

SISTERHOODS ARE POWERFUL: THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEMPLE SISTERHOODS/WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM ON THE REFORM MOVEMENT

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This thesis will evaluate the social, financial and feminist contributions of WRJ and synagogue sisterhoods to the Reform Movement and the world. It reexamines the History of sisterhood in the modern world and models proto-feminist trends such as leadership and decision-making. Women's push in lay leadership paved the way for women rabbis and cantors. My goal in writing this thesis was to look at the changing role of synagogue sisterhoods. I have utilized the catalogues of the American Jewish Archives, published books, personal interviews, newspaper and journal articles and speeches.

My thesis consists of the following five chapters.

1. Organization and History of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods
2. The Traditional Roles of Sisterhood
3. Fundraising for Themselves, By Themselves
4. Emerging Feminism
5. WRJ and the Modern Sisterhood

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¹ Connie Kreshtool, First VP and Lillian Maltzer, NFTS President in 1979. *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. "NFTS Continued to Fight for Equality in Reform Judaism." New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism, 2013.

SISTERHOOD: A COVENANT OF THE SOUL

Deep within, deep within
Our mothers guarded a sacred promise:
they would teach with ageless wisdom,
they would nurture with silent strength,
they would heal with courageous love.
We, who are their daughters, traverse bridges of time.
We gaze into the past to see ourselves.
Now we possess their eternal pledge:
A covenant of the soul.

We, who are teachers, build eternal bridges.
Guiding throughout our deeds,
shaping with our hands,
touching with our dreams.
Each moment overflows with insight, with creativity, with passion.

We, who are nurturers, protect eternal bridges.
We are shield and shelter, shepherding with confidence,
allowing heartsongs to soar and embraced souls to reach.
Each moment overflows with comfort, with sustenance, with freedom.

We, who are healers, repair eternal bridges.
Whispering of desire and hope, weaving together lifeprayers,
risking love.
Divine sparks refill shattered vessels.
Each moment overflows with bravery, with spirit,
with trust in ourselves and in God.

We, who are their daughters, renew our faith
In their solemn oath: A covenant of the soul.
Each of our moments overflows with blessing.
We are the guarantors of the promise.
The journey continues through us.
The journey continues through us.²

Rabbi Rachel Hertzman
Covenant of the Soul, 2000

² Hertzman, Rachel. *Sisterhood: A Covenant of the Soul*, New York, NY: Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, 2000.

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Sisterhood is Powerful

“Sisterhood is the Rabbi’s best friend.”³

-The American Hebrew, January 6, 1928

Since the origination of the sisterhood gathering, Reform women have aimed to promote the practice of Reform Judaism, both outside and within the home, uniting as National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) in 1913, and later named Women of Reform Judaism in 1993.⁴ WRJ defines its organization as “the collective voice and presence of women in congregational life. Stronger together, we support the ideals and enhance the quality of Jewish living to ensure the future of progressive Judaism in North America, Israel, and around the world.”⁵ This definition is the statement upon which many sisterhoods base their own mission statements.

However, they were not the first organization to promote women and Judaism. National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), founded in 1893 was the “first national organization in history to unite Jewish women to promote the Jewish religion.”⁶ While there are records of Jewish women gathering together for the benefit of their synagogue

³ Joselit, Jenna Weissman. "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: The Synagogue Sisterhood, 1890-1940." In *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer, 206. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

⁴ NFTS changed its name to WRJ in 1993, all references before 1993 will be referred to as NFTS, and after as WRJ.

⁵ “The Pluralism Project”. 2006. Accessed September 09, 2016.
<http://pluralism.org/profile/women-of-reform-judaism/>.

⁶ Rogow, Faith. "Sharing Stories Inspiring Change." National Council of Jewish Women| Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed November 6, 2016.
<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/national-council-of-jewish-women>.

as far back as the Civil War⁷, the very first Reform movement sisterhood was founded in 1889 at Temple Emanu-El in New York. NFTS predated the Conservative movement's sisterhood, the Women's Religious Union of the United Synagogue by five years. Over the past 103 years the WRJ, has significantly impacted the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC)/Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)⁸ through actively fundraising for the students and the facility of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), the first rabbinical school of the Reform movement; financing the building of the House of Living Judaism, which relocated Reform Judaism to New York; and was a founding partner for National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), an organization that has nurtured young Jewish youth into leadership positions at all levels within the Reform movement.

WRJ sisterhoods are social groups that build relationships together with other Reform Jewish women while responding to the needs of their synagogues, surrounding communities, the Reform movement and the social and political aspects impacting the world. Sisterhood, through WRJ creates a supportive environment in which its members meet and work together to foster and further the highest ideals of Judaism. As the purpose of NFTS evolved into WRJ so did its influence grow from the promotion of Judaism to the social justice of humanity.

⁷ "The Pluralism Project." 2006. Accessed September 09, 2016.
<http://pluralism.org/profile/women-of-reform-judaism/>.

⁸ UAHC changed its name to WRJ in 2003, all references before 2003 will be referred to as UAHC, and after as URJ

Despite the significant contributions of the WRJ to the Reform Movement, its history remains largely unknown to most people. Rabbi Marla Feldman, Executive Director of WRJ stated:

“There are too many people in our Movement who do not know the story of WRJ. The major reason, it seems to me, is that WRJ is not engaged in a continual campaign of self-promotion – which tends to be the norm in the Jewish world. They are simply too busy encouraging the grassroots efforts of their members, and in doing the everyday, nitty-gritty work that sustains our synagogues and strengthens the Jewish people.”⁹

Feminist and gender theory understand that because sisterhood women have always served their synagogue communities in the “traditional” female roles: teaching in the religious school, baking for the *onegs* and synagogue dinners, making sure the sanctuary was decorated for the holidays. This has led to its lack of recognition sisterhood women have undertaken.

“Long before that first organized meeting of the NFTS (National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods), women had become a vital part of synagogue life in many Reform congregations in America and Canada. Women’s auxiliaries were educating future generations in Sabbath schools, helping to buy ritual objects for their synagogues, organizing community holiday celebrations and creating caring communities.”¹⁰

Just 103 years ago, 152 women dedicated to the teachings of Reform Judaism gathered to establish an organization dedicated to religion. “One hundred years later, WRJ has evolved into a large and complex organization boasting eight district offices,

⁹ “Building a Movement: A Survey of 100 Years of Sisterhood Support,” Women of Reform Judaism, November 5, 2013, accessed June 9, 2015, <http://www.wrj.org/blog/2013/11/05/building-movement-survey-100-years-sisterhood-support>.

¹⁰ “Our Roots Run Deep” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

nearly five hundred sisterhood affiliates and a membership of approximately 65,000 women.”¹¹ As Temple Beth Hillel of Valley Village, CA states on their website:

“Sisterhood is made up of *all* the women of Temple Beth Hillel. We’re old, young and somewhere in between. We may be employed full-time, or part-time, in the home or out. We may be retired. We may have little kids, or big kids, empty nests or no nests. We all have full lives, yet find the extra time to be active in temple life as the work – and the relationships - are so very rewarding.”¹²

Since their inception, sisterhood women have proven to be successful in instituting a social difference worldwide. Despite being limited to traditional roles, WRJ can nonetheless be understood as Feminists, establishing power and change through their voices, deeds and actions. Sisterhood is inclusive of women with various interests, expanding the definition of feminism as not limited to activism.

The scope of WRJ has broadened to helping the youth of the world, enhancing Jewish education, assisting charitable organizations outside of Judaism and marching for women’s rights. They have openly supported issues that the UAHC/URJ took many more years to stand behind, for instance; the ordination of women, which WRJ supported in 1961¹³, seven years before the Union of American Hebrew Congregations endorsed women’s admission to the rabbinate¹⁴. At the URJ biennial in 2015, URJ stated it “Affirms its commitment to the full equality, inclusion and acceptance of people of all

¹¹ Zola, Gary P. "Sisterhood and the American Synagogue: An Introduction." Edited by Gary P. Zola, Jonathan B. Sarna, and Dana Herman. In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013.

¹² "Women of TBH." Temple Beth Hillel, Reform Synagogue in Valley Village, California. Accessed February 09, 2016. <http://tbhla.org/community/sisterhood>.

¹³ “WRJ Lends a Voice to Social Issues and Civil Rights” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹⁴ Nadell, Pamela Susan. *Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. 169.

gender identities and gender expressions”¹⁵. WRJ passed a similar resolution, twenty-four years earlier in 1991.¹⁶

The congregational sisterhood works to strengthen and support their synagogues in any way that it can, both in front and behind the scenes. Their names may not be as familiar as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg or Activist Betty Friedan, but their work has made an indelible mark on Reform Judaism today.

In this thesis, I will show that NFTS kept the synagogue economy viable through “in-kind service” and paved the way for greater inclusion of women as lay and professional leaders. You will also learn how WRJ and synagogue sisterhoods have evolved in the 21st century, and the methods that will sustain the organization for years to come.

¹⁵ "Resolution on the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People." URJ. Accessed June 11, 2015. <http://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/resolution-rights-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-people>.

¹⁶ "WRJ R&S 2003 Transgender and Bisexual Rights." Accessed November 11, 2016. <http://www.wrj.org/sites/default/files/WRJ%20R%26S%202003%20Transgender%20and%20Bisexual%20Rights.pdf>.

Chapter 1: Organization and History of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods

Jewish life underwent a massive change at the turn of the 20th century. American synagogue life had become central to Reform Jews. Outside their homes, storefronts, farms and synagogues, the world was changing. Thousands of immigrants were moving to America, leaving their old lives behind for a new beginning. Invention and industry were booming in towns and cities all across America. Jews were in need of a place to gather, not only for prayer, but also for socializing. This transition became the catalyst of refocus, transforming the synagogue from its past existence as only a *beit t'filah*, a house of worship, to a *beit kneset*, a house of gathering.

With the influx of Jewish families immigrating to America from all over the world, sisterhoods, as established Jewish women, united with the charitable goal to acclimate the “Jewish -Americans” to their communities. Through these groups, women gathered food, clothing, and most importantly, a group of friendly faces to help new immigrant families adjust to American culture.

“Yet we can say with some confidence of the American Synagogue, after thinking about its history over more than three centuries, that it has been the most significant Jewish institution in the life of Jews...it has provided a wide variety of ancillary activities in the form of sisterhood, brotherhood, youth fellowship, social action projects and much more...”¹⁷

Sisterhood organizations were important in the creation of a congregational life that encompassed more than the prayer experience of previous generations. Jewish

¹⁷ Raphael, Marc Lee. *The Synagogue in America: A Short History*. New York: New York University Press, 2011. 207.

women joining together for a common cause happened in the synagogue long before it occurred on a national level. Sisterhoods often found themselves fulfilling the immediate needs of their communities. There are records of women in congregations gathering together during the Civil War to roll bandages for use by the injured soldiers¹⁸. In Philadelphia, the women of Congregation Mikveh Israel, founded in 1740, transformed their synagogue into a hospital for injured soldiers, and many Jewish sewing societies would gather together to create and mend their uniforms. “As the wives, mothers and daughters of men in military service, they shouldered a range of responsibilities brought on by wartime exigencies. As community activists, they involved themselves in home-front activities to minister to the soldiers directly and to raise money for the troops.”¹⁹

In these efforts, Jewish women looked to the model established by their Christian neighbors, who had been active in supporting the less fortunate in their neighborhoods through their own benevolent societies. “Christian women doing good was not the only model; most of the Jewish women emigrated from Jewish communities where *tzedakah* was highly-developed, the powerful concept of helping one’s own deeply ingrained...”²⁰ Other organizations like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in 1881, and the Jewish Federation of Boston (1895) were natural precursors to the philanthropic work of sisterhoods, as seen through their deeds for others.

¹⁸ Diner, Hasia. "Civil War in the United States." Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed January 20, 2016. <http://www.jwa.org/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Greenberg, Blu. "Women: How American Jewish Women Made Contributions to Jewry and the World." Accessed December 4, 2015. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/valor.html>.

In 1889, Rabbi Gustav Gottheil of Temple Emanu-El in New York founded the first sisterhood group within a synagogue's walls. Hannah Einstein defined "sisterhoods of personal service" in the 1905 edition of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*: "female charity workers who devote time to the care of the needy and distressed."²¹ The goal of a sisterhood organization was to "overcome the estrangement of one class of the Jewish population from another and to bring together the well-to-do and the poor, in the relation, not of patron and dependent, but of friend and friend."²²

As Jewish women were striving to meet the needs of other Jewish families, there was a natural transition to branch out into the community. One of the values of these German-American women was to perform *tzedakah* to preserve Judaism. It was a social activity that could justify their assembling outside the home. HUC-JIR professor Dr. David Kaufman stated:

"In New York especially, congregational women's groups came into vogue. Formally called the "*Frauen Verein*" or ladies' society, the distaff auxiliary matured into an integral element of congregational life...Unlike its precedents, the synagogue sisterhood was founded to serve as a philanthropic agency, enabling the women of the community to exercise their activist impulse, and concurrently, offering the rabbi an effective way to expand the reach of his congregation."²³

As a more practical aspect, since women represented half of the congregation, the rabbi learned to share his views with the sisterhood on many important issues. With their

²¹ Einstein, Hannah B. "Sisterhoods of Personal Service." *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1903. 398.

²² Einstein, 398.

²³ Kaufman, David. "*Shul with a Pool*": *The Synagogue-Center in American Jewish life, 1875-1925*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1993.32.

support, these women could influence their husbands to work with the rabbi, since many of the men didn't attend synagogue functions. As Rabbi Hyman G. Enelow of Adath Israel in Louisville, Kentucky stated in his sermon: "the average man of today is absorbed overmuch in the ordinary toil and business of the world to pay much heed to the pursuits of culture and religion...the Jewess is destined to play anew an important part in the life and development of her religion."²⁴ This statement rang true to the chair of NFTS's National Committee on Religion and Rabbi Enelow's congregant, Barbara Solomon Goodman. Through her leadership, the members of NFTS became more involved in worship at their own synagogues.

As time progressed, more sisterhood groups were founded throughout the East coast, spreading westward as more Reform synagogues were established nationwide. It is due to this growth of Reform Judaism, and the natural need for unification, the notion and necessity of a national sisterhood organization developed.

The Founding of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS)

In the research, Dr. Pamela Nadell, Director the Jewish Studies Program at American University, conducted for her chapter in the book *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, there is not a great deal of documentation on the preparation for the first assembly of NFTS. As observed in her endnote, "Historians dislike making arguments from silence. Still, it is surprising that the UAHC, which has preserved so much of its records, has no correspondence or documents pertaining to the

²⁴ On Enelow, see Felix A. Levy "Hyman Gerson Enelow-A Biographical Sketch, (4 volumes, Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1935)" Vol. III "The Synagogue and Woman", 10-26.

decision to organize NFTS and the plans established for its founding meeting.”²⁵ Despite a lack of documentation, a great deal of planning that must have occurred in the run-up to the conference, and indeed, much was accomplished during their inaugural gathering. Despite the UAHC’s call for the meeting but a month before, a great deal of planning had gone into organizing this convention. (President Carrie) Simon was surely a force, if not the chief force behind its success.”²⁶

“The UAHC had scheduled its assembly for January 1913 in Cincinnati. Fifty-two ladies auxiliaries, temple societies, and a few groups already called sisterhoods responded to the UAHC’s call to send delegates to establish its female counterpart; at least another fifty had endorsed the idea but were unable to send representatives.”²⁷

Its purpose was to formally organize groups of women with the same goals and because the UAHC supported and publicized this new organization, over 100 women’s groups showed interest in such an endeavor.

Carrie Simon, the founder of NFTS and wife of Rabbi Abram Simon of Washington Hebrew Congregation, chose to pioneer this organization believing that she could accomplish much more than on a smaller scale with the women at her synagogue. She envisioned NFTS to would be a larger version of the sisterhood at her congregation as “her interests lay in fostering religious lives in the synagogue and she strove to

²⁵ Nadell, Pamela S. "Carrie Simon and The Founding of NFTS." In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 44.

²⁶ Nadell, *Sisterhood*, 26.

²⁷ Simon, Mrs. Abram (Carrie). "The Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (1913)." *American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger*, February 21, 1913, 464.

establish a national group along these lines.”²⁸ On January 21, 1913, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods was born. “NFTS’s efficient and productive founding meeting—which saw in its first day alone, the election of a president and secretary, the ratification of a constitution and the accreditation of delegates representing fifty-two congregations.”²⁹

“In January 1913 she utilized her husband’s temple sisterhood as a springboard for establishing a National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.”³⁰ As a Rabbi’s wife, Simon had an essential influence on the programming, and education of her own synagogue, and wanted to teach other women to do the same on a local level, yet provide the support of a national organization.

“UAHC President J. Walter Freiberg called the meeting to order. Ella Philipson (née Hollander) of Cincinnati nominated Carrie Simon “temporary chairman,” and the meeting got underway.”³¹ NFTS was now officially embraced into the folds of the UAHC.

Historian Dr. Jacob Marcus has suggested NFTS “emerged because the National Council of Jewish Women, founded in 1893, had abandoned its original aim of strengthening Jewish religious life in favor of focusing on social service work. Certainly, Simon saw NFTS created not to duplicate existing Jewish women’s organizations but to

²⁸ Melammed, Renee Levine. "His story/her story: Carrie Simon, founder of Temple Sisterhoods 100 years ago." The Jerusalem Post | JPost.com. Accessed September 21, 2016. <http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Judaism/His-storyher-story-Carrie-Simon-founder-of-Temple-Sisterhoods-100-years-ago-334429>.

²⁹ Nadell, *Sisterhood*, 26.

³⁰ <http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Judaism/His-storyher-story-Carrie-Simon-founder-of-Temple-Sisterhoods-100-years-ago-334429>.

³¹ Nadell, *Sisterhood*, 27.

carry the banner of religious spirit necessary to strengthen the congregation.³² Many of the first members of NFTS began as members of NCJW, however, as education was the principal goal of some of the women at the time, they decided to join NFTS to accomplish this goal. Although religion was taught within the walls of the synagogue, Simon believed that the key to sustaining it was through the women. Uniting to help others was secondary to empowering the women through ritual and education.

This objective wasn't new to the synagogues or the women involved, however, through the formation of NFTS, more could be done to promote the future of Reform Judaism. Simon heard the call, and once the women gathered that day, the organization swiftly moved into action.

Rabbi David Philipson of K.K Bene Israel in Cincinnati, stated in his opening speech to the newly formed NFTS, "In anticipation that through the NFTS, the women of Reform Judaism "will forge a mighty weapon in the service of Judaism." Those words were quite powerful to the representatives in the room with him that day. A prominent rabbi was stating that women, (often unrecognized as a *tour-de-force*) could make an impact on Judaism for their generation and generations to come.

In his address, Rabbi Philipson spoke about how the Reform movement made strides for women's equality through the modifying of *Nesim B'col yom*, the blessings for everyday miracles, when traditionally one would state "Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, who has not made me a woman." He also spoke about the removal of the *mechitza*, the partition between the men's and women's sections in the sanctuary, and that woman

³² "Sharing Stories Inspiring Change." National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods | Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed September 21, 2016.
<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/national-federation-of-temple-sisterhoods>.

could be counted in a *minyan*, the group of 10 individuals that gather to say prayers during a service or with people in mourning. Rabbi Philipson stated: “We have organizations galore for philanthropic, charitable and human purposes. We have not organizations enough for specifically religious work and for strengthening of our congregational life. Here lies your great opportunity, may you rise to it.”³³ With the founding of the NFTS, women could now join forces nationally to make a real difference.

According to the constitution drafted at the convention, NFTS set out four major goals to achieve. 1) To bring the various Sisterhoods of the country into closer co-operation and association with one another. 2) To quicken the religious consciousness of Israel, by strengthening the spiritual and educational activity. 3) To make propaganda for the cause of Israel. 4) To co-operate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.³⁴

This constitution consisted of many empowering statements, and impressive goals that the women set to accomplish with their new organization. “The constitution’s emphasis on Jewish women’s “increased power” shows its authors alert to what historian Nancy Cott has called “that percolating environment Feminism”, which, in the 1910’s unleashed a “revolution of rising expectations” for what women could do and achieve.”³⁵

In order to achieve these goals, sisterhoods around the country needed to unite and remain in contact with each other. Without communication, this newly formed

³³ “Woman and the Congregation” (21 January 1913). Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

³⁴ “Constitution” (21 January 1913). Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

³⁵ Nadell, *Sisterhood*, 32.

federation would fail. NTFS would plan to hold their biennial meetings concurrently with the biennial meeting of the UAHC. “The delegates-many of them married to the men attending the UAHC gathering³⁶ created National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.” The women also communicated between the biennials through letter writing between sisterhoods, and on a larger scale, through articles written about the successful endeavors of sisterhoods in the Union Bulletin, a newspaper issued monthly by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

“The smaller 'Communities look forward each month to receiving this paper, and to many of the Jewish women in rural districts it is the only means of contact with the outside Jewish world. It is also valuable material for propaganda and many prospective Sisterhoods seeing the Union Bulletin and realizing the scope of work of the Federation and the Union...”³⁷

As the second goal listed in their constitution, Israel, as in Jewish peoplehood, was high on the list of interests of NTFS. At the third NTFS Biennial meeting in 1917, President Simon stated “the purpose of our Federation must be the preservation of Jewish life, and the development and expression of that life in varied forms of activity.”³⁸ Since many of the women in NTFS were 2nd and 3rd generation Americans, their primary purpose within sisterhood was to bring Judaism into the home through the celebration of the holidays, and their involvement in synagogue life.

³⁶ Pamela S. Nadell in *Sisterhood*: For example, Washington Hebrew Congregation elected five delegates to the UAHC meeting. Of the seven women representing its Ladies Auxiliary society at NTFS’s founding meeting, four were the spouses of those elected delegates. Minutes Book, 1907-1914, 1 December 1912, 468a, Archives of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington DC; First General Convention of NTFS (1913), 21, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1, AJA.

