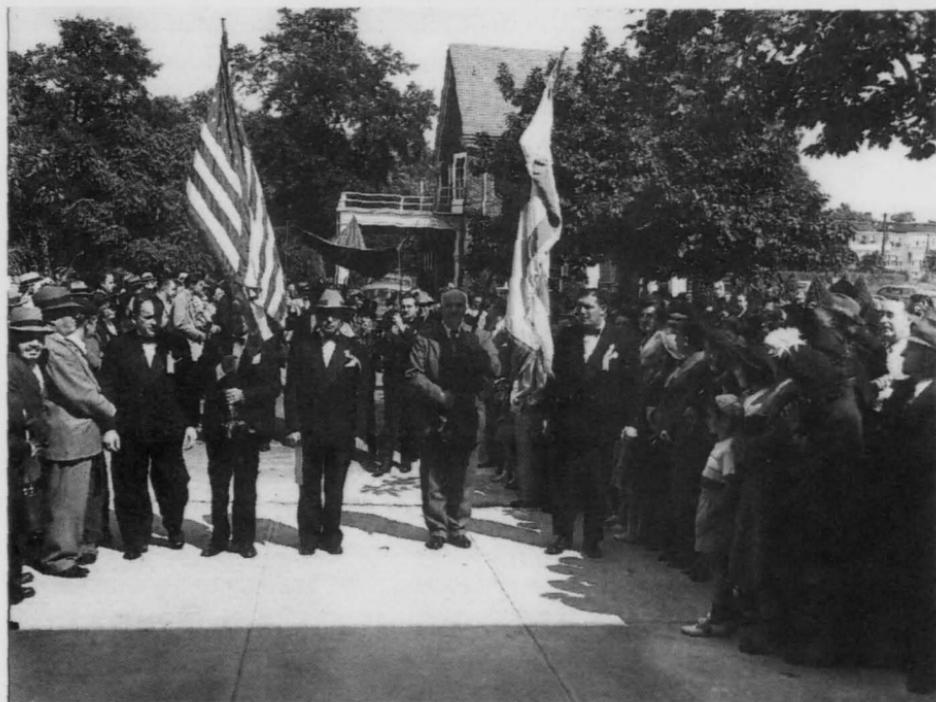


Cultural Historical Studies of Jews in Pennsylvania: A Review and Preview

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Photo courtesy Dauphin County Historical Society



Dedication of Keshet Israel synagogue (Orthodox), Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1948. The flag-bearers are carrying American and Israeli flags. Behind the flag bearers is the Torah underneath the hupah. Photo by Arnold Zuckerman.

Since the 1950s, study of the Jewish Pennsylvania experience has owed much to Maxwell Whiteman's weighty narrative of Philadelphia's Jews.¹ The story he recounted emphasized the centrality of Philadelphia to Jewry in Pennsylvania, and its connection in a vertical line to the other eastern seaboard cities of New York and Baltimore. Making the case for the integration of Jews into American society, apparently in awe of the assimilation-minded Oscar Handlin, Whiteman and his cohorts joined Jewish history to a generalized immigrant experience that evolved from uprooted folk culture to integration within a promising American life.² In *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia* (1956), Whiteman together with Edwin Wolf II proclaimed that "the story of Jewish immigration to the United States is the story of all immigration here.

Irishmen, Italians, and Jews all fled from impossible economic conditions. Puritans, Quakers, and Jews all fled religious persecution. The Merchants of the Virginia Company, the Dutch of New Amsterdam, and Jews all sought the adventure and promise of untapped resources and unexplored land.”³ In various versions of the narrative, America was the golden land of asylum, freedom, and opportunity where Jews joined other “great movements of masses, many different people at different times, impelled by forces beyond their control, to seek a common goal.”⁴ An impetus to this historical reflection was the observation that mass immigration to America had ended, and together with the Holocaust and World War II, the United States witnessed the end of East European Jewish folk culture.

This approach reflected general post-World-War II concerns stressed in the journals of Jewish historical agencies such as the American Jewish Historical Society for combating anti-Semitism by locating Jews pridefully into a pluralistic American consensus.⁵ It offered a parade of American Jews worthy of fame to signal widespread positive ethnic participation within a patriotic American pageant. Indeed, Whiteman and Wolf sang the praises of America’s promise in Jonas Phillips’s letter of 1776 in Yiddish explaining the significance of the Declaration of Independence to an Amsterdam correspondent. At the prologue to their history of Philadelphia’s Jews, Phillips’s letter served as a central symbol of Jewish integration into the American experience. Their narrative, they asserted, “is the story of individuals, many of whom contributed significantly to the progress of Philadelphia, and of a religious group which, from small beginnings, has become an integral and important part of the diversity which is the city’s life today.”⁶ Whiteman and Wolf boosted the image of Jews for their energetic individual and collective contributions to a spreading American civilization.

Agitating for historians to add the story of Pennsylvania Jews to the dominant historiography of Quakers and Germans in Philadelphia, Whiteman repeatedly reminded Jewish historians of their tendency to center American Jewish cultural life and historical drama primarily in New York City. From the 1950s to the 1980s he felt lonely in his advocacy for the richness of the Philadelphia Jewish field toward an ethnic history of Pennsylvania and America. In 1975, he quipped that his “only disappointment” in his career “has been that there are not young historians of the Philadelphia Jewish community who, like those of American academia as a whole, have relegated their predecessors to the polite limbo of ‘elders.’”⁷ It was a refrain he loudly sang until his death in 1995.

Reflecting on the silencing of Whiteman’s prolific pen, I felt prompted to review the shift of Jewish cultural historical inquiry to issues of community and cultural tradition, identity, and continuity. With the passing of Whiteman’s “elders” influenced by Cold War politics and mid-twentieth-century anti-

Semitism, I reflected on their narratives devoted to creating ethnic leaders and heroes who early in the emergence of the United States helped move the nation toward a pluralistic consensus. In leading the campaign to join Jewish events into a chronological order of American nation building, their generation gave way to revisionist students who situated studies in the swirling social patterns of the recent past, examining the separatism of multiple ethnic communities especially associated with Pennsylvania. Many of the new studies used sources outside of traditional historical analysis limited to written documents, making use of fieldwork methods as part of ethnographic and folklife perspectives on the *distinctiveness*, *diversity*, and *contrastability* of the Jewish experience within the problem of the production and consumption of culture. Yet as historical interpretation increasingly incorporated ideas of the past as a form of tradition encompassing everyday life, and cultural expressions toward the goal of identifying social patterns of behavior and thought, the goal of identifying experience rather than political impact became more central. Indeed, efforts during the 1950s scholarly pluralist advocates such as Alfred Shoemaker and Don Yoder used Pennsylvania-German culture as an ethnic experience to challenge models of American melting. They arguably stood at the vanguard of a national movement for considering folklife as a form of historical analysis.⁸ With this in mind, I offer a preview of Jewish cultural historical effort and scope in the state of Pennsylvania.

