

FROM GHETTO TO GONZALES, FROM OPPRESSION TO OPPORTUNITY
THE STUDY OF JEWISH BUSINESSES ALONG THE VICTORIA ROAD

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Jewish immigrants who left family, synagogues, and ancestral homes to seek economic opportunity and political freedom in an alien environment. They traveled to the fringes of western civilization and settled on the Texas frontier. Many of these pioneers, including my own forebearers, left with this prayer in their hearts. I include it here as a tribute to their courage and optimism. : תפלת הדרך

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שחוליקנו
לשלוש והצדיקנו לשלום ותסמכנו לשלום ותנחמנו אל-מחוז
חפצנו לחיים ולשמחה ולשלום . ותצילנו מקף קל-אויב
וארב וחסון בדרך ומכל-מיני פרעניות המהררשות לבוא
לעולם . והשלח ברכה במעשה ידיו . ותתנו לחן ולחסד
ולרחמים בעיניך ובעיני כל-רואינו . ותשמע קול תחנונינו .
כי אל שומע תפלה ותחנון אתה . ברוך אתה יי . שומע
תפלה :

May it be Thy will, O Lord my God and God of my
Fathers, to conduct me in peace, to direct my steps in
peace, to uphold me in peace, and to lead me in life, joy,
and peace unto the haven of my desire. O Deliver me from
every enemy, ambush and hurt by the way, and from all
afflictions that visit the troubled world. Send a blessing
upon the work of my hands. Let me obtain grace,
lovingkindness and mercy in Thin eyes and in the eyes of all
who behold me. Hearken to the voice of my supplications;
for Thou art a God who hearkenst unto prayer and
supplication. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who hearkenst unto
prayer.

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CHAPTER I
AMERICAN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND
JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN TEXAS

Even before the separation of the American Colonies from their British rulers, the economic changes within Colonial America created new mercantile opportunities for almost all inhabitants. Thomas Cochran observed that in Europe social barriers and restrictions limited the business opportunities which were available to the average person. Additionally, in Europe church affiliation substituted for "business clubs," and family connections and social rank formed boundaries which also limited the opportunities to enter commercial ventures. In moving to the New World, most family ties were severed, and in the United States, religious and class barriers dissolved, thus creating new and flexible business associations. The only limitation to business opportunity here was the possession of capital.¹

Cochran believed that Americans were more readily enticed into taking risks than were Europeans; moreover, if an American businessman failed in one town or one business, he moved on to another location or adapted his approach to business. In America, unlike in Europe, risk takers who found capital to reinvest after a failure could always find a new venture or a new town. In most instances, this

¹ Thomas C. Cochran, *200 Years of American Business* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1977), 5-9.

ability to change and the opportunity to try again did not exist in Europe.²

With few restrictions, these opportunities were opened to most inhabitants of the United States regardless of religious affiliation or social standing. Arthur Hertzberg wrote that "[i]n the New World Jews were being treated as equals, or very nearly as equals." He explained that as early as 1770 Jews and men of "goodwill in Europe . . . saw in [the] United States the laboratory which justified their emancipationist thinking." Not only did the United States offer economic opportunity, it was a "symbol" of what could happen in Europe.³ Jews who moved to America in the first half of the nineteenth century left behind the restrictions and anti-Semitism found in Europe, and in America they found opportunities which were unavailable anywhere else.⁴ Likewise, Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Palsson stated that bigotry and anti-Semitism were not endemic and "virulent" in the United States. Although incidents of individual bigotry existed, organized anti-Semitism arose only in times of

² Cochran, *200 Years of American Business*, 10-14.

³ Arthur Hertzberg, *Being Jewish in America: The Modern Experience* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1979), 76-77.

⁴ Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, ed. *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 7.

crisis, first during the Civil War and later during the depression of the 1890s.⁵

Prior to 1840, Jews fleeing oppression or restrictions in Europe sought freedom in the New World and, as often as not, settled in the South.⁶ Louis Schmier noted that "the South, not the North, was the center of American Jewish life until the Civil War." Further, he stated that "it was in the Southern states that the Jews first experienced" political freedom and equality. "Utilizing their freedoms, these Jews became part of Southern society, made their presence felt, and wove their contributions through the Southern fabric."⁷

The America which Cochran described, a land where anyone could share in economic opportunities, and the conditions which Schmier attributed to the South conformed to the conditions which most Jews sought and found in Texas.

⁵ Dinnerstein, *Jews in the South*, 6.

⁶ According to several scholars, in 1800 the largest Jewish population center was Charleston, South Carolina, Louis Schmier *Reflections of Southern Jewry*, 160; Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson *Jews in the South* 3. Like most other immigrants, Jews took the first ship leaving Europe which were sailing for America. The specific destination whether Boston or Charleston was irrelevant; therefore, many Jews settled in the South. Because no religious restrictions or hostility existed in the southern states and because no large Jewish population centers existed in the northern states, one destination was as good as another. According to Dinnerstein and Pallson, only increased industrialization and a need for capital changed the demographics and brought Jewish immigrants to the North. *Jews in the South* 3-9.

⁷ Louis Schmier, *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky 1878-1879* (City Mercer University Press, 1982) 160-161.

Because most Jews had been prevented from owning land in Europe, they were experienced urban dwellers, often with previous commercial experiences. Jews opened businesses in the South and Texas and achieved success and experienced failures similar to their non-Jewish neighbors. These immigrants had been artisans, shopkeepers, and traders, and their business experiences combined with a tradition of literacy facilitated their acceptance and assimilation into both Southern and Texas life.

In some ways the Jewish immigration into the state of Texas mirrored the pattern of Jewish settlement found in some other Southern states; however, when viewed as part of Texas history some differences were apparent. As Texas history differed from the history of other Southern states because of its Spanish background, size, frontier atmosphere, and isolation, so did Jewish history within Texas differ from Jewish history in other states. These differences were especially apparent in central and west Texas. This study focuses on the Jewish businesses along the teamster, stage, rail, and water routes inland from the Matagorda Bay area toward the North and West. Family associations existed between many of the Jewish settlers along this route. Was it possible that these Jewish businessmen profited from family ties or prior relationships?

The search for the earliest Jewish businessmen and settlers in this region of Texas proved to be enigmatic and

confusing. The first problem which appeared when attempting to investigate any aspect of early Texas Jewish history was determining who was a Jew. Because so few Jews lived in Texas, very few Jewish religious records existed which referred to Jewish inhabitants in the sparsely settled areas. Adding to the dearth of information was the fact that prior to Texas independence, according to the regulations established by the Spanish and later the Mexican governments, all the foreign settlers who were given permission to immigrate into Texas nominally converted to Catholicism. Thus, at least on paper, all the settlers legally allowed into Texas under the Mexican land grants espoused the Catholic faith.⁸ That many Jews who wished to move into the Mexican territory of Texas converted on paper made making definitive statements about religious affiliation difficult. Whether these men--most early records were of men because few Jewish mothers would allow their daughters to move to the Texas wilderness--were Catholics in practice as well as in name was a question which was opened to debate.⁹

⁸ Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991) 64.

⁹ Archie McDonald ed., *Hurrah for Texas! The Diary of Adolphus Sterne, 1838-1851* (Waco, Texas: Texiana Press, 1969), x. Sterne himself even said that Sam Houston's conversion was for "purely political" reasons.

An additional problem was created because of the shortage of Jewish women within the territory of Texas. Although some Jewish men traveled East, married, and returned, many Jewish men who never converted married Catholic and Protestant women. Researchers must ask if these men retained their Jewish religious identity or shed it. For this paper, men considered to be Jews in previous studies or those who did not deny their Jewish heritage were considered Jewish. An example of one such settler was Nicholas Adolphus Sterne who moved to Nacogdoches in 1826. Although Sterne married a Catholic woman, officially converted to her religion, and settled in Texas during the time when only Catholics were legally allowed to enter, he is usually recognized as a Jew.¹⁰ Another early Jewish settler who has previously been identified as Jewish was David Levi Kokernot. In 1832 Kokernot moved his family to Anahuac on Galveston Bay. While living in Anahuac, Kokernot operated a general store, but later he moved to Gonzales County where he purchased and operated a large ranch.¹¹ Although none of Kokernot's children retained their Jewish identity, Kokernot did not deny his Jewish heritage and was able to settle in Texas because, by the time he arrived, the

¹⁰ McDonald, ed., *Hurrah for Texas! The Diary of Adolphus Sterne, 1838-1851*, xii.

¹¹ Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1990) 11.

Mexicans were not enforcing the religious restrictions which they had imposed upon earlier settlers.¹²

In addition to accepting as Jews those previously identified as Jewish, this study recognizes anyone who was buried in a Jewish cemetery or was a family member of someone buried in a Jewish cemetery as a Jew. Wives of Jewish husbands were accepted as Jewish, if the children were reared as Jews; in addition, extended family members of practicing Jews were accepted as Jews. Because congregational affiliation records do not exist for many of the communities, cemetery inscriptions or newspaper announcements were the only extant written documentation. These assumptions about who was a Jew were especially important when studying families who arrived in Texas during the second and third quarter of the nineteenth century. For example, brothers, sisters, and cousins of a known Jew were considered to be Jewish, as were relatives of their wives or husbands. In some instances, if no proof existed but close business connections were found, a supposition was made, and that fact was noted in the work. More recently, oral traditions or remembered associations from interviewees were used to establish religious identity.

¹² Robert A. Calvert and Arnold De Leon, *The History of Texas* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlin Davidson, Inc., 1990) 59. Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune*, 67.

One final problem existed in identifying and researching people for this study. Often names came from handwritten census records and tax rolls. Other names were traced from personal letters, handwritten deeds, and other handwritten legal documents. Because of the varying condition of the documents themselves and the ignorance or questionable literacy of the person who wrote the records, variances in spelling were apparent. Different documents which contained variations of a name apparently referred to the same person or same family. In some instances it was assumed that these references were to the same person and at other times it was not. An example of the former was the name "Masur." In some documents it was spelled "Masur" and in others "Mazur" or "Masor." These references were to a family living in Luling late in the nineteenth century, and it was assumed that these references were to the same family. In another instance, this assumption was not made. A census taker enumerated the name Franks in Gonzales and supplied a note that the man was a Jew; other references were also found to several men with the last name of Frank also in Gonzales. It was suggested that some references might be to the same person or family, but in this research, that fact was not assumed to be true. The name Masor or Mazur is less common than the name Frank or Cohn, Cahn, or Cohen. Based on this fact, it was assumed that references to "Mazur" and "Masor" were to the same family, and that perhaps the Franks were not the same family.

This study focused on the geographical area along the Victoria Road which coincided roughly with part of the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers. Branches of this road provided access to the towns in central Texas. Although the road shifted in response to the growth or decline in the population of towns along the route, it began at Matagorda Bay and ran inland to the north and west. From the bay it connected the cities of Indianola and Port Lavaca to Victoria. At Victoria the road branched and this study is mainly concerned with the cities along the route which ran through DeWitt, Gonzales, and Caldwell Counties. In Caldwell County the road divided again with one branch leading to Austin and one to San Antonio. These large cities are not included because they would provide enough information for separate studies.

CHAPTER II

MATAGORDA BAY AND CALHOUN COUNTY

1

Matagorda Bay and the First Jewish Settlers

Beginning in about 1821, the empresario grants spread out along the Texas coast and inland along the rivers. These early Anglo and German colonies, along with earlier Spanish settlements formed a network for future settlement. One of the early empresarios was Green DeWitt. Choosing to settle along a river in the western section of Texas, he selected the area along the Guadalupe and Lavaca Rivers. Because the de Leon land grant spread around Matagorda, Lavaca, and San Antonio Bays, DeWitt selected an area north and west of the de Leon property. The DeWitt colonists placed their capital at the junction of the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers, near where the city of Gonzales now stands. Southeast of DeWitt's colony and spreading out toward the bays was the old land grant of Martin de Leon with its headquarters in the vicinity of present day Victoria.¹ Both of these settlements as well as Goliad and other towns served as stopover points for the immigrants traveling the Victoria Road inland from the mid coast.

While Galveston remained the principal city and port in Texas, other harbors were needed to supply the colonists who settled further south and west. Shippers sought western

¹ Calvert, *The History of Texas*, 52-53.

harbors and ports so they could circumvent the arduous trip overland from Galveston or Houston. Teamsters and later stagecoach lines hauled passengers and freight from these ports.

Matagorda Bay, in the south central coastal area, offered several promising harbors, and two port communities developed to provide access to the growing inland settlements. Several early roads, the Goliad and the Victoria roads, ran inland from Matagorda Bay. Branches of these trails connected the ports of Indianola and Port Lavaca to Victoria, Refugio, Goliad, Gonzales, Luling, and San Antonio.² By 1850 both Indianola and Port Lavaca were offering port facilities and scheduled stage transportation inland. Immigrants, supplies, and mail traveled through these ports enroute to Victoria, Gonzales, New Braunfels, and other Hill Country settlements. In 1848 the Planter's House and General Stage Office advertised stage connections from Indian Point, near Port Lavaca, to Austin and San Antonio. One route ran from Planter's House through Victoria, Cuero, Gonzales, Seguin, New Braunfels, and on to San Antonio.³ Each stop along the way became a small commercial settlement with business establishments to serve

² William C. Poole, *A Historical Atlas of Texas* (Austin, Texas: Encino Press, 1975), 106.

³ Robert H. Thonhoff, *San Antonio Stage Lines, 1847-1881* (El Paso: The University of Texas at El Paso, 1971), 6.

the local settlers and travelers. Most towns contained dry goods stores, hotels, blacksmith shops, and grocers.

Drawn by opportunities offered in new towns and the new state of Texas, Jewish merchants slowly moved into the Matagorda Bay and Guadalupe River area. By the years between 1848 and 1860 Jews had settled all along these routes. The first permanent Jewish settlers in an area formed both business and social ties. They encouraged more Jewish settlers--family and friends--to move into the area. Some settlers like David Hirsch came to a town, stayed a few years, envisioned new opportunities in other places, and moved to better locations. Still others like Paul Levyson settled in an area, went off to fight in the Civil War, and later returned to remain permanently in an area. Prior to the Civil War, most of these communities along the teamster routes and stage lines contained Jewish residents and merchants. Many of these early Jewish settlers joined brothers, cousins or landsmen--people from the same small village or shtetl⁴--who had pioneered in an area.

Perhaps the first; and undoubtedly the most noted Jews to settle in the Guadalupe River valley, were David L. Kokernot and Michael Seeligson. Kokernot, a veteran of the Texas War for Independence, had operated a small retail business at Anahuac prior to 1836. After the war, Kokernot

⁴ A small Jewish community or village in eastern Europe.

moved his family to the western part of the state and settled in Gonzales County where he became a rancher.⁵ Although his children did not remain Jewish, the family continued to live in the Gonzales area,⁶ and throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, his sons operated various businesses in Gonzales.⁷ Seeligson, who had served as alderman and later as mayor of Galveston, moved to Goliad in the 1850s. Although he was a rancher and not a businessman, Seeligson, who owned 4,4000 acres of land, vigorously promoted Jewish immigration to Texas by writing letters extolling the advantages of living in Texas to the editor of the *Occident*, a national Jewish newspaper.⁸

2

Indianola

To some Jews seeking a new beginning in developing areas, the port towns along the central coast offered promising commercial opportunities. Around 1854 David Hirsch settled in Indianola and earned his living by peddling merchandise around the area. Hirsch remained in

⁵ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 11.

⁶ Many advertisements for various businesses belonging to the Kokernot brothers appeared in the *Gonzales Weekly Inquirer*. Additionally, the paper printed the reminiscences of David L. Kokernot on May 4, 1878 and on June 22, 1878. These lengthy articles were reprinted in the July 19, 1923 edition of the same paper.

⁷ Various advertisements and notices can be found in the *Gonzales Inquirer*.

⁸ Weingarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 19.

Indianola only for four years, moving in 1858. Although Hirsch moved several times after he left Indianola, he eventually returned to the coast and settled in Corpus Christi where he opened a dry goods business. In 1878 he expanded his businesses to include money lending and speculation on the wool market. In 1891 he formalized his banking business and formed the Corpus Christi National Bank.⁹

Prior to the Civil War, Hirsch had not been the only Jew living in Indianola. About the time Hirsch left the bay area, Julius Henry arrived in Indianola. Henry, who was involved in salt mining along the coast, appeared in the bay area about 1858. He gathered salt during the Civil War and exported it from Flour Bluff near Corpus Christi.¹⁰

Another businessman who moved to the bay area prior to the Civil War was Leon Rouff. He immigrated to Louisiana between 1849 and 1850 and moved to Texas about 1854.¹¹ Sometime after reaching Indianola and prior to 1859, Rouff joined the firm of L. Labe and Company, and in the spring of 1859, Labe and Rouff advertised in the *Indianola Courier*. One advertisement stated that Labe and Company was a dealer

⁹ Correspondence from Frank Wagner concerning the Hirsch family. File 3A165 Texas Jewish Historical Society Records, Center For American History, Austin Texas.

¹⁰ This information is in the Corpus Christi Folder File 3A170 of The Texas Jewish Historical Society Records, Center For American History, Austin, Texas.

¹¹ United States Census, 1870, Indianola, Calhoun County, Texas.

in fancy and staple dry goods, and indicated that their shop was located near the government warehouse. This notice was signed by both Rouff and Labe.¹² By 1860 the men were operating a mercantile business in Indianola under the name of Rouff and Labe.¹³ Although the census indicated only that Rouff lived in Texas in 1854, he must have arrived in Indianola earlier than the beginning of 1859 because in the fall of that year his name appeared as an officer in the fraternal organization I.O.O.F.¹⁴ Labe and Rouff continued to advertise into the 1860s.¹⁵ In addition to Labe and Rouff, S. Marx also advertised in the 1859 *Indianola Courier* that he carried staple and fancy dry goods, lady's and gentlemen's clothing, hats, and caps. Marx mentioned that he served the "plantation" trade, and he advertised several items not generally found in the average mercantile advertisements. He reminded the readers that he carried "choice wines, Brandy, segars [sic], powder and shot" along with a variety of coffees, teas, and spices.¹⁶

¹² *Indianola Courier*, May 21, 1859, Some of the old papers were fragmentary and page numbers were difficult to determine, also many issues omitted page numbers.

¹³ From the column titled "People of our Town" about Simon Levy printed in the *Victoria Advocate*, copy in the possession of the author provided by David Lack.

¹⁴ *Indianola Courier*, May 21, 1859. The paper did not explain the initials; presumably they represent the International Order of Odd Fellows.

¹⁵ *Indianola Courier*, Various dates in 1861.

¹⁶ *Indianola Courier*, May 21, 1859.

After the Civil War, other Jews moved to the Indianola area. By 1866 Elias Rouff, probably a brother or cousin of Leon, purchased property in Calhoun County which he sold to the firm of A. Levy and Brother, a firm comprised of partners August and Simon Levy.¹⁷ The business transaction between Elias Rouff and August Levy probably represented a transaction between family members because Leon Rouff was August Levy's uncle.¹⁸ In 1867 Elias Rouff sold another parcel of land in Indianola to Henry Halfin of Victoria.¹⁹ Deed records of Calhoun County indicated that by 1869 at least one other Jewish merchant, M. Lichtenstein, had moved to Indianola and purchased property in the town.²⁰ The 1870 census records for Calhoun County contained a listing for Morris or Moritz Lichtenstein who resided in Indianola. Lichtenstein listed his occupation as a retail merchant, and claimed his personal worth--non-real property--as \$10,000.²¹ Lichtenstein also advertised in the paper, and in June of

¹⁷ Vol. G page 327, Calhoun County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

¹⁸ From the column titled "People of our Town" about Simon Levy printed in the *Victoria Advocate*, copy in the possession of the author provided by David Lack.

¹⁹ Vol. G page 536, Calhoun County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

²⁰ Vol. H page 452, Calhoun County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

²¹ United States Census, 1870, Indianola, Calhoun County, Texas 18.

1871 he placed a notice in the *Indianola Bulletin* which informed all his customers that they were expected to settle all debts with him by July first, and that after that date he would sell for cash only.²² Records in the Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection suggested that Lichtenstein was engaged in the import and export business. For a time around 1873, Lichtenstein operated with a partner, Elizar Alexander. The records of the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Texas contained a bankruptcy petition for the Indianola store belonging to Alexander and Lichtenstein. Shortly after Lichtenstein and his partner filed the papers, the judge sold the property to Edward Kaufman of Galveston.²³ Before 1874 Lichtenstein operated stores in Goliad, Victoria, and Indianola, but for a short time after the bankruptcy, Lichtenstein alone operated his Victoria and Goliad stores only.²⁴

Undaunted by his previous financial troubles, in 1879 Lichtenstein reorganized and moved to Corpus Christi. He then operated stores in Corpus Christi, Victoria, and Goliad. Lichtenstein's retail establishments sold goods to the farmers and ranchers who lived in outlying rural areas,

²² *Indianola Bulletin*, June 20, 1871.

