

## People of the Rock: Plymouth's Jewish Community

### Introduction

Each year several hundred thousand people visit Plymouth, Mass., America's Home Town. Many climb the steps to Burial Hill to see monuments to the Pilgrims. The stone dedicated to Governor William Bradford bears an inscription in Hebrew, which reads "Jehovah is the help of my life." In the early 1600s, young Bradford struggled to learn the Hebrew language, in order to read the scriptures as originally written. The Old Testament was very important to the Separatists who settled Plymouth. Indeed, the holiday Thanksgiving is thought by some scholars to derive from the festival of Sukkot.

What visitors may not know is that Plymouth hosts its own Jewish community. Indeed, 350 years after the Pilgrims landed, a Jewish businessman owned the site of Governor Bradford's house in Town Square. The synagogue, built in 1912-13, is located a block or two from Plymouth Rock. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish immigrants lived in the oldest parts of Plymouth. They participated in Plymouth's economy as peddlers, shopkeepers and factory workers. They built homes, businesses and a synagogue, most of which are still standing today. While not as numerically significant as Italian immigrants to the town, Jews made important contributions.

Many works have been written about Jewish communities in both large and small cities. This is not unexpected, as Jews tend to live in urban areas. Less has been written, however, about communities in smaller towns. Congregation Beth Jacob was established in 1909. While not the earliest Jewish community on Massachusetts' South Shore, Plymouth's synagogue is one of the oldest in continuous use, and still hosts Shabbat services today. What part did small towns play in the vast migration of Jews to America between the 1880s and 1924?

This study seeks to document the Jews that lived and worked in Plymouth. What part did they play in the development of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Plymouth? How did they negotiate becoming American in the oldest colonial settlement in New England? Using oral histories, vital records, newspaper

articles and other resources, we will answer these questions and demonstrate the significance of this small-town community.

## Chapter I: Coming to America

### Jews in 17<sup>th</sup>-century New England

There were very few Jews in early colonial America—an estimate numbers them at around 300 by 1700, a tiny proportion of the European population (Dalin, 8). The earliest Jews came to New England circa 1650, as part of the migration from Spain and Portugal to avoid the Inquisition. Many had lived in the Netherlands or Dutch colonies. These people included Solomon Franco, 1649, first Jew recorded in Boston (Jews in Boston, Sarno), as well as a group of Jews who moved into Newport in the religiously tolerant colony of Rhode Island. Jews also appear in the Hartford, CT records, with a reference to “the Jews” in 1660 (Dalin, 9). Plymouth town and colony records have been thoroughly combed for information on the Pilgrims for more than a century and a half (Pulsifer). No mention is made of any Jewish people in records as yet encountered.

While hardly metropolises, Boston, Newport and Hartford were colonial capitals. As centers of trading, they offered opportunities for merchants. Boston and Newport participated in trade with the West Indies, where many Jews lived. Plymouth was the seat of Plymouth Colony until 1691, but was much smaller in size and population than Boston. Additionally, it did not boast a harbor well-suited for much international trade.

Additionally, Plymouth, like Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut, was a strictly Puritan colony, offering no toleration of religions other than its own fundamentalist version of Calvinism. Those who preached more liberal tenets, like Roger Williams, were removed from the colony. Religious minorities such as Quakers, who flouted the official religion, were banished. With the exception of Rhode Island, the Puritan New England colonies were hardly welcoming of Jews.

By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, Boston and Newport had grown to become major urban trade centers. Plymouth, no longer a colonial capital, had become a shiretown, or county seat. While a legal center, Plymouth did not have the cosmopolitan population of urban areas like Boston and Newport.

New England's population remained relatively stable after the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. While a couple of Scottish immigrants stand out in Plymouth in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were few newcomers from other European countries until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Jews in Plymouth at Mid-Century**

Irish laborers began migrating to Massachusetts in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Plymouth's 19<sup>th</sup>-century historian William T. Davis mentions the first Irish as working for Joshua Thomas, who helped them find a place of worship for their holy days. A Catholic church was formed in Sandwich in the 1830s. While Plymouth became more religiously diverse, there is still no mention of Jews.

In the 1840s, a new wave of migration to New England began. Refugees from potato blight, famine, poverty and political turmoil flooded cities like Boston. These included Irish, German and Scandinavian immigrants. Jews left various provinces of what is now Germany as early as the 1820s through the 1860s. Reason included the concern of integration into German society after emancipation. The majority of Boston's Jews came from the northern provinces in and around Prussia. Congregation Ohabei Shalom was established in Boston in 1843. The next year the congregation established a Jewish cemetery in East Boston (Smith, 47-49).

While thousands of immigrants stayed in Boston, a few trickled into Plymouth, attracted by economic opportunities. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Plymouth was a thriving minor port. Plymouth made its living from burgeoning industry and maritime trades. Industry had begun in Plymouth in the 1790s, with a mill on the Town Brook. The abundance of flowing water helped the development of industry. By the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many industries worked hand-in-hand with seafaring. Iron mills made anchors, textile mills made sail cloth, and rope walks made rope.

One of Plymouth's most significant businesses was the Plymouth Cordage Company, established by Bourne Spooner in 1824. Spooner had visited New Orleans to study the rope industry, and

returned to his native Plymouth determined to make rope with free labor. The Cordage Company opened in Seaside (North Plymouth), a couple miles north of the Plymouth's town center. In order to attract labor, the Cordage Company solicited immigrants from central Europe. Many Germans came to the north part of Plymouth to work for the rope factory.

Among the German immigrants were Samuel Alexander and his wife, Caroline. Alexander, who worked as a rope maker for the Cordage Company, lived in what is now North Plymouth. He and his family appear in the 1860 and 1870 censuses, as well as in vital records. Three children are all listed at one time in birth records, along with other immigrants from North Plymouth. Apparently, several births from local families were reported to Plymouth authorities at the same time. The place of birth for the parents is listed as Hesse. (PHOTO OF A RECORD)

After staying in Plymouth a few years, the Alexanders moved to New York, where the family still lives. They discovered the Plymouth connection when researching their family history. Interestingly, there are other Samuel Alexanders in the 1860 street directory who do not appear to be Jewish. It is entirely possible that there were other Jewish families with last names that are not obviously Jewish that were part of the German migration.

Descendants of German Jewish immigrants to other cities became quite successful, and several summered in Plymouth and belonged to the Plymouth Country Club. In fact, a Jewish man served as the commodore of the Plymouth Yacht Club. These earlier immigrants distinguished themselves from the next group of refugees to come.

### **Jewish Immigration to Plymouth 1889-1913**

No one knows exactly who was the first of CBJ's founding families to arrive in Plymouth. Certainly Louis and Ida Resnick had come by the late 1880s, as seen by the record for the birth of their daughter, Edith, in 1889 or 1890 (VR says 1890). Ida Bahn Resnick's obituary states that she "was of the First Jewish Family in Plymouth" (OCM Feb. 1934). David Resnick arrived in New York in 1886, as seen in his naturalization certificate, but it is not known when he arrived in Plymouth. As shown by his naturalization certificate (PHOTO), Joseph Berg lived on High

Street in Plymouth in 1889. Other early families that came in the 1890s include the Orentlichers, the Sadows, the Toabes, the Medveds, the Julius Cohens and the Karnofskys. Unlike the earlier wave of immigration, these new arrivals came from Russia, Poland and Lithuania.

