

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Romance, Melodrama,
Mayhem in Not-So-
Fictional St. Paul

Page 10

Spring, 1993

Volume 28, Number 1

. . . *'And A Sprinkling of Jews'*

Work, Faith and the Jewish Merchants *Page 4*



The Swadelsky family in the 1890s, Zlotah Rivkah Swadelsky (second from left) settled with her husband and family on the West Side after emigrating from Russia. She was one of those unsung women of history. Pious herself, she led religious services for the women of B'nai Abraham Synagogue on State Street. She ran a Shelter House for strangers passing through the Jewish community, and organized a Women's Free Loan Society that provided loans without interest to immigrant women to help them buy furniture for their new homes. Photo from the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William S. Fallon
Chairman of the Board

Joanne Englund
President

John M. Lindley
First Vice President

James Russell
Treasurer

Arthur Baumeister, Jr., Thomas Boyd,
Marshall Hatfield, John Harens, Liz
Johnson, Don Larson, Judge Margaret M.
Marrinan, Dr. Thomas B. Mega, Laurie
Murphy, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Eileen
Roberts, Darrell Rooney, Mark Stein,
Richard A. Wilhoit and Laurie Zenner.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H.
Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Charlton Dietz,
Thomas J. Kelley, Arthur McWatt, Laurie
M. Murphy, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Coleman Bloomfield,
Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William
Finney, Clarence Frame, Otis Godfrey, Jr.,
Ronald Hachey, Reuel D. Harmon, Robert
S. Hess, Ronald M. Hubbs, Fred T.
Lanners, Jr., George Latimer, Lewis Lehr,
David Marsden, Robert B. Mirick, Samuel
Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome
Plunkett, Peter S. Popovich, James Reagan,
Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman
Commissioner Diane Ahrens
Commissioner John Finley
Commissioner Ruby Hunt
Commissioner Warren Schaber
Commissioner Brenda Thomas
Commissioner Richard Wedell

Terry Schutten, executive director, Ramsey
County.

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1993, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 28, Number 1

Spring, 1993

CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** . . . 'And a Sprinkling of Jews'
Work and Faith and Minnesota's Jewish Merchants
Marilyn Chiat
- 10** Romance, Melodrama, Murder, Mayhem—
The Novelist in Not-So-Fictional St. Paul
Frances Sontag
- 19** Growing Up in St. Paul—
Looking Back at the Black Community—Part II
David V. Taylor
- 25** Books, Etc.
- 26** What's Historic About This Site?
The Highland Park Water Tower
And Its Architect, Clarence Wigington
Arthur Mc Watt

Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by gifts from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.; by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon, and by grants from The Saint Paul Foundation and the F. R. Bigelow Foundation.

Special contributions have been received from the following supporters who are hereby named honorary editors of the Winter and Spring, 1993, issues of *Ramsey County History*:

Anthony Andersen	Robert Haugen
Anthony Bechik	Ronald M. Hubbs
George Benz	Robert B. Mirick
Charlton Dietz	Samuel H. Morgan
Roger Foussard	Mary Bigelow McMillan
Harry and Lorraine Hammerly	John G. Ordway
Marshall and Elizabeth Hatfield	

The Ramsey County Historical Society and the members of *Ramsey County History's* Editorial Board wish to express their deep appreciation to these contributors for their support.

. . . 'And a Sprinkling of Jews'

Work and Faith and Minnesota's Jewish Merchants

Marilyn J. Chiat

On May 31, 1859, an unusual advertisement appeared in the *Stillwater Messenger*. It read:

Notice. Our store is closed every Friday evening at sunset and reopens on Saturday evening.
[Signed] Levy and Daniels

We know very little about Levy and Daniels, but one fact we can be certain of is that they were Jewish merchants who observed the Sabbath; their faith had an impact on their work.

This article examines work and faith and how the reconciliation of these two essential components of human endeavor affected the lives of one immigrant group who chose to settle in Minnesota—the Jews who emigrated from German-speaking areas of Central Europe and later, from Eastern Europe. It indicates why Jewish immigrants, such as Levy and Daniels, entered the occupations they did, and describes the accommodations they had to make in their faith in order to work and survive in a New World. Their experiences allow us to arrive at a better understanding of the crucial role religious faith often has played in defining people's lives, including determining the occupations many immigrants could enter.

