

M'DOR L'DOR - FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

The Jewish Legacy in Cleveland

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From generation to generation, it is incumbent upon the Jewish people to transmit the legacy which was revealed to Moses at Sinai. Our tradition tells us that the souls of all of the generations of the people of Israel were present at the foot of Mount Sinai when God proclaimed the Torah to Moses as a heritage for all time to come. Moses transmitted the Torah to Joshua and Joshua extended the legacy to the Men of the Great Assembly or Great Synagogue. Rabbinic tradition continued the Torah legacy, a blueprint for life, for more than three thousand years.

Just recently, Clevelander Juliana Cumberworth wrote poignantly about this legacy in the "Cleveland Jewish News."

One of the gleaming marvels of Judaism is its unbroken continuity of past, present and future. In the Passover seder itself, we invoke time, stretching from thousands of years past to "next year in Jerusalem," as time personally experienced. Along this line, we can also experience "100 years ago on 55th" and "50 years ago in Glenville." These streets are as alive as history books with reminders of our parents', grandparents', great-grandparents' struggles and hopes for a future for their children.

Traditions of the exciting Glenville era are very vivid to me. My roots, my Jewish heritage, family, friends, education and communal service are inextricably bound up with Jewish life in Cleveland. The legacy of service is inherited from my grandfather, Rabbi Dr. Philip Rosenberg, an immigrant from Austria-Hungary, in 1925, who served as the dean of Orthodox Jewish rabbis in Cleveland for many years.

Cleveland's Jewish community, however, had its beginnings more than 150 years ago.

Early History

The early Jewish settlements, 1837 - 1900, were the Jews of Central Europe, most of whom spoke German and identified strongly with Jewish culture. The original German settlers were from the town of Unsleben, Bavaria. A fascinating letter exists in the archives. It is addressed to Moses and Jetta Alsbacher and contains the "ethical testament which exhorts the emigrants to remember those left behind and to guard against loss of their faith in a land of tempting freedom."¹

Among the first settlers of the Unsleben group were Simson Thorman and Regina Klein who married soon after she arrived in Cleveland. Samuel, their first child and eldest of twelve children, was the first Jewish child born in this city. The small Jewish community settled near the Central Market, west of the Cuyahoga River. The community soon began to build its communal institutions.

Tradition has always indicated what is important for a Jewish community to create. It is inherent in the daily morning prayers:

These are the things the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him in the hereafter, namely: honoring father and mother, practice of kindness, early attendance at the schoolhouse morning and evening, hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, dowering the bride, attending the dead to the grave, devotion in prayer, and making peace between fellow men; but the study of the Torah excels them all.

In 1839, the Israelitic Society of Cleveland was soon established. This eventually became Congregation Anshe Chesed which is now Fairmount Temple. Four years later Tifereth Israel (now The Temple) was formed. Both are now the largest Cleveland Reform Congregations.

A second wave of immigrants, the East European Era, increased the Cleveland Jewish population to about 85,000 in 1925. Many of these newcomers were Russian, Polish, Galician and Romanian Jews. Early arrivals were often peddlers, but by the latter part of the 19th century, many of the

Jewish community went into business with relatives or "landsmen," opening dry goods, groceries and clothing stores.

What is noteworthy is the early establishment of cultural societies and self-help organizations such as B'Nai B'Rith (Sons of the Covenant) which opened an orphan asylum which eventually served 16 states. The Keshet Home of the Aged became the Keshet Montefiore Home. The Hebrew Relief Society was founded in 1875 to serve charitable needs. One of the most significant organizations was the Council Educational Alliance created in 1899 by the Council of Jewish Women which celebrates its 100th birthday this year. How well we, the post World War II generation, remember the "Alliance" which was "home away from home" with its plethora of after-school arts and crafts, gym and music activities. Eventually the Council Educational Alliance became the Jewish Community Center.

