

# "GENTILES PREFERRED"

Minneapolis Jews  
and Employment  
1920-1950

Laura E. Weber

**M**inneapolis at the end of the 20th century has the image of a liberal, progressive city. In the 1990s concerns about discrimination and racism focused on the African-American, Asian-American, American Indian, and Hispanic communities. No one thinks much about the Jews of greater Minneapolis who are, for the most part, economically comfortable, if not well off. Many are integrated into the economy as successful business owners, professionals, or corporate managers. But this benign situation has not always existed. Minneapolis has a dark past with respect to its attitude toward Jews and employment, a difficult era that lasted from the end of World War I until a number of years after the conclusion of World War II. Its peak occurred during the Great Depression.

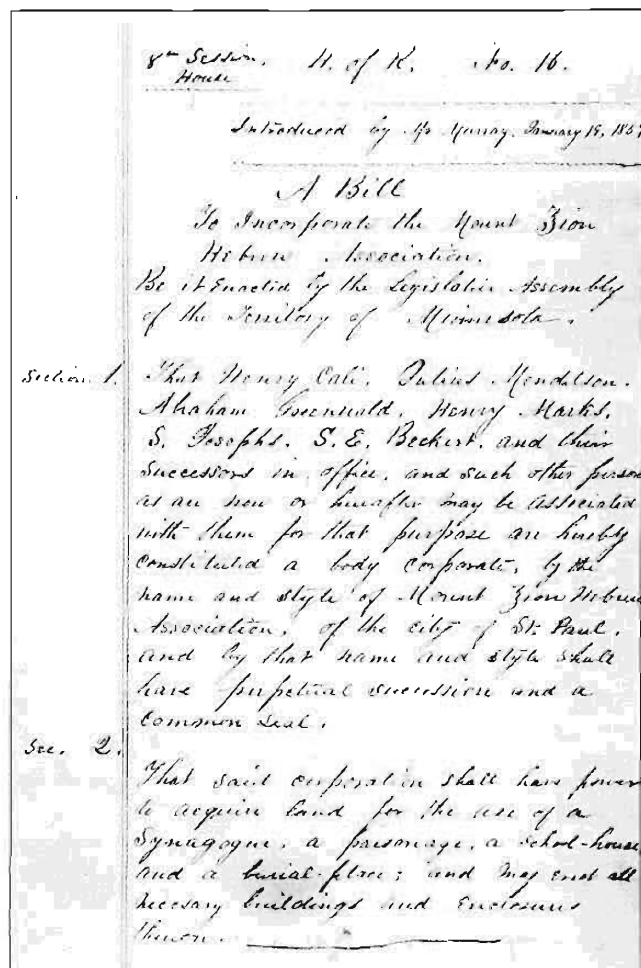
Economic discrimination against Jews was a problem in virtually every United States metropolitan area during this period. It was acknowledged even at the time, however, that the problem was particularly virulent in Minneapolis, given its size and relatively small number of Jews. What were some of the historical factors that contributed to the economic discrimination against Jews in Minneapolis?

Jews were among the people who arrived in Minneapolis after its major industries were established. "Empire builders," ambitious men of Anglo-Saxon descent who moved to the Midwest after the Civil War, developed the sawmill, flour milling, and railroad industries upon which the city's growth was based. The rank-and-file Minnesota miner, lumberjack, farmer, or railroad worker, however, was more likely to be of Scandinavian or German origin or perhaps of Irish or French-Canadian descent. He had been attracted to the area by the economic opportunities created by the Anglo-Saxon entrepreneurs. The worlds of the industry owner and the worker who toiled for him did not mix.<sup>1</sup>

Jews from Germany were the first statistically significant of the group to settle in Minnesota, attracted first by the commercial opportunities in St. Paul, then Minneapolis, as that city grew. By 1880 it is estimated that 103 Jews lived in Minneapolis. (The total state population was 780,773.) St. Paul had two synagogues by the time the first one was established in Minneapolis in 1878.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Charles R. Walker, *American City: A Rank-and-File History* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), 1-42.

<sup>2</sup>Hyman Berman, "The Jews," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, ed. June D. Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society [MHS] Press, 1981), 489-491; Albert I. Gordon, *Jews in Transition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), 14; United States, *Census, 1900, Population*, 1:2.



*Bill of incorporation for Mt. Zion Hebrew Association, St. Paul, January 19, 1857*

Unlike the German Jews who settled earlier in other midwestern towns and cities, those in Minneapolis apparently bypassed the peddler stage. They opened stores, using capital they had acquired from ventures in previous residences in eastern or southern communities. They sold clothing, dry goods, and general furnishings, supplying the needs of the lumberjacks from the north woods and workers in the other industries of the state. These merchants and their families lived a comfortable life in Minneapolis and were on good terms with their non-Jewish neighbors, whom they tried to emulate in external ways. These Jews wanted to

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Temple Israel on Tenth Street South, about 1890, a descendent of Minneapolis's first congregation

Nathan Hershman's business on Third Street South, in Minneapolis, 1950-1908



take their place in the community, but they associated socially with each other.<sup>3</sup>

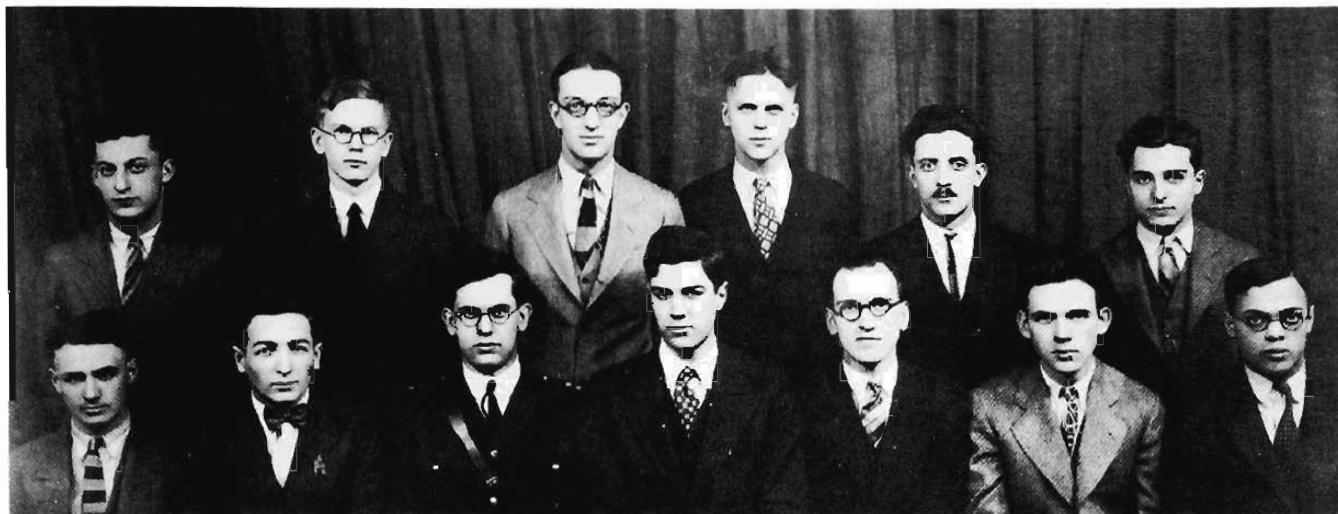
Eastern European Jews began to arrive in large numbers in Minneapolis (as in the rest of the country) during the 1880s, as a result of Russian pogroms in 1881 and rampant anti-Semitism and poor economic conditions in other countries. Most of those who traveled to Minneapolis at this time came alone, earning their livings as peddlers and sending for the rest of their families when they had enough money. The Eastern Europeans settled in neighborhoods with others of their nationality, distinct from the German Jews and each other. The Romanian Jews, for instance, settled in south Minneapolis in the vicinity of Franklin Avenue and Fifteenth Street. The Russians, Poles, and Lithuanians lived on the near north side, but each group had its own synagogue. The German Jews had, by 1915, moved from the central city neighborhood near their business establishments to the lakes district on the west side of town. By the time of the First World War, however, a number of conscious efforts by community leaders, as well as sociological forces and other events, helped break down the nationality barriers that had separated the city's Jews. One of these institutions was the Twin Cities-based Anglo-Jewish newspaper, the *American Jewish World*, founded in 1912.<sup>4</sup>

