

Sites Associated With The Jewish Community of St. Joseph, MO

Introduction:

Eastern European Immigration to the U.S.

Taken from “The Eastern European Immigrant Community of St. Joseph, Missouri c. 1850-1950 <https://www.stjosephmo.gov/DocumentCenter/View/14841/Eastern-European-Immigrant-Community-of-St-Joseph-MO-PDF?bidId=>

This tour traces the paths of the Jewish community in St. Joseph, Missouri in the period between c. 1850 and c. 1950. St. Joseph’s Jewish community developed as a part of a larger pattern of immigration to the United States from Eastern Europe, including Germany. This was the period when large numbers of people were leaving Eastern Europe and heading to parts of the world where they believed that they would be more free; free to practice their religion and free to make a living. Between 1846 and 1940, 55 to 58 million Europeans moved to North and South America. The migration hit its peak between 1900 and 1909 with Austria-Hungary providing the largest number of immigrants. In 1907 more than 300,000 people from Austria-Hungary came to the United States, the largest number of immigrants from a single country in one year. In the 1850s upwards of 20,000 Bohemians were given passports to emigrate from Austria. Many more left illegally, meaning the true number was likely closer to 64,000. Between 1880 and 1910, 2.7 million people left Russia; the vast majority of which were Jews who spoke either Polish or German.¹ Leopold Caro, a Polish-Jewish lawyer described the exodus: “Entire regiments left in 1907 in order to earn money in America. Many houses stood empty, and in many others only old women and small children remained behind. In some villages the entire young generation left home. . . Everyone believed that America was the Promised Land, a true paradise.”²

Beginning in the mid-19th century, many governments in Eastern Europe began policies that made life dangerous for ethnic minorities including those of the Jewish faith. Historian Tara Zahra writes, “Eastern Europe’s Jews were the most tragic victims of a growing conviction that emigration could solve the perceived ‘problem’ of national, linguistic, and religious diversity. Well before the Nazi conquest of the East, a broad consensus had developed – among Western diplomats, Zionists, humanitarian organizations, and East European officials, as well as ordinary Jews desperate for a better life – that the ‘solution’ to the so-called ‘Jewish problem’ would entail the mass emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe.”³ In the 1890s, government officials in Russia encouraged Jewish people to emigrate, while simultaneously striving to prevent more

¹ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 4, 11, & 17.

² Quoted in Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 26.

³ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 18.

ethnically “desirable” citizens from leaving.⁴ Beginning in the 1880s, waves of violent anti-Semitism washed across Eastern Europe; these included the 1881-82 pogroms in Russia; the emergence of the openly anti-Jewish Christian Social Party in Austria; and a rash of blood libel trials. The promulgation of the so-called “May Laws,” a series of anti-Semitic edicts in 1881 made life in Eastern Europe untenable for many Jewish people. These laws concentrated Jewish communities into the “pale of settlement” and significantly reduced their civil and economic rights. Many Jewish people decided the life in Eastern Europe was too dangerous and that the time had come to make new lives in the United States.⁵ The period after World War I was associated with violent policies of ethnic cleansing, including the murder and deportation of Jewish people and the mass exodus (both voluntary and compulsory) of ethnic Jews. This “can be traced to the Wilsonian moment after World War I, when democratic governments began to selectively open and close the migration tap in order to mold nationally homogenous populations.”⁶ Certainly this escalated after the rise of Hitler and his occupation of the Sudetenland in 1938.

According to Laura Levitt, “The vast majority of Eastern European Jews who came to this country at the turn of the last century were the least educated, the poorest, and the most desperate. . . And so it was that Eastern European Jewish immigrants brought with them a mixture of pride, shame, nostalgia, and joy in the Yiddish culture and politics they left behind.”⁷ These immigrants were for all intents and purposes, refugees. Unlike other Eastern European immigrants they did not arrive in the United States as individuals seeking to work for a few years and then return to their home village with money in their pocket – a pattern that encouraged men to leave their families in the home country. Instead, Jewish immigrants came as families who were fleeing violent persecution and seeking freedom from oppression.⁸ “To East European Jews, ‘America signifies distance. America signifies freedom,’ wrote the Austrian-Jewish writer Joseph Roth in 1927.”⁹ For many, modernity signified an escape from the restrictions of the more stringent religious life they led in their home countries.¹⁰

The period from 1850 to 1920 is often referred to as the age of Mass Migration from Europe. “With revolutions in shipping technology and a growing reliance on a network of migrant finance, migration costs declined in the mid-19th century, ushering in a sustained Age of

⁴ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 30.

⁵ Steven J. Gold, “‘The Jazz Singer’ to ‘What a Country!’ a Comparison of Jewish Migration to the United States, 1880-1930 and 1965-1998,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:3 (Spring 1999): 116; Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 72

⁶ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 17.

⁷ Laura Levitt, “Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism.” *American Quarterly* 59:3 (Sept. 2007): 816.

⁸ Steven J. Gold, “‘The Jazz Singer’ to ‘What a Country!’ a Comparison of Jewish Migration to the United States, 1880-1930 and 1965-1998,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:3 (Spring 1999): 117-18.

⁹ Joseph Roth, *The Wandering Jews*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York, 2001), 93, 95 quoted in Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 8.

¹⁰ Laura Levitt, “Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism.” *American Quarterly* 59:3 (Sept. 2007): 815.

Mass Migration from Europe.”¹¹ Before the age of the steamship, emigrating from Eastern Europe was expensive and lengthy, averaging between 30 and 40 days. But by 1890, the trip had become easier and more affordable.¹² This shift from sail to steam, beginning in the mid-19th century, and the corresponding decline in the cost and the time it took to cross the Atlantic led to the rise of mass migration.¹³

Migration from Eastern Europe was fueled by the seemingly endless demand for cheap, unskilled labor in the growing industrial cities of the United States. Many of the immigrants made their way to the industrial Midwest and found work in the packing houses. Austrian emigrants tended to settle in the Midwest and the Northeast, perhaps because there were already established Austrian communities in those areas.¹⁴

The period of Mass Migration from Eastern Europe came to an end in the period around 1920. Nativists in the United States were troubled by the influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, seeing them as racially inferior.¹⁵ The decline in immigration began with the imposition of a literacy test on those who wished to enter the United States in 1917. The final straw was the creation of harsh immigration quotas in 1921.¹⁶ Following the First World War, the United States enacted quota laws designed to specifically limit immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. The idea was to safeguard the “racial fitness” of the United States. The American Immigration Act of 1924, known as the Johnson-Reed Act, did result in the sharp decline of legal immigration to the United States from Eastern Europe.¹⁷ Anti-immigrant sentiment increased significantly with the onset of the Great Depression. Threatened American workers saw the immigrants as competition for scarce jobs.¹⁸

In 1892, Ellis Island was opened to facilitate a more rigorous screening of immigrants upon arrival. Starting the year before, the U.S. government had barred migrants who were seen to be ill, criminally inclined, immoral, or “likely to become a public charge.” The last phrase served as a catch-all: it tended to include nearly all unmarried women (unless they intended to work as domestics), pregnant women, and those women who were thought likely to become prostitutes. Following 1907, “poor physique” became the grounds for wholesale rejections. It was not necessary to be suffering from an actual medical condition to fall under this category,

¹¹ Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan, “Immigration in American Economic History,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 55:4 (Dec. 2017): 1311, 1313.