One place to begin is the Jewish presence in colonial Philadelphia so often hailed as signifying that Jews were present, if problematically, at the creation of the nation. The grounding of historians' primary attention to Jewish life in colonial Philadelphia is evident in Jacob Marcus's confident assertion in 1953 that colonial Philadelphia "sheltered the most important Jewish community in the United States, though by no means the oldest."⁹ His effort was to identify in documents the Jewish contributors to emergence of the American Republic such as Haym Solomon, Barnard Gratz, David Franks, and Nathan Levy. This group represented for him "people of culture and wealth," "city-folk, as were most Jews in the colonies" who were tempted to join the wide American impulse for "larger opportunity" westward.¹⁰ Marcus detected in letters and other documents concerns from these folk for their Jewish identity within Philadelphia society. He struggled to explain the rift with the "assimilationist" David Franks who was "determined to become a British gentleman in the fullest sense of the term" with his brothers Naphtali and Moses. "Though native Americans, [they] had gone 'home' to England—not only for commercial reasons, but also to live in a large Jewish community where there were a number of other coreligionists who enjoyed an enviable economic and social status."¹¹

Beyond knowing the leading actors in the nation's opening drama, cultural questions remain of the traditions and performances, indeed the bor-

ders, that needed to be negotiated to form New World identities among individuals from varied backgrounds. After Manuel Josephson arrived in Philadelphia from a German principality he immediately observed differences from the institutions he knew as a Jew residing in Europe. In 1784, he implored the board of directors of Philadelphia's Congregation Mikveh Israel to maintain continuity with tradition by building a *mikveh*, a bath traditionally used for purification rites. He openly warned the synagogue that without such continuity, the city's Jews would be "equal as with a different nation or sect."¹² He must have been surprised to find that *Ashkenazim*, or fellow Jews with a central European background, followed a *Sephardic* or Spanish liturgy. He must have wondered what kind of place Pennsylvania would turn out to be for living a Jewish life as he read in the German press about Jews scattered in Lancaster, Easton, and Reading. In 1795, some of his fellow Dutch and German *Ashkenazim* left Mikveh Israel to organize a second congregation in the city. The first secession within a pioneer congregation in the United States, it signaled a series of discussions among American Jews, sometimes escalating into arguments, about the character of Jewish tradition in Pennsylvania particularly, and its relation to the idea of America generally.

The traditions of Jews in Pennsylvania are more than a matter of charting religious difference between rites of Sephardim and *Ashkenazim* that has been at issue over three centuries of Jewish presence in the region. Of concern was the location of Jews in a new American community. Opinions could be heard about where Jews as an often-persecuted minority could best prosper and openly practice their traditions. Although the highest concentration of Jews in the early years of Jewish settlement was in urban Philadelphia, a number of Jews put down roots in towns throughout Pennsylvania. In fact, the first inland Jewish settlement in the United States formed in Lancaster with the organization of a place of worship and burial in 1747. As the country opened up and Jews were drawn to Pittsburgh and other towns on the way, sometimes difficult choices about living a Jewish religious life had to be made. When the Lancaster Jewish community was on the decline in the 1780s, 50-year-old Andrew Levy, a father of seven children, wrote of his desire "to remove to a place where a Congregation of our Society [is] and that I might bring up my children as Jews—this my Dear Sir is part of my troubles & which I often consider of, for a family to be remote from our Society [a Jewish community] is shocking."¹³ If worries arose about the ability of a Jewish life to persevere in the Pennsylvania countryside, other locations appeared even less desirable. Rebecca Samuel wrote of her Petersburg, Virginia, home in 1791: "When the Jews of Philadelphia or New York hear the name Virginia, they get nasty. And they are not wrong! It won't do for a Jew." "Here Jewishness is pushed aside," she complained. "The way we live now is no life at all. We do not know what the Sabbath and the holidays are."¹⁴

The concern of Rebecca Samuel and others pointed to the emerging position of Jews as a separable “ethnic” as well as a religious group in America. In many scattered locations Jews identified themselves or were identified by others as culturally different in addition to being religiously distinctive. Jews came to America from various national backgrounds but were associated with an ancient tradition in the land of Israel. Indeed, early newspapers often referred to them as “Hebrews” or “Israelites.” In the early history of Pennsylvania, many Jews were of Sephardic background and hailed from South America, the Caribbean, and the Netherlands. Added to this tiny population were Ashkenazic Jews from central Europe who came in increasing numbers through the nineteenth century.

As American Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors scrutinized the intersection of cultural practice with the national backgrounds of new arrivals calling themselves Jews, the analysis of social change for Jews in Pennsylvania necessarily became subject to more numerous categories beyond those of Ashkenazic and Sephardic. From the late-nineteenth century until immigration restrictions effectively closed the American gates of entry in 1924, a wave of “traditional” Jews, associated with east European folk culture, especially from Poland and Russia, was subjected to progressive efforts to Americanize and reorganize their visible difference and folkness into an assimilable faith. After World War II, many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, most from central and eastern Europe, came to build new lives in Pennsylvania. The largest survivor concentration was in the Philadelphia area. They redirected some of the inquiry to psychological adjustment and a renewal of the assimilation process. During the 1980s, several thousand new immigrants arrived from the former Soviet Union, Israel, and other Middle East countries, settling mostly in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and other metropolitan areas. With ideas of multiculturalism challenging progressive views of inevitable assimilation in the nationalizing American context, the new influx suggested in-situ examination of the immigrant and community-forming process. Yet arguably Jews had lost the racialized “minority” status characterizing the focus of much of modern ethnic scholarship. Jewish scholars often found themselves infelicitously left out of the multicultural discourse on community diversity and contrastability.

One response to shifting definitions of Jewish ethnicity has been to shift Jewish self-examination to the group’s perception and creative selection of cultural characteristics. In *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism* (1998), David Biale offers that “Jews are an ethnic group, but not an ethnic group traditionally conceived. Neither are they characterized by uniform religious practice or belief. The instability and multiplicity of Jewish identity, which has a long history going back to the Bible itself, has become even more true today.”¹⁵ The paradox of cultural historiography, then, is that one can

draw a portrait of Jews as one of the most quickly and thoroughly acculturated ethnic-religious groups, and at the same time, one of the most resistant to complete assimilation. This driving question itself is a symptom of the diaspora tradition, and indeed way of thinking (referred sometimes as a “ghetto mentality”), of Jews as guests of a host state.¹⁶ The answer requires an assumption of Jewishness as something whole to preserve or escape. Ethnographic and folklife approaches that get at experience, community, and identity may rephrase the question to symbolic forms of expression that are enacted variously within different cultural scenes.

Photo courtesy Dauphin County Historical Society



Model Passover Seder, Harrisburg Hebrew School, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1951. The banner above the stage exhorts the community "To Save Lives, Strengthen Israel, and Aid Democracy." Photo by Arnold Zuckerman.

Describing the Jewish experience within the frame of immigrant or multicultural history complicates the varied definitions of Jewishness as distinct from Judaism, and therefore discrete from the bulk of American immigrants and minorities assumed to share Christian ideals. While Jews who came may have been religiously attached to Judaism, some, especially in the twentieth century, have identified themselves as “ethnic” or “cultural” Jews in the sense

that they thought of themselves as expressing traditions associated with Jewish life—such as speech, foodways, and customs—even if they did not affiliate with a synagogue or observe religious rites. Within Jewish history, there have also been a number of political and social organizations from the Workmen's Circle to the Society for Ethical Culture based on Jewish values without reference to synagogue life. People have also identified emotionally with Jewish ethnicity or associated with other Jews although they did not articulate particularly “Jewish” traditions.

So the issue arises: who is a Jew in American society? The U.S. Census is of little help because following a policy of church-state separation it has refused to count Jews because of their religious status. Because congregational membership represents only a portion of those claiming a Jewish identity, it is difficult to exactly account for the number of Jews in America. In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) launched a National Jewish Population Survey and estimated Pennsylvania's Jewish population at 330,000—the fifth largest in the nation. At 2.8 percent of the total state population, the 1990 figure represents a decline from estimates made in 1984 (412,210, or 3.5 percent) and 1980 (419,730, or 3.6 percent).¹⁷ The best estimate for the peak of Jewish population in Pennsylvania is that it occurred around 1960 (454,600). According to the CJF's estimates, the largest concentration of Jews is in Philadelphia (250,000), followed by Pittsburgh (45,000), lower Bucks County (14,500), Harrisburg (6,500), and Allentown (6,000). In relation to other ethnic groups, if counted as a nationality, Jews would rank eighth in the state, roughly comparable in numbers to people claiming Slovak, Netherlands Dutch, and French ancestries.¹⁸ As a religious group, Jews are sixth in the state after Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists, but ahead of members of the United Church of Christ, Episcopalians, and Mennonites.¹⁹ The predominant cultural background of Pennsylvania's Jews is Ashkenazic, with European roots in Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Austria-Hungary, Ukraine, and Russia. With recent immigration and interest in conversion, renewed ethnic diversity within American Jewish folklife is even more apparent. A congregation of African-American Jews, Tabernacle Beth El, for example, has been established in Center City Philadelphia.²⁰