²³ Vol. I page 451, Calhoun County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

²⁴ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 55.

and the salesmen delivered the merchandise to the customers instead of expecting their customers to come to them. Lichtenstein's salesmen drove out into the brush country in specially made hacks. When the salesmen could no longer drive the buggies through the dense brush of this rugged area, they left them with a rancher and continued carrying their supplies on horseback into the remote country.²⁵

Leon Rouff remained in Indianola throughout the war and encouraged other Jewish immigrants to settle in the area. In the 1870 Indianola census Leon Rouff declared that he was a retail merchant who owned real estate valued at \$5,000 and personal property valued at \$800.²⁶ Perhaps Leon and Elias Rouff were brothers or cousins. Both men emigrated from Prussia, both arrived in Texas during the late 1850s, both were living in Indianola in 1870, and both owned a retail business. Along with the two older Rouffs, Marks Rouff, Leon's son, advertised in the *Indianola Bulletin* that he was a wholesale and retail merchant who dealt in staple and fancy dry goods, clothing, hats, and caps which he would offer to his customers at New Orleans prices.²⁷ Leon and perhaps Elias Rouff were the uncle(s) of Simon, Meyer, and

²⁵ Texas Jewish Historical File, Folder 3A170, and 3A169 Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

²⁶ United States Census 1870 Indianola, Calhoun, County Texas, 18.

²⁷ *Indianola Bulletin*, March 27, 1871.

August Levy, and all of these men moved to Texas within a few years and took advantage of the opportunities they saw emerging in the coastal area.²⁸

Indianola was a thriving area and other Jews also settled there. In September of 1871, the *Indianola Bulletin* printed this notice: "The Jewish New Year was duly observed by our Hebrew population last Saturday, being the first day of the year 5632. The stores were closed and all business transactions suspended."²⁹ This announcement indicated that the Jewish community was large enough to be recognized and that possibly the Jewish businesses represented a substantial percentage of the total businesses in Indianola.

In 1871 Joseph Cahn, discussed later as a Gonzales resident, advertised that he sold both wholesale and retail from Indianola. He only offered dry goods--clothing, boots, shoes, and hats--at the lowest price for cash. Several years later Cahn sold land to Jacob Halfin. The deed for this transaction noted that Halfin paid for the land in gold not currency.³⁰ Another merchant, E. Moses, advertised that he offered merchandise which he claimed to have purchased at

²⁸ From a copy of an article printed in the *Victoria Advocate*. The title was "People of our Town" Today Simon Levy. This article was supplied by David Lack and is in the possession of the author. Most likely printed before Levy's death around 1930.

²⁹ *Indianola Bulletin*, September 19, 1871.

³⁰ Vol. I page 468, Calhoun County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

sheriff's sales, bankruptcy sales, and other sales in New Orleans.³¹ The 1880 census for Caldwell County included the names Halfin, Lichtenstein, and H. and R. Kleinsmith. Each of these families eventually formed connections in both Calhoun and Victoria Counties. Many of the men mentioned traded real estate, entered partnerships, invested in various ventures, and then quickly dissolved the partnerships and formed other working arrangements.

Although several Jewish men moved their businesses from Indianola to Victoria around 1870, this relocation was intensified when the coastal area was hit by a devastating hurricane in 1875. Business declined, and when another larger storm hit the area in 1888, the town was evacuated and never rebuilt. Indianola, formerly a thriving port which contained seven thousand inhabitants, existed no more.³² Records suggest, however, that many of the Jewish businessmen from Indianola and surrounding Calhoun County moved to Goliad, Victoria, and Corpus Christi.

3

Port Lavaca

Jews also settled in other areas of Calhoun County. Port Lavaca rivaled Indianola and competed to offer port facilities on Matagorta Bay. According to Sidney Weisiger a

³¹ *Indianola Weekly Bulletin*, March 27, 1871.

³² *The WPA Guide to Texas*, Reprint Edition ed. (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Press, 1986) 530.

Victoria native and columnist for the Victoria paper, prior to the Civil War Simon and August Levy operated mercantile businesses in both Indianola and Port Lavaca.³³ In 1867 the brothers formed the partnership of A. & S. Levy Dry Goods. In about 1870 the firm closed their coastal stores and moved to Victoria.³⁴

Another pre-Civil War resident was Max London who settled in Port Lavaca prior to 1859. In that year he began operating a mercantile establishment which he continued until 1861 when he joined the Confederate forces.³⁵ The 1860 census of Port Lavaca included M. H. London, and recorded that he was a fancy store keeper who owned merchandise valued at \$4,000. That same census also included E. Rouff, a merchant holding personal property valued at \$7,000. This Rouff was probably Leon's relative and the same Elias Rouff later listed as a resident of Victoria. That census also included brothers Solomon, Simeon (usually spelled Simon), and August Levy. Solomon appeared as a resident of the same house with Simeon and August Levy, and he was listed as a clerk in a store. In

³³ Typed copy of the "Vignette" written by Henry Weisiger for the December 23, 1973 *Victoria Advocate* in the Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston Victoria Texas.

³⁴ From the obituary of Simon Levy printed in the *Victoria Advocate* in 1930, supplied by David Lack and in the possession of the author.

³⁵ Typescript of the life of Max H. London written during his life, in the possession of the author.

the 1870 census both Simon and August Levy claimed to have \$6,000 in personal property. It is possible that each of the Levys' personal property represented one-half interest in the inventory of their business. In addition to the men listed above, the census included merchant M. Oppenheimer, who, like several of these men, later moved to Victoria ³⁶

Some Jews did not claim that Calhoun County was their residence; nevertheless, they traded from the ports or owned businesses in the area. Felix Halff and a partner William Moses operated in Calhoun County under the name of Moses and Halff. Among other business ventures which this partnership undertook was trading in cotton, and in the winter of 1863-1864, they purchased 750 bales of cotton. Moses and Halff purchased the cotton in Texas; as a French national Halff resided in Mexico where he planned to take possession of the cotton. While being transported along the southern bank of the Rio Grande between Piedras Negras and Matamoros, the United States military confiscated the cotton. This action resulted in a claim against the United States government. The partnership ended, and Moses assigned his interests in all assets to Halff. Felix Halff presented the claim to the United States government in 1876, but he never received any compensation.³⁷

³⁶ United States Census, 1870, Lavaca, Calhoun County, Texas 7.

³⁷ The written account of this claim and its history was supplied to the author by Ruth Meyer Woodman, Shreveport, Louisiana, great granddaughter of Felix Halff.

Although there were Jews moving in and later moving out, few remained in Port Lavaca for more than a few years. When the economy of the coastal area declined after the storms, most of the early Jewish settlers left. Some moved to Victoria or Corpus Christi and others moved upriver to Luling or Lockhart. According to David Lack of Victoria, the few Jews who settled in the Port Lavaca area after the turn of the century were only transients. They lived on the coast a few months or a year or two, getting a start, and then moved on to larger towns.³⁸

³⁸ Interview with David Lack, July 31, 1994, Victoria, Texas.

CHAPTER III

VICTORIA AND DEWITT COUNTIES

1

Victoria

By 1848 the area around Victoria appeared more secure, hence the small town attracted several Jewish businessmen. After 1849 the Victoria Jewish community regularly conducted religious services and occasionally imported rabbis from Houston, Galveston and New Orleans. At times the rabbis visited Victoria to conduct services and at other times merely to visit the community and encourage religious activity.¹ The fact that the Jewish community conducted services in Victoria indicated that at least ten adult Jewish men lived in the town. Considering that the total population was only 806 people, 10 adult males would represent a substantial proportion of the total adult male population.²

Early Jewish settlers of Victoria included brothers Henry and Jacob Halfin, and Abraham Levi, and perhaps Victoria residents C. M. Coen and Solomon Goldman and Leopold Goldman.³ According to Robert S. Shook, who studied

¹ Description of Passover Celebration written by Carolyn Mullins March 1987, in the possession of the author.

² *The Seventeenth Census of the United States* (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong Public Printer, 1853), 504.

³ Although no corroboration is available at this time to support the idea that the Goldmans were Jewish, the facts that they were willing to guarantee the loans of Halfin

Abraham Levi, the admission of Texas into the Union probably stimulated settlement of Victoria. He explained that in 1848 Jacob Halfin, a New Orleans merchant, loaned his brother Henry and Abraham Levi \$3,000 to purchase a shipment of dry goods and have it sent to Victoria, Texas. At the time that Jacob Halfin made the loan, both Abraham Levi and Henry Halfin were living in Liberty, Mississippi, and working for the firm of A. Schwartz.⁴ Sources differ about when Levi actually settled in Victoria. Some say he was living in Victoria in 1848,⁵ while other sources suggest he did not arrive until 1849.⁶ Years later, Levi himself swore that on January 29, 1849, he had appeared in the district court in Victoria and declared his intention to become a citizen of the United States. This would support the earlier date rather than the later one.⁷ The 1850 list of persons rendering taxable property in Victoria did prove,

and Levi and they had several business dealings with them suggested that they might have been assimilated Jews.

⁴ Robert W. Shook, "Abraham Levi: Father of Victoria Jewry," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 2 (1977): 149.

⁵ Leopold Morris, *Pictorial History of Victoria and Victoria County* (San Antonio, Texas: Clemens Publishing Company, 1953), 5.

⁶ *Memorial Volume Leo N. Levi I.O.B.B.* (Chicago Illinois: Hamburger Printing Co., 1905), 12.

⁷ District Court records for declaration of intention, dated February 22, 1871. This record is on an unnumbered microfilm list of Victoria County declaration of intention in The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

however, that both Abraham Levi and Henry Halfin were established in Victoria and doing business prior to the beginning of that year. The tax list included both men personally and the firm of Halfin and Levi. Additionally, another firm, that of the Goldman brothers was included in that tax assessment. Because the assessment form noted that the taxes were assessed on merchandise or inventories held by businesses on January 1, 1850, both firms were operating at the end of 1849. Halfin and Levi rendered the value of their merchandise as of January 1 at \$1,000, and Goldman and Brother rendered merchandise valued at \$2,200.⁸

In the summer of 1850 when the census was taken, none of these men were living in their own homes. The census taker listed Henry Halfin, A. Levi and at least one Goldman as residents of a hotel.⁹ Tax assessments for subsequent years continued to include both Henry Halfin and A. Levi along with their company. In addition to the tax records, the 1850 census indicated that both Levi and his partner Henry Halfin considered Victoria their permanent residence. In April of 1850, Halfin and Levi placed an advertisement in the Victoria newspaper. This advertisement did not mention that the store was new, but it did claim that the store had just received a new shipment of merchandise directly from

⁸ Microfilm of 1850 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

⁹ United States Census, 1850, Victoria County, Texas 232.

New Orleans. The notice was lengthy and provided a list of goods which the firm offered. Part of the list included:

150 pieces of French, English, and American fancy prints,. . . . 25 pieces Scotch and French Gingham's, . . . 12 pieces Irish linen,. . . Fancy silk parasols and umbrellas,. . . 20 Doz. ladies white hose,. . . Boots and Shoes,. . . Clothing,. . . Groceries, Sugar, coffee, tea, salt, fish, bacon, flour, spices, soap, lard, candles, [and] dried apples. The undersigned beg leave to tender their thanks to the public for the patronage heretofore received, and respectfully solicit a continuance of the same.

The notice was signed Halfin and Levi--Victoria, April 1, 1850.¹⁰ The fact that Halfin and Levi offered such luxury items as silk parasols and stockings indicated that at least a few of the ladies who lived in Victoria desired and could afford luxury items. A year later the firm advertised that Halfin and Levi had moved and now was located east of the establishment belonging to S. Goldman. This notice promoted winter goods such as silk worsted, velvet trimmings, Alpacas, Cashmere and tweeds. The firm also carried clothing which was "well and neatly made." Again at the bottom of this announcement, Halfin and Levi thanked the public for the liberal patronage they had received, and they expressed the hope that they would continue receiving it by selling "good bargains to all who may favor them." This advertisement was signed "Halfin and Levi's Cheap Cash

¹⁰ *Texas Advocate*, April 12, 1850 (emphasis mine).

Store, in Victoria."¹¹ Over the next few years the firm only slightly changed the advertisements noting that they offered their goods for cash.

Throughout the next few years, the Victoria County tax renderings indicated that the firm's capital base was expanding because the tax assessments for Halfin and Levi consistently rose. In 1853 the firm declared that they held \$3,000 worth of merchandise which was on hand at the beginning of January.¹² Henry Halfin and Abraham Levi continued to operate as partners, and in January of 1856, the firm of Halfin and Levi purchased a female slave.¹³ In 1857 the assets grew again: Halfin and Levi paid taxes on at least three city lots, valued at \$7,300, Negroes valued at \$1,800, and merchandise valued at \$9,000. Sometime during the middle years of the decade, Jacob Halfin must have left New Orleans and moved permanently to Victoria because the 1857 tax roll not only listed the firm of Halfin and Levi, but immediately beneath the firm's name both Jacob and Henry Halfin declared taxable property.¹⁴ Besides conducting a

¹¹ *Texas Advocate*, April 2, 1852.

¹² Microfilm of 1850 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

¹³ Vol. 6 page 305, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria.

¹⁴ Microfilm of 1857 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

mercantile business, the company speculated in the real estate market in Victoria. The deed records contained numerous contracts for the purchase and sale of lots in the town of Victoria.¹⁵

After Jacob Halfin moved to Victoria--around 1856 or 1857--Abraham Levi, Henry and Jacob Halfin began operating in partnership with Moses and Isaac Schwartz. Several legal documents mention all five of these men or various combinations of the five. Then, in April of 1858, an Article of Dissolution was filed in Victoria County. Not only did this document indicate that Abraham Levi, Jacob Halfin, Moses Schwartz, and Henry Halfin were jointly operating a store in Victoria under the name of Halfin Levi Co., but it also explained that along with these men their partner Isaac Schwartz operated in Goliad under the name of Schwartz and Co. Furthermore, this document stipulated that Henry Halfin was voluntarily withdrawing from the firm.¹⁶ Although this legal document was filed in the Victoria courthouse in 1858, the newspaper did not print the notice of "withdrawal" until August 6, 1859. The notice reported that "Henry Halfin a member of the firm of Halfin Levi and Co. of which Henry and Jacob Halfin, A. Levi and M.

¹⁵ Vol. 6 page 370 and 374, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria.

¹⁶ Vol. 7 page 260-261, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library.

Schwartz were the partners, had this day withdrawn by mutual agreement." The notice was signed by Henry Halfin, Jacob Halfin, A. Levi, and Moses Schwartz.¹⁷ Perhaps Isaac Schwartz's name was not mentioned because he was a silent partner in this store and was publicly known only to run the Goliad business. Shortly after Henry Halfin withdrew from the partnership of Halfin and Levi, the firm suffered a devastating fire which terminated the remaining partnership. Although the losses were insured, the Civil War delayed payment of the claim.¹⁸

Early in the 1850s, the firm of S. and L. Goldman guaranteed a debt for the firm of H. Halfin and A. Levi.¹⁹ About a year later Goldman and Brothers also sold a piece of property to Halfin and Levi.²⁰ These transactions indicated a close working relationship between Solomon and Leopold Goldman and several of the Jewish merchants in Victoria. Although no proof of their Jewish affiliation existed, it is probable that Leopold, Solomon, and I. Goldman were Jewish.²¹ Most likely these men died or moved away because

¹⁷ *Texas Advocate* August 6, 1859

¹⁸ Shook, "Abraham Levi: Father of Victoria Jewry," 149.

¹⁹ Vol. 6 page 41, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library.

²⁰ Vol. 6 page 185, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library.

²¹ In the Declaration of Intent records for Victoria county S. Goldman's petitioned

within a few years all legal references to this family ended.

Godcheaux L. Levi contended that Jacob Guggenheim was another early Jewish settler in Victoria. Godcheaux Levi stated that Guggenheim moved from Plaquimine, Louisiana, to Victoria, and although Guggenheim's son eventually moved to Corpus Christi, Jacob remained in Victoria all his life and ran a confectionery.²² By 1858, about ten years after the first Jews moved to Victoria, the settlement included enough Jewish residents to support a congregation, and the families established Congregation B'nai Israel. The founding families included Lewis Silverstein, Dan Alexander, Jacob Guggenheim, Moses and Isaac Schwartz, as well as Abraham Levi and Levi's brothers-in-law Jacob and Henry Halfin. Three different circumstances could explain this web of relationships between the Levi, Halfin, and Schwartz families. First, the families were all intermarried; secondly, they came to Texas from Mississippi and Louisiana; and finally, the families originated from the same area of Europe. Moreover, Abraham Levi and Henry Halfin had worked for A. Schwartz prior to moving to Victoria. Godcheaux Levi

dated in August of 1849 stated that he was a native of Bavaria. Leopold Goldman and Henry Halfin both appeared at the court the same day in March of 1853 to sign declarations, and they stated that they were from Bavaria. This is another strong indicator that these men were related or at least had some association.

²² From the text of a speech given by Godcheaux L. Levi to the Victoria Historical Society, September 1973. In the possession of the author.

mentioned that most of the Jewish families who lived in Victoria in the later nineteenth century were related either directly or by marriage; he mentioned specifically the Guggenheims, Halfins, Levis, Levys, Schwartzs, and Rouffs. Because so many of these men were related or were landsmen, it is likely that Moses and Isaac Schwartz were related to A. Schwartz from Liberty, Mississippi.²³

By the end of the 1850s, names of Jewish merchants regularly appeared in the Victoria newspaper and in court documents. Some of these documents and articles illustrated a working relationship between the Jewish and non-Jewish community. After the 1858 election for constable of Victoria, Jacob Halfin and Solomon Alexander guaranteed an election bond for the newly elected constable E. Fitz. Halfin and Alexander put up \$500 as a guarantee that Emanuel Fitz, not Jewish, would "truly perform all the duties incumbent upon him by law as constable."²⁴ The facts that Fitz would accept help from Jews and that Halfin and Alexander would not only endorse this man, but also risk money on Fitz indicated that the Jewish and non-Jewish communities were integrated and working together to achieve mutual goals.

²³ From the text of a speech given by Godcheaux L. Levi to the Victoria Historical Society, September 1973. In the possession of the author.

²⁴ Vol. 7 page 380, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

In September of 1858, Henry Halfin and Isaac Schwartz joined together and formed a new corporation to sell "goods, wares and merchandise." This venture was called Halfin and Schwartz. Halfin contributed \$8,600 to the partnership and Schwartz contributed \$3,500. The agreement stated that the partnership was to last from September 10, 1858²⁵ until September 10, 1862. Although Halfin contributed more capital, the partners were to divide the profits equally. Furthermore, the agreement also stipulated that each partner was to work for the firm, and each was authorized to sign agreements and contract obligations for the firm. In addition to the cash contributions to capital, the partnership owned a brick building. The contract indicated that the business would occupy the lower floor of the building, and the upper floor would served as the living quarters for Henry Halfin and his family. Because Halfin invested more money, he had the right to obtain repayment of the difference upon dissolution of the partnership. The agreement also stipulated that should Schwartz need a residence--evidently he was not married--the firm was obligated to purchase a dwelling for him and his family. Additionally, each partner promised not to become encumbered by any debts other than within this partnership.²⁶

²⁵ This date was unclear and could have been 1859.

²⁶ Vol. 7 page 590, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

In 1861 Abraham Levi was also operating a business with one of the Schwartz brothers. A notice to this effect appeared in the October 19, 1861, *Texas Advocate*.²⁷ Shook stated that the Civil War and the 1860 fire, a constant hazard, affected Abraham Levi's businesses, decreased his capital, and placed a strain on Levi's ability to pay his backer in Strasbourg. Although Levi had suffered financial difficulties in Victoria, by 1864 he was able to satisfy these debts. Shook wrote that Levi left Victoria for a short time during the war and operated a business in Matamoros, Mexico; however, Levi had returned to Victoria by 1865. Evidently most of Levi's capital was lost in the fire and later the war, and not until after the war ended, was Levi able to collect some insurance money and reestablish himself in the business community of Victoria. When Levi moved back to Victoria, he was forced to open a new and smaller business establishment. This time Levi formed a partnership with his cousin Henry Levy--also at times spelled Levi.²⁸

The financial problems caused by the fire and the Civil War did not mar Levi's credit record. Although these problems delayed repayment of his debts, he evidently satisfied all creditors. The R. G. Dun report about his

²⁷ *Texas Advocate*, October 19, 1861.