¹² Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 4.

¹³ Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan, “Immigration in American Economic History,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 55:4 (Dec. 2017): 1314.

¹⁴ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 5, 68.

¹⁵ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 9.

¹⁶ Laura Levitt, “Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism,” *American Quarterly* 59:3 (Sept. 2007): 817; Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan, “Immigration in American Economic History,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 55:4 (Dec. 2017): 1311, 1313

¹⁷ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 107.

¹⁸ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 136.

simply being thought to appear frail or underweight. This category tended to be applied most vigorously to Jewish people.¹⁹

In the first generation or so following immigration, Jewish immigrants tended to hold on to the customs of the mother country. They continued to eat the foods that they were familiar with.²⁰ In many cities, Jewish people from Russia created *landsmanschaften*, organizations combining the functions of a synagogue and a community center.²¹ In the early 20th century “established German Jews provided their Eastern European coethnics with organizations, activities, and jobs. At the same time, the Eastern Europeans also brought with them a strong tradition of communal organization and extensive involvement with social movements and political activism developed after their emancipation in Eastern Europe. Jews transplanted, modified, and invented a diverse array of associations, clubs, *landsmanschaften*, synagogues, and mutual benefit societies which made up the communal basis of Jewish-American life.”²² This retention of old patterns troubled many who shared the ethnic background of the immigrants, but who had been in the United States for a longer period and were more thoroughly assimilated. There arose organizations to help “Americanize” new arrivals.²³

The people who came to the United States from Eastern Europe did so to find a better life for themselves and their families. One of the first challenges that they faced was how to make a living. Many undertook commercial ventures; a great many first-generation immigrants sold second-hand goods or were “junk dealers.” Their children and grandchildren frequently inherited those businesses but altered them to more “respectable” endeavors, opening more traditional retail establishments such as department stores. Others found a niche providing for the nostalgia that many felt for the food they remembered from home. Neighborhood groceries and bakeries were important both as a means for immigrant families to make a living and for feeding that nostalgic need. For many families, it took multiple incomes to make a living thus women and children helped generate income.²⁴ Some families found that the “American Dream” worked and they were eventually quite financially successful.²⁵

The communities formed by the initial immigrants and their children often tended to be quite homogeneous and retained many customs from the home country. But as the first generation and their children died, these tight-knit communities began to disperse.²⁶ In the Jewish communities, the emphasis on education for their children of both genders facilitated this

¹⁹ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 40-41.

²⁰ Laura Levitt, “Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism.” *American Quarterly* 59:3 (Sept. 2007): 816.

²¹ Bruce A. Phillips, “Accounting for Jewish Secularism: Is a New Cultural Identity Emerging?” *Contemporary Jewry* 30:1 (June 2010): 66.

²² Steven J. Gold, “‘The Jazz Singer’ to ‘What a Country!’ a Comparison of Jewish Migration to the United States, 1880-1930 and 1965-1998,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:3 (Spring 1999): 129.

²³ Steven J. Gold, “‘The Jazz Singer’ to ‘What a Country!’ a Comparison of Jewish Migration to the United States, 1880-1930 and 1965-1998,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:3 (Spring 1999): 125.

²⁴ Steven J. Gold, “‘The Jazz Singer’ to ‘What a Country!’ a Comparison of Jewish Migration to the United States, 1880-1930 and 1965-1998,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:3 (Spring 1999): 118.

²⁵ Allan Mazur, “How Distinct are American Jews?” *Contemporary Jewry* 36:2 (July 2016): 234.

²⁶ Laura Levitt, “Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism.” *American Quarterly* 59:3 (Sept. 2007): 810.

assimilation. These children tended to stay in school through high school and very frequently both daughters and sons went to college.²⁷ Though this assimilation could be seen as a mark of success in their new country, there is – still – for many a sense of loss. As the ethnic neighborhoods diversified and people changed their habits, ethnic groceries, bakeries, and even synagogues closed. The sense of having a distinct community was lost.

²⁷ Steven J. Gold, “‘The Jazz Singer’ to ‘What a Country!’ a Comparison of Jewish Migration to the United States, 1880-1930 and 1965-1998,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:3 (Spring 1999): 119, 126-27.

The Jewish Community in St. Joseph

The Jewish community in St. Joseph divided according to place of origin – broadly those from the German areas of Europe and those from areas associated with imperial Russia. The Jewish community began in St. Joseph in the wake of the 1849. Very quickly they established the Jewish Burial Society and opened Adath Joseph Cemetery. The Adath Joseph congregation began holding services in 1856 in a hall on Felix Street. The congregation did not have a Rabbi, so M. Lehman served as lay leader. The following year they purchased the former Cumberland Presbyterian Church at 6th and Edmond and renovated it for their use. Unfortunately, it burned soon after and the congregation decided to build a synagogue on the Southeast corner of 6th Street and Jules. In 1910 they engaged the services of renowned St. Joseph architect E.J. Eckel and built an imposing structure at 17th and Felix.¹ The members of the Adath Joseph congregation were largely of German ethnicity and considered relatively liberal.

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe did not arrive in St. Joseph until the late 1880s and they tended to be more conservative than those from Germany. The 1888 and 1889 city directories state that the “Orthodox Jewish Church, Rev. Aaron Hurwitz, Pastor” was meeting at 209 Felix. In 1895 the Shaare Sholem congregation was meeting in a rental hall at 601 Angelique St.² In July 1899, they purchased a lot on which to build at 7th and Patee [725 S. 7th St.] streets. According to the *St. Joseph Herald*, “The congregation of the church is small, numbering only sixty-five members. . . Unlike the Christian and reformed Jewish church, the orthodox Jews have no sermons at their meetings. The services are simple, consisting of the reading of prayers. No rabbi is employed by the church, the different members serving at the gatherings every Saturday.”³

In 1894, the B’nai Yaakov congregation is first referred to by that name. At that time it was meeting at 209 Felix Street. In 1910, the congregation moved into the former Salem Lutheran Church at 1001 S. 12th Street⁴ where it remained until it built at 615 S. 10th St. in the heart of a largely Jewish neighborhood. The Congregation established their cemetery in 1918. In 1960 the two conservative congregations merged and met at Temple B’nai Yaakov on 10th St. which was then renamed Temple B’nai Sholem.⁵

The neighborhood around Temple Shaare Sholem at 725 S 7th Street and Temple B’nai Yaakov at 615 S. 10th Street was the heart of the Jewish community in the first half of the 20th century. This densely populated area was home to a large proportion of the city’s Jewish citizens – both those of German background (who tended to attend Temple Adath Joseph) and those from Eastern Europe. Like all such neighborhoods, each block had a mixture of commercial and residential structures, with neighborhood groceries on nearly every block.

In the midst of this bustling neighborhood sat a lovely Italianate brick home at 610 S. 10th Street, just across the street from Temple B’nai Yaakov. The house was one of the oldest in the city, having been built in 1853. In 1869 the property was purchased by the clothing merchant

¹ “Jewish Context,” unpublished notes in the Historic Preservation Office, Room 107, City Hall, St. Joseph, Mo.