Ethnographic and folklife approaches focus on the symbolic significance of the local setting and communicative behavior within it as attractive ways to analyze diverse groups who often create a separate character even within individual synagogues and ethnic organizations. The U.S. Census is not useless, however, in writing Jewish cultural history. It provides significant aggregate cultural data on language. A feature of identifying Jewish ethnicity has been its attachment to distinctive languages and dialects. The language of prayer for the most part is Hebrew and a number of Jews of east European background are familiar with Yiddish. Yiddish derives largely from German gram-

mar and vocabulary with influences of Hebrew and Slavic languages. It probably has its dialectical roots in the Rhineland region that led to formation of the Pennsylvania-German dialect. It flourished as German Jews moved east to Poland, Romania, and Russia after persecutions in Central Europe during the Middle Ages. In 1970, the Census reported Yiddish as the fourth leading non-English mother tongue in Pennsylvania after German, Italian, and Polish. Over 120,000 speakers of Yiddish could be located in the state. By 1990, however, the figure had dropped to less than 10,000 speakers.²¹ Yet many Yiddish words and phrases have become part of Jewish, and for that matter, national everyday speech. Use of *nosh* (snack), *meshuge* (crazy), *mensch* (decent human being), *shlemiel* (a fool), *shikse* (non-Jewish woman), and *shlep* (to drag), to name a few, regularly peppers American speech.²² The exclamation *oy* can be used, consciously and unconsciously, as an affective marker of ethnicity in many conversations. Some Yiddish proverbs and sayings persist among American Jews, and some commentators have noticed Yiddish influence on an identifiable “Jewish English” in the United States.²³ Even when Yiddish words are not used, syntax and inflection of Jewish English speakers may reflect historic Yiddish patterns. The rhetorical usage of Yiddishisms in documented conversational “performances” over time deserves more attention in cultural history as symbolic communication revealing ethnic process. While typical linguistic attention to these patterns suggests the demise of distinctive language communities as a mark of assimilation, Rakhmiel Peltz in the historical-ethnographic study *From Immigrant to Ethnic Culture* (1998) identified in South Philadelphia cycles of Yiddish usage that varied in the life cycle among children of immigrants. Revising the narrative of necessary assimilation, Peltz uncovered varying patterns in the private realm of family and the public arena of the mixed community. “Historiography,” he wrote, “has often neglected an essential dimension of ethnicity that pertains to most Jews: the activities and emotions that inhabit the private sphere, the domain of primary institutions—namely, the family. Thus, scholarship about the experience of the mass of Jewish immigrants who arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century and the lives of their descendants often focuses on institutions, such as the daily press, or on individual leaders. The resulting picture, which omits the thoughts and emotions of the people themselves, is necessarily a limited one.”²⁴

Among the Jewish communities in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia developed as host to the fourth largest Jewish population in the United States. Although Philadelphia has garnered the most historical and cultural attention, the story of Jews in Pennsylvania is not the city’s alone.²⁵ Pittsburgh’s dramatic rise as a Jewish center in the twentieth century deserves recognition in the context of the growth of industrial America.²⁶ With factories attracting many immigrants from Eastern Europe, Pittsburgh increased its Jewish population six-fold from 1900 to 1920. A distinctive Jewish section arose before

suburbanization affecting many cities altered the settlement patterns of the city.²⁷ Other industrial centers during this period that attracted East European Jews included Allentown, Easton, Altoona, Erie, Harrisburg, Hazleton, Johnstown, McKeesport, Reading, Scranton, and Wilkes-Barre. They cannot be easily lumped together, however. For the historian interested in ethnic migration and adaptation, these communities hold varied backgrounds. Scranton, for instance, is notable for attracting a sizable contingent of Turkish Sephardim in addition to Russian Ashkenazim.

By the 1960s, Harrisburg with a count of congregational members estimated at 6,500 overtook Scranton as the state's third largest metropolitan Jewish community (although Wilkes-Barre, together with nearby Scranton, in 1960 brought the population figure close to 11,000). Harrisburg's Jewish community comprised mostly Germans and in 1853 it established its first synagogue. By the late nineteenth century the city had a strong contingent of Lithuanian and Russian immigrants. They established a synagogue named Chisuk Emuna B'nai Russia. The orthodox Kesher Israel was added in 1901 and a Hasidic synagogue in 1904. A Jewish Community Center was built in 1958 in the center of the uptown section of the city where most of the city's Jews resided. With some movement into the predominantly gentile suburbs of the West Shore, a Reconstructionist synagogue arose in Mechanicsburg.

In 1994, the kind of detailed community survey documenting cultural practices that was unavailable to Whiteman and his cohorts was completed for Harrisburg. The first such survey organized for a Pennsylvania city, it was modeled on a survey of Jews in New York City sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York City in 1991. From the tone of previous historical and social studies, the expectation was that Harrisburg's experience of a small, scattered population within a mid-sized city would provide stark contrasts to the marked Jewish presence in New York City. Indeed, the Harrisburg survey showed that the residence of Harrisburg's Jews had diffused but still remained concentrated on the East Shore area of the Susquehanna River. While two-thirds of the marriages were between Jews, one-third were interfaith (the national average for intermarriage at the time of the survey was reported by various organizations as between 28 and 50 percent). Also reported was that the Harrisburg area had high rates of affiliation at the orthodox and liberal ends of the spectrum. Yet Harrisburg revealed one of the highest identification of observant and "ethnic" Jews: 10 percent identified themselves as Orthodox, 33 percent as Conservative, 22 percent as Reform, 4 percent as Reconstructionist, and 32 percent as "just Jewish."

While some measures existed previous to the 1990s for denominational affiliation, the surveys of the 1990s made a special effort to question cultural practices of those identifying themselves as Jews (see table 1). This concern arose because of the growing non-religious definition of Jewish identity. Many

Jewish organizations wanted to therefore quantify the bases of identity in the kinds of traditions providing continuity from one generation to another and offering a sense of “community” or social connection for an increasingly diffused and intermarried population. The Harrisburg survey reported that 86 percent of households always or usually do one of the following: light Hanukkah candles, attend a Passover seder, light Sabbath candles, or keep kosher. Over ninety percent always or usually follow one of these practices and/or belong to some Jewish organization or synagogue and/or give to Jewish charities. Probably indicating the rise of Hanukkah as an answer to Christmas, one statistic alarming traditionalists was that more Jews in Harrisburg lit Hanukkah candles (85 percent of households in which all members are Jewish and 59 percent of those in which one was Jewish; the New York City average was 87 and 69 percent, respectively) than Sabbath candles (24 percent of totally Jewish households and only 1 percent of interfaith households; 53 and 19 percent in New York). In fact, 78 percent of the interfaith households reported having a Christmas tree and even 6 percent of the “Jewish” couples said they had one in their homes. Judging from the survey the most common identifying custom among Harrisburg Jews was to hang a *Mezuzah* on the door, followed closely by lighting Hanukkah candles and attending a seder. The least popular custom was refraining from electricity on the Sabbath (8 percent of Jewish households) and keeping kosher in public (13 percent of totally Jewish households). Yet 34 percent of the Harrisburg respondents claimed they kept kosher in the home.²⁸

Table 1: Religious Practices of Harrisburg Jews by Household Type

Harrisburg (1994)		
Percentage Reporting Engaging in Activities:		
	Interfaith (Jews/Non-Jews)	Jews Only
Has Christmas Tree in Home	78	6
Refrains from Electrical Use on Sabbath	1	8
Lights Sabbath Candles	1	24
Eats Kosher Out	1	13
Eats Kosher in Home	2	34
Has Mezuzah on Door	34	87
Attends Passover Seder	38	84
Lights Hanukkah Candles	59	85

