

American Biennial Scholars Conference 2006, Charleston, S.C.
Southern Strategies Panel

**Whistling *Dixie* while Humming *Ha-Tikvah*
Acculturation and Activism Among the Orthodox in Fort Worth
by Hollace A. Weiner**

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Fort Worth's Jewish history is a tale of two congregations—in common parlance, a “temple” and a “shul.” The Reform temple, Beth-El, began in 1902. The Orthodox shul, Ahavath Sholom, chartered ten years before, was the prime mover in forging the local Jewish community. Yet it has received scant attention from historians, both those on its home turf and those surveying Orthodoxy from further a field.¹ One reason for this omission is that Reform Jews have long dominated the popular image of southern Jewry. They arrived first and rapidly integrated into commercial and civic affairs.² Another reason is that Ahavath Sholom's early records are in Yiddish minutes books haphazardly stored at the synagogue and in private collections. A third reason for Ahavath Sholom's omission from a number of survey articles is that it did not affiliate until the mid-1980s

¹ The most detailed narratives relating Ahavath Sholom's history are in the congregation's commemorative books, which essentially rewrite and condense the same details over and over without a fresh look at the primary sources. These anniversary volumes repeat erroneous dates, omit mention of one early president, and give misinformation about the origins of the Ladies Auxiliary. *Seventh-Fifth Anniversary Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Fort Worth, Texas, 1892-1967* (Fort Worth: Congregation Ahavath Sholom, 1967); *Congregation Ahavath Sholom: 5741/1980* (Fort Worth: Congregation Ahavath Sholom, 1980); *Congregation Ahavath Sholom 100th Anniversary: 1892-1992, 5658-5758* (Fort Worth: Congregation Ahavath Sholom, 1992). *The Southwest Jewish Sentiment*, published in Dallas at the turn of the century and available in spotty sequence on microfilm, reported social news about Fort Worth's Reform Jews, not the Orthodox. The social columns are filled with details about whist parties, indicating a Jewish social network that pre-dated the Reform congregation. Later, *The Jewish Monitor*, published beginning in 1914 with Beth-El's Rabbi George Fox as editor, also carried far more details about the Reform Congregation than the Orthodox; Editor Stanley Chyet's *Lives & Voices: A Collection of 19th and 20th Century American Jewish Memoirs with Drawings of the Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 274-309, includes a chapter on a Fort Worth Reform rabbi; for the history of Beth-El see Hollace Ava Weiner, *Beth-El Congregation, Fort Worth, Texas, Centennial, 1902-2002* (Fort Worth: Beth-El Congregation, 2002), Hollace Ava Weiner, “Cowtown's Front-Page Rabbi,” in *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 80-101.

² “Classical Reform,” replete with its anti-Zionist stance, “is usually taken as the normative religion of the Southern Jew” writes Leonard Rogoff in *Homelands: Southern Jewish identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 3.

with a major branch of Judaism. Insiders waged a tug-of-war between Orthodoxy and Conservatism. Because the congregation was unaffiliated, its rabbis and auxiliary organizations were not written up in regional and national publications reporting news, views, and activities. The congregation fell below the radar. It seemed out of the mainstream.

A decade ago, volunteers began systematically archiving materials pertaining to the Fort Worth Jewish community. A Yiddish minutes book, covering the years 1898 to 1905, was rediscovered. It piqued my interest, and I gathered a team of people to translate and transcribe the contents.³

The minutes answer questions, such as the names of the congregation's first rabbis (Korn and Halpern), who were hired in 1904 to launch a Talmud Torah. The minutes explain why the Orthodox started a cemetery of their own. (A non-Jewish spouse was laid to rest in the city's pioneer Hebrew cemetery.) They pinpoint the start of the congregation's Orthodox vs. Conservative struggle. (It was a contentious vote in 1898 against joining the newly formed Orthodox Union.) The minutes describe correspondence with sister congregations in Waco (ninety miles south) and Dallas (forty miles to the east).⁴ The minutes book also describes a 1903 "mass meeting" during which Ahavath Sholom's officers were joined by elected politicians who decried pogroms in the Bessarabian town of Kishinev that left forty-nine Jews dead and more than 500 injured or

