

Harry W. Davis  
Submitted by Karen Alpert Entous  
January 12, 2018

### **1981-2 Harry W. Davis JFN**

***Some year's before his death in 1948, Harry W. Davis wrote about the history of the Jews of Duluth. His son Linel, an organist at Temple of Aaron in St Paul and also a Jewish history buff, recently came across the original and offered it to the Fellowship News. The author was a prominent Duluth attorney, active in Jewish and civic life. His wife Ida was for many years the director of the Jewish Federation and also a prolific writer. The Davises' writings have been used widely as reference and resource about early Jewish life in Duluth. In addition to Lionel, another son, Daniel, also lives in the Twin Cities and a daughter, Mrs. Daniel Chern in Santa Maria, Calif.***

### **Faith and charity united early settlers.**

From the writings of Harry W. Davis

The Jewish communities of the Eastern Seaboard remind one of the different layers of rock, like geological layers. At bottom is the layer of the Sephardic community of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. In the middle is the German Jewish aliyah. And on top, most numerous, maybe a little vociferous as yet, is the third stratum, the Russian Jewish immigration.

In Duluth, as in most Western communities, the bottom layer is missing and the beginnings go to the results of the upheaval in Europe in 1848 and the resultant flight of the Jews of Germany to the United States, to the great detriment of Germany and to the great gain of the United States.

The patriarch of this community was that staunch Jew and perfect gentleman, Bernard Silberstein, who was the founder of the Duluth branch of the family. He was born near Budapest in Hungary and arrived in Duluth on his honeymoon in 1870, looked over this straggling frontier community of a few hundred people and, fortunately, decided to stay.

For decades he was a prominent businessman, adviser and in many cases, the protractor of the later comers. He was a big brother to the poor and downtrodden Polish, Lithuanian and Rumanian Jews who flocked to these shores after the May laws and pogroms of the nefarious czaristic government of Russia. He became commissioner of public safety and a 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Mason.

Bernard Silberstein left his son, E. A. Silberstein, to carry on the family tradition and the son has even outdone his father; first president of the Associated Charities, president of Temple Emanuel, organizer of the Community Fund an outstanding Jew of Duluth E. A. was the father of Mrs. Charles (Helena) Siegelbaum.

Another Hungarian Jew who was to become prominently identified with the life of the community, I. Freimuth, did not arrive until the early '80s. I. Freimuth was truly the head of a patriarchal family. He became the owner of the second largest department store in Duluth, was active in mining circles, president of Temple Emanuel for many years. In short, there was hardly any Jewish or non-Jewish activity in which I. Freimuth did not participate.

Many other German Jewish families figured in the early history of Duluth, but few of their descendants are left here. There were Louis Hammel and his wife, Rosa, and later her daughter Rae Gordon. P. H.

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Oswald ran a cigar store. J. H. Winterfield was a wholesale cigar man in a place so tiny that it was known as the Jumbo Block. Henry Leopold, a tailor and Asa Leopold in the furniture business; Philip Levy, father of Mrs. Louis (Estelle) Zalk, operated the cigar stand in the St. Louis Hotel.

Sam Loeb, Isaac Bondy (brother of L. R. Bondy), Ben Heller, J. D. Sattler, and Louis Loeb all joined the tiny community in the '80s. Louis Loeb was president of Temple Emanuel for some time and a bank director and prominent in business affairs.

This little Jewish community followed the tradition that when 10 Jews get together they organize a Minyan. So by 1891 Temple Emanuel, a Reform congregation was organized. This vigorous and active congregation today is more conservative than it was in 1891.

With the exception of the early arrival of Bernard Silberstein, the Russian Jewish immigration to Duluth began about the same time as the German.

About 1882 there arrived from the Ukraine in Russia, Samuel Oreckovsky, uncle of Joe Oreckovsky (big Joe) and engaged in the tailoring business. He moved to Superior shortly afterwards. Mose Polinsky, father of L. (Simcha Leib) Polinsky came about the same time.

They were the founders and magnets for the large Oreckovsky (Oreck) and Polinsky families in Duluth. They are rivaled only by the clan of the Karons and the Kaners.

Legend has it that when Joe Oreckovsky recently had a reception there were 400 persons present who were in some way related to Joe.

About the same time, arrived the Isaac Cook family. From this family came Moses Cook (big Mose), a prominent member of the Adas Israel Synagogue, Mose Cook (little Mose) who was active in Temple Emanuel and whose wife, Anna Cook, was a worker in social welfare of all sorts' Barney Cook, and that grand old lady, past 90, Ida Cook, the benefactor of the Talmud Torah and other institutions; Mrs. Etta Josephs, prominent in musical and philanthropic circles, in the community fund and in a host of other activities.

H. Y. Josephs, who married into this family, was also among the pioneers of Duluth Jews, distinguished for his generous giving to numberless causes, Jewish and Gentile, and today the most prominent Jewish man in business in Duluth.

The religious life of these newcomers was first bound up in a Minyan, known as the Chevra Kadisha. In 1900, the first synagogue was organized and named Adas Israel Congregation. Its officers were Isaac Cook, president; Joseph Polinsky, vice-president; Isaac Abrahamson, treasurer; Abraham Klatzky, secretary, financial secretary.

Yankel Levine, L. Polinsky and Louis Cohen were also among those who escaped from Russian persecution in the early days. They were among the organizers of the Tifereth Israel Congregation, which was originally on Fifth Street and is now popularly known as the Fourth Street School.

Among other early arrivals were S. (Shapsie) Karon, William Goldstein, Isaac Abramson, Max Zalk, Jacob Zien (who became allied with the German portion of the community), Israel Oreckovsky, Joseph Polinsky.

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From Max Zalk's family came Louis Zalk, prominent businessman; Eva Wilk, now of New York, and a grandson Signey Buchman, who is making a name for himself in Hollywood.

From Joseph Polinsky came Lena Oreck, one of the ablest businesswomen; Charles P. Meyers, prime mover in the organization of the United Jewish Social Agencies in 1922, and ardent worker in all forms of social welfare, grandchildren, the Oreck boys, and Sally Polans, who was interested in many private charities.

In 1897 the first B'nai B'rith lodge was organized with Bernard Silberstein as president, Isaac Cook, vice-president; H. Y. Josephs, secretary; and Louis S. Loeb, treasurer. Through some dispute, the charter of this lodge was surrendered, but a few years later, Covenant Lodge was organized and is still carrying on today. The fraternal life of another portion of the community centered around the O.B.A. Lodge which ceased to exist many years ago.

As in many cities, the scene has now shifted, and the last immigration, the Russian Jews (in which category are also included the Rumanian Jews) hold the center of the stage.

Gone, too, are the Van Baalens; the Loeb, with the exception of another Sam Loeb, and the Mondachine family. Mrs. Fannie Mondschine was very prominent in congregational and relief activity and was a very highly cultured woman; most of the Levys and many others.

*(Transcribed by Karen Alpert Entous-January 12, 2018)*