A new wave of Jewish immigration to America began in the 1880s. These migrants came from the Russian empire. Jews in Russia faced a number of challenges. They were forced to live in the “pale of settlement,” subject to conscription, and threatened by pogroms. Hundreds of thousands fled, many to America. In the 20 years between 1880 and 1900, the amount of Jews in America doubled from 250,000 to 500,000 (Dalin and Rosenbaum, 48).

An important factor that sparked the massive migration was the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by anarchist terrorists. The government blamed the Jewish people, among others, and encouraged mob violence against them. These pogroms continued through 1914. Pogroms included atrocities such as murder, rape, mutilation, and kidnapping, as well as the destruction of homes and businesses (Dalin and Rosenbaum, 49). Trade was restricted. Jewish admission to universities was limited, and Jews could not become lawyers or participate in government (Dalin and Rosenbaum, 49).

A major incentive to emigrate was conscription. While many Russians served in the army, the Jewish population was disproportionately hit with quotas. Jewish boys as young as 12 years old were drafted into the army. Long terms of service (up to ten years) encouraged Jews to convert and assimilate.

Many Jewish families have stories about how their ancestors escaped Russia to avoid the draft, changed their names, or even injured themselves. Joan Tieman remembers hearing how her great grandfather Joseph Berg broke his trigger finger to avoid conscription. (Another family member recalled that he cut the tendon in his finger.) Among the Sadow sons who emigrated to America, some served in the army and survived, while others escaped. Sue Sadow writes about how her father, at the age of 13, joined a group who secretly fled from their village of Doag, Lithuania (Sadow, 39). Bernard Skulsky survived the Russian army—according to family history, he served as a Cossack.

The decision to emigrate was a major one. Passage was expensive, and families needed to save in order to afford to send the entire family away. Often a father would emigrate to America (or England) and work for many years to raise money to bring over the rest of the family. Joseph Berg left Russia in the 1880s, and worked for around 10 years to afford passage for his family. In other cases, young men like Abram Sherman and Meyer Shwom came over on their own.

The vast majority of Jews fleeing Russia traveled to Hamburg to pick up an ocean-going vessel. Often emigrants had to wait for weeks for a ship. An emigrant village, called the Veddel, complete with a synagogue was built around the port. Up to 5,000 emigrants could await passage there. Local German Jewish philanthropists helped provide Kosher food for the refugees (<http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/rz3a035/emigration.html>).

Passage could be direct (Hamburg straight to America), or indirect (Hamburg to Hull, England, train to Liverpool, and steamer to America). Sue Sadow was the daughter of Jewish immigrants to Plymouth. Her autobiography, *Can Do! Said Sue*, tells of life in Plymouth in the early 1900s. Both of Sue Sadow's parents left via Hamburg. At least one family member, her uncle Jacob, took the indirect route, living in Manchester (near Liverpool) with his family for several years (Sadow, 3, 43). Another early immigrant, Max Toabe, worked for years as a peddler before sending for his family from Russia. When he arrived at the port in Boston to pick them up, he learned that his wife, Sarah Berger Toabe, had died on the way, probably on one of the many stops along the indirect route.

Passage from Liverpool to Boston took about five days. Emigrants traveled in steerage, with few facilities for washing. When Sue Sadow's uncle Jacob and his family arrived in Plymouth c1906 after days on board ship, "the smell in our kitchen was overwhelming. They had all been on the boat for many days, traveling in steerage, and had probably slept in their clothes the whole time" (Sadow 43).

Upon arrival in America, the immigrants were processed through various inspectors. A common myth is that the immigration inspectors at the port of arrival often changed the immigrants'

names. For example, Mottel Toibe, who came from the village of Shepetovka in Russia, had his name changed to Max Toabe. Recently, historians have determined that the inspectors checked a written record from the port of embarkation, dispelling the myth that names were changed upon arrival in America.

What did families bring on the journey? Many brought religious items that represented their Jewish identity and traditions. The Shribers, who came from Odessa and arrived in Philadelphia, brought Shabbos candlesticks (PHOTO). The Brodies, who came from Vilna and moved to Boston, took with them a siddur (PHOTO, which is still used at CBJ for High Holy Days services). Everyday things were important to starting a new life as well. The Shribers brought copper pots in addition to their candlesticks. The Kabelskys brought feather pillows and perenie, or feather-stuffed blankets/mattresses.

### Coming to Plymouth

It is not known what attracted the first Jews to Plymouth. Milt Penn recalled hearing that the Plymouth Cordage Company sent representatives to the port in Boston to recruit workers (Penn, "The Plymouth Jewish Community: 1930-1940"; 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary script). Moving to Plymouth may have been a way for immigrants to escape the crowded tenements of Boston for a smaller town. Sue Sadow stated that many immigrants were met by Jewish agents at the port in Boston, who urged them to move to nearby towns instead of staying Boston (Sadow, 27). When her uncle Jacob and family arrived in Boston in 1906 from Liverpool, they were transferred to Plymouth as none of the Boston relatives had room in their flats (Sadow, 43).

Ties of family and mishpocha also led people to Plymouth. Sarah Besbris Orentlicher, originally from Alayka, Ukraine, had been living in Plymouth for about 15 years when her sister, Rebecca (Rivka) Dezorret and her family joined her. Rebecca's husband, Israel, came from near Kiev. After a few years in Plymouth, he sponsored a young man from his village, Joseph Cohen, to come (Eunice Dezorret Glassberg, interview).



While Plymouth had an abundance of industries, most of the early immigrants worked on their own as peddlers, rather than in factories. As a county seat a port, Plymouth was of sufficient size to support shops and businesses. Many Jewish immigrants started as peddlers and worked their way from peddling to running their own stores.

One family moved to Plymouth for health reasons. Fanny Brodie married Max Pyzanski in Boston in the early 1900s PHOTO, but soon grew ill. Her doctor urged the family to “move to the country.” Asking around, Max’s brother Moe was advised to take the train south to find a suitable town. Moe took the train from South Station and rode it to the end of the line, Plymouth. He found that there were other Jewish families, and decided to move his brother Max and his wife and children there (Muriel Swartz, interview).

## Chapter 2: Building a Congregation

By the early 1900s, there were enough Jewish families in town to support a congregation. There was no rabbi or cantor, so the community invited religious leaders from Boston for the High Holy Days (Sadow, 29-30). During the rest of the year, the community relied on local scholars to lead services and teach children. The first Hebrew teacher was Michel Toabe, father of Max. Michel had escorted Max's family from Russia to Plymouth in the late 1890s. While he had intended to return to Russia, he decided to stay in Plymouth where he lived until his death in 1904.

While Max was a rather strict man, his son Mitchell Toabe recalled his elder brothers' stories about how their grandfather Michel had a liberal and considered interpretation of the law. When the boys asked their father if they could go skating on Shabbat, he automatically said no. When they asked their grandfather, he said, "Let us consider the situation. If you should happen to go to services and have your skates with you... and you should go to a frozen pond that other people have skated on so no matter how much you skate, you aren't cutting the ice... that's not so bad" (Mitchell Toabe, interview).

