and if any of them be guilty of deviation of duty or immoral conduct he shall call a special meeting of the Board.

Art. 2, Sect. 7. He shall, if requested in writing, grant permission to the *לשן* to perform the marriage ceremony and he shall also sign the marriage certificate (*כתובה*).

Art. 8, Sect. 1. Any candidate for the office of *לשן* (Reader) shall, before the election takes place at least read on *לשן* the Prayers and the Torah (*תורה*).

Art. 8, Sect. 3. Within One Month from the date of his election he shall give a bond for the faithful performance of his duties, to be approved of by the Board. His refusal to give such a bond shall make his election null & void and he shall never again be admitted as a candidate.

Art. 8, Sect. 4. His duties shall consist to read at all Sabbaths and Holydays the prayers, the Torah and the Haftorah, if there is none to read the latter and give a lecture every other Sabbath.

Art. 8, Sect. 5. He shall attend *לשן* and read the prayers in the house of mourning also at *לשן* in the Synagogue; except on Sabbaths and Holydays when his services are required at the Synagogue.

Art. 8, Sect. 6. He shall, in his capacity as Shochet, kill all the meat wanted for the congregation and

be present in the market every morning to see that only cosher meat be sold to the Jewish community. He shall also kill all poultrie for the members of the congregation; for which latter a specified time and place shall be named by the Board.

Art. 8, Sect. 7. He shall, with the written consent of the Parnas perform all marriage ceremonies, consistent with the Jewish religion and shall attest the same with a written כתובה (Marriage certificate) and shall transcribe the same in a book of record of the congregation and his fee shall be not less than Ten Dollars for the same.

Art. 8, Sect. 8. On all occasions in which he acts in his capacity as קורא (reader) he shall be attired in his clerical costume.

Art. 8, Sect. 9. He shall be in attendance in the Synagogue prior to the commencement of divine service attired in his clerical costume and read the prayers with their proper sections.

Art. 11, Sect. 1. Any member shall be entitled to be called to the ספר [that is, an Aliyah, the honor of being called up to the pulpit to recite the blessings before and after the reading of a portion from the Torah] the Sabath after גרית המצות [the circumcision of a son], the Sabath after יארצייט [the anniversary of the death of a parent, spouse or child], the naming of a daughter, גר מצות of a son, the wedding of a child or any other ח'וק; provided notice is given to the Parnas or in his absence to the Vice President before service commences. [The ח'וק is a general term for a religious obligation, like the above examples.]

Art. 12, Sect. 1. No child under Four years of age shall be admitted in the Synagogue during worship.

Art. 13, Sect. 1. The following shall be the fines:

- a) for absence from a special meeting. One dollar.
- b) for absence from a stated meeting. One dollar.
- c) any person appointed on a committee and after acceptance neglecting its duties. Two dollars.
- d) Officer for absence from Board meeting. Fifty cents.
- e) any member signing a call for a meeting and being absent from the same. Five dollars.
- f) whoever refuses to come to order at the request of the chair. from One to Ten dollars.

There can be no doubt that the minutes, rules and regulations of this congregation have a distinctive flavor all their own. Formal though they may be, they do not lack a personal touch.

The treatment that the hazan receives in the By-Laws is rather shabby. This "reader" of the worship service and jack-of-all-trades around the synagogue is here a far cry from the spiritual leader that today's rabbi is considered to be. His meager salary of only \$700 a year has already been mentioned, as well as the congregation's preference that the poor man be single so as to minimize the congregation's financial responsibilities, with no thought or consideration of their reader's personal life. And regarding that gentleman's personal life, a rather insulting view of the congregation's regard of their leader in divine worship is found in the inclusion in their By-Laws (Article 2, Section 6) of a ready-made provision for the procedure when the hazan shall be guilty of immoral conduct. No such stipulation was made regarding the possibility of such conduct on the part of the parnas or other congregational officers. Of course, how moral could they expect a man to be on \$700 a year? Further, out of that meager salary, the hazan was also expected to pay for a performance bond. The surprising thing is that the congregation did not lack for candidates for the degrading job that they were offering. We note too, that here the parnas is still to be the arbiter of proper Jewish practice (Article 2, Section 3), although in Mickva Israel Congregation of Savannah, this was passed over to the hazan when they finally got one.

In this congregation, as in Mickva Israel, a system of fines was employed, both as a source of income for the

congregation, and for the discipline of its members. But rank had its privileges. While the average member would be fined one dollar for missing a congregational meeting, an officer would only be fined fifty cents for missing a Board meeting. However, the basic principle is not a bad one, and if it could be enforced today, might do a lot of good in making nominal congregational members more active. Perhaps some of the speed, noted before, with which the various committees of the congregation pursued their assigned tasks, could be traced to the two dollar fine to be imposed on "any person appointed on a committee and after acceptance neglecting its duties."

We note that Article 2, Section 5, of the By-Laws tells us that it is one of the duties of the parnas to "dis-pense all honors in the Synagogue," and the secretary notes that this refers to mitzvos and aliyahs. The Constitution has already told us that "the mitzwoth shall not be sold." So, those who are called up to the Torah, do not have to pay for the honor.