³ I am deeply grateful to the team that translated and transcribed the minutes, which include 199 pages, and 145 meetings. Conducted between October 1898 and October 1905. The work began in 2003 when Hannah Howard, a volunteer at the Jewish Community Archives housed at Ahavath Sholom, photocopied the minutes. Esther Winesanker, the daughter of a Yiddish printer and a volunteer in the Reform congregation's archives, translated and transcribed them on a manual typewriter. The job took more than six months. Rabbi Sidney Zimelman gave these translations a second reading, adding nuances, deciphering abbreviations, and translating Hebrew passages. Audrey Slotter, a legal secretary, typed the translated minutes in a style that approximates the form utilized in the ledger book. Some time after the minutes book was photocopied in 2003, it disappeared. Copies of most of its pages are on file in the Beth-El Congregation Archives.

⁴ Ahavath Sholom Minutes, April 5, 1903, p. 93; May 10, 1903, p. 96; May 24, 1903, p. 97; Karp mentions that Rochester's Beth Israel Congregation's has several "sister" congregations in "The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester," in *Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society*, ed. Abraham Karp (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 81; Waco's Agudath Jacob traces its origins to 1886 when fifteen Orthodox Jewish families brought Rabbi Samuel Levy to the city. Two years later, in 1888, Agudath Jacob, received its charter. "Historic Markers of Genealogical Interest in McLennan County," www.rootsweb.com/~txmclenn/historicchurches.htm, accessed April 23, 2006; Dallas's Shearith Israel was founded in 1884 and chartered in 1886. Rose Biederman, *They Came to Stay: The Story of the Jews of Dallas, 1870-1997* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 125.

raped. In relating these events, the minutes point toward additional primary source materials that are helping to weave a richer picture of the congregation's history as well as its place in American Jewish Orthodoxy.

Not only matters of substance, but also of style are conveyed in the minutes. Because the various recording secretaries wrote many words and phrases in anglicized Yiddish, the minutes provide a veritable tape recording of voices from a century ago. One can practically hear the participants' accents: A motion is *mooft* and seconded. Trustees are *apsent* from a *meetin'*. They heat their shul with a wood-burning *schtoff*. The synagogue is referred to as the "cong" – spelled *koof*, *alef*, *nun*, *gimel*. The custodian who kindles the fire on Shabbos is the *dzheniter*. They use the Texas term "*fiksen' to*" when embarking on a project. Their Purim ball is a big *sooksess*.⁵ Having a Purim ball at all, much less one attended by the mayor, shows transformation and Americanization of a Jewish holiday into a masquerade akin to Halloween or Mardi Gras.⁶

The minutes also demonstrate that Ahavath Sholom was part of the mainstream. More than likely it qualifies, in Jeffrey Gurock's terminology, as a "proto-typical American synagogue of the 1890s."⁷ The immigrant congregation, founded in 1892, was not marching to a different drummer. It was in step with others around the country and with events at home and abroad. This paper is the beginning of a quest to explore the history of Fort Worth's Congregation Ahavath Sholom, including its interrelationship with local Reform Jews, its zeal toward Zionism, its place in the study of American Orthodoxy, and its contribution to the study of Jews in the South.

It also serves as a case study of an atypical pattern. In most American cities, Jewish entrepreneurs with roots in Central Europe, who arrived before the 1880s, established religious institutions in their new hometowns. Not in Fort Worth. In Fort Worth and a few other cities—Lee Shai Weissbach cites Bradford, Pennsylvania, and

⁵ Other striking examples of anglicized Yiddish words include *arenzmands* for arrangements (spelled ארצנומענדס); *rul af affisers* for roll of officers, and *ekspents* for expense. A yard is *iad*; the month of June is *dshuen*; Sunday school is *sohndi skuhl*; Hebrew School becomes *hibru skuhl*. The Talmud Torah's Board of Education is the *bord af edjukeshe*.

⁶ "Purim Masquerade Ball, A Splendid Affair," *Fort Worth Gazette*, February 28, 1896, p. 8; Such Purim balls show that the immigrants are "yielding to American ways," writes Abraham Karp, "The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester," 83-84.

⁷ Jeffrey S. Gurock, "A Stage in the Emergence of the Americanized Synagogue," in *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock (New Jersey: KTAV, 1996), 267.

