

MAGIC CITY JEWS:
INTEGRATION AND PUBLIC MEMORY
IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, 1871-1911

by

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ABSTRACT

The numerous books and articles that record the actions of Birmingham's first Jewish residents generally discuss the actions of these transatlantic and domestic migrants in two ways. They either frame the individuals' daily interactions in relation to common patterns of American Jewish community building or replicate the commercial tropes and ideals of nineteenth-century Protestant boosters. Neither captures the full diversity of the settlers or the numerous ways they contributed to Birmingham's early growth and expansion. Using the lives of Jewish men and women who settled in the city between 1872 and 1911, including Herman Simon, Isaac Hochstadter, Emil Lesser, and Bertha Gelders, this dissertation explores the waves of immigration that brought Jewish residents to the town and the various paths that local Jews took to accomplish their professional, political, and religious goals.

Like many of their counterparts in other American towns, the Jewish families who came to Birmingham in its first four decades drew from their experiences in other cities to form new connections and integrate into their local community. Although most remained socially and religiously distinct, they defined and practiced Judaism in different ways and possessed a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The activities of Birmingham's most prominent Jewish citizens, however, can also be linked to their extensive networks with many non-Jewish white residents, including skilled laborers, civic-commercial elites, and German immigrants. The role they played in the city and its history was also deeply tied to upper- and middle-class boosters' conceptions of success, progress, ideal citizenship, and social order. In contrast to other studies, this dissertation compares previous accounts of Jewish settlers to the city's promotional

materials, newspaper articles, and oral testimonies. In so doing, it highlights the work of Orthodox Jews, non-practicing residents, and Jewish women and investigates how local Jews minimized antisemitism through their daily interactions and the active role they played in public memory.

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INTRODUCTION

“Whether it be in the work of cutting away the barriers of mighty forests, whether it be in the work of blazing a new trail, in fact wherever the forces of civilization endeavor to grasp power out of the hands of the wilderness, the Jew can be found exercising his boundless energy and dynamic intellect.”

Benjamin Gross
The Reform Advocate, 1911

In 1873, fifty-one-year-old Samuel Marx settled his business affairs in Montgomery, Alabama, and helped his wife Henrietta pack what was left of their household. Traveling with their four young children, the couple beat a hasty path ninety miles north to Elyton, a small village in the center of their state’s mineral district. Marx, a Jewish merchant who had emigrated from Bavaria in 1837, was fleeing the crushing debt he had accumulated during the Civil War and recent national economic panic. Although once a successful shopkeeper, Marx’s financial troubles had finally cost him the family’s home and Marx & Son, the dry goods store that he ran with his twenty-two-year-old son Morris. Even though Elyton was a just small village, it seemed the perfect place for a new start. Located in the middle of Alabama’s rich coal and iron seams and the seat of Jefferson County since 1821, it was heavily promoted in the state’s newspapers as a rising railroad and commercial hub and a place of unlimited possibility. It was a place that drew countless migrants like Marx.

The Marxes, however, did not stay long in Elyton. After only a year they moved two miles west, to Birmingham, a new town that was founded in 1871, following Samuel’s son Morris and brother-in-law Charles Neumann. They relocated after learning about Birmingham’s

inexpensive rents and dire need for merchants and shopkeepers. Pooling their money, they invested in Charles' fledgling dry goods store, which they owned and operated together. It was a risky decision. Birmingham was actually the creation of the Elyton Land Company (ELC), one of the many corporations that profited from state- and federally-funded rebuilding efforts after the Civil War. Like many other Alabama towns, it was fighting bankruptcy and still suffering from the Panic of 1873 and a legacy of overspeculation. But the Marxes made it. By the time Samuel died in 1886, his family and Birmingham as a whole were prospering. He and Henrietta had two additional children while living in the city, and they, along with Morris, became influential citizens who led local building projects and charities and established Birmingham's Jewish community, which memorialized Samuel as a founding father in the early twentieth century.¹

When Samuel and Henrietta Marx arrived in Birmingham, there was little evidence to suggest that it would ever flourish. Its corporate founders knew little about city planning and early residents often lacked housing, clean water, or a voice in local government. Nonetheless, the town's economic and political challenges failed to defeat the Marx family, whose eventual success depended on a mix of luck and activities that resembled those of their friends and coreligionists. Samuel Marx drew heavily from his history of building commercial and social networks in Montgomery. He and his son Morris sought allies and fellowship with non-Jews by embracing post-war Democratic politics and the ideology of the Lost Cause and pursuing leadership positions in the most popular fraternal orders. The Marx women built ladies' aid associations and funded charities and kindergarten programs. As they emerged as civic leaders,

¹ *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 6, 1872; July 6, 1873; February 4, 1886; 1880 United States Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 7, 29; H.M. Caldwell, *History of the Elyton Land Company and Birmingham, Alabama* (Birmingham: Elyton Land Company, 1892; reprint, Birmingham: Caldwell-Garber, 1926), 10-11.

the family dedicated themselves to organizing a vibrant Jewish community, pledging money and support to their synagogue and its associations, and nurturing a popular identity that combined their roles as influential Birmingham citizens with their duties as observant Jews.²

Twentieth-century historians and writers, including George Cruikshank, Mark Elovitz, and Robert Corley, have made sense of Marx and his coreligionists' success by examining their actions in relation to American Jewish community-building patterns or the commercial ideals of the city's nineteenth-century Protestant boosters. This dissertation builds on the work of those scholars even as it seeks to extend their analyses. Similar to previous studies, it stresses Jews' vital contributions to the founding of Birmingham and examines how they found meaning and power in the early city. It, too, recognizes that local Jews made decisions and chose specific pathways to civic integration that reflected their prior experiences, occupational networks and talents, and ethnic and religious identities. On the other hand, the study argues that the Marx family and other prominent Jews did more than simply absorb the values of Birmingham's corporate founders or reflect typical patterns of Jews in other rising cities. To integrate into their town's specific environment, they meshed their economic practices, networks, and ambitions with local civic-commercial leaders' conceptions of ideal citizenship and social order. They internalized white middle- and upper-class racial and social codes of conduct and emphasized their Confederate backgrounds and local pride to connect to a wide range of individuals in the white population, which included not only non-Jewish business leaders, fraternal members, and social workers but also skilled workers in Democratic factions and the Knights of Labor.

² For further discussion and other examples of Jewish community building in the nineteenth-century American South, see Michael R. Cohen, *Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish Entrepreneurship in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2017), Leah Elizabeth Hagedorn, "Jews and the American South, 1858-1905" PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1999. ProQuest (9938154); Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Jews of Mobile, Alabama, 1763-1841* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1970); Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

Birmingham's Jewish community was never homogenous nor without its divisions and splits (and rarely exceeded more than one percent of the population), but it had a profound impact on the way Birmingham developed, especially during its first four decades. The success of many upper- and middle-class Jewish residents was not only related to their civic activism, but also their ability to minimize the power of their internal disputes, hiding them from public view.

Much of our understanding of Birmingham's early Jewish history is based on books and journals that were written before 1912. Although these materials were designed and accepted by the general public as professional scholarship, they were written by local boosters and Jewish leaders who focused solely on upper- and middle-class businessmen with substantial connections to Birmingham's commercial and political elites. For too long, scholars have tended to consider these materials as transparent sources, but like popular advertisements for the city itself, the works describe the town as an industrial paradise full of boundless social and economic opportunities. Their authors present local Jews in the same way that they describe the city's non-Jewish founders and professionals, emphasizing their unwavering commitment to God, the white South, and the city itself. Little is written about the diversity and struggle of early Jewish residents or their conflicts with local leaders and each other, which leaves significant gaps in the town's history and its public memory. This study seeks to fill those gaps by acknowledging the complexity of early Birmingham and its Jewish population. Through a series of microhistories focused on a range of Jews—Reform and Orthodox—it expands the stories of those who lived in the city between 1872 and 1911 and asks a series of different questions. How did local Jews define themselves and their role in the city? How did they connect and interact with various groups of residents in the population? What influenced their activities and the way they represented themselves and the past?

To answer these questions, this study examines the lives of Jewish men and women like Herman Simon, Isaac Hochstadter, Sophia Wise, Emil Lesser, Morris Wolff, and Bertha Gelders. General information about other residents can be found in numerous places, including the archives of the Birmingham Public Library, the oral history project of the Birmingham Jewish Federation, and Rabbi Mark Elovitz's *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*.³ These individuals, however, are especially notable for the connections they made and the roads they took to satisfy their civic ambitions. Because they and other Jewish migrants possessed a range of backgrounds and beliefs, their stories emphasize the fluid, subjective nature of their multifaceted identities. Because the city was still being constructed when their families began arriving, they were in a unique position to play an active role not only in the construction of the town's economy and growing fraternal and philanthropic organizations, but also its physical landscape and history. While it was not uncommon for nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jews to carve a place for themselves in the American past, Birmingham's Jews possessed a distinctive ability to do so because the young city's origin narratives were still forming as they arrived.⁴ This study, therefore, investigates various forms of civic integration in a new light, illuminating the decisions and lives of these Jews as recorded in local, regional, and national newspapers as well as synagogue records, census materials, and (when available) Jewish and non-Jewish oral histories and memoirs. In so doing, it expands our understanding of the tools of integration and

³ The memory project of the Birmingham Jewish Federation was a series of oral testimonies gathered from Jewish citizens who had lived in the city for several decades, some arriving with their families in the city as early as the 1890s and early 1900s. The project was conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. Transcriptions are available in the Library and Special Collections of the Birmingham Holocaust Education Center, Birmingham, Alabama.

⁴ Early boosters like James R. Powell and John Witherspoon DuBose used their speeches and writing to praise specific qualities in residents that came to be associated with leadership, progress, and civic order. In the 1870s and 1880s, model citizens were portrayed as white men who were dedicated to local improvement, God and their families, the South and its Democratic Party, hard work, and entrepreneurialism. Examples can be found in the articles Powell wrote for the *Birmingham Iron Age* and the *Montgomery Advertiser* as well as the local histories referenced in this introduction.

highlights how southern Jews adapted to a particular locality and the specific challenges they faced between Reconstruction and the First World War.

Building Birmingham and Its History: Corporate Speculation and Civic Ideals

When Samuel and Henrietta Marx moved to Birmingham in 1874, it was three years old and had a general population of two thousand, fifteen of whom were Jews. The city was the brainchild of ten businessmen, who formed the Elyton Land Company (ELC) on December 20, 1870, elected Montgomery entrepreneur James R. Powell their president, and charged him with creating the mining and manufacturing town they envisioned. The stockholders were not always popular in their new city, but their financial and political machinations were hardly unusual. Like many southern states, Alabama's late nineteenth-century economy was largely agricultural, but a handful of wealth holders had been investing in blast furnaces and transportation networks since the 1830s. Industrial production and railroad construction increased substantially when sectional tensions rose and geological reports inspired Alabama legislators to fund infrastructure and extraction projects in the mid-1850s. During the Civil War, private companies capitalized on the Confederate Army's need for iron, and when the fighting ceased in 1865, state and federal officials offered financial incentives to rebuild the facilities that Union forces had destroyed.⁵

⁵ Blast furnaces existed in Alabama prior to the 1810s and 1820s, but iron production was little more than an experiment until the 1830s. In that decade, Daniel Hillman established the Roupes Valley Iron Works, coal mining began in Talladega County, and David Hubbard built the first railroad. During the Civil War, a small number of Alabama iron makers, industrialists, and railroad developers received government patronage and protection in exchange for their products. Working closely with Confederate bureaucrats, self-interested owners and managers manipulated rates and prices. According to historian Michael Bonner, the actions of such individuals were a key factor in the development of corporate capitalism in the South. Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 27-31, 37, 61-67; Henry M. McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1995), 8-15; Michael Brem Bonner, *Confederate Political Economy: Creating and Managing a Southern Corporatist Nation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2016), 2-4; H.M. Caldwell, *History of the Elyton Land Company and Birmingham, Alabama* (Birmingham: Elyton Land Company, 1892; reprint, Birmingham: Caldwell-Garber, 1926), 3-5.

Moreover, speculators had been building cities in what would become the United States since the British Crown granted thousands of acres to the proprietors of Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas. After the American Revolution, territorial expansion and the building of roads, canals, and railroads increased the existence of such corporations, and additional land grants stimulated development during the nineteenth-century. Towns popped up along railroad lines, especially in the decades before and after the Civil War. In Alabama, these included Clanton, Anniston, and Cullman, all established within six years of Birmingham. Like Powell and his colleagues in the ELC, most of the founders of these towns were capitalists who had little experience with infrastructure planning, and many of the communities remained small or struggled to survive when faced with environmental challenges or economic depressions. Unsurprisingly, the speculators' promotional material frequently ignored or downplayed negative conditions and promised that the settlements would bring modernity and prosperity to underdeveloped or depressed territories.⁶

Powell was a gifted writer and a talented marketer. When he arrived in Jefferson County, it was not as barren or backward as the city's boosters would later suggest, but it was filled with small farmers and laborers who either valued agrarianism or rejected the ELC's attempt to rule. Powell was determined to entice the population's cooperation or reduce their power to object. After the fifty-seven-year-old businessman had the ELC's land surveyed for saleable lots, he began constructing the social and political structures that would create the society his company desired. Although part of his plan involved the manipulation of newly emancipated black voters,

⁶ John W. Reys, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), 349-350, 373-380, 382; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (repr. 2007, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 22, 59; Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011), xxiii, xxv, 14-15, 20-25, 156.

his connections with Montgomery newspapermen were also important. The tropes and ideals he applied in his speeches and advertisements were neither new nor fully developed, but they would form the base of Birmingham's civic character and distinctiveness. Generated from the antebellum efforts of men like J.D.B. DeBow and Alabama industrialist Daniel Pratt, they were extended in the New South books and speeches of Henry Grady and local writer John Witherspoon DuBose. Like Powell, these men represented a minority of Southerners who pressed for the diversification of their region's agricultural economy. They supported mineral extraction, manufacturing, and transportation advances and encouraged commercial practices that many of their peers associated with northern forms of marketing and production. Viewing industrialism as compatible with their culture, Southern entrepreneurs and speculators like Powell rooted their "new" Southern practices in their region's antebellum racial and social hierarchies.⁷

Like Southern marketers who hoped to make money through investments, Powell used his interpretation of modernity as a framework for marketing and interpreting his new city's public image and history. Elevating Birmingham's actual condition, the ELC president wrote and spoke prolifically about its potential even as the corporation's creditors were confiscating his office furniture to pay its debts. He portrayed the town as he imagined it, highlighting opportunities for employment and investment instead of its unfinished rail lines, muddy streets, and high crime rate. He dubbed the town a "magic city," a nickname that stuck, and promised potential settlers and manufacturers cheap land and an unprecedented ability to produce and

⁷ In this study, the New South refers to both a time period (roughly 1865 to 1913, which reached its highpoint in the 1880s and 1890s) and an ideology (calls for economic diversification through the tenets explained here). Although its basic characteristics are explained here, additional information can be found in Paul Gaston's, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Myth-Making* (2002 repr., Montgomery: New South Books, 1970); C. Vann Woodward's *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (2006 repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); and Howard N. Rabinowitz's *The First New South, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

market new products. In the early 1870s, he predicted the industrial and building booms that became synonymous with Birmingham in its second and third decades. His work offered hope to struggling merchants like Samuel Marx and inspired other Alabama boosters to weave favorable tales about the city in the 1880s and 1890s. The myths they created about the city's founding also linked the town to Alabama's antebellum industrialists, whom they painted as progressive and wise. This encouraged civic leaders and new settlers to feel that they were playing an important role in the state's future while proudly extending the work of the most innovative developers from its past.⁸

One of the reasons Jews settled in Birmingham was because they were relatively accepted and less visible targets for discrimination. The Jewish population grew substantially between 1874 and 1904, but the city's non-Jewish white and African American residents increased at a greater pace and in larger numbers. Definitive figures are difficult to generate for Birmingham's Jews in the 1880s and 1890s, but they were only one percent of the population in 1874 and approximately the same between 1905 and 1910, which is consistent with statistics collected for other Southern Jewish communities. African Americans, however, ranged between thirty-nine and forty-three percent of Birmingham's residents between 1884 and 1910, and long traditions of slavery and racism caused non-Jewish white elites to consider African Americans much more racially and socially threatening than their Jewish counterparts. In the 1870s, white businessmen and politicians were also more likely to criticize "Yankees" and Republicans before

⁸ Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 162; *First and Second Annual Reports of President and Secretary and Treasurer to the Stockholders of the Elyton Land Company* (Birmingham: Frank A. Dural & Co., 1878), 22, Closed Stack Pamphlet Collection, Box 77, Item 23, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter cited as ADAH); Caldwell, *History of the Elyton Land Company*, 8-13; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 8, 1871; July 11, 1871; October 6, 1872; Connecting industrialism, commercialism, and postwar labor hierarchies to the South's antebellum past was a common practice among nineteenth-century southern speculators. For examples of Powell and other boosters' promotional tenets, see Gaston, *New South Creed* 41-51; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama: Historical and Biographical* (Birmingham: Teeple & Smith, 1887), 63-66, 120-129, 177-185.

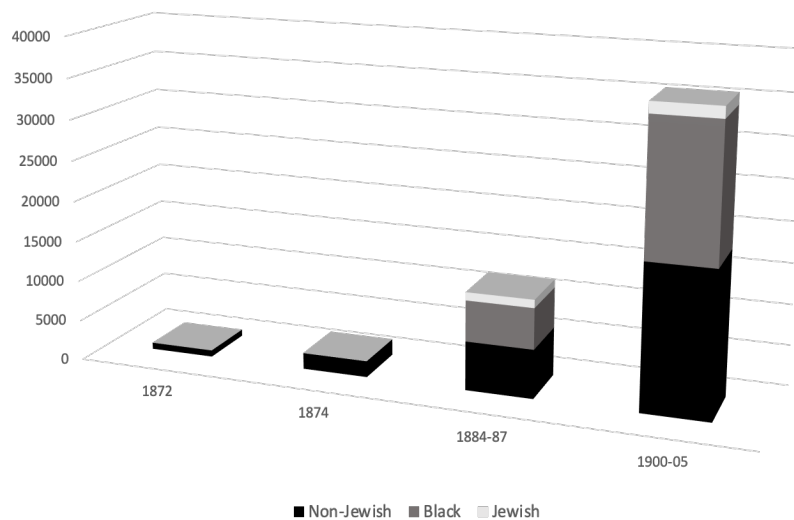


Figure 1: Birmingham Population Estimates, 1872-1905

they targeted Jews. In the next two decades, non-Jewish civic leaders tended to focus their negative energy on black and white unskilled laborers, whom they associated with crime and social disorder. Nineteenth-century residents in search of acceptance simply had to pass for “white” and profess loyalty to a Democratic South.⁹

Another reason why Jews were drawn to and accepted in the city was connected to their occupational backgrounds and experiences. Birmingham was not the only town created in Alabama after the Civil War, but it was specifically designed to promote and support the state’s railroads, mineral extraction, and iron and coal production, which made it attractive to Jewish

⁹ *First and Second Annual Reports*, 3-4; Temple Emanu-El Records, 1887-2000, AR796, Folder 796.1.1, Birmingham Public Library Archives & Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama (hereafter cited as BPL); Temple Emanu-El Records, 1887-1923, MF-2569, microfilm, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter cited as AJA); *Birmingham Iron Age*, Feb. 14, 1883, *American Israelite*, September 30, 1887; *1880 United States Federal Census*, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; “Birmingham’s Population, 1880-2000,” Birmingham Public Library, Government Documents, last updated March 10, 2016, <https://www.bplonline.org/resources/government/BirminghamPopulation.aspx>; Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 11-14; Howard N. Rabinowitz, “Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, Mark K. Bauman, ed. (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2006), 278-279; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 71-72.

migrants for multiple reasons. It was one of the few *new* settlements to gain a substantial reputation as a model New South metropolis. Unlike Atlanta, Richmond, or Charleston, it had no antebellum or Civil War history of its own, and the men who acquired the most power were real estate developers, professionals, and manufacturers instead of planters or farmers. Nineteenth-century American Jews rarely engaged in the subsistence or large-scale farming that was prevalent in much of the South, but many were well versed in the business practices Birmingham's early boosters promoted. More importantly, they shared a love for investment with its Protestant founders, stepped easily into white civic elites' conceptions of the local economy, and developed networks in some of the same industries. Jewish residents understood Powell's vision and how to make the most of the resources he stressed, including the town's exaggerated promotional image and commercialism. If they found the city incompatible with their interests and ambitions, they took the same action as their non-Jewish counterparts—they moved.

Chronicling Magic City Jews: Birmingham's Jewish and Non-Jewish Historiography

Dozens of books and articles record the histories of early Jewish settlers.¹⁰ One of the first was written by New South advocate John Witherspoon DuBose, who featured short biographies of successful entrepreneurs like Isaac Hochstadter and his brother Alfred in *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama: Historical and Biographical* (1887). Depicting the Hochstadters as representative of the city's commercial values, DuBose focused on the men's participation in the town's economy, government, and fraternal organizations. Unfortunately, the

¹⁰ Many of these works are based on descriptions of Birmingham's founding that were written between 1887 to 1920. They are inseparable from the city's promotional material and efforts to emphasize Jews' contributions to local development. As such, they possess multiple meanings and must be considered products of the time and culture in which they were written.

book was essentially a marketing tool, even though it was presented and popularly received as a work of professional history. DuBose utilized the same language and promotional tropes that Powell had employed during the 1870s. To make wage labor and industrialism more appealing to post-Civil War agrarians, he embellished romantic narratives of Birmingham's founding and corporate developers. Key citizens, including the Hochstadters, were portrayed in similar ways and featured simply as examples of the many opportunities available for new settlers.¹¹

DuBose was not the first Alabama booster to exaggerate the nature of Birmingham's founding and possibilities, nor was he the only writer to present American Jews as exemplary New South entrepreneurs or copies of their non-Jewish counterparts. DuBose and his tales were, however, frequently cited in the twentieth century to endow Birmingham with a culture that could be related to progressive individuals in its state's past. In 1910 and 1920, local historians Ethel Armes and George Cruikshank repeated and extended some of DuBose's stories in their chronicles. Protestant middle-class women who formed the Pioneer Club in 1914 also drew from DuBose to organize their memories and inform their speeches. Like DuBose, these chroniclers included a small number of Jews in their accounts and focused on particular individuals who supported the town's progressive civic identity and financial ideals. While these texts recorded information that cannot be found elsewhere, they framed Jewish actions in ways that supported local leaders' social and political structures, and they rarely—if ever—mentioned residents' Jewish heritage or highlighted the work of Jewish women. Grocer N.B. Miles' wife Lucy, for example, recalled Isaac Hochstadters' store in a speech entitled "A Few Reminiscences of the Early

¹¹ For examples, see John Witherspoon DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama: Historical and Biographical* (Birmingham: Teeple & Smith, 1887).

Days,” and Cruikshank’s book praised Samuel Marx for his business practices and “broad-minded and public-spirited citizen[ship].”¹²

Some local Jewish leaders turned to the writing of history to combat discrimination and antisemitism, embedding their friends and relatives into a narrative of civic development that celebrated Jews as vital and honorable citizens. They found inspiration in the work of Jewish scholars and editors such as Simon Wolf, Mark Lehman, and Reform Rabbi Emil Hirsch, who used their books and journals to stress Jewish inclusion in American wars and expansion. Taking a cue from these publishers, local Jews used their writing and connections to demonstrate their essential role in Birmingham’s early economy and development. Like non-Jewish books about the early city, special editions of Lehman’s *Jewish Ledger* (1900) and Hirsch’s *Reform Advocate* (1911) reinforced and reshaped DuBose’s origin narratives. Similar to the town’s promotional texts, they glorified iron production, railroad construction, and mineral extraction and highlighted key founders and entrepreneurs—they just did so with a Jewish focus. Local Jewish contributors to these journals, including Rabbi Morris Newfield, wrote and served as sources for most of their articles, which depicted several Jewish men as model residents and emphasized their dedication when Birmingham was just a struggling frontier village. Temple Emanu-El, the city’s first synagogue, was proclaimed a representative institution in the interfaith community and depicted as a leading source of private education and philanthropy in both the city and the state.¹³

¹² Like any good New South mythmaker, DuBose had a fondness for the word “progressive”—he used it forty-nine times in his book, most particularly in relation to Birmingham’s entrepreneurs and developers. Neither Ames nor Cruikshank directly cited DuBose’s books, but their language and stories about early extraction and railroad projects and the Elyton Land Company overlapped. Ames even stated she “borrowed” one of her sources from J.W. DuBose, so there is no doubt he was a strong influence upon her work. DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 399-498; Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama*, 107; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environ*, 229; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 92.

¹³ Adam Mendelsohn, “Before Korn: A Century of Jewish Historical Writing about the American Civil War,” *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelson, eds. (New York: New York Univ. Press,

The *Ledger* and the *Advocate* served as critical primary sources for several histories of Birmingham Jews. They informed, for example, Mark Elovitz's *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (1974), the most extensive account of the religious community. Elovitz—who also cited DuBose and Cruikshank—was, in turn, a source for other materials, including Robert Corley's history of Temple Emanu-El (1982), Mark Cowett's biography of Newfield (1986), and webpages on Birmingham's Wiki and the online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. Elovitz's work emphasized the social and economic patterns that Birmingham residents shared with other Southern Jews and provided these and other histories with a good overview of their activities. Elovitz, however, often failed to question the language and context of his sources. Although Cowett examined Newfield's social work and religious leadership in the context of local and regional events, Elovitz did not view his subjects or his sources in relation to Birmingham's civic image or origin narratives.¹⁴ His work on local Jews, therefore, often simplified the conditions in which Jewish men and women were acting, which has had a considerable effect on the documentation of their activities.¹⁵

2010), 2, 5-6. For examples, see Simon Wolf, *The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier, and Citizen* (Philadelphia: The Levytype Company, 1895); *Jewish Ledger*, May 19, 1899; May 18, 1900; April 19, 1901; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911.

¹⁴ In the 1870s and 1880s, Powell, DuBose, and countless other boosters created exaggerated, romantic tales of Jefferson County's history and Birmingham's founding. The stories were not only used to promote the city and connect it to Alabama's past, they also were repeated and extended in local histories from 1900 to 1920 and played a central role in the city's promotion, celebrations, parades, and commemorative events. Since they served as invented traditions that unified the population, suggested historical continuity, and created ideals of model citizenship, I often refer to them as origin narratives or myths. For further discussion of such practices, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-3, 7-8.

¹⁵ Mark Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974); Robert G. Corley, *Paying "Civic Rent": The Jews of Emanu-El and the Birmingham Community* (Birmingham: A.H. Cather Publishing Co, 1982); Mark Cowett, *Birmingham's Rabbi: Morris Newfield and Alabama, 1895-1940* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986); Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Association, *Bham Wiki*, last modified September 19, 2015, http://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Hebrew_Ladies_Benevolent_Association; Herman Simon, *Bham Wiki*, last modified January 19, 2019; http://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Henry_Simon; Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, "Birmingham, Alabama," *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*, last modified 2020, <https://www.isjl.org/alabama-birmingham-encyclopedia.html>.

Several historians of American Judaism have simultaneously highlighted both Southern Jews' dedication to each other and the Protestant frameworks in which they operated. Although many Jews were determined to remain faithful to their sacred traditions, they also desired to live in harmony with their non-Jewish neighbors. According to Stephen Whitfield, some nineteenth-century families felt an intense pressure to conform to social norms, especially in the South, which was racially polarized and "not famous for cherishing pluralism." Through their interactions with black and white Protestants and Catholics, Jews internalized what he calls "conventional wisdom," even though they generally remained religiously separate. As a result, they tended to possess multiple identities that informed a hybrid identity that Eliza McGraw describes as a "cultural compound." She and Whitfield, along with Jonathan Sarna, identify acculturation as more than just assimilation or secularization because it allowed for the existence of multiple cultures within an individual at any given time. American Jewish identity was—and still is—multifaceted. It interweaves religious, national, and local values into a synthetic whole. Leonard Rogoff, Shari Rabin, and Michael Cohen's studies about the western frontier and nineteenth-century North Carolina and Georgia have reinforced these conclusions. To integrate, domestic and international Jewish migrants drew from both their ethnic networks and their communities' social and economic structures. In the Southern Black Belt, for example, many Jews achieved substantial wealth and reputations in the cotton industry by doing so.¹⁶

¹⁶ Stephen J. Whitfield, "Jewish Fates, Altered States," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark Greenberg, eds. (Waltham: Brandeis Univ. Press, 2006), 309-311; Eliza McGraw "An 'Intense Heritage': Southern Jewishness in Literature and Film," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, ed. (Waltham: Brandeis Univ. Press, 2006), 213-214; Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture," *Jewish Social Studies*, 5, no. ½ (Autumn, 1998-Winter 1999), 52; Shari Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Michael R. Cohen, *Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish Entrepreneurship in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2017).

Common patterns of integration and American Jewish community building were prevalent in early Birmingham and similar to those found in other small cities. Jewish settlers often shared religious and cultural backgrounds, family connections, and more than one language, which they used to bond and sustain their religious networks and traditions. They played a visible role in the city's founding and development, and, as they rose to the upper- and middle-class, they occupied leadership roles in Birmingham's non-Jewish fraternal organizations and Democratic political factions. When they were economically stable, they formed Jewish institutions. Benevolence associations, fraternities, synagogues, and social events related to the Reform congregation, Emanu-El, and its Orthodox counterpart, Knesseth Israel (KI), provided Jews with the ability to remain religiously and socially distinct. Tensions and negotiations between Orthodox and Reform Jews were common, but Reform Jews routinely possessed more local power. Similar to their counterparts in other cities, many Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Newfield and KI board member Morris Wolff, were highly integrated and acted within substantial interfaith commercial and political networks. They not only bonded with non-Jews through their dedication to Southern racial and cultural norms, but they also used their philanthropy, business ventures, and leadership skills to benefit and support both a Jewish subculture and the general community. In so doing, they solidified their individual status in Birmingham and advanced Jews' collective reputation in Alabama and the nation.¹⁷

¹⁷ Reform Judaism was popular among acculturated Jews in America especially from the 1870s and thereafter. Unlike their Orthodox counterparts at KI, Temple Emanu-El's Reform Jews did not separate men and women during their worship services or follow traditional Jewish law, which included ritual baths for women and dietary restrictions. While KI's members tended to self-segregate, Emanu-El's Jews conducted services in English rather than Hebrew and were generally dedicated more to rationalism, universal brotherhood, and social justice than concepts of the Jewish Diaspora or Zionism. See Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation as well as Gary Phillip Zola, "The Ascendancy of Reform Judaism in the American South During the Nineteenth Century," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Marcie Cohen Ferris & Mark I. Greenberg, eds. (Brandeis University Press: Waltham, 2006), 156-158, 177-181; and Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 264-289.

Previous studies of Birmingham's Jews have often presented them as a cohesive, single-minded group, which is how they tended to represent themselves in the *Jewish Ledger* and the *Reform Advocate*. Local Jews, however, did not always share the same values or lifestyles. Broad characteristics of American Jewish integration are important to recognize because Jewish residents tended to unite through commonalities that they felt made them distinguishable from others. Doing so encouraged fellowship and cooperation and enabled Jews to unite when they felt collectively threatened. The religious community they created was composed of heterogeneous people from different socioeconomic levels. They frequently disagreed about their leaders, politics, and the definition and practice of Judaism, and used their personal talents and interests to integrate. Prioritizing their own goals and ambitions, Jewish civic leaders and professionals related to each other and their non-Jewish neighbors in a variety of ways. While general characteristics of local Jews' self-proclaimed mutual values or belief systems cannot be ignored, it is important as well to illuminate how they differed among each other.¹⁸

Despite their commonalities with other American Jews, Birmingham's early Jewish residents should not be examined solely in relation to their commercial acumen or ethnic social or occupational patterns. Birmingham's Jews embraced expressions of belonging that were inherently communal, relational, and dynamic, which required social interactions to generate. Many practiced the social norms and ideals of non-Jewish white civic elites to become economically and politically mobile, but they also extended them to suit their own needs.¹⁹ The

¹⁸ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 8; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006 repr., London: Verso), 6.

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 416-417; Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 8-11, 29, 31-59; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (1994 repr., New York: Random House, 1978), 2-8; Beatrice Gottlieb, "Translator's Introduction," in Lucien Febvre; *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), xxiii-xxvii.

following chapters explore the social and discursive world in which Birmingham's Jews lived and wrote. Chapter One features Birmingham's first two Jewish merchants, Herman Simon and Samuel Marx. Through their stories, it investigates the way Jews were perceived and treated in Alabama during and just after the Civil War. It introduces themes of whiteness and antisemitism, which are threaded through most of the dissertation's chapters, and explores the experiences Simon and Marx had before they moved to the city, focusing on the commercial backgrounds and racial and social perceptions that Birmingham's Jewish and non-Jewish citizens brought with them when they relocated. Finally, it notes Alabama's economic condition when the ELC built the city in 1871 and offers motives for Jewish migration and acculturation.

Birmingham's Jewish settlers arrived in three waves, which reflected typical trends in Jewish migration and settlement. The city grew rapidly in size and importance in the late nineteenth century, and the patterns that are evident moved at a faster pace than elsewhere. The Western European backgrounds of the first wave of migrants, who arrived in the 1870s, are explored in Chapter One through Simon and Marx, who—like many of their fellow domestic migrants—lived in the United States for several decades and were already fairly acculturated when they arrived in Birmingham. Chapter Two continues exploring the backgrounds of several individuals who composed this wave and focuses upon Birmingham's creation and Powell's promotional efforts. It sheds light on Jewish experiences by noting conditions in the ELC's fledgling city, providing readers with examples of how information about Birmingham was recorded in contemporary newspapers and Jewish and non-Jewish histories, another theme that can be found throughout the dissertation. The chapter also discusses the establishment of Simon and Marx's businesses, the arrival of the Hochstadter and Wise families, and the importance of

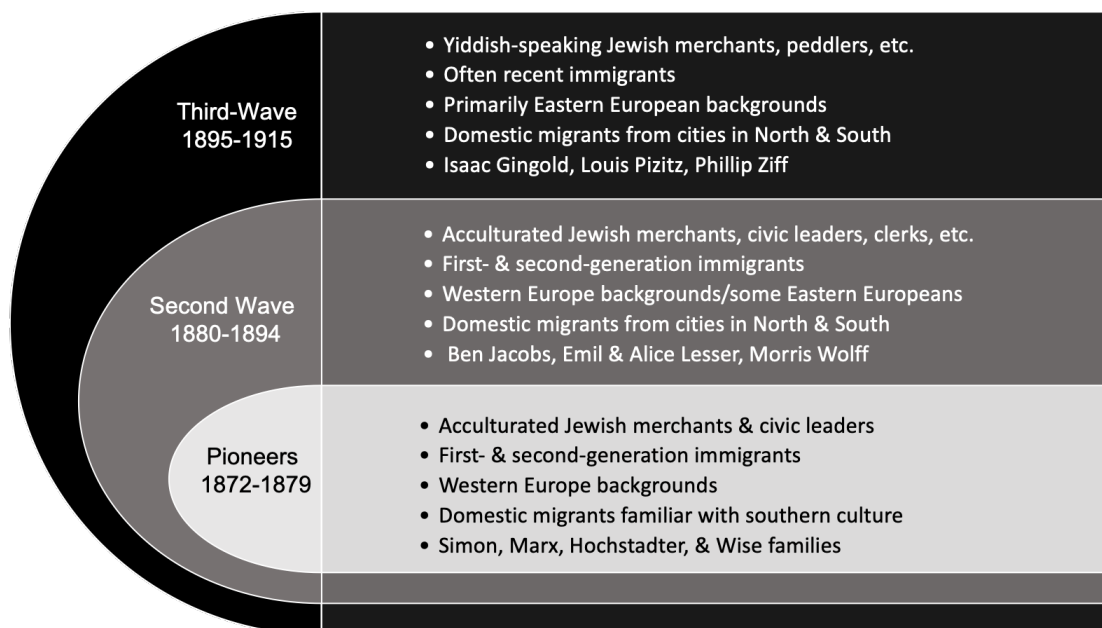


Figure 2: Waves of Birmingham's Jewish Migrants, 1872-1915

the liquor trade in local Jewish commerce. It also notes economic networks that the city's Jews began to form with non-Jews, who greatly outnumbered them in the general community.

Using Isaac Hochstadter's story as a lens, Chapter Three examines how Jews built important nineteenth-century social and political networks through Birmingham's fraternal organizations and Democratic political factions. In addition, the chapter features a few individuals in the second wave of Jewish migrants, including Ben Jacobs and Nettie Newman, who arrived in the early 1880s. The second wave, which continued until approximately 1894, possessed slightly more diverse backgrounds but still tended to be from the same German-speaking nations as their predecessors. Individuals like Jacobs and Nettie Newman's father Ferd were drawn to the city by its commercial opportunities and promotional materials, so they connected well with the families that composed Birmingham's Jewish "pioneers," who were often their friends and relatives. Although a few transatlantic migrants appear in the second

wave, most of them relocated from other American cities, including several in the North. Although their arrival increased the Jewish population enough to stimulate the desire for the establishment of Jewish institutions, second wave migrants also developed alliances with non-Jewish civic-commercial elites, which is discussed in Chapter Three as well. The chapter discusses the formation of Temple Emanu-El and notes how religious voluntarism provided Reform Jews with opportunities to expand their leadership training and professional reputations. Such work was especially important for young, ambitious men and women who sought to demonstrate their leadership skills and expand their interfaith connections.

Chapter Four examines diverse actors in the Jewish community and how their integration was both similar and different from paths taken by their coreligionists. It opens with a prominent individual in Birmingham's second wave, Emil Lesser, whose story demonstrates the work of local Jewish professionals and how they created and maintained their civic networks. Like Chapter Three, this chapter discusses how loyalties could change with the rise and fall of various interest groups, such as ELC enthusiasts, white skilled laborers, and German immigrants. Chapter Four also notes the arrival of a third wave of migrants between 1895 and 1915. Generally Orthodox Jews of Russian and Eastern European descent, this wave increased the city's Jewish population considerably and resulted in conflicts over politics, leadership, and worship practices. Chapter Four examines the splits and socioeconomic disparities that led to the creation of new congregations and neighborhoods and reveals the tools Jews used to weave Judaism into the social and religious fabric of the city.

The dissertation ends with a look at Birmingham's Jewish women, who have been noticeably neglected in local Jewish histories. Although Reform women's actions in the city's clubs and charities have been noted in other studies, they are rarely contextualized and often

passed over quickly for the work of Jewish men. Like the commercial and political achievements of their husbands, brothers, and fathers, Jewish women's activities increased Jews' collective civic status in Birmingham and their community's interfaith and professional networks. Chapter Five not only discusses the social roles Temple Emanu-El's middle-class women played in the Jewish community and analyzes their activities in relation to nineteenth-century American and Jewish gender ideals. Jewish women like Sophia Wise and Paula Simon were charter members of Emanu-El's ladies' associations and charities. They funded Emanu-El and its charities and organized matchmaking events and social occasions. This chapter outlines their accomplishments, and when possible, compares their work to that of their Orthodox counterparts. It concludes with Bertha Gelders and Carrie Ullman's role as professionals and social workers in Birmingham's early education movement, which created important opportunities for local women and children.

From 1875 to 1910, Jewish merchants dominated Birmingham's clothing and liquor industries. They became aldermen, police commissioners, educators, corporate directors, and social workers, and as the city and its population grew, they united with middle-class non-Jews to challenge the political and economic power of its corporate founders. Although Reform and Orthodox Jews did not always agree, they frequently presented a unified front that reveals the collective importance of their activities. The paths they took to integrate may have varied and were not without their challenges, but by the first decade of the twentieth-century, Birmingham had made a distinct impression on its Jewish residents, and its Jewish residents had made a distinct impression on it. Jews not only found a home in the city, they also embraced the early vision of its founders, shaped its history, and listened to its people. Rather than just navigating

local conditions, they were among the first to improve them. The story of Birmingham's Jews, therefore, is not associated with the development of one synagogue or another, as Morris Newfield suggested in 1911. It is the story of Birmingham itself.

1. THE BEGINNING:
H. SIMON, SAMUEL MARX, AND ALABAMA, 1850-1873

“The pioneer founders and builders of Birmingham all knew the late Samuel Marx and esteemed him as a broad-minded and public-spirited citizen as well as a very successful merchant... During the Civil War, [he] enlisted as a private and served for a period in the Confederate Army. His property was swept away by the war and he had to start anew and rebuild his shattered fortune.”

George Cruikshank,
A History of Birmingham and Its Environs, 1920

At about 10:30 p.m. on May 6, 1873, Thomas Durden and John Belser, “two well-known colored men,” smelled smoke while walking up Court Street, a central road in Montgomery that served as its main commercial thoroughfare. As recorded in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the men followed the scent to a fire at Marx & Son, a store located at No. 25, just four or five buildings from the newspaper’s office. Since Durden “was an old fireman,” he was able to identify the blaze even though no flames were visible from the street. Cautioning no one to enter the building, he sent for the police and “sounded the alarm,” but “few took the trouble” to repeat what Durden reported or listen to the African American’s expertise. Volunteer firemen, who arrived ten minutes later, had difficulty organizing and opening the door. The “whole interior” was “a perfect furnace flame” when they entered the building, making the fire difficult to extinguish. By the time it was contained, Marx & Son and the boot store beside it were severely damaged.²⁰

This article did more than record an exciting event near the *Advertiser*’s headquarters. Its

²⁰ *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 6, 1873.

anonymous staff writer’s language implicitly referenced Montgomery’s racial hierarchies and instability, both of which—like the fire—had a distinct impact on Samuel Marx, the proprietor of the shop that went up in smoke and one of Birmingham’s first Jewish residents. When the Magic City was being constructed, however, Marx operated a dry good store in Montgomery, where he had moved during the 1850s.²¹ While he lived in the state capital, he adjusted to crime and social tensions common in nineteenth-century Alabama. His interactions with customers and business associates introduced him to regional culture and local markets, which he tapped for economic stability and prestige. Although he had been prosperous in the antebellum period, the inflation and hardship caused by the recent Civil War had cost him dearly. Seven years after the war, Montgomery’s jaded white residents were less likely to respond to downtown disturbances and easily dismissed the black man who reported the fire. With little left in his pocket, Samuel Marx was unable to regain his financial footing in the city. He soon abandoned Alabama’s capital for Jefferson County, hoping to provide for his growing family in a section of the state that was promoted in the *Advertiser* as economically promising.²²

When Marx finally made his way to Birmingham in 1874, he brought his experiences and economic networks with him, as well as his embrace of Southern norms, the Confederacy, and Alabama’s growth and development. The years he spent in Montgomery had honed his commercial skills and taught him valuable lessons about how Jews were received in the state,

²¹ In 1873, James R. Powell’s first stockholders’ report referenced Birmingham as “this magic little city of ours”

²² Racial and social tensions rose in Montgomery when soldiers and refugees of many backgrounds (Union and Confederate, black and white) poured into the city during the Civil War. They were heightened when African Americans gained freedom and citizenship through federal laws and constitutional amendments. Durden could easily have been one of the enslaved men who fought the fires that retreating Confederates set in 1865, which continued to paralyze the hearts of businessmen who had lost goods that they had been storing to combat starvation and southern inflation. Because Durden and Belser were “well known” black men, they were not accused of the 1873 fire, but their report was also disregarded. The confusion that ensued contributed to its strength and the destruction of Marx’s property. *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 8, 1871; February 15, 1872; May 6, 1873; William Warren Rogers, Jr. *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 133-134, 146.

and the social and racial knowledge he gained proved to be a key factor in his family's advancement in Birmingham. Like other Jewish settlers, Marx drew from his antebellum background to form new connections in his rapidly changing world. In so doing, he supported and embodied the progressive ideals that had drawn him to the Elyton Land Company's new town, which he used to recover from his financial challenges and provide a springboard for the success of his children. Hard-working Jewish professionals like Marx were thus linked to their non-Jewish counterparts in the Magic City before they even arrived.

Life Before Birmingham: Antebellum Migration and Commerce

H. Simon and Samuel Marx were Birmingham's first two Jewish merchants. The two men's economic stories, however, began long before they reached the city in the 1870s. Although their backgrounds differed, they shared a Jewish heritage and love for industrial towns and Southern life. Familiar with their region's antebellum values, Simon and Marx used the South's complex blend of individualism, white supremacy, and self-reliance to build commercial networks and civic reputations. Their experiences linked them not only to other Jews, but also to their non-Jewish Southern neighbors, whom they supported and suffered alongside during and after the Civil War. Similar to nineteenth-century Jews living in other cities, Simon and Marx learned how to balance their desire to remain religiously distinct with non-Jewish Southerners' abhorrence of difference and their need to belong.²³

Unlike Samuel Marx, H. Simon left few records of his activities before he reached

²³ Cultural values in the American South were generated from frontier ideals related to self-reliance, individualism, and white male supremacy. They were often related to specific codes of masculine honor and enforced through violence. This promoted a simplified vision of race and society and intensified a collective distrust of those considered "foreign." To thwart the limitations of these constructions, Jews internalized and supported regional norms and carved out niches for themselves in particular markets. W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (1991 repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1941), 31-39, 117-119; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); 3-4; 26-27; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman*

Birmingham. Since he was a second-generation immigrant, Simon may have changed his name to Anglicize it, a common practice among nineteenth-century American Jews. An “H. Simon” appeared in Birmingham newspapers published between 1874 and 1878, leading Mark Elovitz and other scholars to identify his first name as Henry, but no Jewish merchant in the town used that name. He is also difficult to locate in Selma, where the *Jewish Ledger* reported he was in the general merchandising business prior to moving to Birmingham, but was probably a partner in Selma’s short-lived Simon, Denman, & Straus, a dry goods store. The business was the only one to carry the Simon name during the period in question, and an H. Simon did not pick up his mail from the post office a short time after it failed in 1866.²⁴

This timeline matches that of *Herman* Simon, the man most likely referenced in early documents. Herman lived in Virginia from 1867 to 1869, where he and his wife Paula had two sons, Edwin and Oscar. Although vague, birth records for the couple’s final child, Franklin, reinforce claims that the Simons were living in Elyton, Alabama, in 1871. The family moved to Birmingham sometime between 1872 and 1874 and can be definitely placed in the city in 1880 through the federal census. In 1888, the *Birmingham Iron Age* also reported a burglary in their home, using both Herman and Oscar’s names. By that time, Herman’s real estate and banking interests had made him a wealthy, well-respected member of the city’s commercial circles, and he and Paula helped establish several Jewish institutions, including Temple Emanu-El and its

Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13-14; Stephen J. Whitfield, “Jewish Fates, Altered States,” 304-305, 311-312.

²⁴ Birmingham’s first Jewish merchant appears only as “H. Simon” or an anonymous member of the “Simons” in the *Birmingham Iron Age* (1874-1878), the *Jewish Ledger* (1900), and the *Reform Advocate* (1911). Three men listed as “Henry Simon” were residing in Alabama during the time period in question: a black farmer from Hale County, a local pipe fitter who was born in 1896, and a German Jewish immigrant who lived in Montgomery between 1870 and 1930, none of whom could be the man in question. *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 12, 1874, May 29, 1878; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 8; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911; 1870 and 1930 United States Census, Montgomery, Montgomery County, Alabama; 1920 United States Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; *the Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), June 1, 1866.

benevolent association. When he died from a stomach ailment at the age of 82, Herman was buried in the Reform synagogue's cemetery. Regional newspapers portrayed him as an example of the American Dream, stating he had arrived in Birmingham with nothing but had worked hard and accumulated a "fortune" of "nearly a million dollars." His will left one thousand dollars to each of his two surviving sons and the rest of his assets to Paula. To increase their worth, he instructed her to invest his extensive holdings and chastised anyone who tried to stop her.²⁵

The Simons' backgrounds were slightly different from that of the Marxes, Birmingham's second set of Jewish settlers. Paula's parents culturally identified as German and were from what was then Prussia, while Herman's were French. Because she spent most of her childhood in New Jersey, however, Paula rarely told people she was born in Posen in 1843 and frequently listed the state as her birthplace. Her much older husband was a native Southerner, born in Louisiana in 1826. Samuel Marx, his second wife Henrietta, and her brother Charles Neumann, on the other hand, were Bavarian immigrants. Although historian George Cruikshank claimed Marx "came alone to this country" in 1837 when he was fourteen, the Jewish merchant actually arrived in 1846, at the age of twenty-four, with his mother and three siblings in tow. He traveled first to New Orleans, but was in Montgomery by 1850, when he married Jenny Wolf. Sadly, Jenny died within a decade, and by 1860, Marx and his eight-year-old son Morris were living with the family of his business partner Jacob Meyer. In 1866, shortly after the Civil War, he married twenty-five-year-old Henrietta.²⁶

²⁵ 1880 United States Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911; *The Birmingham News*, November 3, 1888; February 3, 1891; January 21, 1908; *American Israelite*, September 30, 1887; *Constitution of the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society, Birmingham, Ala., w/the By-Laws, Rules of Order, Etc.* (Birmingham: Roberts & Son, 1888), 2; *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 22, 1908; Herman Simon, Last Will and Testament, Wills Records, Vol. J-K, District and Probate Court, Jefferson County, Alabama, February 11, 1908.