In another instance, the brothers asked if they could go to a ball game in the next town on Shabbat. Michel evaluated their request. While others might have automatically denied the boys permission to travel on the Sabbath, Toabe considered the definition of "the next town." "If you can see the roofs of one town from the other, without a break in houses, that's not traveling" (Mitchell Toabe, interview).

Without a space of their own to meet, the community rented space in local public buildings, such as the Town House (now the 1749 Courthouse) PHOTO and the Red Men's Hall on Middle Street (above what became the Arons's furniture store). Using public buildings for religious services was nothing new—in the 1850s the Catholic community also used the Town House, prior to the construction of their church (Davis). Community members adapted the spaces to their religious requirements. "A dealer loaned the necessaries for setting up the altar with the ark with sliding doors where the Holy Scrolls were ensconced, complete with a velvet cover and gold fringe trimming, a sculpture of the ten commandments, and the eternal light... a cloth

drapery extended the full width of the hall to divide the space” between men and women (Sadow, 29-30).

Sarah Toabe Sherman kept the Torah scrolls at her home during the week (Rose Geller, interview). Sarah was the sister of Max Toabe, and came over at the same time as Max’s children and their grandfather. In 1905 Sarah married Abram Sherman, who worked as a junk dealer. They set up housekeeping at 106 Sandwich Street, just south of the Town Brook. A 1907 Rosh Hashana postcard shows Sarah and Abram with their eldest son, Louis. PHOTO

Even before the congregation was established, there was a split. Residents divided into two minionim based on where they came from. (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 4) By the time there were 20 families, the community split into the Litvak group and the Russian group. “They used to fight like hell. Because each had their own enunciation, each read the Hebrew differently...and they used to come to actual fistfights.” Eventually, the dissenters were fined a nickel each time they argued, which not only kept decorum, but also helped raise money for the treasury. (75<sup>th</sup> anniversary script)

In 1909 the community established a single congregation, the Jacob Beis Society, comprised of more than forty families. (PHOTO of incorporation paper) Dues were modest—only \$6 a year, but along with a contribution from the Ladies Aid Society, helped raise money for land for a synagogue. It took a year to find a suitable site. Several people can be credited with the purchase of the land. In a heated discussion with a competitor (one of the Sadows), peddler Joseph Berg offered to buy the land. Berg had long been interested in real estate, and had bought land in North Plymouth and built at least two stores/apartment buildings. As part of the deal, Berg received the seat in front of the bima (75<sup>th</sup> anniversary script).

Sue Sadow remembered a slightly different story. Her uncle Jacob, a very Orthodox Jew, disapproved of using the town hall for religious services. He dreamed of a synagogue where people could worship and boys could study for their bar mitzvah. Jacob, a peddler, faithfully solicited contributions from his customers, both Jewish and gentile. He saved the contributions to purchase the plot. (Sadow, 47).

The land at the corner of Sandwich and Pleasant had been owned by the Harlow family for generations. It was near the area where many of the Jewish immigrants lived, so people could walk to shul on Shabbat.

Members met every two weeks to manage progress on the building. Fund-raising events, including a Purim Ball, helped garner enough money to start building. (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 4) In 1912 the congregation laid the cornerstone for the synagogue on the west side of the property. The foundation was cement, with a wooden structure of three rooms. The building was designed by an engineer from the Plymouth Cordage Company. It was built in the traditional manner, with a bima in the center surrounded by pews, and a gallery for women and girls upstairs. The mikveh was located in the basement. The building was heated by steam, and lit with both gas and electricity. The High Holy Days were celebrated in the new building in fall of 1912, with services led by Rabbis Nathanson and Steinberg. (Mills, OCM, 1988, OCM, Jan 2, 1914; CBJ 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary script; 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 5-6).

The December, 1913 dedication of the synagogue attracted the attention of the local newspaper. The reporter described the interior:

“The ceiling is done in three shades of blue...and the walls are in buff tints, while the ornamentation is derived from the Egyptian. The dado is of conventionalized papyrus leaves, while the frieze is of old Egyptian ornament, representing the papyrus and the waves of the Nile... Directly above the tabernacle are the spread wings representing speed and strength and still higher are vases of lotus flowers with sacred palms. The ornamentation is in tints of sienna and pale green. The star of David in the eastern window with its white ground, is repeated in the centre pieces of the ceiling and in the chandelier...The decoration is the work of C. H. Badger & Son.” (OCM, Jan. 2, 1914)

Religious leaders from several and Boston-area houses of worship attended. “The Jews are the first Pilgrims in history...they crossed the Euphrates river to escape from tyranny and oppression,” said Rev. Dr. P. Israeli of Boston. Rev. C. F. Andrews of the First Universalist Society of Plymouth commented that “the Christian church was an outgrowth of Judaism; that

the world's progress was due to the Jewish race." Rev. Arthur B. Whitney of the First Church in Plymouth extended his congratulations: "The Pilgrims' gift of a free and open faith is brought to you." (OCM, Jan. 2, 1914).

The first president of the synagogue was David Resnick. Joseph Berg served as vice-president. Abraham Nathanson served as rabbi, while shokhet Jacob Steinberg is sometimes referred to as a rabbi. Milt Penn recalled rabbis in the 1930s. CHECK THIS

The first Rabbi I remember was Rabbi Goldberg. He was a kind man, hardworking, served as the shoichet, and later commuted to Boston to work in a Kosher slaughterhouse. In the mid to late thirties Rabbi Friedman was engaged and some semblance of Hebrew and religious school came into existence." (Milt Penn, 2).

The community came together from various different Jewish traditions. Many were Orthodox. Joseph Berg was extremely frum, and his family remembered hearing how he would not allow his daughters to brush their hair on Shabbat (Joan Tieman, interview). Jacob Sadow was very observant, according to his niece Sue Sadow. "Every morning my Uncle Jacob rose very early and said all the prayers...It was understood that no one could speak to him to interrupt him while he was praying (Sadow, 44-45). Many people refused to talk on the telephone on Shabbat, as the operator had to work. Women used to cook their meals for Saturday the day before, as not to work on the Sabbath. (75<sup>th</sup> anniversary script) At least one family used a "Shabbos Goy" to light their stove (BUSI< )

The DeZorett family was shomer Shabbat. Israel Dezorett and his son Sol worked for the Plymouth Foundry on Water St. (now the marina). As the foundry was Jewish-owned, the job allowed the DeZoretts to be observant and not work on the Sabbath. Neighbor Nancy Kabelsky Cutler, who lived across the street, recalled visiting Mrs. DeZorett. The family kept strictly Kosher, and Nancy used to deliver Mr. DeZorett's lunch to him at the foundry--she'd hand it in the window where he worked (interview, Eunice Dezorett Glass, interview, Nancy Kabelsky, interview).

In an oral history, the late Mitchell Toabe referred to Simon Orentlicher as Chassidic, and remembered that he danced at services. While family members do not remember his being Chassidic, it may be that Simon came from an area of Russia with Chassidic traditions (Toabe, interview; Leanne Wolfe, interview).