Article 8, Section 5, tells us that the custom of having a minyan of ten men gather at the home of a mourner during the seven days of the shivah period of mourning, so that the mourner could say the kaddish, or memorial prayer, for his deceased, was observed by this community, as was the yahrzeit, or annual recitation of the kaddish on the anniversary of the death of a near relative, in the Synagogue in the midst of the entire congregation.

The rule that "no child under Four years of age shall be admitted in the Synagogue during worship" is a good one. It sounds as if some of the members were recalling disturbing experiences when they put that one into the By-Laws. It is a rule that could still be validly included in rules and regulations of modern synagogues. Of course, there is no way to be sure, but I believe that the inclusion of the phrase "during worship" was not accidental. I know of a number of households today where the parents are most anxious to infuse their children with Jewish content at the earliest possible moment in their lives. To this end, they will bring them into the synagogue building at every opportunity, even babies considerably younger than four years of age, and even when there are no services going on. Perhaps this too was the desire of some parents in the Macon community.

One week following the adoption of these rules, the congregation met again, on December 11, 1859, and heard reports of its feverishly working committees. The Committee on Building left no detail unattended to.

[The Committee on Building reported] that we have seen a room in Cherry St. over Horns Confectionary, and which we think a desirable and central location. -- The size of the room is 50 feet in length by 28 feet in width, with gas already put in, thereby saving the Congregation a considerable outlay. -- The rent of the room will be 100 Dollars per annum, to commence on the 1st January 1860. --

We have also consulted Mr. Pflaumbocher, regarding the carpenter's work and painting to fix up the room complete as a Synagogue, he offers to take the work named for one hundred & fifty Dollars. We also consulted a Negro boy, who is willing to paint the walls & white-

wash the room for the sum of ten Dollars, also seen Mr. Dennis, a gas fitter, who will furnish the necessary gas chandeliers & pipe for the sum of 60 Dollars; all of which the whole of the contracts, if approved by the Congregation to be finished by the 1st January 1860. --

Once more we notice a Negro working for a Jewish congregation for pay in the South, and this being the year 1859, he certainly was a slave. The words used in the report also have a somewhat strange ring to them. The word "Negro" is seldom encountered as such in the South, especially with the dignity of capitalization. And this Negro slave boy was "consulted", the same term used in connection with Mr. Pflaumbocher, a white member of the congregation. It would appear that Georgia Jewry had a somewhat warmer feeling toward the Negro population than the general community, at least within the confines of their own group, although we recognize that such a statement of generalization is dangerous, and can only be implied and not proven from the evidence adduced.

The Committee on Correspondence had a report for this meeting too:

On the 9 inst. an other letter was received by the Committee from Rev. A. Laser from Cumberland, Md., which letter we submit to the Congregation with the remark, that as the applicant is not capable to fulfill all of the duties named in our advertisement and more especially because he, Rev. A. Laser, declares in said letter that his religious principles are inclined to moderate reform -- contrary to the express Law of our Constitution -- the Committee don't consider Rev. Laser worthy to the confidence of an orthodox Congregation.

We shall defer comment on the above report for a couple of paragraphs, until we have had the opportunity of

viewing an account of still another committee, as it was recorded and preserved in the minutes of this meeting:

Moved and seconded that a Committee shall be appointed to wait on those Gentlemen, which on a previous time offered some money for a 720 & if collected, such money shall be especially appropriated for buying a 720. carried.

Mr. H. Manhaimer moved & was seconded that a special Committee of 3 shall be appointed to buy a 720, out of the funds of the Congregation. carried.

Ah, the depths to which an ideal can sink! In the margin of this minute book of this congregation which "don't consider [a hazan inclined toward moderate reform] worthy to the confidence of an orthodox Congregation," which states in its Constitution that their German orthodox minhag "shall never be altered or reformed," is the bald question of a later officer of the congregation who read the early minutes: "What is a 720?"

Indeed, quite a lot would seem to have been altered in that proud congregation when one of its officers would no longer know what a Torah scroll is!

At any rate, a Sefer was bought for the congregation, and it cost them \$110.¹

A hazan was also approved by the congregation. Rev. H. Loewenthal was elected to that position on February 2, 1860, for a one-year term. Towards the end of that term, on December 9, 1860, another election was held for the new term, and a Rev. E. Herzman was elected. The chances are that

¹Minutes of Congregation Beth Israel, Macon, Georgia, April 1, 1860 (in the American Jewish Archives).

Rev. Herzman never served, because on February 3, 1861, just a year and a day after Rev. Loewenthal had been elected, the president called a meeting of the congregation:

The President stated the object of this meeting as Rev. E. Herzman resigned his office as Chasan of this Cong. to go into an election for Chasan & Shochet. Mr. Sternheimer was the only candidate nominated for such office and duly elected as such for the term of one year provided he procures a new שוחט.¹

One can only guess that possibly this Mr. Sternheimer is the same Mr. Sternheimer who served as shamas and shochet to Mickva Israel Congregation from 1853 to 1856.

