

Jews Connected With The History of Pittsburgh 1749-1865

The following material is part of a Master's Theme written by Julia Miller of Pittsburgh in 1930. Data for the thesis was obtained among other sources from the Jewish Criterion, Mr. William Frank's autobiography, Mr. I. Wertheimer's manuscript, the Rodef Shalom archives and the Journals of the Ladies' Aid Society.

Jews As Indian Traders

Jews were among the first traders with the Indians at Fort Pitt. The story of the trading between the native red man and the dark Jewish immigrant sheds a new light on the role played by the Jews in the history of Pittsburgh. Joseph Simon, David Franks, Levi A. Levy, Barnard Gratz, and Michael Gratz were the first Jewish traders here. Between 1749 and 1754 when fur trading was organized from Lancaster to the Forks of the Ohio (now Pittsburgh) and down the Ohio, Joseph Simon was perhaps the first Jew trading with the Indians at Fort Pitt. There is record of his religion in the following statement made by William Riddle: "Few possibly living at the present day have ever heard of Joseph Simon, a worthy, honest Jew."

Joseph Simon arrived in America about 1740 and eventually became the outstanding success of all Indian traders. His store at Lancaster was the distributing center for beaver and other furs from the Ohio Valley. He was by training a silversmith, and exchanged his wares for furs.

Joseph Simon was in partnership in the fur trade with David Franks of Philadelphia, and these men are two of the most remarkable characters of American Jewish history of the eighteenth century; yet historians have ignored them. David Franks, although not very orthodox in his religious views, was a member of a Jewish Congregation, Mickveh Israel.

In 1760 the Jewish Indian traders; Joseph Simon, David Franks, Levi A. Levy, a nephew of Mr. Simon's, living in Lancaster, established together with William Trent the Largest Indian trading firm at Pittsburgh. They were very fortunate to be associated with William Trent, for he was a man of wide experience. In 1754 he built, along with Gen. Gist, the rude cabin which was the inception of what is now the City of Pittsburgh.

It is interesting to note the merchandise, which the Jewish Indian trading firm sold to the Indians. The following list contains some of the typical articles handled. From three long groups listed in the original bill, some of the most popular articles are selected.

Fort Pitt, Mar. 23, 1765

George Croghan Esq.

to Simon, Levy, and Comp'y

For sundries for the Use of the Indians

65 Blanket & Matchcoat Coats	40 Gro: Bed Lace
55 Cloth Ditto, Diff't Colors	30 Lb. Vermillion
37 Pieces strouds	36400 Black Wampum
29 Fine ruff'd Shirts	24100 White Wampum
221/4 Yds. Scarlet Napt	163 Dozen Broaches
52 Pewter Basins, 81 Lb.	136 Wrist Bands
44 Curb Do., with Bosses	107 Pr. Ear Bobbs.

In 1763 the Conspiracy of Chief Pontiac was a terrible misfortune to the Jewish Indian trading firm, for its large trading house at Fort Pitt was plundered and destroyed. This firm likewise lost a large amount of goods, which has been carried by agents into the Indian country. Some years later, in October, 1768, when a council of the English, and the six Nations, Shawanees and Delawares was held at Fort Stanwix, New York, William Trent was the attorney representing the claims of all the sufferers. Through the influence of Sir William Johnson and others, the Indians on Nov. 3, 1768 made a deed of land to Trent in payment of his own claims and those he represented. The tract of land thus conveyed was situated between the Kanawha and Monongahela rivers. Among the twenty-two Grantees appear the names of David Franks, Joseph Simon, Levi A. Levy.

There is a gap in the discussion of the Jewish Indian traders' activities at Fort Pitt from 1766 to 1774, for no information seems to be available although a thorough search has been made.