Others were less observant, beginning to assimilate into American society. Sue Sadow recalled that her father was “always too busy to say all the prayers that were expected of the Orthodox Jew.” He kept his head covered with a hat, except when in his store or while visiting Gentiles (Sadow, 44-45). Some businessmen even began keeping their shops open on Saturdays. A few members of the community, including Meyer Shwom, did not participate in services for political reasons.

Services were conducted entirely in Hebrew, with no page numbers referred to. Milt Penn recalled that, in the late 1920s, the rare sermon was conducted in Hebrew. Harry Koblantz, a tailor, often led services and read from the Torah. (Milt Penn, 1998:1-3) On the High Holy Days, most people did not ride. “It was the practice to auction Aliyas for the Holiday services during the service itself. The auction was conducted in Yiddish, and since writing was not allowed, pre-written tabs were placed in envelopes identified with congregants’ names.” Rose Geller remembered Mrs. Milner standing all day for the Yom Kippur services, wearing her white stockings (Geller, interview).

When women and girls attended services, they sat in the gallery. Rose recalled sitting in the gallery as a girl, giggling with her young friends. She garnered many angry looks from the men praying below. Her father used to mumble “shah veibelach” to keep her quiet. Mrs. Steinberg occupied the center seat. Rose recalled that she was very good at Hebrew, and women used to sit next to her to better follow the service.

Tzedakah as well as prayer was an important part of religious life. Sue Sadow’s family kept pushkes fastened to the counter of their kitchen, one for each charity. Both adults and children contributed to the boxes. “The ‘collectors’ came several times a year. They were religious

Jewish men, dressed in long black coats and round black hats trimmed with fur... They drank tea in glasses that Mama offered them” (Sadow, 6-7).

Sarah Toabe Sherman was one of the founders of the Beth Jacob Ladies’ Aid Society, a forerunner to the Sisterhood. Mrs. Steinberg led the group, which helped to buy Torah scrolls for the synagogue. (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 6) Rose Geller remembered going to meetings in Mrs. Steinberg’s kitchen, next door to the synagogue. The Society was a *gemelich chesed*, or charitable society, which helped local Jewish businessmen with small loans.

### Chapter 3: Finding Work

Many immigrants, to Plymouth, particularly those from Italy and Portugal, worked for industries like the Plymouth Cordage Company or one of the many woolen mills. While sons and daughters of immigrants often worked in the mills, most of the first generation of Jews tended to work independently. Large towns like Plymouth had substantial enough populations to support shops. Many Jewish immigrants started as peddlers and subsequently opened stores of their own. Peddling allowed immigrants with limited skills in English to work when and where they wanted to.

Many immigrants started as junk dealers—including Max Toabe, Morris B. Resnick, his brother Simon Resnick, Benjamin Resnick (son of Louis and Ida), David Karnofski, Esser Milner and Abram Sherman. All they needed was a horse and wagon. According to Sue Sadow, “They turned to rag picking and became rag peddlers as it required only a few words in English. As rag peddlers, they could be independent. With the help of their wives and children, they could sort out items from the day’s collection, which they could sell for cash.” (Sadow, 28). Many new peddlers were not aware that they had to pay a \$2 license tax to the town, got in trouble. Town officials appealed to established Jewish merchants like Max Sadow to help translate (Sadow 29).

One of the best-known characters in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Plymouth was junk dealer Harry Frim, who lived on Union Street near what is now the yacht club. Frim was known for his prodigious strength. He could raise his horse off the ground, by putting his back under the horse and lifting. Joe Busi, interviewed in his nineties, recalled that local kids used to ask Frim to lift his horse for them (Joseph Busi, 22).

“The darndest stunt I ever saw him pull was moving a stove. A fellow was remodeling his house and he had one of those big old black iron stoves with the hood on the top. He told Harry that he could have the stove if he could take it down the stairs. Harry Frim went upstairs and disassembled the stove and got it ready to take down. He called down that he was ready and needed some help...After a while Harry tapped at the window and said, “Never mind.” He had



that kitchen stove on his back complete. He'd taken all the loose things and thrown them in the oven...It must have weighed five or six hundred pounds." (Joseph Busi, 23).

While some junk dealers collected rags, others bought furniture. Meyer Markus sold second-hand furniture near Town Square as early as 1911. He also sold coal. For a time Kasiel Simon Bass, who also owned a variety store, sold second-hand furniture. Max Shriber is listed as an umbrella repairman in early street directories, but expanded to used furniture by 1919. By 1921, he sold antiques. His son-in-law Hyman Klasky took over the business after Shriber's death in 1924. (Hyman's son Melvin continued running the antique store through the early 2000s.)

Some found dealing in junk to be a lucrative endeavor. David Resnick arrived in New York in 1889, and first appears in the Plymouth street directory in 1896. He made his living as a junk dealer, starting small but becoming significant. He took advantage of Plymouth's many industries, buying their cast-off material. Mitchell Toabe recalled that he had an arrangement with the Plymouth Cordage Company for their junk (Mitchell Toabe, interview; Obituary, January 14, 1921).

While some collected items, many sold goods, either as peddlers or as shopkeepers. Shopkeepers generally started as peddlers until they could afford stores of their own. Some peddlers were lucky enough to have a horse and wagon. Others walked the streets with packs on their backs. Sue Sadow recalled her uncle Jacob, who carried his stock "all bent over under his heavy load that reached from his shoulders to his ankles" (Sadow, 45).

Max Toabe peddled pots and pans until, around 1907, he was approached by Luigi Cortelli (L. Knife), who owned several buildings in North Plymouth. "Why don't you sell your pots and pans in one of my empty stores?" Cortelli proposed. Max protested that he didn't have enough money to pay rent. "Don't worry," Cortelli replied. "You can pay me rent when you earn enough money." One day a man at the railroad station showed Max a load of damaged goods. "Why don't you take these," he suggested, "and have your family fix them to sell in your store?" (Mitchell Toabe, interview) The Toabes began a chain of hardware stores on the South Shore that lasted for several decades.

Shopkeeping did not preclude peddling. Often wives would mind the store while the men took a horse and wagon and peddled in nearby towns too small to support their own stores. Joseph Berg is listed in 1896 as having a drygoods store at 289 Court Street in North Plymouth. A photograph shows him with his horse and wagon in Kingston PHOTO. Max Sadow had a clothing store, first on Russell Street, then near the Town Square. Daughter Sue Sadow remembered that it had a blue flashing electric sign—the first in town—and people used to walk by to look at it. A couple of days a week, his wife Celia would watch the store, while he took a horse and wagon to smaller towns to peddle men’s and boy’s clothing (Sadow, 7).

Not all peddlers were men. A few years after arriving in Plymouth, Max Pyzanski, husband of Fannie, died. A well-off cousin in Boston urged her to move back, but Fannie persevered. “As long as I have two hands,” she said, “I will take care of my children” (Muriel Swartz, interview). Her granddaughter Muriel remembers that her grandmother sold aprons to her neighbors and friends to support her family. Long-time OCM reporter Maggie Mills remembered that Mrs. Pyzanski sold second-hand children’s clothes, in particular a pair of cashmere infant booties that “caressed a baby’s foot” (Maggie Mills SOURCE). Fannie continued peddling until she was well into her seventies—“visiting her old acquaintances, more than business.” (Milt Penn, 2).