(Source: UJC Community Study of Harrisburg)

Table 2: Religious Practices of Jews in New York City by Household Type

New York City (1991)		
Percentage Answering "Yes" to Following Statements:		
	Interfaith (Jews/Non-Jews)	Jews Only
Never Has a Christmas Tree	32	93
Fasts on Yom Kippur	43	70
Attends High Holy Day Services	32	66
Lights Shabbat Candles	19	53
Attends Purim Celebration	15	38
Uses Separate Dishes for Milk And Meat	7	31
Attends Holocaust Commemoration	8	25
Handles No Money on Shabbat	7	22
Celebrates Israeli Independence Day	8	21
Attends Synagogue Weekly	3	18
Fasts on Fast of Esther	2	12
Attends Passover Seder	80	94
Lights Hanukah Candles	69	87

(Source: UJA-Federation of New York City 1991 Population Study)

The typically unsurveyed Jews scattered in small towns had a variety of distinctive experiences of loss and renewal. A place like Middletown in Dauphin County lost most of its Jews by the 1970s and it appeared that a developer's bulldozer would remove evidence of the community's old-fashioned *shul* (Orthodox Synagogue). Concerned citizens placed the building on the National Register of Historic Places, and reorganized the congregation with members from surrounding towns. Services led by a lay leader are now held once a month rather than weekly and for the high holy days. Once threatened with oblivion, the congregation has grown as more Jews have moved from the Harrisburg core into the outlying Hershey area and others have been drawn to the intimate setting of the historic building in contrast to some of the slick "Bar Mitzvah factories" of the larger urban synagogues. To be sure, many historic synagogues have not been revived, but there are scattered efforts toward preservation of the sites, particularly in the towns of the "coal region."

Probably the most extensive study of the rise and decline of Jewish town life is Ewa Morawska's *Insecure Prosperity* (1996) about Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It offers valuable cultural insights drawn from abundant socioeconomic data and fieldwork. She describes the way Johnstownners worked together as a

community and adjusted their socially accepted ways of ritual practice. She writes: "Although more pliable than in Eastern Europe, this range of group-sanctioned and practiced behavior was stricter, however, than in the big cities."²⁹ Especially important was observance of the Sabbath, dietary laws (*Kashrut*), and charity (*Tzedakah* in Hebrew). She found that "the ethnicization of Johnstown Jews' sociocultural life contained a more substantial, and more visible, component of old-country traditional patterns, or, differently put, a proportionately larger share of continuity than of change."³⁰ Yet this continuity existed, she reports, with only limited segregation between Jewish and dominant groups, little developed or virtually nonexistent group ethnic networks, and the presence of routine, usually formal-institutional, social contacts between Jews and members of the dominant groups.³¹ Suggestive for cultural historical studies is her interpretation of the Jewish ethnic worldview from these patterns. It includes varying perceptions of ethnic self-identification in city and small-town life and the particular kind of collective insecurity that arose. She found a pattern shifting over time from socially embedded folklife to a more individualized Jewish identity.

The interpretation of historic Jewish settlements that are difficult to generalize into Whiteman's Jewish "masses" provides interdisciplinary challenges from archaeology, oral history, and folklife. Most prominent, or just most mysterious, among the earliest vanished settlements is one in what is now Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania. Documents identify the location as home to a small group of Jewish settlers around 1759. Great speculation has revolved around a mysterious group who may have established a community even earlier. Julius Friedrich Sachse described it in the 1890s as unique German "Jewish Christians" who were Indian traders. He wrote: "Several German families not content with a partial following of the Mosaic code returned to the old dispensation, and with these accessions quite a Jewish community was formed in Lancaster County [before Schaefferstown became part of Lebanon County]. They built a log house of worship on an old Indian trail 'the first synagogue in the American desert.' They employed a Hazzan [cantor], whose home adjoined the synagogue. Nearby they buried their dead. To what extent these practices actually made Jews of these theologically confused Christians, we are not in a position to say."³² Material remains of, and oral traditions about, these early communities persisted in Schaefferstown more than a century after the settlers had disappeared. David Brener even asserted in 1976 that the custom of some townspeople of not mixing milk and meat derived from the Jewish dietary laws of the early communities.³³

Among the vanished legacy of Jews in Pennsylvania are a number of isolated Jewish families who set up shop in tiny hamlets in the highlands. In the early twentieth century, the Hurwitzes of tiny Karthaus, Pennsylvania, operated a general store in the mountain village and were the only Jews for

many miles. Yet they observed tradition and held to their identities. Such oral accounts as I have collected display a reckoning of individual responses to cultural and religious isolation rather than the homogenizing tendency to generalize ethnic behavior from the experience of Philadelphia's Jews. In many nineteenth-century locations, Jewish peddlers came through remote areas of the Pennsylvania countryside and left a tangle of ethnic interrelations for later historians to unravel. The mobile, entrepreneurial Jews stood out in the eyes of their Christian customers, judging from legends scattered in local annals. I have heard several narratives from elderly Mahantango Valley residents who recall Jewish peddlers using Yiddish to communicate with Pennsylvania-German-speaking farmers. There has been speculation that Martin Seltzer, who inscribed German script on Pennsylvania baptismal certificates around 1860 and signed his name in Hebrew accompanied by a Star of David, may have been an itinerant German-Jewish peddler who brought blank *Taufscheine* among his wares.³⁴

Worthy of more study in a cultural history of twentieth century Jewish tradition and identity are temporary communities, including summer camps and ethnic "bungalow colonies" in the Poconos and in the Catskills mountains across the New York-Pennsylvania border.³⁵ Related to these arranged settings are "organizational" cultures of social associations such as Holocaust survivor groups, Jewish community centers, Yiddish *vinklen* (clubs for Yiddish culture), Workmen's Circle groups (which had a "Philadelphia District"), and *landsmanschaften* (clubs for immigrants from a particular town in eastern Europe).³⁶ Although folklife and ethnographic approaches have tended to focus on ethnic-urban neighborhoods or traditional bounded communities, the reorganization of Jewish culture in suburbia also deserves analysis.³⁷ In their social psychological attention to individual choices and responses to traditions of society, the approaches are also appropriate to an assessment of Jews struggling with issues of identity and continuity in an era concerned about the loss of community among many ethnic groups. Many Jewish organizations during the 1990s have sounded alarms for Jewish survival in an era of high intermarriage rates and declining congregational affiliation.³⁸ Surveys now regularly refer to the growth of American Jews declaring themselves "ethnic" or "cultural" Jews with little or no religious connection.³⁹ This trend is balanced by the growth of a revitalization movement in the traditionalist orthodox wing of Judaism and the rise of institutions and organizations devoted to Jewish religious and cultural renewal (e.g., Jews for Judaism, Toward Tradition, Institute for Jewish Life). Another pattern suggesting examination of the introduction of new traditions is the growth of liberal *Havurot* emphasizing egalitarianism and dedicated to maintaining small discussion groups determining their own religious practices.⁴⁰

Among those with a religious affiliation, substantial diversity exists. Four official Jewish denominations are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. And within the Orthodox label, some religious surveys also identify a pietistic “ultra-Orthodox” wing including Hasidim (who subdivide further into various “courts”). In Pennsylvania, the main ultra-Orthodox group is the Lubavitcher Hasidim who have communities in Philadelphia, Scranton, and Harrisburg and show signs of growth because of high birth rates and aggressive media programming. They have attracted ethnographic attention because of their communal expressions of difference. They have distinctive dress (including long dark coats and symbolic undergarments for men, and special holiday and Sabbath garb), sidecurls and beards (wigs for women in some groups), and kosher food practices. The Lubavitcher group proselytizes among non-Orthodox Jews to follow rites such as the “laying on of tefillin,” that is, wrapping of phylacteries around the arm and head as part of morning prayer. As the Hasidim have successfully installed a giant menorah at the Pennsylvania Capitol during the December holiday season to rival the official Capitol Christmas tree, they have opened a heated discourse on the public representation of religious belief as cultural practice and the acceptable separation of religion and state. Most of the scholarly attention to the Hasidim has been sociological, particularly in the main settlements of New York, treating them as an unusual communal group defying modernistic urban tendencies associated with the United States. Cultural historical issues can become more prominent, however, in the influence of Hasidim on the idea of Jewish renewal reaching many American non-orthodox families. Additionally, the relation of language (most Hasidim are committed to the preservation of Yiddish), politics (there are sects such as Satmar among the Hasidim opposed to Zionism), and religion to expressions of ethnicity in America is critical to many explorations of folklife and ethnography.

