

*Constellations of
Atlantic Jewish History,
1555–1890*

The Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of
Early American Judaica



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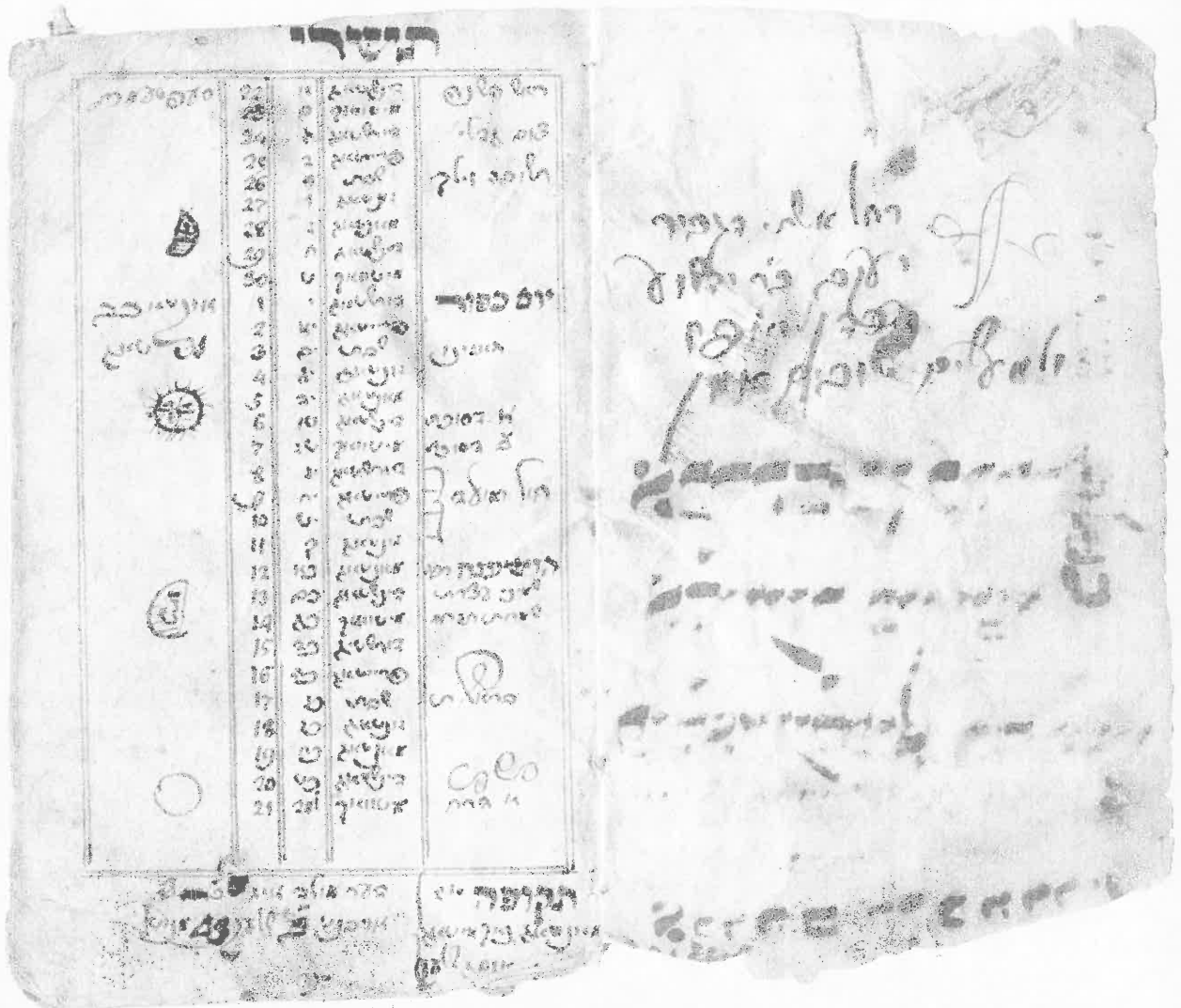


Figure 3.1: Abraham ben Eliezer Ka'ts [Kohen Tsedek], calendar (*lu'ah*), Philadelphia and Lancaster, PA, September 1778–August 1779, in Hebrew and Yiddish—Table VIII depicted.

Marking Time:

Notes from the Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica on How Nineteenth-Century American Jews Lived Their Religion

Jonathan D. Sarna



The Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica may well be the finest private collection of its kind ever assembled. Wisely, the Kaplans defined their collection policy according to the mantra, famously articulated by the German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, that “nothing Jewish is alien to me.”¹ Their collection, as a result, highlights wide-ranging facets of early American Jewish life, embracing social, political, economic, cultural, and religious history. The availability of the collection, thanks to the Kaplans’ generous gift to the University of Pennsylvania, should revolutionize our understanding of the Jewish experience during the first century of America’s independence.

Among the many subjects that the collection illuminates is what scholars now speak of as “lived religion.” Professor David Hall of Harvard, who did more than anybody else to introduce this concept, once observed that students of religion in America “know next to nothing about religion as practiced and precious little about the everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women.”² The same is true of students of American Judaism. While a great deal of attention has been lavished upon individual rabbis, individual synagogues, and dueling religious movements, we know far less about how religion and spirituality were “practiced, experienced, and expressed by ordinary people . . . in the context of their everyday lives.”³

Fortunately, the Kaplan Collection contains abundant information on this subject—far more than can possibly be incorporated into a single essay. Here I will focus on a few items from the collection that illuminate how American Jews “practiced, experienced, and expressed” the distinctive calendar of the Jewish people—what is commonly known as “Jewish time.”

When American Jews kept their Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, celebrated Jewish holidays, attended Jewish charity balls, and observed their bar mitzvah, they were marking Jewish time, living out aspects of their religion that distinguished them from their neighbors. Their actions made a double statement: first as declarations of faith and second as assertions of cultural distinctiveness.

Jews were not alone in “marking time” differently than their neighbors in the nineteenth century. Catholics, Adventists, and Native Americans, among others, likewise did so. The sanctification of time, however, has long been especially important to Jews, scattered as they were to all corners of the world without a country of their own. The importance of documents and objects related to “sacred time” among the materials in the Kaplan Collection reflects the importance of this theme in the lived religion of America’s Jews.

