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MAKING THEIR WAY IN THE NEW SOUTH: JEWISH PEDDLERS AND MERCHANTS IN THE SOUTH CAROLINA UP COUNTRY

DIANE C. VECCHIO*

IN 1896 RUSSIAN-BORN NATHAN SHAPIRO BEGAN PEDDLING goods in and around the small courthouse town of Union in northwestern South Carolina. After three years of peddling on foot, Shapiro bought a horse and wagon, and by 1907, he had established his own dry-goods store in Union. Another Russian Jewish immigrant, Joseph Miller, followed a similar path to becoming a merchant. Miller began peddling goods in Charleston in 1900; a decade later, he was the proprietor of the Standard Cloak Company in the rising textile-mill town of Spartanburg, located about twenty-five miles northwest of Union.¹

The experiences of peddlers and merchants such as Shapiro and Miller reflect a larger history of the Jewish experience in the South following the Civil War. The restructuring of the national supply system that took place during Reconstruction left the war-torn southern states desperate for goods and services. Enterprising Jews from the North as well as recent immigrants from eastern Europe recognized this need and were attracted to the South for its economic potential.

This essay examines one specific region of the South, the South Carolina up country, and demonstrates how migrant Jews provided consumer goods and contributed to commercial growth at a time when the economic and political power of rural planters was giving way to town-based businessmen.² Jewish influence on consumer culture and commercial activity was not unique to the up country of South Carolina, however. Jewish peddlers

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¹ Up-country South Carolina, also referred to as the upstate, is bordered on the north by North Carolina and on the west by Georgia. It extends southward and eastward to the fall line in central South Carolina. For the purposes of this article, the fifteen mountain and piedmont counties that comprise the up country are Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg, Cherokee, York, Anderson, Laurens, Union, Chester, Abbeville, McCormick, Greenwood, Edgefield, and Newberry.

² Bruce W. Eelman, *Entrepreneurs in the Southern Upcountry: Commercial Culture in Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1845–1880* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 5. Eelman explains that this critical power shift meant Spartanburg's champions of commercialization and diversification could implement their longstanding vision for the region.

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and merchants were ubiquitous throughout the postbellum South as well as the expanding West.³

While northern investors and southern progressives transformed the economic base of the Carolina up country from cotton production to textile manufacturing after the Civil War, peddlers and merchants—both Jew and gentile—provided a wide array of goods to the burgeoning population.⁴ As they moved up the economic ladder, Jewish migrants entered the southern middle class and became vigorous players in civic and community life. Comparable to patterns in other parts of the South, Jews in the up country steadily reformulated their ethnic identity to blend into southern culture.

JEWIS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Jewish settlement dates to the seventeenth century in the British colony of Carolina, where it was largely concentrated in the port city of Charleston, a thriving trading center that was home to the largest American Jewish community in 1820. While the Sephardim, Jews of Iberian descent, immigrated to Charleston during the colonial period, later arrivals tended to be Ashkenazi Jews, almost all of them from the German-speaking lands of central Europe.⁵

The number of Jews engaged in peddling increased during the late nineteenth century with the coming of eastern Europeans. Deteriorating economic conditions coupled with violent anti-Semitism in the Russian Empire resulted in the emigration of some 2.25 million Jews from Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Galicia to the United States between 1890 and 1924. While the majority of late-nineteenth-century Jewish immigrants settled in the urbanized Northeast and Upper Midwest where garment manufacturing dominated the economic landscape, smaller numbers followed kinship and social networks to rural areas and small towns scattered from coast to coast and took up peddling. The appearance of eastern European Jewish peddlers below the Mason-Dixon line places the South in an expansive trajectory of Jewish migration that helped to shape domestic commerce during the post-Civil War era.

Whereas the commercial spheres of their Jewish predecessors in the South had been confined to the port cities, eastern European Jews filled a

³ See Elliott Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West, 1870s–1952* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

⁴ While few in number, there also were several peddlers from Ireland, Syria, and Italy.

⁵ Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845–1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 14.

different economic niche. Peddlers and shopkeepers as well as cloth and scrap-metal dealers, they ranged far into the southern interior selling clothing, needles, tobacco products, dry goods, hardware, and jewelry. Their extensive territory included the hinterlands of the up country, where large numbers of Scots-Irish had lived since before the Revolutionary War.

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Spartanburg and Greenville, the two largest cities in the up country, were at the center of the South's postbellum textile-manufacturing boom. Although relatively few mills existed in the area before the Civil War, technological advances initiated by local entrepreneurs with the backing of northern capital investments led to a wave of mill development from the 1880s onward.⁶ In Spartanburg County alone, the number of spindles multiplied from about eight thousand to a half-million during the last two decades of the century.⁷ The radical economic shift of this region where cotton once was king has been a focus for several historians of the New South. Lacy Ford, for one, claims that "perhaps no other region was transformed more dramatically by the commercial and industrial revolutions that swept through part of the South between 1850 and 1900 than was the South Carolina Upcountry."⁸

The expansion of the transportation system further contributed to the commercial revolution of the up country. By 1890 three major north-south rail lines crossed upper South Carolina. Railroads were crucial for bringing Jewish peddlers and merchants to the up country and also created easy access for merchants to northern wholesalers and commission houses. As textile manufacturing spread, the industry attracted a large town class and thousands of mill hands to the up country. The population of Spartanburg County surged from 65,560 in 1900 to 116,323 by 1930, and Greenville County's more than doubled from 53,490 to 117,009 over the same period.⁹ Cities grew and commercial development made this part of the state an attractive destination for entrepreneurial Jewish migrants, who together with local businessmen helped to build the foundation for a postwar liberal capitalist ideology.¹⁰

⁶ In *Entrepreneurs in the Southern Upcountry*, Eelman argues that during the antebellum period, Spartanburg had a middle class of professionals and commercial people that challenged planter control and laid the foundation for a postwar liberal capitalist ideology.

⁷ Betsy Wakefield Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Hub City Writers Project, 2002), 41.

⁸ Lacy K. Ford, "Rednecks and Merchants: Economic Development and Social Tensions in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1865-1900," *Journal of American History* 71 (September 1984): 298.

⁹ Diane Vecchio, "Migration from the Mountains: Building a Local Labor Force," in Teeter, *Textile Town*, 83-84.

¹⁰ Eelman, *Entrepreneurs in the Southern Upcountry*, 8.



