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Construction and Reconstruction:
Jews in North Carolina
After the Civil War

Max W. Weiss

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for ordination:
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Digest

After the Civil War the citizens of North Carolina faced the daunting task of rebuilding a ruined state. The economy of the South was in shambles, much its infrastructure was destroyed, and the plantation based economic system fell apart with the end of slavery. The political structure in North Carolina changed radically after the war. Prior to the Civil War the state government was run by a landed aristocracy. After the war, under the new Republican government, a more democratic system was put into place and all citizens in the state were given a chance to participate in government. The social systems which held sway prior to the war were overturned and new systems came into being. Democrats and Republicans, whites and freedmen struggled for political control of the state.

This thesis examines the role of Jews in the process of the Reconstruction of North Carolina. There were Jews in the state prior to the war and Jews who came after, but the Jewish population of North Carolina remained small throughout Reconstruction. Most Jews who came to the state came for the sake of filling a commercial role, a role in which they were desperately needed. Jews helped rebuild the economy of North Carolina after the war and they were welcomed into the state. Jews found a strong supporter in Governor Vance, who went out of his way to provide support to the state's Jews. With Governor Vance's support, after Jews gained the right to hold

public office, they became active members in the Democratic party, the party of the white elite. Reconstruction was a period of growth for Jews in North Carolina. The Jewish population increased, and Jews began to establish formal communities, social groups and synagogues.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one examines the economic role of Jews and the forces of antisemitism and philosemitism, including governor Vance's speech, "The Scattered Nation." In chapter two the struggle of Jews for the right to hold public office is examined and their role in the Conservative party is analyzed. Chapter three explores the building of a Jewish community in the state with a special emphasis on the struggle between traditional and Reform Judaism.

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Introduction

The Civil War ended in 1865 and the soldier who came home to North Carolina returned to a devastated and much changed state. The economy and society of the state, and indeed the entire South, were in disarray. With the end of slavery the plantation-based economy was destroyed. The political reality of the southern states shifted with the adoption of the fifteenth amendment which gave freedmen the right to vote, and for a brief time the Republican party held sway in the South. The aftermath of the Civil War affected the lives of Southerners on all levels as social structures were demolished and reborn.

When the war was over North Carolina was placed under military rule, and the period of political Reconstruction began in North Carolina. The period immediately following the Civil War until 1877 was known as the era of Reconstruction. Reconstruction took place on three levels, political, economic and social.

The Jews of the Reconstruction period in North Carolina are of particular interest because of the situation in which they found themselves following the war. North Carolina was the second to last state in the Union to give full political freedom to its Jewish inhabitants. It was not until 1868 that North Carolina allowed its Jewish citizens to legally hold office. Once

they were granted the legal right many Jews took advantage of the opportunity and supported the Conservative Democrats, the party which held power prior to the Civil War, the very party which had refused them the right to hold office to begin with. North Carolina's Jewish population was very small during this period. Because of its small size it is possible to examine a large proportion of the community in depth and view their community in greater detail than would be possible with a larger community. As the number of Jews in North Carolina and their wealth increased, they were able to create a vital Jewish community in which the national struggle between Reform and traditional Judaism was played out.

Most of the towns with Jewish populations during Reconstruction formed some sort of formal religious community. These communities began because of both internal and external pressures. Finally, North Carolina is of particular interest because of "The Scattered Nation" speech composed and delivered by the state's war-time governor, Zebulon Baird Vance. Vance, who was known as one of the foremost orators of his time delivered his philosemitic speech, "The Scattered Nation" across America during the 1870's and 1880's. He knew many Jews in North Carolina prior to and during Reconstruction and their acquaintance no doubt helped inspire his speech. Vance's broad influence was one factor shielding the Jews of North Carolina from much of the antisemitism which was prevalent in the South and across the nation during Reconstruction.

Although North Carolina has a Jewish population that dates to the early eighteenth century it was not until 1867 that its first synagogue was founded. It was during this period that the Jews of North Carolina began to organize themselves into communities. Five synagogues were established during or immediately following Reconstruction. Emigration from the North and from overseas increased as Jews sought new economic opportunities.¹ Jews established businesses in North Carolina that not only survived but thrived.

Although Reconstruction presented enormous challenges it also offered tremendous political, social and economic opportunities. Eli Evans writes, "It is difficult to measure the contribution of the Jews to the recovery of the South, because most Southern historians have neglected them as a factor, more from oversight than from careful research. It is fair to say that they played an important role and in some cities, a crucial role, in reorganizing the market place after the war."² Economically the Jews had a large impact on the damaged state. During the Civil War the economy was destroyed, production and railroads were disrupted and much of the South's young leadership was lost. The economy needed to be rebuilt with a new structure. Some of that structure was provided by Jews. North Carolina's

¹Thomas D. Clark. "The Post Civil War Economy in the South." American Jewish Historical Quarterly LV, 1966, 430.

²Eli Evans, The Provincials, (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 69.

Jews and Jews who immigrated to the state immediately following the war were poised to take full advantage of these opportunities and to aid the state economically. In North Carolina Jews contributed significantly to commerce. In some small communities single Jewish families dominated trade and brought relative prosperity to areas which were otherwise economically devastated.

When Jewish communities began to organize they faced the same problems in microcosm which were being confronted by Jews across America. Some of these tensions were played out in Wilmington. The founding of a temple in Wilmington was the catalyst for a religious struggle, recorded in the pages of The Occident. The struggle was between Leeser and Wise over the religious practice and allegiance of the Wilmington congregation. A synagogue was first founded in 1867 under Leeser's auspices and in 1868 collapsed only to be reorganized four years later as a Reform synagogue. An examination of the struggle surrounding the founding of Temple Israel should show the meaning and nature of the struggle between Orthodoxy and Reform for North Carolina's Jews and shed light on the way this struggle was played out across the nation.

While the Jews of North Carolina were struggling to define themselves religiously, they were also struggling against a growing antisemitism. Harry Simonhoff observes, "The emergence of the race conscious white peasantry

brought to the surface suppressed antipathy toward religious minorities.³ It was against this background of growing antisemitism that the Jews of North Carolina fought for and gained political equality. In North Carolina the specter of antisemitism, while possibly hovering beneath the surface, never came into the full light of day as it did throughout much of the South and the nation during Reconstruction. There were no recorded antisemitic incidents in North Carolina during Reconstruction. Lack of antisemitic incidents came from a combination of factors. The Jews who came south were largely involved in trade, a position which did not place them in competition with freedmen laborers or with white farmers and landowners. The economic contribution of Jews to the state was widely reported and appreciated by newspapers of the era. Jews were politically conservative and sided with white majority. And Governor Vance's speech provided a calming influence.

This thesis will examine the economic impact Jews had on North Carolina and the influence of their role in the economy on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the state; the role of Jews in politics in North Carolina and politics effects on the Jews; and the building of Jewish communities across the state.

³ Harry Simonhoff, Jewish Participants in the Civil War, (New York: Arco Publishing, 1963), 320

Economy and Philosemitism

Following the Civil War the economy of North Carolina was in ruins. Every bank in the state was forced into liquidation. The rail system, cannibalized by Southerners and wrecked by invading Northern armies, was almost useless. Many of the best laborers in the state had died in war and business was almost at a standstill for lack of capital. There was nothing in place to lure potential investors to North Carolina, no manufacturing or distribution infrastructure and no sources of cash. North Carolina was a land of vast potential but "no fluid security and no money."¹

The economy of the state needed rebuilding and trade needed to be renewed. These needs provided enormous potential and opportunity for those so inclined to participate in the economic growth of the region. Jews came in small numbers to North Carolina for the sake of commerce. Some Jews, who resided in the state prior to the war stayed on. After the war the market was open to potential investors and needed an injection of new ideas. The slave-based economy was destroyed and with it old patterns of doing business. The farmers had no capital, no equipment, no seed or fertilizer with which to farm. If they did manage to produce crops there was no

¹Thomas D. Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, LV(1966): 425.

organized market through which to sell them.² This was the situation which merchants faced in North Carolina and throughout much of the South. The obstacle facing them was not merchandizing or advertising but helping to invent a system of "capitalization and distribution which would work in a bankrupt region."³ The Jews in North Carolina during Reconstruction did just that. They helped the economy of North Carolina in an amount that is disproportionately large when compared to their minuscule numbers. Many came south with strong ties to Northern cities already firmly in place and supplied the state with an infusion of cash. Others relied on a traditional but revitalized barter system and provided local farmers with seed and clothing in exchange for crops, providing trade in a cash poor economy. One family relied on a system of barter dependent on herbs and was able to provide goods to mountain regions that had no cash and very few crops. Many Jews who entered this difficult environment went bankrupt. Most made a living at a string of successive businesses, and a handful became moderately wealthy.

During the Reconstruction period more Jews came into North Carolina and became an active element in the commercial and social establishment. As the Jewish population began to increase the question of the relationship between Jew and gentile came into play. Jews found remarkable acceptance in

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

North Carolina during Reconstruction and no references to antisemitic incidences are readily available. Newspaper reports on Jewish activities were overwhelmingly favorable. North Carolina, for the most part, welcomed Jewish immigrants with open arms. Harry Golden called this trend "American Philo-Semitism"⁴ North Carolina's Jews had several advantages which limited antisemitic incidents during Reconstruction. There were very few Jews in the state and the ones there were not engaged directly in agriculture so they were not viewed as a group in competition for jobs. Racial prejudice against the black freedmen was the primary way prejudice in North Carolina was manifest and Jews were considered part of the white majority, especially since they identified with the Democratic, "whiteman's" political party. Jews brought a needed infusion of cash and commerce to the state. As in Atlanta the commercial atmosphere "cast a blanket of relative social equality over the ... white businessmen" in the first two decades following the Civil War.⁵ The Jews also worked hard to fit into local society. They became highly assimilated and were respectful of the religious sentiments of their Christian neighbors. Finally, and importantly, the war-time Governor, Zebulon Vance, was a strong advocate on behalf of the Jews and traveled the

⁴Harry Golden, Our Southern Landsmen, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), 228.

⁵Steven Hertzberg, Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta 1845-1915, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 170.

state and country during Reconstruction delivering a lecture which portrayed the Jewish citizens of the United States in a favorable if condescending manner.

Peddling and the Rural South

Many Jews who eventually opened stores in North Carolina probably came South as foot-peddlers. Carrying a pack and travelling rural roads, they plied their wares from farm to farm. They were based in larger cities such as, Baltimore, Richmond, and Cincinnati and would often return home for supplies. Many of these traveling merchants chose to remain in North Carolina and open permanent stores at crossroads or in small towns. Enough of North Carolina's peddlers were Jewish that the Cherokee Indian population in the mountains referred to all of the peddlers as "egg eaters," referring, it has been hypothesized, to the dietary habits of the peddlers who kept Kosher.⁶ Unfortunately, this mobile, transient group did not leave many records behind. Many who stayed lived in areas too small to even sustain newspapers. These traveling merchants provided a needed service to isolated rural communities supplying cloth for clothing, sewing needles, pots, pans and spices.⁷ They became a romanticized part of the Old South, often

⁶Ibid.

⁷Caroline S. Coleman, "Knights of the Pack: The Heyday of the Foot Peddler," Southern Folklore Quarterly 7 (1943): 187-191.

referred to nostalgically. In 1940 the Weil family of Goldsboro ran a radio show about the history of Goldsboro in celebration of their business' seventy-fifth anniversary. In this show the family laid claims to roots in the push-cart business even though Herman Weil, the partnership's founder, had come South to clerk in a general store.⁸ The radio spot claimed that Herman Weil "traveled through Wayne County with a pushcart, selling his merchandise."⁹ If the image of the foot peddler was romanticized as late as 1940, peddling must have been a common, if less romantic, aspect of life during Reconstruction.

Whether Jews peddled their way south or came with money in their pockets to start businesses many stayed and contributed significantly to the economy in North Carolina. Wilmington was North Carolina's primary port city and prior to the Civil War had a bustling economy which attracted a few Jews to the area, most of whom acted as "agents," selling stock on consignment for large wholesale houses in New York and Philadelphia. Some of the local merchants also hired groups of peddlers who worked in the rural countryside for them.¹⁰ The Jewish population of Wilmington grew by

⁸Dictionary of North Carolina Biography.

⁹Weil Family Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Folder #79, Series 2.2.

¹⁰Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738-1925," 22-23.

50% between 1860 and 1865, during the course of the Civil War, as the port gained national attention as a source of supplies for the Confederacy.¹¹

War Time Accusations of Profiteering and Commercial Growth in Wilmington

Perceived Jewish participation in blockade-running and speculation was one source of antisemitic feelings during the war, and Wilmington, due to the treacherous nature of its coast line, was a primary port of entry for ships attempting to avoid the Union blockade. Wilmington attracted many foreign investors and agents during the war all hoping to grow rich in an economy with high demand but little supply. These speculators engendered hostility among the impoverished Southerners as the, "pinched Confederates, whom the lingering years of the war had reduced to rags or homely homespun, look[ed] with envious eyes upon the sleek, well dressed blockade runners who sauntered through their streets at will."¹² In Wilmington many of these speculators were identified as men of, "strongly Jewish physiognomy."¹³ Prices soared during the war as the demand for goods increased or remained

¹¹Ibid., 23.

¹²Ibid., 24, Quoted from, Charles Halleck, "Bermuda in Blockade times," New England Magazine, (May 1892), 339.

¹³Ibid., 25; Quoting from, John Johns, "Wilmington During the Blockade," Harpers Weekly.

constant but supplies declined. In 1864 a quarter of lamb sold for \$100.¹⁴ Jews were in high positions within the Confederate command responsible for supplies and were easy to scapegoat. Judah Benjamin was the secretary of state; Colonel Abraham Meyers, Quartermaster General; and J.M. Seixas was a permanent agent of the war department stationed in Wilmington to keep the port open and supplied.¹⁵ Under-currents of antisemitic thought and feeling existed after the war but Jews were still welcomed with open arms into Wilmington and most of North Carolina during Reconstruction to help rebuild the economy of the state.

Jews comprised a large proportion of Wilmington's commercial community and helped the city get back on its feet after the war. They were important in keeping the port vital and active.¹⁶ In 1866 Jews were such a significant part of the business community that the Wilmington Daily Journal, in its story on Rosh Hashanna felt obligated to mention that Jewish-owned businesses would be closed, because their closing, "will of course cause some remark and inquiry into the reasons for this cause, as the Jews comprise

¹⁴Ibid., 25.

¹⁵Ibid., 26.

¹⁶John Henry Gerdes, "The Early Jews of Wilmington," Lower Cape Fear Historical Society Bulletin, 28:1 (Wilmington: October, 1984), 3.

quite a large portion of the business community."¹⁷ By 1869 when New Hanover County had a population of approximately 20,000 and, counted liberally, maybe 200 Jews lived in Wilmington, every clothing store listed in the business directory was owned by Jews.¹⁸ Jewish dry-good stores began to line the streets in Wilmington's downtown area. Wilmington's Jews were highly visible and played a significant role in the commerce of the region. Jacob Loeb served both as a notary public and the French Vice-Consul.¹⁹ From their visible role in commerce many of Wilmington's Jews began to take an active interest in Conservative politics. Their success also enabled them, in 1875, to spend \$20,000 on building a synagogue and to hire a rabbi at a yearly salary of \$2,000. The impact that Jews had on Wilmington's economy was unusual for North Carolina only in the number of Jews who lived in the town. In smaller cities throughout the state Jews played a vital part in the economy and were recognized as doing so in the local newspapers.

Jews and the Small Town Economy

Tarboro

Tarboro, a small town with only 1,300 residents in 1870, had an active

¹⁷Wilmington Daily Journal, Sept. 9, 1866.

¹⁸Bransom's Business Directory 1869, (Raleigh), 108.

¹⁹Bransom's Business Directory 1869.

and vital Jewish population the majority of which moved into the town immediately after the war ended.²⁰ Jews in Tarboro arrived to a mixed reception but they were supported by the local Conservative newspaper. The editor of the Tarboro paper wrote in 1872 that, "No town of the same size in the United States has more members of the Jewish persuasion doing business therein than that of Tarboro, and, with rare exceptions, they are men of probity, honesty and character."²¹ The editor took, "pleasure in asserting that among the most reliable and respectable portion of our community will be found the majority of Jewish settlers, who are as honorable and prompt in all of their dealings as any of their Christian rivals. Tarboro Is fortunate in this respect."²² One can only guess at what lay behind the praise that was published in the Tarboro Southerner. It was not uncommon that the charge was leveled against Jews that they were corrupt or dishonest in their business practices. There was almost certainly a pervading, if largely silent, prejudice against Jews that prompted the editor to run this article. The Atlanta Constitution, acknowledged in 1870 that there was a prejudice against Jews but claimed that in Atlanta, "little of the general prejudice against Jews is ever

²⁰Bransom's Business Directory 1872.

²¹Tarboro Southerner Weekly, February 29, 1872.

²²Ibid.

demonstrated."²³ The editor in Tarboro seems to be responding to a prejudice that existed but had not yet made its way into print and is not preserved.

In 1874 the editor of the Tarboro Enquirer Southerner responded to a specific charge made by "several Gentlemen" who on the street expressed the opinion that "the advent of Jews to Tarboro had injured the place." The editor took pains to defend the Jews against this defamation and in his defense revealed why he felt strongly about the positive role of the Jews. He argued that, "the Jewish element of this community has increased the value of real estate and the trade at this point at least 25 percent. Were they to leave we believe there would be equally as large a decline." The Jews were good for Tarboro because of the increased commerce that they brought to town. The editor further wrote that the Jews were, "good citizens and an unoffending set of people." The editor continued, that he, "would be glad to see 500 Jews come to Tarboro tomorrow with capital."²⁴ The editor of this small weekly paper defended the Jews against the charge that they were bad for the city on the grounds that they were good for commerce. Jews were welcome into the town as long as they brought capital with them. The need for capital in the cash poor South made Jews a welcome addition to most towns, at least as expressed by the local press. This Tarboro editorial also reinforced stereotypes

²³Hertzberg, Strangers Within the Gate City, 180.

²⁴Tarboro Enquirer Southerner, August 14, 1874.

about Jews as only being interested in commerce. Later the editor had cause to speak favorably about the religious practices of Tarboro's Jews. Jews brought expanded trade with them to Tarboro and enhanced the city's standard of living. They built new stores and brought in stock from Northern cities.²⁵ The Jews who came into Tarboro were for the most part able to thrive and build strong business but at the end of Reconstruction only 54 Jews were reported as living in the town.²⁶ They constituted a small minority of Tarboro's citizenry and were probably not perceived as a threat by the majority white population when compared to the population of freedmen who made up approximately 50% of the town. It is not a surprise that the majority of citizens, represented by the conservative newspaper, welcomed Jews to the city even if they were met with prejudice by a few citizens.

Goldsboro

The contribution made by Jews to the rebuilding of the economy in Goldsboro, lead by one family, is even more impressive. Herman Weil emigrated from Oberdorf, Wurtenberg, Germany where his father was a moderately wealthy antique dealer. He moved to Goldsboro in 1858 after a brief stay in Baltimore with his sisters. He began his career in Goldsboro as a

²⁵Tarboro Southerner Weekly, September 26, 1868.

²⁶Jacob R. Marcus, To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 167.

clerk in a general store. Shortly after his arrival the Civil War broke out and he enlisted with the Confederate army. Immediately after the war ended in 1865 he opened a general store with his brothers as partners.²⁷ Goldsboro was ideally situated as a location for a business with potential to expand. It was located at the juncture the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad and the Raleigh to New Bern Stage coach line. The city was geographically situated to serve the fertile coastal plain of eastern North Carolina. Once established, the Weil Brothers' partnership became the dominant business in Goldsboro. In addition to their general store, at various times during Reconstruction they ran: a buggy manufacturing business, a brick factory, and in 1873 built three new brick stores one of which became a hotel. They built a brick ice-house, and bought and managed farms as well as commercial and rental property throughout the region.²⁸

Since there was little cash in the state, merchants had to find new ways to make money and distribute goods. The Weil brothers were able to take advantage of the "crop lien system" that came into being as a way to provide goods in a cash poor economy. Under the crop lien system farmers could borrow from merchants against the crops they had planted in order to buy

²⁷"Weil Family," Dictionary of North Carolina Biography.

²⁸Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, various dates. Bransom's Business Directory 1869 and 1872. "Weil Family Papers," Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, Series 2.1 folders 44, 74, 75 for example.

farming supplies and provisions. This system was necessary because the few banks that existed would not take the risk to lend farmers the money they needed. Because of the high risks incurred by the merchants they charged a high rate of interest.²⁹ The Weil Brothers' ledger from their general store contains many entries where they were owed large debts.³⁰ The Weil Brothers' came to be in possession of a lot of property by loaning money or goods in exchange for a lien against the property.³¹ They even took possession of a "bay horse" as a payment for a debt of \$50.³² The Weil family began trading in property early but also did a brisk trade in their general store. Their first year, 1865, their store turned over more than \$30,000 in stock, by 1875 the volume had grown to \$100,000.³³

It is through their general store that they were best known in Goldsboro: "The store was the everyday meeting place of the community, the headquarters where men gathered to play checkers, swap yarns, and discuss

²⁹Richard L. Zuber, North Carolina During Reconstruction. (Raleigh: Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1975), 53.

³⁰"Weil Family" Southern Historical Collection, S-1:4696.