The largest group of congregationally affiliated Jews is the more liberal Reformed, which does not feature tefillin use, does not require use of prayer shawls (*Tallis* in Yiddish or *Tallit* in Hebrew) or skullcaps (*Yarmulke* in Yiddish, *Kippah* in Hebrew), and uses more English in its service than the other Jewish groups. Conservative and Reconstructionist groups usually balance adherence to traditional practices with fewer modern adaptations than Reformed. Unlike several other “official” religions, Judaism has a strong folk-cultural dimension that rarely comes into conflict with institutional obligations, probably because observers view their traditions as part of the official religion.⁴¹ The great age and oral transmission of the Jewish religion, periodic threats of persecution and nationalism, and patterns of diasporized community in Judaism have influenced the emphasis on tradition, identity, and continuity as key concepts of the ethnic-religious culture. Judaism encompasses many ethnic variations of religious folklife, and this can be seen in a diversity

of customs as they are practiced by immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

One distinctive traditional feature of Jewish ethnicity is observance of calendar customs based on a lunar calendar. The climax of the year therefore occurs not in December but in September. The New Year is celebrated during *Tishri* (or “beginning”) which is not a set date but usually falls in mid-September. In September 1999, Jews marked the new year 5760 during the “High Holy Days” of *Rosh Hashana* (literally “head of the year”) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement). The holidays include the traditional blowing of the ram’s horn, fasting on Yom Kippur, and casting of crumbs into water (*Tashlich*). Other major holidays include *Sukkot* (“Feast of Booths”) in the fall and Passover and *Shavuot* (“Festival of the Weeks”) in the spring. Religiously, Purim and Hanukah during the winter are traditionally minor festive holidays, but Hanukah has grown culturally in America because of the influence of the Christmas season around the same time. Jewish holidays typically integrate a number of traditions including games, dramas, songs, foods, and dress. Purim, for example, involves costuming by children, performances of a *Purimshpiel* (Purim play), eating of *Hamantashen* (three-cornered pastries), use of noisemakers during religious service, and singing of folk songs. It has gained some importance because of its use to emphasize resistance to anti-Semitism. Recently introduced holidays such as Israel Independence Day and *Yom HaShoah* (memorial for the Holocaust) held during the spring have also become noteworthy observances for a number of Jews. Their political uses as well as for demonstrations of ethnicity and memory are ripe for ethnographic analysis. The distinction of the Jewish calendar as a mark of ethnicity in historical everyday life, or of *contrastability*, is evident in a number of Jewish folklife surveys organized around the weekly and yearly cycle.⁴²

The special weekly cycle of religious Jews also attracts folklife attention in an effort to record cultural historical change. The issue is the way that American public institutions have failed to accommodate Jewish Sabbath observations even in the contemporary age of sensitivity to cultural diversity. Historically, eliminating “blue laws” in Pennsylvania to counter privileging of Christian traditions (and foster consumerism in a service and information economy) has nonetheless left traditions of using Saturdays for public events intact. Most college graduations in Pennsylvania still are scheduled on Saturdays, even though Jews are often part of the student bodies. Although nineteenth-century efforts of the Reformed wing to hold services on Sunday failed to take hold, a slackening of Saturday prohibitions has been apparent in the late twentieth century. A steady increase in Jewish Community Centers in the decades since the 1960s have opened on Saturday afternoons.

Changing Jewish attitudes toward the Sabbath reveal multiple community definitions of practice. Orthodox groups usually insist on keeping the

synagogue and observance of the Sabbath as central pillars of religious life and encourage congregants to live in community near the centers of worship. The traditional Jewish Sabbath begins Friday at sundown and ends Saturday evening. It involves a number of ceremonies that show the folk cultural dimension of Jewish religious practice. Women oversee a candle-lighting ceremony (non-Scriptural in origin) on Friday night and there is a ritualized Sabbath meal. Services on the Sabbath include traditional melodies for prayers and songs of ethnomusicological interest.⁴³ Customs of using a *Tallit* (prayer shawl), being called to the *Bimah* (platform for Torah reading), and touching the carried Torah with fringes of the *Tallit* or a prayer book are regular parts of many services. The conclusion of the Sabbath involves a ritual of separation called *Havdalah*. Candles with multiple wicks are lit and aromatic spices are inhaled. Specially crafted artifacts made by Jewish artisans to hold candles and spices are central to these ceremonies. In addition to the order of the week, the day also merits ritual practice among many Orthodox Jews. Ultra-orthodox educators typically hail the daily laying on of tefillin as symbolic of religious fidelity to tradition, and further single it out as an issue of ethnic distinctiveness. Daily blessings and ritual cleansings before meals are certainly observed among the orthodox but are not typically foregrounded for their ethnic contrastability and symbolic communication. In ethnic-religious studies of Pennsylvania's Jews, therefore, a major consideration is the effort of synagogues to unify the dispersed Jewish community and bring congregations into observance.

If following the weekly cycle has become less noticeable in many Jewish communities, observance of distinctive rites that mark passage in the life course has grown as a mark of continuity. Next to the yearly cycle, life cycle is the most common organization of Jewish folklife studies.⁴⁴ One reason for this emphasis is a birthmark of distinction among Jewish males—circumcision. Although circumcision in America has become a common health procedure often conducted in hospitals, in Jewish tradition it is accompanied with a family ceremony called a *Brit Milah*. It involves ritual specialists called *Mohels* and a designated witness called a *Sandek*. The male child may also have a ritual ceremony to receive a name, called a *Pidyon Ha-Ben*. In recent years, comparable ceremonies have been introduced in America for girls.⁴⁵ Studies of naming patterns and creative alteration of ceremonies offer opportunities for quantifiable cultural historical perspectives. Changes of names in the great wave of immigration were signs of Americanization and given great emotional weight in many examples of Jewish literature. Parents, often of the third and fourth generation after immigration, who choose traditional Hebrew Biblical names as well as modern Israeli forms for their children, raise questions of Jewish renewal within broad American movements for ethnic contrastability.⁴⁶

Distinguishing American Jewish practice from European culture in the twentieth century has been the American emphasis on the coming-of-age ritual, the *Bar Mitzvah*. In addition to expanding the significance and extent of the ceremony, Americans in an egalitarian spirit introduced the *Bat Mitzvah* (usually at 12) for girls to complement the *Bar Mitzvah* (usually at 13) for boys.⁴⁷ The American emphasis on the coming-of-age ceremonies raises cultural historical issues of explaining the distinctiveness of the American Jewish historical and cultural context. While some sociological analysts have proposed that the accentuation of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah in America represented pressures to show status achievement as Jews suburbanized and rose from their “ghetto” past, ethnographers have tended to posit the socially unifying function of the ceremonies among a dispersed assimilating community and the need for coming-of-age rituals in American culture, which generally lacks agreed upon public ceremonies for becoming an adult. Another ethnographic view joins institutional needs within the Jewish community to psychological demands for ethnic identity in mass culture. Many synagogues have increasingly pushed education and preparation for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs (and the relatively recently introduced “confirmation” that follows) to keep families close to the religious centers. The families in turn have given the coming-of-age ceremonies much of the burden of ethnic identity formation.⁴⁸