²⁸ Shook, "Abraham Levi: Father of Victoria Jewry," 150.

next venture never mentioned a credit problem. By 1871 Abraham Levi was operating another dry goods store, this time his partner was Charles Wertheimer. The new firm operated under the name of Wertheimer and Levi and sold dry goods, clothing, and notions. Levi's business acumen and dedication to responsible management proved beneficial when the reporters for R. G. Dun evaluated the new business venture. The R. G. Dun report mentioned that Wertheimer had been in financial difficulty and involved in bankruptcy proceedings in 1868, but did not mention any problems relating to Levi. In 1871 the evaluator considered the firm reliable. In December of that year, the report mentioned that the house was "good" and that it was possible that A. Levi had bought the business for one of his sons.²⁹ This venture was one of many in which Levi engaged; he was always willing to consider a new opportunity, and, despite problems, he remained solvent.

The war caused changes in the businesses of Victoria. The 1866 tax rendering for Victoria County listed several new Jewish merchants including D. Alexander, Henry Halfin, E. Rouff, A. Levy in addition to the firm of Levi and Schwartz. E. Rouff, probably the same merchant from Calhoun County mentioned above, opened a store in Victoria that was managed by Meyer Levy--another one of Simon and August

²⁹ Texas Vol. 31, p. 272, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

Levy's brothers.³⁰ Rouff's firm sold dry goods, boots, shoes, hats, caps, and groceries. An invoice for one sale dated October 1, 1866, listed one coat for \$18.00 and a shirt for \$4.00. The total for that one sale was \$45.95, a substantial sum in post Civil War Texas. The firm's invoices also reminded the customers that the Rouff bought produce, cotton, wool, and hides.³¹ By 1868 the list of Jewish merchants had expanded. The tax roll included not only Daniel Alexander individually, but also the firm of Alexander and Brother. The firm rendered the value of their merchandise at \$7,000. Henry Halfin declared that he owned merchandise valued at \$1,300. H. G. Levy, perhaps Abraham's cousin, owned over 8000 acres of land, and Abraham Levi declared that he owned 631 acres of land and merchandise valued at \$4,500³² which probably represented the investment from his share of the insurance settlement.

As the population of Victoria grew, the older Jewish residents retained close business and personal relationships with each other. When merchant Louis Silverstein died in 1867 and left a widow and child, Charles Wertheimer served

³⁰ If August Levy was the nephew of Leon Rouff then his brothers Simon and Meyer would be Leon's nephews, and this web of relationships would indicate that E. Rouff and Leon Rouff were brothers.

³¹ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas.

³² Microfilm of 1886 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

as the administrator of his estate. As administrator, he was charged with first liquidating the assets and paying the liabilities, and then paying the widow an allowance.³³

Several years later Elias Rouff died and Henry Halfin served as the administrator of his estate.³⁴

By 1870 several new Jewish businesses appeared. Some were owned by new residents and others by older residents who were opening new businesses. Their numbers included S. Alexander (who was listed separately from the firm of Alexander and Brothers); Mayer Levy, A. Levy, and his brother Simon; Henry Levy (Levi), and the firm of Lichtenstein and Company. The Lichtenstein store was a branch of the business in Indianola. Lichtenstein's store in Victoria contained merchandise valued at \$7,200.³⁵ The January 20, 1870, issue of the *Victoria Advocate* carried advertisements for these firms and several others. Henry Halfin advertised that he was a "Dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Boots and Shoes, Hats, Saddlery, Crockery and Woodenware, and Furniture." Mayer Levy publicized that he carried "Fancy Dry Goods," and claimed to have a buyer

³³ Vol 3 page 19 and 172, Probate Minutes, Victoria County, Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

³⁴ Vol. 3 page 574, Probate Minutes Victoria County, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library.

³⁵ Microfilm of 1870 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

permanently residing in New Orleans; most likely it was another of his brothers who had remained in New Orleans. Just below the advertisement for Mayer Levy, one appeared for Schwartz and Oppenheimer. That business claimed to be new and said that it did both wholesale and retail business in dry goods, clothing, boots, and fancy articles. M. Oppenheimer who first appeared in the 1860 census in DeWitt County, was another of the businessmen who operated in both Calhoun and Victoria counties. In this same issue of the paper, the advertisement for the firm of A. Levi and Company stated that the firm was a wholesale grocery dealer only. The notice listed many of the items they carried including: staple and fancy groceries, stoves, plows, bridles, "smoking and chewing tobaccos, segars [sic] liquors . . . as low as they can be bought in New Orleans." At the bottom of the advertisement the company stated that it would pay their customers the same price for hides, cotton, and wool which the sellers could receive at the bay, implying that Levi was absorbing any transportation costs.

Also in January of 1870, the *Victoria Advocate* printed a business directory for Indianola. Many of the Jewish businesses which had previously operated in Indianola were not included, but the directory did include Alexander and Brothers located on Main Street in Indianola--dealers in dry goods.³⁶ Although some Jewish businesses continued to

³⁶ "A. Levi & Co." *Victoria Advocate*, January 20, 1870.

operate in Indianola, most were branch stores with the main office in Victoria. In 1878 L. Alexander operated in Victoria; however, an invoice also indicated that, despite the 1875 storm, he still operated in Indianola and additionally owned a store in Cuero.³⁷

The 1870 census for Calhoun County included merchant M. Oppenheimer as a resident; however, shortly after the census Oppenheimer moved to Victoria, and for several years he operated in partnership with Moses Schwartz under the name of Schwartz and Oppenheimer. An invoice from this business filled out in January of 1873 listed purchases of one pair of children's gloves for \$1.00, one pair of boots for \$6.50, and two undershirts for \$1.50. The invoice indicated that the business was operated by Moses Schwartz and Meyer Oppenheimer. By 1878 that partnership had ended, and Oppenheimer was operating a small business by himself.³⁸

In September of 1875, the first of two fierce storms which eventually destroyed Indianola hit the area. On Sunday morning, September 19, 1875, the people of Victoria assembled to discuss what they could do to help their surviving neighbors in Indianola. Abraham Levi served as

³⁷ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2, item 98, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas.

³⁸ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2 item 96, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas.

the chairman of the citizens' committee which formed to help the survivors. Of the seven men appointed to collect goods and money, at least two men, G. A. Levi (Abraham Levi's son) and A. Wertheimer, were Jewish. Not only did the Jewish residents work for the relief effort, but also the residents, businesses, and organizations donated money to the cause. For example, the Hebrew Benevolent Society donated \$75.00.³⁹ That donation represented the largest single contribution made by any person or organization to the fund. Therefore, it was obvious that the Jewish residents of Victoria felt that the area was their home and, additionally, felt a responsibility to assist the community at large.

The brothers Mayer, August, and Simon Levy all lived and conducted business in the area around Victoria and Port Lavaca. In 1871 August and Simon succeeded Meyer in his business and moved the firm of A. and S. Levy away from Calhoun County to Victoria. During the 1870s the firm of A. and S. Levy expanded. Several R. G. Dun reports declared that the brothers were good credit risks. The reports noted that the firm was selling for cash and the men were temperate and owned real estate in addition to the stock in their business. By 1876 the report mentioned that the firm was operating out of both Galveston and New Orleans.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Victoria Advocate*, September 20, 1875.

⁴⁰ Texas Vol. 31, p. 268, R. G. Dun & Co.. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard

August Levy eventually left Victoria and, for a short time, lived in New Orleans before moving to New York where he represented the firm. While he was living in New Orleans he acted as the purchasing agent, and Simon remained in Victoria and operated the growing retail establishment.⁴¹ Eventually the firm closed the office in Galveston. The Dun assessment of the business continued to be favorable and in fact mentioned that the firm was one of the leading merchant establishments in Victoria.⁴²

In 1876 A. and S. Levy purchased an advertisement which ran the breadth of the front page of the Victoria Advocate. Instead of a banner advertisement, this notice actually consisted of seven small block advertisements, each distinct and independent. The first said that everyone should call at A. and S. Levy's. The second claimed that the firm had \$8,000 worth of goods on hand which would be sold below cost. The next one said that they were offering their dress goods 25 percent cheaper than they had ever been offered before. The next block contained an advertisement for boots and shoes, and the next offered 15,000 yards of Sea Island cotton. The sixth box advertised 500 imported corsets, and

University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

⁴¹ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2 item 93, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas.

⁴² Texas Vol. 31, p. 289, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

the final one noted that sales were cash on delivery only.⁴³ The company repeated this large advertisement in several succeeding editions. A. and S. Levy continued to conduct business in Victoria, and in 1877 the editor of the paper noted that despite problems in Europe, the firm of A. and S. Levy was still receiving steamer shipments of merchandise from the continent.⁴⁴

By 1879 the *Victoria Advocate* informed the people of Victoria that the firm of A. and S. Levy was keeping a representative in New York, acknowledging that by this date August had permanently settled there. That issue also referred to the firm as the "Emporium of Fashion" which sold only the best quality goods at the lowest price. In subsequent advertisements, Simon and August Levy continued to call their store the Emporium of Fashion. In the late winter of 1880 a small note in the paper mentioned that the store was selling out all the fall stock to make room for the new stock expected to arrive after Simon returned from a buying trip to New York.⁴⁵ In the fall of that year, Simon Levy took out a notice which reminded his customers that "We take this method of informing our customers that on next Wednesday, the 15th inst. the Emporium of Fashion will be

⁴³ *Victoria Advocate*, July 20 1876, 1.

⁴⁴ *Victoria Advocate*, March 31, 1877.

⁴⁵ *Victoria Advocate*, February 17, 1880.

closed on account of the holiday of Yom Kippur." signed A. and S. Levy.⁴⁶

Nearly thirty years after the first Jewish merchants arrived in Victoria, the Jewish population, along with that of the city in general, continued to expand. In addition to established businesses, the 1876 tax roll included many new Jewish names and several new Jewish businesses firms. The list contained both L. Alexander, and D. Alexander separately, Jacob Apfel, M. Guggenheim, I. and J. Guggenheim, W. S. and Henry Halfin, Abraham, Henry, and Godcheaux Levi, the firm of Levi and Schwartz, A. and S. Levy, M. Oppenheimer; and Moses and Louis Schwartz. Among the major merchants who rendered asset values was D. Alexander who declared that he owned merchandise valued at \$5,000. After the brothers divided the business, Daniel Alexander founded The Racket Store, a merchandising operation that was similar to a dime store. The list of other merchants included Jacob Apfel, who declared that he owned merchandise valued at \$3,000; Abraham Levi, who declared assets in several business ventures with a total value of \$26,000; M. Oppenheimer, who reported that he owned merchandise valued at \$2,500, and also Louis Schwartz, who declared that his stock was valued at \$4,000.⁴⁷

⁴⁶*Victoria Advocate*, September 11, 1880.

⁴⁷ Microfilm of 1876 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

The Jewish community was growing, and the paper indicated that Jewish citizens were an integral part of the community. The September 13, 1879, issue of the *Advocate* contained an article about the upcoming Jewish holidays.

The notice said:

The important festival of the Israelite faith, known as Rosh Hashonah will be celebrated by the members of that creed throughout the world on next Thursday the 18th inst. This day is the beginning of the civil year and represents to them our New Year. On the recurrence of this festival each year the Jewish citizen closes his place of business and observes the day with religious decorum. Ten days after this festival occurs Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement.⁴⁸

By printing this notice, the editor acknowledged the importance of the Jewish citizens and their community within Victoria. On that same day, Henry Halfin placed a notice stating that his business would be closed on Rosh Hashonah, and he asked his customers to come by to shop the day before the holiday.⁴⁹

After the firm of Alexander and Brother dissolved, each brother operated independent establishments. L. Alexander's firm carried an extensive stock; however, by 1877 it must have been faced with a cash shortage because Alexander executed a promissory note to the banking firm of Brownson and Company and pledged all the merchandise in his store as

⁴⁸ *Victoria Advocate*, September 13, 1879

⁴⁹ *Victoria Advocate*, September 13, 1879

collateral. The list of goods which were pledged was lengthy and included nearly 2,000 yards of fabric, boys' clothing, men's' clothing and ladies' clothing.⁵⁰

Evidently, the firm was able to overcome the difficulty and remain solvent. A sales ticket dated in December of 1878, indicated that the firm was still operating and the ticket proclaimed that the firm dealt in staple and fancy dry goods, clothing, hats, and millinery supplies. Further it announced that the firm of L. Alexander operated stores in Victoria, Indianola, and Cuero.⁵¹

Other firms which were operating about 1876 included Solomon J. Cohen, a dealer in fruit, confection, and tobacco supplies. Solomon Cohen did not remain in business long. On January 4, 1881, he sold several barrels of flour, sugar, and tobacco, and over 4,800 cigars; and then on January 12, he sold the remainder of his merchandise to Sol Halfin.⁵² Another new business was the hardware firm of E. Schadwitz. Schadwitz advertised that he was the agent for John Deer's Moline plows and cultivators.⁵³ The company invoices listed

⁵⁰ Vol. 14 page 163, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library.

⁵¹ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2 item 98, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas.

⁵² Vol. 14 pages 506 and 509, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library.

⁵³ *Victoria Advocate*, July 27, 1876, 3.

other supplies which they carried, such as barb wire, wagon materials, painting supplies, and improved fire arms.⁵⁴

As the original Jewish settlers grew older, some of their sons joined the businesses. By the end of the 1870s, the Levi family businesses were expanding and diversifying. Within a few years, Abraham Levi advertised three separate businesses, banking, mercantile, and wholesale groceries. The banking service operated out of the mercantile business; however, it eventually became an entity within itself. A. Levi and Company Bankers advertised that they offered banking services and were dealers in exchange. Eventually the banking operation outgrew the corner of the mercantile business it had occupied, and the banking operations moved to another building reserved only for banking. By the mid 1870s, the bank was actively seeking deposits from customers, friends, and the public. The bank's advertisements indicated that at least two of Abraham's sons, Hy and Godcheaux A. Levi were involved in the banking business.⁵⁵ These two young men must have become more involved in the banking business so that Abraham Levi could run the wholesale grocery. Neither Godcheaux A. nor Hy's names appeared in the advertisements for A. Levi Grocery. Whereas the bank advertisements were relatively small and

⁵⁴ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2 item 71, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas..

⁵⁵ *Victoria Advocate*, July 27, 1876, 1.

conservative, the grocery advertisements were much more eye-catching.

One large notice placed in the July 20, 1876, issue of the *Victoria Advocate* contained an extensive list of the items and brands which the grocery company handled. In large letters directly under the title Wholesale Grocers the company noted that they dealt in Stoves, Plows, Furniture, Cordage, Liquors, Tobacco and Cigars. This advertisement mentioned that the firm had just moved into a larger and nicer building, and therefore could carry a greater variety of stock. And because they bought their stock for cash, they could offer it to their customers at prices equal to those in Galveston and New Orleans. Levi Wholesale Grocers was more than a dealer in groceries and staples. They were suppliers for almost anything necessary for life on rural farms and ranches outside the city of Victoria. One advertisement noted that they were the outlet for Avery, Brinley, and Moore plows, and also that they carried Rosedale Cement and M. L. Filley's Stoves. The notice continued that they carried "fine and common furniture" and finally that they were the "sole agents for Victoria of the celebrated Milwaukee Beer, also W. J. Lemp's St. Louis Beer the best and healthiest in the market."⁵⁶ Evidently, at least some customers in Levi's marketing

⁵⁶ *Victoria Advocate*, July 20, 1876.

territory could afford "fine" furniture and beer brought from places as far away as Milwaukee.

Over the next few years, the Levi bank continued purchasing small advertisements; meanwhile the grocery notices changed slightly. In 1877 the Wholesale Grocery advertisement contained a picture of a cooking stove and claimed that the firm was "sole agent for Filley's celebrated 'Texas Cooking' Stove." The announcement also contained a notice that the company was the agent for the Oriental Powder Company. A. Levi and Company advertised that this product was being offered to the public in Victoria at factory prices with freight added. In addition to the picture of the stove, the advertisement contained the logo for W. J. Lemp's Lager Beer.⁵⁷ In November 1878, the Dun records indicated that A. Levi and Company was a wholesale Grocery and Banking establishment. The report mentioned that they were a "safe business," meaning that the evaluator considered them worthy of credit. The report did, however, point out that if the firm had experienced any losses, they had been in the cotton market,⁵⁸ suggesting that perhaps Levi was speculating in cotton.

The firm of A. and S. Levy remained a market leader in Victoria, and the letterhead and invoices continued to

⁵⁷ *Victoria Advocate*, March 31, 1877.

⁵⁸ Texas Vol. 31, p. 297, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston Mass.

advertise the fact that August Levy was in residence in New York. A ledger sheet for one customer's account dated January 1887 to July 1887 recorded the following purchases: one pair pants for \$8.00; one pair shoes, \$2.75, ten yards of gingham, \$1.00; a pair of kid gloves, \$1.25; one straw hat, \$1.75; and to outfit a man, four shirts were fifty cents, seventy five cents, and two each for \$1.50, one suit ran \$9.00 and two undershirts were fifty cents each. Also included on this list of goods which were purchased over a six months period were cuffs, collars, shoe fasteners, muslin, lace, and whale bones.⁵⁹

By the 1880s the Jewish businessmen dominated the dry goods trade in Victoria. The Advocate printed a Victoria Business Directory on January 17, 1880, which contained eight listings under the heading of dry goods. Of the firms which were listed, six were owned by Jewish merchants. The list included A. and S. Levy, L. Alexander, H. Halfin, M. Oppenheimer, M. Schwartz, and C. A. Wertheimer. Although the listing for Halfin mentioned that he carried family groceries, the separate list of grocers included only A. Levi and Company which was described as a wholesale grocer. Two stores were listed as hardware dealers, and one of those was the firm of E. Schadwitz, a dealer in hardware and farming implements. Three banking houses were listed

⁵⁹ Callender Family file folder 28 Box 2 item 44, Sidney Roper Weisiger Local History Collection, Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria, Texas.

including that of A. Levi and Company. The directory contained at least one other listing for a Jewish business, that of the Two Boys Saloon owned by Sol Halfin.

Throughout the 1880s the Levi family continued to invest in various business ventures. In the fall of that year the *Advocate* mentioned that Godcheaux Levi had just recently returned to Victoria from "Kansas and other states north." The news article explained that the firm of A. Levi and Company owned about ten thousand head of cattle and that Godcheaux had been learning about that business.⁶⁰ In Texas alone, the family owned over 3,500 acres of land which were rendered on the Victoria tax roll.⁶¹ Always interested in diversification, in February of 1884, Abraham Levi entered into an agreement with the Texas Continental Meat Company to erect and operate an ice manufacturing facility in Victoria. In addition to manufacturing ice, the business would operate a cold storage plant. Not only would the facility be available for Levi's use, but the business could also offer cold storage to others.⁶² The construction of the cold storage facilities only took a few months, and by October of the same year Abraham Levi was operating the plant, an ice

⁶⁰ *Victoria Advocate*, September 11, 1880.

⁶¹ Microfilm of 1886 tax assessments form B, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

⁶² Vol.19 page 262, Victoria County Deed Records microfilm in the Victoria College University of Houston-Victoria Library, Victoria, Texas.

manufacturing business under the name of Crystal Ice Factory.⁶³

The Victoria County tax roll for 1886 continued to include several of the old, established businessmen. Retailers Lasar and Daniel Alexander were included. Abraham Levi's cousin Henry Levy, who had entered the wholesale grocery business, was also included, as were Simon Levy and the firm of S. and A. Levy. A. Levi and Company was listed along with Levi's sons, Charles and Godcheaux A. Levi, individually. The estate of H. Halfin also appeared on the roll, along with two unexpected listings. These were the listings for Mrs. Julia Cohen and Mrs. Cornelia Rouff-- probably the widow of Leon Rouff. Obviously these women were operating retail establishments because Julia Cohen declared merchandise valued at \$1,000 and Cornelia Rouff also rendered merchandise. It was possible that this was the first time that Jewish women in Victoria personally rendered a value on business assets.⁶⁴ Finding these women's names on the tax roll rendering merchandise indicated that by the 1880s, at least in some instances, women were beginning to own mercantile establishments.