In 1851, *The Minnesota Pioneer* described the population of St. Paul as,

Yankee, Western, Southern, Irish, German, French, and a little shade of the Indian and African . . . [with] a sprinkling of Jews . . .

The "sprinkling of Jews" who first arrived in the territory emigrated mainly from Germany; several had settled elsewhere in the United States before moving to St. Paul. Generally they brought with them enough money, usually a few hundred dollars, to allow them to start an independent business. According to St. Paul's first business directory, published in 1856–1857, most of the Jews who were members of the newly established Mount

Zion synagogue were merchants.

Mount Zion Hebrew Congregation was founded in the spring of 1856; it received its papers of incorporation on February 26, 1857. Among its founders were Henry Cali (also known as Cole), an immigrant from Prussia who operated a clothing store, as did Jacob Newman and the two Julius Mendelsons, senior and junior. Joseph Ullmann, another founder and the congregation's financial mainstay, came from French Alsace. He established a world-wide fur business in St. Paul with branches in New York, London and Leipzig. Immediately following its formation, the congregation hired a *Hazan* (cantor) who could also serve as a *Schochet* (ritual butcher). His name was Kalmon Lion; he came from Koblenz in Germany and had first settled in Cleveland with his wife, Dina. His arrival provided the small Jewish community with all the necessities to carry on its traditional religious practices.

The settlers adjusted rapidly to life in America. Although observant of Jewish traditions, the fact that they were German-speaking enabled them to integrate into St. Paul's social and business communities that were heavily German. In addition, as followers of Neo-Orthodoxy, a less demanding form of Orthodox Judaism developed in the nineteenth century in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, as a response to Jewish emancipation, they were able to make adjustments in their faith that accommodated modernity. By the 1880s,

the congregation of Mount Zion had decided to abandon Orthodoxy entirely and affiliated with the liberal Reform movement that was founded in Germany. Reform Judaism allowed the congregation to abbreviate the liturgy, introduce choral singing with organ accompaniment, and have the sermon and prayers in English. In addition, congregants were free to choose whether they wanted to maintain the dietary laws which included the use of kosher meat.

There were as well German-Jewish families who could not resist the appeal of total assimilation and converted to Christianity. The number may have been as high as 15 percent of the total German-Jewish population of St. Paul in the late nineteenth century. Most became Episcopalians, possibly as a result of the efforts of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews in St. Paul that was associated with the Church of the Good Shepherd, an Episcopal mission church in downtown St. Paul.

German-speaking Jews were the first Jewish settlers in Minneapolis as well, but they didn't begin to arrive until the 1870s, about twenty years later than their coreligionists in St. Paul. They also differed from the Jews in St. Paul in that they came primarily from Bohemia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and, as a result, were not perceived to be "true" Germans.

The first synagogue in Minneapolis was chartered in 1878; its name was Sha'ari Tob (Gates of Truth), known today as Temple Israel. Unlike Mount Zion in St. Paul, Sha'ari Tob from its inception was affiliated with the Reform movement. The Jewish community in Minneapolis also differed from the St. Paul community in other important areas. For one, they were not as well-received by the community-at-large, particularly by the Yankee

erchants

elite and later by the Scandinavians. Although a number of Jews opened small dry goods stores, clothing stores, and general furnishing stores, others had saloons and liquor stores, occupations familiar to them from the Old Country. According to one source, the Jews' concentration in the liquor business resulted in the establishment of Minneapolis' notorious liquor patrol limits; these were perceived by Jews as an effort "to fence in the Jews with their liquor establishments."

There is no question that being Jewish in Minneapolis, unlike St. Paul, was difficult and limited the occupations one could enter. An American-born attorney of German-Jewish parentage who settled in Minneapolis in 1883 observed:

None of us Jews ever engaged in the banking business, nor were we in the milling or lumber businesses. We never got anywhere near the really big businesses of this area . . . The Jewish people never stood very high with the non-Jews even in those days.