The Jewish community of Macon, Georgia, was a determined little band, who knew what they wanted, and went right out and got it. What Mickva Israel worked and waited for for almost a century, Beth Israel achieved in a little over three months. Here there was no careful and studious accumulation of funds over several years, no clever investments and progress reports, no delays because the time wasn't quite right. Eleven men met in late October of 1859. By the beginning of the following February, the new congregation had for itself an organization, a house of worship, a hazan and a shochet, as well as a new Torah.² The spirit of these men is greatly to be admired!

¹An authorization to act as shochet.

²Bought on January 7, 1860. See minutes of that date.

V. THE JEWRY OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Congregation Children of Israel of Memphis, Tennessee, was founded in 1854. Its extant minutes go back to April 1858. From that point through the entire period studied, those minutes record one continuous squabble. Memphis Jewry was in transition from the very beginning of its existence as a congregation.

In the beginning, its members were of Orthodox persuasion. However, Isaac Mayer Wise was called upon to dedicate their new synagogue building on March 26, 1858,¹ and in a number of discourses on that occasion succeeded in transforming "nearly all its members . . . from Orthodoxy to Reform."² This last statement is perhaps an exaggeration, but it is certainly true that Wise started a ferment in the congregation. The minutes are full of confusion and inconsistency, reflecting very much the changing attitudes of the community.

On April 18, 1858, a committee of five was appointed to draft suitable rules of order, arrangement of prayers, and proper decorum during divine services.³ That committee

¹Becker, op. cit., p. 10.

²The American Jew's Annual, 1889-1890, p. 92.

³Minutes of Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, April 18, 1858 (in the American Jewish Archives).

reported back on July 11th to a regular quarterly meeting of the membership of the congregation.¹ Their recommendations follow:

1. No one but the **המזכיר** shall be allowed to read the **הפסוק**.
 2. The **הפסוק** shall be read in future previous to the saying of **הפסוק**, and no one but the Vice President allowed to respond, and in his absence the President will appoint one in his place.
 3. The **מצוות** are in future to be sold at auction during divine service, the calling to the **ספר** shall be arranged in the following manner:
The Vice Pres. is to keep a correct Register of all the members, same are to be called up in rotation they being notified on Friday previous by the proper officer. Each member so notified is taxed the sum of 50 Cents on **שבת** and Holy days \$1.00 **יום כיפור** excepted.
 4. All the Mitzvos on Rosh Hashono & Yom Kippure are to be sold at a special meeting previous including **חוקת תורה + חוק בראשית**.
 5. The President and Vice President shall each retain one mitzvo & tender them to such person or stranger as they may think proper.
 6. The other **מצוות** such as **הקבא** can be applied for to the Vice President at the stipulated price of 50 Cents on **שבת** and \$1.00 on Holy days, if not disposed of are left to the disposal of the President.
 7. No one can be called to the **ספר** except he wears a hat, neither are the members to take a **טלית**, Tallos, off the shoulders of any person in the Synagogue, as there will always be two Talaysim provided, on the pulpit.
 8. The **ספר** has to be at the Synagogue Ten minutes before divine service commences in order to dress and set the Saypher as it ought to be, and be ready for service when the congregation are assembled.
 9. No member is allowed to wear a Sargenos, nor appear in his Stocking feet, on Rosh Hashono, or Yom Kippure under penalty of Ten Dollars.
 10. No member is allowed to take his Tallis off until the Service is entirely over.
 11. Any violation of the Laws are subject to fine of not less than \$1.00, and not more than Ten Dollars.
- The above report was . . . taken up Section by Section and duly passed, with the exception of article 9, which was amended so far as to permit the Sargenos being worn on Yom Kippure.

¹ Ibid., July 11, 1858.

In this set of rules, many traditional observances are codified, but a number of tendencies toward Reform may also be noted. The congregation has aliyahs and mitzvos, such as g'liloh (rolling the Torah after reading from it), and hagbooh, (raising the Torah after reading from it and before replacing it in the Ark), the Hatan Torah and Hatan Berashis, mentioned before in connection with the practices of Mickva Israel Congregation. There is a rule that no one can be called to the safer unless he is wearing a hat. Does this not imply that one might be worshipping in the congregation with his head uncovered? Else why this specific rule? Rules 7 and 10 are conflicting. Does Rule 10 mean that everyone in the congregation must be wearing a tallis? Then why, in Rule 7, should anyone have need of borrowing a tallis from another? Or why should two extra talaysim have to be provided on the pulpit? The Sargenos of Rule 9 is apparently a kittel, judging from what one does with it, and when. The committee felt that the time had come to do away with a traditional custom that had perhaps become distasteful to them -- the wearing of the kittel and going barefoot during the High Holy Days. However, they found that the congregation was not quite ready for this particular step. The kittel was to be allowed, but going barefoot was no longer to be the custom in the Memphis Congregation. Regarding Rule 2, the Mizmor shir l'yom hashabas and the Anaim z'miros shir hayihud are prayers which normally would come at the end of the service. However, merely rearranging them and

placing them at the beginning of the service is not in itself an important noteworthy innovation, as the two prayers involved are insertions anyway. Possibly what is noteworthy about the rule, is that the Vice President only is to be allowed to respond in these passages. It is an attempt to end some of the confusion and non-unison congregational readings that make some orthodox services sound so undecorous.

