

BUTLER JEWISH HISTORY
compiled by Alice J. Leeds

NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE VANISHING GERMANS

Jews went West. The first Jews to arrive in Butler came as frontier settlers, probably peddlers, certainly on the same westward wave of enthusiasm as other adventure seekers. Rather than as communities, they came as individuals or families. By the mid-1800's, though individual Jews reached the west coast much earlier, Jews established actual congregations as far west as San Francisco. Jews first appeared in Butler as early as 1829; however, records indicate the first consciously organized Jewish activity at the turn of the century.

The pattern followed was that Jews generally settled first in the cities, then gradually spread to outlying areas. Jews came to Pittsburgh during the large German Jewish emigration of 1848. During the 1850's German Jews began to move from Pittsburgh into the smaller towns of western Pennsylvania. One early example: in 1858 Mark Schneiderman, a cap dealer in Pittsburgh, moved to Butler to join his in-laws the Rosenthals in their store. Little more is known about either family, though Dr. Max Nast, who was born in Butler in 1891, remembers,

When my family came to Butler they learned that a Schneiderman had married a Gentile (a Presbyterian), and at that time such a person was considered a shanda*. My uncle knew the man by sight, but I think he never became acquainted with him. From that family

descended two Doctor Purvis's, prominent physicians in Butler.

The early settlers had no Jewish community. They tended to intermarry and subsequently were no longer heard from in the context of Judaism. It takes guesswork to figure out who the early Jews actually were. Generally, the first Jews came to small towns as peddlars, so much so that eventually all peddlars became known as "jew peddlars." Those who found some measure of success settled down and opened businesses of their own. They were drawn to the freedom of life in America. Although these first Jews had certain religious, cultural, and educational aspirations, they were most characterized by their desire for economic opportunity.

For example, in 1867 the Zimmerman family opened Ritter and Ralston Dry Goods Store in Butler. According to the Butler Eagle, it catered "to the carriage trade that the horses drew across the unpaved thorofares." In 1918, after ready-made clothing had become popular in Butler, I. Max Jaffee opened The Leader, a women's clothing store. His son then purchased Ritter and Ralston Dry Goods Store and converted it into The Style Center for women's clothing. Investing in such innovations as air conditioning in 1933, a first for retail stores in Butler, the Jaffees developed a successful and well-known modern department store which still bears their name. I.M. Jaffee also became a key member of the Butler Jewish community.

The stories of some early Jewish inhabitants of Butler tell as much about early twentieth century small towns as about Jewish life. Philip Nast, the father of Max S. Nast, came to Butler in 1890. He opened a men's clothing store on South Main Street with his brother-in-law Philip Schaul. Sarah Nast joined her husband

the following year, the same year that Max was born in a wooden frame house on East Clay street (now East Brady). When Mrs. Nast first arrived, the streets of Butler were still not paved. Dr. Nast remembers his mother telling about her first trip to Butler.

The omnibus which conveyed passengers from the railroad station to the Lowry House at the northeast corner of the intersection of Main and Jefferson streets became stuck in the mud in the center of the street, and a man picked her [Mrs. Nast] up bodily and carried her from the bus to the wooden sidewalk in front of the hotel, where she first stayed.

Such conditions indicate why Zimmerman's carriage trade succeeded.) Additionally, we begin to note the fact that Eastern European Jewish emigration to America at this time was a movement of families, moreso than for any other ethnic group. If a young man did not arrive at his new home with his wife and children, he saw to it that they joined him as soon as he could afford to pay their travel expenses. Joseph Hurwitz, once established in his brother's scrap yard business, sent boat fare to Vilna for his wife-to-be, "the girl of my dreams." Likewise, Jewish businesses were family businesses in which every member of the family was involved. This family orientation set the tone for Jewish life in America.

Max Nast remembers the Butler of his youth as a small town. "There seemed always to be four or five Jewish families there." He remembers Julius Kaufman of North M, Kean Street; Max and Leon Shloss, brothers of Mrs. Julius Kaufman; Adolph Steel of West Cunningham Street; the Rosenberg family at the corner of North Washington and West Penn Streets; the Trexler or Traxler family who had a shop on West Main Street; and Abe Cohn of Elm Street

who had a scrap metal business in a building behind his home. Two of Abe Cohn's sons, Louis and Harry remained in Butler. Dr. Nast recalls,

...in later years Abe Cohn often told me about how he traveled the dirt roads with horse and wagon to get iron scrap, etc. from the oil wells [equipment] in the vicinity.

As opposed to heavy industrial labor that employed other western Pennsylvania immigrants at the turn of the century, the scrap metal business, the grocery stores, and the clothing shops were popular among Jews. Many of these small concerns grew to become lucrative businesses, promoting an economic mobility other immigrant groups did not have. These Jews who gained modicum of wealth became key supporters of the Jewish community's ability to sustain itself religiously and socially. A few examples: In 1898, William Horwitz moved with his parents from Cleveland to Chicora, Pennsylvania and opened the Pittsburgh General Store. The move was precipitated by William's numerous bouts with pneumonia and his doctor's subsequent recommendation that the family move to the country. The store did so well that they opened a second one northeast of town. Soon the family moved to Butler and established Keystone Oil and Supply Company, one of the most successful businesses in Butler. The Horwitz family has been a major cornerstone of the B'nai Abraham Synagogue community. In 1900 Jake Friedman emigrated to the United States from Austria-Hungary and opened a small meat market in Lyndora. By 1917 he was able to enlarge to a grocery store in Butler on West Jefferson Street. Eventually the family business grew into a three-store chain of supermarkets, carried on by Jake's son Harold. The Friedman family has also been prominent in the

development of the Jewish community of Butler.

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: FOUNDATIONS OF A COMMUNITY

In 1902 the Standard Steel Car Company (the forerunner of Pullman Car Company?) began in Butler, with the famous Diamond Jim Brady as its star salesman and promoter. This company's success prompted the near doubling of Butler's population from 10,858 in 1900 to 20,720 in 1910. From this point, Jews began to arrive in Butler in larger numbers, seeking business opportunities there and in nearby Lyndora where workers were housed on "Red Row," named both for the color of the houses and for the bloody rows which would erupt among the single male workers on weekends. The arrival of Standard Steel was perhaps the key factor in the establishment of an organized Jewish community in Butler.

In 1903 twenty-five Jewish families decided to establish a religious school and a place of worship for Jews in Butler. This group of Jews were Hungarian, Lithuanian, Rumanian and American born. They elected Abraham H. Goodman as teacher and cantor; Mr. Goodman was also the community's shochet, ritual slaughterer of chickens.* During this year the first recorded High Holy Day services were held in Butler on the third floor of the Knights of Pythias Hall, now the Reiber Building. Dr. Nast recalls the early religious services:

There were Jewish religious services in Butler for several years on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, held in second floor rooms at different locations on Main Street. I do not know whether there were any before 1903. I believe there were groups of 12 to 20, possibly more men, including my father. I also would

go. There was a leader, Hassan, from outside Butler. Possibly there were men who attended from outside the town of Butler. I cannot recall any women being present. The stores of our family were always closed for one day on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, even before the time of such meetings. The prayers were always in Hebrew, or possibly in some other language which I did not understand.