Pogroms in Russia following the assassination in 1881 of Czar Alexander II resulted in the deaths of thousands of Jews and the destruction of their homes and businesses. Many Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews were forced to seek a safe haven elsewhere. These distant events had an enormous impact on the first Jewish settlers in the Twin Cities, including contributing to the decision of German-speaking Jews who belonged to Mount Zion in St. Paul to move into the Reform camp, or assimilate entirely. The largest number of Eastern European Jewry fled to the United States—2.5 million between 1881–1924. To them America was a nation that held out the promise of freedom of worship and the separation of church and state, concepts that were compelling to a people who had experienced years of



Mannheimer Brothers' Great Dry Goods Establishment, St. Paul. This drawing of the Jewish-owned department store appeared in The Northwest Magazine in 1888 and is from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

persecution. The vast majority of Jews living in the United States today, including Minnesota, are descendants of Eastern European Jewry.

Initially, German Jews who already had gone through the process of adjusting to the New World tried to distance themselves from Eastern European Jewry who they perceived as foreign and too orthodox. However, they quickly came to recognize that if they did not provide these impoverished newcomers with assistance, including jobs, there would be a backlash of anti-Semitism that would not distinguish between German and Eastern European Jewry. But before discussing the measures taken to help these newcomers adapt to a new world, it is important to understand something about the world they left behind.

For the new arrivals, religious faith and work were intertwined. For nearly a millennia their religion determined where they could live and what occupations they could hold. In the baggage they brought from the Old World was the living memory of repressions in their past and a belief that the new world would provide unheard of opportunities, if not for them, at least for their children.

Jews fleeing from the rampages of the Crusades began to arrive in Eastern Europe and especially Poland

from Germany in the twelfth century. Initially welcomed by Polish nobility as entrepreneurs who could fire-up the lagging Polish economy, Jews were soon seen by the Roman Catholic Church to pose a threat. A prosperous population of a different religion could undermine the faith of impoverished Polish peasants. Canonical laws passed in 1267 separated Jews from the rest of the population. Besides requiring them to wear special clothing, the laws also prevented Jewish merchants from operating in Poland's three major cities: Posen, Cracow and Lvov; in addition, Jews were expelled from Warsaw.

Even so, by the end of the seventeenth century more than 500,000 Jews were living in Poland-Lithuania where they comprised 5 percent of the population; another 51,325 lived in Ukraine. Jews were to be found in cities, towns and villages where they often lived in separate quarters, at times behind ghetto walls. They rarely interacted socially with non-Jews, and because of official restrictions, had their own distinctive occupational patterns. Most Jews were merchants, small retailers, peddlers and moneylenders. Those living in rural areas were not farmers, since they could not own land, but a small percentage were estate managers and lease-holders for Polish nobility, and were responsible for the day-to-day management of the estates.

In the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church ordered the nobility to cease employing Jews, who also were banned from other areas of commerce. As a result, they had to seek other work. Some attempted to become artisans. This provoked a backlash from Polish artisans who would neither allow Jews into their guilds nor hire them for jobs. In reaction to these restrictions, Jews formed their own guilds and began to compete for jobs, which inflamed matters further. Jews in these crafts often were self-trained and worked only for their co-religionists. The one craft in which they were most active was tailoring. There were several reasons for this: historically, Jews were textile producers in their ancient homeland, Israel, during the first centuries of this era. Secondly, according to Jewish folk lore, tailoring was considered an easily transportable skill. It did not require elaborate tools, only cloth, thread and needles, items that could be quickly packed up when an expulsion order was received.

Even with all its hardships, the period from 1580 to 1648 is known as the Golden Age of the Jews in Poland; it witnessed a flowering of Jewish culture and the emergence of celebrated scholars and writers. Jewish society of this period has been described as "closed, highly organized, stable, deeply rooted in tradition and slow to change." As a result, the Jews of Eastern Europe were incapable of anticipating the tragic consequences of their isolation. In 1618, the Thirty Years War unleashed a series of furious rebellions of serf against master, with the Jew caught in the middle.