²⁶ 1880 United States Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; Paula Simon Kaufman, death certificate, September 7, 1911, file no. 11-0000207, Nevada State Board of Health, Carson City, Nevada; *SS Meganticook* Passenger Manifest, March 7, 1846, Quarterly Abstracts of Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820-1875 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M272, roll); Records of the U.S. Customs Service,

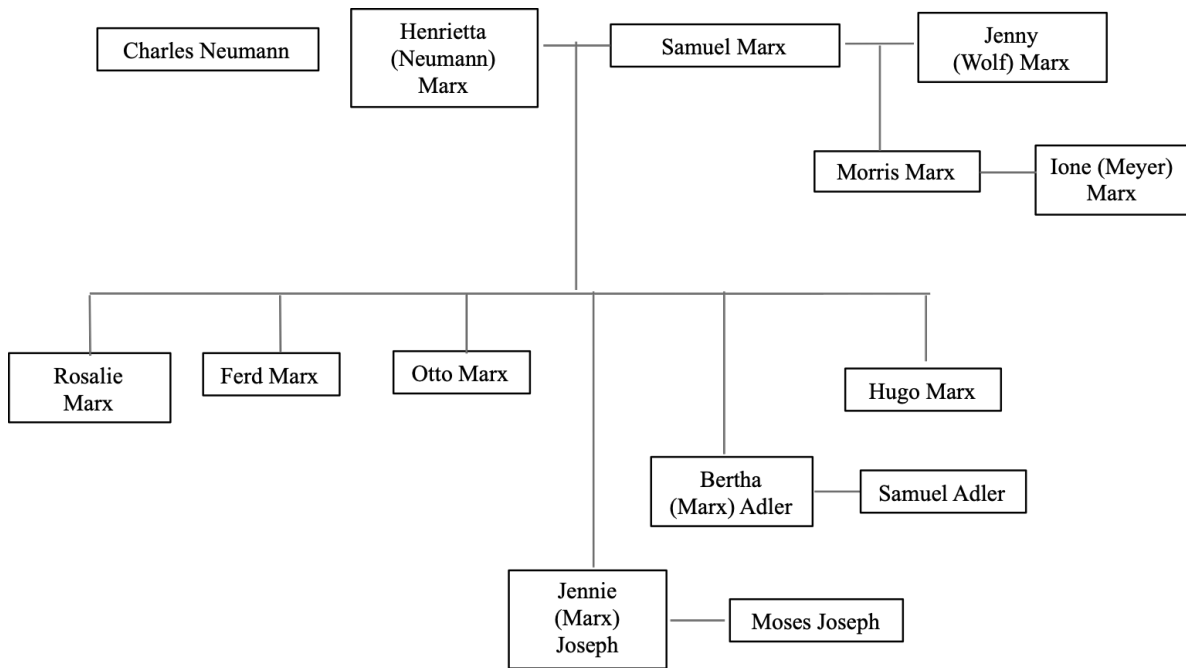


Figure 3: Marx Family Tree

Many Jews found a niche in Alabama’s antebellum or postwar cotton markets, but Herman Simon and Samuel Marx followed the path of small storeowners who developed networks in the clothing and grocery industries of larger cities that supported industrial growth, such as Atlanta and Mobile. Agriculture continued to drive the state’s economy between 1850 and 1865, but Selma and Montgomery were also transportation and supply centers with several important railroad connections. By 1840, the Selma & Cahawba and Selma & Tennessee lines were linking planters and merchants to North Alabama and Florida. Enslaved men built the Montgomery Railroad in 1832, and the Montgomery & West Point, constructed in 1843, connected to Georgia. In 1859, Marx and his partner Jacob Meyer were two of several

Record Group 36; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 229; 1850 and 1860 United States Census, Montgomery, Montgomery County, Alabama; Alabama, Marriage Index, Montgomery County, 1850- 1853 and 1860-1866, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter referred to as ADAH); 1860 United States Census, Montgomery, Montgomery County, Alabama.

subscribers to the Montgomery, Union Springs & Eufaula Railroad. The railroads increased Alabamians' access to goods and sparked a boom in the state's iron production. Manufacturers like the Selma Iron Works drew their resources from nearby coal and iron, and the George G. Plant and Company, a firm that sold iron stoves, credited its success to its local customers' urban mindsets.²⁷

What is commonly considered New South development continued in Selma and Montgomery during the 1860s. At the beginning of the decade, Montgomery's Court Street, where Samuel Marx's store was located, bustled with milliners, haberdashers, and cobblers as well as jewelers, gunsmiths, and banks. Although only two percent of the city's population invested in industrial projects, they built a steam-powered factory and manufacturing facilities that belched thick clouds of black smoke. Shortly after the Civil War began, Selma had added an arsenal to its blast furnaces, which was so important to Confederate munitions that its skilled laborers were exempt from the Confederate draft. When both cities suffered blows to their economies after the war, Marx was one of several Montgomery businessmen, including Elyton Land Company banker Josiah Morris, who proposed a convention that would recruit immigrant farmers and laborers. An article in the *Wilcox News and Pacificator* inspired them. It presented the state's natural minerals and inexpensive land, water, and fuel as inducements for settlement, while depicting Alabama's resources as "abundant" and inexhaustible. The ELC's promotional material featured similar tenets in 1872, when Marx joined another group of professionals to lobby for a Montgomery Board of Trade.²⁸

²⁷ Michael R. Cohen, *Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish Entrepreneurship in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 1-5; Michael S. Frawley, *Industrial Development and Manufacturing in the Antebellum Gulf South: A Reevaluation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019), 33-34, 66-67; *Weekly Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), March 9, 1859.

²⁸ Henry McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 9.

Although his associations in these and other activities included non-Jews, Samuel Marx tended to hold intimate business ties only with Jewish friends and relatives. When he was still in his twenties, he began working for Jacob Meyer, a man with whom he also lived. The pattern was fairly typical of nineteenth-century American Jewish immigrants—men who were well established in a region would often introduce their younger counterparts to trade patterns and markets, employing them as clerks or peddlers. Meyer guided Marx through Montgomery’s business world and Southern customs, modeling how to develop relationships with customers and cope with social and financial challenges. Because Meyer also provided Marx and his son Morris with a place to board after Jenny’s death, his advice and guidance were ever present. His home provided support for Jewish domestic traditions through the cooking of Meyer’s wife Amelia and the fellowship they and their eight children offered. Marx opened his own store on Court Street and hired Morris as a clerk until his son was ready to become a full partner. By the time he decided to become an independent broker, he had already formed relationships with many of Meyer’s vendors. If Meyer offered Marx products for the new store’s inventory, he would have been more likely to offer reasonable credit terms than other wholesalers. When Marx married Henrietta, he provided a similar service for her brother Charles Neumann, who lived with them in Montgomery. Charles used his lessons to become a successful merchant in Birmingham during the early 1870s. He later employed Marx’s son Ferd, who ran a large department store on Second Avenue from 1891 to 1911.²⁹

²⁹ The partnership between Marx and Meyer was fairly typical among Jewish immigrants to the United States and other nations and often involved commercial hierarchies and peddling, which were often viewed as the fastest and most effective way to achieve economic stability, family reunification, and other goals of migration. Apprenticeships, goods, and credit were often provided by established Jewish businessmen (like Meyer) who passed information about localized markets down to young transatlantic and domestic migrants (like Marx). These economic networks and commercial patterns are described in more detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation and in Hasia Diner, *Roads Taken*, x, 6-7. Meyer’s surname is spelled several different ways in historical documents. I have chosen the most common spelling and that which is used in Montgomery newspapers. 1850, 1860, and 1870 United

Herman Simon approached his close commercial ties a bit differently but learned no less. Simon, Denman, & Straus had at least one non-Jewish proprietor, and while such arrangements were unusual, they did exist, especially in rural areas and during periods of financial crises. Given Alabama's struggling economy in the mid-1860s and the antisemitic rhetoric in many postwar newspapers, Jews like Simon often needed as many allies as they could find. He may have had a close relationship to R. Marsh Denman, a Protestant who was also born in Louisiana and had ties to Paula's home state of New Jersey. To save their store when it was failing in 1865, the proprietors of Simon, Denman & Strauss hired W.H. Carroll, an assertive Baptist grocer, to "influence trade from the city and country." A Confederate chaplain during the Civil War, Carroll—like Simon—was fond of the press and creative inventories. When he found a supplier, he bought, stored, and sold cotton through his dry goods store and obtained "well timbered land" to mill. Through Simon, Denman & Straus's advertisements, Carroll sought "the patronage of his friends" and promoted a sale of "four hundred sacks of corn" they had randomly obtained "below market prices." He offered country merchants dry goods, clothing, boots, shoes, and notions, so they could save "a trip and expense North"—Simon would use almost identical language in an advertisement for his Birmingham confectionary ten years later. Unfortunately, Carroll's efforts could not spark enough business to save the store in Selma. J.W. Blandin took over the building Simon, Denman, & Straus had occupied on Broad Street on March 1, 1866, using it to sell books, music, pianos, and organs. Whether or not the Simons operated a similar store when they moved to Virginia is unknown.³⁰

States Census, Montgomery, Montgomery County, Alabama; *City Directory of Birmingham and Gazetteer of Surrounding Section for 1884-5*, Vol. II (Atlanta: H.H. Dickson, 1884), 101.

³⁰ 1850 United States Census, New Orleans, Louisiana; *Daily Selma Reporter*, Dec. 18, 1863, *Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), December 2, 1865; December 4, 1865; December 14, 1865; December 15, 1865; March 1, 1866; *Selma Times and Messenger*, February 28, 1866.

Simon and Marx shared their love of commercialism with more than one original stockholder of Birmingham's founding corporation, the Elyton Land Company. Although several men, including state legislator Bolling Hall, were planters, some were heavily invested in trade and development. From 1860 to 1880, Judge William Mudd supplemented his legal fees with a shop in Elyton, which he ran with Joseph Earle, a non-Jewish merchant who dissolved their partnership to a business in Birmingham. Tennessean Samuel Tate built railroads and worked closely in camps with John Milner, the South & North Alabama engineer who informed Josiah Morris of the legendary railroad crossing. When James R. Powell came to the Alabama territory in 1818, he had little money. After getting a job as a Lowndes County Pony Express rider, Powell used his ingenuity to develop a contracting business that delivered mail on stage coaches. Like many Southerners of the time, he invested in land and enslaved workers, becoming a planter and a state congressman in the 1820s, but his mail-carrying business was so competitive that it earned him a significant commercial enemy, Tuscaloosa slaveholder Robert Jemison. In 1836, Powell negotiated a partnership with his rival, who was the dominant member of their firm. He too would learn from his professional connections, which would prove essential when Alabama was rebuilding its economy and infrastructure after the Civil War. Jemison, for example, diversified his agricultural and stage coach interests with sawmills, foundries, and coal mines, introducing Powell to the possibilities of industrialism.³¹

Powell's antebellum networks and experiences would prove just as useful as those of Simon and Marx. Even though Birmingham's future founders and early settlers had little else in

³¹ Sarah Stephens, "A rare glimpse at Ellerslie: Where Millbrook's history began in 1818," *Elmore & Autauga News*, May 2, 2016; John Witherspoon DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 144, 313, 482. Maury Klein, *History of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad* (2003 repr., Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 118; 165; John S. Lupold and Thomas L. French, Jr., *Bridging Deep South Rivers: The Life and Legend of Horace King* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 103-108.

common, both would draw from their knowledge as Southern businessmen to help them prosper in the 1870s. Rejecting agricultural activities to pursue other avenues of trade and commerce was a common practice for most Jewish merchants, who frequently gained their experience in regional markets in the stores of their fathers, brothers, or mentors. Likewise, a small group of Alabama businessmen, including Powell and his colleagues, diversified their incomes by investing in railroad construction, manufacturing, retail or wholesale partnerships, or other non-agrarian economic projects. Because they had been operating as entrepreneurs in the state for decades, they were able to grasp the possibilities that the new city could offer when they were given a chance to participate in its creation.

Coping with Regional Norms and Racial Tensions

Southerners also had to find ways to cope with the violent and racially charged atmosphere in their local communities. The challenges were different for Herman Simon and Samuel Marx, however, than they were for middle- and upper-class Protestant businessmen like James R. Powell. The Jewish merchants lived and operated in a complex environment that linked success to cultural values of self-reliance, individualism, and white supremacy. Antebellum society was heavily racialized and patriarchal, and a white man's status was linked not only to the number of women and/or enslaved individuals in his household, but also to his adherence to regional norms. Since masculine prowess was also connected to physical power, public displays of civic and racial loyalty often became violent. Anyone who seemed different or stepped out of commonly accepted social boundaries was vulnerable to a dark form of communal correction. Jews were not targeted as much as black men and women, but they understood the risks that came with failing to "fit in." Many Jewish merchants who spent decades in the South actively adopted the attitudes of their white Protestant counterparts. Through local newspapers and their

interactions with customers and mentors, they learned regional norms and values that were important for their inclusion in Southern society. Like Jews throughout the country, Simon and Marx distanced themselves from other marginalized groups and had access to benefits of citizenship denied to European Jews and African Americans. The knowledge they gained was exhibited in their economic and political activities, which displayed their acceptance of the South's racial, class, and gender hierarchies.³²

Samuel Marx's story exemplifies how many immigrant Jews learned to carve a place for themselves in what could be a precarious racial and social environment. Although Jews remained less than one percent of the Southern population in the nineteenth century, a large wave of immigrants flooded the country between 1830 and 1860, the period in which Marx arrived. Since the nation's Jews also swelled to 150,000 during this period, they became a more visible target for xenophobic rhetoric, and Marx would have wanted to have avoided being branded as too alien to assimilate, especially since he had likely faced similar accusations as a European Jew. Adding to their worries, the American or "Know-Nothing" Party rose in popularity between 1849 and 1857, organizing around hostility to Irish-Catholics, another group that was religiously distinct.³³

When Samuel Marx began working in Montgomery, he would have learned the South's cultural norms through his daily interactions with Jacob Meyer and his black and white

³² Through daily exposure to their non-Jewish neighbors and southern literature, the region's antebellum Jews realized that while they were considered white because of the color of their skin, "becoming southern" was dependent upon their support of dominant social and cultural norms connected to race and slavery. This is why historians like Stephen Whitfield often conclude that those "who went South went native." Whitfield, "Jewish Fates, Altered States" 311-312; Eric L. Goldstein, "'Now is the Time to Show Your True Colors,'" 137. For more information about the cultural values discussed in this paragraph, see W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (1991 repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1941) and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

³³ William D. Rubinstein, "Antisemitism in the English Speaking World," in *Antisemitism: A History*, Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157-158.

customers. Foreigners and Northerners were commonly criticized, and anyone who carelessly disregarded racial customs did so at his or her own peril. Although Montgomery considered itself progressive, white men with the highest social standing—including merchants, doctors, and lawyers—owned enslaved workers. According to Frederick Douglass, urban whites occasionally treated the individuals they owned slightly better than their rural counterparts, and some enslaved city workers enjoyed limited freedoms, like “hiring their time” and conducting business for their owners or themselves. This does not mitigate the physical or psychological suffering they faced in bondage, however, nor did it lessen the legislative measures that were taken to reduce their autonomy. Blacks outnumbered whites in Montgomery, for example, heightening fears of rebellion, which meant that curfews and racial restrictions were strictly enforced. African Americans were forbidden to carry weapons, buy liquor, and own livestock, including dogs. Even with their owners’ permission, enslaved men and women could not sleep outside their registered residences and, like most antebellum blacks, had to carry passes to travel. Moreover, a bell rang at nine p.m. every night to order them off the streets. Those who breached this or any other city ordinance could be punished with twenty-five to fifty lashes.³⁴

The region’s values also appeared in the work of Alabama’s journalists. Two incidents in the late 1850s serve as examples of the rhetoric Marx would have encountered that conveyed common attitudes toward Jews. In 1858, a Catholic maid kidnapped Eduardo Mortara from his Jewish parents’ home in Italy because she feared an illness would kill the six-year-old boy and his soul would not be saved in accordance to her beliefs. She secretly baptized him, and when the Catholic Church heard of it, police entered the Mortaras’ home and whisked Eduardo off to a convent where he remained despite the pleas of his parents. The Mortara Affair, as it came to be

³⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself* (London: H.G. Collins, 1851), 36-37, 92-93; Rogers, *Confederate Homefront*, 8.

known, sparked protests all over the world about the reach of the state into Jewish families. Sir Moses Montefiore of Britain published a circular that inspired large groups of American Jews to join global complaints against the kidnapping. Sectional tensions kept many Southern Jews from participating in these appeals because they asked for the intervention of the federal government. As supporters of state's rights and slaveowners, they were reluctant to call for criticism they felt could be used against their region in the future. Regardless, the Mortara case was featured in newspapers across the South, including several in Alabama.³⁵

The state's reporters treated the Mortara Affair with a combination of sympathy and indifference, which revealed how widely attitudes toward Jewish causes—and Jews—varied. Editors in Prattville and Montgomery displayed the philosemitism many antebellum Jews reported in the 1850s, discussing the Mortaras' plight from the point of view of Eduardo's mother or Montefiore's personal appeal to the Pope. Their support for the child's parents inspired Samuel Marx's Jewish community to address the issue, like some of their coreligionists in large cities like Charleston or Mobile. During an "immense mass meeting" held in Montgomery, its leaders opposed European inaction in republican rhetoric, a tactic American Jews often employed to object to attacks upon their civil and religious liberties.³⁶

Other Alabama Jews did not find their communities amenable to the same protests. Newspapermen in Troy divided the event from its antisemitic overtones, contextualizing it in relation to Napoleon III's squabbles with the Pope. Baptists in Marion capitalized on Eduardo's

³⁵ Dov Levitan, "'I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews' (Gen. 40:15): The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara," (speech, Ramat Gan, Israel, November 27, 2010), Bar-Ilan University Parashat Hashavua Study Center, 2-3, <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/vayeshev/839Lev.doc>; Mark K. Bauman, "Variations on the Mortara Case in Midnineteenth-Century New Orleans," in *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History: Studies in Institution Building, Leadership, Interaction, and Mobility* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), 16; Bertram Korn, *The American Reaction to the Mortara Case, 1858-1859* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1957), 9-12, 92-93.

³⁶ *Autauga Citizen* (Prattville, Alabama), Dec. 9, 1858; *The Weekly Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), Feb. 9, 1859; Feb. 16, 1859.

abduction to fulfill their own agendas. Although they proclaimed the child's abduction and non-consensual baptism "unscriptural and wrong," their conclusions were linked to anti-Catholicism and fears that their children could become susceptible to the same fate. Thinking about challenges to the South's own prejudicial legislation, editors in Tuskegee and Greensboro contextualized the event in relation to Southern politics. They portrayed the British government's refusal to act as the best course of action and expressed relief when a resolution calling for mediation was rejected in the House of Representatives. They were explicit in this link to American politics, citing the "dangerous" precedent that such an act would set, which could inspire "governments of foreign nations" to object to "our system of slave labor."³⁷

These reports of the Mortara Affair and the various ways Alabamians responded to it shed light on challenges Marx and other Southern Jews faced prior to the Civil War. When Eduardo Mortara was kidnapped in 1858, Jewish Americans were already struggling with a series of political crises that were tearing their nation apart, including those related to the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott decision. The Mortara Affair provided Know-Nothings with more fodder for their nativist propaganda and reminded Jews of their minority status and need to maintain white Protestant allies. Few were slaveholding planters, but Samuel Marx and his partner Jacob Meyer, like many merchants, benefitted from the privilege of white citizenship that allowed them to gain access to the regional economy. Slavery appalled some immigrants, and many peddlers sold their goods to both enslaved and free blacks as part of their regular business practices. Most Alabama Jews, however, unconditionally accepted their region's proslavery doctrine, and some bought and sold enslaved men and women.

³⁷ *Independent American* (Troy, Alabama), Nov. 17, 1858; Feb. 16, 1859; *Tuskegee Republican*, Dec. 9, 1858; Jan. 13, 1859; Jan. 20, 1859; "The Mortara Case," *South Western Baptist*, Mar. 10, 1859, 2.

Similar to their non-Jewish neighbors, they saw no conflict between their republican arguments for their civil rights and their participation in the South's "peculiar institution."³⁸

When news of Eduardo Mortara's kidnapping was winding down, Marx was given another implicit message. In late 1859, he and Jacob Meyer reported several items stolen from their store, which included not only a beaver overcoat but also pocket and Bowie knives. In November, Tuskegee authorities caught a "suspicious character" calling himself George W. Cook with their items. Cook's arrest and the way it was reported demonstrated that Southern support was reserved for white tradesmen who respected cultural norms and racial hierarchies, a lesson that would prove advantageous for Marx, Meyer, and their property. Simultaneously, the man's portrayal in the *Tuskegee Republican* reinforced white Southerners' distrust of strangers and regional assumptions about communal threats and collective justice.³⁹

Before he was arrested, Cook crossed several social boundaries that made his behavior appear extremely suspicious. The anonymous staff writer who reported his story depicted Cook as a stranger in a small Alabama community who could not give satisfactory answers to insightful residents' questions. Wavering between claims that he was a horse dealer and a slave trader, Cook was likely a confidence man who pretended to cater to both the black and white community. He was arrested at a plantation near Tuskegee, where he convinced a white landowner to give him lodgings, but the reporter claimed he was first seen in Cotton Valley, "talking confidentially with negroes" and traveling with a "mulatto boy." Because antebellum Southerners repeatedly worried over clandestine abolitionists, Cook's decision to fraternize with

³⁸ Bertram Wallace Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865." in *Jews in the South*, Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 91, 103-105, 128-132; ---, *The Jews of Mobile*, 34; Hagedorn, "Jews and the American South, 1858-1905," 2, 8-9, 15-17; Whitfield, "Jewish Fates, Altered States," 311-312.

³⁹ *Tuskegee Republican*, Nov. 24, 1859.

enslaved men and women was a dangerous one. Combined with his lies and equivocation, it made him appear to be a shifty interloper who was capable of inciting unrest. This caused Tuskegee's white community to confront him. While he was being questioned, they found Marx and Meyer's property among his belongings, which enabled them to arrest him for carrying concealed weapons. The journalist predicted that as soon as the merchants claimed their goods, Cook would be sentenced to the penitentiary, where he would learn a "more honorable trade than that of breaking into houses and tampering with slaves."⁴⁰

When Cook's story appeared, sectional and racial tensions were high, which influenced the writer's word choice. Lincoln had lost the 1858 Illinois senate seat to Stephen Douglas, but his popularity was growing among northern "free soilers" and antislavery Whigs and Democrats. The Douglas-Lincoln campaign debates, along with perpetual disagreements about the implementation of the Compromise of 1850, solidified Northerners' dedication to limiting slavery's expansion. Approximately a month before Cook was arrested, John Brown attacked Harper's Ferry, hoping to begin a slave insurrection, adding to white Southerners' recurring fears of slave rebellions. The reporter chose to use "houses" rather than "stores" to describe where Cook's robberies occurred, implying a more personal connection to the crime in question. Moreover, he referenced people in bondage who had not technically been "tampered with," which implicitly referred to the unspoken rules the drifter had broken. This suggested the offense was much more contemptible than theft. As Jewish merchants, Jacob Meyer and Samuel Marx did not have to be asked twice to play their role in Cook's punishment. A postscript indicated that when they were notified of the situation, Meyer immediately left to identify their property.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

When he did so, Cook was “carried down to Montgomery...where he [was to] be tried for burglary.”⁴¹

By the time the Civil War started, Samuel Marx had been interacting with his mentor, Southerners, and the press for more than a decade. The information he gained through his experiences was likely useful for a Jewish merchant operating in a racially polarized society that was divided into broad categories of “black” and “white.” Jews frequently struggled with these racial categories, largely because their non-Jewish neighbors found them difficult to classify. In the eyes of black and white Southerners, Jews were simultaneously perceived as foreign and white, making them difficult to relate to established hierarchies of class and labor. Moreover, in the South, racial tensions were ever present, and lynchings and other forms of violence served as means of social control. The brutality and antisemitism nineteenth-century Jews heard or read about in newspapers—or experienced—taught them that there was little benefit to having their whiteness questioned. To reconcile such struggles with their racial identity, some nineteenth-century American Jews cast *themselves* as a separate Biblical “race,” making sure it fell on the white side of the color line. Many avoided taking definitive positions in local or national conflicts or international disputes like the Mortara Affair. Some connected to the white Christian majority through trade, charity projects, military service, and their knowledge of the Old Testament. They also frequently defended their Jewish heritage by pointing to their exemplary citizenship and patriotism, their military service, and the freedom of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment. Experienced merchants like Marx, however, learned that racial classification

⁴¹ Ibid.

for Jews was often malleable, which left them vulnerable and dependent upon attitudes and relationships that could change as social and political tensions increased.⁴²

Civil War Support and Challenges

A powerful key to the success of antebellum Southern Jews was their embrace of regional norms, which many chose to accept to ease their integration rather than being forced into such a position by their fear of overt antisemitism. As regional tensions escalated, Marx and his coreligionists would find several opportunities to demonstrate their loyalty, and similar to their non-Jewish counterparts, they would become deeply affected by the ebbs and flows of the approaching military conflict. The challenges they faced would have a profound effect upon not only their economic security and physical well-being, but also how they operated in their local communities, which rapidly changed both during and after the Civil War.

When the fighting began, Samuel Marx was in the middle of Montgomery's social hierarchy. He did not belong to the group of affluent planters and professionals whose assets included land and enslaved workers, but like many of the city's Jews, he operated a retail store with a steady clientele. Secession initially stimulated business, which may have been why he chose to separate from his partner Jacob Meyer. Because Montgomery was the Confederacy's first capital, a wide range of residents were able to negotiate contracts to supply its army with clothing, liquor, and other provisions, and the Union's blockade of Southern ports in 1861 was initially ineffective. Steamboats continued to appear in Montgomery's docks on the Alabama River, carrying a variety of goods that could replenish Marx's inventory when it ran low, and in

⁴² Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South," 96-97, 123; Eric L. Goldstein, "'Now is the Time to Show Your True Colors': Southern Jews, Whiteness, and the Rise of Jim Crow," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Macie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds. (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 135; Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew" in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa: Univ of Ala Press, 2006), 416-417; Pamela Nadell, *America's Jewish Women: A History from Colonial Times to Today* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019), 85-86.

1862, the city was booming. Merchants created new businesses or refashioned old ones, opening stores in the commercial district on Court Street, and Kahl Montgomery, Marx's congregation, received enough donations to complete the synagogue they were building.⁴³

Confederate pride also permeated the city. Established militias like the Mounted Rifles and the Montgomery True Blues gathered and armed themselves. The Montgomery Greys and Alabama Fusiliers formed additional companies, expressing their pride through public drilling and lofty rhetoric. Some of the city's Jewish immigrants felt caught in the middle of these passions. Many felt as Jacob Weil, a German-speaking immigrant, who ran a store on Market Street but firmly believed that slavery was wrong. Drawing from his experience as a Mexican-American War veteran, Weil decided to enlist anyway, telling his brother Josiah that since "a man of reason [had] no place left" in the "dispute," he chose the "more familiar" side of the "two evils." In a letter explaining this decision, he recalled the brothers' youth in Oberlustadt, attributing the "rights and property" they possessed to the South, which inspired him to "fight to [his] last breath" to defend it. He recognized, however, that not all Jews felt the same. Another brother, Heinrich (Henry) Weil, held a "more moderate view" and chose to financially support the Confederacy but refused to fight, a common tactic among Unionists who wished to avoid persecution in the city. Since Jacob had no love for "Yancey and the fire-eaters," he seemed to understand Henry's belief that Southern politicians "should have continued the fight in Congress."⁴⁴

Samuel Marx left no such record of his position, but his actions suggest he was one of

⁴³ "Fire-eaters" were outspoken southern nationalists and politicians who pushed for secession in an attempt to advance and protect their region's dedication to slavery and states' rights. Alabama congressman William Lowndes Yancey was a prominent leader among them. Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 3, 48; Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 67-69; Kahl Montgomery (Montgomery, Alabama) minute books, 1847-1947, microfilm, MF 2590, AJA.

⁴⁴ Oberlustadt was located in what is now Germany, where nineteenth-century Jews were legally emancipated but still subject to negative caricatures, violent attacks, and oppressive restrictions on their ability to own property,

countless American Jews who used the Civil War and its memory to express their regional loyalties. On May 16, 1861, the “Israelites of Montgomery” declared their allegiance to the Southern cause and blamed the Lincoln administration for an unjust war on the region’s citizens. Marx’s direct support, however, was reserved for the protection of his community. He joined several businessmen who declared “solidarity with [their] white neighbors” after the fall of Vicksburg in 1863, calling for Alabama’s defense against a common “unscrupulous” enemy who sought to “waste our land and utterly destroy our people.” Although his family never corrected claims that Marx was a Confederate veteran, he—like “Colonel” James R. Powell—never saw active service. He was in his forties, too old to become one of the thousands of Southern Jews who enlisted, and since Morris was only nine years old in 1861, he could not send his son in his place. He settled for joining the Home Guard, a volunteer militia designed to protect the city, and being a member of Kahl Montgomery, which bolstered the fight through its rabbis’ fiery speeches and ladies’ benevolent association.⁴⁵

As the war progressed, it began to take a toll on Montgomery’s citizens. The Union blockade improved, creating shortages and heavy inflation that Southern losses compounded. As resources were depleted, taxes increased, and the Confederacy confiscated both enslaved people and goods for its military’s use. Montgomery merchants, like their counterparts in other Southern cities, were forced out of business—they often blamed manipulative speculators who bought

marry, or enter particular professions. Jacob’s view of the South was fairly typical of immigrant Jews, who fought for the South not because they supported slavery but because they had experienced freedoms they had previously been denied. The issue was complicated for many, however, who like Henry saw these as federal, rather than state, rights. Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, xi-xiii; Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 15, 19; Leon Hyneman, *World’s Masonic Register* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott, 1860), 59; Jake Weil to Josiah Weil, May 16, 1861, Closed Stacks (SPR15), ADAH.

⁴⁵ Although the nature of Civil War records makes it difficult to determine the exact number of Confederate Jewish soldiers, historian Robert Rosen estimates them at approximately two to three thousand. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 161-162. *Montgomery Adviser*, July 11, 1863; Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 90-96; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 229; *Muster Roll*, March 1862, Civil War Soldiers, 1860-1865, ADAH.

essential supplies in bulk and hoarded them to sell at exorbitant prices. James R. Powell's wartime activities also earned the animosity of his neighbors, even though Birmingham's boosters later portrayed them as admirable. Many Montgomery citizens balked when he gave William Lowndes Yancey a horse as a gift, for example, interpreting it as a "warhorse" that implicitly criticized the Alabama politician's failure to act more militantly on his principles. Powell's purchase of a Mississippi plantation did little to warm their hearts, especially because he decided to become an absentee landlord only *after* Union occupation had severely reduced the property's price. Moreover, his attempts to redeem his reputation in the winter of 1863 were less impressive than John Witherspoon DuBose reported in the late 1880s. A harsh storm produced a large quantity of ice on the river, which Powell gathered and donated to the Confederate Army Hospital Department. Although the ice was valuable, Confederate currency was highly inflated, making it much less so than the \$40,000 DuBose estimated in 1887. According to DuBose, Powell also "enlisted the help of every dray and laborer in the city to collect it," which suggests Montgomerians may have viewed the event as a collective volunteer effort rather than a form of Powell's benevolence, especially since the "colonel" did no work himself and spent little money on the enterprise.⁴⁶

Because wartime hardship made Southerners sensitive to economic exploitation, Powell was wise not to capitalize on what only he considered "his [ice] crop." Financial tensions and personal frustrations increased throughout the region, overshadowing prior acts of bravery, voluntarism, and loss. Although there was little evidence for Jewish participation in financial deceit and corruption, antisemitic stereotypes resurfaced sharply in Alabama, drawing from long-

⁴⁶ Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 71-73; John Witherspoon DuBose, *The Mineral Wealth of Alabama and Birmingham Illustrated* (Birmingham: N.T. Green, 1886), 97; ---, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 165-166.

standing European prejudices that painted Jews as cunning and corrupt. In Selma, the press criticized Jefferson Davis for appointing “Jews and Yankees to office” and published stories about Jewish dealers who cheated “daring” blockade-runners so they could gather profits at five hundred percent. “Unpatriotic parties” in Huntsville were supposedly selling cotton to mysterious Jews “who swarmed there from the North.” Reporters portrayed these Jewish merchants as occupying “Yankees” and dishonest thieves who bought cotton with “bogus gold pieces.” They implied that if Huntsville’s leaders were “true Southerners,” they would have chosen to burn the city’s cotton to protect innocent citizens from the Jews who corrupted Southern markets.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, antisemitism had its limits in Alabama. In the antebellum era, many non-Jews had built substantial relationships with Jewish friends and business associates and respected them as “people of the Bible.” For every article that criticized the merchants, there seemed to be one that supported them. Stating that many “Christians” also participated in market exploitation, their writers noted that the financial milking of innocent residents was hardly limited to a few Jewish wholesalers. Moreover, they recognized that Jews were being used as scapegoats for larger complaints about the ubiquitous commercial abuses that came with shortages and inflation. Selma and Montgomery editors also reprinted the *Charleston Courier’s* condemnation of the Georgia townspeople who had expelled Jews from their midst. Its anonymous author expressed the feeling of many Alabamians, who abhorred the era’s “speculators” and “land

⁴⁷ Bertram Wallace Korn, “American Judaeophobia: Confederate Version,” in *Jews in the South*, Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 134-138; *Daily Selma Reporter*, Sept. 11, 1862; Dec 12, 1862; *Daily State Sentinel*, July 19, 1862; *Montgomery Weekly Mail*, July 18, 1862, 1; Sept. 23, 1863, 2.

sharks” but still felt “no antipathy” toward Jews or anyone else “who was guiltless of extortion.”⁴⁸

These articles suggest that the experiences of Jewish merchants like Herman Simon and Samuel Marx were similar to those of other Southern Jews during the Civil War. Anti-Jewish rhetoric in the state was much harsher than the treatment Jews actually received, but the stories still caused Jews to feel alienated and marginalized. They suffered alongside their non-Jewish neighbors, however, sharing experiences that brought them closer together. Many Southerners, for example, struggled to make a living after the Civil War. When Confederate soldiers finally found their way home, the South had succumbed to hard war policies that destroyed its economy and infrastructure. Selma and Montgomery were spared occupation until the last few months of the war, but when Union soldiers finally arrived, they obliterated the cities’ resources, contributing to the destitution that many white Alabamians, including Simon and Marx, faced during Reconstruction.⁴⁹

Most of the destruction occurred during the spring of 1865, when Brigadier General James Wilson led a cavalry raid through the state that shattered the remnants of residents’ physical and financial security. In March, Wilson’s troops confiscated food and brandy at William Hawkins’ plantation near Elyton. They then destroyed ironworks, cotton gins, mills, and factories in Central Alabama, pillaging the nearby countryside as they passed through it. In Jasper, Union soldiers scattered books and papers in the streets and stole thousands of

⁴⁸ Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 94; *Daily Selma Reporter*, Sept. 29, 1862; *Montgomery Daily Mail*, Oct. 22, 1862.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the variance between stereotypically negative conceptions of Jews and the way Americans actually treated those they encountered or knew well, see Jonathan Sarna, “The ‘Mythical Jew’ and ‘The Jew Next Door’ in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, David A. Gerber, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 58-65. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Army*, Series I, Vol. 93, Part II: Confederate Correspondence (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 100-200, 206-209, 641.

Confederate bonds, which they did not realize were worthless. Although one division was dispensed to capture the military university at Tuscaloosa, Wilson's primary target was Selma and its arsenal, which he reached on April 1. Fearing local assets would fall into enemy hands, retreating Confederates set fire to thirty-five thousand bales of cotton and the city's commercial warehouse, which caused one Illinois soldier to state "destruction [made] everything look desolate" even before his unit arrived. Flames engulfed two blocks along Water Street and three on Broad, wreaking havoc on a local market that was already buckling under wartime shortages and inflation. Federal troops plundered the city, loaded railroad cars with explosives, and confiscated guns and ammunition, throwing what they could not carry into the Alabama River.⁵⁰

Samuel Marx's hometown fared only slightly better. When news of the Union's victory reached Montgomery, Confederate troops assigned to guard the city also burned *its* commercial warehouses despite the pleas of local residents. The fires destroyed 40,000 bushels of corn and 85,000 cotton bales, which infuriated city leaders and inspired them to negotiate a surrender immediately after the Confederates departed. When Union troops finally arrived, they paraded peacefully through the streets and occupied the town for only two days. Before they left the city, however, they destroyed its arsenal, depots, railroad cars, foundries, and niter works. Federal raiders in the countryside also wrecked trestles and bridges on the Montgomery & West Point Railroad, and when they discovered three hidden steamships loaded with food to help the population survive the occupation, they sent them back to the city and burned them as well.⁵¹

Such devastation, although horrible to encounter in the 1860s, united Jewish merchants like

⁵⁰ Thomas D. Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," 387; Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 84-86, 116-118, 125-135; James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid through Alabama and Georgia* (Lexington: Univ Press of Kentucky, 1976), 57-64, 94-97; Jerry Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps: Union Campaigns in the Western Theatre, October 1865 Through Spring 1865* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1998), 163-164, 183.

⁵¹ Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 57, 139, 145-148; Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps*, 183; Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg*, 111-117.

Marx with non-Jews who survived similar conditions in Montgomery and beyond. Their shared experiences of deprivation and ruin would provide Birmingham's first settlers with a common past that became important when they began building their initial social, political, and economic networks.⁵²

The Postwar Economy and Motivations for Migration

Even if his store escaped the massive amount of looting many Southern merchants feared, Samuel Marx faced other challenges as the postwar economy and living conditions deteriorated, which would directly affect his decision to relocate in the 1870s. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House the week after Montgomery was attacked, and Confederate bonds and currency soon had no value. Both armies' penchant for destruction made it difficult to obtain food and other necessary supplies, let alone commercial goods. In search of resources, black and white refugees filtered into Montgomery and violence was common. Two years later, Marx's luck had not significantly improved. On March 7, 1867, a runaway horse "came tearing down the sidewalk" in front of his store because of its handlers' ineptitude, destroying the goods, awnings, and pillars of several businesses, including his. That December, he reported three pistols, along with two boxes of shoes and "some pins," as stolen, but forms of communal justice and racial boundaries had shifted since drifter George Cook's arrest in 1859. Burwell Barnett, a black man,

⁵² Confederate pride and values were considered social and racial assets in many Southern cities, not only immediately after the Civil War, but long after it ended. As a result, Birmingham's early boosters frequently referred to the city's founders and prominent residents by their military titles, which were often honorary. Jews who moved to Birmingham in the 1870s and 1880s also tended to cultivate public personas that emphasized Confederate service. Although some enlisted and truly engaged in brutal combat, including Reform leader Samuel Ullman and Jennie Marx's husband Moses Joseph, others' experiences were exaggerated in accordance with activities that were collectively viewed as admirable for middle-class white founders. Samuel Marx's time in the Home Guard, for example, brought him no closer to danger than "Colonel" James R. Powell's decision to harvest ice, yet both were repeatedly identified as Confederate veterans. For examples, see DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 154, 166, 169; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 229; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 18; Joel Campbell DuBose, *Notable Men of Alabama: Personal and Genealogical With Portraits*, Vol. 2, (Atlanta: Southern Historical Association, 1904), 142.

was accused of the robbery but stated he had found the single pistol that was in his possession, which was likely true since the case “broke down” upon the prosecution’s examination of its own witnesses. Alabama may have been full of vigilantes who threatened Republicans and African Americans, but Reconstruction’s federally monitored legal system offered protections Barnett had been denied when enslaved. Marx recovered his goods but rightfully lost his case and had to pay half the court costs, which he could ill afford.⁵³

Despite these difficult circumstances, Marx remained civically active. During the Civil War, he served in the fire department of the Home Guard, likely working alongside the black and white men who fought the blazes that threatened the city in 1865. He continued to volunteer as a fireman during Reconstruction and belonged to the Dexter No. 1 Company, a nineteen-year-old unit that had forty-five members. Marx was one of the department’s six foremen and elected first assistant engineer on June 18, 1867. In October, two months before the robbery he reported, Marx was on the printing committee for a “Grand Promenade Concert and Ball” that “the citizens of Montgomery” gave for the city’s brass band. In 1871, he and Jacob Weil were among the Jewish and non-Jewish businessmen who pooled their resources to buy a house for the widow and children of General James Clanton.⁵⁴

Like Marx, the Protestant men who founded Birmingham adjusted to the challenges of the post-Civil War period. Many were recovering from the trauma of their Southern service or mourning the death of loved ones. James Gilmer, a quartermaster and inspector general, made his way home to the same war-torn Montgomery that Samuel Marx inhabited. Colonel Samuel Tate, who worked with Jefferson Davis and Leonidas Polk to fortify railroads and deliver

⁵³ Thomas D. Clark, “The Post-Civil War Economy in the South,” 387; Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 133-134, 144; *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 7, 1867; December 15, 1867; *Daily Sentinel* (Montgomery, Alabama), December 14, 1867.

⁵⁴ *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 18, 1867; October 18, 1867; October 6, 1871.

munitions, returned to similar conditions in Tennessee. The war cost Bolling Hall, Jr., a former Alabama senator, a brother-in-law and his son Thomas. In 1866, his son Bolling Hall III died from complications related to a foot injury he received as a Confederate colonel at Chickamauga. Hall's family struggled with their agricultural interests after the war, but he was also the director of the Montgomery & Eufaula, the railroad Marx and Meyer had funded in 1859. This and his other investments enabled their families to stay financially afloat when the droughts and labor conditions of the period destroyed others. From 1869 to 1871, Hall used his substantial influence to increase his railroad securities and keep Alabama from bankruptcy when over-speculation threatened to topple it. Because he had always been a state's rights advocate, he also criticized those who supported Republican policies. In 1874, he was specifically recruited to fight the election of African Americans like Wilcox County's Thomas Hill and assist the Democrats in their efforts to recapture control of the state's government.⁵⁵

James R. Powell was also working hard to regain his footing in the South after hostilities ended. He remained in Alabama but contracted John C. Calhoun's grandson (who was also named John Calhoun) to manage the Yazoo County plantation he bought in the middle of the war. His actions continued to make him unpopular, although DuBose and other boosters painted them as modern and progressive. Calhoun, for example, "attracted wide attention and created no adverse comments" for the "advanced" agricultural techniques he applied at the plantation. Powell also hired recruiting agents to convince black laborers to migrate from Alabama and South Carolina to Mississippi, where Calhoun would give them jobs. Although these practices

⁵⁵ *Confederate Veteran*, 13, No. 1 (Jan 1905), 158; Sarah Sasnett to Bolling Hall, Jr., June 21, 1866 and circa 1868; W.A. Crenshaw to Major Bolling Hall, February 2, 1869; Frank Gilmer to Bolling Hall, January 12, 1871; September 29, 1874; LRP39, Subgroup XII, Series A, Box 5, Folder 12, Bolling Hall Family Papers, ADAH; Sarah Stephens, "A rare glimpse at Ellerslie: Where Millbrook's history began in 1818," *Elmore & Autauga News*, May 2, 2016.

were common during the period, they frequently incurred the wrath of white Southerners who had once depended on the enslaved for their livelihoods. Their lack of control over the men and women they had once owned—who were now free to move and negotiate for the terms of their labor—frustrated and angered many. Before the crop lien system fully developed in Alabama (as in the rest of the South), Black Codes and vagrancy laws attempted to thwart African Americans’ ability to work and live where they pleased. The Ku Klux Klan and other vigilante groups pursued would-be migrants, punished those they caught, and returned them to plantations. White planters even appealed to state legislators, who imposed a state tax on recruiters in 1879 to reduce flight.⁵⁶

Hall and Powell faced significantly different financial hardships than those of other white Alabamians, including Marx and Simon. Similar to other small businessmen, the Jewish merchants may have possessed some political and financial connections that would become useful in the future, but their networks were not as substantial as those of white commercial elites. As a result, their resources were limited, which made it more difficult for them to rebuild in the South’s cash-poor, damaged economy. In January 1872, Samuel Marx finally began to succumb to his commercial pressures. The *Montgomery Advertiser* announced his stock of fish, liquor, sugar, tobacco, and clothing would be auctioned to settle his debts. At the end of the month, the “Messrs. Bradley” used his Court Street location to organize a large sale of silver watches, selling them each for a dollar and causing a “rush” that was the “center of attraction” for the week. Marx’s arrangement with the Bradleys was not recorded, but whether he rented the

⁵⁶ DuBose, *Jefferson County*, 167; Harold D. Woodman, “The Political Economy of the New South,” in *Origins of the New South Fifty Years Later: The Continuing Influence of a Historical Classic*, John B. Boles, Bethany L. Johnson, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 248-251; Dan Carter, *When the War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1867* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Univ Press, 1985), 17.

store to them or received a cut from their profits would soon prove irrelevant. Approximately two weeks after the sale, a notice of his bankruptcy appeared in the *Advertiser*, and a collective meeting of Marx's creditors was organized for mid-March. Even though he opened a store with Morris in 1873, Marx & Son's building and inventory were destroyed in the fire Thomas Durden and John Belser discovered on May 6. Two months later, the mortgage he and his wife Henrietta obtained in 1870 was confiscated and sold to the highest bidder at another auction. The credit issues he accumulated as a result of these events hounded Samuel Marx until 1878, only eight years before he died at the age of 64.⁵⁷

Samuel Marx shared his postwar economic hardship, like his Civil War experiences, with a wide range of Southerners, including many of Birmingham's first settlers. Unsurprisingly, a hope for economic recovery strongly motivated people of various backgrounds to migrate. The development of railroads, natural resources, and farms drew black and white laborers to Central Alabama between 1870 and 1874, although they routinely found work more oppressive than labor recruiters promised. Ellen Hawkins, a white Protestant, stated that her father was in the process of migrating from Texas to Atlanta when he heard about "a city of great expectations" and decided to "make a detour." Minnie Lane's father transferred his law practice to Birmingham in 1873, sometime between the time Simon and Marx made their way to the city. She stated the town offered "fresher fields" for those "who were trying to recuperate from the consequences and devastations of the Civil War," so it seemed to be the perfect place to "start anew."⁵⁸

Simon and Marx were drawn first to Elyton, the village that was initially identified as the

⁵⁷ *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 6, 1872, 3; January 30, 1872; February 15, 1872; February 25, 1872; May 6, 1873; January 23, 1878; February 4, 1886.