² “Jewish Context,” unpublished notes in the Historic Preservation Office, Room 107, City Hall, St. Joseph, Mo.

³ “New Jewish Temple,” *St. Joseph Herald*, July 13, 1899, pg. 3.

⁴ Demolished in 2021.

⁵ In 2018, the congregation sold the building to Rubidoux Resident theater who have since opened the Ruby Theatre in the building.

David Siegal. David had been born in Berlin and had married Henrietta Hamburger and had three children. The Siegals were prosperous and devout members of the Adath Joseph congregation. David died in 1892, but his family continued to live and prosper at 610. In July 1900, David and Henrietta's daughter Eleanor (Lollie) married Nathan Block, a clothing retailer from a well-to-do German Jewish family. In 1916, Lollie died unexpectedly and as a memorial her family gifted the house she grew up in, 610 S. 10th, to the Federated Jewish Charities of St. Joseph to be used for educational and charitable purposes. It was to be known as the Lollie Siegal Block Memorial House (more commonly known as the Settlement House). The house was used as an educational center to teach new Jewish immigrants, primarily from Eastern Europe, the skills they needed be successful in their new country. It continued to fulfill this purpose until the mid-20th century, when the majority of St. Joseph's Jewish population began to leave the city⁶ and the property was sold in 1965.⁷

Until the mid-20th century, the Jewish community in St. Joseph – both conservative and reformed – was vibrant and growing. In 1919, approximately 3,300 Jewish people lived in the city. By 2018, that number had dropped to fewer than 100.⁸ The reasons for the decline are not clear, but Anti-Semitism may well have played a role. Anecdotal accounts indicate that Jewish girls were not invited to join the local sororities. In the late 1990s, serious negotiations began which eventually led to the merger of the Adath Joseph and B'nai Sholem congregations. Those negotiations were somewhat contentious as B'nai Sholem was more conservative in its practices than Adath Joseph and it was clear that one of the synagogues would have to close.

600 Block S. 10th St.

At the turn of the 20th century, the 600 block of S. 10th street was a thriving Jewish neighborhood, which is why the B'nai Yaakov congregation chose to build their synagogue here in 1924. As you walk down the sidewalks of this once bustling neighborhood it is possible to see the remnants of that era. The neighborhood is now dominated by the former synagogue (now home to Robidoux Resident Theater), which takes up the whole of the west side of the street; but in 1910 the block was entirely residential. Taking a large step backwards in time is a terrific way to get the feel for this neighborhood and the Jewish community that called it home. It would have had a very different feel and sound than it does today. Likely the primary language you would have heard was Russian and the residents were much more densely packed than is currently the case.

Taking a big step back in time to 1910 provides a rich insight into what the life of the immigrant community was like: Starting on the east side of the street:

602-608: Three of these four attached residences were occupied by Jewish families in 1910. On the corner in **602** lived the Agronsky family. Orlich (aged about 45 in 1910) and his wife Rebecca (aged 35) and their five children between the ages of 15 and 4 called this home. Both

⁶ Why the exodus occurred is a fascinating question that would be a fruitful topic for further research.

⁷ "Folk Art Houses," Historic St. Joseph Emporium, <https://historicsaintjosephemporium.com/folk-art-houses>

⁸ "A look at the changing Jewish landscape in St. Joseph," *The Kansas City Jewish Chronicle*, Sept. 6, 2018.

Orlich and Rebecca were born in Russia and had immigrated to the United States only five years earlier. Orlich worked as a butcher to support his family. Sharing the home were Harry and Lena Agron, Orlich's nephew and niece [They had shortened their last name in an attempt to Americanize it] who both worked as clerks in clothing stores. Next door in **604** lived Abraham and Gertrude Abgenman and their two very small children. Abraham and Gertrude had immigrated from Russia in 1906 and they were a bit younger than the Agronskys – Abraham was 35 in 1910 and his wife was 28. Abraham worked as a tailor. Rose Farrell and her son James lived in **606** – they were Irish Catholics; one wonders if they felt very different from their neighbors or if the experience of being immigrants was enough common ground. In **608** were Frank (aged 23) and Frieda (aged 23) Agron; again, both were Russian immigrants; Frank came to this country in 1905 while Frieda had come over in 1903. Frank was a machine operator. In order to supplement their income, they had Samuel Kahingsky boarding with them. He had immigrated from Russia in 1906 and was working as a shoemaker in a factory.

610: In 1910 this house (minus its distinctive decorations – see below in background and context to learn more) was home to the Siegel family. The Siegels were of German background, though they all had been born in the United States. In 1910 the head of the family was Henrietta, the widow of David, and she shared the house with her adult son Lewis and the family servant Katie Reck. The family made their living in the clothing business. The Siegels played an important role in the Jewish community.

620: The extended family of Ben (aged 24) and Sarah (aged 23) Zurosky lived in 620 in 1910. Like many of their neighbors, the family had come from Russia, immigrating in 1906. Ben worked as a clerk at handler Brothers Distilling while Sarah took care of their three children all aged three and under. Sharing the home was Ben's brother Dave (aged 21) who was a laborer in a shoe factory and Ben's nephew Max Medoff, a clerk in a furniture store.

Next door to the Zuroskys was the duplex at **624/626** (no longer standing). These two residences had rather a staggering number of people living in them. Meyer Dolginoff (aged 47) and his wife Louise Agronsky Dolginoff (aged 46) had their large family in **624**. Myer immigrated from Russia in 1904; in 1910 he was the proprietor of Silvar Ladies Fine Tailoring at 509 Francis Street. Louise came to the United States the year after her husband, bringing with her their seven children (four of whom lived with their parents in 624). Their eldest son Jake (aged 19) worked at the Johnston-Woodbury Hat Co. at 112-118 N. 4th Street. Sharing the home with Meyer and Louise were Louise's parents, Jake and Hoda Agronsky. They also had two boarders living with them, Ida Ruskin a Russian-born seamstress at the Wheeler & Motter Mercantile Company and Julius Seleznoff, a laborer in a packing house who had come from Russia just the year before.

On the other side of the common wall lived the Borofsky family at **626**. Hyman and Hannah were both born in Russia and had immigrated in 1891 and 1892. Hyman was a Rabbi. Their 21-year old daughter Jennie, who had immigrated with her mother, was working as a clerk. The younger four children, between the ages of 10 and 15 were all students.

In **628** another family named Zurosky lived (it is unclear if they are related to their neighbors). Nathan (aged 32) immigrated from Russia in 1905 and was working as a tinner for H. Ehrlich & Sons, and his wife Eva (aged 27) followed him the next year. They had two very small daughters. The 1911 City Directory lists an Anna Zurosky at this address as well, she was a seamstress for Meyer Dolginoff in his shop on Francis St.

South from 630 the rest of the block had non-Jewish residents in 1910. **630** was home to the Theisen family: Joseph was a German-born bartender; his wife Pheba and their three teen-aged children as well as Pheba's mother lived here. The family of George P. Swearingen, a streetcar conductor, lived at **632**. **634** housed the all-female blended household of Annie Schmidt and Meta Sharpe. Anna, who was born in Germany, was a widow whose only surviving child, also named Anna lived with her. The younger Anna was a clerk in an insurance office. Meta Sharpe immigrated from England and made her living as a music teacher. Her daughter Selena, a school teacher, shared the house as did another teacher, Mary E. Raines.