One of the Kaplan Collection’s most precious gems relates directly to the marking of time. It is a handwritten *lu’ah*, a Jewish calendar, covering the Jewish year 5539, corresponding to the Christian year 1778–79 (Figure 3.1).⁴ The author of the *lu’ah*, Abraham Eleazer Cohen (d. 1785), was a schoolmaster and sometime *shamash* (beadle) at Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia. Composed during the American Revolution, and written in Hebrew and Yiddish following the Central European format, his *lu’ah* apparently traveled to Lancaster with Jews who fled there to escape the British occupation. Even amid the dislocations of war, local Jews would have turned to a *lu’ah* like this to find the Hebrew lunar dates that corresponded to dates in the Gregorian calendar, to find out when Jewish holidays fell, to see what weekly Torah portion to read, and to determine when a new Hebrew month began. The *lu’ah*, which contains various minor errors in spelling and calculation, is very much a folk production. It did not substitute for printed English-language calendars and almanacs; it complemented them. Yet its very existence is significant, for it demonstrates, in the words of historian Elisheva Carlebach, “how a minority culture creatively and simultaneously embraced and distanced itself from the majority culture.”⁵

Subsequently, following the publication of multiyear English-language Jewish calendars, the handwritten Hebrew-Yiddish *lu’ah* morphed into a kind of cultural artifact, preserved as a relic of days gone by. That may explain why Jacob I. Cohen eventually presented it to his wife, Rachel; they were married in 1807.

In 1810, Jacob Cohen received as a gift a printed Jewish calendar entitled *A Lunar Calendar of the Festivals and other Days in the Year Observed by the Israelites Commencing Anno Mundi 5566 and ending 5619 being a period of 54 Years* (his copy is preserved in the Rhode Island Historical Institute).⁶ Published in Newport in 1806, this Jewish calendar—the first ever printed in the United States—was created by Moses Lopez (ca. 1744–1830), nephew of the famous Newport Jewish merchant Aaron Lopez. The younger Lopez had immigrated to America in 1767, after escaping the Inquisition in Portugal (where he had lived as a Crypto-Jew), and was circumcised in Tiverton in Newport County.⁷ He became a local merchant and was known for his mathematical abilities.

Lopez's calendar, published when he was in his early sixties, was influenced by Sephardic traditions of calendar-making and geared to American Jews who knew no Hebrew and operated their secular lives according to the standard Gregorian reckoning. Those Jews had no need for a day-by-day Jewish calendar of the kind that Abraham Eleazer Cohen had written by hand. What they wanted was to be able properly to mark the anniversaries (*yortsaytn*) of their loved ones' deaths, traditionally calculated according to the Jewish calendar, and also to know when Jewish holidays fell and what Torah and Prophetic portions to read on particular weeks. Lopez's calendar made all of that information conveniently available, in English, with brief explanations, and for a comfortably long 54-year period.⁸

The well-preserved Kaplan Collection copy of this pioneering American Jewish calendar was previously owned and annotated by Rebecca Gratz (1781–1869), the American-born daughter of a wealthy merchant and considered the foremost Jewish woman of her day. Best remembered as the founder of the first American Jewish Sunday school, Gratz piously inscribed the death dates of family members in her calendar, presumably so they could be appropriately marked. Hebrew Bibles, traditionally used for that purpose, were hard to come by in early nineteenth-century America, so Gratz and other Jews used their copies of Lopez's Jewish calendar instead. For them, Lopez's calendar was more than just a series of numbers and tables: it also functioned as a repository of information and memories.

Of great interest, from the perspective of "lived religion," was the Lopez calendar's "Table VIII," which set forth "the Hour to Commence the Sabbath, in the City of New-York." The start of the Jewish Sabbath is determined by sundown, and (except in Jerusalem and for those who are more stringently observant) candle-lighting time is traditionally set eighteen minutes earlier. In contemporary calendars, the time for candle-lighting shifts a few minutes each week as the length of daylight waxes and wanes with the shifting of the seasons. Not so in Lopez's day. Then, candle-lighting times shifted in full half-hour increments according to a schedule carefully worked out in 1759 by Joseph Jeshurun Pinto, the hazan of Shearith Israel in New York City.⁹ Under his system, candles were lit either on the hour or the half hour according to the following schedule, which Lopez conveniently reprinted (Figure 3.2).

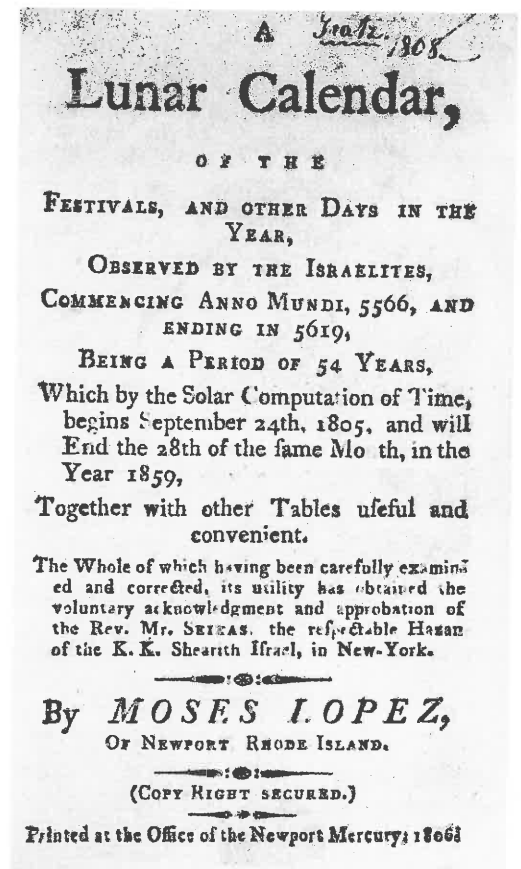


Figure 3.2: Moses Lopez, *A Lunar Calendar of the Festivals and other Days in the Year Observed by the Israelites Commencing Anno Mundi 5566 [1805] and Ending 5619 [1859] Being a Period of 54 Years. By Moses Lopez with the Recommendation of Rev. Mr. Seixas....* Newport, RI: Office of the Newport Mercury, 1806. This particular copy was owned and annotated by Rebecca Gratz to record family deaths. It is the first Jewish calendar printed in the United States.