On March 22, 1906 thirteen Jewish men applied for a charter for a Hebrew Congregation B'nai Abraham whose purpose "is the the support of the worship of Almighty GOD according to the faith, doctrine, discipline, rules and regulations and usages of a Hebrew Congregation." Adolf Smulovitz was elected as first president of the congregation. Smulovitz ran a bank of sorts which provided the service of sending money to relatives in foreign countries.

By the following year, the same year William Horwitz arrived in Butler, plans were first proposed for the construction of a synagogue. Annual dues to the congregation were raised from twelve to eighteen dollars. This may seem trivial, but the raise of six dollars was significant to a community whose members were earning as little as nine dollars per week. It was estimated that costs for the synagogue would come to around \$10,000, but by 1909 funds were running low. A gentile, Levi M. Wise, prominent Butler lawyer and founder of the Butler Eagle, helped fund the project by securing a charter and floating a \$5000 bond.

On March 13, 1911 the first synagogue in Butler was dedicated, located on Fifth Avenue. It was not until around 1925, however, that the community hired their first ordained rabbi, Rabbi Kahn, who was educated at the Jewish Theological

Seminary. It is of major significance to the Jewish community of Butler that they have maintained allegiance to a single synagogue to the present time.

Hilda Friedman? Golanty recalls one of the first Yom Kippur services in the Fifth Avenue shul from her perspective as a young girl. She recreates the atmosphere of the women's section before such luxuries as air conditioning.

In those days, women sat in the balcony. On a hot Yom Kippur day, it got pretty "smelly," and some of the women fainted. The panacea for this was a fresh lemon stuck with cloves, which the women constantly sniffed. During certain parts of the service, the women would start to wail and thump their chests. Mrs. Goodman [the cantor's wife] was the woman who always started this. At this point, I got frightened and ran out. Children were running in and out all day. No one paid any attention.

Hilda Golanty also remembers her first introduction to a mikvah, the women's ritual bath.

The mikvah was in the Hoffman house behind the shul. Ann took us in and showed it to us. This was evidently a "no-no," because we were sworn to secrecy. We had no idea what it was for, but I remember thinking that it was a very small pool.

Most early Butler Jews followed the Orthodox tradition which had been passed on to them in the shtetls of Eastern Europe. As Americanization took hold, new forms of Judaism emerged and individual members began to side more with Conservative, or Reform Judaism. German Jews, who had been in America longer than the Eastern European Jews, had pioneered Reform movements in

Cleveland and Pittsburgh and perhaps this also exerted an influence on Butler's Jewish community. By the late 1920's, after heated discussion, men no longer sat separately from women at B'nai Abraham services and the pulpit had been moved from the center of the sanctuary to the east wall, both in keeping with a less orthodox interpretation of Judaism. Other orthodox traditions such as the mikvah and kashrut, special dietary laws, were being called to question, either by the synagogue community or by individuals in their personal religious lives. Debates over the nature of prayer and religious ritual have characterized the history of B'nai Abraham congregation and have kept the community alive without ever seriously threatening its unity. Similar debates have split other small town Jewish communities which were subsequently unable to support more than one synagogue.

From the start, the synagogue was a focal point for the Jewish community, where social events were frequently sponsored to maintain financial resources. Hilda Golanty recalls,

On of the main fundraisers, about seventy-five years ago was the box social. The women packed baskets filled with food and decorated with a large bow. Heaven help the man who didn't remember his wife's basket and bid accordingly. My mother was known to be a good cook and baker, so the bidding on her basket was pretty spirited, so my father had competition. The entertainment was strictly local. My sister Alice and I did a mean Highland Fling--year after year. Ann Hoffman had a sweet voice and she always sang. As we grew older and took music lessons, the Friedman trio always gave a concert. I played piano, Alice the

violin, and Milton the mandolin. I can imagine how boring that must have been, but my parents beamed with pride.

The years following the introduction of Standard Steel saw many Jews added to the Butler community, many of whose children or relatives remained in Butler and established the foundations of the future Butler Jewish community. In 1907 William Horwitz established Keystone Oil and Supply Company in Butler, joined the following year by M.A. Berman as a partner. By 1904 Joe Hurwitz had a brother who was running a scrap yard in Butler. Joe came out to Butler for a visit from New York City, where he had recently emigrated from Vilna, Russia. For a little over four months he earned a living peddling shoelaces and gas mantles, then returned to New York where he would send for his true love in Vilna. He then worked as a paper hanger, street car conductor, and postal carrier for the next thirteen years before settling permanently in Butler with his family in 1917 where he joined his brother in business. In 1915 Jack Ziman's family arrived and opened up a meat market. In 1916 Samuel Rosenblum, a Lithuanian immigrant, brought his family of five daughters and four sons to Butler from New Castle to join his brother-in-law who had peddled his way along the road from New Castle to Butler and had already settled in Butler. The family moved into a yellow brick house which remains standing on ____ St.; Samuel Rosenblum went into the furniture business with his sons.

These examples of the beginnings of family businesses are typical of the lives of Jews who came to Butler in the early twentieth century. Life was hard on immigrants when they first arrived. Rita Ziman's parents moved the family to Lyndora (the little town on the edge of Butler which housed mill workers) into

an empty building (site unseen) that was to become their home and general store./

It was a very cold and bitter winter day in January, 1924...We had a second-hand old Ford with plastic windows that snapped onto the car. Mother wrapped us in blankets and we managed to survive the long trip on a two-lane highway.

Once arrived at their destination, there was a huge amount of work to be done before the business was ready to open. And then there was the difficulty of making a living in a poor community.

When we reached our destination, my parents were very disappointed. There was no turning back now. So, with the help of a couple of nice neighbors, the Druda's and Vinovitch's, we managed to get settled in the apartment above the store.

While my sister Dorothy and I played together and tried to stay out of the way, Mother and Daddy worked many long hours trying to stock the shelves with hundreds of items and get ready for the opening day.

Finally, the day came when they could open up for business. The customers they served were all from ethnic backgrounds and were also very poor with large families. The men worked in the mill too, but didn't make enough to support their families. So, the only way to do any business was to give them credit for what they bought. Then, on payday, they would come in and pay a little on their bills. They always left a balance. My parents figured that whatever they could receive each week was better than nothing. And so, we

were able to make a living then.

Jewish businesses were family businesses by definition. From the earliest of ages children helped out in the family store during whatever spare time they had. Rita Ziman remembers waiting on customers when she was barely able to reach the counter. "That's how we made money," she said, "the only way."

Even though children were involved in the family enterprise, a Jewish education remained important to this community. Children went to Hebrew school for one hour after school each day. On Friday evenings and Saturday mornings they attended synagogue to daven the Sabbath prayers, and on Sundays they had additional religious training for a couple(?) of hours. Marcus Rosenblum, son of Samuel, remembers being drilled in the Hebrew alphabet, "which I'd already learned from my father. In a supposedly modern mood, [we were] taught conversational Hebrew phrases, not the prayers or psalms or Torah."