Many Jewish immigrants were involved in the clothing trade, not just as peddlers but also as tailors. Simon Orentlicher is listed as a tailor in the street directory as early as 1893. By 1905 he is listed as a clothier, with a business near Town Square on Sandwich Street near the synagogue. By 1913 he specialized in woolens and worsteds. (Several of Plymouth’s textile mills produced woolens.) Samuel Shoman and his son-in-law, Nathan Goldsmith, operated a tailoring business on Sandwich Street (PHOTO). His family recalled that they had a successful business, doing alterations and custom work for “a high class of customers.” Benjamin Dretler and Aldi Greenspan had a tailoring business on Main Street for many years. Women, including Sarah Resnick, worked as dressmakers.

Jewish merchants operated many of the town’s clothing stores. Louis Rubenstein started as an employee of Old Colony Clothing, and eventually became proprietor. Max Sadow’s son Phil

continued in the family clothing business, opening Sadow's Women's Shop at 38 Court Street near the Courthouse in the early 1920s. Meyer Shwom and his brother Ellis ran a store at 305 Court Street in North Plymouth. Several young women worked in shops downtown, including Lilyan Kabelsky. Her sister Nancy recalled that Lilyan always looked very fashionable (PHOTO at beach). Jews in neighboring communities also ran clothing stores. Abraham Feinberg operated a clothing store on Plain Street in Marshfield as early as XX. The Shiffs ran a store in Duxbury.

Abraham Penn (Pyzanski) left school at age 16 to pursue a retail career. Unbeknownst to his mother Fannie, he had started in sales while still in school, helping peddler Harry Frim sell potatoes. By 1919 he purchased Puritan Clothing with partner Kelly (Achille) Maccaferri. The business was established by Samuel Levine, who had recently died. The site at 56 Main Street (now an Indian Restaurant) had been owned by Julius Cohen, who ran a boarding house called the Shirley Inn, formerly the Colony House Hotel. (Penn and Maccaferri's business prospered, and they soon opened branches in Rockland, Chatham, and Hyannis. In the early 1950s, Penn and Maccaferri divided the business. Maccaferri chose the Plymouth store, which closed c1990. Penn took the Hyannis store. Penn was admired for his business acumen. In spite of the fact that he'd never graduated, his high school class honored him with the 'most successful' award at their 50th reunion.)

Others made a living in the shoe industry. Louis Goldstein repaired shoes near Plymouth's Town Square in the 1910s. The Student Brothers, Joseph and Hyman, operated a shoe store at 47 Main Street into the 1920s.

Jewish merchants also ran variety stores. Kasiel Simon Bass opened a variety Store on Market Street in Town Square around 1900 (PHOTO). Many dealers sold Pilgrim souvenirs to Plymouth's summer visitors. Bass imported porcelain dishes with Pilgrim scenes, either from Austria or Germany. A member of the congregation has two examples in her collection (PHOTO FROM ROSE).

Julius Cohen also had a variety store on Main Street in the early 1900s. Eventually he purchased several buildings on Market Street and opened Cohen's store, which sold second-hand goods. Milt Penn that Mr. Cohen's reading glasses "always had a small round sticker label on one lens, identifying as having come from the rack of glasses in his store." (Penn, 2). His son Harris and his wife Rose Skulsky Cohen ran a second-hand store into the 1960s (photo) The large sign with the Cohen name attracted many Jewish visitors to Plymouth. PHOTO

Every immigrant group in Plymouth had grocers, and the Jews were no exception. By 1903 Louis and Ida Resnick had established a grocery store at their residence at 92 South Street, a frame house that is still standing today. Eventually they opened a small store across the street where they sold candy, tobacco and magazines. (The building was recently torn down.) On visits in the 1930s, grandson Bernard Resnick remembered watching his grandfather sitting in his store reading *Argosy* magazine. (Bern Resnick, interview)

Joseph Cohen, who came to America around 1908, started working at the Plymouth Cordage Company, but decided it was not for him. He opened a whole-sale candy business, and rented a horse and wagon to deliver candy to small shops in towns from Cape Cod to Kingston. Nephew Morris Bloom remembered asking how he earned a living. Even after deducting the price of the horse and wagon, Cohen earned \$5 per week, almost twice what the average worker at the Cordage Company made (Bloom, interview).

After WWI, Joseph joined forces with Julius Sepet, a meat cutter, to open several grocery stores. Cohen appeared in the Plymouth Directory from 1913 through 1921 as running a store at 41 Summer St, (an apartment building built by another Jewish family, the Markuses) Throughout the 1920s and '30s, Cohen and his wife Sylvia ran two stores in downtown Plymouth: People's Market, on Market St., (photo) and National D. Market at their home at 27 Summer St. National D. catered to the Jewish population. The Cohens ran two other stores—Pioneer Market on Main St. Extension, across from the Post Office, and a store at the Federal Cranberry Bog in Carver for Cape Verdean cranberry workers. On Friday nights, the men came in from the cranberry bogs to People's Market to shop and talk about their families back home in Cape Verde. Daughter Gladys remembered roasting potatoes and chestnuts for the men (Gladys Cohen Rotenberg,

interview).

There were several Jewish butchers. Jacob Steinberg, who lived next door to the synagogue, served as the community shochet in the 1920s and later. Nancy Kabelsky Cutler remembered visiting the Steinbergs as a girl. Steinberg slaughtered chickens in his basement, and Nancy recalled holding the chickens' feet for him.

Other members of the community, particularly the Resnicks and Skulskys, operated cattle businesses. Both Morris Resnick and brother Simon were cattle dealers as early as the 1910s. Morris and his sons, William and Alton, traveled by horse and wagon (later truck) between Cape Cod and Brockton to buy and sell cows. Veterinarian Ray Russo remembered how most families who lived outside of town kept at least one cow to provide milk, as late as the 1960s. By 1936, Morris had a farm in Kingston on Basler's Lane to keep the cattle, near his brother Simon's farm. PHOTOS (In 1948, William and Alton bought the 200-acre Berquist farm in East Bridgewater. Alton's sons remembered helping to milk 70 head of cattle every day. They family also sold produce during the summer, and were known for the sweet corn they grew on the farm.)

Many Jews in Boston worked as cigar makers, and Plymouth had some as well. David Seldeen and Harry Glassman worked in the tobacco trade. As early as 1915, Glassman had a shop at the corner of Sandwich and Water streets. Milt Penn recalled, "Tobacco leaves hung in his attic and his house always had the pervading odor of tobacco." (Penn, 2)

A couple of businessmen made supplemented their incomes by buying and selling land, which Jews had not been allowed to do in Russia. Some of the earliest to do so were Meyer Markus and his wife Bessie. They bought old houses or vacant lots in the center of town and built new flats. Many Jewish families, including the Kabelskys, lived in apartments at 41 Summer Street, built by the Markuses. PHOTO They also built the Dezorrett house at 52 Summer Street, near the Grist Mill. PHOTO The Cohens were extremely active in real estate. Julius and his sons and daughters bought and sold dozens of old houses in central Plymouth and rented them as tenements. OCM reporter and long-time Plymouth resident Maggie Mills grew up in two of

Cohen's apartments. Julius's son Harris continued the family tradition of real estate into the 1960s, supplying low-cost apartments to Plymoutheans.