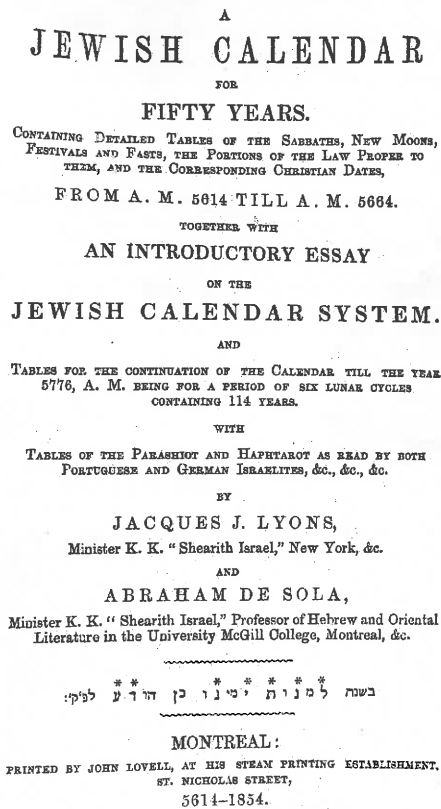


Figure 3.3: Jacques J. Lyons and Abraham de Sola, *A Jewish Calendar for Fifty Years* (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1854). This fifty-year Jewish calendar, authored by two leading Sephardic ministers of congregations in New York and Montreal, contains an introductory essay on the Jewish calendar system and tables providing the weekly biblical lectionaries “as read by both Portuguese and German Israelites.”

As Michael Satlow has pointed out, almanacs containing precise times of sunset were common in Lopez’s day, so accurate candle-lighting times could easily have been calculated. But in New York, as in London and Amsterdam, convenience trumped minute accuracy. Sabbath times, like most scheduled events, were instead rounded to the nearest half hour. Pinto’s schedule remained in effect at Shearith Israel at mid-century (as an 1854 calendar by Jacques J. Lyons and Abraham de Sola attests; see Figure 3.3), but subsequently—under the influence of carefully calibrated (to-the-minute) railroad schedules and with the advent of “standard time” in the 1880s—precise candle-lighting times became the norm.

Candle-lighting, of course, was but one aspect of marking the Jewish Sabbath, observed on the seventh day of the week, from just before sunset on Friday to the appearance of three stars on Saturday night. One wonders how nineteenth-century American Jews actually observed all twenty-five hours of the Sabbath day—how they marked it as distinctive, what special foods they ate, and how, even if husbands went to work on the Jewish Sabbath (as many did prior to the five-day work week), “Jewish time” suffused the home.

Esther Levy’s *Jewish Cookery Book* (1871) provides some insights into this question. Friday, in her book, is set aside as “the day preparatory to the Sabbath.” She reports that on Friday night “it is usual . . . for persons of our faith to use raisin wine to say the blessing of the sanctification.”¹⁰ The wine “is placed on the table with the salt and twist”—meaning twisted or braided bread. Furthermore, Levy reminds her readers “that we cannot cook on this day,” though how many Jews proved

scrupulous in observing these Sabbath laws is impossible to know. Levy assumes that her readers were accustomed to eating fish and dairy foods on Friday night, not chicken. For Saturday lunch, she suggests “Frimsel soup”—meaning chicken soup with egg noodles¹¹—as well as “cold roast fowl or turkey.” The most important lunchtime dinner of the week for Mrs. Levy’s readers, however, was clearly reserved for Sunday, not Saturday. “This is the day the husbands are at home,” she declares, “then something good must be prepared in honor of the lords of the household.” There seems to have been no similar expectation that the husbands would be at home for lunch on Saturday. Indeed, she indicates that “the blessing of the sanctification”—kiddush—was recited at “Sabbath breakfast.”¹²

We know from other sources that some nineteenth-century Jews worshipped at synagogue on Saturday morning and then ran off to work.¹³ Once there, they may still have tried to mark the Sabbath. In 1818, for example, the assistant to Mordecai Noah, then editor of New York's *National Advocate*, happened to mention in court that his boss was in the office on Saturday, but did "not attend to business on that day."¹⁴ Others, of course, observed the Sabbath scrupulously, completely refraining from work. The famous Washington, D.C., publisher and bookstore owner Adolphus S. Solomons, for example, is said to have declined nomination as "governor" of the District of Columbia in the 1870s, because he felt "that his observance of the seventh day Sabbath would be incompatible with the duties of his office."¹⁵

The Kaplan Collection preserves several volumes of a Jewish periodical for young people, *The Sabbath Visitor*,¹⁶ that offers further insight into the lived Sabbath of the nineteenth century for American Jews (Figure 3.4). Founded in 1874 and modeled on Christian religious periodicals for children, the *Sabbath Visitor* was initially distributed at Jewish religious schools that met on the Sabbath. "How pleased I am to find you all regularly attending your Sabbath school!" founding editor Rabbi Max Lilienthal wrote approvingly to readers in the journal's opening issue. "How glad I am to see you so orderly, so attentive, so anxious to learn. . . . Good children ought to be rewarded. And therefore I have resolved to visit you every Sabbath morning, and bring you a nice paper full of instruction and amusement. We shall talk together about our sacred Jewish religion."¹⁷ Subsequently distributed nationally, with a circulation estimated in 1884 at 5,500 households, the *Sabbath Visitor* conveyed the message, embedded in its title, that the Jewish Sabbath was a day for "visiting" with other Jews and with quality Jewish reading material. To some of its rural subscribers, like twelve-year-old Flora Rothschild who lived a great distance from other Jewish children, it served as "the *only* sign of Judaism visible to us children." For young nineteenth-century Jews whose friendship circles extended far beyond the Jewish community, the journal made it possible, at least on the Sabbath, for them to immerse themselves in Jewish fiction and nonfiction, and to interact through the popular "letter-box" column with "Cousin Sadie" and her Jewish correspondents across the United States.¹⁸



Figure 3.4: *Hebrew Sabbath School Visitor* and the *Sabbath School Visitor*. This Jewish periodical, founded in 1874 by Max Lilienthal and discontinued in 1892, encouraged young Jews to use the day of rest for visiting each other in person and for discovering ties to each other by reading the pages of this newspaper.