Marcus remembers another feature of his Jewish education as well,

SR [Samuel Rosenblum] enrolled me in the cheder in the basement of the synagogue on Fifth Avenue, next door to the home of Mr. Zuckerman who, like Tevye, begat daughter after daughter, five times, but no son, a condition which I appreciated more than he did. His daughters enhanced the ambiance of the synagogue.

There is evidence that Rudolf Coffee of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh organized a Zionist B'nai Brith chapter in Butler in 1908, although other records state that B'nai B'rith Lodge 772 was first established in Butler in 1920 with Henry Rosenberg as its first president. Both may be accurate, for Jewish organizations in many small towns have been

known to bubble up, dissolve, and resurrect in later years.

Hadassah, the international women's Zionist organization has existed continuously in Butler since 1919 when it was established with Mrs. Nathan Goodman as its first president and Mrs. David Barron as one of the charter members. The group's purpose is to raise funds to aid Israel in the areas of hospital care, education, and general welfare. B'nai Abraham's Congregation has been a generous and ardent supporter of Israel through the years, raising large funds annually for the Israel Bond Drive.

In 1912 Morris Taffel purchased land for a synagogue cemetery, a further sign of the establishment of a Jewish community. Mr. Taffel owned Taffel's Saxonburg Mineral Springs Hotel south of Butler, a tourist attraction known for relieving rheumatism and arthritis.

WORLD WAR I -- WORLD WAR II: PROSPERITY AND COHESION

By
ARICE J. LEEDS

By the time World War I, the prominent Jewish families of Butler had arrived. According to the Butler Eagle, members of Butler's Jewish community served in the Spanish-American War, and 39 Butler Jews served in World War I. War efforts got people intermingling in Butler. Mrs. William Horwitz and her friends were active in the Red Cross during the war and her husband was active in the war bonds campaign. After the war, there was a combined effort by the Jewish and Christian communities under the Joint Distribution Committee to raise funds for aid to war-torn Europe.

By 1915, the groundwork for Butler's Jewish community had been laid. During the next fifteen to twenty years, few people left town; fifty to sixty per cent of the businesses on Main

Street remained under the ownership Jewish families. At this time, many foreign-born Jews still spoke Yiddish in the home exclusively. Social, religious, and cultural life revolved around the synagogue. For reasons of language, religion, cultural security, and other such external factors as exclusionary policies, many of these Butler Jews, according to Maurice Horwitz, were "self-ghetto-ized." The period of time between the two world wars saw a thriving and involved Jewish community which nonetheless never felt totally accepted by its Gentile neighbors.

Although anti-Jewish sentiment in America was first noted at around the time of the Civil War, the 1920's offered several outstanding examples of anti-semitism in the Butler community. During that time, a resurrected Klu Klux Klan marched down Main Street and burned numerous crosses on North Hill and Tuson(sp?) field. One day when Dr. Purvis (perhaps an assimilated descendant of one of Butler's first Jews) was paying a house call to a Jewish family, he noticed one of the cross burnings and spoke to the lady of the house about it. He took some sort of action(?), because no more cross's were burned behind that Jewish home from then on.

Marcus Rosenblum recalls another example of treatment against Jews,

...the Masons invited every male in the class of '29 to join the DeMolay society, with the exception of three who were Jewish. (At the time, no blacks were enrolled.)

Maurice Horwitz sensed little anti-semitism while growing up in Butler, outside of one or two isolated schoolyard incidents which were quickly remedied. In fact, most of his friends were

non-Jews throughout his school years. He discussed the first "restrictions" on Jews as occurring in the 1920's. At that time, his father, already a successful Butler business man and involved in such community organizations as the local hospital, the Rotary Club, and the war bonds campaign, applied to join the Butler Country Club. Nine months went by and he heard nothing from the club. One day a banker friend approached him and suggested he withdraw his application, "to avoid an embarrassing situation." It was not until that past decade that Jews were been allowed as members into the Butler Country Club.

Some years later, in the mid-40's, Joel Rosenbloom and his brother commuted from Butler to Shadyside High School where there was a Jewish quota. "Twenty to twenty-five out of three hundred students were Jewish."

It was also difficult for Jews to get jobs with certain businesses. For a number of years, Armco and Pullman wouldn't hire Jews, and the hospital was also restrictive. Some employees were fired once their Jewish identity was discovered. One woman responded to an opening and was asked what church she attended. When she answered that she attended synagogue, she was immediately told, "I believe that job was just filled this morning." Another woman's application was kept on hold for months while Gentiles she knew were hired. Eventually, however, she was given a position. One Jewish applicant was told, "Go down to Main Street and get a job." Another man was told that the mills wouldn't hire Jews, taking the stand that, "They [Jews] won't stick with that kind of work." The Hurwitz family found itself on the cutting edge of discrimination policy in the public schools; in the 1930's a daughter could not get a position in the public schools, but after the war a son was hired as a science

teacher and soon thereafter was elected president of the Butler Teacher's Organization.

Discrimination against Jews in the 1920's through the 1940's was experienced differently by different people. Some Jews of Butler accepted the restrictions and went on about their lives, closely involved with the Gentile community and responding to such issues as isolated incidents. Other Jews, the larger(?) of the two categories, stuck more ever closely with their Jewish neighbors, who they knew they could trust and feel at home with, centering their social, cultural, and religious life around the synagogue. As time went on, restrictions and quotas were lifted, generally without pressure from the Jewish community. Certainly by the late 1930's Armco was hiring Jews. Paul Rudoff, for example, worked for Wheel Works of Butler Armco from 1936-1970.

The founding Jews of Butler were a business-minded group with minimal education beyond the basic skills and knowledge of Judaism, yet they were devoted to their children's further education. Beginning in the 1920's Jewish families sent their children away to college, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. This represents a typical pattern of Jewish immigrants. As Maurice Horwitz explained it,

During the thirties...you had a sizable increase in younger members of the community going to college...Of course a disproportionate number of those never came back to town.

Though some offspring returned to take over the family business even when it was unrelated to their educational background, this trend inevitably lead to a decline in Butler's Jewish population.

By 1928 there were approximately 325 Jews living in Butler, with more in the rural areas around the county. With a growing

membership, the community exerted considerable influence on its members. Now at its more mature stages, all children of both sexes went to Hebrew School, generally until confirmation at age 15. As Rita Ziman put it, "We knew we had to go." Joel Rosenbloom remembers being chastised by his peers for quitting Hebrew school after his bar mitzvah in 1940. To this day he feels that he has not been forgiven this crime. At this time, children were not yet sorted into age groups at Hebrew school and the teacher had to deal with varying levels of knowledge and ability within one room. Each teacher developed a method for coping with this situation. One former student remembers his teacher moving in tutorial fashion from pupil to pupil while the rest of the class frolicked about the room. If this particular teacher came to a page the child didn't know, he ripped the page from the book and handed it to the student to study, then went on to the next pupil. When times were rough during the depression, a pay-as-you-go coupon system was started for a short time in the Hebrew school, where children had to turn in a coupon for each lesson, each coupon being worth ten cents. There was also a period during this era when most Jews were still keeping kosher, that you had to have your synagogue dues paid up before you were allowed to purchase meat from the kosher butcher. The community created its own ways of keeping itself in check.