Another custom involving presentation of ethnic identity that has changed dramatically in the twentieth century has been the Jewish wedding. To be sure, customs in the wedding such as the canopy called a *Hupa* and the smashing of a glass by the groom at the end of the ceremony persist from European tradition and are amply symbolic of Jewish ethnicity in American films and literature.⁴⁹ The Jewish wedding may also be set apart by the ethnic “exuberance” of traditional Jewish music and dance (in contrast to ascribed restraint of gentile celebration), and occasionally a festive lifting of the bride and groom on chairs.⁵⁰ Innovations initiated by the bride and groom within the wedding have been increasingly common since the 1970s, particularly to accommodate interfaith unions; at the same time, efforts toward renewal of *Yiddishkeit* in contemporary weddings have been noticeable.⁵¹ In a revival of an old custom, for example, an illuminated manuscript called a *Ketubah* (marriage contract) is often sought by the couple, displayed at the wedding, and hung in a conspicuous place in the newlyweds’ home. *Ketubot* had been available in printed form (usually kept as a private document by the woman rather than framed and hung as a public statement of identity), but in recent decades, artists have offered a return to the handworked tradition. The old legalistic use of the document has been transformed in the American experience into an ethnic art, but one that showcases the American idea of personalizing romantic love.

The intensity, and contrastability, of Jewish mourning customs have become symbolized for commentaries on interfaith unions and ethnic persistence. An elaborate number of traditions regarding death are maintained by Jews including distinctive burial practices such as use of a plain wood coffin with no nails and the mourning ritual of sitting *Shivah* (seven days), rending of garments, and covering mirrors during the period.⁵² The Jewish cemetery has special traditions setting it apart from Christian practice such as the absence of flowers, leaving of stones on a visited grave, and washing hands after leaving a cemetery.⁵³ While the cemetery makes a public statement of ethnic presence and difference, the *Shivah* commonly expresses private grief of discontinuity that can extend beyond the death of a loved one. The *Shivah* performed when a Jewish child marries a non-Jew is a narrated scenario as a commentary on the split between an older generation and its ideas of maintaining ethnic continuity and a younger generation breaking down prejudicial ethnic barriers to personal relationships. A hotly circulating joke, for example, spread over the Internet, and previously in oral tradition, uses historical American images to confront contemporary issues:

An Indian brave named Sitting Bull comes home to the wigwam and informs his father that he's found a wonderful new Jewish girlfriend and they're getting married. Naturally the father is upset. "Why don't you find a nice Indian girl? It's not right for Indians to marry out. Anyway, I'm sure that Jews feels the same way. Surely, they're not thrilled with having an Indian son-in-law." "Not true!" replies the brave. "They like me so much that they've already given their daughter a new Indian name." "What's that?" says the father. "Sitting Shiva."

If Jews become emotionally rather than materially attached to their ethnic identity in contemporary America as a rift with the past, is there a material culture to observe or preserve? As metropolitan surveys show, the *Mezuzah*, a decorated container for a written blessing put on the upper right-hand side of a doorframe, still holds meaning for presentation of ethnicity. Usually it is found on the front door to mark a Jewish home, but Orthodox Jews will place them on all doors. Designating the material symbol as specially spiritual rather than ethnic, some Orthodox Jews will also kiss a finger that touches the *Mezuzah* as they enter a room. While the *Mezuzah* marks a Jewish home, the synagogue, and often the *Mikveh*, mark a Jewish community. Although often formally designed, the *Mikvehs* have many traditional architectural and artistic features that deserve more cultural attention. Vernacular forms are still evident on the landscape in Pennsylvania, especially in smaller communities, and need documentation. In the interior, the ark and its holy scroll, the center of worship, attracts much ritual of folklife interest. Torahs are still prepared by

hand inscription that is a traditional art form, and its bindings and coverings are often decorated.⁵⁴

Dress and hair treatment within Jewish folklife are often markers of orthodoxy, and today are especially of significance within ethnographic studies of Hasidim.⁵⁵ The long dark garb, holiday robes (*Kittel*), long beards and earlocks, fringed undergarments, and headcoverings worn by men clearly distinguish the Hasidim within modern urban settings.⁵⁶ Variations in presentation of dress among the Hasidim invite comparative examinations with the “plain” dress of Amish, Brethren, and Mennonites. In addition, Jewish orthodox tradition raises comparison with Mormon uses of Jewish symbolism such as the ritual undergarment. Yet the folklife attention to dress as a mark of communal identity can expand beyond the Hasidim to ethnic variation among Jews of various backgrounds and creative choices that so-called secular Jews make in their presentations of their ethnic body images in public discourse. Sander Gilman, for example, has offered insightful historical readings of the cultural sources of attributes of the so-called Jewish nose, foot, and voice.⁵⁷ In many immigrant narratives, clean-shaven faces for men become the essential mark of Americanization. For women it is often losing the kerchief or wig. The male headcovering of the *Yarmulke* remained in American Jewish tradition for most religious use, and today can show modern adaptations as well as subethnic identity among Jews.⁵⁸ Festive occasions are often opportunities to show some of these creative choices and subethnic identities. At one recent celebration, I noticed head-coverings made with Laotian Hmong needlework,

Photo courtesy Dauphin County Historical Society



“Religious Articles” Booth at Family Night at Temple Beth-El (Conservative), Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1953. Behind the women is a poster advertising the “George Washington’s Birthday Ball” at the synagogue celebrating Washington’s public stance on religious tolerance for Jews in 1790.

personalized names hand embroidered into a child's headcovering, Middle-Eastern decorations woven into a cap, and a sports team logo emblazoned on a traditional *Yarmulke*. As with other uses of tradition in historical research, the evidence of folklife and material culture is presumed to be stable; but when change occurs, the implication is that significant social and cultural shifts in need of interpretation are apparent.

A tradition that formerly set Jews apart was a system of dietary laws called *Kashrut*. The complex system of separating meat and milk dishes, precautions against consumption of blood, prescribed slaughtering practices, and prohibitions on the animals that could be eaten encouraged Jews to live in close proximity to one another. Once prevalent among a broad spectrum of Jews, "keeping kosher" today is often a sign of an orthodox home, and kosher restaurants and food preparers cater to this trade. The availability of deep freezers to consumers has made it possible for some of the "outlying" Jews to store kosher foods and maintain traditional practices at home. During the late twentieth century, the kosher trade went beyond a market of Jews to an ethnic and health-conscious audience. Pennsylvania is home, in fact, to Empire Kosher, a major kosher food supplier. Pennsylvania also has many "kosher-style" establishments that offer an ethnic menu of matzoh-ball soup, gefilte fish, halla bread, kasha-varnishkes, rugelach, and knishes. Other foods associated with Jews such as bagels have become staples of American culture and Sam's Club (an offshoot of Wal-Mart), to name one mass-market chain, features rugelach. The adaptation of kosher restaurants to American tastes deserves closer cultural attention; kosher pizza parlors are now common. The Middle-Eastern influence on recent Jewish tradition is also apparent in the rise of establishments selling falafel, hummus, and pita bread. Of cultural-behavioral interest are the choices that individuals make in negotiating the ancient rules of *Kashrut* into modern everyday life. As the Harrisburg community survey showed, some Jews may keep kosher at home but not when they are "out." The majority of Jews who do not "keep kosher" they may nonetheless insist on avoiding pork, shellfish, and mixing meat and milk products. As the Academy-Award-winning movie *Annie Hall* showed in a celebrated delicatessen scene with the Jewish character Woody Allen and the gentile Diane Keaton, Jews may also make food choices on the basis of tradition such as dark rye breads and salted meats, and wince at *goyishe* (gentile) combinations of white bread, peanut butter and jelly, mayonnaise, and milk. Jewish identity can also be invoked at all-American holidays such as Thanksgiving by preparation of a kosher turkey or addition of Jewish festive foods to the table.⁵⁹