Jews likewise interacted with one another on Jewish holidays: “sacred times” that Jews marked at home and in synagogue, and that served as annual focal points of their distinctive religious lives. Evidence from the Kaplan Collection and elsewhere makes clear that Passover, in the spring, demanded more time, effort, and forethought than any other Jewish holiday. Its ritual demands, particularly the requirement to eat matzah, also generated more artifacts than any

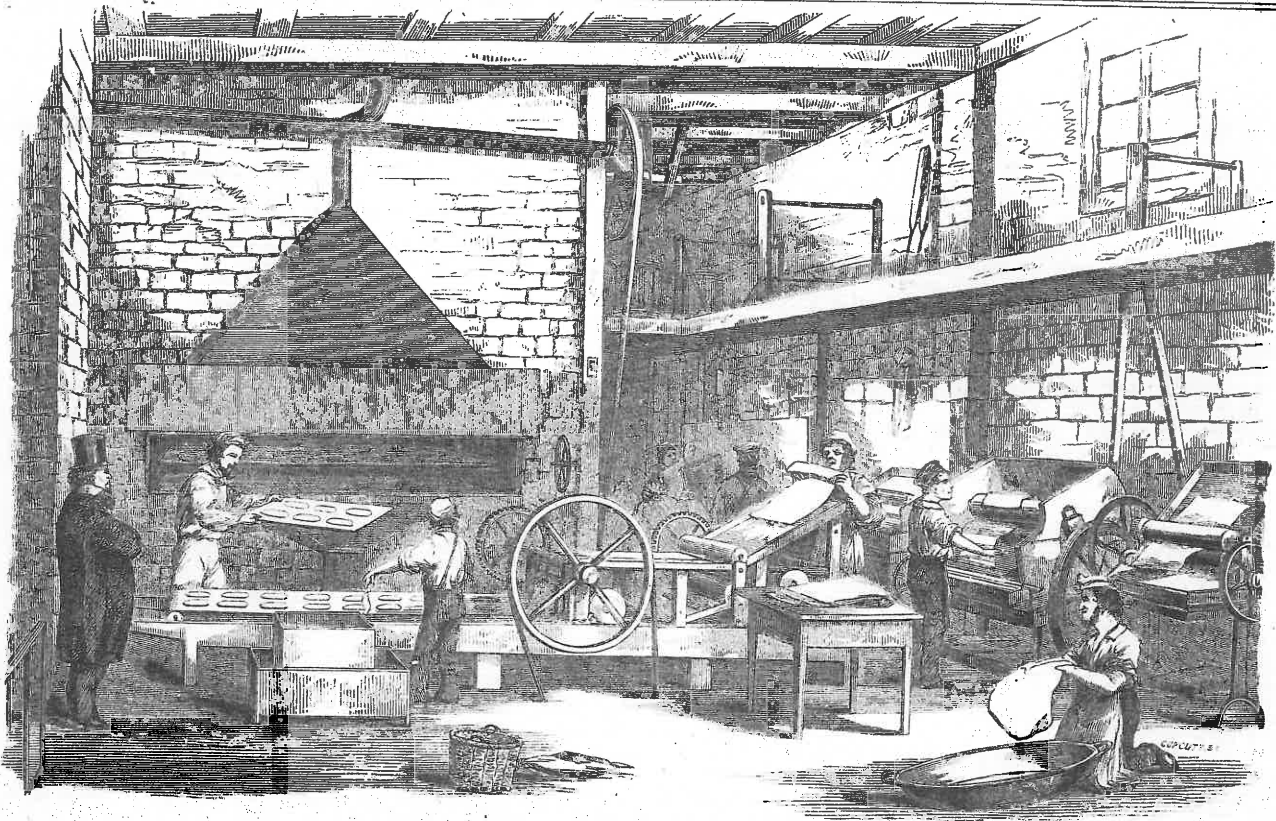
other holiday, as we shall see below. The high holidays of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) in the fall also drew Jews to synagogue and shaped their everyday lives; a few related items, such as a New Year’s letter, a non-Jew’s description of the high holiday service, and instructions concerning the recitation of penitential prayers on the Day of Atonement at Congregation Shaarey Tefilah in New York City (where Samuel M. Isaacs, later editor of the *Jewish Messenger*, served as minister), are found in the collection. On the other hand, Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shavuot (Pentecost)—which from the perspective of Jewish law are no less important to observe than other biblically mandated holidays—seem, from surviving evidence, to have made a far smaller impact on the lives of ordinary Jews. These holidays, as well as multiple fast days and other semisacred days, warranted mention in nineteenth-century Jewish calendars, but do not otherwise feature in the Kaplan Collection. Nor does Chanukah feature in the collection, although today it is among the most popular of all Jewish holidays. The so-called revival of Chanukah only began in the late 1870s, partly as an effort to spark an awakening of religious and group consciousness among American Jews and partly as an antidote to the growing popularity and commercialization of Christmas.¹⁹ Prior to that, as artifacts in the Kaplan Collection make clear, the Jewish holiday celebrated with merriment and gift-giving was the one-day late-winter holiday of Purim (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5: Myer S. Isaacs (sheet music, arrangement, based on Hebrew melodies), *Purim Quadrilles as Played at the Purim Ball, Academy of Music, March 5, 1863*, New York City. Prior to the emergence of Hanukkah as a day of Jewish revival and celebration in the late 1870s, Purim Balls, including this one held in New York City, marked a Jewish calendar occasion for gift-giving and merriment, and in this case went ahead despite its occurrence during the height of the Civil War.

A well-illustrated article by “Doesticks”—the pseudonym of the once-famed journalist and humorist Mortimer Neal Thomson (1832–75)²⁰—found in the Kaplan Collection underscores the great significance of Passover for American Jews (Figure 3.6). Originally published in *Frank Leslie’s*

Figure 3.6: “The Jewish Passover of 1858,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, New York City, April 10, 1858. This non-Jewish newspaper devoted multiple pages to the depiction of Jews preparing for Passover, along with explanations about the festival and how matzah was prepared.