Jewish rituals were host to many colorful occasions. One member told the following story:

There was a mikvah [ritual bath for women] at the Hoffman house that closed [in 1948] when the old shul closed. Once a schnorer [vagrant] was caught there at three a.m. Another time, on a hot summer day, a bunch of us kids took off our shoes, filled it up, and went

wading in it. Boy, did Mrs. Hoffman give us heck for that!

In addition to being a house of worship and an educational center, the synagogue sponsored many community gatherings. There were theatrical events, classes and lectures, dinner and dance parties, fundraisers for Israel as well as for the community, holiday festivities, and of course bar mitzvahs. It seems that people were always gathering together and organizing some activity or another. Harrit F. Blatman, who ran catering at the synagogue for almost twenty years, remembered working with other women of the congregation to prepare celebratory meals.

At one of the weddings we were doing, the ovens suddenly went out and there were 200 people in their finest clothes waiting to be fed. I believe it was Jack Secher and others who got down on their knees to see how they could help us. Fortunately they were able to get the ovens going again and we continued on as though nothing happened. We all remained calm but when it was over--whew!! Then there was the time the ovens blew up in Eleanor Secher's face--that was something.

There were times when Betty, Gitty, Ruth, Reva, Sylvia, Etie, and many others were helping me cook--at 3:00 A.M. The police came knocking at the door because we were still working away--and laughing!! We invited them in for coffee.

*** [other examples?] Under Rabbi April's guidance an adult Bible study class was initiated which met in rotating homes on a weekly basis. The class went on for a number of years. During the 1920's the Council of Jewish Women was started by Mrs. William Horwitz as a support group for the synagogue. The

organization existed until the 1950's when it was absorbed by Sisterhood, which fulfills the same function. For a short time there was a YM-YWHA on Main Street which sponsored debates. Maurice Horwitz recalls that I.E. Hurwitz, M.A. Berman, M. Steele, and Ben Lasman were among the members.

Social life among the youth was a topic of Jewish concern. Such organizations as American Zionist Organization (AZA), Junior Council of Jewish Women, and Junior Hadassah sponsored social events with other synagogue communities in New Castle, Beaver Falls, New Brighton, Sharon, Rochester, Pittsburgh, and Braddock, providing meeting grounds for those of dating age. Groups of young people by train or bus to the various events. There were numerous weekend events when young people were housed with families in neighboring towns. As one man described attitudes towards interfaith dating in the 1930's and 40's, "You only went out with a Jewish girl on Saturday night." Even though the Jewish community as a whole was substantial in size, the number of youth in any particular age group was still relatively small, offering what one member called, "pretty lean pickings." There was additionally a family feeling among individuals who had grown up in a close-knit community which did not generally promote romantic relationships, although some folks, like Rita and Jack Ziman, married the boy or girl next door. Groups of Butler teens frequented the movie theatres after shul on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons. Movies held great interest to all ages before the introduction of television. Joel Rosenbloom remembers running from synagogue to the movie theatre each Saturday afternoon for a succession of weeks to catch the weekly Tim Towers serial. "I only missed one out of fourteen, and I've always regretted that loss," he said. During the 1930's, one

particular theatre owned by a Mr. Isaacs, a Gentile, allowed young people a special admission price of two cents in exchange for second-rate seating. "If you didn't have two cents, he took a penny, but you had to empty your pockets to prove it." When a parent owned a car, it was offered for socializing on special occasions. Rita Ziman double-dated with her sister using their parent's car. "Booky" Garber was one of the few young Jewish people to own his own car in the 1940's(?) He would take a group of friends around, "but you had to pay him for it."

Younger members of the community had other activities. From the 1920's until World War II there was a Jewish Boy Scout troupe in Butler, involving such early synagogue members as Max Jaffe, Nathan Grum., and Syd Nast. The troupe played in sports with other area troupes and ran paper drives during the war to raise money. The boys went camping each year during the last weekend of the season at the local boy scout camp. There was at least one Jewish Eagle Scout (name?) Ida Rosenbloom, with the assistance of Selma Abis, formed a Jewish Girl Scout troupe in Butler (dates?). Both the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts split up in the mid-1940's when AZA became popular among the boys and BEG became popular among the girls.

Adults in the Jewish community have always been involved in such civic organizations as the Butler Area Chamber of Commerce, the Butler Rotary Club, and the Butler Community Chest. In addition to his involvement in all of these organizations, not to mention his leadership role in many aspects of the Jewish community, William Horwitz served at various times as president and vice president of the board of Butler County Memorial Hospital. He served on this board from the close of World War II until 1960; during the depression he chaired a fundraising

campaign which successfully bailed the hospital out of debt. Max Jaffe was a charter member and first president of the Butler Symphony.

During the 1930's and 1940's most people in the synagogue community maintained Jewish traditions within their home; they lit the Sabbath candles each Friday night followed by a Sabbath meal, kept a kosher household, and observed the Jewish holidays. Traditions first began to relax in connection with businesses, which remained open on Saturdays and minor holidays. Maurice Hurwitz remembers his mother keeping him home from school on minor Jewish holidays when the family business remained open. The truant officer came to their home and questioned his mother about this inconsistency. "My mother said that the religious upbringing of the children was her responsibility. She never changed her attitude." Yiddish was still an integral part of the Jewish experience in many people's lives. Rita Ziman talks about her close relationship with her grandmother in the 1930's:

I used to play school with her. She couldn't speak English so I would take chalk and write on the bedroom door and teach her the alphabet. She was anxious to learn. Thanks to her, I learned to speak and understand Yiddish. My parents spoke mostly English to us and if they wanted to say something not for our ears, they would say it in Hungarian.

The depression brought the Jewish community closer together. Jews who were financially well-endowed helped others who were less fortunate. Many informal loans were passed between members of the Jewish community to help continue or initiate businesses. The Butler Jewish Welfare Fund was established, one of the first of its kind in this part of the country. From this organization

emerged a free loan fund which was rarely used, perhaps only three to five times, probably due to the occurrence of so many informal loans. On Passover, special holiday food packages were sent to needy families as part of the synagogue effort under Rabbi April. Maurice Hurwitz states that, "There was a lot of self-help in the Jewish community [of Butler].", He recalls that there were some bankruptcies, but "The bankruptcies were very few and far between among the Jewish community." Mr. Horwitz recalls working for his father's company in 1932, two years after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania. He was given only three days work per week, "as was everyone else" for nine dollars a week. He also recalls,

There was a family in town, Jake Green's stepmother, who had five or six children. The husband passed away. The Greens were related to the Baron and Abis clan. My father got them all together. They all went on a note, borrowed money at the bank. They purchased a building on Fifth Avenue and started a small store for this woman. She raised all her five or six children successfully. That was what transpired in those days in terms of community help and cooperation.