The Industrial Revolution that began to affect Russia in the nineteenth century had a profound impact on the empire's impoverished Jewish population. Jews were no longer able to manage land, let alone rent or buy it, beyond the precinct of their own town; they could not attend public schools, or join guilds, and only a favored few received any type of professional training. The towns and *shtetles* in which they were forced to live could not support their growing numbers, a growth that paralleled population increases throughout Europe at this time. Factories in large cities attracted Jewish workers, particularly since many of these factories were in the garment industry. A market was develop-

ing for ready-made clothes, and for the first time Jews had a marketable skill—tailoring. Nearly 40 percent of all Jews now worked as artisans and laborers; besides tailors, these included shoemakers, bakers, butchers and some carpenters. Many more continued in their role as middlemen; more than 70 percent of the people engaged in trade in the Pale were Jewish; in Lithuania and Byelorussia it was nearly 90 percent.



Mount Zion Temple. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

Jewish workers in Lithuania and Byelorussia were described as "living in the semi-darkness of cellars and similar hovels that had wet walls and floors . . ." It was these conditions, coupled with the horrific pogroms, that caused 2.5 million Jews to flee Eastern Europe for America between 1881 and 1924.

Who were the Jews who chose to emigrate? According to sociologists who have studied the phenomenon, Jewish immigrants were generally young; 95 percent were forty-five years old or younger. Property owners and those with decent jobs were least likely to emigrate; the same held true for the few Jewish professionals who constituted less than 1 percent of the Jewish immigrants between 1899 and 1910. The poorest and least educated also were unlikely to move. Laborers whose skills could be transferred abroad were most likely to leave, particularly since factory jobs were becoming so scarce in Eastern Europe as a result of overpopulation and the industrialization of agriculture that forced many peasants off the land.

Contributing further to Jewish laborers' out-migration was the development of their own socialist party, the Bund (abbreviation of General Workers' Union in

Lithuania and Poland and Russia). Created in 1897, the Bund protested the working conditions in the textile mills, many of which were owned by their co-religionists. Furthermore, many Jewish laborers affiliated with the Bund had already freed themselves from the constraints of family and tradition, often by moving from a rural *shtetl* to a large city, and by doing so had become more socially and economically mobile. For these workers, America offered them political and economic opportunities unavailable in Europe; for them America was the "Golden Medina."

Ultra-religious Jews were less inclined to leave the Old Country. They viewed America as the *trayfa Medina*, the impure land. Just over .05 percent of those who emigrated identified themselves as rabbis, and as a result, there were relatively few trained leaders for the newly formed American synagogues, or teachers in religious schools.

In some respects, Jewish immigrants did not differ substantially from other immigrant groups who came to America. Most were poor, fleeing overcrowded and impoverished conditions in the Old World, compounded for Jews by discriminatory laws and attitudes. But they did differ from others in one very important respect. A much higher proportion came as families. The vast majority of Jewish immigrants did not plan to make some money in the New World and then return to the homeland. They did not have a homeland to return to; their lands of origin were alien and inhospitable. Thus, most Jewish immigrants saw America as their permanent home; a place where they could live in peace, observe their religion, and pursue on equal terms the prosperity the country promised. It is this pursuit in terms of occupations that is to be examined next.

Jewish immigration offices, often staffed and funded by wealthy German Jewish philanthropists, were set up throughout Europe to assist what became an avalanche of Jewish refugees fleeing Eastern Europe. Because these offices were forced to work quickly, they often did not have time to make arrangements with the communities that were to receive the needy Jews. St. Paul was one case in point. It was one such office, the Mansion

House Committee in London, who made the decision to send nearly 200 Jewish refugees to St. Paul, unannounced. They arrived Friday evening, July 14, 1882, just as the Jews in St. Paul were preparing to observe the Sabbath. Their unexpected arrival was noted in several newspaper articles that were published at the time. A headline in the July 17, 1882, *St. Paul Globe* read:

The Russian Refugees. They are cared for over Sunday by Samaritans of their Race in St. Paul—Christians likewise charitably inclined toward them.