Few if any Jews in Minnesota participated in the major industries such as iron mining or flour milling in the early years, but a very few became grain merchants. Banking and the lumber industry were also closed to Jews, as to almost anyone not a part of the Anglo-Saxon elite. Areas where the early Jewish settlers did pioneer economically were in manufacturing specialty apparel such as furs and other types of winter clothing, paralleling the role Jews took in the garment industries of New York. Not until the early 1900s, when Minnesota's Jewish population grew from 6,000 in 1900 to 13,000 in 1910, did Jewish employment in garment and cigar factories become widespread. There, Jewish employers allowed their Orthodox employees to follow their religious practices by closing on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. However, Minneapolis did not have much to offer in the line of light manufacturing, which provided employment to Jews in other large cities. Jews in Minneapolis by the 1920s, for the most part, had to be self-employed, either as businessmen or professionals.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Gordon, *Jews*, 14-15.

<sup>4</sup>Gordon, *Jews*, 17-19, 30-42; Michael G. Rapp, "Samuel N. Deinard and the Unification of Jews in Minneapolis," *Minnesota History* 43 (Summer, 1973): 213.

<sup>5</sup>Berman, "The Jews," 495-496; Herbert S. Rutman, "Defense and Development: A History of Minneapolis Jewry, 1930-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1970), 10.



*Members of the all-Jewish Chess and Checkers Club at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis campus, 1925-1926*

The image of prosperity that colors recollections of the 1920s did not apply in large measure to Minneapolis or Minnesota. Agriculture never really shared in the boom that manufacturing and commerce enjoyed in the 1920s, and agriculture was the cornerstone of the state's economy. Farm machinery and improved methods, which were used to meet the increased demands caused by World War I, only contributed to overproduction when the war was over. Deflation of land values and decline in export markets in Europe also added to the farmers' woes. When farm areas suffered, Minneapolis, the market center, suffered as well.

Minneapolis's other economic mainstays also were in trouble by the 1920s. The once-strong lumber industry dwindled rapidly after 1910. The sawmill towns that sprang up during the lumber boom were left without an economic base, and they shrank or disappeared. Many of the residents descended on "the Cities" looking for work. The opening of the Panama Canal made it cheaper to ship a load of freight from Seattle to New York via canal, then west to the Midwest, than to send it by train from Seattle to the Midwest, shattering James J. Hill's dream of an empire based on rail freight throughout the Northwest. The great flour milling in-

dustry of Minneapolis began to move to Buffalo and the South, although financial control remained in the city. Even small and middle-sized businesses were affected, not only by the inevitable lessening of trade caused by the downturn in the main industries, but by the rise of national manufacturing companies, chain-store syndicates, and mail-order houses.<sup>6</sup>

The post-World War I years were marked by a continuation of the 100 percent Americanism brought on by the war, but without an external enemy, these xenophobic feelings were directed inward at recent immigrants and their families. The clamor to restrict immigration resulted in the quota system of 1924. Historian John Higham wrote of this period: "the Jews faced a sustained agitation that singled them out from the other new immigrant groups blanketed by racial nativism—an agitation that reckoned them the most dangerous force undermining the nation."<sup>7</sup>

Nationally, job opportunities for Jews were narrow, and this first became obvious during the 1920s. Historian Leonard Dinnerstein wrote that Jews did not protest job discrimination nor feel it was unusual; rather, the immigrants and their children *expected* it because of their European experience. It would take two decades before organized protest would have an effect on the situation. A study of anti-Semitism in Minnesota from 1920 to 1960 claims that the end of World War I marked the beginning of almost total exclusion of Jews from participation in civic and social organizations in certain parts of the state. Jews began to find themselves discriminated against more intensely in employment, housing, and resort accommodations. These developments coincided with increased instances of anti-Semitic rhetoric among certain religious leaders.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Walker, *American City*, 21-23.

<sup>7</sup>John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 278.

<sup>8</sup>Leonard Dinnerstein, "Anti-Semitism Exposed and Attacked, 1945-1950," *American Jewish History* 71 (Sept., 1981): 138; Michael C. Rapp, "An Historical Overview of Anti-Semitism in Minnesota, 1920-1960—With Particular Emphasis on Minneapolis and St. Paul" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1977), xix.

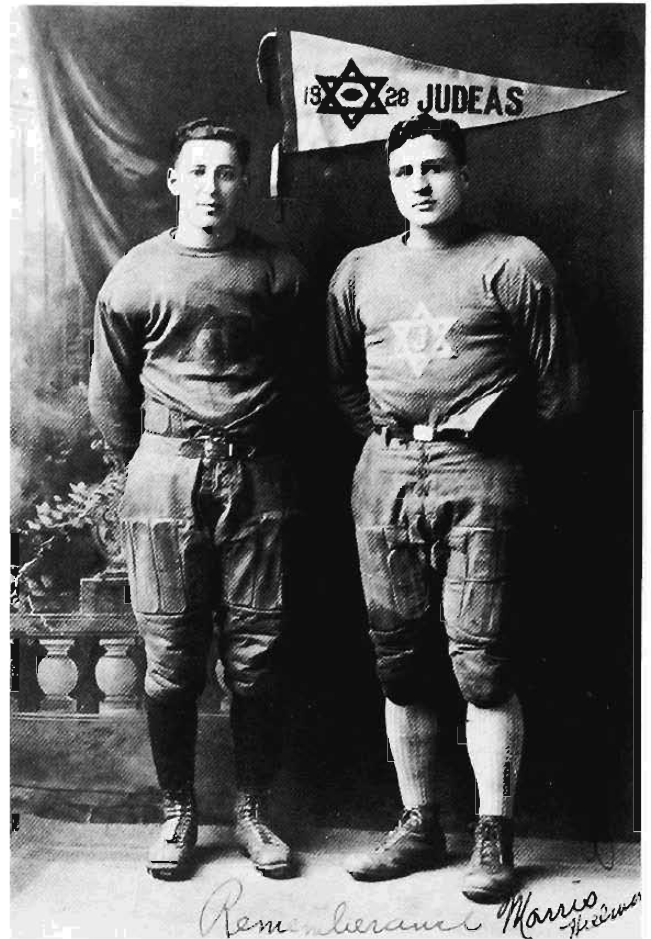
The local activity of Jewish hoodlums and gangsters in the 1920s also contributed to Minneapolitans' low opinion of Jews. Scandal sheets such as the *Saturday Press* and others that proliferated during this period ceaselessly examined the theme of links among Jewish gangsters, the police department, and the mayor. Even though their readership was not significant, constant battles to suppress and censor them kept the "rags" and their contents highly visible.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Maurice H. Lefkovits, a rabbi who settled in Minneapolis after World War I and went on to become active in social welfare agencies, described the state of the Minneapolis Jewish community in 1922. While it was healthy because of its strong religious, cultural, and social-welfare groups, Lefkovits wrote of its status in the larger community in depressing terms: "Minneapolis Jewry enjoys the painful distinction of being the lowest esteemed community in the land so far as the non-Jewish population of the city is concerned."<sup>10</sup>

Higher education as a means of upward mobility for the children of immigrants is a familiar story in American Judaism. Minneapolis residents were no exception. But a college degree in the hand of a Jewish man or woman in the 1920s did not necessarily mean that white-collar jobs were open to them. As a consequence of this discrimination, a large percentage of Jewish men became professionals or independent businessmen. But even as professionals, they faced forms of discrimination. By the mid-1920s they were restricted as to where they could practice. A quota system was enforced in some downtown office buildings, including the LaSalle, Syndicate, Physicians and Surgeons, Besse, and the Donaldson buildings. The Yates Building did not rent to Jews at all. Jewish physicians had difficulty finding hospital residencies, compelling the community to think of building its own hospital.<sup>11</sup>