Jewish education was the focus of the Eastern European immigrants. Eventually the "Talmud Torah" schools were enhanced with a distinctive Hebraist curriculum as well as a Zionist philosophy. They became the Cleveland Hebrew Schools in the 1920's and the 1930's. By 1924 the Bureau of Jewish Education was created.

As the Jewish community grew, the migration moved east, eventually building the Glenville area and Kinsman Road neighborhoods. Temples and synagogues were established and, as their membership increased, they, too, moved eastward. B'Nai Jeshurun was the "Hungarian shul," known as the temple on the Heights. A fascinating aspect of the Orthodox Jewish life was the creation of "landsmen" congregations. There were at least 25 "shuls" between 1895-1920. During the 1940's in the Glenville area, nearly every corner on East 105th Street had a synagogue with a membership harkening back to the community in Eastern Europe.

Jewish culture in Cleveland thrived in the beginning of the 20th century. There was a Yiddish theater, a Jewish newspaper which was published through the 1950's, literary and debating societies. Ever mindful of caring for its members, the Jewish leadership established the Federation of Jewish Charities. The organization was a familiar pattern of the "kehillah" or community network of self-help agencies. Significant among the groups which were established was Mount Sinai, the Jewish hospital, Menorah Park, the Jewish home for the aged, the Orthodox Orphan Home which eventually merged with the Jewish Children's bureau.

Personal Vignettes of the Glenville Era

How well I recall every street, every shul, most every store along the main artery of Glenville, East 105th, between Superior and St. Clair Avenues. We shopped Saturday nights "after Shabbos" at Yulish's fruit store and at Friedman's creamery. Often Sunday mornings we stood waiting for "our next" at the butcher shop while Mr. Oster slowly cut the chuck roast with his saw. It was sheer pleasure sitting at the modern Echo Dairy ice cream store waiting for a sundae or chocolate malt. Before Passover, Kerrett's put the bushels filled with plates, cups and saucers on the sidewalk so that we could pick new dishes for the holiday. Unger's bakery sent aromas through the street of honey cakes, sponge cakes and egg kichel, but especially of challah before Shabbos and the holidays. If we were lucky, we could peek into the back room to see venerable Mr. Unger with his long white beard and flour-dredged apron and pants as he worked like lightning to shape the twisted challah loaves. We went to the Council Educational Alliance for art classes, piano and theory, or a friendly visit with director, Ida Schott.

During the holidays, we went from shul to shul (synagogue), visiting with friends, listening to the "new Chazzan (cantor)" or just admiring the new outfits of our classmates. I have powerful recall of my grandfather's sermons at Knesseth Israel, the Hungarian orthodox shul. He wore his cylinder, a high black silk hat, prayer shawl over his frock coat as he exhorted his congregants to study, to respect parents and grandparents, and to lead a Torah life.

The center of our lives, however, was Glenville High School. Today, more than four and a half decades later, we still share a loving camaraderie with Glenville graduates. Recently, on a nostalgic

bus tour of the "old neighborhood," we gathered at the empty lot on Parkwood Drive where Glenville once stood. Joining hands in a sentimental circle, forty-four of us sang the alma mater and broke into a rousing cheer of "Tar-Blood, Whack Thud," recalling our athletic teams that rarely won. We were a rare breed at Glenville, high on scholarship and community service. Outstanding community leaders, United States diplomats and ambassadors, musicians, artists, doctors, actors, a U. S. senator, movie producers, business executives are in significant numbers among the graduates of a high school that was predominantly Jewish.

My revered teacher and mentor, the late Sidney Vincent, inspired us to high achievements and to sensitivity to and respect for people of all cultures and religions. He was the one who organized the Glenville Area Community Council when the East 105th area was first integrated in the post war years. Sid Vincent also taught Sunday School and confirmation classes at the Jewish center, encouraging an entire generation to give of themselves to communal efforts. A gifted leader, Sid Vincent left teaching to become prominent in Jewish communal efforts and eventually, co-director with Henry Zucker, of the Jewish Community federation.