⁶³ Invoice dated October 20, 1884, Item 3, folder 28 box 2 Callender Family file in Weisiger Collection Victoria College and University of Houston Library Victoria, Texas.

⁶⁴ Microfilm of 1886 tax assessments, Victoria County, The Victoria College, University of Houston-Victoria Library.

As the century drew to a close, A. and S. Levy remained a leader in the Victoria market. Their business stationery, however, reflected the modernization of the business. By 1888 the brothers names no longer appeared on the statements; furthermore, the stationery indicated that the firm was also operating as Commission Merchants and Jobbers. Although the firm had made changes, the New York address remained the same, 20 Walker Street. Other subtle changes also began to appear in the advertising and merchandising. By the end of the 1880s, the firm placed advertisements in the paper for name brand merchandise. An example of this was one 1889 notice in the *Advocate*, which stated that A. and S. Levy was the agent for W. L. Douglas' \$3.00 shoe for gentlemen and for ladies. The advertisement proclaimed: "Best in the world. Examine his \$5.00 genuine hand-sewn shoe. \$4.00 hand sewn welt shoe. \$3.50 Police and Farmer's shoe \$2.00 and \$1.75 Boy's school shoes. Fraudulent when my name and price are not stamped on bottom. W. L. Douglas Brockton, Mass."⁶⁵

The A. Levi Company continued to advertise as bankers and grocers. Further, one advertisement included the statement, "Fire Insurance and Exchange and agent for Glidden's Barb Wire."⁶⁶ As the company entered the final

⁶⁵ *Victoria Advocate*, April 13, 1889.

⁶⁶ *Victoria Advocate*, April 13, 1889.

decade of the nineteenth century, the banking business expanded, necessitating the construction of a dignified new building to house all the banking activities. The Levi Bank now offered exchange and banking services all over the continent and in the Orient. Advertisements reminded readers that at A. Levi Bank customers could purchase money orders which would be payable in any town with a post office and that the bank was an agent for fire insurance. Moreover, the new banking facilities offered a fireproof steel vault and safety deposit boxes for bank customers' safety and convenience.⁶⁷ In the 1900 Victoria telephone directory, the A. Levi Bank advertised that they offered loans and collections, and noted that the bank was established in 1875 which implied longevity and stability.

The dry goods firm of A. and S. Levy continued to operate into the twentieth century. In 1889 they claimed to be the oldest dry goods establishment in Southwest Texas. In September they reminded customers that they had the largest stock of any area retailer and that they would gladly fill mail orders. The firm even offered to pay "express charges" on orders which exceeded five dollars.⁶⁸ The next year the firm advertised not only clothing but carpets, rugs, floor oil, trunks, and valises. They claimed

⁶⁷ *Victoria Advocate*, October 31, 1891.

⁶⁸ *Victoria Advocate*, September 12, 1889, 1.

to be "Cheaper than the Cheapest." Again the advertisement mentioned that a representative of the firm was continually in New York so that he could purchase bargains for the store.⁶⁹ The firm continued to place small notices in the *Advocate* about their merchandise. One October 1898 notice recognized the changing attitude toward ready-made clothing by stating that "[n]owhere in Texas can you find a better selection of ready made clothing than is now exhibited at A. and S. Levy's Victoria, Texas."⁷⁰ Such a statement indicated a change in upper-class taste as previously only hand tailored clothing were considered acceptable.

Retaining control of the Victoria operations, Simon Levy displayed his interest in the continual modernization of the store and the marketing strategy used by A. and S. Levy. He planned and executed several major renovations. First he expanded the retail space by moving stock to the second floor of their original building, and later to accommodate further growth, he added a third floor to the existing building. The business then adopted the slogan "Victoria's Greatest Store." Throughout the past thirty years, the firm had grown and responded to customers' needs and changing competition. This ability to evolve and respond to changing marketing situations helped the firm

⁶⁹ *Victoria Advocate*, September 25, 1897, 1.

⁷⁰ *Victoria Advocate*, October 22, 1898, 2.

when August Levy died in New York. August's death left the total business in Simon's hands. Simon Levy continued operating the store, and in June of 1928, he incorporated A. and S. Levy with all the stock being divided between Simon Levy and four of his sons.⁷¹

Although most represented the second generation of Victoria's Jewish residents, the 1900 business directory for Victoria continued to contain a few old names. Moses and August Oppenheimer were listed as hide buyers and dealers in wool, hides, furs, brass, copper, and scrap metal. Merchant D. Alexander was listed as a grocer along with M. L. Apfel. Newer resident A. Levitansky owned a "mammoth" jewelry store and advertised on several pages that he carried emeralds, pearls, diamonds, and many other items. Mrs. H. Cohn also advertised along with Levitansky's as jewelers. Banker A. Levi advertised that he was a dealer in foreign and domestic exchange. Henry Levy no longer operated his wholesale grocery business and was retired. Simon Levy still ran the A. and S. Levy Dry Goods firm. C. Levi was listed as a banker and grocer along with his brother G. A. Levi who was listed as a banker, and the A. Levi Company was included under insurance. Newer families were also listed. M. L. Potash owned a photography business, and joining the few working women, his wife ran a milliner shop. Max Zahn

⁷¹ From "People of Our Town" *Victoria Advocate* 1930 in the possession of the author. Supplied by David Lack.

operated a barber shop and also advertised under the heading of baths. Zahn's father--also a Victoria resident--was a druggist.⁷²

Between 1900 and 1920 many new Jewish families moved into Victoria. For a few years, the number of Jewish owned businesses increased. Then around 1920 except for the Levy family, most of the old families left the area or died out. Although branches of the Levi family moved to Dallas, San Antonio, and Galveston, some branches of other early Victoria Jewish families moved up the Victoria Road during the 1860s and 1870s and were found in smaller cities.

2

Cuero

Just a few miles upstream from Victoria was the little village of Cuero in DeWitt County. During the nineteenth century, Jewish merchants settled in Cuero, opened business, and later moved. Some of these merchants had moved to Cuero from Victoria and others from Gonzales. M. Oppenheimer lived in DeWitt County when the 1860 census was taken. He indicated that he was a merchant and that he owned both real estate and personal property.⁷³ Oppenheimer later moved to Cameron County and Victoria where he was previously mentioned. In the later nineteenth century, L. Alexander

⁷² 1900-1901 Victoria Telephone Directory in the collection of the Center for American History at the University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

⁷³ United States Census, 1860 DeWitt County, Texas.

operated a branch store in Cuero, and Lichtenstein's operated in Nursery between Victoria and Cuero. Records of Jewish families remaining in Cuero were sketchy; however, during the 1880s the family of Leo Frank lived in Cuero where Leo was born.⁷⁴ In 1888 the *Cuero Weekly Star* noted that "The Jewish New Year day was kept religiously by all the citizens of that sect in the city on last Thursday."⁷⁵ That such a notice was printed in the paper implied that the closure of Cuero's Jewish owned businesses was significant enough to be mentioned.

After the turn of the century, Jake Cohn and his wife moved from San Antonio to Cuero. Jake's brother-in-law, Ben Tudzin, was living in Gonzales, so while Jake learned English at his San Antonio job, the couple planned their move. When they were ready, the Cohns used their savings to purchase both merchandise and a building. During the early years, the Cohn's bought from traveling representatives or bought from San Antonio wholesalers. They later traveled to St. Louis and New York to purchase stock for the store. Because he spoke both Polish and German, Cohn fit into the immigrant community in DeWitt County. The store grew and eventually two of Cohn's daughters married and returned to Cuero. Jake died in 1980, and in 1987 the Cohn family sold

⁷⁴ "Leo Max Frank," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1978 ed.: 73.

⁷⁵ *Cuero Weekly Star*, September 14, 1888.

the store.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Jackie Hall, "Two hard-working immigrants from the Promised Land in Cuero," *The Cuero Record*, February 11, 1987, 9.

CHAPTER IV

GONZALES

Gonzales, a city located near the junction of the San Marcos and Guadalupe Rivers, served as the governmental and commercial center for the DeWitt colony. Although Gonzales began as the headquarters of the colony, later it served as a stopover point on stage and teamster lines which ran not only north and west from the coast through Gonzales, but also from Columbus to San Antonio and eventually to El Paso.¹ The land in the area was fertile and well drained; therefore, it attracted men interested in commerce and agriculture. The 1860 census listed over eleven hundred residents of Gonzales County.²

Perhaps the first Jewish merchant or businessman in Gonzales was Morris or Moritz Levysen. The earliest records which referred to Levysen indicated that by late 1853 he was already established in the mercantile business. On December 17, 1853, Levysen ran an advertisement in the *Gonzales Inquirer* which offered "Dry goods, Clothing, Hats, Boots . . . and Shoes, Jewelry, and Groceries." The advertisement stated that the store carried "articles too numerous to mention. . . . [we] are continually in receipt of choice

¹ Thonhoff, *San Antonio Stage Lines, 1847-1881*, Figure 32.

² *The United States Census, Table Three Population of Cities and Towns* (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1860). 486.

selections . . . to sell cheap."³ During the 1850s merchants often continued to run the exact same notice for extended periods, and this advertisement appeared in subsequent issues of the paper. Because the notice did not announce the opening of the business, one can assume that Levysen was not new in the community. Furthermore, because he did not invite customers to try his merchandise, one can assume that the business had an existing clientele.

The 1855 Gonzales County tax record included M. Levysen. The tax roll indicated that he held no real property but paid \$50.00 in tax on personal property--which was how merchandise was rendered. Because he had purchased a lot for \$1,300 during the year,⁴ the 1856 assessment showed that he paid taxes on one lot, one horse, and merchandise valued at \$6,000. Although the value of his property varied, the Gonzales tax rolls continued to list merchant M. Levysen until about 1861.

The county deed records and the R. G. Dun reports suggest that several other Jewish men were living in Gonzales prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Simon and Abraham Frank executed a partnership agreement in New Orleans, Louisiana and also had the agreement filed in both Orleans parish and in the Gonzales County clerk's office.

³ "M. Levysen & Co." *Gonzales Weekly Inquirer*, December 17, 1853, 3.

⁴ Vol. I page 742, Gonzales County Real Estate Deed Records in the Gonzales, County Courthouse Annex.

The partnership was specifically established to operate a dry goods and grocery business in Gonzales, Texas. The agreement stipulated that Abraham would contribute \$3,560 in cash and two \$1,000 notes receivable owed to him; Simon was to contribute \$3,975 in cash. The duration of the partnership was one year, and each man agreed to forego any other business enterprise and devote his time solely to pursuing this business.⁵ Because the 1860 census for Gonzales County included S. Frank, age either 25 or 35, along with his wife, Regina, a daughter, Caroline, parents, Aaron and Hannah Frank, age 65 and 68 respectively, one can assume that Simon moved to Gonzales. It is possible that Aaron and Abraham were the same person because the census indicated that both were merchants. Unfortunately, tragedy followed the families after they arrived in Gonzales. In 1861 Hanna, the wife of Aaron Frank, died. The next year Caroline, the daughter of Simon and Rebecca died; the following year, Aaron Frank himself died. All three of these residents were buried in the Gonzales Jewish Cemetery. The condition of the stones in the Original Jewish Cemetery in Gonzales, the oldest and least cared for of the two

⁵ Vol.J page 366, Gonzales County Real Estate Deed Records in the Gonzales, County Courthouse Annex. The existence of this 1855 contract drawn up between two merchants living in New Orleans, Louisiana, stimulates several questions. First, how would these two men living in the large cosmopolitan city of New Orleans have known about the small village of Gonzales, Texas, and what would have drawn them to leave New Orleans and move to this small town of the edge of the frontier?

Jewish cemeteries, and translation of the names could account for the differences between Aaron and Abraham. The possibility that other Jewish families lived in Gonzales with the name Frank exists; however, the early date of this record would suggest that if that did occur the families were most likely related. In 1870 the Gonzales County census indicated that another Aaron Franks, probably Frank, resided in Gonzales, and twelve years later that same family still resided in Gonzales. In 1870 Aaron Frank had a son Abraham, age five years. Because of the Jewish tradition of naming children after deceased relatives, this name would suggest that the three families were related and that perhaps the older Frank's name was Abraham.

Court documents also revealed another Jewish-owned firm which operated in Gonzales prior to 1860. A deed dated in May of 1859 stated that Halfin and Cahn or Cohn, merchants from Gonzales, purchased a lot in the town.⁶ The next year Jacob Halfin and his wife sold their half of the lot to Joseph Cahn or Cohn⁷ and his wife Fanni.⁸ By 1867 Joseph and Fanni Cahn had moved to Calhoun County and designated

⁶ Vol.M page 649, Gonzales County Real Estate Deed Records in the Gonzales, County Courthouse Annex. Also Texas Vol 5 p. 100, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration., Boston, Mass.

⁷ I believe that this name is Cohn; however, both documents are handwritten and determining whether the letter is an a or an o is difficult.

⁸ Vol.N page 580, Gonzales County Real Estate Deed Records in the Gonzales, County Courthouse Annex.

Jacob Halfin as their agent to care for all their property in Gonzales County⁹. Presumably this was the same Joseph Cahn who later advertised in the 1871 *Indianola Bulletin*, and part of the same family which continued to be linked with the Halfin family during the next twenty years.

While Jacob Halfin mentioned above might be the same person who began his Texas business career in Victoria, it is doubtful because each was listed in the 1860 census in different counties. The possibility did exist that one was the son, nephew, cousin, or even brother of the other. Most likely the documents executed in Gonzales and Caldwell counties referred to one Jacob Halfin, and those executed in Victoria referred to another.¹⁰ Deeds indicated that a Jacob Halfin owned land in Calhoun, Victoria, Gonzales, and Caldwell counties. Cahn left Gonzales to move south to Calhoun County which continued to reinforce the ties between the towns upriver and the coast. Eventually Jacob Halfin from Gonzales, his brother Elias or Eli, and Jacob's wife Sarah all moved to Lockhart, and all three were eventually buried in the Luling Jewish cemetery.

Another transaction which probably involved Jewish merchants was an agreement between Emanuel and William

⁹ Vol.P page 309, Gonzales County Real Estate Deed Records in the Gonzales, County Courthouse Annex.

¹⁰ Except on census records it is difficult to distinguish between two people with the same name.

Katsenstein and Julius Oppenheimer dated March 13, 1855. The Katsensteins, who were Gonzales merchants, gave a chattel mortgage to Julius Oppenheimer. This document mortgaged fabrics, such as poplins and muslins; clothing, such as silk mantillas; coats, and other dry goods which were in transit from New York to Gonzales. The entire stock including a buggy was valued at \$1,800. Although this mortgage might have eased the credit strains of the Katsensteins,¹¹ they did not remain in business in Gonzales. Not much was known about Julius Oppenheimer; however, it is possible that he was one of the brothers of Anton and Dan Oppenheimer. Anton and Dan had two other brothers; one, Julius, died before the Civil War.¹²

The tax records indicated that sometime between 1862 and 1865 Morris Levyson left the county because in 1866 his property evaluation was rendered by his brother, Herman.¹³ Morris Levyson died in Philadelphia, and his Texas estate was administered by his brother Herman Levyson who had moved from Lockhart in Caldwell County to Gonzales. The probate records for Morris Levyson mention that Herman filed claims

¹¹ Vol.J page 348, Gonzales County Real Estate Deed Records in the Gonzales, County Courthouse Annex.

¹² From the personal library of Jesse Oppenheimer, File 1009.00 , San Antonio, Texas.

¹³ Microfilm of 1855 through 1866 tax assessments, Gonzales county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

against several people who had owed his brother money for goods they had purchased from his store. Over the next few years, Herman Levyson determined that most of the claims were uncollectible, and after selling all the real estate which Morris Levyson owned, he closed the estate. By this time Herman Levyson had moved back to Lockhart, but his brother Paul Levyson was living in Gonzales.¹⁴

In a memorial which appeared in the Gonzales paper after Paul Levyson's death, the authors told how Paul had traveled from New York to Lockhart in 1859 to join his brother Herman. Sometime before the spring of 1862, Paul moved to Gonzales, and in May of that year, he enlisted in a Gonzales regiment of Confederate forces.¹⁵ According to Rabbi Henry Cohen, both Paul Levyson and A. Levyson served during the Civil War in Company B, Waul's Legion.¹⁶ After the Civil War, Paul returned to Gonzales. For a few years, he and perhaps two brothers, Lewis and Herman, operated a business together. Eventually Herman and Lewis moved to Lockhart and later to Austin.

The 1867 tax roll for Gonzales County included P. Levyson. That year he rendered one horse and merchandise

¹⁴ Probate Records, Levyson family Gonzales County Archives, Gonzales County courthouse annex.

¹⁵ "In Memoriam," *Gonzales Inquirer*, August 18, 1905, 3.

¹⁶ Henry Cohen, *One Hundred Years of Jewry in Texas* (Dallas, Texas: Texas Centennial Exposition, 1936), 22.

valued at \$6,000. Within two years his holdings had grown, and in the 1869 tax roll Levyson declared that he owned one lot and merchandise valued at \$8,500. That same tax roll still included property under the name of M. Levyson Est.¹⁷ The 1870 census proved that the only Levyson remaining in Gonzales by that year was Paul. By this time, however, he had married and was the father of a son. The census record for Gonzales County reported that Paul was a 31 year-old merchant who had emigrated from Prussia, owned real estate valued at \$2,000 and personal property valued at \$7,000.

Eventually, after the Civil War ended, other Jewish merchants began to move to Gonzales. By 1870 the Gonzales County census included at least four other Jewish merchants. Joseph Levy, age twenty-six, and Jacob Levy, age twenty-four, lived next to Levyson and gave their occupation as "store keeper and back hall"--perhaps they were the owners of a small saloon located in the rear of the store. Also included at the Levy residence was Sigmund Phillipson, age eighteen. Phillipson was also listed as a store keeper.

Several factors suggest that these men were either landmen, relatives, or partners. First, Levyson, the two Levy brothers, and Sigmund Phillipson all listed Prussia as their country of origin, and the three younger men lived

¹⁷ Microfilm of 1867 tax assessments, Gonzales county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

together in the dwelling next to Paul Levyson's house.¹⁸ Additionally, R. G. Dun records indicate that a business relationship existed between Joseph L. Levy, Paul Levyson, and Theo H. Phillipson of New York. That would suggest that young Sigmund might have been a relative of Theo and was working in Texas to learn the mercantile business. In 1867 the R. G. Dun report mentioned that the New York house of Theo H. Phillipson was manufacturing goods for two stores, one in Gonzales and one in Lockhart. These establishments were operating under the name of Levyson and Company and were run by Paul and Herman Levyson respectively. By 1868 another store had been added to the Texas association of stores. This store operated in New Braunfels. A. L. Kessler ran this mercantile business under the name of Kessler, Levyson and Company.¹⁹ Within a few years, the stores in Lockhart and New Braunfels were not mentioned in the report, and instead Theo Phillipson and Company was connected with stores in Gonzales and Austin, Texas, and Okolona, Mississippi. The Dun report indicated that the partners in that enterprise were Theodore H. Phillipson, Joseph L. Levy, Paul Levyson, and A. L. Kessler.²⁰

¹⁸ United States Census, 1870, Gonzales, Gonzales County, Texas 7.

¹⁹ New York City Vol. 207, p. 1072, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

²⁰ New York City Vol. 207, p. 110066, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

Several records indicated that for a short time after the 1870 census Paul Levyson left Gonzales County. Although the 1871 tax rolls listed property owned by P. Levyson and Levyson and Company valued at \$13,500, it was rendered by his neighbor, and silent partner, J. L. Levy.²¹

In addition to Levyson and the Levy brothers, at least one other Jewish businessman, Aaron Franks (or Frank), possibly related to the Frank family from New Orleans, was listed in the 1870 census. Franks was described as a merchant living in Gonzales County. He was forty-two years old and had a twenty-eight year old wife Sophie and three children. Both Aaron and Sophie were listed as immigrants from Bavaria. All their children were born in Texas; the oldest, Rose, was nine years old. These dates suggested that the census taker could have been mistaken when he added an "s" to the last name, because a daughter Lena was also listed, and twelve years later a Lena Frank married Sol Berman. They also indicate that the family arrived in the United States prior to the outbreak of the Civil War and arrived in Texas by 1861; therefore, this information did not contradict the theory that this man could have been the Frank from New Orleans.²² During the 1870s another Frank, S. Frank, perhaps the original Simon Frank, advertised in

²¹ Microfilm of 1871 tax assessments, Gonzales county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

²² United States Census, 1870, Gonzales, Gonzales County, Texas 4.

the Gonzales Inquirer. In the same edition which carried the announcement that P. Levyson had reopened his store, S. Frank's Gonzales Bazaar of Fashion also advertised.²³ In February of 1880, the company advertised spring and summer clothing. The advertisement reminded the customers that S. Frank and Company was "the place to invest your money," presumably in top quality goods. Additionally, they advertised "Paris suiting for the ladies."²⁴ Although it was possible that two unrelated Frank families settled in Gonzales, it was more likely that these men were brothers or cousins.