Michigan City, Indiana⁸—the first wave of Jews, though well established, did not launch a congregation. The later-arriving East European Jews took the lead. They chartered a congregation that became the cornerstone of a Jewish community and the catalyst for creating and revitalizing other Jewish institutions.

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Jewish settlers began trickling into Fort Worth in 1854 when it was a frontier town subject to Comanche Indian raids. The earliest Jewish pioneers hailed from Central Europe, Louisiana, and Tennessee. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, some Jewish war veterans arrived with their extended families. Most, but not all, had fought for the Confederacy. In 1876, the year the railroad reached Fort Worth, two B'nai B'rith members from Dallas visited to launch a Fort Worth lodge. Three years later, when the city had grown to 6,600 residents and the Jewish community to around 150, a local civic figure set aside land for three cemeteries, designating acreage for white Protestants, for African Americans, and for “the Israelites of the City.”⁹ The Jews named their cemetery Emanuel Hebrew Rest and three years later formed the Emanuel Hebrew Association to tend it. During the 1880s, economic downturns and yellow fever afflicted the frontier town. The B'nai B'rith lodge disintegrated. The cemetery association became dormant. Visiting rabbis from Dallas and Galveston unsuccessfully attempted to start religious schools. Charles Wessolowsky, a journalist and B'nai B'rith representative touring the south in 1879, reprimanded the Jews of Fort Worth for their “lack of zeal” in teaching their children about Judaism.¹⁰

⁸ Lee Shai Weissbach calls arrival of the East Europeans “vital” and spotlights “their role as founders of new Jewish centers.” He adds, “Any account of the history of small-town Jewry cannot be complete if it neglects the distinctively East European subculture that materialized in many corners of the South around the turn of the century and that lingered there . . . in the decades before World War II.” Lee Shai Weissbach, “East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South,” *American Jewish History* 85 No. 3 (September 1987): 231-262. See also Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 167.

⁹ “Table I, Cities of the South with Triple-Digit Jewish Populations, c. 1878,” in Weissbach, “Image of Jews in the Small-Town South,” 235; Quote attributed to *Fort Worth Democrat*, February 19, 1879, in Lisa Mack, “Emanuel Hebrew Rest,” Texas Historical Marker Application folder, Cemetery box, Beth-El Congregation Archives, Fort Worth.

¹⁰ Louis Schmier, *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Albany, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1982), 119-120.

A second wave of Jews reached Fort Worth during the 1880s. These were Russians and Poles driven out of Europe by the repressive May Laws of 1882, which expelled Jews from vast areas under czarist control and restricted admission to secondary schools and numerous professions. Among the Eastern European refugees who resettled in Fort Worth were Rachael and Joe Jacobs, who opened a restaurant and saloon. Their nephew, thirty-year-old Moses Shanblum, emigrated from Poland and joined his relatives in Fort Worth in 1887. Borrowing money from fellow Jews, Moses Shanblum filled a backpack with household notions and peddled to surrounding farm-and-ranch towns. With his earnings, he bought a cart, then a horse and buggy, and finally moved his business into a downtown storefront. By 1891, he was raising a family with his wife, Gitel. His younger brother, Louis F. Shanblum, followed him to Fort Worth where he acquired the nicknamed “L.F.” and borrowed money to fill a peddler’s pack.

With his extended family settled in Fort Worth, Moses Shanblum made his next priority establishing a Jewish community. He was adamant that a loan for a backpack was not enough. “When I came to Fort Worth,” he later recalled, “I found only six Jewish families who worshiped in a private house on the Holidays.” He began organizing a morning and evening minyan that met in homes and stores. On October 9, 1892, Moses Shanblum, his uncle Joe, and his brother L.F., were among the ten to fifteen Jewish men who gathered in the home of produce vendor William Goldstein to organize Congregation Ahavath Sholom.

As the congregation evolved over the next two decades, it had much in common with immigrant shuls across America: Yiddish was its *lingua franca*, its “portable homeland,”¹¹ and Yiddish newspapers were its means of advertising for rabbis, conveying condolences, and publicly praising fellow congregants. The congregation had trouble gathering a Saturday morning minyan, but optimistically paid a *Shabbos goy* forty cents to kindle a fire. Ad hoc committees screened potential members for integrity before voting them in. When Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, died in July of 1904, the board of directors convened briefly and “moved in his honor, that the meeting should close.”¹² The minutes show that the congregation’s earliest rabbis were not sermonizers

¹¹ Rogoff, *Homelands*, 119.