While Jewish material culture has attracted attention because of the visible evidence it provides of ethnic difference, oral tradition among Jews should be noted in more historical studies of Pennsylvania. In a religious setting, Biblical and Talmudic legends have a rich oral vitality. Some holidays such as

Hanukah and Purim encourage storytelling on historical themes by parents to their children. The eastern European influence on American Jewish literary as well as oral tradition is evident in folktales and legends woven around magical characters such as wonder-working rabbis, protective angels and warning prophets, eerie ghosts and *Dybbuks* (spirits possessing human bodies), clever *Shadkhans* (marriage brokers) and pragmatic *Shammeses* (synagogue beadles), numbskull residents of *Chelm* (with analogues to the American moron joke), harried *Mohels*, and wisdom-dispensing fools and *schnorrers* (beggars). In the American context, jokes by and about Jews can be easily collected. The immigrant experience and the greenhorn theme produced a number of New World jests of comic misunderstandings. The Jewish dialect-joke, collected extensively by Richard Dorson, is often a comment by younger native-born generations on their position between the tradition of their immigrant forebears and the modernity of assimilated Americans.⁶⁰ The dialect-joke is not exclusively Jewish, but reference to Yiddish and Ashkenazic traditions in the texts often require a Jewish background to appreciate the humor. Jokes without dialect usage comment frequently on anti-Semitism, synagogue and community organizational life, distinctions among the different Jewish denominations, and Jewish family relations.

Other forms of humor can be collected among many non-Jews and may be categorized as the “folklore of Jews” rather than Jewish folklore. The Jew as a historical American folktype has entered into American jokelore that often characterize Jews alongside blacks, Irish, Poles, and Chinese as frequently stereotyped ethnic groups.⁶¹ While themes in lore told by Jews to themselves have shifted particularly to interdenominational tension, issues of intermarriage, and Jewish family relations, the Jew as a folktype in ethnic slurs remains overly concerned with money or learning.⁶² The stereotyped images of Jews in folklore, literature, and art have received significant attention, but the role of the Jew in the folklore of the Pennsylvania countryside, except for a exploratory article in *Pennsylvania Folklife* by Mac Barrick (1985), has been underreported.⁶³ The American contributions to humorous ethnic folktypes have been in the construction of the doting Jewish-American mother (JAM) and the self-indulgent Jewish-American princess (JAP). Folklorist Alan Dundes suggested that JAM and JAP jokes are signs of an American wish fulfillment for modernizing trends in national society—professional success and women’s freedom.⁶⁴ Others may see them as persistent signs of anti-Semitism or Jew-baiting as the modern public Jew becomes less ethnically distinctive. Undoubtedly more will, and should, be said on the subject.

Realizing the humanistic tendency in cultural history toward identification of fixed types persistent over time such as tales and proverbs, many researchers are exploring the uses of the “personal narrative.” A contribution of folklife research has been to encourage recording everyday forms of commu-

nication, including the ways that people customarily narrate their experience in conversation. It is worth asking when tradition is invoked to convey a sense of Jewishness. It is also important to note the ways that Jews and members of other groups define their traditions, values, and identities in explaining the events of the past.⁶⁵ Historians often relegate narrative to facts embedded within "oral history," but such testimonies can also be analyzed as expressive forms, indeed situated performances that convey emotional and cultural meaning. This rhetorical function of narrative has become particularly evident to me in collecting Holocaust testimonies from survivors and narratives of their children. Although as a historian I am anxious to recover the facts from these oral accounts, I also have to pay attention to the way that they are constructed as moralistic stories with historic references to be passed along to friends and family.⁶⁶ Other personal narratives can be heard as family sagas about the immigrant experience, finding long-lost relatives, and maintaining bonds. In the context of intermarriage and decline of community, I also hear narratives that interpret the meaning of Jewish identity in the experience of interfaith couples. They contain repeatable themes that can be analyzed as traditions within discourse.

Folklife research for Jewish communities in Pennsylvania has lagged behind work on the traditions of other ethnic-religious groups such as Mennonites, Amish, and Quakers. A fair amount of documentation is available on Jewish urban neighborhoods and farming communities in New York for comparison, but I would argue that Pennsylvania's social contexts have special features for drawing a picture of American ethnic complexity. The interethnic combinations with the Pennsylvania Germans provide one kind of problem. The special mixes of east and south European immigrants during the period of heavy industrial development of the state offers yet another. Although chronological histories are increasingly being pursued for many Pennsylvania Jewish communities, cultural features of their daily lives need documentation to answer more fully questions of ethnic maintenance, change, and adaptation. The contribution of such research in Jewish cultural history can be to interpret Pennsylvania social contexts and the expressions of traditions within them. As this review should have shown, there are many forms of Jewish cultural history in Pennsylvania that deserve analysis in a reconsideration of the American pluralistic consensus. Even today there is a great range from the communal life of the urban Hasidim to suburban "ethnic" Jews. In Philadelphia there is still the task of interpreting an often-overlooked Jewish "metropolitan homeland" serving as a nostalgic center for a diffused population.⁶⁷ In addition, there are new social borders being created by Russian and Israeli Jews that deserve scrutiny and bring into question the contemporary community-forming and acculturation process.⁶⁸

Beyond Philadelphia are many significant case studies of Jewish ethnic-religious traditions maintained and adapted for a sense of identity. From Manuel Josephson's plea for the first Mikveh to feminist and vegetarian Passover seders today, traditions are invoked for managing Pennsylvania ethnic continuity and social change. Within historical studies of Jewish communities and traditions, one can raise issues about the creation of community by Sephardim in colonial America; the building of a visible built environment in the Pennsylvania city and countryside; relation of industrialization to ethnic patterns in the nineteenth century; confrontation of different Jewish regional groups such as the east Europeans and Germans in the American mix; and interaction of Jews with Pennsylvania-Germans, African-Americans, Italians, Slovaks, Irish, and others in the broad Pennsylvania social landscape. These efforts work toward the widening of social inquiry and deepening of historical interpretation. Rakhmiel Peltz, for example, justly asks about the accuracy of the "typi-

Photo by Simon Bronner



"Old World Folk Band," a klezmer revival band formed in 1982 and based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The costuming of the band (hats and vests) makes references to Jewish roots in the Lower East Side at the turn of the century. In 1994 the band added Russian immigrants to the line-up (third and fourth from left). Here the band is performing at a cultural heritage festival in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, August 1997.

cal story” of consensus: immigrants confined in urban neighborhoods moving to the suburbs, and the subsequent blossoming of Reform and Conservative congregations and community centers, which are depleted of *Yiddishkeit* and coupled with American gentility and progress. Assuming an evolutionary structure over time and ascribing a social unity to the ethnic group, the typical story is giving way to what Peltz calls “the complex portrait” suggesting varieties of historical experience, forms of social conflict, and situated expressions of cultural identity.⁶⁹

Ethnographically, there are many emerging challenges for examining Jewish cultural traditions in the modern world. There is on the one hand, spread and revitalization of the traditional orthodoxy of the Hasidim. On the other is the fragmentation of traditional communal bonds on modernizing, assimilated Jews.⁷⁰ More broadly joined to American studies, many concerns of the Jewish field confront the paradoxical tugs of American individualism and the urge for ethnic, communal vitality within mass society. Accordingly, studies work both inwardly toward distinctive expressions and outwardly toward contexts linked to a supposedly American, or modern, consciousness. One can find significant problems of Jewish cultural historical research in the traditional structures of the synagogue, mikveh, and hupah as well as in the communication networks of suburbia, college campuses, organizations, and with an amazingly growing intensity, the Internet. One has to sort out the cycles of continuity, revival, revitalization, innovation, and dissolution in traditions and the communities of which they are a part. Among interfaith couples, Holocaust survivors, Russian immigrants, men and women, elderly and children, city dwellers and small-town residents, one can situate different patterns of the Jewish cultural theme. Drawing out a cultural history for Jews within the special Pennsylvania scene, a narrative of complex adaptation emerges of the ways that traditions and their social contexts have constituted ethnic self and society. Culture becomes history in its expression of experience organized over time as traditions. Whiteman, searching for those “young historians” of Philadelphia’s Jews, would have been gratified to see their attention to “community” within an expanded Pennsylvania field, even if their concerns for cultural practice and discourse shifted the narrative of the Jewish experience away from an American consensus.