It is to be further noted that the Congregation of the Children of Israel, however, had not gotten to the point where it considered the auctioning of mitzvos during the worship service, or the selling of alivahs, undecorous, whereas the two strictly orthodox congregations so far studied in detail, Mickva Israel Congregation of Savannah, and Beth Israel of Macon, had both abandoned those practices.

An ongoing discussion throughout the minutes was the question of the observance of the Sabbath by members and employees of the congregation. That there was a large amount of ambivalence on this question is beyond doubt. Another question would be: "Where does ambivalence leave off and hypocrisy begin?"

At any rate, at the July 11th meeting of the congregation, "It was moved & Seconded that no person should be called to the Sayphir on Rosh Hashono & Yom Kippure that violates the Sabbath day." The motion was lost, but apparently this was not the first motion on this subject, for in the minutes of November 14, 1858, "Mr. T. Tolz [Theobald Foltz] offered a resolution that the Law respecting the office of

President & Vice President to be filled by persons observing the Sabbath be repealed." This motion was ordered laid over for thirty days. It was again taken up on January 23rd next when there was a "motion of Mr. A. S. Myers to adopt resolution of Mr. Foltz respecting, that no member can hold the office of President or Vice President unless he observe the Sabbath, not carried." Mr. Foltz' motion was to repeal the above requirement. Since this motion was not carried, the provision still stands, and those officers are required to be Sabbath observers. At this point in the meeting, David Frank turned in his resignation as Vice President, and it was accepted. Apparently Mr. Frank was not a Sabbath observer, and did not care to become one!

But never say die. The issue was not dead. At the meeting of April 24th of that same year the following occurred:

The article which used to read as follows, No person shall be elligable [sic] to office of President or Vice Pres. who has not been a member two years previous to an election and who does not keep the Sabbath day, it was moved seconded and carried that the last 8 words alluding to keeping Sabbath be stricken out.

The issue of Sabbath observance probably reached its peak in the famed Peres Case. Jacob J. Peres was a particularly gifted linguist and educator. Born in Holland in 1830, Peres emmigrated to the United States in 1857, where he opened a school of ancient and modern languages in the city of Philadelphia and became acquainted with Isaac Leeser.¹

¹Becker, loc. cit.

When the Congregation Children of Israel of Memphis advertised in April 1858 in the Israelite, Occident and Asmonean for "a capable person to officiate as Lecturer, Reader & Teacher, to lecture in English & German, at a salary of \$600.00, perquisites to net \$400.00 more,"¹ Isaac Leeser persuaded Peres to apply for the job.² A Mr. Delbanco had also applied for the job, and in an election held on December 6, 1858, the congregation chose Mr. Peres.³ On December 2, 1859, being the only candidate presenting himself for the position, Mr. Peres was re-elected hazan, but this time only for a six-month term instead of a year.⁴

However, Mr. Peres did not serve out even that short short term. The biographer of the Peres family wrote:

The Rabbi was not an extreme Orthodox Jew, but he was conservative in his religious views. The officers of the congregation, on the other hand, were moving toward Reform Judaism. That displeased the Rabbi, and led to his resignation.⁵

That description of Mr. Peres' departure from the service of the congregation was not quite accurate. As a matter of fact, the contemporary minutes of the congregation contain the full details of a trial held on April 18, 1860,

¹Minutes of Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, April 18, 1858.

²Samuel Shankman, The Peres Family (Kingsport, Tennessee: Southern Publishers, Inc., 1938), p. 6; and Becker, loc. cit.

³Minutes of Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, December 6, 1858.

⁴Ibid., December 2, 1859. ⁵Shankman, loc. cit.

in which Mr. Peres is found guilty of conducting a retail business on the Sabbath, and he is then summarily dismissed. Even then, did Mr. Peres resign gracefully? O no. He still wanted his job! On April 29th, a letter was read from Peres stating that even though he had been discharged, he intended to hold the congregation responsible for the whole time of his contract. The congregation offered a compromise, which was refused. Peres carried his fight for his job and contract rights into the civil courts. The case went up to the Tennessee Supreme Court, where it became the classic decision that the rules of a religious body are sovereign.¹ This hardly sounds like the story of a man who resigned from a congregation because he was displeased at a growing tendency toward Reform!

And yet, in spite of this obvious falsehood, we would be remiss if we painted too black a picture of Mr. Peres. The congregation was headed toward Reform. I would hesitate to say that Mr. Peres' trial was not a fair one, or that he was "railroaded", since both the verdict of guilty and the decision to discharge him were passed unanimously by the congregation, hardly leaving open any grounds for factionalism, and yet, two days before the trial was to be held, and three months before Peres' contract was due to expire,

it was moved and seconded that an advertisement should be sent to Israelite, Occident & Jewish Messenger for a

¹Interview with Rabbi James Wax, historian and Rabbi of Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, February 1957.