¹² Herzl died July 3, 1904. Ahavath Sholom Minutes, July 10, 1904, p. 133.

or arbiters of Jewish law. Rather, in the words of historian Abraham Karp, they were “teacher-preachers,”¹³ hired to run the Talmud Torah and to teach Judaism to the next generation. There were few other religious functionaries. Lay leaders conducted worship services and divided up the honors for *yom tov*. An annual frenzy of activity preceded the High Holidays, when several dozen chairs were rented and tickets were sold (for \$3 per family) to accommodate unaffiliated Jews. On the eve of Yom Kippur, many congregants observed the ritual of *schlogen kaporos*, twirling a chicken above their heads to symbolically atone for sins. Afterward, they would bring the live chickens (roosters for the men and hens for the women) to the *shochet* for kosher slaughter. On occasion, because of the sheer numbers, the rabbi was drafted to help the *shochet* flick or de-feather the chickens.¹⁴

As congregants acculturated, the board of trustees installed spittoons in the sanctuary and became mindful of decorum, asking parents to hush noisy youngsters and refrain from moving their rented chairs outdoors. Similar to what Jeffrey Gurock observes in his studies of turn-of-the-century Orthodoxy, Fort Worth’s immigrant religious community was “moving away from the world of the *shtibl*” and the shtetl and becoming concerned with what the neighbors might think.¹⁵

Ahavath Sholom’s early narrative parallels the story line of the upstate New York congregation profiled in Abraham Karp’s essay, “The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester.”¹⁶ Both Ahavath Sholom and Beth Israel served as “half-way” houses for American Judaism as it evolved from being an “exponent of East European traditions” into a “reflector” of American social patterns.¹⁷ In Fort Worth, as elsewhere,

¹³ Karp, “The Americanization of Beth Israel, Rochester,” 69.

¹⁴ “It was decided ask Rabbi Halpern to help the *shochet*, Mr. Gordon, to flick the chickens for the Days of Remembrance.” Ahavath Sholom Minutes, September 24, 1905, p. 188. *Schlogen Kaporos* is the ceremony in which a fowl is twirled around one’s head to transfer sins symbolically to the bird.

¹⁵ Decorum becomes a concern with “heightened visibility.” Jeffrey S. Gurock, “A Stage in the Emergence of the Americanized Synagogue,” in *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective*, 267-268, 271; Decorum is “always the first demand of acculturating groups” in order to make their worship services more “respectable to the world around them.” Jeffrey S. Gurock, “The Orthodox Synagogue,” in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1989), 49.

¹⁶ Abraham Karp, “The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester,” in *Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 45-105.

¹⁷ Gurock, “A Stage in the Emergence of the Americanized Synagogue,” 282.

the immigrant Orthodox congregation progressed from a one-room worship space designed for Old World camaraderie into a multi-purpose institution that sought to perpetuate Judaism among the next generation.

The founders of Ahavath Sholom became its aristocracy, holding onto board positions for most of their lives. The men running the congregation were largely produce vendors, clothing merchants, saloon proprietors, and scrap metal dealers. Moses Shanblum remained the anchor or, in Karp's terminology, the "strong man" who set the agenda.¹⁸ Once Ahavath Sholom received its state charter in December of 1892, Shanblum began fund raising for a building. Wearing his trademark black coat and black bowler hat—a decidedly foreign form of dress in West Texas—Shanblum went from door to door, shop-to-shop, and peddler to peddler soliciting money and persuading fellow Jews "that a synagogue was more important than a new buggy or suit."¹⁹ He stuffed cash contributions into the sweatband of his hat. Within two years, Ahavath Sholom had purchased a thousand-dollar lot located twenty blocks south of the courthouse—a healthy walk, considering that the Orthodox Jews lived clustered on streets two blocks north of the courthouse. By 1895, Shanblum had raised another \$640 to construct Fort Worth's first Jewish house of worship, a wood-frame building facing east toward Jerusalem.

Despite having a synagogue of their own, the immigrant congregation had difficulty attracting a Shabbos morning minyan. "There should be a minyan every Saturday," declared the minutes of January 12, 1896.²⁰ Evidently, the press of business and the distance to shul led congregants to break the Sabbath, a lament voiced at Orthodox shuls elsewhere in the United States.²¹

¹⁸ Karp, "The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester," 74.