Nationally, job opportunities for Jews continued to shrink through the 1920s. By the end of the decade, one source indicated that Jews were excluded from 90 percent of the general office jobs in New York City. In Minneapolis Jews did not work in factories as laborers (except some light industry such as garment, specialty manufacturing, and cigar making), nor were they permitted on a rung of the corporate ladder. They instead filled supplemental but necessary roles in the Minneapolis economy as small retailers, salespeople, or professionals.<sup>12</sup>

THE FIRST THREE years of the Great Depression hit Minneapolis no differently from the rest of the nation. The effect was somewhat moderated, however, by the facts that the local economy had been stagnant before 1929 and depended on consumer industries rather than heavy manufacturing. The full impact of the depression hit the Midwest by 1932, as it did in the rest of the



Morris Hillman (left) and Ernie Kaplan, members of a Jewish football team sponsored by the Emanuel Cohen Center of Minneapolis

nation. During the "winter of despair"—November, 1932 to March, 1933—the economy came to an almost complete halt.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Fred W. Friendly, *Minnesota Rag: The Dramatic Story of the Landmark Supreme Court Case that Gave New Meaning to Freedom of the Press* (New York: Random House, 1981), 36–37, 40–43, 57–59.

<sup>10</sup>Lefkovits quoted in Charles I. Cooper, "The Jews of Minneapolis and Their Christian Neighbors," *Jewish Social Studies* 7 (Jan., 1946): 32–33; *Minneapolis Star*, May 20, 1950, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>*American Jewish World* (hereafter *AJW*), Jan. 6, 1925, p. 8; Rapp, "Historical Overview," 25.

<sup>12</sup>Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 278, citing research by Heywood Broun and George Britt; Rapp, "Historical Overview," 28.

<sup>13</sup>George D. Tselos, "The Minneapolis Labor Movement in the 1930s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1970), 59; Rapp, "Historical Overview," 39; William E. Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 18–40.



Times of economic panic usually create fertile ground in which seeds of fear and prejudice can grow. By the winter of 1932–33, about 68,500 people were reported jobless in Hennepin County. But having a job was no guarantee of economic security, as hourly wages—already low in Minneapolis—dropped in many industries and work weeks were cut. Some employers attempted to lower costs by utilizing wage-sex differentials, increasing the proportion of lower-paid women workers on the payroll, especially in the laundry and dry cleaning industry. In 1931, Abe Altowitz, writing in the *American Jewish World*, said that societal dislocation caused by the Great Depression meant discrimination and prejudice were increasing appreciably.<sup>14</sup>

Rabbi C. David Matt wrote in a Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) review of Minneapolis in 1930: “It goes without saying that whenever economic conditions are not of the best the surest barometer and the greatest sufferer is the Jew. And since so much of Jewish energy and man-power is devoted to trade and business the strain of economic reverses is felt more heavily by the children of Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

Politically, Minnesotans reacted early to the distress of the depression years when they elected Floyd B. Olson governor in 1930, the first on the Farmer-Labor ticket. The Jewish community of Minneapolis supported Olson from the beginning of his political career. Indeed, each knew the other well. One of Olson’s biographers described his north Minneapolis boyhood home as “austere and quarrelsome” and said that Olson found the congenial family life he was seeking in the Jewish households of his neighborhood. He learned Jewish customs and the Yiddish language and even took part in religious services, acting as a “Shabbos goy,” one who lights the candles on the Sabbath when religious Jews are forbidden to do any work. “They [the Jews] reciprocated with an affection, trust, and loyalty that grew almost fanatical when the mature Floyd went into politics.” Several of his old Jewish friends were part of his administration and that of his elected successor, Elmer Benson. This situation prompted the charge in



*The La Salle Building, about 1922*

1938 that the Farmer-Labor party was run by Jews, and the vicious anti-Semitic campaign of 1938 was perhaps the worst display of public Jew-hatred in Minnesota history.<sup>16</sup>

Floyd Olson’s influence was a decisive factor in changing the long-standing bar against Jews working in state government, remembered Edward P. Schwartz, who participated in an oral history project on the Jewish immigrant experience in Minneapolis. The two or three years following the crash of 1929 were especially rough on the Jews, Schwartz said. They were “the last to get the jobs.” Young men never had an opportunity to work in a bank or with the major railroads, and a young woman had no chance at all of working in any public institution or even for the government, he remembered. “The few people that were accepted in the post office and the state were so infinitesimal against the population that it isn’t even worth accounting. . . . Maybe 10 or 12 kids got into city government and county government and state government [because they knew someone] until a man like Floyd Olson came along. . . . We saw the pattern, it was very clear, and as time progressed the only way out was to work your way out and that’s what the average Jewish kid in this city did.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Tselos, “Minneapolis Labor Movement,” 65–67; *AJW*, Nov. 6, 1931, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>*AJW*, Sept. 19, 1930, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>George H. Mayer, *The Political Career of Floyd B. Olson* (reprint ed., St. Paul: MHS Press, 1987), 8. For more on this campaign, see Hyman Berman, “Political Antisemitism in Minnesota during the Great Depression,” *Jewish Social Studies* 38 (Summer-Fall, 1976): 247–264.

<sup>17</sup>Edward P. Schwartz, tape-recorded interview with Rhoda G. Lewin, 1976, tape in MHS collections. The oral history project was the basis for Lewin’s Ph.D. dissertation, “Some New Perspectives on the Jewish Immigrant Experience in Minneapolis: An Experiment in Oral History” (University of Minnesota, 1978).



"The 'Three Jehu Drivers,'" 1938,  
prepared by R. J. Lloyd of Minneapolis,  
"in behalf of better government"

Nathan M. Shapiro, another interviewee, remembered: "There weren't too many fields open to us in those days unless you had a good WASP name." Shapiro worked for a coreligionist at Max P. Snyder Cut-Rate Cigars in the late 1920s. By that time Jewish people in Minneapolis, as nationally, dominated the cigar business—both production and wholesale and retail sales. The lifting of Prohibition in 1933, first by allowing 3.2 beer, then, at year's end, all liquor, created an economic opportunity for Minneapolis Jews, according to Shapiro. Legal saloons had been shut down for many years and the market was wide open for all, because no one group was already entrenched. Like a great many Jews, Shapiro went into the 3.2 bar-restaurant business with his brother Monroe, whose nickname "Curly" provided the name for their venture. When all liquor was legalized, a number of prominent Jewish families went into the wholesale business. "Here was an opportunity for people who didn't have the opportunities that WASPs had, to go into a business and show what you could do," Shapiro said.<sup>18</sup>

But even this opportunity could be studded with prejudicial roadblocks. "When the country went wet," Cy Young, an executive from Northern States Power Company located across the street from Curly's, offered to back an off-sale liquor store next door. But Young's banker from First National Bank, "a real anti-Semite from the old school—actually not much different from most of them around here in those days," did not want to give Young a loan "because we were Jews and shouldn't be trusted." With the insistence of Young,

however, the loan went through and the venture expanded. Curly's Bar was sometimes called "the Stork Club of the Northwest" because of its excellent food and nationally known entertainment acts.