Preacher, Teacher & Reader, one in favor of moderate Reform and is capable of delivering a lecture every Sabbath in English or German -- Salary \$1000.00. Applicants must be recommended by Dr. I.M. Wise. Testimonials must be sent to the undersigned.

Within no more than three years from this time, under the spiritual leadership of Rev. Simon Tuska of Hungary, and Rochester, New York, the Congregation Children of Israel made more and more reforms. A year after his arrival in Memphis, Rev. Tuska presented a resolution "that no Piyutim¹ be henceforth recited in the Synagogue on any sabbath, or on any of the three great festivals, . . . excepting the prayers for *Shema*!"² The resolution passed, and it was followed by the installation of an organ, family pews and a mixed choir.³ After all this, when the Orthodox element seceded from the congregation to form their own Congregation Beth El Emeth, Jacob J. Peres was among the secessionists.⁴ He further was a very highly respected man in the Memphis community. He rose to become president of the Memphis Board of Education, raised the standards of the curriculum, and published an elementary arithmetic textbook. His two sons after him, Israel H. Peres and Hardwig Peres, also served as members of the Memphis school board, so Peres could not have

¹Accreted religious poetry found in the traditional liturgy, and eliminated by Reform.

²Minutes of Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, August 18, 1861.

³Becker, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴The American Jew's Annual, 1889-1890, p. 94.

been such a bad fellow.¹ And yet, there remains the enigma, how could he have been found guilty of doing a retail business on a Jewish holy day, with no dearth of witnesses?

Items which we had noticed in the minutes of other congregations were to be found here too. For example, Congregation Children of Israel, like the Savannah and Macon congregations, also fined its members for not attending meetings. Very likely they had as elaborate a system of fines as those other congregations, but unfortunately their old by-laws are not extant, and in the period studied the only reference found was that "a fine of fifty cents was ordered to be placed against . . . members for absense at meetings" on July 11, 1858.

Here too, members presented the congregation with gifts of ritual objects. Two such were recorded in the minutes of April 18, 1858:

Letter was received from Mr. M. Bloom, presenting the Congregation Children of Israel with a white satin Perochos,² and also a Showfor, to be kept in this Congregation. Same was received and a vote of thanks passed.

Letter was received from Mess. Strauss & Hoffman presenting this Congregation with a crimson silk velvet curtain bearing a golden eagle, accepted, and a vote of thanks passed.

The congregation had a shochet and a shames. The former was not unusually involved in an altercation, men-

¹Becker, op. cit., p. 11.

²A curtain which hangs in front of the Ark. This white one would be used on the High Holy Days; the crimson one mentioned below would be used during the rest of the year.

tioned in the minutes of October 10, 1858, along with a bit of editorial comment on the part of the secretary:

Charges were then preferred against H[art] Judah Shochet by G. Jacobs Butcher. Same were read. Mr. Judah replied in defense -- a stormy debate here arose -- much noise and confusion ensued, where in Mr. H. Caro was ordered fined \$5.00 pending this disturbance. Mr. Strauss declined acting as President -- Mr. Frank [David Frank, Vice-president] took the chair. Order having been in a measure restored, it was moved and seconded that a Com. of Five be appointed as follows, two from Mr. Judah, two from Mr. Jacobs, and one by Congregation to arrange the dispute amicably, whereupon meeting adjourned.

The dispute was settled amicably. On October 31st, the "Committee of Five reported concerning Shochet it was agreed that Mr. Jacobs should have 4 weeks longer time to procure a suitable Slaughter House."

Another bit of levity in the minutes, but one which is nonetheless important as a sign of the constantly changing ideas of the congregation, is the matter of the various committees to determine how to carry on divine services. We have already mentioned in detail the report of a committee "to draft suitable rules of order, arrangement of prayers, & decorum during divine Services," which was presented on July 11, 1858. But this was far from the end of the matter. A little over a year from that time, on October 16, 1859, "it was moved and seconded that a committee should be appointed to bring in a report how to carry on devine Services. L. Kremer, H. Judah, A. Seesel, L. Kaufman, H. Caro, on motion Rev. Peres and Pres. was added to committee." But on January 15, 1860, the committee had not yet made a report, and

It was moved and seconded that the committee to devise how to carry on divine Service be discharged, carried.

It was then moved that a committee of 5 be appointed to take into consideration the necessary changes to be made in our present mode of worship & report at a meeting to be held one month from date, carried. H. Judah, A. Seesel, L. Kremer, I. Halpnick, Saml. Shlop.

Needless to say, no such report was forthcoming at the end of one month. In fact, on April 15th, the secretary, in his own quaint way, tells us that: "Committee on worship were discharged, there having not done anything." No further attempt to set up a committee to perform this function was made. But, as we have already noted, when Rev. Tuska arrived, he proceeded, on August 18, 1861, to make his own recommendations for changes in the worship service.