The east side of the street bears no resemblance to what it was in 1910; when the B'nai Yaakov synagogue was built, the residential structures were demolished. But in 1910, this side of the street was residential in nature. Crossing the street from the now empty corner where 632 and 634 stood and walking to the north:

The single-family brick residence at **631** was home of William A. Scott, a paper hanger for the Henry Voss Wall paper company, and Walter Lanham who worked as a clerk at the Union News and Railway Company.

The duplex at 625/623 had a lot of people living there. Isaac and Mamie Gordon lived at **625** with their six children and two servants. Both Isaac and Mamie, as well as their son Joseph, had been born in Russia. Isaac was the proprietor of Gordon & Rosen, a millinery store located at 325 Felix Street; Mamie and their daughter Gussie both worked as clerks in the store. The two oldest sons, Joseph and Meyer were both travelling salesmen. The two servants, Tina Seymoicek and Katie Ratch were recent German immigrants. In 1910, two employees of National Life and Accident Insurance were living in **623**. James T. Horn and John L. Stark were among the few residents of the block who were not part of the Russian Jewish community there.

The double house at 621/619 had some of the most colorful characters on the block. Samuel Weinberg, a 29-year-old clothing merchant lived at **621** with his wife Pauline's family, the Plotells. Samuel and Pauline had a small daughter, Calin. Pauline's mother Hannah Plotell and her brothers Samuel and Harry as well as her sister Bertha [Rositzky] and Bertha's husband Samuel Rositzky all shared the small brick dwelling. All of the adults except for Samuel Rositzky had been born in Russia and most had come to the United States in 1892. Samuel Plotell became known as a particularly aggressive bantam-weight boxer. Later the Plotell brothers became involved in corrupt politics and gambling with men they met on this block – members of the Gordon family. Members of the extended Rositzky family lived at **619**. Isaac Rositzky and his wife Minnie, along with their two small children shared the residence with Minnie's mother Pearl. Isaac and Pearl had been born in Russia. Isaac was in the wholesale dry goods business in 1910; he went on to be one of the most prominent figures in the retail clothing business in St. Joseph, operating the United Department Store (for further information see the entry under the Felix Street Businesses on this tour).

The single-family houses on large lots at **609 and 601** were not occupied by members of the Jewish community in 1910. The brick house at **609** was occupied by the widowed dressmaker, Hattie Wylie Gallup, whose father had been sheriff of Buchanan County. Another widow, Mary Zumwalt, lived at **601**.

Over the years, the 600 block of South 10th Street was home to a whole cast of colorful characters and witnessed a great deal of change. Much of this life centered around the evolving Jewish community that lived here until the mid-20th century. The most dramatic change came in 1924, when the residences on the east side of the street were razed and B'nai Yaakov Synagogue was built.

Some of the most striking incidents:

The structure as **602-604** is perhaps best remembered as the E.R. Sidenfaden Funeral Home in the 1920s. Much earlier, in 1889, **602** was home to Herman Rosenblatt, who is famous for forming the first band in St. Joseph. In 1900, **604** was a boarding house operated by Mary Garrett.

In 1895, Edward Farrell died at his home at **606**; he was one of St. Joseph's first carriage makers. Doris Kilgore and her seven-year-old son Larry were injured when a race car left the track and plowed into the bleachers during a race at the Beverly Speedway in June 1959. Both Kilgores, who lived at **608**, sustained significant injuries but recovered.

The folk-art houses at **610** and **620** are perhaps the most distinctive on the block. In 1916, Eleanor Siegel Block, whose mother and brother owned 610, died unexpectedly. In her honor the family donated the house to the Associated Jewish Charities to be used as a settlement home, where recent Jewish immigrants would receive assistance assimilating into the United States. . The Lollie Siegel House remained an important asset as the community around it began to change. Most of the Jewish community in St. Joseph had left the city by the mid-20th century and the expense of maintaining the property was more than the Federated Jewish Charities felt that they could bear; they sold the property in 1965. In 1969, local mason Bobby Bohot, who had purchased 610 also bought **620** and set about putting his distinctive mark on the properties. Because of Bohot's obsessiveness with the décor and storytelling of his embellishments, he should be considered an "outsider artist" – one who created art in its most raw and uninhibited form and was seen to exist outside the established culture and society. It is unclear if Bobby G. Bohot considered himself an artist; however, his works are not only well-known locally, but caught national attention as well.

On September 22, 1905 a burglar broke into Sam Toub's home at **624** in the night. While Sam and his wife were sleeping the gutsy intruder stole money from below Mrs. Toub's pillow and went through the pockets of Sam's trousers; the robber got away with \$83.60.

Like so many in the city, the young men of this neighborhood answered the call to serve their nation in both World Wars. In 1945, Private First Class Harry Vegder, who lived at **626** was killed while crossing the Ruhr River in Germany. His body was returned to St. Joseph in 1949 for burial at Shaare Sholem Cemetery.

George Silberman, **628 S. 10th**, worked as a travelling salesman for the clothing company Meyer & Meyers in the 1880s. His job took him throughout the Midwest.

In 1899, Justice Warburton issued a warrant permitting Sarah E. Beal to search the home of Mrs. Siebert at **630 S. 10th**. According to the Gazette, Mrs. Beal "had reason to believe that Mrs. Siebert was unlawfully detaining a trunk containing clothing, a watch, a diamond ring, and other valuable household ornaments." The search did not turn up Mrs. Beal's possessions.

In 1894, the owner of **632** advertised it for rent: "Six-room house; modern conveniences; newly papered and painted."

Mr. and Mrs. George Sprengle celebrated their golden wedding anniversary with a breakfast after mass at their home at **634**.

As you cross the street, all of the residences that were once here have been demolished to make way for Shaare Sholem synagogue (now the Ruby Theater). But before that happened, people lived rich lives in the houses.

A short-lived marriage proved quite profitable for Mattie M. Payne, **631 S. 10th**. In 1912, she received \$25,000 worth of property in Holt County as a result of a lawsuit against her former husband James B. Payne to whom she was married for a year in 1909. Prior to the wedding the couple signed a contract in which James agreed to give Mattie one-third of his property. Following the divorce, Mrs. Payne sued to recover the promised property and the court saw it her way.

In 1896, the City of St. Joseph passed a curfew ordinance mandating that all “youth” be off the streets by 9:00 p.m. The first people cited for violating the new ordinance were Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Gordon of **625**. The couple refused to pay the fine and insisted that the case go to court as a protest against what they saw as an unjust law.

In 1956 a fight broke out in the neighborhood; Elmer Justus, **623**, and Richard Brumback, **626**, were arrested “after a neighborhood altercation.”

In January 1904 Bertha Lynch and Anna Scotch were arrested for robbing the home of Maurice Mayer at **621**. The robbery and arrest were not particularly noteworthy, but the hair pulling fight that the prisoners indulged in while being held at the county jail garnered a fair amount of press attention.

The north part of the brick duplex at **619** was home to music in the 1920s. The violin virtuoso Sherman Kalis lived here with his family, including his mother Esther, before he left to teach at the New York Institute of the Violin in Wichita Falls, TX.