GENERAL VIEW OF PREPARING AND BAKING MATZES, THE UNLEAVENED BREAD FOR THE PASSOVER.

THE JEWISH PASSOVER OF 1858.

By Doesticks.

ANY one taking a morning walk through Chatham street will meet enough men whose low stature, shining black eyes, crisp inky hair, hooked noses, stooping shoulders, and eager movements proclaim them as of the Hebrew race, to convince him that Jews are prevalent in our city in large numbers. Exactly how many thousands of the Hebrew people have their present sojourning in New York we have no means of ascertaining, but the number is very considerable, and is on the rapid increase.

The Israelitish race preserve to this day their peculiar characteristics as strongly marked, and their national prejudices in as full force as in the days of Darius, King of Persia. They exist among us, a distinct race, preserving an identity of their own, never parting with an atom of their national individuality, but whilst constantly intermingling in trade and business with the Gentiles, keeping themselves as separate from the uncircumcised dogs, in all social and religious intercourse, as if they were in a different country. They could not keep themselves more apart, if they were walled out from the Christian world by an impassible chain of mountains or deep waters, instead of the intangible and seemingly unsubstantial barrier of mere religious prejudice. The Jews never intermarry with the Christian world; a Hebrew gallant may not set his affections on a woman of the Gentiles, nor can a Jewish maiden be achieved by a Christian lover, unless he will renounce his faith, undergo a strict purification, and submit himself to all the rites attendant upon becoming a member of the Jewish church. It is by this refusal to amalgamate with the people by whom they are surrounded that they preserve themselves a distinct body, while all other races and religions blend and coalesce with the natives of the country, and in a generation or two become thoroughly and completely Americanized. There are some exceptions to these remarks, but the general assertion is correct. A short chapter on some of the usages and observances of this strange people is of peculiar interest at the present time, because it is the most holy and most universally observed religious festival, the Passover, or the Seven Days' Feast of Unleavened Bread.

This feast of the Passover, as all our readers conversant with Jewish history are aware, is a yearly festival instituted to commemorate the Providential preservation of the Hebrews, when all the firstborn of Egypt were smitten by the wrath of God; on that terrible occasion the angel of the Lord passed over the houses of the Israelites; the doors were marked by being sprinkled with the blood of the Paschal Lamb. This memorable event is religiously remembered every year, and the anniversary is celebrated with the most solemn ceremonies.

This feast occurs in the month known to the Jews as Abib, or Nisan, which corresponds to part of our March and the early part April. It is the first month of the Jewish year. The eating of the unleavened bread for the seven days of the Passover is obligatory on all of the Jewish faith, and it is observed with the

most punctilious exactitude by all, old and young, no matter how poor or rich. During the seven days this unleavened bread is the only sort permitted to be used, no meat is allowed, and no drop of wine or spirituous or fermented liquors. Fish and some kinds of vegetables are eaten sparingly.

So necessary is it considered that every family of Israelites should have a full supply of the holy bread, that large sums are donated by the wealthy of that church and by the various Jewish societies for the purpose of purchasing quantities of it to be distributed to the poor, "without money and without price." This year one wealthy Hebrew gentleman gave a thousand dollars to be expended for this purpose.

Persons are appointed whose duty is somewhat like the collectors of the Christian churches, only, instead of distributing books and tracts, they visit the indigent of their brethren who may be without the means to purchase, and inquire if they are provided with a full supply of the unleavened bread, and should any be needed it is at once furnished from some of the charitable depots. Thus none need be without the means of properly celebrating this the most sacred of all their festivals.

The preparation of this bread is a matter of the greatest importance; every step of the process is watched by a committee, consisting of one or more of the Jewish church, lest some extraneous substance should by design or accident become incorporated with the lawful ingredients. The bread is composed of fine flour and water, nothing else; no yeast, no particle of salt or any flavoring matter, and the greatest possible care is exercised lest dust or some other foreign thing should fall into the mass of

dough, and so defile the whole. Should such an accident happen, the whole batch is immediately laid aside and used for other purposes, while the committee weigh out the flour for another experiment. The bread is not prepared in private houses, except in exceptional cases, but is baked in large quantities by regular bakers, some of whom prepare thousands of pounds every year. It is not necessary that the baker should be a Jew—the bread may be touched and manipulated by Gentile hands without being defiled, but the whole process must be closely watched by Hebrew eyes, that there may be no juggling and no introduction of improper materials.

The flour is furnished the baker by the committee, who, of course, take pains to satisfy themselves as to its purity; it is by them weighed and put into the machine, for the whole kneading process is performed by steam. When it is thoroughly mixed and worked up to a proper consistence, it is transferred to the cutting machine, where it is cut.

The unleavened bread is not made in loaves, but in large flat cakes as large as an ordinary teaplate, which resemble in appearance and taste the "hard bread" or "sea biscuit." These cakes are not all alike; some of them are about an eighth of an inch thick and are rather black-baked, being of a very light color. This bread is for everyday use, and is of the commonest kind that is made. Another variety is about twice or three times as thick, and is baked much browner, though these are the only differences, the material being precisely the same. These latter cakes are marked with little slashes about an inch or two long, with three of these marks. These are to be eaten on the first, second and third days of the Passover respectively.

Although the unleavened bread is made in the same machines in which other bread is made, every part of the machine that touches the bread is taken out and others substituted that have never been used for anything else. Thus separate rollers, feeding-web, cutters, and some other parts of the mechanism are owned by the Jews, who put them into the machine duly once a year when the feast of the Passover approaches. All this preparation is under the supervision of a Rabbi of some one of the synagogues. The bread is exposed for sale, and any person, whether Jew or Gentile, may get all he is disposed to pay eight cents a pound for. Hundreds of pounds are disposed of in this way, and some of the Gentile bakers make a good profit out of the Israelitish tribes, thus far once reversing the usual order of things.

Just before the days of the Passover are at hand every utensil in which food is prepared or from which it is eaten, in the house of every Jew in the country, is laid aside, and others are put in their place. This law is despotic, and is conscientiously obeyed. If a Hebrew should be so poverty-stricken as to have but a single pannikin from which to eat his scanty meals, he will find means to change it for a new one. This rule applies to all the utensils of the kitchen and the dining-room that ever



WEIGHING AND KNEADING OF THE FLOUR IN PRESENCE OF THE RABBI.