³⁷ “Minutes of the Executive Board Report of the President” (4 January 1924) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

³⁸ “Minutes of the Executive Board Report of the President” (16 January 1917) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

The third goal of NFTS was “to make propaganda for the cause of Israel.” Propaganda in the 1920’s was defined much differently than it is today, and did not carry the negative connotation. “The derogatory use of the word “propaganda” itself only came about in the early twentieth century, with the rise of states and regimes, which could widely disseminate political ideologies and messages in an unprecedented, centralized manner through mass media and the arts.”³⁹ To NFTS, *propaganda* referred to the multiple publications that they created to teach women about the various holidays, and to publicize programs that they deemed would be successful in sisterhoods. “The work of the Committee on Propaganda has been facilitated by the lofty aims of our union to create an efficient central agency for stimulating and fostering co-operation on the part of our Jewish women in behalf of their religion.”⁴⁰

Their fourth goal “To co-operate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations” remains to this day. “UAHC, now the URJ, is the umbrella for Reform congregations in North America and was founded in 1873...NFTS was its first affiliate, in 1913, and was followed ten years later by the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods (NFTB, now MRJ) in 1923.”⁴¹ They have united to establish NFTY, worked together to appoint women to various board positions and move the movement’s headquarters to New York from Cincinnati. Through policy and name changes, WRJ and URJ, remain steadfast partners.

³⁹ King, Seungkun Stephen. "Propaganda." Propaganda. 2007. Accessed October 10, 2016. <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/propaganda.htm>.

⁴⁰ “Report on the National Committee of Propaganda” (20 Jan 1915) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁴¹ “WRJ and the Reform Movement.” Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed October 21, 2016. <http://www.wrj.org/wrj-and-reform-movement>.

As well as establishing the positions of President, Vice President and Secretary, 25 other women were elected to the executive board. This committee proposed to meet semi-annually, in January and in July and “each sisterhood shall pay into the treasury of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods ten cents per annum for each member thereof.”⁴² Although it may seem to be a small amount of money, “its designation would legitimize their federation.”⁴³

Six standing committees were established that day with five members each, which were appointed by the President of the Executive board: Co-operation, Religion, Sabbath School, Propaganda, Scholarships and the Union Museum for Jewish Ceremonial Objects. The initial goals of the organization that were in line with the expectations and beliefs of the time were far different than those that would develop later.

The first meetings of the Executive board were held at the Hotel Rudolf in Atlantic City on July 1-3, 1913. In the six months that followed the establishment of NFTS, the following were among the achievements accomplished as confirmed by the reports of the various committees from the Executive board meetings.⁴⁴

The committee on Co-operation decided that sisterhoods in larger communities should “hold an annual joint meeting...many opportunities arise in large cities for the spread of religious work both among adults and children not affiliated with the synagogues [sic].”⁴⁵ Even in 1913, NFTS aspired to outreach within the larger community, to work

⁴² “Dues” (23 January 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁴³ As of 2016, \$11 of each member’s dues is given to the WRJ.

⁴⁴ “The Proceedings of the First Executive Board” (1 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁴⁵ “The Committee on Co-operation” (1 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

with members of other synagogues. Successful projects included “Jewish community Seders, institutional welfare work, and the formation of reception committees.”⁴⁶ These special endeavors helped Judaism as a whole, not just the individual sisterhoods or only NFTS.

The Sabbath school committee’s goal was to ensure that the schools within each synagogue had the proper supplies to celebrate various Jewish holidays and to promote family involvement. They aimed to produce flyers for the home, and literature on Sabbath school management.

“These endeavors came under three general heads: 1. Personal Service Work, consisting of parents' meetings, tracing up absentees. 2. Supplying Sabbath school Equipment; and 3. Assisting in Sabbath-school Holiday Observance. The report recommended that the information be tabulated and printed for general distribution.”⁴⁷

Since some of these Sisterhood communities did not have a formal religious school, NFTS wanted to create a guideline for the curriculum of a religious school for reference.

The Scholarship Committee was founded to ensure grants, and occasionally loans for rabbinical students attending the Hebrew Union College. “Were it not for these scholarships many young men especially gifted for the pulpit would be unable to become rabbis...these scholarships...enabled students who have no independent means to pursue their studies.”⁴⁸ Early on, NFTS realized how important it was to finance the education of the future rabbis of the movement.

⁴⁶ “Report of the National Committee on Co-operation” (1 November 1 1917) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁴⁷ “Report of the National Committee on Sabbath Schools” (1 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁴⁸ “Report of the National Committee on Hebrew Union College Scholarships “ (1 July 1913), MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA

From January to July of 1913, the Committee for the Union Museum for Jewish Ceremonial Objects collected many artifacts from various donors to establish a museum to be housed on the Cincinnati campus of HUC. Their goal was to secure “such articles are in the possession of various members of the local sisterhoods...occasionally some local sisterhood may discover in their city, an art treasure... and those members who go to Europe should be called to the fact that many beautiful articles can be obtained for the Museum at a very small cost in Europe.”⁴⁹ The purpose of this collection was to ensure that ceremonial objects were preserved for future generations and encouraged the sisterhoods to start their own collections within their synagogues. No one at the time realized that their efforts would save many pieces of art and ritual items from destruction in Europe.

The Committee on Religion was most likely the hardest committee to determine their exact purpose, for they did not want to impede other groups and individuals whose ultimate goals were similar to theirs, like the Temple Board or the Rabbi. “Our task should not be to interfere...let us not try to do the work of the rabbi and the congregation put together, but to ascertain what special sphere is reserved for the sisterhood.”⁵⁰ The committee wanted to share to their members that their goals were to promote synagogue attendance. At this time, Sisterhoods merely wanted to encourage worship by decorating the sanctuaries, welcoming visitors and handing out prayer books. They had no intention of influencing the style or prayers used in worship until much later on in the 20th century.

⁴⁹ “Report of the National Committee for the Union Museum of Jewish Ceremonial Objects” (1 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1.AJA.

⁵⁰ “Report of the National Committee on Religion” (1 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

They aimed to help members and their families observe the holidays and encourage learning, both inside and outside the home, “arranging a half dozen evenings a season which should be devoted to a consideration of things Jewish.”⁵¹ The creation of the Jewish art calendar was also suggested as a means of promoting religion within the home and showcasing art and artifacts that the average family may not have in their possession.

Another committee convened at this meeting of the Executive board, was a special committee on the creation of the Uniongram, which served as a “substitute telegram for revenue...the price of the substitute telegram be as follows: 15 words for 25 cents, 50 words for 40 cents”⁵² This would prove to be one of the most successful fundraising campaigns for NFTS, and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The goal of the Committee on Propaganda was to be in contact with sisterhoods that were not members of the NFTS and to create a Directory of Reform sisterhoods. NFTS was making strides to swiftly increase their membership around the country. With more members, NFTS could accomplish their goals of improving worship, outreach and education, as well as becoming more financially stable with an increase in the number of women paying dues. At the first meeting of the executive committee, the treasurer reported, “setting forth that up to July 1, 1913, forty-nine sisterhoods had paid ten cents per capita as dues, and that the treasury contained \$798.74.”⁵³

Lastly, a seal was created for the NFTS, bearing distinct similarities to the seal of the UAHC. With National Federation Temple Sisterhoods on the top and Union of

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Report of the Special Committee on Uniongram” (2 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1.AJA.

⁵³ “Report of Treasurer” (3 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1.AJA.

American Hebrew Congregations below, it displays the partnership between the two organizations. The Hebrew on the seal translates to “Torah study is equal to all other mitzvot.” The tablets signifying the commandments and a Star of David also appear within the seal. This phrase, and the symbols chosen serve as strong representations of Judaism.⁵⁴

Between the convention in Cincinnati in 1913, and the convention held in Chicago in 1915, 56 women’s groups joined the NFTS.⁵⁵ In the address of welcome given by the 1915 NFTS treasurer, Mrs. Israel Cowen expresses the need to unite as women to serve the Jewish people.

“And so if this great UAHC has need of our powers and if our Judaism calls us to hold up the hands of our fathers, husbands and brothers, let us as one sisterhood march forward in solid phalanx and do our duty as women in Israel. The Temple must be to us the center of our activities and to uphold its influence and send succor and support to those who need religion’s aid should be our sacred aim...We have accomplished much in two years, but in the vista of the future I see arising a greater sisterhood like unto Deborah leading from darkness into night.”⁵⁶

At the time, this statement was revolutionary. Instead of the men holding up the women’s hands, the women were lifting their hands, to empower the men.

In her presidential message to the Federation, Carrie Simon speaks of the timing of the formation of the NFTS. There was a need to unify and with the numbers of NFTS doubling since the first convention, sisterhoods throughout the country were realizing that the organization was worth joining.

⁵⁴ See Example 1. “The Seal of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods” (3 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1.AJA.

⁵⁵ “Committee on Propaganda” (19 January 1915) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁵⁶ “Treasurer’s Message to the Federation” (19 January 1915) “Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

“It was evident to many that the time was ripe for federating these dozens of sisterhoods which were isolated and out of touch with one another... Two years are but a fleeting moment in the life of human history...yet somehow we feel that the hopes of the founders have not been misplaced...From forty nine to one hundred and five sisterhoods, from nine thousand to fifteen thousand women! These signs of splendid growth are, at least, surface indications that the sisterhood idea has taken hold.”⁵⁷

NFTS had exceeded their original expectations, for their hard work and perseverance had paid off, and their organization was proving to be a success. Carrie Simon held the position of President for three terms, and every task that NFTS set out to accomplish, from creating a more welcoming service experience, to fundraising for various causes, succeeded. “Simon could justifiably point with pride to a “new type of Jewish leadership” that was “emerging and ascendant” as Jewish women took on a “leading part in congregational ideals and practice.””⁵⁸

⁵⁷ “Presidential Message to the Federation” (19 January 1915) “Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁵⁸ Nadell, *Sisterhood*. 39.

Chapter 2: The Traditional Roles of Sisterhood

The activities of NFTS mirrored the traditional accepted roles of women. For many years, sisterhood women have served the role of hostess: cooking food for all synagogue functions and decorating the synagogue for various holidays. They were the teachers of the children, from before they attended elementary school, and well into their teenage years. Responsible for budgeting for the household, they learned how to purchase as much as they could with their allotted funds and utilized those skills for the purchasing of items for the synagogue.

“At a time when most middle and upper-class women did not work outside the home, the women of the Sisterhood created an acceptable outlet - religious community work that utilized the skills that they had perfected in the home and then transferred those skills to considerable effect outside the home.”⁵⁹

Their ingenuity in developed into significant fundraising skills for the Reform Movement, which initially funded major scholarships, and building of the first dormitory of Hebrew Union College, the movement's seminary. Sisterhood created a network that moved outward from within their homes, into the synagogues and to the larger organized movement.

Teaching others

In Reform Judaism in America, women have always played an important role in the education of the children. Teaching was one of the few professions where women could be employed outside of the home, and sisterhood women would volunteer to teach in the religious schools. As Jewish educator Shulamith Reich Elster stated: “At the

⁵⁹ Kushner, Dr. Joel L. Interview by author. December 6, 2016.

beginning of the twentieth century, there were few paid religious school teachers. Most were volunteers, and many of those were public school teachers—trained for assignments in general education but woefully lacking in knowledge of Judaism.”⁶⁰ In many towns with one Jewish community far from the next, sisterhoods had taken over the responsibility for the education of all of its members. Former Professor of History, Dr. Lee Shai Weissbach describes the role of sisterhood women in the synagogue schools:

“In addition to providing money for the maintenance of temple facilities and for the conduct of services, another major responsibility women took upon themselves in Reform congregations was providing religious instruction for the children. Again, all concerned seemed to view the involvement of women in Jewish education as a natural outgrowth of their obligations as nurturing caregivers and moral guides.... Sunday schools frequently were said to be under the “full jurisdiction” of the sisterhood...women took charge of organizing classes and they constituted most or all of the teaching staff, designing and imparting a rudimentary curriculum, usually in consultation with a rabbi, whether he served the congregation full time or came to town only occasionally.”⁶¹

Since the establishment of Temple Shomer Emunim in Sylvania, Ohio in 1875, the women of the sisterhood comprised the majority of the teachers and tutors in the religious school. Through the numerous stories from the Temple members recalling their mothers teaching in the religious school, many sisterhood women followed in their mothers’ and grandmothers’ footsteps and taught as well. Today, the scope of the curriculum has changed to incorporate Israeli culture, and current events. The sisterhood understood that it was their responsibility to educate the synagogue’s children, and in turn their children would do the same for the next generation of students. This arrangement

⁶⁰ Elster, Shulamith Reich. "Sharing Stories Inspiring Change." Hebrew Teachers Colleges in the United States | Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed October 24, 2016. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/hebrew-teachers-colleges-in-united-states>.

⁶¹ Weissbach, Lee Shai. *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.239

formed a close-knit community. On most Sunday mornings, sisterhood members would teach and then have an event ranging from speakers, luncheons, preparing for a synagogue-sponsored event, or meeting, on some Sunday afternoons. Rochelle Barchik, Sisterhood President from 2010-2012, mother of two in the religious school and a teacher of the Temple Tots program, loved giving back to the temple. "As the former president of sisterhood, to teaching, to running the temple gift shop...I love watching the children grow from babies to *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* students."⁶² Many other sisterhood women within the congregation could have shared this same sentiment.

The members of Shomer Emunim sisterhood also created a slide show to share a glimpse of the Jewish religion to the outside community. Elementary schools, church youth groups, and students from the local universities would be invited to view the presentation and ask questions to the clergy. This form of outreach resulted in a better understanding of Judaism, and even encouraged some of the university students to return to the temple for services.

Another sisterhood member, a mother of two and a teacher at Temple Jeremiah on the North Shore of Chicago states: "I love teaching at Temple Jeremiah. I have learned so much more about my religion and my culture simply being present at the temple...Can I really call coming to temple and interacting with such a variety of great people work?"⁶³ Even with the professionalization of Jewish Education, numerous sisterhood members continue to serve as synagogue teachers.

⁶² Barchik, Rochelle. "Question on Involvement in Sisterhood." E-mail message to author. July 11, 2015.

⁶³ "Teachers." Home - Temple Jeremiah, a Reform temple in Chicago's North Shore. Accessed July 24, 2015. <http://www.templejeremiah.org/learning/school/teachers>.

From teaching in the religious school classroom, tutoring of *b'nai mitzvah*, and running programs on how to create a Jewish home, sisterhood members today and in the future owe a sense of gratitude to these women.

Fundraising for women's causes

Jewish American women have always found methods to fundraise for causes that were “appropriate” to women: education, acceptable housing conditions, the feeding of the hungry and the war effort. Women, historically have consistently supported those proceeding causes. “The “definite tasks” included running nurseries and religious schools, youth clubs, vocational training programs, and health clinics, evening classes in English, citizenship and sewing...some even established their own full-scale settlement houses.”⁶⁴ As NFTS continued to support worldly causes, one of the first tasks they selected was to fundraise to educate the future rabbis of the Reform movement. Rabbinical education was important to NFTS because those students would become their own rabbis, the backbones of their own congregations, passing on the laws and traditions of Judaism to each and every congregant.

From the beginning of NFTS, scholarship and support of Hebrew Union College has been paramount. However, as the process was described by Rabbi David Ellenson and Dr. Jane F. Carlin, expert on Institutional advancement: “Rather than seeking donations from a few wealthy patrons, these broad based membership groups relied on state-wide and local networks to mobilize thousands of women on behalf of specific

⁶⁴ Diner, Hasia R., and Beryl Lieff Benderly. *Her Works Praise Her: A History of Jewish Women in America From Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: Basic Books, 2002. 233-34.

projects through grassroots techniques.”⁶⁵ The sisterhood groups around the nation worked hard to secure funds for HUC, organizing every kind of fundraiser imaginable, from rummage sales, to bake sales. “Donations as little as \$5.00, contributed by the Temple Sisterhood, House of Israel in Hot Springs, Arkansas were listed in the Union Bulletin.”^{66/67} In 1919, the Chairman of the Scholarship Committee, Mrs. Joseph Stolz, made it abundantly clear that all donations would be graciously accepted.

“It is evident, however, from letters received...that some of the smaller sisterhoods have refrained from contributing...because they could only send a small sum. No Sisterhood has ever been expected to give beyond its means, nor has even the smallest contribution been unappreciated.”⁶⁸

These various fundraisers, combined with some of the proceeds the sale of the NFTS Jewish Art Calendars and Uniongrams, secured scholarships for future students. In 1915, just two years after launching the scholarships, NFTS contributed a total of \$2,161.⁶⁹ This was a great deal of money raised by a small group of individuals and in 2016 this would amount to over \$110,000.⁷⁰ “In 1919, the committee reported that the fund totaled almost \$6,000. At a time when annual tuition was \$300, this sum resulted in scholarships for nearly one-third of the seventy-member student body.”⁷¹ As the Chair

⁶⁵ Ellenson, David and Jane F. Karlin. “Mothers and Sons, Sisters and Brothers: Women of Reform Judaism and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 73.

⁶⁶ The Union Bulletin was a monthly paper published by the UAHC in Cincinnati

⁶⁷ “Donations Towards Scholarships Made in the Past Fiscal Year.” *The Union Bulletin* Vol. 11 (Cincinnati), June 1921. Accessed March 11, 2015. <https://goo.gl/5kNPqu>.

⁶⁸ “Report of the National Committee on Hebrew Union Scholarships” (1 November 1918), MS-73, Box 1, Vol. 1 AJA.

⁶⁹ “Report of the Treasurer” (23 February 1916), MS-73, Box 1, Vol. 1 AJA.

⁷⁰ Calculated using the CPI calculator from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

⁷¹ “Report of the National Committee on Hebrew Union Scholarships” (1 November 1918), 51 MS-73, Box 1, Vol. 1 AJA.

of the Finance committee stated in 1918: “Were it not for these scholarships many young men especially gifted, for the pulpit would be unable to become rabbis.”⁷²

NFTS had lofty goals for sisterhoods around the country, and tried to summon up funds with a captivating headline.

“If, for example, every State in the Union would supply one scholarship (\$300.00) to be given preferably to a student from that State, the Hebrew Union College would be able to accomplish a tremendous amount of good, and many young men struggling for an education in their chosen field would be enabled to continue their work. We should adopt the slogan-A SCHOLARSHIP FOR EVERY STATE IN THE UNION.”⁷³

Although NFTS did not succeed in this admirable goal of one scholarship for every state in the union, NFTS has continued to be a major contributor and supporter for the students of HUC-JIR, contributing to multiple HUC-JIR scholarships yearly.

During the 1930’s- 1940’s, NFTS provided scholarships for students from Europe to escape the atrocities of World War II to study towards the rabbinate.

“But the most significant event of the past year...the acceptance of 5 German students from the Berlin "Hochschule" as regular students there. The Scholarship and the Isaac M. Wise Sisterhood Memorial Funds are both helping to make this possible...surely this new work should move our Sisterhoods to more generous response than heretofore for support of the work of the Scholarship Committee.”⁷⁴

These future rabbis made an indelible mark on Reform Judaism. “The five students who had been offered scholarships went on to become well known rabbis, to serve pivotal

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Report of the National Committee on Hebrew Union College Scholarships” (31 October 1935). MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

roles in the Jewish youth camp movement, and even to teach at HUC-JIR campuses.”⁷⁵

These students were known as “The Gang of Five: W. Gunther Plaut, Herman Schaalman, Wolli Kaelter, Alfred Wolf, and Leo Lichtenberg.”⁷⁶ Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut became the Senior Rabbi of Toronto, Canada’s Holy Blossom Temple and wrote the Torah Commentary that is found in the pews of most Reform synagogues today. Rabbi Herman Schaalman was Senior Rabbi of Emanuel Congregation in Chicago and founded the first UAHC camp, Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute in Wisconsin. Rabbi Wolli Kaelter served Temple Israel of Long Beach, CA and became the first camp director of Camp Saratoga in Northern California. Rabbi Alfred Wolf, Senior Rabbi of Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles was the founding Director of the Skirball Institute on American Values of the American Jewish Committee. Rabbi Leo Lichtenberg served various congregations and was a professor at Adelphi University in New York. Each of these men enhanced Reform Judaism and their legacies live on today.

A Place to Live

Today, HUC-JIR is a graduate institution: however, in the 1920’s, many young men entered the college at the young age of seventeen. They left their families for an unknown city, and the women of NFTS wanted to provide them with a safe place to live.

⁷⁵ Mwanika, Eva, and Kurt Backlund. "From Nazi Europe to Cincinnati: The Story of Hebrew Union College’s Rescue Program." *Qol Hadash*, March 2015, 1. Accessed November 1, 2016.

http://huc.edu/sites/default/files/alumni/associations/sgs/SGS_Spring2015.pdf.

⁷⁶ Damashek, Richard. "The Gang of Five: The Impact of Five German Rabbinic Students on Twentieth-Century Reform Judaism." *CCAR JOURNAL: THE REFORM JEWISH QUARTERLY*, September 2016, 5.

In January 1921, NFTS established the HUC dormitory committee, and swiftly went to work to construct a place for these students to live.