One-fourth of the refugees are described as children and most of the men as “artisans.” The article continues: “Thus far the Israelitish residents of St. Paul have borne all the trouble and expense incident to the care of these unfortunate people.”

The refugees almost equaled in number the Jews residing in St. Paul, but the city’s two Jewish congregations, Mount Zion and Sons of Jacob (established in 1872 by Yiddish speaking Eastern European Jews), came to the assistance of their impoverished co-religionists, providing them with clothes and food. After seeing the desperate plight of the refugees, the mayor of St. Paul and the city’s Chamber of Commerce, as well as the governor of the state, all contributed funds and services for their aid. But what was most sorely needed was jobs.

An article the next day in the *Minneapolis Tribune* offers additional information about the immigrants and the jobs that were found for them:

The conditions of the 185 people who were sent here, as similar parties have been sent from Europe to other American cities without warning, has been materially improved since Saturday . . . Eleven men of the party have been sent to railroad work at Cable, Wisconsin; nine to Crookston for grading; six to points beyond for railroad section work; and fourteen have been hired in and near St. Paul. Today six families, numbering 25 persons, will be taken to Colonel Thompson’s farm near Wells, Minnesota.

The *Stillwater Gazette*, dated August 16, 1882, reports on the ongoing efforts of St. Paul Jewry to find a place for the new arrivals:



The West Side’s Jewish neighborhood as it looked in the 1920s. This is Indiana and Robertson Streets, looking south. Photo from the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest.

The Jewish friends of the Russian refugees in St. Paul are endeavoring to make farmers of a portion of them. A suitable quantity of land was secured for them near the Missouri River, where they have formed a community, dividing up the land so that each family only have four to five acres, which they cultivate with spades. They seem to utterly fail to comprehend the American idea of farming.

The settlement was near Painted Woods, North Dakota. It was undertaken by the rabbi of Mount Zion in St. Paul, with the support of his congregation, to make the new immigrants self-supporting. However, the immigrants did not choose to become farmers. According to one source whose family was sent to the colony,

. . . they weren’t trained. They knew nothing about [farming], except [for] their contact with the peons of Russia when they were in business. My father was a distiller in the Old Country.

For four years the rabbi raised funds and encouraged the settlers to make a go of the effort, but repeated droughts and fam-

ine, the lack of farming experience and farm implements, coupled with the immigrants’ desire to maintain their orthodox traditions, led to the failure of the project. It was simply not realistic. Other methods of integrating the rapidly arriving newcomers into society and making them self-sufficient would have to be found.

Between 1880 and 1900, the number of Jews living in the Twin Cities increased dramatically from about 350 to approximately 4,500 in St. Paul and another 5,000 in Minneapolis. Jobs were needed and quickly so Jews would not go on the welfare roles and cause a backlash of anti-Semitism. Because so many of the immigrants’ skills were unsuited for most available jobs, the St. Paul Jewish community decided that some type of “industrial school” had to be developed where marketable skills could be taught.

The Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society of Mount Zion Temple and the local section of the National Council of Jewish Women co-sponsored an industrial school located in Neighborhood House, a settlement house on St. Paul’s West Side flats, that opened in the spring of 1895. The



The Jewish community's first Neighborhood House at Indiana and Robertson Streets. Jewish Historical Society photo.

school's first students were young women who were taught homemaking skills and industrial arts such as dressmaking. A boys' manual training department was added in 1897, and soon after, classes were extended to adults as well. By 1899, a day nursery, supported by the four major Jewish women's organizations in St. Paul, was begun; it was intended to free mothers for work that would supplement family incomes. An employment bureau was operated in connection with the nursery, but both efforts proved unsuccessful; Jewish mothers were reluctant to leave their children. But this failure did not discourage other Jewish organizations from continuing their efforts to prepare Jewish immigrants for employment.

One such effort that was successful was undertaken by the successor of the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society, the Jewish Relief Society. The society maintained rooms in the Union Block in St. Paul where women volunteers ran an "employment bureau." By 1907, more than 200 men and women had found employment through their efforts.