Illustrated Newspaper, it described the holiday in 1858 as Jews' "most holy and most universally observed religious festival" and found that it was "observed with the most punctilious exactitude by all, old and young, no matter how poor or rich."²¹ In preparation for Passover, the article claims, "every utensil in which food is prepared or from which it is eaten, in the house of every Jew in the country, is laid aside, and others are put in their place." One suspects that this claim, like some others in the article, was exaggerated. The article's great importance lies in its thick description (complete with six illustrations²²) of the process of matzah baking. This work was carried out, according to the article, in non-Jewish bakeries that Jews leased and transformed for Passover use:

every part of the machine that touches the bread is taken out and others substituted that have never been used for anything else. Thus separate rollers, feeding-web, cutters, and some other parts of the mechanism are owned by the Jews, who put them into the machine duly once a year when the feast of the Passover approaches. All this preparation is under the supervision of a Rabbi.

By 1858, we learn, significant aspects of matzah baking in New York had already been mechanized ("the whole kneading process is performed by steam"), a development that increased the rate of production and reduced costs but ran counter to traditional manual practices and would soon engender considerable rabbinic opposition in Eastern Europe.²³ The illustration nevertheless makes clear that matzah was still sold and distributed in the traditional way (much as fresh bread was): customers picked it up, unboxed, directly from the bakery. The price of matzah greatly exceeded that of bread; it sold for "eight cents a pound" (\$1.94 in 2012 dollars). "Some of the Gentile bakers," Doesticks perceptively calculated, "make a good profit off of the Israelitish tribes." As a result, poor Jews could not afford to purchase matzah, and charities made it available to them for free. In addition to matzah, Jews apparently purchased matzah meal at the bakery. One of the illustrations clearly depicts "grinding the broken pieces of matzes, or unleavened bread, into meal"—the first illustration of the commercial production of matzah meal known to me.

Fascinatingly, New York Jews, according to Doesticks, could choose between two different types of matzah in 1858: "some of them are about an eighth of an inch thick and are rather slack-baked, being of a very light color. . . . Another variety is about twice or three times as thick, and is baked much browner." This description is somewhat puzzling. It may be that the thicker matzah was handmade "watched" (*shemurah*) matzah, but that is not clear from the article. Also puzzling is Doesticks' passing observation that on Passover "no meat is allowed"—an idea that has no basis whatsoever in Jewish law and was almost certainly a journalistic invention. Equally false is the claim that Jews were compelled to abstain from drinking "wine or spirituous or fermented liquors" on Passover—hardly likely given the well-known ritual obligation to drink four cups of wine at the Passover Seder. Instead, we know from other sources that many American Jews drank homemade raisin wine on Passover, since kosher-for-Passover wines and liquors were, at that time, unavailable.²⁴ On balance, though, Doesticks' article reveals a great deal about the lived experience of Passover in New York of 1858. Read critically, and in conjunction with other Passover-related

items in the Kaplan Collection, it provides a better portrait than ever before available concerning how the holiday was actually celebrated by America's Jews.

Two Passover items in the Kaplan Collection serve as important glosses on Doesticks' article. The first is a rare late nineteenth-century wine bottle clearly marked, etched in the glass, that it is "kosher for Passover." With the growth, in the post-Civil War years, of both the size and the wealth of America's Jewish population, demand for wine that could be consumed at the Passover Seder rose. As this artifact reveals, wine distributors met that demand. In the process, they completely shattered the illusion (beloved of temperance advocates) that Jews refrained from drinking fermented wine on Passover.²⁵

The second and no less revelatory item is an ad that appeared in the *Daily Alta California*, February 15, 1871, that advertised "Matzos"—complete with a headline in Hebrew letters (Figure 3.7). "The Israelites of San Francisco are hereby notified that the undersigned has made arrangements to Bake Passover Cakes for the coming Holidays, and their patronage is respectfully solicited," the ad read. San Francisco at the time was home to sixteen thousand Jews, so the production of matzah there is not surprising; indeed, matzah had been produced in the city since at least 1850.²⁶ It is somewhat surprising to see such a bold ad (complete with Hebrew letters!) in a general newspaper. Apparently, in San Francisco (as in New York) Jews formed a sufficiently large percentage of the newspaper's readership that ethnic-based advertising was worthwhile. Even more surprising is the date of the ad, February 15, 1871—some seven weeks prior to Passover, which that year began on the evening of April 5. Given the volume of matzah that needed to be produced to supply sixteen thousand Jews for eight days, production clearly had to begin well in advance of the holiday, and it was important to get orders in early. The matzah manufacturers, by then, were also servicing Jews who lived far from the urban center: "country orders," the ad made clear, would be "promptly attended to."

The most fascinating element of the ad, however, is the notice that appeared directly below the announcement that arrangements had been made to bake "Passover cakes." It read as follows:

In order to take into consideration the interest of all those whom it may concern, the undersigned have united with E. BLOCHMAN²⁷, at his solicitation, to establish a uniform low rate of twelve and a half (12 ½) cents per pound for Matzos this season.

FRIEDMAN & LYONS
J.M. COHN

מצות

MATZOS—THE ISRAELITES OF SAN FRANCISCO are hereby notified that the undersigned has made arrangements to Bake Passover Cakes for the coming Holidays, and their patronage is respectfully solicited. Country orders promptly attended to. E. BLOCHMAN, No. 4 Battery street, near Market, and 5 Kearny street. Depot and Salesroom opposite ALTA office, No. 525 California street. P. Alexander, Agent. fe5-1m1p

IN ORDER TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION the interest of all those whom it may concern, the undersigned have united with E. BLOCHMAN, at his solicitation, to establish a uniform low rate of twelve and a half (12½) cents per pound for Matzos this season.

FRIEDMAN & LYONS,
J. M. COHN.
San Francisco, February 13, 1871. fe14-1p

Figure 3.7: Advertisement for "Matzos," *Daily Alta California*, San Francisco, CA, February 15, 1871. This advertisement, with Hebrew lettering, for a Passover staple appeared in a non-Jewish newspaper.