⁵⁸ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 7; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 5; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 1-2, 35.

epicenter of the state's mineral district. In 1911, a writer for the *Reform Advocate* attributed Marx's move to "distant but audible rumors of a great metropolis," which could have easily been true. Elyton was depicted as Alabama's "up and coming" postwar savior nearly a year before Powell and his ELC colleagues began to plan their central Alabama city. Reporters highlighted the little village in Selma and Montgomery, employing the same language Birmingham's promotional material would feature in 1871 and 1872. Their articles claimed tracklaying on the South & North Alabama (S&N) was "rapidly progressing" toward Montgomery and Elyton, buttressing sleepy towns like Calera, which were predicted to soon flourish as mediation points along the railroad's line. They also portrayed J.C. Stanton and other northern speculators as important developers even though the same men would be depicted as cunning carpetbaggers the following year. In 1870, however, Stanton's Alabama & Chattanooga Railroad was being "well and rapidly built" toward Elyton and would "develop one of the best sections of [the] state." It would provide connections to New Orleans and Cincinnati, expanding markets and easing travel. Regardless of their meager finances or economic challenges, Alabama citizens and legislators became confident in the advantages that railroads could provide and invested in additional projects. Several were associated with Elyton, including the Grand Trunk Railroad (also known as the Mobile & Elyton), the Corinth & Elyton, and the Elyton & Aberdeen. In June, two hundred men were predicted to "soon be at work" for the S&N, which was under construction between Elyton and Brock's Gap.⁵⁹

Jefferson County's boosterism was extended through the work of R.H. Henley, a young Protestant lawyer who worked as an editor in the up-and-coming village. Although he soon

⁵⁹ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 29; *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 7, 1870; January 11, 1870; *Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), January 11, 1870; *Aberdeen Beacon* (Greensboro, Alabama), January 15, 1870; *Weekly Huntsville Advocate*, January 21, 1870; *Times-Argus* (Selma, Alabama), March 17, 1870; June 2, 1870.

became a respected member of Birmingham's business circles, Henley first moved to Elyton, like Simon and Marx. He started a newspaper with an "old printer" named Charlie Cantley. The paper was different from others in the area because Henley's professional connections extended its reach. His stories about the mineral district and Elyton's politics, epidemics, and commercial news were widely reprinted in South Alabama papers, informing the public not only of the town's possibilities but also of its dynamics and character. On April 7, 1870, Selma's *Times-Argus*, for example, reprinted Henley's story about the Agricultural Association of Central Alabama's preparations for their next fair, which would take place near Elyton. Henley recalled his visit to the grounds, enticing visitors to his town with elaborate descriptions of the fair's fountains, lakes, "trotting track," and amphitheater. To ensure they came, he added a statement about the three-story exhibition building that would be packed with "a great quantity of articles of every kind." If that did not suit them, the observatory on its roof might entertain them.⁶⁰

Articles like R.H. Henley's seemed to suggest that Elyton offered something for everyone, whether they were laborers, farmers, or merchants who wanted to expand their customer base, and when Herman Simon and Samuel Marx arrived in the little village, it seemed much more promising than Powell's new town. In the first few years of its existence, Birmingham lacked completed rail lines and comfortable housing and had a reputation for being dangerous and politically unstable. Powell was committed to his progressive vision of the South's future, however, and like many of the Jewish settlers who moved to his corporation's Magic City, he drew from his prior experiences to ensure his own success and improve local conditions. Moreover, Powell continued to cultivate both the industrialism that he and his

⁶⁰ *Times-Argus* (Selma, Alabama), February 10, 1870; February 17, 1870; March 17, 1870; March 31, 1870; April 7, 1870.

colleagues used to supplement their incomes and the manipulative business practices he had learned in antebellum and postwar Montgomery. As a result of his efforts, Birmingham grew rapidly and encouraged the settlement of like-minded individuals. It soon overshadowed Elyton, which lost its status as county seat and most of its population to Powell's machinations.

By 1874, Simon and Marx had joined the hundreds of people who had moved to Powell's city to recover from the hardship they had experienced as a result of the Civil War. Like other Jewish tradesmen who migrated to and within the American South, they connected to their non-Jewish neighbors through their shared experiences of hardship and the social and economic knowledge they had gained in Montgomery and Selma. Through their daily interactions with their customers and colleagues in the state's capital city, Simon and Marx had also become very familiar with Southern culture and the racial, social, and gender codes that served as the foundation for Birmingham's labor and class hierarchies. They internalized many of these regional values and strongly supported the Confederacy during the Civil War, which in turn usually helped them be identified as white and thus avoid much of the dangers of occupying an ambiguous position on the color line or standing out as too foreign in rural towns and villages. They and other Jewish merchants carefully balanced their religious identities with their professional personas. As Jewish families settled into the local community, they also incorporated their own values and ambitions into the commercial ideals that boosters had used to draw them there.

2. EARLY BIRMINGHAM: OPPORTUNITIES IN LIQUOR, AND COMMERCE, 1871-1890

“When Birmingham was a mere village, only here and there a few pretentious buildings being in a semi-chaotic condition of construction, Israelites, attracted by its promising advantages, located there. These few pioneers were as enthusiastic and as painstaking as their other fellow-citizens and their zeal and belief in the future of Birmingham has met with the reward of duty well done.”

The Jewish Ledger, May 18, 1900

On May 27, 1875, Herman Simon “broke dirt” on the lot he had just purchased on Twentieth Street. The Jewish merchant planned to build a new variety store, which would be finished within three months and sit next to the corner developed by John Webb. Despite the national depression, the site looked promising. Webb, a well-known Protestant businessman and one of Birmingham’s first aldermen, had anticipated the growth of the city when it was little more than a swamp. In July 1871, when both men still lived in Elyton, he had constructed the three-story building that stood next to Simon’s carefully chosen lot. By the time they became Birmingham neighbors, “Webb’s Corner” was a downtown landmark that was used to identify the location of other businesses. Webb’s son Alex managed the Dude Saloon, a popular bar on the structure’s ground floor, and white merchants and laborers rented rooms and shops on its second and third levels. Simon’s new brick shop would increase his customer base and provide room to house his growing inventory. Its elaborate iron-gated front also served as a visible reminder of the Jewish merchants’ support for local products and craftsmanship, as well as his increasing finances and status. Before construction was even finished, the *Birmingham Iron Age* predicted the two-story edifice would be an “ornament” to the booming “business thoroughfare”

in which it was located.⁶¹

Although the lot on Twentieth Street was a practical investment, Herman Simon's ability to purchase it marked an important shift in his life. He and his family no longer drifted from place to place in search of an adequate livelihood, and although memories of the Civil War were hardly distant, the sting of its deprivations and the Panic of 1873 were beginning to fade. Simon's prospects looked better than they had for a decade. James R. Powell, the Elyton Land Company's president, remained an important businessman in the city, but he no longer controlled the city's government, much to the relief of residents who considered the "Duke of Birmingham" untrustworthy or violent. Since the ELC's stock continued to suffer from the beating it took during the recent financial crisis, real estate prices remained low, enabling some residents to buy property. Similar to John Webb and other Protestant developers, Simon was a clever businessman who saw beyond the town's rough environment to capitalize on the opportunities set before him. When times were difficult, he supplemented his income with whatever he could, which caused his business to grow. He gradually added alcohol, tobacco, and "fancy groceries" to the sweets and cigars he sold in 1874, and by April 1875 he was carrying enough to serve as a wholesaler so that "country merchants" could "replenish their stocks without going abroad." When he outgrew the confectionary that he ran beside Powell's hotel that spring, he decided to build the store on Second Avenue, where he added a bakery to the services

⁶¹ The reporter's notation of the iron gate and the use of the term "ornament" is significant. Iron was one of the natural resources that was sourced locally and used to promote the city's potential for wealth and industrial manufacturing. Early boosters, including Elyton Land Company president James R. Powell, also routinely bragged about the two- and three-story brick buildings that were popping up downtown and later, the "strikingly handsome" residences that commercial leaders constructed. (For examples, see *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 8, 1871; October 6, 1872; May 23, 1873; *First and Second Annual Reports*, 4-5.) The lot and design Simon chose for his new store indicate he understood the financial potential of the property and the importance of showcasing and promoting local goods, which is highlighted through the journalist's word choice. His store was so well built that another *Iron Age* reporter labeled it "one of the handsomest storehouses in the city." *Birmingham Iron Age*, May 27, 1875; August 17, 1875; February 24, 1876; John Witherspoon DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 57.

he provided. The construction project was one of many local endeavors that contributed to the Simon family's positive reputation and affluence.⁶²

Because he was a successful Jewish entrepreneur, Simon could have been the victim of antisemitic jealousy or discrimination, especially in “bad Birmingham,” which had a reputation for drunkenness, crime, and brutality during the 1870s and 1880s that countered the ELC's self-aggrandizing boosterism and promotional material. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that he was. Rather than being resented for their success, Herman and his wife Paula were popular among their non-Jewish customers and neighbors, and like acculturated American Jews in other growing cities, they encouraged acceptance, tolerance, and respect through their daily interactions. They and the three Jewish families that followed them—the Marxes, Hochstadters, and Wises—drew from their prior experiences with regional culture and commerce to bond with their fellow settlers and build new professional networks. Similar to other domestic and transatlantic migrants, they also connected their behavior to what was happening around them. For the first-wave of Birmingham Jews, this included joining John Webb and other Protestant business leaders in devoting their time, energy, and money to Birmingham when violence, housing shortages, and disease drove others away. The extreme nature of their early challenges is often dismissed or downplayed in twentieth-century chronicles of their lives. Many local historians and journalists also give Isaac Hochstadter and other male business leaders more attention than women like Sophia Wise and non-practicing Jews, but a diverse group of these settlers played important roles in Birmingham's economy. They created public personas that utilized the town's self-aggrandizing civic image and marketing ideals to rise in the local economy and present themselves as dedicated residents and entrepreneurs. Their pathways to

⁶² *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 12, 1874; April 8, 1875; May 27, 1875; August 17, 1875; September 13, 1876; H.M. Caldwell, *History of the Elyton Land Company*, 10-12.

son Morris and brother-in-law Charles Neumann migrated from Montgomery during the same period. When they had proven the city could sustain the growing Marx family, Samuel and Henrietta followed with four of their children in 1874.⁶³ The oldest, Rosalie was seven, and the youngest, Jennie, was two. Henrietta was already carrying their daughter Bertha, who was later honored for being the first Jewish child born in the city. Her brother Hugo, who followed her four months after Simon built his store in 1875, was the second. Although they possessed slightly different backgrounds, this first-wave of Jewish migrants were acculturated first- or second-generation immigrants from German-speaking nations. They relocated from various parts of the United States but were familiar with Southern culture because they had once made their livings as antebellum merchants in states like Alabama, Virginia, and Mississippi.⁶⁴

When these families settled in the city, however, the challenges they faced were monumental. Similar to the non-Jewish settlers that came to the town between 1871 and 1875, the Jewish “pioneers”—as they were dubbed in the 1900 *Jewish Ledger*—confronted substandard conditions that arose from the Elyton Land Company’s inexperience with city-building. Despite James R. Powell’s passion for his corporation’s new project, the ELC president

⁶³ Both the Marx and Hochstadter families exhibited patterns of chain migration common among nineteenth-century American Jewish domestic and transatlantic migrants. Common practices included sending young bachelors to new or underdeveloped territories to work with relatives or build businesses that would provide them and/or their families with an economic base. When they possessed enough resources to support or offer jobs to their Jewish friends or relatives, they would send for additional relatives, often paying for expenses related to migration. Those who traveled alone or were the first in a long line of migrants frequently stayed with relatives or Jews they had formerly known in European towns and villages. Such patterns would remain common among all three waves of Birmingham’s Jewish settlers as well as among the city’s European immigrants, including those who found work in its industrial facilities. For more information, see Hasia Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 54-56; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 115.

⁶⁴ 1870 United States Census, Montgomery, Montgomery County, Alabama; 1870 United States Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1880 United States Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 5; *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 12, 1874; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900; *Birmingham News*, April 14, 1958; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 554.

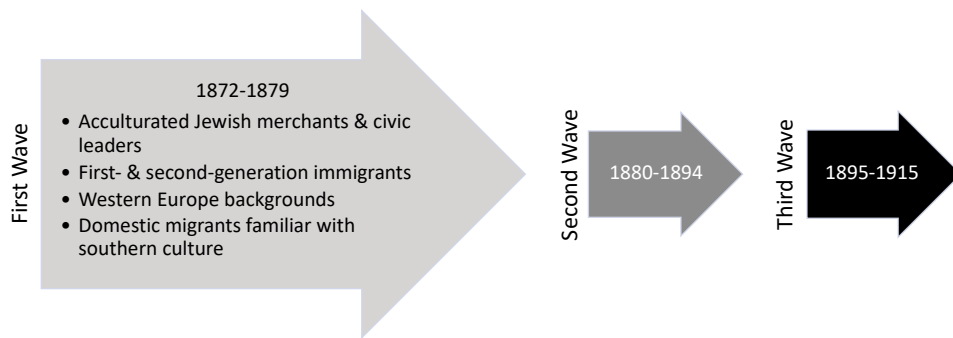


Figure 5: Timeline and Characteristics of First-Wave Jewish Migrants

was much better at marketing Birmingham and negotiating his own political and financial power than he was at actually constructing or governing the city. Early residents found it difficult to access basic necessities, including clean streets and an adequate water supply, let alone the commercial and industrial benefits that were glorified in the city’s promotional materials.

Although the troubles Jewish settlers confronted in the 1870s are occasionally referenced in the *Ledger* and other Jewish histories, the physical hurdles the Simons, Marxes, and Hochstadters overcame to succeed tend to receive much less—if any—space than tales of their commercial acumen or the city’s railroad networks, opportunities, or fabulous residences and buildings.⁶⁵

Despite the beneficence credited to Birmingham’s Protestant founders in its boosters’ histories, Powell and his colleagues were little motivated by their desire to provide Alabama and its people with a means to recover from the devastations of the Civil War, as they and their

⁶⁵ In the *Jewish Ledger* (1900), these struggles are only referenced in the excerpt that opens this chapter, which portrays them as part of “the semi-chaotic condition of construction.” The *Ledger* contains a whole page of statistics that praise Birmingham’s opportunities for manufacturing, commercialism, and production as well as an article about the importance of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. In the city’s edition of the *Reform Advocate* (1911), they are neither mentioned in the biographies of Isaac Hochstadter or Samuel Marx nor in Morris Newfield’s congregational history. In Benjamin Gross’s history of “The Pioneer Jews of Birmingham,” which also appears in the *Advocate*, the conditions are collectively described as “the first struggling years” but are not mentioned in detail. *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 1-2, 9; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 7, 29.

biographers later claimed.⁶⁶ The town was created in the early 1870s, in the middle of a national speculation craze that enabled railroad managers and investment brokers to capitalize on the substantial profits that could be gotten from postwar rebuilding incentives offered by the state and federal government. The Elyton Land Company was composed of men who had been diversifying their income for decades, including Powell and planter Bolling Hall. Since the war severely damaged their ability to utilize their agricultural holdings, they used their industrial investments to wait out the recovery of cotton, grain, and corn markets and create new sources of income. Among the other eight stockholders were Josiah Morris, a Montgomery banker, and Sam Tate and Campbell Morris, who built railroads in Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia. Like northern financiers Jay Gould and Jay Cooke, the men possessed connections to financial and political “friends” that worked to their advantage until overspeculation caused Wall Street to crash in 1873. Many of them supported a vision of the South that supplemented its agricultural economy with industrialism and manufacturing, but their desire for economic advancement was much more motivating than any love that they possessed for the state or even their new city’s population.⁶⁷

One of the first challenges that Powell faced was related to the transportation networks that he and his colleagues anticipated when they made the decision to create Birmingham. In

⁶⁶ The earliest claims about the ELC stockholders’ honorable intentions, enterprise, and foresight are outright stated in articles written by James Powell and his contacts at the *Montgomery Advertiser* in the 1870s. They are extended in New South advocate John Witherspoon DuBose’s biographies of Powell and his ELC successor, Henry Caldwell, in *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama* (1887). While Ethel Armes’ *The Story of Coal and Iron* (1910) and George Cruikshank’s *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs* do not explicitly repeat the tropes, the language and tone both local historians use imply a similar attitude about the Elyton Land Company’s motivations. For just a few examples, see *First and Second Annual Reports of President and Secretary and Treasurer to the Stockholders of the Elyton Land Company*, (Birmingham: Frank A. Dural & Co., 1878), 12, Closed Stack Pamphlet Collection, Box 77, Item 23, ADAH; *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 6, 1872; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 168-169, 171-172.

⁶⁷ Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 27-31, 37, 61-67; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 8-15; Michael Brem Bonner, *Confederate Political Economy: Creating and Managing a Southern Corporatist Nation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 2-4; Richard White, *The Republic for Which it Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 244-246.

June 1871, Powell's advertisements praised Jefferson County's railroads, particularly focusing on the South & North Alabama (S&N), the Alabama & Chattanooga (A&C), the Mobile & Grand Trunk, and the Savannah & Memphis. By November, however, he was forced to admit that no regular trains were passing through the city. Like any good promoter, Powell shifted his stance to predict that they soon would be, focusing on lines that had already been completed or begun. He even suggested that Birmingham would soon possess freight, travel, and marketing advantages far superior to those of Atlanta or Meridian, two Southern commercial hubs. Powell was not wrong—railroads would indeed play a key role in the city's development, but construction did not look promising when he made these claims. Both the S&N and the A&C experienced severe financial difficulties during the early 1870s, so the tracks and rolling stock that the ELC's stockholders expected when they bought their land initially failed to materialize. During Birmingham's first two years, traveling to the city meant a two-mile walk after disembarking on lines that stopped in Elyton. Long delays were common because trains ran sporadically or not at all. Goods were also difficult to obtain and ship, which may have been why Herman Simon and Samuel Marx initially chose Elyton as their new home. Between 1871 and 1872, Powell even had to convince Montgomery's Figh & Brothers to make bricks on the ELC's property just so Birmingham's construction workers would have access to the materials they needed.⁶⁸

The disappointments he faced did not deter Powell from his marketing campaign, which continued to feature glowing reports of the city and its amenities. To ensure that positive publicity would continue, he invited several Montgomery newspapermen to tour the city in October 1872. The flattering article they produced described residences as “strikingly handsome”

⁶⁸ *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 11, 1871; Nov 8, 1871; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 167; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 226-227; *First and Second Annual Reports*, 3-4.

and highlighted the city's "air of thrift and prosperity," painting the rough frontier town as a budding metropolis. The editors' work actually bears a striking resemblance to Powell's first stockholder's report, which had been released in January. That document stated the city already had over a hundred residences, a newspaper and printing office, a livery stable, a planing mill, and several boarding houses, bakeries, stores, and restaurants. According to Powell, local and foreign corporations were already beginning to invest in iron manufacturing, and construction was planned for another planing mill, a grain mill, two "good" grist mills, a "woolen factory of three hundred spindles," a machine shop, and a railroad car factory that would "employ two hundred fifty operatives."⁶⁹

When Jewish and non-Jewish settlers began arriving, they encountered a very different version of the city. Early resident Ella Hawkins stated that in September 1871 there was "no shelter for love or money" because the city only possessed four dwellings: a saloon, a grocer, the Alabama & Chattanooga toolhouse, and "Mrs. Watkins' residence," likely a boarding house. Historian Ethel Armes recorded two toolhouses and a blacksmith shop but little else. Most residents camped in tents until their houses were built, but the Hawkins family decided to occupy their home as it was being constructed, moving from one side to the other as it was "ceiled." Powell initially lived in one of the railroad houses, choosing it over the rough accommodations he had previously encountered. At the end of 1871, he asked his fellow stockholders to fund the building of a modest hotel. They agreed to assess their stock at five percent to build the Relay House, a thirty-five-room structure with "modern" amenities like gas fixtures and a brick oven. According to Powell, however, the building "was not half enough to supply the constantly

⁶⁹ *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 6, 1872; *First and Second Annual Reports*, 4-9, 13-16.

increasing demand of the public.”⁷⁰

The effectiveness of Powell’s promotional material, however exaggerated, created additional challenges for the ELC president. Early residents recalled not only housing shortages, but also Birmingham’s filth. Lucy Miles arrived about the same time as the Simon family in 1872, *after* Powell glowingly reported the town’s fabulous progress to his fellow stockholders. Both she and Ellen Watts, the daughter of a local banker, mentioned the city’s swampy soil in their memoirs, which Henry Milner, the son of railroad engineer and coal magnate John Milner, recalled as well. Mud had a tendency to accumulate on the streets, which inspired Miles to call it “a crude little village, sitting in a mud hole.” Ella Hawkins stated that the same mud pond provided “great sport” for the city’s young people. Residents also lost shoes in the muck and joked that if the city had been christened “Muddtown” after ELC stockholder William Mudd, its name would have been much more appropriate. In 1872, Powell told his colleagues that “unless the water was carried off by suitable ditches and drains,” it would continue to be “very difficult to go from one part of the city to another.” The population agreed—locals recalled they had trouble avoiding the “mire and pitfalls” as they walked in the evening. Until Birmingham’s first gaslights were installed in 1878, they had to place kerosene lamps on posts to avoid injuring themselves.⁷¹

Powell spent thousands of dollars on street grading, but problems continued and began to severely affect residents’ health. Since the city’s first Jewish settlers did not report their specific dates of arrival, members of the Marx and Hochstadter families may have arrived after these conditions improved. The Simons, however, would have been among the residents who dealt

⁷⁰ *Early Days in Birmingham*, 1-2; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 226-227; *First and Second Annual Reports*, 10.

⁷¹ *Early Days in Birmingham*, 3; 27, 75, 91; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 226-227; *First and Second Annual Reports*, 8.

with the consequences of Powell's actions. The ELC president certainly did not cause a cholera epidemic in 1873, but his inability to recognize an immediate need for clean water contributed to its spread. Estimating costs at \$41,742, he finally obtained a loan to build a waterworks from banker Charles Linn in late October 1872. By then, his promotional material was working. Herman Simon and his family were part of the growing population in 1872, which local historian Ethel Armes estimated at "twenty-five hundred souls." Armes also noted that those souls had "no water supply, sewage, or drainage system of any kind." Asking for grace rather than permission from his fellow stockholders, Powell began constructing a water facility early the following year, but the waterworks could not be completed until 1875 and even then were too small for the population. Ellen Watts remembered "water was a rare commodity," and she and residents like Herman Simon had two options for water, neither of which were clean. They could get it from the two small wells the ELC provided between Twentieth and Twenty-Fifth Street or the fly-infested supply local vendors collected from Avondale Springs, three miles from the city center.⁷²

By the time Samuel Marx arrived in 1874, the early city had a reputation not only for disease, but also for crime, drunkenness, and prostitution. Local madam Louise Wooster arrived from Montgomery a few months before the 1873 cholera outbreak. She remembered volunteering to nurse its victims with several of her colleagues in the brothels that were transformed into sick houses. Unfortunately, many of the men who composed her clientele were fighters as well as lovers, so violence was a common way of settling disputes. A man was shot and killed the day Ella Hawkins moved into her family's unfinished house. Journalists reported so much crime and vice, they nicknamed the city "Bad Birmingham" and stated only "the

⁷² *First and Second Annual Reports*, 19; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 254; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 2-3, 25.

constant wielding of the heaviest 'arm of the law'" could render it "barely habitable." Powell had enough clout among local investors and entrepreneurs to win election as mayor in 1873, but he had a dangerous reputation himself. In May 1875, he attacked editor Lawrence Mathews with a cane on a public street for criticizing his political decisions. Some of Powell's supporters stated that Mathews only reported the cudgeling because he "crave[d] notoriety," but during the resulting court case Powell pled guilty to the charges "in an irrelevant and abusive harangue" and continued to "abuse" Mathews with "opprobrious epithets." In 1883, Powell lost his life over another violent dispute with laborer Charles Robinson, the brother of a man he had killed in "self-defense" two years before. When Powell was shot, he was in the process of raising a chair to strike Robinson, with whom he was arguing.⁷³

While booster John Witherspoon DuBose tended to downplay James R. Powell's disagreeable nature to praise the speculator's accomplishments, journalist Ethel Armes not only acknowledged Powell's penchant for violence, but begrudgingly admired it. In *The Story of Coal and Iron*, the local history she wrote in 1910, Armes quoted Kevin St. Michael Cunningham, a man who had once known the ELC president and former mayor, who stated that Powell was "argumentative and dictatorial" and would "break everything his way," fighting a "legion of devils" in the process. Unable to deny that Birmingham experienced substantial growing pains in the 1870s, Armes recognized that early residents were frequently left without a safe, clean environment in which to conduct business. Similar to advocates of the ELC in the 1880s and 1890s, however, she overlooked Powell's "autocratic ruling" to suggest that if not for his dedication to the town's construction and rather elevated promotional image, Birmingham would

⁷³ *Early Days in Birmingham*, 2, 31, 53-54; Louise C. Wooster, *The Autobiography of a Magdalene* (Birmingham: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1911), 102; *Our Mountain Home* (Talladega, Alabama), September 15, 1875; *Birmingham Iron Age*, May 20, 1875; September 9, 1875; December 13, 1883; December 20, 1883.

not exist. According to Armes, he was the one who “kept on writing stories about Birmingham, that more than anything else, sold the Elyton Land Company’s lots.” Like Herman Simon and Isaac Hochstadter, the Jewish merchants who bought the properties, Powell possessed the mettle to confront daunting tasks that defeated others, building a legendary reputation as he did so. His violence is exemplary, however, of that which was common in the city and did not always live up to the progressive exceptionalism that Powell projected both in Birmingham’s nineteenth-century promotional image or the histories that continued to employ the same tropes between 1887 and 1911. Despite the exaggerated nature of the town’s marketing campaign, the first wave of Jewish settlers, like other professionals who found economic niches in its downtown district, would come to use, enhance, and support its boosters’ exaggerated narratives and find opportunities in the needs and desires of the rapidly growing population.⁷⁴

The Commercial Success of the First Jewish Families

In his first ELC stockholders’ report, James R. Powell stated that “Birmingham [had grown] from a barren waste to the proportions of a city” in a few short months. Although he acknowledged the city’s drainage problems, housing shortages, or transportation delays in 1872, Powell downplayed its issues and exaggerated its living and economic conditions, a deflective strategy he repeated in his newspaper advertisements. Ever the pragmatic reporter, Ethel Armes minced few words when she described what “young Birmingham” was really like in the 1870s. In addition to noting settlers and investors’ aggressive ambition and commitment to improvement, the young writer labeled the city a “bold, mean little town” and quoted residents

⁷⁴ Armes was a well-known local journalist who had worked for newspapers like the *Chicago Courier* and *Washington Post*. After she moved to Alabama in 1905, she became a staff writer for Birmingham’s *Age Herald and News* and was hired by its Chamber of Commerce and the Alabama Coal Operators’ Association to report on the history, resources, and challenges sparked by Jefferson County’s mineral belt and the state’s coal fields. John William Leonard, ed., *Women’s Who’s Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada, 1914-1915* (New York: The American Commonwealth Company, 1914), 54-55; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 223, 233, 254.

who claimed “a man had to drink a full quart of whiskey before he could see what Powell said was there.” Members of the Simon, Marx, and Hochstadter families were among those who served the rowdy crowd that initially populated the city’s saloons and shops. When the Jewish pioneers arrived in the city, Powell’s claims that it would soon become “the future industrial center of the South” seemed far-fetched, but they—like other determined entrepreneurs—still chose to embrace his vision. They manipulated rather than fought Birmingham’s frontier atmosphere and attempted to understand both its markets and boosteristic ideals. Their networks and business practices meshed well with those of their Protestant counterparts, earning the respect of the white civic elite who founded and controlled the city, which in turn tempered antisemitism. Within a decade, the Jewish merchants not only achieved many of their economic goals, but they were also accepted among their non-Jewish peers as important commercial leaders and professionals.⁷⁵

When Herman Simon moved to the city in 1872, it resembled popular ideas of the Wild West more than the New South, where poker games, cockfights, and bars were as common as downtown brawls and shootouts. Simon’s decision to open a confectionery may seem odd for such a rough environment, but he found a way to benefit from the elevated image of progress and refinement Powell relentlessly projected in the newspapers. In the 1870s, international production had reduced the cost of sugar, and cakes and candy became much easier to produce than they had been twenty years earlier. The ELC’s advertisements regularly promised settlers and investors they could find modern goods in the city, and confectioneries were popular. Many of Simon’s goods were inexpensive and those that weren’t carried a sense of luxury and power. His items fit well into Birmingham’s promotional image, and to ensure he could serve local

⁷⁵ *First and Second Annual Reports*, 4-5, 8-9, 12; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 234.

needs when they did not, he added cigars to his inventory. In 1875, he continued to increase his customer base by becoming a wholesaler and selling fresh bread out of his new shop on Twentieth Street. Simon also carried liquor for the saloon crowd, and when the liquor he obtained from his New Jersey suppliers ran low, he made his own.⁷⁶

In the early twentieth century, Samuel Marx was credited for his family's wealth and prowess, but their success in the new city was a collective effort. Although both the *Reform Advocate* (1911) and *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs* (1920) minimize the roles of Samuel's son and brother-in-law, the men were more than twenty years younger than Marx and arrived before him and Henrietta. In February 1874, Neumann operated a shop across the street from Simon's first confectionery, and Morris Marx ran one on Second Avenue, close to the store of the city's third Jewish storekeeper, Charles Hochstadter. The careers Morris and Neumann began, like those of Simon and Hochstadter's son Isaac, were a visible presence in Birmingham's business district. The dry goods stores that they operated in the early 1870s played an important role in the city's early development and served as the predecessors of the massive department stores Jews ran at the turn of the century.⁷⁷

Like Herman Simon, the Marx and Hochstadter families chose occupations derived from their experiences as Jewish merchants, but they were also closely linked to local consumers' desires and Powell's promotional material. They used their connections to northern Jewish wholesalers and manufacturers to access trustworthy credit sources and fill their shelves with the latest goods, which they frequently bought in bulk and sold at discount prices. The products and

⁷⁶ *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 12, 1874; April 8, 1875, September 20, 1876; May 29, 1878; Wendy A. Woloson, *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 9-12, 14; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 234.

⁷⁷ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 29, *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 12, 1874, May 14, 1874; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 229

bargains they offered varied, so they could cater to the needs of a wide range of people, from the town's elites to its marginalized classes. Like many American Jews, they probably offered credit terms to laborers or farmers, allowing their customers to settle their debts gradually or seasonally when times were hard. The economic networks that allowed them to do so were highly valued in the eyes of the ELC's founders because they stimulated trade and consumption. Powell encouraged similar links in Birmingham's iron and manufacturing industries, for example, and used his advertisements and stock reports to boast about "the large investments" of men from Philadelphia, Ohio, New York, and St. Louis, even before they were fully realized.⁷⁸

Herman Simon's rapid rise in the city was connected to his business practices, which were likely perfected elsewhere but well-suited to Birmingham's fledgling commercial economy. He adjusted to financial challenges by regularly diversifying his income, promoting his business ventures in the newspapers, and investing in what he thought consumers needed or demanded. Samuel Marx did not initially fare as well in the city's depressed conditions, but after pooling his resources with his son and his brother-in-law Charles Neumann, he and his family began to flourish. Marx & Son consolidated its inventory with Neumann's in September 1874, shortly after Samuel and Henrietta moved to the city with their children. The decision was a wise one. Although Neumann's store specialized in clothing, his energy and enthusiasm had made him a bit more successful in Birmingham than Morris and Samuel. Once a simple clerk in Marx's Montgomery store, Neumann became the public face of the family's commercial endeavors until Samuel's son Ferd came of age in 1890.

A more prolific advertiser than any of his in-laws, Neumann routinely told the public the

⁷⁸ *First and Second Annual Reports*, 5, 17-18; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 8, 1871; Diner, *Roads Taken*, 6-8; William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 5-8; Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 98-101.

store was packed with bargains and chic products that only *he* could get from special dealers in the North. The family's store carried custom shoes, gloves, corsets, and dress patterns and was listed under Neumann's name from 1874 to 1890. His marketing material described the products as "stylish" and colorful. Their stock was "the most complete...to be found in this section [of the country]" and featured popular brands, including "pure Dickens' mohair," Irish linens, and Kid Newport Ties. Like Simon and other downtown merchants, the extended Marx family was soon able to realize a profit even though other Southern businesses were still reeling from the Panic of 1873. Although the family stayed on Twentieth Street, they moved to larger quarters in the National Bank Building across the street on May 18, 1876, and rented "two capacious storerooms" on the corner that the road shared with First Avenue three years later.⁷⁹

While Neumann was serving the family's economic interests, Morris cultivated local respect through civic activism. He and other Jewish men—including his father, and Isaac Hochstadter—belonged to the Knights of Pythias, a popular fraternal order and mutual aid association. Morris was well known and respected among its members and other middle-class residents. Between 1874 and 1879, the young bachelor continued to operate the family's store with Neumann and his father, but he was also mentioned in the city's social pages and elected the Pythians' presiding officer. Although he never joined Hochstadter in the city's government, he was involved in early politics and signed petitions calling for Democratic conventions and the nomination of James B. Luckie, the Protestant physician the city sent to the state legislature. In 1878, he and Hochstadter were two of the five men who represented their fraternity at its state meeting in Montgomery, and a year later, they accompanied ELC stockholder William Mudd

⁷⁹ *Birmingham Iron Age*, September 17, 1874; June 8, 1876; May 18, 1876; April 3, 1878; August 20, 1879.

and two other non-Jewish Pythians to Gadsden help form a lodge in that city.⁸⁰

The man who accompanied Morris Marx on these journeys, Isaac Hochstadter, was close to his age and belonged to the only other Jewish family in the city between 1872 and 1878. But because he was such a prominent figure in both Birmingham and its Jewish community, Hochstadter's place in local history overshadows that of almost any other early Jewish settler, including his parents. Although Isaac was raised in Philadelphia, he has been born in Fayette, Mississippi, where Charles and Rosa Hochstadter originally settled after emigrating from Württemberg (a territorial kingdom in what is now Germany). In 1869, a year after completing his high school, Isaac moved to Okolona, Mississippi, to establish a store with Emanuel Rubel, a maternal uncle who eventually followed the family to Birmingham. The short time he spent in Mississippi provided Hochstadter with the opportunity to learn the South's norms and markets, but he may not have needed such a transition. Jewish migrants Ben Jacobs and Morris Wolf arrived directly from northern states during the 1880s, and since their commercial practices and ethnic connections were complimentary to those that already existed in the city, they had little trouble adjusting.⁸¹

Unlike his father, Isaac Hochstadter was an ambitious young man who possessed substantial leadership and political goals, which influenced his activities during the 1870s. He was reputed to be bright and amenable, dedicated to Birmingham, and active in the town's economic and social circles. His extensive career began with his father's store, which he operated alone after Charles died in 1876. Since Charles had been hard hit by the national depression, Isaac's mother Rosa was left with substantial debt, which led to the confiscation of

⁸⁰ *Birmingham Iron Age*, July 4, 1874, November 7, 1877; May 22, 1878; October 30, 1878, February 13, 1879, February 19, 1879, July 7, 1879.

⁸¹ *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 6-8; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 7; 1870 United States Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; DuBose, *Jefferson County, and Birmingham, Alabama*, 554.

her property. Rosa and his brother Henry moved in with Isaac, and since his brothers Alfred and Joe were interested in other business, he established himself as the leader of the family's store on First Avenue, which local booster John Witherspoon DuBose stated that he ran until 1880.⁸²

Hochstadter's early advertisements supported his reputation as an "active business factor" in Birmingham. They were similar to those of Charles Neuman and frequently mentioned Isaac's trips to suppliers in Philadelphia. He promoted his business as a "New York Store" and featured a wide-range of products, including most of the goods Neumann mentioned, and those tailored for Birmingham's fast-paced, transient population, such as hats, caps, "fine trunks," valises, and traveling bags. When his customers "began to clamor for the delivery of dry goods," he made sure he fulfilled their wishes. Lucy Miles, the wife of a Protestant grocer, humorously recalled that one "prominent woman" stated that Miles' husband was delivering produce and haughtily commented that "the dry goods merchants should deliver their packages also." Without hesitating, Hochstadter replied he would bring the woman whatever she bought, so she chose a spool of thread, thinking he would balk at her request. To her surprise, a "two horse dray" showed up at her house that afternoon with a large box. Under "numerous layers of paper, she found her thread," but not before she tried to turn away the driver, who kept insisting that the huge package was indeed for her.⁸³

The Jewish merchant also acknowledged something Powell frequently failed to admit: the city's economy did not benefit all of its citizens equally. Even before Hochstadter became an alderman, he understood the importance of addressing the needs of his working-class neighbors. Like any good politician, he regularly appealed to his fellow citizens by recognizing common

⁸² *Birmingham Iron Age*, June 22, 1876; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 554; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 6; 1880 United States Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama.

⁸³ *Birmingham Iron Age*, April 22, 1875; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 92.

plights and indicating how he could help. This quality not only made him well-liked and respected, it was apparent in his early marketing material. In 1878, between his terms in the city government, he continued to assure “everyone” that they could trust him to pass along his advantages through his store’s advertisements. One declared that even when “hard times [had] come...it was to be expected” that they would save all the money they [could]” if they would simply allow him to provide for their needs.⁸⁴

During the early 1870s, dry goods and variety shopkeepers like Isaac Hochstadter, Herman Simon, and Charles Neumann used their stores to contribute to Birmingham’s growing economy and improve its public image. They drew from the suppliers and marketing talents they had cultivated as Jewish businessmen in other American cities and remained in Birmingham despite the discrepancy between its promotional image and early conditions or the national depression that began in 1873, around the time many of them first arrived. In the 1880s, they continued to build long-lasting relationships with their non-Jewish peers and customers, which, in turn, taught these Jewish pioneers the characteristics of local and regional markets and how to make the most of the population’s needs and white boosters’ ideals, regardless of the negative reputation the town continued to hold in Alabama.

Jews and Liquor in “Bad Birmingham”

Birmingham’s first three Jewish families used their abilities and prior experiences as Southern merchants to become popular residents and downtown shopkeepers. Sophia and Abe Wise, the final Jewish couple to bring their children to the city during the 1870s, likewise adapted quickly to the young city’s rather boisterous, aggressive atmosphere, and soon found ways, like the Simons, Marxes, and Hochstadters, to make a profitable living. Other migrants,

⁸⁴ *Birmingham Iron Age*, September 11, 1878; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 554.

however, had trouble adjusting, especially because the town continued to fall short of its promotional image. Two Jewish settlers, recorded only as M. Fox and A. Schuester, arrived in 1878, for example, but left little evidence of their activities. At the very least, their time in Birmingham failed to make a significant impression on its civic leaders or chroniclers, who largely omit their activities from the city's origin and promotional narratives. Fox and Schuester likely abandoned the town after dwelling in it for only a few years. Birmingham continued to have a reputation for ruthless commercialism and violence throughout the 1880s, and many transient black and white workers moved elsewhere after discovering that its living conditions and rowdy environment were incompatible with their lifestyles and goals. Nineteenth-century promoters and middle-class residents soon found themselves defending not only Powell's initial vision, but also their own business ventures, morality, and social ideals.⁸⁵

Journalists and religious reformers frequently blamed alcohol and false advertising for local problems. In 1882, Alva C. Rooney, a painter from Marietta, Georgia, visited the saloon of Jewish liquor merchant S. Wise, where he drank "two glasses of beer," and then shot himself in a candy store on Second Avenue. *Iron Age* reporters described Rooney as "given to hard drink," stating that he had picked up the habit only a few days before the tragic event. Instead of looking for the cause of this behavior, they attributed his suicide to "a moment of dementation [sic]

⁸⁵ A reference to M. Fox and A. Schuester can be found in Morris Newfield's history of Temple Emanu-El in the *Reform Advocate* (1911), but there are no references to either settler in Birmingham's newspapers or census documents from 1870 to 1900, where other new Jewish settlers appear. An M. Fox appears among the congregation's charter members in 1882, but records suggest he was gone at least by 1887 since neither he nor Schuester were included in Emanu-El's membership or seating lists for 1887, 1889, or 1890. Other individuals with the surname Fox, including successful liquor and cigar dealer Jonas Fox, are listed in the 1888 city directory and as members of Emanu-El in 1890. A definitive link between him, Herman, or Isadore Fox and the mysterious M. Fox cannot be proven, but they may have been relatives, given Jewish residential patterns of chain migration. This suggests that although M. Fox moved on for undisclosed reasons (there are also no records of him being buried in Emanu-El's cemetery), he just as likely recommended the city to other Jews, who found it more to their liking in the latter half of the 1880s and the 1890s. *Reform Advocate*, November 11, 1911, 7; Temple Emanu-El Records, 1887-1890; AJA; *Birmingham City Directory, 1888* (Birmingham: R. L. Polk and Co., 1889), 245.

caused by excessive drinking.” A year later, an anonymous minister likewise noted the population’s unrelenting demand for alcohol in an article he wrote for the *Birmingham Iron Age*. He blamed miners for residents’ vices, contrasting boosters’ image of the city with the observations he made when he visited Birmingham. Since the individuals he referenced were either black or working-class whites, the visiting reverend was likely adhered to the social and racial hierarchies that privileged upper- and middle-class whites, which the town’s black and white laborers continually resisted in its political forums.⁸⁶

Although the minister praised the booming town for its building efforts, his comments also implicitly criticized citizens who were committed to the city’s promotional tenets, which he—like historian Ethel Armes—suggested were in opposition to its actual conditions. He did not reference the shootouts and lavish social events that contradicted each other, but he noted the opera house and three-story buildings that appeared across the street from a humble corn patch enclosed by a railed fence. He stated that “the most common and homely things [were] seen in connection with the grandest undertaking” and discussed the real estate boom alongside the city’s thirty-two bars and exploitative commercial practices, which he viewed as negative. To emphasize his point, he also provided what he considered a striking example of “the method which had generally been adopted by the good people of Birmingham to bring her into notice”: a ten-by-twenty brick store “of very humble and homely appearance.” He stated that the tiny building was only capable of “comfortably” holding two or three barrels of alcohol,” but a sign “nearly as large as the store itself” used “flaming letters” to market the establishment as a “Wholesale Liquor Dealer.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Birmingham Iron Age*, April 13, 1882; May 17, 1883.

⁸⁷ *Birmingham Iron Age*, May 17, 1883.

Jewish merchants may have had a different interpretation of the liquor industry and such exaggerated promotion, both of which they used to their advantage. Since alcohol was a popular commodity, Herman Simon added it to his inventory within three years of his arrival. By 1875, he labeled himself a “wholesale dealer in liquors, tobacco, cigars, [and] fancy groceries” as well as a baker and confectioner. Three years later, he was one of four men targeted in a federal marshals’ “crooked whiskey” sting, which was more about unpaid taxes than quashing the sale of alcohol in central Alabama. Two stills were destroyed at local mines, and Simon was arrested for possessing nine barrels of “brandy” that he had made from tobacco leaves, dried peaches, vinegar, and what newspapermen labeled as “drugs.” Inspector T.G. Hewlett found five containers in his store’s privy, where Simon had placed them to cool. The incident did little to stifle his sale of liquor. In 1883, he was still working as a liquor agent, promising his customers “New Jersey wine and apple cider [that was] the best in the market.”⁸⁸

Since liquor dealers were often connected to agents like Simon, he was not the only Jewish merchant to profit from the city’s demand for alcohol. Jews throughout the United States developed ethnic economic niches in several industries, including garment making, cotton dealing, and alcohol distribution. Their prominence in the latter can be traced to rabbinic laws that forbade Jews to use non-Jewish wine in their rituals or consume alcohol with their Protestant neighbors. Centuries before they reached the United States, Jews brewed, distilled, and distributed a variety of intoxicating beverages in Europe. When they emigrated, they brought their knowledge and commercial networks with them. In the nineteenth-century, they used

⁸⁸ *Birmingham Iron Age*, May 27, 1875, May 29, 1878; May 23, 1883.

technological and transportation advances to facilitate production and marketing. Jews like Simon thus used alcohol to develop significant social and economic connections in new towns.⁸⁹

Birmingham offered its Jewish liquor dealers substantial opportunities to increase or supplement their incomes, which made it a perfect trade for those who wanted to rise economically and already had connections to Northern suppliers. During the 1880s, the city was growing into an important railroad hub. As the population rapidly increased, many incoming evangelical Protestants found the handling and purchasing of liquor deeply sinful. Because they often joined temperance organizations and repeatedly proclaimed the “evils” of alcohol in the town, the market opened for Jews and Catholics, who still found plenty of customers for their wares. State, regional, and national markets also expanded with the city’s tracks, allowing liquor brokers to offer a wide range of products because their access to wholesalers in the North increased. Moreover, the popularity of bars among the town’s travelers and laborers added to the number of consumers they served, which kept business booming.⁹⁰

In 1884, Jews were heavily over-represented in the city’s alcohol industry. They owned or operated twenty-four percent of Birmingham’s saloons, which even at the highest estimates of their population would have been more than twelve times their percentage in the general community. That year Simon closed his shop and joined the eight other Jews who operated bars and billiards rooms. He kept his business on Twentieth Street, operating his saloon in the heart of the city and within walking distance of his home. Within five years, he had earned enough to buy the southeast corner of Nineteenth Street and Third Avenue, and according to the *Iron Age*, he

⁸⁹ Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 2012): 6-8; Cohen, *Cotton Capitalists*, 1-8; Adam D. Mendelsohn, *The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to Success in American and the British Empire* (NY: New York Univ Press, 2015), 2-5.

⁹⁰ Davis, *Jews and Booze*, 22; Ira M. Sheskin, “The ‘Loss’ of the Small Southern Jewish Community,” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa: Univ of Ala Press, 2006), 167.

continued his investment by “erect[ing] one of the handsomest three-story buildings in the city.” After renting its space to the merchants and professionals who continued to pour into town, Simon became so wealthy that he was able to start a bank in 1891, even though signs of another national financial crisis had begun to surface the previous November. His advertisements,

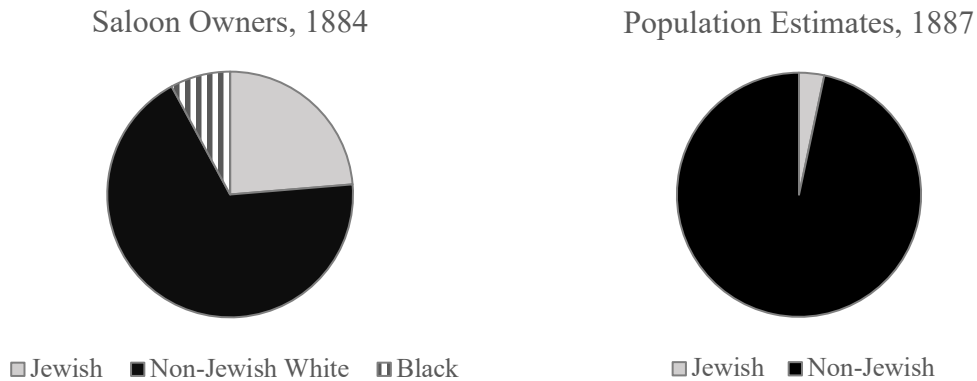


Figure 6: *Saloon Owners and Population Estimates*

however, stated that “notwithstanding the hard times and scarcity of money,” H. Simon & Sons could advance cash for rents, offer terms of “exchange on all countries,” and were “well prepared” to “make loans.”⁹¹

Although most of the city’s Jews did not reach Simon’s economic status, several started successful enterprises in the local liquor industry that provided them and their families with a stable income for decades. Isaac Hochstadter and his brother Joe ran separate saloons and were

⁹¹ Gilded Age financial busts were common and tended to severely affect individuals who did not possess the financial networks they needed when credit and money were short. Herman Simon was one of many southern Jews who drew from their ethnic economic connections in banking and exchange to sustain them and provide credit for their local economies—the Steiner Brothers, who established a Birmingham bank in 1888, were another. These links would prove essential when credit shrank and banks and brokerages began to close in November 1890. The cause of these events was linked to global money markets and British investments in Argentina, which would eventually result in the Panic of 1893. Elmus Wicker, *Banking Panics of the Gilded Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 40-42; Cohen, *Cotton Capitalists*, 164-165; Mark Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 31; *Birmingham Iron Age*, April 3, 1884; March 13, 1889; January 2, 1891; January 5, 1891; *Moulton Advertiser*, February 17, 1887; *City Directory of Birmingham and Gazetteer...for 1884-5*, 291-292.

wholesale beer agents in the city. Although it is unclear how Joe Hochstadter became the proprietor of developer Jack Webb's Dude Saloon, John Witherspoon Dubose wrote that Isaac "embarked in the wholesale and retail liquor trade in association with S. Wise" in 1880. He began "conduct[ing] his business alone" in 1884, when he established the Iron City Exchange, a saloon and pool hall that doubled as a beer and whiskey store. The business served Hochstadter well as a politician, allowing him to connect to the voters who enabled him to regain his position as alderman after he lost it in 1878.⁹²

Hochstadter's partner was most certainly Jewish and a key player in Birmingham's liquor commerce, but records of the period are ambiguous and reference two people who might qualify as the S. Wise in question. Although some local myths hold that Hochstadter did business with a Solomon Wise, like "Henry" Simon, that name is difficult—if not impossible—to verify in census records or city directories.⁹³ Generally, only the person's initials are connected to business transactions or advertisements, which complicates identification. One possibility is Samuel Wise, the brother of Abraham Wise, who moved to Birmingham with his wife and six children in 1879. Like Charles and Rosa Hochstadter, Abe's family had emigrated from Württemberg, but when they came and where they first settled is unclear. Samuel is not listed with Abe and Hochstadter among Temple Emanu-El's charter members in 1882, but two years later, an S. Wise ran the Climax Saloon and lived separately from Abe. The bar owner also hired a black servant, Laura Jones, and took in boarders, including M. Levy (the Casino Saloon's proprietor), and Herman and I.C. Meyers (Hochstadter's bartenders).⁹⁴

⁹² DuBose, *Jefferson County*, 191, 554; *City Directory of Birmingham and Gazetteer...for 1884-5*, 288.