So we have seen in Congregation Children of Israel of Memphis, Tennessee, a congregation in transition from its very outset, fairly certain of the direction in which it wanted to travel, but not always able to stay in the right gear to get there. It knew that Isaac Mayer Wise was right in his philosophy, but it had a sentimental attachment to some of the old ways.

VI. ALABAMA JEWRY

It was mentioned in Chapter II that there exist conflicting records, documents and opinions regarding the date of the founding of the Montgomery, Alabama, congregation. Perhaps some extracts from correspondence between James L. Loeb, of the Montgomery congregation, and Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, will point up the problem:

At present, I am very anxious to establish the actual date of founding of Kahl Montgomery. The congregation secured a charter as Kahl Montgomery in 1852 and has celebrated its 50th, 75th, and 85th anniversaries based on that date. However M P Blue, a local historian, in his CHURCH HISTORY OF MONTGOMERY states that Kahl Montgomery was founded on June 6, 1849 and has been known by that name since that time. Blue's article was published in the local paper as early as 1871 and I feel that his information is apt to be correct in view of the fact that he was an able man and knew the founders of the congregation personally. . . . In addition, there hangs in the Temple vestry a manuscript which has across the top "Kahl Montgomery", then a list of officers, and a list of members. In either top corner are the dates 1847 and 1872. These people were celebrating a 25th anniversary of something. The dates are exceedingly legible so that they could not be mistaken.

We thus have three dates and none genuinely established. The date of the manuscript is very odd as it is unsupported by Blue who says that a society for the care of the sick was founded in 1846. Blue gives the date 1849 and lists officers and members for that date. The congregation itself was chartered in 1852 and has always used that date as the date of celebrating its anniversaries.¹

¹Letter from James L. Loeb, Montgomery, Alabama, to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, March 10, 1947 (original in the files of Dr. Jacob R. Marcus).

We are indeed fortunate that the Montgomery community has for decades been keenly interested in the history of their organization. In his letter of March 10th, Mr. Loeb also mentions that the minutes of his congregation then available to him only went back as far as 1858. The American Jewish Archives has these minutes, but they are written in German in addition to not really going back far enough. However, on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of the congregation, celebrated in 1927, a volume was published with a finely written history of the congregation by Charles F. Moritz. For his treatment of the earlier history, Mr. Moritz must have had access to some additional documents which became lost during the twenty years before Mr. Loeb became interested in a similar project. For example, Mr. Moritz gives the exact date of November 17, 1846, as the founding date of the association for the relief of the sick, and May 6, 1849, as the founding date of "a small chevra or group, who, amidst their new surroundings, could freely and untrammelled worship the God of their fathers and keep aglow the religious torch of light and truth."¹

We shall list now the various conflicting data. In 1937, as part of the celebration of the congregation's 85th anniversary, what purports to be "a translation from the German of the original constitution of Kahl Montgomery, as drafted in 1852," was published.

¹Charles F. Moritz, "Kahl Montgomery," Kahl Montgomery Diamond Jubilee (Montgomery: Kahl Montgomery, 1927) p. 12.

In another letter to Dr. Marcus, Mr. Loeb informs him that Rabbi Maurice Hinehin of Dothan, Alabama, "has in his possession a copy of the Constitution of 1847 of the society known as 'Mebacker Cholim'."¹ In that same letter, Mr. Loeb notes that "Blue, further, says that Kahl Montgomery was founded in 1849 and that a new constitution was prepared at that time."

In a contemporary issue of the Occident, Isaac Leeser published the following:

We have received a letter, under date of May 22nd [1847], which communicates the following pleasing information: -- During the month of January last, several German Jews, residing at Montgomery, united themselves, induced by the praiseworthy exertions of Mr. Aaron Englander, into a congregation, by the name of Mebacker Cholim.²

As late as 1853, the Occident is still referring to a congregation in Montgomery called Mebacker Cholim.³

How do we reconstruct the actual history of the Montgomery, Alabama, Jewish community, and how do we account for these varying dates?

I believe that the development of the Montgomery Jewish community followed the standard pattern outlined in Chapter II. On November 17, 1846, a preliminary meeting of the Jews of Montgomery was held to discuss the formation of

¹Letter from James L. Loeb, Montgomery, Alabama, to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, March 17, 1947 (original in the files of Dr. Jacob R. Marcus).

²Occident, Vol. 5, No. 4, July 1847, p. 213.