Undated photograph of the interior of Greenwald's Department Store in Spartanburg. Moses Greenwald founded the store in 1886. He later was joined in the business by his brothers Isaac, David, and Max. Greenwald's closed in 1991. From a private collection.

JEWISH PEDDLERS IN THE UP COUNTRY

Peddlers were among the earliest commercial agents in the up country. Travelling to remote places to sell urban-produced goods, they introduced the rural population to the budding market economy. While rural dwellers with limited access to consumer goods anxiously awaited the peddlers' visits, established merchants dreaded the competition. In his study of Edgefield and Barnwell Districts during the antebellum period, historian Tom Downey notes that itinerant peddlers were portrayed as "foreign and unscrupulous characters."¹¹ Downey argues that "district merchants not only sought to discredit a source of economic competition but also to enhance

¹¹ Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 159-160.

the reputation of their profession, as well as the place of commerce within the agrarian landscape."¹² Regardless of the charges waged against them, peddlers persisted in hawking their goods and became increasingly visible in the up country in the wake of the Civil War. Along with the relatively large number of Jews in the business, there were several Irish and Lebanese peddlers who passed through the up country in the late nineteenth century.¹³

Peddling was often the first occupation many Jewish males took up when they arrived in America. According to Hasia Diner, who provides excellent historical context for understanding the Jewish peddler, peddling was "a global movement of Jews engaged in an occupation that was deeply rooted in European history."¹⁴ Generation upon generation of Jews had peddled goods throughout the world since the Middle Ages, selling to Jews and non-Jews alike. In France, Poland, and the German state of Wurttemberg, for example, peddling was the chief occupation of Jews during the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ In fact, Diner argues that peddling actually formed the economic, political, social, and cultural framework for the lives of most European Jews.¹⁶ In America, Jewish peddlers could be found everywhere selling their wares—from the large eastern cites to the Ohio River Valley, to the agricultural South, to the sparsely inhabited Southwest.¹⁷

Jewish peddlers were drawn to the South by family and friends, and personal connections were one of the most important factors determining the specific communities in which they settled.¹⁸ In South Carolina, Jewish peddlers generally came through the port of Charleston and worked their way north and west across the state. Networks of migration and settlement

¹² *Ibid.*, 159.

¹³ Basher Hodge was a Lebanese peddler who sold goods in the environs of Spartanburg. Susan Hodge interview conducted by author, October 24, 2007. Phillip Najar was the first Lebanese to arrive in Greenville. In 1900 he was listed in the census as a peddler. Elizabeth Virginia Whitaker, "Lebanese Families Who Arrived in South Carolina before 1950: From the Margins of Society to the Center of Society" (M.A. thesis, Clemson University, 2006), 24.

¹⁴ My work on Jewish peddlers is chiefly informed by the path-breaking analysis of Hasia Diner. See especially Diner, "Entering the Mainstream of Modern Jewish History: Peddlers and the American Jewish South," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, ed. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark L. Greenberg (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 86–108.

¹⁵ Diner, "Entering the Mainstream of Jewish History," 89–92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸ Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 45.

were repeated many times over in the up country as demonstrated by Russian-born David Poliakoff, who left Worcester, Massachusetts, in the 1890s to be near his sister in the town of Abbeville. Years later, his cousin Rosa From Poliakoff recalled that "he [David] started peddling—they all started out as peddlers, my father did too—he started peddling and followed the Savannah River . . . each day he'd go a little bit further, establishing a clientele."¹⁹ Israel From, a native of Lithuania, began peddling in Union in 1879 after a cousin settled there, while George A. Visanka of Poland followed a family member to Charleston, eventually leaving the low country to join an Abbeville mercantile firm owned by his uncle. Native Russian peddler Sam Davidson initially lived with an uncle in Anderson upon arriving in the up country in 1903.²⁰

In the years following the Civil War, a peddling license required only a small investment.²¹ It had not always been that way in South Carolina, however. Fearing that abolitionists might pose as peddlers or that peddlers would trade with slaves, the state of South Carolina enacted stringent assessments on peddling licenses in the antebellum era. In 1825 peddlers paid fifty dollars for a license; by 1835 the cost of a license had skyrocketed to one thousand dollars.²² After the war, licenses once again became affordable, and goods were usually provided to peddlers on consignment from a wholesaler. East Coast importers and wholesalers shipped goods to merchants and manufacturers in regional centers, who in turn provided merchandise directly to peddlers.²³ George Visanka opened his own peddler-supply business in Charleston in the postbellum period, providing goods and credit to itinerant merchants all around South Carolina.²⁴ Perhaps one of the best-known wholesalers to offer goods and credit to Jewish peddlers and merchants in the South was Jacob Epstein, a Lithuanian Jew who founded the Baltimore Bargain House in Maryland in 1882. In 1906 Union peddler Nathan Shapiro bought a round-trip ticket to Baltimore and selected the stock he would peddle in South Carolina from the Baltimore

¹⁹ Rosa From Poliakoff interview conducted by Dale Rosengarten, May 19, 1995, p. 11, Jewish Heritage Collection, Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C. (hereafter cited as JHC).

²⁰ Ibid.; Trevor Anderson, "Owner of Davidson's Dress Shop Plans to Hang It Up in Chesnee," *Herald-Journal* (Spartanburg, S.C.), November 27, 2008.

²¹ Amy Hill Shevitz, *Jewish Communities on the Ohio River: A History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 37.

²² Lewis Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising in the Antebellum South," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19 (April 1945): 35–39.

²³ Shevitz, *Jewish Communities on the Ohio River*, 37.

²⁴ George Visanska Rosenberg interview conducted by Dale Rosengarten, September 2, 1996, JHC.