Women's organizations were in the forefront in providing occupational training and jobs for the newcomers. But there

was one men's organization, B'nai B'rith, an international Jewish men's fraternal organization, that played an active and somewhat unique role in securing employment for Jewish immigrants. The men were not as interested in job training as in seeing to it that Jews did not settle in the impoverished, overcrowded ghettos in the large cities in the East. That this concern was real can be seen by the fact that more than 70 percent of the Eastern European Jews who arrived in the United States never left New York City.

In 1911, B'nai B'rith formally joined forces with the already operational and overworked Industrial Removal Office (IRO), a New York Jewish placement service established to "benefit . . . the Jew in general by taking the immigrant out of the segregated districts of the City of New York and sending him to the interior." Local B'nai B'rith Lodges would take the responsibility of finding jobs in their communities for the immigrants and see to it that they would not go on welfare. Papers of the Industrial Removal Office stored in the American Jewish Historical Society archive at Brandeis University provide us with insight into the efforts carried out in Minnesota. This material further illus-

trates how faith and work interacted within the Jewish community.

Prior to the formal affiliation of B'nai B'rith with the Industrial Removal office, the Minneapolis Lodge of B'nai B'rith was already at work resettling Jewish immigrants. A letter dated August 7, 1901, provides us with an idea of the types of occupations available to the immigrants and the salaries they were paid. The letter was written by the local president of B'nai B'rith to the New York director of the Romanian Committee for resettlement of Romanian Jewish immigrants. It lists the names of nine men who are requesting that their wives and families be sent to Minneapolis as they now had jobs and could support them. Of the nine men listed, five are peddlers earning between \$10 to \$12 a week; the others include a tinner, porter and tailor with salaries ranging from \$8 a week for the porter to \$15 for the tailor.

In a letter dated January 20, 1910, the director of the IRO writes the local B'nai B'rith representative ". . . that a good ladies' tailor can always secure employment in Minneapolis," therefore he requests that he be allowed to send additional tailors to the city. But not all immigrants were able to find employment in their trade. A letter to the IRO from St. Paul, dated April 27, 1914, tells the tale of one such immigrant who "was unemployed all last winter, and that he had just commenced to peddle with junk, and is paying on the horse and wagon."

Many Jewish men unable to find other jobs became peddlers and traveled throughout Minnesota. A letter from a Jewish merchant in Duluth to the IRO, dated August, 1915, reads:

As we have heard that you are sending people to certain parts of the United States we would like to ask if you have any young men who would like to make their business as peddlers, this is a very large part of country and a peddler can make a nice living and save some money besides you could send them to Duluth, Minnesota.

Jewish peddler tales are part of our state's folklore, as can be seen in the following excerpts from county histories:

Peddlers were common in Amador. They came by foot and horse and wagon and in time by car and truck. Pienstien, the "Penny

Jew," travelled on foot and carried two big bags. He came twice a year. He would sell thread, brushes, yardgoods, sewing needs, etc. and would lay out his entire display often to sell only one spool of thread.

Another writer recollects:

Mr. Hirschmann, Santa Claus and the Easter Rabbit must have entered my life about the same time. I cannot remember a time when they were not there. Hirschmann was different in that he was visible and arrived twice a year in the early spring and again in the fall

Mr. Hirschmann looked much like all members of his race. A short beard, brown eyes, the color of chocolate, which in themselves were unusual in our Scandinavian household. . . . In thinking of Mr. Hirschmann, I think of him as a real early American entrepreneur. He must have made a very good living. No overhead, no taxes, no permits, no expensive transportation, no hotel bills, meals were gratis

The myth of the peddler is apparent here. This is how it looked from the other side:

. . . my father when he was a peddler and he'd go out in these Irish communities where the peddlers would get stoned or their horses would be separated. . . . The kids around the Holy Rosary Church . . . would wrap a piece of coal in a snowball and throw it at these peddlers.