Here we see an early American example of a “matzah cartel”—a combination of independent matzah bakers fixing the price of matzah in a bid to maximize profits. The “uniform low rate,” translated into 2012 dollars, was \$2.27 per pound, fully 33 cents (17 percent) more than the price in New York City back in 1858. The price of flour and labor may explain some of this difference, but in fact even the New York price, we have seen, generated significant profits. Producers of matzah, knowing their product to be a religious requirement of the Passover holiday, manipulated its price for their own benefit—an early example of the intersection of religion and capitalism.²⁸

The added costs of living as a Jew, especially evident on Passover and on the Jewish Sabbath (at least to those who closed their businesses on that day), also displayed themselves at Jewish charity events. Opulent fundraisers for Jewish charities formed part of the annual calendar of nineteenth-century upper-class American Jews. More than generally recognized, these seasonal dinners and charity balls, where money and power flowed and gifts to the poor were extolled, served as ways for American Jews to show off their religion to the public.

“Gifts,” the religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt reminds us, “are supple and hybrid, positioned on the overlapping borders of self-interest and self-denial, festive play and strategic purpose, spirit and materiality, public and private, sacred and secular.”²⁹ This is likewise often true of gifts to charity, especially those offered publicly as part of a large charitable “event.” So, for example, the Hebrew Charity Ball in Philadelphia—“generally recognized as the most successful social affair of each recurring winter season”—was “exclusively devoted” to the city’s Jewish charities.³⁰ The handsome ticket to the 1873 ball, preserved in the Kaplan Collection, featured numerous names of generous donors. A few prominent non-Jews also probably attended. Their role was to extol the Jewish community, promote “the common cause of human charity,” and deliver paeans to civil and religious liberty. As a rule, Jewish charity balls, held at about the same time and usually in the same place every year, were highly ritualized events, reflecting Jews’ pride in how well they took care of their own. The balls highlighted the themes of charity, communal harmony, and patriotism, and provided attendees with an abundance of toasts, music, dancing, and good cheer. They testified to the values that Judaism held dear and, simultaneously, celebrated those values in a well-appointed setting that was at once convivial, festive, and culturally uplifting. Often reported in the press, these events formed part of the religious life of the nineteenth-century American Jewish community, providing its elite members with an annual opportunity to come together for a good cause.³¹

Jews likewise came together to mark life-cycle events. These occasions too provided opportunities to live out religion in public, often in the presence of non-Jews. The Kaplan Collection contains material on numerous life-cycle events. A particular gem is a detailed description by a visiting church organist of a bar mitzvah/confirmation service in La Porte, Indiana, in 1867 (Figure 3.8). La Porte, at the time, was a community of fewer than 150 Jews and a single temple, B’ne Zion. That temple followed “the doctrine [sic] laid down in the prayer book of Dr. Einhorn,” Radical Reform Judaism.³² The service took place on “Whitsunday 1867,” which was June 9 and coincided with the Jewish holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost). According to the document, the service was a “confirmation,” a term used at

This morning, being Whitsunday, & Pentecost, I accepted an invitation to witness a Confirmation, at Jewish Synagogue. The service commenced at 8 o'clock, and continued till 11 1/4 o'clock, with one chap[ter] from the Bible, in English. The music, was excellent, and the ceremonies as interesting as interminable. The two candidates, made long German recitations, and went upon the stage (or stand, point) before the veiled "Bosch" (Bosch, four times). The hands of each parent were laid upon the head of their child, and I his [unclear] After this [unclear] (for some time) the Rabbi, placed both hands upon the head of each, separately, whispering sentences, & repeating the usual words, or testimonials. The parents, give their dinner party, this P.M. and the juvenile dancing party, is to night, at the elegant residence of Mr. Wile, a banker, and father of one candidate. I left the Whitsunday Service, at St. Andrew's, but know it was good. (Except you had music and German, at St. Andrew's, a propitiate to the occasion).

Figure 3.8: Autograph letter, C.C.P. Lerner, La Porte, IN, to Horace Chase, Hopkinton, NH, Whitsunday [June 9], 1867.

the time both as the English equivalent of bar mitzvah (for a male who turned thirteen), and for a ceremony, first introduced in Germany in 1803 on the model of Christian confirmation, for solemnly inducting a mixed-gender group of teens into their ancestral faith. Jewish confirmation ceremonies of this latter sort began in New York in the 1840s, and by the turn of the century, according to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–6), the ritual, conducted on Shavuot and generally restricted to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, had become a “regular feature of congregational life” in Reform congregations, “and one of the most inspiring ceremonies of the whole year.”³³

The “confirmation” that took place in La Porte in 1867 was something of a hybrid. One of the two confirmands was David J. Wile, born on May 10, 1854, and therefore exactly of age to become a bar mitzvah.³⁴ But the ceremony also included many features of later, group-based confirmations. The description of the service, in a letter written by Ms. C. C. P. Lerner, organist at St. Andrew’s Church in Hopkinton, New Hampshire, to Horace Chase in Hopkinton, makes that clear.³⁵ Significantly, nothing in this letter from one Protestant to another is antisemitic, nor does Ms. Lerner call upon Jews to convert. In fact, she skipped church in order to attend the Jewish ceremony:

This morning being Whitsunday, & Pentecost, I accepted an invitation to witness a Confirmation, at Jewish Synagogue. The service commenced at 8 o'clock, and continued till 11 1/4 o'clock with one chap[ter] from the Bible, in English. The music

was excellent, and the ceremonies as imposing as interminable. The two candidates made long German recitations and went upon the stage (or stand point) before the veiled "Book of Moses," four times. The hand of each parent was laid upon the head of their child, and a kiss given. After two or more sermons, (or some such), the Rabbi, placed both hands on the head of each, separately, whispering sentences, & presenting the usual cards, or testimonial. The parents gave their dinner party this P.M. and the juvenile dancing party, is to night, at the elegant residence of Mr. Wile,³⁶ a banker, and father of one candidate.

As a description of "lived religion" this document is particularly fascinating. It reveals that services in La Porte began on Shavuot at 8 a.m., lasted for an "interminable" three and one-quarter hours, and included "excellent" music (high praise from an organist!). The bar mitzvah confirmands delivered "recitations" in German, but not apparently in English or Hebrew. The Torah scroll itself was kept "veiled," and only a single chapter of the Bible was read out in English. Parents blessed their children as part of the service, in addition to the blessing delivered by the rabbi. Finally, the celebration following the service featured a dinner party at lunchtime, provided by the parents, and a dance for the boys' juvenile peers in the evening.