Bargain House.²⁵ Reputedly, Epstein even paid peddlers' railroad fares to Baltimore to restock their merchandise.²⁶

After purchasing their stock, up-country peddlers traveled desolate, treacherous roads hawking their wares. Journeying mainly by foot with packs strapped to their backs or one-horse wagons, Jewish peddlers sold merchandise to eager clients hungry for goods that were unattainable during the Civil War and for many years thereafter.²⁷ Historian Jonathan Sarna hails peddlers as the "foot soldiers of the nineteenth-century market revolution . . . the proverbial middlemen who purchased goods and sold them" to people living in far-flung places.²⁸

In her study of itinerant commerce in the rural South, Lu Ann Jones demonstrates the significance of peddlers who "extended the world of manufactured goods into the countryside."²⁹ Jones contends that the farm household was a place of consumption as well as production, made possible in large part by the appearance of itinerant merchants.³⁰ Up-country peddler Harry Shapiro sold goods that appealed especially to women like notions, needles, pins, buttons, hair pins, linens, and piece goods.³¹ Moreover, it was women who bargained, bartered, and purchased goods from the peddlers. Jones maintains the exchanges that took place between peddlers and rural women challenged prevailing notions of male dominance in southern society.³²

Peddlers appealed to women and African Americans in particular. These groups had fewer options as consumers than white men and rarely frequented towns and country stores. Nathan Shapiro recognized the significance of his visits for rural women, noting that "farmers never came to town over twice a month. Their wives hardly came more than twice a year."³³ Mrs. Richard Glasson, an up-country farm wife, explained that "Mr. Glasson

²⁵ Nathan Shapiro interview conducted by Caldwell Sims, South Carolina Writers' Project, March 6, 1939, p. 16, Union County Historical Society, Union, S.C.

²⁶ Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (1973; repr., New York: Free Press, 1997), 81–82.

²⁷ Thomas D. Clark, *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows: The Southern Country Store* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944), 23–26.

²⁸ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Peddlers Peddling, Judaism Spreading," reprinted from Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004) on the My Jewish Learning website, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/historycommunity/modern/ModernSocial/Peddlers.htm> (accessed June 10, 2009).

²⁹ Lu Ann Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce in the Rural New South," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (May 2000): 297–320.

³⁰ Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 28.

³¹ Nathan Shapiro interview, p. 6.

³² Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce," 300.

³³ Nathan Shapiro interview, p. 6.

[her husband] would go to Spartanburg to buy the things he wanted," adding that "it was hard to buy things during Reconstruction. Those old carpetbaggers and scalawags were hanging out all around Spartanburg, but I never went there a single time."³⁴ Limited by constraints on their time and travel as well as their discomfort in negotiating male-dominated public spaces, rural women became shrewd purchasers of goods that they skillfully haggled over at home with the peddler.³⁵ Further revealing the gendered practices of consumerism, southern writer Harry Crews recalled that the peddler "did business almost exclusively with women, and whatever they needed, they could always find in the Jew's wagon. If they didn't have the money to pay for what they needed, he would trade for eggs or chickens or cured meat or canned vegetables and berries."³⁶

Rural farmers depended on peddlers. According to Shapiro, "When they got to know you well, they bought all the things that they needed from you. If a farmer wanted something you did not have, you got it and brought it on your next visit to his house."³⁷ Peddlers regularly competed for clients. Shapiro recollected that "some of my good customers would not buy from any of the other four peddlers in the county at all. The other four had their exclusive customers as well as I."³⁸

The occasional visit by a peddler injected a measure of excitement into the relatively monotonous lives of rural farm people. Caroline Coleman, in her published reminiscences of growing up in Greenville County at the turn of the twentieth century, remembered how thrilling it was when she and other children playing in the yard noticed a "familiar stooped figure toiling up the lane."³⁹ Coleman wrote: " 'Grandma, there's a peddler a-coming,' we would call out as we hurried into the house. Into the big living room the peddler would come, upon grandma's invitation. We watched in wide-eyed wonder as the inner covering was unfastened and all the riches of Araby lay before us."⁴⁰ Another southern girl remarked in the 1880s that "Jewish peddlers . . . gave us something to look forward to. It was almost like having Santa Claus come. . . . We loved to see the big bundle opened up, for we seldom saw new things."⁴¹ Historian Thomas Clark describes

³⁴ Mrs. Richard Glasson interview conducted by Caldwell Sims, South Carolina Writers' Project, December 1938, Kennedy Room, Spartanburg County Public Library, Spartanburg, S.C. (hereafter cited as KRSCPL).

³⁵ Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work*, 29.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Nathan Shapiro interview, p. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ See Caroline S. Coleman, *Five Petticoats on Sunday* (Greenville, S.C.: Hiott Press, 1962).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴¹ Harry Crews, *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place* (New York: Quill Publishers, 1983), 74.

the experience of a peddler's visit as "bringing a country store right up to the most isolated country hearth."⁴²

Despite the warm welcomes Jews received at many farm houses, peddling could be a dangerous trade. Some peddlers experienced verbal and sometimes even physical abuse along their routes. Commonly stereotyped as shady dealers, peddlers were represented in literature and the popular imagination as outsiders and shrewd tricksters.⁴³ "The harshest critics of itinerants were white men who constructed unsavory images of peddlers and their female and African American clientele," notes Jones.⁴⁴ "By extending the market," she continues, "peddlers and their patrons undercut the domestic authority of men," and hence, they represented threats to the established social hierarchy.⁴⁵ For the most part, though, evidence gleaned from letters, memoirs, and personal interviews reveals that peddlers' contact with southern farm families was courteous and inviting.

Peddlers were oftentimes given lodging in the homes of gentiles. It was not unusual for Nathan Shapiro, who generally carried his pack about seven miles a day in Union County, to spend the night with friendly farm families.⁴⁶ Shapiro recalled his first such stay: "My pack was heavy and my feet ached for I had peddled all day. I could not tell them [the Humphries] in English that I wanted to spend the night, but I made signs and they made signs back. Well, they gave me my supper, a comfortable bed and a nice breakfast. The next morning when I offered money, they shook their heads and waved the offer away."⁴⁷ A second gentile family in Union County who provided Jewish peddlers with overnight room and board was the Porters, described by Shapiro as "kind-hearted people."⁴⁸ In Greenville County, Caroline Coleman's grandmother likewise refused any compensation after giving the peddler a place to sleep.⁴⁹ Another boarding option for peddlers was local hotels. Abraham Mayer peddled in the rural up country and lived in Spartanburg's Windsor Hotel during the 1890s.⁵⁰

The apparent tolerance and even kindnesses shown by many rural southerners towards peddlers raises questions about gentile attitudes

⁴² Thomas D. Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 163.

⁴³ Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce," 300.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁴⁶ Nathan Shapiro interview, *passim*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Coleman, *Five Petticoats on Sunday*, 24.