“In typical fashion, NFTS immediately took action to raise \$250,000 to construct an on-campus dormitory. They began a national fundraising campaign that was dazzling in its efficiency and organization. Replete with pamphlets, flyers, and mass mail solicitations for donations, NFTS sought support from coast to coast.”⁷⁷

NFTS also made pleas for funds by advertising in the Union Bulletin. Various advertisements included “DORMITORY-originally meant-A PLACE TO SLEEP. Now it also means a place to live and study while attending school, and is the next best thing to a home.”⁷⁸ Another plea in the November 1921 issue of the Union Bulletin shared the following tagline: “The Health of our future rabbis. The health of Hebrew Union College students is being impaired because they are compelled to live under inadequate housing conditions. The need of a Hebrew Union College Dormitory is as imperative from a medical as it is from an education viewpoint.”⁷⁹ This was a compelling flyer sent out to UAHC and NFTS members: “Suppose it was your Son, Away from home poorly housed and expected to devote himself to the severe disciple of study. We are not building Dormitories. We are Building Judaism.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Proffitt, Kevin. "From Dream to Reality: The Hebrew Union Colleges Dormitory." Women of Reform Judaism. October 15, 2013. Accessed April 4, 2015. <http://www.wrj.org/blog/2013/10/15/dream-reality-hebrew-union-college%E2%80%99s-dormitory>.

⁷⁸ "Advertisement." *The Union Bulletin Vol. 11* (Cincinnati), October 1921. Accessed March 11, 2015. <https://goo.gl/5kNPqu>.

⁷⁹ "Advertisement." *The Union Bulletin Vol. 11* (Cincinnati), November 1921. Accessed March 11, 2015. <https://goo.gl/5kNPqu>.

⁸⁰ Printed flyer published by NFTS as seen in “We need Rabbis, What is Life without Religion” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

Clearly NFTS was successful in their fundraising efforts, for the building of the Sisterhood dormitory began in December of 1922, and was completed in January 1925. Since then, hundreds of students have lived in the sisterhood dormitory which today functions as offices for the college.

Uniting during the Hard Times in America

The Great Depression impacted the fundraising capabilities of NFTS, and it was quite difficult to support the causes that were so near and dear to their hearts.

“At the 1935 Assembly President Martha Steinfeld stated, “ I am well aware that economic conditions have tremendously increased the demands made upon our constituents. The urgent call of philanthropy, which each of us had to meet...has made our support of the Scholarship Fund unusually difficult. But as imperative as it is to respond to the needs of the suffering people where ever they may be, equally necessary is it to maintain our institutions of learning and culture.””⁸¹

Despite so many families were worried about their own futures, individuals gave what they could, and NFTS persevered. “Even during the Great Depression, NTFS never failed to deliver at least \$10,000 per year to HUC for scholarship support.”⁸²

As America entered World War II, sisterhoods were boosting their morale by uniting together for the common good. In Professor Karla Goldman’s article “Reform Judaism in America” she states: “During World War II... many women looked to the sisterhood to formalize their contribution to the war effort. They knitted, crocheted, baked cookies, organized blood banks, sold bonds, conducted first-aid classes, and

⁸¹ “NFTS in the Era of the Great Depression” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

⁸² Ellenson, David and Jane F. Karlin, 79.

resettled Jewish refugees, all under the auspices of their congregational sisterhoods.”⁸³

Their husbands, sons, and neighbors were off to serve, and these women wanted to help as well. NFTS president Reina Hartmann spoke to her fellow executive board members on February 15, 1942 about how important their role was to the war effort.

“It is imperative that religious and cultural organizations continue their work and their meetings even in the midst of the war emergency...we are part of the morale building forces of the country and no American woman can truly feel that she is serving democracy if she participates in national defense at the expense of religious or cultural institutions and values. It is our task to find our place...but that place must be integrated with a motivation based on religious values and those concepts of social justice which have come to us throughout the ages as part of our especially rich Jewish heritage.”⁸⁴

Keeping Judaism alive in the synagogue and home life was of extreme importance during war times. By engaging in synagogue life through service attendance, teaching religious school, and observing the holidays at home, these tasks ensured Reform Judaism’s survival in those hard times. Nationally, NFTS joined forces with the National Jewish Welfare Board and with the World Union of Progressive Judaism (WUPJ).

“Working with the Jewish Welfare Board, NFTS created Serve-a-Camp, Serve-a-Hospital, Serve-a-Chaplain, and Veteran services programs. With the World Union, NFTS worked to help women and children in Palestine.”⁸⁵ At home, they continued to work teach, cook, and raise funds, and helped each other cope with life in a Post-War America.

⁸³ Goldman, Karla. "Sharing Stories Inspiring Change." Reform Judaism in the United States | Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed September 24, 2016.
<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reform-judaism-in-united-states>.

⁸⁴ “Minutes of the Executive Board Report of the President” (15 February 1942) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 4. AJA.

⁸⁵ “The 1940’s” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY. 2013.

Sisterhood and NFTY

There were numerous organizations for religious youth, YMCA, founded in the 1840's and the YMHA, founded in the 1870's for Jewish immigrant youth. However, there was a need to form a national organization with a religious background for the Reform Jewish young adults, who were no longer immigrants and observed Reform Judaism in accordance to the movement. NFTS was a founding partner with the National Federation of Temple Youth, or NFTY.

“The Jewish mother has always watched and cared for her young. We Jewish mothers should take pride in, and actively participate in, the development of NFTY. I urge every local president to see that her group has an energetic, cooperative member as its Chairman on Youth Activities.”⁸⁶

At its inception, many members were in their late teens and early twenties. In order to capture this important demographic, the UAHC, NFTS, and NFTB met in 1923 to decide how to “retain the interest of this rising generation of Jews.”⁸⁷ These were young adults that had just lived through the aftermath of World War I, with financial and personal hardships. According to NFTS, the UAHC, and specifically Rabbi George Zepin, director of the UAHC's Department of Synagogue and School Extension, was not moving swiftly enough to form a youth organization.

“Jean Wise May (1881–1972), the daughter of Isaac Mayer Wise, with the backing of the New York chapter of NFTS, had organized a regional youth conference in January of 1924. This successful gathering led to the establishment of the “Union of Temple Young Folks' League of New York State.” In December of 1924 she sent a copy of the constitution of the newly created League to Zepin.

⁸⁶ “Report of the National Committee on Youth Activities” (31 October 1942) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 2, Folder 2-3. AJA.

⁸⁷ Zola, Dr. Gary P. “The Founding of NFTY and the Perennial Campaign for Youth Engagement.” *American Jewish Archives Journal* LXVI, no. 1-2 (2014): 68.

May's message to Zepin was subtle but clear: If the UAHC was not going to take the lead in attending to the needs of Reform Jewish youth, then NFTS would!"⁸⁸

Many groups for young adults within synagogues were forming at this time on their own, but like the sisterhoods, they needed a unifying organization, and NFTS was willing to help in its creation. As Dr. Gary Zola states:

"The leadership of the UAHC showed little enthusiasm for spearheading the establishment of a national youth conference... in 1927, NFTS established a national committee on Young Folks Temple Leagues with corresponding local committees in each of the local sisterhoods...With the support of NFTS's organizational prowess as well as its philanthropic backing, Reform Judaism's drive to establish a national association of temple youth persisted."⁸⁹

Twelve years after its foundation, NFTY held their first convention. "NFTY began just as World War II began, and NFTS worried that it would lose half of the organization to the military. NFTY survived this first test."⁹⁰ Young men and women continued their involvement in NFTY during WWII by attending Biennials and by attending NFTY sponsored events within their hometowns.

NFTS always knew how important it was to engage the next generation, especially in light of Judaism's declining numbers post-World War II. "NFTY's launch on the national level coincided with the American Jewish community's growing recognition in the wake of the destruction of European Jewry."⁹¹ It was difficult in the wake of so much destruction, of a peoplehood to establish a federation that evoked a

⁸⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁰ "The Birth of NFTY" *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

⁹¹ Krasner, Jonathan. "Dreaming Dreams and Seeing Visions: NFTS and the Early History of the National Federation of Temple Youth" In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 206.

sense of hope for the future. However, it was essential for the preservation of Reform Judaism. Historian Jonathan Sarna states that the founding of NFTY was “a defensive response to adversity and a form of cultural resistance.”⁹²

The demographics of NFTY went through a transformation soon after the war ended, and the focus of NFTY shifted to high school aged students. Rabbi Samuel Cook, the regional advisor for the state of Pennsylvania “was convinced that post-confirmation youth represented the Reform movement’s weakest link. A program designed specifically for teens would shore up their loyalty to Judaism in general...before they went off to college.”⁹³ The post confirmation youth could become disinterested in synagogue life and NFTY would be the organization to inspire their continued involvement.

Besides being financially supported by NFTS for the first twenty years of its existence, NFTS also supported NFTY with the utmost amount of devotion, ensuring that there were local NFTY groups for young members of their synagogues to belong to.

Generations of youth have stated that their involvement in NFTY encouraged them to set goals. Their involvement in NFTY provided them the leadership and organizational skills to become successful in their chosen fields. Looking back on the positive impact NFTY had on their lives, many members have also elected to become leaders in the Reform movement, as clergy or as lay leaders.

In 1989, former NFTY president Steven Derringer addressed the members at the NFTY at 50 celebration:

⁹² Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.271.

⁹³ Krasner, 227.

“Today I insist that Sisterhood’s greatest accomplishment is the creation of NFTY 49 years ago. By establishing an organization that provides our youth with a challenging, creative, and exciting expression of Judaism. Sisterhood created one of the greatest Jewish life insurance policies that the UAHHC has ever known.”⁹⁴

Rosanne M. Selfon, a past president of WRJ greeted the members of NFTY at their national convention in 2013 and the acknowledgement of the role sisterhood played in the Jewish lives of NFTY members was evident by their responses.

“On Saturday evening, I asked the more than 860 kids how many were helped by local sisterhoods to get to L.A., and hundreds of hands shot up. They know they received *B’nai Mitzvah* and Confirmation gifts from their sisterhoods. They know sisterhood scholarships help get them to a URJ camp! And they learned WRJ is the largest donor they have (next to the Jim Joseph Foundation) today. They were VERY aware WRJ was responsible for founding NFTY.”⁹⁵

Jordan Rodnizki, NFTY Programming Vice President in 2013 encapsulates the importance of WRJ. “I am forever indebted to the remarkable generosity of my sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors – for without them, I wouldn’t be the involved Jewish adult I am today.”⁹⁶ NFTS continues its support of NFTY, helping to rear the next generation of Jewish leaders.

⁹⁴ “The Birth of NFTY” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

⁹⁵ Selfon, Rosanne M. "Greetings from Los Angeles and NFTY Convention 2013!" NFTY. February 21, 2013. Accessed January 24, 2016.

<https://nfty.org/2013/02/21/greetings-from-los-angeles-and-nfty-convention-2013/>.

⁹⁶ "Yom Huledet Sameach, WRJ!" NFTY. April 30, 2013. Accessed July 11, 2016. <https://nfty.org/2013/04/30/yom-huledet-sameach-wrj/>.

The Synagogue Cookbook

The Sisterhood synagogue cookbook has been in existence longer than NFTS itself. To Jewish women, both immigrants and those who had family roots deeply imbedded in their communities, the sisterhood cookbook ensured that recipes passed down from generation to generation would be prepared and insure a home's "Jewishness", if they lived in a different place from their families. The pioneering scholar of Jewish cookbooks, Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett, reminds us "these books are an invaluable resource of the social historian," in part because they implicitly "project an image of the ideal Jewish woman and the world she manages from her post in the home."⁹⁷ The ideal Jewish women would maintain a Jewish household and knew how to prepare meals for both everyday and the various holidays.

Some of the cookbooks were compiled and given out for free; others were sold to members of the congregation and the outlying community of members of other synagogues. "To raise funds, virtually every synagogue in the country published a cookbook that mixed its members' regional specialties and their family's heirloom Jewish recipes."⁹⁸

Occasionally, the proceeds from the sale of a sisterhood cookbook went to help people outside of their community. "The earliest charitable cookbooks in the U.S. date to the Civil War, when Northern women's groups -- including the Hebrew Ladies Aid

⁹⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "The Kosher Gourmet in the Nineteenth Century Kitchen: Three Jewish Cookbooks in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Gastronomy* 2, no. 4, Winter 1986-87, 53.

⁹⁸ Ferris, Marcie Cohen. "From the Recipe File of Luba Cohen." In *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, edited by Pamela Nadell, 269. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2003.

Society of Pittsburgh -- raised money in a variety of ways to support the Sanitary Commission of the Union Army.”⁹⁹

Temple Emanu-El of San Francisco published their cookbook, *Soup to Nuts* in 1931. “Through the sale of these books, we provide funds for unemployment emergencies. Not one dollar from donations or sales has been used for any other purpose.”¹⁰⁰ Professor Deborah Dash Moore and student Noa Gutterman described the process of the assemblage of the Temple Emanu-El cookbook. “Unemployed girls were hired to stencil, mimeograph, and assemble the cookbook, even though it would have been cheaper to print it. The sisterhood, however, was pleased to report that the first edition of five hundred copies sold out in a month. Sales reached across the United States and abroad.”¹⁰¹

Although most cookbooks bring a sizeable amount of money into a synagogue, some cookbooks prove more successful than one could ever imagine. The sisterhood cookbook from Rockdale Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio titled *In the Beginning-A Collection of Hors D’oeuvres* has gone through 17 printings and raised over \$1 million dollars.

“The women eventually established an endowment to benefit the temple, but initially they used the money to fund various innovative projects. They underwrote scholarships for teenagers to visit Israel and attend camp...they helped fund “Rock Dial”, a program that brought prayer services over the phone to those homebound or in the hospital. Although they contributed to renovations

⁹⁹ Berg, Martha. "From the Archives." Rauh Jewish Archives. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.jewishhistoryhqc.org/uploads/ac89c254-30fa-436c-97b7-f8f551c5de20.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood. *Soup to Nuts: Cookbook for Epicures*. 6th ed. San Francisco: Sisterhood House, 1934

¹⁰¹ Moore, Deborah Dash and Noa Gutterman “Cooking Reform Judaism” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 142

of Rockdale Temple, in general they decided to use the money for “social dividends”, to support items not covered in the regular temple budget.”¹⁰²

This cookbook trend is far reaching today. Through the Internet, one can purchase a sisterhood cookbook from a foreign country, therefore introducing their families to holiday recipes that are prepared by sisterhood women in Panama, the Netherlands or Brazil.¹⁰³

Regional recipes and ingredients also played an important role in a sisterhood cookbook. When new settlers moved to unfamiliar places, they were presented with ingredients that did not exist where they previously lived, such as Crisco, collard greens and processed cheeses. These new ingredients opened up a new world of recipes.

“This blending of foodways is seen the in temple’s cookbook [Congregation B.Nai Israel, Leawood, KS].... titled A Little Bit of This & A Little Bit of That. It includes recipes for traditional Jewish foods, such as "Traditional Gefilte Fish," "Cholent," "Nicha’s Noodle Kugel," and "Rabbi Cohon’s Favorite Rugelach," as well as Southern fare, such as "Chicken Pot Pie," "Sweet Potato Soufflé," and "Corn Muffins.”¹⁰⁴

The cookbooks became a biography of the history of the town, a permanent record of the food memories of its members.

“They are handwritten, typed, computer generated, or professionally typeset. Some books have colorful hard covers and are bound with glue; others use a heavy paper cover and are bound with either a plastic or spiral coil. Some cookbooks are in loose-leaf binders and a few are bound with large silver rings. One Sisterhood printed the recipes on 5” x 8” file cards and stored them in a metal filing box that the women decorated using decoupage. While some cookbooks are

¹⁰² Ibid., 152.

¹⁰³ See Example 2: *Anniversary Cookbook*. Sanocho Popular (Native Soup). Panama City, Panama: Kol Tifereth Israel, 1957.

¹⁰⁴ Norman, Carrie. "Studying Food, Gender, and Identity among the Religious Communities of Upstate South Carolina and Western North Carolina." The Pluralism Project. Accessed February 1, 2015. <http://pluralism.org/affiliate/corrie-norman/>.

illustrated professionally, others contain artwork drawn by Sisterhood members or their children. One cookbook is a large-print book.”¹⁰⁵

Some of the sisterhood cookbooks consisted of only kosher recipes, others had ingredients like shellfish and pork, or mixed milk ingredients with meat. Recipes like Carol Perlman’s shrimp mold¹⁰⁶, and roasted game hens with pineapple glaze¹⁰⁷ were found in some sisterhood cookbooks. In the *Can Do Cookery* volume from Temple Sinai (New Orleans, LA) “recipes made from crabmeat and crawfish far outnumber those made with matzoh meal.”¹⁰⁸ Many sisterhood cookbooks were written with recipes to serve at the Jewish holidays, so in order not to offend anyone at the table, a majority of the recipes would not mix milk and meat or contain shellfish or pork. One could find many recipes for gefilte fish in sisterhood cookbooks as well, very similar to the one found in *Passover Pleasers*, the sisterhood cookbook from Temple Beth Am in Warwick, Rhode Island.¹⁰⁹

“In the case of Reform Jewish women, their cookbooks let us explore what it means to be both a religiously affiliated Jewish woman and, at the same time, to modify *kashrut* to accommodate modern American tastes.”¹¹⁰ Restaurants around their homes,

¹⁰⁵ Apfel, Nancy J. "Salute to the WRJ Cookbook Collection." Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://blogs.rj.org/wrj/2013/02/05/women-of-reform-judaism-cookbook-collection/>.

¹⁰⁶ See Example 3. Sisterhood of Beth Shalom Synagogue and B’nai Israel-Baton Rouge, LA. *The Eleventh Commandment Cookbook: (Thou Shalt Not Make Reservations)*. Baton Rouge, LA: Beth Shalom Synagogue.

¹⁰⁷ See Example 4. "Roast Game Hen with Pineapple Glaze." Meat entrees. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://templeisraelomaha.com/community/cook-book-sp-744/category/meat-entrees/2>.

¹⁰⁸ Ferris, Marcie Cohen. *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.126

¹⁰⁹ See Example 5. *Passover Pleasers*. Warwick, RI: Sisterhood of Temple Beth Am. Not dated.

¹¹⁰ Moore, Deborah Dash and Noa Gutterman. 137.

their neighbors, and recipes in the local newspaper had an influence of the cuisine choices of the Reform Jewish American home.

“Our Sisters’ Recipes [Temple Rodef Shalom Pittsburgh, PA] reflects its community in many ways: a number of the recipes originate in German cooking styles, some are definitely not kosher, they do not include traditional Jewish holiday dishes, they mirror a social group that would have had “kitchen help” to put on full-scale dinner parties, and they do not demonstrate significant ethnic differences from the mainstream American cuisine of their time. Measurements and oven temperatures tend to be imprecise.”¹¹¹

Although Rabbis had authority in the sanctuary, sisterhoods were in charge of the synagogue kitchen and the recipes in their cookbooks. Dash and Gutterman agree.

“Rabbis undoubtedly influenced cookbooks, although it is hard to gauge the effect of their leadership on what was largely a women’s project.”¹¹² The *kashrut*, or the Jewish dietary laws of the synagogue’s kitchen and the dietary laws of the households dictated the type of recipes that would appear in the cookbooks.

Although there may be fewer homemade recipes on the *oneg* table today, many sisterhood groups remain in charge of food within their congregations. The recipes will live on, both in written and cooked form to be enjoyed by future generations.

The Synagogue Gift Shop

Greeting cards, *mezuzot*, candlesticks, *chanukiyot*, Seder plates, *yahrzeit* candles: these were the typical items that one would find in their synagogue gift shop in the mid-20th century. Sisterhoods established the synagogue gift shop in order to encourage home observance and ritual and to teach the women of the synagogue how to use such items.

¹¹¹ Berg, Martha. "From the Archives." Rauh Jewish Archives. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.jewishhistoryhqc.org/uploads/ac89c254-30fa-436c-97b7-f8f551c5de20.pdf>.

¹¹² Moore, Deborah Dash and Noa Gutterman.145.

The display of goods also created a small “Jewish Museum”, except the art and artifacts were available for purchase. Professor of Jewish History Joellyn Wallen Zollman describes the purpose of the gift shop. “Not only did the sale of Judaica within the Temple foster Jewish ritual practice within the home, a recurrent concern for NFTS, it also helped provide a steady source of income for the local groups.”¹¹³ The funds that were generated through the purchase of goods directly through the synagogue financed programs that benefitted all of its members such as new ark covers, prayer books and *onegs*.

Former NFTS Executive Director Jane Evans was instrumental in the conception of the synagogue gift shop. Items such as *Seder* plates and *yahrzeit* candles needed explanations to properly utilize them at the correct times and with the correct items.

“By marketing Jewish ceremonial objects, including many from the new state of Israel; teaching women what these objects were and how to use them; and encouraging them to decorate their homes with Jewish symbols and artifacts, synagogue gift shops advanced some of her fondest goals. Through such activities, she...contributed to the religious transformation of Reform Judaism, strengthening its ties to Zion and to the Jewish people as a whole.”¹¹⁴

The synagogue gift shop was the only place for the Jewish community to purchase Judaica, especially in areas where synagogues are the only Jewish gathering

¹¹³ Zollman, Joellyn Wallen. “Sisterhood Gift Shops and the NFTS Campaign for Home Observance” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013 See Joellyn Wallen Zollman, “Shopping for a Future: A History of the American Synagogue Gift Shop” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2002).

¹¹⁴ Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism: a History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 253. Citing “Jane Evans: A Builder of Reform Judaism,” *Reform Judaism* 12 (Fall 1983): 36

place for many miles. They were not only a way to raise money, but also served as a way to service the Jewish family. Zollman explains: “The synagogue gift shop made particular efforts to reach young, female congregants who were just setting up Jewish homes. In turn, the newly married were among their best workers and customers.”¹¹⁵ Although some ritual items were inherited, some of the young women wanted to acquire their own ritual items in the style of the time to grace their homes.

In 1963, NFTS published brochures titled “Model Judaica Shop” and “Let’s Talk Shop” to instruct sisterhoods on what to purchase for their gift shops. “Both guides recommended replicas of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Israeli coin jewelry, brass ”patina” Judaica and decorative objects.”¹¹⁶ These gifts were purchased directly from Israeli merchants, and sisterhoods felt that by buying them, they were supporting the new Jewish state. Many of these “ceremonial objects” have become heirlooms to families and their designs brought a piece of Israel into their homes.