The Legacy—Yesterday and Today

In the aftermath of World War II, Cleveland became home to several hundred Holocaust survivors, many of whom were teen-agers whose parents and entire families had perished. The Jewish Children's Bureau and Bellefaire welcomed the young people, placing many with families and encouraging them to continue their education. The survivor community, courageous and energetic, despite the traumas of the Holocaust, created new lives, established families and became vibrant members of the Cleveland Jewish community. Today, the Kol Israel Foundation, its sisterhood and the Second Generation sponsor educational forums about the Holocaust, establish programs and projects for Israel and offer scholarships in Holocaust education for young people.

Telshe Yeshiva is a center of higher Jewish learning also created after the original Telshe was destroyed during the Holocaust. Today the yeshiva is a flourishing academy of Orthodox religious learning, located in Wickliffe, Ohio. Graduates of Telshe are rabbis and administrators in Jewish centers of study throughout the world.

Remembering the legacy that education is of primary importance, the Jewish Education Center (formerly the Bureau of Jewish Education) has developed a vibrant Jewish continuity all-embracing program, training teachers and community leaders. There are five successful Jewish day schools, representing a spectrum of approaches to Jewish education. The Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, founded by the rabbis of Telshe Yeshiva, recently celebrated a milestone 50th anniversary. Other day schools are Bet Sefer Mizrachi, Mosdos, Ohr HaTorah, Solomon Schechter and Agnon. The Cleveland Hebrew Schools, temple schools, pre-schools such as Yeshivath Adath B'Nai Israel are all part of the Jewish education network. The Cleveland College of Jewish Studies is a renowned college of higher learning, offering degrees in undergraduate and graduate levels.

Cleveland's Jewish Community Federation is a model for federations throughout North America. In fact, many former Cleveland federation leaders serve as agency heads throughout the United States. In addition to the Jewish Welfare Fund Campaign which raises funds for local, national and overseas agencies, the Jewish Community federation engages in a wide-range of community relations activities. Scholarships for young people, education missions to Israel, Menorah Park and Montefiore Homes for the Aged, Mt. Sinai Hospital, Jewish education, political awareness programs, human relations efforts are all part of federation activities.

Resettlement of new immigrants, many of whom came from the former Soviet Union has been a major federation program. We are blessed with a cohesive, extensive cadre of outstanding professionals and dedicated lay persons to meet the constant challenges to our community.

For almost thirty years, the CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS has been the English language publication serving as the mouthpiece for the Jewish community. Award-winning staff, both editorial and

business, bring to the community an awareness of world, national and local Jewish news as well as human interest stories, Jewish educational material, religious articles and special interest adjunct magazines.

Our Jewish community continues to move geographically. We are located in all suburbs of the city of Cleveland. Jewish residential areas have spread from Cleveland Heights, University Heights to Beachwood, Pepper Pike, Solon and other eastern suburban areas. There are two thriving Jewish Community Centers, one in Cleveland Heights and one in Beachwood, near to the campus of the College of Jewish Studies. The JCC recently hosted the International Maccabi games with more than 2500 young athletes participating.

As we reflect on the development of the Cleveland Jewish community these past 150 years, we remember the giants in our midst who helped create our vibrant community, religious leaders who served long periods of time, such as Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, Rabbi Barnett R. Brickner, Rabbi Daniel Silver, Rabbi Rudolph M. Rosenthal, Rabbi Alan Green, Rabbi Israel Porath, Rabbi Jacob Muskin, Rabbi David L. Genuth, Rabbi Myron Silverman, all of blessed memory.

We recognize the immense contributions of our religious leaders who have served for decades and who continue to enrich our communities, Rabbi Armond E. Cohen, Rabbi Philip Horowitz, Rabbi Louis Engelberg and Rabbi Shubert Spero (who made aliyah to Israel with his family).

With the vision of our devoted lay leadership and our professionals, may we continue to transmit the heritage envisioned at Sinai, M'DOR L'DOR - from generation to generation, to work for a world of peace for all humankind, everywhere.

Notes

¹*Merging Traditions*, p. 73.