Sometime between 1870 and 1880, Phillipson moved to Austin. But he clearly retained ties to Gonzales, because during that period he married the daughter of Gonzales resident A. Frank. The Aaron Franks listed on the census was the father of Phillipson's wife. Phillipson and his wife returned to the city for special occasions and were listed as guests at a Jewish wedding which took place in 1882. At this wedding, Phillipson offered a toast to the new couple because he was married to the bride's sister.²⁵

By 1873 the Gonzales paper regularly carried advertisements from Jewish businesses. On January 10, 1873,

²³ *Gonzales Inquirer*, January 10, 1873, 4.

²⁴ *Gonzales Inquirer*, February 14, 1880, 2.

²⁵ "A Jewish Wedding," *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 16, 1882, 3.

the *Inquirer* included a notice that P. Levyson was reopened for business. This advertisement supported the evidence found in the earlier tax record that Levyson was out of the county for a few years. The notice stated that Levyson had reopened in his former location in the Odd Fellow Building North of Central Park. Additionally, the advertisement claimed that Levyson had been on a buying trip to New York, where he personally selected all the new merchandise. The stock included dry goods, clothing, boots, and shoes. Levyson thanked his "former customers for their patronage in the past" and solicited their future patronage.²⁶

Throughout the next few years, the paper noted that several other Jewish merchants also operated in Gonzales and the surrounding area. S. Frank, perhaps the Frank from New Orleans, for instance, was operating a business in Rancho,²⁷ and Jacob Cohn ran a candy store in Gonzales.²⁸ Cohn advertised that he carried "Home-Made Candies, [and] the finest stock of Fancy Toy Candies!"²⁹ According to Ginny Karlos and Ruth K. Denman, Gonzales County historians, Cohn had advertised as early as 1873 that he carried "'pure ice cold soda water and [he] manufactured candies daily'". His

²⁶ "Attention Re-opening," *Gonzales Inquirer*, January 10, 1873, 3.

²⁷ *Gonzales Inquirer*, January 10, 1875, 3.

²⁸ "The Candy Man," *Gonzales Inquirer*, December 6, 1879, 3.

²⁹ "Jacob Cohn," *Gonzales Inquirer*, November 8, 1879, 2.

shop was located on the north side of Plaza Square.³⁰

Another Jewish merchant H. Opet operated the New York Cheap Store. Opet rented a space upstairs over another business. His location must have allowed him to reduce his prices, and he advertised stylish goods--clothing, boots, shoes, and groceries--at a cheap price.³¹

Jacob Levy and, later, his brother Julius operated another dry goods establishment in Gonzales. The Levy brothers owned a store in Gonzales for about fifteen years--from before 1867 to 1881. After the turn of the century, Julius Levy wrote a lengthy letter to the *Daily Inquirer* in which he recounted his arduous trip to Gonzales to join his brother Jacob. Jacob and his cousin, Joseph Haas, already resided in Gonzales when Julius arrived in the area in July of 1867. At that time, Jacob Levy was the proprietor of a dry goods store in Gonzales which he operated until 1872. Julius explained that both Jacob Levy and Joseph Haas had drowned in the Guadalupe River on May 26, 1872, and both men were buried in the original or Old Jewish Cemetery in Gonzales. Julius explained that someday he hoped to return to Gonzales to visit his brother's grave.³²

³⁰ The Gonzales County Historical Commission, *The History of Gonzales County* (Dallas, Texas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1986), 105.

³¹ Gonzales County Historical Commission, *The History of Gonzales County*, 104. The advertisement appeared in the *Gonzales Inquirer*, March 7, 1880.

³² The fact that there was a Jewish cemetery in Gonzales in the early 1860s indicated that there was at least a loosely organized Jewish community.

After the deaths, Julius Levy continued to operate the dry goods establishment which his brother had owned. He remained in Gonzales until 1881, operating under the name of Julius Levy and Co.³³ The 1875 school tax roll listed merchants Levysen and Levy, and Levy was listed in 1877 and 1878. By 1879 J. L. Levy personally was listed on a separate line from the J. L. Levy Company. That tax roll listed the value of his property at \$3,500.³⁴

Although not evident from his taxed value, Levy advertised as if he carried huge assortments of merchandise in his store. One lengthy advertisement noted that "Julius Levy & Co., Under Miller & Sayers' Banking House, Dealers in Staples and Fancy Dry Goods . . . [sells] Groceries, Saddlery, Crockery and Glass Ware."³⁵ Several weeks later Levy placed an advertisement with a lengthy list of his supplies. This advertisement was unusual because it quoted some prices in the notice. In the 1870s most merchants did not disclose their prices because they were negotiable. The items with prices included calicoes, eighteen yards for one dollar; colored alpaca's, twelve and one-half cents per yard;

³³ Julius Levy, "Remembers Gonzales," *Gonzales Daily Inquirer*, June 22, 1906, 1.

³⁴ Microfilm of 1875-1879 tax assessments, Gonzales county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

³⁵ Julius Levy & Co." *Gonzales Inquirer*, October 5, 1878, 3.

protecting corsets, seventy-five cents; kid gloves, fifty cents a pair; Star shirts, one dollar; coffee, six pounds for one dollar; and light brown sugar, ten pounds for one dollar.³⁶ The advertisement was two columns wide and over ten inches long. Julius Levy often purchased other extremely large advertisements. One 1880 advertisement ran the entire width of the top of one page. It claimed that Levy had \$35,500.00 worth of goods in his store--a claim which was highly unlikely. The goods were offered for cash at New York prices, which would have been lower than those regularly charged in Texas.³⁷ Finally, in April of 1881, a small notice appeared in the paper explaining that the Levy Company was closed.

On the same page were two other notices about Julius Levy. One reported "Major Penn is coming; J. Levy & Co., the resort for supposed cheap goods, have gone." Another article, this one definitely a news item, reported that J. L. Levy had been acquitted of charges of carrying a pistol.³⁸ This incident was not the first time Levy had experienced legal trouble. Three years earlier Levy had filed charges against the Gonzales County sheriff. Supposedly, Levy had bid on and won land at a sheriff's

³⁶ "The Boom," *Gonzales Inquirer*, November 8, 1879, 2.

³⁷ "Great Booming Gonzales," *Gonzales Inquirer*, March 27, 1880, 3.

³⁸ *Gonzales Inquirer*, April 16, 1881, 3.

sale. He had then refused to comply with the terms of the bid, and the sheriff confiscated "forty-five pairs of pantaloons" from the store of Julius Levy & Co. The case hinged on whether the company was liable for the actions of Julius Levy.³⁹ After the two trials and the business closure, Levy left Texas.

During the 1870s the business and social climate in the Gonzales area encouraged Jews to settle there. Not only did Jewish families continue to move to Gonzales and towns in the vicinity, but evidence that Jews were socially accepted could be seen in the local paper. On September 27, 1879, the editor of the *Gonzales Inquirer* printed the following article.

Today occurs another and the most important festival of the Israelitish faith, known as Yom Kipur or Day of Atonement. With the going down of yesterday's sun pious Hebrew everywhere throughout the world closed his business house and returned to pay strict religious observance of the day. During the long hours that intervene he abstains from food and drink, and not until the stars appear tomorrow evening does he break his long fast. All enmities between members of the faith which may have occurred during the year are healed on this day; a beautiful and beneficial custom which should be imitated by all others.

On that same day and on the same page J. Cohn advertised that "Mr. J. Cohn, the Candy Man, will observe Yom Kippur today, hence his doors will be closed."⁴⁰ The

³⁹ *Gonzales Inquirer*, May 18, 1878, 3.

⁴⁰ *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 27, 1879, 3.

editor also printed another notice about the Jewish Holy Days. The notice stated "Today is the Jewish Day of Atonement known as Yom Kippur, Jom Kipir, Jom Kippie. The reader can take his choice." Throughout the next several years, notices such as these regularly appeared in the Gonzales paper. Additionally, the editor often published notices about Jewish celebrations, such as weddings and "circumcision rites."⁴¹ These articles indicated that the Jewish residents of Gonzales were accepted without bias; similarly Jewish merchants were treated like other businessmen, and newspaper reports indicated that they were free to bid on county contracts. In March of 1878, the Commissioners Court authorized a payment of \$14.00 to Paul Levyson for merchandise purchased in his store. The county had purchased the goods to supply the jail.⁴² These news articles were evidence of a tolerant mood within the community. Cohn would not have called attention to the fact that he was closing for Yom Kippur, if he did not feel safe and accepted in the community.⁴³ Similarly, if the merchants and their families had not been respected by their neighbors, the commissioners court would not have purchased supplies from Paul Levyson. These notices indicated that at

⁴¹ *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 20, 1888, 3.

⁴² "Commissioners Court," *Gonzales Weekly Inquirer*, March 2, 1878, 3.

⁴³ *Gonzales Weekly Inquirer*, September 27, 1879, 3.

that time there was little or no religious hostility in the Gonzales.

Paul Levyson lived in Gonzales for over thirty-five years. Other members of his family had preceded him to Gonzales and Texas. Paul Levyson felt accepted enough to return to Gonzales after the Civil War; he later married and brought his wife from the East to Gonzales. Prior to the Civil War Paul's brother, Herman Levyson, resided in Lockhart, and originally twenty-year-old Paul immigrated to Lockhart to join Herman.⁴⁴ Sale slips indicated that Herman, another brother Louis, and Paul had been in business together, but eventually they separated, and began operating independent establishments. In 1870 Herman and George Levyson lived in Caldwell County; Louis resided in Travis County, and Paul remained in Gonzales County.⁴⁵ During the next thirty years Paul and his family made Gonzales their home, and he operated a stable business in town.

Over the years, Levyson's advertisements evolved from long lists of available items without prices to more modern advertisements which included prices and, eventually, pictures. A September 1878, advertisement listed dry goods, gents' furnishings, ladies dresses, tobacco, groceries, and

⁴⁴ "In Memoriam," *Gonzales Weekly Inquirer*, August 30, 1906, 3.

⁴⁵ United States Census, 1870, Caldwell County, Texas 2, Travis County 36, and Gonzales County 7.

other goods.⁴⁶ That same month the editor printed information mentioning that he had been passing P. Levyson's store and noticed that some new stock had recently arrived. He continued that "Rare bargains in dry goods, clothing, ladies dress goods, etc. may be had [at Levyson's]."⁴⁷ In October of 1878, Paul Levyson advertised that he had a new supply of winter goods. At the bottom of the advertisement, he thanked his patrons and then reminded the readers that his customers "will find him ever ready to pay the highest market price in goods and cash for cotton."⁴⁸ This statement suggested that Levyson was acting as a broker for cotton, and that perhaps an independent broker did not reside in the area, or that Levyson was willing to trade cotton for goods at a favorable discount.

Several years later Levyson's advertisement only included a statement that he was selling cheap.⁴⁹ In 1881 another supposed news item appeared in the paper. It read:

Paul Levyson is a suiter, so to speak. That is to say he can suit you in any kind of suit, especially in those suits suited for suitors in pressing their suits. Young man . . . you can render the chance more in your favor by appearing

⁴⁶ "Paul Levyson," *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 18, 1878, 2.

⁴⁷ *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 28, 1878, 3.

⁴⁸ *Gonzales Inquirer* October 5, 1878: 2.

⁴⁹ *Gonzales Inquirer*, February 14, 1880, 2.

before her in one of Levyson's suits . . . and she could not possibly say no.⁵⁰

The next year Levyson placed an advertisement mentioning that there were "[e]legant patterns in carpets, rugs, and matting at Paul Levyson's."⁵¹ This advertisement indicated that he had not limited his inventory to clothing.

Notices in the Gonzales paper during the first part of 1880s revealed that at least one Jewish firm was operating a wholesale business out of their Gonzales office. In 1881 Sam Lapowski placed a notice in the *Inquirer* directed at the stockmen of Runnels, Shackelford, and Coleman counties. The advertisement stated that the company had a large stock of general merchandise, and furthermore, it stated that "Our goods are bought by the carload, we give. . . the advantage of cheap freights. We are at 'Baird' on the T. & P. R.R., . . . We deal in groceries and general merchandise by the wholesale. S. Lapowski & Bro."⁵² The Lapowski general merchandise store was in the same block on the north side of the Central Plaza as Paul Levyson's.⁵³ The Lapowski name appeared in the Gonzales tax rolls as early as 1878; thus, in 1881 they were not new to the area.⁵⁴ About five years

⁵⁰ *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 24, 1881, 2.

⁵¹ *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 16, 1882, 3.

⁵² *Gonzales Inquirer* May 7, 1881, 3.

⁵³ Gonzales County Historical Commission, *The History of Gonzales County* 109.

⁵⁴ Microfilm of 1878 tax assessments, Gonzales county, Genealogical Section,

later the paper carried a notice which informed the area residents that Lapowski Brothers was planning to close their Gonzales store and were, therefore, offering "great bargains."⁵⁵ For Sam and Jake Lapowski, the lure of the West must have been too strong to resist. They moved to San Angelo and opened a dry goods business. Supposedly, it was the largest dry goods establishment in the area. The brothers opened branch stores throughout West Texas and reportedly conducted over \$125,000 worth of business each year.⁵⁶

Although the Lapowskis had left, during the next ten years the Gonzales County tax rolls indicated that there was an ever increasing Jewish presence in Gonzales. The 1880 tax rendering for the county included the firm of Epstein and Miller. That firm had \$1,400 in merchandise and \$25 in cash on hand at a rural store in Waelder. That same year H. Opet declared merchandise valued at \$2,500, and the list also included P. Levyson, J. L. Levy, individually, and J. L. Levy and Company. The next year the roster also included J. Cohn; however, in contrast to the other merchants his holdings were valued at only \$600. In 1882 the list

Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

⁵⁵ *Gonzales Inquirer*, December 19, 1885, 3.

⁵⁶ From the Texas Jewish Historical Society Files, Folder 3A173, The Center for American History, Austin Texas.

included a merchant named Aaron, and by 1885 S. Berman had replaced Epstein and Miller in Waelder.⁵⁷ Later tax records continued to list these same Jewish merchants; however, the valuation of the property rendered fluctuated.

During the 1880s the connections between Jewish families living in Gonzales and those in the surrounding communities of Luling and Lockhart increased. In January of 1881, S. Berman moved to Waelder in Gonzales County to manage the store owned by Epstein and Miller. Both Epstein and Miller were Luling residents; then shortly after Berman arrived, the paper noted that he had purchased the interests of Epstein and Miller, and was patronizing "home enterprise" a policy the editor recommended to other local merchants.⁵⁸ In September of the next year, Berman cemented his ties to Gonzales and married the daughter of Gonzales grocer A. Frank. After the wedding, the couple made their home in Waelder. Under the heading "Jewish Wedding," the *Gonzales Inquirer* printed a lengthy article describing the ceremony.⁵⁹

Sometime later Berman took a partner, Allsup. Unfortunately, this partnership was not successful, and in

⁵⁷ Microfilm of 1880-1885 tax assessments, Gonzales county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

⁵⁸ *Gonzales Inquirer* January 29, 1881, 3.

⁵⁹ "A Jewish Wedding," *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 16, 1882, 3.

March of 1885, a notice of a consignment of assets to creditors appeared in the Gonzales newspaper. The notice stated that the merchants were assigning all their assets to their creditors. The author of the article estimated that the value of the assets was between eight and nine thousand dollars and the liabilities about the same amount.⁶⁰ After Berman left Waelder, at least one other Jewish family, the Hambargers, settled in the area.⁶¹ It must be noted that both Epstein and Miller lived in Luling along with other men by the name of Berman. Although S. Berman had not appeared in the Luling business directory, it is possible that young Berman was the son or nephew of one of the Bermans from Luling.

The December 19, 1885, edition of the *Gonzales Inquirer* was filled with news of interest to the area Jewish residents. Not only did it contain the notice about the closing of the Lapowski store, but it also contained numerous advertisements for Jewish businesses and another Jewish wedding announcement. This wedding united two area Jewish residents, Abe Josey, who was born in Texas and had been reared around Luling, and Jennie Finkelstein,⁶² whose

⁶⁰ *Gonzales Inquirer*, March 7, 1885, 3.

⁶¹ *Gonzales Inquirer*, July 19, 1894, 3.

⁶² *Gonzales Inquirer* December 19, 1885, 3.

family also had Luling ties.⁶³ During the preceding year, Josey had opened a grocery business in Gonzales. In the December editions of the paper, he advertised heavily for the Christmas trade. Several small notices mentioned the specialty items he had on hand: cranberries, pickled pigs feet, dried fruit, hams, and mincemeat in bulk. An additional advertisement invited Josey's customers to come to his store and take a "chance on a life size doll." Josey was not the only Jewish merchant who advertised for the Christmas trade. Paul Levysen also had extensive advertisements in that Christmas edition.⁶⁴

Over the next few years several Jewish couples celebrated weddings in Gonzales; however, two of the notices indicated that the weddings were unusual. Unlike the wedding article about Abe Josey and Jennie Finkelstein which stated that the couple had been married at the home of the bride's mother and that the rabbi from San Antonio had officiated at the ceremony,⁶⁵ the article about the wedding of Solomon Joseph and Sarah Greenthal named local officiates. When Solomon Joseph married Sarah Greenthal on July 25, 1885, the editor wrote that "our Hebrew townsman, Mr. W. H. Opet, who, however is not a licensed minister"

⁶³ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 47.

⁶⁴ *Gonzales Inquirer* December 19, 1885: 3.

⁶⁵ *Gonzales Inquirer* December 19, 1885: 3.

performed the Jewish rites and then Rev. A. A. Killough performed the legal ceremony. Although the Greenthal name had not appeared in the records, both of these young people must have been Gonzales County residents because the marriage license was taken out in the county.⁶⁶ Moreover, the paper mentioned that many friends had attended the ceremony. The fact that two men, a Christian and a Jew jointly officiated suggested that a cordial and respectful relationship existed between the Jewish and Christian citizens of the community.

The editor of the paper who wrote about the overall community of Gonzales which included the Jewish citizens, at times used levity in his writing. In January of 1887, the paper humorously speculated about a trip that Max Cohn made to San Antonio. Although Cohn reported that the trip was for business purposes, the editor guessed the subject of the trip was "matrimony."⁶⁷ Later when a different tone was needed the editor became respectful. In February 1888, the paper announced that the son of Gonzales resident Paul Asher had been circumcised. The paper called it the "ancient rite of circumcision," and noted that the rabbi from Houston had traveled to Gonzales to perform the ceremony.⁶⁸ Later that year the paper again printed a notice explaining that

⁶⁶ *Gonzales Inquirer* July 31, 1886: 3.

⁶⁷ *Gonzales Inquirer* January 29, 1887: 3.

⁶⁸ *Gonzales Inquirer* February 11, 1888: 2.

Last Saturday was the most solemn day in the Hebrew calendar and was kept zealously. It was Yom Kippor or Day of Atonement, commenced at sundown Friday and continued until the same time Saturday. Among them it is a day of fasting, deep humiliation and prayer.⁶⁹

These notices reveal that citizens of the community held a tolerant attitude toward their Jewish neighbors and also reveal the comfort felt by the Jewish citizens of the Gonzales community.

When the Paul Ashers moved to Galveston in the fall of 1888, the Jewish community lost one family; nevertheless, the Jewish population continued to grow. Solomon Stahl had moved to Gonzales earlier in 1888 and opened a grocery store. Shortly after he opened the store, Stahl experienced a devastating loss when his business, along with several others, was damaged in a fire. His uninsured loss was reported to be about one thousand dollars. After he recovered from the fire, Stahl advertised that in addition to groceries he carried fruit, crockery, and notions. Another Jewish merchant, Solomon Joseph, also sold fruit, groceries, and confections in Gonzales. Solomon Joseph was the young man mentioned above who married Sarah Greenthal. Additionally, late in the century, other new families moved into the area. H. Gurinsky opened a dry goods store in the Franks building, and Solomon Stahl's sons Jake and Dave

⁶⁹ *Gonzales Inquirer* September 20, 1888: 3.

opened another grocery.⁷⁰ Morris Fogotston owned a grocery store and dry goods business, and Frank Garriaria ran a dry goods business. S. Slakman operated a tailor shop, and L. Halfin ran a saloon.⁷¹ L. Halfin, perhaps Louis Halfin who was listed on the 1870 census as the seventeen-year-old son of Jacob Halfin of Lockhart, will be discussed later.⁷²

Prior to the turn of the century, Lehman Michelson moved to Gonzales and opened the Barrel House Saloon in the Reese building, and M. Cohen opened another tailor shop.