In some synagogues, the members of sisterhood, and local artists display their Judaic handiworks within the synagogue gift shop. At Temple Shomer Emunim in Toledo, Ohio, there was a sisterhood member who designed wire *kippot*, a painter who created images of heroes from the Bible, and a woodworker who produced *challah*-cutting boards. Many of these items were donated to the gift shop, and all of the proceeds would benefit the causes that sisterhood supported. The community displayed them proudly and anyone from Toledo knew who created that piece of Judaic art.

¹¹⁵ Zollman, Joellyn Wallen. *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism* 172-73.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

With the advancement in retail practices, like the Internet, many sisterhood gift shops today have become more like museum displays than shops. With a few words typed on a computer keyboard, one can purchase the same *Kiddush* cup or tallit from hundreds of vendors around the world. However, if you are in immediate need of a *Bar Mitzvah* card, or a *yahrzeit* candle, your sisterhood gift shop will always have them on hand.

Sisterhood in the Suburbs

As the middle of the 20th century approached, NFTS was busy rebuilding from the war years, as well as making significant developments in Reform Judaism. Professor Jack Wertheimer explains the role of sisterhoods in the life of a synagogue. "Sisterhoods were critical to the flourishing of synagogue organizational life in the post-war era, sustaining community in older congregations and creating new frameworks as old and new congregations found their way to the suburbs."¹¹⁷ As Jews moved out of the cramped dwellings of major American cities, there was a need for more synagogues in the outlying communities. "During just one two-year period of the 1950s... 50 (new synagogues) affiliated with the UAHC."¹¹⁸ Women, who eventually formed sisterhood groups within these synagogues, also helped families' transition from city to suburban life.

¹¹⁷ Goldman, Karla. *Beyond the Synagogue gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000. 212

¹¹⁸ Wertheimer, Jack. "Recent Trends in American Judaism." *American Jewish Year Book*, 1989, 65.

As Jewish families moved into the suburbs, they were faced with many questions regarding their own Jewish identity. Sociologist Dr. Nathan Glazer explains the social affect that Christian neighbors had on their Jewish neighbors.

“In this situation, the religious behavior of the Christian neighbor began to impinge on the consciousness and conduct of the Jewish suburbanite...when Sunday came, it was embarrassing to have the children playing outside while the Christian children went to Sunday school and church. In moving from the city to the suburbs, the second generation had to become self-conscious about religion.”¹¹⁹

It was a sensitivity and self-consciousness that they did not have to face when living solely amongst Jews because when they were in synagogue services, so were their neighbors.

There were many families that moved into suburbs out west, far from the major cities of the East Coast. Demographers Dr. Sidney and Alice Goldstein state: “The immigrants in the 1940’s and 1950’s were typical of the larger movement to the West...Jews seeking greater freedom “from the constraints of traditional Jewish communities.”¹²⁰ Sisterhood was waiting to help the new families adjust to a new life.

Thelma Press, Sisterhood president of Congregation Emanu-el in Redlands, CA from 1956 to 1957, remembers the second half of the decade bringing an influx of new residents to the community. “We hosted luncheons for new temple members, and we’d invite the wives to come to Sisterhood,” she said. “For each one, I’d ask a member to be a

¹¹⁹ Glazer, Nathan. *American Judaism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957. 118.

¹²⁰ Goldstein, Sidney, and Alice Goldstein. *Jews on the Move: Implications for Jewish Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.99.

‘big sister,’ and we would follow up and check on them...the women were the connection between the families and the temple.”¹²¹

The suburban family became the new “American” family, and their concerns mirrored the concerns of their non-Jewish neighbors. Glazer describes the discussions Jewish women would partake in regarding family life. “The problems of how to raise the children, how to educate them, where to live so that they would have suitable playmates...made up a good part of middle-class conversation.”¹²² For young Jewish women, these discussions would happen within the synagogue, and would result in new friendships. This changed the function of the synagogue, from primarily a place of worship, to a place of socialization.

The children socially adapted to their integrated communities far sooner than their mothers did. While the children played with their classmates, the women mainly socialized with their fellow sisterhood members. Moore describes the social habits of the young Jewish couples: “Jews pursued suburban leisure and recreation activities almost exclusively with other Jews, behavior that came to be seen as typically Jewish.”¹²³

When women looked for a synagogue to belong to when families relocated to the suburbs, the supplementary activities that a synagogue offered were more important than worship.

¹²¹ Sweet, Stuart. "Congregation Emanu El - 1950s." Congregation Emanu El - 1950s. Accessed October 24, 2016. <http://www.emanuelsb.org/sisterhood/a-sisterhood-history-introductions/1950s>.

¹²² Glazer, 122.

¹²³ Moore, Deborah Dash. "Sharing Stories Inspiring Change." Suburbanization in the United States | Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed November 24, 2016. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/suburbanization-in-united-states>.

“The religious services often seemed the least vital of the many “services” supplied by the new synagogues. The children almost certainly went to the school, the teen-agers very likely went to the dances, the women probably joined the sisterhood, the men possibly joined the brotherhood, and last-and the rabbi often asked himself if it was also least-were the religious services...”¹²⁴

Given the traditional gender roles, members of sisterhood operated within, their success in funding causes and their enthusiasm for growth in the Reform movement community has been unabated. However traditional, there was an underlying voice that beckoned to be heard, and this voice became distinct as they began fundraising for NFTS themselves.

¹²⁴ Glazer, 126.

Chapter 3: Fundraising For Themselves, By Themselves

One of the most powerful aspects of an organization for NFTS was the ability to decide what causes their fundraising benefitted as well as deciding how the money would be raised. Two major fundraising endeavors for NFTS were the Jewish Art Calendar and the Uniongram. Funds generated benefitted the treasuries of the local sisterhoods, as well as helping the national organization. “A number of Sisterhoods report this money used in maintaining Religious Schools, and one Sisterhood is always assured of a fund to send a delegate to the Biennial Convention through its profit from the “Jewish Art Calendar””.¹²⁵ After the various costs for production of Uniongrams, most synagogue sisterhoods used their profits to benefit their free religious schools as well. “NFTS used their profits for HUC scholarships and for their Religious Education fund.”¹²⁶ Through the sale of both items, NFTS financially assisted students and themselves.

The Jewish Art Calendar

Very early on in the history of NFTS, the calendar was introduced as a means to raise funds for individual sisterhoods, as well as for NFTS. “The images within the calendars depicted art from a wide range of Jewish history, from paintings, to photographs.”¹²⁷ It also provided an opportunity for more modern Jewish artists to

¹²⁵ “Report of the National Committee of Religion” (31 October 1919) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

¹²⁶ “Report of the National Committee on Uniongrams” (31 October 31 1940) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 4. AJA.

¹²⁷ See Examples 6 and 7. NFTS Art Calendars from 1936 and 2013-14.

showcase their talents to a much wider audience, and broadened the concept of art appreciation to all.

The calendar also served as a reminder to prepare for the tasks at hand to observe Judaism at home. Families would not have to purchase two calendars, one for secular dates and another for the dates of the religious holidays. “Jewish Holiday dates are all listed, so there is no last minute rush for Chanuko [sic] gift, matsos, or Confirmation dresses...And, Bible readings for each Sabbath tend to remind us in the midst of our busy lives of the ideals for which we strive.”¹²⁸

According to the Executive board notes of 1913: “Artistic calendars can be gotten up in quantities at a cost of about fifteen cents a piece, and quite fine ones at a cost of twenty-five cents. These could be sold at cost to our members.”¹²⁹ In 1913, NFTS sold 4,700 calendars; by 1927 sales had grown to over 18,000.¹³⁰ Not only were they purchased for the families of sisterhood members; they were frequently given as gifts.

NFTS was responsible for all aspects of production, from the choice of art and how it was distributed. NFTS would decide how to disperse the proceeds earned without the influence of any other organization or persons.

“While local sisterhoods could decide how to use the money, NFTS’s National Committee on Hebrew Union Scholarships helped direct how funds could be used: for local sisterhoods’ discretionary needs but also as “an additional source

¹²⁸ "Letter to Every Chairman." Letter to Committee of Uniongrams. MS-73 Box E-4, Folder 1, AJA.

¹²⁹ “National Committee on Religion” (2 July 1913) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

¹³⁰ “The First Art Calendar” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

of revenue to make up for the 25 cents per capita abstracted for the Scholarship Fund”—the minimum required.”¹³¹

Sisterhoods would advertise their calendars to the members and the community at large, through word of mouth, and send them to stores in the hope that they would stock them. NFTS would also secure advertisements in various Reform publications. The information varied from year to year, as world events affected what would be printed in various parts of the calendar. “The 1943-45 calendar included information on air raid precautions and instructions on fighting fire bombs, compliments of the U.S. Office of Civil Defense.”¹³² The art that was chosen was also influenced by the world outside the United States. “Palestine featured centrally as the authentic site of the Jewish past in NFTS Jewish art calendars. All of the extant calendars from 1913 to 1927 depict biblical life in the Holy Land, and the majority from 1929 to 1951 invokes Palestine.”¹³³

Even today, artists are excited about their work being chosen for the WRJ calendar. As Harriet Goren wrote in her blog:

“I’m very happy and honored to announce that **I’m this year’s featured artist** for the 5775/2014-2015 Women of Reform Judaism Art Calendar! This spiral-bound desk calendar has been printed annually for over 100 years, each year including a bio, photo, and 5-6 pieces with commentary from an individual artist.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ “Report of the National Committee on Hebrew Union Scholarships” (19 January 1915) MS-73, Box A-1, Vol. 1, AJA.

¹³² Jacobs, Arielle. “WRJ Art Calendar.” Women of Reform Judaism. July 23, 2013. Accessed August 16, 2015. <http://www.wrj.org/blog/2013/07/23/wrj-art-calendar>.

¹³³ See Example 6. Carr, Jessica. “Picturing Palestine: Visual Narrative in the Jewish Art Calendars of Nation Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.” *The American Jewish Archives* LXVI, no. 1&2 (2014): 6.

¹³⁴ Goren, Harriet. “I’m the featured artist for the WRJ 5775 Calendar!” I’m the featured artist for the WRJ 5775 Calendar! - Goren Judaica. Accessed September 28, 2016. <http://www.gorenjudaica.com/blogs/news/15277697-im-the-featured-artist-for-the-wrj-5775-calendar>.

Harriet Goren was one of the last artists to have her work featured in a WRJ calendar. WRJ ceased publishing their calendar in 2015 since so many people now utilize the calendar on their phone or computer. It proved to no longer make financial sense to spend the time and energy to produce it.

Uniongrams

At the founding meeting of NFTS, the concept of the Uniongram came to fruition. According to Mrs. Blanche Stoltz, a young German newlywed had received numerous notes all in the same kind of envelope from her Jewish girls' club back in Germany. By sending these notes, the group had raised money for charity.¹³⁵ Former HUC-JIR Professor Dr. Carole Balin describes the publicizing of the Uniongram. NFTS had an “imaginative fundraising campaign to market and sell the Uniongram: the blank page that was described as a “Telegram substitute” but was conveyed via the U.S. Postal Service and so functioned like a greeting card.”¹³⁶ For 25 cents, sisterhood members could send others greetings: in celebration of a wedding, bar mitzvah or birthday. The creation of the Uniongram was a step towards gaining independence. They used their own money to purchase them, they didn't have to ask their husbands to purchase them on their behalf. Women could choose to send one to mark any occasion they wanted; for example, their sisterhood president's birthday, or the birth of a member's grandchild.

¹³⁵ “The Birth of the Uniongram” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹³⁶ Balin, Carole. “Get the Uniongram Habit: NFTS's Imaginative Fundraising Campaign 1913-53” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 185.

The cost of a Uniongram was relatively inexpensive.

“Uniongrams were twenty-five cents a piece, or a book of four for \$1.00...that price held steady until at least 1953, despite the fact that \$1.00 in 1913 was equivalent to \$2.70 forty years later. Twenty cents of every Uniongram sold was “returned” to the local sisterhood to be applied toward its education scholarship fund, while the national office retained the remaining five cents to cover expenses.”¹³⁷

The more Uniongrams sold within the congregation, the greater financial support sisterhood was able to provide to its local students. Sisterhoods would often sell them at a profit to raise even more funds for local programming.¹³⁸

“In the 1920’s, a pamphlet called “*How to Use A Uniongram*” instructed, “Keep a book of Uniongrams on your desk so they will be accessible as occasion demands or telephone the chairman of your Uniongram committee or the secretary of your sisterhood and give her a message to be forwarded at once to its proper destination. Allow sufficient time for transmission...for the Uniongram is sent like an ordinary letter. The recipient knows that you have given the message thought...He is further gratified to know that an attention which gives pleasure to him is bringing help to others.”¹³⁹

Many women followed the advice of this pamphlet and sent numerous Uniongrams.

“From 1913, when the National Committee on Uniongram was established...until 1953, sisterhood members sold close to three million Uniongrams, raising more than \$500,000 for causes related to Jewish education.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Balin, *Sisterhood*. 189

¹³⁸ According to their websites, Temple B’nai Emet in Simi Valley, CA charges \$3 per Uniongram, while Temple Chai in Skokie, IL charges \$5 per Uniongram. WRJ sells each Uniongram for \$1 each, not including postage.

¹³⁹ “The Birth of the Uniongram” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ See Table 1 in *Sisterhood “Get the Uniongram Habit: NFTS’s Imaginative Fundraising Campaign 1913-53”*. 186.

As the styles changed in the outside world, so too did the design of the Uniongram.¹⁴¹ Uniongrams were orange at first, and then they were printed in lavender and grey. Balin elucidates the later design of the Uniongram. “The lavender-and-grey Uniongram that became standard by the 1920’s blended elements of fin-de-siècle artistry with Jewish symbolism, Western-Union-esque fonts and a dash of NFTS pride...In keeping with the era’s aesthetic, the illustrations evoke the beaux-arts.”¹⁴² Unlike other forms of greeting, the Uniongram was rich with Jewish symbols, like the Star of David, candelabras, as well as a verse from Talmud, “Speech is the messenger of the heart.” If one looks carefully, NFTS’s insignia is held within the stars of David above the candelabras. Goldman states that the insignia is not a focal point on the Uniongram, believing that women were not to be the focus.

“For all their initiative and ingenuity, the women of sisterhood drew little attention to themselves, remaining in the background, content to hand over the proceeds of their zealous fundraising efforts, year after year, to the male leadership of the UAHC in the service of, primarily, men’s education.”¹⁴³

Although this statement may have been true at the start of the Uniongram campaign, not long after the women of sisterhood took the initiative to decide how the money from the sale of Uniongrams, and various other fundraising campaigns would be dispersed.

The Uniongram of the 1940’s changed in style from its previous design. Two candelabras were replaced with one, and the Talmud passage was relocated from the top of the Uniongram to the bottom in a larger font. Perhaps the most noticeable difference

¹⁴¹ See Examples 8, 9 and 10 for samples of various Uniongrams throughout the past 100 years.

¹⁴² Balin. *Sisterhood*. 185.

¹⁴³ Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, 145.

symbolically was NFTS's insignia, larger and removed from inside of the Star of David, which was removed entirely from the Uniongram.

January 21st, 1940 was the first National Uniongram Day, in honor of the 27th birthday of NFTS. Since then, sisterhoods around the world send greetings to one another in celebration and many sisterhoods choose to hold special events to mark this momentous historical occasion. In the 1950's, the proceeds of Uniongram sales went into the YES fund (Youth, Education and Sisterhood) to provide funds to various programs in a way that no individual or synagogue sisterhood could manage to do alone.

In the 1970's, the style of the Uniongram changed yet again with the times. "The Uniongram began to become more diverse, new and more beautiful designs were created...and sales increased substantially...Later, Goldengrams were added, as well as High Holiday cards, placemats and tribute cards."¹⁴⁴ The creation of new and different types of cards presented the Uniongram as a more versatile method of correspondence.

Families saved Uniongrams; much like one saves a greeting card, tucking them away in albums next to wedding and bar mitzvah pictures. Sisterhoods within synagogues have retained Uniongrams sent to the clergy for the High Holy Days' and ones sent to the Sisterhood president when elected.

The most popular Uniongram design of the 21st century no longer incorporates the Jewish symbols of the candelabra or Star of David. Rather, WRJ's insignia and leaves are incorporated into its design. The Talmud quote remains to this day.

There are now Uniongrams in all sizes, from greeting card sized that are sent to individuals, to large Uniongrams that could be signed by many people. Some

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 145.

synagogues have even made it possible to send a Uniongram as an E-card. From paper and stamps, to the Internet, the Uniongram has survived.

Helping The Reform Movement

Like many organizations, the UAHC and the Reform movement had financial difficulties. Jewish Education Professor Dr. Jonathan Krasner believes: “The Depression also had a dire affect on communal institutions as funding sources dried up.”¹⁴⁵ NFTS was in a position to finance a loan to them, for even in the midst of the Depression, NFTS gained seven new sisterhoods.¹⁴⁶ In the financial notes of 1949, it states that the UAHC borrowed \$30,000 from NFTS in 1930, and that the UAHC was continuing to pay NFTS the loan back with interest.¹⁴⁷ As synagogue and communities rebounded from the financial and personal devastations of the Depression and World War I and II, NFTS continued to move optimistically forward. As Reform Judaism continued its growth, its headquarters necessitated its relocation to New York. In *Sisterhood*, American Jewish History Professor Rebecca Kobrin states:

“Rallying behind the idea that the Reform Movement needed a new home so that it could have “a stronger presence in North America’s largest Jewish community,” the women of NFTS raised \$500,000 ...for the UAHC offices. Since this geographic reorientation was mired in controversy, the...support of NFTS demonstrated the widespread popular support for this historic move, transforming this female ‘auxiliary’ into a major artery of the Reform movement.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Krasner, Jonathan. "American Jews Between the Wars." My Jewish Learning. Accessed August 17, 2016. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/american-jews-between-the-wars/>.

¹⁴⁶ “Report on the Committee on National Committee of Temple Sisterhoods ”UAHC 61st Annual Report (1936)

¹⁴⁷ “NFTS Statement of Financial Situation” (31 October 1949) Proceedings of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, MS-73, Box 1, Vol. 5, AJA.

¹⁴⁸ Kobrin, Rebecca. "Latest Updates." Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://blogs.rj.org/wrj/2013/05/28/the-house-that-jane-evans-and-the-nfts-built/>.

This move, which changed Reform Judaism, would not have been possible without the leadership of NFTS Executive Director, Jane Evans. Jane Evans served as the Executive Director of NFTS from 1933, until 1976. During her 34-year tenure, she accomplished so much that enhanced both NFTS and Reform Judaism today. Evans was an advocate of the one-on-one meeting, personally traveling to sisterhoods across the nation. “Evans realized the importance of personally interacting with local chapters to “sell” NFTS and Reform Judaism. “In many ways”, according to UAHC President Yoffie, Evans was “the ultimate company man,” as “she was utterly devoted to this Union-in many ways the very backbone of this Union.””¹⁴⁹ Perhaps one of her most considerable accomplishments, for NFTS and Reform Judaism, was the construction of the House of Living Judaism in New York City. “Under Evans’s supervision, NFTS raised over \$500,000 for the project in less than three years.”¹⁵⁰ Sisterhoods rallied behind its construction, and Mrs. Paula Ackerman, speaking on behalf of small congregations of NFTS, quantified its importance to the movement and to the advancement of women within the movement.

“Why should the Sisterhoods build the House of Living Judaism? Why not? I say unhesitatingly that I think it is the most appropriate activity we’ve undertaken. It not only graciously reciprocates our debt to the UAHC for emancipating the Jewish woman-for taking her out of relegated galleries and placing her on Temple Boards and Union Commissions, but it actually demonstrates this new freedom.

¹⁴⁹ Kobrin, Rebecca. “The House [of Living Judaism] that Jane Evans and NFTS Built, 1951” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 91.

¹⁵⁰ Kobrin, 98.

Heretofore, we have only been asked to keep the home fires burning, and tend the eternal lights. Now we emerge as builders of the House as well.”¹⁵¹

In Rabbi Eisendrath’s speech at the cornerstone laying ceremony of the House of Living Judaism on November 19, 1950 he declared:

“This imposing edifice rising on the very main street of America is intended to be no mere structure of steel and stone, no museum of antiquities but rather a House of Living Judaism, the very dynamic center of Jewish religious life in America, whence will flow instructions to our children, guidance to our youth, and a challenge to the men and women of our time.”¹⁵²

The NFTS’s national project of the 1940’s was “A Book of Living Judaism, in which people could add their names for a fee paid in cash or war stamps. This fund was then converted into war bonds, and then later launched the House of Living Judaism Fund to build the Union’s new headquarters in New York.”¹⁵³ This book was monumental on many levels, for it provided much-needed funds. Kobrin believes that the book “allowed women for the first time to demonstrate publicly both their commitment to the Reform movement as well as the extent to which they had financially recovered from the Great Depression.”¹⁵⁴ It allowed sisterhood women to be listed as their own entity, that the cause was important to them as an individual.

Throughout its narrative, NFTS and sisterhoods have made a lasting impact on their own communities, and the world. Their contributions are recognized by their accomplishments in fundraising, social services and long-term relationships.

¹⁵¹ Ackerman, Paula. “Participation of Small Sisterhoods: House of Living Judaism Campaign” (14 November 1948) Box 2, Folder 4. AJA.

¹⁵² “NFTS Builds a House of Living Judaism” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹⁵³ “The 1940’s” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Kobrin, *Sisterhood*. 91.

Chapter 4: Emerging Feminism

Since Jewish women immigrated to the United States, there have been movements with women's activism, particularly in the areas of peace, education and the well being of others. History Professor Melissa Klapper describes how a woman's Jewish faith stimulated their desire to rally behind a cause.