⁵⁰ *Johnson's City Directory*, 1896, Spartanburg, S.C.

concerning Jews. Historian Amy Shevitz argues that "in the American Protestant mind, negative stereotypes of Jews coexisted with positive ones in an elaborate and inconsistent way."⁵¹ In the Protestant mind, she goes on to say, Jews evoked an "ambivalent image," compounded from attitudes about the "mythical Jew" and real-life experiences with the "Jewish other." As gentiles came face to face with "real Jews," their predispositions toward the mythical Jew were altered by personal contact with the "Jew next door," who seemed to contradict long-held prejudices.⁵² Some gentiles engaged in what Sarna calls a process of reconceptualization—that is, they began to reconsider their antipathy for Jews and changed the paradigm to accept individual Jews on their own merits.⁵³

Harry Golden, a Jewish humorist, writer, and publisher of the *Carolina Israelite* from 1942 to 1962, declared that southern Protestant attitudes toward Jews had more to do with religion than anything else. "There is a touching naïveté in the small-town Southerner's respect for the Jewishness of the Jew in his community," he wrote. "It springs from the Southern Protestant's own attachment to Biblical Judaism," whereby the Jew "represents the unbroken tie with sacred history and the prophets of the Bible."⁵⁴ Historian W. J. Cash observed in *The Mind of the South* (1941) that "the relationship between Judaism and Southern Protestantism is more than parallel; it is an acknowledged bond between the two religions."⁵⁵

Respect for Jews as God's chosen people among simple rural southerners may help to explain their acceptance of Jewish peddlers. But equally important was the fact that Jewish peddlers brought consumerism to their front doors, and for that, they were extremely grateful. Peddlers were the first Jewish settlers in the up country, and typically, they were the first Jews that rural South Carolinians encountered. For the most part, those experiences were positive and paved the way for future commercial relations between Jews and up-country gentiles.

⁵¹ Shevitz, *Jewish Communities on the Ohio River*, 104. See also Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Louise A. Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth-Century America's Perception of the Jew* (Rutherford, [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988); Jonathan D. Sarna, "The 'Mythical Jew' and the 'Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 57–78.

⁵² Shevitz, *Jewish Communities on the Ohio River*, 104.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Harry Golden, "Jew and Gentile in the New South," box 32, folder 20, Harry Golden Papers, Special Collections, Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

⁵⁵ Quoted in David Goldfield, "A Sense of Place: Jews, Blacks, and White Gentiles in the American South," *Southern Cultures* 3 (Spring 1997): 61.

FROM PEDDLER TO BUSINESSMAN

Peddling was often a stepping stone to greater entrepreneurial endeavors. Many Jewish businessmen in up-country South Carolina were eastern Europeans who started out as peddlers. With hard work and the accumulation of sufficient capital, they eventually opened their own retail businesses. There were other Jews, however, who came to the South with express intentions of becoming established businessmen.

Because of the challenges they faced moving into unfamiliar areas far from Jewish enclaves, historian John Higham characterizes southern Jewish migrants as "more adventurous, independent and acculturated than the two million [eastern European Jews] who remained in the North."⁵⁶ David Gerber adds that "the possibility of failure and relocation enabled Jews to become risk takers who might well be considered exemplary American capitalists."⁵⁷ Union peddler Nathan Shapiro exemplifies the quintessential "risk taker." He borrowed money from friends (Jew as well as gentile), purchased goods on credit, struggled to learn the English language, failed in some business ventures, tried again in different locations of South Carolina, and ultimately prospered as a businessman.⁵⁸

Jewish merchants, similar to peddlers, shared a long history of trade as well as wholesale and retail merchandising in the Old World. In the eighteenth-century Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth, for instance, Jews settled towns to run the grain markets, making them, in the words of European scholar Adam Teller, the "forbears of capitalism in Europe."⁵⁹ In the Russian Empire in the mid nineteenth century, 40 percent of Jews were engaged in commerce, consisting mainly of shopkeeping and petty trade.⁶⁰

While some entrepreneurial Jews who came to South Carolina were initially drawn to Charleston, others headed directly for the up country. Gradually, they fanned out across the state until virtually every town was served by a Jewish-owned shop.⁶¹ A successful peddler-turned-businessman, David Poliakoff established a dry-goods store in Abbeville in 1900 after peddling first on foot and then by wagon in the up country.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, 11.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 72.

⁵⁸ Nathan Shapiro interview, *passim*.

⁵⁹ Adam Teller, "Before Rothschild: Jewish Businessmen in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Europe" (lecture, Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvania, February 4, 2009), available at <http://www.youtube.com> (accessed January 4, 2010).

⁶⁰ Howard M. Sacher, *A History of the Jews in the Modern World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 175.

⁶¹ Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten, eds., *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 113.



Undated photograph of Davidson's Department Store in Chesnee. After working a quarter-century as a peddler, Russian immigrant Sam Davidson opened this store in 1928. Following his death in 1954, Davidson's daughter Jeanette Davidson Finkelstein and her husband, Charles, took ownership of the business, which Finkelstein operated until 2009. From a private collection.

Poliakoff's became a popular destination for generations of farm families who purchased their semi-annual stock of shoes and clothing at the store. Poliakoff catered to a clientele that extended across the up country and over the Savannah River into Georgia.⁶² His experience was characteristic of numerous peddlers. Israel From peddled for over twenty years before opening a dry-goods store in Union that operated for nearly a century.⁶³ Sam Davidson started peddling not long after emigrating from Russia to South Carolina in 1903 and established a dry-goods store in Chesnee in 1928 that remained a family business until 2009. As mentioned earlier, George Visanka achieved economic mobility by opening a peddler's supply

⁶² *Ibid.*, 176.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 22. The dry-goods store was known as I. From, Dry Goods and Notions.

business; later, he became a business partner in the Rosenberg Mercantile Company in Abbeville, which sold clothing, hardware, farm machinery, guns, and ammunition to local farmers and townspeople.⁶⁴

For many immigrant Jews, the up country was a secondary destination that came after initial settlement in the Northeast. There, they learned English and acquired knowledge of American ways before moving South. One such example was Hyman August. August settled on the lower eastside of Manhattan in 1900 and within ten years was a successful businessman in Spartanburg, where he owned and operated the New York Loan Office, a pawn shop, and a shoe store. Likewise, Russian-born Max Cohen initially took a job in Manhattan as a cloak maker, but several years later, he became the proprietor of Spartanburg's Dixie Shirt Company. Abraham Morris came to Spartanburg in 1914 after working at Bloomingdale's Department Store in New York and bought into Joseph Miller's business, the Standard Cloak Company.⁶⁵