By 1888 Paul Levyson was regularly quoting prices in his advertisements. In October of that same year, one advertisement stated that the store carried boys' suits priced from \$1.75 and men's suits priced from \$4.50. Shoes and boots were advertised at \$2.50 for "button shoes," and the notice claimed that the shoes were hand made and "as good as any five dollar shoe" on the market.⁷³ In the 1890s Levyson's advertisements changed, as did the company. Paul Levyson's son Albert began working with his father, and in 1896 P. Levyson and Company became The Levyson Dry Goods Company, Incorporated. Articles of incorporation filed with

⁷⁰ Gonzales County Historical Commission, *The History of Gonzales County* 110.

⁷¹ United States Census 1910, Gonzales County, Texas. Many were listed as Yiddish speakers.

⁷² United States Census, 1870, Lockhart, Caldwell County, Texas 1.

⁷³ *Gonzales Inquirer* October 4, 1888, 3.

the Texas Secretary of State's Office identified G. Pessels of Travis County and Albert Levyson and R. S. Cobb of Gonzales County as sole stock holders. These men filed the papers on October 13, 1896, and declared that capital stock for the Levyson Dry Goods Company was valued at \$10,000.⁷⁴ Although Paul Levyson was not a stockholder, an advertisement in the 1898 *Gonzales City Directory* described him as the secretary-treasurer of the firm. The same notice indicated that Albert Levyson was the president of the Levysons Dry Goods Co.⁷⁵

By 1898 Levyson's newspaper advertisements looked less wordy and cluttered and, thus, more modern. On February 19, Levyson's ran an advertisement which explained that a representative from Strauss Bros. would be in Gonzales for two days. The notice described the gentleman as "an expert designer and professor of cutting . . . [who] will be on hand to take scientific measures of customers." This announcement also quoted prices: suits to order were \$12.00 and up, overcoats to order ran \$11.00, and trousers to order were \$3.00 and up.⁷⁶ The advertisement was distinctive not

⁷⁴ Document #7466 Articles of Incorporation filed with the Texas Secretary of State.

⁷⁵ 1898 *Gonzales City Directory* from the Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

⁷⁶ "Good Opportunity," *Gonzales Inquirer*, February 19, 1898, 4.

only because it contained prices, but also because it contained a drawing of a well appointed gentleman.

When Albert Levyson married, he must have believed that his future remained in Gonzales, because after his marriage in 1898, he and his wife returned to Gonzales to live. In June of the next year, his son, Sidney Maurice Levyson, was born in Gonzales. Rabbi S. Solomon of Corsicana traveled to Gonzales and on June 25, 1899, performed the *bris*.⁷⁷

Although Albert Levyson owned stock in Levyson's and his father did not, the elder Levyson remained actively involved in the company.⁷⁸ Together the men ran the business another five years; however, early in 1905, Paul retired and moved to San Antonio.⁷⁹ After Paul's retirement, Albert Levyson moved to Shiner and then to Boerne.⁸⁰

As the nineteenth century ended, the city of Gonzales was becoming a modern town. In 1893 about two hundred homes obtained electric lighting and eight street lights illuminated various corners in the downtown area. A year or

⁷⁷ "Rite of circumcision," *Gonzales Inquirer* July 25, 1899, 4. *Bris* is the common name for the rite of *Berit Milah*. The ceremony which is performed on male children when they are eight days old, represents the covenant between God and the Jewish people. During the ceremony the baby is named and circumcised.

⁷⁸ 1898 *Gonzales City Directory* from the Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas. The advertisement appears opposite the page with names beginning with col and ending with coo.

⁷⁹ "In Memoriam," *Gonzales Inquirer*, August 30, 1905, 3.

⁸⁰ "In Memoriam," *Gonzales Inquirer* August 30 1905: 3.

two later phone service came to Gonzales.⁸¹ Some old Jewish families remained and new ones arrived. Not only were both Paul and Albert Levyson still operating a dry goods establishment, but W. H. Opet, who had arrived in Gonzales prior to 1873, remained and operated a dry goods and grocery business.⁸² Likewise, Solomon Joseph still owned a dry goods and grocery store on St. George Street where his neighbor, H. Gurinsky, also owned a dry goods and clothing establishment.

Solomon Stahl recovered from the losses caused by the 1888 fire and began to expand his holdings. Within a few years, he owned two grocery stores and a saloon. Later, he purchased the Plaza Hotel, the largest hotel in Gonzales. According to his grandson Marion Stahl, who grew up in Gonzales, Solomon Stahl never regretted immigrating to Gonzales and thought it was a wonderful town. Both Marion Stahl and David Michelson, who was also reared in Gonzales and was the grandson of Lehman Michelson, believed that the town welcomed the Jewish families. While growing up in Gonzales, neither of these men experienced any overt prejudice--either in business or in personal relations.⁸³

⁸¹ Gonzales County Historical Commission *The History of Gonzales County*, 110-111.

⁸² Gonzales County Historical Commission, *The History of Gonzales County* 112.

⁸³ Interview with David "Buddy" Michelson and Marion Stahl.

Solomon Stahl's sons, Dave and Jake, opened a grocery in 1898 which later advertised that it also bought and sold commodities. In 1902 Stahl Brothers advertised that they bought dry and green hides, furs, poultry, bones, and other junk. At the bottom of this small advertisement the brothers reminded their customers that they also carried staple and fancy groceries.⁸⁴ In 1906 Stahl Brothers expanded, and in 1909 they moved and enlarged their business again. By 1922 Stahl Brothers shipped about 122 carloads of produce out of Gonzales County each year, and by 1923 each week the firm was shipping 2 to 3 carloads of live chickens from Gonzales to markets in the East. Additionally, during the fall, they shipped thousands of dressed turkeys. Besides dealing in produce and live and dressed fowl, the firm brokered commodities such as "hides, pelts, wool, cotton, [and] pecans, practically all of which they handle in carload lots." The extraordinary growth of their wholesale business did not end their retail trade which thrived and eventually sold everything from groceries, to paints, and Firestone tires.⁸⁵

Early in the new century, other Jewish families began businesses which would last for years. In 1912 Harold and

⁸⁴ *Gonzales Inquirer*, September 25, 1902, 3.

⁸⁵ "Stahl Bros., Pioneer Produce dealers of Gonzales," *Gonzales Inquirer* July 19, 1923.

Jake Michelson bought the Candy Kitchen.⁸⁶ Prior to purchasing the shop, brothers Laurence, Harold, and Jake Michelson sold candy which their mother made at home. After they purchased the candy store, the brothers expanded it to include an ice-cream parlor and then added food service. The first shop proved to be so profitable that the brothers opened a second shop. About 1914 when a local bottling plant became available the family, Lehman, Harold, Jake, and Lawrence bought that too.⁸⁷

Around 1900 drawn by family ties, M. H. Fogotston moved from East Texas to Gonzales and opened a dry goods store. Fogotston's business prospered, and within two years he moved to larger quarters. In December 1902, Fogotston ran a notice under the heading "Removal Sale." That notice announced that he was selling all his dry goods and groceries at cost. The advertisement also stated that his new store would open in the Randle and Rather building on January 1, 1903.⁸⁸

As in other Texas towns, the Jewish families of Gonzales were intermarried. Three Bath sisters married into the Stahl, Michelson, and Fogotston families. Besides being in-laws, one other point distinguished these three families.

⁸⁶ "Change in Business," *Gonzales Inquirer*, December 9, 1912, 2.

⁸⁷ Interview with David "Buddy" Michelson in Lockhart.

⁸⁸ *Gonzales Inquirer*, December 25, 1902.

Around 1915, all three operated soft drink bottling plants. The Fogotstons operated one bottling concern, the Stahls bottled Dr. Pepper, and the Michelsons first bottled Iron Brue Root Beer and later Coca-Cola.

About 1916 the Michelsons purchased the franchise rights to manufacture Coca-Cola and to supply bottled Coke throughout Gonzales County. As the bottling business grew, it overwhelmed the other Michelson businesses. Eventually they sold the ice-cream manufacturing machinery and closed the candy kitchens. The Coke franchise owned by the Michelsons transferred rights and responsibilities to the owners. They owned the right to supply Coke to the entire county and an obligation to do the same. Because the roads were poor, transportation around Gonzales County was difficult, especially to the western areas. Supplying the town of Nixon was time consuming and unprofitable, so the Michelsons sold the supply rights to Nixon. According to David Michelson the family retained the Coca-Cola franchise for over fifty years.⁸⁹

Not all the Jewish families operated such large and visible businesses; other Jewish men operated small and medium-sized stores. For example, Morris Wolk ran a small second-hand clothing store, and Harry Gurrinsky ran a retail

⁸⁹ Interview with David "Buddy" Michelson in Lockhart, Texas and on the telephone.

clothing shop.⁹⁰ One 1905 advertisement for the Gurrinsky store announced that Gurrinsky's was taking orders for men's suits. Gurrinsky measured the customers, sent the measurements off to be translated into a garment, and guaranteed a perfect fit. Gurrinsky also advertised dress goods, clothing, shoes--oxfords and sandals--and mentioned that by trading with him his customers got a bonus. Gurrinsky was experimenting with a new marketing strategy; he offered trading stamps with every cash purchase.⁹¹ The 1910 census proved that two of Gurrinsky's brothers were living in Gonzales. Ben Gurrinsky listed his occupation as grocer, and Charles Gurrinsky listed his as horse trader. Other new immigrants were also listed in this census. Both Alex Kaufman and his brother-in-law, Jake Pomerantz, listed their occupations as fruit sellers.⁹² Ben Tudzin, who began by pushing a cart, eventually owned a dry goods store. Jake Efron operated a dry goods store but also sold groceries and livestock feeds. Additionally, the Orinovskys, Friedmans, and Hamburgers all ran small retail establishments in Gonzales or the surrounding towns.

As the Jewish population in Gonzales grew, it became possible to conduct services in town. Around the turn of

⁹⁰ Interview with Dr. Marion Stahl June 2, 1995.

⁹¹ "Trading Days," *Gonzales Inquirer*, March 2, 1905, 4.

⁹² United States Census, 1910, Gonzales County, Texas E. D.181.

the century, the Gonzales Jewish community held services on the third floor of the Michelson home. For services the community used a Torah owned by Solomon Stahl. This practice of conducting services in Gonzales did not last long, however, and when the trip to San Antonio became easier, it ended. By mid-century the Jewish community was slowly shrinking, and by 1960 few Jews remained in Gonzales.⁹³

⁹³ Interview with David "Buddy" Michelson in Lockhart, Texas and on the telephone.

CHAPTER V

CALDWELL COUNTY

1

Early Caldwell County

North of Gonzales County is Caldwell County. Prior to the Civil War, Jewish families began to settle both in the rural areas of the county and in Lockhart, the county seat. The San Marcos River at the western boundary of the county provided rich fertile farm land, which probably attracted the first Jew to settle in Caldwell County.

In the late 1840s Joseph Josey was living in Mississippi. When the Mexican War broke out, he enlisted in the United States forces and came to fight in Texas. After the war, he remained in Texas and settled in western Caldwell County--a few miles from the present town of Luling. Although Joseph Josey was listed in the census as a farmer, he also ran a small country store;¹ in 1860 he purchased Kees's Mill and all rights which could be conveyed with the mill for \$3,000.² The mill was located on the San Marcos River, and in later censuses Josey listed his occupation as a miller, although precisely what he milled was not mentioned. The R. G. Dun reports mentioned that in 1858 Josey was operating a small general mercantile

¹ Weingarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 47.

² Vol.H page 126, Caldwell County Deed Records in the Caldwell, County Courthouse, Lockhart, Texas.

establishment in the area near Prairie Lea. The first report emphasized that Josey only sold for cash, and in 1859 the investigator mentioned that Josey had suffered a loss estimated to be about \$4,500 in a fire which devastated the entire Prairie Lea area where the store was situated. A later report mentioned that after the fire Josey did not reopen his mercantile business and was only operating his mill. By 1870 the Dun representative reported that Josey was back in the mercantile business and described Josey as a good credit risk. Subsequent reports mentioned that besides owning the business and mill Josey owned extensive acreage.³

Reflecting the rural nature of his surroundings and the needs of his customers, Josey's advertisement in the June 1878 *Luling Signal* indicated that he handled mostly farm implements and supplies. It noted that Josey was back at "his old stand" and that he sold Studebaker Wagons, buggy materials, iron and steel, and all agricultural implements including plows, cotton gins, and corn huskers. This notice also stated that Josey wanted to rent his four hundred acre farm .⁴ In November Josey announced that he had purchased insurance against fire losses on all cotton that came to his gin for processing. For this insurance, he would charge an

³ Texas Vol. 5 p. 97 and p.107, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

⁴ *Luling Signal*, June 17, 1878.

additional thirty cents a bale.⁵ Josey did not run continual advertisements in the paper; however, his name frequently appeared in the suits filed section of the paper, and occasionally he filed claims against other Jewish merchants.⁶ Beginning in the spring of 1879 Josey announced that he was cutting the prices on all his farm implements. He offered Peerless equipment formerly priced at thirty-six dollars for twenty-five dollars--about a thirty percent reduction--and other equipment was similarly reduced.⁷ The next year Josey placed an announcement in the paper stating that he wished to engage in other businesses; and therefore, he was offering his entire stock of hardware, agricultural implements, wagons and wagon parts, and groceries at reduced prices. Furthermore, he asked those who owed him money to settle their accounts.⁸ Although Josey died in 1889,⁹ at least one of his sons remained in the area. Abe Josey who moved to Gonzales in the 1880s where he opened a store and married a Gonzales resident,¹⁰ eventually moved back to

⁵ "Fire! Fire!" *Luling Signal*, November 21, 1878.

⁶ "Josey vs Mazur and Rouff," *Luling Signal*, April 3, 1879. Although the paper did not explain what the suit was over, the practice of filing law suits over relatively minor events was common at the time.

⁷ *Luling Signal*, May 8, 1879.

⁸ *Luling Signal*, December 16, 1880.

⁹ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 52.

¹⁰ *Gonzales Inquirer*, December 19, 1885, 3.

Luling. The 1900 census for Caldwell County indicated that Abe Josey was then operating Josey's mill.

2

Luling

The Josey family had moved to western Caldwell County before the town of Luling was established. Although Joseph Josey was most likely the only Jewish merchant in the western area of Caldwell County until after the Civil War, others arrived shortly after the fighting ended. More came when the railroad arrived in Luling increasing the business opportunities. One of these early settlers was Henry Seligman or Seeligman. He immigrated to Texas in the 1860s and settled first in Luling. The Dun representative reported that in 1874 Seeligman was making money, nonetheless, by 1875 the representative noted that he had filed for bankruptcy.¹¹ After several moves, Seeligman eventually settled in Seguin where he operated a mercantile business until his death in 1920.¹²

When the railroad began laying tracks into Caldwell County, Josey was convinced that the tracks would end on his property. he was wrong, however, because the tracks ended

¹¹ Texas Vol. 5, p.118, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

¹² Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas* (Dallas, Texas: Texas Development Bureau, 1930), 433.

before they reached his settlement called Joseyville. Instead, the railroad tracks terminated where the town of Luling developed; Luling, not Joseyville, became a terminus for rail traffic moving from Houston to the West.¹³

By the end of the 1870s at least ten Jewish families were living in the small village of Luling.¹⁴ This fact was corroborated by both H. H. Nathan, who was reared in Luling, and Charles Wessolowsky who traveled across Louisiana and Texas in 1879 as a representative for the paper, *Jewish South*, and the B'nai B'rith . According to Wessolowsky, in April of 1879 Luling proper had twelve Jewish families. Two of these residents, Mr. Miller and Mr. Epstein, accompanied him on his trip from Luling to San Antonio. Wessolowsky noted that both of these men were merchants. Most likely, these were the same two men who owned the store previously mentioned in Waelder in Gonzales County, and who were later included in the 1880 Gonzales County tax roll.

H. H. Nathan wrote that all the Jewish men who lived in Luling during the 1870s and 1880s were either merchants or peddlers. He said that his father, Meyer Nathan, arrived in Luling in 1876 along with two brothers, J. and Alfred. H.

¹³ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 47.

¹⁴ Letter from H. H. Nathan to Jacob Marcus dated June 7, 1957, in the Luling, Texas file American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion.

H. Nathan claimed that K. Kleinsmith,¹⁵ R. Jacobs, M. H. Epstein, L. Goodman, M. Miller, M. Masor (or Mazur),¹⁶ O. Walcowich, along with Josey, all were living in Luling prior 1880,¹⁷ and several of these men appeared on the Caldwell County tax roll.

On the 1876 Caldwell County tax records, J. Josey declared that he owned property which included 960 acres of land, 12 horses, 40 cows, and \$1,000 worth of merchandise. The tax records also included other Jewish business establishments. The firm of Kleinsmith, Jacobs, and Epstein declared they held \$2,500 worth of merchandise; L. Lichtenstein rendered merchandise; as did Max Miller, who declared that his firm Miller and Mazur owned \$3,000 worth of merchandise. This tax list also included Caldwell County residents Jacobs, Kleinsmith, Finkelstein, and Walkowich individually.¹⁸ In addition to the Jewish men recorded in the earlier tax return, the 1880 census included Julius

¹⁵ It is possible that this Kleinsmith is a son of the Kleinsmith who lived in Gonzales twenty-five years earlier.

¹⁶ Although this name is spelled in various ways on the census, tax renderings, and letters, I believe that the correct spelling is Masor because in 1912 Mose Masor was buried in the Luling Jewish cemetery.

¹⁷ Letter written from H. H. Nathan to Jacob Marcus, dated June 4, 1957, Luling file, American Jewish Archives Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion. The 1870 census also indicated that Josey moved to Texas between 1857 and 1862.

¹⁸ Microfilm of 1876 tax assessments, Caldwell county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

Nathan, H. Kleinesmith, R. Kleinesmith, Reuben Jacobs, Louis Goodman, J. E. Goodman, H. Goldsticker (probably a relative of Mrs. Josey) and Abraham Mazur. Near the end of the century other Jewish families arrived in Luling. Oscar Berman immigrated to Texas around 1868, and by 1893 he was living in Luling where his son Willard was born. Oscar had married a local resident, Ray Finkelstein.¹⁹

In September of 1878, a notice appeared in the Luling paper announcing the death of Leon Rouff, the father of Luling resident M. Rouff. Leon Rouff originally settled in Calhoun County and later in Victoria. The notice mentioned that Mr. Rouff had been buried in the Luling Jewish Cemetery which indicated that prior to September 1878 the Jewish community was organized enough to plan for Jewish deaths.²⁰ The contract for the purchase of the cemetery property, however, was not filed in the courthouse until the next year. This contract indicated that by April 1879 the Jewish community of Luling had formed an association to formally purchase land for the cemetery. Joseph Josey, J. Amelsky, and L. Ahrenberg, acting as trustees of the Jewish Community C. B. J. of Luling, purchased for one dollar two lots on the

¹⁹ Davis, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas*, 593. Ray was probably short for Rachel.

²⁰ Jewish cemeteries are usually located on high ground, must be consecrated by a rabbi; therefore, some organization and planning must precede the selection and dedication of a Jewish cemetery. Some less observant Jews were buried in city cemeteries, however, these areas must be fenced to maintain a separation.

outskirts of Luling.²¹ This legal document indicated that in 1879 two other Jewish men not previously mentioned resided in the area, Amelsky and Ahrenberg.

The cemetery was purchased from a non-Jew for one dollar, and the sale represented a humanitarian gesture. Notices in the paper indicated that the social conditions between the Jewish residents and the non-Jewish residents of Luling were cordial. Jewish men joined fraternal organizations and often served these organizations as officers. In 1878 both M. Rouff and L. Lichtenstein served as officers in the I.O.O.F.²² In response to community needs, Jewish women often organized socials and fundraisers. In September of 1879, Mrs. Josey sponsored a cake and ice-cream social to benefit victims of the yellow fever epidemic. This social raised \$60 which was contributed to the general fund; furthermore, Mrs. Josey and Mrs. Lichtenstein also raised \$62.50 for Hebrew sufferers.²³ Even the Jewish women were part of the social life of Luling. In 1880 the *Signal* described a dance which was held for the ladies of Luling. Both married and unmarried women were feted, and Jewish women were included. Those Jewish

²¹ Vol. U page 11 Deed Records Lockhart, Caldwell, County Texas. No explanation of the initials C. B. J. were included, and I did not find an explanation in my reading.