³¹*Ibid.*, Series 2.1, folders 44 and 74.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Moses Rountree, Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe. (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company 1969), 8.

politics.”³⁴ The Weil Brothers’ general store was ideally situated to be the social heart of the community. It was downtown across the street from the railroad depot. News from the outside world would reach there first. The editor of the Goldsboro Carolina Messenger recognized the importance of the Weil partnership to the community even though it seems few of the Goldsboro’s citizens had, “more than a faint idea of the large business the firm does.” The firm contributed more to Goldsboro than providing goods. According to The Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, the Weils were among Goldsboro’s “most public spirited citizens.” They “always manifested a degree of interest in the welfare of Goldsboro,” and were responsible “in no small degree to the progress which our town is readily making.”³⁵ The editor of the paper wrote very favorably about the Weils who were among the town’s leading citizens. They treated the residents of Goldsboro fairly, and “made a rule to sell at living prices.”³⁶ Perhaps that is the reason that they were so accepted. They were regarded as honest merchants, offering goods at a fair price. The Weils also fit into the white power structure of Goldsboro. Two of the brothers fought for the Confederacy. After the war they became active in

³⁴Jacqueline P. Bull, “The General Merchant in the Economic History of the New South,” Journal of Southern History, 18, (Baton Rouge, LA: The Southern Historical Association, 1952), 38.

³⁵Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, September 7, 1874.

³⁶*Ibid.*

conservative politics. Although they were committed Jews and helped found a synagogue they also occasionally attended church services to hear sermons. They tried and succeeded in fitting in to Goldsboro's society.

The Weils did not represent a threat to Goldsboro. Their presence enhanced the town through improved commerce and building expansion. They were welcomed into the town as good citizens and so were other Jews. By 1878 Goldsboro's Jewish population was second only to Wilmington's in size, although they were far from being the second largest city in the state.³⁷ In 1878, the end of Reconstruction, Jews comprised approximately 5% of Goldsboro township's population and 10% of its white population.³⁸ In the general population of North Carolina they made up only .06%. Jews came to Goldsboro because it was a commercial center and because they were welcome in the town and had a history of being welcome. Raleigh and Charlotte too were commercial centers in the state without histories of antisemitism but had smaller Jewish populations and much lower densities of Jews in the total population. Goldsboro was able to attract and keep their Jewish residents because the Weil family paved the way for other Jewish residents to be

³⁷Goldsboro's Jewish population was 147 in 1878, Wilmington's was 200. Jacob Marcus, To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984, 166 & 168.

³⁸This data takes population information from the 1872 census of Goldsboro and doubles it to arrive at the total population figures. Jews may have been an even higher percentage of the total population. Bransom's Business Directory 1872.

welcome in the town.

Jews were accepted into Goldsboro and even welcomed there because they contributed so much to the local economy. This motif held true across the state. Jews were welcomed into towns as positive contributors to local economies. Nowhere was this more true than in Statesville, North Carolina.

Statesville

Statesville, like Goldsboro, was a town heavily dependent on one Jewish family for its commerce, and the town supported the Jews who lived there. The Wallace family in Statesville dealt with the cash depleted economy in a unique way. They created a new barter economy based on the herb trade, where "herbs were substituted for hard money in the cashless Southern mountains." The Wallaces linked the herb trade to their wholesale operations and, "accelerated the penetration of manufactured goods to isolated areas." Their use of herbs instead of cash encouraged a level of trade that would otherwise have been absent from the area.³⁹

Isaac and David Wallach left their birth city of Nieukirken, Hesse-Cassel in the late 1840's or early 1850's and arrived in the United States through Augusta, Georgia in 1851. David and Isaac first went to Smoaks, South Carolina near Charleston where they changed their surname from

³⁹Gary R. Freeze, "Roots, Barks, Berries, and Jews: The Herb Trade in Gilded-Age North Carolina," William R. Childs, ed. Essays in Economic and Business History, (Columbus: Ohio State, 1995), 109.

Wallach to Wallace. In 1857 Isaac left Smoaks for Statesville, North Carolina, the rail head of the newly established Western Carolina Railroad, and was joined shortly thereafter by his brother. Prior to and during the Civil War they ran a store selling general merchandise. In the midst of the war David went to New York to meet his father Solomon, who they had brought over from Germany. Family stories relate that David was trapped in New York by the blockade until the end of the war. It may have been his intention to stay in the North to diversify trade or to send supplies South but no records remain. After the war David returned to North Carolina with his father and resumed trade.⁴⁰

The Wallaces quickly went into the wholesale business in partnership with a gentile, J.A.D. Stephenson. Wallace Brothers and Stephenson wholesale business was large and successful, at one point they were advertising to buy 15,000 dozen eggs at 15¢ a dozen. They received a carload of kerosine every three weeks and 40-50 carloads of salt in season.⁴¹ Business conditions were difficult in the decades following the Civil War. Economist Gary Freeze reports that, "More than two dozen firms were opened in the late 1860's in Statesville and Hickory.... The majority closed during the 1870's

⁴⁰Homer M. Keever, Iredell Piedmont County, (Statesville: Brady Printing Company for the Iredell County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 240. "Wallace Family," AJA, Cincinnati, Biographies file.

⁴¹Keever, Iredell Piedmont County, 240.

recession."⁴² The Wallace Brothers survived the panic of 1873 and even thrived during its duration using an edge that they had developed earlier, the herb trade.

How or why the Wallaces became interested in herbs is not entirely clear. Family tradition relates that one of the brothers went on a buying trip to New York and when he asked for medicinal herbs he was told that the herbs were where he was from and he should be selling not buying.⁴³ The herb trade was not new to the Carolinas but it had never been capitalized on to the extent that it was by the Wallaces. The Wallace brothers' herb business grew so quickly that by 1870 they needed to establish it as a separate branch from their other businesses. They hired M.E. Hyams, a Jewish botanist from Charleston who had worked for the Confederate army buying medicinal plants, to run their newly built herb warehouse. A year later they needed to build an even bigger warehouse. This entrepreneurial adventure was admired and questioned by the citizens of Statesville because, "previous to the year 1872 the trade in roots was comparatively unknown."⁴⁴ The Wallaces were known to Statesville through their general store but the herb business

⁴²Freeze, "Roots, Barks, Berries and Jews: The Herb Trade in Gilded Age North Carolina, 111.

⁴³Keever, Iredell- Piedmont County, 242.

⁴⁴The Statesville Landmark, January 29, 1876, recorded in Keever, "Roots Barks, Berried and Jews: The Herb Trade in Gilded Age North Carolina," 113.

was new and may have seemed like a questionable investment to Statesville's inhabitants. The Statesville Landmark reported that "At first they encountered the ridicule against which the projectors of new theories and bold enterprises have always contended."⁴⁵ The paper continued that, although in time the business proved itself the "root, herb and bark business" was "never properly appreciated... when properly considered it is really valuable."⁴⁶ The locals recognized the value of the herbs and had for generations but it took an outside impetus to figure out how to make a business out of what used to be individual operations.

The Wallaces had two methods of gathering their herbs, both of which brought them into close contact with people in their own and surrounding communities. One method was that they advertised for farmers to grow medicinal crops. For several months in 1872 they ran an advertisement on the front page of The Statesville Intellegencer announcing that they were giving away opium poppy seeds, "a valuable article," and advising farmers to cultivate it.⁴⁷ One can only imagine what society would have become if opium poppies developed into North Carolina's major cash crop instead of tobacco. The second, and most successful way, that they spread their

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Statesville Intellegencer, April 18, 1872.

⁴⁷Statesville Intellegencer, April 18, 1872 and following.

gathering abilities and the way that made their business unique and innovative was that Hyams, along with Isidore Wallace, David's son, spent several years traveling far into the countryside to educate rural folks and merchants on how to look for and prepare plants for trade.⁴⁸ Herb gathering became a serious activity for mountain folk who had no available source of cash after the Panic of 1873. The prices of apples and other traditional mountain produce fell off sharply during the panic but the price of rare, uncultivable medicinal herbs remained high. Except for the herb trade, "many country merchants during the recent depression in financial affairs would have gone into bankruptcy."⁴⁹ With the Jewish Hyams as instructor "the women and children in the mountains were taught where to look for plants they had never gathered before, when to pluck them, and in what condition to deliver them to the stores." This was labor-intensive task because, "there were collectors and stores in some thirty counties to be visited" all of which supplied the Wallace's Statesville depot.⁵⁰

Wallace Brothers and Stephenson brought trade to rural counties which otherwise would have had none. "Herbs became a kind of currency

⁴⁸Freeze, "Roots, Bark, Berries, and Jews: The Herb trade in Gilded Age North Carolina," 113.

⁴⁹The Statesville Landmark, June 29, 1876, Quoted in Freeze, "Roots, Berries, Herbs, etc.," 114.

⁵⁰New York Commercial Advertiser, November 26, 1887; Reported in Freeze, "Roots, Barks, Berries, and Jews etc.," 115.

with which trade was carried on."⁵¹ They succeeded in substituting herbs for cash and keeping their trade alive through the financial panic in the 70's. "Seldom was any money used in the country store of that time. Instead, what the housewife bought was paid for with herbs and dried fruit..."⁵² The firm "made arrangements with several hundred country merchants to buy for them."⁵³ The country stores in turn would trade the collected herbs to the Wallace brothers in exchange for merchandise from their wholesale business. The Wallaces would then ship trainloads of goods North and West for cash.

Their trade made the Wallaces popular in the local community for their contribution to the economy and famous nationally and internationally as botanists. Sales the first year of of their herb business totalled \$7000 and "more than doubled each of the subsequent recession years." By 1875 the "volume exceeded \$50,000."⁵⁴ In 1876 they shipped all over the United States as well as to Liverpool, Bremen, London, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam. They had an agent in Europe to promote trade.⁵⁵ The members of the firm became

⁵¹Keever, Iredell Piedmont County, 244.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Thomas E. Anderson, "When Statesville was Nation's 'Yarb' Center," Southern Medicine and Surgery, 96:11, November 1934.

⁵⁴Freeze, "Roots, Bark, Berries, and Jews: etc.," 114.

⁵⁵Ibid., 118.

famous as Victorian botanists and in 1876 put together a collection of between twenty-five to thirty-thousand specimens at a personal cost of \$3000 that was the centerpiece of North Carolina's exhibit at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.⁵⁶ Their exhibit won first place in the show and the firm was requested by the state department to exhibit in Europe with an eye toward expanding international trade. The correspondent for the Raleigh Daily News wrote that "the people of North Carolina...are indebted for the collection of the many botanic substances for the purpose of enhancing the 'Old North State' in the estimation of the world."⁵⁷ The reputation of the Wallace brothers herb business had expanded beyond the borders of Western North Carolina. They had a strong national and international reputation that was perceived as enhancing the general reputation of the entire state. They also ran a business remarkable for the diversity of its products and the sheer size of its operation. In 1876 the firm offered 1,739 varieties of herbs and plants and their annual shipments exceeded 1,500,000 pounds.⁵⁸ They were said to have dominated the country trade in seventeen counties.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁶Raleigh Daily News, March 14, 1876.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸A. Davis Smith, Western North Carolina Historical and Biographical, (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, Printers and Binders, 1890), 200.

⁵⁹Freeze, "Roots, Bark, Herbs, and Jews: etc." 111.

Wallaces made a significant impact on the small town of Statesville. The town's population tripled between 1870 and 1880 from 644 to 1,869.⁶⁰ When their store closed for Rosh Hashanna in 1875 the event was significant enough that it "excited general remark in town" and gave the Statesville Landmark an opportunity to run an article on the Jewish New Year.⁶¹

Statesville was proud of its Jewish citizens and the advances that they brought to the city through their business endeavors. In 1876 one paper bragged that Wallace Brothers had shipped 1,800,000 pounds including 12,000 pounds of dried elder flowers. The paper doubted if "there is another house in the state that can compare with this exhibit of shipments."⁶² Bragging about the business done by the firm was common. In 1875 the Statesville Landmark ran a short article comparing the business done by Wittkowsky and Rintels, the leading wholesale store in Charlotte, with the business done by Wallace Brothers. They listed all the counties from which merchants had come to do business on one day. Merchants from nine counties visited the Charlotte store and merchants from ten transacted business in the Statesville store.⁶³

⁶⁰Bransom's Business Directory, 1872 and 1880.

⁶¹Statesville Landmark, October 4, 1875.

⁶²Statesville American Weekly, April 6, 1876.

⁶³Statesville Landmark, October 25, 1875.

Not only through commerce did Statesville's Jews gain respect and acceptance in the community. They also were civically responsible and played a valuable role in other aspects of the community's life. The Wallaces were known as the "substantial people of the town, men of integrity and foresight." Their general store like that of the Wiel's in Goldsboro "was the hub-center of trading and gossip." Through their store they became known to the other inhabitants of Statesville. But merely running a store was not enough to gain respect. They were known to be, "liberal and generous in their terms to the ever struggling small land owners." They were not only scrupulous in their business dealings but as citizens as well and were known as "generous donors to every worthwhile cause." One of their causes included advancing the salary of the minister of the First Presbyterian Church to him in hard times. They were also considerate of the feelings of their non-Jewish neighbors regarding the Christian Sabbath to the, "extent of forbidding young Isadore Wallace from riding his pony on that day."⁶⁴ The Wallace family, recognized their minority status, and carefully respected the needs and beliefs of the society in which they lived. They became a welcome part of that society and thus enabled other Jews to be welcome into the town.

The good feelings about the commerce brought by the Jews and the benefits they brought into the town spilled over into general good will toward

⁶⁴Selig Adler, unabridged, "Zebulon B. Vance and the Scattered Nation," *AJA*, Cincinnati, Ohio, 4-6. (Abridged article appears in, The Journal of Southern History, 1941).

the Jewish inhabitants of Statesville. With the Wallaces as pioneers and the herbarium as an anchor, the Jewish population of Statesville began to grow. Articles of Jewish interest were run continually in the paper including information on the Reform movement as well as articles on Kashrut and on the Jewish holidays. The papers also reprinted articles that portrayed Jews in a favorable light religiously and as citizens. In 1875 the Statesville Landmark reprinted an article from a Dallas paper under the headline, "Christ Killer" which refuted the charge against the Jews but primarily was focused on reprimanding antisemites. According to the article the charge of Jews as "Christ Killers... illustrates in tones unmistakable, the impudence and injustice of thousands in this land of civil and religious liberty." The article continues by portraying Jews as good citizens who contributed to the societies in which they lived. It derided the prejudice of people who denied that Jews were, "friends of humanity, the patrons of learning, of science, of commerce, of liberty." The Landmark may have felt a need to print this article as a defense against some antisemitic remarks that had surfaced, like in Tarboro, or they may have simply printed it as a nice thing to say about the Jews who had contributed so much to their town.⁶⁵ The next month the paper ran a story that portrayed Jews as devoted religionists, relating the tale of two Prussian sailors singled out by the emperor for promotion. When told they were Jewish, he replied that they would have to convert. Rather than

⁶⁵Statesville Landmark, May 24, 1875.

convert the Jews flung themselves into the sea. This article was run under the headline "Intrepid Jews" and illustrated the Jews' willingness to face adversity for the sake of their religion.⁶⁶ The Landmark also decried the desecration of Jewish cemetery in Pine Bluff, Arkansas calling it a "disgraceful outrage."⁶⁷

The Statesville papers in all of their reporting were strongly philosemitic, supporting the Jews who lived in the town and showing Jews in general in a positive light. Most notably in 1875 the Landmark ran an article, inspired by the advent of Yom Kippur under the headline, "The Jews, What is to Become of This Extraordinary People?" This article wondered what was to become of the Jews, the "able-bodied orphans" now that they were free of the bonds of oppression. Like many of his contemporaries and modern thinkers the writer wondered,

Will they be merged into the surrounding nations through the influence of liberty and toleration? Will the spirit of brotherly love and the hand of fellowship extended to this once persecuted race, bring about their long expected conversion; which the sword the stake confiscation and the most brutal treatment failed to effect?

These questions were common after the emancipation of the Jews, especially among Protestants, who, though tolerant of Jews and even welcoming, still expected and desired the conversion of the Jews as a sign of messianic

⁶⁶Ibid., June 12, 1875.

⁶⁷Statesville Landmark, July 15, 1875.

redemption. The writer of this article in the Landmark disputed the idea that prosperity and social acceptance would lead to conversion because, "The number of conversions is so small that they do not form an item in the calculation." He expected that if Jews followed the trends set by other nations, "relieved of disabilities and persecutions" they would "naturally increase in power and numbers."⁶⁸ Run in a paper that did not have a record of pro-Jewish bias this article could easily be viewed as an attempt to incite riot or resentment against the Jews. But in the Landmark it can be taken at its face value, as a sincere expression of wonder at the achievements of these "able-bodied orphans" in an open society.

Portrayal of Jews in North Carolina's Newspapers During Reconstruction

Harry Simonhoff in Jewish Participants in the Civil War, claimed that, across the United States, "after Appomattox anti-Jewish prejudice declined perceptibly."⁶⁹ It was certainly true in North Carolina that during Reconstruction newspaper reports regarding Jews were largely favorable and even philosemitic. One exception is a report on Christmas written in an Asheville newspaper. Christmas and Easter, throughout history, have been times during which anti-Jewish feelings have erupted, as Christians were

⁶⁸Ibid., October 11, 1875.

⁶⁹Harry Simonhoff, Jewish Participants in the Civil War, (New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1963), 296.

reminded of Jewish involvement with the early life of their religion. On Christmas day, 1871 the Asheville Pioneer, ran an extended article on Christmas. Embedded within the article was paragraph about the "poor benighted Jew." This paragraph is an example of virulent antisemitism based on religious rather than economic grounds. Jews were called "the enemy of our Christian religion." Christmas brings Jews "no recurrences of solace or joy." Jerusalem was "doomed by the edict of Christ as he hung on the cross" and, Jews "themselves made exiles throughout the world because "he came unto his own and they received him not."⁷⁰ This type of antisemitism, indicting Jews on religious rather than economic grounds, was more typical of the South prior to the Civil War. After the war Southern antisemitism was more focused on the Jews as economic predators, an image propagated during the Civil War when Jews were perceived as profiting unfairly from it.⁷¹ Asheville, at the time this article was written, had few if any Jewish inhabitants. Jews did not start settling in this mountain city until the 1890's. Cities with a noticeable Jewish presence did not run articles like this one. In fact, I found no significant antisemitic newspaper reports beside this one in North Carolina during the Reconstruction period. Like the articles in Wilmington, Tarboro, Goldsboro, and Statesville newspaper reports of Jewish

⁷⁰Asheville Pioneer, December 25, 1871.

⁷¹Allan Peskin, "The Origins of Southern Antisemitism," The Chicago Jewish Forum, 1954, 83-88.

significance were overwhelmingly positive and portryed the Jews favorably.

Jews were occasionally stereotyped in newspaper articles and advertisemments and sometimes played into the stereotypes to help business. They were stereotyped as cheats, cheap, willing to bargain, transient, and weak. In Hillsboro, a small town in the Carolina piedmont Morris Cohen opened a general store and advertised with a poem which concluded:

In Fifty lines I cannot tell
of all he has, and how he'll sell,
But this I know, he's selling cheap,
And profits large he doesn't reap.
He'll take just what you bring to sell,
And though called 'Jew' will treat you well.⁷²

This poem assumed that the local residents of Hillsboro were at least aware of stereotypes against Jews as cheats who would take advantage of their customers as well as their having inexpensive merchandise. He conjectured that they held these preconceptions even though there were no known Jewish settlers in Hillsboro prior to his arrival. The notion that Jews were swindlers was spread during the Civil War as part of the profiteering charge that was often leveled against them and seems to have survived into Reconstruction.

Jews themselves capitalized on the notion that they bargained and had inexpensive goods and advertised their Jewishness to promote business. In the Durham Business Directory of 1876 J. Goldstein and Brother advertised as, "Old Jews in the Bottom. Dealers in dry goods, clothing, boots, shoes, hats,

⁷²Leonard Rogoff, Unpublished manuscript in possession of author, 20; from Hillsboro Recorder, November 3, 1866.

caps, groceries and confections.”⁷³ In 1875 the firm advertised as “the Jew Store” on main street.⁷⁴ The Goldstein brothers used the perception of Jews having inexpensive merchandise and being willing to bargain to their advantage. They advertised their Jewishness in order to attract business. They were also in a society where they could be openly Jewish and not fear antisemitic retaliation otherwise they would not have advertised their Jewishness in the paper.

During Reconstruction many entrepreneurs moved in and out of the state. It was difficult to make a living in the depressed economy of Reconstruction, especially for newcomers. People would come, set up a business, often fail and leave. In the larger cities this was a particular problem. Southerners valued roots; people who were committed to staying in a place had an advantage over those who were perceived as transient who were often lumped together with carpet baggers. One entrepreneur in Wilmington, realized that as a Northerner and a Jew he was probably perceived as transient, and took out an ad in a Wilmington paper which read in part,

From New York to Wilmington
I came to stay;

⁷³Claudia Roberts, The Durham Architectural and Historic Inventory, (Durham: City of Durham, 1982), 322; From the Durham Business Directory, 1876.

⁷⁴Rogoff, Unpublished manuscript, 27.

I am selling dry goods,
and almost giving them away.⁷⁵

It is poor doggerel but it got his point across, that though a "Yankee" and a Jew he committed to making Wilmington his home. This entrepreneur was fighting against a distrust of the transient foriegnner that may have been linked to antisemitism.