MINNEAPOLIS began to come out of the worst effects of the depression by 1936. Economic improvement was evident there in most categories by June, 1935, and in all areas by June, 1937. Improvement in economic conditions, however, did not bring about a decline in job discrimination and other forms of anti-Semitism in Minneapolis.<sup>19</sup> It was 1936 when William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirts, a fascist hate group, first actively attempted to recruit members in the Twin Cities. The group made enough of an impact to become the subject of a six-part investigation in the *Minneapolis Journal* in September of that year. The reporter was Arnold Eric Severeid, fresh from the University of Minnesota, much later to become famous as a network television newscaster. According to Severeid's reports, the group claimed 6,000 members in Minnesota with 300,000 nationwide. One of the aims of the local group was to segregate all Jews in one city in Minnesota. "Anti-Semitism is the outstanding feature of the Silver-shirts [sic]," Severeid wrote.<sup>20</sup>

Some, like Edward Schwartz, looked back and saw Severeid's series as one of the first public exposures of anti-Semitism in Minneapolis. "This was one of the worst Jew-hating communities in the world through the Thirties and into the Forties [and] if it weren't for the finger of publicity—fellows like Eric Severeid and his remarkable series on the Silver Shirts—no attention would have been called to it."<sup>21</sup>

The issue surfaced again in 1938, causing more community tension the second time around. In July and August, organizers held three Silver Shirt meetings in Minneapolis. The first drew 350 people, but photos were taken of people exiting, a factor given in explaining the much smaller attendance (65) noted at the second meeting.<sup>22</sup>

Among those present at the first meeting were Dr. George Drake, a member of the Minneapolis School Board, and George K. Belden, automotive company head and president of the Associated Industries of Minneapolis, an employers' group. Rabbi Albert I. Gordon of Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in south Minneapolis immediately wrote a letter to the directors of Associated

<sup>18</sup>Here and below, see Nathan M. Shapiro, tape-recorded interview with Rhoda Lewin, 1976, tape in MHS collections.

<sup>19</sup>Cooper, "Jews of Minneapolis," 34; Tselos, "Minneapolis Labor Movement," 323.

<sup>20</sup>*Minneapolis Journal*, Sept. 11, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Schwartz interview.

<sup>22</sup>AJW, Aug. 5, 1938, p. 1.

Industries asking for an explanation of Belden's presence at the meeting. Part of Gordon's letter tactfully and obliquely brought up the relation between the anti-Semitic aims of the Silver Shirts and the professed aims of the employers' association: "Inasmuch as the Associated Industries of Minneapolis is an employer organization that has as one of its professed aims the establishment of amicable relationships between all the classes and groups in this city, the presence of Mr. Belden . . . appears to be a true violation of the purpose and spirit of your organization and should, therefore, be regarded as utterly shameful."<sup>23</sup>

The reply to Gordon said that Belden attended as an individual and not as a representative of the Associated Industries, which as a group abhorred the Silver Shirts. Belden himself also responded to Gordon, saying that he accepted the invitation to the meeting out of curiosity and was "pretty much disgusted" with what he saw and would not attend again. He also trotted out the old cliché often used when someone is accused of discrimination: "I have always had the highest regard for the Jewish people of this community, among whom I have many close friends."<sup>24</sup>

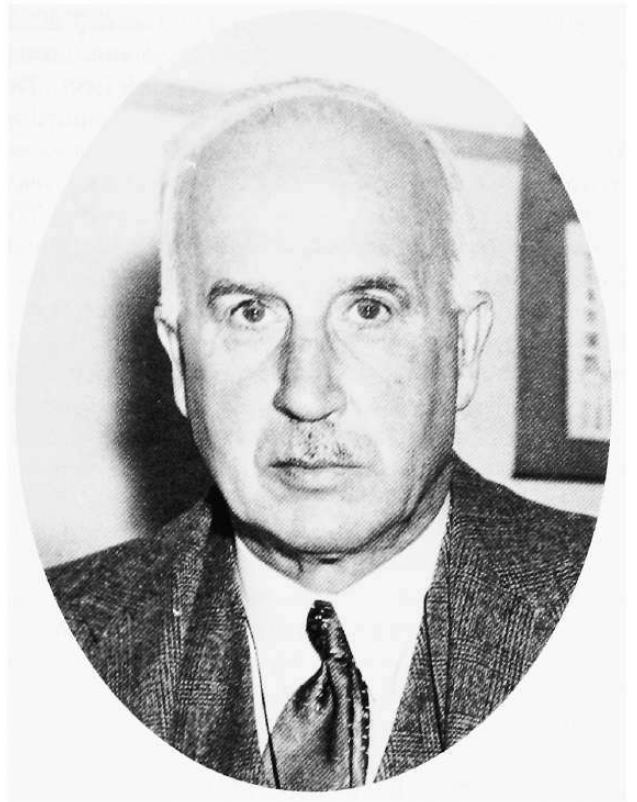
Gordon also sent copies of his letter to Minneapolis's three daily newspapers—the *Star*, *Journal*, and *Tribune*—where it and the replies to it received front-page coverage. During the next week, letters to the editor blasting the Silver Shirts poured into these newspaper offices, as well as those of the *Minnesota Leader*, the *Minneapolis Labor Review*, and the *American Jewish World*. Editorials agreed with the letter writers. Fundamentalist ministers, led by Dr. William B. Riley of the First Baptist Church in Minneapolis, attempted to defend Belden and tried to insinuate that an attempt was made to deprive him of his constitutional right to attend any meeting he wished. This was not the first public stand of certain fundamentalists against the city's Jewish population. Earlier in the year George Mecklenburg, pastor of Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, had been banned from the airwaves of radio station WTCN after giving an anti-Semitic radio lecture entitled "Who Runs Minneapolis." At the same time that Jews were having severe difficulties securing any kind of job at major corporations, utilities, and banks or as civil servants, Mecklenburg felt that the Jews controlled the city.<sup>25</sup>

As early as 1936 concerned community members had formed the Jewish Anti-Defamation Council of Minneapolis, an informal organization dedicated to in-

<sup>23</sup>*Minneapolis Journal*, Aug. 4, 1938, p. 1, 2.

<sup>24</sup>*Minneapolis Journal*, Aug. 4, 1938, p. 1, 2; *AJW*, Aug. 5, 1938, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>*AJW*, Aug. 12, May 13—both 1938, p. 1; Gordon, *Jews*, 50.



George K. Belden

Rabbi Albert I. Gordon





vestigating the city's profascist climate. Council members realized their need to become a permanent, formal body after the gubernatorial campaign of 1938. The group was renamed the Minnesota Jewish Council in May, 1939, and Samuel L. Scheiner was appointed executive director. (Except for two leaves of two years each, he continued in that role through 1974.) The name was changed again in the 1950s to the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC).<sup>26</sup>

IN THE LATE 1930s help-wanted ads could still be found in Minnesota newspapers stating "Gentile" or "Gentile preferred." Some Minneapolis Jews passively accepted this discrimination by avoiding the Gentile-dominated marketplace, either by becoming independent businessmen or self-employed professionals. Others tacitly accepted discrimination by attempting to "pass" as non-Jews, changing or lying about their names. But the Jews of Minneapolis also worked actively throughout the decade in an organized fashion to counteract job discrimination, both in the practical realm of trying to obtain jobs and also by fighting the attitudes that resulted in discrimination. As one means of response, Scheiner attempted to get the Duluth papers to use "State nationality" instead of the blatant preference. Even though the intention of the substitute phrase was still obvious, apparently the consolation was that susceptible minds would not be exposed to and influenced by the bald truth.<sup>27</sup>

The main agent of this effort, however, was the Jewish Free Employment Bureau (JFEB), known after 1936 as the Jewish Employment Service (JES). This organization existed before the Great Depression, but that cataclysm, coupled with a growing perception of widespread job discrimination against Jews in Minneapolis, led to a great expansion of its work. Begun as an aid to Eastern European immigrants at the turn of the century, the Jewish bureau was reestablished in 1927. Four years later, Dorothy D. Gordon, wife of Rabbi Albert Gordon, conducted a survey under the auspices of the Council of Jewish Women and the Jewish Family Welfare Association (JFWA) to determine whether conditions merited continuation of the service. It seems odd that it was deemed necessary to conduct a survey, for the JFWA knew well that unemployment was a problem among Jews in the city. In October of 1930 the *American Jewish World* reported that calls for help from the welfare association had never been greater. A large number of the people seeking help were unemployed and hoped for assistance in finding a job rather than direct financial aid. Many of the applicants were reported to be trained in factory, office, and other work and were willing to accept temporary or odd jobs. Furthermore, at the November, 1930, board of directors' meeting of the JFWA, Executive Secretary Anna F.