As they established themselves as merchants in the South Carolina up country and elsewhere, migrant Jews were welcomed by New South advocates of economic development. Jews may have been religious outsiders in the Protestant South, but they were increasingly respected for their business acumen. One southern newspaper exclaimed, "Where there are no Jews there is no money to be made."⁶⁶ Nationwide, Americans found much to respect about the Jewish businessman. "Jewish merchants were perceived to be thrifty, orderly, 'wide-awake' go-getters in a country that had come to embrace the values of the market and the ideal of the self-made man," writes historian Rowena Olegario.⁶⁷

Records reveal that Jewish merchants frequently picked up stakes in search of more profitable sites for their business endeavors. In 1872 Polish-born Wolf Rosenberg established P. Rosenberg & Company in Abbeville after moving there from Chester. Within three years, Rosenberg relocated the business to a larger store and brought his brothers and nephew George Visanska into the business. He opened a second store in 1882, and by 1895 the local newspaper proclaimed, "P. Rosenberg & Co. has attained greater financial success than any other firm in town. They own more bank stock,

⁶⁴ George Visanska Rosenberg interview; Anderson, "Owner of Davidson's Dress Shop."

⁶⁵ Susan Jacobs interview conducted by author, June 18, 2008.

⁶⁶ *Richmond Whig*, 1866, quoted in Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City*, 34.

⁶⁷ Rowena Olegario, "'That Mysterious People': Jewish Merchants, Transparency, and Community in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Business History Review* 73 (Summer 1999): 161-189.

more town bonds, more mortgages, more farming land, more town property than any other firm in Abbeville County."⁶⁸

Eastern European Jews who prospered as merchants in South Carolina's up country could add to their fortunes through marriage. As an example, the legacy of the Winstock family, whose business interests continued into the mid twentieth century, predates the Civil War. Immigrant Moses Winstock, a Polish Jew, purchased a wholesale jewelry concern in Charleston that evolved into a peddler's supply company. After moving his family to the up-country town of Due West to escape the stifling heat and humidity of the low country, Winstock built several stores on Main Street and acquired a 525-acre plantation five miles from Abbeville, where he planted cotton and corn. His daughter Rebecca consolidated Winstock's fortune with another prominent up-country Jewish family when she married Abraham Rosenberg of Abbeville's P. Rosenberg & Company. In addition to the mercantile business, the Rosenbergs owned more than twenty buildings and some eight thousand acres in Greenwood County that generated income from timber harvests and tenant farming. They were said to "work a hundred mules and employed five hundred Negroes."⁶⁹

The growth of textile manufacturing in the up country by the turn of the twentieth century resulted in a substantial increase in the region's urban population as well as the size of its Jewish mercantile community. New Yorker Harry Price, the son of Lithuanian Jewish parents, took the advice of a cousin in Georgia that Spartanburg was "a good place for business."⁷⁰ Price opened his first men's clothing store in 1903, providing high-quality apparel to the mills' owners and upper management, who became regular customers. Walter Montgomery, grandson of the founder of one of Spartanburg's largest cotton mills, had memories of accompanying his mother on shopping trips to another leading Jewish-owned business, Greenwald's, his mother's favorite downtown store that featured a "complete ladies' ready-to-wear department" on the second floor.⁷¹

Even before Harry Price started his business, Jewish clothing stores dominated the main business sections in both Spartanburg and Greenville. In 1896, for example, seven out of eight men's "furnishing" establishments in

⁶⁸ See Rosenberg Mercantile Company Records, 1861-1965, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Harry Price (grandson of the original Harry Price who started the men's clothing business in Spartanburg in 1903) interview conducted by author, October 30, 2007.

⁷¹ Vernon Foster, ed., with Walter S. Montgomery Sr., *Spartanburg: Facts, Reminiscences, Folklore* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Spartanburg County Foundation, 1998), 317.



Undated photograph of Cohen's Chain Store in Greenville. Max, Jack, and Eli Cohen opened Cohen's, known as the "Store of Better Values," on Main Street in 1925. Courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society, Greenville.

Spartanburg were Jewish owned.⁷² During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Spartanburg businesses became more diverse as larger numbers of southern-born men went into the retail trade. Nonetheless, Jewish merchants still were at the fore of the clothing business and ventured into other dealings as well. Between 1900 and 1935, forty businesses in Spartanburg were Jewish owned. In neighboring Greenville, there were twenty-two

⁷² *Johnson's City Directory, 1896, Spartanburg, S.C.*

shops owned by Jews, plus four in Union, and at least one in dozens of additional up-country towns.⁷³

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, most Jewish establishments sold dry goods, men's and women's clothing, hats, shoes, and jewelry. In Spartanburg, Jewish businessmen also operated a liquor store as well as a motel in the post-World War II years, and a Jewish bakery introduced bagels and challah bread to the community in the 1950s.⁷⁴ In Greenville, in addition to the standard apparel and dry-goods stores, Jewish businessmen were the proprietors of pawn shops, and several members of one family sold auto parts.⁷⁵

Jewish merchants were best known, though, for bringing stylish New York clothing to the South. Residents of Spartanburg had access to the latest fashions at Abe Goldberg's, Harry Price's, the Standard Cloak Company, and the Fashion. Greenewald's was touted as "the Style Center of the Piedmont" and carried "practical gifts" for men from house robes to Dobbs Hats, cigarette cases to golf attire. In Greenville, upscale Jewish clothing merchants such as Bloom's and the Vogue, which advertised as "Exclusive but Not Expensive," were interspersed with gentile businesses along Main Street.

Along with carrying an extensive array of New York clothing and accessories, Jewish merchants in the up country sometimes hired their own tailors who hand-made gentlemen's suits. Greenville merchants sought skilled Jewish tailors from New York. Lee Rothschild, a Greenville "clothier and haberdasher," frequently contacted the Industrial Removal Office (IRO), a New York-based Jewish assimilation society, for skilled workers.⁷⁶ In 1907 Rothschild wrote the IRO stating, "We would be very much pleased if you could furnish us with two first class coat makers for merchant tailoring work." A later request asked for "a good coat maker who is Americanized." Arnold Schonwetter, a Greenville "maker of fine clothes," was in need of "two tailors no matter if they are green" from the

⁷³ Fred Leffert, "Reflections on Greenville's Jewish History," *Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina* newsletter, Fall 2006, 3; Jack L. Bloom interview conducted by author, June 17, 2008. Jewish clothing stores were the only businesses of their kind in small towns such as Union in the early decades of the twentieth century.