¹⁹ "Moses Shanblum," Fort Worth Business file, Fort Worth Jewish Archives, Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Fort Worth; Moses Shanblum, "History of Fort Worth Jewry," *The [Fort Worth] Jewish Monitor*, December 11, 1925, p. 3.

²⁰ Ahavath Sholom Minutes, January 12, 1896, p. 109, reproduced in *Congregation Ahavath Sholom, 100th Anniversary, 1892-1992, 5653-5753* (Fort Worth: Ahavath Sholom, 1980), 3.

²¹ "Probably the most wrenching change . . . was the violation of the Sabbath. Even the earliest of the immigrants were faced with a choice: would they work at the mills and keep their shops open on Saturday or would they honor the day of prayer and rest in the traditional way? . . . As time passed, most people opted for working on Shabbat. . . . Both the form and substance of Jewishness were undergoing unmistakable changes that involved the Orthodox as well as the non-traditionalists." Robert Perlman, *From Shtetl to Milltown: Litvaks, Hungarians, and Galizianers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875-1925* (Pittsburgh:

Ahavath Sholom's trustees tried two strategies to attract more participants. The first was to convince the city's unaffiliated Jews to join. To that end, on January 8, 1899, the board appointed a four-man "Committee to Try to Unite all Jews." The reasoning, according to the minutes, was, "There should be unity in the community," which by then was approaching 500 Jews. "There should be a *minyan* of Jews every Shabbos and *yom tov* in shul. And there should be no other *minyanim*." Two months later, the "Committee for Uniting All Jews, so that there should be unity and not be two entities in the city," reported back that it "had not succeeded" in absorbing the rest of the city's Jews. Within three years the city's unaffiliated Jews would charter a Reform congregation, an eventuality that the Orthodox apparently perceived as a threat.²²

The shul's alternate strategy for increasing membership was to relocate in the central business district, closer to areas of Jewish concentration. Moving to a more convenient and visible downtown location required more money than the cash-strapped congregation could expend. Often, the congregation's treasury—which was not deposited in a bank but taken home with the treasurer—dipped below a dollar. The main source of income was dues of fifty-cents per month. During a good month, up to twenty-six people paid. The annual Purim ball brought in profits up to \$60. In 1900, this income and additional donations were spent on *chuppah* poles, priced at \$2.60, for the first wedding performed in the shul; and for the down payment on a \$95 Torah.²³ That year a local *shochet* sued the congregation for \$75, his fee for leading Shavuot services. (He settled out-of-court for \$15—far less money, but still a strain on the treasury and on local civilities.)²⁴

Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 2001), 85. See also Karp, "The Americanization of Beth Israel, Rochester," and Rogoff, in *Homelands*.

²² Ahavath Sholom minutes, January 8 1899, p. 8; January 22, 1899, p. 9; March 12, 1899, p. 11. In Rochester, the creation of a rival minyan led the congregation to adopt an amendment that read: "It is forbidden for a member to attend the Nusbaum Minyan." Karp, "The Americanization of Beth Israel Congregation, Rochester," 51; Fort Worth's Jewish population in 1906 was estimated between 500 and 800, and the city had 40,000 residents. U.M. Simon to IRO, March 28, 1906, Box 64, Fort Worth Folder, IRO Collection, American Jewish Historical Society, New York.

²³ The Torah cost the congregation \$95. The board paid \$64 down and "the rest later when the cong. would collect more money." Ahavath Sholom Minutes, November 11, 1900, p. 38. At a later date, it was discovered that a word was missing from the scroll. A *sofer* corrected the omission.

²⁴ Ahavath Sholom Minutes, September 30, 1900, p. 35; October 28, 1900, p. 37; Karp describes suing a *shochet* in "The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester," 70-71.