³Ibid., Vol. 12, 1853, p. 78.

an association for the relief of the sick. This is the date given by Moritz for the formation of such a society.¹ In January 1847, only a little over a month after this first meeting, this organization for the care of the sick was formally brought into being, given a name -- the Mebacker Cholim Society (Society of those who visit the sick) -- and a constitution for it written. This places the first formal organization of the Montgomery Jewish community in 1847, and thereby accounts for the date on the manuscript of a 25th anniversary celebration memorial hanging in the vestry of the temple. We have now to account for the discrepancy in the Occident. It is my belief that either Isaac Leeser misunderstood what his Montgomery correspondent was writing to him about in May 1847, or his correspondent misled him. But it was surely this association for the care of the sick that the Occident article must have been referring to as having been founded in January 1847, and not a real congregation. Mebacker Cholim would be a very odd name indeed for a congregation, but would be a perfectly normal and appropriate name for an association for the care of the sick. Further proof that Leeser misunderstood or was being misinformed is that in 1853, long after the congregation had adopted the name "Kahl Montgomery", he was still referring to the Montgomery congregation as Mebacker Cholim.

To continue with the development of the community,

¹Also Blue's date. See p. 63 of this paper.

on either May 6 (according to Moritz) or June 6 (according to Blue as quoted in Loeb's letter of March 10th), 1849, the Montgomery community came together for worship. Moritz is right in simply calling this a "small chevra or group," rather than a congregation, even though it is not impossible that the group might have called itself "Kahl Montgomery", as Blue says.¹ Regarding the discrepancy in the months between Moritz and Loeb, my belief is that both used Blue as his source, and one misquoted him.

On April 12, 1852, the Congregation Kahl Montgomery was formally incorporated and received its charter from the State. This is the date that had been observed as the founding date of the congregation, and was a quite natural occasion for the drawing up of a new constitution. Thus the different dates suggested for the founding of the congregation may be seen to be nothing unusual at all. As we noticed in Chapter II, the Memphis Jewish community began holding divine services together in 1850, but did not formally incorporate their congregation until 1854.² The Nashville Jewish community was worshipping together at the latest in 1852. They organized a congregation in 1853, but did not incorporate it until 1854.³ So in Montgomery, community worship began in 1849; the congregation was founded in 1852.

¹See this paper, p. 63.

²Ibid., pp. 4f.

³Ibid., pp. 5f.

But what was the Montgomery congregation like? Let us see what Moritz has to say about it:

The congregation was orthodox in many of its outward forms and practices, for the readers were not only Chazanim but Shochetim who killed fowls and cattle according to the old Rabbinic law. The men wore hats at service, the women sat apart from the men. The pulpit was in the center of the house of worship. Thaletnim and Tefilin were in evidence at the service. The dead were buried in shrouds.

On March 8th, 1862, the first permanent synagogue was erected on Catoma St. . . . Organ and choir, the first symptoms of reform Judaism, were installed.¹

The 1852 Constitution of Kahl Montgomery, published in 1937, also contains some interesting information. The system of fines which we have found so prevalent among the congregations studied, is also to be found used here. Members might be fined from fifty cents to one dollar for failure to attend a meeting of the congregation. "Sickness or absence from the city on business only can be taken as an excuse; but absence on pleasure, as hunting and such will not be taken as an excuse."² "Any Member disturbing the meeting will be liable to a fine of from 50 cts. to \$5.00."³ "Any Member wishing to address the meeting must rise and address the Chair in the German language, and only one person can be allowed to speak at the same time."⁴ "The proceedings of this Society shall be in the German language."⁵ "Any Member leaving the meeting, before it is adjourned by the

¹Moritz, op. cit., pp. 12f.

²Article 4, Section 2.

³Article 4, Section 3.

⁴Article 4, Section 4.

⁵Article 6, Section 2.

President, without permission from the meeting shall be fined 50 cents."¹

Members of this Society shall on the New Year and Day of Atonement close their place of business, and at the Hall specified by the President shall attend the Divine Service at the hour appointed, and any Member violating this Article shall be fined the sum of from \$2.00 to \$20.00 or be expelled from the Society. Any Member being in partnership with a Christian is not compelled to close his place of business, but he cannot enter same; nor a Member who is employed as Clerk in the store of a Christian.²

Would that we could have some of the above rules in our congregations today!

Also of interest is the provision for the continued religious use of the assets of the congregation in the event that it might become necessary for it to dissolve:

Four Members shall be sufficient to continue the Society, but should there be only three Members, the Society shall be dissolved.

Should the Society be dissolved the last three Members shall transfer all their funds and Accounts and Deeds to some Incorporated Congregation.³

There were other Jewish communities in Alabama. In Mobile in 1859, there were at least three going congregations, judging from reports about them in the Occident, and elsewhere. One of them (Dorshey Zedek?) was founded in 1858 as a Reform synagogue. The Jewish Messenger, on June 4, 1858, published a fairly lengthy article on the consecration of the new Reform synagogue in Mobile. Among the items was the following news:

¹Article 4, Section 5. ²Article 9, Section 1.

³Article 11, Sections 1 and 2.

The choir was managed by Mr. Bloch, and the organ played by Mr. Dietrich. This part of the ceremonies was admirably conducted. There was one charming female voice in the choir, but whose we had no opportunity of learning.