Through similar concerted family efforts, The Ziman family was able to reopen their store after it was destroyed by fire at the bleakest part of the depression. The fact that many Jews in the relatively small town of Butler were related to one another by marriage and the fact that most were involved in family businesses are major characteristics of the community during this time period. So much so that one man who grew up in Butler encapsulated this entire history project in the following way,

We're the same as any other Jewish community in

any one of these little towns--tightly woven, almost everyone is related. You have a lot of small family businesses. Then everyone left when there was no more opportunity. I don't see what you can write.

Rabbi Simon April, one of the more remembered rabbis of B'nai Abraham, arrived in 1932 and remained in his position for twelve years. He established a choir for High Holy Day services and also inspired a pride in Judaism through excellent educational programs which addressed all age levels.

World War II brought economic prosperity for many businesses, but of course there was other stress and tension in the community at this time. Seventy-three Butler Jews served America during the war; two gave their lives for it, Captain Haskell Rosenblum and Sergeant Harold Toubes. Many Jewish women filled in for men's jobs in government offices in Washington, thus changing their roles during the war years. Rita Ziman (Rita Green at that time) shared an apartment in Washington with several young Jewish women from Butler. She did clerical work for the War Department, a branch that was dealing in land for soldier's camps. Eventually, however, she joined her future husband Jack at Camp Cook in California where he was stationed before he was sent overseas. It was there that they decided to get married, although it would be two more years before they would be able to reestablish themselves in Butler at the end of the war.

Jack got two days leave and we were married by Rabbi Talmage in his study. It was a nice ceremony with ten people in attendance. Afterwards, we all went to a nice restaurant for dinner. After dinner, Jack and I left our guests and went to Earl Carroll's nightclub. They had a beautiful floorshow and we

enjoyed ourselves. We then went to Knicker Bocker Hotel to spend our first night together as husband and wife.

The wedding was announced in MANAC (Marines Army Navy Air Core) News, a monthly bulletin put out by the Jewish community of Butler to keep members informed about their boys in the service. It served the purpose of maintaining cohesion in the Butler Jewish community at a time when many of its members were away. The paper told who had recently been called to service, who had gotten promotions, who got married, who had babies (the Ziman's first was announced several years later), where Butler's Jewish servicemen were stationed, and whatever other bits of information came in. Each issue was sponsored by a member of the Butler Jewish community. Often excerpts from letters were printed. One issue was dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Max Arnovitz. "They have sent four sons into the Armed Forces, all of which excel in their duties." One issue contained the following story:

During Arthur Jaffe's Parisian leave he came across a small community of Jews and conducted the services for them. Of the eighty families that once comprised this congregation there were but fifteen survivors. Whatever became of the remainder can hardly be imagined. They were surprised to see an American in uniform capable of running the services and they wept with joy as it was the first service they had in four years. Arthur relates that this was his biggest Paris thrill.

Other bulletins told of services conducted by Butler boys in Arkansas, England, South Africa, and Australia. There were such tiny gems as, "Jack Ziman wrote home with a red pencil taken from

a German General. Keep going, Jack." A letter from Bernard Zaritsky stationed with Merle Lipsky in Hawaii, was excerpted:

I am in the ground crew...and enjoy it here very much...so much that I would not mind living here for some time.

Joe Hurwitz remembered receiving a V-mail letter from his son, telling his father not to worry when word was received from the army that he had been involved in a minor accident. "This minor accident was that a shrapnel exploded over the foxhole and both he and his buddy were wounded." Hurwitz's at the time had a wife and small child waiting for him back in Butler. The family spent months waiting for their son's transfer to an American hospital, uncertain as to the extent of injuries. Joe Hurwitz remembers this time in his autobiography, written just a few years later in 1949,

I hoped that he wasn't too seriously hurt. I wished, though, that his wounds were serious enough that he wouldn't have to return to the battlefield. I wanted our boy to come back alive to us, his parents, and to his family, even if our son would be crippled. It is cruel for a father to wish that upon his son, but as we were not sure of the extent of his injury our thoughts ran away with us and I felt this desire to be the best solution.

Finally, ---- Hurwitz was returned to his family and subsequently given an honorable discharge from the army.

One beautiful day, early in September, we were embracing our son on the lawn of the Deshon Hospital. He was on crutches, but both of his legs were intact and not a limb of his body was missing. Tears of

happiness came flowing from my eyes when I watched our boy embracing his mother, his wife, and his son...my son's injuries were serious enough to keep him from returning to the battle lines.

Jewish families felt the same human pain that is experienced by all families in times of war. On the home front, on a more positive note, business was thriving. Many who had struggled through the difficult years of the depression found that there work was now paying off. Those who were not involved in businesses in the Jewish community were hired by the larger companies in town; American ^{BANTAM} Bandum (sp?), which manufactured the first jeep, Armco, or Pullman Standard (?), all of which were involved in the stepped up economy of providing war supplies and materials.

In 1948, the Butler Jewish community raised \$100,000 for the newly established state of Israel. The United Fund of Butler donated \$10,000 to Israel that same year, and took part in the funraising drive for Israel during the following year as well, exhibiting a newly-born attitude of generosity on the part of the Gentile community of Butler towards Jews.

1945-- : WEALTH AND AMERICANIZATION

After the Second World War, relations between the Gentile and Jewish communities of Butler began to open. This change had many effects. Jewish people were less pressured to stick to themselves. There was an increasing rate of intermarriage. Baron's meat market went half-and-half. There was a kosher section and a non-kosher section. Meat that didn't sell quickly on the kosher side was simply moved into the non-kosher section.

Additionally, the Jewish community of Butler had reached a considerable level of success. As opposed to other ethnic groups who had spent years working for other individuals or companies, Butler Jews had focused on developing entrepreneurships of their own. These enterprises were now bearing fruit.

But the Butler Jewish Community had yet to reach its high water mark. This occurred in the 1950's under Rabbi Robert Syme, when B'nai Abraham had 150 families in its membership. Rabbi Syme, a dynamic and vigorous leader, came to B'nai Abraham in 1947 and remained for about six years, during which time he established a year-round congregational choir, complete with an organ purchased by Sisterhood. One member commented that, while Rabbi Syme lessened the traditional Jewish flavor of the synagogue, he was community spirited and much admired by the Gentile residents of Butler. It was during this period that the present synagogue and community center was conceived and built.

In 1948 the Edward Reiber Home was purchased on East Fulton and Main Street for \$50,000. It was renovated for use, and the old synagogue was sold to Church of the Nazarene. An architect

was hired to design a new building adjacent to the Reiber stone house. It was eventually realized that the chosen site would not accomodate intended plans for a synagogue and community center. In 1954 the present site was purchased by William Horwitz and presented to the congregation as a gift. The original architect was reinstated and plans were approved. That same year, Rabbi Milton R. Rube became the new rabbi. In 1955 construction was initiated. The new and modern building was connected to the former W.J. Brandon Home which was now used for educational purposes. This building was named the William Horwitz Education Center, dedicated to the individual who served the congregation for over fifty years as president and chairman of the board of trustees of the congregation almost since the congregation's inception. The sanctuary was built to seat 240, but overflow space was designed to accomodate 400 on High Holy Days. On the weekend of November 18, 1956, B'nai Abraham's synagogue was dedicated in the congregation's fiftieth year. Rabbi April, now of Detroit, and Rabbi Syme, now of Miami, returned to participate in the ceremonies. According to a report at the time in the Butler Eagle,

A Saturday morning service will be conducted by the children of the Hebrew School and the choir with Rabbi Milton B. Rube, present spiritual leader of the congregation, and Rabbi Simon April, officiating.