⁷⁴ Dorothy Cohen interview conducted by author, October 29, 2009. Sheila and Hy Tanenbaum owned and operated the Quality Bakery in Spartanburg. Sheila Tanenbaum interview conducted by author, January 19, 2010.

⁷⁵ *Greenville City Directory, 1877-1930*.

⁷⁶ The Industrial Removal Office was created in 1901 by the Baron de Hirsch Fund to disperse Jews to cities and towns throughout the country. Fearful that a rise in anti-Semitism would occur due to the large concentration of Jews on the East

IRO. In 1911 the IRO wrote to the owner of Greenville's Kantor Company that in response to his request, they could send "Jacob Sherman, 21 years of age, unmarried, who is in this country two years and speaks English to fill the position of a men's and ladies' tailor."⁷⁷

Jewish businesses were typically family affairs. Brothers, sisters, wives, sons, daughters, and nephews helped in the day-to-day operations. In Spartanburg, Abraham Morris's wife worked side by side with her husband at the Standard Cloak Company, while his daughter Sylvia regularly accompanied him on trips to New York to purchase goods for the store.⁷⁸ Anna Finke assisted her husband on weekends at the Fashion, and Louis Goldstein clerked in his brother's clothing store.⁷⁹ In Greenville, Ida and Israel Switzer were clerks in their father's dry-goods store, and Harry and Freida Zaglin helped their father in his kosher butcher shop.⁸⁰ Jeanette Finkelstein worked in her father's Chesnee dry-goods store, eventually taking it over after his death.⁸¹

The trendy New York fashions Jewish merchants used to stock their stores appealed to women as well as men, both black and white. Some Jewish-owned clothing stores carried exclusive styles, whereas others provided affordable clothing for the whole family. African Americans in Spartanburg purchased their clothing, shoes, and dry goods from downtown merchants, many of whom were Jewish, largely because there were no retail stores in the African American southside neighborhoods.⁸² Frank Nicholls Jr. recollected that he and other young black men from Spartanburg's southside would shop at Jewish-owned men's stores like Price's and Greenwald's. "Those stores," he recalled, "had real nice and some expensive clothing. We didn't have a lot of money, but we worked odd jobs just to buy one or two pieces so we could dress nice and neat."⁸³

During the 1950s and 1960s, Jewish businessmen in the up country extended credit to African Americans at a time when few white business

Coast, the IRO resettled Jewish immigrants, especially the unemployed, in locations beyond the major cities of the Atlantic seaboard.

⁷⁷ Correspondence between Greenville merchants and the Industrial Removal Office, private collection.

⁷⁸ Susan Jacobs interview.

⁷⁹ *Spartanburg City Directory*, 1910.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Zaglin (grandson of Tzemach Zaglin) interview conducted by author, June 26, 2009.

⁸¹ Anderson, "Owner of Davidson's Dress Shop."

⁸² While there were no retail shops on the African American southside of Spartanburg, there was a bustling business sector where blacks operated barber shops, eating establishments, funeral parlors, and grocery stores.

⁸³ Beatrice Hill and Brenda Lee, comps., *South of Main* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Hub City Writers Project, 2005), 70.

owners would do so. Edward Gray remembered seeing African Americans lined up on Saturday mornings outside of his father's jewelry store waiting to make weekly payments on their accounts.⁸⁴ In 2009 Dorothy Cohen, proprietor of Jack's Economy Shop, a clothing store in downtown Spartanburg that had been in business for over sixty years, still provided in-store credit to some of her African American customers. She allowed them to pay a set amount each month on their purchases without charging interest. "I treat them like I want to be treated," she said, and "I won't sell them stuff I don't think is right."⁸⁵

While some Jewish businessmen quietly challenged southern racial mores in their daily commercial interactions with blacks, good business sense dictated public acceptance of the status quo. As historian Clive Webb observes, sympathetic Jewish merchants refrained from any overt action that might risk retaliation from whites and contented themselves with small acts of kindness toward their black customers.⁸⁶

REFORMULATING JEWISH ETHNIC IDENTITY

As the Jewish population of the up country grew larger, merchants spearheaded the creation of religious and informal organizations of self-help for the Jewish community. However, up-country Jews did not look inward and were not insular; they were just as likely to become Shriners or members of the Elks Lodge as they were to attend services at the synagogue.

Several Orthodox Jewish merchants began meeting regularly in the back of their Spartanburg stores for morning prayers in 1905. In 1912 a group of merchants gathered in Abraham Levin's store and made plans to build a temple. Five years after that, the Congregation of B'nai Israel was established. The founders were all local businessmen representing a broad cross-section of Spartanburg firms: Joseph Spigel, proprietor of Spigel Brothers Jewelers and Spigel Brothers Real Estate; Russian-born Hyman August, owner of a pawn shop and shoe store; clothiers Harry Price and the Greenwald brothers; peddler-turned-merchant Joseph Miller; Julius Schwartz of the Carolina Mercantile Company, who served as temple secretary; Max Cohen, proprietor of the Dixie Shirt Company; and merchant Joseph Jacobs, who organized Temple B'Nai Israel's first Sunday School in 1915.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Edward Gray interview conducted by author, December 10, 2009.

⁸⁵ Dorothy Cohen interview.

⁸⁶ Clive Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow," *Southern Jewish History* 2 (October 1999): 55-80.

⁸⁷ Joe Wachter, "Research on Founders and Synagogue of Temple B'Nai Israel," Temple B'Nai Israel Archives, Spartanburg, S.C. Many other businessmen raised funds and were instrumental in the founding of the temple including Moses Spigel,



Undated photograph of Rabbi Charles Zaglin and family. Originally from Lithuania, Zaglin established Greenville's first kosher butcher shop in 1911. From a private collection.

In Greenville, Hyman Endel, a local businessman since 1877, took the lead in establishing Congregation Beth Israel, an Orthodox synagogue, in 1913. A decade later, Reform Jews founded the Temple of Israel. Business leaders also recruited Tzemach ("Charles") Zaglin, a rabbi and shochet to minister to the needs of Greenville's Jews. Zaglin, from Lithuania via Wilmington, North Carolina, eventually opened a kosher meat market and slaughterhouse.⁸⁸

By forming congregations and attracting religious leaders, Jews contributed to the stability of their small but growing community. Local newspapers took notice and reported on Jewish communal activities such as the dedication of a synagogue. An announcement of the Jewish businesses

Samuel Hecklin, Abraham Blotcky, Harry Brill, Joseph Goldstein, Meyer Levite, Samuel Loef, Philip Weintraub, Bernard Berlin, and Barnett Hecklin.