In 1775 business was very prosperous in Pittsburgh. In April, 1775, Simon and Campbell were easily first among Pittsburgh merchants; while the Gratz brothers, after having reorganized their Western business at the close of Dunmore's War, were becoming firmly entrenched in Pittsburgh. George Croghan managed the Indians in the interest of the Pittsburgh fur trade, and then, the new Illinois Company, which was organized in 1773, brought in a lot of people. In May, 1775, the Virginia Court planned a meeting to put into effect the new 'city plan,' which had been adopted. Pittsburgh was to be changed from a mere trading settlement to the leading Vir-

ginia town of the new West. The most romantic period of Western fur trade closed with the news of the battle of Lexington. The Revolutionary War made it impossible to continue the fur trade, which had been started at Lancaster and through Pittsburgh had extended to the Mississippi Valley.

In July, 1781, George Rogers Clark was recruiting in the Pittsburgh district for the expedition which had been long planned against Detroit. From the store belonging to the Gratz brothers and to Gibson supplies for the campaign were advanced to the extent of one thousand, four hundred twenty-five pounds, sixteen shillings, seven pence, in payment for which Gen. Clark and his adjutant, Col. Dorsey Pentecost, pledged their personal credit as endorsers for Virginia. Unfortunately the expedition failed because of the quarrel of 1774 between Pennsylvania and Virginia. After more than two years, with Col. Pentecost urging Virginia to pay, the firm of Gratz and Gibson had their memorials endorsed as reasonable. Since there was no money in the Virginia treasury, they finally paid in tobacco, the sale of which left a small net loss, to be divided between them.

Role Of Jews In Opening Up The West

Towards the end of the period during which the West was occupied by adventurers, Indian trade was displaced by land relations as the most important phase of the Indian affairs. The first Jews who came to Pittsburgh were not only prominent as Indian traders, but they were also conspicuous as projectors of inland colonies. They were leaders of the vanguard of that mighty host which made the great march across the continent and carved an empire out of an unchartered wilderness.

The aggressive westward push during the period 1730 — 1775, was aided by the moral and financial support of the wealthy merchants. In fact, it was the firm, Simon, Levy, and Company, which made possible the first occupation of the West in 1765, when it advanced to Croghan "Sundries for the Use of the Indians." At this time the French were in possession of the "Illinois Country," where Chief Pontiac retired and refused all overtures of peace; in spite of this circumstance, Croghan determined to penetrate into this Country. With great exuberance of spirit he sent a message for the Indians around Fort Pitt. In it he told of his coming, and asked them to have their peltry collected and to be ready to transact business. Croghan prepared presents of ammunition, dry goods, and liquor, but he left in advance of his convoy of gifts.

Shortly after Croghan arrived at Fort Pitt, news came that the "Black Boys" had attacked his convoy, burned his presents, and threatened his life if he ever returned to Cumberland County. The frontiersmen of Pennsylvania could no longer overlook the burning of their homes and the scalping of loved ones. They objected to the reopening of trade with the savages, to the presenting of large gifts, and especially to letting them have guns and ammunition. When they saw the size of Croghan's convoy and heard rumors that the firm, Baynton, Warton, and Morgan, was illegally sending goods along with the King's presents, they acted quickly. They burned or captured the eighty-one packhorses of goods and saddles.

Since Croghan's presents were destroyed, he faced his work with serious handicaps. For a moment he felt that he ought to resign. In the emergency he went to the firm, Simon, Levy, and Company, at Pittsburgh, and asked for goods out of their warehouse. He inspired them with enthusiasm for his vision of the future of the West and partially repaired his loss with goods to the amount of two thousand one hundred thirty-seven pounds, even shillings, ten and one-half pence, about ten thousand four hundred eight dollars, four cents. Thus the Jews advanced the loan that made possible the first occupation of the Illinois Country, and this territory opened the first business connections between itself and the Atlantic seaboard. Traders, land speculators, and settlers were now greatly spurred on to exploit the Great West.

The Jewish colonists failed in acquiring possessions through their interests in land companies, but their contribution toward opening the west should always be remembered. Alvord, while discussing Franks and Company and its close relation with the Lancaster County traders, says:

"These trading groups formed a much more important element in trade, land speculation, and politics than historians have generally credited them with. All large enterprises were promoted by such groups."