²² *Luling Signal*, May 19, 1878 and December 19, 1878.

²³ *Luling Signal*, September 12 and 19, 1878.

women honored were Miss Sallie Cohn, Miss Lilly Cohn, Miss Clara Josey, Miss Rose Lichtenstein, Miss Schwartz, and Mrs. Mazor.²⁴ The social interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish women was more noticeable in Luling than in other towns. In other communities, the paper often reported that Jewish men participated in fraternal and service organizations together with non-Jews; however, only in Luling, interaction involving the women was apparent.

Beginning in 1878 the editor of the Luling paper printed information that was of interest to the Jewish community. He ran one notice in the "Home Affairs" column stating that the Hebrew merchants of Luling would close on September the 27th and 28th because of a religious holiday.²⁵ The next year the Jewish community itself placed the following notice: "The Jewish Holiday of New Year will begin on the 16th and close on the 18th of this month. Services will be held at Bowers Hall on the 16th at 7 o'clock p. m. All Jewish brethren are invited to be present and participate with us." The notice was signed by M. Rouff, president, and Moses Miller, secretary.²⁶ On September 2, 1880, the community placed the following notice in the *Luling Signal*: "Notice Religious services will be

²⁴ *Luling Signal*, May 6, 1880.

²⁵ *Luling Signal*, September 12, 1878 and September 26, 1878.

²⁶ *Luling Signal*, September 14, 1879.

held on the eve of September 5 and continue during the Israelitish holiday. All Israelites who wish to participate in our religious service are respectfully invited. [signed] L. Lichtenstein Secretary Hebrew Benevolent Association."

Luling Jewish merchants often placed notices reminding customers that they would be closed for the Jewish holidays. The paper also printed items of interest to the Jewish residents. The articles included wedding announcements, visitation announcements when a former resident returned for a holiday, or articles such as the one that described how the Jewish ladies raised funds for the orphanage in Galveston.²⁷ These articles indicate that from their arrival throughout the later part of the nineteenth century, the Jewish citizens of Luling were well integrated into the community.

Several of the families who were included in the early tax roll for Luling were also longtime residents. The firm of Kleinsmith, Jacobs, and Epstein which was included in the 1876 tax roll became the firm of Kleinsmith and Jacobs, and that partnership proved to be one of the most stable in the Luling area. Established between 1876 and 1878, it continued through the end of the century. In 1879 the firm of Kleinsmith and Jacobs advertised that it carried all kinds of dress goods from calicos to silks, and it also

²⁷ *Luling Signal*, June 25, 1886.

carried household goods such as carpets which the firm priced "very low."²⁸ In September 1881, the firm placed two small notices in the Luling paper explaining that they were closing for the Jewish Holidays.²⁹ Their business grew and in August 1882 the firm announced that it had moved to a larger store. Pointing out one of the advantages of the new location, the firm announced that the new building was constructed out of rock. In fire-plagued Luling, this was a considerable improvement. Kleinsmith and Jacobs invited all their customers to come to their new store and visit.³⁰ Competition must have increased, because in 1884 Kleinsmith and Jacobs advertised that they were discounting their prices by 15 percent.³¹

Evidently, the firm of Kleinsmith and Jacobs did not draw their customers exclusively from Luling because it placed advertisements in both the Luling and the Lockhart papers. One 1885 advertisement in the *Lockhart Post Register* took up an entire column and did not mention any specific merchandise. The notice claimed that the prices at Kleinsmith and Jacobs "paralyzed the competition" and that the store only carried "first class goods." They also

²⁸ *Luling Signal*, September 18, 1879.

²⁹ *Luling Signal*, September 22, 1881, and September 29, 1881.

³⁰ *Luling Signal*, August 31, 1882.

³¹ *Luling Signal*, October 9, 1884.

claimed that they only purchased in cases not lots;³² therefore, the prices were lower. Kleinsmith and Jacobs continued to advertise in Lockhart, and the next spring they said the store was offering great bargains in order to make room for the summer stock which was on its way from "New York and other eastern Markets."³³ In February of 1886, the Luling paper mentioned that Kleinsmith had recently returned from a spring buying trip.³⁴ These two advertisements must have referred to the same buying trip. Because most of their merchandise was purchased in New York, one of the owners traveled to the New York markets to select goods and place orders directly with manufacturers.

By the end of the century the advertisements for Kleinsmith and Jacobs were much larger but less cluttered. One notice took up an entire column; however, it contained only a few words. At the top of the column were the names "Kleinsmith and Jacobs," and at the very bottom of the column were the words "are the leaders of low prices."³⁵ Although both Kleinsmith and Jacobs remained in Luling over the next few decades, the partnership eventually ended.

³² In retailing, cases are unbroken boxes and usually sell at a discount, whereas lots are smaller amounts and, therefore, are more expensive.

³³ *Lockhart Post Register*, December 1885, February 1886.

³⁴ *Luling Signal*, February 1886.

³⁵ *Luling Signal*, March 6, 1890.

Advertisements found in the *Luling Signal* during the late 1870s and the early 1880 indicated that the Jewish businessmen of Luling were conspicuous because of their number. Additionally, the Jewish merchants represented a substantial portion of the total number of retail merchants operating in Luling. In addition to Kleinsmith and Jacobs, at least two families of Millers participated in Luling businesses during the early years. One Miller family was involved in the firm of Miller and Mazur which dealt only in dry goods, clothing, boots, shoes, and hats.³⁶ The other family was involved with the firm of Epstein and Miller which also advertised under the name of the New York Store and offered fancy and staple dry goods, boots, shoes, hats, groceries, and furnishings.

By the end of the 1870s, the editor of the paper printed a Luling business directory on the front page of the *Luling Signal*. The ten listings included L. Lichtenstein's dry goods, grocery, and fruit dealer; Kleinsmith and Jacobs dry goods and clothing; Epstein and Miller dry goods, shoes, and boots; and Miller and Mazur dry goods and clothing. Out of the total list, Jewish merchants represented at least 40% of the retail business in Luling, and that figure did not include the smaller merchants known to be in town or peddlers who traveled out into the countryside.

³⁶ *Luling Signal*, June 17, 1878.

Epstein and Miller were included in the 1878 directory, and later that year the paper reported that Max Epstein had recently returned from a buying trip to New York. Epstein and Miller operated for several years, and in January 1879, they placed a very unusual advertisement. The notice consisted of a seven-stanza poem which began, "Of all the stores in Luling town Epstein and Miller's of great renown, North side railroad up street and down, Epstein and Miller will take the crown."³⁷ In the fall Max Epstein again traveled to New York to purchase goods for the upcoming season. This trip lasted an entire month, and after he returned, the paper mentioned that Epstein purchased all the stock for cash so that the business could offer better bargains to the customers.³⁸ In early June of 1880 Epstein and Miller suffered a fire, after which the firm placed the following notice: "We desire to [offer] our grateful thanks to the firemen and citizens of Luling for the heroic efforts in saving our stock of goods during the fire last Sunday."³⁹

The old firm of Miller and Mazur dissolved, and Miller Brothers opened in the location formerly occupied by Miller and Mazur.⁴⁰ The Miller Brothers firm only lasted about a

³⁷ *Luling Signal*, January 16 1879.

³⁸ *Luling Signal*, September 11, 1879.

³⁹ *Luling Signal*, June 17, 1880.

⁴⁰ *Luling Signal*, September 12 1878.

year, and in March of 1889 M. Miller and Brother assigned all their assets, goods and accounts receivable, to Moses Miller of Epstein and Miller.⁴¹ Within five years the firm of Epstein and Miller had also dissolved, and Max Epstein began operating without a partner. He retained the name, "New York Store" and advertised that he carried dry goods, cashmere, twill, hosiery, and clothing. Evidence indicated that Epstein remained in Luling until late in the century.⁴²

After the firm of Miller and Mazur dissolved, Abraham Mazur joined M. Rouff and formed a new partnership. These men called their store "The Emporium" and handled dry goods and clothing. Mazur and Rouff were the object of a law suit filed by J. Josey and eventually closed. In 1881 M. Rouff gave up retailing to become a traveling salesman--or, as the paper reported, to become a "drummer." During the years that Rouff lived there, he also served the city of Luling as fire marshal of the Luling Hook and Ladder Company.⁴³

One of the early arrivals remained in Luling only about ten years. L. Lichtenstein advertised in March 1878 that he carried dry goods, groceries, fruit, confections, cigars, and other tobacco products. Later that year the editor of the paper noted that in "perambulating about the city" he

⁴¹ *Luling Signal*, March 13, 1879.

⁴² *Luling Signal*, October 9, 1884.

⁴³ *Luling Signal*, June 9, 1981.

had noticed that Lichtenstein's had recovered from the fire which had devastated his stock the previous year.

Lichtenstein must have lost most of his merchandise in the fire and had been slowly replenishing his stock.⁴⁴

Lichtenstein remained in Luling through 1886 when he advertised that he carried grocery items including boiled ham and Swiss cheese.⁴⁵

According to Josephine Josey Harris, a descendent of Joseph Josey, Josey's brother-in-law, Herman Goldsticker, moved to Caldwell County during the 1850s with the Joseys, and later he enlisted in the Confederate army. She reported that Herman was killed fighting in Virginia.⁴⁶ Henry Cohen's list of Confederate veterans included a J. Goldsticker--killed at Sharpsburg--perhaps these reports refer to the same person;⁴⁷ however, a H. H. Goldsticker's name appeared in the Luling newspaper around 1880. The *Signal* reported that Goldsticker, formerly of Luling, was returning to town. He planned to open a business in the city. A month later a notice appeared announcing the opening of his store. Goldsticker's carried "a choice stock

⁴⁴ *Luling Signal*, March 14, 1878 and April 18, 1878.

⁴⁵ *Luling Signal*, April 1, 1886.

⁴⁶ Letter from Josephine Josey Harris to Jacob R. Marcus, dated June 20, 1973, in the Luling, Texas file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion.

⁴⁷ Cohen, *One Hundred Years of Jewry in Texas*, 21.

of staple and fancy groceries." The notice also announced that Goldsticker would pay the highest market price for hides, pelts, and produce.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, within a year, Goldsticker was forced to close. Although he remained in Luling, he gave up retailing and, along with Rouff, became a representative for a wholesale house.⁴⁹

The Nathan brothers arrived in Luling late in the 1870s. Shortly after their arrival, the paper reported that one of the brothers experienced an unfortunate incident near New Braunfels.⁵⁰ Nathan was peddling goods out of his wagon, when one night while he was sleeping in a farmhouse, his assistant took all of his money and disappeared. The paper reported that Nathan lost about one hundred dollars in cash. Meyer Nathan continued to peddle goods in the Luling area, but one brother joined William Finkelstein and opened the New York Branch Store. Under "New Advertisements" the pair announced to friends and customers that they would keep in stock a choice assortment of merchandise and requested that customers come by and price their goods before purchasing items elsewhere.⁵¹ This partnership was short-lived, because Finkelstein was killed in an argument and

⁴⁸ *Luling Signal*, June 8, 1881, and July 28, 1881.

⁴⁹ *Luling Signal*, May 4, 1882.

⁵⁰ *Luling Signal*, May 9, 1878.

⁵¹ *The Signal*, September 5, 1878.

Nathan eventually moved. According to Ruthe Winegarten, William Finkelstein operated a mercantile business in Luling during the 1870s, and in 1879 Finklestein was killed in his store over a disputed sale. Although Winegarten believed that Finkelstein was the first Jew to be buried in the Luling Jewish cemetery,⁵² he died in 1879 and Leon Rouff had been buried in the cemetery in 1878. Despite William Finkelstein's unfortunate death, several members of the Finkelstein family, including Abe, remained in the Luling area.

Although some of these men and their families only remained in Caldwell County a decade or less, several families remained in the Luling-Lockhart area much longer. Many of these families have members buried in the Luling Jewish cemetery. The cemetery also provided evidence of the connections between the Luling area and the area further south. Marks Rouff, the son of Leon Rouff, lived in Luling around 1880. Leon, who perhaps had moved from Victoria to Luling to join his son, was buried in the cemetery when he died in 1878. In 1881 Marks' daughter who was born in Luling was buried in the same plot with her grandfather. Furthermore, over ten members of the Halfin family, previously mentioned in Gonzales, were also buried there along with the Weils.

⁵² Winegarten, *Deep in the Hears*, 47.

Beginning in about 1859 numerous business transactions took place between the Halfin and Cahn families. The Halfins had conducted business with J. Cahn and his wife Fannie, in Gonzales⁵³ and in Calhoun County.⁵⁴ Then in 1879 Jacob Halfin of Lockhart and Joseph Cahn of Luling--probably the same Joseph Cahn mentioned earlier in Gonzales and Calhoun County--drew up a contract which allowed Cahn to operate Halfin's store in Luling. The stock in the store was valued at one thousand dollars and Cahn was obligated to make purchases to replenish the supplies when that was necessary. Cahn would collect fifty dollars per month as a salary, and he would operate the store in Jacob Halfin's name.⁵⁵ In another transaction dated February of 1881, Eli Halfin, Jacob's brother, sold land in Lockhart to Sarah Cahn.⁵⁶ In March 1881, the *Luling Signal* printed notices about the transfer of goods from Jacob Halfin to Sarah Cahn:

The undersigned having purchased from Jacob Halfin his stock of goods wares and merchandise in Luling, Texas offer the same for sale at a reduced price. Call on my agent Joseph Cahn and sample my

⁵³ Vol. M page 648, dated February 2, 1859 and Vol. N page 580, dated August 23, 1860, Gonzales County Deed Records.

⁵⁴ Vol. I page 468 dated September 22, 1873, Calhoun County Deed Records Victoria College, University of Houston Victoria, Victoria, Texas.

⁵⁵ Vol.U page 101 and 102, Caldwell County Deed Records in the Caldwell, County Courthouse, Lockhart, Texas.

⁵⁶ Vol.V page 325, Caldwell County Deed Records in the Caldwell, County Courthouse, Lockhart, Texas.

stock at the Holcomb store formerly occupied by Jacob Halfin on the north side of the Railroad in Luling, Texas." March 8, 1881, signed Sarah Cahn.

On March 4, 1881, Sarah Cahn executed a power of attorney to Joseph Cahn, appointing him as her agent to control a stock of goods, wares, and merchandise, which she had purchased from Jacob Halfin.⁵⁷ In December 1881, the Luling Signal included S. Cahn's mercantile establishment in the business directory, and for several years Sarah Cahn placed advertisements mentioning that S. Cahn's carried both dry goods and groceries. Perhaps the explanation of the relationship between the Halfin family and Cahn family was found on the grave stone of Sara Halfin, Jacob's wife. The stone gave as her maiden name Kahn. Cahn and Kahn were variant spellings of the same name.⁵⁸

Like Josey, who farmed and ran a mill, not all Jewish settlers of Caldwell County owned urban mercantile establishments; some engaged in other businesses in town and others peddled goods on foot or horseback. One Jewish peddler used the stage lines to peddle his goods out to the surrounding countryside. Moses Lauterstein lived in Luling and sold merchandise in nearby communities. Lauterstein

⁵⁷ Vol.V page 600, Caldwell County Deed Records in the Caldwell, County Courthouse, Lockhart, Texas.

⁵⁸ The 1860 census of Gonzales county indicated that the families of Jacob Halfin and Jos Cahn lived side by side. Although Cahn's wife was Fannie, he did have a daughter named Sarah who would have been about 22 in 1880.

used the stage for transportation to and from his customers. He boarded the stage in Luling carrying bundles of his goods, disembarked in surrounding hamlets, made his sales to local residents, and returned to Luling on the stage.⁵⁹ Other men became saloon keepers. After trying several businesses, Abe Finkelstein purchased the Merchant's Exchange which was a popular saloon,⁶⁰ and around the turn of the century one of the Mazors also owned a saloon.

Another family which engaged in a rather non-traditional business for Jewish immigrants were the Walcowiches. Oscar and his wife Anne arrived prior to 1880 and remained in Luling until well into the twentieth century. The family ran a livery business which was located next to the Southern Pacific depot. In the early days people who arrived in Luling on the train and were traveling out to the countryside needed to rent horses or buggies, and for over thirty years, the Walcowiches ran the livery stable which provided this service.⁶¹ Oscar Walcowich appeared in both the 1900 and the 1910 census. The 1910 census confirmed that he was still operating the livery stable, and that his sons Reuben and Sam were working for him as stable

⁵⁹ Davis, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas*, 593.

⁶⁰ *Luling Signal*, September 29, 1881.

⁶¹ Interview with Herman Glosserman who was born in Lockhart and knew the family.

hands.⁶² Oscar must have remained in Luling, because in 1939 he was buried in the Luling Jewish cemetery.

Not all Jewish businesses advertised in the papers. The small establishments conducted business in tiny spaces and relied on word of mouth or friendships for their customers. This was especially true of the beginning merchants or the women who, near the end of the century, began to operate modest businesses. An example of such a store was that owned by Mrs. R. Finkelstein. No advertisements were found concerning this business; however, on December 11, 1890, the *Luling Signal* printed a notice explaining that "[t]he stock of goods of the late Mrs. R. Finkelstein consisting of dry goods, notions, [and] groceries will be sold at street cost."

During the 1890s, new business names began to appear in the paper. B. Berman began operating in partnership with Max Epstein. The *Luling Signal* included their firm in the directory of businesses it published in 1890. The listing mentioned that Berman and Epstein were selling clothing and dry goods. It was likely that Oscar, Sol, and B. Berman were related because all three were living and working in the Gonzales, Luling area during the 1880s and 1890s.

In 1894 a partial list of Luling's young Jewish citizens appeared in the Gonzales paper. The occasion was a

⁶² United States Census, 1900, Caldwell County, E.D.121 sheet 6A and 1910 Caldwell County 1A

large wedding, and guests from Luling, San Antonio, and New York attended. The Luling families included Henry Horowitz, Ike Goodman, Miss Ray Goodman, Rabbi Goodman, Miss C. Cohen, Miss Epstein, Ike Epstein, A. Gumbiner, M. Meyer, Ike and Ben Jacobs, Sara Finkelstein, Bessie Nathan, and Mr. Nathan.⁶³ Except for Henry Horowitz and A. Gumbiner, most of these young people were members of established Jewish families.

Ruben Jacobs, who operated in a partnership with Kleinsmith for over twenty years, eventually opened his own store. From the time Kleinsmith and Jacobs closed until 1921, Jacobs operated a general mercantile store in Luling, and he and his family actively participated in Luling life. Besides running a dry goods store, Jacobs acted as a local cotton buyer.⁶⁴ In 1921 Ruben Jacobs sold the store to G. C. Jacobs, L. Jacobs and I. Mazur (or Masor).⁶⁵ The business continued to carry hardware, dry goods, groceries, and men's clothing.

The 1900 census revealed that several of the original Jewish families still remained in the area. Moses Masor or Mazor, who had lived in Luling moved away and returned, now

⁶³ *Gonzales Inquirer*, July 19, 1894, 3.

⁶⁴ Davis, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas* (City: Publisher, Year), 2245.

⁶⁵ The spelling of these names comes from a variety of sources--tax returns, census records, old letters, and word of mouth, and not legal documents. Several variations exist which refer to the same person.

listed his occupation as a bar tender. Hyman Kleinsmith and Ruben Kleinsmith each declared that they owned dry goods businesses. The census proved that Hyman had immigrated first, about 1862, and that Ruben came later, about 1878. Despite the fact that his brothers must have left the area, Meyer Nathan remained in Luling. According to the census, Nathan continued to list his occupation as dry-goods peddler. Louis Goodman who served the surrounding areas as a lay Rabbi also listed his occupation as dry goods peddler. Abraham Josey, one of Joseph Josey's sons, must have retained control of part of his fathers property, because in 1900 he listed his occupation as owner and operator of a grist mill. Additionally, he reported that he was a cotton merchant. M. Epstein, who gave his occupation as merchant, druggist, and grocer, reported that he immigrated in 1874. This could have been the original Mr. Epstein who escorted Charles Wessolowsky in 1879.⁶⁶

The 1910 census provided information which other census reports did not contain. That report included language of origin thus indicating that many of these Jewish residents were native Yiddish speakers--suggesting that they were born in eastern Germany, rather than Bavaria or western Germany where many of the early Jewish immigrants were born.⁶⁷ New

⁶⁶ United States Census, 1900, Luling, Caldwell County, Texas E. D.121.