Another Jewish man recalls his father's days as a peddler:

As soon as he came in [to Duluth] they put a back pack on his back. He spoke no English and he walked towards Litchfield, Minnesota. He said that he was able to converse with people all right, but he couldn't sleep in their home so he slept in barns for three years because he had no other means of going any place.

At times, if the peddler was able to save enough money, he would establish a small retail store on one of Minnesota's Main Streets. Jack L. of Cambridge is one example:

Jack L. started as a country peddler in Isanti County before becoming a leading and popular Cambridge businessman. Although Jack was Jewish, he learned to speak fluent Swedish.

Jews like Jack L., who settled in small

towns, tried to maintain their traditions in the face of great difficulty. Often accommodations had to be made. Unlike Levy and Daniels who closed their store on the Sabbath, most Jewish merchants in small communities had to keep their stores open on Saturday in order to survive. But this did not mean they would abandon their Jewish identity because of their work. On the contrary, most Jewish families in small towns made every effort to see to it that their faith—their religion—and its traditions were transmitted to their children. A letter to the IRO illustrates this point; it is from a Jewish merchant in Winona and is dated February 8, 1904.

As we read an article in the Jewish Daily News about your office and found out that you send out of New York people who are poor and deserving we beg to ask you to kindly send a *schochet* [Jewish ritual butcher] to this town but it should be a cheap *schochet*. We are here about seven or eight families. Please be kind enough and answer.

A response came back a week later requesting more information about the community. On March 30 the long awaited letter arrived.

This will introduce to you Mr. Abraham N., who is a *schochet, mohel* [circumciser] and a Hebrew teacher who is highly recommended to us by the Rev. M. . . . We trust he will find a happy home in your small community and in time be able to send for his family from Russia, which consists of his wife and two children.

Apparently the story did not have a happy ending, because in 1905 and again in 1908 the community was requesting help in finding a *schochet*. Life in a small town for an observant Jew was difficult, but the merchant was willing to make accommodations that an ultra-Orthodox Jew such as a *schochet* was unable to make. The lure of the big city with its synagogues and other Jewish institutions was too much, and, as happened in Winona, he would leave.

By the early twentieth century, the children of many Eastern European Jewish immigrants began to feel that adjustments had to be made in their religious observances to accommodate the realities of being Jewish in America. The most far-reaching and important accommodation was the development of the Conservative movement, an

American phenomenon. Conservative Judaism bridges the gap between the liberal Reform movement on the left and the traditional Orthodox movement on the right. It was intended to attract Jews who were uncomfortable with the religious practices of the two extremes and wanted a more moderate middle-of-the road approach. By 1912, both Minneapolis and St. Paul had Conservative congregations. The new Conservative movement allowed Jews more latitude in the level of observance, particularly by the introduction of Friday night services.

Eastern European Jewish immigrants who lived on St. Paul's West Side and Minneapolis' North side (with a lesser number in south Minneapolis) generally were small merchants—primarily kosher butchers, bakers, grocers, rag pickers and junk dealers. Others were carpenters and shoe repairmen who often worked out of their homes. Laborers usually worked in the tailor shops of large department stores such as Mannheimers in St. Paul or Rothschilds in Minneapolis, both owned by Jews. But, as Jews slowly began to prosper, they began to move out of their "ghettoes" into the larger community and their children began to move into different occupations.

By the 1920s, the work situation had improved somewhat for the Jewish people in Minneapolis, but they still were restricted as to their economic, social and civic activities. Jews did not enter the factories as laborers, nor were they permitted to ascend the corporate ladder; rather, according to a study conducted in the 1960s, "They filled the interstitial roles in the economic life of Minneapolis as small retailers, salesmen, or professional men." It wasn't until the 1940s that sociologists began to report improvements in the status of Minneapolis' Jewish community.

Charles I. Cooper, in a 1946 article entitled, "The Jews of Minneapolis and Their Christian Neighbors," reported that Jews were becoming influential in a number of important industries and in several branches of trade and commerce. However, he went on, "Jewish names are absent from the list of the leaders in banking, milling, and real estate; and only a few are to be found in the grain business." What he

Jewish Merchants to page 27

During the early 1930s, he designed a number of public schools for St. Paul, including Marshall, Wilson, Monroe, and Cleveland Junior High Schools, as well as Randolph Heights and Como Elementary schools. He designed the administration building at Holman airport in 1938 and the clubhouse at Keller Golf Course that same year.