Skolsky reported on 57 unemployed people and suggested that their names and qualifications be given to members of the board, many of whom were employers, and that a list of qualifications, without names, be published in the *American Jewish World*.<sup>28</sup>

The results of the 1931 survey indicated that discrimination, not merely economic depression, was causing some of the problem. Employment agencies were contacted, and eight responded. They revealed that employers who used their services—Jewish as well as Gentile—often qualified their needs with "Gentiles preferred." Between October, 1931, and January, 1932, researchers interviewed 96 employers to try to determine the causes of the discrimination. Some of the common responses were: Jews were too social with their own group and not courteous to others; Jews wanted raises in salary too soon and wanted jobs that did not require physical labor; fear of hiring too many Jews lest the business look "too Jewish"; Jews showed too much familiarity with those in authority; Jewish employees represented the danger of ultimate business competition; and Jews refused to take instructions readily and took off work on Jewish holidays. The survey uncovered some positive comments about Jewish workers too. Jewish employers had good things to say about employees who had shown unusual ability and character. Other attributes given by both Jewish and Gentile employers: Jews made good salespeople, were unusually good at technical details, adjusted easily to new tasks, were often loyal employees, and young women in particular were said to catch on quickly and work at high speed when necessary.<sup>29</sup>

The results of the survey convinced community leaders that an agency was still needed to place Jewish applicants. Consequently, a reorganization and expansion of the employment bureau occurred in October, 1931. A social worker, Margaret S. Ginsberg, was named director. Her job was to make contacts with employers "with a view to elimination of the attitudes which result in rejection of applicants for jobs because they are Jews," and to find jobs for men and women, skilled and unskilled. Various city employment services claimed that they recognized the value of the new bureau and were willing to co-operate. A cynic might say

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<sup>26</sup>Inventory notebook, JCRC of Minnesota Papers, archives and manuscripts reading room, MHS.

<sup>27</sup>Clippings from unidentified newspaper and S. L. Scheiner, Report, Jan. 2, 1940, JCRC Papers.

<sup>28</sup>Gordon, *Jews*, 36; *AJW*, Jan. 8, 1932, p. 3, Oct. 24, 1930, p. 13; JFWA Board of Directors, Minutes, Nov. 19, 1930, Jewish Family and Children's Service (JFCS) Papers, MHS.

<sup>29</sup>*AJW*, Jan. 8, 1932, p. 3.

this was because they were glad to have someone else deal with the problems of Jewish applicants.<sup>30</sup>

In early 1932 the *American Jewish World* reported on the types of applicants; males ranged from unskilled boys to tradesmen such as carpenters, tailors, upholsterers, and printers, and a small group of salesmen and accountants. The females were clustered in the categories of stenographer, bookkeeper, saleswoman, and factory help. The number of domestic workers and laborers was small, about 50 out of the 400 job seekers at that time. Margaret Ginsberg described the applicants as generally well groomed and well mannered. The bureau did a thorough investigation of each person's capabilities, school history, and employment records to see if the common criticisms of Jewish employees were warranted. Only two such cases were found.<sup>31</sup>

Ginsberg was particularly concerned about discrimination by Jewish employers. "If he shows no tolerance, what can be expected of the Gentile employer? . . . If we can induce Jewish employers to let our Jewish applicants apply for positions, we are breaking down certain taboos," she said. After interviewing employers during a five-week period following mid-October, 1931, the bureau began to receive requests for experienced workers in various trades. In November, 17 placements were made, four permanent.

Throughout the year, the *American Jewish World* publicized the employment bureau's placement record. In the first six months of 1932 there were 68 placements, 20 permanent, 42 temporary or seasonal, and six odd jobs. March was the best month with 15 jobs secured. June had the highest number of applicants—144—hopeful that the coming summer would bring seasonal work and temporary jobs filling in for vacationing workers, but only one permanent and nine temporary jobs were found.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of Ginsberg's first year, 635 employers were listed in the files of the agency and about 400 people had applied for jobs. After making this commendable beginning, Margaret Ginsberg resigned as director of the Jewish Free Employment Bureau, citing other interests to which she wished to devote her time.<sup>33</sup>

The bureau was not the only resource available. Unemployed Minneapolis Jews also looked to New Deal programs for relief. In May, 1933, the JFWA brought up the question of encouraging young men to enlist in

the Civilian Conservation Corps; by October, 25 had joined and "very fine results were obtained with the young men and . . . all felt they were greatly benefited by the experience." The *American Jewish World*, meanwhile, ran articles pinning hopes for increasing job opportunities on the National Recovery Act (NRA). "The new codes demand more employees. Whatever your 'help' needs . . . call the Jewish Free Employment Bureau," said an article in August, 1933. The next month a story entitled "NRA Gives Impetus to Employment Bureau" claimed that "The inauguration of the 'Blue Eagle' campaign with its resulting expansion of business and industry has given impetus to the activities of the Jewish Free Employment Bureau." The ratio of job applicants to placements was given as 125 to 12 a month. Applicants ranged from "college graduates to scrub women."<sup>34</sup>

*Jewish filling-station attendant, 1931*



<sup>30</sup>AJW, Oct. 16, 1931, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup>Here and below, see AJW, Jan. 8, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup>AJW, July 22, 1932, p. 8. The paper actually claimed 69 jobs for the first six months, but the numbers tally to 68.

<sup>33</sup>AJW, Sept. 23, 1932, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup>JFWA Board, Minutes, May 10, Oct. 18, 1933, JFCS Papers; AJW, Aug. 25, Sept. 1—both 1933, p. 10.

THE Jewish Free Employment Bureau became part of the Jewish Family Welfare Association in early 1934, ending the joint management by the welfare association, B'nai Brith, and the Council of Jewish Women. One of the reasons for the change was that 1934 saw the beginning of government relief intended to help the unemployed and other needy people, thereby usurping the welfare association's direct relief function. "With the passing of the more acute phases of the Depression in 1933, and the assumption by public agencies of . . . basic needs . . . it was natural that our agency should turn its attention to the effects of the prolonged crisis upon the economic structure of our community," said Charles I. Cooper, who had succeeded Anna Skolsky as executive secretary of the JFWA in 1932.<sup>35</sup>

By May, 1934, a permanent manager for the employment bureau had been hired to replace Margaret Ginsberg. Belle W. Rauch was engaged for a trial period of six months at a salary of one hundred dollars a month. She was to remain with the bureau for the rest of the decade. A three-person employment committee to oversee the bureau was also appointed, chaired by Minneapolis lawyer J. Jesse Hyman. Hyman worked actively throughout 1934 in his new post. He organized a regular series of weekly meetings with Rauch, Cooper, and his committee. He arranged noontime sessions with Jewish businessmen to enlist their support for the JFEB. He also worked on plans to enlist the support of non-Jewish businessmen. The board of directors was extremely pleased with Hyman's "very businesslike and energetic activities," and later, for "splendid work done."<sup>36</sup>

The fruits of Hyman's, Rauch's, and Cooper's efforts were reported at the annual meeting of the JFWA and the Community Fund. From May 1 to December 31, 1934, the employment bureau had found 99 permanent and 203 temporary jobs. It had interviewed 170 Jewish employers, 144 non-Jewish employers, and 2,953 job applicants. Placing Jews in jobs was a task of educating employers, Jewish and non-Jewish, Rauch reported at the meeting. Although the educational process was difficult, definite progress had been made, as companies that had never hired a Jewish employee had now done so. Rauch's comments that she put herself in the employer's place and tried to send over the best possible candidate sounds merely like good business practice, but her next comment—that she told applicants that their prospective employers would judge other Jewish workers by their achievements—shows that even positive action to combat Jewish joblessness was a delicate, defensive operation.<sup>37</sup>