⁹³ Local legend identifies Hochstadter's partner as Solomon Wise, which is repeated on Birmingham's wiki page. Isaac Hochstadter, *Bham Wiki*, last modified November 22, 2018, https://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Isaac_Hochstadter.

⁹⁴ Temple Emanu-El Records, 1887-2000, AR796, Folder 796.1.1, BPL; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 5-9; *Birmingham City Directory, 1888* (Birmingham: R. L. Polk and Co., 1888), 96, 109; *Birmingham City Directory, 1890*, 174, 291.

Evidence suggests that Samuel Wise lived in Birmingham between 1887 and 1890, but his time in the city was short. An S. Wise purchased a seat in the Reform synagogue in 1887, and the 1888 and 1890 Birmingham directories both reference him by his full name. If he did own the Climax Saloon in 1884, however, his career in what Protestant reformers labeled the city's "Whiskey Ring" did not last long. He was associated with "commissions" (or general sales) in 1888, and two years later as a "soda water manufacturer," which were also popular trades among the town's Jewish residents. By May 1, 1890, S. Wise was no longer a member of Emanu-El and did not vote on important congregational issues. Samuel and his wife Jennie moved to New Orleans and he took a job as a clerk in a U.S. Appraiser's office. He remained in the Crescent City until his death in 1909.⁹⁵

It is possible, however, that Samuel Wise was never Isaac Hochstadter's partner and that the business connection DuBose referenced in 1887 was a product of human error or the booster's attempt to soften the city's negative reputation. While few connections existed between the two men, both personal and professional relationships developed between Hochstadter and Samuel's brother Abraham Wise, who was operating a saloon in Birmingham by 1880. Hochstadter and Abe worked together on the establishment, growth, and management of Temple Emanu-El throughout the 1880s and 1890s, and in 1882, Hochstadter applied for three liquor licenses, two in conjunction with "A. Wise" and one alone. A year later he and his wife Carrie lived with the Wises after they returned from their honeymoon and before their new house was completed. Abe and his wife Sophia were thus among the friends who offered comfort to the

⁹⁵ Abraham Wise was among the many Jews who worked as a commissioned salesman in the 1880s and 1890s, and Alfred Hochstadter, Isaac's brother, owned a soda manufacturing company in 1887, which he bought from his boss, B.H. Goldberg. *Birmingham City Directory, 1890*, 543-544; Temple Emanu-El Records, 1887-2000, AR796, Folder 796.1.1, BPL; 1900 United States Census, New Orleans, Louisiana, DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 468. *Birmingham City Directory, 1888*, 289

Hochstaders when they received a telegram about the unexpected death of Isaac's brother Willie.⁹⁶

Another candidate for the S. Wise in question is Sophia Wise. Three listings for S. Wise followed Hochstadter's lone entry for a liquor license in the 1882 bar docket. Since Samuel Wise's specific whereabouts are unknown in the early 1880s, he *could* have been the S. Wise who applied for those licenses, but Sophia was running a successful liquor company of her own at that time, so they are much more likely to be hers. When DuBose edited his promotional history in 1887, he may not have wanted to draw attention to a middle-class thirty-five-year-old mother who was running a very profitable alcohol business, especially given the criticism the town had received for impropriety. Sophia Wise, however, was no different from other women who used the city's opportunities to provide an income for themselves and their families. Whether black or white, married or unmarried, Jewish or non-Jewish, women gave music lessons, were tailors or milliners, or ran boarding houses. Several owned and operated complex establishments without the assistance of a husband or male relative. Mary Fox, Mary Littleton, and Adelia Lloyd were grocers. Mrs. L.N. Nolan was the proprietor of the Oswald House, a hotel. Nancy Miller, Mattie Robinson, and Elizabeth Ruehle managed their own restaurants, which were located on Nineteenth and Twentieth Streets along the same stretch as most of the city's bars. Mrs. C. Boehn owned the Union Saloon, one of those bars.⁹⁷

Sophia Wise's business was popular in the city, so it is highly unlikely DuBose would not have known that she was a woman. When he was writing, however, that fact might not have been

⁹⁶ *Weekly Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), January 1, 1880; 1880 United States Federal Census, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama, *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 5-9; "Bar Docket," *Birmingham Iron Age*, May 25, 1882; October 18, 1883.

⁹⁷ McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 60-68; *City Directory and Gazetteer of Birmingham...1884-5*, 63, 285-286, 279, 292, 295.

acceptable to his middle-class readers, which may have generated negative publicity that DuBose wanted to avoid. In 1874, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was established and soon joined other teetotaling organizations to publicly protest the sale and consumption of alcohol. Its members drew from popular gender and religious ideals to suggest "right-minded" women of all religious backgrounds belonged in their organization. Southern Jewish women like Sophia Wise, however, generally rejected the WCTU for its identification as a Christian organization and the conservative attitudes it spawned. Since Jews and their Catholic counterparts frequently used and sold alcohol, they often believed the WCTU was a brazen, intolerant, and undemocratic association. Due to the promotional nature of his books, however, DuBose regularly downplayed the city's thriving liquor commerce as well as its crime and racial tension. If a woman was Hochstadter's partner, DuBose may have avoided a clear reference to her because he believed her business may have been construed as negative and inappropriate.⁹⁸

Even if one attributes both the partnership and the operation of the Climax Saloon to Abe's brother Samuel, Sophia was recorded as the proprietor of the much more profitable S. Wise & Co., the establishment that served painter Alva Rooney just before he shot himself in 1882. Moreover, Sophia's handling of the company suggested that she understood and embraced the city's love of hyperbolic promotion and luxury products. She utilized her talents and the population's demand for alcohol wisely, advertising even more prolifically than Charles Neumann and Isaac Hochstadter. She proclaimed her company the "largest liquor house in Alabama" and sold both wholesale and retail liquor, stocking her inventory with lager in kegs, brand name smoking and chewing tobacco, and imported wines, whiskies, brandies, and ale. Focusing on her "factory prices," she offered cash refunds for any product that was not exactly

⁹⁸ Davis, *Jews and Booze*, 41-42; Susan Hill Lindsey, "You Have Stept Out of Your Place": *A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 103.

as it was represented, implying that she had confidence in her goods and services. Her store was among the first twenty-five businesses in Birmingham to own a telephone, and like Hochstadter, she delivered her goods “anywhere in the city” free of charge using Birmingham’s “board cars,” a local innovation in its growing transportation networks.⁹⁹

Shrewd in her commercial practices, Sophia carved a space for herself in an environment that was often violent and considered only male professionals worthy of remembrance. She failed to be intimidated by financial challenges and events that inspired the city’s bad reputation. As part of her retail business, she served alcohol in her store which doubled as a saloon. The city’s health committee condemned the cellar under her building in 1884, declaring it a “public nuisance” after it flooded, but Sophia overcame this challenge as well. In 1888, she was one of several businesses that provided food and supplies for the troops who regained control of Birmingham after the Hawes murder riots, and even though she allowed her brother-in-law Moses to become her business partner in 1888, she remained active in the company’s affairs.¹⁰⁰

From 1888 to 1892, Sophia continued to cultivate a separate public identity from that of her husband. She appeared in city directories in connection with her company and was recorded as “Mrs. Sophie Wise” rather than “Mrs. Abraham Wise” or “Mrs. A. Wise” as she was in Temple Emanu-El ladies’ associations. She and Moses Wise, another saloon owner, started their collective business to capitalize on Birmingham’s prodigious railroad traffic. The company, which was still branded with her name, operated the Metropolitan Hotel and hired Abe as its clerk. Built in 1886, the Metropolitan was in a good location, directly across from the Union

⁹⁹ *Birmingham Iron Age*, April 18, 1882; September 23, 1882; January 12, 1882, *Birmingham City Directory*, 1888, 289.

¹⁰⁰ The riots occurred after sheriff’s deputies shot and killed nine men who were part of a mob that tried to lynch white railroad manager Richard Hawes for brutally killing his wife and daughter. *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 14, 1884; *Weekly Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), December 13, 1888; *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 18, 1889.

passenger depot on the corner of Morris Avenue and Twentieth Street and just down the road from many of its bars and shops. The hotel offered rooms at “seventy-five cents and up” and gave special rates to commercial travelers. S. Wise & Co. controlled the hotel and its restaurant until 1892, when another Jewish business leader, Emil Lesser, bought and remodeled it. By then Sophia was forty-five and ready to pass her business expertise and connections to her son William, who opened a liquor and cigar store on Twentieth Street his cousin Moses Levy. Although Abraham Wise was in his sixties by then, he decided to work for his son as he had done for his wife. Sophia, however, left commercial life, focusing her time and energy on Jewish social engagements and philanthropy instead.¹⁰¹

Sophia Wise’s business endeavors were exceptional, but not unusual. Jewish women began running mercantile businesses in the United States during the colonial era and continued to do so during the nineteenth century. Even though they were more frequently recognized for their charity and club work, women frequently produced goods or sold items in their husbands’ shops, managing them when the men visited distant suppliers or customers. Whether immigrants or native-born American Jews, they saw their labor as an important factor in the family income and knew it could mean the difference between sustainability and poverty. Frequently combining their professional and home life, they used their work to provide a firm foundation for themselves and their children while simultaneously buttressing their local economies. Like her male counterparts in Birmingham, Sophia Wise played an essential role in the development of the early city. Even if the town’s living and working conditions may have been less than what she had expected when she arrived in 1879, she was little different from Herman Simon, Isaac

¹⁰¹ Birmingham City Directories for 1888, 1889, 1890, 1900, 1902, and 1904, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011; *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 22, 1889.

Hochstadter, and other Jewish men who ran businesses in its downtown district. She, too, was determined to make the most of the opportunities set before her, which often required her to adapt to the town's rapidly changing conditions and the needs of Birmingham and its people. When she retired, she continued to utilize her leadership skills and her promotional talents to the benefit of her rapidly growing religious community.¹⁰²

Regardless of the progressive image that James R. Powell used to market his corporation's town, Birmingham was initially a dangerous, unstable place to live. The ground was muddy, transportation options few, and water supplies inadequate and unclean. Jewish "pioneers," however, accepted local conditions and the civic-commercial ideals that surrounded them. As part of the first wave of Jewish settlers, the Simon, Marx, Hochstadter, and Wise families were among the local entrepreneurs who adjusted well to the Magic City's rough environment by finding ways to utilize its marketing material to their advantage. They found economic stability and established a strong position for themselves and the Jews who followed them by utilizing their experiences and connections as merchants in the dry goods, liquor, and service industries. They furthered their careers by serving the public through its bars, saloons, and shops. Simultaneously, they held fast to their religious distinction and developed public personas that emphasized social conventions related to faith, sobriety, and order that middle-class residents and promoters related to ideal citizenship. In addition to finding ways to mesh

¹⁰² Beth S. Wenger, "Jewish Women of the Club: The Changing Public Role of Atlanta's Jewish Women (1870-1930)," *American Jewish History*, 76, no. 3 (Mar 1987), 311; Mark Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 22, no. 3 (Spring 2003); 34-37; Irene D. Neu, "The Jewish Businesswoman in America," *American Jewish Business Enterprise*, 66, no. 1 (Sept. 1976), 138-143; Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 101-102; --, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 81-83.

their Jewish and professional identities well, they manipulated and extended local boosterism, using it to support the city's growth, population, and public image.

Although successful Jewish settlers drew from similar ethnic economic networks and commercial experiences, their specific paths in Birmingham were very different. Herman Simon invested his profits in real estate and banking, and the extended Marx family chose to build a successful mercantile business. Sophia Wise and Isaac Hochstadter joined Simon in the alcohol trade, but they went in separate directions. Sophia established a public identity that ensured her own financial power and that of her husband and children, while Hochstadter focused his attentions on connecting to his non-Jewish neighbors, who had voted him into office once and would soon do so again.

Similar to many successful Gilded Age Jewish merchants, Hochstadter formed social and political connections that expanded his civic status and opportunities for advancement. His activities in Birmingham made him popular and earned him a prominent place in its histories. The question becomes why scholars and local writers favor him and other Jewish entrepreneurs over others. Hochstadter's success was partially due to his individual ambitions and interests, but he exhibited the same broad patterns as many first-wave migrants, who likewise used their business talents and knowledge to build social and economic capital. Although it might be easy to attribute Sophia Wise's omission to her gender, Herman Simon was one of the wealthiest and well-known men in the city. Regardless of Simon's prominence during his lifetime, however, he is barely mentioned in local chronicles. Moreover, the activities of Morris Marx and Charles Neumann are frequently downplayed in favor of Morris's father Samuel, who took a rather sedentary role in the local economy. What then made men like Hochstadter worthy of remembrance?

The answer may lie in Birmingham's fluctuating ideals rather than the Jewish founders' integration skills. In the 1870s and 1880s, the city's marketing campaign transformed Protestant speculators and entrepreneurs into ideal citizens. Both Jewish and non-Jewish accounts of the early city, especially those written between 1887 and 1920, prioritized the stories of men like Hochstadter who fit neatly into the narratives that boosters used to highlight its opportunities. Although women contributed to social and economic development, they were cast aside for male shopkeepers and businessmen. Regardless of their position in Birmingham's collective memory, however, Jewish men and women helped form the progressive urban image that James R. Powell, John Witherspoon DuBose, and other boosters valued. Their work provided a base for the integration of a second and much larger wave of acculturated Jews between 1880 and 1895, who would continue to cultivate substantial reputations as model residents as Birmingham continued to grow.

3. CIVIC CONNECTIONS:
ISAAC HOCHSTADTER AND LOCAL NETWORKING, 1875-1890

“Mr. Hochstadter has taken an active interest in public affairs, having served as alderman nearly all the time since 1876, being elected by the people three times and by the board for several terms. He is also director of the Alabama National Bank and of the Ice Company, and is president of several land companies and a director in others. He is a member of the A.F. and A.M. [the Masons], K. of P. [Knights of Pythias], and I.O.O.F. [Odd Fellows] and has served in an official capacity in [their] grand lodge[s].”

John Witherspoon DuBose
Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama, 1887

At 8:30 a.m. on July 25, 1877, Birmingham Mayor William Morris called his Board of Aldermen to order. Isaac Hochstadter, one of its members, found time for the meeting between the hours he spent in his family’s dry goods store and his service in several volunteer organizations, including a local militia and the Knights of Pythias. That morning Hochstadter was eager to discuss the board’s recent contract with the city’s waterworks, a privately-owned utility that had a reputation for heavy debt and poor service. Although the group had already amended the document, Morris hesitated to sign it because he was not satisfied that the changes they had made the previous week were significant enough to safeguard the city from fire. Hochstadter, who also served as a volunteer fireman, recommended that the group reconsider its actions and offered a resolution to the problem. He took charge of the negotiations and prioritized the mayor’s concerns. Their new contract would provide the fire department with unlimited access to the waterworks’ fire plugs and gave the corporation thirty days to “insert proper connections” for the city’s hoses. Hochstadter received the support of the mayor and his

non-Jewish peers on this issue and several others and was elected twice more to the city's government. From 1878 to 1888, he served his constituents on Birmingham's Accounts and Finance Committee, presided over a session of the Mayor's Court, and continued to advocate for the concerns of local leaders and residents.¹⁰³

Because he had built important contacts and status through his business practices, Hochstadter's popularity was the result of more than his friendly personality. Similar to Herman Simon, Charles Neumann, and Sophia Wise, he was a leader in Birmingham's mercantile and alcohol industries and played a key role in the local economy by increasing the city's access to goods and satisfying consumers' demands. His public persona combined his individual interests and values with his understanding of the town and its population and appealed to a diverse group of white citizens, ranging from skilled laborers to the commercial elite. Although Hochstadter was a devout Jew and never compromised his personal beliefs, he shifted his political stance when doing so was to his advantage. He reflected the Elyton Land Company's social and economic ideals while using his actions to demonstrate that Jewish professionals were essential to Birmingham's sustainability and growth.

As the nineteenth century progressed, Hochstadter and other Jewish residents continued to develop their commercial networks and knowledge of Birmingham through their activism and voluntarism. In the 1880s, they were numerous enough to establish Jewish institutions that expanded their interfaith connections and served as training grounds for civic advancement. More than successful merchants, Jewish men and women could—and would—serve the city as

¹⁰³ Before 1900, two aldermen were elected from the city's wards every four years—they served staggered two-year terms. Hochstadter was elected three times, serving from 1875 to 1877 and 1884 to 1888. *Birmingham Iron Age*, July 25, 1877; January 9, 1878; October 4, 1888; December 4, 1888; Edward Shannon LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, 1900-1975* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 16; John Witherspoon DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama: Historical and Biographical* (Birmingham: Teeple & Smith, 1887),

political and religious leaders and local developers, dedicating their time and energy to its people and positive image.

Masculinity and the Masons

In Birmingham's first decade, Jews composed less than one percent of the population, but they were included in its most prominent social and political circles. Isaac Hochstadter, who was in his twenties when he began his career in the 1870s, was one of the town's most ambitious Jewish entrepreneurs. His story demonstrates how Jews affected and reacted to shifts in local conditions while they simultaneously advanced their civic goals and social and religious networks. Like Reform and Orthodox Jews in Mobile, Richmond, and Atlanta, Hochstadter developed important relationships with prominent non-Jewish residents without sacrificing his faith or ethnic traditions. As he rose to the middle class, he skillfully navigated rising divisions in the Democratic Party and built interfaith alliances to influence his city's growth and government. At first glance, Hochstadter's actions may seem to simply reflect basic patterns of nineteenth-century Jewish acculturation, but they can be connected specifically to Birmingham's promotional image and public life. In particular, he led the way for Jews to join fraternal orders and other civic organizations and embrace a popular masculinity rooted in membership in secret societies.¹⁰⁴

Central to Hochstadter's early success was his reputation as a "likeable" and "fair" businessman. These adjectives genuinely indicated his affability and reliability, for which he was

¹⁰⁴ For more information and examples of Jews living in Birmingham and other American cities who integrated in similar ways, see Mark Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974); Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Jews of Mobile Alabama, 1763-1841* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1970); Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979); and Mark K. Bauman, "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: The German Jews from the Civil War through the Progressive Era" in *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (Fall 1998).

well known, and made him popular among both his working-class customers and other downtown businessmen. They also signal, however, that Hochstadter was respected and trusted despite the spirit of antisemitism that occasionally surfaced in Southern newspapers during and immediately after the Civil War, which suggested Jews were manipulative, exploitative, or conniving.¹⁰⁵ His easy nature and dedication to service earned him several invitations to local chapters of national fraternal organizations. Because he used the organizations to build important relationships with white middle-class non-Jewish businessmen, they would become some of his most important resources for gaining social and political power.

Fraternal associations flourished in the United States during the nineteenth century, and Hochstadter joined at least three. His lodges, like most, were segregated by race and gender, but religious identity did not always limit their composition. Jews and non-Jews freely mixed in several societies, and hundreds of Birmingham's citizens participated in them. Black and white women and unskilled laborers often formed separate orders or auxiliaries, and like their counterparts across the nation, used them to develop leadership skills and a platform for civic engagement. Others joined the associations to obtain mutual aid and death benefits and cultivate common interests. They used their orders to create social bonds, improve their commercial networks, and gather support for their personal values.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Examples of such articles and their effects on Alabama Jews like Samuel Marx can be found in more detail in Chapter One of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁶ Although the "Golden Age of Fraternity" would not reach its peak until the mid-1890s, fraternal orders and mutual aid associations increased substantially in the United States between 1850 and 1880, largely due to their social welfare benefits and the status and respect they offered to their members. Rooted in European craft unions, the organizations were often seen as part of a continuing effort to manage industrial societies and tended to develop in growing towns and cities. Although membership was highly selective and lodges were often segregated, according to historian David Beito, membership "seemed to cut across divisions of race, gender, and income." Individuals who were excluded from lodges frequently formed their own, and as institutions, the orders provided opportunities to promote solidarity and form alternative "kinship groups." As a result, they served as sites of cultural construction for gender, class, national, and racial identity. David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2000), 8, 14, 24-27, 44; Bayliss J. Camp and Orit Kent, "'What a Mighty Power We Can Be': Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Initiation Rituals," *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (Fall, 2004), 441; Jim

Jewish settlers may have realized the potential of such organizations from their prior experiences. Both the Marxes and the Hochstadters had moved from large cities where Masonic lodges were composed of a cross-section of elite and middling classes that included a relatively high percentage of Jews. Samuel Marx was identified as a high-ranking Mason in local historian George Cruikshank's twentieth-century biography, which suggests his membership was considered important even in 1920. The white male orders of which he and other Jews were a part reiterated social and political themes of dominance and masculinity through rituals of autonomy and authority. Progression through these fraternities' graded hierarchies and degrees also expressed Jewish members' dedication to the societies' moral standards, which were linked to middle-class ideals of nineteenth-century manhood like self-reliance, responsibility, charity, thrift, honesty, and cooperation. Fraternal organizations were rife with favoritism and class privilege. Thus, the associations were not a "school for democracy," but they often served as recommendations for credit and respectability. Members' participation in their procedures and benefits suggested they embraced American governance and were willing to perform civic duties when called on to do so. Moreover, since Jews were often elected to important positions in state, regional, and national lodges, the orders reiterated non-Jews' faith in their ability to represent the collective.¹⁰⁷

Isaac Hochstadter joined the Masons and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), but he was most active in the Knights of Pythias. Both the Pythians and the Odd Fellows were

O'Loughlin, "Past Perfect: The Golden Age of Fraternity," *North American Review* 291, no. 1 (January-February 2006), 48; Jason Kaufman and David Weintraub, "Social-Capital Formation and American Fraternal Association: New Empirical Evidence," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2004), 8, 24-25; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 69.

¹⁰⁷ Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 10, 49; Kaufman and Weintraub, "Social Capital Formation," 15-16, 21, 35; Camp and Kent, "What a Mighty Power We Can Be," 445-446; Jeffrey C. Benton, *Respectable and Disreputable: Leisure Time in Antebellum Montgomery* (Montgomery: New South Books, 2013), 38; Howard M. Sachar, *The History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 70; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 229.

identified as “flourishing organizations” in an 1875 edition of the *Birmingham Iron Age*, and by 1893, they were considered two of the most important lodges in the state. Both were mutual aid associations, and both were quite popular. The national membership of the Odd Fellows alone grew from 3,000 to 465,000 between 1830 and 1877, but the Pythians were a favorite among the commercial elite, which may have been why Hochstadter, his brother Al, and Samuel and Morris Marx initially joined the Jefferson Valley chapter. A “quasi-Masonic” society that excluded women and non-whites, their organization encouraged its members to “Be Generous, Brave, and True” and provide aid to “worthy Pythians in distress.” Birmingham’s lodge was established in 1874, and members began meeting weekly in a brick building on the corner of Second Avenue and Twenty-First Street, within a few blocks of the Jewish merchants’ stores. In 1877, the year the Pythians added life insurance to their benefits, Hochstadter and Morris Marx were elected Lodge No. 11’s finance minister and presiding officer, respectively, filling two of its six available offices. Within a decade, the fraternity was issuing substantial policies that ranged between \$1,000 and \$3,000, and several other Jewish residents could be found among the fraternity’s 118 members, serving on committees and elected as guides and lieutenants.¹⁰⁸

Participating in the Pythians contributed favorably to the civic reputations of the Hochstadters, the Marxes, and second-wave Jewish migrants like Emil Lesser (who was a member during the 1890s). Since the organization routinely distributed funds that were essential to many residents’ survival, Birmingham’s commercial elites—including those who were Pythians—associated it and other lodges with communal honor, responsibility, and duty. Booster

¹⁰⁸ The organization I am speaking of here should not be confused with Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, a separate fraternity that formed after black men were denied entry into the parent organization in the late 1860s. Black Pythians established lodges in Birmingham in 1887 and 1888. *Birmingham Iron Age*, December 16, 1875, January 1, 1893, Marilyn T. Peebles, *The Alabama Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa: A Brief History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2012), 16; *Birmingham Iron Age*, Sept 17, 1874; January 26, 1882; November 24, 1888; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 301, 468.

John Witherspoon DuBose praised the Pythians in his *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, his 1887 promotional text, stating that the order delivered its benefit payments promptly and “[its] standing, financially and in other respects, has always been first-class.” A less flattering depiction of the organization might be a bit more accurate since Pythian chapters upheld political conservatism and nativism, forbade the inclusion of “maimed individuals,” and imposed standards of morality and patriotism to suppress oppositional opinions. The assistance its members provided to Birmingham’s needy families, however, was undeniable. Between 1882 and 1887 alone, the Pythians issued approximately \$15,000 in benefits, which is over \$377,000 in current value. Consequently, their collective actions earned the gratitude and respect of local citizens, which produced a considerable amount of social capital for its members.¹⁰⁹

Birmingham’s Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, No. 384, offered Jewish men additional opportunities to work cooperatively and develop connections with their non-Jewish counterparts. Isaac Hochstadter and Samuel Marx were both Freemasons, with Marx reaching the institution’s thirty-second degree, the order’s highest level of leadership and prestige. He was not alone. Ben Jacobs, an Illinois native who traveled to the town from Mississippi in 1880, also became a thirty-second degree Scottish Rite Mason. After opening a furniture store on First Avenue with his brothers, Jacobs grew to be a well-respected businessman, but his reputation as a prominent Jewish citizen was more closely linked to his achievements in the Masons than to his business ventures. Birmingham’s editions of the *Jewish Ledger* and *Reform Advocate* commented on little besides his standing as an “active Mason.” The latter pronounced Jacobs “one of the leading lights in the Masonic work and fraternity of Alabama” and claimed he

¹⁰⁹ DuBose, *Jefferson County*, 301, 468, 554; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 229; Kaufman and Weintraub, “Social Capital Formation,” 4-8, 20; *Birmingham Iron Age*, May 23, 1877, 2; *Birmingham Iron Age*, July 4, 1877, 5; *Our Mountain Home* (Talladega, Alabama), May 287, 1896, 8.

“occupied every station of honor” in the state. He served as “wise master of [the] Birmingham Chapter of Rose Croix” and a charter member, recorder, and potentate of the Zamora Temple of the Mystic Shrine. He was not only the latter’s representative to the Imperial Council on three occasions, but also a member of Alabama’s Grand Lodge. Moreover, he was named Grand Master in 1907, the highest position a state Mason could obtain. He was lauded for “liv[ing] as nearly as possible according to the precepts and truths of Masonry” and even occasionally neglected his store to devote his time to the order.¹¹⁰

Like the Knights of Pythias, the Masons provided Hochstadter, Jacobs, and other Jewish men with considerable standing and connections among Birmingham’s civic and business leaders. Jews were, therefore, inherently included in early published narratives of leadership, success, and power even though all but the most prominent remained unnamed. Many of the biographies that DuBose featured in his book were of doctors, former Confederate soldiers, state legislators, and industrialists who were Masons. The local booster depicted them as exemplary citizens, “public spirited” men of the “highest type.” As such, they possessed qualities that were transferred to men who were part of their civic circles. One of DuBose’s most widely known subjects was Dr. James B. Luckie, a highly respected non-Jewish physician who migrated to Birmingham from Montgomery in 1872. Luckie, who had once been a Confederate hospital inspector, specialized in smallpox and was a member of numerous county and state medical associations, some of which he helped found. His wife Susan reported he was a “physician and

¹¹⁰ DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 554; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 50-51, 229; Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 8, 39-40; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900; *Jewish Ledger*, Vols. 9-15, Jan. 6, 1899-Jun. 27, 1902 (MIC AJPC 290), microfilm edition, reels 5-8, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, 5; Morris Newfield, “The History of the Jews of Birmingham,” *The Reform Advocate* (Chicago: Bloch & Newman, 1911), 19.

surgeon of rare ability” and was nearly killed by the cholera he contracted while vigorously assisting the population during the 1873 epidemic.¹¹¹

Luckie was also part of the city’s first group of civic-minded professionals, which included middle-class Jews who were interested in forming social, economic, and political networks. Similar to his acculturated Jewish neighbors, the Protestant doctor used his interactions with Birmingham’s residents, his political activities, and his writing to advance both his status and profession. A minor politician, he continued to serve as a public doctor while filling elected positions in state and local government and was frequently the first on the scene when railway accidents occurred, using his battlefield and domestic experience to operate on the men who were involved. The doctor likely knew Ben Jacobs since, according to DuBose, he was a “zealous Mason” who “held many exalted positions in the fraternity.” He also possessed social and political ties to Isaac Hochstadter. He was one of James R. Powell’s aldermen in 1873, just two years before Hochstadter was elected, and in 1874, he founded the Birmingham Rifles, a small militia that the young Jewish merchant joined sometime between 1875 and 1879.¹¹²

The Birmingham Rifles, similar to the city’s fraternal organizations, was an important part of its civic culture. It was one of the white volunteer militias that communities were encouraged to form after Radical Reconstruction ended in Alabama in 1874. White working- and middle-class men were drawn to the group, largely because it, like many local militias, was a social organization that reinforced masculine identity rather than a defense unit. Linked to a longstanding Southern tradition that expressed physical fitness and white mastery through

¹¹¹ DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 73, 112-113, 191-192, 382, 387, 443, 466, 511; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 20, 29.

¹¹² DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 387; “Deaths: James Buckner Luckie, M.D.,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 51 (July-December 1908), 2231; James B. Luckie, “Two Cases of Fracture of Cervical Vertebra, with Recover,” *Virginia Medical Association* 14 (April 1887-Mar. 1888), 542-543; C.B. Stemen, *Railway Surgery: A Practical Work on the Special Department of Railway Surgery for Railway Surgeons and Practitioners in the General Practice of Surgery* (St. Louis: J.H. Chambers & Co., 1890), 186.

martial activities and rough adventures, the militias represented a form of racial superiority that was venerated through the Lost Cause. Many associations, including the Rifles, were rumored to be white supremacist paramilitary organizations, which is unsurprising given J.B. Luckie's position in the state's Democratic Party and his discriminatory stance in local and national politics. The Rifles also assisted the Alabama National Guard in protecting African American prisoners from being lynched, however, indicating that if they were a paramilitary group, their duties blurred the lines between racial oppression and general social control. Regardless, as a physical representation of the city's white manhood and power, the militia was a source of local pride and met regularly to drill and attend important political events, including gubernatorial visits and inaugurations. Luckie was its first captain, and Hochstadter was part of the unit that Governor Rufus Cobb dispatched on March 19, 1879 to stifle a "quarrel of white and black miners" in Helena that threatened to become a racial riot. Less than two months later, Hochstadter was named the Rifles' first lieutenant, and, in 1881, he served as its captain as well.¹¹³

Moreover, Luckie and Hochstadter shared an interest in protecting Birmingham from fire, which consumed an entire block and killed a small boy in July 1872. As professionals and politicians, both men owned downtown establishments and possessed business associates and constituents who benefitted from the safeguards they developed. When he was an alderman in 1873, Luckie organized and ran the city's first fire department, financing it through parades and other fundraisers, including a baby show that pronounced its winner "the finest male child on

¹¹³ Susan T. Falck, *Remembering Dixie: The Battle to Control Historical Memory in Natchez, Mississippi, 1865-1941* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 75-77; Christopher Waldrep, ed., *Lynching in American: A History in Documents* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 136-137; Greg Burden, *Blount Springs: Alabama Fountain of Youth* (self-pub., 2014), 142; *Shelby Guide* (Columbiana, Alabama), January 15, 1874; *Marion Commonwealth*, September 3, 1874; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 25, 1874; November 29, 1874; *Birmingham Iron Age*, November 19, 1874, 2; March 19, 1879.

exhibition.” Hochstadter likewise supported the fire department as a volunteer and alderman, placing its needs high on his list of priorities. Similar to their fraternities’ initiation rites and the Rifles’ public drilling, both men’s work in the fire department enabled them to demonstrate their urban pride and male prowess, but Hochstadter’s participation served an additional purpose. Similar to Jewish participation in various American wars, it contradicted longstanding antisemitic stereotypes that suggested Jewish men were cowardly and physically weak, qualities that might make Hochstadter seem unfit for local or national service. Hochstadter thus took part in the martial activities that were available for him, which furthered his positive reputation in the city. He was still working for the city’s fire department in 1881, when as first assistant to Chief A.J. Jones, he was part of an inspection that encouraged competition between two of its three companies. Instructions in the newspaper stated each man should “exert himself” during the exhibition drill so he would present his unit to its “very best advantage.”¹¹⁴

Their individual beliefs and religious practices may have differed, but both Luckie and Hochstadter benefitted from opportunities to exhibit their civic loyalty through their positions in the Masons, the Rifles, and the fire department. Wage labor and industrialism may have been idealized over agrarian pursuits in Birmingham, but its civic-commercial elites remained committed to antebellum social and racial codes that linked definitions of manhood and status to the dependency of non-whites (particularly African Americans) and women.¹¹⁵ Although Isaac

¹¹⁴ Amy S. Greenburg, *Cause for Alarm: The Volunteer Fire Department in the Nineteenth-Century City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4-5, 9; *Birmingham Iron Age*, June 25, 1877; May 14, 1879; October 13, 1881; *Gadsden Times*, July 11, 1872; *Selma Dollar Times*, July 16, 1872; *Union Springs Herald*, May 21, 1873; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 387.

¹¹⁵ Examples of such values can be found in the testimonies of early citizens and the work of local writers and boosters. Twentieth-century historian Ethel Armes and resident Dora McCree Francis, for example, recalled that Powell used Birmingham’s women to entice investors and future settlers by blatantly tying their sexual and reproductive potential to his city’s benefits. John Witherspoon DuBose used race much in the same way. Like many New South advocates, DuBose combated antebellum tropes related to negative perceptions of “wage slavery” through long diatribes on the “natural harmony” of the work Birmingham industrialists offered both black and white workers. In the 1880s, the city’s promotional material frequently offered skilled white laborers positions of authority

Hochstadter was Jewish, he was striving to be (and was) accepted among his non-Jewish peers as a strong, intelligent white man. He was also a second-generation immigrant who—like Paula Simon—culturally identified as American. Although nineteenth-century American manhood was a fluctuating concept that he might have interpreted differently from other local men, Birmingham’s growing institutions welcomed Jews and provided Hochstadter with the ability to earn the respect of his male colleagues. In the 1870s and 1880s, middle-class white men like Hochstadter and Luckie were often caught between martial and restrained identities, but they frequently bonded and demonstrated their whiteness and authority through physical fitness and performances of bravery.¹¹⁶ In the absence of war, they battled destitution, flames, rioting mobs, and striking laborers to prove their mettle and what they perceived as their inherent ability to lead.

The Mayor’s Office: Politics in Early Birmingham

Isaac Hochstadter’s membership in fraternal orders and other local institutions eased his path to civic power. In addition to linking him to characteristics Birmingham’s commercial leaders and boosters admired, the organizations distanced Hochstadter from unskilled white workers and black men, distinctions that became increasingly important as the city grew. The

and stressed their needs above those of their non-white or unskilled counterparts. Dubose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 156; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 234; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Nineteenth-century American manhood was a dynamic cultural construction that individuals often perceived differently. It was caught between conceptions of self-mastery and authority and physical displays of male prowess, and while not in crisis per se, it was (and would continue to be) challenged by shifting forms of work, immigration, emancipation, and New Women. Middle-class white men were thus pressured to reformulate their gender performances, many of which were linked to the body. Although historian Sarah Imhoff’s work relates to a slightly later period, her theories hold true for Jewish men in nineteenth-century Birmingham like Hochstadter. Because they were neither “purely assimilatory or purely particularist,” Jewish men worked within the dominant Protestant framework that provided a background for their social interactions, meaning they constructed their conception of manhood *with* their non-Jewish counterparts. Amy S. Greenburg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8-12; Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 10-11; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11-16.

white manhood and leadership skills he cultivated and displayed as a volunteer would play a distinct role in the factional battles between Birmingham's nineteenth-century laborers and its commercial elites. Friction between the two groups appeared as early as 1871, the year the Elyton Land Company incorporated the city, and grew worse as the ELC tightened its hold on the population and gained control of the town's early government through rather dubious means. Two of the corporation's presidents served as mayors during the 1870s, and the majority of their administrations were composed of their colleagues, who often controlled the city's economy and development. Their actions frequently conflicted with the wishes of white laborers, who sought to hold the men accountable to their promotional promises or vied for power of their own.

Troubles began shortly after Alabama governor Robert B. Lindsey appointed twenty-six-year-old Robert Henley to be the first mayor of Birmingham. Henley was the young editor of the promotional *Elyton Sun*, which became the *Birmingham Sun* in 1872. According to Arabella Morris, who moved to central Alabama in 1870, Lindsey's actions resulted from "the request of the more prominent people of the time," who felt the local population "[was] not of the patriotic class the president and directory [sic] of the Elyton Land Company and the more 'solid men' considered to be trustworthy." Fearing they could easily lose political control of their new town, the ELC sidestepped an election and nominated Henley for the position, knowing his press and politics aligned with their vision of Jefferson County's future. Even DuBose, an ELC supporter, had to admit the decision ignored the wishes of a group of men who wanted a "mayor of a different type"—in other words, an elected individual who would also defend their interests. A large group of residents immediately objected, holding two public meetings to demand that the governor reverse his actions. Since most of them were unskilled black and white workers, they found it difficult to overcome the influence of the ELC, whose stockholders possessed

connections to the Alabama legislature. The governor was a much less powerful ally than Henley's poor health. Even though the young man jumped into his new duties with vigor, tuberculosis prevented him from completing his duties and expanding his political career. In May 1872, Henley declined to run for state senate, and six months later, he resigned his duties as mayor. By the following May, he was dead.¹¹⁷

Henley's resignation did little to deter the ELC's attempts to regulate the everyday operations of its new city. By the time Henley left the mayor's office, James R. Powell, the corporation's president, had drawn additional merchants, professionals, and investors to Birmingham, including Herman Simon, J.B. Luckie and his wife Susan, and Hochstadter's parents, Charles and Rosa. This influx and the city's 1872 building boom gathered Powell enough popularity to win the 1873 mayoral election. When he fulfilled his term as mayor, Powell kept his position as president of the land company, a blatant conflict of interests that did not go unnoticed. Nevertheless, he was elected for a second term in 1874. To give the appearance of social diversity, his administrations included representatives of the business district and the skilled working class, a group that would sporadically work with ELC stockholders to build and improve the city during the 1870s and 1880s. Powell's aldermen included Dr. Luckie and his fellow physician M.H. Jordan, as well as bankers, real estate contractors, and railroad men like L&N shop foreman Thomas Jeffers and S&N engineer John T. Milner.¹¹⁸

Isaac Hochstadter became involved in politics during the first mayoral term of Arabella Morris's husband William, who was also one of Powell's aldermen. A Confederate veteran who

¹¹⁷ *Early Days in Birmingham*, 57-59; DuBose, *Mineral Wealth of Alabama*, 92-94; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 187-188; *Gadsden Times*, January 4, 1872; *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 21, 1872; *Times-Argus* (Selma, Alabama), May 2, 1873.

¹¹⁸ *Early Days in Birmingham*, 20, 58-59; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 190, 254-255, 384; *Birmingham Iron Age*, September 17, 1874; December 10, 1874; October 14, 1875; LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham*, 15.

speculated in land, banking, manufacturing, and transportation, W.H. Morris may not have been directly involved in the ELC, but his connection to the company's benefactors and supporters—including those who did not always agree with Powell—increased the chances of his economic and political success. Just before Morris took office in January of 1875, the Powell administration amended the specifications for local elections, creating a fruitful environment for the rise of popular white men in the commercial district. While the group did not necessarily rig elections, they set a specific date for the contests, required each position to have at least two challengers, and allowed voters in Birmingham's four wards to choose two men to represent their section of the city. The men with the highest number of votes won seats as aldermen.¹¹⁹

Hochstadter's public persona affected his ability to win elections. Those who were not members or colleagues of the ELC had to gain respect through a demonstration of their civic allegiance and the purposeful cultivation of social, economic, and political "friends." Successful aldermen also possessed qualities that suggested their embrace of the ELC's industrial vision while still remaining loyal to the South's Democratic politics. Like Henley, Hochstadter was in his twenties when he was first elected and had been in town for just two years, but the young Jewish merchant had already developed significant networks with other rising businessmen and several city leaders, using his work as a firefighter, militiaman, and fraternal "brother" to do so. The loyalty he displayed to Birmingham and its population enabled him to win his first election in its second ward, where he initially lived with his family. His continued support of the collective identity ELC boosters promoted in the 1870s and 1880s ensured he would be elected

¹¹⁹ The aldermen served for four years, but their terms staggered, which meant the board could change every two years. For more information, see *LaMonte, Politics and Welfare*, 16; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 60-61; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 190-191, 278, 290, 299; *Birmingham Iron Age*, December 3, 1874.

three more times in the first and third wards as his residences and businesses moved about the city.¹²⁰

Because they were frequently skilled white workers or rising professionals, aldermen appeared to represent “the people” in local government, but they ultimately adhered to social and racial hierarchies that supported elite conceptions of the town and its working class. Between 1875 and 1877, the boards of aldermen in which Hochstadter took part failed to substantially shake the political influence of the ELC. When Morris resigned in the middle of his second term, the councilmen replaced him with Henry Caldwell, who had taken over Powell’s position as the company’s president in 1875. Caldwell repeated Powell’s habit of mixing his public and private interests and continued to serve as the ELC’s director while he ran the local government. Furthermore, the aldermen’s concerns—though repeatedly revisited throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—rarely benefitted a large percentage of Birmingham’s population in any significant way. Hochstadter and his colleagues ignored issues relating to the black community, for example, and the needs of other common laborers. They concentrated instead on publicity at state and national events, petitions and improvements linked to municipal services, and petty accusations of corruption and collective immorality. If they addressed the safety and health of the population, they concentrated on prominent white neighborhoods or the financial district. This established a precedent for the issues that future boards and commissions would discuss.¹²¹

Aldermen avoided African American concerns for a distinct reason. In 1873, white elites and professionals had no problem with Powell’s use of newly emancipated black voters to win

¹²⁰ *Birmingham Iron Age*, December 6, 1876; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 190-191; *1880 United States Census*, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama.

¹²¹ *Birmingham Iron Age*, August 22, 1877; December 12, 1877; LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 18-20, 22-24.

an election that transferred the courthouse and the business it generated to the city. Like most Alabamians, however, ELC directors and boosters regularly portrayed Reconstruction as an offensive tragedy that violated their rights as white citizens and threatened their town's social and economic viability. In the mid-1870s, when Hochstadter took office, most of Birmingham's white men belonged to the Democratic and Conservative Party. Since it was generated from remnants of antebellum factions that had reorganized in 1868, members had little in common besides their dedication to defeat "Radicalism" and "negro rule." Agrarian elements dominated the party after the state's first successful election of a post-Civil War Democratic governor in 1874, but in Birmingham, the party was comprised of entrepreneurs and industrialists, who strongly supported the mining, railroad, and manufacturing interests their fellow Democrats worked against. Their Democratic committee included William Morris and Thomas Jeffers, the town's mayors between 1875 and 1881, and several aldermen, including Dr. Luckie. At local meetings, the men collectively expressed a dedication to "the ascendancy of the white race in this county" which they believed was "endangered by the multitudes of aspirants for office and their contentions."¹²²

Isaac Hochstadter left no specific evidence of his feelings about the black population or the Democratic and Conservative Party. His participation in local politics, however, would have required much more than a mild rejection of Radical policies and the Civil Rights Bill that the town's white men considered another "little hell" that the federal government was imposing on the South. A small coalition of labor unions, Republicans, and white workers soon challenged the power of the commercial elite, but they were not yet strong enough to present a significant

¹²² DuBose, *The Mineral Wealth of Alabama*, 150; Bolling Hall Family Papers, LRP39, Subgroup XII, Series A, Box 5, Folder 12, ADAH; Allen Johnston Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890* (1992 repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1951), 27, 207; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 190-191; *Birmingham Iron Age*, July 2, 1874, 2; July 9, 1874; July 16, 1874.

threat. If candidates were anything less than “true and tried” Democrats, they were severely criticized because—according to the *Birmingham Iron Age*—the “issues at stake [were] too momentous” to be placed in the hands of men who possessed “uncertain principles.” White men who insisted on being labeled “independents” were immediately suspected of colluding with Republicans. Even more threatening was the political club the local party formed in 1874, which used the city’s newspapers to warn the white population that it would “wait upon every white man in the beat” to enroll him as a member. Hochstadter’s victory in the second ward demonstrated that he must have joined the party by that time. If anyone refused, those who had joined would take down his name, condemn him as a “traitor at heart,” and brand him “with the mark of political infamy henceforth and forever.”¹²³

Fortunately, Hochstadter was considered an effective representative until party loyalties shifted, when he once again was forced to navigate a delicate political shift. Tensions reappeared once again in 1878, when white laborers cast aside Powell’s Democratic Conservatives to support businessman and former L&N engineer Thomas Jeffers. Hochstadter and Luckie supported the Democrats in opposition to the workers. Both helped to organize a rally with ELC stockholder William Mudd and Frank O’Brien, a Catholic alderman and real estate developer who would become a substantial Jewish ally. Moreover, Hochstadter was listed as a recommended alderman for the first ward on Powell’s Democratic Conservative ticket, indicating that his social and commercial networks were bringing him close to the source of the ELC’s civic power. His suggested running mate was Christian Enslen, a Protestant banker who, like Hochstadter, had begun his career as a merchant. Enslen was also a member of the Birmingham Rifles and the same Masonic and IOOF lodges. Other candidates for aldermen

¹²³ *Birmingham Iron Age*, March 26, 1874; May 26, 1874; July 9, 1874; July 16, 1874; August 27, 1874; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 78.

included M.H. Jordan, a local favorite among the city's professionals, and James Sloss, an industrialist who—similar to former S&N engineer John T. Milner—supported the use of and abused convict labor.¹²⁴

Hochstadter's political choices embedded him in conflicts between Birmingham's white laborers and its economic elites, which affected the civic loyalties of many white residents and cost him the election. A national depression stifled development in the mid-1870s, but boosterism led to a small amount of industrial growth through foreign and national investment. As black and white men migrated to the city to obtain work, the labor pool rose, making production managers less amenable to workers' requests for fair working conditions, standard wages, and shorter hours. Jeffers' "People's Ticket" appealed to a wide range of individuals who were frustrated with the ELC and the manufacturers they supported, including skilled white workers who routinely claimed that their employers violated their rights as citizens and men. Jeffers had significant ties to the railroad shops and unions like the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, but he also held strongly to his affiliation with regional Democrats. He was also a Mason, and, during several terms as an alderman, supported the "progressive ideas and liberal views" that Birmingham's professionals embraced.¹²⁵ Furthermore, since black voters tended to align themselves with *anyone* whose allegiance to the Democrat Conservatives was absent or relatively mild, Jeffers seemed a good option for African Americans who stubbornly refused to

¹²⁴ DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 254, 381-384, 387; *Birmingham Iron Age*, November 8, 1876; July 10, 1878; November 20, 1878; Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: the Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996), 94-95; Karen R. Utz, *Sloss Furnaces* (Charleston: Arcardia Publishing, 2009), 8.