⁸⁸ Jeffrey Zaglin interview. A shochet is a Jew who performs ritual circumcisions on male babies.

that would be closing to celebrate the Jewish New Year was printed in the *Spartanburg Herald* in 1916.⁸⁹

As the Jews of Spartanburg and Greenville became more numerous, they established cemeteries to bury their dead and landsmanschaften benefit societies to assist the living. Jewish wives organized the Women's Auxiliary of Temple B'nai Israel and chapters of the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Hadassah, were founded in both cities.⁹⁰ Later, a chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women was created as well as the Greenville Federated Jewish Charities.⁹¹

On an informal basis, Jews provided financial help and support for their brethren. "The Jewish community was very cohesive," said Marsha Poliakoff, and "when a Jewish business failed or hit on hard times, other Jewish merchants helped out." Poliakoff explained that "if someone lost a job, the Jewish businessmen would find them a job or hire them." This was particularly true during the lean years of the Great Depression.⁹²

Jewish merchants went beyond providing aid for their co-religionists and became involved in efforts for the greater good of the up country. Mae From served as the first female member of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and was instrumental in establishing a branch of the University of South Carolina at Union, where generations of her family had operated a dry-goods store. From the shoe giveaways for needy children sponsored by Lou Pollack every Christmas Day in Asheville, North Carolina, to the educational philanthropy of Spartanburg textile industrialist Andrew Teszler, who donated the library at Wofford College, Jews contributed heavily to local causes.⁹³

By erecting places of worship, creating formal associations and informal networks of support for their brethren, and becoming active members of the communities in which they lived, up-country Jews put down roots in conservative Protestant soil. Even as they ingratiated themselves with southern society, first-generation Jews sought to maintain a balance between acculturation and preservation of ethnic and religious traditions. Even though they would never be as successful striking this balance as the large numbers of Jews living in close proximity in major urban areas,

⁸⁹ *Spartanburg Herald* (Spartanburg, S.C.), September 27, 1916, p. 4, col. 7.

⁹⁰ Jack L. Bloom, "A History of the Jewish Community of Greenville, South Carolina," *Proceedings and Papers of the Greenville Historical Society* 12 (1998–2005): 73–88.

⁹¹ Leffert, "Reflections on Greenville's Jewish History," 3.

⁹² Marsha Poliakoff interview conducted by author, September 25, 2007.

⁹³ Jan Schochet and Sharon Fahrer, *The Family Store: A History of Jewish Businesses in Downtown Asheville, 1880–1990* (Asheville, N.C.: History@Hand Publications, 2006), 35; Marsha Poliakoff, comp., "History of Temple B'nai Israel," Temple B'nai Israel Archives.

the very fact that they were such a small minority in the Protestant South made their assimilation to the host society more likely.

While immigrant Jews as a rule married within the faith, several pioneer Jewish businessmen in the up country did not. David and Moses Greenewald married Susie Webber and Annie Milan of Spartanburg in 1889 and 1907, respectively, and their children were raised as Christians.⁹⁴ Although it occurred with less frequency, some gentiles who married Jews converted to Judaism. The daughter of a Protestant minister converted to Judaism when she married Abraham Davidson of Spartanburg.⁹⁵

At the same time they were adapting as best they could to southern culture, first-generation Jewish migrants to the up country tried to uphold traditional Jewish rituals and observances. Most businesses closed their doors and many parents kept their children out of school for the Jewish holidays.⁹⁶ Rosa Poliakoff, born in 1914 in Union, recalled, "My [Orthodox] parents wanted us to know that we were Jewish and they wanted us to maintain our identity. My mother wanted us to stay out of school for every holiday . . . not just Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but Sukkoth, and other holidays."⁹⁷ Growing up in a Jewish home in Greenville, Alex Davis reminisced about how his mother stripped and cleaned the house during Passover. "It was washed thoroughly," he said. "The dishes were changed. The pots and pans were changed. Everything was changed, silverware and all; we had a separate set for Passover."⁹⁸

Another way that immigrant Jews maintained a strong ethnic identity was through food traditions. While keeping kosher in the South was always a challenge, it became easier once Charles Zaglin opened his kosher butcher shop in Greenville in 1911. Alex Davis remembered "over half the Jewish population waiting outside Zaglin's store Saturday night . . . to get their [kosher] meat." Thinking back about the typical Jewish meals his mother served, Davis stated that "on Passover there was nothing better than matzo with a little chicken schmaltz and pepper, and the chicken soup with schmaltz piled on the top."⁹⁹

Eighty-eight-year-old Jack Bloom, a native Greenvillian whose father and grandfather operated Bloom's Department Store, fondly recalled his mother, who kept kosher, and their African American cook, Lucille, prepar-

⁹⁴ Jamie Cobb (son of Ethel Greenewald and James Cobb, who started working at the Greenewald firm in 1917) interview conducted by author, November 8, 2007.

⁹⁵ Jeanette Finkelstein interview conducted by author, June 29, 2009.

⁹⁶ Rosa Poliakoff interview.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Alex Davis interview conducted by Dale Rosengarten, February 28, 1997, JHC.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

ing typical eastern European foods alongside grits and cornbread.¹⁰⁰ Black women employed in Jewish homes learned to prepare kosher food just as Jewish wives were introduced to southern regional cooking like cobblers and hoppin' john from the hired help. The result, notes historian Marcie Cohen Ferris, was a fusion of southern and Jewish cuisine.¹⁰¹

Joining communal and fraternal organizations with largely Protestant memberships helped Jews blend into the predominately Christian world of the up country. According to Shevitz, "Jewish participation in the daily life of the small town reinforced the shared interests of Jews and non-Jews."¹⁰² This was particularly evident as local newspapers anxious to underscore the commercial growth of the up country highlighted the activities of Jewish merchants. In 1919, for example, the *Spartanburg Herald* showcased two Jewish businessmen, Harry Brill, the owner of an electrical-supply business, and Abraham Goldberg, proprietor of a men's department store. Brill was described as "one of the most progressive citizens of the city and a booster for Spartanburg every day of the year." The author of the article depicted Goldberg as "a live wire [who] believes in Spartanburg's big future and . . . [is] ready . . . to make of Spartanburg a greater city."¹⁰³