First Jewish Owners Of Land In Pittsburgh and Vicinity

In connection with the Jews who played such an important role as Indian traders and colonizers it is interesting to know, furthermore, that these same men; namely Joseph Simon, David Franks, Levi A. Levy, Barnard Gratz, and Michael Gratz, together with Joseph Meyers and David Jacobs, were the first Jewish possessors of land in Pittsburgh and vicinity. They were closely allied with Croghan in acquiring some of their lands. Large grants had been ceded to George Croghan at the Indian Conference of 1768, and later he allocated large portions of it to his Jewish associates, Joseph Simon and the Gratz brothers.

All of the Jews who were mentioned in the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1769 as grantees of land, probably became possessors of land near Pittsburgh, considering that some of the grants were in Southwestern Pennsylvania. In this same year David Franks and George Croghan owned jointly three thousand acres on Sewickley Creek.

It is surprising to find that Wilksburg, was once called "Jews Town" after its first owners: Joseph Simon, Levi A. Levy, and David Franks. These men bought their land directly from the Penns according to the system of land grants then prevalent in Western Pennsylvania.

Joseph Simon put in the first order in Wilksburg for two hundred ninety-five and one-half acres of land, surveyed June 30, 1769, for which he received a patent, April 17, 1795, on a warrant to accept, Jan. 23, 1795. Eccentric names were given to certain sections of land in those days: Simon's land was called "Plainfield;" while Levi A. Levy's land was known as "Africa."

The latter's order came in right after Joseph Simon's, and he had two hundred sixty-six acres surveyed July 1, 1768. The following is his application as it is entered in the *Deed Book*:

"Africa"

Proprietaries of Penna: Application No. 3122

To : Entered April 20th, 1769.

Andrew Levy So.

David Frank's order followed Levi A. Levy's; he had two hundred eighty-nine and one-half acres surveyed July 30, 1769. Joseph Simon sold his plot of ground to John Johnson, in 1796; although he had paid only forty-nine pounds for it, he received two hundred pounds, ten shillings. Levi A. Levy sold his land to William Thompson in 1788. David Franks sold his to James Ross in 1829.

On Oct. 2, 1773, Joseph Simon together with John Campbell purchased in the "New Town of Pittsburgh" a "Lot of Ground," of which Joseph Simon became sole owner, April 10, 1779.

In 1775 Joseph Simon owned some more land in Pittsburgh, for George Croghan mortgaged to him an estate, "Croghan Hall," located northeast of Fort Pitt. "Distinguished visitors, both white and red, frequented this landmark, Washington, on his tour to the Ohio in 1770, dined here."

In 1780 the Gratz brothers were conspicuous among the first possessors of land near Pittsburgh, but it is specifically known that they possessed one thousand four hundred eighty-eight acres on Sewickley Creek. To-day there is near West Newton, on the Youghiogheny River, a place called Gratztown; since the Gratz brothers owned land at this point, it was undoubtedly named after them.

At this time, there is record of Isaac Israel and Andrew Simon as signers of a petition in 1787 to create a new county with Pittsburgh as the seat of government, for Pittsburgh was then in Westmoreland County. In 1788 Allegheny County was formed with Pittsburgh as its county seat, but it was not until March 18, 1816 that Pittsburgh became a city.

On Oct. 2, 1788, David Jacobs, also a resident of Pittsburgh, had bequeathed to him some land in Westmoreland County. According to an indenture Frederick Smith, a soldier in the first American regiment, bequeathed to Jacobs his patent for two hundred acres of donation land in Westmoreland County.

Role Of Jews In The Civic Life Of Pittsburgh

Up to 1800 no Jew of Pittsburgh was conspicuous through his profession. In this year, however, John Israel disclosed himself very prominently as the Jewish publisher of the *Tree of Liberty*, which was the second newspaper established in Pittsburgh. Until 1800 the *Pittsburgh Gazette* was the only newspaper. John Israel, of great journalistic ability, was brought from Philadelphia to publish the *Tree of Liberty*.

Mr. Israel was a stranger here, having come from Philadelphia at the solicitation of the Anti-Federalists for the purpose of publishing the *Tree of Liberty*. His enemies made the most of the fact that he was a Jew.