Hyman took advantage of the meeting to address the greatest problem his committee encountered—lack of co-operation by certain Jewish employers, several of whom were present: "It was naturally found that a



*Belle W. Rauch*

greater acceptance of the problem and willingness to co-operate was shown by the Jewish employers, but unfortunately they as a whole do not make use of the bureau in a measure at all consistent with its opportunities to perform service. This lack of co-operation or forgetfulness—or call it what you will—is a serious handicap. And I could be quite scathing in my comments in this regard, and if made would affect a number of employers who are in this room at present."<sup>38</sup>

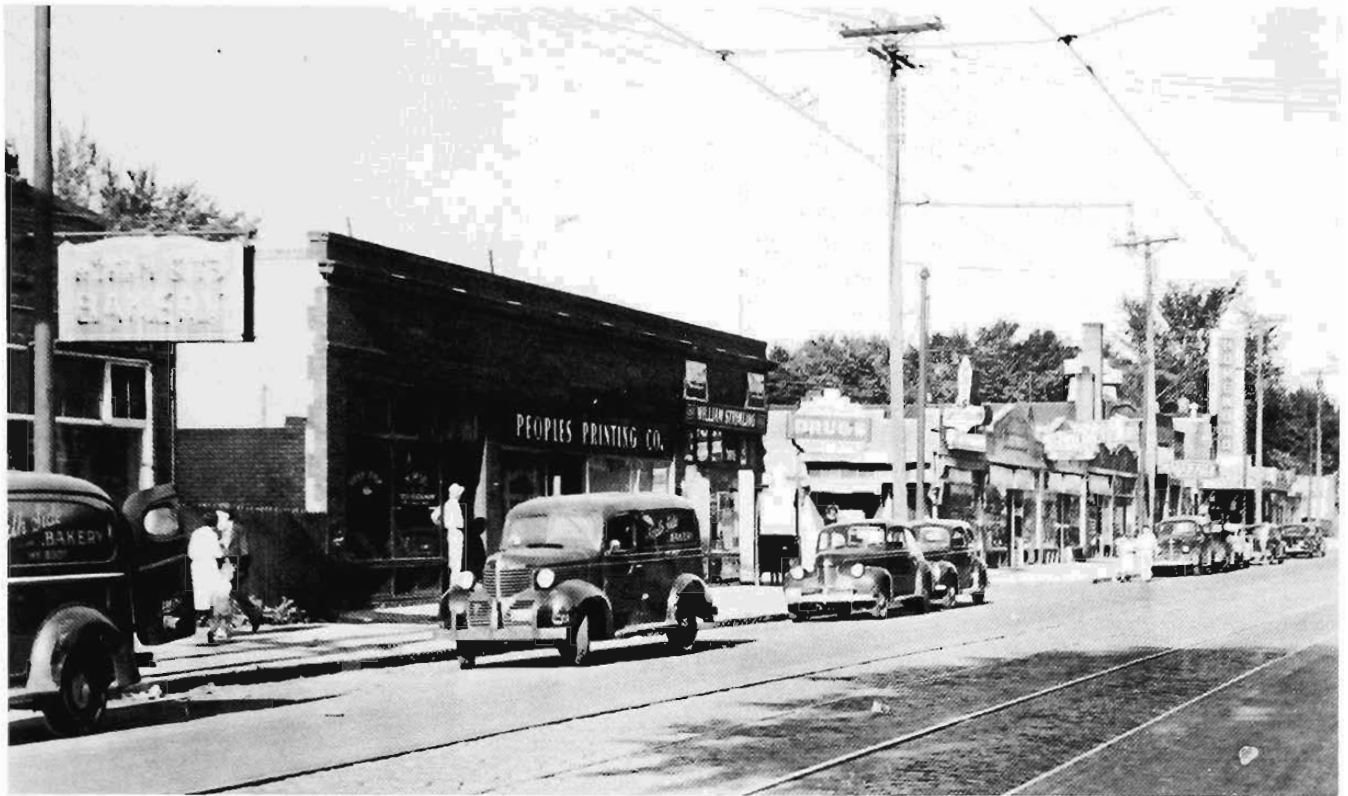
The report of these remarks in the *American Jewish World* brought a flood of applicants into the offices of the employment bureau during the following month, interpreting the criticism "as indication that jobs would be immediately available 'in abundance.'" Rauch commented, however, "It seems that all prospective employes read the criticism. . . . but I'm afraid the employers haven't read it." In February, 1935, the agency found 20 permanent jobs and 17 temporary ones. Hy-

<sup>35</sup>AJW, May 18, 1934, p. 8; Report of Executive Secretary, Feb. 9, 1938, JFCS Papers.

<sup>36</sup>JFWA Executive Committee, Minutes, May 15, Aug. 3, and JFWA Board, Minutes, May 9, Oct. 10—all 1934, JFCS Papers.

<sup>37</sup>AJW, Feb. 1, 1935, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup>AJW, Feb. 8, 1935, p. 5.



*The heart of the north-side Jewish community: Plymouth Avenue North, looking toward the intersection of Morgan Avenue, about 1944.*

man moved from Minneapolis soon afterward, and Jacob G. Cohen, president of a Minneapolis publishing firm, succeeded him as chairman in December.<sup>39</sup>

The year 1936 was a time of cataloguing and counting for the Minneapolis Jewish community. In spring a communal survey was done under the auspices of the Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies with the cooperation of the Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service. Field work for the survey pointed up the need for authoritative data, so a population census, supervised by Charles Cooper, was conducted during summer.<sup>40</sup>

While the communal study did not include any detailed information about economic status or employment distribution, the census showed there were 16,260 Jews in Minneapolis or 3.5 percent of the city's 1930 total of 464,356. Almost 70 percent of the city's Jews

lived on the north side (11,018), with two other areas of lesser concentration to the southwest. Most of the population consisted of Eastern European immigrants and their native-born children, but the immigrants had been in Minneapolis for quite a while—almost half of them for 25 years or more. Only 536 or 8.8 percent of the Jewish population had been in the United States for 15 years or less. In summary the communal survey report said "In many respects the Jewish community reflects the essential economic and social characteristics of Minneapolis, which is a commercial and distributing center, located in the heart of the 'Wheat Empire.' The Jews are largely engaged in small business, with no extremes of wealth. The depression affected the Jewish business man as it did his neighbor, but both came through the experience with less relative loss than was generally evident elsewhere. Although a minority group, the Jewish population has kept pace with the rest of the city in its concern for the general social welfare."<sup>41</sup>

The final report of the survey also gave a convenient summary of the work of the employment bureau through spring, 1936, noting that the JFEB was located across the street from the Minnesota State Employment Service, "whose services are available to Jewish appli-

<sup>39</sup>AJW, Mar. 8, 1935, p. 4; JFWA Board, Minutes, Dec. 11, 1935, JFCS Papers.

<sup>40</sup>AJW, Aug. 28, 1936, p. 8; Sophia M. Robison, "The Jewish Population of Minneapolis, 1936," in *Jewish Population Studies*, ed. Sophia M. Robison (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1943), 152.

<sup>41</sup>[Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies], *Minneapolis Jewish Communal Survey* (Minneapolis, 1936), 3:1; Robison, "Jewish Population of Minneapolis," 153–154.

cants, although it is not used very extensively by them. Though no studies of anti-Jewish discrimination in employment are available, it is felt that discrimination exists and that the Jewish applicant can get a more sympathetic hearing at the Jewish Free Employment Bureau."<sup>42</sup>

The study showed 566 placements were made in 1935, of which 206 were permanent jobs. Among the 942 applicants women outnumbered men, 510 to 432. Of the jobs, 420 fell into six categories: sales (104); factory workers (90); general office assistants (75); stenographers (75); bookkeepers (45); and shipping clerks and stock boys (32). Other occupations where three or more jobs were found were housecleaners, laborers, automobile drivers, practical nurses, waitresses, carpenters, and upholsterers.