The Charlotte paper which was one of the state's most philosemitic, consistently reporting items of Jewish interest and reporting favorably of the city's Jews referring to them as "our Israeliteish fellow citizens" and "our Jewish friends," ran a strange item perhaps meant as humor about two Jews fighting in the street:⁷⁶

Two of our Israelitish friends were out on the street quite early yesterday morning practicing throwing stones. When we first discovered them, one had his coat off gathering up stones and hurling them with all his might across the street, while the other seemed to be running trying to catch the stones, and when he would succeed in getting hold of one he would hurl it back with considerable fury, his opponent making a desperate attempt either to dodge or catch the stones as they went whistling by. We thought they were having huge fun, when our devil came running in and said they were *fitin!*
Keep on your shirt nobody hurt.⁷⁷

This story was reported as humor at the expense of the Jews of Charlotte who

⁷⁵Wilmington Daily Journal, April 17, 1870.

⁷⁶Charlotte Daily Observer, March 3, 1874 and September 12, 1874 for example.

⁷⁷Ibid., October 5, 1869.

were portrayed as weak and ineffectual in a fight. Had the story portrayed any other ethnic group the article would have had no humorous element. Jews were portrayed in stereotypical ways in North Carolina's press but largely they were portrayed favorably. To a great extent the favorable press they received was due to Governor Zebulon B. Vance and the address he delivered on behalf of the Jews in North Carolina and throughout the United States.

Zebulon Baird Vance and "The Scattered Nation"

Zebulon B. Vance was born in 1830 in the mountains of North Carolina near Asheville. He was a charismatic, imposing man with a booming voice who rose quickly through the political ranks in his home state. Vance was elected State Senator in 1854, representative to the United States Congress in 1858, and reelected in 1860, all before he was thirty. His constituents gave him ardent support even though he was a Whig and pro-Union in a largely anti-Union age. During his second term in Congress North Carolina declared for the Confederacy, a move he strongly opposed. Vance's loyalty to the state was unabated and he returned home where he was shortly appointed Colonel of the Twenty-sixth Regiment. He was nominated without his knowledge for the governorship, and without participating in the campaign was elected by a tremendous majority. He was inducted into office in 1862 when he was little over thirty-two years old. Vance was a tremendously popular governor for the state, protecting it from attempted

encroachment by military authorities of the Confederacy. Vance even went beyond the authority provided him by the constitution of the Confederate States of America and purchased ocean-going ships for North Carolina to keep trade open and provide supplies for the state through the war. As a result of his challenge to Confederate authority troops from North Carolina were better supplied than troops from any other Confederate state. Even though Vance had originally opposed secession, North Carolina supplied more troops to the Confederate army than any other state in the Confederacy. In 1864 as a testament to his popularity he was re-elected to the Governorship.⁷⁸

When the war ended Vance was placed under arrest and brought to Washington for a short stay in federal prison. After serving his brief term he returned to North Carolina and set up a law practice in Charlotte. In 1870 he was once again elected to the Senate but, like most Confederate leaders, he was still under national political disability and was unable to take his senatorial seat. In 1876 he was elected Governor of North Carolina for the third time and in 1879 he was elected once again to the United States Senate and was reelected to the position in 1885 and 1891, both times without opposition.⁷⁹ Vance was idolized in North Carolina during his lifetime, and

⁷⁸Zebulon Baird Vance, *The Scattered Nation*, introduction by Moses Jacobson, (Raleigh: Alfred Williams and Company, 1928), 6-9.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 6-9.

legends about him still circulate in the state. His fiery oratory inspired people to action and his warm personality won him wide affection. Governor Vance used part of his formidable influence in support of the Jews. He traveled the state and country delivering what became his most famous address, "The Scattered Nation."

Vance's inspiration for writing "The Scattered Nation" remains unknown, if he ever revealed to anyone why he wrote it, the story is lost. Vance was known as a man with a strong passion for justice and love for humanity.⁸⁰ His mother instilled in him a passion for the bible which he stored in his mind "as fully as a theological student preparing for an examination."⁸¹ Although he knew the Bible by heart he did not apply his knowledge toward the "conversion of souls."⁸² Vance had a broad positive exposure to Jews following the Civil War which may have brought their plight and the injustice of the accusations leveled against them to his attention.

When the Civil War ended in 1865 Vance went to Statesville, North Carolina where he lived temporarily with his family in a rented house.

⁸⁰Unfortunately this passion did not extend to North Carolina's black population.

⁸¹Zebulon Baird Vance, The Scattered Nation, introduction by Marcus Schnitzer, (New York: Marcus Schnitzer, 1916), 10.

⁸²Ibid.

While there he came into contact with the Wallace brothers and became friends with Sam Wittkowsky. Vance regularly attended the church whose minister the Wallaces occasionally supported and his visits to their general store, the center for town gossip, were remembered into the 1950's. Vance's relationship with Wittkowsky was sealed in May, 1865 when Vance was arrested by federal cavalry men. The soldiers had only pack horses on which to take the governor away, so Wittkowsky volunteered to drive Vance in his personal carriage to train depot in Salisbury where he could board for Washington. Their friendship remained strong for Vance's entire life. When Vance later practiced law in Charlotte Wittkowsky's store was close by and they would often spend time together. At Vance's funeral in 1894 Wittkowsky delivered one of the eulogies.⁸³

In Charlotte, Vance came into contact with many Jewish merchants whose stores were in close proximity to his law office. These merchants likely had an influence on Vance; "The essential integrity of these Charlotte Jews plus a realization of the part they played in the building of the 'New South' makes Vance's *Scattered Nation* tribute readily explicable."⁸⁴ Charlotte's Jews like those of much of the rest of North Carolina contributed tremendously to

⁸³"Samuel Wittkowsky," Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, (Raleigh) 6, 253.

⁸⁴Selig Adler, unabridged "Zebulon Vance and the Scattered Nation," 11.

the economy. Wittkowsky's firm was grossing over \$700,000 a year by the end of Reconstruction.⁸⁵ Vance who was "improvident in his own affairs" admired Wittkowsky's business acumen and his contribution to the welfare of the state.⁸⁶ The Jews of Vance's acquaintance without doubt made a powerful impression on him and were one inspiration for "The Scattered Nation."

Vance wrote "The Scattered Nation" in a time when antisemitism in the United States was on the upswing.⁸⁷ The speech was probably composed sometime between 1868, when Jews gained political freedom in North Carolina and 1873 when records of its delivery began to be common.⁸⁸ That Vance even wrote the speech, which at its heart is a defense of the Jews, is an indication that there were antisemitic thoughts and feelings present in the South. Vance certainly did not write the speech for political gain as Jews made up such a tiny minority of North Carolina's total population, only .06%

⁸⁵Jerome Dowd, Sketches of Prominent Living North Carolinians, (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printers and Binders, 1888), 237.

⁸⁶Selig Adler, unabridged "Zebulon Vance and the Scattered Nation," 13.

⁸⁷Allan Peskin, "The Origins of Southern Anti-Semitism," 84.

⁸⁸Selig Adler, unabridged "Zebulon Vance and the Scattered Nation," 28.

by 1878.⁸⁹ He did, however, make a significant amount of money delivering it across the country. Although financial compensation could account for the frequency of its delivery it could not account for the speech's composition.

In "The Scattered Nation" Vance examined the history of the Jews, their "origin and civilization, peculiarities, present condition, and probable destiny."⁹⁰ Primarily though his speech was a defense of the Jews against attacks which were prevalent in his time. Vance brought to light several of the prejudices common to his day. It was said about the Jew that, "industrially he produces nothing...adds nothing to the public wealth... He will not own real estate... He merely sojourns in the land and does not dwell in it."⁹¹ Vance said that these objections to the Jew have some basis in reality but he placed the blame for these traits squarely on the shoulders of Christendom, "These habits he learned by persecution."⁹² The Jews' lack of tie to the land arose because the Jew always had to be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Yet, he admonished, given a chance in a land of freedom

⁸⁹Jacob Marcus, To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984, 166.

⁹⁰Zebulon Baird Vance, "The Scattered Nation," 1928 Ed., 14.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 52.

⁹²*Ibid.*

the Jew has proved to be a "faithful and zealous patriot."⁹³ Vance refuted the charge that Jews were dishonest in their dealings with gentiles. He called this charge an "atrocious calumny." And insisted that by charging the Jews, the moral teachers of Christianity, with dishonesty Christians were doing themselves a disservice.⁹⁴ Vance insisted that the Jew should be judged as any other man would be judged, "by his merits."⁹⁵

While Vance was sympathetic toward the Jews he did not hesitate "to criticize the Jews when he feels it necessary."⁹⁶ His criticism was tempered by an awareness that it was persecution and repression that may have lead to some of their faults. Vance is also not immune to prejudice against those Jews who are not of German or Western European descent. He divided the Jews into three classes. The Jews who "inhabit the interior of Africa, Arabia, India, China, Turkestan and Bokhara," he said were, "the lowest of the Jewish people in wealth, intelligence, and religion." The second, "most numerous," category of Jews were the "strictly orthodox, Talmudical Jews... This class is represented as being all very ignorant of all except Jewish learning." These two "classes" of Jews were obviously not held in high esteem by Vance and he

⁹³Ibid., 53.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 49.

⁹⁶Allan Peskin, "The Origin of Southern Antisemitism," 5.

deviated from his own rule of judging individuals on their own merits. Since he felt similarly about blacks, that they could be judged as a "class," his belief in individual merit extended only to those who already met his racial standards. The third group of Jews which Vance discussed were those of "Central and Western Europe, and the United States." He argued that these Jews, the ones with which he was the most familiar, were, "by far the most intelligent and civilized of their race, not only keeping pace with the progress of their Gentile neighbors, but contributing to it largely."⁹⁷ Vance, like most conservative Southerners clearly believed that racial characteristics were important in determining character. Fortunately for the Jews of the United States he found that the racial characteristics of Western European Jews were equal to those of gentiles. It was probably through his positive exposure to so many Jews that he came to his decision to write a speech on the Jews behalf.

Although there are some antisemitic undertones in "The Scattered Nation," it is largely a defense of the Jews. Vance referred to the Jew as "the most remarkable man of this world---past or present." It is not just that the Jew was interesting in a detached scientific way. The Jew was interesting and worthy of respect because, "His history is the history of the civilization and progress in this world... From him we have derived the form and pattern of

⁹⁷Zebulon B. Vance, "The Scattered Nation," 37-39.

all that is excellent on earth or in heaven."⁹⁸

Jewish civilization served as the model for all which modern Southerners held dear, most especially Christianity and the politics of States' rights. "All Christian churches are but offshoots from or grafts upon the old Jewish stock. Strike out all of Judaism from the Christian Church and there remains nothing but an unmeaning superstition."⁹⁹ Vance bound the Christian and Jewish religions tightly together in his rhetoric giving legitimacy to Jewish religious practices on an equal footing with Christian. He attempted, in his speech, to sweep away any intellectual validity in religious discrimination against the Jews. Vance saved his closest look at Jewish history for his examination of the Jews' forms of government. His explanation of ancient Israel's government looks suspiciously like what the Confederacy espoused prior to the Civil War:

The Kingdom thus composed was in fact a confederation...The tribes were equal and sovereign within the sphere of their individual concerns. A tribe could convene its own legislative body at pleasure; so could any number of tribes convene a joint body whose enactments were binding only upon the tribes represented therein...They were to all intents and purposes independent states, joined together for common objects on the principle of federal republics, with a general government of delegated and limited powers. Within their tribal boundaries their sovereignty was absolute minus only the powers granted to the central agent.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Ibid., 12.

⁹⁹Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 28-29.

By describing the Jewish national political makeup in these terms Vance accomplished two things. He made the Jews appear as good conservative Southerners from their very roots and he advanced his own political agenda. Vance made the Jews, who were suspect because of their religion and status as newcomers, appear as essentially Southern and politically proper as any Southerners by birth. The Jews were not only politically in line with the Conservative movement through free choice; they were aligned with the goals of the Conservative party through predisposition. The goals of states' rights were the religious and national inheritance of the Jews. By tying the political history of Israel so closely to the political agenda of the Southern states Vance was able to advance his own political purposes. He gave the states' rights agenda venerable roots, establishing history and respectability for system that promoted a weakened centralized government.

Vance's defense of the Jews was powerful, "the most popular lecture of one of the era's foremost orators," and it was well received where ever it was delivered. The speech was given in "virtually every major city in the nation and was widely reprinted."¹⁰¹ "The Scattered Nation," was a speech whose popularity across the country was undeniable. A Raleigh reporter, after hearing the speech wrote that it has, "awakened unbounded admiration wherever heard and sharpened the eagerness of those who know only by

¹⁰¹ Allan Peskin, "The Origin of Southern Anti-Semitism," 85.

report to taste for themselves a fruit so much appreciated by others..."¹⁰² And many did avail themselves of the opportunity to hear it. Vance traveled far and wide delivering "The Scattered Nation" but it had its greatest impact in Vance's home state where he was beloved and respected.

Vance was probably the most popular person in North Carolina during his lifetime and his activities were widely reported in the state's newspapers. His delivery of "The Scattered Nation," was likewise widely reported and the state took pride in the national exposure which its delivery gave them. In 1874 the Charlotte Observer, reported that Vance delivered his lecture in Atlanta, Georgia; Augusta, Georgia, Wheeling, West Virginia; Washington, Norfolk, and "quite a number of other cities."¹⁰³ When Vance delivered his speech in North Carolina he did so primarily for charitable purposes. It was delivered in Wilmington to benefit the building of a new synagogue, in Raleigh to benefit two soldiers who were injured during centennial celebrations, and in Charlotte to benefit the Oxford Orphans' Asylum.¹⁰⁴ Vance's delivery of "The Scattered Nation" was bound up with the charitable purposes for which it was delivered. Its emotional impact was due to the settings of its delivery as well as to Vance's personal popularity and fiery

¹⁰²Raleigh Daily News, June, 19, 1875.

¹⁰³Charlotte Daily Observer, March 31, 1874.

¹⁰⁴The Morning Star, May 12, 1875; Raleigh Daily News, June, 19, 1875; Charlotte Observer, September 27, 1874.

oratorical style. And it did make a strong impression on those who heard it across North Carolina. The speech's delivery was reported widely and always with favorable reviews in North Carolina's newspapers. It was attended not only by Jews but by the most important people in whichever city it was presented. In Charlotte the delivery of the speech was attended by "the elite of the city," a crowd of about 400-500.¹⁰⁵ In Raleigh the "hall was filled with beauty and fashion, with the young and old, with the professional men and the mechanic."¹⁰⁶ All segments of North Carolina's white society heard the most respected conservative in North Carolina delivering a favorable report on how valuable Jews were to society.

Newspapers, when they were reporting on Vance's delivery of "The Scattered Nation" and in most of their reporting about Jewish activities, seconded the favorable language with which Vance described the Jews. The Charlotte Observer, in its report on the upcoming address by Vance wrote about the Jews who lived in Charlotte, "Many of those whom we have with us... are among our best and most worthy fellow citizens." And the writer of this article took, "pleasure in extending to them the right hand of fellowship in the race for preferment."¹⁰⁷ Vance's support for the Jews was reflected in

¹⁰⁵Charlotte Observer, September 3, 1874.

¹⁰⁶Raleigh Daily News, June 19, 1875.

¹⁰⁷Charlotte Observer, September 2, 1874.

the newspaper reports about his speech. Indeed, the Raleigh paper recorded, it was not only the Jew but the Christian who, "owes some thanks to Z.B. Vance for presenting his noble view of the long suffering and much wronged people."¹⁰⁸ The theme of Jews being a wronged and "chosen yet stricken, smitten, and afflicted people of God" was echoed in many articles reporting the delivery of "The Scattered Nation."¹⁰⁹ The plight of the Jews seems to have touched a chord in the Southern psyche. The Southerner, just having experienced defeat in the Civil War and still feeling economic and political repercussions, could readily identify with this "chosen people" who still seem to be living under a "curse."¹¹⁰

Vance's delivery of "The Scattered Nation" did not go without thanks from the Jews. The Jews of Wilmington presented Vance with a gold headed cane and was the guest of Mr. A. B. Weill, while he was in the city.¹¹¹ In Raleigh the Jewish community, "appreciating the speech of Gov. Vance," presented him with a "handsome gold watch."¹¹² The Raleigh Daily News

¹⁰⁸Raleigh Daily News, June 19, 1875.

¹⁰⁹The Charlotte Observer, September 3, 1874.

¹¹⁰Ibid., September 2, 1874.

¹¹¹The Philadelphia Jewish Record, 1:6 May 28, 1875, 5.

¹¹²Raleigh Daily News, June 20, 1875.

commented that, " Governor Vance, by his lecture, is winning to him the Jewish element of the land."¹¹³ The Jews found in Vance, "a defender whose arguments for them while beautiful and interesting were forcible and unanswerable."¹¹⁴ North Carolina's Jews were very happy with the positive attention from Vance. His support for them may have helped seal their political affiliation with the Conservatives. Jewish support for Vance was so strong that one reporter, after Vance received so many gifts from the Jews, quipped, "He will yet be able to start a jew-elry establishment."¹¹⁵ The Jews returned the loyalty and support that Vance gave them.

The delivery of "The Scattered Nation" by one of the most popular and certainly one of the most powerful men in North Carolina contributed to Jews being given a favored status within the state. Vance's charismatic influence embraced the Jews who he presented as a much wronged people, conservative from their roots, with whom Southerners could readily identify. Vance, however, would not have been able to deliver this speech if Jews in the North Carolina and all of the United States had not established themselves as good and valuable citizens. The economic and social contributions made by Jews to the rebuilding of North Carolina during

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Charlotte Observer, September 3, 1874.

¹¹⁵Statesville Landmark, November 1, 1875.

Reconstruction proved their worth to the state. Their economic position, at the center of many communities, and the acceptance generated or reinforced through the delivery of "The Scattered Nation" poised North Carolina's Jews to be able to advance in politics as well as in commerce.

Jews and Politics

The end of the Civil War was a time of tremendous political and social upheaval that presented enormous risks and opportunities to all of North Carolina's citizens, both Jew and Gentile. The political arena which had been, prior to the war, dominated by an entrenched political establishment was thrown open to greater participation by citizens from all levels of society. During Reconstruction Jews were, for the first time, given the right to hold public office. Once this right was granted them they entered the political arena enthusiastically and with great success. The struggle to gain political equality was long and difficult.

Historians divide the era of political reconstruction into two periods. The first period, Presidential Reconstruction, began immediately after the war under President Johnson. President Johnson took a conciliatory attitude toward the South and tried to bring the southern states back into the union as quickly as possible. Conservative Democrats and Whigs, many of whom wielded political and economic power before and during the war, continued to rule in North Carolina during this period. They drafted a new constitution which in large part was designed to maintain the pre-war status quo. The second period began when the United States Congress refused to accept the arrangements of Presidential Reconstruction feeling that the changes made by the southern states did not go far enough to warrant their readmission to the

Union. The Congress, at this stage, was dominated by a Republican faction known as the "Radicals." The Radicals insisted that the South was being governed by men who were disloyal to the Union, that the southern courts were mistreating union men, that the freedmen were being treated unfairly, and that state and local officials could not maintain law and order. To advance change the Radical Congress placed the South under military rule and declared that no legal state government existed in the South. To be readmitted to the Union Southern states needed to rewrite their constitutions with a state legislature approved by Congress. It was in the best interest of the Radical Republicans to delay the readmission of the Southern states to the Union until they were felt confident that the states would elect Republican representatives to Congress thus maintaining the Republican majority. This struggle for power in the United States between the Democrats who represented the conservative establishment and the Republicans who wanted change was reflected in the microcosm of North Carolina. The struggle between conservatives and radicals had profound impact on the lives of the state's Jewish citizens.

Prior to the Civil War, North Carolina's government was run by a landed aristocracy. There were property qualifications for both the governorship and representatives to the General Assembly. Judges were appointed for life terms, and Squires, appointed for life by the General

Assembly ran the local county courts.¹ There was no system for the election of county commissioners and no political opportunities for common non-propertied citizens, black or white. The changes that were made in state and local government during "radical reconstruction" allowed democratic principles to work in all sectors of North Carolina society. Freed blacks and white yeomen were given opportunities for political power that were unheard of prior to the war.² However, political disabilities, preventing Jews from holding office still existed in the constitution.

Prior to the constitutional convention of 1868 a provision in the constitution prohibited citizens who "denied the being of God, the truth of the Christian religion, or the divine authority of either the Old or the New Testament," from holding public office.³ When, after long struggle, that clause was omitted Jews became active in the Conservative party as

¹Paul D. Escott, "White Republicanism and Ku Klux Klan Terror: The North Carolina Piedmont During Reconstruction", in Jeffery J. Crow, Paul D. Escott And Charles L. Flynn, Jr. Eds. Race Class and Politics in Southern History: Essays in Honor of Robert Durden, (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 23.

²A yeoman is a farmer who owned only a small plot of land. In N.C. They were located primarily in the western foothills and mountains of the state. They were characterized by a fierce independence and opposition to the Civil War.

³Article 32 of the state constitution of North Carolina (prior to the Constitutional convention of 1868) from "North Carolina," Encyclopedia Judaica, (Jerusalem: Keter House Publishing, 1971), 1218. Prior to 1835 the word "Christian" was "Protestant," opposing Catholic office holders.

candidates and party organizers.

The long road to public office

Thanks primarily to the liberality of the composer of its constitution, John Locke, North Carolina was among the first of the thirteen colonies to expressly welcome Jews. The 1668 *Fundamental Constitutions for the Carolinas* explicitly stated that the colony was to be open to settlement by, "Jews, heathens, and other dissenters," and that "any seven or more persons agreeing in any religion shall constitute a church or profession."⁴ Despite the inclusiveness of this founding principle, article 32 of North Carolina's 1776 constitution attempted to bar any non-Protestant from holding public office. North Carolina would be the second to last state to remove the ban against Jews holding public office from its constitution. Every time that a constitutional convention was held in the state article 32 was debated. Jews were involved in these discussions to a greater or lesser extent at different stages of the continuing debate.