The *Tree of Liberty* proved a formidable weapon in the hands of the Party. "It was ably gotten up; the Federalists were up in arms." The establishment of the *Tree of Liberty*, and the strength of the position it assumed, contributed largely to the marvelous growth of the Jeffersonian party in the vicinity of its subscribers. This paper became extinct, however, at the close of 1804. Perhaps the lawsuits brought against it were some of the contributing causes. It placed the severest strictures upon the course and character of opposing politicians.

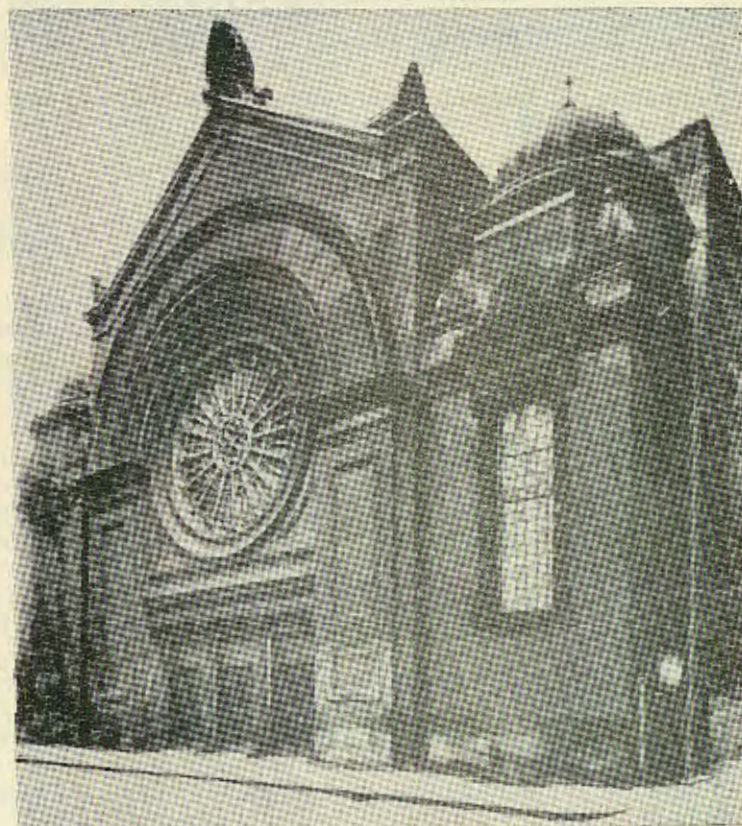
In 1858 the Jews of Pittsburgh were represented in the civic life of the community through Solomon Schoyer, Junior, the first attorney of Jewish heritage in this city. He was born on Aug. 10, 1832 in New York, and came here in 1834. His early residence was in "Dalzells Row." Solomon Schoyer, Junior, was admitted to the bar in 1858, and at once opened a law office in 139 Fourth Ave. He became very active in the political field; he was a delegate to the county and state conventions on several occasions; and he reported the first Republican convention for the Pittsburgh Gazette. He was the president of the Duquesne Club for four years, something unusual for a person of Jewish heritage. Although he was a member of a Presbyterian church; he was proud of his Jewish ancestors; for he expressed this fact to one of his clients.

The Jews of Pittsburgh showed their political leanings during the Civil War by enlisting on the side of the Union. There were at least three Captains: Jacob Brunn, Samuel Schoyer, and Joseph Zeigler. Max Klein, who came to Pittsburgh in 1859, was a First Lieutenant during the Civil War. Jacques Aldersheimer was also a Lieutenant, however, he lived in Pittsburgh after the War. As a result of his bravery in the battles of Chattanooga and Chancellorsville, he was mentioned in special orders for gallantry. Joseph B. Benedict was a Sergeant in the War. The following Jewish men of Pittsburgh were privates in the War: Jacob Eiseman, Joseph Gallinger, Samuel Lowenthal, his name is also on Tablet 3 in Memorial Hall; and Frank Meyers. Thus there were at least ten Pittsburgh Jews in the Civil War.

The Organization Of The Jewish Community

The oldest Jewish congregation in Pittsburgh—this unique distinction belongs to the Rodef Shalom Temple. It dates back to the "Bes Almon Society", House Forever, formed in 1846.