To aid its work, the JFEB began making contacts in earnest with both state and federal employment agencies. In March its offices were moved next to the State Employment Bureau, in the Transportation Building Annex on Second Avenue South, partly to facilitate greater co-operation. That same month, the bureau was renamed the Jewish Employment Service (JES). Committee chairman Cohen initiated a letter-writing campaign explaining the purpose of the service to area firms, which paid off with a big spring and summer. Workers for spring odd jobs and summer-vacation fill-ins were the greatest number being requested, unlike 1932 when these kinds of work never materialized. Even so, Rauch reported that the service could accommodate twice the number of odd jobs already filled. A serviceman's bonus paid to veterans in mid-June, 1936, by the federal government provided a boost to the work of the JES as well. Businessmen and merchants of Minneapolis hoped to lure the recipients in to spending their bonuses by sending direct-mail advertising. The ad blitz required stenographers, filing clerks, and "classifiers." "Many who have applied for work through the JES have already been given employment because of the bonus. Many more are available," asserted Rauch.<sup>43</sup>

Business was good at the JES for the remainder of 1936, due in part to the efforts of Cohen and Rauch to continue publicizing the service. The *American Jewish World* had begun printing small articles in 1935, advertising on behalf of individual applicants. A typical "article" read: "Salesman Wants Work: Among the latest applicants at the Jewish Free Employment Bureau is a 35-year-old salesman, who has had experience in general merchandise and men's furnishings. For further information, call Mrs. Rauch." Such ad-articles continued throughout the decade on a regular basis.<sup>44</sup>

At the annual meeting of the Jewish Family Welfare Association held in February, 1938, Executive Secretary Cooper reported, "Our placement service records for 1937 the finding of 606 jobs; but 606 jobs speak vol-

umes." Placement figures for 1939 included a breakdown by age. Positions were secured for 76 people under age 20 and 43 for those over age 40. Jobs for those ages 20 to 30 numbered 235 and for those 30 to 40 years old, 60. The total number of jobs found for those 414 individuals was 619. Jacob Cohen reported on some of the problems of the JES at the 1939 annual meeting: "Applications are taken from every member of the community, and the community looks for positions for children and relatives of members of this board, as well as for relief clients from the Jewish Welfare Association and the Department of Public Welfare."<sup>45</sup>

"It is a gruelling task that Mrs. Rauch . . . has to face every morning when she opens her office, and must go through, by the time she has completed her round of visits, consultations, and phone calls. It is a depressing piece of work, and great credit must be given to her for keeping up the spirit of optimism, as well as for placing as many individuals as she does during the year."

By the end of the decade and at the beginning of the 1940s, the immediate crisis turned from economic depression to war. Europe was already fighting, and the United States was anxiously watching developments there. The economy was given a boost when the United States began selling arms to the Allies. In the 1940 annual report of the JFWA, Jacob Cohen noted that while employment conditions in the United States had improved because of the defense industries, Minnesota had not benefited as few such plants were located in the state. He hoped that as work proceeded on defense contracts, subletting would eventually help Minnesota industries.<sup>46</sup>

Employment figures for 1940 were about the same as 1939, although the greatest number of persons were found temporary jobs. The number of employers working with the agency had increased by 6 percent, yet there was still a call, nine years after the first reorganization of the JES, for more co-operation from the Jewish community.

Also on the agenda for the employment committee in 1940 was a study of the effectiveness of public employment agencies and their degree of co-operation

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<sup>42</sup>Here and below, see [Minneapolis Council], *Minneapolis Jewish Communal Survey*, 1:11, 22-23.

<sup>43</sup>JFWA Board, Minutes, Mar. 11, 1936; *AJW*, April 17, p. 12, May 15, p. 13, June 12, p. 11—all 1936.

<sup>44</sup>*AJW*, Jan. 3, 1936, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup>Here and below, see Report of the Executive Secretary at 28th Annual Meeting of JFWA, Feb. 9, 1938, p. 5, and Minutes of Annual Meeting of JFWA, Jan. 10, 1940, p. 4, both in JFCS Papers.

<sup>46</sup>Here and below, see "Report of the Industrial Division of the Family Welfare Assn.," in Minutes of Annual Meeting of JFWA, Jan. 27, 1941, p. 5-6, JFCS Papers.





Samuel Scheiner

with the JES. There was concern that duplicate services might be offered. The committee was also considering investigating the problem of job discrimination for Jewish applicants. Later in the year, Cohen reported that his committee was undertaking a review of employment discrimination at some of the public utilities and large corporations. By June, 1941, the "improved industrial condition in the community" contributed to the large number of placements made during the month—77, of which 46 were permanent.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Memorandum of Sub-Committee Appointments (Preliminary), Sept. 25, 1940, and JFWA Board, Minutes, Dec. 11, 1940, June 25, 1941, p. 2—all in JFCS Papers. The minutes record 77 placements—"46 permanent and 36 temporary" [sic].

<sup>48</sup>Dinnerstein, "Anti-Semitism," 134; Samuel L. Scheiner to Miles Goldberg, Sept. 29, 1942, JCRC Papers; Rapp, "Historical Overview," 41.

<sup>49</sup>Selden Menefee, "What Americans Think," *The Nation*, May 27, 1943, p. 765, and *Assignment: U.S.A.* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943), 101.

<sup>50</sup>Carey McWilliams, "Minneapolis: The Curious Twin," *Common Ground*, Autumn, 1946, p. 61–62; Rapp, "Historical Overview," 179.

THE ENTRANCE of the United States into World War II in 1941 meant the end of the long-term depression. The needs of the war revitalized American industry in a way the New Deal could not. But it did not mean that anti-Semitism waned in the United States. Historian Dinnerstein noted that one national poll indicated that anti-Semitism in the U.S. "reached its zenith as World War II approached, declined somewhat during the conflagration and rose again immediately after the war ended." In Minneapolis, too, employment discrimination continued. Indeed, it was so persistent that in 1942 Samuel Scheiner wrote, "Employment discrimination work has taken at least three-fourths of my time. We have a full-time man hired for that purpose now." Attempts to boycott Jewish businesses and discrimination by certain insurance companies were other ways economic bias was practiced.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, poor economic conditions alone were not the sole cause of job discrimination. Underlying prejudice on the part of a significant number of Minneapolis citizens that continued during the "good" times of the 1940s was also a factor. Selden Menefee, a journalistic observer of the country during wartime as a representative of the Office of Public Opinion Research of Princeton University, wrote in 1943, "I found almost no evidence of anti-Semitism in the Northwest and West Central States. Except in Minneapolis, no one considered it to be a problem." Three years later in the book *Assignment: U.S.A.*, he reiterated, "Signs of militant anti-Semitism I found to be almost entirely lacking in the Middle West, as in the South and West—except for Minneapolis."<sup>49</sup>

Carey McWilliams's 1946 investigation of anti-Semitism in Minneapolis and lack of it in St. Paul coined a phrase that stuck to describe Minneapolis: "the capitol [sic] of anti-semitism in the United States." McWilliams pointed out that the most striking aspect of anti-Semitism in Minneapolis was the lack of significant Jewish participation in the dominant economic activities of the city, such as milling, lumber, transportation, banking, insurance, private utilities, and to a degree, department-store merchandising. This sounds no different from the situation in the 1920s, but actually community attitudes were gradually changing. Acts of discrimination were rarely overt after the war, as they had been in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Instead, they became more "discreet."<sup>50</sup>

Minneapolis Jews by 1946 had carved out influential niches in wholesale meat distribution, scrap iron, cleaning and laundry, jewelry, furniture, furs, theater operation, wholesale and retail liquor, dry goods and wearing apparel, grocery, produce, and drugs and cosmetics. They were somewhat active in manufacturing, but tended chiefly to wholesaling and jobbing. A few were involved in building and demolition. That year

Minneapolis had 66 Jewish doctors, 56 dentists, 92 lawyers, and a few each of teachers, journalists, and social workers. A high proportion of the Jewish working population was described as white collar, involved in sales and office jobs.<sup>51</sup>

After the war, feelings of national unity and patriotism brought on by the defeat of fascism caused many to view discrimination against racial and religious minority groups as unacceptable, even un-American. And efforts of American Jewry to fight anti-Semitism began to pay off. No semblance of unity had existed among major American Jewish groups until 1943. By this date, these groups were attempting to use the social sciences to discern the causes of prejudice and develop a cure for it—and to use the legal system to try to eradicate it. The areas these groups focused on included discrimination in employment, education, and immigration.<sup>52</sup>

Attacks on anti-Semitism began coming from non-Jewish sources as well after the war, including two popular 1947 movies, *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*; popular magazine articles and books; and scholarly studies. President Harry S Truman appointed blue-ribbon panels to investigate fair employment practices, higher education, and civil rights. After

Aaron M. Litman



these groups cited examples of widespread prejudice in the country, Truman proposed a major civil rights bill in 1948.