“Their Jewishness enhanced both their own activism and the contributions they could make to the larger movements. Ultimately they also brought their feminist interests to bear on their Jewish communal life, as Jewish suffragists did when they demanded greater representation in the synagogue, or as Jewish birth control activists did when they examined the relationship of Jewish law to contraception, or as Jewish peace activists did when they called on biblical texts about peace and pointed out the special interest of a diasporic group in ending war.”¹⁵⁵

Sisterhood women and NFTS have always acted on behalf of those in need, as well as fighting for egalitarianism within Judaism, and throughout the world. Founder Blu Greenberg of the Jewish Feminist Orthodox Alliance states: “As Jews, we affirm that there is value and validity in serving and giving to others-in volunteer action and professional work, in being good family members and friends, in doing good works.”¹⁵⁶ This also proved true when it came to educating themselves in the practices of Reform Judaism. For many years, women attended, but did not participate. Their persistence in fostering egalitarian worship was an early feminist accomplishment.

Starting the organization itself was also a feminist act. NFTS would be only the second national Jewish organization to be founded by women, behind the National Council of Jewish Women in 1893. Not everyone was supportive of its establishment,

¹⁵⁵ Klapper, Melissa R. *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890-1940*. New York: New York University Press, 2013. 208.

¹⁵⁶ Greenberg, Blu. “Judaism and Feminism,” *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 189.

making it difficult for the organization to gain respect within the Jewish community.

NFTS President Carrie Simon describes in her speech:

“Two years ago in Cincinnati amid the misgivings of some and the enthusiasm of others the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods saw the light of day. There it was that delegates from forty-nine societies of women effected a permanent organization, with a view of putting Jewish womanhood on the road of highest usefulness to the cause of American Israel.”¹⁵⁷

Although “sisterhood” and “feminism” were not synonymous with each other during the founding of NFTS, historians like Dr. Gary Zola are connecting the terms to describe what feminism may have looked like during the beginning years of sisterhoods.

“During the first decades of the twentieth century, the label “sisterhood” connoted a sororal solidarity on behalf of women’s activism in the synagogue as well as in the community at large. At the same time, “sisterhood” was a term that betokened a commitment to the advancement of women in general. As one historian explained, “Though most of [the women active in synagogue sisterhoods] were not feminists in the current sense of the word, some of them saw in their social and charitable work an opportunity to reach out for equality for women.”¹⁵⁸

Through their personal interaction with those who were struggling day after day, sisterhood women saw firsthand how hard life could be. Dr. Felicia Herman describes how Jewish upper-class women understood the dilemmas of the poor.

“This work had expanded sisterhood members understanding of the world and increased their knowledge about and sympathy for others. Their exposure to the poor and working women...led some to the realization that limited opportunities existed for such women to improve their lot, which in turn led...to call for more diverse opportunities for working women.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ “The President’s Message” (19 January 1915) Box 1, Folder 1. Proceedings of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, MS-73, Box A-1, Vol. 1. AJA.

¹⁵⁸ Zola, Gary. “Sisterhood and the American Synagogue: An Introduction.” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 91.

¹⁵⁹ Herman, Felicia. *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*. Edited by Pamela Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2001. 170.

Sisterhood women took their success in uniting for the less fortunate as proof that they could empower themselves in other areas in their lives.

Teaching themselves

Since the formation of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, education of themselves, their families, and the Jewish community at large was a high priority.

“At the second Biennial meeting, (Carrie) Simon explained that the purpose of the federation was no less than “the preservation of Jewish life, and the development and expression of that life in varied forms of activity.” Education was the essential means to that end, and Simon called on women to inform themselves “of our own history, literature, and religion” and then use that knowledge not only to enrich their homes, influence their husbands, and educate their children, but also to share with members of other faiths.””¹⁶⁰

Sisterhood women were seeing examples of more women going on to college and graduate programs, taking their education into their own hands. Even if they did not further their academic education, they had the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about Judaism.

There was a great need and want for speakers to visit congregational sisterhoods to speak about Judaism, and Jewish issues. From Jewish History and art, to *kashrut* and holiday observance, sisterhood members wanted to be informed. As Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz explains: “(NFTS) wanted to give members a sense of Jewish historical context-past, present and future-and interreligious context. It sought to situate Jewish women within the larger societies in which they moved both historically and in the

¹⁶⁰ Schwartz, Shuly Rubin. “No Child’s Play: Educating NFTS Women Jewish!” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013. 247. From “President’s message, Second Biennial meeting (1917) MS-73 box A-1, Vol. 1 AJA.

present, and it explored the fruits, responsibilities, and challenges of acculturation.”¹⁶¹

NFTS also published a guide entitled “*A Sheaf of Program Suggestions*”, emphasizing the importance of Jewish content within their meetings. As well as sharing Judaism through history, Simon also thought it was important to share Judaism through art and Jewish artifacts. According to Schwartz,

“Simon initiated the collection, display, and distribution of Jewish objects, such as candle sticks, “Not because they are the dry bones of a once living institution, but because it is possible to reclothe them and ensoul them for the religious instruction of our present generation.” By highlighting these objects, Simon hoped to reclaim ritual relics and reimagine them as religious objects with relevance for the present. This focus on the aesthetic eventually culminated in the establishment of the Hebrew Union College Museum.”¹⁶²

The availability of printed materials for sisterhood members was important to Jane Evans, for they would be the vessels that would enable education on a variety of topics, from how to run a gift shop, to ideas for successful programming.

Since sisterhoods were constantly offering classes on how to create a Jewish home and celebrate holidays, the NFTS published guides on holiday worship. “One guide contained all the blessings for Shabbat at home, with the blessings over the candles, wine and *challah*, in transliteration, Hebrew and English.”¹⁶³ With this booklet, they would possess the materials to celebrate Shabbat with their own families, and with the prayers articulated in three ways, women were more apt to do so. NFTS also wanted to put an emphasis on celebrating the more joyous Jewish holidays of *Hanukkah*, *Tu B'Shevat* and *Purim*, and offered pamphlets on celebrating those holidays in the home as well.

¹⁶¹ Schwartz, *Sisterhood*. 249.

¹⁶² Ibid. 249.

¹⁶³ *Program Suggestions* (Cincinnati: NFTS, 1920's) MS-73 Box E-2, Folder 2, AJA.

Former Executive Director Jane Evans was responsible for the publication of *Topics & Trends*, a newsletter from NFTS to sisterhood members nationwide. “Evans chief aim [for *Topics & Trends*] was “to arouse enthusiasm for all Federation projects”...one could easily skim the bulletin with its catchy headlines and voluminous pictures-appearing as it did like similar trade catalogs of the 1930’s.”¹⁶⁴ Along with NFTS news, *Topics & Trends* covered stories that were important to Evans, as well as the country.

“Over the next forty years, NFTS issued other holiday guides that were designed to update, refine and improve on the earlier publications...in the post-war period, NFTS promoted intensive learning and observances in response to a new generation of members who clamored for a vital, dynamic Jewish education for their children and themselves and who readily admitted how little they knew.”¹⁶⁵

The country itself was in need of social, economical and spiritual repair. Zionism, the plight for a Jewish state was on many peoples’ minds. Judaism needed an international language, one that would unite Jews together all over the world. NFTS published information to help sisterhood teach each other about the Hebrew language. As Schwartz describes: “By the 1950’s this effort included an emphasis on Hebrew...a renewed effort to educate women about prayer resulted in a volume that focused on studying Hebrew not only to recognize the prayers but also to foster religious engagement to make Hebrew sources accessible...”¹⁶⁶ Women wanted to learn to read Hebrew and sisterhoods were starting classes to foster their learning of both the texts and the language itself.

¹⁶⁴ Koblin, *Sisterhood*. 93.

¹⁶⁵ Transcript of Proceedings of the seventeenth Biennial assembly (1948), MS-73, box B-3, folder 2, AJA

¹⁶⁶ Referenced in Schwartz, *Sisterhood*. 256. Mrs. David M. Levitt, Mrs. Herbert Podell and Mrs. Jacob P. Rudin, *Prayer and the Union Prayer Book* (New York: NFTS, 1954) MS-73, Box K-5, Folder 2, AJA

The most recent sisterhood guide “More Jewish Holidays: A Study Guide” by Rabbi Hara Person provides more information and ideas for celebrating the holidays not found in previous guides.

“Person’s guide covered “lesser known traditional Jewish holidays” such as *Tu B’Shavat* and *Tishah B’av*, as well as the modern holidays including *Yom Ha’atz’mat* and Israel Independence Day...This booklet suggests a *Tu B’Shevat* Seder...the section on *Yom Ha’atz’mat* includes a full page about the evolving relationship between the Reform movement and Israel...”¹⁶⁷

Whatever tools sisterhood members needed to inspire their learning, NFTS would find a method to make that happen.

Sisterhood and Worship

Although the family pew was present in many synagogues¹⁶⁸, it took time for women to recognize that they could have a say in their spiritual lives. Sisterhoods would encourage people to come to worship “sometimes even canvassing house-to house”¹⁶⁹ so that more people were present at services. Women were starting to join the Temple choirs and participating in congregational singing. “The stimulation of Sabbath attendance, an interest in the services which as been increased...congregational singing is one of the many achievements of the Women’s Association of Temple Rodef Shalom, New

¹⁶⁷ Referenced in Schwartz, *Sisterhood*. 264. Person, Hara. *More Jewish Holidays*, 11-12, 25.

¹⁶⁸ This may have arisen when synagogues in the middle of the 19th century bought old churches and didn’t want to rebuild, see Goldman. “Reform Judaism in the United States” <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reform-judaism-in-united-states>

¹⁶⁹ Nadell, Pamela S., and Rita J. Simon. "Ladies of the Sisterhood: Women in the American Reform Synagogue, 1900-1930." In *Active Voices: Women in Jewish Culture*, 68. Champaign, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995.

York.”¹⁷⁰ Similar advances in worship were happening at the Virginia Street Temple in Charleston, West Virginia. “In order to improve congregational singing, choir practice has been inaugurated at Sisterhood meetings...and that temple attendance is stimulated.”¹⁷¹

The creation of a Sisterhood Sabbath was the innovation of the chair of NFTS’s Committee on Religion, Barbara Solomon Goodman (1868-1948) of Louisville, Kentucky. Sarna writes: “It first found mention in 1916, when Goodman matter- of - factly reported “one sisterhood secured the consent of the rabbi and congregation to set aside one Sabbath in the year as ‘Sisterhood Sabbath’ and requested a special sermon for that day.””¹⁷²

As well as teaching, the women of sisterhood also wanted to have a chance to participate in worship. “The institution of Sisterhood Sabbaths around this time provided opportunities for women to lead worship, read Torah, and preach from the bima, and exposed increasing numbers of Reform Jews to women as spiritual and ritual leaders.”¹⁷³ From that day forward, this special service became an important event in many reform sisterhood organizations, and their worship experience would be forever changed.

The sisterhood service began being led by the rabbi with a special sermon, to today, where sisterhoods create their own *siddurim* for their unique service, with meaningful readings, songs and prayers. In some cases, the clergy is given the night off

¹⁷⁰ "Religious Activities Strengthened by Sisterhood." *The Advocate: America's Jewish Journal*. August 5, 1922. Accessed July 8, 2015. <https://goo.gl/QX5zxk>.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷² Sarna. *Sisterhood*. 59

¹⁷³ "In Praise of Uncompromising Women." *Women of Reform Judaism*. May 22, 2012. Accessed September 29, 2015. <http://blogs.rj.org/wrj/2012/05/22/in-praise-of-uncompromising-women/>.

and the members of sisterhood take on the role of Rabbi and Cantor, singing the Shabbat liturgy and preaching. At Temple Emanu-El in San Jose: "Members of Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood participate in leading an Erev Shabbat service once a year. Our women come together to lead a Friday night service, chanting their favorite Hebrew blessings, and sharing special poems and readings."¹⁷⁴

Some members of WRJ have also embraced the celebration of Rosh Chodesh, the celebration of the new moon. From study sessions, to dinners and *Havdalah* services, sisterhoods have found many different ways to celebrate the holiday that was given to women because they refused to give up their precious jewelry to create the golden calf.

"Holy Blossom Temple Sisterhood in Toronto, Ontario celebrates the new moon with *Rosh Hodesh*, a traditional liturgy (readings on creation, revelation, redemption, and other themes) accompanied by modern poetry and prayers. The Touro Synagogue Sisterhood of New Orleans, LA has its own liturgy, *Rosh Hodesh Adar*--songs, creative readings, and a birthday blessing--all celebrating the relationship of women to nature and to God."¹⁷⁵

Some sisterhoods are also inviting the younger generation into their folds for Rosh Chodesh. "Nineteen women including teen girls from the Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing! Program got together on Sunday, December 21st to celebrate Tevet. There were five mothers with their beautiful daughters which made this Rosh Chodesh extra special."¹⁷⁶ Not only does this kind of partnership enhance the celebration of Rosh

¹⁷⁴ "Temple Emanu-El." Shabbat Services | Temple Emanu-El. Accessed October 19, 2016. <https://templesean jose.org/content/shabbat-services#sisterhood-shabbat>.

¹⁷⁵ Eisman, Marge. "Ritual: A Women's Circle Under the New Moon ." *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Winter 2000.

¹⁷⁶ "Rosh Chodesh Tevet, 5775." Temple Emanu-El of West Essex. Accessed January 14, 2015. <http://emanuel.org/rosh-chodesh-tevet-5775/>.

Chodesh, it allows a new generation of young women to the beauty of sisterhood and WRJ.

From the Kitchen to the Temple Board

From the delicious *onegs* to cooking and organizing the break-fast meals, sisterhoods around the country ruled the synagogue kitchen, although some women weren't permitted to become members. During the early years of Reform Judaism in America, many single and widowed women struggled to gain membership to synagogues. Dr. Alan Silverstein describes the history of the membership of single women within the synagogue.

“Temples gradually had implemented changes in the policies toward women. By the 1880's congregations permitted widows... to retain the “seats” and membership rights of their deceased husbands. In the late 1880's and into the 1890's, single women, generally the unmarried adult daughters of members gained the right to acquire a “seat” and become a member.”¹⁷⁷

As women were campaigning for equality at the voting booth, they wanted equality within the synagogue walls as well. Raphael tells of the lengths NFTS leadership went to encourage synagogues to involve women. “Carrie Simon...traveled the land in the 1910's and 1920's speaking at synagogues and urging the male leaders to permit women to sit on the board of directors and to permit women (and not just their husbands) to be voting members of synagogues.”¹⁷⁸ With women granted the right to vote within the synagogue, the areas in which them, as individuals and as a group, desired change could move forward. “We do not find her today relegated to the gallery of the synagog

¹⁷⁷ Silverstein, Alan. *Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930*. Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1994.

¹⁷⁸ Raphael, 15.

[sic] docilely watching the men of the congregation. Her voice is heard on 'Temple Boards, her advice is asked in the direction of the affairs of the Sabbath School, she-is in fact, a force in the religious community.'"¹⁷⁹

At around the same time, Jewish women desired to be part of the professional world, and were venturing out into non-typical female roles, as Dr. June Sochen describes. "In 1910, it was the bold daughter who defied convention and her parents' wishes to become a professional worker. Paradoxically, while the Jewish culture did not encourage women to become professionals, it often recognized when they did so."¹⁸⁰ Jewish newspapers would publicize the successes of women in the workplace. One example of such an article appeared in the Detroit Free Press. "Miss Ida Lippman, supervisor of policewomen...was graduated last night with the senior class of the University of Detroit Law School at Orchestra Hall. She is one of nine women who received a law degree."¹⁸¹

Not long after women were granted the right to vote in their synagogues, the sisterhood president became a member of the Synagogue Board. "By 1915 a number of reform congregations around the country were not only inviting women to attend annual congregational meetings but had also asked local sisterhood to send representatives to

¹⁷⁹ "Report of the President"(4 January 1924) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

¹⁸⁰ Sochen, June. *Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of Jewish American Women, 1880-1980*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981.138.

¹⁸¹ "Law Degree Given-Miss Ida Lippman." *The Detroit Free Press*, June 18, 1927.

attend synagogue board meetings.”¹⁸² Eventually, the sisterhood seat opened up the possibility to women filling other positions on the board.

As the driving force of children’s Jewish education, and beautifying worship, sisterhood women wanted to make a positive change within Reform Judaism. Joselit explains one of the paths that women took towards leadership. “Sisterhood women spoke proudly of the increased power that came their way via the sisterhood, of being propelled into the synagogue boardroom through the sisterhood kitchen.”¹⁸³ The kitchen, the aesthetics of the holiday decorations, classroom management; those were the arenas that women coordinated in the early 20th century. Yet, even with this feeling of increased power, it would take a long time for women to be referred to by their own first name.

Noted in NFTS records, is Carrie Simon constantly, yet consistently referred to as “Mrs. Abram Simon.”¹⁸⁴ However, there are some rare listings of women by their first and last name. In 1932, Martha L. Steinfeld signed off her presidential address to the Executive board of NFTS without listing her husband’s name.¹⁸⁵ Throughout the 1930’s and well into the 1960’s, women were listed as “Mrs. [Husband’s name]”¹⁸⁶ by position

¹⁸² Goldman, Karla, "Reform Judaism." In *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, edited by Rosemary Skinner Keller, 538. Vol. 2. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2006.

¹⁸³ Joselit. *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*. 223.

¹⁸⁴ “Report of the Committee on President’s Message” (22 May 1919) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

¹⁸⁵ President’s address” (31 October 1932) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 3. AJA.

¹⁸⁶ “National Standing Committee Chairman” (18 October 1931) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 3. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio

within NFTS, however, when one wrote minutes as the chairman of their committee, they mostly referred to themselves as “Mrs. [husband’s name] given name and Last name.”¹⁸⁷

Sisterhood women were soon appointed to some national and prime leadership positions. “Within the world of Reform Judaism, NFTS continued to break down barriers as NFTS President Gertrude W. Watters became the first woman elected to the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College in 1938.”¹⁸⁸ By 1956, NFTS President Helen Dalsheimer became the first female President of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, one of the largest Reform congregations at that time.¹⁸⁹

As early as 1970, 96 percent of all Reform temples had elected a woman to their congregational board¹⁹⁰ and in 1973; former NFTS president Norma Levitt became the UAHC’s first female officer.¹⁹¹ Just last year, Daryl Messinger became the first woman to chair the URJ Board of Trustees.¹⁹²

In the 40 plus years since then, many sisterhood women have been held major leadership positions within the URJ, CCAR, and HUC-JIR organizations; however, a woman has not yet served the URJ as President.

¹⁸⁷ “Report of the Treasurer” (31 October 1933) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 3. AJA.

¹⁸⁸ “NFTS In the Era of The Great Depression” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹⁸⁹ Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*. 129.

¹⁹⁰ Umansky, Ellen. “Feminism and Reform Judaism.” In *The Americanization of the Jews*, edited by Norman Cohen and Robert Seltzer, 275. New York, NY: NYU Press, 1995.

¹⁹¹ “NFTS Continued to Fight for Equality in Reform Judaism” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

¹⁹² “Daryl Messinger Will Become First Woman to Chair the URJ Board of Trustees.” Daryl Messinger Will Become First Woman to Chair the URJ Board of Trustees | RJ Blog. Accessed March 2, 2016. <http://blogs.rj.org/blog/2015/06/30/daryl-messinger-will-become-first-woman-to-chair-the-urj-board-of-trustees/>.

From the Temple Board to the Bimah

As the fight of woman's equality in the voting booth was taking place outside of the walls of the synagogue, the role of the woman within the synagogue was changing as well. "In 1919, for example, it (The National Committee on Religion) urged sisterhood to conduct summer services in the synagogue while the rabbi was away on vacation...these summer services...also expanded the possibilities open to women and paved the way for more."¹⁹³ Services led by women proved to many naysayers that a woman was capable of leading from the pulpit. These first women who dared to step onto the *bima* were brave individuals. Services may have ceased during the Rabbi's absence if not for their leadership.

During the 1920-30's, four women in America were seminary students. Martha Neumark, studied at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, while Irma Levy Lindheim, Dora Askowith and Helen Hadassah Levinthal at Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.¹⁹⁴ Their ultimate goal of study was to become clergy, yet there was backlash coming from all directions making ordination impossible. Dr. Dalia Marx describes the kind of woman would wanted to become a Rabbi.

"Some of them were daughters of rabbis or scholars, or married to rabbis, but most of them were isolated individuals encountering powerful forces of resistance by those in power, all of them men's seminary faculty members, board of governors, and classmates. Even some of the most openly supportive rabbis and leaders of women's quest for equality showed a great deal of ambivalence and hesitation when it came to actually ordaining women."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Sarna.*Sisterhood*.62.

¹⁹⁴ Names listed in Nadell's "Women Who Would be Rabbis"

¹⁹⁵ Marx, Dalia. "'A Female Rabbi is Like an Orange on the Passover Plate': Women and the Rabbinate: Challenges and Horizons." Academia.edu - Share research. Accessed November 19, 2016.

By the mid 1920's, sisterhood women were not as concerned as to what the rabbis thought about their new function in the synagogue.

'When Stella Freiberg, as president...addressed the NFTS national convention in 1925, she emphasized that sisterhood women no longer needed men to validate their efforts: "I don't know how the rabbis will feel about it, but we have not called upon them to invoke us with their blessing. Our own women are doing it."¹⁹⁶

Short-term service leadership opportunities allowed women to start dreaming big, about becoming rabbis themselves. However, this issue was not at the forefront of their causes during war times, for they had much more pressing issues at hand. Goldman explains why discussion of the ordination of women was delayed. "The question of whether women should serve as rabbis lay dormant over the next few decades as the energy and creativity of women within the movement provided their communities with a rich congregational life."¹⁹⁷ The women of NFTS were so occupied with managing home, work and synagogue life; so the discussion of women becoming rabbis was postponed.