And this Society marks the inception of local worship in an organized manner.



Rodef Shalom Temple, Eight Street near Penn Avenue.
Built 1862 — Rebuilt 1901

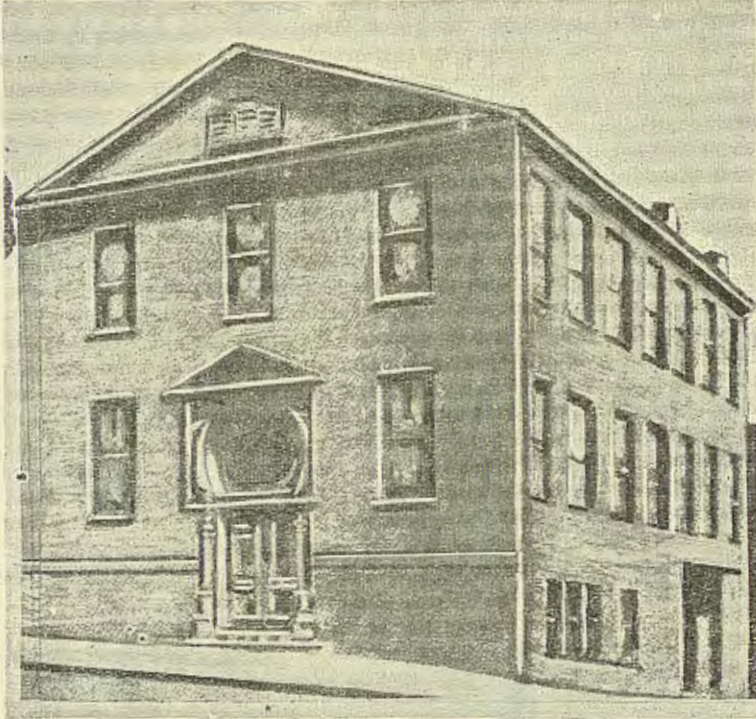
Even as early as 1842, however, services were held at private homes in Lawrenceville on Sabbaths and principal holidays. Yet the city directories do not mention a Minyan (a group of ten men required to conduct services in a synagogue) until 1850. William Frank, the father of I. W. Frank, notes that in 1846 a handful of men was organized with the hope of forming a congregation and that as a result the "Bes Almon Society"

was created. They worshipped in a room on Penn Street near Walnut (now Thirteenth Street) and engaged Rev. Mannheimer as Cantor. The following were some of the first members:

Ephriam Wormser	Reis Bros.
William Frank	Stein Bros.
Nathan Gallinger	Louis Morganstern
Jacob Klein	David Strassburger
Emil Klein	Henry Silverman
Moritz Kraus	Alex Fink
Eisman Kahn	

The constant stream of German-Jews to the United States, began about 1830, and reached its height between 1848 and 1850.

At the outset these immigrants settled in Western Pennsylvania, in small isolated villages where they soon keenly realized that there was no opportunity to worship in accordance with their religious practices. They were "Foreigners." Those who eventually settled in Pittsburgh, planted the roots of Judaism for themselves and posterity. It required time and per-



The Old Tree of Life Synagogue, Fourth Avenue and Ross Street (Where the New County Building now stands)

severance to establish a permanent place of worship because the Jews were not only strangers, but they were also without the necessities of life. The formation of the "Bes Almon Society", therefore, augured great hopes in Jewish hearts toward the establishment of a permanent congregation.

The German-Jews had comprised the Liberals in the political life of Germany, and their modern views penetrated into their religious thoughts in America. On the other hand, the Polish-Jews were imbued with a spirit of orthodoxy; nothing must change, the vicissitude of thought must not enter the synagogue. Division was the by-product of this disagreement.

In spite of the creation of other congregations the "Bes Almon Society" functioned as an organized group until 1854. About 1847 it removed its place of worship from Penn Street to Liberty Street and elected Rev. Sulzbacher as the Chason. In fact, he had many duties in those days, for it was one of the customs to have the Rabbi serve not only in his official capacity, but also to serve as Shamos and Shochet. In 1853 Rev. Marcuson was chosen the leader of the Congregation. In 1853, there were less than one hundred Jewish families, who were then huddled together chiefly along 2nd and 3rd Streets, between Market and Ferry Streets, constituting the Rodef Shalom Congregation, whose weal and woes were committed to a Mr. Marcuson. Religious services were held on the 2nd floor of the Vigilant Fire Engine Co., on 3rd Street, the men with their hats on, and their wives seated apart from them." Mr. William Frank was the first President of the Congregation.