By the 1930s, there were a few Jewish professionals. Dr. Earl Waterman came to Plymouth when he was courting Hattie Resnick in the late '20s. He loved the ocean, and decided to settle in town. Hyman Duberstein practiced medicine in North Plymouth. There were two dentists: Dr. Sam Hirson, and Dr. Harry Keller, who came to Plymouth around 1940. Attorney Reubin Winokur arrived in town in the 1930s. Abe Feinberg, who later became a judge, was the son of the Feinbergs who ran a clothing store in Marshfield.

## Chapter 4: The Importance of Family

### Marriage

Perhaps the first Jewish marriage celebrated in Plymouth was between Max Toabe and Ida Schachter on July 26, 1899. It is not known who officiated. Max had come to America from Russia on his own in the early 1890s. His wife, Sarah Berger Toabe, and two sons left a few years later, accompanied by Max's sister Sarah and their father, Michel. When Max went to Boston to meet them, he discovered that his wife Sarah had died en route. Max had a difficult time making a living and raising two boys. He went to a *shadchen* and found a new wife, Ida. The couple had six children of their own.

Losing a spouse was not uncommon. David Resnick lost his wife, Sarah Lipsitz in 1902 from consumption. Having young children to raise, he married Jennie Miller the next year in Plymouth. Meyer Markus, who came to Plymouth in the 1890s, lost his wife Eva, and was later married to Bessie Chesler of New York in 1904.

With a pool of about fifty families, it was possible to find a Jewish spouse without leaving Plymouth. Indeed, there were several marriages between Plymouth families in the early years. Sarah Toabe (sister of Max) married Abram Sherman in 1905. The couple settled at 106 Sandwich Street where their four children were born. Other marriages between Plymouth families include: Esther Skulsky and David Rice (1909); Rose Greenspoon and Benjamin Dretler (1909); William Jacob Berg and Annie Bass (1909). By the second generation it became harder, and Rose Skulsky and Harris B. Cohen (1934) are the only example of Jewish Plymoutheans to marry.

Mixed marriages were almost inconceivable. "The only intermarriage was a Litvak and a Russian, or a Sephardic marrying an Ashkanazi." (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary script) By the 1920s, it became harder to find Jewish spouses locally. Dozens of young people found mates in Boston and the surrounding towns, both north and south. Others were married in East Providence, Pawtucket, Fall River and New Bedford. Several families moved away to make it possible for

their young-adult children to marry within the faith. More than one of Sarah and Simon Orentlicher's daughters married "out." Eventually the family moved to New York.

In one case, a Plymouth father tried to make his son marry within the faith from beyond the grave. The son was in love with a *shikseh*. When the father died, he made a provision in his will that his son could only claim his inheritance if he married a Jewish girl. The young man decided to marry his cousin, who later felt "ill used." Eventually the couple divorced; each remarried more happily within a few years.

There is at least one instance of conversion. Hattie Resnick Waterman had a Finnish nanny named Lillian Puukka to help with her children. Hattie's brother Alton fell in love with Lillian. They courted quietly for several years. Lillian underwent an Orthodox conversion, and the couple married.

Occasionally the local newspaper gave detailed descriptions of weddings. Gertrude Cohen (daughter of Julius and Mary) married Jules Goodman of Boston in 1922. The ceremony took place in Kingston Town Hall, and was performed by Rabbi Borkin. "The bride wore a gown of white satin, covered with Chantilly lace and tulle bows on either side. Her veil was of Spanish lace, caught up with orange blossoms in coronet fashion. She carried a shower bouquet of white roses." (OCM March 3, 1922). After the wedding, the couple and 250 guests enjoyed a chicken dinner and dancing.

## Children

Couples of the first generation of immigrants had large families. In the first quarter of the century, five or six children were not uncommon. By the '20s and '30s, large families were less frequent. A few families had one or two children, while the Orentlichers were the largest family—they had 13 children, ten of whom lived to adulthood.

When Morris and Celia Resnick left Lithuania together in 1902, Celia was pregnant. The family was afraid she'd give birth while aboard the ship, but Hattie Rachel arrived a few weeks after



they arrived. Other couples were separated by immigration, as the husband emigrated to America first to earn money for his family's passage. Elmer Berg was born a year or so after Ida Berg joined her husband Joseph in Plymouth. The Shomans also had two American-born children after Edith arrived in Plymouth, to join the four that had come from Russia.

Most children were born at home in the early years. Rose Sherman Geller remembers hearing of how she was born in 1918. Neighbor Celia Resnick called Dr. Hitchcock, who came to deliver Rose at home. Fannie Pyzanski served as a midwife for many women of the Jewish community, and was known for her standards of cleanliness. Dr. Earl Waterman, who came to Plymouth in the late 1920s, delivered hundreds of Plymouth babies, both Jewish and gentile.

Death from sickness or accident was more common than today. Three of Sarah Orentlicher's babies died young, as did the Bass's daughter Becca, who was born and died in 1899. Libby (Leah) and Jacob Sadow survived a tragedy—while living in England, their daughter three-year old daughter Anna was “standing in front of an open fireplace, and her dress caught fire.” She died of the burns. Libby could not stop crying, and Jacob decided to move from England to take her away from the scene of the tragedy. (Sadow 44-5). After living a couple of years in Plymouth, Libby gave birth to another daughter, whom she named Anna.

Becoming a *bar mitzvah* was not a major event. Neither Rose Sherman Geller nor her mother Sarah attended Hy Sherman's *bar mitzvah*. Abram took his son to Boston to Rabbi Korf's synagogue. “There was a minyan, and some schnapps. That was it,” Geller recalled.

Most children were educated through grade school. Many of the boys, particularly the older ones, stopped going to school to work, either for the family store or in the mills. Some boys, however, went on through high school and into college and became professionals. Kebe Toabe and Alvin Sadow attended MIT. Wilfred Cohen became a dentist. Maurice and Albert Resnick and Igo William Toabe became lawyers, as did David Dezorett. David was the first son born to Israel and Rebecca Dezorett after they came to Plymouth from the Ukraine. He attended City College of New York (known as the Jewish Harvard) and then St. John's Law School.

Selig (Philip Steinberg) attended Harvard University on a scholarship established by a Cordage Company executive whose son had died in the service. Upon graduation in 1920, Selig had no leads for employment. While sitting on a park bench in Boston Common, he met a newspaper owner. While chatting together, Selig was offered a job as a writer—the agricultural columnist for a Springfield paper. Selig enjoyed a long, successful career as a newspaper columnist, ending up as the New York Times financial editor. (Morris Bloom, interview)

It was not common for girls to go to college. Sue Sadow related how she had a fight on her hands to convince her family that she should go for further education. “A *girl* get more education? Why? A *girl* gets married and raises a family,” her Aunt Ida scolded her. Sue had done very well in school, and her principal recommended that she attend Simmons College in Boston, which she did. Sue wanted to “get more education and see the world.” (Sadow, 64-69). Even a generation later, when Rose Sherman Geller went to the University of New Hampshire, it was not common for Jewish girls to go to college (Geller, interview).