Jane Evans reintroduced the possibility of women becoming rabbis to the board of NFTS in 1961. Evans stated "The time has now come for sisterhood women to take a definitive stand on the question" of opening the rabbinate to women. As NFTS headed

https://www.academia.edu/8070977/_A_Female_Rabbi_is_Like_an_Orange_on_the_Pasover_Plate_Women_and_the_Rabbinate_Challenges_and_Horizons.

¹⁹⁶ Goldman. *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*. 210-11. Quoted in Deborah Levine Lefton: "Women's Equality in the Synagogue: The National Federation of Temple Sisterhood's Search for Autonomy 1913-30 (Rabbinic Thesis, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 2001)" 44-46.

¹⁹⁷ Goldman. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reform-judaism-in-united-states>.

toward 1963 and the Golden anniversary of its founding, Evans asked its members to prepare to resolve once and for all in favor of women rabbis.”¹⁹⁸

Women were different than the previous generation, and the woman’s role had changed drastically since the issue of women’s ordination was first presented to the Central Conference of American Rabbis and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Goldman credits the changing times in America. “In the years following the publication of Betty Friedan’s 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique* the rhetoric of gender egalitarianism and equal opportunity became more familiar in the broader culture.”¹⁹⁹ Women of all religions were making their voice heard and rallying together for equality in the workplace, as well as in their place of worship. Nadell explains the historical progression to the likelihood of the female rabbi.

“In New York City in November 1963, NFTS’s one thousand delegates reviewed Reform’s history on the question of the woman rabbi. They learned how the CCAR had debated the matter in 1922, and again in 1955...in the end, en masse, they demanded the convening of a conference of all reform institutions-the CCAR, the UAHC, HUC-JIR and NFTS-to resolve the matter of the woman rabbi once and for all.”²⁰⁰

Unfortunately, this conference did not occur, despite an outstanding effort on the part of Jane Evans and NFTS. However, not long after NFTS’s delegate meeting, Sally Priesand was admitted as a student to HUC-JIR and was the first woman ordained as a rabbi from this institution in 1972, followed by the investiture of the first female cantor, Barbara Ostfeld-Horowitz in 1975.

¹⁹⁸ Nadell, *Women Who Would be Rabbis*.135.

¹⁹⁹ Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*. 213.

²⁰⁰ Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*.138.

Rabbi Shelley Kovar Becker, ordained in 1991 from HUC-JIR, was the first sisterhood president to be ordained as a Rabbi.

“I become interested and involved with Sisterhood worship services at my own *shul* and on the District level. In those positions I helped put together and lead prayer services especially crafted for Sisterhood Shabbat or specific programming, e.g. a female gendered and a non-gendered service...From these experiences I increasingly realized this was where I was the most happy and decided I wanted to make Judaism the central focus of my life -not just as an involved lay member. This led me to explore a way in to Jewish professional life.”²⁰¹

However, she was not the first sisterhood President to serve a congregation as a Rabbi.

Paula Ackerman: Rebbetzin to Rabbi²⁰²

Paula Ackerman, a well-learned rabbi’s wife from Florida never in her wildest imaginations, would envision she would become the spiritual advisor for a congregation. As a young girl growing up in Pensacola, Florida at Temple Beth El, Paula was involved in many aspects of synagogue life.

While taking on the traditional roles of the proper rebbetzin of the early to mid-20th century, Paula Ackerman was also involved in the day-to-day tasks of overseeing the religious school. She taught the pre-confirmation class and even served as the service leader of the congregation when her husband was out of town or ill. She also served on the board of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. “Active in sisterhood,

²⁰¹ Becker, Shelly Kovar. "How did being a sisterhood president affect your decision to become a rabbi?" E-mail. November 15, 2016.

²⁰² Previously submitted from a portion of a paper “Paula Ackerman: From Rebbetzin to Rabbi” June 2014

Ackerman served as secretary, program chairman and “advisor in every capacity.”²⁰³ As seen on the letterhead of The Union of American Hebrew Congregations Commission on Synagogue Activities, Ackerman also served on their board, one of only two women to do so.²⁰⁴ When Rabbi Ackerman suddenly passed away of a heart attack on November 30th, 1950, instead of contacting the Central Conference of American Rabbis for an interim replacement, the board approached Paula Ackerman to become their “Rabbi” in his place.

She was a skilled teacher, had led services before, and been a rebbetzin for over 25 years, watching firsthand what the job demanded from her husband. Perhaps, most importantly, the congregation and its board supported her. The congregation was more interested in a leader that cared for the people of the congregation, and less about the gender of the individual or their textual knowledge.

The notion of handing over the leadership to a lay leader who was a woman was unprecedented. Then synagogue President Sydney Kay even states that members of the synagogue who came from more traditional backgrounds and were supportive of her appointment. It seemed that she was well prepared to lead the congregation, for she had done so in her husband’s place many times before.

Throughout the month of January 1951, Ackerman’s selection as spiritual leader was not only on the cover of *The Meridian Star* in Mississippi, but many other publications as well. The headlines read, “Woman Heads Congregation –First in History

²⁰³ Schwartz, Shuly Rubin. *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. 160

²⁰⁴ Jacob B. Schwartz to Mrs. William Ackerman, 20 December 1950. “Ackerman, Paula”, correspondence file MF-2041, AJA.

of Judaism” in the New York Post. The Ashville Times read “Jewish Church May Soon have Woman Rabbis-Mississippi Woman is New Spiritual Leader of Congregation.”

Paula Ackerman was interviewed in these articles as well, commenting on both her appointment and the effect that it may have on the ordination of women. She was humbled and hopeful that she would serve her congregation fittingly, and inspire a change in policy in the Reform movement.

Ackerman’s goal was to temporarily help her congregation of 27 years. This position may have helped her heal as well, giving her life a new purpose. Between her knowledge of the individuals of the congregation, and the love that she had for Judaism, she succeeded in filling the void for Beth Israel’s beloved rabbi.

This was her only goal, to carry on in the footsteps of her husband by serving the congregation of Meridian, which she served from January 1951 until September of 1953. Although she had stated that she would only function as the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Israel, nine years later her childhood congregation was in need of an interim spiritual leader, and so she headed back to Beth El Congregation in Pensacola, Florida for six months. Ackerman’s appointment to the pulpit was one of the fundamental motivations for NFTS calling for the ordination of women rabbis.

Worship and Learning Tools for Sisterhood

Sisterhood women were encouraging their members to engage in Bible study and women were taking more of an active role in synagogue worship, not only for

themselves, but by encouraging children's services as well. "By 1924...women began leading services, sitting on the *bimah* and delivering sermons."²⁰⁵

In 1948, the NTFS published their first prayerbook of their own, titled *Book of Prayers* that was a beginning to hearing their own voice within worship. Forty-five years later, the first of what today is a four-book Covenant series was published: Covenant of the Heart (1993), Covenant of the Soul (2000), Covenant of the Spirit (2005) and Covenant of the Generations (2013).²⁰⁶ This collection was published to supplement both congregational and individual worship practices.

With the support of the UAHC press, the WRJ published a collection of poetry, prayers, meditations and art in 2001. Entitled "*A Gift of Prayer: The Spirituality of Jewish Women*, sisterhood members were given the opportunity to share their own talents with the world. "Their prayers, poems, and meditations are complimented by the work of Jewish artists on the theme of prayer-prayer inspired by nature, by ritual or by awe of the Divine. The result is a gift of words and art for every woman."²⁰⁷

Sisterhoods would create their own special *siddurim* that they would use for their sisterhood Shabbat year after year. Here is an excerpt from the Temple Sisterhood Shabbat Service at Temple Shomer Emunim.

²⁰⁵ "These Were Busy Times for NTFS" *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²⁰⁶ Covenant of the Generations is the only one available for purchase on www.wrj.org

²⁰⁷ *A Gift of Prayer: The Spirituality of Jewish Women*. New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism/UAHC Press, 2001.

“We have come here together to build something holy,
A *Makom Kadosh*, separate and apart.
We have come to rest, to sing and tell stories.
We have come to learn, to teach and to grow.
We bless this time with our presence.
We welcome God’s presence into our midst.”²⁰⁸

Through the use of sisterhood publications, or works of their own, sisterhoods took control and ownership of their own worship experience.

The Creation of the Women’s Torah Commentary

For many years, sisterhoods within their respective synagogues were studying the weekly Torah portions using a commentary written by, and written for, men. Women’s viewpoints were completely missing from the Torah narrative. After all, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah and Miriam, among countless named and nameless females lived through the trials and tribulations in the books of the Torah. There was a great need for a commentary that gave a voice to these women.

Cantor Sager of Anshe Chesed Fairmont Temple in Beachwood, Ohio recalls preparing for a D’var Torah on *Vayeira* and the binding of Isaac:

“As I thought about the horrifying image of Abraham with arm uplifted against his son, I suddenly thought about Sarah. For the very first time, it occurred to me that Sarah was part of this story, that her feelings and her reactions mattered, that if she had been asked to sacrifice her child, the story might have ended right there. I realized that in her absence and her silence there was room for commentary.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Anonymous. Temple Shomer Emunim Sisterhood Shabbat, 2005

²⁰⁹ Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn., and Andrea L. Weiss, eds. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*. New York: Women of Reform Judaism, Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, 2008. xxvii.

Although certainly not the first person to feel that parts of the narrative were missing, Cantor Sager issued this challenge at the 1993 NFTS assembly in San Francisco in her Presentation “Sarah’s Hidden Voice: Rediscovering and Discovering Women’s Spirituality”: She stated:

“If we are really serious about women’s spirituality, about re-claiming our history and our voice, about liberating the concepts of God and community, of integrating the Torah of our tradition into the Torah of our lives, then there is something very concrete that we can do. We can commission the creation of the first feminist commentary to the Torah.”²¹⁰

As in many other instances, the renamed WRJ relished in the opportunity of creating such a book, speaking to their Torah study leaders, and rabbis on what this new commentary should contain. The introduction to *The Torah, A Women’s Commentary* recalls the time when the concept of the commentary was voted upon by WRJ.

“In the spring of 1995, WRJ convened a gathering in Elizabeth, NJ that brought together WRJ lay leaders, scholars and clergy to envision what this sort of commentary might look like. Enthusiasm for the project was contagious. Less than one month later, WRJ Board Member Davna Brook put forth a motion to the WRJ Board of Directors that WRJ should publish a Torah commentary authored by women. The motion passed unanimously amidst tears of joy and celebration.”²¹¹

As difficult as it would be to write such a Torah commentary, this project would be a huge financial undertaking. “WRJ leaders traveled coast to coast to meet with individual donors, to discuss donations at district meetings and to build excitement about the

²¹⁰ “WRJ Begins to write a Torah Commentary” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²¹¹ Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn., and Andrea L. Weiss, eds. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*. xxv.

upcoming publication.²¹² Various individuals, families, sisterhoods and synagogues sponsored the 52 *parashot* and the matriarchs of the Torah as well, honoring those who helped make WRJ what it is today.²¹³ Through the amazing efforts of WRJ, they raised much more than it would cost to produce.

The WRJ invited Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi to serve as Editor, and she gathered the most brilliant female biblical scholars and clergy to collaborate on the various sections of the commentary. Not long after, Dr. Andrea Weiss, became Associate Editor. Each Torah Portion in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* features:

- A central commentary written by a biblical scholar.
- A second, shorter commentary from another biblical scholar that compliments, supplements, or challenges the primary interpretation.
- A compendium of post-biblical interpretations highlighting issues related to women.
- A contemporary commentary reflecting social, philosophical, and theological concerns that link the Torah portion to current issues.
- Creative responses in the form of poems, prose, or modern Midrash.²¹⁴

Through many rough drafts, and samples of different methods of presenting the *parashot*, the commentary soon began to take form. Although many were pleased with *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, there were others that “voiced discomfort with the commentary’s overt feminism”²¹⁵ however there were so many more that were pleased with its content.

²¹² “WRJ’s Women’s Torah Commentary is Published” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²¹³ As seen by whom the various writings were dedicated to in the front of the commentary.

²¹⁴ “The Torah: A Women's Commentary.” Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed June 17, 2016. <http://www.wrj.org/torah-womens-commentary-0>.

²¹⁵ Kalman, Jason and Andrea L. Weiss “Women of Reform Judaism and Hebrew Union College.” In *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*, Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013.113.

Many newspapers covered the first widespread use of the commentary:

“During the week of Nov. 18, (2006) when Parshat Chayei Sarah is read, some 250 Reform Congregations - some 5,000 people in all - will participate in a study program based on the Women's Commentary. WRJ and URJ Press... have released the chapter from the 1,500-page volume for congregations to use...along with a list of suggested talking points, to give a taste of what the commentary will offer, said Rabbi Hara Person, URJ Press' managing editor.”²¹⁶

There was some concern that his commentary would replace the beloved Plaut Commentary; one of the reasons for its publication was to serve as a companion. As WRJ Executive Director Emeritus Ellen Rosenberg stated in an interview in 2012:

“One day I was talking with Rabbi Gunther Plaut, of blessed memory, and told him about WRJ's massive project. He told me that there was no need to replace his Torah. I said that our intent was to enhance, not replace, and just as Adam needed Eve in order to make his life complete, the present Torah would have a companion to sit beside it in the pew, to fill in the gaps, bring another perspective and strengthen what already existed.”²¹⁷

This new form of a Torah commentary gave women and men an alternative interpretation of the Torah texts. If one didn't want to read the translation directly from the text, one could read a poem based on the *parsha* or a modern interpretation from a 20th or 21st century scholar. Nadell describes the role of the woman and her concerns in the new commentary.

“In *The Women's Torah Commentary*, female rabbis from across the denominations interject women into almost every one of the fifty-four weekly Torah portions. They discover female characters unnamed in the text, like

²¹⁶ Berkman, Jacob. "New Reform commentary looks at Torah through woman's eyes." The Jerusalem Post | JPost.com. Accessed October 24, 2016. <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-Features/New-Reform-commentary-looks-at-Torah-through-womans-eyes>.

²¹⁷ “WRJ's Women's Torah Commentary is Published” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

Naamah, Noah's wife, and use the laws of kashrut to comment upon Jewish women cooking holiday foods and to raise concerns about anorexia."²¹⁸

On the WRJ website, one can discover study guides for each *parsha*, allowing anyone to start a *chevruta* to enhance their knowledge of Torah.²¹⁹ The study guides were written with thoughtful questions, not only pertaining to the Torah verses, but also the commentary and corresponding poetry.

The Torah: A Women's Commentary inspired a whole new community to study Torah. Congregations were beginning new Torah study groups, utilizing the new commentary. From the website of Congregation B'nai Israel in Boca Raton, Florida.

"Come learn the text of the weekly Torah portion from the perspective of some of the world's best Women Authors, Rabbis, and scholars. Connect and share with a wonderful group of intelligent women and learn how these texts relate to our own personal spiritual journeys. Each session is stimulating and will challenge you to look at Torah with a whole new perspective, all while laughing, crying, and forming spiritual bonds. Join a community within a community!"²²⁰

Jews of all future generations will benefit from the collaboration on *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*. All who use this commentary, as a tool to study Torah will preserve its poetry, commentary, and translations for future generations.

²¹⁸ Nadell, Pamela S. "A Bright New Constellation." In *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, edited by Mark Lee Raphael, 395. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008.395.

²¹⁹ For an example of the WRJ study guide for *Sh'mot*, visit <http://www.wrj.org/sites/default/files/WTC%20Study%20-%20Shemot%20-%20new.pdf>

²²⁰ "Women's Torah Commentary 2015-2016 - Congregation B'nai Israel of Boca Raton." Women's Torah Commentary 2015-2016 - Congregation B'nai Israel of Boca Raton. Accessed September 6, 2016. <https://login.cbiboca.org/wtc>.

Ahead of the Curve: Engaging the Reform Movement Towards New Directions

Since its inception, NFTS has been consistently involved in the enhancement of Judaism around the world. In conjunction with sisterhoods nationwide, thousands of women swiftly organized and offered to aid, whether as a workforce, or to give financial support.

Early on, NFTS was also branching out globally, engaging sisterhoods around the world to join NFTS. By 1924, three synagogues in Canada and one in London were affiliated with NFTS,²²¹ and it was “recommend that Sisterhoods outside the United States, be invited to participate in Sisterhood meetings in the city or cities located nearest them whenever possible.”²²² “NFTS also encouraged and supported the founding of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), started in 1926 by Lily Montagu. Because of her efforts in building Progressive Judaism in Great Britain...she was made an honorary member of NFTS’ Board of Directors.”²²³

NFTS, noticing how many families were far from synagogues, making it difficult to attend regularly, decided that they would broadcast services over the radio. They suggested to the UAHC that this was imperative to keep Reform Judaism alive.

“Religious services are being broadcast by radio in various parts of the country. The need and value for this service has been adequately demonstrated. Believing that it is of great importance that this work be properly systematized and supervised, so that its benefits may be extended as widely as possible.”²²⁴

²²¹ “Report on the National Committee on Propaganda” (31 Oct 1924) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

²²² “Minutes of the Executive Board, Foreign Policy” (31 Oct 1924) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

²²³ “A Global Sisterhood Begins” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²²⁴ “Fourteenth Annual Report, Radio Broadcasting” (31 Oct 1925) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

NFTS helped finance radio broadcasts of sermons, services and religious educational programs throughout the 1920's and 1930's. Jewish inmates of the Ohio Penitentiary sent a letter to NFTS stating "We were lifted spiritually from our surroundings of drabness, of gray stone, of steel bars and of great locks. We became aware that not yet had we lost everything."²²⁵

NFTS also helped establish the Jewish Braille Institute (JBI) in 1931, after establishing a Committee on Literature for Jewish Sightless in 1925. In the 1925 report, it stated "Forty two sisterhoods appointed Chairmen who are now at work studying Braille"²²⁶, and "Initial correspondence has brought many letters from sightless persons, fraught with enthusiasm for the new opportunities to be presented to them through the efforts of the Sisterhoods."²²⁷ "Sisterhood women became active in JBI, serving as volunteers transcribing books into Braille, establishing a Hebrew Braille alphabet and recording books on tape."²²⁸ These undertakings allowed a portion of the Jewish population that before may have felt alienated from their Judaism, to be brought back into the folds.

Throughout the 1930's, NFTS supported "The National Anti-Tuberculosis Society, a constitutional amendment to end child labor, the punishment of police who do not protect their prisoners, and exempting doctors and nurses from a law prohibiting the

²²⁵ "We Discover the Power of Radio." *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²²⁶ "Committee on Literature for Jewish Sightless" (31 Oct 1925) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 2. AJA.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ "The Jewish Braille Institute" *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

distribution of materials on birth control.”²²⁹ Taking a stance on birth control in the 1930’s was quite radical, since literature regarding it was illegal to be sent across state lines.²³⁰ Talking about contraception was considered a taboo topic, yet NFTS believed that it was an important issue to speak about. Klapper explains why Jewish women’s organizations took on particular issues.

“The heavy involvement of Jewish women’s organizations in secular causes like birth control and peace upends any firm distinction between inward-looking communal organization and outward-looking dispersionist activities...NTFS...was founded with explicitly religious missions but, caught in an era of progressive reform and a general expansion of women’s public activities, came to see secular activism as part of their Jewishness and religious mandate.”²³¹

Peace, both at home and abroad was a crucial cause that NFTS supported early on in its history, however, since NFTS was a religious organization, it was important that their support of issues didn’t divide the members of NFTS. “By 1925, NFTS had a standing national committee on peace...local sisterhoods took up issues such as U.S. membership in the Permanent Court of International Justice and forwarded resolutions to their political representatives.”²³² They believed that through writing campaigns and because of their sheer numbers, they could inspire change. At the fifth biennial assembly, NFTS President Hattie Wiesenfeld stated: “Remember, we are an organization of approximately 45,000, and our power and influence is far-reaching. We want peace!”²³³

Their fight continued with the onset of WWII and the rise of Hitler. Klapper

²²⁹ “We Influence Social Issues” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²³⁰ See Comstock Act of 1875.

²³¹ Klapper, 14.

²³² Klapper, 28.

²³³ “President’s Message” (23 January 1923) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

states: “For much of the decade, Jewish women peace activists adopted this approach, continuing to work for peace while keeping a weary eye on events unfolding in Europe and sometimes shifting their attitudes or activities as circumstances seemed to demand.”²³⁴ NFTS President Reina Hartmann said the following to the Executive Board in 1944, a year before the war would end.

“Sound knowledge of world conditions is fundamental if we are to translate religious ideals into effective action or if our prayers for ourselves and our posterity are not to be in vain. The duty to study and then to act has ever been a commandment laid upon the Jew. A religious organization such as our National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods must be cognizant of the seering spiritual needs that the days before us will bring to our members and all our countrymen. A time that tests the souls of men also tests the value and the depth of their religious convictions.”²³⁵

NFTS and individual sisterhoods contributed to the war effort in many ways, from collecting funds for displaced families, to writing President Roosevelt on behalf of saving European Jews from being sent to the camps.

Interfaith relations were also important to NFTS, and starting in the middle of the 20th century, local sisterhoods would invite members of nearby churches to celebrate the Jewish holidays together. In return, the church sisterhood would invite the sisterhoods to a program held at the church.

In the late 1950’s and into the 1960’s, NFTS and its members fought tirelessly for Civil Rights. Sociologist Dr. Jean Van Delinder believes: “As the Civil Rights movement progressed, many Jewish women were drawn into civil rights activism since it gave them an opportunity to create existential meaning in their lives through moral

²³⁴ Klapper, 185.