From the point of view of the state's Jews the attempt to gain equal rights can be divided into three stages. Stage one, prior to 1855, was marked by a public silence on the part of North Carolina's Jews regarding their right to hold office, except for one anomalous case. During stage two, from 1855 until the outbreak of the Civil War, Jews both inside and outside the state lobbied

⁴Ibid., Quoting the "Fundamental Constitutions for the Carolinas."

for change in Article 32. After the Civil War the Jews who lived within the state were silent regarding the issue of equal political rights while those outside of the state continued to lobby on their behalf. Ultimately, whether or not North Carolina's Jews participated in the discussions depended upon their political affiliation and the prevailing attitudes of the times.

In 1776, when article 32 was first adopted there were very few Jews in North Carolina. Perhaps a few Portuguese Jews were concentrated in the coastal region, engaged in the indigo trade. Speculations about Jews in this period of North Carolina history are based solely on the basis of names presumed to be Jewish. The few families present could hardly have represented a threat to the nascent political establishment. Nevertheless the ban against Jews holding public office was put on the books addressing what at that time could only have been a theoretical concern, namely, that non-Protestants might, through holding office, exert undue influence in the state. Underlying prejudices held by the Protestants who controlled the state can also account for the presence and longevity of article 32.

The first time that article 32 faced a practical challenge was in 1809. Following the American Revolution a few Jewish families entered the state and made homes for themselves. The son of one of these families, Jacob Henry, born and raised in North Carolina, was elected on the Federalist ticket to represent Carteret county in the 1808 session of the North Carolina House of Commons. That year no objection was raised to his presence in the House

either because no one noticed that he did not take the oath, or if they did notice, were not alarmed by it. Possibly the representatives were not even aware of the prohibition.⁵ In 1809, when Henry was re-elected, Representative Mills, a Republican delegate from Rockingham County, protested Henry's appointment on the grounds that he "denies the authority of the New Testament, and refused to take the oath prescribed by law for his qualification."⁶ Interestingly, the person who defended Henry the loudest was William Gaston, a fellow Federalist, also a Catholic. Although Gaston was a Catholic and article 32 required that no office holders could "deny... the truth of the Protestant religion," Gaston used a semantic loophole to take the oath. He claimed that he did not "deny" the truth of the Protestant religion, he merely did not "affirm" it. This argument could have worked for Henry as well, but Henry, a practicing Jew, had to deny the truth of the New Testament in order to hold true to the principles of his religious upbringing.⁷ The day after Mills' attack, Henry defended himself and Judaism eloquently in a speech that was widely reprinted in collections of famous addresses. The House of Commons chose to affirm both article 32 and Henry's right to hold

⁵Morton Borden, Jews Turks and Infidels, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 43.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Leon Hühner, "The Struggle for Religious Liberty in North Carolina, with Special Reference to the Jews," American Jewish Historical Society Publications, 16, 1907, 53.

political office. The members of the house argued that legislators were not members of a "civil department within this state" and therefore were exempt from the oath. The result of this ruling was that Henry could retain his seat, and other Jews could hold legislative offices, but Jews would not be allowed to hold any office in which they might interpret or execute laws that the legislature enacted.⁸ After Jacob Henry left office there is no record of any Jew being elected or appointed to state or local position besides postmaster until after the Civil War.⁹

Article 32 was challenged in subsequent years by non-Jews as contrary to the values of liberality and religious freedom that were innate to the United States constitution and the spirit of the age. Article 32 was debated in 1823 and received a great deal of attention at the constitutional convention of 1835.¹⁰ One among many of the vociferous opponents of the restriction was David Miller Carter, an influential lawyer and a legislator during the Civil War, who in 1851 wrote an essay titled, "Religious Tests of Office Unjust and

⁸Borden, Jews, Turks, and Infidels, 44.

⁹Lazarus Fels, the father of soap manufacturer and social reformer, Joseph Fels, was appointed postmaster of Yanceyville in the Confederate States of America in 1861. William S. Powell, Editor, Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, 2 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 185. Perhaps other Jews held small local positions but I could find no record.

¹⁰See, Borden, Jews, Turks, and Infidels, for a detailed analysis of the debates in 1823 and 1835, 43-50.

Impolitic in a Republic."¹¹ In this essay, probably written while he was studying to be a lawyer, he argued for repeal of the religious test for holding office, a subject to which he returned later in his career. Carter, who never mentioned Jews specifically, argued like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, that the right to hold office should be based on talent and industry, not on religious belief. While many non-Jews were fighting for removal of the ban, the Jews of North Carolina, of which there were very few, either remained silent on the issue during these debates or their voices were not recorded for posterity.

Why the Jews remained silent during the debates of 1823 and 1835 is not recorded. It is likely that as relative newcomers, their energies were directed toward economic and physical survival. Jewish families, like the Mordecai and Henry clans who came to North Carolina early in the nineteenth century and established themselves tended to either assimilate or leave the state after they had made their fortunes. The Jews who remained were primarily focused on making a living. As non-landowners or small landowners who therefore did not qualify for office, they were perhaps not even aware of the disability. It is possible, though doubtful, that fear of antisemitic retribution may have been an issue. There is only one recorded

¹¹David Miller Carter, "Religious Tests of Office Unjust and Impolitic in a Republic," David Miller Carter collection, Number 143, May 17, 1851, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill.

antisemitic incident in the state prior to the Civil War and that involved a Jew publicly shooting a non-Jew.¹² It was not ideological differences that sparked the trouble.

Prior to the 1853 organization of a burial society in Wilmington there were no Jewish organizations in North Carolina that could have acted formally on behalf of the Jews. There were no synagogues, no charitable societies, and no B'nai B'rith Lodges. Jews, if they were to act needed to organize collectively or act as individuals. The small number of Jews in North Carolina and their status as newcomers makes it likely that holding public office was only a theoretical possibility and did not have much bearing on their day-to-day lives. Since office holding would have appeared as an abstraction, and possibly even distraction from commercial endeavors, it is likely that the struggle to enact legislative change was not considered worthy of the expenditure of energy it would have required. It appears that an outside catalyst was required to inspire the Jews to act on their own behalf.

That necessary catalyst proved to be an 1855 visit by Isaac Leeser, editor of The Occident and a national Jewish leader, to dedicate the new cemetery in Wilmington. Wilmington at that time had the largest Jewish community in the state. Leeser spoke at the dedication service to a mixed group of Jews and Christians and used the opportunity to lobby for a change in the state's law

¹²Moses Rountree, Strangers in the Land The story of Jacob Weil's Tribe (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company, 1969), 5.

under which, "the son of Israel is excluded from equal rights by the constitution."¹³ Leeser recognized that North Carolina's laws had implications that extended beyond the borders of state. He argued in much the same way as the non-Jewish advocates of his position had earlier in the century that, "...it is a disgrace to a state, in this age of the world, to exclude anyone for the sake of the opinions he entertains, regarding his idea of the Godhead and the religious duties which he thinks himself bound to observe."¹⁴ Leeser argued that political equality was a prerequisite for true religious freedom as it was expressed in the laws and principles of the United States. He urged all who were hearing his address, Jew and Christian alike, "to exert their power to aid in wiping out this blot, this disgrace from the escutcheon of North Carolina."¹⁵ Leeser knew that without agitation from inside the state by those, "who have weight or influence among their fellow citizens,"¹⁶ any attempt to change the law from without would be futile. In his address he attempted to inspire or incense his fellow Jews and move them toward action.

¹³Isaac Leeser, reprinted in Discourses on the Jewish Religion, (Philadelphia: 1868), 67-68.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Leeser printed his address in The Occident, which was subscribed to by many Jews in North Carolina urging them to engage in the battle for equality. He also kept up a correspondence with some of the state's Jews entreating them to action.¹⁷ Leeser's persistence paid off. In September of 1858 the Jewish community of Wilmington circulated an advertisement in the Wilmington Journal:

We do not care for commencing any agitation or starting any new issue. We merely state our opinion that the invidious distinction in our state constitution against members of this religious group is not in accordance with the liberal spirit of the age in which we live. The number of Israelites in North Carolina is very small, and does not, to our knowledge and belief, contain a single man who is an applicant for any office of any kind, and therefore the incapacity for holding it is more invidious because it is wholly gratuitous.¹⁸

The Jews who submitted this statement to The Journal recognized in their statement that they did not care to start "any new issue," that any proposal to alter the constitution was coming at an inopportune time yet they were grounded by their ideological conviction that all citizens should be granted equal rights. The Jews who submitted this advertisement argued from a belief in general equality not from a position that Jews were particularly deserving. This position echoes Leeser's argument and the reasoning used by advocates for the removal of article 32 earlier in the century. They were not

¹⁷Borden, Jews, Turks, and Infidels, 48.

¹⁸David J. Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738-1925" Unpublished paper (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 21. Quoting the Wilmington Journal, September 20, 1858.

submitting a new argument but the Jewish community was finally speaking with its own, local voice. The Jews of Wilmington were a powerful group during this period and obviously felt comfortable enough in their position to challenge the political establishment. Many of the wholesale and retail markets were owned by Jews and the Jewish community was supported by the editor of the local newspaper in the attempt to gain political equality. The same year that the Jews submitted this advertisement, a bill to remove the constitutional clause which prohibited them from holding office was examined by the Judiciary Committee of the legislature. The committee agreed with the spirit of the bill but declined to pass it because they felt the time was not right to amend the constitution. In 1858 the rivalry between the Northern and Southern states was beginning to intensify.

There may have been a general reactionary feeling in the legislature that any change would be negative, opening the door for more radical changes and weakening the conservative political establishment which was already beginning to feel pressure from the yeomen in the Western part of the state. The legislature may not have wanted to add another contender to the race for political spots. After this legislative rejection the editor of the Wilmington Journal wrote, "This is not a matter which concerns simply the few persons of the Jewish faith within our borders. It is a matter which

concerns the reputation of the state of North Carolina."¹⁹ The Journal reiterated the position articulated by opponents to the amendment earlier in the century. Article 32 was an outdated relic of an illiberal time. The strong relationship between Wilmington's Jews and the Wilmington Journal would continue through the Reconstruction period.

The effort to alter the state's laws affecting Jews may be the first time that North Carolina's Jews attained a consciousness that united them on a statewide level. There was activity from the Jews of Charlotte, in the foothills, as well as from Wilmington on the coastal plain. In 1860 the Jews stepped up their action and a letter initiated in Charlotte was addressed, "To the Candidates for the State Legislature," by several of North Carolina's Jews, asking, "Will you, if elected, use your influence to remove the odious disability clause in the constitution which excludes the Jewish citizens of the state from holding offices of profit and trust?"²⁰ No candidates responded and a letter by S.A. Cohen of Charlotte ran in a paper of that city accusing the legislators of not responding because they feared an "illiberal and biased few."²¹ Cohen blamed the lack of support for a constitutional amendment on the undue influence of a minority of people who wished to maintain the

¹⁹Borden, Jews, Turks, and Infidels, 49; quoting, The Occident, November 1858.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

²¹*Ibid.*

status quo and preserve the privileged status of the white elite.

The Jewish push for amending the constitution came at a time when North Carolina was considering secession from the Union. The state was far from united over the question of secession and the legislature was trying to consolidate its authority in response to the lack of unity. Any attempt to challenge to the status of the white elite who controlled the legislature was bound to be viewed as radical and undesirable. So in 1861 when the state voted to secede from the Union and join the Confederacy the constitution was amended but no change was made in the religious qualifications for holding office nor were changes made in the constitution that would in any way alter the existing power structure.

Once the war ended, North Carolina's Jews, a large proportion of whom had fought for the Confederacy, once again had an opportunity to work toward constitutional change. Under the plan of Presidential Reconstruction, North Carolina had to revise its constitution to be readmitted to the Union. The convention, called by Governor Holden, met in October but recommended the old restriction against Jews holding office be kept in the constitution. This failure to change article 32 can be viewed as one of several conciliatory gestures Holden made toward the politically powerful Conservatives in North Carolina. The Jews in the state were silent on the issue. And when Isaac Leeser heard that the North Carolina's legislature was meeting to amend the constitution he "urged the few of our persuasion we

met from time to time, to watch over the doings of the convention, and take the necessary steps, to counteract, if possible, the sinister designs of the reactionists."²² Leaser attempted to pick up where he left off before the Civil War, as a leading voice for change, urging the Jews inside of the state to fight for political equality. But the situation in North Carolina changed after the war, and the Jews were less receptive to his ideas. During the constitutional convention the local Jews either did not lobby for a change in article 32 or the lobbying was, "ineffectually carried out."²³ Leaser came to this conclusion because, "the clause referring to the right of citizenship makes office holding dependent on the belief in Christianity."²⁴ Leaser wrote that he was continuing his correspondence with North Carolina's Jews, many of whom he probably came into contact with when they traveled on buying trips to Philadelphia. He urged them to fight on behalf of the change. Leaser implied in his article that one possible reason for the Jews' silence was a growing trend of antisemitism after the Civil War. According to Leaser, after the war it was claimed "that the Israelites of the South failed to perform their duty."²⁵ After the Civil War Southern antisemitism increased to levels that were higher

²²The Occident, September, 1866.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

than before the war. However, antisemitism seemed to have little impact in North Carolina.

Leeser was not the only Jew outside of the state agitating for change in North Carolina's constitution. Isaac Mayer Wise, in The American Israelite, joined the national battle on behalf of North Carolina's Jews and was even more condemnatory of the Jews in North Carolina than Leeser, perhaps because, "It is the only state in the Union where we have no subscribers and no correspondent."²⁶ Since he had no subscribers there he was free to be condemnatory without fear of losing constituency or readership. The few Jews who reside in the state he wrote were apparently, "not of much account or else they must have prevented this disgrace, or at least must have complained about it- brought it to public notice, and done something."²⁷ He then directly addressed the Jews of North Carolina, saying, "If there are any Hebrews there let them be ashamed of themselves that they suffered this clause to disgrace the state constitution."²⁸ Wise placed the blame for the failure of North Carolina's legislature to change the restrictions against Jews squarely on the shoulders of the state's Jewish population.

Both Wise and Leeser were correct in noting that North Carolina's Jews

²⁶American Israelite, July 20, 1866.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*

did not act regarding the clause during the Constitutional Convention of 1865 (at least no records exist) despite the fact that there were Jews in the state who had considerable money if not influence. Leiser implied that a reason Jews did not act was fear of antisemitism in the form of their being labeled as disloyal. A label of disloyalty could mean considerable damage through economic boycott to retail businesses with thin margins of profit. But fear of economic, or perhaps even physical, repercussions was not the only factor working to keep Jews silent. The majority of Jews in North Carolina identified strongly with the privileged white upper class and sided with them even on issues that would seem to run counter to the Jews' best interests. White Conservatives still retained some power under the Presidential plan for Reconstruction while they were being courted by the provisional Governor, William W. Holden.

In 1865 the Whig candidate, Jonathan Worth, defeated Holden for the position of Governor. There was a very low turnout of voters, "almost fifteen thousand fewer than the seventy-two thousand who had voted in 1864." This low turnout was largely due to the desperate conditions many of the yeoman farmers faced.²⁹ Governor Worth and the Conservative congressmen who were elected, "steadily hardened their opposition to

²⁹Paul D. Escott, "White Republicanism and Ku Klux Klan Terror: The North Carolina Piedmont During Reconstruction," in Jefferey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Charles L. Flynn Jr. Eds., Race, Class, and Politics in Southern History: Essays in Honor of Robert F. Durden, (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 20.

change, either within North Carolina, or in the state's relations to the national Government."³⁰ These Conservatives by 1866 had determined to fight even the revisions to the constitution proposed in 1865. These revisions were very moderate in nature. They retained residence and property requirements for office holders but also changing the methods of determining representation to the legislature which lessened the power of conservative districts. Because of the issues of changed representation and of direct election of county magistrates, the Conservatives opposed the new constitution which incidently carried the clause against Jews holding office.³¹ The proposed constitution was defeated in a general election because of Conservative opposition which had very little, if anything, to do with the clause that kept Jews from office. The defeat of this proposed constitution which retained the clause against Jews holding office was reported with enthusiasm in the Jewish press as a triumph for North Carolina's Jews and as if Jews now had the right to hold public office, which they did not.³² The old constitution to which the state reverted still retained article 32. If the Jews of the state cared at all about the issue of office holding during 1865, their interests were best met by keeping silent, or by siding with the Conservatives,

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 21.

³²The Occident, February 1867. The American Israelite, September 28, 1866.

who opposed it, so that the proposed constitution could be defeated and a new one drafted without the prohibition.

Outside of the state, the national Jewish community continued to lobby for changes in North Carolina's constitution either on behalf of the Jews of the state or in spite of them. In February 1867, an item in The Occident announced that, "the Board of Delegates of American Israelites have submitted to the House of Representatives to the United States, a memorial protesting against the test oath contained in a bill lately introduced for the reconstruction of the state of North Carolina."³³ The issue of the religious distinction clause was brought up during the national convention of the International Order of B'nai Brith on July 28, 1867 and the delegates were warned to "constantly be on watch" against such challenges to Jewish liberty and equality.³⁴ The Board of Delegates of American Israelites even went so far as to draft a letter about the constitutional prohibition to be published in North Carolina newspapers.³⁵ Clearly Jews outside of the state were familiar with the clause in North Carolina's constitution preventing Jews from holding office and viewed it as a national issue, an issue of equal rights and protection under the law. The two largest national Jewish organizations,

³³The Occident, February, 1867.

³⁴Ibid., September 1867.

³⁵Ibid.

B'nai Brith and the Board of Delegates, worked for change in North Carolina's constitution even though, it seems, the Jews who lived in the state remained silent. North Carolina's Jews were not swayed by the efforts of the national organizations of which they must have been aware. While the Conservatives remained in power no amount of outside lobbying had an effect but with the end of Presidential Reconstruction a new window of opportunity opened.

With the defeat of the proposed constitution in 1866, Presidential Reconstruction failed in North Carolina. It appeared as if the Conservatives would retain power and the status quo under the old constitution. The Radical Republicans who controlled the United States' congress had no intention of allowing the South's return to pre-war politics. So, in 1867 Congress' Military Reconstruction Act was passed which required that blacks, who were overwhelmingly Republican, be allowed to vote and participate in the drafting of a new state constitution. It also barred prominent Confederates, who sided with conservative Democrats and Whigs, from participating in political activity during the formation of the new government. The election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1868 marked a new era in the politics of North Carolina. Republican delegates filled a sizable majority of the seats, 107 to the 13 held by Democrats and fifteen blacks took seats for the first time.³⁶ This was the first time that liberal Republicans held a majority in North Carolina and they immediately

³⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

began to change the constitution to encourage greater political, economic, and social equality for all of the state's citizens.

North Carolina's constitutional convention was in session from the middle of January to the middle of March 1868 and was widely denounced by the Conservative newspapers of the state and enjoyed little if any support from the rest of the conservative establishment. During the convention, the Constitution, originally written in 1776 and revised in 1835, was almost completely rewritten. Every branch of government was affected. New offices were added in the executive branch and most significantly the officials were chosen by direct election rather than through appointment by the legislature. The number of senators per district prior to 1868 was based on the wealth of the district. The new constitution based representation on population, providing a more democratic system than had existed prior to the Civil War or in the immediate post-war period. Judges, sheriffs, and court clerks were to be chosen by direct election rather than appointment and boards of county commissioners were created for the first time to govern on the local level. Public schools were also created which were supposed to be open on an equal basis to all students.³⁷ Amongst these sweeping changes the prohibition against Jews holding office was omitted. There was not even any debate on the issue. It was simply left out of the constitution. It is understandable in the democratic spirit of the convention how the issue was not even raised for

³⁷Zuber, North Carolina During Reconstruction, 14-17.

debate. Most of the changes in the constitution were for greater access to government by all of North Carolina's citizens. All political disabilities except one barring atheists from office were removed and more opportunities were provided for ordinary citizens to hold office. For the first time all citizens of North Carolina were equal in respect to the right to hold government positions. Blacks, whites, Jews, and people who did not own any land were all equally qualified for political opportunities.

Although the new constitution authored by the Republicans in power would provide Jews with the right and opportunity to hold political office, the Jews remained loyal conservative Democrats. They held positions in Conservative organizations and voted against the new constitution, at least in Wilmington, where the majority of Jews lived. In Wilmington the merchants, many of whom were Jews, held a strategic position and were courted by both the Republican and Conservative parties. The merchants dominated Wilmington, and the Jews were strongly represented among the merchants. In 1869 all of the dealers of clothing listed in the business directory were Jewish.³⁸ The business class in Wilmington was not a homogenous group. They were mostly first and second generation newcomers from a variety of backgrounds whose political differences,

³⁸Bransom's Business Directory for 1869, (Raleigh: 1869), 112.