¹²⁵ For examples and definitions of these views, which were based on Powell's initial promotional material, see discussions in the first section of Chapter Two of this dissertation, "James R. Powell and the Construction of the 'Magic City.'"

be bullied out of voting. Although the election was contested, Jeffers easily captured the mayor's office and held it firmly, securing two terms between 1878 and 1882.¹²⁶

Although Jeffers' victory closed an immediate opportunity for Hochstadter, it opened doors for politically ambitious white businessmen that would serve the Jewish merchant well later. It marked a definitive moment in Birmingham's local government, for it indicated that leadership would not necessarily lie in the hands of "the dominant economic entity in the community" but "men of means" of a lesser financial rank who were a bit more connected to the general population. The pattern continued throughout the late nineteenth century due to the increasing success of boosters' campaigns to attract northern and foreign developers. Their efforts manifested in the absentee ownership of the most important industrial manufacturers, whose stockholders and managers were rarely interested in local politics unless it directly affected their bottom lines.¹²⁷

Those who retained their influence had to find a balance between the workers and the civic-commercial elite, however, and although Hochstadter adjusted quickly, others were not as adept at reading Birmingham's political culture. The career of Hochstadter's former colleague, J.B. Luckie, serves as the perfect example of this phenomenon. Luckie won a seat in Alabama's legislature in 1880, but as soon as his term was over he returned to local politics. Seeking to

¹²⁶ Black voting was severely diminished in Alabama in 1888, when the Democrats prohibited black men from voting in their primaries. Nonetheless, Democratic Conservatives in Birmingham, similar to many in other cities and towns, began to make voting difficult as early as 1875, when the state's rewritten constitution allowed appointed county registrars to control wards and districts. P.H. Carpenter, the city clerk, kept his office open for only five days that November. Those who did not register during business hours—something difficult for black and common white day laborers to do—would be unqualified to vote in local elections for the upcoming year. Even though the practice eliminated many of their votes, Jeffers was accused of preferring to "make the negro the balance of power" when he was elected since the "majority of the negro votes for the 'People's Ticket' was about 40 over the Democratic and Conservative ticket." McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 78-81; *Birmingham Iron Age*, April 1, 1875; November 8, 1876; January 24, 1877; October 24, 1877; December 12, 1877; January 29, 1879.

¹²⁷ LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 10-15, 22; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 78-81, 117-123; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 386-7, 422, 543; 2.

capitalize on the social conflicts that had grown more prevalent in his absence, Luckie challenged incumbent Alexander Lane, who succeeded Thomas Jeffers as mayor in 1882. During Lane's first term, the Birmingham Rolling Mills' corporate managers refused to honor union recruiting contracts, which stimulated laborers' complaints and led to a strike over wage scales and "frontierlike [living] conditions." Union sympathizers in the city, including several merchants, bought benefit tickets and offered some workers temporary jobs. Luckie's "Workingman's Ticket" included a dentist, grocer, clothing storeowner, and railroad agent and was jointly sponsored by the Republicans and the Knights of Labor. Although they represented the skilled white working class, their association with Republicans alienated some white Democrats, regardless of their collective support for the strikers. The mayor's reputation as an "independent judge amid Birmingham's warring factions" contributed to Luckie's defeat. Although Lane was a wealthy lawyer and part of the city's successful business class, he was an advocate for the poor and the town's public schools. He presented himself as non-violent, emotionally balanced, fair, and generous, which appealed to black and white voters. He too placed middle- and working-class alderman on his tickets, including Isaac Hochstadter, who served the last two of his three terms during Lane's administration. Hochstadter was reelected the year Luckie switched "sides" to try his hand in the mayor's race.¹²⁸

Like many of Birmingham's rising entrepreneurs, Hochstadter wisely shifted his political loyalties and occupation when it suited his professional and economic needs. In the 1880s and 1890s, he continued to hone his leadership and networking skills, which strengthened his alliances with a wide range of white men, including the city's commercial elite, rising middle-

¹²⁸ McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 31-37, 77-79; Steve Suits, *Hugo Black of Alabama: How His Roots and Early Career Shaped the Great Champion of the Constitution* (Montgomery: New South Books, 2017), 159; DuBose, *The Mineral Wealth of Alabama*, 157-158; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 191-192.

class, and even skilled laborers. His activities were hardly unusual since nineteenth-century American Jews frequently joined fraternal organizations and other civic organizations to integrate into their cities' commercial and political circles. Nevertheless, the timing and details of his actions, as well as the way they were interpreted and remembered, were distinctly linked to Birmingham's growth and fluctuating conditions. Hochstadter, for example, continued to expand his connections through the Knights of Pythias and Odd Fellows, mutual aid associations that were run by professionals but offered white laborers the social welfare their employers evaded or refused to provide. The local respect he earned through these lodges and other civic organizations led to corporate positions on the board of the Alabama National Bank, the Birmingham Ice Company, and several land companies. In 1884, he accumulated enough capital to open the Iron City Exchange, the popular saloon that he operated on First Avenue. His position in his town's liquor industry demonstrated his financial viability and generated good will among working-class voters who utilized Birmingham's bars to socialize and air their political grievances.¹²⁹ Hochstadter combined his economic, social, and political goals to rise to a position of power in Birmingham, but he also made an effort to balance the progressive vision of local leaders and the desires of the dominant population.¹³⁰

Temple Emanu-El, Interfaith Alliances, and Sunday Schools

While Isaac Hochstadter's business and political networks were important to him, he was also dedicated to his faith. In 1882 and 1883, the young merchant began increasing his

¹²⁹ Between 1880 and 1910, Birmingham's most powerful Democrat machines were associated with saloons, especially in districts that housed rolling mills and furnace operators. Laborers used bars like the Iron City Exchange not only as watering holes, but also to rebel against the city's moral reformers and distribute food and funds when their unions went on strike. For more information, see McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 71-72; Madelon Powers, *Faces Along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman's Saloon, 1870-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 69.

¹³⁰ *City Directory of Birmingham...for 1884-5*, 79-80, 174; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 468, 554.

relationships with Jewish residents who wished to build and maintain their non-Jewish networks while simultaneously remaining religiously distinct. He joined fifteen other Jewish men in the establishment of Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham's first Jewish congregation. Similar to many American Reform Jews, Emanu-El's founders balanced their nineteenth-century social and commercial work with their ethnic and religious traditions, engaging in common practices of Jewish community building that increased their status among the city's white middle-class Protestants.¹³¹ How and when Emanu-El and its Sunday school were created, however, was also related to Birmingham's construction and spiritual development. As one of Emanu-El's principle founders, Hochstadter was provided with opportunities to foster and exhibit his leadership skills and religious dedication, which reinforced the image of strength and stamina he demonstrated in the city's fire department, militia, and government.

Moreover, the synagogue provided acculturated Jews like Hochstadter with opportunities to work cooperatively on religious projects and build interfaith partnerships. This publicly displayed their piety and devotion—characteristics that local journalists and promoters often used to combat the city's reputation for rough living and unfettered commercialism. New South advocate John Witherspoon DuBose pointed out, for example, that Henry Caldwell, the second president of the Elyton Land Company, was affiliated not only with the Masons but also the First Presbyterian Church, which entrusted him “with the duty of procuring the plans” for the “large and costly church” the congregation built in 1887. Historians Ethel Armes and George Cruikshank likewise highlighted the religious activities of land speculators and entrepreneurs,

¹³¹ Unlike their Orthodox counterparts, nineteenth-century Reform Jews tended to be acculturated Jews like Hochstadter who rejected traditional laws and worship practices, dietary restrictions, and a dedication to the Jewish Diaspora which drew attention to their religious differences. They tended to unite with white Protestants, especially those who were advocates of the Social Gospel, through their philanthropic work and beliefs in universal brotherhood and calls for interfaith cooperation.

including Jefferson County Reverend R.K. Hargrove, who became the local bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and one of his congregants, merchant William Hood, who was “faithful in his membership and obligations.” The language these and other writers routinely employed frequently associated religion with social order—like many middle-class whites—and suggested Birmingham’s model residents were active churchgoers who often possessed leadership roles in their congregations.¹³²

Not all members of the population were interested in thwarting “bad” Birmingham’s negative image, but those who were often came from different classes, denominations, and races. Black and white congregants, Jews and non-Jews, worked hard to create institutions that negated the downtown district’s drunkenness, fraud, crime, and prostitution. James Powell donated several “suitable lots” for the building of new churches, exhibiting the ELC’s support for white congregations that were forming or relocating from nearby towns like Elyton or Tuscaloosa. As early as 1872, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Catholics began churches on these lots, many in prime locations between Twentieth Street and Seventh Avenue. Episcopalian Margaret Ward saw this as proof that Birmingham was a town where “good men and women [had] always lived.” Although no such assistance was offered to the black community, emancipation sparked religious organization among Jefferson County’s African Americans, who like their white counterparts often utilized their churches as political centers and sources of emotional and social assistance. Although segregated, black congregations also rose up during the city’s early years. Black Methodist missionaries began St. Paul United Methodist in 1869, two years before Birmingham was built, and the First Colored Baptist and St. John African Methodist Episcopal churches were organized in 1873. As black labor recruitment

¹³² DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 174; Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron*, 52; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 226.

increased and more black families moved to the city in the 1870s and 1880s, these congregations grew as well.¹³³

Hochstadter and his coreligionists established Temple Emanu-El, a Reform congregation, in 1882, a little more than a decade after the Elyton Land Company surveyed the first city lots. Their efforts had begun the year before, when “some twenty-five or thirty worshipers” assembled in Herman and Paula Simon’s “spacious parlors” at their home on Seventeenth Street. The group gathered in September 1881 to observe the Jewish High Holidays, and laymen—although it is unclear exactly who—conducted the rituals. Few had been in the city as long as the Simon, Marx, and Hochstadter families. Most had migrated to set up bars or shops within the previous three or four years. On June 28, 1882, several men participated in what would become Emanu-El’s first board meeting. Herman Simon, Samuel Marx, Al and Isaac Hochstadter, Sophia Wise’s husband Abraham, and Mason Ben Jacobs were recorded among the synagogue’s charter members. Abe Wise was elected president, and Jacobs and Hochstadter were named secretary and treasurer, respectively. Drawing from common standards of religious organization and their knowledge of Gilded Age legal and economic practices, the group immediately incorporated their congregation in Birmingham’s probate court, listing Simon, Marx, Hochstadter, Wise, and Jacobs among its trustees. Since life tended to move much faster in the city than it did in other sections of the state, Emanu-El quickly sprouted other Jewish organizations. Within a year, the congregation had purchased land for Jewish burials, organized a ladies’ benevolent society, and formed a social club under Hochstadter’s direction. Although the Reform synagogue’s building

¹³³ *Early Days in Birmingham*, 31; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 208-245; Wilson Fallin, Jr., *The African American Church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1815-1963: A Shelter in the Storm* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 21-32.

was not completed until 1889, its cornerstone was laid in 1886. The congregation hired its first rabbi, Maurice Eisenberg, who served from 1887 to 1890.¹³⁴

A variety of factors influenced the ability of local Jews to create Emanu-El and its organizations, many of which were related to additional migration and the economic rise of Jewish residents. In 1879, only six Jewish families lived in Birmingham, but by 1882, that number had substantially grown, making it easier to comprise a *minyan* (the quorum of ten men required for collective worship). The city's general population also tripled between 1874 and 1882, and the white middle-class professionals and investors who moved to and developed the city brought their visions of a moral social order, which included public displays of religion, with them. The town's promotional material and social structures—like those in many cities throughout the country—also encouraged ambitious residents to engage in religious activities that white Protestant elites associated with civic duty and social responsibility. Neither Birmingham nor its boosters can be credited for middle-class Jews' desire to observe their religion or participate in interfaith alliances, but they provided a favorable atmosphere for them to do so, especially during the 1880s.

When Congregation Emanu-El founded its initial institutions, for example, Birmingham's non-Jewish congregations were experiencing what evangelical Protestants considered a religious revival. In 1881, the *Iron Age* suggested “the number of church goers” was growing with the building boom. On March 9, a staff writer indicated that five Christian churches—four Protestant

¹³⁴ Emanu-El's other charter members were Bernard Wellman, Monroe Hochstadter, Henry Lazarus, Morris Fox, I. Forst, Ike Adler, Sam Rich, Joe Beiderman, H. Schuester, and Ben Jacob's brother Robert. Fox, Lazarus, and Wellman were also elected trustees. *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911; Hannah Bennett Smith's “Emanu-El” and other undated articles (circa 1932), Linda Akenhead Collection: Survey of Six Historical Religious Structures in Birmingham, AR758, Folder 758 (85-193), 2.6, BPL; *The American Israelite*, October 6, 1882; September 30, 1887; Sylvia Blascoer Kohn, “By Reason of Strength: The Story of Temple Emanu-El's Seventy Years, A Record of Its Members' Service to Birmingham, 1882-1952,” April 29, 1952, Temple Emanu-El (Birmingham, Ala.) nearprint, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

and one Catholic—had “good congregations every Sunday” and predicted that “as soon as new spring suits are put on, they will be filled to overflowing.” Three months before Emanu-El was created in 1882, editors claimed that Christian churches were so well attended “the ministry ought to feel encouraged” and that “more Birmingham people go to church now than formerly.” Attendance had increased so much, that journalists predicted “the churches will soon have to be enlarged.” Their vague assessment was not only correct, but also a conservative indicator of religious growth. Writers based their declarations solely on the five churches associated with Powell’s original land grants, excluding congregations that had split from these institutions as well as the African American churches that white chroniclers tended to lump together or disregard. From 1878 to 1886, fourteen new congregations were organized—half were predominantly African American and the other half were white. Emanu-El was one of the latter.¹³⁵

These articles reveal that all groups were not included in white middle-class visions of uplifting religious growth—but civically-minded Jews like Isaac Hochstadter and Ben Jacobs were. The connections the men made through their work in non-Jewish fraternal organizations and political associations assisted them in the formation and promotion of Temple Emanu-El. Jewish congregations often met in Masonic Halls, which were made available to them through local Jews’ membership in various orders. While Emanu-El preferred renting churches for worship, board members Hochstadter and Jacobs were able to draw from similar links to Birmingham’s lodge, which enabled them to hold their first meeting in its hall in Charles Linn’s newly completed First National Bank, the same building in which the Marx family’s store was

¹³⁵ *Birmingham Iron Age*, March 9, 1881, 3; February 9, 1882, 3; March 2, 1882, 3. DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 208-245; Fallin, *The African American Church*, 21-32; Nathan Turner, Jr., "Birmingham Churches Established in the 1800s Have Mastered a Formula," *Birmingham Times*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.birminghamtimes.com/2017/06/birmingham-churches-established-in-the-1800s-have-mastered-a-formula/>.

located. In September 1882, the men contributed to Emanu-El's first public service, sparing no expense and calling upon their Jewish and non-Jewish colleagues to ensure the event was a success. After securing the Cumberland Presbyterian Church for worship, Emanu-El's board members hired Joseph Stolz, a rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College, the Cincinnati seminary that Reform leader Isaac Mayer Wise established in 1875. They then asked several Protestants to sing in their choir, which was composed of Frank O'Brien, a Catholic, and Protestants Margaret Ward, Sallie Pearson, and Nellie Cobbs. Jewish grocer Elias Gusfield, who later served as Emanu-El's secretary, and organist Fred Grambs, another Protestant rounded out their numbers.¹³⁶

Writing in 1911, Morris Newfield, who was then serving as Emanu-El's rabbi, identified "Ike Hochstadter, a single man and young in years" as "the leader of the movement which culminated in the formal organization of Congregation Emanu-El on June 28, 1882." To highlight his congregation's continuing dedication to their Protestant allies' interpretation of a moral social order, he linked Hochstadter's and other bachelors' role in early Jewish institutions not only to their devotion to Reform Judaism, but also to the "remarkable interest and activity of young men in the communal life of Birmingham." Newfield's language indicated that Jews continued to view such religious works as a powerful tool of Jewish integration and social interaction, which is likely why he emphasized that it had been "maintained." Similar to other American Jews, Emanu-El's members used public displays of religion and their participation in

¹³⁶ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 7-9; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 212, 317, 332, 544; *City Directory of Birmingham...1884-5*, 277; Richard Dabney, *Images of American: Birmingham's Highland Avenue Park* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2006), 87; John Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 89.

local interfaith projects to demonstrate the values they shared with their non-Jewish counterparts, a practice that was deeply linked to both their religious and their public identities.¹³⁷

Emanu-El's interfaith choir was also a resource for the extension of professional and political connections. Many of its participants had substantial ties to Birmingham's fraternities and financial circles and were already acquainted with some of the congregation's board members. O'Brien, for example, was a Mason and one of Powell's aldermen in the 1870s. As a real estate developer, he built rolling mills, coke furnaces, and an amusement hall, and when he sang for Emanu-El in 1882, he was in the process of constructing his elaborate Opera House. In 1909, O'Brien won elected as the city's mayor. Margaret Ward moved to Birmingham from Rome, Georgia, to help her father William Ketchum run the city's first hotel, the Relay House. When Ketchum died, Ward and her husband George, who was an Odd Fellow around the same time as Isaac Hochstadter, became its sole managers. Like Hochstadter and Ward's son (who was also named George), Sallie Pearson's husband was a prominent Democrat. Robert Pearson was not only a member of their local party's executive committee, but also a lawyer with a "large and lucrative practice" that largely concentrated on public corporations. Moreover, he belonged to the Knights of Pythias, the fraternity that had several Jewish members, including all three Hochstadter brothers and Morris Marx. Nellie Cobbs was considered an "accomplished lady" who was noted throughout Alabama for her "domestic virtues," literary accomplishments, and "superior musical talent." She was the daughter of Thomas Cobbs, a state politician elected in 1880 and 1886. Cobb married school superintendent J.H. Phillips, a close associate of Samuel Ullman, who was Newfield's father-in-law and Emanu-El's spiritual leader from 1890 to 1894.

¹³⁷ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 7.

In 1898, Cobb and Jewish women like Ullman's daughter Carrie, Bertha Marx Adler, and Paula Simon would worked together to establish a free kindergarten association.¹³⁸

In addition to the extension of their local networks, Emanu-El provided Isaac Hochstadter and other young Jews with the ability to demonstrate their competency as leaders. Half of Emanu-El's charter members were single merchants, whose reputations were just beginning to rise in Birmingham's commercial district. Since religious leadership was a characteristic that non-Jewish boosters linked to model residency, they increased their social and political capital through their work on board committees and elected positions. For those like Hochstadter and furniture dealer Ben Jacobs, who already held substantial business and fraternal networks, such activities enabled them to actively express devotion while reinforcing their civic status. In 1882, Hochstadter was elected Emanu-El's treasurer, and Ben Jacobs became its secretary. Two years later, Jacobs was elected treasurer, a position he still held when Newfield was writing in 1911. Hochstadter, in turn, was elected to the first of his two terms as Emanu-El's president. Managerial and committee positions on their synagogue's board provided these men—and many others—with opportunities to work collectively with their coreligionists and cultivate the leadership experience they had already begun to gather as members of secular fraternal orders such as the Masons and the Odd Fellows. Unmarried Jewish women found similar opportunities in Emanu-El's Sunday schools and benevolent associations to build skills and reputations they would draw upon as social workers and educators.¹³⁹

Non-evangelical Protestants and Americanist Catholics, such as the individuals in Emanu-El's choir, would have also related to their late nineteenth-century Jewish counterparts

¹³⁸ DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, " 190, 212, 309, 317, 332, 411, 544; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 31.

¹³⁹ *American Israelite*, October 22, 1882, 122; Newfield, "The History of Temple Emanu-El," 7-11.

through their rational approach to the Old Testament and their adherence to the social gospel. These ties were strengthened in November 1885 when nineteen rabbis (including Isaac Meyer Wise) met in Pittsburgh to distinguish the principles of Reform Judaism from other forms of universalism and more traditional practices. According to the Pittsburgh Platform, its social instructions were rooted to longstanding “Mosaic legislation” that deemed it a Jew’s duty to encourage a moral social order not only by addressing, but trying to solve injustices related to “the present organization of society.” Birmingham’s Jews may not have shared their Protestant allies’ opposition to the sale of alcohol, but Emanu-El’s Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society and other Jewish organizations participated in collective charities and social work, increasing their civic networks as they did so.¹⁴⁰

Jewish residents also indicated their dedication to their faith and the city’s spiritual growth through the establishment of a Sunday school. Since Birmingham’s reputation for civility was rather questionable in the 1880s, its boosters and middle-class residents considered religious education essential to securing the city’s positive image and development and to combat local crime. They were not alone. In the post-Civil War South, many Southern whites viewed Sunday schools as a stabilizing force in what they perceived as a chaotic world. Protestants of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds used them to soothe the psychological effects of poverty

¹⁴⁰ Many American Reform Jews, non-evangelical Protestants, and Catholics found ways to bridge disparities in their religious beliefs through principles of universal brotherhood and morality, the Old Testament, and their interfaith social work, but since expressions and practices of faith could differ greatly among individuals and specific congregations, this is NOT to say that all of them connected in the ways discussed here or held the exact same belief systems. Some Reform Jews, for example, did not initially support the Pittsburgh Platform, even though it came to epitomize their movement later. Michael Meyers, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 265; “Declaration of Principles” (“The Pittsburgh Platform”), 1885 Pittsburgh Conference, Central Conference of American Rabbis, <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/>; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 22; Walter Jacob, ed., *The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect* (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1985), 26, 35.

or oppression and combat the social ills they believed were the direct result of urbanization and industrialization. Between 1881 and 1883, Sunday school invitations, reorganizations, and state conventions were regularly featured in the *Birmingham Iron Age*, and its middle-class editors associated “the rapid progress” the city’s churches were making not only with church membership, but also Sunday school attendance. Three months before Emanu-El rented Cumberland Presbyterian for its first public service in 1882, the church reported that it operated two Sunday schools with 100 pupils and teachers, almost as many as its 132 members. The Methodist Episcopal Church South served 160 students. The eighty children enrolled at the Church of the Advent had the smallest teacher to class ratio at 10:1¹⁴¹

Isaac Hochstadter was among the many Birmingham businessmen and politicians who used their positions in local Sunday schools to publicly demonstrate their morality and administrative skills. Similar to industrialist James Sloss and real estate developer George Miles, Hochstadter served his congregation as a superintendent (or principal), but other men associated with the city’s churches became stewards and secretaries, including city treasurer James Francis and Protestant tin and stove merchant James Hopkins. They and other city leaders were frequently praised in local histories and promotional materials, where their religious voluntarism was linked to leadership and boosterism. In 1911, Morris Newfield focused on Hochstadter’s Sunday school work in his congregational history in the *Reform Advocate*, shaping the young Jewish merchant into an ideal founder and early entrepreneur. Newfield stated that Hochstadter was directly responsible for beginning the school in 1883, contradicting an 1882 edition of the

¹⁴¹ *The American Israelite*, September 30, 1887; Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1917), 3; Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 2-4; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 63-64; *Birmingham Iron Age*, February, 23, 1881; March 16, 1881; June 1, 1881; January 5, 1882; ; July 6, 1882; December 28, 1882; June 14, 1883; September 13, 1883.

American Israelite, a journal published by Reform leader Isaac Mayer Wise, which listed the establishment of Emanu-El and its school as a concurrent event. Wise attributed both to the spiritual guidance of Joseph Stolz, the student rabbi who was hired to conduct the program.¹⁴² Since Stolz was just finishing his studies at Wise's Cincinnati rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College, the *Israelite* may have been biased in its reporting, but it was published only a month after Stolz's visit and even Newfield admitted "the enthusiasm aroused by the visit of the young college student" was a motivating factor in the school's creation.¹⁴³ Regardless of who was responsible for its formation, Newfield reserves most of his praise for Hochstadter, whose actions may have been inspired by his civic goals as much as they were by his religious dedication.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, Hochstadter did not found the Sunday school alone, as Newfield led his readers to believe. The *Israelite* noted the contributions of Mason and furniture dealer Ben Jacobs and sixteen-year-old Nettie Newman, who helped Hochstadter prepare "a small class of boys and girls for confirmation." Newman, who was born in Montgomery like Morris Marx, moved to Birmingham in 1881 from Shelby County, where her parents, Ferdinand and Theresa, operated a small hotel. Although the Newmans were not related to Henrietta Neumann Marx or her brother Charles, they exhibited the same patterns of chain migration as the Marx family and other Jewish settlers. They relocated to open a "fancy stationery and music store" with Theresa's

¹⁴² Laymen led worship services for most of Emanu-El's first few years, but Stolz was hired to serve during the High Holy Days, the holiest days of the Jewish calendar, during the fall of 1882 and 1883. Many new and small synagogues used student rabbis in this fashion until they had sufficient membership and financial resources to hire full-time rabbis. This system also provided rabbinical students with congregational experience.

¹⁴³ After graduating from Hebrew Union College, Joseph Stolz went onto a long and distinguished career as an American Reform rabbi, serving most prominently in Chicago.

¹⁴⁴ DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 186, 466, 479, 485, 489, 491, 515, 521; *American Israelite*, October 22, 1882; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 9.

brother Arthur Hirscher and were joined sometime before 1887 by another brother, Alfred Hirscher, who soon became Emanu-El's board secretary and cemetery warden.¹⁴⁵

Sunday school teaching was common for young Jewish women of Newman's era, and while the Jewish equivalent of the Protestant Sunday school had a particular social function in Birmingham, the American movement possessed stronger origins, which were deeply connected to expressions of acculturation, the desire for religious distinction, and increasing opportunities for Jewish women. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, Jewish men who immigrated to North America frequently concentrated on their professions rather than teaching Jewish children (especially boys) as they had done in Europe. Their business pursuits left a void that expanded what was considered acceptable behavior for their wives, daughters, and sisters. American Jewish Sunday schools arose in the 1830s, when conversion, apathy, intermarriage, and public education threatened Jewish culture—and what some considered Jewish existence—in the United States. The schools were rooted in rabbis' concerns about the diminishing knowledge of Hebrew, Jewish history, and religious traditions and can be traced to the efforts of Philadelphian Rebecca Gratz. Blending American and Jewish feminine ideals related to piety and charity, the highly educated Gratz opened the country's first free Jewish Sunday School in 1838.¹⁴⁶ She and her upper- and middle-class followers established institutions that provided

¹⁴⁵ *American Israelite*, October 22, 1882; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 9; 1880 *United States Census*, Columbiana, Shelby County, Alabama; *The Shelby Sentinel*, July 24, 1879; October 27, 1881; *The Montgomery Advertiser*, June 1, 1884; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, September-November 1888, Temple Emanu-El Records, 1887-1923, MF-2569, microfilm, AJA.

¹⁴⁶ Nineteenth-century Americans often associated female gender ideals with components of "True Womanhood," which connected women to domesticity, piety, and morality. Middle-class non-Jewish black and white women frequently drew from such principles when forming their religious identities, performing them through their missionary efforts (which were sometimes directed at Jews), fundraising or philanthropic activities, and/or work in Sunday schools. Although subject to additional cultural influences, acculturated Jewish women like Rebecca Gratz and Nettie Newman usually adhered to similar notions. They, too, felt they had special qualities that made them morally superior to men and especially suited for benevolence and religious education. Their activities, however, also included fostering the continuity of Jewish culture. Like American Jewish men, they frequently tried to develop positive relationships with non-Jews and eliminate any potential for antisemitism. For more information, see Natasha Kirsten Kraus, *A New Type of Womanhood: Discursive Politics and Social Change in Antebellum America*

young Jewish women with their first opportunity to enter public life as teachers. Together, they inspired a movement that convinced American Jews to collectively educate their children on Sundays. Their activities aligned with the behavior of non-Jews who met for religious classes before or between their worship services. Concurrently, they allowed Jews to keep *Shabbat*.¹⁴⁷

Similar to the Jewish bachelors Morris Newfield praised in the *Reform Advocate*, Nettie Newman and the Sunday school teachers who followed her benefitted from the leadership skills and connections that they cultivated at Emanu-El as volunteers. Like Isaac Hochstadter and her uncle Alfred, Newman was well respected in Congregation Emanu-El and was the only woman who taught until at least 1884, when the board awarded her with a gold watch in appreciation of her “punctuality, patience, and tireless labors in teaching the children.” As the congregation grew, so too did the Jewish education department that Newman helped Hochstadter and Ben Jacobs found. By 1888, eight women taught at the Reform temple’s Sunday school. Like Nettie, they worked with Emanu-El’s men to prepare its young people for confirmation, which began to replace *bar mitzvahs* in progressive American synagogues in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Confirmation, a coming-of-age ritual available to all Jewish children rather than just males, was a departure from Jewish tradition that recognized and stressed the importance of women in the Jewish body politic, which inherently encouraged the next

(Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 12, 27-30; Mark K. Bauman. “Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2003), 34-36; Paula E. Hyman. “The Jewish Body Politic: Gendered Politics in the Early 20th Century,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues*, 2, (Spring 1999), 37-38.

¹⁴⁷ Although the practice varied, many Jews closed shops and otherwise avoided working from sundown on Friday night to sundown on Saturday. This was in keeping with *Shabbat* observance against work. For more information about the work of Rebecca Gratz and the Jewish Sunday school movement, see Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 13-19; Bauman, “Southern Jewish Women,” 34-36; Pamela S. Nadell, *America’s Jewish Women: A History From Colonial Times to Today* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019), 77, 179.

generation of the city's Reform women to actively demonstrate their support for Jewish institutions.¹⁴⁸

Newman's voluntarism did more than reflect nineteenth-century conceptions of Jewish American womanhood or her individual commitment to her personal beliefs and values. Her participation in Emanu-El's Sunday school expressed multiple levels of American Jewish acculturation while simultaneously demonstrating Birmingham's early Jewish residents' intention to retain their religious distinction and culture. Moreover, her actions paralleled those of middle-class black and white women (Christians and Jews) in cities and towns throughout the United States, who resisted and redefined their gender roles without appearing to disrupt traditional notions of femininity or challenge what was perceived as their communal or spiritual duties. Although few Jewish women entered Birmingham's business realm as visibly as Sophia Wise, Newman and many others developed important relationships with their male peers and their non-Jewish counterparts through their religious and social work. Their labor was generally unpaid and viewed as an extension of women's nurturing roles as mothers and caregivers, but it opened an avenue for those who chose to delay marriage (or never marry, like Rebecca Gratz). Some women who attended Emanu-El, including Isaac Hochstadter's niece Corinne and kindergarten teacher Carrie Ullman, used the training they received to spark careers as professional educators. Jewish women, therefore, developed religious networks and experiences that bolstered their community's positive status in Birmingham as much as the voluntarism, fraternities, and political work of rising Jewish businessmen like Isaac Hochstadter. Their efforts likewise reinforced Emanu-El's position in the general community and reflected the city's

¹⁴⁸ *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 1, 1884; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, September-November 1888, AJA; Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), 186.

middle-class social and gender ideals, even though their work often receives little attention in the city's early Jewish histories.¹⁴⁹

Isaac Hochstadter, a member of Birmingham's first three Jewish families, combined his commercial experiences as a merchant with his personal interests and talents to achieve his professional and political goals. He established local networks in the 1870s and 1880s with a diverse group of white residents, including prominent civic leaders like J.B. Luckie and the working-class men who elected him to public office. His activities exemplify how Birmingham's early Jews contributed to the city's early growth and development and used their daily interactions to display their support for the city and its middle-class social and gender ideals.

Hochstadter became a leader among a second wave of Jewish migrants, who arrived in the city during the early 1880s. Like Herman Simon and Samuel Marx, he used the influence and connections he had developed with Protestants to help establish the city's first Jewish institutions, including Temple Emanu-El, the Reform synagogue, and its Sunday school. Even though he is often held up as a model Jewish founder, he did not work alone (nor did he claim to at the time). Ben Jacobs and Nettie Newman, for example, were among the young Jewish men and women who also used their civic voluntarism to integrate into the general community and increase the respect non-Jews had for their growing congregation. Jewish residents like Jacobs and Newman would continue to develop close relations with Catholic and non-evangelical Protestants, increasing their economic and social opportunities not only through their commercial and political work, but also through the city's cultural societies, labor unions, and schools.

¹⁴⁹ *Birmingham News*, April 23, 1900.

4. NEW WAVES:
EMIL LESSER, DIVERSITY, AND CONFLICT, 1884-1910

“Mr. Lesser is an aggressive, practical man of business and devoted to the advancement of Birmingham...Liberal to a fault, charitable, and responding promptly to the appeal of the distressed, he utilizes his advantages and means to bring happiness to others as well as to his own family.”

Jewish Ledger, May 18, 1900

Emil Lesser was a new arrival to the United States when he moved to Birmingham in 1883, but the twenty-eight-year-old immigrant had much in common with many of his neighbors. His background largely differed from Jewish merchants like Herman Simon or Isaac Hochstadter, but he, too, knew what it was like to overcome challenging circumstances due to social or political factors beyond his control. When he was still a toddler, Lesser lost his parents and grandparents in a cholera epidemic similar to the one that swept through Birmingham in 1875. At the time, his father, Michael, was serving as a German diplomat in Riga, Russia, where Lesser was born in 1855. He was soon forced to leave his home, traveling with unfamiliar relatives to Borna, a small town near Leipzig in what would later become modern Germany. Lesser came to love the culture and people of his new nation as a young boy, but decided to exchange his university education for a new start in the United States, where he traveled to make his fortune in 1882. He followed the same path as many nineteenth-century Jews who were born in German-speaking nations, including Samuel Marx and Sophia Wise, and made his way to Birmingham after settling first in other Southern towns. After a brief stay in Galveston, Texas, he moved to Cullman, a small farming community in North Alabama with a large German

population. Although most of the village’s residents were Lutheran, Lesser made lasting non-Jewish friends through the German culture they shared, a networking strategy that he would employ throughout his professional career. He soon wanted more than Cullman and its population could offer, however, so he decided to travel fifty miles south to the state’s Magic City, where he could live among his coreligionists and try his luck in Birmingham’s growing liquor and real estate industries. According to the *Jewish Ledger*, he quickly built a reputation as a businessman who was committed to the town and its underserved population. The “practical, aggressive” nature that the *Ledger* praised in 1900 indeed contributed to his economic and political rise, but it earned him as many civic enemies as it did friends.¹⁵⁰

Emil Lesser was part of a second wave of Jews who came to Birmingham between 1880 and 1895. They included Mason Ben Jacobs and Sunday school teacher Nettie Newman, as well as clothing magnate Moses Joseph (Jennie Marx’s husband), banker Burghardt Steiner, and alderman Simon Klotz. In some ways, they were quite similar to the four Jewish families who arrived during the 1870s. Predominantly Reform Jews, they were eager to integrate and played substantial roles in Birmingham’s early development and expansion. Like Isaac Hochstadter and

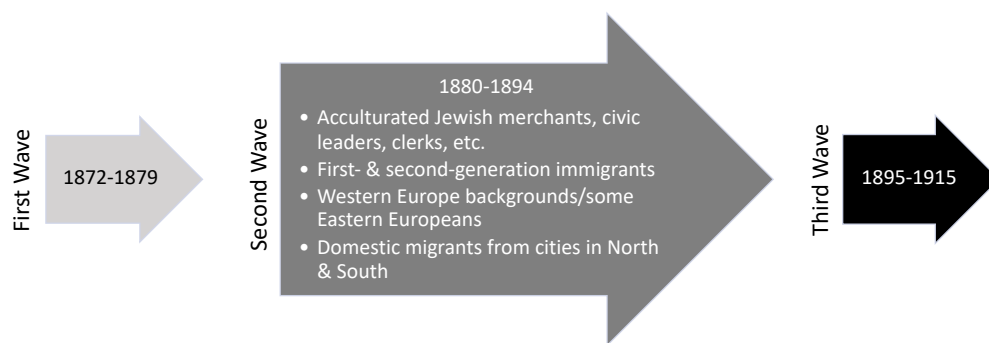


Figure 7: Timeline and Characteristics of Second-Wave Jewish Migrants

¹⁵⁰ *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 7; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 21.

other first-wave migrants, they drew from their prior networks and experiences to establish profitable businesses. They, too, strengthened the local economy and supported Birmingham's progressive image and middle-class social ideals.

Despite the broad patterns of civic integration that they shared with their predecessors and other American Jews, second-wave migrants were a diverse group of individuals who followed their own civic goals and ambitions. Temple Emanu-El's business leaders and politicians, including Lesser and his colleagues Moses Joseph, Burghardt Steiner, and Simon Klotz, joined Isaac Hochstadter and Samuel Marx in tales of the city's founding and early development, especially in chronicles that were produced between 1887 and 1911. Jewish settlers who came to the city in the 1880s and 1890s, however, possessed a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds, values, and opinions about religious leadership and representation. They frequently quarreled among themselves and encountered a variety of social and financial challenges that often divided the Jewish community.

Regardless of their differences, second-wave Jews also encountered a very different city than the one Herman Simon and Samuel Marx had found when they had arrived in Birmingham. During the 1880s and 1890s, Birmingham was expanding in size and importance. Industrial growth and building projects meant a need for more laborers and the saloons, dry goods stores, and the real estate market that served them. When Lesser arrived, he had numerous opportunities to increase his economic and political status and, like many of his coreligionists, drew from the civic connections and industries his predecessors had already cultivated. He was likely one of the many Jews who relocated to Birmingham because of its promotional materials, but others possessed friends and relatives who coaxed them into moving, housed them, and provided them with their first jobs. After 1882, individuals seeking a Jewish congregation could join Temple

Emanu-El, the Reform synagogue, where they formed important commercial and social networks.

Lesser and other second-wave Jews also encountered political conflicts and social unrest that their predecessors did not experience, which sharpened their sense of racial and religious vulnerability and affected their relationships with each other and their non-Jewish peers. From 1882 to 1899, Birmingham's black and white laborers struggled to obtain the wages and working conditions they were promised. Production managers and manufacturers frequently broke recruitment contracts and union agreements, which sparked a series of violent strikes that put local citizens on edge. Skilled white workers also continued to form powerful Democratic factions that escalated their conflicts with white elites and middle-class reformers, many of whom were the allies of Jews like Lesser. His story sheds light on the kinds of challenges prominent Jewish business leaders and politicians tackled in late nineteenth-century Birmingham and how they used the city's boosterism to their advantage. It also hints at the various ways that Jewish residents developed their professional and political networks and how those networks began to change. In addition, Lesser's troubles as a developer and police commissioner reveal how these individuals conducted themselves when accused of patronage and misconduct and defended their fluctuating positions in battles over the mayor's office, temperance, and anti-gambling legislation.¹⁵¹

Second-wave Jews were joined by a third-wave of migrants, predominantly Yiddish-speaking small shop owners and peddlers, who arrived in large numbers between 1895 and 1915. Many joined the Orthodox congregation, Knesseth Israel (KI), which began meeting in its members' homes in 1889 but had neither the funds or the congregants to organize public worship

¹⁵¹ McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 43-56; 71-73, 79-87.

services before the turn of the century. Although not all of these third-wave migrants chose to practice their faith through strict Orthodox practices, they often possessed different backgrounds and had less desire to acculturate than the Jewish families that had arrived before them. As the twentieth century approached, a wave of antisemitism rose in the city and the nation that made all of its Jewish residents more aware of the troubles that could arise from their religious differences.¹⁵² Upper- and middle-class Jews became intensely aware that the acceptance and respect that they had earned in Birmingham during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s could easily be threatened. This led them to change the way they kept their non-Jewish Southern neighbors' sensitivities to difference at bay. To combat a collective threat, Magic City Jews often overlooked internal squabbles and found new tactics to ensure their acceptance and inclusion. Although they began to back away from political representation, they remained strong in the city's economy and found ways to emphasize the contributions of Jewish entrepreneurs like Lesser in the city's founding, growth, and expansion.

Emil Lesser and Second-Wave Settlers: Housing, Promotion, and Trade

From 1880 to 1895, a new wave of Jewish settlers arrived that would play key roles in the advancement of Birmingham and its Jewish community. Emil Lesser was among those who joined and extended the substantial networks their predecessors built with skilled white workers and civic leaders during the 1870s, using their business ventures, fraternal order memberships,

¹⁵² Events in the state and the nation reinforced Birmingham's Jewish residents' uneasiness. Citizenship and social privileges were narrowed around the turn of the century through Alabama's 1901 constitution, for example, and the legalization of de facto segregation policies. Leo Frank was not lynched in Atlanta until 1915, but mob violence against white criminals was not uncommon in Birmingham and manifested through riots and the attempted lynching of railroad manager Richard Hawes in the late 1880s. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were also eliminated from commercial and social clubs they had helped non-Jews form in cities like Atlanta and Mobile, refused service at American hotels, and unwelcome to build or rent in particular neighborhoods throughout the country. Goldstein, "'Now is the Time to Show Your True Colors': Southern Jews, Whiteness, and the Rise of Jim Crow," 136-140; Rogoff, "Is the Jew White?," 402-404.

and promotional talents to achieve economic and political success. Similar to Hochstadter, Lesser nurtured a public persona that meshed his personal interests and experiences with the characteristics that boosters assigned to ideal citizens and commercial leaders. As he rose into the middle class, he, too, built important interfaith networks and gained a substantial reputation among the city's white professionals. Like Hochstadter, Lesser can be used as a springboard for discussing the actions of Birmingham's Reform Jews in the late nineteenth century and examining the shifting conditions that contributed to their social and political decisions.

Similar to young immigrants in other American cities, Emil Lesser's integration into Birmingham's upper echelon was facilitated by the commercial and religious work Jewish residents did before he arrived. Emanu-El was only a year old when Lesser made his way to the city in 1883, but the eighteen or nineteen families that composed the Reform congregation provided Lesser with social and financial resources that proved invaluable to his adjustment. Isaac Hochstadter managed Emanu-El's new Sunday school, where Ben Jacobs and Nettie Newman were preparing Hannah Wellman, Eugene Fies, Julia Silverman, and Hattie and Mose Lazarus for confirmation. When student rabbi Joseph Stolz returned to perform the High Holy Day services in September 1883, Lesser attended worship services full of rising Jewish businessmen. Julia Silverman's father Henry was a butcher from Cleveland, Tennessee, for example, and Hannah Wellman's father, Bernard, owned a downtown clothing store.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Henry Silverman and his daughters occasionally report their surname as "Silberman," but to prevent confusion, I have used Morris Newfield's spelling as well as that of Alice Silverman, Lesser's second wife, who modernized her name before she married Lesser in 1896. There is little information about Henry Silverman, so it is unclear whether he provided kosher meat to those who wanted it. Since he advertised simply as a butcher in local directories and served non-Jewish customers as well as Reform Jews who rejected dietary restrictions, he likely was operating in a non-kosher capacity. There seems to have been little demand or evidence for kosher establishments before the early 1900s, when Orthodox Jews remembered establishing them in their neighborhoods on the north side of the city. *American Israelite*, September 30, 1887; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 8, *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 9; *1880 United States Census*, Cleveland, Bradley County, Tennessee; *City Directory of Birmingham and Gazetteer...for 1884-5*, 136. Louis Gingold, transcript of oral history, *Memory Bank Project*, July 2, 1985, BHEC.

By the time Lesser arrived, additional patterns of Jewish migration and community building were evident, which included several occupational networks that provided second-wave migrants like him with extensive opportunities for employment and economic growth. Like Morris Marx's brother Ferd and Sophia Wise's son William, Mose Lazarus and Eugene Fies advanced due to their relatives' Jewish contacts and initial business ventures. When Mose Lazarus was an adolescent, he began working as a clerk in his family's leather and hide shop, which was closely related to the fur dealership his father Henry operated in Louisville, Kentucky, during the 1870s. Eugene Fies joined his father Jacob in the prosperous livery stable the Fies had opened after relocating from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in 1882. Jacob had followed his daughter Jennie to Birmingham after she married Al Hochstadter, Isaac's brother, in 1881. By 1884, Eugene's brother Max Fies was operating the City Shoe Store with another Hochstadter brother, Monroe. The latter business drew its supplies from the connections the men had to Jewish leather dealers like Lazarus.¹⁵⁴

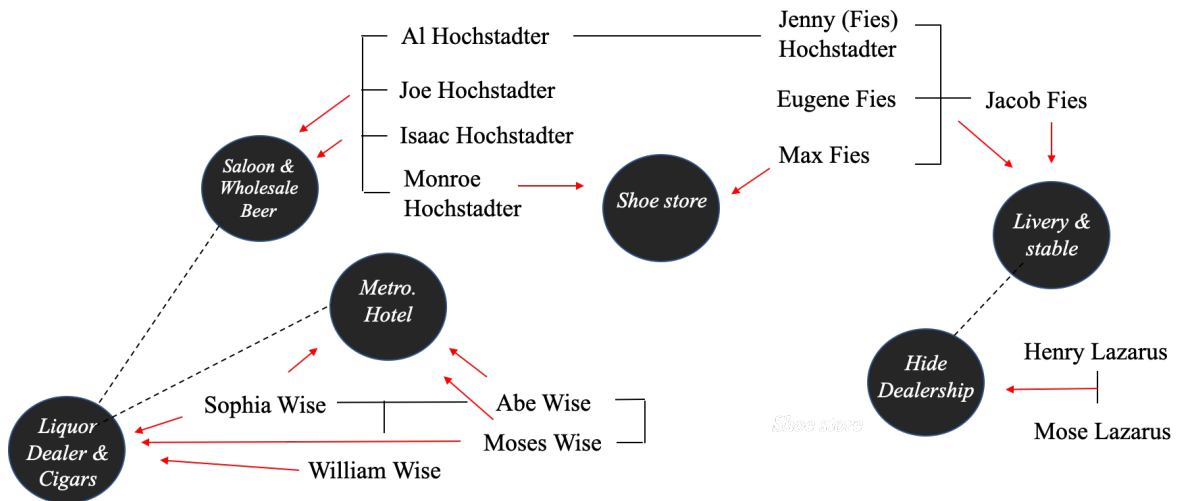


Figure 8: Jewish Family and Occupation Networks, 1884

¹⁵⁴ 1880 United States Census, Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 5; *Birmingham Iron Age*, June 22, 1881; *City Directory of Birmingham...1884-5*, 61, 80.

Like many second-wave migrants, Lesser directly benefitted from the contacts he made in the newly formed congregation. He was never elected president of the synagogue's board, although Isaac Hochstadter, Jacob Fies, and Henry Lazarus all held the position between 1883 and 1893. He was a dues-paying member, however, and demonstrated his responsibility and religious dedication, not to mention his leadership skills, through its cemetery and building committees. Through his active involvement in Emanu-El's growing membership, he also met butcher Henry Silverman's oldest daughter Freda. When they married in 1885, the synagogue did not have a professional rabbi to perform the service, but three years after Freda died in 1893, Morris Newfield, whom Emanu-El hired in 1895, was available to perform the service between Lesser and his second wife, Freda's younger sister Alice.¹⁵⁵

Emil Lesser obtained his first position from a Jewish businessman. When he arrived in 1883, Isaac Hochstadter's brother Joe was the proprietor of the Dude Saloon, which was at the center of long-standing disputes between Birmingham's moral reformers and its alleged "liquor ring." His job as Joe's saloon restaurant manager quickly introduced Lesser to the social and political conflicts that were linked to the city's alcohol industry.¹⁵⁶ Jack Webb, the Protestant developer who was once Herman Simon's neighbor, still owned the saloon's property, but under pressure from the city's middle-class prohibitionists, Webb had distanced himself from its daily

¹⁵⁵ "History of Temple Emanu-El Factsheet," Temple Emanu-El (Birmingham, Ala.) nearprint, AJA; Marriage License of Freda Silberman and Emil Lesser, Jefferson County, Alabama, April 14, 1885, Alabama County Marriage Records, 1805-1967; Ancestry.com; Marriage License of Alice Silverman and Emil Lesser, Jefferson County, Alabama, April 14, 1896, Alabama County Marriage Records, 1805-1967; Ancestry.com; Temple Emanuel Cemetery Records, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 18.

¹⁵⁶ From 1880 to 1907, Birmingham's middle-class social reformers (many of whom were conservative businessmen and politicians) called for legislation to eliminate working-class entertainments that they felt were "moral evils." Attempting to combat their city's reputation in the state as "bad Birmingham," they targeted gambling, prostitution, and even baseball. Their primary goal, however, was to close the city's saloons, which they felt cultivated drunkenness, crime, and political unrest. Such efforts angered black and white laborers and caused bitter political conflicts that remained unresolved until 1908, when local and state prohibition laws went into effect. For more information, see McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 71-73; Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham* 21-23; and Chapter Two of this dissertation.

operations. In 1877, Webb's son Alex, then the bar's manager, shot a customer in a violent altercation and fled the city to avoid prosecution. During the scandal that followed, Webb briefly tried to replace the saloon with a "family grocery," but demands for the Dude continued, so the former alderman sacrificed his share of the bar's profits to save his civic reputation, generating income instead through the value of the property and Joe Hochstadter's rent.¹⁵⁷ The Hochstadter brothers and other local Jews had no such reservations about the liquor industry, viewing saloons as profitable businesses that served the population and provided jobs for their friends and relatives. When Joe Hochstadter hired Lesser, the Dude was thriving—Joe was running not only the bar and its restaurant, but wholesaling beer in bulk. Since the establishment rarely lacked customers and Lesser excelled at his new job, he soon made civic connections with other ambitious young men, both Jews and non-Jews.¹⁵⁸

One of the first ways Lesser built his reputation as a local businessman was by capitalizing on Birmingham's speculative real estate market and the general population's need for affordable housing. His opportunity grew from the Elyton Land Company's inability to keep up with the rapidly expanding population, which had been an issue in the town since Powell began building it in 1871. Although the ELC fought bankruptcy throughout the 1870s, by January 1883, business was booming for the corporation, which stated it was finally out of debt and had achieved an annual income that would guarantee its stockholders "regular and high dividends" from that point forward. Machine shops, rolling mills, the Alice Furnace, and a new section of the Georgia Pacific Railroad had been recently constructed, stimulating production

¹⁵⁷ Alex Webb shot John Rainey, a Dude Saloon customer, on February 23, 1876. After fleeing the city, he traveled through Arkansas and Texas, but was finally apprehended in November 1877 in a Louisiana cotton field. His father had been wiring him money for his support. Alex Webb was brought back to Jefferson County and tried for his part in the murder but served a light sentence and was operating another bar in the city—under his own name rather than his father's—by 1881. *Birmingham Iron Age*, February 24, 1876; January 7, 1877; January 17, 1877; November 21, 1877; July 20, 1881; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 7; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 21.