Obituaries are especially revealing of how Jewish merchants were viewed by the community at large. Upon the death of Jacob Cohen, a Union businessman, the newspaper editor stated, "Mr. Cohen was a great reader, a deep thinker, and a man of a vast fund of knowledge. [His death] . . . has caused wide-spread sorrow and regret."¹⁰⁴ When Moses Greenwald died in 1926, the *Spartanburg Journal* informed its readers that "news of the death of Moses will be met with regret through the city and county. . . . His progressiveness; liberal-minded nature and unselfish contribution to his city's growth . . . and his sterling worth and sound character were acknowledged and admired by all."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, when Israel From passed away, the editor of the *Union Times* mournfully stated that he had "lost a true and worthy friend and the county one of its best citizens."¹⁰⁶

Another indicator of the interaction among Jews and gentiles was Jewish participation in local Masonic and fraternal societies as well as their involvement in civic affairs. Jewish businessmen were attracted to the mystic brotherhoods that became popular during the late nineteenth

¹⁰⁰ Jack Bloom interview.

¹⁰¹ Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzo Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 16.

¹⁰² Shevitz, *Jewish Communities on the Ohio River*, 105.

¹⁰³ Clipping from *Spartanburg Herald*, June 8, 1919, KRSCPL.

¹⁰⁴ Undated clipping from *Union Times* (Union, S.C.), KRSCPL.

¹⁰⁵ *Spartanburg Journal* (Spartanburg, S.C.), May 19, 1926, p. 4, col. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Union Times*, March 1, 1935, p. 1.

and early twentieth centuries, the golden age of fraternal associations. The lodge offered Jewish members a refuge from loneliness and anonymity and afforded opportunities for personal relationships with representatives of the predominate group.¹⁰⁷

Civic and fraternal participation also served as a crucial means for Jews to fit into southern communal life. The Greenwald brothers perhaps provide the best example of this sort of community involvement. Moses served as chief of the volunteer fire department for twenty years; Isaac was a member and exalted ruler of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks; Max belonged to the Improved Order of Red Men; and David served as director of the Spartanburg Music Festival and a member of the board of directors of the Spartanburg Chamber of Commerce.¹⁰⁸ Harry Price was a member of the Loyal Order of Moose, and Meyer Mallinow was a Shriner as well as a member of the Elks. Seymour Gray belonged to Civitan and was on the board of directors of the YMCA, while Charles Finke was a Shriner and a Mason. This pattern of Jewish engagement in largely gentile organizations in the South Carolina up country occurred throughout the South. Jews joined associations that were dominated by Protestants not only for good fellowship, but also to advance their socioeconomic standing.

Jewish women were less likely than men to take part in communal activities with non-Jews during their early years of settlement in the up country; rather, they stuck close to the temple and volunteered in Jewish-related organizations such as Hadassah. The disparity between Jewish male and female outside activities most likely reflects the importance Jewish businessmen placed on associating with their gentile colleagues and customers in social settings.

While up-country South Carolinians welcomed the Jewish business presence and Jews made efforts to be accepted in southern society, boundaries remained. Jews were prohibited from becoming members of most elite social clubs. Young Jewish girls were never invited to join debutante societies, and in both Spartanburg and Greenville, Jews were kept out of private eating clubs until the late 1970s.¹⁰⁹ In a region where public facilities were segregated by color, the exclusion of Jews from clubs seemed to question their social standing as whites.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City*, 168.

¹⁰⁸ Jamie Cobb interview.

¹⁰⁹ Harry Price and Rick Dent interviews conducted by author, June 2009.

¹¹⁰ Eric L. Goldstein, " 'Now Is the Time to Show Your True Colors': Southern Jews, Whiteness, and the Rise of Jim Crow," in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, 134–155.

For the most part, up-country Jews affirmed their whiteness and their southernness by ostensibly supporting the region's dominant social and cultural mores. They recognized that a policy of racial conformity would go far in confirming their status as white, even though many empathized with the plight of blacks in the segregated South. This is evidenced by Jewish merchants who quietly challenged white racial etiquette in their business dealings with African Americans. Like Dorothy Cohen, these merchants formed relationships with black customers by extending them store credit and carrying merchandise that catered to their personal sense of style. Regardless of how certain individuals defied racial mores in their own places of business, up-country Jews as a whole recognized the importance of abiding by racial customs, and in doing so, they secured their place on the white side of the color line.¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

The South Carolina up country was one region among many in the South where Jewish peddlers and merchants had a powerful impact on consumerism and commercial expansion after the Civil War. Jews came to the up country during a time in the region's history when foundational economic transitions marked the beginning of textile manufacturing and the emergence of a "New South." In this economic climate, the work ethic and perseverance of peddlers was rewarded, and small-town Jewish merchants came to dominate main streets. While contributing to an emerging consumer culture in the rural countryside and rising cities, Jewish migrants made up-country South Carolina their home and created institutions to keep alive their religious and cultural traditions. Jewish participation in local clubs and community organizations reinforced their place in society.

Jewish peddlers and merchants rode the wave of industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to commercial prosperity, but the fortunes of the Jewish mercantile community also were affected by the downturn of textile production in the up country following World War II. Regional economic decline coincided with increased competition from major national retail chains, leaving many sons and daughters of first- and second-generation Jews with no desire to carry on the family businesses. During the 1950s and 1960s, many Jewish youth went away to college and never returned. Others, however, remained dedicated to their commercial legacy in the up country. Today, there are

¹¹¹ Ibid.

several descendants of those original Jewish merchants who continue to operate family businesses that have existed for a hundred years or more.¹¹²

¹¹² These include Price's Men's Store, operated by Harry Price, the fourth generation in the business for 109 years; Kosch & Gray Jewelers, operated by Edward Gray, the third generation in the family business in Spartanburg; and the Greenville Army and Navy Store, operated by Jeffrey Zaglin, the second-generation owner and grandson of Charles Zaglin, Greenville's rabbi and kosher grocer. In January 2009, ninety-year-old Jeanette Davidson Finkelstein closed the eighty-one-year-old store in Chesnee that she had operated since her father's death in 1954. From's Department Store in Union closed in 2004 after conducting business there for more than a century.