"sometimes followed the lines of their cultural differences."³⁹ Before the commencement of the Civil War both the German and the Jewish citizens of Wilmington were, "regarded as staunch supporters of the old society."⁴⁰ In 1853 Jewish and gentile German immigrants together created the German Volunteers. Later, during the Civil War the German Volunteers fought under Lee in the army of Northern Virginia. The German and Jewish merchants were proud of the loyalty they had shown the Confederacy and continued to identify with it even after the war was over. Not all of the merchant class adopted the conservative stand of the Jews. Not all of the merchants were as dependant on politically powerful plantation owners known as the "Bloods."⁴¹ The New Englanders who came south after the Civil War were often accused of Union sympathies. Many of the New England immigrants were engaged in the lumber industry, shipping Carolina's plentiful pines North and overseas for the shipbuilding trade, and so were not as "dependent as the Germans and Jews on the 'Blood' dominated plantation economy."⁴² Many of the merchants from New England

³⁹W. McKee Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails; Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 122.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹"Bloods" is the common name given to the aristocracy of plantation owners prior to and immediately following the Civil War.

⁴²Ibid.

maintained close ties to the strongly Republican region from which they came. The Jewish merchants, many of whom had been in Wilmington since before the Civil War, were strongly tied to the plantation economy, exporting cotton and produce in exchange for cash or goods. They needed to maintain the goodwill of the whites who controlled the crops. Most of the business class except for the New Englanders, stayed within the conservative ranks. At least one Jew, Solomon Bear, was appointed to the committee for the organization of a Conservative party in the county.⁴³ In the Spring of 1868 the Republican party tried to coax some German merchants to run for office on the Republican ticket and was rebuffed.⁴⁴ The Jews were most active politically where they were the most populous, Wilmington. But in Charlotte, which had the second largest Jewish population in the state we also see Jews active in the Conservative clubs. E.B. Cohen, a prominent merchant, is listed in the paper as a member of the Young Men's Democratic Club.⁴⁵ And later during Reconstruction Jews held more prominent positions in the Charlotte Conservative community and became loyal allies the Conservative leader, Zebulon Vance. Jewish merchants tended to be politically conservative during the beginning of the Reconstruction period

⁴³Wilmington Daily Journal, December 15, 1867.

⁴⁴Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear, 122.

⁴⁵Charlotte Western Democrat Weekly, September 15, 1868.

siding with the white elite.

The loyalty of the Jews to the Conservative party and platform was so great that at least one member of a politically and economically active family voted against the proposed constitution of 1868 which would have given him the right to hold office. A prominent Jewish merchant after the vote asked a local paper to uphold his good name, "Mr. Maurice Bear has also been charged with voting the radical ticket, and requests us to say the author is an "infamous liar"He voted the whiteman's ticket."⁴⁶ In this edition of the paper many people were charged with voting for the new constitution. Lists of names were run of those who did not vote the Conservative platform. The same occurs in Charlotte where names of people and how they voted were published in the local papers.⁴⁷ The papers' readers were encouraged to patronize the shops of blacks and whites who had voted the Conservative ticket. Jews had a history in North Carolina of supporting the white elite that dated to before the Civil War, and they had strong economic incentives to do so after the war. Not only were the Jews dependant on the whites for the bulk of their trade but the conservatives were against the voiding of the war debt which Republicans favored.

⁴⁶Ibid., April 24, 1868.

⁴⁷Jannette Thomas Greenwood, Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 54.

During the Civil War all of North Carolina's banks and railroads, as well as many other businesses, invested heavily in war bonds. After the war, with North Carolina's economy in disarray, the Republicans decided not to repay the Confederate war bonds. Failure to repay these bonds led to the collapse of North Carolina's banks and railroads and ruined many businesses. The Conservatives opposed the repudiation of the debt and received the support of much of the business community. North Carolina's Jewish businessmen continued their support of the Conservative party through Reconstruction, holding office and working actively as party supporters.

In all parts of the state, from the foothills to the coast Jews became active in local Conservative organizations. The primary shapers of the conservative political faction in North Carolina were upper and middle class whites, people who had supported secession and who had enjoyed political power before the war.⁴⁸ Even before the Civil War, North Carolina's plantation owners established a foothold in the mercantile world brokering cotton, rice, and other agricultural commodities. When the war ended many more of the "bloods" entered the mercantile world, seeing in it an acceptable path to wealth that was not as dependant on slave labor or climate as farming.⁴⁹ As more of the "bloods" became engaged in mercantilism the

⁴⁸Escott, "White Republicanism and Ku Klux Klan Terror," 27.

⁴⁹Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear, 253.

status of the merchant increased. This new-found social status combined with the money some of the Jewish merchants possessed and their highly visible role in the life of the community made them excellent political candidates and activists in all of the cities of North Carolina where they had established themselves including Wilmington, Charlotte, Goldsboro, Statesville, Raleigh, and Tarboro. Without exception, in all of the cities of North Carolina where Jews were successful businessmen they took an active and visible role in local and regional politics, confining their activities to the Conservative party during the Reconstruction period.⁵⁰ Like other white Conservatives they were not only motivated by a desire for better government but also by the politics of race.

Wilmington during Reconstruction was the most populous city in North Carolina. Thriving trade in this active port city survived the Civil War because of the ease with which blockade runners could penetrate the Union's barrier in its vicinity. Wilmington was poised after the war to be the center of commerce for Eastern North Carolina. This status combined with an active Jewish presence which predated the war attracted many Jews to Wilmington during Reconstruction. The number of Jews in the city doubled

⁵⁰ "Conservative party" is used instead of "Democrat" because for a few years after the Civil War Whigs and Democrats united in one party with a common conservative political agenda opposed to the Republicans. It is not until a few years into Reconstruction that the Conservatives came to be identified exclusively with the Democrats.

between 1865 and 1875.⁵¹ As the Jewish presence increased Wilmington's main streets became lined with stores owned by Jewish merchants and the Jews established a visible social and economic presence.⁵²

The Conservative party organization in Wilmington included at least one Jew from its inception in 1867. In that year Solomon Bear, who came to North Carolina in the early 1850's with his four brothers and established several successful businesses, was appointed to the New Hanover County Executive Committee for the organization of a Conservative party.⁵³

Solomon Bear continued to be active in conservative politics through Reconstruction and until the time of his death in 1904.⁵⁴ He represented the county in the Conservative district conventions in 1872 and 1876 and served as one of twenty county magistrates in 1877.⁵⁵ Many other Jews were also active in the Conservative party in Wilmington. Some were active in internal party politics, others held political office. A. Weil, Nathaniel Jacobi,

⁵¹Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738-1925," 23.

⁵²Bransom's Business Directory 1869, 1872, and 1877-78, (Raleigh).

⁵³Wilmington Daily Journal, December 15, 1867.

⁵⁴ "The Bear Family" Bill Reaves Collection, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina, 23.

⁵⁵Wilmington Daily Journal, April 25, 1872, and May 18, 1876, also Bransom's Business Directory 1877-78.

S.H. Fishblate, Maurice Bear, J.I. Macks, E.H. Eilers, and William Goodman all served the Conservative party in varying capacities.⁵⁶ Most of these men served as delegates to Conservative conventions in different years, but Nathaniel Jacobi was on the nominating committee for city aldermen in 1875, and Solomon Harry Fishblate had a distinguished career with the Conservatives, serving as a city alderman from 1873 to 1875, as a "thorough and uncompromising Conservative" and as mayor from 1878-1881.⁵⁷ These Jews were also the principal founding members of the synagogues during the same time period and were outspoken voices in the general German community.

The Jews who were active in the Conservative party were successful businessmen and had earned credentials as good Southerners. North Carolina's Jews gained a level of acceptability in the white community by virtue of their being white and merchants. To be fully accepted in these urban North Carolina communities, however, they had to have good credentials as "Southerners." The surest path to being accepted as a part of the

⁵⁶A. Weil in Wilmington Daily Journal, April 25, 1872. Maurice Bear, J.I. Macks, E.H. Eilers and William Goodman in Wilmington Daily Journal, May 18, 1876. J.I. Macks also served as secretary of the Fourth Ward Conservative Democratic Committee, Wilmington Daily Journal, May 18, 1876.

⁵⁷ Nathaniel Jacobi in Wilmington Daily Journal, March 9 and 10, 1875. S.H. Fishblate in Wilmington Daily Journal, May 6, 1873, and May 18, 1876, quote from "The Fishblate Family," Bill Reaves Collection, New Hanover Public Library, 2.

white establishment would have been to have served in the Confederate army as did Nathaniel Jacobi and Solomon Bear.⁵⁸ But for Jews who came later another route to acceptance into the white establishment was open. Newcomers had to prove their loyalty as white men to the "whiteman's party" the Conservative Democrats. So we find Maurice Bear insisting he voted the "whiteman's ticket" in the 1868 elections.⁵⁹ And we find that Solomon Fishblate who was born in New York City and only came to North Carolina after the Civil war became, "well known to the people as a thorough and uncompromising Conservative."⁶⁰ Throughout North Carolina Jews were active in the Conservative party.

Although Wilmington, North Carolina's urban center and the city with the largest Jewish population in the state, had the most Jews who were active in politics, all other cities in the state with established Jewish presences also had Jews who were active in Conservative political organizations. In Charlotte E.B. Cohen was listed as a member of "The Men's Democratic Club," and Samuel Wittkowsky who was a personal friend of Governor Vance served as a delegate from Charlotte to the "Mecklenburg County

⁵⁸Nathaniel Jacobi in J.S. Reilly, Wilmington Past, Present and Future, (Wilmington: 1884), 109. Solomon Bear in Wilmington Daily Journal, February 25, 1904.

⁵⁹Wilmington Daily Journal, April 24, 1868.

⁶⁰"The Fishblate Family" in the Bill Reaves Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, 2, 29.

Conservative Convention."⁶¹ From 1878-1879 Wittkowsky served as a city alderman on the Democratic ticket.⁶² Wittkowski's friendship to Vance was sealed during the final days of the Civil War when both men were living in Statesville, North Carolina.⁶³ When Governor Vance returned to North Carolina and settled in Charlotte his law office was very close to Wittkowsky's business, and they remained friends until Vance's death in 1894.

Wittkowsky's friendship with Vance and his influence on him is documented in the previous chapter. That friendship may have been one of the influences on Vance leading him to compose "The Scattered Nation." One Raleigh reporter noted that, "Governor Vance by his lecture is winning to him the Jewish element of the land."⁶⁴ But the Jews were associated with the Democrats long before Vance composed his oration. His frequent delivery of the speech on the Jews' behalf surely helped them feel at home in Conservative politics in the face of the growing antisemitism that began to take hold toward the end of Reconstruction and into the Gilded Age of the 1890's.

⁶¹Charlotte Western Democrat Weekly, September 15, 1868; Charlotte Daily Observer, July 6, 1875.

⁶²Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, 6 (Raleigh), 253.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴Raleigh Daily News, June 20, 1875.

Goldsboro and Statesville: Two Representative Towns

During Reconstruction there were two towns which had remarkably similar Jewish populations and about which there is more surviving documentation than the sketchy newspaper records which exist for most of North Carolina. Goldsboro in Eastern North Carolina and Statesville in the Western foothills were communities of similar size whose economies during Reconstruction and into the early twentieth century were dominated by individual Jewish families that moved into the state from Germany prior to the Civil War. In both cities the Jewish families became active in Conservative politics. Statesville and Goldsboro were ideally located for region-wide trade, both were situated at the juncture of two railroad lines. The Weil Brothers in Goldsboro and the Wallace Brothers in Statesville both were able to use this proximity to their advantage. The Weil brothers built a complex partnership of department stores, farms, and manufacturing, while the Wallace brothers established the largest herb wholesaling business in the world and a large wholesale house providing goods to Western North Carolina.

The three Weil brothers emigrated from Oberdorf, Germany in 1858 when they were still rather young, moving first to Baltimore then quickly to Goldsboro where the oldest, Herman, clerked in a Jewish-owned store. When the war broke out, Herman Weil enlisted in the Confederate army as did one

of his younger brothers a few years later. Immediately after the war, in 1865, the two older brothers opened a general store in Goldsboro directly across from the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. They were shortly joined in the enterprise by their youngest brother.⁶⁵ Their business thrived and they became interested in Goldsboro's politics.

Most of the records from this time period about the political interests of Jews must be compiled and reconstructed from newspaper reports. But the Weil family preserved their personal correspondence. Their letters offer a complete and thorough look at the political attitudes of one Jewish family that seem congruent with the attitudes of middle-class Jewish merchants in North Carolina.

Henry Weil, the middle of the three brothers, often traveled to outlying towns to carry on trade and for visits. He was a frequent visitor to Emil Rosenthal, a merchant who lived in Wilson, 26 miles from Goldsboro. Henry Weil became engaged to Emil Rosenthal's daughter, Mina, in 1873 when she was 14 and he was 26. They carried on a detailed correspondence during their two-year engagement on subjects ranging from religion to social activities to politics. Henry wrote four letters to Mina about the elections of 1874 and his role in them.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Moses Rountree, Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company, 1969), 2-8.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

The 1870's brought a period of economic depression to the United States that hit the Southern states especially hard.⁶⁷ A combination of crop failures and plummeting prices for agricultural commodities crushed the non-industrial South. Political upheaval in the Northern and Southern states followed in the wake of the depression "as the voters reacted to hard times by turning against the party in power."⁶⁸ In the national elections of 1874 voters swept away the massive majority that Republicans had enjoyed since the South's secession. The Republican party's 110 vote margin in the House of Representatives was overturned as the Democrats gained a majority of sixty seats.⁶⁹ This national trend held true in local political races across the South and Democratic candidates won many of the local and state positions ending the near total dominance that Republicans had enjoyed since the end of the war.⁷⁰

Henry Weil wrote, in the midst of a chatty letter to Mina, about the excitement that elections for local office were generating in April 1874. Henry was caught up in the general fervor generated by political races across the

⁶⁷Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 535.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 523.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 539.

nation. He wrote his fiancé, "This is something which rarely ever interests me, but this time I am manifesting more interest than usual, as there are a few aspiring for the office of Mayor and commissioners who I would like to see beat." Henry's interest was in seeing the Republican candidates defeated in their race for office, a very common sentiment during the election of 1874 where depression politics and economic policy dominated the electoral scene. He suspected however that racial issues would still prevail and that the Republicans would retain control, "as there are too many negroes in Goldsboro who carry their point generally at the polls."⁷¹ But if the black citizens were the only people voting the Republican ticket it is unlikely that Republican candidates could ever have held office in Goldsboro.

The population of Goldsboro in 1870 was 687 white citizens and only 447 black.⁷² It is doubtful that the population changed much in the following four years. In Goldsboro the Republicans held a majority of municipal positions prior to 1874. Their electoral majority must have included some of the white vote or there was voter apathy on the part of white voters which allowed the Republican candidates to gain victory.

In 1874, much to Henry's surprise, but following the national trend, there was a turn-around at the polls in Goldsboro, and Democratic candidates

⁷¹Rountree, Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, 24.

⁷²Bransom's Business Directory 1872.

were elected to office. Henry took some credit for the election of Democrats to office. On May 6 he wrote, "I think that I can flatter myself that I at least contributed a good deal in having a decent and respectable man elected for mayor of Goldsboro, contrary to my expectations."⁷³ Henry did not write what his contributions were to this particular campaign but about a later campaign he wrote that he physically sent some blacks away from the polls without voting.

By this point in Reconstruction he and his brothers had a thriving business which involved real estate, dry goods, clothing, brick manufacture, and partnership in a building and loan association. In 1875 they were doing over \$100,000 a year in business and showed consistent growth.⁷⁴ They had the most successful business venture in Goldsboro, and the elite of the town were their customers. The Weils had influence in the town as merchants, interacting on a daily basis with dozens of people and they had credibility as good Southerners since two of the brothers had served in the Confederate army. When Henry bragged to Mina that he "contributed a good deal" to the election of a Democratic mayor his words carry more weight than the words of a man merely trying to impress his fiancée.

After the Democrats won office there was great rejoicing in this town

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Weil Family,, Southern Historical Society, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Genealogy File, Series 1.2, Number 28, 4.

which was still occupied by Union troops. Henry wrote that the exultant Democrats, "had bonfires and fireworks. Even some of the houses were illuminated and scarcely a darkey was to be seen on the streets."⁷⁵ The politics of race was alive and well in Goldsboro, as it was across the South during this time. The Republican party became strongly identified with the freedmen and the Democratic party was touted as the "whiteman's party."

Weil's description of the celebration reflected those racial party lines and his own preferences as did his description of a Republican nominating convention in Goldsboro which convened a few days later to select a candidate for congress. "Today the sky darkened on the arrival of the trains, as a crowd of dark skinned radical and dark hearted white-skin radicals emerged from the cars and the whole of city center was thronged with them."⁷⁶ Henry associates the perceived "darkness" of the Radicals' political ideas with the darkness of most of its constituency's skin. In his mind the whites who affiliated with and supported the Republican movement were tainted with "dark hearts." The race of the Republican supporters clearly mattered to Henry as much as their ideas, about which he did not write. In the same letter Henry ridiculed the black political contestants, "It is surely a

⁷⁵Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, "The Emerging Political Consciousness of Gertrude Weil: Education and Women's Clubs, 1879-1914," Unpublished Thesis. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 4. Rountree, Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, 24.

⁷⁶Ibid.

great sight to see such a lot of darkey aspirants for various offices promenading the streets, puffing away on their havanahs, or stinkadoras, whichever the case may be. Tomorrow the place will be thoroughly perfumed."⁷⁷ He clearly had little regard for blacks who may have held positions of power. Whether they became nominees for congress or not they were still just "darkeys" with little standing in society.

Henry Weil even kept some blacks from voting in the upcoming election during which he "had the store closed up all day and went to the polls frequently." He wrote Mina about some of the violence that the elections provoked, "A few darkeys that would have voted with me were completely surrounded by other negroes, who almost tore them to pieces. I sent them out of town without voting."⁷⁸ It is unclear who Henry sent away. He either sent the freedmen who were going to vote the democratic ticket away so that they would not get hurt or change their vote or he sent the attackers away. Whether the story he related to Mina is true or an exaggeration meant to show his bravery, whites did keep blacks away from the polls on different occasions.⁷⁹ From his perspective his hard work on election day paid off "The whole Democratic ticket was elected with the

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 29.

⁷⁹Escott "White Republicanism and Ku Klux Klan Terror," 29.

exception of the sheriff."⁸⁰

Henry Weil and his brothers fit in politically very well with the white economic elite of Goldsboro. Henry's older brother, Herman was elected city alderman in 1875 and Henry was elected county commissioner in 1876.⁸¹ They identified with the elite powerful culture, the culture of the whites, and they thrived socially, economically and politically as a result. Their identification with the white, primarily Christian, elite did not stop them from also maintaining strong Jewish identities including being founding members of the synagogue in Goldsboro, Oheb Shalom in 1883.

The Jews of Statesville were in a very similar social and economic situation to the Jews of Goldsboro and responded in kind politically. Although there were several Jewish families in Statesville, the dominant voice in the community belonged to the Wallace family. They were among the first Jews to arrive in the town and many of the Jews who followed came initially to clerk in their store.

The Wallaces' business grew after the war, and by 1876 they were reported to dominate the the county trade in seventeen western counties. They established a complex commercial venture with "significant cultural side effects," established a strong Jewish community, and became famous

⁸⁰Rountree, Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, 29.

⁸¹Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, May 6, 1875; May 1 and 4 1876.

Victorian botanists.⁸² The impact of their commercial ventures on Statesville's economy can not be underestimated. When cash was virtually non-existent after the war in the mountain towns of western North Carolina they encouraged the barter trade in herbs. Herbs that local farmers brought to small county stores could be traded directly for supplies or Wallace Bros. script.⁸³

The Wallace family in Statesville, like the Weils in Goldsboro were in an excellent position to become involved in politics. They were highly visible in the community, they were respected, and enjoyed excellent relations with the non-Jews in town, even advancing the minister of the first Presbeterian Church his salary during hard times.⁸⁴ What the Wallaces lacked was Civil War credentials. A younger brother, Victor, served for the Confederacy but he settled in Salisbury, not Statesville.⁸⁵ During the Civil War Isaac kept the brothers' business open while David was in New York where he had to meet their father who they brought over from Germany. David remained in New York through the war, unable to travel South

⁸²Freeze, "Roots, Barks, Berries and Jews: The Herb trade in Gilded Age North Carolina," 109.

⁸³Keever, Iredell; Piedmont County, 244.

⁸⁴Adler "Zebulon B. Vance and the Scattered Nation," 6.

⁸⁵Obituary for Jacob V. Wallace in Greensboro Daily News, March 31, 1933.

because of the Union blockade.⁸⁶

It is unlikely that in Statesville this lack of service would be as detrimental to political careers as it would have been in other parts of the state. During the war Iredell county, in which Statesville is located, experienced widespread resistance to authority and had high desertion rates.⁸⁷ Statesville and Iredell county was a seat of the yeoman powerbase. Many small independant farms existed in the foothill environment of Iredell county. The pressure to enlist was probably less severe in the political climate of Statesville than in other parts of the state. Failure to enlist would not have automatically led to condemnation.

Iredell county's position as a more politically independant area continued into Reconstruction. The county had a high percentage of white yeomen and a large number of white supporters of the Republican party. Ulysses S. Grant recieved 46 percent of the vote in Iredell during his run for President in 1872.⁸⁸ The Jews of Statesville however identified with the White elite, with the Democratic, "whiteman's party." It was this party that provided for them the greatest oppurtunities for power and respect. The

⁸⁶"Wallace Family", American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, Biographies file, personal information sheet provided by Soloman Wallace Hoffman.

⁸⁷Escott, "White Republicanism and Ku Klux Klan Terror," 26.

⁸⁸Ibid.