¹⁵⁸ *City Directory of Birmingham...1884-5*, 55, 262, 291.

and market access. Since the city's potential for wealth and success was widely advertised by the popular press and government publications, people flooded into Birmingham to capitalize on investment and employment opportunities. A year later, the population had reached 12,000, twice what it had been in 1881 and six times its number in 1874. While this was beneficial for early entrepreneurs like Herman Simon, who bought his lot during the 1870s, those who rented their properties, including the Hochstadter, Marx, and Wise families, found themselves strapped with monthly fees that were twenty-five to forty percent above their buildings' dollar values. Those wishing to invest in their own establishment had to save \$1,000—over \$25,000 in the current market—for a twenty by one hundred forty-foot lot on which to build.¹⁵⁹

The soaring costs of rent frequently encouraged ambitious young men like Lesser to finance building projects, many of which extended both housing options and the city's borders. Although company homes were available in the 1880s (and even quite comfortable for white managers and skilled workers), some laborers shunned the simple frame dwellings in an effort to retain their autonomy. This was not difficult to do since black and white women frequently supplemented their husbands' or their own incomes by leasing rooms to single men and young couples. Several of the city's segregated boardinghouses also specifically catered to laborers, and Jewish women, like their counterparts in other American towns, ran boarding houses that served male relatives or family friends. When Lesser first arrived, he rented a room with William and Emma Kaminsky. This proved to be a fortuitous relationship. Although non-Jewish, the Kaminskys possessed substantial ties to Jewish leaders in the city's liquor and business circles, which reinforced their lodger's growing social and commercial connections.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Caldwell, *History of the Elyton Land Company*, 11-16; *Birmingham Iron Age*, January 12, 1881; February 14, 1883; April 3, 1884.

¹⁶⁰ William Kaminsky tended bar at S. Wise's Climax Saloon and also provided a home for John Peterson, who served drinks at E. Solomon and E.H. Levi's whiskey and beer agency on Twentieth Street. Emma Kaminsky was a

Sometime between 1884 and 1886, Lesser began following a path that was quite different from other Jewish professionals, including first-wave migrants like Herman Simon, Morris Marx, and Sophia Wise. He joined the Knights of Labor, which was a risky move due to the organization's position in local political battles between the city's white workers and the civic-commercial elite.¹⁶¹ In 1886, the same year the union briefly fused with Republicans to sponsor J.B. Luckie's "Workingman's Ticket," Lesser incorporated the Mutual Land and Insurance Company with fellow knights Herman Lowenthal, a Jewish merchant, and L. H. Schmidt, a non-Jew he likely met through the German Society. The men bought thirty-seven acres of land just south of Birmingham and divided it into lots, naming their new town Powderly after the union's national leader, Terence Powderly. The company's 120 stockholders offered white laborers affordable housing through weekly installments, which allowed them to buy a sixty-dollar lot for one dollar per week, one fifth of what the same lot would cost in Birmingham. At the end of its first year, Powderly had a population of two hundred, and Lesser's corporation had built it a school, general store, reading room, Labor Hall, and railroad station. When demand exceeded available lots, Lesser established the Beneficial Land and Improvement Company, which constructed another town that he named after Richard Trevillick, a prominent union lecturer.¹⁶²

dressmaker with ties to young women like Alice Silverman who were milliners. McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 60-68, Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 83; *City Directory of Birmingham...1884-5*, 90, 96, 122, 138, 150.

¹⁶¹ Although the Knights of Labor declined in national power after the 1886 Haymarket Riots in Chicago, the organization continued to remain prominent in Birmingham and Alabama as a union and workers' cooperative throughout the 1890s. They played an essential role in the state's Populist Movement and interracial political coalitions and supported the Farmer's Alliances' unsuccessful gubernatorial candidate, Reuben Kolb, who lost elections in 1890, 1892, and 1894 due to voter fraud and corruption. For more information, see Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late Nineteenth-Century South* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 130-132, 167-168. 220.

¹⁶² McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 60-61, 78-79; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 266-267; "H. Lowenthal" appears in the Birmingham's 1889 City Directory as a grocer and is listed as having purchased a seat in Temple Emanuel in both 1887 and 1889. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line], Ancestry.com, 2011; *Birmingham Iron Age*, January 12, 1881; *Troy Messenger*, March 10, 1887; *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 5, 1887.

Lesser's involvement in the Knights of Labor not only indicates his essential role in Birmingham's physical expansion, but also the way he cultivated his civic networks, which differed from those of the city's other upper- and middle-class Jewish residents. The large group of Jewish professionals who arrived between 1883 and 1888 tended to generate important connections through their commercial, political, and religious work, which was typical of both their predecessors and Jewish merchants in other American cities. Moses Joseph, Simon Klotz, and Burghardt Steiner were among those who established Birmingham's Commercial Club and trade unions. Klotz, who had immigrated to the United States from France in 1875, was a member of the Odd Fellows, like Morris Marx and the Hochstadter brothers, and almost as heavily involved in the Masons as Ben Jacobs. Steiner and his brother Siegfried were bankers like Herman Simon, who aided the city and its people with loans when Birmingham faced another financial crisis in the early 1890s. Similar to Isaac Hochstadter, Klotz was elected to four terms as an alderman, the first between 1894 and 1896 and the other three between 1905 and 1911, and Steiner served on the Board of Education from 1897 to 1901. In addition to their participation in local charities, Klotz, Steiner, and Joseph were Temple Emanu-El's board presidents from 1893 to 1923—all three were re-elected several times, serving for four, seven, and thirteen years, respectively.¹⁶³

Emil Lesser was certainly part of these same economic and religious circles. He was actively involved in the Reform synagogue's board, president of its Hebrew Relief Society, and a member of the Commercial Club and Klotz's Elk Lodge. On the other hand, he tended to pursue additional relationships that drew from his personal interests and talent for journalism,

¹⁶³ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 15-17; *The Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 4-8; *Birmingham Times*, April 23, 1909; *Alabama Journal* (Montgomery, Alabama), June 17, 1941; *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 12, 1893, December 28, 1900; Kohn, "By Reason of Strength," 24; Dorothy Steiner, transcript of oral history, September 1989, *Memory Bank Project*, Birmingham Jewish Federation, BHEC, Birmingham, Alabama, 4-5.

administration, and marketing. In 1884, the year after he migrated from Cullman to Birmingham, he helped found Birmingham's German Society which possessed seventy members by the time he began serving as its president three years later. He was not the only Jewish settler to play an active role in the organization, but the group was largely composed of non-Jewish German-Americans who had found their way to Birmingham in the 1880s and 1890s. Together, they worked hard to build the city's reputation as a German cultural center and sanctuary in Alabama. One of their first goals was to persuade the city to add German to its public-school curriculum. Even though the society stated it would pay half the salary of the individual who was hired to teach the language, the mayor's office not only agreed to their terms but soon decided to assume all of the expenses related to instruction. In 1892, Lesser and his colleagues in the German Society formed a new chapter of the Knights of Pythias, which conducted all of its meetings and social events in German. Lesser was elected presiding officer of the lodge, but only one of its other nine officers, S. Hirsch, was Jewish. Although Lesser repeatedly denied the association was a political organization, he was still president when the society complained that German-Americans were "slighted" at Jefferson County's 1896 Democratic Convention, causing Alabama gubernatorial candidate Joseph Johnston to hurriedly promise to give them "full recognition" if he were elected (which he was).¹⁶⁴

In 1887, New South booster John Witherspoon DuBose suggested that the German Society's power was due to the rise in Birmingham's German-American population, but other factors may have contributed to local and state politicians' capitulation to its members' desires. The positive publicity sparked by its "imposing Mardi Gras display," for example, may have

¹⁶⁴ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 17, 21; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 7; *Birmingham News*, December 4, 1892; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 308.

contributed to both Lesser and his society's civic influence.¹⁶⁵ Begun in 1886 to celebrate the German Society's anniversary, the carnival was promoted throughout Alabama. Its lavish parades and balls were featured events in the city from 1887 to 1900 and drew so many celebrants from surrounding towns and villages that a separate organization was soon required just to plan and sponsor the festivities. When Lesser was the Birmingham Carnival Society's president in 1899, it used "gasoline lamps" that he had contracted from New Orleans to light up the downtown district during the two days Birmingham held its parades. When asked how his carnival compared to the famous celebrations in Louisiana, Lesser proudly stated that he believed Birmingham's floats compared "most favorably" to the ones he saw when he traveled to collect the lights. The lavish display tapped a widely popular form of entertainment, which elevated Lesser's standing among civic leaders and promoters because it attracted people to Birmingham and highlighted the town's amenities.¹⁶⁶

Lesser contributed to the local economy through his support for German culture in other ways as well. He convinced the Southern Central Turn District of the North American Turnerbund to celebrate its 1887 convention in the city and regularly organized other German festivals.¹⁶⁷ His work not only drew immense crowds to the city, it also broadcast the entertainments locals provided for the occasions throughout the South. In 1892, Lesser helped found the *Birmingham Courier*, Alabama's first German-language newspaper, which announced the invitations to weddings and public events he received that kept him connected to the state's

¹⁶⁵ Mardi Gras (French for "Fat Tuesday") is a carnival season that marks the beginning of Lent in Catholic and other Christian traditions. Nineteenth-century Jews, however, participated in what had become a secular celebration of civic pride and entertainment in many cities, including Birmingham. Lesser's career was also connected to the liquor industry, which made the holiday season good for business.

¹⁶⁶ DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 308; Alabama), *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 25, 1896; January 11, 1899.

¹⁶⁷ A nineteenth-century American Turnerbund was an organization that promoted German culture and gymnastics or physical fitness.

German community. The hands-on writing and editing he did for the *Courier* enabled him to become one of his town's representatives in the Alabama Press Association, which extended his promotional efforts and professional networks. Between 1902 and 1910, he served as a delegate at its meetings, traveled with other newsmen to New York, was elected president of the Birmingham Press Club, and spoke at the state's 1908 press convention in Bessemer, a town approximately eighteen miles away.¹⁶⁸

Lesser and other second-wave Jews not only thrived in the city between 1880 and 1895, they also shaped its development and public image, which increased its status in Jefferson County and Alabama. Although they benefitted from the work of the city's Jewish pioneers, this new group of residents cultivated commercial and political networks of their own. Although many of these individuals replicated patterns of acculturation common among other nineteenth-century American Jews, they also built new pathways for economic success and civic activism. Lesser was among the middle- and upper-class Reform Jews who joined fraternal lodges, built important relationships with commercial elites, and remained religiously distinct through their support and leadership of Temple Emanu-El. Simultaneously, he was the city's most visible advocate for German culture and immigrants and a member of the Knights of Labor, which separated his actions from other Reform business leaders. Like many second-wave Jewish settlers, he continued to play an important role in Birmingham's growth and politics until he left the city for Los Angeles in 1912. His road to success, however, was as turbulent as that of the Jewish community to which he belonged.

¹⁶⁸ *Cullman Tribune*, August 13, 1896; *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 7, 1897; September 21, 1897; *Tuskaloosa Gazette*, July 17, 1902; *Herald-Journal* (Bessemer, Alabama), October 28, 1904, *Prattville Progress*, July 9, 1908, *Russel Register* (Seale, Alabama), February 11, 1910.

**Facing New Challenges:
State and Local Politics and the Growth of Temple Emanu-El**

The careers of Emil Lesser and other second-wave Jews were often more difficult than they appeared in Birmingham's early histories, including those in the *Jewish Ledger* (1900) and *Reform Advocate* (1911). During the 1870s, Jewish residents faced environmental and structural calamities due to the Elyton Land Company's ineffective planning and mismanagement, but the settlers who followed them in the 1880s and 1890s encountered volatile social and political tensions related to industrial workers' disputes with their employers. Black and white unskilled laborers participated in these conflicts but were frequently left with fewer options than their skilled white counterparts, who united in exclusionary unions and brotherhoods. As early as the 1870s, workers' organizations sprouted Democratic factions that used downtown saloons as their bases, but the political associations they formed were often less violent and more socially diverse than the machines they created during the 1890s. Instead of joining them to threaten the power of ELC autocrats like James R. Powell, middle-class reformers and business elites viewed these groups as socially and morally corrupt. Jewish businessmen who had formed strong bonds with both skilled white laborers and professionals, including Emil Lesser, were often caught up in the middle of slanderous election campaigns and vicious political conflicts. Lesser in particular, who always considered himself a champion of workers and German immigrants, found his loyalties torn as his political power increased in the city and state. He and other Jewish leaders rarely complained of antisemitism but were forced to increasingly draw from their connections and reputations to defend themselves when arrested or accused of misconduct.

Not every commercial project Lesser attempted was successful, and his colleagues frequently disagreed about his status as an exemplary entrepreneur or model resident. Lesser's troubles began with the Birmingham, Powderly, and Bessemer Street Railway, a local "dummy"

line that connected the downtown district to Powderly and Trevillick and the suburbs he built in 1886. The corporation he formed to construct the railroad with Jewish businessmen like Isaac Hochstadter and Burghardt Steiner was plagued with accidents and lawsuits over land rights and crossings shortly after it was established in December 1888. In 1890, a global economic downturn caused the failure of the New York bankers who financed the company, which resulted in it going into receivership. In September, Lesser, then the railroad's general manager, was arrested for forging the signature of non-Jewish resident Vinson Lovelace on sixty shares of the railway's stock. Although he was acquitted of these charges, Lesser soon faced more when Herman Scholze, a fellow German Society member, accused him of changing the date on a promissory note, which resulted in several lawsuits that were not settled until 1898. Whatever his level of culpability in these cases, Lesser continued to fight for his commercial reputation throughout the 1890s. While he was still engaged in the Scholze case, he successfully defeated an additional charge of embezzlement and began a lawsuit against the corporation that refused to honor the terms of his father-in-law's life insurance policy, which he won in 1900. He also bought and remodeled the Metropolitan Hotel, the roadhouse Sophia Wise and her brother-in-law Moses operated on Twentieth Street, and settled into a career in the service industry that he successfully pursued for twenty years.¹⁶⁹

Shortly after Lesser bought the Metropolitan, he cultivated additional networks that indicate shifts in the city's political circles and the way Lesser's loyalties began to change. From 1897 to 1899, he served as a police commissioner, a controversial position that stemmed from

¹⁶⁹ *Birmingham News*, December 3, 1888; February 18, 1889; July 24, 1889; January 15, 1890; January 22, 1890; September 15, 1890; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 7; *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 20, 1900; "Lesser v. Scholze," *Southern Reporter*, Vol. 9, April 29-Oct 21 (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1891), 273-274; "Steiner et al v. Scholze et al," *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Alabama During the Nov. 1896 Term*, Vol. 127 (Montgomery: Brown Printing Co., 1898), 88-94; "United States Life Insurance Co. v. Lesser," *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Alabama*, Vol. 126 (Montgomery: Brown Printing Co., 1901), 569-576.

squabbles between Mayor David Fox's working-class political machine and the Citizens Reform Union, a conglomerate of white social reformers and professionals. Fox correctly viewed the Citizens' calls for "clean government and public order" as an attempt to concentrate power in the hands of the civic-commercial elite, a group in which Lesser and other middle- and upper-class Jews were a distinct part. Since Fox's supporters felt Birmingham's restrictive Sunday drinking and gambling laws were offensive because they branded working-class entertainments as immoral, the mayor often refused to support or enforce the legislation that passed before he came to office, which was not hard to do because he possessed his own police force.¹⁷⁰

Although Fox and the Citizens' disputes began three years before Lesser took office in 1897, they sparked divisions among Birmingham's white residents for more than a decade. As a Jewish businessman who owned a thriving hotel bar and restaurant, Lesser sympathized with the anti-prohibitionists and was one of several civic leaders who initially refused the appointed position. Once he was persuaded to accept, however, he whole-heartedly embraced his conservative colleagues' political position. In 1898, when disputes caused moderates to suggest the police commission should be abolished and replaced with an elected body, Lesser published an article in *The Courier* that a Montgomery journalist characterized as a "severe attack." Accusing the opposition of dirty politics, Lesser claimed that "promises were not kept" and a "scheme was afoot" that "would give the office of chief of police to a gentleman who is a dangerous candidate." Moreover, although his career had begun with projects that benefitted

¹⁷⁰ Fox, a former ironworker and an active member of the American Association of Iron and Steel Workers, became mayor in 1893. Accusing Fox of "thug" politics, the Citizens immediately sought to reduce his patronage and executive power. Since Fox and his aldermen controlled the police department, they began there, appealing to the state legislature to give Jefferson County's probate judge (and later the governor) the power to appoint a five-member commission to run it. In 1894, a lengthy battle between the mayor and reformers ensued, especially after Fox declared the commission unconstitutional and set up his own police department, which answered only to him and his administrators. McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 82-88; *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 23, 1894; June 8, 1894; November 30, 1894.

white workers, the piece clearly supported the reelection of Frank Evans, a fellow journalist and business leader who became infamous for his fear-mongering, anti-labor editorials in the early twentieth century. The Jewish hotel owner's politics became increasingly difficult to reconcile with his personal beliefs and commercial practices and contributed to further conflicts. In 1899, his final year as a commissioner, he was targeted and arrested for "selling beer" with the meals he served on Sundays, and four years later, he and two of his non-Jewish colleagues successfully won a lawsuit against C.W. Austin, Birmingham's conservative police chief, for falsely accusing them of operating a gambling ring in Lesser's hotel.¹⁷¹

Other issues arose in relation to Lesser's work with German immigrants. In 1893, Lesser's link to journalists introduced him to the plight of Charles Meincke, an inmate at the Pratt Mines, which served as a stepping-stone for Lesser's work as a state immigration officer. Since Meincke was of German descent, he pled with Birmingham's "German element" to assist him in his appeal for a murder he repeatedly stated he did not commit. Working with other newspaper editors and sympathetic citizens, Lesser was among the nine hundred Alabama citizens who convinced Governor Thomas Jones to pardon the German-American, who stated he had known little English at the time of his arrest and had been a victim of the woman who committed the crime and the local investigators who wished to close the case quickly.¹⁷²

In 1901, Lesser continued his work with German settlers as the president of Alabama's newly organized German Immigration Society. The organization promoted immigration "both

¹⁷¹ *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 7, 1897; November 16, 1898; January 1, 1908; *Gadsden-Times News*, May 19, 1899; Cruikshank, *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 113-114, 374-375; Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-21* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 16-18; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 88.

¹⁷² In 1873, Meincke was working as a butcher in Opelika when Albert Lyons, a wealthy planter, was murdered. Twenty years into his sentence as a convict laborer, the German immigrant's English had improved. He claimed Mrs. Lyons (who was arrested for trying to kill a second husband when he was in prison) had asked him to kill her husband. According to Meincke, when he refused and she was caught, she implicated him in the murder, knowing it would be difficult for him to understand or object to the charges. *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 27, 1893.

from the old Country and from the North and Northwest” without engaging the help of “the railroad or other influences,” which John G. Cullmann and other settlement agents used to form their towns. In 1902, Lesser’s association proposed a bill to Alabama’s legislature to induce “an industrious German population” to come to the state. To broaden recruitment efforts in 1906, Lesser circulated 20,000 copies of a “profusely illustrated” edition of the *Courier* in several foreign countries that had German-speaking populations. A journalist predicted his German newspaper would “work faster” than “all the immigration agents” then employed in central Alabama.¹⁷³

Lesser’s work was among several projects that drew Birmingham’s Jewish business leaders into industrial elites’ attempts to attract white laborers to their facilities.¹⁷⁴ Employers’ complaints about their workers’ skill levels, instability, and racial composition were nothing new, but they grew louder as production facilities increased in number and size. Don Bacon, president of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (TCI) between 1901 and 1906, believed European immigrants would be the perfect candidates to replace the black and common white workers he considered troublesome. Bacon believed American immigrants who had been trained in northern iron and steel production might be persuaded to bring their skills south if subjected to effective promotional material, which could eliminate the need to train new workers and reduce

¹⁷³ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 21; “Individual Newspapers: Birmingham, Ala., *Courier*,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. 27, Jan-Dec 1923 (New York: Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 1923), 591; *Our Southern Home* (Livingston, Alabama), October 30, 1901; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 7, 1902.

¹⁷⁴ Another primary example of this was the work Simon Klotz, Burghardt Steiner, and other Jewish professionals did in the Commercial Club. In 1897, when Moses Joseph was president, the group raised some of the funds that built not only a steel plant at the Birmingham Rolling Mills but also a textile mill in Avondale, a local suburb. City leaders reasoned that if rural women and children could find employment in the mill, their contribution to a “family income” would convince their husbands and fathers to accept the unskilled, low-paying jobs reserved for black men at new iron and steel facilities, including the one they had just established. This was specifically designed to cut the autonomy of black men who dominated specific jobs in production lines and create competition between white and black laborers, which gave managers and owners more control over their work force. Cowett, *Birmingham’s Rabbi*, 23; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 154-155.

the power of the city's labor unions. TCI and the L&N Railroad, key players in Birmingham's economy, were part of the state's attempts to recruit workers from several countries. Due to the racial prejudices prevalent in the South, Western Europeans were viewed more favorably than those of "darker complexions," including the Italians, Greeks, and Eastern Europeans who primarily answered the companies' calls. This made Lesser's pleas and projects for German workers popular among politicians and wealth holders in both the city and state.¹⁷⁵

Lesser's extensive biographical excerpts in the *Jewish Ledger* (1900) and *Reform Advocate* (1911) portrayed him as a defender of German-Americans and their common culture, someone who would continue to advocate for the underserved regardless of the toll it took on his own life or career. He, like many of his upper- and middle-class Jewish business associates, was depicted as a faithful citizen and ideal developer who used his economic and political power to serve Birmingham and its population. Lesser's actions in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, suggest he was beginning to align less with the white laborers and immigrants he had once supported and more with the industrialists who sought to exploit them, which further highlights the disparities between nineteenth-century Jewish developers' professional activities and the way they were often cast in local histories. In 1901, for example, his state-sponsored immigration society routinely stated it viewed railroad and other corporate "interests" with suspicion, but simultaneously hinted it sought to stimulate local and state markets through immigrant workers and the goods they produced. Whether domestic or international, German migrants were encouraged to settle in "places adjacent to large towns" to ensure their entry into Alabama's economy, which profited from their labor. The 1906 copy of Lesser's *Courier*, an

¹⁷⁵ For more information on the types of immigrants boosters considered "desirable" as workers, see DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 40-41; McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 42; and Jennifer Brooks, "'John Chinaman' in Alabama: Immigration, Race, and Empire in the New South, 1870-1920," in *Journal of American Ethnic History* 37, no. 2 (Winter 2018), 9-11.

edition that was specifically designed to bring German immigrants to Birmingham, was branded the “Immigration and Industrial Issue” in *The Sumter County Sun*, indicating the issue reinforced the labor recruitment efforts of the city’s manufacturers.¹⁷⁶

Lesser’s official findings in the Jackson Lumber Company’s 1906 peonage scandal also displayed his conflicted loyalties. Problems began in July, when Pensacola journalists reported that one hundred individuals were being “held in bondage” at the corporation’s labor camp in Lockhart, a town it had formed near Alabama’s border with Florida in 1902. Their sources were three Hungarian and German laborers who arrived at their newspaper’s office looking haggard and desperate and claiming they had just escaped the company’s armed guards. Recruits from northern cities, the men stated that their wages had been much less than promised and they were repeatedly denied food and beaten or attacked with dogs if they ran away or “did not work to suit.” Those of German descent said they had also applied to the German consul for help. Five days after the stories first appeared, however, Emil Lesser used the *Courier* to proclaim “not a single German had applied for protection or complained of peonage against the Jackson Lumber Company.” Nevertheless, because he was both Birmingham’s immigration agent and the voice of the state’s German Immigration Society, he vowed not only to visit the Lockhart camp but “any other lumber and manufacturing camps where German labor agents had been received.”¹⁷⁷

Other Alabama newspapermen were torn between supporting the immigrants’ harrowing stories and reiterating Jackson’s dismissal of them as sensationalism, but commentators on both sides contextualized the men’s accusations in relation to the South’s deep religious and racial prejudices. Some reporters suggested that the privileges of nineteenth-century white manhood

¹⁷⁶ *Our Southern Home* (Livingston, Alabama), October 30, 1901, 1; *The Sumter County Sun* (Livingston, Alabama), October 18, 1906.

¹⁷⁷ *Tuscaloosa News*, July 26, 1906; July 28, 1906; *Birmingham News*, July 27, 1906; Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (1990 repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 83, 88.

had been attacked because the immigrants had been treated “virtually as slaves.” Others accused the men of being “shylocks” who “demanded their pound of flesh” just like the region’s critics, who were “constantly making an outcry against the cruel treatment of the negro.” Regardless of the nativist and antisemitic slurs, Lesser ultimately sided with Jackson and its political allies rather than the immigrants he was reputed to champion. After interviewing “nearly one hundred laborers,” he stated that he had “not found a single person who could or would make any complaint about peonage or cruel treatment,” adding that “if peonage existed at Lockhart, all trace of it had been removed,” statements that were likely true due to the corporation’s efforts to hide any wrongdoing.¹⁷⁸

Emil Lesser’s actions at the time of the incident, however, indicated that he played a substantial role in state legislators’ attempts to minimize the bad publicity that would have come from a proclamation of Jackson’s guilt. Described as “one of the richest lumber companies in the world,” the corporation was considered one of the state’s most valuable industrial assets. It founded two Alabama towns and was praised for bringing “white labor” into the state and paying taxes that funded rural education. In his report to Governor W.D. Jelks, which was published in the *Floral News*, Lesser not only exonerated Jackson and its production managers, but went so far as to state that the German vice consul had authorized him to “say officially that the statements as to the complaints being made to him by Germans escaping from the camps are absolutely false.” While it is significant that Lesser chose the word “escaping” to describe the immigrants’ actions, it is even more important to note that the German vice consul he referenced was the same one he had previously claimed had received no complaints at all. Lesser’s declaration that the accusations were “untrue” did a substantial amount of damage to Alabama’s

¹⁷⁸ *Montgomery Times*, July 25, 1906; *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 29, 1906; *Elba Clipper*, July 27, 1906; *Floral News*, *Tuscaloosa News*, July 26, 1906.

immigrants and reduced the likelihood that other mistreated workers—especially those who were unskilled or socially marginalized—would report abuse in the future. Even though there was ample evidence that the accusations were true, his findings were quickly disseminated throughout the state, much to the delight of the Jackson’s foremen and other industrial managers.¹⁷⁹ One Tuscaloosa reporter went as far as to blame the “misunderstandings” on a “bunch of foreign laborers” who barely spoke English, stating “it was easy to magnify” misunderstandings about labor conditions, especially if those relating them were “utterly worthless” or possessed a “vivid imagination.”¹⁸⁰

There is no evidence that Emil Lesser’s passion for German immigrants and culture waned nor is there any indication of his personal feelings about the Jackson Lumber Company scandal. He never spoke about the controversial events of 1906, which are unsurprisingly absent from twentieth-century works that honor Lesser and other second-wave Jews’ commercial success and development projects.¹⁸¹ Although the political and social pressures Lesser and his colleagues confronted in the 1880s and 1890s do not negate the good that they did as local

¹⁷⁹ Jackson was no stranger to negligence and accusations of wrongdoing. In 1905 and 1906, fifteen-year-old Ernest Lasiter fell off a stacking machine and was instantly killed, and an accident left a white engineer dead and an unnamed black worker’s hand crushed so badly that two of his fingers had to be amputated. Lawsuits against the company included that of M.F. Davis, a white, native-born laborer who had received “personal injuries” when he was employed on its premises. When the pay train was robbed, the company searched for the African American suspects with bloodhounds, dogs that were once used to hunt the enslaved and prevalent in the immigrant laborers’ accusations. This evidence and the laborers’ testimonies were fairly conclusive, but Jackson’s political allies in the state government served the corporation well. Even though the lumber company was forced to turn over some of its managers for federal prosecution, the political cover-up bought Jackson a temporary reprieve and allowed it to influence pardons and appeals, which were still ongoing in 1910. Managers and foremen received fairly light sentences for their brutality, which they served quickly. *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 28, 1906; *Marion Democrat*, February 21, 1906; *Weekly Times* (Selma, Alabama), February 22, 1906; Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 90-92.

¹⁸⁰ *Florala News*, August 16, 1906; *Elba Clipper*, January 5, 1905; *Fort Payne Journal*, August 2, 1905; *Anniston Star*, July 26, 1906; *Union Banner* (Clanton, Alabama), February 15, 1905; “Florala and Lockhart, Ala.,” *North & South*, 4, no. 1 (May 1905), 23; *Tuscaloosa News*, August 3, 1906.

¹⁸¹ Examples of these works include local Jewish writers’ contributions to Birmingham’s edition of the *Reform Advocate* (1911), George Cruikshank’s *A History of Birmingham and Its Environs* (1920), Mark Elovitz’s *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie* (1974), and Robert Corley’s *Paying Civic Rent* (1980).

business leaders and promoters, they do indicate that Jews faced ethical and moral challenges as both they and Birmingham increased their status in Alabama and beyond.

The city's upper- and middle-class Jews continued to possess substantial economic and philanthropic networks in the early 1900s, rarely—if ever—complained of antisemitism, and were frequently lauded by non-Jewish business elites and social welfare agents. Although Lesser's actions in the peonage incident were not questioned, he was accused of embezzlement, gambling, and other forms of commercial misconduct between 1890 and 1903, and alderman Simon Klotz fought charges of racial mixing in 1905 and bribery in 1908. These and other political conflicts, not to mention national trends toward antisemitic discrimination in employment and housing, resulted in a tempering of Birmingham Jews' interest in state and local politics. After 1910, Jewish businessmen tended to supplement their civic networks and reputations through positions as public educators, entertainers, and social workers rather than elected or appointed officeholders.¹⁸²

Congregation Emanu-El and Its Initial Challenges

While upper- and middle-class Reform Jews like Emil Lesser and Burghardt Steiner were dominant in Birmingham's Jewish community during the 1880s and 1890s, they were certainly not its only members, nor did they always agree. Although the city's Jews often presented a united front when contributing to local histories and charities, they possessed a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and often defined what it meant to be a Jew in different ways. Disputes about leadership, representation, and politics increased with an influx of a third wave of Jewish settlers, largely more traditional immigrants from Russian and Eastern European, that began in 1895. Tensions existed much earlier, however, stemming from Reform Jews' conflicts

¹⁸² *Birmingham Times*, January 13, 1905; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 22, 1908.

with each other and with ethnic Jews who had no desire to practice their religion. Many congregational histories, including those of rabbis Morris Newfield and Mark Elovitz, note the economic and religious disparities that caused Jews to self-segregate and form separate organizations and neighborhoods, focusing upon tensions that caused animosity and resentment between Orthodox and Reform Jews in the 1910s, 1920s, and late 1950s. Deep divisions were not as easy to identify in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, when the line between these two groups blurred in the city.¹⁸³

Emanu-El and its institutions played a significant role in the lives of many Birmingham Jews, but they did not develop seamlessly. When Emil Lesser arrived in the city in 1884, the Reform congregation possessed a Sunday school, ladies' benevolent society, social club, and cemetery, which provided Jewish residents with opportunities to educate their children, work together, meet and mingle, and bury their dead. The synagogue building that was completed in 1889 provided Jews with a place to gather and worship and served as a physical representation of their status in the city and their commitment to God and progress, just like the beautiful structures that other congregations created.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, board members faced challenges that were similar to those that Jewish and non-Jewish religious leaders confronted

¹⁸³ Birmingham's Reform and Orthodox communities, like many in the United States, united through refugee efforts and military service between 1935 and 1955, when news began to surface about the persecution and killing of Jews in Europe. According to the oral testimonies of several residents, however, tensions between Orthodox and Reform Jews began again in the late 1950s and continued for at least a decade. Some said their parents refused to let them date or socialize with their Reform or Orthodox counterparts; others indicated they just gravitated toward friends and partners of their own traditions. Gingold, *Memory Bank Project*; Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier*, 51-54, 97.

¹⁸⁴ It was typical for new Jewish communities to use their synagogues to indicate that they were deeply bound to public life. Similar to "German-Jews" in Kentucky, Georgia, Illinois, and Idaho, Emanu-El's Reform Jews envisioned their synagogue as part of what scholar Lee Shai Weissbach identifies as "the larger constellation of local civic society." It is thus no surprise that Emanu-El's elaborately decorated and furnished synagogue was begun and completed during a broader church renovation boom in Birmingham during the 1880s that was related to the Catholic, Baptist, and other congregations' demonstrations of their members' religious dedication, abilities, and status. Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 225; Steven H. Moffson, "Identity and Assimilation in Synagogue Architecture in Georgia, 1870-1920," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9, *Constructing Image Identity and Place* (2003), 151; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 208-245.

throughout the country. Work delays and increasing costs, for example, made it difficult to complete both a house of worship and a cemetery that represented them well and served their practical needs. In the autumn of 1887, more than a year after the temple's cornerstone was laid, work still crawled. Samuel Ullman, a hardware store owner and the congregation's president, observed in September that the rapid growth of the city's Jewish population caused an increase in Emanu-El's members, which would make the sanctuary under construction too small to house them. He convinced his fellow board officers, who included Isaac Hochstadter, to have it redesigned and enlarged. The quality of the roof and gutters that were installed in November was also poor. Since they endangered the whole building, they, too, had to be redone at an additional cost. The cemetery took even longer to finish. In 1888, warden Aaron Stern reported that it was only in "fair condition" and lacked the small building that was necessary for preparing the dead and sheltering mourners. In 1891, its land was finally graded and drained and the rough fence around it was replaced, but Isaac Hochstadter did not pronounce the cemetery as something Emanu-El could "feel proud of" until he was serving his second term as president the following year.¹⁸⁵

Funding was also a primary concern. The board had difficulty generating income, a common problem among many nineteenth-century Jewish congregations. Not every member was a successful businessman, and some found it difficult to make a living in Birmingham, especially during the economic downturns associated with the financial panics of 1873 and 1893. Even before they relocated from Tennessee in the early 1880s, Emil Lesser's wives Freda and Alice Silverman worked in the meat market of their father Henry, a widower with no sons who employed no additional laborers, likely because he could not afford them. Although Henry

¹⁸⁵ "History of Temple Emanu-El Factsheet," AJA, 1; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, September 4, 1887-September 1, 1892, AJA.

continued to work as a butcher in the city, his daughters continued to contribute to the family's income before and after his death in 1895. Freda married Lesser in 1885, which provided her with a living before she died in 1893, but before Alice married Lesser in 1896, she and Henry's youngest daughters, Ida and Julia, lived separately from their father and worked together as clerks and milliners for Ferd Caheen, a Jewish department store owner. In addition to serving as examples of the diverse roles Jewish women played in the local economy, the Silverman sisters serve as reminders of Reform Jews—men and women—who made livings as humble wage laborers rather than civically active entrepreneurs, business owners, or educators.¹⁸⁶

Regardless of president Samuel Ullman's report of growth and interest, the city's Jews were not united in their support of Emanu-El or its nineteenth-century organizations. Alice Silverman and other women were not eligible for membership (unless they were widows like Henrietta Marx) and many Jewish men were simply uninterested in joining the congregation. Those who were non-religious or chose to work on Saturdays often shunned expensive membership dues or seat rentals, especially if they were bachelors without wives and children. When Alfred Hirscher (Nettie Newman's uncle), was secretary in 1887, he reported that Emanu-El had grown from thirty-six to ninety-three members between September 1, 1886, and August 31, 1887. Based on his estimation of the religious community's size, however, he believed its members should number closer to 150 or 175. According to the board's minutes and trends of migration in the city, the figures Hirscher reported were associated with transient Jewish laborers or secular or rural Jews' habit of participating only during High Holy Days. There may have been dissenters because of religious terms, but before 1889, when enough Orthodox men had

¹⁸⁶ 1880 United States Census, Cleveland, Bradley County, Tennessee; *Birmingham City Directories, 1888* (Birmingham: R. L. Polk, 1888), 469; *Birmingham City Directories, Birmingham City Directories, 1889* (Birmingham: R. L. Polk, 1889), 360; *Birmingham City Directories, Birmingham City Directories, 1890* (Birmingham: R. L. Polk, 1890), 436.

moved to the city to establish Knesseth Israel, Emanu-El remained Birmingham's only outlet for Jewish worship and companionship, which occasionally inspired those who preferred more traditional practices to join anyway.

Regardless of the reason for the discrepancy, Hirscher warned that the congregation's expenses would soon exceed income, and Emanu-El's board frequently found itself in dire financial situations, largely due to expenses related to the building and maintenance of its synagogue. Temple Emanu-El's building would soon serve as an important resource for reinforcing and expanding Jewish identity in Birmingham, but by the time it was completed in 1889, it cost between \$12,000 and \$15,000. Despite the donations of the congregation's board members and ladies' aid association or the recruitment efforts of its officers and new rabbi, Maurice Eisenberg, the building project resulted in a substantial amount of debt, which the congregation had been desperately trying to avoid since construction began in 1886. In June 1888, board members were forced to mortgage the uncompleted synagogue and its land to secure a \$10,000 loan to finish the lavish structure. Like many of their counterparts in other cities, its officers responded by pressing members for money and donations, which some resented. In 1887, nearly twelve percent of Emanu-El's men were suspended for not paying their dues, and by 1890, that figure had increased to eighteen percent. The difference can be connected to the substantial rise in membership fees and seat rentals in 1889, the first year that services were held in the new sanctuary. All first-class rentals grew from five to twelve dollars per month and even fifth-class rentals went from one to five dollars. Eleven members of the congregation, including bachelor Joe Rubel, begged for reductions the month after these increases were implemented because they could not pay them. Hard times in the 1890s, especially after the Panic of 1893, continued to stretch the resources of Birmingham's Jews through the end of the decade, causing

even successful businessmen like Ferd Marx and clothier A.B. Loveman to ask for decreases in their monthly fees. All of these men were still threatened with suspensions, and reinstatement required members to pay what they owed in arrears. Negative experiences like these soured some members' experiences with Emanu-El's board and cause men to hesitate to rejoin even after their circumstances improved.¹⁸⁷

The religious identity of Birmingham's nineteenth-century Jews was also a dynamic construction that fluctuated with interpersonal relationships and the creation of local support systems. From 1872 to 1892, definitive lines between Reform or Orthodox Jews were rare, and as elsewhere in the United States, some individuals avoided such labels to find a central position that satisfied their individual needs and belief systems. Samuel Marx, who was a charter member of Temple Emanu-El in 1882, was one of many Reform Jews who attended an Orthodox synagogue before moving to Birmingham. When the first Yiddish-speaking families with Russian and Eastern European backgrounds began arriving in the mid-1880s, they had little trouble connecting to their more numerous Reform counterparts. Although individual choices varied, ambitious Orthodox men frequently built strong personal and professional relationships with Reform Jews that lasted well into the twentieth century. Morris Wolff, for example, a Russian immigrant who was raised and educated in Cincinnati, joined Emanu-El in 1887, while his father Samuel, who was less socially and civically active, avoided worship and synagogue membership until 1889, when enough Orthodox men arrived to establish Kneseth Israel.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, AJA, September 1, 1886-August 26, 1890; Akenhead, Survey of Six Historical Religious Structures in Birmingham, BPL; Jessica Young, "Give the Man His Dues: How They Did It in Birmingham," Chicago, Illinois, 1990, SC-13302, AJA.

¹⁸⁸ Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier*, 97; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, August 31, 1887; *Birmingham News*, September 11, 1893; June 11, 1903.

Jewish residents' religious differences did not seem to create much animosity between KI and Emanu-El's members between 1890 and 1910, which was fairly common in nineteenth-century American communities where Orthodox Jews were too small in number to threaten the political or economic status of acculturated Reformers. In 1890, KI celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the hall of Emanu-El's Phoenix Club. From 1890 to 1898, the two congregations joined together to contribute to articles and postings in the *Birmingham News* to inform the general public about Jewish rituals, holiday services, and collective shop closings. In 1900, Reform contributors to Birmingham's 1900 edition of the *Jewish Ledger* described KI as of "more than ordinary importance" and praised its founders for their "devotion to Judaism." Although coverage of Orthodox institutions consisted of less than a quarter of the journal's nine pages, it included a description of KI's establishment, board members, and building on Twenty-Second Street as well as its relief society and ladies' aid association, the Daughters of Israel. In 1903, Emanu-El's rabbi Morris Newfield, president Samuel Ullman, and board member Emil Lesser further supported their Orthodox colleagues by participating in KI's cornerstone-laying ceremony.¹⁸⁹

Orthodox merchants also built significant reputations as local business leaders, using the same networking and commercial practices as Reform Jews. Raised and educated in the United States, Morris Wolff was relatively acculturated and possessed economic and fraternal connections to several of Emanu-El's board members, which may have been why he was featured alongside them in the *Jewish Ledger*. Wolff initially found a job in an "Optical, Musical, and Cutlery establishment," where he worked hard until 1896, when he opened a similar shop. Like Isaac Hochstadter, Morris Marx, and Emil Lesser, he joined the Knight of

¹⁸⁹ *Birmingham News*, September 16, 1890; September 22, 1892; September 11, 1893; September 18, 1895; June 11, 1903;

Pythias, and like Lesser, he was president of his congregation's Hebrew Aid Society and a member of its cemetery committee. Another Russian immigrant, Louis Weinstein, formed some of the same networks after he migrated in the late 1880s. He joined Lesser and livery owner Jacob Fies (as well as their non-Jewish political allies) in their efforts to reelect A.O. Lane, the mayor under whom Hochstadter served his second term as alderman. In 1889, Weinstein paid ten dollars a month to rent a third-class seat at Emanu-El, and three years later, he worked with Samuel Ullman and Ben Jacobs in the Young Men's Hebrew Association, a collective social organization that supported Jewish men through social engagements and lectures. Although Weinstein actively engaged in Birmingham's modern commercial environment as a businessman, like Morris Wolff, he connected more with the religious traditions of his youth. He joined KI sometime before 1898, when he was elected vice president of its board and worked closely with Wolff, who was then serving as its secretary.¹⁹⁰

Local Reform and Orthodox Jews also tended to support Rabbi Morris Newfield, who was hired to lead Temple Emanu-El in 1895, in the way he represented their community. A highly respected social reformer and educator, Newfield served the city as an ethnic broker, encouraging Jews and Protestants to work together and refrain from criticizing each other. He was similar to his friend David Marx, who was Emanu-El's rabbi in 1894 before accepting a position at Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation ("The Temple"). Like Marx, Newfield sought to alleviate tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish residents through his writing, lectures, voluntarism, and interfaith projects. He understood that effective leadership required him to accept and engage a range of citizens, whose religious orientations could vary from

¹⁹⁰ Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, August 6, 1889; *Birmingham News*, October 25, 1888; May 26, 1892; October 5, 1898; July 7, 1899; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 8.

Orthodox Judaism to fundamentalist Christianity.¹⁹¹

Before Newfield arrived, however, conflicts arose within each congregation in relation to issues with other spiritual leaders, which led to splinter organizations that further indicate the fluid –and often fractious—nature of local Jews’ religious identity. In 1886, the Reform synagogue hired its first ordained spiritual leader, Alexander Rosenspitz, who lasted only four months before leaving for unspecified reasons. Emanu-El had much more trouble with its second rabbi, Maurice Eisenberg, who was hired in 1887 but departed three years later during a scandal that severely divided its members. In the spring of 1890, a woman identified only as Mrs. D. Fox accused the rabbi of impropriety during the unchaperoned religious lessons he was giving her. After interviewing both Eisenberg and Fox, a five-man committee, which included President Samuel Ullman, Isaac Hochstadter, and banker Burghardt Steiner, cleared the rabbi of any wrongdoing. At the insistence of Fox’s angry husband and several other congregants, however, the board was forced to call a special meeting on May 1 to determine if they should dismiss Eisenberg over the charges. Sixty-five of the one-hundred twenty-three members who were present voted to allow the rabbi to keep his job, narrowly defeating the fifty-eight who voted against him.¹⁹²

Although board minutes and other documents fail to indicate why Eisenberg’s defense failed to convince so many, the incident’s repercussions were swift. On July 1, thirty-six members resigned, including Morris Marx and Sophia Wise’s husband Abe. Although most of

¹⁹¹ Ethnic brokers are individuals within ethnic communities who serve as mediators between the dominant culture and that of their own community. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rabbis like Newfield often served in this capacity for their congregants and other local Jews, especially in growing American cities. They attempted to alleviate social tensions and conflicts by providing advice to newcomers, doing charitable work through interfaith alliances, and keeping communication lines between various groups as open as possible. Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, “The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1983), 51-52; Gingold, *Memory Bank Project*; Cowett, *Birmingham’s Rabbi*, xi-xii, 175.

¹⁹² Kohn, “By Reason of Strength,” 24; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, April-July 1890; *Birmingham News*, July 4, 1890; September 13, 1890; September 7, 1895.

these men rejoined Emanu-El in September after Eisenberg resigned, they initially banded together to form a congregation they named B'nai Israel. Their short-lived organization began with fifty-three men, suggesting that they convinced local Jews who were not members of Emanu-El to join them. Its trustees included members of the Goldberg and Kaufman families, who were later associated with KI. The Orthodox congregation, which had begun meeting in the homes of its congregants in 1889, the year before Emanu-El's split occurred, soon had its own conflicts. Several rabbis and Hebrew teachers were hired and fired in the first decade of its

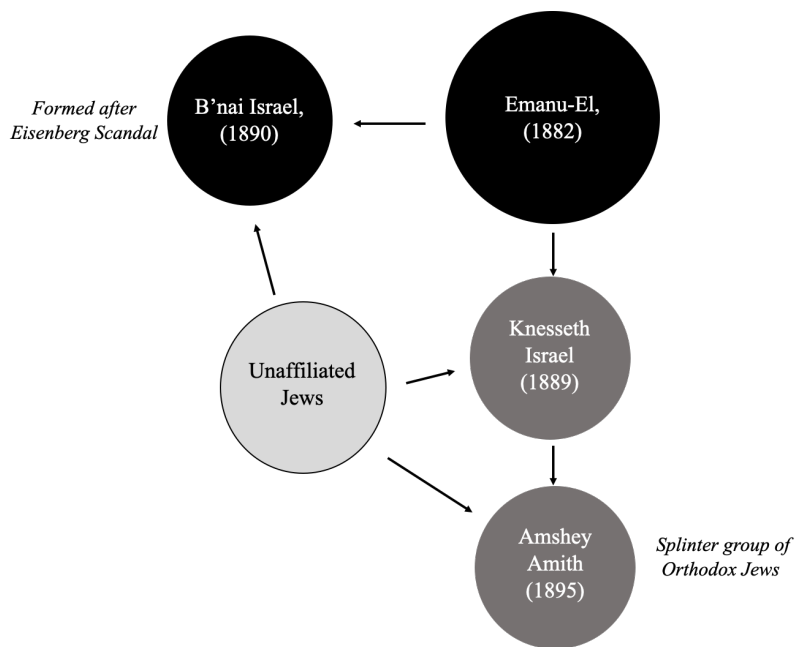


Figure 9: Jewish Congregations, 1882-1895

existence, and unrecorded differences among its members sprouted Amshey Amith, a separate congregation, in 1895. Like B'nai Israel, Amshey Amith faded away when its members reunited with their parent organization.¹⁹³

Birmingham's Jewish community substantially increased with an influx of Yiddish-

¹⁹³ Ibid.

speaking Jews who arrived between the mid-1890s and the late 1910s. Although KI's membership never outnumbered Emanu-El's, their numbers enabled Orthodox Jews to establish a Jewish subculture in the city that supported their religious identities and lifestyles, which were frequently more traditional than those of Reform or non-practicing Jews. Most of these third-wave migrants, like their second-wave counterparts, were neither as financially secure nor as civically active as middle-class businessmen like Emil Lesser or Morris Wolff. In the first decade of its existence, KI's board members included acculturated merchants, including Wolff and Louis Weinstein, but the congregation was generally similar to many Orthodox institutions throughout the United States. It routinely possessed a few members and was often cash poor. The group could not afford to construct a structure of its own until 1903, so its first synagogue was a structure on Twenty-Second Street that the First Baptist Church abandoned in 1893 when the Baptists constructed a new building. The Orthodox Jews modified it to fit their needs, no small feat since they had to arrange for separate seating for the congregation's women, a practice that Reform Jews rejected.¹⁹⁴

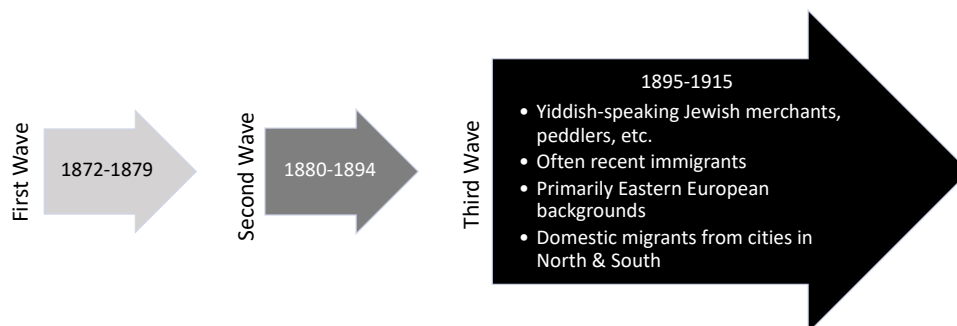


Figure 10: Timeline and Characteristics of Third-Wave Jewish Migrants

¹⁹⁴ Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier*, 97; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, August 31, 1887; *Birmingham News*, September 11, 1893; June 11, 1903.