Tradition notwithstanding, a few other young women attended college. Sue Sadow’s younger sister also attended Simmons College for social work, and Gladys Cohen Rotenberg went to Boston University. One of the best-educated of the second generation of Jews in Plymouth was Irene Toabe, who received an MA in social service from the University of Chicago.

## Death

When emigrants left Europe, they took the chance that they might never see their families again. Max and Jacob Sadow’s mother stayed in Doag, Lithuania. Only one son, Julius, who lived in Boston, was able to visit her in Europe. Shortly after he returned, the family heard that she had died.

“My father stayed home from the store for a whole week, which meant my mother had to go there all day long. He was sitting “shiva” at home...He sat on a low stool, was in his stocking feet, prayed all day, and looked sad. Each morning when it was still dark at six o’clock...nine Jewish men arrived in their working clothes...They came to say the prayer

for the deceased...My mother prepared glasses of tea to serve them before they left...The same group arrived at sundown every day for the week of “shiva.” (Sadow, 41-42).

Sadly, death a young age was not uncommon. The immigrant generation worked hard, and some worked themselves to death. Tailor Samuel Shoman died suddenly from a brain tumor in 1920, at the age of 49. David Resnick dropped dead in Boston at age 51 the next year. Even surgery was risky. In 1933, Ida Kabelsy suffered a fall. She underwent surgery, and died from a cardiac arrest, leaving her husband Frank and four daughters. One man, Lewis Smith, was killed in an accident at the Plymouth Cordage Company (OCM April 19, 1918).

In 1930, Abram Sherman was in the hospital for surgery, and also died suddenly at age 48. Daughter Rose Sherman Geller, only eleven years old at the time, recalled crying in the hallway of their new house on Lothrop Street, where the family had moved from Sandwich Street. He was laid out on the parlor floor of their home. Sherman’s death was a shock to the Jewish community. Not only was he young, he was successful and a leader. Rose remembered the men of the Jewish community marching in front of the hearse. Abram was buried in Plymouth Rock Cemetery in Brockton, where many of Plymouth’s Jews are interred. (Rose Geller, interview)

Young men died from war. Fifteen men of Plymouth’s Jewish community served in WWI. At least one, Samuel Smith, was killed. He was the son of Louis and Ida Goldberg Smith. Born in Russia, he worked for the Plymouth Cordage Co. prior to enlisting in the army during the border issues with Mexico in 1916. He enlisted in the Standish Guards (Massachusetts 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry) and served in the 101<sup>st</sup> infantry in France, where he was killed on August 8, 1918. It is said that Smith’s Lane in Kingston is named in his honor.

The 1918 Spanish Influenza epidemic, which attacked people in their prime, claimed several Jewish people. Mitchell David Cohen, son of Julius and Mary lied about his age to join the army. He survived WWI, only to fall victim to the dangerous flu just before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Harris Kaplowitz, who ran a clothing store, also succumbed to the epidemic.

While the Jewish people observed family events within the community, they were part of a large town. They lived, worked, went to school and played in a gentile society.

## Chapter 5: A Community within a Small Town

### Jewish Participation in a Gentile Town

While there was no single Jewish neighborhood, Jews tended to live in certain areas. With the exception of North Plymouth, these areas were within walking distance of the synagogue. These were Plymouth's unfashionable neighborhoods. Many homes were located in very old districts, and were often carved into tenements. Homes in other areas, like South Street on the outskirts of town, were very small and modest.

The synagogue is located immediately south of Town Brook, which divides Plymouth. People who lived over the brook came from "t'other side." (Davis). Many Jews lived within a rectangle formed by Sandwich Street on the north and east, Pleasant Street on the west, and just beyond South Street on the south. Sue Sadow referred to this neighborhood as "over south" (Sadow, 41-42).

The house that used to be on the synagogue's lawn was long occupied by Jewish families, particularly the Steinbergs. Down the street to the southeast (where Friendly's is today), lived tailor Benjamin Dretler and his wife Rose. The Shomans lived across the street. A few families lived east of Sandwich Street close to the waterfront: Water, Union and Bradford streets. They included junk dealer Harry Frim on Freedom Street, the Shribers and Klaskys on Union Street, and the Orentlichers and Markuses on Bradford Street.

Pleasant Street, which borders the Town Green, had many Jewish homes, including 57 and 57 1/2. Shokhet Jacob Steinberg ran a small grocery and butcher shop in 57. Across from the synagogue on Pleasant Street was Bass Alley, which ran along the south side of Town Brook. It was named after Kasiel Simon Bass, who lived there for many years. The lane disappeared during urban renewal. The Cohen family owned 3 South Green, which was divided into several apartments for Cohen siblings. Fannie Pyzanski (Penn) lived there in her older years.

A group of tiny houses on Sandwich Street, many with more than one family, formed the nucleus of a Jewish area: 105, 106, 106 ½, 107 and 108. On the west side, number 105 housed a number of Jewish families over time. Cattle dealer Simon Resnick and his wife Rachael lived there as early as 1915 through the 1930s. A variety of other Jewish families lived there, changing over time. Number 107 housed the Padlusky family. Ida Padlusky was Abram Sherman's sister, and her husband John worked for one of the woolen mills. Ida was known for her cooking, and she ran a boarding house for peddlers who wanted to stay in a Kosher home. Behind the Padlusky's house was the car barn for Plymouth's trolley system (defunct by the '20s). According to family legend, the Padluskys used to keep chickens in one of the old trolley cars.

Across the street, the Sherman family lived at 106 Sandwich from around 1907 until the early '20s, when they purchased a comfortable house on Lothrop Street, just north of the center of town. It appears that the Shermans took in Jewish boarders—the 1920 census lists a furniture store clerk named Louis Kordish. In the early 1930s, the Kabelskys lived at 106 1/2 Sandwich Street, in a house behind 108, which was owned by the Skulskys. The Kabelskys lived upstairs. Another Jewish family, the Bolotins, lived adjacent. Nancy Kabelsky Cutler remembered hearing Mrs. Bolotin coaxing her daughter Sylvia to eat her oatmeal, "*Es, es, es!*"

Just up the street across from South Street at number 88 lived Simon's brother Morris Resnick and his family. Celia Resnick is remembered by her grandchildren as a devout, loving woman, known for her excellent Kosher cooking. She raised six living children of her own, and took care of David Resnick's sons when his wife died. She took in tenants, including Jewish couples just starting out (including Morris and Lee Bloom after WWII). Her grandchildren recalled family celebrations at the 88 Sandwich St. house, when Celia made her famous sponge cake, and sweet-sour tomato soup with meatballs. She would squeeze her grand-children's faces with her long fingers, exclaiming, "*shena punim!*"

The neighborhood was not exclusively Jewish, but people got along. Joe Busi related how, as a boy, he used to play ball on one of the fields by the high school. One day he was engaged in a ballgame when "this fellow Sherman" (Louis or Hy) came along. The boys knew each other from school. Busi noted that Sherman had a chicken head sticking out of his sweater—he was

on the way to the shokhet to have the chicken slaughtered for Shabbat dinner, and had to wait for the rabbi to return. Busi called his younger sisters to babysit the chicken, while the Sherman boy joined the game until it was time to go to the rabbi (Busi, 6-7).