Wallaces were secure enough in their position to stand up to the local newspaper editor and publically disagree with him. In 1874 David and Jacob Wallace visited the editor of the local conservative newspaper and protested to him about his calling Bismark the "Ben Butler of Germany." The editor later apologized in the paper.⁸⁹ The Wallaces were secure enough in town to speak up on issues that concerned them. At least part of that security was due to their acceptance by the white elite.

Many of Statesville's Jews bought into or supported the racial politics of the Democrats. J.M. Rosenbaum, who came to the town to clerk for the Wallaces' and subsequently opened his own retail shop, shared an article with the editor of The Landmark, about the Jews of Cochin that was originally....., published in the Raleigh Crescent. In The Statesville Landmark it appeared under the heading, "The Jews-- Interesting Facts." The article called the Jews of Cochin, "the most ancient and purest specimen of the Jewish Race" and said they are divided into two classes, the "black Jews and the white Jews." The black Jews were not allowed to worship in the synagogue with the white Jews and were, "altogether a distinct class." The two classes separated because a conflict arose between the black and white Jews when the former were denied various "social privileges." After the conflict the two classes became "wholly separate." The article concluded with the observation that, "it seems that as early back as the year 70 we find the negro trying to get himself upon a

⁸⁹Statesville Landmark, December 12, 1874.

social footing with the white man, and in all honor be it said that the Jews had not a radical white face among them who was backing the negro in his efforts."⁹⁰ Since Roman times what had set the Jews apart and in some instances gave them credibility was the venerability of their religion and people. This article traces Conservatism and anti-black sentiment to the roots of the Jewish people. It supplied Jews with conservative credentials, in much the same way as did Vance, which date to centuries before the Conservative party ever existed. The Jews, this article said, were good whites and good Southerners. This article appeared in the same year that there was a great deal of sentiment expressed against Governor Moses of South Carolina. Governor Moses, whose father was a child of one of South Carolina's oldest Jewish families, was one of the South's most corrupt Reconstruction Governors. He spent South Carolina's money for his personal gain and came to be hated across the South sparking some antisemitic incidents. Southern Jews tried to distance themselves as far as possible from him and anything with which he was associated. Jews ran articles in local papers denouncing Governor Moses and disseminated articles such as this one distancing themselves from his policies.⁹¹

Statesville's Jews were active in the Democratic party as functionaries

⁹⁰Ibid., July 25, 1874.

⁹¹Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, July 9, 1874. Tarboro Southerner Weekly, August 6, 1874.

and as office-holders. Jacob Wallace served as an assistant marshall at a "mass meeting" of Democrats in 1876.⁹² In 1872 David Wallace was elected town commisioner.⁹³ His brother Issac was elected to the same post in 1875 and was elected as a county commisioner along with L. Pinkus in 1876.⁹⁴

The attraction of the Democratic party for Jews cannot be denied. Across North Carolina wherever Jews lived and prospered they became active in or supported the Democratic party. As the party of the elite class it afforded them the greatest opportunities and toward the middle and end of Reconstruction it became the party in power in North Carolina. Jews, by affiliating with the Conservatives, were able to distance themselves ideologically and socially from the freedmen who became the scapegoats for the problems in the state. The primary divide in North Carolina was between freedmen and whites. By associating with and supporting the "whiteman's party" Jews came to be viewed and part of the "white" establishment rather than being viewed as "other" and there were virtually no antisemitic incidents in North Carolina during Reconstruction.

⁹²Statesville Landmark, October 31, 1876.

⁹³*Ibid.*, April 18, 1872.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, May 3, 1875; May 2, 1876.

Jewish Community Formation

North Carolina's Jewish population experienced a major period of growth during Reconstruction due to enormous economic opportunity.¹ Although the changed political climate in North Carolina gave Jews the opportunity to participate in government on an equal footing with their fellow citizens it is economic, not political opportunity that lured Jews to the state. As Jews entered North Carolina they formed communities following the national sociological pattern in a three-stage organic process. First, loose bonds of friendship and social groups arose to fill the basic human need for companionship. Jewish immigrants tended to cluster on the same streets and work in the same handful of professions. These loose affiliations gave way to a more formal grouping when the inevitable need arose to care for the needy and bury the dead. Benevolent societies were formed to buy cemeteries and provide funds for those in need. Often these benevolent associations supplied religious services beyond funerals and organized regular worship. These societies established a social network with regular meeting times, a working board, and a treasury laying the groundwork for the building of congregations. Sometimes congregations were established and sometimes

¹Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738-1925," 20.

only B'nai Brith lodges and social organizations. Usually, both congregations and social lodges were created. These Jewish communities were not established according to the centralized European model with which the immigrants were familiar. They were highly decentralized and independent.²

Formal Jewish communities were established for several reasons almost all of which met basic human needs. Most Jews who moved to North Carolina were recent immigrants to the United States and not native English speakers so they associated with each other for business and social purposes. These informal meetings grew into formal clubs following the model of nineteenth century America, which Jacob R. Marcus called, "a nation of joiners."³ They also associated with each other endeavoring to find the sacred and came together for life-cycle events and holidays even before formal congregations coalesced. The religious needs of North Carolina's Jewish citizens may have been met without formal congregations, however, societal pressure dictated a need for establishing a formal religious community. The Jews constituted an extreme minority in a Christian society where church membership was a primary method of identification and source of social

²Hasia R. Diner, A Time For Gathering The Second Migration 1820-1880, Vol. 2 of, The Jewish People in America, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 86-141.

³Jacob Rader Marcus, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, class notes in possession of author from Fall, 1993.

contact and entertainment. Even now in the South one of the first questions asked after formal introductions are made is, "What church do you attend?" and the mere fact of membership is more important than the actual answer. Jews without a synagogue were accused of not being religious. Newspaper editors of the time expressed pleasure when Jewish congregations were formed and displeasure or concern when they failed.

This chapter will examine the formation of Jewish communities in North Carolina during Reconstruction looking at statewide trends with a special focus on Wilmington, the largest city in the state. Even this outpost of Judaism had no immunity from the conflict that affected the future of Judaism in the United States. In Wilmington the national conflict between the nascent Reform movement led by Isaac Mayer Wise and Orthodoxy, represented by Isaac Leeser was fought in clear and human terms. The struggle over the formation of a stable Jewish congregation in Wilmington can serve as paradigm for the national struggle between Orthodoxy and Reform in cities across the United States.

The Beginnings of Community

Although North Carolina had a Jewish presence from the time of Sir Walter Raleigh's second expedition the Jewish population remained too small to support any sort of organized Jewish community until the mid-nineteenth century. Jews who settled in North Carolina had to turn to

established Jewish communities in other states to meet their religious needs. The Mordecai family established a school in Warrenton, North Carolina while maintaining ties to the Richmond, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina communities. Jews in Wilmington, including the Benjamin and Lazarus families had close ties to the Charleston community. The Lazarus family also subscribed to the local Episcopal Church.⁴ Isaac Leeser reported that Wilmington's Jews sent their dead to either Charleston, Richmond, or Norfolk for internment.⁵ Later, after many German Jewish immigrants had arrived, Jews in towns across North Carolina maintained mercantile ties in many Northern cities and would often plan their buying trips to coincide with the Jewish holidays.

Before Jews established formal communities, informal communities and gatherings existed for both social and religious purposes. Individual Jews also practiced Jewish rituals on their own. Since these groups were informal records are slim, but it is possible to discern the beginning of tenuous group connections. In the 1850's German Jews began to settle in Wilmington in larger numbers than they had previously. They lived and worked very closely together. Their stores were within a three-block radius and their

⁴Leonard Rogoff, Unpublished Manuscript, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina 1996), 9-10.

⁵Martin M. Weitz, Bibliography: Temple of Israel, (Wilmington, North Carolina: by the Temple of Israel, 1976), 12.

homes or boarding houses were nearby.⁶ Before a synagogue was obtained, religious services were held in the home of Abraham Weill "whenever a ritual quorum of ten men could gather and on the High Holidays."⁷ These Jews, strangers in a new land, who lived and worked so closely together, must have been involved with each other socially as well. Some shared clubs in common including the Masons, Oddfellows, and the German Club. In 1852 they banded together to form the "True Brothers Society" an organization formed to raise money to buy a Jewish cemetery.⁸ Across the state clues exist that point toward Jewish social and religious interactions before the founding of formal groups. In Charlotte a group of Jewish women raised \$150 to be donated to the Confederate volunteers.⁹ That they raised and donated this money as a group and not as individuals shows that some order and assembly existed. Later, in Newbern, a similar group of women donated a "valuable box of clothing" to the Oxford orphan asylum.¹⁰

⁶Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738-1925," 20.

⁷Wilmington Star News, May 16, 1976.

⁸Weitz, Bibliography: Temple of Israel, 12.

⁹Morris Speizman, The Jews of Charlotte, (Charlotte: Heritage Printers Inc., 1978), 4.

¹⁰Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, February 17, 1876.

The Jewish population of Statesville originated with two brothers bringing their cousins and in-laws into town to start businesses.¹¹ Thus alliances among the Jews of Statesville existed even before they arrived in town. The Wallace Brothers' general store served as a hub for social activity in the town for both Jews and Gentiles.¹² Prior to the founding of the Statesville congregation in 1883, holiday services were held in the home of Isaac Wallace, and the Statesville Landmark recorded that Yom Kippur in 1876 was "appropriately observed" by the Wallace Brothers. Unfortunately it did not give any details.¹³ Isaac's brother, David, whom family members called a "devout Israelite" taught about Judaism in his home throughout his tenure in Statesville.¹⁴ Individual families in Statesville observed holidays before a formal community was established. At the end of the Civil War a detachment of Union Soldiers foraged the Wallace home during Passover. Failing to find any bread, they tried the matzah that was in the house only to

¹¹Centennial Celebration of Congregation Emanuel, (Statesville: Published by Congregation, 1983), 2.

¹²Selig Adler's unabridged "Zebulon B. Vance and the Scattered Nation," Adler papers, AJA, Cincinnati, 4.

¹³Wallace Family, AJA, Biography File. Statesville Landmark, October 3, 1876.

¹⁴Freeze, "Roots, Barks, Berries and Jews: The Herb Trade in Gilded Age North Carolina," 120.

throw them away with the disgusted comment, "more hardtack."¹⁵ The Jews in Statesville had close contact with the Jews of Charlotte, who were only a short train ride away, and buried their dead in Charlotte before they purchased a cemetery of their own. It is likely that Jews in Statesville joined their Charlotte co-religionists, some of whom they were related to by marriage, for religious observances and social events, expanding the circle of social connections beyond the borders of Iredell county.¹⁶

The most compelling and complete picture of the early formation of a Jewish community in North Carolina comes from the letters of the Weil Family in Goldsboro. These letters reflect Jewish interactions in a small town before a formal community solidified. They show the social and religious interactions that brought comfort and unity to a group of immigrants. It is these ties that eventually led to the founding of a more formal Jewish community in Goldsboro. Henry Weil's letters to his fiancée, Mina Rosenthal, reveal the active social life that Jews in Goldsboro enjoyed with one another. On December 14, 1874, while the Methodist Conference was in session in Goldsboro, and gospel could, "be had cheap on every corner," and there was, "preaching in every church in town, as well as the court house and town hall," the Einstein family threw a large party for the Jews in town as

¹⁵Adler, unabridged "Zebulon B. Vance and the Scattered Nation," 6.

¹⁶Centennial Celebration of Congregation Emanuel, (Booklet Published by Congregation, Statesville, North Carolina 1983), 2.

well as visitors from New York and Wilson. Some of the older members of the community played card games while "the ladies and young men were playing social games." Moses Einstein was a local shop-keeper whose home was a favorite gathering spot for Goldsboro's Jewish population.¹⁷ Although Henry Weil reported that he went to hear some of the Methodist preachers on Sunday, the natural reaction to such an outpouring of Christian enthusiasm was for Jews to gather in a place where they would feel welcome and part of a community, much in the same way as Jews today will gather for parties during Christmas in order to be with other Jews. There was a "Jewish crowd" who socialized with each other. One Wednesday, "the whole Jewish crowd went up on the other side of Princeton on a fishing excursion."¹⁸ Henry identified himself with a solid core group of Jews knew each other well and spent a great deal of time together.

At least on one occasion the hostess who sponsored a get-together had ulterior motives. Mrs. Einstein, who was the great Jewish social organizer in town, decided to rent out a local ball-room for a formal party when her niece came down from Boston.¹⁹ The entire visit and ball, while a great excuse for a party, was a means to introduce her niece, Sarah Einstein, to Solomon, one of

¹⁷Rountree, Strangers in the Land: The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, 16.

¹⁸Ibid., (Letter dated, June 17, 1874), 27.

¹⁹Ibid., (April 1, 1874), 23.

the Weil brothers. A day after Sarah's arrival Henry referred to her in his letter as "Sarah Weil" even though she and his brother had only met the night before.²⁰ Solomon and Sarah were married a year later.

The time that the Jews spent together was not entirely social. This group also relied on each other for help when they were in need. Henry wrote that when the partner of friend grew ill while on a selling trip in the countryside he went with his friend "and the doctor on the first train."²¹ There was a clear sense of obligation to each other among members of Goldsboro's Jewish population that was perhaps strengthened by their social activities.

They also came together on at least one occasion during Yom Kippur to break fast and to pray. The men broke fast together at a local boarding house and, "came to the conclusion that they would make better arrangements next Yom Kippur" as the food was not satisfactory. The prayer meeting for some of Goldsboro's Jews was held at the Weil's home. Three other families went to a different home.²² The only newspaper report of all this activity is that some of the Jewish-owned stores were closed. There were newspaper reports across the state about stores owned by Jews being closed for the High Holidays

²⁰*Ibid.*, (May 20, 1874), 24.

²¹*Ibid.*, 17.

²²*Ibid.*, 31.

and sometimes for Passover. These reports often pre-dated the organization of a formal Jewish community in individual cities.²³ It is doubtful that Goldsboro's Jews were any more or less observant than Jews in other parts of North Carolina during this stage of their community's formation. The possibility exists that underlying the simple reports in newspapers that Jewish-owned stores were closed for the holidays were groups of Jews who met, independent of an organized synagogue, for prayer.

The Jews were not driven by the local society in Goldsboro to associate only with each other. They were active in local fraternal orders and even rose to positions of prominence. They were also active in local politics which was a source of many social opportunities during Reconstruction. Their group identity was based on religious affiliation and possibly language. A need and desire existed to affiliate with others with similar attitudes and from similar backgrounds.

As Jewish immigrants made homes in North Carolina's communities the inevitable need arose for local cemeteries so that the Jews could spare the expense and indignity of having to ship bodies to cities in other states. The communal foundations laid by the early immigrants served them well when they needed to establish formal groups in order to incorporate and buy land

²³See, Charlotte Observer, September 21 and 23, 1873; and October 1, 1873. Statesville Landmark, October 11, 1875; and October 3, 1876. Raleigh Daily Sentinel, September 10, 1866; October 1, 1867; September 18, 1868; etc. Tarboro Southerner, September 14, 1871; etc.

for these local cemeteries.

Charitable Societies and Cemetery Building

Wilmington, with its relatively large Jewish population was the first city to obtain land for a cemetery and the only one to do so prior to the Civil War. In 1852 the first organized association of Jews in North Carolina was formed, "The True Brothers' Society." This charitable society was established in Wilmington for the purpose of raising money to buy land for a cemetery and in 1856 the cemetery was dedicated by Isaac Leeser who was scheduled to pass through during his tour of the South. Leeser reported that the Jews had, "gradually increased in Wilmington sufficiently to form a charitable society," their first care was to buy a piece of ground dedicated to receive the mortal remains of their friends and kindred."²⁴ There were about twenty Jews present at the dedication and approximately 200 of Wilmington's non-Jewish citizens attended as well.²⁵ The Jewish community received wide support from Wilmington's general population as will also be shown below in the discussion about the founding of the synagogue. In 1860 Leeser reported that the True Brothers Society fulfilled another of its purposes when its members

²⁴Weitz, Bibliography: Temple of Israel, 12.

²⁵*Ibid.*

raised 28 dollars for the "Morocco refugees."²⁶ Leeser also reported "worship during the Fall holy days" in Wilmington that year.²⁷ Charitable societies did not arise in other parts of North Carolina until Reconstruction was well underway. Their organization followed Jewish population growth in various cities throughout the state. The True Brothers Society in Wilmington is very similar to other groups that arose later. Charitable societies began as an avenue for the community to come together to purchase and manage a cemetery, then took on a charitable role and often filled a social function. These groups often became organizations that held religious services and later helped build synagogues.

In Charlotte the "Hebrew Benevolent Society" received a charter from the state House of Representatives in 1870 and purchased land for a cemetery in 1872.²⁸ The charter authorized the president of the Hebrew Benevolent Society to distribute five dollars in charity on his own initiative; and the board of directors could act on requests for larger amounts.²⁹ The Benevolent Society hosted Purim balls to raise larger sums of money for donation. In 1875, when there were a reported 109 Jews in Charlotte, they hosted a Purim

²⁶Occident, XVII:60, March 8, 1860.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Speizman, The Jews of Charlotte, 7.

²⁹Diner, A Time For Gathering: The Second Migration, 95.

ball which raised "one hundred dollars to be sent to Rabbi Tiltzer for the old age home."³⁰ That year the Purim ball was held in the "Jewish Club Rooms."³¹ But the previous year the Purim Ball was held in a private residence.³² Before the Charlotte community organized a synagogue they organized a social club of some sort that had the wherewithal to purchase or rent a club room. By 1877, the same year a B'nai Brith lodge was founded, the responsibilities for the Purim Ball were taken over by the "Jewish Hop Club."³³ As the Jewish population of Charlotte grew so did the number of Jewish organizations in the city. It was no longer possible or desirable for one group to perform all of the burgeoning community's tasks. The Charlotte Benevolent Society fits the pattern of dozens of similar societies across the United States during the same time period which were organized to bury the dead and quickly added other activities and responsibilities to their stated task.³⁴

³⁰Statesville Landmark, March 8, 1875. Harry L. Golden, "Jewish Roots in the Carolinas; a Pattern of American Philo-Semitism," (Charlotte: The Carolina Israelite, 1955), 22. Charlotte Observer, March 22, 1875.

³¹Charlotte Observer, March 22, 1875.

³². Charlotte Observer, March 3, 1874, (The residence of Mr. L. Drucker).

³³Charlotte Observer, February 20, 1877, February 22, 1877.

³⁴Diner, A Time For Gathering: The Second Migration, 95.

Benevolent societies were formed and cemeteries were purchased in Statesville, Raleigh, and Goldsboro all during Reconstruction as the populations grew and the need arose. In Statesville, Isaac Wallace was a strong advocate for the purchase of a municipal cemetery and when the town bought one he made sure that there was a section for Jews.³⁵ The Jewish community of Raleigh incorporated the "Hebrew Cemetery Company" to buy land. They were also permitted by their charter to "provide charity for poor persons of the Jewish faith."³⁶ In Goldsboro the Jewish community purchased land from the town in 1875 to use as a cemetery. Around the same time the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent society was begun as a separate organization to provide assistance to the needy. It is not recorded whether they served the function of a traditional chevra kaddisha.³⁷

Tarboro's Jewish community seemed to follow a slightly different path. The rapid rise and organization of Tarboro's Jewish community seems anomalous when compared with the leisurely pace with which other Jewish communities in North Carolina grew. This speed can probably be traced to the arrival of Henry Morris, a merchant, who prior to moving to Tarboro was

³⁵Congregation Emmanuel Centennial Celebration Booklet, 5.

³⁶Incorporation papers of the Hebrew Cemetery Society, Near Print file; Geography for Raleigh, North Carolina, AJA, Cincinnati.

³⁷Rountree, Strangers in the Land; The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, 55.

an active member of Congregation Keneseth Israel in Richmond, Virginia.³⁸ He arrived late in 1869 or early in 1870.³⁹ There were a few other Jewish families in the town before he arrived, and shortly after his arrival the "Jewish Social Circle" held their grand opening at a Purim Ball in a local hotel.⁴⁰ In 1871 the "Jewish Merchants of Tarboro" took out an advertisement stating that they would be closed for two days for the Jewish new year.⁴¹ In other cities individual stores had taken out advertisements to announce that they would be closed but this is the only advertisement that showed a unity of purpose. Within four years the community had organized high holiday services and a synagogue. It took much longer for the Jewish populations in North Carolina's other cities to move from the first stirrings of community to organizing a synagogue.

Charitable societies filled a definite need in the early stages of the development of North Carolina's Jewish communities. They met the basic human needs for comfort, aid, and burial of the dead. Many came to fill a

³⁸Myron Berman, Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 154.

³⁹Smaw's Business Directory for 1869, (Raleigh), Morris is not listed in the Business directory for 1869 but his store had advertisements in 1870 in the local weekly paper. Tarboro Southerner Weekly, April 14, 1870.

⁴⁰Tarboro Southerner Weekly, March 9, 1871.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, September 14, 1871.

social role as well and provided an extent bureaucratic structure when the time came to build synagogues. The Reconstruction beginnings of burial/charitable societies enabled North Carolina's Jewish population in cities across the state to found synagogues shortly after Political Reconstruction ended and a sense of stability returned.