²³⁵ “President’s Message” (10 April 1944) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 4. AJA.

action.”²³⁶ Denouncing segregation, a sisterhood in El Paso, TX, a state that was very slow at de-segregating their schools, “Invited colored teachers to interfaith institutes along with others, non-segregation was practiced at lunch.”²³⁷ At their 21st Biennial convention, NFTS stated:

“We call upon our members to study the problem of discrimination in housing as it affects their own communities and to examine, each within herself, her reactions to the moral imperatives of Judaism, translating these imperatives into concrete action to remove her personal prejudices and the unjust barriers which men have created against their fellow men.”²³⁸

Sisterhood women were not only aware of the problem; they were urged to do something about it. One of NFTS’s resolutions of 1963 was to stand up for the fundamental human rights for all:

“The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods urges all its members to conduct their relations with their fellow men of whatever racial, ethnic or religious origins in accordance with the highest concepts of the Judaic and democratic principles of justice and equality and to take initiative in finding ways to open equal opportunities for all in education, housing, employment, recreation and the use of public facilities.”²³⁹

The right to obtain an abortion was a matter that NFTS stood behind in 1965 and since then have been staunch supporters of Planned Parenthood. “We appeal for liberalization

²³⁶ Delinder, Jean Van. *Struggles before Brown: Early Civil Rights Protests and Their Significance Today*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008. 87.

²³⁷ “Interfaith Workshop Session” (14 February 1955) Women of Reform Judaism Records, MS-73, Box 1, Folder 5. AJA.

²³⁸ “Discrimination in Housing-1959.” WRJ Resolutions and Statement 1950-1959. Accessed January 20, 2016.

<http://www.wrj.org/sites/default/files/WRJ%20R%26S%201959%20Discrimination%20in%20Housing.pdf>.

²³⁹ “Resolutions & Statements: 1960 - 1969.” Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed January 20, 2017. <http://www.wrj.org/resolutions-statements-1960-1969>.

of the abortion laws of the various States and urge our United States constituents to work toward this end.”²⁴⁰

In 1969, a statement was made at the twenty-seventh biennial supporting the Jewish state of Israel.

“The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods: urges the United Nations and all powers, whether large or small, to exert their influence to persuade the Arab nations to accept Israel’s repeated offers to sit face to face with them to negotiate a fair and permanent peace to the end that the nations of the area may work together in mutual cooperation for a better life for all the peoples of the region.”²⁴¹

Sisterhood women supported Israel financially and socially, by urging sisterhood members to plan trips to Israel, by buying Israeli goods, and through the education of their communities about the importance of Israel’s existence.

In 1971, a resolution titled “Women in Decision Making” approached the existence of the workingwoman within sisterhoods across the nation.

“For both the woman who works from economic necessity as for the woman who combines her contribution to her home with service to society either as a volunteer or through continuation or resumption of her educational, business or professional career, there is urgently required and NFTS Sisterhoods and their members should seek: 1. A system of comprehensive child-care services adequately funded by government; 2. Information and action on pending, current legislation about child care services.”²⁴²

Recognized as a national issue for the first time in NFTS, this resolution impacted all workingwomen.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² "Resolutions & Statements: 1970 - 1979." Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://www.wrj.org/resolutions-statements-1970-1979>.

1975 was a active year for NFTS resolutions: “An omnibus resolution supports all illegal surveillance, the Freedom of Information Act, legal representation in court for the poor, establishment of counseling centers for rape victims...the right of women to a legal abortion.”²⁴³ Sisterhood women marched in Pro-choice rallies, and in the 1978 Equal Rights Amendment march in Washington D.C.²⁴⁴

The 1980’s allowed NFTS to refocus their priorities on how to incorporate the workingwoman into their sisterhoods. At the 1987 assembly, President Dolores Wilkenfeld stated in her speech to the delegates: “The woman who is too tired to come to a sisterhood meeting at night, night also be too tired to come to Temple on Friday night or make *Shabbas* at home...I believe it is time to shift our focus from to trying to attract and involve these women...to helping our congregations serve the needs of these women and all women in their congregations.”²⁴⁵ The role of mother and wife had changed since the founding of NFTS and this statement was important to make so that sisterhoods were cognizant of the different kinds of women that were part of their organization, and that it was more about helping them, rather than them helping sisterhood.

NFTS was officially renamed Women of Reform Judaism at the WRJ 38th Assembly in San Francisco, CA in 1993. The change in name led to the individual, the woman of the movement, joining together with other individual women, as “Women of Reform Judaism”, and not only united by a “Temple Sisterhood.” Anthropologist Riv- Ellen Prell believes the following about the name alteration of WRJ. “The name change

²⁴³ “Key Resolutions of the Decade” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²⁴⁴ See photos: “NFTS Takes Up Big Causes with a Big Voice” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

²⁴⁵ “The Rise of Working Women” *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

reflected a desire to be seen not merely as an auxiliary service group but as an organization that puts its members and their interests at the center of the Reform movement.²⁴⁶

The significance of the name change would prove to be even more important as the decision to allow individual women to join WRJ, without additionally being a member of a synagogue sisterhood.

In continuing with their task of supporting social issues, many WRJ women took to the streets on Mother's Day in 2000, participating in the "Million Mom March", advocating for stricter gun control laws. Sharon Samber wrote the following recalling the march:

"Standing among thousands of other American women on the National Mall, Jews called on the House of Representatives to enact "sensible gun control laws," such as background checks, firearms registration, licensing of gun owners and more handgun safety locks... "Make this moral issue political," urged Rosanne Selfon, vice president of Women of Reform Judaism. "We have a moral obligation that emanates from Torah and God. Today is the day to make our legislators listen."²⁴⁷

In 2013, WRJ celebrated its 100th birthday, issuing the following statement to the Reform Movement:

"The Centennial of Women of Reform Judaism celebrates and honors our accomplishments as we continue on the path of those who came before us. We will educate, inspire and energize our membership to look toward the future-creating a lasting legacy that ensures the vibrancy of our sisterhoods, our congregations and Reform Judaism."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Prell, Riv-Ellen. *Women Remaking American Judaism*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007.125.

²⁴⁷ Samber, Sharon. "Jewish mothers join the 'million.'" Jewish Telegraphic Agency. May 15, 2000. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://www.donate.jta.org/2000/05/15/life-religion/features/jewish-mothers-join-the-million>.

²⁴⁸ "How WRJ's Centennial Came About" *Women of Reform Judaism: A Centennial Celebration*. New York, NY, 2013.

As their history states, WRJ has always had the future in mind, promoting and preserving Reform Judaism.

They also celebrated their centennial with a WRJ trip to Israel and Berlin, which included a service at the Kotel with “Women of the Wall”, “a group of Jewish women from Israel and around the world who strive to achieve the right to wear prayer shawls, pray and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Western Wall.”²⁴⁹ WRJ has supported the rights of women to pray at the Kotel in the same manner as men. In 2013, “WRJ joined Knesset members and Women of the Wall in prayer at the Western Wall to celebrate the beginning of a new month and to stand together for religious pluralism in Israel,” said WRJ President Lynn Magid Lazar.”²⁵⁰ WRJ Board Member Jeanne W. Kahn shared her experience of praying with Women of the Wall on the “Voices of WRJ” blog.

“Even though we knew that wearing *tallitot* and participating in the Rosh Chodesh service put us at risk of detention and potential disruption of our trip, we stood as one with the other Women of the Wall, which is what we now were, too. The solidarity and support that we drew from one another was incredible; I was so proud to be a participant!”²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ “Who We Are.” Women of the Wall. Accessed January 23, 2017.

<http://www.womenofthewall.org.il/who-we-are/>.

²⁵⁰ “WRJ Leaders Pray With Knesset Members at Western Wall to Advocate for Religious Pluralism in Israel.” Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://www.wrj.org/blog/2013/03/12/wrj-leaders-pray-knesset-members-western-wall-advocate-religious-pluralism-israel>.

²⁵¹ Kahn, Jeanne. “Voices for WRJ: Parashat Emor.” Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed January 19, 2017. <http://www.wrj.org/blog/2013/04/26/voices-wrj-parashat-emor>.

Rabbi David Saperstein, former Director of the Religious Action center conveys the cause for social justice of WRJ:

“In all of these issues and countless more, WRJ continues to be actively involved and engaged. Whether calling for swift consideration of judicial nominees, advocating for reproductive rights in states where those rights are threatened, meeting with members of Congress to advance the Violence Against Women Act, or honoring social justice work in congregations through the Or Ami awards, Women of Reform Judaism has embodied our divine command to “pursue justice.”²⁵²

Whether WRJ engaged with their causes through their feet, their voices, or their pens, they strived to endorse change in the world.

²⁵² Saperstein, Rabbi David. "Chazak Chazak V'nitchazek: Women of Reform Judaism and Social Justice." Fresh Updates from RAC. July 09, 2013. Accessed January 23, 2017. <http://blogs.rj.org/rac/2013/07/09/chazak-chazak-vnitchazek-women-of-reform-judaism-and-social-justice/>.

Chapter 5: WRJ and the Modern Sisterhood

The end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, structural changes have occurred within the local sisterhood and WRJ. Some of these changes have been decisions directly made through WRJ: ceasing the publication of the WRJ calendar, deciding to discontinue the WRJ bi-annual assembly, and allowing women who are not members of URJ congregations to become members of WRJ. Others have been natural transitions because of changing times in modern Jewish life: women finding other leadership positions that are not associated to their sisterhoods or synagogues, and the absence of involvement within sisterhood, both nationally and locally, of the full time working woman.

I asked lay and professional leaders between 2015-2017 about their experiences in WRJ and synagogue sisterhood. Informants have held leadership positions, both on a local and regional level. They range in age from their early thirties to their late sixties. They live on the coasts, and in the middle of the country. Some have grown children, or elementary aged children or have never been married. One quality they do share in common; their love of being a member of WRJ and their synagogue sisterhoods.

Through my interviews, they will share their experiences, both as a sisterhood and WRJ leader. They will also describe how WRJ is a women's organization, and not solely an auxiliary organization. They support each other as well as themselves, through social, religious and philanthropic efforts.

Their Jewish backgrounds varied greatly, from early involvement in synagogue life, to coming back to Judaism as an adult. One was raised as a secular Jew, celebrating Hanukkah and Passover at home. She feels that she was raised secular because "My

grandparents were atheists and communists...my mother didn't have that much of a Jewish education growing up, Judaism was foreign to them, and when they moved to the Midwest from the East Coast, 40 years ago in this area there were not a lot of Jews...they were really self conscious about being Jewish and didn't want to stand out." Another grew up in a family in the tri-state area that she described as a "mixed bag", her father was Orthodox and her mom was Atheist, but raised Jewish. She did not grow up attending camp or Hebrew School. When she married she joined a conservative synagogue and did not like it, and then decided to join a Reform synagogue.

My informants joined sisterhood for a variety of reasons. The most mentioned that they had a desire to make friends. One woman started a sisterhood at her synagogue without one specifically because "I wanted a place to meet other women, I had children but didn't know anyone at the Temple." Although Jews typically join synagogues when they start families, this did not apply to some of the women I interviewed who joined as young singles precisely to meet other Jewish women. A woman who is now a national leader joined as a young, single member for the same reason.

"I am a unique member of my congregation and sisterhood. I joined as a single 26-year old member...I was the only person in my membership category for over 10 years. I joined because I was away from home, living in the suburbs, and wanted a place to go for the Jewish holidays...I joined sisterhood as a way to meet other women."

Another informant similarly related joining sisterhood as a young single woman.

"When I went to college, I had a Jewish roommate, had Jewish friends, and went to my first High Holy Day service... I wouldn't call myself a practicing a Jew until I moved back near home, and I was single and was interested in meeting new friends...I decided to go to a service, and met the sisterhood president, who sat next to me and she became a good friend, and I became a member two years later...My parents joined my synagogue after I did and are now really involved...my mother is now a member of sisterhood."

Women taking on leadership positions in synagogues pose a challenge to sisterhood. Sisterhood membership is on the rise at some synagogues, however, there are women who are not members of sisterhood for various reasons: “it may be because no one asked them, or maybe it is because they are involved in other things.” One informant stated that women in her synagogue have said “Oh no, that’s my mother’s thing.” There is this stigma surrounding the sisterhood organization that some young women choose not to join because of a reputation that it is a group that younger women don’t belong to. “Phrases like “sisterhood ladies” and “Hadassah arms²⁵³” capture the frequently dismissive portrayals of Jewish women’s public work as essentially trivial, staffed by middle-class women with bourgeois concerns.”²⁵⁴ Unfortunately, this is a common sentiment amongst women who are unfamiliar with the role of WRJ and the women who encompass the organization.

Sisterhoods, and WRJ have always tried to modify their structure and goals throughout the years. One informant explained the need for change: “if you were to ask me if sisterhood and WRJ remained exactly the way it is for the past 100 years, I would be concerned about its future... but because we are changing with the times, and appealing to other types of members, I think it will exist.” She stated the following regarding WRJ and its success thus far: “We are always ahead of the rest of the movement, and I hope that we continue to do that and continue to stay relevant.”

Since its inception in 1913, NFTS, now WRJ held an assembly that ran concurrently with the URJ Biennial. WRJ Assembly is described as:

²⁵³ A woman’s upper arms that are lacking muscle tone.

²⁵⁴ Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*. 210.

“Women from across North America and around the world who identify with or are interested in the Reform Movement to come together to learn through various workshops and study sessions, worship together, share ideas and best practices, make decisions about WRJ policies that will determine the organization’s future, hear from inspiring presenters, dance and sing to exciting music, shop at Judaic and art vendors, reconnect with old friends, and form new bonds.”²⁵⁵

The purpose of URJ Biennial is: “the place for Jews from across North America to come together to learn, pray, share ideas, dance and sing, hear from inspiring speakers and the leaders of our Movement; reunite with old friends, create new connections, and make decisions about the policies of the Reform Movement.”²⁵⁶

The last WRJ assembly was held in Orlando, Florida in 2015. When asked why the decision was made to discontinue holding WRJ assembly, one national leader replied: “It will allow all the women that would have been separated at assembly, to be together with women who were only attending Biennial programs...I hope that WRJ can reach some of these women who were going to Biennial that we weren’t reaching before.” According to Rabbi Marla Feldman, WRJ is developing a specific WRJ track, a recommended list of programs, for the next Biennial in 2017.

The Freed Leadership conference, a conference geared with programming for sisterhood board members, that occurred during the years that Biennial did not occur will now be held yearly. One member’s sisterhood has been working on finding ways to ensure a future by sponsoring women to attend the Freed leadership conference. “This conference is geared towards new leaders and more seasoned leaders...there will also be

²⁵⁵ “WRJ Assembly.” WRJ Assembly. Accessed November 24, 2016.

https://www.facebook.com/events/1437231073250435/?active_tab=about.

²⁵⁶ “URJ Biennial 2015.” Online Event Management & Registration Platform. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://www.cvent.com/events/2015-urj-north-american-biennial/custom-39-1acd8248a17d4cd5b04fb5daeff84725.aspx>.

a delegation of NFTY women attending.” This partnership and learning experience is exciting for both NFTY and WRJ. When young women age out of NFTY, this delegation will see firsthand that there is an organization that they can belong to, and they can pass on their experiences at the conference to their fellow female NFTY members.

When speaking about the termination of WRJ Assembly, another stated:

“It will be a major loss...we would have twelve women attend Biennial, and only two attend the Freed Leadership conference...as someone who attended Assembly on a regular basis, I will be sad not to be able to be with such a large group of sisterhood women....I don’t know how many people will choose to attend Biennial without Assembly.”

This is an unavoidable dilemma. Although leadership of WRJ may interact with other women that are not active in their synagogue sisterhoods or the organization itself, there are groups of women that are loyal supporters of WRJ who feel dejected for the loss of WRJ assembly from their sisterhood experience.

One of the newest methods to enhance WRJ membership is offering individual memberships to WRJ. “WRJ is proud to newly welcome individual members: any woman who identifies with our mission & goals can have their voice counted alongside those in our sisterhoods around the world.”²⁵⁷ I was given many of same reasons in all of my interviews for why WRJ believes individual membership will enhance WRJ.

“Women who are not members of Reform congregations, military women, and even mothers who want to buy memberships for their young daughters...these are all women who can now be members of WRJ.” When another was asked about WRJ individual membership, she believed that there were both positives and negatives to its

²⁵⁷“Join WRJ.” Women of Reform Judaism. Accessed September 14, 2016. <https://www.wrj.org/join-wrj>.

implementation. “It will be great for members of the military or others that can’t join a local WRJ sisterhood for some reason.” However, she was concerned about the long-term effects this would have on local sisterhoods. “Now that you can join WRJ yourself, will people think they don’t need a sisterhood anymore? If you don’t attend events you won’t join sisterhood and you will miss out on meeting some great women.”

It was made clear to me why I received the same type of answer, when I asked my informants their opinion of the individual WRJ member within the organization.

“The leadership of WRJ did a phenomenal job of preparing all of the delegates at the assembly for what was coming in these votes...there were webinars, a lot of personal phone calls by board members...we spent a couple of years working on this...I was worried about backlash, and what would happen if it didn’t pass...There were a few sisterhoods who said “this is bad, this is going to directly affect my sisterhood if you don’t have to join our sisterhood to be a part of WRJ.”, but the numbers that were concerned were very, very small and through the conversations...95% of the people who came in with concerns, had their concerns addressed and felt pretty good about the decision...I don’t know if it was unanimous but it was very close to going that way.”

One informant was quite optimistic about WRJ’s future.

“The look of WRJ will change with individual membership, and individual members will be a large part of that change... local sisterhoods should not feel threatened and will continue to serve the congregations... it opens the door to the unaffiliated, saying that this is a wonderful organization and I want to be a part of that...the key is being adaptable...”

As of December 2015, 75 individuals decided to join WRJ without membership in a WRJ affiliated sisterhood.²⁵⁸ WRJ hopes that this number will increase through positive campaigns publicizing the option of WRJ individual memberships.

²⁵⁸ Data from WRJ office.

Despite seeming “old-fashioned”, informants related that synagogue sisterhood offered opportunities for growth and leadership. Likewise, one can also be a participant. As a stay at home mom for the past eight years, one informant had just begun a part time job and her involvement in sisterhood honed her skills for a return back to the workplace. “Sisterhood and WRJ have given me a chance to feel smart and to feel accomplished and allowed me to expand my leadership skills...like public speaking, and leading workshops...it gave me an outlet for that part of my intellect over the past few years.” When describing her experience as a leader, her passion for WRJ shone through. “When I attended my first assembly, I was so impressed by all of these smart, and savvy women who were all volunteers...I wanted to be like them... I have been involved at a national level because I felt really honored to be asked.”

Finances were yet another obstacle for many women in participating in WRJ, and in its national meetings.

“WRJ is definitely geared towards an older population who have the time and the finances to come to an event like assembly or committing to a national board...it is expensive to be a volunteer and it takes a lot of time, and I have been a stay at home mother, so I have the time, and we decided as a family that this was a financial thing that we wanted to do.”

Another informant stated: “Maybe younger women would take on a larger leadership role if they could afford it.” Another issue for the lack of younger leaders is seeking out of information on a national level and that her sisterhood is “locally focused.” Providing leadership opportunities for the new generation of sisterhood women is complicated. One informant perceived a lack of turning over leadership to others. “As a baby boomer, I see the importance of letting new and younger members take on

leadership roles, but there are others that want to keep everything the same. If we don't allow some new blood to run the sisterhood, who will make sure it exists in 20 years?"

Sisterhoods that have a majority of younger members tend to be more concerned with local, rather than national activities. "Most of my sisterhood doesn't know what WRJ is...just recently our President put time in our meeting for a WRJ update from me...most are not super knowledgeable or engaged about WRJ or URJ." There are some congregations with clergy that possess no knowledge of the role WRJ and sisterhoods within the Reform movement, and therefore cannot be as supportive of the organization if they are not informed. Rabbi Marla Feldman, Executive Director of WRJ shared in the book "The Sacred Calling: Four Decades of Women in the Rabbinate" her wish for a partnership between the major Reform organizations:

"What might be possible if the professional women and lay women of Reform Judaism worked collaboratively? There is tremendous power in sisterhood, yet so much of that power has yet to be tapped. It is difficult to believe, but the Women's Rabbinic Network (WRN) and WRJ have never engaged in a joint enterprise. What might such a venture make possible? What if WRJ and WRN worked together, along with the CCAR, URJ, and other arms of the Movement, to secure equal pay for professional Jewish women, or to enhance the bat mitzvah experience for girls, or to advocate in the public arena for women's health? Separately we may make an impact on some of these issues, but working together, there is no limit to what we can accomplish."²⁵⁹

Rabbi Marla Feldman sees a partnership within the near future.

My informants are involved within their synagogue sisterhoods in various capacities, and the traditional roles within sisterhood continue, but to a lesser extent.

Many stated their main purpose was to supplement synagogue activities and

²⁵⁹ The Women Who Set the Stage: Celebrating Over One Hundred Years of Women in Reform Judaism, RABBI MARLA J. FELDMAN (2016-06-14). The Sacred Calling: Four Decades of Women in the Rabbinate (CCAR Challenge and Change Series) (Kindle Locations 116-117). CCAR Press. Kindle Edition.

programming. They served as the core group of volunteers within the synagogue.

Another informant described her sisterhood as such: “My sisterhood provides spiritual programming with a social aspect.” Others described the traditional roles within their synagogues, like baking for the *onegs*, volunteering to decorate the synagogue, and distributing apples and honey to the religious school. Another informant’s sisterhood has also taken a role that was not associated with traditional sisterhood groups until recently; training to lead *shiva* minyans, the home services for people in mourning. Previously this would be only the job of the clergy, but it is becoming something that lay leaders are learning how to do.

Others stated that their Sisterhoods play a large financial role in purchasing items for the synagogue. “The congregation asks for things and we buy them: Torah covers, things for the kitchen, artwork for the social hall.” The catering role of sisterhood has also diminished. When I asked who cooks the various foods for their *onegs*, one replied: “We don’t *do* onegs.”