Wigington drew up the plans three years later for the famous Harriet Island Pavilion, which became the center for much of the city's summer entertainment festivities and celebrations during the next decade. In 1941, he was chosen to design one of several ice palaces in connection with the St. Paul Winter Carnival. One was unique. Built into its structure was a postal station where official Carnival stamps were issued.

St. Paul's Sterling Club honored Wigington in April of 1941 "for his twenty-five years of distinguished service to the field of architecture." When a permit was first sought to construct a building on the corner of Rondo and Dale Street for this black social club, the request was turned down by the City Council for reasons not entirely clear. Wigington, who had designed the building, had to re-design it as a private dwelling in order to acquire the necessary building permit.

The following year, Commissioner Fred Truax lauded him both for his extraordinary talent and his dedicated service, and the City Council designated him the city's Architectural Designer. The title of City Architect continued to elude him, however, and he resigned in 1949, disappointed but not discouraged. Before leaving for California, he designed St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis. For the next five years, Wigington designed buildings and homes in Los Angeles and San Diego, and his fame as an outstanding architect continued to grow. As a registered architect, he was a member of the American Institute of Architects and the National Engineering Society. In St. Paul he was active in the Urban League, the Sterling Club, the Elks Lodge, and St. Philip's Episcopal Church. When he died in Kansas City, Missouri, on July 7, 1967, he left a legacy of beauty and form not only



Highland Park Water Tower, about 1940. Donaldson Photo Co., Minnesota Historical Society.

to St. Paul but also to cities on the West Coast, as well. In 1991 a Clarence Wigington Memorial Scholarship was established to encourage St. Paul students of African American descent to pursue studies in mathematics, science, and the visual arts at Lakewood Community College. The scholarship provides money for tuition, course fees and materials, books, and transportation.

Ironically and unfortunately, the Highland Park Water Tower does not bear his name. Numerous sources have listed Frank X. Tewes, city architect in 1928, as its designer. This was customary at that time, but to this day, Tewes' name still appears on the plaque attached to the building.

The Highland Park Water Tower remains a monument to Clarence Wigington and his years as an architect for the city of St. Paul.

—Arthur C. Mc Watt

Jewish Merchants from page 9

found as most conspicuous was "the low ratio of Jewish names among the owners of department stores." Unusual, in that in St. Paul most of the major department stores at one time were owned by Jews. But, he continued, "by and large, it may be said that in the last four decades, the Jewish community has achieved a fairly rapid adaptation to the industrial and general economic structure of Minneapolis."

One could argue, and this writer does, that it was not the Jewish community that achieved adaptation to the "industrial and general economic structure of Minneapolis," but rather that fifty years after the Jewish people first settled in Minneapolis, the city's leaders finally began to "achieve adaptation" to the idea that an individual's abilities were not dependent upon religion.

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, the barriers that restricted areas of work on the basis of faith have been dismantled. But faith remains an important force in their lives. This is evident by the fact that more than 65 percent of the people in the Twin Cities who identify themselves as Jews are affiliated with a synagogue. The Jewish people did not lose their faith when it limited them in the work they could do, nor did they lose it when the freedom of choice was open to them.

Work and faith have an impact on all of us in different ways. This is the story of one group who emigrated to the New World to find the freedom to worship and work as they chose. That they did find it speaks well for the American Dream.

Marilyn Chiat is co-director of the Center for Documentation and Preservation of Places of Worship, which is affiliated with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. She holds a doctorate in art history from the University of Minnesota. This article is adapted from a paper she presented in February, 1992, as part of the Ramsey County Historical Society's lecture series, "Have Lunch with an Historian."



Murder most foul! Colonel Hankins draws on local lore, circa 1868, for his colorfully imaginative "history" of St. Paul's early years. See the article on novelists and not-so-fictional St. Paul beginning on page 10.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul MN
Permit #3989