Religious Practice and Synagogue Formation

Eventually Jews across the state found that they needed more to sustain their communities than charitable societies. They felt the need for a religious community. Before Jews established synagogues and before they created any sort of formal community they practiced religious rituals and learned about Judaism on their own. The Mordecai family, who were early Jewish settlers in Warrenton tried hard to give their family a firm foundation in Judaism. Jacob Mordecai was a biblical scholar and synagogue officer, nevertheless, only three of his thirteen children married Jews and many members of his family converted to Christianity.⁴² He did manage however to give his family, many of whom taught in his Warrenton school a firm background in Jewish texts. One of his daughters, Emma settled in Wilmington during Reconstruction

⁴²Leonard Rogoff, Unpublished work, 9.

and taught at the school of Miss Kate Kennedy.⁴³ While in Wilmington she came to know Dr. Watson who was the minister at St. James Church Episcopal in the city and was later appointed Bishop of East Carolina.⁴⁴ This acquaintance probably arose through the Calder family who were Emma's relatives and members of Dr. Watson's parish.⁴⁵ Evidently Dr. Watson challenged Emma on the Jewish beliefs on the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead. Emma response was passionate, scholarly, and had a rather audacious tone. She was 56 years old when she wrote this reply:

My dear Mr. Watson,

Your inquiry of the other evening respecting our belief in the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body, surprised me not a little coming from such a student of divinity as yourself, and to remove all doubt upon the subject from your mind, I transcribe for your perusal the opening clause of our daily morning service- beautiful in its solemn simplicity, and containing the avowal of both these articles of belief.

"My God! The soul which Thou hast given me is pure; Thou hast created, formed and breathed it into me. Thou preservest it within me; will hereafter take it from me, and restore it unto me in futurity. Whilst my soul continues within me, I do acknowledge before thee, O'Lord my God! And God of my fathers, that thou art the sovereign of all works, ruler of all creatures, and Lord of all souls! Blessed art thou O'Lord who restorest the souls to the bodies of the dead!"

Am I mistaken in thinking that while the new faith, (not yet

⁴³James Sprunt, *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River 1660-1916* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, second edition Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1943), 657.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 609.

⁴⁵Calder Family Correspondence, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Letter dated November 29, 1872.

nineteen centuries old) had its origin in the ancient one to which I belong, and which belongs to me as my "inheritance" while in fact it is the pupil of the old, from which it derives all its ancient knowledge- it too often ignores its obligations to its venerable instructor, and assumes to have originated what it has but learned- such as the doctrine, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" considered and received as so preeminently of Christian origin, but which Jesus learned from the same source that I learned it- the Law of Moses.

Pardon me who belong to (humanly speaking) so powerful a minority, for addressing one sustained by so many and such powerful influences. I speak not for the purpose of being answered, but only in some sort to justify my faith.

In the spirit of perfect friendliness, let me call your attention to an article in the "London Quarterly" for October, on "The Talmud" which throws much light on the misunderstood spirit of Judaism," the Bishop has the number.

Do not trouble yourself my dear Mr. Watson to reply to this. I know how pressed you are for time, and how oppressed with duties to which allow me to say without presumption, and with all sincerity, none could more faithfully or seriously devote themselves. Excuse the liberty I have taken, and believe me with sincere esteem and sincere regard.

Your friend,
Emma Mordecai
Wilmington, March 14th 1868.⁴⁶

Even without the Jewish education that a formal community could provide, Emma had a detailed knowledge of Jewish daily ritual and a firm sense of her own faith as well as a desire to defend it against attack. In her response she challenged both Dr. Watson's erudition and the nature of Christianity. It was a very bold reply for a single woman to have made to someone as powerful as Dr. Watson. While the depth of education she received was probably

⁴⁶Emma Mordecai, Wilmington, to Mr. Watson, Calder family correspondence, March 14, 1868, Southern Historical Collection, collection 125, folder 9.

uncommon it was not uncommon for Jewish youths to learn about Judaism even before formal communities were established.

From Charlotte a young man was sent to Atlanta to prepare for his "confirmation." By sending their son to study in a distant city his family showed an enormous commitment to Jewish education. The Rev. B. A. Bonnheim tutored him and then returned with him to Charlotte to officiate at the ceremony.⁴⁷ In Statesville, David Wallace used to offer religious instruction in his home. And in Raleigh, Michael Grausman, who was the city's pre-eminent Jew and had some rabbinical training, turned the nursery of his house into a beit kenneset and a classroom in 1874 where he taught Hebrew and Jewish history.⁴⁸ A formal congregation was not organized in Raleigh until 1885 but in 1876 two of the city's Jewish teens were confirmed in a ceremony held on Shavuot. The officiant was Mr. Rosenbaum, a local citizen. The ceremony was held at the "Hebrew Union," space that the Jews had rented on Fayetteville Street.⁴⁹ Even before North Carolina's Jewish population established synagogues, individuals and communities found ways to meet the need for religious education.

⁴⁷Charlotte Daily Observer, November 19, 1873.

⁴⁸Temple Beth Or Golden Anniversary Book, (1963), AJA, Near print file Geography, Raleigh, North Carolina.

⁴⁹Raleigh Daily News, June 1, 1876.

Only in two cities in North Carolina, Wilmington and Tarboro, were synagogues actually incorporated during Reconstruction. In other cities in the state Jewish communities began to coalesce during this period and in some instances proto-synagogues were formed. In Raleigh, for instance, Michael Grausman held religious services in his home as early as 1874, and the Jewish community rented rooms down town as a meeting place.⁵⁰ In Charlotte as well, Jews rented or purchased a space for their meetings. The Jews of Goldsboro were already in possession of a Torah when their synagogue was built.⁵¹ The Tarboro community formed their "Jewish Social Circle" in 1871 and a B'nai Brith lodge in 1875.⁵² Perhaps these were carried down from Richmond by the Morris family. Tarboro's Jews began to meet as a community for High Holiday and other services in 1876 and perhaps even earlier. It was reported in the local paper that on Yom Kippur "all businesses will be closed and services held in the Odd Fellows Hall."⁵³ The official synagogue minute book of Tarboro's Congregation B'nai Israel begins in 1877

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Rountree, Strangers in the Land; The Story of Jacob Weil's Tribe, 55.

⁵²Tarboro Southerner, March 9, 1871; April 23, 1875.

⁵³Ibid., September 29, 1876.

with Henry Morris being elected president.⁵⁴ Although only two congregations were incorporated during Reconstruction the foundations for at least five others have their origins in the tumultuous period of Reconstruction. It was not only the internal pressure of a need for cemeteries and religious companionship which led to the creating of permanent Jewish communities in the state. External pressures from both the national Jewish community and the local non-Jewish community motivated North Carolina's Jews to create permanent institutions.

Societal Pressure to Create Religious Community

Religion in North Carolina, before, during, and beyond Reconstruction was a primary source of identity and provided a level of social acceptability as well as an important social network. While the state's constitution provided for freedom of religion it also required religious belief for office-holders. Even after the constitution was revised to allow Jews the right to hold public office a prohibition against atheists remained on the books. North Carolina's constitution reflected the attitudes of the state's citizens toward religious affiliation. North Carolina during Reconstruction was politically and morally conservative. Having lost the Civil War and facing radical change regarding

⁵⁴Synagogue Minute Book, Congregation B'nai Israel, Tarboro, North Carolina, AJA, Near Print File, Geography.

government and the status of the freedmen, the state's population clung to religion as a means to maintain continuity with the past. Organized religion also conveyed a sense of stability and permanence in a rapidly shifting and changing world. Times and locations of religious services appeared on the front page of almost every newspaper across the state. Into this world came the Jews, representatives of the oldest and perhaps most stable religion in the Western world. Yet for a long time the Jews did not have synagogues or public places of worship. In most cities in North Carolina until the 1880's and 1890's Jews worshipped in private or in other states if they worshipped at all. But there was a great deal of public interest in Jewish practices and rituals. Jewish holidays and "interesting facts about the Jews" especially regarding the new Reform movement, were common features in local papers.

The Statesville Landmark in 1874 ran four and a half columns on their front page regarding the Jewish dietary laws.⁵⁵ They also offered yearly columns which gave details of the various Jewish holidays.⁵⁶ The Landmark recorded that, "the Day of Atonement was properly observed by the Wallace brothers."⁵⁷ Perhaps this was included to assure the citizens of Statesville that the Jews were fulfilling their religious obligations. The Charlotte Western

⁵⁵Statesville Landmark, December 5, 1874.

⁵⁶Ibid., for example, October 11, 1875.

⁵⁷Ibid., October 3, 1876.

Democrat Weekly, ran an article under the heading, "important to the Jews" that went on to talk about a meeting of Jews in Germany the purpose of which was to reconcile science and religion.⁵⁸ Other papers in Charlotte also paid attention to the rising Reform movement especially around high holiday time.⁵⁹ Some of these articles were long and quite detailed, discussing the particulars of the various holidays including how they were currently practiced and their biblical origins. There were also reports about the Jewish New Year stating that Charlotte's Israelites, "observed the day in a proper and becoming manner."⁶⁰ North Carolina's newspapers seemed to be responding to a concern that Jews were areligious. The papers countered this concern by assuring their readers that the Jews practiced their religion properly.

The Raleigh, Tarboro and Statesville papers also carried items of Jewish interest in disproportionate amounts to the number of Jews in town. Even Asheville, which had only a handful of Jewish inhabitants ran news items about Jews regularly in their paper.⁶¹ The Asheville editor ran a piece on

⁵⁸Charlotte Western Democrat Weekly, September 15, 1868.

⁵⁹Charlotte Observer, September 11, 12, 13, 1874; September 29, 1875; April 8, 12, 1876, etc.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, September 23, 1873.

⁶¹The Asheville Pioneer, October 7, 1869; September 7, 1871; June 20, 1874; August 15, 1874, etc.

Jewish Sabbath ritual with antisemitic overtones. After a reprint of an article that ran in the Jewish Messenger in New York, regarding Jews who attended horse races on Shabbat the editor observed, "Why... are not some Jews decent? Why will they being discredit upon themselves and their brethren by their lack of common sense and common decency?" He remarked that the "Messenger can find no excuse for this desecration of Sabbath." And he continued, "Looking from a Christian standpoint, "Would a decent American Christian attend a race on Sunday?"⁶² There was an obvious expressed interest in Jewish practice, or rather lack thereof, even in a small town which at that point had very few Jewish inhabitants. It seems that the lack of demonstrable religious practice on the part of North Carolina's Jews represented a threat to the establishment and made Jews suspect citizens. The Jews' lack of an organized "church" made them stand out as a non-Christian minority.

Isaac Leeser was aware that the lack of an organized synagogue made the Jews appear suspect in the eyes of their fellow citizens. In 1867, before any synagogues were established in North Carolina he wrote that lack of a synagogue in the state was not just disgraceful from a religious point of view but was, "hurtful to Israelites-- to their respectable standing in the community;" because, "their townsmen are not blind to the fact that of all denominations the Jews alone are without a place of worship or any religious

⁶²Ibid., August 8, 1874.

organization."⁶³ North Carolina's Jews, without a place to worship, stood out as alien and strange to society and lost respect in the eyes of the community. Leiser, hundreds of miles away in Philadelphia, recognized that the Jews not having a place to worship was problematic. It made them appear unsettled and impermanent. He pointed out an underlying social pressure that must have existed for Jews to build places of worship.

This pressure was felt most strongly in Wilmington with the largest and oldest Jewish population in the state. It can be seen in the contrast between the joy that the local newspaper editor expressed when a synagogue was formed and his subsequent sarcasm when it failed. Several articles were run when it was discovered that the local Jews had decided to form a congregation and hire a Rabbi. All of the articles were highly complementary in tone and took a fair amount of space in the paper. The first one expressed a thought that had gone unexpressed in print until this point; "It has long been a matter of much surprise that the Jewish residents of our city did not take some steps towards establishing a synagogue here and securing the services of some minister of their faith to assume the spiritual direction of the same."⁶⁴ The Jews must have been aware that this attitude was present among the general population. Isaac Leiser was aware of it and he lived hundreds of

⁶³Occident, April 25, 1867.

⁶⁴Wilmington Daily Journal, September 24, 1867.

miles away. When this congregation failed a year later the editor took a slightly sarcastic tone. After the Rabbi left, the editor reported his departure fairly. But follow-up articles regarding the Jewish holidays made his bias clear. After a long article about Sukkot he noted unnecessarily; "The synagogue here being without a minister, there will be no public services during this festival."⁶⁵ Perhaps in this instance he was expressing disappointment or only reporting the news since the rabbi had just left the month before, but five months later, when the Jews still had not hired a new rabbi; he wrote regarding Purim, "The Hebrews in this city being without a rabbi and a synagogue, the occasion will scarcely be more than partially celebrated."⁶⁶ Evidently the religious practices of the Jews were very important to the citizens of Wilmington. There was an expressed desire in the local press that the Jews have a stable religious community.

Religion exerted a stabilizing influence in a very unstable time in North Carolina's history. Societal pressures pushed the state's Jewish communities toward founding permanent congregations. There was no question, as North Carolina's Jewish population grew and external pressure increased, that synagogues would be founded, but the question remained as to what form they would take.

⁶⁵Ibid., October 4, 1868.

⁶⁶Ibid., February 25, 1869.

Traditional Versus Reform Judaism in North Carolina

The last few decades of the nineteenth century mark the beginning of a new phase of Judaism. Judaism's encounter with science and modernity had a permanent effect on the religion as a whole, leading to the establishment of Reform Judaism. The seeds of Reform Judaism came to the United States from Germany and fell on fertile ground, taking root and spreading rapidly across the nation. As Reform Judaism spread, its proponents experienced conflict with traditionalists in many places. The conflict between Reform and traditional Judaism was played out across North Carolina but was especially evident in Wilmington where the national leader of Orthodoxy, Isaac Leeser, and two proponents of Reform, Isaac Mayer Wise and Marcus Jastrow, took personal interest.

The first synagogue founded in North Carolina had a traditionalist orientation and was established with the blessing of Isaac Leeser. Leeser began his campaign to have the Jewish community organize along Orthodox lines over a decade before the congregation was actually formed. He was present at the dedication of the cemetery in 1855 to conduct "suitable" religious exercises and show his support to the community.⁶⁷ Leeser reported in 1860 after speaking to several "gentlemen residents" of Wilmington that the Wilmington community held worship services during the High Holidays. Leeser hoped that soon the Jews of Wilmington would become, "fully

⁶⁷Occident, Vol. 13, 1855.

organized and secure the services of a pious minister." Then he exerted a bit more pressure announcing, "It is time they were busy in the good work, and we trust that they will not neglect it much longer."⁶⁸ Leeser was eager for the Jewish community of Wilmington to organize a synagogue under his watchful eye; the first synagogue in the state. Evidently his entreaty had some influence, a few months later the following advertisement appeared in the New York Hebrew Leader, "Wanted by the Israelites of Wilmington, North Carolina; Hazan, Schocket, Mohel. Communicate M. Hirscheberger, Wilmington, N.C."⁶⁹ Wilmington's Jews attempted to start a traditional congregation before the Civil War. Unfortunately, their timing could not have been much worse. The Civil War broke out and Wilmington was in turmoil for several years.

After the war ended the members of the Jewish community again turned their attention to the founding of a synagogue. And Leeser turned his attention toward making sure that it was "organized according to Orthodox principles." In April, 1867 Leeser wrote that "Wilmington is perhaps the only place in the whole world where so many Jews live without a union." He was eager to found a congregation there so that the North Carolina Jewish

⁶⁸Occident, XVII:50 March 8, 1860.

⁶⁹Hebrew Leader, (New York), Aug. 2, 1860. Found in Harry Golden "The Jewish People of North Carolina" North Carolina Historical Review, 32: 2, April 1955, 207.

community would start out on the right path. But Leeser recognized that even isolated Wilmington faced the hazard of "the reform element" which everywhere was, "displaying its evil tendencies." He feared that the reformers, "may be a serious barrier to any result."⁷⁰ Leeser's concerns were unwarranted in the short term, an Orthodox congregation was founded shortly thereafter. In the long term his fears proved prophetic. The traditional leaning of the congregation alienated too many of the city's Jews for it to remain a fiscal possibility.

Four months after his entreaty first appeared in the Occident Leeser reported that the Jews of Wilmington had decided to form a congregation and were actively looking for a Rabbi. Leeser hoped that, "the people may speedily succeed in engaging the proper man for a minister; and of one thing we are almost confident, that it depends entirely on the choice they make whether religion will progress among them..."⁷¹ Once again Leeser's words would prove prophetic, although perhaps not in the way he intended, as it was undoubtedly the rabbi's inflexibility which was the major contributing cause to the decline of the congregation. In September of 1867, just in time for the High Holidays, Wilmington's local papers carried articles announcing that the Jewish community had hired Reverend E.M. Myers of England, whose brother was the Hazzan in Charleston, to serve as rabbi and that they

⁷⁰Occident, 25:36 April 1867.

⁷¹Occident, 25:216, July 1867.

had rented a place to serve as a synagogue.⁷² Rev. Myers, in addition to serving the congregation, planned to open a non-denominational preparatory school.⁷³ Evidently the rabbi and his family were planning on staying for a while. In October his family sought a "house servant."⁷⁴

The Rabbi's arrival was exciting to the Jewish as well as gentile community. After his arrival the synagogue was, "filled... by a large and respectable congregation" on Rosh Hashanna.⁷⁵ A long article appeared in the Wilmington Daily Journal describing in detail the practices of Rosh Hashanna and its history, the background for which was probably provided by the Rev. Myers. The article stated that Rosh Hashanna is to be celebrated for two days.⁷⁶ This was consistent with Myers' traditional background and leanings which he expressed in a letter to Isaac Leeser assuring him that, "everything has been organized on orthodox principles, and that these [principles] will be preserved in all public affairs." Leeser, who knew personally many of the Jews who resided in Wilmington, recognized that,

⁷²The Wilmington Daily Post, September 18, 1867. and Wilmington Daily Journal, September 24, 1867.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Wilmington Daily Journal, October 10, 1867.

⁷⁵Wilmington Daily Post, October 1, 1867.

⁷⁶Wilmington Daily Journal, October 1, 1867.

"the minister cannot be responsible for the conduct of individuals." But he hoped that they would, "conform to the religion in honor of which they have at length established a house of worship."⁷⁷ Rev. Myers intended to do everything in his power to make the Wilmington community Orthodox. Ultimately he would fail.

In December, Rev. Myers called a meeting which, "every Hebrew resident of the city, with three or four exceptions attended." Those attending were informed by him that his purpose in calling the meeting was "to induce them to close their establishments on the Sabbath day." Rev. Myers made his argument forcibly, pointing out to the attendees, "the ridiculous position in which they placed themselves by forming a congregation and not keeping the Sabbath." He told those attending that they were causing a "great and lasting injury... to the growing generation by its violation." The group went on to pass resolutions "acknowledging the paramount duty of every professing Jew to keep the Sabbath, and that its violation was derogatory to our nation, injurious to our children, and to the means of bringing us into disrespect of our fellow citizens."⁷⁸ Although the Jews passed this resolution under the direction of Rev. Myers it appears that very little was done to enforce or support it. It would have been impractical for Jews to close their shops on

⁷⁷Occident, 25, November 1867, 414-15.

⁷⁸Occident, 25, January 1868, 541.

Shabbat during this highly competitive period in history. Perhaps the owners of larger stores could have hired clerks to serve on Sabbath but there was no recourse for the smaller shop-owners except to remain open. It would seem that Rev. Myers was, through his obstinacy, preparing for his own departure.

In March of 1867 the congregation threw a surprise party for Rev. Myers. The president of the congregation presented Rev. Myers with new "robe of office" on behalf of the ladies of the congregation in expression of the "high esteem and regard" in which they held him. They hoped he would hold his office "among them for many years." By way of reply Rev. Myers responded that if they really did wish to promote his happiness as their pastor, "They must use their influence with their husbands, for the observance of the Sabbath. They must observe it themselves and teach their children to do so." Rev. Myers pitted wife against husband in his desire to have the Sabbath observed. He vowed that, "he would never rest in his endeavors until he had accomplished it." Rev. Myers, at this party in his honor, made his agenda in the Wilmington community very clear. He used whatever influence he had to accomplish his ends.

The local newspaper reports about Jewish holidays also took on a decidedly traditional turn. They included an article on the Fast of Esther with a detailed story of Purim and an article about Passover which stated "in all respects the holiday will be strictly observed."⁷⁹ The paper announced that

⁷⁹Wilmington Daily Journal, March 6, 1868; and April 7, 1868.

"during the continuance of the festival (Passover), services will be held and prayers offered in the synagogue in this city, and the first two and last two of the eight days are holidays."⁸⁰ It is doubtful that the rabbi shared the support of all of the Jewish population of Wilmington for these sweeping pronouncements. In December an article about Reform appeared in the paper regarding a new synagogue that had been built in New York where, "the sexes occupy seats together, as in Protestant churches and the service is read from a desk or pulpit..."⁸¹ These reforms probably appealed to many of the Jews in Wilmington most of whom traveled North on business and were certainly aware of some of the changes that were taking place in Jewish ritual practice.

It was during the High Holidays of 1868 that events came to a head. On September 15 the Daily Journal ran a long article giving details about Rosh Hashanna from a traditional perspective. Included in the article was the information that the holiday lasted for two days. The editor noted that, "even the lukewarm Israelite always unites with his brethren in the faithful observance of the 'day of memorial.'"⁸² Rev. Myers, with this newspaper article, was taking his appeal for increased observance outside of the Jewish community and placing it in the public sphere. Now the non-Jewish

⁸⁰Ibid., April 7, 1868.

⁸¹Wilmington Daily Journal, December 1, 1867.