Sunday afternoon, the dedication service for members and invited guests will be conducted by Rabbi M. Robert Syme...At 6:30 p.m. Sunday, the dedication banquet honoring Rabbi Milton B. Rube will be held in the new Center's social hall.

The Butler Eagle also noted, "In keeping with the Jewish

custom of worship in a setting as close to nature as possible, the sanctuary has a wall of glass through which permanent planting in an outdoor patio can be seen." Numerous newspaper articles discussed and pictured the new synagogue in Butler. There was even an open house, with tours especially prepared for the Gentile community, including a handout explaining the main features of the sanctuary and interpreting the relief sculpture on the face of the new building:

...Not only does the symbol serve as an historic reminder of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but it represents a constant monument to their specific outstanding characteristics: The Ideal of Faith, The Ideal of Worship, and the Ideal of Study.

During the first years in the new synagogue, all 400 seats were occupied on High Holy Days. Congregation members were assigned seat numbers which they also used on Sabbath services(?) One member (name?) recalled that, during the entire year following his father's death, he had no difficulty finding a daily minyan to recite the Kaddish with him. Yet it was during the 1950's that the Jewish population of Butler, along with the overall population of Butler, began to diminish. There were several factors involved in this shift.

The shopping centers and the subsequent malls made downtown shopping a thing of the past. Merchants began to close their stores and children no longer had ready-made professions. Pullman closed. (date?) As already noted, the increasing number of young people who continued on in higher education was closely related to the number of young people who were leaving town; professional skills in combination with decreasing business opportunities in Butler created a strong pull away from the home

town community. Founding members of the community were getting on in age; some of them died while others sought retirement in Florida. Of the individuals who intermarried, there were some who felt uncomfortable or unwilling for other reasons to continue affiliation with the synagogue. Rita Ziman pointed out another way that some members were lost; "One thing about a small town. If somebody gets angry, they quit...and we can't afford that." Yet to Roberta Gallagher, president of Sisterhood, the mother of two young boys, and presently the sole Jewish member among her contemporaries who is still living in Butler, the reason for a mass Exodus in recent decades, at least directly, is neither spiritual nor economic. Having something to do with social values, the reason she gives is much more simple than any of the above,

I think many people wanted to leave their home town. I think that's the root of it. Once you left and went to school you found someone and just stayed out.

Another change that became apparent in the 1950's is that the existing Jewish community no longer confined itself to certain neighborhoods, many people moving into newly constructed housing developments. It was no longer a bonus to live walking distance from the synagogue. By now, most people drove to shul. The Jewish and Gentile communities were overlapping more than they ever had before. (Roberta Gallagher's mother) -----Hurwitz, chairperson of the Butler Welcome Wagon Committee during the 1960's, would invite the neighborhood over to share latkes on Hanukah or to join in on the Passover Seder. Being Jewish was no longer something you had to hide; now it was something you could share with pride.

The Jewish educational experience at B'nai Abraham was also changing in certain ways. During the late 1950's and early 1960's there were about 100 children enrolled in Hebrew school. Children were divided up into age groups. Classes were held on two instead of four weekdays, and children also attended Saturday morning services and Sunday school. Roberta Gallagher remembers attending Ida Rosenbloom's camp in the Blue Ridge Mountains during the summer, where she was given tutoring for her bat mitzvah haftorah, an early innovation for females in Conservative Judaism. Roberta also remembers feeling provincial and inferior in comparison to the wealthy and sophisticated Jewish girls from more urban environments who attended the summer camp.

From 1955 until 1970, there was a succession of six rabbis at B'nai Abraham: Rabbi Milton Rube, (Rabbi Jerome Bass?), Rabbi Joel Dubin, Rabbi Marvin Goldson, Rabbi Louis Cassil, and Rabbi Barry Rosen. Each of these rabbis stay for a period of approximately one to three years, reflecting increasing mobility and change within the community. Of these, Rabbi Louis Cassel (1964-1967) stayed the longest and is accordingly the most remembered, as an organizer and a man of action. (?details) In 1970, Rabbi Eliezer Ben Yehuda arrived, a native-born Israeli and grandson of Eliezer (?) Ben Yehuda, the father of modern Hebrew. He remained at B'nai Abraham for fourteen years. Rabbi Ben Yehuda, as may be assumed, was quite a Zionist. He had been a messenger boy for the Hagganah during the War of Independence and, at age 16, had volunteered for the Israel Defense Force. Because of his fluency in five languages, Ben Yehuda had been sent to speak for his country in France, England, and the United States, eventually settling in America in 1958. In January of 1976, shortly after the "Zionism is racism" resolution in the

U.N., Rabbi Ben Yehuda invited Zeidan Atashi, a non-Moslem Arab of the Druse sect, to speak to the congregation. The Butler Eagle had a lengthy article on this visit, including the following remarks:

Asked about the Palestinian refugee problem, he speculated that room can be made for these 700,000--not all of them Palestinians--in historical Palestine, within the Jordanian kingdom, to the east--possibly on the West Bank--and in the Gaza strip. He said this can be done, not necessarily at the sole expense of Israel, as he said PLO leader Arafat insists. Atashi pointed out that Israel dominates only one-third of what is considered Palestine. "Live beside us, but not instead of us" is the Israeli answer.

The article concluded,

Atashi was a guest here of Rabbi Eleizer Ben Yehuda of B'nai Abraham Congregation--a circumstance that prompted on participant in the discussion to remark that he never thought he would see a master--rabbi--hosting an Arab. Atashi smiled and said it could happen in Israel, but not elsewhere in the Middle East.

Rabbi Ben Yehuda was the sort of Rabbi who inspired strong feelings among his congregation; his admirers as well as his critics were adamant. One young man remembers rebelling against Rabbi Ben Yehuda's approach to Jewish education. A young woman remembers his firm opposition to her interfaith marriage, although she concedes that he arranged the circumcision ceremony for each of her sons. Rabbi Ben Yehuda did not welcome the children of interfaith marriages into the Hebrew school, yet his

keen intellect gained him the respect of Butler's Gentile community. He served as president of the mental health association in Butler, was active on the school board, and involved in the community. (other examples of positives types of reactions?)

Marc Selman, the current president of B'nai Abraham, is an example of recent Jewish involvement in the greater community. His ties to Butler began when he was already married and the father of two children, and after he had established the foundations of his career. In 1963 Selman moved to Butler from Washington, D.C. with his wife and two children to accept a position as political science professor at Slippery Rock University. He subsequently became the first Jew in an administrative post at the University, serving for three years as assistant to the president in charge of the building program which expanded the campus two decades ago, and next as interim acting president for a short period of time. Believing that one should practice what one teaches, Selman remained active in politics after leaving Washington. In 1975 he became the first Jew elected as Butler County Chairman, and in 1978 he became the first Jew appointed to Butler City Council. Selman further explains, "No Jew had ever wanted to be on City Council." He feels that most anti-Jewish sentiment exists in rural areas where people have little or no contact with Jews, although he mentions the existence of what is termed "closet antisemitism." Selman explains, "You take abuse in politics and if you're a Jew or any other minority, you take more abuse."