If there was music at 619, there was dancing at **609**. From 1900-1904, this was home to the Prinz family; the most famous of whom was the Hollywood choreographer LeRoy Prinz. It was LeRoy’s grandparents, Peter and Caroline and their children who lived on S. 10th Street. Their son Edward opened a famous dance studio in St. Joseph where he taught generations of young people.

In 1915, Charles Patterson, a carpenter living at **601** took his five year old son with him to the cellar and after giving the boy his watch, slashed his own throat.

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St. Joseph City Directories

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Adath Joseph Cemetery

3155 Beck Rd.

In 1848, St. Joseph began to grow rapidly as a jumping off point for those heading west to find gold and broader horizons. The influx of people created a diverse and rather cosmopolitan community in what had been little more than a backwater trading post. A relatively large community of Jewish immigrants from Germany arose. Before long they established the Jewish Burial Society which opened Adath Joseph Cemetery at 3155 Beck Road (the cemetery predated the synagogue by the same name). This cemetery served as the primary burial place for members of the German Jewish community of St. Joseph and so many of the most prosperous members of the St. Joseph Jewish community were buried here. It is currently the least used of the three Jewish cemeteries and is suffering from the effects of deferred maintenance.

Several of the people featured in the Felix Street Commercial Corridor and the 600 Block of S. 10th Street entries are buried at Adath Joseph Cemetery.

Among the notable burials here is that of Levi Rosenblatt, who was the first leader of Rosenblatt's Band, a brass and string band that was a fixture on the St. Joseph music scene for years. The Rosenblatt family lived in several homes in the 600 block of S. 10th Street. Others who lived on S. 10th Street and who are buried here include George Silberman and the Block Family. Those associated with the Felix Street Commercial Corridor whose graves can be found here are Aaron J. Strauss, Samuel Kahn, and William Lehman.

Other notable burials include the Westheimer family who were important figures in the wholesale liquor business in St. Joseph. Several of their impressive homes are still standing including the Whiskey Mansion Inn at 1723 Francis;

Sources:

"Rosenblatt's Band," St. Joseph Gazette, March 30, 1872.













Temple Adath Joseph

102 N. 17th St.

The earliest Jewish settlers to St. Joseph came primarily from the German areas of Europe. Arriving in about 1849, nearly immediately they established the Adath Joseph congregation. Initially the small congregation comprised of between 15 to 20 men and their families held its services in a hall on Felix Street. This earliest group did not have a Rabbi, so M. Lehman served as lay leader. In 1857 the group purchased the former Cumberland Presbyterian Church at 6th and Edmond Streets and renovated it for their use. Unfortunately, that structure burned not long after. One of the congregation, Mr. Harburger, rescued the scrolls. The congregation then built on the southeast corner of 6th and Jules, dedicating the new synagogue in the fall of 1868. The size of the congregation reflected the growth of the community: forty-two men and their families worshipped there. It was at this time that a division in the Jewish community of St. Joseph began to emerge; Adath Joseph was becoming increasingly reformed in character (more liberal) while the congregation at B’Nai Yakov (comprised largely of immigrants from imperial Russia) remained resolutely orthodox (more conservative).

The Adath Joseph congregation continued to thrive economically prompting them to engage the services of renowned St. Joseph architect Rudolph Meier and commission him to design an imposing synagogue at 102 N. 17th St., Temple Adath Joseph. Meier was given a substantial budget (\$32,000) and did not fail in his commission to create an imposing structure.

The Temple was dedicated in September 1910 with a week of elaborate ceremony. Prominent Rabbis from across the country participated. The Torah scrolls were installed and the perpetual light kindled.

In 1923, the annex was built to serve as a social center. The substantial structure contained a banquet room, parlors, a kitchen, and a gymnasium. The architect for the annex was Eugene Meier, the younger brother of Rudolph Meier who designed the Temple.

Following World War Two, the Jewish population of St. Joseph declined sharply as did the congregation of Temple Adath Joseph. By the mid-2010s it was clear that there were not enough active members to sustain both Adath Joseph and the Conservative synagogue, B’Nai Sholem and the difficult decision was made to merge. Since the merger, services have been held at Adath Joseph while B’Nai Sholem was closed and eventually sold.

The members of the Adath Joseph congregation were largely of German ethnicity and considered relatively liberal. For much of its history, its congregants were buried at the Adath Joseph Cemetery (site on tour).

Rabbis for the Adath Joseph Congregation:

- M. Kaufman, earliest days until 1875
- S. Gerstman, 1875-1879
- Isaac Schwab, (born in 1841) 1879-1906. Rabbi Schwab, born in Bavaria, was known as a great scholar. In 1906, the congregation did not re-elect him to his post, prompting him to sell most of his property in St. Joseph and move to Chicago to take up a career in religious journalism. When he retired the

congregation awarded him a pension of \$1,000 (per year). He died soon after in Chicago.

- Louis Bernstein, (1882-1921). 1906-1921. Born in New Albany, Indiana to a Russian father and a German Mother. During the tenure of Rabbi Bernstein, the congregation grew substantially and the Temple was constructed. Bernstein played a prominent part in the civic life of St. Joseph, serving on the board of the Associated Charities and on the Public Library Board. He left in 1921 to take over a congregation in Baltimore, MD.
- Gary August, 1921-1926. Rabbi August came to St. Joseph from a post in Joplin, MO. It was during his time that the annex was constructed. In 1926, he moved to Gary, ID.
- Myron M. Myer, (1896-1974) 1927- 1968. Rabbi Myer, born in Dallas and educated at the University of Cincinnati and the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, came to St. Joseph from Alexandria, LA. .Rabbi Meyer was a prominent voice in St. Joseph's religious, educational, and cultural life. He had been a director of the St. Joseph symphony society. He was professor emeritus at Missouri Western State College at the time of his death, teaching philosophy and comparative religion.
- John Rosenblatt, 1968-
- Stephen A. Arnold, 1974
- Wolfgang Hamburger, 1983
- Jeffrey Glickman, 1989-1995
- Matt Friedman, 1997 - 1999

Rabbis after this point were part-time and served one-year terms.

- Lynn Koshner, 1999-2000
- Eileen Kollins, 2003
- Debbie Stiel, 2005
- Amy Bigman, 2006
- Audrey Korotkin

Among the prominent congregants were David Siegal (link to the S. 10th); the Westheimers

The Sept. 16, 1910 *News-Press* described the Temple: “The new church, of brick and stone, is of Greek design. Rudolph Meier was the architect. The interior woodwork is mahogany and the assembly room is one of the handsomest in the city. Illumination is by five chandeliers wrought in the familiar interlaced triangle design, by side lamps in the style of Jewish Sabbath lights, and by ten large stained glass windows, with smaller windows overhead. A novel plan has been followed in these. Each of the small windows bears a symbol, while the larger window below bears an appropriate inscription. Thus, the representation of a Sabbath light, emblematic of the

home, and, accordingly, love, has below it the inscription, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'

"The church contains a balcony, organ loft, rabbi's study, clubrooms and classrooms for the Sunday school. The building and property represent an investment of \$50,000.