As Orthodox Jews gradually increased in number, so too did tensions between them and the city's established Jewish business leaders, some of which were related to the new migrants' occupational choices and networks. Although it was hardly unusual for nineteenth-century Jewish storeowners to begin their careers as peddlers when they first arrived in the United States, Jews who were drawn to the city before 1895, including the Marx and Hochstadter families, had been in the United States long enough to transition out of itinerant merchandising. In the 1870s, merchants like Herman Simon and Isaac Hochstadter had already built the commercial connections they needed to finance and supply the shops or bars they set up in the young town, which they used to provide relatives and incoming migrants with positions as clerks, managers, and milliners. When times were hard, they supplemented their income through diversification and cooperative business ventures, including consolidations similar to those that the Marx and Wise families created. If they needed additional income, they took in temporary lodgers or ran boarding houses. When many arrived, there were so few Jews in the city that the Simons, Marxes, and other Reform Jews lived among their non-Jews. Because some of their families had been in the city during the booms of the 1880s, they were able to take advantage of its economic opportunities. As Jewish residents rose to the upper- and middle-class, they led the exodus away from the downtown district and built houses in the Highlands, a southern suburb, along with non-Jewish civic leaders and skilled white workers.¹⁹⁵

Yiddish-speaking Jews who migrated to Birmingham between 1895 and 1910, however, were often more recent immigrants who continued to peddle and scavenge as they had done in

¹⁹⁵ The occupation trends discussed here were typical of many Jewish immigrants to the United States throughout the nineteenth century, who viewed peddling as a transitional phase in their migration experience and felt it was the most efficient path to economic and social mobility. Peddling not only dispersed products beyond Jewish stores and extended customer bases, it also provided new migrants with the ability to interact with a diverse group of people, which gave them the knowledge they needed to acculturate quickly, taught them how to navigate local and regional markets, and increased the commercial networks that fed Birmingham's economy. Diner, *Roads Taken*, ix-x, 6-16. For specific examples of these Birmingham residents and others, see Chapters 1-3 of this dissertation.

their native countries. Samuel Sewelovitz, a Russian immigrant, peddled in Atlanta before moving to Birmingham in 1900 to eke out a living by repairing and selling the second-hand shoes that he bought from New York. Other men picked up and resold scrap iron. Pete Jaffe owned a junk shop. Many acculturated families who had been in Birmingham for decades, similar to the second- and third-generation Jews in other American cities, had largely forgotten their humble beginnings and were less likely to assist peddlers or Jewish junk dealers.

Businessmen in the Orthodox community felt differently, rightfully viewing such labor as mutually beneficial for the community, just as the fathers and grandfathers of their Reform counterparts had done in the 1840s and 1850s. Isaac Gingold, who moved to the city in 1895, peddled jewelry in New York and operated a small country store in Graysville, Alabama, before opening a successful furniture business in Birmingham. Well into the 1910s, Isaac Gingold and other Orthodox commercial leaders, including clothing merchant Louis Pizitz, sponsored or provided inventories for men like Phillip Ziff, who made his living peddling with a horse and buggy. They were drawn to the north side of the city, where Louis Gingold stated he lived even before KI built its synagogue in 1903. The area's inexpensive property allowed them to set up modest shops and businesses, kosher grocery stores and restaurants, and a *mikveh* (a ritual bathing facility for Orthodox women).¹⁹⁶

Political opinions and representation also varied, which led to disagreements that demonstrate early tensions. In the 1890s and early 1900s, Reform Jews like Emil Lesser, Samuel Ullman, and Simon Klotz were deeply involved in Birmingham's Democratic factions, just as Isaac Hochstadter had been in the 1870s and 1880s. They received both elected and appointed

¹⁹⁶ Weissbach, "Eastern European Immigrants," 110; Gingold, *Memory Bank Project*, BHEC; Diner, *Roads Taken*, 15-16, 58; Sidney Ziff, Lena Feldelson and Louis Gingold, transcripts of oral histories conducted in 1977 and 1985, *Memory Bank Project*, BHEC.

positions in state and local government, serving as alderman, police commissioners, immigration agents, and members of the board of education. Orthodox Jews arriving in the decade before and after the turn of the twentieth century, however, tended to distance themselves from political battles, a logical stance given their small size and non-Jews' tendency to associate Eastern European immigrants with radicalism. The never-ending conflicts between the city's black and white laborers, their employers, and moral reformers may have increased their worries since it created a dangerous environment for objections that might be branded as socialist. Although the only Reform Jew who owned a rolling mill or blast furnace was Morris Adler, many supplemented their incomes by investing or funding industrial or railroad projects, including the Simon family and banker Burghardt Steiner. Both Steiner and Jennie Marx's husband, clothier Moses Joseph, were presidents of the Commercial Club, which contained Jewish and non-Jewish businessmen such as Lesser and Klotz, who were part of the middle and upper class. Although exceptions existed, these men and other Reform Jews generally supported positions that were aligned with their economic cohort. Between 1900 and 1910, Orthodox Jews in Southern cities like Atlanta and Dallas frequently supported workers' associations like the Arbiter Ring/Workmen's Circle, but in Birmingham, they joined Reform leaders in rejecting such organizations. Many Yiddish-speaking Jews claimed that the socialists who formed them attacked religion, but their daily interactions could have easily convinced them that the Reform Jews who warned that antisemitic reprisals could arise from their formation were correct.¹⁹⁷

A political dispute that occurred in 1899 exemplified not only Orthodox Jews' tendency to distance themselves from politics but also the conflicts that KI's congregants had with their

¹⁹⁷ *Birmingham News*, April 5, 1889; January 20, 1895; March 17, 1895; November 25, 1895; July 15, 1899; Josh Parshall, "Yiddish Politics in Southern States: The Southern District of the Arbiter Ring, 1908-1949," PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2017. ProQuest (0153D_17059), 24, 47.

middle-class civic leaders, some of whom they felt were too close to their Reform counterparts. The quarrel began when board members from both KI and Emanu-El attempted to lump their fellow Jews into a single category to support a factional cause, an action that many KI congregants resented. After a political letter that was attributed to their congregation began circulating in the general community, a large group of KI's members held a special meeting on April 2 to express their views. Although the exact nature of the letter's alleged position was not specified in their response, a representative committee from the Orthodox congregation was clearly unhappy such an action had been associated with KI at all. Led by L. Joseph and speaking collectively for the congregation, the committee denounced the Orthodox synagogue's authorship, stating that Burghardt Steiner, the wealthy banker who was then Temple Emanu-El's president, had actually written the document and then colluded with Louis Weinstein, their vice president, to distribute it. In a notice printed in the *Birmingham News*, Joseph angrily stated KI's members felt "very indignant that [they] should be placed in a false position before the public" as they did "not mix religion and politics."¹⁹⁸

Conflicting views about politics, representation, and occupational networks continued to cause internal tensions in the Jewish community within the first and second decade of the twentieth century, but initially they were not enough to substantially divide the Jewish community. In 1905, Birmingham's Jewish population was more than fifty-eight times what it had been when Herman Simon bought his first downtown lot thirty years before.¹⁹⁹ The men and women who composed it were first-, second-, and third-generation Jews from both Eastern and Western Europe who had migrated from both Northern and Southern cities. They made their livings as business leaders, educators, clerks, tailors, merchants, peddlers, and junk dealers.

¹⁹⁸ *Birmingham News*, April 3, 1899.

¹⁹⁹ Marcus, *To Count a People*, 11-14.

Some of them had been in the city for decades and others had recently arrived, and many defined and practiced Judaism differently. Even though Jewish residents generally represented a united front under the leadership of Rabbi Morris Newfield, a well-respected social worker and religious functionary, they did not always agree. Their religious community's growth and status in the early city is unquestionable, but like the careers of businessman and politician Emil Lesser, the path to its success was less ideal than it has often been recorded by local chroniclers and professional scholars.

As Birmingham's Jewish pioneers, the Simon, Marx, Hochstadter, and Wise families established a strong foundation for the integration of a second generation of Jewish migrants into the city's most important economic and political circles. Their dedication to the city in the 1870s and early 1880s established important niches in the clothing, liquor, and real estate industries that would provide a base for the integration of a second generation of Jewish migrants, including German businessman Emil Lesser. As the century progressed, Jewish professionals like Lesser continued to form substantial networks with a wide range of Birmingham's white residents and play instrumental roles in the promotion and expansion of the city.

In the 1890s, several shifts in Lesser's public persona demonstrate his struggle to find a place in the narrowing social and political environment of his city and state, a challenge he shared with many upper- and middle-class Southern Jews, including banker Burghardt Steiner and alderman Simon Klotz. As they were increasingly exposed to a rising wave of antisemitic and nativist rhetoric, Birmingham's Jewish civic leaders found the atmosphere in Alabama much more sensitive to difference than it had once been, which coincided with the arrival of a large influx of Yiddish-speaking settlers who self-segregated and made lifestyle choices that were

visibly different from their predecessors.²⁰⁰ Lesser and other Reform leaders thus found themselves caught between their desire to freely express their opinions and values and their desire to maintain a positive reputation among their non-Jewish peers. Lesser may have found it difficult to remain loyal to all of his former allies under these pressures, but Jewish women and their local supporters found other groups to champion. As educators, social organizers, and philanthropists, their volunteer and professional labor not only mirrored that of Reform and Orthodox men, but also contributed to the positive reputation and civic networks that the city's Jews continued to work hard to maintain.

²⁰⁰ Periods of rapid economic and social change, like that which occurred in Birmingham in the 1880s and 1890s, sparked nativism and bigotry. Although Alabama legislators generally embraced immigration, "old line Americans" and agrarian idealists tended to view certain immigrants as threatening because of their politics, visible religious differences, or what was perceived as racial ambiguity. Alabama's 1901 constitution eliminated the black electorate (and the votes of many common whites) through poll taxes and literary tests and the legalization of de facto segregation in the state increased civic-commercial elites' sensitivity to difference. In Birmingham, Jews were noticeably absent from the city's social clubs and real estate agents began refusing to sell them houses or land in particular neighborhoods. Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, Mark K. Bauman, ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 272-273; Eric Goldstein, "'Now is the Time to Show Your True Colors': Southern Jews, Whiteness, and The Rise of Jim Crow," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds. (Walton: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 136; "Investigating Klotz: An Alderman is Charged With Graft," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 21, 1908; Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life*, 34-36.

5. SOCIAL SERVICE:
LADIES AID AND THE “KINDERGARTNERS,” 1882-1906

“Our Ladies, both old and young, zealous at all times and all hours [are] unselfish as only women can be! It is not saying too much that the realization of our aims and objects in our midst— as of old in the camp of Israel—our mothers, sisters, and daughters were ever ready to lend a willing and cheerful hand to the furtherance of [our] cause.”

Samuel Ullman
Temple Emanu-EL President
August 26, 1888

On March 18, 1889, the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society sponsored an elaborate masked ball in Erswell’s Hall, one of the largest and most elegant ballrooms in downtown Birmingham. One hundred-thirty costumed guests arrived at the recently renovated venue, ready to celebrate Purim, a traditional Jewish festival that was becoming increasingly Americanized through charity galas similar to the one that the women were hosting.²⁰¹ The timing of the holiday fit nicely into the parades and masquerades held during Mardi Gras in Mobile and New Orleans, from which many of the city’s most prominent residents were just returning. Isaac Hochstadter and his wife Carrie, Sophia Wise, and Samuel Ullman were on the arrangement and reception committees that planned the event. They and their colleagues hired music teacher Paul Franklin’s “orchestra,” which the maestro advertised as a moderately priced “first-class string

²⁰¹ Purim is the joyous Jewish Festival of Lots that is based on the Book of Esther, an important woman in Jewish tradition. It takes place in the month of Adar (which usually falls sometime in March) and commemorates Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai’s thwarting of Jewish genocide during the ancient Persian empire. In nineteenth-century America, the practice of giving alms and dressing up as Biblical characters was often transformed into extravagant masques such as the one described here. For more information and examples, see Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, vol. 3, part 2, The Germanic Period (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 423-424.

band.” His music provided a lovely backdrop for the eligible Jewish women who had traveled all the way from Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Louisville to dance with Otto Marx and other local bachelors. When the young people needed a break, they talked with Herman and Paula Simon, Rabbi and Mrs. Eisenberg, and other couples who joined the young people at supper. C.H. Nabb, the proprietor of the Union Depot’s dining hall, prepared the large spread. Nabb had built his substantial reputation by hosting charming parties at his home in the South Highlands, an affluent neighborhood he shared with the Simons. According to the *Birmingham News*, the evening was “one of the most delightful nights of the season of ’89.”²⁰²

Jewish charity balls soon became a popular annual event in Birmingham, just as they were in other American cities. Although not always as extravagant as the gala thrown by Emanu-El’s ladies’ aid association in 1889, they consistently demonstrated Jewish residents’ ability to organize elaborate entertainments that required money, social status, and civic connections. Birmingham’s newspapers had started calling for masquerades in 1882, and within a decade they were a regular part of the local Mardi Gras festivities. Members of Temple Emanu-El and Knesseth Israel (which began advertising its masques in 1893) drew from their knowledge of Purim masques in New York, Philadelphia, Montgomery, and Atlanta, where the balls began between 1862 and 1872. The popularity of their parties soon surpassed social events held by other groups in the city, including the Knights of Pythias, the Presbyterian Church, and the Social Four Club. As a result, the events helped establish Jewish leaders as notable civic and social figures. They reinforced their organizers’ religious and ethnic identities while meshing a well-known form of entertainment with Jewish traditions and concurrently demonstrated local Jews’ acculturation and distinction.²⁰³

²⁰² *Birmingham News*, February 11, 1889; February 20, 1889; March 8, 1889; March 19, 1889.

²⁰³ Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654-2000*, 137; Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 423; *New York Daily*

Birmingham's Reform and Orthodox women played key roles in the success of its Purim balls as well as other local entertainments. While certainly active in commercial circles as small business owners, seamstresses, and clerks, these Jewish women—similar to their counterparts in other American cities—were more likely to be recognized in the local and Jewish press as social organizers and philanthropists. Although the press rarely connected such activities to their civic goals or ambitions, the women's social and religious voluntarism served as a major factor in their successful integration into important middle-class professional and economic circles. The unpaid labor they performed in their ladies' aid associations mirrored and extended many of the experiences of Jewish men, as well as buttressing Jewish identity and contributing to the positive reputation of their religious community as a group. The women worked with non-Jewish suppliers and social reformers to ensure their projects were a success, and the money they earned from dances, concerts, lectures, and picnics generated funds for Jewish institutions and interfaith aid associations. The events they sponsored also served as informal matchmaking events that were part of the Jewish social season, which provided their coreligionists with opportunities to develop friendships and romantic relationships with likeminded individuals. Furthermore, Jewish women who were educators and social workers frequently employed the strategies of professional integration that Isaac Hochstadter and Emil Lesser utilized to establish their careers, drawing from their talents, interests, and connections to increase their civic networks and achieve their goals.

Herald, March 10, 1862; *Philadelphia Enquirer*, March 21, 1864; *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 26, 1867; *Atlanta Constitution*, March 23, 1872; *Birmingham Iron Age*, January 19, 1882; September 18, 1888; *Birmingham News*, November 23, 1888; November 12, 1888; January 3, 1890; December 4, 1892; February 3, 1897; February 7, 1910.

Birmingham's Jewish Women and Their Religious Work

The Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society that sponsored the 1889 Purim ball was formed on October 14, 1883, around the same time Nettie Newman began helping Isaac Hochstadter in Emanu-El's newly-formed Sunday school. The organization, which locals simply called the "HBLS" or "Ladies of Temple Emanu-El," rewrote and published its bylaws when Sophia Wise became president in 1888. Members included not only Carrie Hochstadter, but also her sister-in-law Jennie, who was elected vice president, and Paula Simon, the group's treasurer. Their interest in philanthropy reflected Jewish traditions of *tsedakah* and *tikkun olam*, responsibilities related to the improvement of their local community and the world. While Jewish law (*Halakhah*) also required this social consciousness of their husbands, Jewish gender norms—similar to their Christian counterparts—emphasized the central role of the proverbial "Woman of Valor" (*eschet chayil*).²⁰⁴ Religious duties were deeply linked to benevolence and communal welfare, which partly explains why Temple Emanu-El's women eagerly embraced the chance to form institutions they could run and control. Like Jews throughout the country, the congregation's men and women worked together on many charitable projects, but in Birmingham the women initially lacked the independent fraternal organizations and non-Jewish

²⁰⁴According to historian Beth Wenger, the "woman of valor" praised in Proverbs was held up as the ideal Jewish woman, whose identity was constructed from her service to others. According to Jewish tradition, she was a devoted wife and mother, who sacrificed her time and energy for the physical and spiritual well-being of her husband and children. A diligent worker and a caring individual, she found happiness in contributing to the family's income and "sustain[ing] and inspir[ing] others." Wenger points out that this Jewish feminine ideal was both a myth and an inspiration that changed over time, just as it was for the Christian women who were motivated by the same Biblical narrative. In late nineteenth-century America, many middle-class Jewish women and their Christian counterparts filled the duties of the "woman of valor" by committing themselves to their communities as well as their families. They frequently formed benevolent societies and clubs like those discussed in this chapter, using their volunteer work to present a self-sacrificing front to activities that built their sense of selfhood and independence. Beth Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers," in *American Jewish History* 79, no. 1 (Autumn 1989), 16-17.

networks their husbands and fathers possessed that were used to fulfill their religiously-mandated civic obligations.²⁰⁵

In addition to the traditions of *tsedakah* and *tikkun olam*, the women of Temple Emanuel embraced concepts of religious and social duty that overlapped with those of their Orthodox and non-Jewish counterparts. They, too, connected philanthropy to constructions of American domesticity that suggested they were morally superior and more pious than men.²⁰⁶ According to its by-laws, the society met every Wednesday night “to extend a helping hand to the needy; to alleviate the suffering of the distressed; [and] to be a means of dispensing aid to the poor.” Birmingham’s black and white Protestant women formed similar organizations, which they also connected to concepts of womanhood and religious duty. African Americans, for example, formed the Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Women’s Convention in 1883 to demonstrate their dedication to their faith, the Christian Bible, and evangelism. The city’s white chapter of the inter-denominational Women’s Christian Temperance Union was fighting liquor dealers by 1886, and Presbyterians supported the Ladies’ Aid Society of the Christian Church in 1889. American Jews were rarely rejected from societies run by white women, but they sometimes questioned the

²⁰⁵ *Constitution of the Hebrew Ladies’ Benevolent Society*, 1-3; Jeanne E. Abrams, *Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail: A History in the American West* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 55-57; Carole Bell Ford, *The Girls: Jewish Women of Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1940-1955* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 17.

²⁰⁶ The conception that women were more religious and moral than men was a common feature of nineteenth-century middle-class American gender norms that are frequently labeled True Womanhood. Feminine ideals often deemed women inherently unsuited for the commercial or business world, while encouraging the performance or management of domestic activities, which included childcare, sewing, entertaining, and cooking. Although actual black and white women frequently crossed historian Barbara Welter’s now infamous line between the public and private spheres, many found power and autonomy in classifications of difference. Both Jewish and non-Jewish women frequently did so by emphasizing their uniquely feminine “gifts” (self-restraint, self-sacrifice, sexual morality, sensibility, caring, piety, etc.). They often employed such constructs to justify their unpaid social and religious work and expand traditional gender boundaries. Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 35-36; Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966), 152-153-155; Mary Kelley, “Beyond the Boundaries,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 21, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 74-76, 78; Mark Bauman, “Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations,” in *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2003), 35.

missionary or prohibitionist efforts of such associations, which did not match their personal belief systems or (when they or their families owned a saloon) livelihood. The organizations they formed separately in Birmingham enabled them to demonstrate their commitment to social improvement and their city's poor without compromising their values.²⁰⁷

Birmingham's HBLs and its Daughters of Israel, an Orthodox benevolent society that was founded in the early 1890s, were designed to serve Jews. Although some of the organizations' dances, festivals, and picnics welcomed the participation of non-Jewish residents, they were primarily attended by Jews and raised funds for Jewish causes. The Daughters of Israel often relied on small admission charges to their events, which were praised in the *Birmingham News* as early as 1892, just four years after their congregation was established. That year, they were listed as a "factor of charity" in the city and praised for the "very successful entertainment" that they presented as part of their efforts to "help the Jews of Russia," the home nation of many of the society's members. The HBLs stated that it was "not exclusively yet preeminently" intended for "the destitute of the Israelitish faith," and while the group added that their object was also to promote "harmony and a social intercourse" among its members, their work was primarily intended to keep impoverished or transient Jews from becoming an economic burden on the city and thus a potential source of antisemitism. The Daughters of Israel did likewise, telling a journalist in 1893 that they raised money "for the benefit of the poor of their race." The women's unpaid labor thus expressed civic concern and separated Jews from the poverty and desperation that many middle-class residents associated with crime and depravity. It not only exhibited common characteristics of local Jewish men's public work and that of their

²⁰⁷ *Constitution of the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society*, 1; Fallin., *The African American Church in Birmingham, Alabama*, 72; DuBose, *The Mineral Wealth of Alabama*, 181; *Birmingham News*, March 7, 1889; Bauman, *A New Vision of Southern History*, 11-12.

coreligionists in other American cities, it also was implicitly designed to thwart antisemitism and collectively improve Jews' ability to integrate into the social landscape.²⁰⁸

Since Birmingham's Jewish community was fairly small before 1905, Reform and Orthodox women's work was essential to its collective survival, growth, and maintenance. To support their synagogues monetarily, both the ladies of Temple Emanu-El and the Daughters of Israel donated large sums of money. In 1891 and 1892, Emanu-El's board highlighted two HLBS donations, which included one hundred dollars the women specifically indicated for use in the cemetery. Six years later, Burghardt Steiner, Emanu-El's president in 1897, used the newspaper to publicly thank the women for the \$1,013.49 they donated after a local festival. Likewise, all of the proceeds from the Daughters of Israel's 1895 Purim masquerade went to its board, and on August 5, 1901, the group stated their intention to "assist Congregation K'nesseth Israel in raising funds to be used in the construction of [its] synagogue." According to the *News*, they planned to begin immediately with an outing organized for the following Sunday at Pleasant Valley Park, which they expected to attract "a large number of their friends."²⁰⁹

Their road to independence, however, was not always easy. Even though the HBLS and Daughters of Israel benefitted from Birmingham's Purim activities, they frequently played a secondary role in their planning in the 1880s and 1890s. Knesseth Israel's balls were solely under the control of men, and male-dominated organizations such as the Harmony Club, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, and the Young Men's Hebrew Literary Club increasingly hosted other parties and dances. On March 14, 1892, Ella Patterson, Hannah Wellman, and Ophelia Levy (unmarried daughters in prominent Reform families) designed a fundraiser around

²⁰⁸ "Birmingham News, March 14, 1892; November 7, 1892; January 3, 1893; *Constitution of the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society*, 1-3; Mark Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 38.

²⁰⁹ Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 38-40; *Birmingham News*, January 16, 1897; March 3, 1895; August 5, 1901; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, April 5, 1891-September, 1, 1892.

a Purim play that combined the story of Esther with a “musical farce of a sleigh ride.” Although the women were its primary actors and producers, they were recognized only as the “assistants” of Samuel Ullman, who helped them organize its public performance at Frank O’Brien’s Opera House. It was Ullman who presented the board with the \$302.50 their group raised and Ullman who was thanked for their contribution, a donation that the male board decided to use for a sinking fund (a savings account retiring one of Emanu-El’s bonds). The women rejected attempts to dissolve the HBLs the following September, however, standing their ground when Isaac Hochstadter recommended that all relief societies be consolidated so that charity “could be dispensed by one person.” The HBLs were still growing strong in 1911, however, when it possessed 110 members and continued to “aid the poverty stricken” under the director of Bertha Marx Adler’s sister-in-law, Mary Adler. The women bent gender boundaries but did not break them.²¹⁰

Regardless of power struggles with their congregations’ men, members of the HBLs and Daughters of Israel gradually increased their autonomy, which was typical for American Jewish women during their era. This was especially true for Emanu-El’s women, who were more acculturated and less traditional than their Orthodox counterparts. In the 1880s and 1890s, upper- and middle-class women like Paula Simon and Sophia Wise were founders of the HBLs and Birmingham’s chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). Their work paved the way for a new generation of Reform women, including Bertha Gelders and Carrie Ullman, who rose to leadership positions among the black and white clubwomen whom they worked with on social and education projects. From 1882 to 1902, they joined Jewish and non-Jewish women across the country who gradually began to create new, independent definitions of womanhood.

²¹⁰ *Birmingham News*, March 14, 1891; March 24, 1891; February 22, 1899; March 6, 1901; Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, January 24-September 1, 1892; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 22.

While they continued to recognize sexual and gender differences, they found such distinctions compatible with their self-directed, non-traditional pursuits. Their work in national and local ladies' organizations thus extended their roles and opportunities in both the city and its synagogues.²¹¹

Fun and Fellowship: Matchmaking, Society Life, and Literary Clubs

The activities of the HBLs and the Daughters of Israel directly benefited their synagogues monetarily, but they also connected Jewish women to Birmingham and built their local reputations. Hosting social events to raise money for religious institutions was a common practice among upper- and middle-class nineteenth-century women, including those who were part of the city's commercial elite. Simultaneously, the entertainments and literary circles they organized indicate not only Jewish women's growing independence and acculturation, but also the social tensions within the Jewish community, which were beginning to increase with the influx of Yiddish-speaking Jews after 1895.

One of the most popular events the HBLs hosted in the 1890s were bazaars, which white women in Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian congregations also sponsored. Similar to their counterparts in other cities, Birmingham's church bazaars were regular

²¹¹ In the late nineteenth-century, many American and European women, including Jane Addams and other social reformers, began "campaigns" for a redefinition of their public roles, calling for more access to education and professional opportunities, the right to vote, and the ability to choose to prioritize their intellectual or occupational goals above marriage and domesticity. Although not all women veered from commonly accepted gender ideals, such demands for independence and autonomy created what was often branded a "new woman." From 1890 to the 1910s in the United States and Europe, especially Britain, New Women were a social phenomenon who were both praised and demonized in literature and the press. They could be considered a threat to their male counterparts and established gender norms, which often caused hostility and animosity among their critics. To combat such emotions, some Progressive Era reformers, both Jewish and non-Jewish women, chose to work within established gender frameworks to push social and religious boundaries, as was the case for Jewish women in Birmingham. For further discussion and examples, see Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters*, 131; Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin, eds., *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World* (New York: Rutledge, 1978), 16-17; Charlotte Rich, *Transcending the New Woman: Multiethnic Narratives in the Progressive Era* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 1-2; Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism," 17-19, 23-26; Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 36-37, 44-45.

occurrences and popular fundraisers, like Jewish Purim balls and other masquerades. They were held in the downtown district and widely attended for their attractions and the donated items that were sold or raffled. According to the *Birmingham News*, 1895 was a prime year for the functions. Journalists even declared December 18 the beginning of “Bazaar Week” because of those sponsored by the Church of the Advent, St. Paul’s Catholic Church, the Methodist Baptist Church, and an unnamed merchant “next to Nabers, Morrow & Sinnige.” Even though other events featured music programs and tea, chocolate, and confectionary booths, the bazaar that Emanu-El’s women held in February was among the best. The *News* stated the HBLs and the single Jewish women who helped them “work[ed] like beavers” to make sure “every person [had] a most pleasant and enjoyable time” at their function, which was held in a vacant store on First Avenue and raised \$900 for their synagogue. Festivities lasted a full week and included a “special entertainment” each night and a “delightful lunch” for purchase during the day. Although Jewish men were asked to help, Mary Adler was “in charge,” and women organized and operated the raffle, stands, and restaurant that served the general public. Sophia Wise could be found working at the benevolent society’s booth, and Carrie Hochstadter assisted with the food.²¹²

Other fundraisers indicate the women’s awareness of local resources and popular entertainments. The 1892 Purim play that generated over three hundred dollars for Temple Emanu-El held its performance in Frank O’Brien’s Opera House, a popular venue for community dramas and musicals. Three years later, the HBLs sold tickets for a September outing that occurred on two “brilliantly lighted” cars of the Birmingham Railway & Electric Company, whose trolley rides had “been the means of much enjoyment” during the summer. In 1893, the

²¹² *Birmingham News*, April 3, 1890; December 18, 1891; February 10, 1895; March 3, 1895; December 18, 1895.

Daughters of Israel began organizing functions that also reflected their familiarity with the city and its amenities. They held large annual picnics at suburban parks in Powderly, the suburb Emil Lesser helped found in 1886. The women not only provided what one journalist branded “elaborate refreshments,” they also hired local orchestras to provide music for dancing and chose a location along the town’s “dummy” rail lines to make transportation easy. In 1905, they even arranged for special street cars to carry their guests to and from their picnic.²¹³

Women in the HBLS continued to support their synagogue and work cooperatively with their husbands, fathers, and prominent board members, but their charity events generated popularity and money that enabled them to simultaneously organize separate projects. In January 1890, a small number of Reform women planned a “Chocolataire” at Sublett Hall that was not designed to benefit Temple Emanu-El or any other charity, as were their usual practices.²¹⁴ Since most entertainments they planned were successful and the group was so confident in their abilities, they felt it unnecessary to explain to prospective ticketholders where the proceeds *would* go, which hampered neither the event’s success nor praise for the activity in the local newspaper. Around the same period, the Daughters of Israel began conducting their annual picnics without the help of Knesseth Israel’s men. Since large crowds were drawn to Powderly to attend the events, including not only people from Birmingham, but also Ensley, Bessemer, and Pratt City, their officers were also collectively praised in the city for their organizational skills.²¹⁵

²¹³ Temple Emanu-El Board Minutes, March 27, 1892; *Birmingham News*, July 2, 1893; September 21, 1895; August 10, 1901; July 3, 1905.

²¹⁴ In 1896, social etiquette expert Maud Cook described a Chocolataire as “rather a new entertainment” that was similar to a tea party. Every food or drink that was served included some form of chocolate. Since Emanu-El’s women were planning their event in the winter, the menu was likely to include hot chocolate, cake, and other chocolate desserts and pastries, but if it had been held in the summer, they would have substituted chocolate “lemonade,” wafers, and ice cream for some of the warmer items. Maud C. Cook, *Social Life or The Manners and Customs of Polite Society* (Buffalo: Matthew-Northrup Co., 1896), 296.

²¹⁵ *Birmingham News*, January 11, 1890; July 3, 1905.

Although large charity events like bazaars and picnics were open to the general public, Jewish men and women developed a subculture in Birmingham that allowed them to remain religiously distinct, a fairly common practice in American towns with substantial Jewish populations. The level of social integration that individual Reform and Orthodox Jews chose covers a wide spectrum. Upper- and middle-class Reform Jews like Emil Lesser, Samuel Ullman, and Bertha Gelders were on lists of guests and organizers for the fundraisers, dances, and public assemblies of their non-Jewish associations, the city's Mardi Gras committee, and interdenominational charities. Still, in 1883, the year after Temple Emanu-El was established, a small number of Jewish men formed their own social club, the Phoenix, under the direction of Isaac Hochstadter and Sophia Wise's husband Abe. Whether they did so to thwart antisemitism or simply to encourage Jewish fellowship remains unclear. Members of the Phoenix freely mingled with Protestants during the 1880s and 1890s, when they planned cooperative outings with the non-Jewish Standard Club and hosted Knights of Pythias' and Relay Club balls. The Phoenix was certainly an important social resource for the growing Jewish population, and countless Jewish meetings and entertainments took place in its halls, but it did not appeal to everyone. In 1890, Jennie Hochstadter's brother Eugene Fies was among the clerks and bachelors who established the Harmony Club, which they branded a "younger Jewish elite society." Furthermore, although Morris Wolff attended their social events, early resident Louis Gingold stated that most Orthodox and Reform Jews "did not mix." After Kneseth Israel was organized in 1889, its congregants attended functions organized by associations like the Daughters of Israel, which often took place in their Orthodox neighborhood or synagogue. The

existence of these separate Jewish societies revealed the social, economic, and cultural differences within the Jewish community.²¹⁶

Some dances and parties that Reform and Orthodox women planned were designed purposefully as matchmaking events. Such nineteenth-century mixers were common among Jews in the United States, especially those who were acculturated or from German-speaking nations. Jewish women were regularly responsible for maintaining social and familial networks, so the entertainments they organized alone or with Jewish men became a significant part of their religious communities' subcultures. Although Louis Gingold stated that his parents never told him he could not marry a non-Jew or a Reformer, he admitted that "mixed marriages" were "exceedingly rare" because they were "looked down upon" in Birmingham, as they were elsewhere. Combined with the women's conscious contact with friends and relatives, the events they planned contributed to the strength of the informal Jewish marriage market, which replaced traditional marriage practices arranged through parents or *shadkhens* (paid matchmakers) between 1850 and 1900. Finding a way to meet and choose one's husband was appealing to Jews of a wide variety of backgrounds, but it was especially important to women who were social workers and educators like Bertha Gelders and Carrie Ullman, active professionals both before and after they were married. The matchmaking events that they hosted and attended thus displayed acculturated women's desire for independence and individualism without requiring

²¹⁶ Although social tensions between Orthodox and Reform Jews would not substantially manifest until the 1910s, they were hardly uncommon in other American cities and were beginning to grow in the late 1890s, especially since opportunities to segregate grew substantially after the Yiddish-speaking/Orthodox population became numerous enough to form their own neighborhood and create separate social events like those sponsored by the Daughters of Israel. Still, individual choices varied—Wolff possessed substantial connections to Reform Jews and continued to socialize with them as a young bachelor. *Birmingham News*, May 10, 1890; August 19, 1890; April 8, 1891; April 25, 1893; March 21, 1896; *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 21, 1897; Gingold, *Memory Bank Project*. For more information about American Jewish subcultures and their general effect on southern Jews, see Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'all: The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews," PhD diss., Indiana University, 1986. ProQuest (8628005), 1, 26, 42-49, 52-59. For a more detailed discussion of the self-segregation of Reform and Orthodox Jews in Birmingham, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

them to remain unmarried or reject nineteenth-century Jewish gender ideals.²¹⁷

Birmingham's Reform women were among those who sponsored not only Purim balls but also dances and "hops" at the Phoenix Club, which were recorded in the *Birmingham News*. To provide a beautiful atmosphere for their guests, the press stated that they and their husbands would decorate the club with flowers, potted plants, and palm trees. They served "rare and delicious refreshments" and engaged the orchestra of Emanu-El's Protestant organist Fred Grambs, who regularly provided music for dancing. Attendees usually included "a number of guests from various cities of the South." On January 14, 1889, for example, Morris Marx attended a supper and dance at the club, which was thrown "in honor of the visiting young ladies now in the city," including Iona Meyer from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Iona and Morris also attended a Valentine "hop" at the Phoenix on February 14. A year later, when they attended a musical dedicated to Eva Maas (a single woman from Selma), they were man and wife.²¹⁸

The Phoenix Club also served as a venue for the wedding receptions of many young couples, including Alfred Meyer and Sunday school teacher Nettie Newman, who continued her interest in education when she moved to Selma with Alfred in 1891.²¹⁹ As Mrs. Meyer, Nettie spent most of her time cultivating her reputation as a society matron, but she was also one of the founding members of Selma's Jewish Chautauqua Society in 1897, similar to the Protestant reading and lecture circle of the same name. Popular throughout the United States from 1874 to 1920, the Chautauqua movement sprouted from a Methodist summer encampment on the shores of New York's Lake Chautauqua. When the summer program grew into a popular white

²¹⁷ Karen R. McGinity; *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 22-24; Paula E. Hyman, "Two Models of Modernization: Jewish women in the German and Russian Empires," in *The Jews and Gender: The Challenge to Hierarchy*, Jonathan Frankel, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42.

²¹⁸ *Birmingham News*, January 14, 1889; August 13, 1890; January 15, 1890; August 13, 1890; November 11, 1891;

²¹⁹ Alfred was not directly related to Iona, despite the similarity of their names.

Protestant teaching institution, it became associated with middle-class ideals that connected a quest for learning and self-improvement with American exceptionalism and model citizenship. Henry Berkowitz founded the Jewish Chautauqua Society (JCS) in 1893 after attending a Protestant summer workshop in western New York. A Reform rabbi from Kansas City, Berkowitz designed the JCS to popularize Jewish knowledge and encourage philosemitism by providing non-Jews with accessible information and positive experiences related to Jewish culture and thought. He modeled his national organization after the non-Jewish New York Chautauqua Institution, encouraging middle-class Jews to vacation in Atlantic City, where they were trained to conduct Jewish literary circles and teach at religious schools. Four years after Berkowitz founded the JCS, Nettie Newman Meyer was elected president of the Chautauqua chapter that she and other Jewish women founded in Selma. The *Montgomery Advertiser* predicted the organization would soon be a success because she and Cora Adler, the unmarried secretary of the society, were “peculiarly adopted for the posts they have been chosen to fill.” As a former religious school educator, Meyer jumped quickly into her new responsibilities, advertising weekly meetings in the *Selma Times* and planning programs that included non-Jewish guest scholars who gave “interesting and instructive” lectures.²²⁰

Birmingham’s residents, including its Jews, began expressing interest in the adult education movement at the end of the city’s second decade. In 1889, middle-class white Protestants in Belview and the North Highlands formed Chautauqua assemblies in their homes and attended the organization’s Alabama convention in Fort Payne. That same year, Emanu-El’s

²²⁰ *Birmingham News*, December 27, 1891, 8; *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 31, 1894, 3; July 6, 1898, 2; October 15, 1897, 3; December, 9, 1897, 3; November 8, 1900, 9; *Selma Times*, November 16, 1897, 2; Daniel Green, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 3-8; Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 24-25; Peggy K. Pearlstein, “Assemblies by the Sea: The Jewish Chautauqua Society in Atlantic City, 1897-1907,” in *Jewish Political Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 5.

former non-Jewish choir member Nellie Cobbs Phillips, the wife of the public-school superintendent, went to a summer workshop at the Chautauqua institution in New York, where she learned strategies that she soon employed as an early education advocate. Jews formed their Chautauqua chapter in the city six years later, when Montgomery native William Black organized a circle that followed a JCS course, which “accomplished good results.” Although Black’s assembly and many other reading societies were short-lived, Jewish educational organizations were highly popular among a variety of Temple Emanu-El’s members at the turn of the century, including its single men and women. In 1895, Annie Schlesinger created SPUR, which the *Jewish Ledger* described as a “distinctive literary circle,” and a “Miss Barnard” became the leader of Carpatieta, “a Saturday afternoon club” that studied mythology and Wagnerian opera. The following year, Sophia Goldberg established a reading group that “met weekly in the hospitable home of their leader where they pursued a systematic course of reading” and held monthly debates. Goldberg’s organization lasted until 1898, when older women including Sophia Wise and Paula Simon founded Birmingham’s section of the National Council of Jewish Women, an institution that expanded their ability to learn, teach, and conduct their social and philanthropic projects.²²¹

²²¹ Sophia Wise and Paula Simon were among the charter members of Birmingham’s NCJW, which was established in October 1898. The national organization was well-known for its social and philanthropic projects, which assisted newly arriving immigrants, served the indigent and poor, and established kindergartens and settlement houses. In Birmingham, the NCJW was primarily a Jewish reading and educational circle for Emanu-El’s Reform women, and although the organization sponsored entertainments like candy-pullings and Purim balls, it performed little active social work in the city before 1910. This dissertation concentrates on women’s social work before that period; therefore, it avoids lengthy discussions about the NCJW or Hadassah, an organization that provided medical assistance in Palestine, which both became the primary social service organizations for Birmingham’s Jewish women after 1910. For more information about the NCJW, see Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993); *Birmingham Iron Age*, August 30, 1883; *Birmingham News*, July 25, 1889; August 14, 1889; September 17, 1889; September 28, 1889; October 8, 1898; *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 3.

The educational and philanthropic activities of Birmingham's upper- and middle-class Jewish women suggest that their social and religious work paralleled the commercial and political activities of their male counterparts, such as Reform board members Isaac Hochstadter and Emil Lesser and Orthodox businessman Morris Wolff. Although Sophia Wise and Alice Silverman (Lesser) gained important experiences in the same commercial world as their husbands, individuals in the HBLs, the Daughters of Israel, and Jewish reading circles likewise expanded their organizational and leadership skills. Similar to the voluntarism of Jewish women in cities throughout United States, their activities reflected several strands of their identities, and their motivations included American and Jewish gender ideals that overlapped. They too, drew from their connections to each other and their non-Jewish peers to complete successful projects in the city that fulfilled their personal goals and supported their religious community.

Bertha Gelders and Expanding Roles of Jewish Womanhood

Jewish women frequently did more than extend their civic networks and bolster Jewish identity and culture. In Birmingham, as elsewhere, their voluntarism led to additional opportunities for their sisters, daughters, and non-Jewish peers. Working in conjunction with white Protestant and Catholic clubwomen and social reformers, Reform educators like Bertha Gelders and Carrie Ullman joined the many other American women who became settlement house workers, teachers, and kindergarten advocates. One of their primary projects was Birmingham's Free Kindergarten Association, an interfaith institution the city's Reform Jews helped establish in 1898. Through it and other social missions, these New Jewish Women formed and supported activities that increased Emanu-El's reputation and the connections many of them had formed in the city as businesswomen, volunteers, and entertainers. Hardly unusual or without their particular challenges, the public labor that they performed in the city enabled them

to increase and display the leadership skills and educations they accrued and saw modeled in the HBLs and Jewish literary clubs. Like the matchmaking events and social engagements that they planned, their voluntarism and teaching positions also supported American and Jewish gender norms that connected women to domesticity. On a practical level, their activities increased occupational opportunities for Birmingham's white women and children, but it also implicitly represented the collective work that many hoped could dispel religious intolerance.

Simultaneously, it allowed Jewish women to demonstrate that they, like their husbands and fathers, were model citizens who supported their city's progressive image—even as that image was beginning to shift.

Part of Birmingham's modern promotional identity was based on the public and private education that was available for the children of its residents, especially for those who were white and upper- or middle-class. The Elyton Land Company had donated property for a white public school when the city was between 1871 and 1872. When its president, James R. Powell, was elected mayor in 1873, he pledged his salary to support that school and appointed John Terry, a wealthy South Carolina lawyer who had once been a teacher, to serve as its first superintendent. The Powell School for white children was open in March 1874, and although black residents generally had to rely on their own hard work and tenacity to establish schools, they received some money to hire a black teacher from the board of aldermen in 1876. From 1884 to 1910, black educators, ministers, and women's associations frequently enlisted the help of Progressive Era white educators and civic leaders, including Jewish school superintendent Samuel Ullman, who assisted them in the establishment of the city's first black industrial school in 1900.²²²

²²² Although Ullman *did* speak out for black education as early as 1883, his support was less unusual and more problematic than it has often been portrayed in the city's Jewish histories. Several white Progressive Era politicians and educators in Alabama joined reformers like Ullman in advocating for black technical schools, including state legislator John H. Small, Ullman's fellow school board member J.H. Phillips, and managers of Birmingham

Advertisements and articles encouraging Birmingham's black and white residents to teach appeared in the city's newspapers in 1875, only two years after the state developed a state normal school for white students in Florence and Montgomery and the same year after a similar institution was created for its black counterparts in Huntsville. Only a decade after Birmingham was founded, Thomas Armstrong established its first "female college," a teaching institution for white women. Armstrong, a Methodist minister who had already been a principal in Tuscaloosa and Mansfield, Louisiana, applied for his charter in the middle of a normal school boom that took place in the United States from 1870 to 1890. Like many teaching institutions of its time, his school was branded a high school for girls. Since his staff was composed only of himself, his wife and daughter, and Mary Engle, a former student who taught literature, many local women looked outside of the city for their educations, especially when Armstrong left the city for Gadsden, sometime between 1883 and 1890.²²³

Unmarried Jewish women began teaching in Emanu-El's Sunday school in 1883 and, according to Kneseth Israel congregant Louis Gingold, in the Orthodox synagogue's Hebrew school shortly after it was established in the early 1890s. One of the first Reform women to take her teaching experiences into the professional world was Bertha Gelders, an upper-class Jewish

railroads and industrial facilities like T.G. Bush and Belton Gilbreath. Such support was related to discriminatory discourses that reflected white paternalism and linked unattended black workers to crime and subterfuge. These men, like Ullman, viewed an industrially educated, lower-level black workforce as beneficial to society as long as it did not threaten white privilege, occupational positions, or employment. Ullman's once stated that [black] schools could be maintained cheaper than prisons, a sentiment that rings harsh and presumptuous in the twenty-first century, but between 1883 and 1904, he also worked with African American educators like Arthur H. Parker to ensure the establishment and availability of black schools in Birmingham. James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 100; Margaret England Armbruster, *Samuel Ullman and "Youth": The Life, the Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 38-40; *Early Days in Birmingham*, 8; DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 332; Tondra L. Loder-Jackson, *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 19-20.

²²³ *Birmingham Iron Age*, August 17, 1875; August 11, 1881; June 7, 1883; *Birmingham News*, June 25, 1889; September 24, 1890; Christine A. Ogren, "State Normal Schools in the United States," in *The American State Normal School: An Instrument for Great Good* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 213; Melissa R. Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 96-97.

woman and settlement house worker. Gelders became a popular language teacher in the city, who played a prominent role in Birmingham's Free Kindergarten Association, an organization that stemmed from public calls for early childhood education.²²⁴

Gelders lived in the city with the family of her well-known brother Louis, a wealthy real estate developer who began his career as a restaurateur and owned Parisians, a successful local department store, from 1911 to 1918. On July 4, 1892, the nineteen-year-old Gelders left Birmingham to attend a training session in Monteagle, Tennessee, where an annual Normal Institute and Teacher's Retreat had been conducted for Southern white women for almost a decade. When she returned in August, Gelders was hired to "take charge of one of the classes in the high school." Although there is no evidence explaining how Gelders obtained her position as the new German teacher (which may have come through her brother's connections to German Society president Emil Lesser), her active dedication to the education of women and children soon gained the respect of Birmingham's white commercial elite, especially those who considered themselves progressively minded. She was a public educator in Birmingham from 1892 to 1907, when she left to continue her education at the University of Chicago.²²⁵

Periodically, Gelders lived with her brother, but like Sophia Wise, she cultivated a separate professional and religious identity from that of her male relatives and is listed under her name and occupation in city directories. In 1895, she taught Sunday school at Temple Emanu-El, attended an exposition in Atlanta with her colleagues and pupils, and delivered a lecture to the Young Men's Hebrew Association about the "eminent German poet Heine," whose home she

²²⁴ For more information about Emanu-El's Sunday school, see Chapter Three of this dissertation. Gingold, *Memory Bank Project*.