THE PRESENT: ONGOING CHOICES

1984, the year that Walter Boninger arrived as rabbi of Enai' Abraham, marks the start of the most recent chapter in Butler's Jewish history, a time of adaptation to the present realities of Jewish life in the small town, a time of exploring realistic possibilities and directions for the congregation's future. Rabbi Boninger has a fascinating personal history which colors his ability to lead the present congregation. Growing up in Hamburg in the 1930's in an orthodox home, Rabbi Boninger attended a Hebrew Day school and also experienced such early Holocaust outbreaks as Krystalnacht. In 1939 his parents, sensing what was to come, left with Walter for Chile via England on a Dutch boat which ^{struck mines laid by the} ~~was subsequently bombed by~~ Germans. Although the twelve-year-old boy was rescued, his parents were lost. Boninger was eventually brought to the United States, where he was raised by a non-religious family but spent weekends with orthodox cousins. Rabbi Boninger remembers his mother's fine singing voice which he inherited; he studied music at UCLA and began graduate work in the same field in Cleveland. Through the influence of a close friend whose parents ran the Montefiore Home in Cleveland, Boninger became interested in social work and likewise gained his first position as a cantor. After attending High Holy Day services at the home, Walter approached his friend's father with a proposition based purely on a whim, "If you pay me twice as much [as your cantor] next year, I'll do a better job." He was given the position, and soon became the weekly cantor as well. After completing graduate work in social work, Boninger spent the next thirty years as a part-time cantor and full-time

social worker with the aging and the blind.

Rabbi Boninger came to Butler from Cleveland at a time of transition in his life, a time when he was looking for a career change. Yet he admits, "I'm still in a very real sense a part-time cantor, full-time social worker." Reflecting on his first impressions of Butler's Jewish community, the rabbi relates,

Small communities have very unique problems...Butler represented the kind of challenge I ideally love...a community that had laid itself to rest, prepared to die...They had their glory period, then a very gradual decline brought about by the demographics of the situation.

Members of the congregation are impressed with Rabbi Boninger's initiative, energy, innovation, and community involvement. He has revived or initiated such aspects of synagogue life as the bulletin, community dinners, a Friday night oneg or buffet, different songs and melodies in the service, and social events. He serves the synagogue community with heartfelt dedication, always seeking ways to get more people involved. Said one member, "I've never seen such energy...His background is there; it's a good background." Although he is not an ordained Rabbi, Walter Boninger possesses the skills, enthusiasm, and sensitivity to Judaism which his position demands. His theological orientation and social outlook reflect a modern view of Judaism, indicative of current directions of the Butler Jewish community. In regard to the rabbinate he says,

I'm still not one hundred percent comfortable with the term rabbi. I don't have the ordination so I'm very self-conscious about the title...This community wants to call me rabbi.

After a twenty year period that saw virtually no new congregation members, Rabbi Boninger increased the membership at B'nai Abraham from seventy-five to eighty-nine families. Perhaps the key factor to this increase is the rabbi's inclusion of mixed marriage families in the synagogue community. In regard to mixed marriage, Boninger says,

I see these people as being the future, whether we like it or not, of Butler's Jewish community, because when the older families die out, unless there is a remarkable turn around and something happens that will bring a large number of Jewish families into the area, what we have to work with are these various forms of mixed marriages...If they get turned off by the synagogue, are not made to feel welcome, then they're lost.

Rabbi Boninger believes in supporting the interfaith relationship even before marriage, while offering to point out the difficulties in such areas as raising children, the religious commitment of the non-Jewish partner, the commitment to Judaism of the Jewish partner, the ways in which the couple will keep a Jewish home. He discusses his personal feelings about this issue:

When you have a divided household it's very difficult. I'm sure some couples have made it work and created a good environment for children, some going one way, some the other. But to the extent that I am a rabbi, I want to see them come here. I want to give these people as much exposure as I can to Jewishness.

As much as Rabbi Walter Boninger supports interfaith marriages, he does not see his role as performer of the actual

wedding ceremony, "To me, a Jewish marriage is a marriage of two Jews." The congregation supports this view. The ultimate hope is that the Gentile partner will convert to Judaism, yet Rabbi Boninger is sensitive to the delicate nature of this possibility. "It's not something you can force; it's not something you can push." In some instances, it is actually the non-Jewish partner who is more supportive of upholding Jewish traditions than the Jewish partner. In discussing the issue of interfaith relationships, Gary Zinman, who has two teenage daughters, comments,

I think there's more melting into the general population than we had forty years ago...[My daughters] don't have the same identity with Judaism that I do...There is a very definite Jewish identity with the people my age...They were Jewish kids [and married Jews].

In addition to the issue of interfaith marriage, Rabbi Boninger cites several areas of current concern to the Butler congregation. These include creating events that the synagogue community will respond to, finding continuity in the leadership of synagogue life and events, and taking a concerted stand on social issues as a Jewish community. Boninger has made strides in each of these areas.

For example, in his second year in Butler, Rabbi Boninger initiated a community Passover Seder which was attended by seventy-three people. The annual event has continued to draw a healthy crowd, providing an opportunity for a large portion of Butler's Jews to share in the age-old ritual meal using a special Hagaddah, prepared by the rabbi and his wife Lonnie, which brings contemporary meaning to the ancient custom. The Friday night

onegs which Rabbi Boninger started, and have been supported by sisterhood, create a feeling that B'nai Abraham is a friendly community. Before the onegs began, small groups of people would get together after services in private homes; Rabbi Boninger has made the socializing into an inclusive community event. "I wa always a group worker, a party boy in the best sense." he says.

In another realm, Boninger is determined to find new leadership to replace the people who spent years organizing such events as the annual rummage sale, the raffle dinner, and the Israel bond drive. One by one, he is retrieving such events instead of allowing them to slip away, encouraging individuals to accept responsibilities for one year at a time instead of single-handedly hosting events for years on end as had been the custom. In this way, no one individual is burdened with or relied upon to make a particular event happen, and thus, when an individual can no longer take on the responsibility, the event may continue without them.

Rabbi Boninger concedes that individual members as well as rabbis of the congregation have long been generously involved in the affairs of the community, but with his social outlook, he declares that this is not enough. He feels it is essential that the congregation take an interest in the affairs of the community, that "as a Jewish community, we ask, 'What can we do?'" This has not happened since the blood drives of World War II. Besides developing a Jewish social consciousness in Butler, Boninger sees another advantage to taking a Jewish stand.

For the Jewish community to say 'we care' is important...I hope we never need to count on anything back in return. But if we as a community have a part in the community by showing that we care, we will be

supported, and I don't necessarily mean financially.