⁸²Ibid., September 15, 1868.

community could judge who was a participant in "faithful observance" based on whether or not he attended two days of religious services. Evidently some Jewish shopkeepers did not like the tone of the first article, finding it too stringent and two days later another article appeared in the paper refuting the insistence that it was required to observe two days of the holiday. The paper reported that it was a custom to keep stores closed for two days during the holiday but, "there being no compulsion about the matter it is optional with them whether or not they will remain closed more than one day or that they shall be closed at all."⁸³ The next day, the second day of Rosh Hashanna, Rev. Myers' resignation was announced in the paper.⁸⁴ Apparently he was not willing to compromise on the level of observance. After Rosh Hashanna had passed, the Wilmington Daily Journal ran a follow-up article on the observance of the new year reporting, "The first day of this celebration was generally observed by the Hebrews in this city, almost every store kept by them being closed. Yesterday all of them with but few exceptions were open for business."⁸⁵ The Jews decided by their actions, if not by resolution, that they could not or would not follow orthodox traditions regarding Shabbat or the second days of holidays. Reverend Myers alienated many of

⁸³Ibid., September 17, 1868.

⁸⁴Ibid., September 18, 1868.

⁸⁵Ibid., September 19, 1868.

Wilmington's Jewish citizen's by his insistence that they adhere to a strict orthodoxy. The congregation shrank and the remaining congregants were forced to "express regret at the pecuniary inability of the congregation to retain his services."⁸⁶ In one instance the paper reported that the Rabbi resigned in another that the congregation could not afford to pay him. Possibly it was a combination of the two and following the battles on Rosh Hashanna enough congregants quit to make Myers' salary impossible to meet, and Myers, realizing the lack of moral and financial support, decided to leave town. There were only eleven days between the time Rev. Myers resigned and the day he and his family left by steamship for New York.⁸⁷

After Rev. Myers left town informal services with increased attendance were organized in the home of Nathaniel Jacobi.⁸⁸ Jacobi, one of Wilmington's leading business men, later would help organize a Reform synagogue in Wilmington. It would seem that economy dictated ideology. The economic need to keep stores open on Shabbat during this period of competition and growth out-weighed any desire, at least for the majority of Jews, to remain true to their orthodox roots. And the growing Reform movement provided a clear alternative.

⁸⁶Ibid., September 30, 1868.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Weitz, Bibliography: Temple of Israel, 15.

Four years later, in 1872, Wilmington's Jewish population again decided to attempt the opening of a synagogue, this one organized according to more liberal traditions. An article in the American Israelite announced in November of 1872, the formation of a "Minhag America" congregation in Wilmington.⁸⁹ During 1872 the "Ladies Concordia Society" of Wilmington hosted two balls to benefit the erection of a synagogue; one on Purim and one on Sukkoth. Both were well reported in the local paper.⁹⁰ The formation of the "Ladies Concordia Society" predated the formation of the congregation by several years. The Concordia society was founded to "promote the cause of Judaism and to aid by its funds the maintenance of the temple of worship in our midst."⁹¹ In October the Wilmington Daily Journal and Morning Star reported that there was a large meeting "of the Israelites of the city looking to the erection of a synagogue dedicated to the worship of the Hebrew faith."⁹² Once again Wilmington's Jewish community turned to Philadelphia for religious leadership. This time they chose Marcus Jastrow, who had proven his willingness to compromise with modernity, instead of Isaac Leeser as

⁸⁹American Israelite, XIX:19, November 8, 1872.

⁹⁰Wilmington Daily Journal, March 26, October 17, 18, 1872.

⁹¹Weitz, Bibliography of Temple of Israel, 20.

⁹²Wilmington Daily Journal, October 29, 1872. Similar report on same date in Wilmington Morning Star.

their guide in building a religious community. Jastrow seemed like a perfect match. He had agreed to institute a number of reforms in what had once been an Orthodox congregation in Philadelphia, so he had sympathy for the traditional elements in the community yet was able to compromise to the demands of modernity. Dr. Jastrow made a firm commitment to the building of a synagogue in Wilmington even going so far as to provide his son-in-law to them as Rabbi. When the building cornerstone was laid in 1875 Jastrow was thanked by the community for, "his untiring efforts and... powerful influence in directing the efforts and inclining the hearts of our people to lead to completion a work that he has so much at heart."⁹³ Jastrow's commitment to the Wilmington community was a reflection of his commitment to Judaism and his understanding of the need and desire for synagogue reforms.

In November, 1872 the community invited Dr. Jastrow to come speak about the building of a synagogue. On Friday, Dr. Jastrow delivered an address about the social standing of Jews in every community to a large gathering at the court house. It was reported that there was a "good attendance of ladies as well as gentlemen" at the gathering and that an appeal was made to them by Jastrow that they "build a house of worship dedicated to

⁹³Wilmington Morning Star, July 16, 1875.

the religion of their fathers.”⁹⁴ They adjourned until the next morning when Shabbat services were held at the “old synagogue.” Dr. Jastrow lead services and delivered his sermon to a mixed crowd of Jews and Christians.⁹⁵ The following day “all the Israelites in the city” were requested to meet in the synagogue to discuss practical plans for creating a new synagogue in Wilmington.⁹⁶ The meeting was well attended by the city’s Jewish citizens who raised quite a bit of money and decided to solicit contributions from non-Jews as well. The newspaper editor supported them in their endeavor, writing that he hoped that the general citizens of Wilmington would, “give a liberal aid to the enterprise as it is for the benefit of those who have always been ready to lend us a helping hand in our need.”⁹⁷ This attempt to build a synagogue was met with wide support in the community from both Jews and non-Jews. The local Jewish population gave broad financial support to this attempt, perhaps because they saw in Jastrow and in Minhag America a person and a prayer-book which could bridge the gap between Orthodoxy and American life.

⁹⁴Wilmington Daily Journal and Wilmington Morning Star, November 22, 1872.

⁹⁵Wilmington Daily Journal, November 23, 24, 1872.

⁹⁶Ibid., November 24, 1872.

⁹⁷Ibid. November 26, 1872.

On May 20, 1875 in "honor of the Mecklenburg Centennial" ground was broken for the building of the synagogue, "Temple of Israel" in Wilmington.⁹⁸ The Jews chose the hundredth anniversary of the adoption of North Carolina's first constitution as the date to ceremoniously mark the building of its first synagogue. They did so, according to Solomon Bear, the president of the new synagogue, "to show how earnest was their affection for the state of their adoption and how sincere their pride in all her great deeds and glorious records..."⁹⁹ The building of a synagogue was a mark of their permanence and intent to stay in their adopted home. Breaking ground on an important anniversary for the state reinforced that image of permanence and their sense of connection with their native state. Wilmington's Jewish community did not simply consider themselves American Jews or even Southern Jews. They were North Carolinian Jews and showed that allegiance by choosing the Mecklenburg Centennial as the day of the ground breaking ceremony for their synagogue. About 500 people attended the ceremony showing the strong support that the Jews received from the general community. To raise money for the building the "True Brothers' Society" invited Zebulon B. Vance, the war-time governor of North Carolina, to deliver his address "The Scattered Nation" at the Opera House in Wilmington. There was an "unusually large

⁹⁸Philadelphia Jewish Record, 1:8, June 11, 1875.

⁹⁹Ibid., 1:6 May 28, 1875.

attendance" and the funds raised were used to benefit "the building of an Israelitish place of worship."¹⁰⁰ The Conservative politician, Vance, was a favorite of Jews across the state. And he delivered his speech around the country, often to raise funds for Jewish causes. His speech in Wilmington was attended by both Jews and Christians. The chair of the building committee, Abraham Weill "alluded to the generous aid that had been extended to his people by the Christians."¹⁰¹ It seems that their plea for funds from the general community did not go unanswered. Following the ceremony Solomon Bear held a party in his home for a mixed group of Jews and Christians. These reports came from a Jewish paper in Philadelphia showing once again the strong ties that the Wilmington community felt with the Jewish community in Philadelphia.¹⁰²

Jastrow returned from Philadelphia for the cornerstone laying ceremony of the synagogue. The ceremony began with a parade, lead by the "Coronet Concert Club Band" which stretched through the city. It was estimated by the newspaper that several thousand people attended the parade and the ceremony, a number that was possible since there were over 20,000 people living in the county. The paper urged people to keep their businesses

¹⁰⁰The Wilmington Morning Star, May 12, 1875.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²The Philadelphia Jewish Record, 1:6, May 28, 1875, 5.

closed to allow folks to attend the ceremonies.¹⁰³ The cornerstone laying ceremony was conducted according to the customs of the Masonic lodge and included a lengthy address by Jastrow who touched on themes of brotherly love and duty to state and country. He addressed the entire assembly, Jew and non-Jew asking God's blessing that "union and celestial peace forever knit together, in friendship and mutual regard, the hearts of all members of this community, differing though they be in their religious views." He asked God that all citizens remember that they are "united in the duty of increasing the happiness and glory of this great country, and especially of the commonwealth and city...within whose boundaries they live and work."¹⁰⁴ Jastrow's address was one of liberality and acceptance and likely was well received by the Jewish citizens of Wilmington. They chose American ritual for their prayer book and for the ceremonies of their synagogue. After the official ceremony 250-300 invited guests, retired to a banquet in city hall. The first toast offered at the banquet was to "The Temple of Israel --a monument of liberality."¹⁰⁵ The liberality of the temple, its integration into the general community, was what its founders were most proud of. The laying of the cornerstone received a great deal of coverage in the local press, filling the entire front page of the

¹⁰³Wilmington Daily Journal, July 15, 1875.

¹⁰⁴Wilmington Morning Star, July 16, 1875.

¹⁰⁵Wilmington Daily Journal, July, 16, 1875.

Morning Star, and two full columns in The Daily Journal.¹⁰⁶ The citizens of Wilmington took a great interest in the founding of this liberal synagogue and the building itself had not even been dedicated yet.

In February the synagogue announced that it had hired the Rev. Dr. Mendelsohn of Norfolk to serve as rabbi for a salary of \$2,000 and that he had already moved to town and begun conducting services.¹⁰⁷ Rev. Mendelsohn was the son-in-law of Marcus Jastrow who had helped them so much with the founding of the temple. It was announced that he would preach one sermon a month in German and the remaining three would be in English.¹⁰⁸ Evidently this was a highly assimilated congregation and wanted in all appearances to be as American as possible even though most probably spoke German as their native language. The building was completed sometime in April and their services began to be announced regularly in the paper, listed in the regular church announcements.¹⁰⁹

In May of 1876 the temple building was dedicated in a ceremony that was just as impressive as the cornerstone ceremony. Once again the occasion

¹⁰⁶Wilmington Morning Star, July 16, 1875; Wilmington Daily Journal, July 16, 1875.

¹⁰⁷Goldsboro Carolina Messenger, February 24, 1876; Wilmington Daily Journal, February 15, 1876.

¹⁰⁸Wilmington Daily Journal, February 15, 1876.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, April 23, 30, 1876, etc.

was reported with a full front-page article in the local newspaper.¹¹⁰

Represented in the audience, two thirds of which was Christian, the paper said, "were the native American, the German, the Saxon, the Englishman, the Frenchman, the Austrian, the Swede, the Italian, and the Jew --all assembled in respect to the Jew and his religion."¹¹¹ The newspaper editor stressed the diversity of the attendants at the dedication ceremony, making the point that Wilmington society as a whole was composed of immigrants of whom the Jews were a welcomed part. The Americanism of the congregants was an important factor in these services. The Christians who contributed were thanked and the citizenship of the congregants was stressed as "our good, old North State" was recognized. It was important to the Jews that they fit into the city that was their new home and be welcomed there as productive and contributing citizens. To that end the synagogue was described by its new president as, "an ornament to our city --a living monument of Judaism spreading enlightenment, refinement, humanity and love wherever its luminous rays penetrate." In the spirit of liberal, modern Judaism the synagogue was described not as benefiting only the Jews but as a place that would benefit the whole city.

The congregation found in their new Rabbi a leader who exemplified

¹¹⁰Wilmington Daily Journal, May 13, 1876.

¹¹¹Ibid.

the modernity and liberality for which they strived. Rabbi Mendelsohn utilized the documentary hypothesis as a basis for his sermon during the dedication of the temple. His sermon was based on a critical textual analysis of a psalm and stressed the Jews' role in society. He also spoke of the "spiritual progress" that Jews must show not just by attending synagogue but in all of their endeavors.¹¹² The congregation had found a good match. During the next Rosh Hashanna only one day of services was held and the controversy between modernity and tradition in Wilmington was put to rest at least until Eastern European immigration increased later in the century.

This conflict between Reform and traditional Judaism which was manifest in Wilmington also cropped up in other cities in North Carolina in less extreme forms. It often was reflected in local newspapers as a conflict between those who wanted one day of Rosh Hashanna services and those who wanted two. It seems at least from these reports, that the controversy was less ideological than it was practical. Jews did not want to miss business for two days during the holidays. Orthodox Judaism probably also appeared as an obstacle to their Americanization. In the tumultuos environment of Reconstruction the Jews wanted to appear as much like their neighbors as possible. Within certain limits the Jews wanted to blend in to white Christian society and not appear as "other." However, they were willing to remain distinctly Jewish with a separate religious identity as long as that identity was

¹¹²Ibid.

not too extreme or alien in a Southern religious context. A limitation of these newspaper reports is that the thoughts behind them are not obvious. The report are a reflection of the Jewish community's public face, and the conflicts that inspired them are hidden.

In Charlotte it is obvious, following 1873, that the newspaper was receiving conflicting reports about the holidays from the local traditional and Reform communities. It is also possible that the traditional reports they printed were gleaned from other papers or from previous years of their own paper. In 1873 a report about Rosh Hashannah appeared that was rather traditional in tone. Two days later another report appeared that said stores were closed only for one day instead of two although, "The observance of the holiday season is sometimes continued for two days." There were some people in the Charlotte community who observed two days and some only one.¹¹³ The next year the paper discussed the difference between Reform and Orthodox practices at least in terms of how long the interruption of business would be, "...the festival is observed by Jews of both the orthodox and reformed faiths, the only difference being that the latter observe but one day while the others keep the festival for two days." The paper did not report what the Jews in Charlotte would do, only that they would keep their businesses closed "while the festival lasts." A follow-up article reported that

¹¹³Charlotte Observer, September 21, 23, 1873.

the Jews celebrated the holiday "after their usual custom."¹¹⁴ The ambiguity in reporting the actual practice of the Charlotte's Jewish community suggests that ambiguity in practice existed, some Jews following one custom and some another. There was not one voice speaking for the community as there was in Wilmington after the arrival of the Rabbi and there was no standardization of practice.

By 1875 it was clear from the newspaper reports that the Jewish community of Charlotte considered itself Reform, at least in regards to the closing of their stores. Orthodoxy was portrayed as an outdated, European practice. The paper reported, "that while Israelites of other countries as well as the Holy Land strictly observe the traditional two days, Rosh Hashanna, the so called progressive or reform congregations of this country keep but one day." The Charlotte Jews identified themselves as "progressive," modern Jews in contrast to the denigrated Jews of the Old Country. They were showing the general population that they were as American, as modern, as Southern as any other citizens. The identification of Charlotte's Jews with Reform was made even more explicit in the 1876 with the reporting of Passover. The Observer's initial article on Passover stated that, "The first two days will be religiously observed by our Jewish fellow citizens by a total suspension of business of all kinds." Four days later a correction appeared referring specifically to the practices of the Charlotte Jewish community: "This festival

¹¹⁴Ibid., September 12, 13, 1874.

is not closely observed by the Jews of this place, from the fact that they are not, and do not claim to be, strictly orthodox. They do not suspend business on account of it, and their only observance of it is in the eating of unleavened bread." Evidently at least one Jew in the Charlotte community approached the editor of the paper after taking exception to being told incorrectly what his religious practices were. The penitent editor published one more article referring to the practices of the "reformed Hebrews" on Passover, stating that they observed only the "first and last days as holidays."¹¹⁵ It was important for the Jews to correct errors in the paper that might otherwise make them appear to be irreligious. The Jews wanted it known that they were religious but that they practiced a modern, American religion. Other cities, including Raleigh and Goldsboro also showed some evidence of disagreements amongst the Jewish population but since they had smaller Jewish populations the conflict is less clear.

The conflict between traditional forms of Judaism and Reform which played out in North Carolina was viewed by the Jewish population of the state as the conflict between modernity and antiquity. Traditional Judaism represented, for Jews in the major population centers of North Carolina, a tie to Europe, a link to the past that stood in the way of their becoming fully American and modern. Most of North Carolina's Jewish population during Reconstruction had left Germany because of antisemitism and lack of

¹¹⁵Ibid., April 8, 12, 18, 1876.

opportunity. In North Carolina with its improving economy they saw the potential for unlimited economic and social possibilities if they could fit in with the general population. Liberal Judaism offered them a way to seem less alien, more American.

The formation of Jewish communities in North Carolina followed the national American pattern. Even what seemed to be isolated outposts were connected to the national community through rail lines and newspapers. North Carolina's Jews traveled extensively through the Eastern United States on buying trips to supply their stores. They had contacts throughout the East coast which provided them with a model for building Jewish communities in their home towns. Formal Jewish communities in North Carolina developed rather late in contrast to Jewish communities in surrounding states especially South Carolina and Virginia. So, as North Carolina's Jewish population grew and they began to consider buying cemeteries or building synagogues they had plenty of models to follow. They were familiar with Jewish communities in other states and were able to pattern themselves after outside, American communities.

Jews felt societal pressure to conform to the dominant white culture of the state. One of the requirements of conformity was establishing a religious community another was making it a liberal "American" religious community. So across the State, during Reconstruction, organized Jewish

communities began to be formed, partly in response to the needs of a growing population and partly in response to societal pressure. These Jewish communities showed some marks of the conflict which was changing Judaism across America, the conflict between modernity and tradition. Most communities chose a compromise with modernity accepting a liberal interpretation of Jewish tradition.

Conclusion

When Political Reconstruction ended in 1877 the Jews of North Carolina found themselves well situated for growth and continued strength. They were firmly integrated into the economy of the state, even essential to some local economies. The rewritten state constitution allowed Jews to hold political office. They were accepted, even courted, by the Conservative political establishment which was firmly in power after the demise of Radical Reconstruction. And in this atmosphere of acceptance and relative prosperity the Jews had begun to create a religious home and community for themselves. The foundations for the Jewish Community of North Carolina were laid during Reconstruction.

North Carolina's Jewish citizens were important contributors to local economies across the state. They ran general stores and dry good shops in large and small communities throughout North Carolina and in some places were the dominant players in local commercial economies. Their stores often times were gathering places for community members. In most places in cash-poor North Carolina Jewish merchants used existing economic systems to carry on trade. They, like their non-Jewish competitors, utilized the crop-lien system which allowed farmers to use their unplanted crops as collateral on loans to purchase seed and farming implements. They also carried on an extensive barter trade, trading produce for manufactured goods, which allowed access to these goods to people who otherwise would have had no

way to purchase them. In at least one town, Statesville, Jews invented a new way to increase trade and allow the penetration of manufactured goods to locations which otherwise would have had no access to them. The economic role that they played dominated the way that they were viewed by the non-Jewish citizens of North Carolina and was a significant factor in how they viewed themselves.

Antisemitism in North Carolina was, to a large extent, kept in check during Reconstruction because of the positive contribution Jews made to the economic life of the community. Papers across the state printed articles praising the local Jews for the constructive role which they played in the community. Governor Zebulon Vance wrote a widely delivered speech laudatory of the Jews which was influenced by the contribution that they were making to North Carolina's economic recovery. Jews were welcome additions to most of the communities in which they settled.

One factor which may have limited Jewish growth in North Carolina prior to the Civil War was removed during Reconstruction.¹ Article 32, prior to 1868, banned Jews from holding political office in North Carolina. In 1868 when the state constitution was rewritten to comply with federal regulations the article was omitted. After 1868 Jews were able to live in North Carolina with full equality.

¹Jacob Marcus, United States Jewry, Volume II, (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1991), 30.

Once Jews were granted political equality they sided with the Conservative party, the Democrats, in opposition to Radical Reconstruction and federal intervention in the affairs of the state. The Democratic party came to be known as the "whiteman's party" and was the party of the elite citizens of North Carolina. This political party was the one with which the state's Jews chose to affiliate. The Conservatives not only welcomed Jews and allowed them on the party's steering committees but in Wilmington the Jews' support was actively sought by the Conservative party. Jews were welcomed into the "whiteman's party" because they played an important financial role in the communities of which they were members and because as merchants they were able to interact with and influence many people. The primary political split during Reconstruction was over issues of race and Jews were identified as "whites," a distinction which they worked to maintain. They overwhelmingly affiliated with the Conservative party, the party of the social elite, Governor Vance's party, and the party which ultimately came into power. Once they gained the right to hold office Jews felt they had the most to gain from conservative politics. And the conservative politicians and newspapers overwhelmingly supported the Jews.

As Jews began to feel secure in North Carolina they built religious and social communities throughout the state. As these communities grew it became obvious that they too were affected by the Jews self-perception as economic beings. The focus of local religious controversies was on factors

which affected their commercial well being, closing stores on Shabbat and observing one or two days of holidays. Across North Carolina it was the commercial considerations which won out over religious demands and the majority of Jewish store owners observed one day of holidays and remained open on Shabbat. These Jews found a home for themselves in the tenets of the nascent Reform movement which strove to mold religious practice to the demands of modernity.

The atmosphere in North Carolina proved to be remarkably conducive to the formation and success of Jewish communities in the state. Jews were welcome as immigrants who provided needed capital to the cash poor economy. They were accepted into the mainstream white community by the leading voice in that community. And they were encouraged to build synagogues and meet other community needs. This atmosphere was provided by the unique requirements of the Reconstruction era in North Carolina.

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