The planning and attending of sisterhood social events create enduring social networks within many sisterhoods. There were a lot of creative programs that the women participated in. “We have a woman’s’ dining out group, SWEET dinners (Sisters Who Enjoy Eating Out) at non-chain restaurants once every 6 weeks that 6 to 15 people attend, a Wine & Paint event and “Wingo”-women’s only bingo.” Other events that were mentioned were sisterhood *Shabbaton*, yoga classes, and purchasing block tickets to a show.

Some sisterhoods charged for all events, whether they took place at the synagogue or not, and others were sponsored by individuals so they could be offered for free to

women. Some sisterhoods allowed non-members to join them. “We usually don’t charge for events, and you don’t have to be a sisterhood member to come to an event either.”

The seemingly outdated practice of sending Uniongrams still has fans, but for others they are old fashioned. One informant said her sisterhood loved sending Uniongrams: “We send them to everyone who joins or renews their membership, we also send them as notes to people who are ill or have recently lost someone.” Another sisterhood widely uses Uniongrams as a method of commemorating life cycle events and people buy books of Uniongrams once and year and send them out accordingly. Again, the age demographic played a major role in whether Uniongrams were bought and shared. A sisterhood member in her early 30’s stated: “We have not participated in Uniongrams for a long time... I use them to get them out there, and I try to explain to the members what they are and their history, but they are not popular.”

Most of my informants did not see the discontinuation of production of the WRJ calendar as problematic. “The calendar was not a huge loss to our sisterhood, most people are using other calendars...but people miss seeing the Jewish art.” As more people are using the calendar on their phones and not physically writing appointments down, there is less need for the written personal calendar. “The calendar was not popular and we haven’t sold that many in a long time.” A longtime sisterhood member was saddened by its discontinuation. “Not only was the calendar useful to realize when the Jewish holidays were, it also showcased new Jewish and artists, an underappreciated genre in today’s society.”

This is also true of gift shops. “It was only open during religious school hours, and perhaps for an extra hour or two before *Hanukkah*...it was in a corner of the main area.” However, there are examples of successful synagogue gift shops, despite the relative availability of Judaica. Another sisterhood member shared that “We open the gift shop at specific times, including during Shabbat *onegs*...ours is very successful, we remodel and maintain it.” One shared that their gift shop is rarely open.

“We have a gift shop, but it is in a converted closet that has shelves... We do host a Hanukkah sale within the social hall...the gift shop used to be a source of income, but with the Internet and how easy it is to find Judaica...we are trying to re-examine the role of the gift shop, but it isn’t the source of income that it used to be.”

This is the trend in many synagogues today, there isn’t a great need to shop there anymore. Many more synagogues are holding bazaars to make up for the funds that would have been raised through the profits of the gift shop. One stated: “We invite artists that sell their artwork, as well as sisterhood members that sell Mary Kay, Silpada jewelry, and other things during their spare time to sell at our bazaar. We then collect part of their profits.”

Many of my informants described the close bond they shared with the women in their sisterhood, both locally and nationally. One national leader shared that “All the past sisterhood presidents are going on a cruise in December...there have been times when I have counted on these women and they have helped me through some very tough times.” This was a common statement amongst many of the women I interviewed. One affirmed, “I can share my problems and successes with them freely. “

A common concern of many sisterhoods is the lack of co-mingling between the generations. Speaking about a recent event at the membership luncheon: “One table was long time members, one table was the baby boomers and the religious school mothers.”

She stated that the religious school mothers had a hard time attending events or meetings that were held in the evenings, so her sisterhood alters their programming between evenings and Sunday mornings. Within her synagogue, they provide carpools to encourage members to attend events and meetings. “If the older members are not well, they are more than happy to donate funds to help sponsor an event.” This leads to less comingling between the age groups because the members choose which events they want to attend based on the activity involved and the time it was offered. In other sisterhoods, members choose to attend events based on their interests and age has no bearing on who attends and who does not. “There isn’t a contentious relationship between the two groups, it just doesn’t exist.” This was a common statement made in my interviews; there was not a communal activity that all members of sisterhood could enjoy. Within all the sisterhoods, there were members that supported their sisterhood financially but chose not to attend events. “They either do not attend because they are too busy, or they aren’t interested in our programming.”

Weather had an impact on the involvement of aging individual members. There were members of sisterhood that did not live in the same area year-round. This was especially apparent with sisterhood women who were retired; therefore there were fewer women at events during the winter, than in the spring and summer.

“A growing proportion of the American population, including Jews, maintain multiple residences in different parts of the country. Doing so, they circulate between their permanent and their second places of residence, and as a result, live only part time in any given community.”²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Goldstein, Sidney, and Alice Goldstein. 63.

Some sisterhoods are attempting, as one member put it to “get out of the rut of “this is what we do, this is how we do it, this is how we always done it” and trying to get them to open up the doors a little more, getting them to try new things.”

One informant described separate generational groups within her synagogue sisterhood: the young mothers, the empty nesters and the widows. While finding activities for the empty nesters and widows to enjoy, her sisterhood realized that “in order to get the young mothers involved, we have to get the kids involved...that’s why in order to receive a scholarship for camp, they have to help sisterhood in some way; helping with mailings, serving food at events...”

Although having children who wanted to attend camp brought some young mothers into their synagogues sisterhoods, she shared her worries about their long-term involvement. “I hope that the women stay after their child is finished with their hours to earn a scholarship.” This echoes the dilemma that many synagogues face today. When children finish their studies and have their *Bar or Bat Mitzvah*, some families disaffiliate from their synagogues, and therefore all factions of a synagogue are affected. Synagogues lose families, sisterhoods lose members, and religious schools lose pupils.

“The post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah drop-out syndrome is an often remarked-upon pattern, usually in the context of families who opt to drop their synagogue membership when their youngest child reaches the age of 13. Rabbis have been known to lament the role of Bar/Bat Mitzvah as an end point, rather than beginning, to the synagogue involvement of young Jews.”²⁶¹

²⁶¹ Wertheimer, Jack. "A Census of Jewish Supplementary Schools 2006-07." August 2008. Accessed November 11, 2016. <http://avichai.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Supplementary-School-Census-Report-Final.pdf>.

One of my interviewees explained how widows were largely ignored in her sisterhood. She personally makes sure that this contingency is included in sisterhood activities by arranging for carpools and that they are called regularly.

“When you do don’t include the women in their later years, sisterhood will miss out on a major group of women...they are an asset, but they need to be personally reached out to. We should not make assumptions that they can’t come, or they don’t want to, or that they are too old. They are also a lot of fun and know a lot, if only people would reach out.”

Another sisterhood remained unaffected by the generational divide. “We do everything as one...there is a lot of cross pollination...we have older members that have a lot of organizational memory and institutional knowledge and they share that with the younger members... and the older members let the younger members branch out and try new things. ”

When asked about separating programming based on age groups, another stated it wasn’t necessary in her sisterhood because of alternative programs offered by the synagogue. “My temple has a very active senior group, so if there is something that they feel is missing from sisterhood, they may find it there.” This creates a solution to typical senior aged programming (i.e. Mahjongg, Yiddish, knitting, or mobility limiting exercising classes.) “We do not have events specifically geared towards younger women either, but it hasn’t been an issue for us.” However, to most synagogue sisterhoods, it is difficult to have one organization for different generations.

There were many strategies implemented to attract new members, many stating that the personal touches were the key to making new members feel welcome, as well as reaching out to new women first. “It is important to meet them where they are, rather than wait for them to come to us.”

One member described the process of recruiting a new member to the synagogue into joining sisterhood. “We try to reach out with personal letters from sisterhood members and our President...We offer a free year of sisterhood membership for new members of the synagogue, and we pay their WRJ dues so we count them as members.”

Members shared both their fears and visions of WRJ and sisterhoods for the next decades of the 21st century. Some described a group that diverges into more specific women’s groups. “There may be more groups that splinter off...a group of young professionals, religious school mothers, or maybe a Rosh Chodesh group, a spirituality group.”

Some were fearful of a time when physical interaction will be nonexistent. “Hopefully the virtual world doesn’t take over, we now hold some of our sisterhood meetings over Zoom...²⁶² everything is virtual, we don’t see people in person anymore.” Although it may be easier to meet if everyone can connect via the Internet, the personal interactions: hugging, eating together, the side conversations, disappear when one is hiding behind a screen. One informant quoted the following phrase as the reason for the decline in the number of sisterhood members today: “Millennials aren’t joiners.” Others disagree, but still acknowledged that assumption.

“Of course they’re joiners! In fact, more and more Millennials join everyday, starting at a younger age and joining in the highest percentage of any generation in history. They just aren’t joining *our* organizations. Facebook usage just past 750 million...if membership organizations are going to attract and keep members in this environment, they better figure out what “benefits” people...and provide those benefits in a hassle-free, tangible way.”²⁶³

²⁶² Zoom is a web conferencing program where people can hold meetings face to face over the Internet.

²⁶³ Levin, Mark. "I'm Just Not a Joiner." The Membership Blog. August 29, 2011. Accessed January 24, 2017. <https://themembershipblog.com/2011/08/29/im-just-not-a-joiner/>.

Sisterhoods are struggling to find programming that will encourage new women to join, yet not feel responsible if they are unable to commit to multiple programs.

One described her optimism for the future of WRJ and individual sisterhoods. "It will grow and change...there will still be local sisterhoods within the temples, I think that they serve an important role in building relationships, being a place for women to work together and have a good time."

I ended our interviews with the following question: Were WRJ and their sisterhoods were feminist organizations. One replied "We are creating leadership opportunities for women and organizing activities on behalf of women's interests, so yes I would consider my sisterhood a feminist organization." Another stated: "We support women's causes, and a lot of women in our sisterhood were active feminists in their earlier days...we love being women." This is where the definition of feminism, "the doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women equal to those of men"²⁶⁴ enters a gray territory. Being a feminist should not imply that one is an activist, or an especially active, vigorous advocate of a cause, especially a political cause."²⁶⁵ However, there are women that are feminist activists, feminists and activists. They aren't inclusive or exclusive of each other. The definition of feminism changes from person to person.

²⁶⁴ "Feminism." Dictionary.com. Accessed November 24, 2016.
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/feminism?s=t>.

²⁶⁵ "Activist." Dictionary.com. Accessed November 24, 2016.
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/activist?s=t>.

“I think that WRJ is a feminist organization...I think my sisterhood is too, but I think how they express it varies from woman to woman. I like what the organization does and stands for historically, I am comfortable representing that and bringing it into the future.”

Conclusion

I have always been interested in women and their role within Reform Judaism. In my third year of Cantorial school, I read Pamela Nadell's book *Women Who Would be Rabbis* for a History of Reform Judaism class with Dr. Carole Balin. I couldn't put the book down and wrote down numerous notes and questions for the next class session. I was truly inspired by their journeys. It was then I first thought about becoming a rabbi. Those amazing women had to possess so much determination even to walk through the halls of Hebrew Union College, let alone sit in a class among students and professors that did not believe they could serve communities as rabbis because of their gender. I never realized how their bravery paved a once rocky and unstable path for the multitude of women who would learn in the classrooms on the four HUC-JIR campuses.

Times have definitely changed since Rabbi Priesand was ordained. When I was invested as a cantor in New York in 2010, fifteen of the twenty-two rabbinical ordinees and eight of the nine cantorial investees were women. As I walked up the stairs toward the ark at Temple Emanu-El that morning, I felt the presence of the women who studied before me, ones that were denied their *smicha*. I was so proud to be blessed as a leader of the Jewish people.

As a Rabbinical student, I was privileged to attend the 2013 URJ Biennial in San Diego, which coincided with the WRJ Assembly. I saw a large table set up in the Exhibition Hall with a group of smiling faces sitting behind it handing out a free book in commemorating the 100th anniversary of Women of Reform Judaism. I decided to take a book from them. Later on that night, while looking through the various pamphlets and

handouts, I chose to read some of the book. At the time, I was unaware how much their time and efforts had impacted the Reform movement. I knew that night I needed to share their story.

Just two years ago, I was fortunate to take a class on the History of Jews in the South with Dr. Gary Zola, and knew that I wanted to write my research paper on a Jewish woman who had an impact on southern Judaism. It was then that Dr. Zola introduced me to Mrs. Paula Ackerman, a rabbi's wife and a sisterhood leader who led a congregation in Meridian, Mississippi after her husband's untimely death. Her story was the final motivation to write my thesis on WRJ Sisterhood.

As I immersed myself in NFTS and WRJ history, I read, through their own words these intelligent and resourceful women shared in front of 100's of women about religion, social action, and women's rights, as well as the messages highlighting special programs that brought these women together year after year. They were feminists of their time. They have always sought for equality, especially for those who couldn't speak up for it themselves. They truly instituted change within our world. WRJ has always been an organization that empowered women to do anything. WRJ sisterhood encompasses much more than onegs, decorations and greeters. From the commencement of the first meeting on January 21, 1913, WRJ has chosen to have an impact on the world.

In my rabbinate, I hope to encourage the work of sisterhood and WRJ and make people aware of all they have, and will continue to accomplish. I am eager to become a member of my synagogue's sisterhood and WRJ. I believe in what they stand for. In celebration of its founding, I will hold a Sisterhood Shabbat during the month of January, inviting sisterhood members to share their experiences. There will be a designated space

in the bulletin for a historian of sisterhood to write a column highlighting the accomplishments of their local sisterhood and the international organization. In order to aid sisterhood with membership, I will collaborate with a younger member of sisterhood to reach out to new families. Likewise, I will invite a long time member of sisterhood with me to speak to women who were once involved, who haven't been active in awhile, to ascertain if they would be interested in attending functions again. As a member of the Women's Rabbinic Network (WRN), I aim to collaborate with Rabbi Marla Feldman on WRN/WRJ programs. I want to help educate my fellow Jewish professionals on the importance of WRJ to their congregations and communities. I yearn to be a part of their story.

Example 1

The 1st seal of NFTS



Example 2

Sancocho Popular (Native Soup)

1 5-lb chicken

1 lb. corned pork

1 lb. otoi (root vegetable of Panama)

1 lb. sweet potatoes

3 corn cobs

1 lb. ñame (kind of yam)

1 lb. brisket

1 lb. yucca

3 plantains

1 lb. ñampi (Taro root)

onions, tomatoes, and sweet peppers, salt and pepper.

Boil chicken, pork and brisket, tomatoes, onions, peppers, salt and pepper in 4 qts. of water for 1 ½ hours. Put in otoi, sweet potatoes, corn and plantain. Take them out when done and put rest of vegetables until everything is cooked. Serve in soup plates with a plate of vegetable at the same time.

*Written in handwriting "The natives eat this 3 times a day if they are lucky!"

Example 3

Carol Perman's Shrimp Mold

-Carol Anne Blitzler

The late Carol Herzberg Perlman learned to cook from her famous mother, Fannye Herzberg, hostess at the Louisiana Governor's mansion from 1936 to 1948. When Mrs. Herzberg retired, she compiled her recipes into a cookbook "Fannye's Best Recipes"...When I was first married, if I needed a party recipe, I would call Carol Perlman, one of Baton Rouge's first caterers. One of my favorites is her shrimp mold.

Ingredients

1 envelope unflavored gelatin	Juice of one lemon
¾ cup of mayonnaise	Salt and pepper to taste
2 cups shrimp cooked, chopped	1 pimento, chopped
1 (8 ounce) bottle stuffed olives, sliced	¾ cup chopped parsley
1 ½ teaspoons grated onion	2 hard boiled eggs, chopped

Directions:

Dissolve gelatin in 2 tablespoons cold water. Melt over hot water to dissolve, Add lemon juice and allow to cool. Add mayonnaise, salt and pepper. Pour over shrimp, pimento, olives, celery, onions, and boiled eggs in a large bowl. Mix well. Pour into a greased two-quart mold. Refrigerate to set. Garnish with parsley or lettuce and service with your favorite cracker.

Example 4

Roasted Game Hens with Pineapple Glaze

-Beth Brodkey of Temple Israel of Omaha, Nebraska

Ingredients

4-1 3/4 lb. Cornish hens, giblets removed	4 Tbsp. melted butter
8 oz can crushed pineapple, drained	1/3 cup pure maple syrup
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice	3 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
1 Tbsp. soy sauce	Chopped parsley

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°. Arrange hens' breast side up in baking pan. Brush hens with butter and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake uncovered for 25 minutes. Whisk pineapple, syrup, lemon juice, mustard and soy sauce together. Baste hens with some of the pineapple mixture and continue roasting for about 45 minutes, basting with more pineapple. Transfer hens to platter and keep warm. Scrape pan juices into remaining pineapple mixture. Boil, then reduce heat and simmer until sauce is reduced to 2/3 cup. Sprinkle hens with parsley. Serve hens, passing pineapple sauce

Example 5

Gefilte Fish

-Mrs. Abraham Aron of Temple Beth Am Warwick, Rhode Island

6 lbs. fillet fish (pike, buffle, whitefish)	2 onions
5 eggs	carrots and onions
3/4 cup water	salt and pepper to taste
enough matzo meal to thicken to form balls	

Grind or chop fish and onion and add the above ingredients. (Sugar may be added if desired). Put carrot and onions in bottom of pan. Fish heads may also be added if desired. Shape fish in balls and roll pieces of skin around each ball. Add fish balls and cover with cold water. Boil gently for 3 hours. Seasoning should be added to the pot as desired.

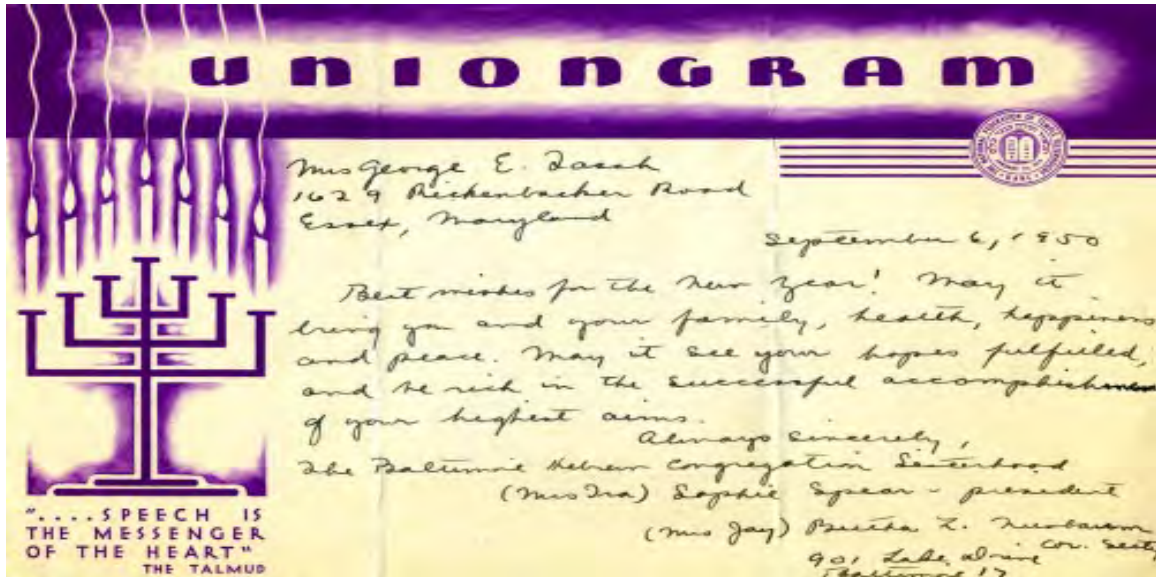
Example 6



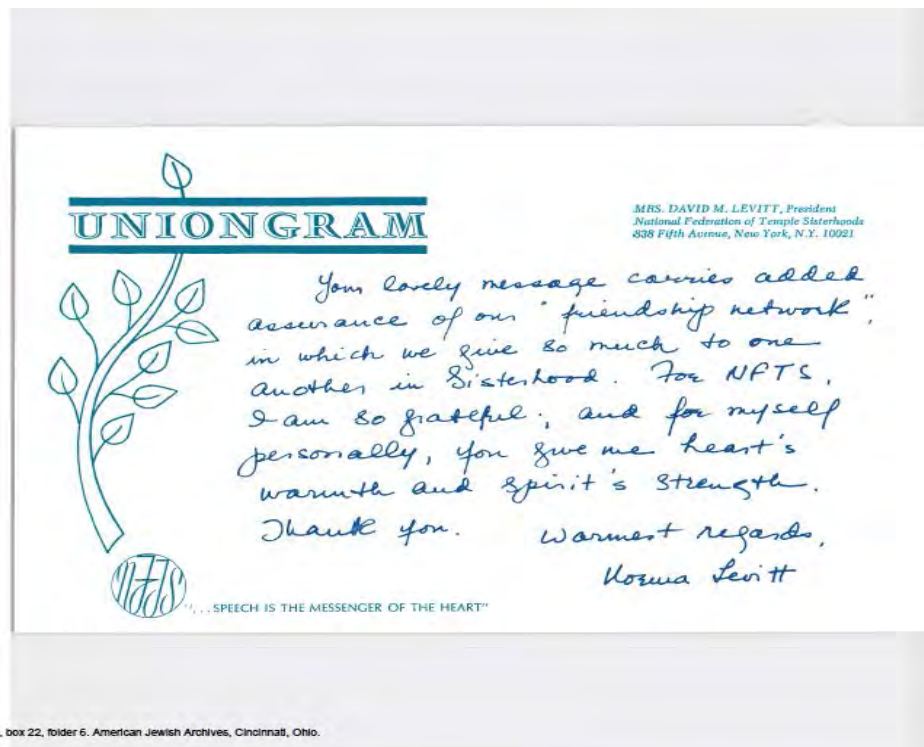
Example 7



Example 8



Example 9



Norma U. Levitt Papers. MS-720, box 22, folder 6. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Example 10



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