Notes

1. See Maxwell Whiteman, "Philadelphia's Jewish Neighborhoods," in *The Peoples of Philadelphia*, ed. Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller, pp. 231-54 (Philadelphia, 1973); idem., "The East European Jew Comes to Philadelphia," in *The Ethnic Experience in Philadelphia*, ed. John Bodnar (Lewisburg, 1973), 287-308; idem., "Pennsylvania Jewry," in *Penn's Example to the Nations: 300 Years of the Holy Experiment*, ed. Robert Grant Crist (Harrisburg, 1987), 61-84; Edwin Wolf II and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (1956 rpt., Philadelphia, 1975); Murray Friedman, ed. *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940* (Philadelphia, 1983).
2. See Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, Mass, 1941); idem., *The Uprooted* (Boston, 1951); idem., *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* (New York, 1954). Reflecting late in his career on his own struggle with defining his Jewish identity and its influence on his attitude toward the immigrant and American experience, Handlin wrote a confessional essay, "Being Jewish: The Endless Quest," *American Scholar* 66 (1997): 361-76. For a criticism of this approach, see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). Much of Bodnar's evidence came out of his work on Pennsylvania. He tried to chronicle the variety of immigrant experiences in his editing of *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973). For the conceptualization of history as tradition, I suggest Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).
3. Wolf and Whiteman, 8.
4. *Ibid.*
5. See Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Looking at a Jewish Ethnic Journal in the American Scholarly Mainstream," in *An Index to American Jewish Historical Quarterly/American Jewish History, Volumes 51-80 [1961-1991]*, prepared by the American Jewish Historical Society (Brooklyn, 1995), ix-xx; Murray Friedman, "Introduction: The Making of a National Jewish Community," in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia, 1983), 1-25.
6. Wolf and Whiteman, viii. A precedent for this theme is, Henry Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1894).
7. *Ibid.*
8. See chapter 6, "Alfred Shoemaker and the Discovery of American Folklife," in Simon J. Bronner, *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture* (Logan, Utah, 1998), 266-312.
9. Jacob Marcus, *Early American Jewry: The Jews of Pennsylvania and the South, 1655-1790* (Philadelphia, 1953), 3. See also, Murray Friedman, ed., *When Philadelphia Was The Capital of Jewish America* (Philadelphia, 1993).
10. *Ibid.*, 9.
11. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
12. Kenneth Libo and Irving Howe, *We Lived There Too: In Their Own Words and Pictures—Pioneer Jews and the Westward Movement of America, 1630-1930* (New York, 1984), 80.
13. David Brener, *The Jews of Lancaster, Pennsylvania: A Story With Two Beginnings* (Lancaster, 1979), 6.
14. Libo and Howe, *We Lived There Too*, 85-86.
15. David Biale, "The Melting Pot and Beyond: Jews and the Politics of American Identity," in *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susan Heschel (Berkeley, 1998), 31.
16. See Alan M. Dershowitz, *Chutzpah* (Boston, 1991).
17. See Sidney Goldstein, "Profile of American Jewry: Insights from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey," in *American Jewish Yearbook 1992*, ed. David Singer (New York, 1992), 77-176. See also Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984* (Lanham, Maryland, 1990).
18. See Simon J. Bronner, *Ethnic Ancestry in Pennsylvania* (Middletown, Pennsylvania, 1996).
19. See Bernard Quinn, et. al, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990*

(Atlanta, 1992).

20. Mubarak Dahir, "Black Jews Struggle for Acceptance," *Patriot-News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) (April 3, 1993), 2-3.

21. See Rakhmiel Peltz. "Who's Speaking Yiddish in South Philadelphia Today? Jewish Language in Urban America," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 67 (1987): 145-66.

22. See Milton Doroshkin, *Yiddish in America: Social and Cultural Foundations* (Rutherford, New Jersey, 1969); Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley, 1990).

23. See Sol Steinmetz, *Yiddish and English: A Century of Yiddish in America* (University, Alabama, 1986).

24. Rakhmiel Peltz, *From Immigrant to Ethnic Culture: American Yiddish in South Philadelphia* (Stanford, 1998). See also Elaine Krasnow Ellison and Elaine Mark Jaffe, *Voices from Marshall Street: Jewish Life in a Philadelphia Neighborhood* (Philadelphia, 1994); Gail F. Stern, ed., *Traditions in Transition: Jewish Culture in Philadelphia, 1840-1940* (Philadelphia, 1989).

25. See Whiteman, "Pennsylvania Jewry"; Gail Stern, ed., *Transitions in Transition: Jewish Culture in Philadelphia, 1840-1940* (Philadelphia, 1989).

26. Jacob Feldman, *The Jewish Experience in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, 1986); Barbara S. Burstin, *After the Holocaust: The Migration of Polish Jews and Christians to Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1989); Ailon Shiloh, *By Myself I'm a Book!: An Oral History of the Immigrant Jewish Experience in Pittsburgh* (Waltham, Massachusetts, 1972); *Guide to Jewish Collections in the Archives of Industrial Society* (Pittsburgh, 1998).

27. Leonard Kuntz, "The Changing Pattern of the Distribution of the Jewish Population of Pittsburgh, from Earliest Settlement to 1963" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1970).

28. See Mary Klaus, "Area's Jewish Community Profiled Through Study," *Patriot-News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) (December 19, 1994), B6; "Greater Harrisburg Community Study Vital to Community's Planning and Future," *Community Review* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) (January 6, 1995), special

supplement.

29. Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton, 1996), 154-55.

30. *Ibid.*, 185.

31. *Ibid.*, 218.

32. Julius F. Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania, 1708-1800: A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers*, 2 vols. (1899 rpt., New York, 1971), II, 372. See also Charles M. Zerbe, *Annals of Schaefferstown with Some Reference to the Early Jewish Community* (Lebanon, Pennsylvania, 1908); Brener, *The Jews of Lancaster*, 27.

33. David Brener, "Lancaster's First Jewish Community, 1715-1804: The Era of Joseph Simon," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 80 (1976): 211-21.

34. Norman L. Kleebat and Gerard Wertkin, *The Jewish Heritage in American Folk Art* (New York, 1984), 56.

35. See Jenna Weissman Joselit, ed., *A Worthy Use of Summer: Jewish Summer Camping in America* (Philadelphia, 1993); Irwin Richman, *Borscht Belt Bungalows: Memories of Catskills Summers* (Philadelphia, 1998); Phil Brown, "Catskill Culture: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Resort Area Seen Through Personal Narrative and Ethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 25 (1996): 83-119; Maurie Sacks, ed. *The Jewish Catskills* (special issue of *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 19, nos. 1-2, 1997); Stefan Kanfer, *A Summer World: The Attempt to Build a Jewish Eden in the Catskills* (New York, 1989).

36. See Hannah Kliger, "In a Common Cause, In This New Found Country: Fellowship and Farein in Philadelphia," in *Traditions in Transition: Jewish Culture in Philadelphia, 1840-1940*, ed. Gail F. Stern (Philadelphia, 1989), 28-45.

37. See Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (New York, 1994); Albert I. Gordon, *Jews in Suburbia* (Boston, 1959).

38. See Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The New Jewish Identity in America* (New York, 1985); Peter Y. Medding, et. al, "Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages," in *American Jewish Yearbook 1992*, ed. David Singer (New York, 1992), 3-76; Jack

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