⁶⁷ Jewish immigrants from eastern areas of Germany were probably of Polish origin and less urbanized. Because they were less urbanized and less assimilated, many felt more at ease using Yiddish. Jews from western areas of Germany were more assimilated into

immigrant and merchant Abe Finkel declared that he was a Yiddish speaker, as did grocer Mike August. Although August claimed to be born in Texas, he still indicated that his first language was Yiddish. Similarly, his wife also listed Yiddish as her language but indicated that she was born in Mexico. Rabbi Goodman, who in 1910 was still peddling dry goods, claimed that he was a native Yiddish speaker. Moses Masor, who now declared that he owned a saloon, also reported that his native language was Yiddish. This census indicated that Sam Jacobs worked in his father's general store, and that his wife Marie was a milliner. Also included in the list were Julius Myers and his wife Jenne. The Myers probably arrived in Texas about 1895 because their daughter was born in Texas and was fifteen years old. Julius reported that he was a grocer and indicated that his wife was a clerk.⁶⁸

After 1910 several established families remained in Luling, and many continued to operate businesses there. The Walcowiches remained, and the Jacobs family continued to be involved in the business activities of the town. Eventually, even the Jacobs family moved to San Antonio, and the second and third generation of Luling's Jewish families

German culture and would, therefore, list German rather than Yiddish as their primary language.

⁶⁸ United States Census 1910 Luling, Caldwell County E. D. 28.

left the area. By mid-century only a handful of older Jewish residents remained.

3

Lockhart

Lockhart, the Caldwell County seat, is only a few miles east of Luling. Although not on the river or a major rail center, Lockhart had attracted Jewish merchants since before the Civil War. In 1859 Paul Levyson traveled from New York to Lockhart to join his brother Herman who was already established in Lockhart.⁶⁹ At the beginning of the Civil War, Herman Levyson lived in Lockhart and operated a mercantile business. After his brother Moritz's death, however, he moved to Gonzales and acted as the administrator of his brother's estate.⁷⁰ Shortly after settling the estate, Herman moved back to Lockhart and reestablished his business. The Dun report indicated that by September of 1866 Herman had returned to Lockhart. The evaluations of his business were favorable, and in 1872 the reporter mentioned that Levyson was solvent. The Dun report included the information that, in addition to his business, he also owned real estate. The reports continued to be favorable; later that year the investigator wrote that Levyson had been in business for seventeen years, suggesting that he began

⁶⁹ "In Memoriam," Gonzales Inquirer August 30, 1905: 3.

⁷⁰ Levyson Probate File, Gonzales County Archives, Gonzales County courthouse annex.

the business in 1853. This report, though, must have been in error because in 1874 the report mentioned that he had been in business only sixteen years, which more nearly matched other evidence.⁷¹ In 1870 Herman was still living in Lockhart, and the census reported that he was a thirty-two year old Prussian immigrant who declared his occupation as merchant. In addition, Herman claimed that he owned property valued at \$10,000. The census also proved that two other Levysons lived near Herman. George, aged twenty-seven, declared that he was a merchant and owned property valued at \$2,500, and living with George were Sigfried Levysen and Julius Levy.⁷² Julius Levy and Sigfried Levysen were listed in the census as clerks.⁷³ Although the 1875 Dun report mentioned that Herman was considering moving to Austin,⁷⁴ the Caldwell County tax records continued to include Herman Levysen throughout most of the decade.⁷⁵ In

⁷¹ Texas Vol. 5, p 102 and p. 118, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.

⁷² It is possible that this was the brother of Jacob Levy of Gonzales and the same Julius Levy who later lived in Gonzales, or it is possible that they were cousins. The name Levy, however, is more common than several of the other names in this paper, and these men might not have been related.

⁷³ United States Census, 1870, Lockhart, Caldwell County, Texas, 1-2.

⁷⁴ Texas Vol. 5, p. 118, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston Mass.

⁷⁵ Microfilm of 1876 tax assessments, Caldwell county, Genealogical Section, Texas State Library, Austin Texas.

1878, Levysen advertised in the *Lockhart Register* that he was selling both dry goods and groceries and "respectfully called the attention of the Ladies and Gentlemen of Caldwell County to the fact that he is [was] still at his same location." The advertisement was dated July 4, 1877, but it continued to run into 1878.⁷⁶ Subsequent Dun reports mentioned that, due to slow collections, Levysen was pressed for cash. Later in 1878, he sold his Lockhart business.⁷⁷

In 1860, David Hirsch, who had earlier lived in Indianola and much later settled in Corpus Christi, married Jeanette Weil of Lockhart.⁷⁸ This fact indicated that at least one other Jewish merchant resided in Lockhart in the years before the Civil War.⁷⁹ The Weil family must have remained in the area, because around the turn of the century two Weils were buried in the Luling cemetery. Two other early Lockhart settlers were Jacob and Eli Halfin. Probably these men were relatives of the Halfins of Victoria who had moved to Texas with Abraham Levi. Dun records indicated that in 1860 Jacob Halfin moved to Lockhart from Gonzales where he had been connected with the firm of Halfin and Cahn

⁷⁶ *Lockhart Register*, February 22, 1878.

⁷⁷ Texas Vol. 5, p. 118, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston Mass.

⁷⁸ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 55.

⁷⁹ Winegarten, *Deep in the Heart*, 55.

or Cohn.⁸⁰ The 1869 Dun report declared that he was doing a "good business" and that his stock was "good." Because there were two Jacob Halfins living in this area of Texas during the 1860s and 1870s, records were confusing. The Jacob Halfin in Gonzales, however, was definitely the same man as the one in Lockhart and Luling. Shortly after Jacob Halfin moved to Lockhart, his brother Eli joined him as a partner in the Lockhart business. The Dun report continued saying that the brothers paid promptly and were considered to be good credit risks.⁸¹ The 1870 census for Lockhart included both Jacob and Eli Halfin. Each gave their occupation as retail merchant; they valued their property at \$3,500 and \$1,600, respectively.⁸²

These brothers, Jacob and Eli, remained in Lockhart where Jacob raised his children. In April 1882, Louis Halfin, one of Jacob's sons, placed an announcement in the paper declaring that he was filing for the position of county clerk. His announcement mentioned that he had been reared in the county and "his interests" were there. Further, he said that he could fill the office in a business-like manner and that if the voters thought that he

⁸⁰ This was part of the ongoing relationship between the Halfin and Cahn families.

⁸¹ Texas Vol. 5, p. 100, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston Mass.

⁸² United States Census 1870 Caldwell County, Lockheart, Texas, 1-2.

was qualified they should vote for him.⁸³ This is another example proving that the Jewish citizens of this region were accepted and respected. Halfin would not have run for office if he had felt animosity or discrimination. In 1882 Eli Halfin, who was not married, died and was buried in Luling. Jacob, however, remained in Lockhart until his death in 1911, and his descendants continued to operate businesses there until about 1950.⁸⁴

Other Jews began to move into Lockhart during the 1890s. One of these merchants was David Wolff, who moved to Lockhart about 1898. David's father Abraham owned a business in San Marcos, but David decided not to join his father and opened a business of his own. He began with a small shop, but within a few months, he announced that he was enlarging his store. David Wolff and his family remained in Lockhart for the next fifty years.⁸⁵ After David's mother died, his father also moved to Lockhart. Around the turn of the century Abraham began to place advertisements in the Lockhart paper. One simply said "for dry goods, notions, millinery go to The Star Store! South side public square. There you will find as large and choice

⁸³ *Lockhart Register*, April 3, 1886.

⁸⁴ Interview with Abbey Glosserman Michelson in Lockhart, Texas.

⁸⁵ *Historical Caldwell County: Where Roots Intertwine* (Dallas, Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 382.

[sic] a stock of goods as to be found anywhere. A. Wolff, Proprietor." ⁸⁶

The 1900 census for Lockhart included these two members of the Wolff family and Abraham's nephew, David Joseph. Both David and Abraham were listed as dry goods merchants. The census indicated that Abraham Wolff, like many other Jewish immigrants, first settled in Louisiana and later moved Texas.⁸⁷ Abraham remained in Lockhart until his death in 1916. He was buried in the Luling cemetery along with Hannah Wolff, who died in San Marcos in 1899. The census records continued to indicate that a connection existed between the Wolff families and the Joseph family. Sam Joseph, Abraham's nephew, ran a dry-goods store in Lockhart, and the 1910 census indicated that he had a boarder named Morris Wolff who was listed as a dry goods salesman.⁸⁸

Another merchant who moved to Lockhart during the final decade of the nineteenth century was Louis Schwartz. Schwartz settled in Lockhart about 1890 and opened a large department store. He advertised during the 1890s, and in June of 1896, the paper mentioned that he was selling "rare bargains" which he had picked up on his recent trip to New

⁸⁶ *Lockhart Register*, 1899.

⁸⁷ United States Census, 1900, Caldwell County, Texas E.D. 118.

⁸⁸ United States census 1910 Caldwell county Lockhart ED 25.

York.⁸⁹ R. Warshawski was another merchant who opened a store around the end of the nineteenth century. Also a dry-goods merchant, he placed an advertisement which contained a list of various fabrics, laces, and other notions which he carried. The notice listed the former price and then stated that this week those items would be sold at a reduced price. At the end of his advertisement Warshawski reminded his customers to look for the next week's special sales in the following issue of the paper.⁹⁰ Evidently, Warshawski was offering weekly specials. In the next few years, he continued to design very simple, clean-cut advertisements. Most were large--usually several columns wide and perhaps one half a page in length. In 1905 Warshawski reminded his customers that "on account of Holiday our store will be closed on Saturday September 30th--Don't forget our bargain day Monday."⁹¹

By 1900 at least five other Jewish merchants were living in Lockhart. One was Phillip Glosserman. Glosserman originally immigrated to Seguin because his wife's brother was living there. He worked as a peddler in the Seguin area until he heard that a cousin in Lockhart was returning East. Phillip bought his cousin's shop in Lockhart and moved.

⁸⁹ *Register*, June 12, 1896.

⁹⁰ *Lockhart Register*, 1899. The date of this notice was unclear.

⁹¹ *Post Register*, August 19, 1905.

According to his son, Herman, the space Phillip purchased was a tiny stall--only large enough to stock fruit and peanuts. Glosserman's small shop was next to a saloon, and when prohibition put the saloon out of business, Phillip bought that space and expanded. He always dealt with the local farmers and never refused to purchase their produce. In this way Phillip gained the loyalty of the local residents. He knew that if he turned the farmers away, they had no other outlet for their fruit and vegetables.

By the time the 1910 census was taken, several occupational changes were evident in the Lockhart Jewish community. First, a few men reported that they were traveling salesmen or agents for specific products. Louis Halfin, who had previously owned a saloon, now claimed that he was the agent for a soap and medicine company. Brothers Sam and Max Melinger listed their occupation as commercial traveler. In addition to these changes, changes in the status of women were also apparent. Most Jewish women only listed an outside-of-home occupation if they did not have working husbands, as in the cases of Pauline Cohn and her daughter. Pauline was a widow and her daughter was unmarried. Each listed their occupation as dry-goods saleslady. The change appeared in the listing of Jenny Josey and Helen Warshawski. Jenny Josey gave her occupation as milliner, and Helen Warshawski listed her occupation as

saleslady.⁹² Both of these women were married and had working husbands.

Lockhart continued to attract Jewish families, and sometime between 1900 and 1910 Sam Joseph opened a dry goods store in Lockhart. About the same time A. Weinbalm, who emigrated from South Africa, also moved to Lockhart and opened a dry goods store. Also during the decade, M. Rossenwasser settled in Lockhart and formed a partnership with Mendolwitz. For many years, these two men ran a large department store, and Rosenwasser remained in Lockhart until he retired. A few years later, Sam Stein joined the other Jewish merchants in Lockhart and opened a trinket shop.

When Phillip Glosserman's older sons decided to open a clothing store, many of the established merchants helped the younger men by taking them on buying trips and offering advice about stock.⁹³ Glosserman's Clothing Store, eventually owned by Sam Glosserman, carried both men's and women's clothing. Sam Glosserman bought directly from the manufacturers and not from jobbers. He carried name brands and was probably the smallest Texas store to carry Hart Schafner and Marx men's clothing. He traveled to markets in Chicago and New York to make his selections. Sam Glosserman ran his store until the late 1980s.⁹⁴

⁹² United States Census, 1910, Lockhart, and Luling, Caldwell County, Texas.

⁹³ Interview with Herman Glosserman.

⁹⁴ Interview with Abbey Michelson.

Three of Phillip's sons remained in Lockhart, and in 1929 a relative helped Mose Glosserman acquire a General Motors dealership. Shortly after he opened the dealership, the market crashed; for several years, the dealership remained in a precarious financial condition. In order to increase business, Mose decided to bid on the Texas state vehicle contract. The winner of the contract would earn the right to supply all the vehicles for the state of Texas. By carefully figuring costs, Mose won the contract, and for many years, the Glosserman franchise supplied all the vehicles which the state of Texas bought. Over the phone, Mose located all the described vehicles at other dealerships, purchased them, and charged the state a flat 10% commission. He retained this contract throughout the depression and eventually won a contract to supply the United States Army.⁹⁵ As with each of the other small towns after the Second World War, Lockhart began to lose its Jewish residents, and by 1960 only two or three families remained.

⁹⁵ Interview with Herman Glosserman.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It is evident that within ten years of Texas statehood Jews had settled all along the Victoria Road. Many of these early Jewish settlers were pioneers who moved into developing areas, bringing to this frontier their knowledge of commerce and an optimism about their future life. Most of the men did not come alone; they arrived with relatives or quickly encouraged others to join them. Beginning with Levi and continuing with the Rouffs, Halfins, and Lichtensteins, these men and their brothers, cousins, or landsmen settled around the coast and later made their way up the trail to Victoria, Gonzales, and Luling. If they came alone, they soon found landsmen and made personal or business connections. For example, Paul Levysen joined his brothers in Texas, and Abraham Levi came with his brothers-in-law. Usually where research revealed one Jew, more extensive searching uncovered others. An example of such a discovery took place in Gonzales. After discovering that M. Levysen lived there in 1854, further investigation led to the discovery of the Franks, Halfins, and Cahns. Likely some early arrivals were still missed.

Joining together with family and landsmen provided these men with a feeling of community or a sense of kinship. Many of these connections or associations were forged within existing extended families or through associations brought from Europe. For this study, these associations can be

placed into three categories based on the amount of documentation available connecting the families. In the first category, abundant evidence exists proving how one man or family is related to another. In the second instance, although research indicates associations exist and some documentation is available, further investigation is warranted. Finally, there are relationships which are implied, but precisely how one family is connected or associated with another has not been proven. An example of the first relationship was the well documented connection--both business and personal--between Abraham Levi and Henry and Jacob Halfin of Victoria. An example of an association needing further study was that between Julius Levy, the Levysons, and the Phillipsons. Although documentation suggested that these men were connected, the connection was not proven until the R. G. Dun records provided evidence of a relationship. Furthermore, the Dun reports revealed previously unknown information which connected stores owned by these men in Gonzales, Lockhart, and New Braunfels with a New York office. This new information highlighted the need for further investigation. Finally, an example of a still elusive relationship is the connection between the Halfins in Lockhart and Luling and the Cahn family. The number of recorded contractual agreements between these families was too high to be attributed to coincidence, and the cemetery records suggest a possible explanation for the multiple

business transactions. However, further study is needed to prove or disprove a relationship.

This research began with the idea that these connections were important to the success of the Jewish businessmen. One might assume that these associations were beneficial to the businesses, themselves, and the social implications of these associations were not significant. After reviewing the evidence, however, although these connections might have provided some assistance to the Jewish merchants, they did not provide an overwhelming business advantage. After reflecting on the stories about Jewish communities in these small towns, it is evident that these associations did have social significance: they strengthened the identity of the Jewish immigrants within the overall community. Whereas a single man would eventually assimilate, a single man with connections to and support from other Jews in nearby towns could retain his Jewishness. Although the Jews socialized with non-Jews, the Jews in these small communities entertained one another, socialized with one another, and acted as matchmakers for each other's children. It was this act of being a community, despite the fact that the community might cover many square miles, that enabled these Jewish men and women to retain their Jewishness. Although a few Jews shed their religion, most clung to their culture and religious heritage. Texas conditions forced some religious compromises, but in the towns studied here, Judaism remained

vibrant and alive. The fact that many Jewish settlers conducted religious services and built Jewish cemeteries in Luling, Gonzales, and Victoria documents that vitality.

For most of the men studied here, the only asset they possessed when they arrived in America was this sense of connection to either kinsmen or landsmen. These Jewish men came from Europe, where owning land was prohibited and gaining middle-class status was difficult. But in Texas, they achieved both. Although not all the men mentioned in this study became rich--and some experienced business failures--almost all of them eventually established themselves in some form of commerce and prospered. Even those who experienced failures, like M. Lichtenstein, were able to start anew and become successful. After opening a store, one of the first things most of the Jewish businessmen did was to purchase land. This act alone proved that they had joined the middle class. Some businessmen bought only enough land for a home; however, many, such as M. Levysen and Simon Levy, traded in real estate and built lasting mercantile establishments. Some, like Joseph Josey, acquired many acres; and a few, like Abraham Levi, invested in various businesses, owned large ranches, and became very wealthy.

Regardless of their wealth or lack of wealth, these Jewish men quickly became part of the community in which they lived. They joined fraternal organizations, ran for office, and were selected for responsible positions in the

communities. Abraham Levi, for instance, served Victoria as the chairman of the committee to help the survivors of the storm which hit Indianola in 1875. Others became officers of fraternal organizations, or served the communities as aldermen, mayors, or fire marshals.¹

Although this study did not begun as a investigation about Jewish immigrants in Texas, after studying the records, it became apparent that almost all of the early Jewish settlers in Texas were immigrants not only to Texas but also to the United States. None represented the second or third generations of Jewish families already settled along the East Coast or in the South. Another fact which became apparent from studying the census records was that most of the Jewish men who moved to Texas between about 1848 and 1880 were born in Europe, first immigrated to Louisiana or Mississippi, and then migrated to Texas. The fact that they were all immigrants and that they first settled in the South brought up several questions which deserve further investigation. First, was the movement from Europe to Louisiana and Mississippi and then Texas part of the greater westward migration which began in eastern Europe and ended in America? Secondly, what were the connections and relationships between the Jewish men in Texas and those in Louisiana and Mississippi, or between the Jewish communities

¹ At least two Jews served as mayor of Luling and one in Lockhart. Paul Levyson served as alderman in Gonzales and one Jew became an official in Victoria.

in Louisiana and Mississippi and those in Texas? The earliest Jewish settlers came to Texas prior to the Civil War, so the economic devastation caused by the war could not have been the impetus that brought those early settlers. Did these men find Louisiana and Mississippi too crowded, or did they, like many others, come to believe that Texas was the land of their dream?

Another point which needs to be investigated is the place these immigrants filled in Texas society. A significant difference existed between the financial and social positions which Jewish settlers in Texas attained within a short time after arriving as compared to that which their fellow immigrants along the East Coast attained within the same time. Further study into this phenomena is needed. What allowed the Jewish immigrants in Texas to achieve such rapid social mobility?² Were these men more adventurous, persistent, or innovative than those who settled along the East Coast? Were the conditions which led to their acceptance and success attributable to Texas's social and economic conditions or the men themselves?

² I contend that the Jews in nineteenth century Texas, like many in other Southern states, were accepted and not the target of widespread anti-Semitism. David Gerber noted that "Jews were continually elected to office in the nineteenth century south." *Anti-Semitism in American History*, 27. Leonard Dinnerstein included the "denunciation" of Jewish members of the Confederate House of Representatives as proof of Southern bigotry. The existence of Jewish House members is proof that Southern voters respected and accepted these men. *Antisemitism in America*, 33.

Finally, historians have described the immigrant experience in Baltimore, Chicago, and New York and implied that the experience of Texas Jewish immigrants was similar. This study proves that the early Texas Jewish immigrant experience did not fit that eastern model. Perhaps a more in-depth study of this region might provide a greater understanding of the Texas Jewish experience. The East Coast experience is not representative of that in Texas; rather, Texas might represent the Jewish experience west of the Mississippi River. Many Jews arrived in America with a dream. For those immigrants who settled on the East Coast only part of that dream came true, but for those brave immigrants who settled in Texas dreams of religious freedom, prosperity, and equality were realized.

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