²²⁵ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 23; Geraldine J. Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 190; *Birmingham News*, July 4, 1892, 6; August 10, 1892, 4; *University of Chicago Magazine* 12, no. 6 (April 1920), 17.

had visited while traveling abroad with friends. The following year, she offered French and German classes for women in her home during the summer, when she had no regular teaching duties. After another summer in Europe, she published an article in the *Birmingham News* that discussed the opportunities for women that she had observed at the University of Geneva. Gelders' wealth and privileged lifestyle influenced her writing. She failed to see the economic, racial, and structural barriers that burdened many of the students and attributed the tendency of three or four students to share modest two-room living quarters to Russian and Polish women's preference for a "Bohemian" lifestyle. The focus of her piece, however, was to demonstrate the autonomous lifestyle and diverse nationalities of women who studied medicine, political and social science, history, and literature. To assure her readers that such independent pursuits were indeed appropriate, she noted that the Geneva students were heavily chaperoned and emphasized their unmarried status, femininity, and social graces. The few who were mothers were from "good families" who sacrificed "all comfort" to send their children to "the best of schools" while they were temporarily apart. Her language reflected not only the frameworks Jewish women employed in the NCJW, but also those of Christian New Women all over the world, including nineteenth-century advocates for "female education" in Germany, black and white reformers in Progressive Era America, and Belle Époque *frondeuses* in France. Gelders likewise employed her nation's gender norms to subtly stretch conceptions of feminine identity. She thus portrayed the Geneva students' work as a rare but respectable endeavor that, while challenging for those who chose it, neither endangered men nor compromised the students' womanhood.²²⁶

²²⁶ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin de Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4-9; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xxi-xxiii 31-32; *Birmingham News*, May 17, 1895; September 30, 1895; November 23, 1895; January 22, 1896; Bertha Gelders, "Women Students Abroad," June 20, 1896, 11; *Birmingham, Alabama, City Directory* (Atlanta: Maloney Directory Company, 1897), 376; *Birmingham, Alabama, City Directory* (Louisville: R.L. Polk & Company, 1905), 237.

Jewish women usually avoided the Women's Christian Temperance Union because of its Christian orientation and focus on prohibition, but Gelders, like Emil Lesser, chose to develop relationships with non-Jews who shared her interests and civic goals. Her belief in the extension of opportunities for women and children also manifested in her work with the WCTU's Mercy Home, a settlement house modeled after Jane Addams' Hull House. The Methodist president of the Mercy Home's board of managers, Mrs. C.B. Spencer, was a proud suffragette who encouraged local residents to think of the settlement house in terms of cooperation, maternalism, and social welfare. Through the *Birmingham News*, Spencer couched her recruitment in terms of solidarity, "enlist[ing] the women of Birmingham without reference to religious or other affiliation" to help her provide assistance to "young girls and dependent women" in need. The Mercy Home was pitched as an association that represented "every [white] church and nationality" and welcomed "all classes and denominations" to its fundraisers. It drew from nineteenth-century cultural trends valuing early education and childcare, encouraging residents to "join in helping a cause that appeals to all without any reference to accidental distinctions." Moreover, many of the women who worked on the Mercy Home were already connected through other philanthropic projects. The settlement house was listed as part of United Charities (UC), which numerous upper- and middle-class Jewish men and women supported, including Samuel Ullman and his wife Emma, who was president of the interfaith organization in 1889.²²⁷ Alongside their non-Jewish counterparts in the UC, Emma and other Reform women dispersed

²²⁷ Birmingham's United Charities was an umbrella organization of various charities that unified various groups' fundraising efforts. Established in 1886 by leading white women—including middle-class Jews like Emma Ullman, it was a precursor to the Community Chest and United Way, was additionally supported by city funds, and served as the city's predominant form of social service, as it did in other southern cities, including Atlanta. For more information, see LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 55-56.

meat and bread to Birmingham's poor, conducted fundraisers, and established a white charity hospital with local physicians.²²⁸

On March 21, 1896, Gelders officially became part of the effort to “teach and care for the [needy] tots [of Birmingham], feeding and clothing and instructing them in the rudiments of education.” She announced that she would be chairing public meetings that sought to establish a “kindergarten for children of poor women who have to go out and work or who are unable to send their children to school or support them with food and raiment.” In addition to her leadership role, she participated in several fundraisers as part of its Young Auxiliary, a group that morphed into “The Creche” which focused on the home’s day nursery. One of the Creche’s most popular events was an 1897 ball known as the “Creche charity hop,” which took place at the lavish home of Mr. and Mrs. C.P. Perin, a wealthy non-Jewish couple who lived in the South Highlands. Gelders was the only Jewish woman on the five-member reception committee that planned the event, which included dinner and dancing for its guests. Although local reporters focused on the presence of non-Jewish “popular leaders and belles” at the affair, they also represented the dance as a demonstration of religious cooperation, estimating attendance at 200 and stating that “Jewish and Gentile society mingled [at the Perin’s home] with mutual pleasure.”²²⁹

Although she was rarely given more than a passing mention in Temple Emanu-El’s twentieth-century histories, Bertha Gelders’ professional and volunteer work was just as groundbreaking as that of its male board members. Like many second-wave Jewish clerks and milliners, she benefitted from the experiences of her predecessors. She drew from her family’s

²²⁸ *Birmingham News*, June 15, 1889; May 10, 1893; March 21, 1896; May 19, 1896; Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham*, 55-56.

²²⁹ *Birmingham News*, June 13, 1896; May 7, 1897; May 27, 1897, 16.

economic stability and status to further her career in Birmingham and used the leadership and administration skills that she had developed in Emanu-El's volunteer organizations to successfully expand her civic networks. As one of Birmingham's first Progressive Era New Jewish Women, Bertha Gelders not only demonstrated her dedication to the local population, she also contributed to the positive reputations of her synagogue and religious community by forming important relationships with its most prominent white social workers and clubwomen. This paved the way for the next generation of Birmingham's Jewish women, who wished to extend their public roles beyond their unpaid labor in ladies' aid associations and Sunday schools.

A Pressing Local Need: Temple Emanu-El's Non-Sectarian Kindergarten

The interfaith connections that Bertha Gelders began to build with the Mercy Home led to similar social welfare networks in Birmingham's Free Kindergarten Association, which became an important vehicle for increasing Jewish power and respect in the city. The organization's initial supporters included Gelders, Emanu-El's rabbi Morris Newfield, school board president Samuel Ullman, and wealthy socialites Bertha Marx Adler and Paula Simon. Their work led to the establishment of Emanu-El's own free kindergarten, a non-sectarian free school that served both Jews and non-Jews, and provided young Jewish women with the experience they needed to begin teaching careers.

Established in December 1898, Birmingham's Free Kindergarten Association was inspired by national trends related to early childhood education that developed from the utopian teachings of German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel, whose work promoted non-sectarian education and religious tolerance.²³⁰ Jewish women were directly involved in Froebel's work in

²³⁰ Far removed from the unpopular American infant schools of the 1820s and 1830s, Froebel's philosophy rejected

Germany and its transfer to the United States during the 1870s. Germans Henriette Goldschmidt, the wife of a liberal rabbi, and Lena Morgenstern, a Froebel textbook writer, viewed kindergartens not only as a form of social service, but also a site for interfaith cooperation and women's emancipation. Elizabeth Peabody, the transcendentalist educator who established America's first English-speaking kindergarten in 1860, opened her private school in Boston as the result of her conversations with Margarethe Schurz, a Jewish émigré whose studies under Froebel led her to open a small German kindergarten in Wisconsin. From 1877 to 1907, when the American movement was at its height, Jewish women took part in countless free kindergarten associations through organizations like Felix Adler's Ethical Culture Society and the NCJW in numerous U.S. cities, including New York, Portland, Atlanta, and Savannah.²³¹

Birmingham's first kindergartens, like many in the United States, were part of private schools that were accessible only to middle- and upper-class residents. In 1888, the Jefferson Female Seminary, a private school for girls in the downtown district, announced it would open a "training kindergarten" under Miss Sara Hogan. The popularity of Hogan's class inspired more kindergartens in the next five years, including those at the UDJ College for Girls and Young Ladies, the Pollock-Stephens Institute, and the Taylor School. American educators like Peabody and St. Louis's Susan Blow frequently advocated kindergarten education as an acceptable occupation for women that fulfilled their desire to engage in useful work and reflected their

strict recitations and compulsory programs that removed young children from the homes of working or immigrant mothers. Drawing from European bourgeois gender norms and folk child-rearing practices, Froebel's pedagogy instead encouraged learning through games and songs and viewed what he perceived as tenderhearted, maternally-minded unmarried women as the best candidates for teachers. Barbara Beatty, *Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 38-39, 52-53.

²³¹ Ann Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten: Education and Women's Movements in Germany and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 65-67, 73; Beatty, *Preschool Education in America*, 38-39, 52-53; Greenberg, "Savannah's Jewish Women," 772; William Toll, "Fraternalism and Community Structure on the Urban Frontier, The Jews of Portland Oregon: A Case Study," in *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (August 1978), 395; Wenger, "Jewish Women of the Club," 320.

“natural role” in society. They also stressed qualifications that mirrored masculine credentials purposefully designed to encourage public acceptance and trust. Hogan’s experiences at the National Kindergarten in Washington, D.C., and a summer Chautauqua institute in 1890 were advertised in local papers along with her classes at both the Jefferson girls’ school and St. Mary’s on the Highlands, and when W.P. Taylor hired Therese W. Burt to conduct classes at his school in 1894, he announced that she had graduated from Chicago’s School of Kindergarten and Pratt Institute.²³²

At a United Charities meeting on December 14, 1898, social reformers decided the services private kindergartens offered were no longer adequate for the needs of Birmingham’s population. When they formed a charitable organization to establish a free kindergarten, Birmingham’s Jewish residents were among its first advocates. As the Board of Education’s president, Samuel Ullman immediately stated that the group could use a few vacant rooms at Paul Haynes, one of the city’s three white schools. Like Isabel Dangaix, the Catholic clubwoman who served as the association’s first president, Bertha Gelders wrote an open letter supporting the kindergarten, which was read at a public meeting to encourage donations in mid-December. By December 28, the efforts of these and other individuals had raised enough funds to hire Edith Woodruff, “an unusually competent kindergartner” from Louisville, to teach the fifty children who had already enrolled.²³³

In January, less than a month after the association was formed, the free kindergarten’s enrollment skyrocketed, causing the free school to outgrow its donated rooms at the Haynes School. Overwhelmed by its ever-growing list of students, the privately funded association added

²³² *Birmingham News*, September 13, 1888; May 15, 1898; September 18, 1889; September 28, 1889; April 11, 1890; August 6, 1890; August 31, 1894; Beatty, *Preschool Education in America*, 63.

²³³ *Birmingham News*, December 14, 1898; December 15, 1898; December 17, 1898; December 19, 1898; December 28, 1898.

a “training class to fit young women to become kindergarten teachers.” Promoters stated that classes taught students “woman’s work” that would “always be used by them, whether professionally or in the home as the mother of the family” and that when they graduated, they would be “capable” of running a kindergarten of their own. Young white women could choose a one- or two-year course at the Birmingham Training School for Teachers, which included instruction in theory as well as “daily practice in the kindergarten.” The school served multiple purposes. More importantly, it provided funds for additional work through tuition fees and non-threatening occupations for white women that fulfilled common middle-class gender norms. It also provided the association with the free labor it so desperately needed, especially during its first few years.²³⁴

Similar to Bertha Gelders, who had a long career at the high school, Jewish women who supported Birmingham’s free kindergarten movement and pursued careers as “kindergarteners” contributed to their religious community’s interfaith networks and helped to promote its visibility and acceptance. Besides Gelders, these included wealthy clubwomen like Paula Simon and Bertha Marx Adler, as well as Samuel and Emma Ullman’s daughter Carrie, who was listed among the training school’s first four graduates in May 1900, and Gelders’ sister Ida, who graduated in another set of four in 1903. They, along with later students like Corinne Hochstadter and Marcella Klotz, were volunteer teachers in Emanu-El’s Sunday school before or while they were receiving professional training. While most belonged to middle-class families that were already connected to prominent social and political circles, the women chose to further those networks through their own professions and interests.²³⁵

²³⁴ *Birmingham News*, January 9, 1899, 3; January, 19, 1899, 2; May 23, 1900, 5; May 29, 1903.

²³⁵ *Birmingham News*, April 23, 1900; January, 9, 1899; May 30, 1899; *1900 United States Census*, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama.

Reform women proved instrumental to the development of Birmingham's Free Kindergarten Association, which was part of a growing movement in Alabama. The organizations were popular among the state's clubwomen and addressed both the needs of the white working-class population and industrialists' attempts to recruit and control their labor, which may have been why Birmingham's commercial elite rushed to support them. From 1896 to 1898, private individuals and groups also established kindergartens in Tuscumbia, Florence, and Anniston, and between 1900 and 1906, the West Point Manufacturing Company, a cotton mill conglomerate located on Alabama's side of the Chattahoochee River, built them as part of their mill schools in Lanett, Langdale, and Riverdale. Birmingham's kindergarten system was one of the largest, however, and the only one with a training facility.²³⁶

Some American middle- and upper-class social reformers advocated for free kindergartens because they viewed them as an important tool of acculturation. American social reformers often took their cues from foundational educators like Elizabeth Peabody and Susan Blow, who believed early childhood education could easily "Americanize" large numbers of immigrants. Acculturated Jews in the NCJW often shared this view because they feared a large influx of Russian or Eastern European Jewish immigrants might threaten the reputations that they had worked so hard to build. Council women in Savannah, for example, specifically opened a free preschool and kindergarten in the city's Russian Jewish neighborhood as a way to distance themselves from their Orthodox counterparts to protect their civic reputations. They assumed Christians "lumped all Jews together" and could misjudge them if the actions of the newcomers were not addressed. Like many chapters of the NCJW in the early twentieth century, they

²³⁶ Lucy Wheelock, *History of the Kindergarten Movement in the Southeastern States and Delaware, the District of Columbia, New Jersey And Pennsylvania*, presented at the 46th Annual Conference of the Association for Childhood Education, 1939, 5-7; Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten*, 75.

believed their kindergartens could teach new Jewish immigrants how to dress, speak, and conduct themselves like Americans, which they considered a service to their religious community regardless of the feelings of their pupils or their parents.²³⁷

Temple Emanu-El decided to establish its own primary school in 1902, and while its founders may have desired to Americanize children in the Yiddish-speaking/Orthodox neighborhood, that certainly was not their primary motivation. Concerns about acculturation were not completely absent in Birmingham's Reform community, but they were much less prominent in the early 1900s than they were later or in Savannah and other American cities. The city's Jewish population did grow substantially around the turn of the century, and some of its members self-segregated on the north side of the city, where they developed a subculture that supported an Orthodox religious identity. Before 1908, however, many new Jewish migrants were more concerned with their friends and families' economic stability (or mobility) than the aggressive forms of religious distinction that their predecessors generally rejected. Knesseth Israel's leaders, including Morris Wolff and Louis Weinstein, maintained close relationships with Emanu-El's board members. Yiddish-speaking Jews generally avoided Arbiter Rings and visible support of Zionism, and if local Jews felt collectively threatened, they tended to unify under Reform rabbi Morris Newfield's leadership.²³⁸

²³⁷ Beatty, *Preschool Education in America*, 52, 105; Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten*, 75; Greenberg, "Savannah's Jewish Women," 771-774.

²³⁸ According to Louis Gingold, the "Zionist movement" was not initially strong and the Orthodox community had difficulty uniting in the first two decades of its existence. Circumstances would substantially change after 1910, but Gingold's observations are substantiated by additional residents who recalled their and their parents' lives in Birmingham during the late 1890s and early 1900s. Lena Feldenson, Sidney Ziff, Abe Berkowitz, and other Orthodox Jews do not discuss Zionism in relation to their experiences, although they do remember speaking Yiddish, going to kosher restaurants and delis, worshipping differently and not socially mixing with "German Jews," stating they attended Knesseth Israel and the functions it sponsored instead. They too remember fluctuating rabbis and Hebrew teachers, though Ziff recalled they were generally male while Gingold stated they were mostly teenagers like his sister. Though these individuals could have just been avoiding Zionism as a topic of discussion, Gingold's response was prompted by his interviewer, and Jews who moved to the city later, after 1915, *do* recall Arbiter Rings and Zionism as part of their lives, which suggests the movement was not prevalent before that time. For more information, see Chapter Four of this dissertation; *Memory Bank Project*, BHEC, 1977-1985; Parshall,

In 1911, an article in the city's edition of the *Reform Advocate* also explicitly linked the formation of Emanu-El's kindergarten to a "pressing local need" for early education and the way the interfaith kindergarten association developed. It stated that even though "a large percentage of [its] patrons and pupils were Jews," when the first classes opened in January 1899, "a spirit of sectarianism made itself manifest in [the teachers' and administrators'] conduct." The issue was common in the implementation of such programs. Isabel Dangaix and other non-Jewish members of Birmingham's Free Kindergarten Association stated they followed the principles of German educator Friedrich Frobel, who promoted universal values rooted in nature, science, and social responsibility even though he was the son of a Lutheran minister. His teachings appealed to a wide range of Reform Jews and progressive Christians, but in both Germany and America, kindergartens run by Protestants often failed to live up to Frobel's utopian ideals. As a result, many Catholics and Jews mistrusted their curriculums and began their own. To indicate their objections to such practices, kindergartens that remained non-sectarian often stressed general theism (e.g. a universal God), used secular symbols to represent Easter or Christmas, or removed Christian holidays from their schedules.²³⁹

In Birmingham, Reform Jewish leaders faced a dilemma that called for action. They supported the kindergarten association's initial goal, which was to provide the white population with access to free early childhood education. Yet, simultaneously, they were disappointed with the prevalence of Protestant religious teachings in the new program, which continued despite its organizers' repeated statements to the contrary. Shortly after classes began at the Paul Haynes School in 1899, Emanu-El's members began to discuss the funding of their own kindergarten. At their first public meeting on March 1, "the ladies of Temple Emanu-El" (the HBLS) claimed they

"Yiddish Politics in Southern States," 36-37,

²³⁹ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 23; Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten*, 31, 75, 109.

had almost raised enough money for a new class, which they intended to hold in a room at the synagogue. Children would be “placed [under the] charge of kindergarten teachers from the normal class,” a group of students that included Carrie Ullman, who was actively practicing her theoretical lessons at Paul Haynes. Since Birmingham’s Free Kindergarten Association had severely underestimated the populations’ demand for primary courses, they fully supported Emanu-El’s activities. Thirty children were already “anxiously awaiting” a place at the city’s existing kindergarten, so the Jewish school was presented—and accepted—as an extension of the organization’s work rather than an objection to it, regardless of how Jews personally felt or reported their motivations in the *Advocate* twelve years later.²⁴⁰

Money was not easy to raise, however, which delayed the opening of Emanu-El’s kindergarten for another three years. The HBLS, NCJW, B’nai B’rith lodge, and Knesseth Israel’s Hebrew Relief Society joined forces to gather subscriptions from upper- and middle-class Jews to finance the school, and in 1900, Emanu-El’s supporters formed the Temple Kindergarten Association, which continued to work closely with non-Jews like Dangaix in the city’s early education movement. Despite Jewish pledges for the cause, donations proved difficult to collect even after the temple kindergarten opened in 1902. As the leader of the group, Samuel Ullman reviewed several typical issues in his annual report for 1902-1903. He wrote that enough money had been promised to cover the supplies, materials, and salaries of the Jewish kindergarten’s teacher, janitress, and pianist, but “for some reason” a few subscribers failed to begin their monthly payments until December, a full month after the school’s first bills were due. When the primary school closed in May, other donors discontinued their annual subscriptions. Ullman noted “these delinquencies were few, and [he had] no doubt some [would] be collected”

²⁴⁰ *Birmingham News*, March 1, 1899, 7.

but gently reminded members of the organization that Emanu-El needed “all the income which [they had] agreed to pay” because the kindergarten was “relying on the subscriptions during the vacation period to carry [it] through.”²⁴¹

Meanwhile, popular demand for early childhood education continued in Birmingham. At the end of her first term as principal in 1899, Edith Woodruff was managing ninety-one students and seven trainees at the Paul Haynes School. Within six months, another class began at the Mercy Home, starting with eight children who were residents of the settlement house—within four weeks, between thirty and forty students had enrolled. Because these kindergartens were reserved for white children, African American women in the Sojourners of Truth and other ladies’ aid associations invited black clergymen to help them form the Colored Kindergarten Association on May 7, 1900. The group received assistance from white benefactors in New York and Baltimore, former mayor James A. Van Hoose, and non-Jewish clubwomen like Isabel Dangaix and Nellie Cobb Phillips, the wife of the Board of Education’s superintendent and a founding member of the free kindergarten association. Together the group gathered enough support to add a kindergarten department to the black school that St. Mark’s Episcopal Church established in 1891. A month after their primary classes began, white Protestants at the South Side Baptist Church began a kindergarten as part of missionary efforts in the rolling mills district. Through the collective efforts of these primary schools, the city’s collective association estimated it could accommodate at least 500 local children.²⁴²

When Samuel Ullman delivered his report at the end of 1903, Temple Emanu-El was one of seven schools belonging to Birmingham’s Free Kindergarten Association. Its inclusion was

²⁴¹ “Temple Kindergarten,” *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 23; Samuel Ullman, “Annual Report of President to Temple Kindergarten Association,” *Birmingham News*, December 12, 1903, 30.

²⁴² *Birmingham News*, May 24, 1899; September 24, 1899; May 5, 1900; September 12, 1900; October 17, 1903;

based on several criteria that contributed positively to the synagogue's reputation as a community partner, which encouraged tolerance and philosemitism. Like many Jews who established primary schools in Germany and America, the founders of Emanu-El's kindergarten repeatedly emphasized their religious neutrality and portrayed their work as part of a collective middle-class attempt to provide the population with an important social service. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Emanu-El reminded the public that "all would be admitted up to the limit of [its] rooms," and the school used "love and duty" as a part of a cooperative effort to "obliterate[e] sectarian lines." Although Jews formed a separate organization to fund and operate the temple kindergarten, they worked closely with Isabel Dangaix and Edna Snyder, the city's non-Jewish primary school superintendent. In 1906, Bertha Gelders and Bertha Marx Adler were also elected to Birmingham's nine-member kindergarten board, which included their Protestant ally Nellie Cobbs Phillips. Emanu-El claimed it "was free in every sense of the word," but the Temple Kindergarten also adhered to local and state segregation policies, making it an acceptable choice for white parents who could not afford a private institution. Like the primary schools at St. Mark's and the Methodist church, however, it accepted pupils of various religious backgrounds. Although many of its students were Jewish, a large number were Protestant or Catholic. In 1911, the *Reform Advocate* reported non-Jews occupied twenty-five to thirty percent of the student population, crediting its popularity to the kindergarten's size, reputation for excellence, and non-sectarianism.²⁴³

Similar to Bertha Gelders, Emanu-El's first kindergarten teacher, Carrie Ullman, decided to delay marriage to establish an independent career as a teacher and social activist. Although the Ullman family's money and status offered her educational and professional advantages that were

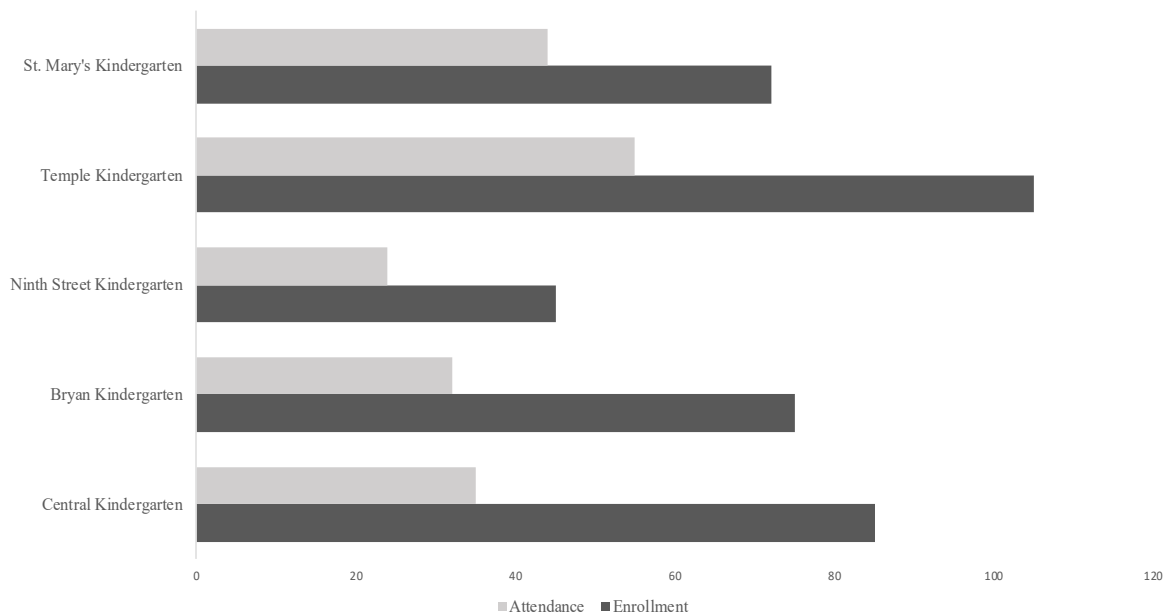
²⁴³ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 23; *Birmingham News*, December 17, 1898; October 12, 1903; October 17, 1903; December 12, 1903; June 14, 1906.

denied to many black and white women, Carrie worked hard to capitalize on her opportunities. Her early experiences were not unlike those of Nettie Newman Meyer. In 1896, when Ullman was sixteen, she pursued an active role at Temple Emanu-El through its Sunday school, where she was first a secretary and then a teacher. She was socially active in the Reform community, and her travels and visits were often featured in the local newspaper. Carrie, like Emil Lesser, also first connected to her non-Jewish counterparts through one of her individual interests: her singing. She was a member of her high school Glee Club, and after graduation, she not only attended Birmingham's Training School for teachers, but also the city's Conservatory of Music. In 1903, she was a soloist in the local European Club's one-hundred-member chorus.²⁴⁴

After Carrie Ullman was hired to be the Temple Kindergarten's teacher in 1902, a position she likely received through her father and her experiences at the training school, she received even more opportunities to advance her professional connections and civic status. She made sure her pupils participated in citywide events, especially communal graduation ceremonies, which allowed her students to exhibit their good behavior and academic accomplishments. She also joined Isabel Dangaix and Bertha Gelders in the Elks' Club Christmas tree and toy drive for needy children. Other participants included prominent civic leaders such as Emil Lesser, the only Jewish member of the Elks' committee that organized the event, and Nellie Cobbs Phillips, one of Emanu-El's long-standing interfaith allies.²⁴⁵ Carrie Ullman's teaching skills directly contributed to the Jewish kindergarten's popularity, which was evidenced by its rise in enrollment from thirty-eight to seventy-one between 1902 and 1903. Emanu-El's students numbered only four less than the free kindergarten association's largest

²⁴⁴ Nadell, *America's Jewish Women*, 179; *Birmingham News*, May 17, 1895; March 14, 1896; May 19, 1896; April 6, 1899; August 31, 1899; April 23, 1900; July 12, 1900; May 3, 1903.

²⁴⁵ *Birmingham News*, December 16, 1902; May 25, 1903; May 27, 1903.



** Statistics for the Mercy Home were unreported*

Figure 11 Birmingham Kindergarten Statistics, 1906

primary school, an institution that had relocated from Paul Haynes to a building on Nineteenth Street and Avenue D. Furthermore, attendance was also fairly consistent at Emanu-El, which was unusual since headcounts generally averaged far below enrollment in Birmingham primary schools, especially after the kindergartens' initial novelty had subsided. Emanu-El's attendance remained high enough to motivate the Jewish kindergarten committee to hire and retain Ida Gelders in addition to employing Carrie Ullman in 1903. It continued to enroll large numbers of students throughout its first decade, reaching as high as 105 in 1906. In the first two months of 1903, attendance was eight-six percent of enrollment, and although that figure had fallen to fifty-two percent three years later, that was still five percent higher than the average for other white primary schools.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ St. Mary's Episcopal Church, the city's only free black kindergarten, had a sixty-one percent attendance rate in 1903, which was almost ten percent higher than any of the white schools. Temple Emanu-El, at fifty-two percent, came in second for said white schools, surpassed only by the German Lutheran Church's Bryan Kindergarten, which

The faith both Jewish and non-Jewish parents placed in Emanu-El's kindergarten was largely due to the experience and qualifications of its teachers, professional women who played a prominent role in the development of the city and Birmingham's Jewish community. Carrie Ullman served as principal (or head teacher) until Ida Gelders completed her degree in May 1903, after which the two operated the school as co-teachers, interchanging their roles as teacher and principal until Ullman left the city in 1907 for a position in Dallas, where she continued her public work as a teacher and "[took] charge of" an NCJW Neighborhood House. The work Ullman did as an early twentieth-century educator and reformer was similar to that of independent Jewish women across the country: it paralleled the public work of local Jewish men and built upon the commercial work and voluntarism of her mother and sister. Her story is one of Birmingham's many hidden histories. Like Reform and Orthodox women in the HBLS and Daughters of Israel, she played a supportive role in her religious community, contributed to interfaith networks that promoted tolerance, and built the reputation of her synagogue in the city and the state.

The fundraisers, social events, literary clubs, and professional careers of Carrie Ullman and other Jewish women demonstrated their acculturation while also enhancing and supporting Jewish identity. Similar to their male counterparts, they exhibited leadership, professional, and organizational skills that were admired and valued in Birmingham as evidence of their civic integration and loyalty. They, too, were willing to use their intellects and talents to fulfill the population's needs, and their actions—like those of Isaac Hochstadter and Emil Lesser—point to

had an attendance rate of fifty-three percent. Nevertheless, the temple regularly served fifty-five of its 105 enrolled children, more than any other kindergarten in the city, including the one at St. Mary's, which served forty-four. *Birmingham News*, December 12, 1903; *Birmingham News*, October 17, 1903; June 14, 1906.

alternative pathways that Jews took to meet their personal goals and increase their local standing. More importantly, their construction of schools and organization of social events helped the Jewish community as a whole—and Jewish women in particular—adapt to their environment and secure their success.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ *Birmingham News*, December 12, 1903; January 9, 1899; May 30, 1899; May 23, 1900; July 1, 1903; May 25, 1903; September 12, 1907.

CONCLUSION

“In spite of the groundless assertions of ignorant persons, the Jew always has been and always will be found among the pioneers of a community...The history of Birmingham has proven no exception to this rule, for during the first struggling years of the mineral city’s existence, no citizens proved themselves more faithful and loyal than the Jews.”

Benjamin Gross
The Reform Advocate, 1911

In 1911, Emanu-El’s rabbi, Morris Newfield, led his congregants in a large-scale effort to record the story of Birmingham’s Jews, which was published as a twenty-four-page spread in a special edition of the *Reform Advocate*.²⁴⁸ “The history of the Jewish community,” he proudly declared on the opening page, was so “closely allied” with that of his Reform synagogue they were “practically identical.” Writing that Emanu-El had been the city’s “representative Jewish organization” since “the settlement of Jews in the Magic City,” Newfield claimed that “half a dozen Jewish congregations in the state of Alabama [could] point to older traditions, but none [could] point to a nobler record of achievements.” After briefly identifying the Simon, Marx, and Hochstadter families as the first Jewish settlers, Newfield described how quickly the Jewish community had grown, specifically focusing on the formation of Emanu-El and its Sunday school in the early 1880s. His article outlined the synagogue’s local charity work and praised the leadership and devotion of young bachelors like Isaac Hochstadter and Mason Ben Jacobs. Likewise, the rabbi lauded the “religious, educational, and philanthropic movements” of his

²⁴⁸ Sixteen of the journal’s forty pages were advertisements, largely for local businesses owned by Reform Jews or their commercial allies.

father-in-law, Samuel Ullman, and other heroes emerging from the second-wave of Jews who had migrated to the city in the 1880s, particularly banker Burghardt Steiner, the Commercial Club's Moses Joseph, and alderman Simon Klotz. While Newfield's history mentioned Emanu-El's challenges in the 1890s, including its scandal and debt, he downplayed them as short-lived and uneventful. After highlighting early twentieth-century building projects and prosperity, he ended by listing the richest Reform leaders who had served the congregation from 1882 to 1911, being sure to draw particular attention to improvements made by Emil Lesser, the Chairman of the Cemetery Board, for the sake of "historical truth."²⁴⁹

Morris Newfield's article was similar to those penned by his peers. Few Jewish writers made mention of the diversity of their community, preferring to cast their coreligionists as a single-minded, middle-class unit who supported Emanu-El's leadership without question. Because Birmingham's issue of the *Advocate* primarily highlighted the lives of the synagogue's founders and board, the wide-ranging contributions of Orthodox, non-practicing Jews, and women in general were also omitted or condensed. Individuals belonging to Knesseth Israel, who were actively involved in the development of Jewish economic and social networks, received less than half a page. Four wealthy Reform women were mentioned by name, but only highlighted for their benevolent and religious work or associations. Moreover, the few paragraphs that summarized the Temple Kindergarten's central role in interfaith relations gave much more attention to the synagogue's public service and wealthy supporters than the work of teachers like Newfield's sister-in-law, Carrie Ullman, whose professionalism was largely responsible for its initial success.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 5-13.

²⁵⁰ *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911.

The subjective nature of this issue could easily be waved away by the observation that it was specifically created by and for Reform Jews—the title of the journal, after all, was the *Reform Advocate*. While it might be convenient to accept Newfield’s dedication to what he called “historical truth,” to do so would run the risk of misinterpreting much of Birmingham’s Jewish past. The rabbi and his congregants’ articles are based on earlier writings, including the chronicles of non-Jewish boosters in the 1880s and Birmingham’s edition of the *Jewish Ledger* in 1900. These two journals have stood as the history of record for the Jewish community for over a century, which inspired several late twentieth-century scholars, including Mark Elovitz, to use them as resources. This dissertation, however, reminds readers that their tales are just as notable for what they leave out as what they include. This study has focused upon the local conditions that sparked the journals’ creation and influenced how domestic and transatlantic Jewish migrants lived and operated. In so doing, it points to the extensive economic, social, and political roles adopted by different Jewish residents and the individual choices they made to accomplish their civic goals. By comparing published histories to each other—as well as to newspaper articles, promotional and census materials, and residents’ surviving oral testimonies—the project sheds light on our knowledge of the Jewish men and women who came to Birmingham in its first four decades, the various paths they chose to accomplish their civic goals, and the similarities and differences between them, their coreligionists, and their non-Jewish neighbors.

Like other nineteenth-century American Jews, including their counterparts in Mobile and Montgomery, Birmingham’s Jews chronicled their role in the city’s history by borrowing liberally from local narrative frameworks that celebrated growth and expansion. The tales and biographies local Jews contributed to the *Ledger* and *Advocate*, for example, employed the

literary tropes of early boosters like James R. Powell and noon DuBose. Depicting Jewish leaders in the same way that the town's promoters portrayed non-Jewish founders, industrialists, and businessmen, they aimed to extinguish any doubts about their worth, service, and dedication, which in turn helped to reduce antisemitism and any challenge to their rightful position in the city's history. They claimed a prominent place in the construction of Birmingham, its nineteenth-century economy, and its middle-class social and political values and life.²⁵¹

The 1911 *Advocate*, however, was much less explicitly boosteristic than previous published accounts, which suggests how the Jewish community reshaped local narratives in response to Birmingham's shifting conditions, including its racial and social tensions. It also hints at the growing concerns Newfield and other Reform leaders held about antisemitism as the twentieth century progressed. Since Birmingham's *Ledger* was written in 1900, much closer to the books that DuBose wrote to market the city in 1886 and 1887, it opened with mythic tales of the Magic City's founding that mimicked the stories the New South boosters exaggerated (or created) to explain its origin. Like DuBose, the *Ledger*'s contributors venerated the corporation that built the town, although they did not name the Elyton Land Company or James R. Powell specifically, and used statistics to glorify its growth, churches, residences, and industries. Birmingham's edition of the *Advocate*, on the other hand, was produced eleven years later. While it, too, highlighted the stories of Jewish settlers who significantly contributed to the early economy, it only implicitly referenced their struggles and the coal and iron seams, railroads, and production facilities that sparked some of their financial opportunities. In so doing, it slowly

²⁵¹ The social ideals and tropes discussed here were predominantly those of professional elites and the white middle-class. This vision of dedication, progress, and ideal residency was, therefore, not always accepted by all of the city's residents. It was often challenged by other residents, including black and white laborers and working-class immigrants. Jewish civic leaders and white women, however, frequently utilized these constructs to increase their economic, social, or political power. For more information, see the introduction of this dissertation. For examples, see DuBose, *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama*, 162-171, 384-387, 542-543; *Jewish Ledger*, 4-8; Reform *Advocate*, 15-21.

moved away from blatant promotion to concentrate more on the Jewish community's prominence and the respect that Emanu-El's founders and board members had gained in the city and state. While the *Ledger* included only brief notations of benevolence, Newfield, an active social worker, made sure the *Advocate* discussed Jewish charities, education, and donations as much as it did commercial talent and fraternal organizations.²⁵²

While both presses testified to Jewish residents' participation in development, the 1911 *Advocate* made a stronger and more direct statement of their leadership and interfaith alliances as well as their financial support of Birmingham's underserved population. At the dawn of the city's fourth decade, Newfield was probably genuinely interested in recording the history of his synagogue and local Jewish leaders who had risen to the upper and middle class. His work also reflected his service as an ethnic broker, which focused on bridging gaps between local Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. He used the journal and the articles he wrote for it to encourage his congregants to do likewise, legitimizing their position and stature in Birmingham by highlighting the Jewish community's long history in the town and its continuous engagement with local values and the past. In so doing, he staked a claim for the legitimization and continuance of Jewish integration and inclusion in the Magic City's upper echelons.

His timing was also important. Between 1910 to 1916 other individuals who were largely absent from nineteenth-century chronicles of the city began to write themselves into local history, reiterating and expanding the idealized framework and literary tropes of the town's original boosters as well. Promotional "histories" were expanded through the work of journalists Leroy Jacobs and Ethel Armes, who tied progress and development to the initial goals and plans of the city's founders. When upper- and middle-class white social matrons formed the Pioneer

²⁵² *Jewish Ledger*, May 18, 1900, 1-2, 9; *Reform Advocate*, November 4, 1911, 29.

Club in 1914, they emphasized the same themes in their public speeches and added their memories to DuBose's stories, dedicating themselves to preserving their "recollections of the early days of Birmingham." Popular madam Louise Wooster even wrote a highly embellished memoir, *Tales of a Magdalene*, casting herself as a model citizen because of her charity work and dedication to the city when its population battled disease and destitution.²⁵³

Growing tensions between and among the city's Reform Jews and the third, primarily Yiddish-speaking, wave of Jewish migrants could have easily served as additional inspiration for Newfield's history. The self-segregated neighborhood the new migrants began creating in Birmingham drew attention to religious and cultural differences that Reform leaders like Newfield were actively attempting to downplay between 1890 and 1910. The Reform community's worries were partly the result of a rising national wave of antisemitism in the late nineteenth-century. Most of the Jews who relocated to Birmingham from 1895 to 1915 were among the two and a half million who came to the United States between 1881 and 1924, which was ten times the number of those who migrated between 1820 and 1880, when the Marx and Hochstadter families moved to the country. Non-Jews' sensitivity to racial and religious differences also began to increase with national and regional events linked to social tensions, *de jure* segregation, and immigration. The combination of these factors increased local and national nativism and xenophobia, which reminded long-standing Jewish residents of the instability of their civic status. Brutal strikes and political battles between Birmingham's black and white laborers and their employers did little to alleviate their fears, especially after Alabama's 1901 constitution began reducing the privileges of citizenship by eliminating the votes of all black

²⁵³ *Birmingham News*, May 11, 1913; December 5, 1915; *Early Days in Birmingham*, introduction, n.p.; Louise C Wooster, *The Autobiography of a Magdalene* (Birmingham: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1911), 102-103.

men and many working-class whites through property ownership requirements, literacy tests, and poll taxes.²⁵⁴

The antisemitic incidents that arose from these tensions were understandably disturbing to Birmingham's Jews. Between 1898 and 1908, Jewish politicians Emil Lesser and Simon Klotz found themselves charged with misconduct and racial mixing in local and state courts and the press. Both fought hard for their reputations and were acquitted of all wrongdoing, but after Klotz was charged with bribery in a highly publicized case in 1908, Birmingham's Jews shifted their civil service away from political offices and toward economic, educational, and social projects. The Yiddish-speaking neighborhood was in close proximity to those of African Americans and Greek and Italian immigrants, which placed some of the city's Orthodox Jews in a vulnerable racial position that manifested in different ways. Peddler Philip Ziff's son Sidney remembered his family "had contact with everybody" on the north side of Birmingham, including Italians, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, and black residents, but other members of Knesseth Israel recalled fighting with their non-Jewish neighbors in what is now Kelly Ingram Park. Louis Gingold reported that he was accepted among a mixture of "white" students at his high school, but young schoolchildren would not play with him when his family moved to the south side of the city in the 1910s because he was "the only Jew."²⁵⁵

Jewish leaders quelled antisemitism through their interfaith and commercial alliances. Before 1912, for example, the city's non-practicing, Orthodox, and Reform Jews often united under the leadership of Rabbi Morris Newfield when directly threatened, using the city's social

²⁵⁴ McKiven, *Iron and Steel*, 31-41, 49-51, 77-83; *Birmingham Iron Age*, April 1, 1875; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 16, 1898; January 1, 1903; LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham*, 10-11; Alabama Legislature, Constitution of 1901, v7516, ADAH.

²⁵⁵ Sidney Ziff and Louis Gingold, *Memory Bank Project*; *Birmingham Times*, January 13, 1905; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 21, 1908.

and commercial ideals to defend their status and position. Although Newfield was more likely to fight antisemitism with his writing or social work, he was a respected religious leader who was not afraid to publicly address antisemitism if he needed to. In 1911, he openly chastised Mr. W.B. Dickerson, a Protestant Board of Trade member, when he was overheard making antisemitic statements on a public railway. Since Dickerson's comments disparaged Jews because they were not "producers" (like the "Chinese"), they reinforced Newfield and his congregants' determination to continue to reiterate their essential role in Birmingham's past. The rabbi's letter to Dickerson used the same tactics as those he employed in the *Reform Advocate* a month before, attempting to reduce bigotry by encouraging "a broader and more comprehensive appreciation of the Jew" through a four-page diatribe that emphasized that he, too, was an American and that rationally outlined Jewish contributions to Western civilization, particularly history, commerce, education, and literature.²⁵⁶

While Newfield and other early Jewish writers' work is admirable, their narratives should still be examined in relation to what was happening in the city and what was driving them to write. They tended to compose histories that unwittingly obscured the contributions that a variety of Jewish men and women made to the city's development, which is why this dissertation introduces its readers to topics left uncovered by studies that overlook their contexts. Between 1871 and 1911, Jewish migrants found Birmingham a fertile environment to cultivate their professional skills, build their businesses and religious institutions, and promote their fundraising, educational, and social projects. Drawing from their prior experiences and networks, Jewish "pioneers" like Herman Simon, Charles Neumann, Isaac Hochstadter, and Sophia Wise built niches in the clothing, banking, and saloon industries in the 1870s and 1880s that eased

²⁵⁶ Morris Newfield to Mr. W.B. Dickerson, December 27, 1911, Morris Newfield Papers, 1868-1947, AR817, Folder 817.1.1.1.3, BPL.

their integration into the Magic City's white civic-commercial circles. Their advertisements and commercial practices generally echoed those of their non-Jewish counterparts, and their community-building patterns broadly replicated those of other American Jews. They augmented those patterns with the tools of civic integration that were readily available to them. Echoing Birmingham's elevated promotional image, they supported the fast-paced, progressive society the Elyton Land Company's stockholders wished to construct. As a result, their work induced much larger waves of Jews to move to the city and encouraged individuals like Emil Lesser and Morris Wolff to pursue their professional and political goals.²⁵⁷

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the diverse roles Jewish women held not only in their religious community and benevolence societies but also in Birmingham's economy and educational institutions. The stories of women like Sophia Wise and Alice Silverman Lesser provide readers with examples of the broad positions that Jewish women held in nineteenth-century business circles, and the work of Bertha Gelders and Carrie Ullman demonstrates how those roles changed as the twentieth century approached. Although they are rarely noted as key players in the Magic City's Jewish histories, Jewish women's leadership and civic reputations mirrored those of their husbands, fathers, and brothers and often boosted the collective status of the Jewish community. The project also suggests that although initial conflicts between and among Jews were downplayed in the early histories, they were in fact a regular—and healthy—part of Jewish life. They were not as aggressive or bitter as disputes that surfaced later, sparking

²⁵⁷ From 1899 to 1902, city editions of the *Ledger* appeared for six southern towns that used a similar pattern to note American Jews' role in expansion and nation building. Each issue was slightly different, however, especially in focus, topic, and tone, which indicates local contributors' tendency to reflect each community's legends and ideals. While Birmingham's issue contained the features mentioned here (and was the only edition not to include biographies of Jewish women alongside their husbands), Mobile's Jews emphasized their colonial history and portrayed themselves with long lineages and numerous cultural and social achievements. Jews in Southwest Louisiana chose to stress political service and religious representation, and in San Antonio, they remembered both the Alamo and their military valor, linking Jews to the "Texas spirit" that was key to defending and extending "Liberty and the Union." *Jewish Ledger*, May 19, 1899; May 18, 1900; April 19, 1901; February 7, 1902.

deep divisions that grew in the 1920s and resurfaced in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Still, they existed between and among many of the city's third-wave migrants, their board members, and their predecessors. Jews fought over religious traditions and practices, occupational habits, and politics, which caused splits in the community that unified some Jews and divided others. Examining these early tensions indicates the dynamic nature of their Jewish identities and the way the town's Jewish residents interrelated.

Both Birmingham's Jewish women and its third-wave of Jewish migrants ultimately supported Jewish identity and strengthened the city's Jewish population. The city's residents more than tripled in the first decade of the twentieth century, and although Jewish residents never averaged more than one to two percent of the general population, their number rose to 1,400 by 1905. Such statistics alone were not enough to strengthen the community, but they did mark the city as a midsize—and growing—Jewish center. Since local Jews were disproportionately active in social work and charitable projects, they appeared to be even more visible in philanthropic organizations. Calls for supportive Jewish institutions, economic connections, and social events also increased, giving local Jews opportunities to serve their religious community and, as Newfield pointed out in the *Advocate*, build their status among their coreligionists in the state and the nation. The establishment and growth of Knesseth Israel in addition to Temple Emanuel, as well as the success of acculturated Orthodox merchants like Louis Weinstein and Isaac Gingold, encouraged the development of not one, but two Jewish subcommunities that served individuals who desired different levels of civic integration or religious distinction.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Weissbach, "East European Immigrants," 110; "Birmingham's Population, 1880-2000," Birmingham Public Library, Government Documents, last updated March 10, 2016, <https://www.bplonline.org/resources/government/BirminghamPopulation.aspx>; Marcus, *To Count a People*, 11-14.

The story of Birmingham's Jews changed during the mid- to late 1910s as social service shifted even further away from voluntarism. European political and military conflicts soon made soldiering and refugee assistance more popular demonstrations of faith and national or regional pride. Jewish religious and commercial leaders, however, continued to proudly recount the deeds of early Jewish settlers and draw from the examples of their community's founders. Like Isaac Hochstadter, Emil Lesser, and Bertha Gelders, they alleviated conflicts between Jews and Protestants through their interfaith connections and the economic positions they achieved through networks with each other and their non-Jewish allies. The commercial, political, and civic power they obtained thus began with the work of Herman Simon, Samuel Marx, and other Jewish migrants, who wove their lives into the fabric of Birmingham through their daily interactions. Even though the origin narratives that Morris Newfield and other Jewish writers created only honored a handful of individuals, their efforts ensured these residents' importance would be examined even in the twenty-first century. Through their insistence on a role in Birmingham's past, Magic City Jews found a way to solidify their position in its present and future.

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