Throughout 1901, the board searched for downtown real estate and began collecting money for a building fund. By December, the congregation was sufficiently solvent to make a down payment on a \$1,665, 50-by-100-foot lot at 819 Taylor Street, a thoroughfare already home to a several churches.²⁵ Within weeks, the congregation sold its original land for \$650 and paid professional house movers eighty dollars to transport their building to the downtown location. By the time the congregation paid closing costs, repaired the sidewalk, and seeded the yard, the treasury was reduced to thirty-five cents.²⁶

Nonetheless Ahavath Sholom's little frame synagogue was finally downtown, giving Jews a prominent space in the local religious constellation. With its increased visibility, the shul began attracting a stream of new members. The move had another consequence, one that demographic historian Lee Shai Weissbach has noted in other Jewish communities. It "galvanize[d] support for a rival congregation."²⁷ Within nine months of Ahavath Sholom's move to the central business district, forty-three of the city's more acculturated Jews formed a Reform congregation, Beth-El, and rented space on the same street.²⁸ The Reform congregation's existence did not diminish the membership roster of the traditional shul. Rather, with double the number of synagogues, local newspapers gave the Jewish community more publicity.²⁹ Affiliation increased. Similar to Jewish communal patterns elsewhere, the relationships between rival synagogues proved to be both "complementary and competitive."³⁰ Within six months, however, the Reform congregation had gone dormant. It would not be rejuvenated until the High Holidays of 1904. Once again, Ahavath Sholom alone represented Fort Worth's organized Jewry. It presumed to represent all of the city's Jews.

²⁵ *Congregation Ahavath Sholom: 5741-1980*, 10-15, 20, 22.

²⁶ Ahavath Sholom minutes, March 9, 1902, p. 66.

²⁷ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 167.

²⁸ For information on the origins of the Reform community see Weiner, *Beth-El . . . Centennial*.

²⁹ "The Hebrew population of Fort Worth yesterday observed Yom Kippur . . . at both of the local Jewish houses of worship," reads one of those newspaper articles that reports on observances at both Beth-El and Ahavath Sholom. "Observe Yom Kippur, Local Jewish Adherents Have Impressive Service, Orthodox Congregation Hold Services in Accordance with Most Ancient Custom," *Fort Worth Record*, October 10, 1905, p. 10.

³⁰ Karp, "The Americanization of Congregation Beth Israel, Rochester," xi.

During Easter week in 1903, news of the terrifying pogroms in Kishinev was reported via international wire services. The brutality became Page One news in Texas where the *Fort Worth Telegram* ran stories headlined: “Terrible Scenes in Desolate Kishineff,” “Horrible Atrocities,” “Massacre of Jews,” “Anti-Semitic Feeling is Still Running High.”³¹ Ahavath Sholom’s response was to spearhead a public protest meeting—one of thirty-eight staged in cities across America.³² At the Fort Worth Kishinev rally, staged in the City Hall Auditorium, a leading Methodist minister passionately protested the pogroms, an audience of 325 sang *Dixie*, and the mayor endorsed a proclamation identifying the city’s Jews with mainstream America. The proclamation decried the czarist regime’s “uncivilized” and “un-Christian” conduct toward Russian Jews. It extended “condolences” to Fort Worth citizens “bereaved . . . by the unhappy conditions” in their native land.³³ The common themes enunciated throughout the public meeting show how attuned these Jewish immigrants had become to American ways. Rather than stressing ethnic and religious distinctiveness, they portrayed persecution of Russian Jews as contrary to American ideals of democracy and religious freedom. They placed the trauma of the pogroms into an “assault on shared American values.”³⁴ The public protest meeting demonstrates that, after little more than a decade,

³¹ *Fort Worth Telegram*, 23 April 1903, p. 1; 10 May 1903, p. 1; 7 June 1903, p. 1.

³² Texas had protest meetings in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Texarkana. At the Fort Worth meeting, “Governor [Fritz] Lanham wrote expressing his sympathy with the purpose of the meeting. A sermon on the Kishineff massacre was delivered by Rev. S.H. Werlein of the First Methodist Church.” The Texarkana meeting, held at a synagogue, heard from Rabbi Joseph Bogen and East Texan Jeannette Miriam Goldberg, who was field organizer for the Council of Jewish Women. Cyrus Adler, ed., *The Voice of America on Kishineff*, microfiche (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1904), 75, 88 89, 201, 483.