Immediately south of the Town Green is South Street. Several Jewish families lived on the western end of South Street, near Towns Street. Louis and Ida Resnick lived at 92 South Street for years. Grandson Bern Resnick recalled a deep lot. Ida tended the huge garden, and raised ducks. She would send her family exsanguinated ducks through the mail for holidays like Thanksgiving (Bern Resnick, interview). Other Resnicks lived at 96 South Street, and the Zavalcofskys at number 90. The Goldbergs lived across the way on Towns Street.

The Summer/High Street neighborhood, a block from the synagogue, was about 20% Jewish. The area includes Edes and Russell Streets. Jews lived and boarded in houses where the John Carver Inn is today. While once a nice area, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century many of the homes were run down and divided into tenements. The Markuses bought a couple lots and erected modern two-and three-decker houses, such as 41 Summer Street, occupied by several Jewish families. The Joseph Cohens ran a grocery store at 27 Summer Street that catered to the community. They carried Passover foods, smoked fish and rye bread (Penn, 2). Muriel Swartz Penn recalled that visiting Cohen's store was very much a social affair—Mrs. Cohen would invite people to the back of the store for cake and a chat (Swartz, interview).

Sue Sadow grew up at a house on Summer Street. When her uncle Jacob and family came to town, Sue's mother Celia helped the newly-arrived family purchase a house across the street at 48 Summer (still extant—PHOTO). Max and Celia were well-established, and were known as the *roche* (rich) Sadows, while Jacob's family were the *uremeh* (poor) Sadows.

A small group lived in North Plymouth, two or three miles from the center of town. These families included the Dreitzers, Meyer and Ellis Shwom, and until 1924, the Toabes. Dr. Hyman and Gertrude Duberstein moved there in the 1930s. There were several Jewish businesses along Court Street in North Plymouth, including Toabe's Hardware, Sherman's Hardware, the Shwom's clothing store, and the Stein's furniture store.

North Plymouth was a community of immigrants, particularly from Italy and Portugal. Many worked for the Plymouth Cordage Company. As almost all the families were of immigrant stock, people got along fairly well. Occasionally there was teasing. Hyman and Zina Dreitzer ran a dry-goods store at 298 Court Street. Jelly (Vincent) Baietti recalled the neighborhood kids teasing Mr. Dreitzer, who had a thick Yiddish accent. They would chant, “Hyman Dreitzer, Hyman Dreitzer, how much for the one-dollar overalls?” (Baietti, interview)

### Service in WWI

Plymouth’s Jewish community was an active participant in the war effort. In an era where sauerkraut was renamed “liberty cabbage,” Plymouth’s many immigrants were eager to show their patriotism for their new country. Some businesses changed names. Abraham Miller ran a bakery from c 1911 to c 1919 at 31 Mayflower St. In 1915 he called it Plymouth German Bakery, but renamed it Plymouth Bakery. Other businesses, like Sadow’s Women’s Shop, held flag-raising ceremonies complete with patriotic songs at their Court St. clothing store.

In 1918 CBJ and the Plymouth Zionist Organization held a flag-raising, with a service flag with 15 stars for Plymouth’s Jewish young men in the armed forces. INSERT LIST. Philip Sadow, son of Max and Celia, served as an officer in Florida. As officers were expected to supply their own clothing, Phil ordered his through the family store. His father claimed that Phil had a better overcoat than General Pershing!

Maurice Shoman enlisted in Co. D, 101<sup>st</sup> Infantry, and served in the Expeditionary Forces in France, where he was gassed. An honored soldier, he received a Distinguished Service Cross for bravery near Verdun. “After killing many of the enemy, he was left alone in a shell hole with no more ammunition. Finding himself surrounded by a sudden counter-attack of the enemy, he grabbed a light machine-gun and held off the enemy until he was rescued by his comrades. The fire from his gun was decidedly instrumental in overcoming the counterattack.” He also received the Croix de Guerre. Soon after his discharge in 1919 at the rank of sergeant, he went west for his health and eventually moved to California.



Elmer Berg enlisted in the army (101<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts National Guard, Co. D) and served both in the 1916 border conflicts with Mexico and in Europe in WWI. He apparently learned electronics while in the service, where he was a mechanic. After he returned, he was often called upon to fix Plymouth's stoplights. Elmer was much decorated. Lou Stein remembered visiting the Berg's house to pay rent. Mrs. Berg used to show him Elmer's war medals.

The synagogue benefited from one man's war service. Saul Padlusky's parents promised to pay off the synagogue's second mortgage if he returned safely, which he did.

### Jewish Contributions to the Community

Jewish businessmen had a lasting impact on Plymouth's commercial buildings. One of the first to build a new shop was Samuel Shoman, who had a house and shop across the street from the synagogue. When his shop burned around 1915, he built a new structure, extending diagonally from Sandwich Street to the new Main Street Extension. The Shoman Building housed his tailor shop as well as Old Colony Furniture. PHOTO. The building was torn down in the 1960s as part of urban renewal. (Shoman obituary, OCM 10/8/1920)

Jews built several structures on Court Street in North Plymouth. Joseph Berg erected the current Balboni's Drug Store building, as well as the building next to it. The lower floors were shops, and the upper storey was rental property. In 1928 Abram Sherman built a three-storey structure for his furniture and hardware store. Rose Sherman Geller thought that it might have been the first in Plymouth with an elevator. (Geller, interview) Across the street, Sherman's long-time friends the Shwoms built another three-storey building. Both the Shwom Building and Sherman Building have their names on them, are still in use today. PHOTOS

### Pride in Plymouth's Heritage

Unlike other immigrant groups, Jews had little reason to want to return home, where they faced sure persecution. Many Jewish immigrants were quick to try to fit into their new country. Most

spoke broken English, and relied on the younger generation to translate. Yiddish was spoken when parents didn't want their children to know what they were talking about (Penn, 1).

As businessmen opened shops, they frequently referred to Plymouth's famous history when naming them. Examples include Old Colony Furniture, Puritan Clothing, and Standish Clothing. Jacob Sadow's son peddled Plymouth souvenirs. Boys like Bobby Shoman hung out around Plymouth Rock, waiting to act as tour guides. Like the rest of Plymouth's population, Jews enthusiastically participated in the 1921 pageant to celebrate the town's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Mitchell Toabe recalled carrying a flag in the parade of states.

Between the 1880s and 1930s, the first two generations of Jewish immigrants adapted to life in their historic new home. They established a congregation, built a synagogue, formed families and established businesses. By the third generation, the community had shrunk, as residents moved to larger cities. It was finally reinvigorated with the end of WWII, which is the next major period of development in the history of Plymouth's Jewish community.