The Hebrew school continues. Usually with one or two children per class, the program is essentially run as a tutorial, much as in the early days. Once a month there is a children's service on Friday night, and each child of the---(number of children in H.school?) has a special role assigned by the rabbi. Attending such a service, one is impressed with the poise each child exhibits in front of the congregation. Roberta Gallagher elaborates:

My children feel very at ease in this building...Nothing is forbidden to them here...When Molly [a young child in the cobngregation] wanders up on the bema [during services] it's okay with the rabbi.

And although some of the young people who have been through bar mitzvah and confirmation have not continued to keep the traditions, the knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism remains with them. Twenty year old Harry Greenberger, who describes himself as "the goyishe [Gentile] sheep of the family" make arrangements to pick up some things at his sister's apartment in Ithace, New York at a time when she wasn't home. "My sister left me a not in phonetic Hebrew to describe where her key was hidden." Even though he professes to have little involvement with Judaism in his present life, Greenberger stops by to see the synagogue and particularly to see the education wing when he visits Butler because, "I spent a lot of time there growing...It's an interesting building to me personally."

To the Jews who live or grew up in Butler, their Jewish identity has various meanings. To Joel Rosenblum, age 59, it is a spiritual identity, a belief in G-d and G-d's teachings. "I have a relationship to G-d that is helpful in everything I do.

It's all there for you in Judaism, without a middle man." To Marc Selman, who came to Butler with his family 25 years ago, being Jewish has to do with social concern and reform, with liberal social movements. "I identify with the old Jewish liberals, like Jacob Javitz...I don't think Jews today are as close to social issues as they use to be." To Gary Zinman, age 52, being a Jew and having grown up in a small town are inextricably related.

I'm not a religious Jew but at the same time I feel very definite about being a Jew. It's a code of ethics, it's a family I belong to, a large extended family...The kids I grew up with in Hebrew school are almost like sisters and brothers to me...Here [in a small town as opposed to a big city] you have to make a statement 'I want to be part of a Jewish community'...It's something I want to continue and I'm willing to work for it.

Roberta Gallagher, age 36, who has put great energy into maintaining Jewish traditions and involvement in light of her interfaith marriage, tells why being Jewish is important to her:

It makes me feel good. Those traditions that I was brought up with make me feel so good, so comfortable, that I want to instill them in my children. When they hear the word Israel I want them to feel what I feel inside, no matter what it's going through, no matter what's going on there, like when somebody says your name you always look. It's like being back in my grandparents' house when I was little eating Jewish cooking and hearing those Yiddish words; even though my children won't hear much Yiddish, it

[Jewishness] is still there in my parents home, and I hope it's there enough in my home that they want to say prayers for the holidays and Sabbath. That's what I want them to continue, that really good feeling.

Harry Greenberger, age 20, less interested in maintaining Jewish traditions than Roberta Gallagher, also describes his Judaism as a feeling for the Jewish people, "a feeling of having something in common with someone." Younger Jews of Butler describe their Jewish identity as a feeling of connection with a people, while older members express more specifically defined identities as Jews, associations with particular political, social, ethical, and spiritual beliefs. The implication is that Judaism has become less defined as a way of life.

One logical outgrowth of a discussion of Jewish identity, is a consideration of what one has tried to pass on to one's children, the legacy to the future. Those Butlerites who grew up in an era where Hebrew school was mandatory generally took a somewhat more relaxed approach with their children, offering them a Jewish education without the pressure to be totally involved in synagogue life. Growing up in a more integrated society than that of their parents, these children grew up into adults with a more haphazard approach to Judaism. "They tried, but it didn't work," one man said of his four sons, most of whom either married Gentiles or settled in non-Jewish communities. Another man expressed the following:

We haven't discussed it [my grown children's involvement with judaism]. I don't want to give them the pressures I had...I got back to religion as I got older...Perhaps my children will also...My daughter must feel something because she wears a Jewish star.

Gary Zinman made a commitment to Judaism when he started his family.

I wanted my kids to grow up as Jews, knowing that they are Jews. The congregation is a part of me. I am proud of my heritage...The richest tradition [I have passed onto my children], the one I enjoy most, is the Passover Seder. I have a ball at it with all the singing.

Those individuals whose children have not yet married express views on this topic as well. Gary Zinman further states:

I would rather have my child marry a Jew. I would feel more comfortable. I feel more comfortable sitting and talking with a Jew. We have something in common more than being a citizen of the United States.

Roberta Gallagher, whose children are the product of her interfaith marriage, expresses herself honestly, "I know it's very hypocritical of me, but I want both my boys to marry Jewish girls...because of the grandchildren. I want Jewish grandchildren."

To those few members of B'nai Abragam Congregation who have young children, the synagogue has a clear purpose in 1988. Says Roberta Gallagher,

If there is one Jewish child in the community, I think everybody should gather around that child and do what they can to instill some Judaism in him, to show him the way...I know that we're all tired, but let them share their knowledge and past with the children...If not for the children, then for whom?

To other members, those whose children have grown and left the community and whose grandchildren now live far away, the

importance synagogue involvement is less vivid. They are more inclined to put energy into their own dispersed families. Furthermore, the social function of the synagogue has faded. At one time, says Rabbi Boninger, the synagogue was "the place where you could be with your people," the main place where Jews socialized. Now that Jews mix freely with the Gentile community, this original purpose has been all but lost. The synagogue now "has more symbolic value as a Jewish presence in the community," says the rabbi. To maintain that presence, to continue that good Jewish feeling which young people refer to, demands energy.

Congregation members express various views about the future of the Butler Jewish community. Synagogue president Marc Selman sees a leveling off period, with no major decline in population for the remainder of this century. "Then, I don't know. It depends on the development of service areas [doctors, banks, etc. in Butler]." Sisterhood president Roberta Gallagher sees involvement as a key issue in the synagogue's future,

If we don't get more of an influx of young Jewish people who are willing to help us on anything, than things are not going to change for the better...then there's not going to be a B'nai Abraham Congregation here for the seven or eight children.

Gary Zinman is to the point. "I think that Judaism as we know it is dying." The question is how the overall changes affecting Judaism in America will apply to the Butler community and what kind of niche the Jews of Butler will find within their evolving community.

From the outset, Butler's Jews lived with a different set of realities than those of the city Jews. Their situation within small town life led to cohesiveness, but also made necessary a

greater level of interaction with Gentiles in both social and professional life. The early German Jews disappeared through intermarriage due to their small numbers. With the arrival of eastern European Jews, a certain strength of community among a generation of shopkeepers emerged, though not without its own pressures. Economic hardships of the depression revealed the closeness of the Butler Jewish community as it upheld itself. It was rather the prosperity of World War II and the post war era that brought large-scale business to eclipse the small shopkeeper, a disruption in old neighborhoods with the coming of new communities, and the commitment of the Jewish community to educate and thus Americanize its succeeding generations. With this came the question of Americanization versus the preservation of Jewish community life, and all the various forms of compromise between the two, which in turn affect family life, personal relationships, cultural life, spiritual practices, social conduct, and personal identity. Being a Jew has always been a matter of making choices; today, in Butler, this is more true than ever.