³³ The Kishinev protest meeting is mentioned in the Ahavath Sholom Minutes, May 10, 1903, p. 96; May 24, 1903, p. 98; May 31, 1903, p. 100; June 14, 1903, p. 100; The proclamation from the people of Fort Worth to the czar read, in part, “[W]e deeply deplore this uncivilized and un-Christian conduct . . . whether . . . instigated by government or . . . prejudice on the part of the people Resolved, That the representatives of the American people . . . use the influence of their high position with . . . the Russian empire to put a stop to . . . the harsh and unjust manner in which the Jewish subjects of the empire are treated. . . . Sincere condolence is extended to our citizens who have been bereaved in family or friends by the unhappy conditions prevailing in their mother country, and we pledge our best endeavors to secure speedy amelioration of these conditions.” “Liberal Donations to Kishineff Fund,” *Fort Worth Telegram*, June 5, 1903, p. 2

³⁴ Steven Windmueller, “‘Defenders’: National Jewish Community Relations Agencies,” in *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American public Square*, eds. Alan Mittleman, Jonathan D. Sarna, Robert Light (Lanham Md.: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002), 14, 15, 17; “‘Politics served as an index of the Jews’ civic integration,” writes Rogoff in *Homelands*, 97.

Fort Worth's Orthodox congregation had begun acculturating to American democratic norms, become a player in civic affairs, and established links with international Jewry

It was not until after the Kishinev protest that Ahavath Sholom's women collectively became involved in the life of the congregation. Previously, women were scarcely mentioned in the minutes of the city's Orthodox shul. Periodically, a widow was thanked by name for assisting with a Purim ball. Occasionally, a small contribution was made toward building a *mikvah*, the ritual bath that Jewish women traditionally visit monthly for ritual and levitical cleansing. During preparations for the High Holy Days, the minutes noted that females would sit on the right side of the sanctuary and men on the left, a visible show of tradition.³⁵

A matter of communal concern led the city's Orthodox Jewish women to mobilize. In the wake of the Kishinev protest, Fort Worth Jewry began resettling refugee families placed by the Industrial Removal Organization (IRO). These families were so needy that in June of 1903, ten days after the first immigrants arrived, thirty women from Ahavath Sholom formed a Ladies Hebrew Relief Society. The purpose was to provide bedside care, food, clothing, "friendship and sociability."³⁶ The group's founder was Texas-born Sarah Levy Shanblum, spouse of L. F. Shanblum and sister-in-law to the shul's "strong man," Moses Shanblum. Through its good deeds, the Ladies Hebrew Relief Society grew to include 120 women. The society collected dues and had fund-raising picnics that helped immigrants cover medical bills. The creation of the ladies organization was not reported in the minutes of Ahavath Sholom. However, the group's name began cropping up whenever the board of trustees needed to raise money to pay a legal fee or to underwrite a rabbinical salary. The Ladies Relief Society was then called upon to donate up to \$25.

Building a *mikvah* was apparently among the women's concerns.³⁷ According to the autobiographical writings of a Galveston rabbi, Schmu'el Geller, the lack of a *mikvah*

³⁵ Ahavath Sholom minutes, September 10, 1905, p. 185.

³⁶ Mrs. L. F. (Sarah Levy) Shanblum, "Ladies Hebrew Relief Society," in "Sketch of Jewish Institutions of Fort Worth," *The [Fort Worth] Jewish Monitor*, September 10, 1915.

³⁷ The *mikvah* is mentioned in the Ahavath Sholom minutes twice previously, on Oct. 12, 1902, p. 80, and April 15, 1903, p. 93. The first time, a committee proposes that the *mikvah* be constructed on the east side of the building. The second time, the plans move it to the northeast corner.

had stopped him from answering Ahavath Sholom's call for a rabbi in December of 1903. Geller writes that he could not move his family to Fort Worth because his wife, Sara, "refused to even live in a community that did not have a *mikvah*. She held the strong conviction that all financial and material exigencies were secondary to the purity and *kedushah* [holiness] which her ethical and moral code demanded."³⁸

In November of 1904, eighteen months after creation of the Ladies Hebrew Relief Society, the Yiddish minutes report that a *mikvah* was completed at a cost of \$439.82.³⁹ Possibly the trustees were shamed by criticism from the Galveston rabbi. Possibly, the new immigrants desired that bit of tradition in their lives. Possibly, the success of the Ladies Hebrew Relief Society and the women's new assertiveness had led Ahavath Sholom's officers to finance construction of the city's first ritual bath.