Shangarai Shamayim Congregation, an Orthodox Portuguese congregation, certainly didn't have any of that at its dedication in 1845. In fact, they didn't even have an all male choir. In a letter to Isaac Leaser, dated January 4, 1846, David Salomon wrote concerning the dedication of their synagogue on December 26, 1845:

The opening services were under the direction of Mr. Da Silva formerly of New York who had been appointed as reader to the congregation. In the absence of a choir and from the fact that many and in fact a majority of our members are unacquainted with the Portuguese mode of reading, the ceremonies were very simple and included little more than the ordinary service for the eve of the Sabbath with the addition of a discourse delivered by Col. D. Salomon.

By January 1860, this congregation had a religious school of seventy pupils and two teachers.¹

A third congregation in Mobile, known as the United Congregation, is mentioned by Leaser as having 100 members in 1859, and a school with 60 pupils receiving instruction daily except Friday.²

The Jewish community of Mobile had a number of other organizations, in addition to their congregations. There was the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society, founded in 1851, and which in 1860 could boast of having some fifty-four mem-

¹The Occident, 1860, vol. 17, p. 270.

²Ibid., 1859, vol. 17, p. 228.

bers.¹ There was also a Mobile Hebrew Relief Association (Chebrah de-Bickur Cholim Ugemiluth Chasandim), whose constitution and by-laws Leaser published in 1859.² And so that all of their organizational efforts shouldn't be on the dismal side, on June 10, 1860, the Jews of Mobile founded a Literary and Social Union.³ Though lacking the availability of detailed minute books for this community, we may yet conclude that their activities were many and varied, and likewise their religious feelings, judging from the three congregations that the community supported.

We have information also about a thriving Jewish community in Claiborne, Alabama during the period of this study, but it, as well as the town itself, was destined to be short-lived. The community was built around the rich Alabama River traffic. When the railroads supplanted this river traffic, Claiborne practically went out of existence. However, in 1853, a congregation was formed, and the fifteen members thereof engaged Rev. Leopold Maas, lately from Europe, as their hazan, shochet and mohel.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 12 and p. 264.

²Ibid., p. 78.

³Ibid., 1860, vol. 18, p. 100.

⁴Ibid., 1853, vol. 11, p. 188.

VII. CONCLUSION

Before closing this study, it is necessary to adduce a few more facts, which, due to the scanty nature of their sources, did not lend themselves to expansive treatment elsewhere in this paper, but which nevertheless should be made known.

One of these is a description of the Nashville Jewish community, taken from the dedication program of Ohabai Sholom's new temple building. You will recall that we have already mentioned that the community organized a Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1851 and a congregation in 1853:¹

Prior to the year 1868 the entire Jewish population of Nashville composed one congregation and had for its place of worship a dwelling located on Second Avenue, North, just beyond the L. & N. Railroad station. The entire membership was of the ultra Orthodox faith. About the year 1868, a handful of new men decided to organize one based on Reform ideas.²

Another item concerns the Jewish community of Port Gibson, Mississippi. From there, we have only a thin Treasurer's Report Book from 1855 to 1869. However, Congregation Gemiluth Chesed was not founded until 1859, according to that book, and since they did not start collecting a burial ground tax until 1867, one wonders what the

¹See this paper, pp. 5f.

²Dedication of the Temple, (Nashville: Congregation Ohabai Sholom, 1955).

one wonders what the treasurer was collecting money for from 1855 to 1859! One can only guess, but since both congregation and burial services are ruled out, sick care and education remain as possibilities, both of which would have precedent in other congregations of the area.

In looking over the structure and functions of the communities studied here, one can only murmur approval of the semi-comic statement that "wherever you have two Jews, you have three opinions." We have noticed that within the area of the Old Southwest, during the same period of time, that is, primarily between 1840 and 1860, we had Sephardic Orthodox congregations, Ashkenazic Orthodox congregations, and Reform congregations. We saw that this condition was likewise true within the one city of Mobile, Alabama. Nor was there any consistency in the type of new congregation that was just being started. Beth Israel Congregation of Macon, Georgia, founded in 1859, was to be forever German Orthodox, while a new Reform congregation had been founded in Mobile, Alabama just the year before. Of the theological opinions of the Jews of the Old Southwest, we must conclude that there were a wide variety of opinions.

One aspect of Jewish life that did not receive much treatment in the body of this study was that of philanthropy. By and large, all of these communities were receiving constant requests for aid for their brethren elsewhere in this country and throughout the world, which they answered to the best of their ability. Most of the communities had benevo-

lent societies, which took care of their own indigent, and were responsible for contributions to other needy communities as well. It was a source of pride to the Committee on Benevolence of the Hebrew Benevolent Society of Savannah that it could report that in the year 1860, it expended \$205.12 in various charities, but only \$82.12 of that sum for the relief of local needy residents, the balance being for transient Jews.¹

Aside from information concerning the individual congregations and communities, perhaps the most significant and general item that has arisen from this study is the pattern of development of a Southwestern Jewish community in the nineteenth century, that is, its beginning organization for some purpose other than worship, such as burial, sick care or education, the expansion into general charity, the occasional meeting for prayer, and then the final formation of a religious congregation.

¹The Occident, 1861, vol. 18, p. 256.

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