It is very interesting to note that the "Bes Almon Society" as an orthodox group, notwithstanding the diametric views of its members, among the following were appended to those previously mentioned:

Isaac and Charles Bierman	Joseph Morganstern
Joseph Meyers	Michael Streng
C. D. Arnsthal	Mr. Sheyer
I. Hirschfield	Mr. Alexander
Louis Fleishman	Ben Oppenheimer
Jacob Silverman	

The dissension which sprang forth in the "Bes Almon" group reached its climax over the appointment of a Reader. William Frank says "Later when the Congregation became mixed and William Armhold (1854) was the Reader, the Polanders wanted a Reader from Baltimore, who had a wife and children in Poland, and we wanted to retain Mr. Armhold. I resigned as a member, then Wormser, Strassburger, Gallinger, Meyer and others, and by night we had organized a new congregation which I named Rodef Shalom (Seek Peace) in as much as we desired peace."

On Nov. 9, 1856 the members of the Congregation adopted their Constitution, and the following members signed it:

I Rosenthal	Jacob Rothschild
Joseph Meyers, President	William Frank
M. Strenz (Streng)	Henry Rosenback
L. Hirsfield	L. Stein (Stern)
T. Kaufmann	James Mittelberger
M. Arnold	Simon Marks
Jacob Klee	L. Trauerman
Louis Meyers	Isaack Kahn
Joseph Klee	Moses Gut
Monty Kraus	S. Zegsmith (Zugsmith)
Asher Genkenheimer	Leopold Stretbronner
(Guckenheimer)	(Heilbronner)
E. Wormser	Alex Greenawald (Greenwald)

Summary

The unique distinction of being the oldest congregation here belongs to the Rodef Shalom Temple, which dates back to 1864, when the "Bes Almon Society" was organized. In this society there were frequent splits resulting in the formation of the present Rodef Shalom Temple in 1854. This group built the first synagogue in Western Pennsylvania. Judge Cohen was the principal of its Day School, the only one of its kind in Pittsburgh and he was also an early President of the Allegheny County Teachers Association. In 1864 the orthodox members of the congregation seceded, organizing the present Tree of Life Congregation in 1865. Thereafter, the Rodef Shalom became a reformed group.

No sooner were the Jews organized in a religious manner than they realized the need of uniting for benevolent purposes. Jewish women were the path blazers of active Jewish charity here, for as early as 1861 they organized themselves into a society which was very active in the Sanitary Commission and this same group formed the Ladies' Aid Society in 1865. The only other women's organization which was most representative of the Jews of Pittsburgh was, however, the Hebrew Benevolent Society, effectively organized May 1, 1864; it had one hundred-twenty members.

The statistics reflect some of the probable Jews of Pittsburgh with their economic pursuits. The most significant findings are: first, that Jews owned all the five wholesale clothing stores in Pittsburgh and that no less than thirty Jews were clothiers; and second, that there were even two Jewish factories here.

My conclusion from this treatise is that the German Jews and the sprinkling of Polish Jews in Pittsburgh left their progeny the legacy of a worthy record. This record corrects the following credulities. It is not true as was once thought that there were no Jews here as Indian traders; to the contrary, in 1760 they owned the largest trading house in Pittsburgh. We must abandon the idea that Jews were absent in the vanguard of adventurers in the West; for they were the financial supporters of the venture, which made possible the first opening of the West in 1765. Contrary to the general opinion Jews were even the original owners of Wilksburg. The Jewish community is not, as had been thought, comparatively recent in organization; but it started as early as 1846. And last, it is not true that Jews occupied an unimportant position in finance in Pittsburgh until the last quarter of the nineteenth century; on the contrary, they controlled the clothing industry as early as 1860.



William Armhold