Before the wartime Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) expired on V-J Day, August 25, 1945, Representative Mary T. Norton of New Jersey had already introduced legislation in Congress to make it permanent. In Minnesota the Council for Fair Employment worked to pass the national FEPC bill and similar legislation on the state level. Minneapolis Jews strongly supported the permanent FEPC bill, as Aaron M. Litman, former Farmer-Labor party publicity director, aide to Congressman Magnus Johnson, and executive director of the Jewish Anti-Defamation Council from 1944 to 1946 said: "The Jews in Minneapolis prior to Pearl Harbor [felt], and unless a permanent FEPC bill is adopted, will again feel the sting of employment discrimination."<sup>53</sup>

Hubert H. Humphrey was elected mayor of Minneapolis in 1945 and created the Mayor's Council on Human Relations that same year. This action had come none too soon, according to Litman: "Minneapolis has lagged considerably in the formulation of councils for goodwill in furthering intergroup relations . . . only within recent weeks, and as a result of approximately a year of pressures exerted upon conscientious Christians, have we taken steps to formulate sound organizations for intergroup relations under the call of the new mayor, Hubert Humphrey."

A "Mayor's Self-Study" was conducted in 1947, and the results were released in September, 1948. Its purpose was to collect opinions about various racial and religious groups from a representative cross-section of about 2,000 adult residents. The final study showed that 63 percent of all Minneapolis firms hired no blacks, Jews, or Japanese Americans; a qualified black was the most narrowly restricted in occupational choices. Substantiating this claim, a study initiated by the Federation of Women Teachers of Minneapolis found that job discrimination persisted in spite of a 1947 city ordinance that made it unlawful for a person to be denied employment because of race, creed, or color. The report indicated that many retail establishments would not hire a qualified member of certain religious and racial groups as sales or office personnel.

<sup>51</sup>Cooper, "Jews of Minneapolis," 34–35.

<sup>52</sup>Here and below, see Dinnerstein, "Anti-Semitism," 136–138, 142–144.

<sup>53</sup>"Q and A About Permanent FEPC," pamphlet in Central Labor Union of Minneapolis and Hennepin County (CLU) Records, MHS; here and below, see Aaron Litman, "Civic Protection in Minneapolis," typewritten copy of speech, undated but filed under "Anti-Semitism 1946–52," JCRC Papers.



*Abe's Delicatessen and other Jewish-owned businesses on Plymouth Avenue, 1948*

As a result of this study, 20 local organizations, including the Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and League of Women Voters, formed the Joint Committee for Employment Opportunity (JCEO) in May, 1947.<sup>54</sup>

Forty-six organizations had joined the JCEO by the end of 1949. The committee had circulated a petition

<sup>54</sup>Gordon Connelly (general manager of field operations, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago) to George Phillips (CLU president), undated; memo to affiliated local unions from the CLU, April, 1947; Opal G. Gruner (chair of JCEO) to Phillips, Nov. 10, 1947; "History and Aims of the JCEO," Jan. 28, 1948; Phillips to J. Selmer Drage and Jean Robertson, Dec. 1, 1948—all in CLU Records.

<sup>55</sup>JCEO, letter to presidents of its member organizations, 1948, CLU Records.

advocating equal opportunity for equal ability in employment, which garnered more than 10,000 signatures. It had initiated a series of "friendly conferences" with managers and heads of retail stores downtown to discuss employment patterns. "Almost without exception, conferences were fruitful and pleasant," said a report. Stickers reading "I should like to see racial and religious EQUALITY practiced in your entire employment policy," were sold for customers to paste on their billing statements. More than 26,000 stickers were purchased in 1948.<sup>55</sup>

Other local groups with aims similar to those of the Mayor's Council on Human Relations and the JCEO after World War II included the United Labor Committee of Minnesota for Human Rights, the Central Body of the Minneapolis Central Labor Union of the AFL, and the local chapter of the National Conference

of Christians and Jews. Evidently, all this activity on behalf of intergroup relations, racial and religious tolerance, and antidiscrimination had some effects. In 1949 the National Conference of Christians and Jews cited Minneapolis for having done the most of all cities in the nation in the field of human relations. The mayor's council reported in 1952 that the problem of lack of appointment of Jewish physicians to hospital staffs had been eliminated. (Unmentioned in the report is the fact that the opening of Mt. Sinai Hospital in 1948 created a place where many Jewish physicians and other health professionals could practice.) Frank W. Fager, executive secretary of the mayor's council, said in 1952: "A number of years ago employers wouldn't even talk about changing their policies. There's a far different climate now. Business leaders who in 1946 wouldn't support the FEPC now are working actively in the field. The chamber of commerce is studying a program of education for top management in employing on merit alone."<sup>6</sup>

MINNEAPOLIS was a declining commercial center during the period from 1920 to 1950. Jews had been relative latecomers to the city, not arriving in large numbers until the turn of the century. Although other ethnic groups, including Scandinavians, Germans, and Irish, generally were not part of the economic or social elite, they were not denied job opportunities the way Jews were. By the end of the 1920s, Minneapolis Jews were restricted in their economic, social, and civic activities and lived, worked, and socialized among themselves.

In the 1930s the Jewish press began reporting job discrimination nationally. Jewish leaders attempted to call attention to the problem, and magazine articles and books written at the time also testify to its existence. Documentation of anti-Semitism relating to jobs and employment in Minnesota can be found in oral history testimonies of Jews describing Minneapolis during the Great Depression and in numerous places in the

papers and records of Jewish groups, now in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. However, no scientific surveys were taken during the period to measure or document employment discrimination, nor did the 1936 Jewish community census ask any questions about economic status.

The hard fact remained that during the 1930s and into the 1940s, it was very difficult for Jews to get jobs in Minneapolis. The Jewish Free Employment Bureau (Jewish Employment Service), which was expanded in 1931 to fight job discrimination, could only place a fraction of its applicants over the course of the decade, but the work it did manage to accomplish was significant. Besides finding jobs for people who badly needed them, the employment bureau was a visible, active presence working to overcome stereotypes and to promote tolerance.

The war and postwar attitudes concerning racial and religious discrimination, brought about by the common national effort to defeat totalitarian and racist governments abroad, contributed to a change of attitude in Minneapolis as well. Things did not change overnight, but by the beginning of the 1950s attitudes about Jews and employment that had been matter-of-factly accepted in Minneapolis were becoming openly unacceptable. The fact that Jews of Minneapolis occupy a spectrum of occupational positions from corporate executive to secretary to postal clerk in the economy of the 1990s and the fact that young Jews in Minneapolis today would find the story told here as remote from their own experience as the Great Depression itself is a testament to that change.

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<sup>6</sup>*Minneapolis Tribune*, May 4, 1952, Upper Midwest sec., p. 12.

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