"The organ is declared to be one of the best in St. Joseph. It was built by M.P. Moeller of Hagerstown, Md."

Above the entrance to the Temple is inscribed, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."

Annex: Opened in 1923. Described by the News-Press on Feb. 17, 1923: "Construction is of buff brick, with cut stone trimmings, the classic style of architecture and material conforming to that of the church proper, except that the annex style conveys more the impression of a social center. At either side of the entrance is a bronze lamp standard, and overhead a copper marquis.

"The entrance vestibule is of tile and marble. Radiators are concealed. The reception room has a coat room and stairway leading to the women's reception and rest rooms. The general reception room is connected with the banquet hall by French doors. The same kind of doors form a connection between the women's reception room and the banquet hall balcony.

"The beauty center of the annex is the banquet hall. It is finished in ivory enamel, with light fixtures carrying out the tone of old gold and ivory. The chairs are finished in gold. The overdrapes and stage curtain are of silk rose velour, with gold fringe. The windows are of the casement type, with divided lights to correspond to the French doors. The windows on the south wall, which forms a dividing line between the annex and the church, are constructed of mirrors to correspond to the outside windows on the north side.

"The banquet hall is commodious, with dimensions 60x40 feet and 18-foot ceiling. Several hundred may be accommodated at dinners. The lovely room also is designed to be used for teas, receptions, musicales, plays, and social gatherings of various sorts. At the west end is a stage with the velour curtains, stage scenery, and footlights. Beneath the stage is storage space for chairs and tables."

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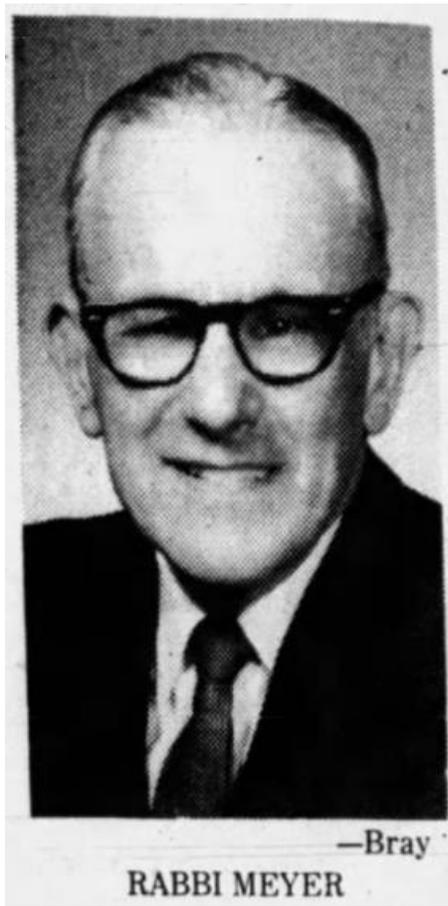
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Image from St. Joseph News Press, Feb. 26, 1906, pg. 1



—Bray
RABBI MEYER





Temple B'nai Yaakov/B'nai Sholem

1202 Lafayette St., 615 S. 10th St.

The congregation at B'nai Yaakov was comprised largely of people with Eastern European, especially Russian, backgrounds. These immigrants and their families brought a more conservative approach to Judaism with them when they came to St. Joseph. This was in contrast to the more liberal, reformed congregation at Temple Adath Joseph where most of the congregants were of German background.

In 1894, the B'nai Yaakov congregation is first referred to by that name. At that time it was meeting at 209 Felix Street. In 1910, the congregation moved into the former Salem Lutheran Church at 1202 Lafayette Street³⁶ where it remained until 1924 when the new synagogue at 615 S. 10th St. opened. B'Nai Yaakov was in the heart of a largely Jewish neighborhood. The *St. Joseph Gazette* described the new synagogue: "The exterior structure is of buff brick of Grecian style architecture. The interior will be finished in plain designs with appropriate furnishings to correspond. The auditorium is 45 feet wide and 85 feet long and will have an overhanging gallery where there will be a rest room for women and a smoking room for men. There will be a banquet room in the basement where social functions may be held." In 1924, B'nai Yaakov's congregation numbered more than 120 and was growing rapidly.

Following World War Two, the Jewish population of St. Joseph declined sharply and it became clear that there was not a need for two conservative synagogues. In 1960 the two conservative congregations, B'nai Yaakov and Shaare Sholem, merged and met at Temple B'nai Yaakov on 10th St. which was then renamed Temple B'nai Sholem.³⁷

By the mid-2010s it was clear that there were not enough active members to sustain both B'Nai Sholem and the reformed congregation at Adath Joseph. The difficult decision was made to merge. Since the merger, services have been held at Adath Joseph while B'Nai Sholem was closed and eventually sold.

Today it is no longer home to its congregation but is an example of successful adaptive reuse. In 2018, the structure was purchased by Robidoux Resident Theatre and has been repurposed as The Ruby Theatre. It now houses RRT's educational facilities and is home to an intimate dinner theater venue.

³⁶ Demolished in 2021.

³⁷ In 2018, the congregation sold the building to Robidoux Resident theater who have since opened the Ruby Theatre in the building.

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Additional Information:

<https://rrtstjoe.org/>



1202 Lafayette 2019, former site of B’nai Yaakov Congregation



1202 Lafayette 2020





Cantor Jack Spector of Temple B'nai Sholem offers an ancient Hebrew chant as the curtains of the Holy Ark are opened to expose the Torah, the five books of Moses that are hand written in Hebrew on scrolls of goat skin. The scrolls are taken out to be read from at each Sabbath service.

St. Joseph *News Press*, Feb. 10, 1974

B’Nai Yaakov Cemetery

5740 Rochester Rd.

Of the three Jewish Cemeteries in St. Joseph, B’Nai Yaakov is by far the youngest. It is associated with the conservative synagogue of that name and like that synagogue, its name officially changed to B’Nai Sholem when Shaare Sholem and B’Nai Yaakov synagogues merged. The cemetery is quite small, with approximately 300 graves. It is still active, though the number of internments is quite small in recent years.

Burials at B’Nai Yaakov Cemetery on Rochester Rd. appear to have begun in the early 1920s (there are about 5 graves with death dates that pre-date 1920, but those appear to have been moved from elsewhere). The death certificates for some who were buried here in 1921/22 give the place of burial as “New Jewish Cemetery.”

Many of the families who are found here were Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. Among the most interesting of those is the Frumhoff family. Rabbi Jossua Frumhoff (1850-Jan. 8, 1922) died as a result of his injuries when a porch he was standing during a funeral service collapsed. The funeral was for Elizabeth Zidell, who had died of stomach cancer, and was buried at the new cemetery in December 1921. Shortly after she was followed by Rabbi Frumhoff. The Frumhoff family immigrated to the United States in 1905 and 1906 and soon took up residence in St. Joseph. The oldest son, Isadore (a photographer), led the way and was soon followed by his parents, five sisters, and two brothers. The elder Frumhoffs were active in the conservative Jewish community and the children found spouses here.