How typical this bar mitzvah/confirmation was in comparison to others of the day is difficult to gauge. Full-scale histories of the bar mitzvah and confirmation in nineteenth-century America do not exist. What we do know, thanks to the Kaplan Collection, is that nineteenth-century Jews devoted a great deal of attention to marking and sanctifying key moments in "Jewish time." The Jewish calendar, the Jewish Sabbath, the Jewish holidays, annual Jewish charity balls, and Jewish rites of passage all bear witness to that attention. In the lived religion of nineteenth-century American Jews, time was clearly of the essence.

* * * Notes * * *

1. Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning* (New York: Schocken, 1965).
2. David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii; see also Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri, eds., *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630–1965* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
3. Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.
4. For what follows, see Jonathan D. Sarna, “An Eighteenth Century Hebrew *Lu’ah* from Pennsylvania,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 57 (2005), 25–27.
5. Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 4.
6. Michael Satlow, “Two Copies of a Printed Early American Jewish Calendar in Providence,” *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Society Notes* 15 (November 2009), 421.
7. Stanley F. Chyet, *Lopez of Newport; Colonial American Merchant Prince* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 104–8.
8. Moses Lopez, *A Lunar Calendar of the Festivals and other Days in the Year Observed by the Israelites. . .* (Newport, 1806). Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica, University of Pennsylvania Libraries. A digital version may be found on-line at: <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/45715>. I have benefited from reading an advance copy of Michael Satlow’s forthcoming article on “Jewish Time in the Early American Republic.”
9. Jacques J. Lyons and Abraham de Sola, *A Jewish Calendar for Fifty Years* (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1854), 161, mentions Pinto’s precedent. Kaplan Collection (the calendar can also be downloaded at <http://archive.org/details/jewishcalendarfo00lyonrich>). David de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World: Portrait of Shearith Israel 1654–1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 165, observes that “the times set in his calendar not infrequently vary rather widely from the time of sunset in New York.” Satlow, “Jewish Time in the Early American Republic,” is more impressed with Pinto’s calculations.
10. On the ritual use of raisin wine, see Jonathan D. Sarna, “Passover Raisin Wine, the American Temperance Movement, and Mordecai Noah: The Origins, Meaning and Wider Significance of a Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Religious Practice,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988), 269–88.
11. Gil Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* (New York: Wiley, 2010), 208–9.
12. Esther Levy, *Jewish Cookery Book* (Philadelphia: Turner, 1871), 176–78. A facsimile copy, gift of the author, is in the Kaplan Collection.
13. Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2004), 163.
14. Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 140; the case is reprinted in John D. Lawson, ed., *American State Trials* (St. Louis, 1914), 676.
15. Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York: Schocken, 2012), 88; for examples of both Sabbath observance and Sabbath neglect in this period, see Jacob R. Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776–1985* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), s.v. index, “Sabbath, neglect of” and “Sabbath, observance of.”
16. At different times, it was also known as the *Hebrew Sabbath School Visitor* and the *Sabbath School Visitor*; see Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:583.
17. *Sabbath Visitor* 1 (January 1874), as quoted in Naomi W. Cohen, *What the Rabbis Said: The Public Discourse of Nineteenth-Century American Rabbis* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 76–77.
18. Melissa R. Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America 1860–1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 112–13, 256 n.16 (italics in the quotation are added); Bruce Ruben, *Max Lilienthal: The*

- Making of the American Rabbinate* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011).
19. Dianne Ashton, *Hanukkah in America: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Joshua Plaut, *A Kosher Christmas* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2012).
 20. David E. E. Sloane, "Mortimer Thomson (Q.K. Philander Doesticks, P.B.)," in *American Humorists, 1800–1950, Part 2*, ed. Stanley Trachtenberg (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1982), 491–7.
 21. "The Jewish Passover of 1858," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (April 10, 1858). Kaplan Collection.
 22. Several of the illustrations are reprinted in David Geffen, *American Heritage Haggadah* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1992), xvi, xvii, 48, and cover.
 23. See Jonathan D. Sarna, "How Matzah Became Square: Manischewitz and the Development of Machine-Made Matzah in the United States," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 272–88.
 24. See Sarna, "Passover Raisin Wine."
 25. *Ibid.*, 275–76.
 26. Ava F. Kahn, ed., *Jewish Voices of the California Gold Rush: A Documentary History, 1849–1880* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 70–71.
 27. Emanuel Blochman (b. 1827) was born in Alsace-Lorraine and arrived in California in 1851. He was involved in numerous religious activities; see Kahn, *Jewish Voices*, 269.
 28. A similar price-fixing scheme was prosecuted in 1991 in a case involving three major American matzah makers; see "Company News; A \$1 Million Fine for Manischewitz," *New York Times*, May 18, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/18/business/company-news-a-1-million-fine-for-manischewitz.html?ref=recipes>.
 29. Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Practices of Exchange: From Market Culture to Gift Economy in the Interpretation of American Economy," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 72.
 30. On the "Hebrew Charity Ball Association," see Henry S. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Levytype Company, 1894), 135–38, from which these quotations are drawn.
 31. Jonathan Woocher considered such gatherings celebrations of "the civil religion of American Jews"; see Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).
 32. A brief history of the Jews of LaPorte is found on-line at the website of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/files/laporte_jewish.pdf; for the size of its Jewish population, see Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 352.
 33. "Confirmation," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–6), 4:219–20; Benjamin Maria Baader, *Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture in Germany, 1800–1870* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 146–51.
 34. For David's date of birth, see <http://www.geni.com/people/Jacob-Wile/6000000006853741178>.
 35. C. C. P. Lerner to Horace Chase (Whitsunday [June 9], 1867). Kaplan Collection; for a brief necrology of Lerner, see *The Churchman* 71 (1895), 61.
 36. Jacob Wile (1828–96) emigrated to America from Bavaria in 1847 and established Citizens' Bank. He also served as B'ne Zion's lay rabbi, though it is not clear that he acted as rabbi on this occasion; see <http://www.geni.com/people/Jacob-Wile/6000000006853741178>.