In addition to the Ladies Hebrew Relief Society, there were other spin-off organizations from the Orthodox congregation. Fort Worth City Directories and newspaper articles mention a Young Men's Hebrew Association, a Hebrew Free Loan Association, Pioneers of the West, the Fort Worth Zionist District, the Ahavath Zion Society, and Young Men and Daughters of Zion.

A B'nai B'rith lodge formed in 1901 with its membership drawn mainly from among unaffiliated Jewish men. It met at the Knights of Pythias lodge. Its handful of Orthodox Jewish members included L. F. Shanblum, who was a charter officer. The Council of Jewish Women formed a Fort Worth Section in 1901. The Council mainly appealed to American and German-born Jewish women, although among its Fort Worth members were Sarah Levy Shanblum and a few other native Texans whose fathers and spouses were congregants at Ahavath Sholom. It was through the Council's efforts that the Reform congregation was revived in 1904. For a decade, thereafter, the Council functioned as the temple auxiliary.

Each of these clubs and subgroups opened leadership positions for Jews and created avenues for interaction with the non-Jewish community. For example, one of the city's leading Baptist preachers, the fundamentalist Reverend J. Frank Norris, visited

³⁸ Shmuel Geller, *Mazkeres Ahavah: Remembrance of Love* (Zichron Yaakov, Israel: Institute for Publication of Books and Study of Manuscripts, 1988), 36-37.

³⁹ Ahavath Sholom minutes, November 12, 1904, p. 147.

Eretz Yisrael and returned an ardent Zionist. He was invited to speak at the monthly meeting of the Fort Worth Zionist District. To introduce the reverend, the Zionists invited a man of equal stature—the rabbi at the Reform congregation, who, although not a Zionist, accepted the honor. The organization customarily concluded its meetings with the singing of the Zionist anthem *Ha-Tikvah*. That evening, however, the group also sang *The Star Spangled Banner* and *Dixie*.⁴⁰ The guests on the podium and the musical selections demonstrate how these Orthodox Jews balanced and blended American, Southern, and Jewish norms.

The activities and growth of Fort Worth’s turn-of-the-century Orthodox community reflect steady acculturation. As congregants became fluent in English and the local vernacular, they developed ties to politicians at City Hall and to mainline ministers. Despite small numbers and meager funds, the Orthodox community emerged as a player on the civic stage. The trajectory of the Orthodox in Fort Worth was neither insular nor assimilationist. They sought to integrate collectively into the mainstream while maintaining their distinct group identity. As Leonard Rogoff has observed among Orthodox communities in North Carolina, “We see the interplay between newcomers and host society. . . . The immigrant group retains its ethnic difference but constantly renegotiates its relations with the larger society as it blends old and new.”⁴¹

Fort Worth’s Ahavath Sholom presents a case study of a turn-of-the-century synagogue that invites further comparisons—comparisons with Orthodox synagogues in nearby Dallas and Waco; comparisons with congregations in small towns where a Reform temple and a traditional shul co-exist; comparisons with small towns where an Orthodox congregation created in the late-nineteenth century galvanized formation of a Reform congregation. By 1927, roughly eighteen percent of the nation’s small-town Jewish centers “were served by rival congregations,” meaning a Reform temple and an Orthodox or Conservative shul.⁴² Ahavath Sholom should be studied in conjunction with these communities, particularly those in which the Reform congregation came into being as an alternative to the Orthodox.

⁴⁰ *The [Fort Worth] Jewish Monitor*, November 26, 1920 and December 10, 1920.

⁴¹ Rogoff, *Homelands*, 2.

⁴² Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 165.

The relevance of regionalism appears to be minimal in the evolution of Ahavath Sholom.⁴³ A chorus of *Dixie* may have added flavor and esprit de corps to public gatherings, but little else. Ahavath Sholom became distinctively “conservadox,” combining elements of Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, rather than distinctively Southern. Its patterns of development demonstrate that Southern congregations did not have to be classically Reform to gain acceptance. The congregation’s small-town setting had more influence upon its development than its geographic locale. The pull of Jewish traditions, the call of Zionism, and the push toward capitalism, pluralism, and volunteerism shaped this early Jewish community in a manner consistent with other immigrant congregations acclimating to American soil.

⁴³ Mark K. Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style*, Brochure Series of the American Jewish Archives, No. XIX, 1996.