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marlouch Left to right: Vera Frumhoff Franzel, Rose Frumhoff Lectchman, Lazar Lectchman, Isadore Lectchman, Mary Shahnin Frumhoff, Rabbi Joshua Frumhoff, Charlie Frumhoff, Isadore Frumhoff, Rose Davis Frumhoff, Jake Rich, Jenny Frumhoff Rich

Those in this picture buried at B’Nai Yaakov:
Mary Shahnin Frumhoff; Rabbi Joshua Frumhoff; Jake Rich; Jenny Frumhoff Rich





Felix Street Commercial Corridor

For well over a century, the 500 to 700 blocks of Felix Street have been a center of commercial activity in St. Joseph. Today, it is a center for the revitalized historic downtown district. From the late 19th to the mid-20th century, many of the businesses on this street were owned by members of the Jewish community. Beginning on the southwest corner of Felix and S. 8th Street:

722-720 – during the 1950s, this was home to Millenary Retailers, the former Lowenberg and Bergman Millinery Co. By the 1950s, there were not many millenary stores remaining; though they had been a staple along Felix St. through the first quarter of the 20th century. The name change appears to have been a last-ditch effort to save the business which went bankrupt in 1954.

718 – (sometimes referred to as **121 S. 8th St.**) In 1909, Bernhard Newburger moved his millinery enterprise from 711 to this site. Bernhard immigrated to the United States in 1857. He married Carrie in 1889. He later moved to 701-703 Edmond St. where he employed 100 women. He died in Lexington, KY in 1927.

The Leibowitzs were a prominent commercial family in St. Joseph. They are best known for their clothing store (which is still in operation at the East Hills Mall). In the 1930s, one branch of the family operated a jewelry store at this location. The proprietor was Abe Leibowitz. He was born in Austria

714 – In 1900 Aaron J. Straus had his clothing store here. Aaron was born in St. Louis, but spent the majority of his life in St. Joseph. He died in 1941 and is buried at Adath Joseph Cemetery.

708 – If one family deserved the title “Kings of Felix St.” it would be the Rositzkys. In 1900 Jacob Rositzky operated a dry goods and notions store at this address. Jacob was a Russian immigrant; he came to the United States at the age of 15 in 1897. He went bankrupt in 1916 and died at his home in 1921 of “general paralysis of the insane.” He is buried at Shaare Sholem Cemetery.

702 – From 1961, this was the final location of Joe Optican’s Jewelry Co. Beginning in the 1930s, it had occupied several sites across the street (see below for more information). In 1965, they added a location at East Hills Mall. Joseph Optican was a diamond salesman from New York, who relocated to St. Joseph when he married Lillian Rosenthal. Joe Optican died in 1958 and his wife Lillian took over the company. When she died in 1971, their son Dick took the reigns (Joe and Lillian are buried at Shaare Sholem). Optican’s closed in 1991.

606-608 – Carl Lohr operated a saloon here, “Lohr’s Place” in around the turn of the 20th century. The *Gazette* described it in 1897: “Mr. Lohr in short conducts one of the best and most pleasant resorts in St. Joseph. He makes a specialty of fine goods and his wines and liquors are the best which money can purchase. When it comes to beer he is famed from one part of the city to the other, for his beer is always just right. He only dispenses the famous Schlitz beer, and it is always in prime condition. He handles the best of imported and domestic cigars and no one who once patronizes him fails to return a second time. In addition, he serves the finest lunch in the city and in a style to please the most fastidious. One reason that his place is so popular is that nothing but the best of everything is served and the service and treatment is of the class that gentlemen appreciate.” Lohr committed suicide in 1911 by drinking carbolic acid (though the press stated that he died of apoplexy). He is buried in Kansas City.

604 – Many of the Jewish community undertook businesses associated with the clothing industry. From the late 1880s to the 1890s, Harry Cohn had his tailor shop here until he moved to 708 Edmond in 1895. Cohn was naturalized at the Buchanan County Courthouse in 1888. In 1910, an article appeared in the News-Press detailing the search by Cohn’s brother-in-law (who lived in New York City) for Cohn.

600-602 – United Department Store leased this building that had previously been the Townsend Ueberrhein Clothing Company in 1932. Isaac Rositzky was president of the new company that was a staple for grand shopping in St. Joseph for 56 years, closing in 1987. The business was a family affair, Isaac’s son Simon was Vice-President when it opened and took over leadership when his father died in 1948 and continued in that role until the closing of the store. Simon was a much beloved figure in the city for his civic engagement and philanthropy. He died in 1999. Located in the United Department Store was the optometry practice of Dr. Jacob Saferstein. Nate and Adele Saferstein operated the jewelry counter in the store.

522- Isaac and Lena Lowenberg operated a fairly nomadic millinery enterprise: between 1890 and 1921 they were located here (1921), 418 Felix (1890), 718 Francis, and in 503-505 Felix. Isaac immigrated to the United States in 1876. Settling first in New York where he married, in 1880 he and his wife moved to St. Joseph. He died in 1924.

502—Einbender’s was one of the grand clothing stores that graced downtown. The store was founded by A.J. (Abraham) Einbender and his wife Sylvia. They began their retail career with a grocery store after J.J. returned from the First World War. In order to increase business Sylvia suggested that they add dresses to the inventory. It was not until after their store at 8th and Locust burned in 1957 that the store moved to this location. They acquired the Orpheum Theater and razed it in order to provide parking. They put the metal cladding on the outside of the building in order to give it a more modern appearance. A.J. died unexpectedly in 1959, never living to see the grand reopening in this location. In 1988, Einbender’s closed its doors.

Cross Felix Street

503 – In 1900 this was one of the sites of the Lowenberg Millinery enterprise (see 522 for more information)

513 – In 1909 Samuel Kahn sold hats here. Kahn was born in St. Joseph in 1871 (his father was from Germany and his mother from Baltimore). He died in 1934 and is buried at Adath Joseph. While here, Kahn became embroiled in a nasty dispute over the erection of a “bridge” over the sidewalk on the northwest corner of 6th and Felix where the Block Brothers were building their store (521-525).

515-517 – From 1895 until the 1920s, this was the site of Lehman Brothers Dry Goods store. The brothers were William, Julius, and Maurice Lehman who came to St. Joseph in 1898; William was born in Memphis but educated in Germany before initially going into business in New York. William died in 1905 and is buried at Adath Joseph. After William’s death, the business continued under the leadership of Maurice who eventually sold out in 1925.

521-525 – Block Building. Built in 1909 to house the large Block Brothers Clothing Store. The construction of this structure caused a bit of a sensation as it was of steel and advertised as being fireproof. The Block Brothers were Harry, Ellsworth, Samuel, and Nathan. The Blocks came to

St. Joseph in 1890 and the father of the family, Jacob, purchased a clothing store on the northwest corner of 5th and Felix and changed the name to Block Brothers. Samuel and Nathan eventually left the business and it was carried on by Harry and Ellsworth. The Block Brothers continued at this site until 1932 when it was taken over by the Plymouth Clothing Co. Ellsworth died in 1933; Harry died in 1953. The family is buried in the Block Mausoleum at Adath Joseph. **701-711** is now Coleman Hawkins/Felix St. Park. In 1902 F.W. Woolworth Co. purchased a small building on the northeast corner of 7th and Felix (it was located at the Felix St. entrance for the Y.W.C.A. building). In 1904, Woolworth's agreed to erect a building on the site 40 feet wide and 118 feet deep. In 1907 they expanded to a frontage of approximately 60 feet and the Pennant cafeteria was opened on the second floor.

709 – In the early 1930s this was home to Joe Optican Jewelers. They opened their jewelry store here in 1929, but business increased so much that they relocated to 721 Felix. Business continued to boom and they moved again to 725 Felix and in 1961 they opened their final downtown location at 702 (see 702 above for more information).

711 – In 1909 this storefront was occupied by Bernhard Newburger's millinery shop before he moved to 718 Felix that year.

715 – In 1884, this was the location of Harry Cohen's tailor shop (see 604 above for more information).

725—This was one of the locations of Joe Optican's Jewelry Co. (see 702 and 709 above for more information).

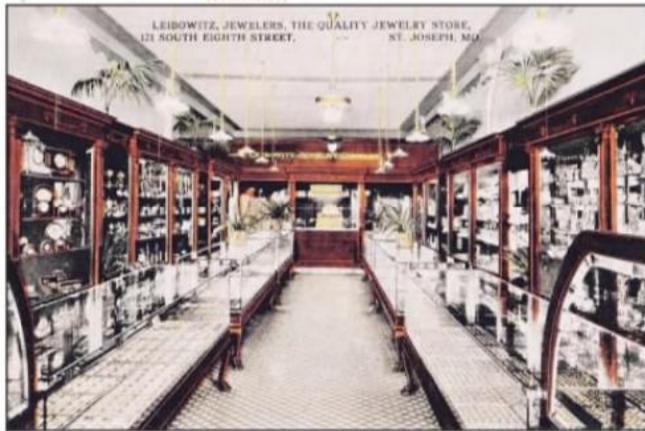
The Felix Street corridor has been a vibrant commercial hub for more than a century. Like much of the rest of downtown, the Urban Renewal program of the 1970s took a terrible toll on the area and escalated the abandonment of much of downtown. Poor design choices, such as the pedestrian mall built in the late 1970s simply made the situation worse. Within three years of its construction it was already being seen as a mistake. In recent years, the area is undergoing a real renaissance and it serves as the center for a revitalized downtown with many interesting shops and restaurants/bars.

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Images:

St. Joseph News Press, Jan. 22, 2018



Postcard courtesy of the St. Joseph Historical Society

By MARSHALL WHITE | News-Press Now

The Leibowitz name has long been associated with St. Joseph. In the first decade of the 20th century, Samuel Leibowitz was a pawnbroker with a shop on Edmond Street. By 1915, the Leibowitz family also had a clothing and jewelry store. Abe, Jacob and Joseph all were involved in the family businesses on Edmond Street and South Ninth Street. By the time of the "Roaring Twenties" Leibowitz Jewelry was located at 121 S. Eighth St. between Felix and Edmond streets. The store was south of the Hirsch Brothers Department Store. It was a great place for a growing business. The jewelry store featured a wide selection of quality pocket watches and clocks as well as a variety of silver and gold jewelry items. Today, the Leibowitz name is associated with Leibowitz Menswear at the East Hills Shopping Center.

St. Joseph Gazette, June 27, 1886



St. Joseph News Press, Sept. 21, 1933.











Shaare Sholem Cemetery

Arlington Rd.

In the late 1880s St. Joseph had a large influx of Jewish immigrants from Russia who were fleeing the anti-Semitic violence that was washing across Eastern Europe at that time. This conservative community quickly founded Shaare Sholem temple, and in the 1890s they established the Shaare Sholem cemetery. In 1919, the congregation purchased an additional tract of land with plans to expand the size of the cemetery; however, neighboring residents objected to the expansion and the debate became quite heated. In 1949, architect Eugene Meier released the sketches for the chapel which was dedicated as the David Friedman Chapel in 1963. This community flourished and grew in St. Joseph for several decades and as one walks through the well-kept grounds you see many familiar names on the stones. Though most of the members of St. Joseph's once large Jewish community have left the city, some come back in death and many are buried at Shaare Sholem.

Many of the individuals associated with the Felix Street Commercial Corridor and the 600 Block of S. 10th Street entries are buried at Shaare Sholem. Those who had businesses on Felix Street are Abe Leibowitz, Jacob Rositzky, Jacob Saferstein, Abraham and Sylvia Einbender, and Joseph and Lillian Optican. The neighbors on S. 10th Street who have graves here are Esther Kalis, the Dolginoff family, the Gordon family, the Borofsky family, and Harry Vegder.

Others of note who are buried here include Rabbi N. Braude and Rabbi H.D. Borofsky.

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Shaare Sholem Synagogue

When Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe began to arrive in St. Joseph in the 1880s they found a thriving Jewish community whose roots went back to Germany. From the beginning, the world-view of the two communities clashed. The Eastern European immigrants, primarily from Russia, tended to be more conservative and less economically successful than those from Germany. This difference prompted those with more conservative views to form their own congregation – Shaare Sholem.

The 1888 and 1889 city directories state that the “Orthodox Jewish Church, Rev. Aaron Hurwitz, Pastor” was meeting at 209 Felix. In 1895 the Shaare Sholem congregation was meeting in a rental hall at 601 Angelique St. In July 1899, they purchased a lot on which to build at 7th and Patee [725 S. 7th St.] streets. According to the *St. Joseph Herald*, “The congregation of the church is small, numbering only sixty-five members. . . Unlike the Christian and reformed Jewish church, the orthodox Jews have no sermons at their meetings. The services are simple, consisting of the reading of prayers. No rabbi is employed by the church, the different members serving at the gatherings every Saturday.” In 1915 the congregation hired a rabbi – M.L. Broude, a recent Polish (when it was under the control of Russia) immigrant. Rabbi Broude was known for his intellectualism. Just before his death in 1929, the congregation conducted a very public squabble over who would lead the synagogue. Some of the congregation supported Broude while others supported Rabbi Baruch Lebovitz who arrived from Laredo, TX to take the pulpit. Those who supported Lebovitz argued that Broude was too old to be an effective leader. Following Rabbi Broude’s death in 1929 (he is buried at Shaare Sholem cemetery), leadership of the congregation passed to Rabbi Iser Levine. The Levine family came to the United States from Lithuania in 1929, settling first in Chicago before coming to St. Joseph in March 1930. He served the congregation until his death of heart failure and cancer in 1945. The congregation and its leaders were active in the civic affairs of the city, playing important roles in the war efforts and providing support to the poor. However, the congregation did not always get along with its neighbors. In 1930, several members of Shaare Sholem Synagogue filed a petition with the police asking them to close several “notorious bawdy houses” that were operating in the neighborhood.

In 1950, Shaare Sholem began serious discussions with B’nai Yaakov Temple concerning the possible merger of the two congregations. Those initial talks did not come to fruition and during the 1950s, Shaare Sholem contemplated replacing their old temple with a new structure. In 1960, the issue was opened again and this time the two congregations did merge. The decision was that the combined congregation would meet at B’nai Yaakov on S. 10th Street; they renamed that synagogue B’nai Sholem. Crouch Brothers Truck Lines purchased the building that had housed Shaare Sholem Temple. It was demolished in 1961 and now there is only an empty lot across from a metal commercial structure where this once vibrant congregation met and worshipped.

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Images:



