

# American Congregations



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## *From Synagogue-Community to Citadel of Reform: The History of K. K. Bene Israel (Rockdale Temple) in Cincinnati, Ohio*

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It was in the month of October, 1816, that a young man arrived in New York from the shores of Great Britain, to seek a home and a residence in the New World. This individual's name was Joseph Jonas, from Plymouth, in England. He had read considerably concerning America, and was strongly impressed with the descriptions given of the Ohio river, and had therefore determined to settle himself on its banks, at Cincinnati. This he was encouraged in by a relative he met with in New York. On arriving at Philadelphia, he was persuaded to settle in that city, and took up his residence for a short time with the amiable family of the late Mr. Samuel Joseph (peace be unto him.) He here became acquainted with the venerable Mr. Levi Philips, who took a great interest in him, using many persuasive arguments not to proceed to Ohio. One of them was frequently brought to his recollection: "In the wilds of America, and entirely amongst gentiles, you will forget your religion and your God."<sup>1</sup>

JOSEPH JONAS, the author of this memoir, and the man generally considered to be the "founding father" of the Cincinnati Jewish community, "solemnly promised . . . never to forget his religion nor forsake his God." For two years, following his arrival in the city in 1817, he worshiped alone. Then, when more settlers arrived, holiday services were conducted. In 1821, local Jews purchased a small plot of land to serve as a cemetery.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in 1824, "a majority of the Israelites in Cincinnati" assembled at the home of Jonas's brother-in-law, Morris Moses, and formed a congregation, "Kahl aKodish Bene Israel," "for the purpose of glorifying our God, and observing the fundamental principles of our faith, as developed in the laws of Moses."

Seventy years later, Dr. David Philipson, rabbi of what had now

become known as K.K. Bene Israel (Holy Congregation of the Children of Israel), and later as Rockdale Temple, commemorated the anniversary of his congregation's founding by compiling its only published history, a volume entitled "The Oldest Jewish Congregation in the West." He explained that the story of Bene Israel's development needed to be told. It was, he wrote, the first Jewish congregation west of the Alleghenies, and "it presents, in the course of its existence, the gradual development of religious thought that may be taken as characteristic of the reform movement in Judaism in this country."<sup>3</sup>

Philipson overstated his case. No one synagogue can claim to be "characteristic"; each in its own way is unique. Nevertheless, as "the oldest Jewish congregation in the west," the premier Reform congregation of Cincinnati, and as a leading member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the organization of Reform temples in North America, Bene Israel did serve as a model for congregations around the country. If its longevity, eminence, and traditions rendered it somewhat distinctive, its origins, stages of development, and ongoing challenges have indeed been typical of many American synagogues, even those outside of the sphere of Reform.

### The Synagogue-Community

Cincinnati's new congregation perceived itself as a frontier outpost of Judaism. "The fiat had gone forth," Jonas reported in his memoir, published in 1844, "that a new resting place for the scattered sons of Israel should be commenced, and that a sanctuary should be erected in the Great West, dedicated to the Lord of Hosts, to resound with praises to the ever-living God." Earlier, in an 1825 appeal for funds, addressed to "the Elders of the Jewish Congregation at Charleston," the same theme was expressed. Leaders of the new congregation portrayed themselves as veritable pioneers, "scattered through the wilds of America," doing all in their power to "promote Judaism" in a frontier "where a few years before nothing was heard but the howling of wild Beasts, and the more hideous cry of savage man." The appeal proceeded to paint a glowing picture of how, slowly but surely, the spiritual wilderness was being conquered: a room had been "fitted up for a synagogue," two Torah scrolls procured, a burial ground purchased, there was even a ritual slaughterer (*shochet*) for kosher meat. If only enough money could be raised for a synagogue, the leaders pleaded, they were certain that

"hundreds" of Jews within a 500-mile radius, particularly the Jews of New Orleans "who now know and see nothing of their religion," would travel to Cincinnati, at least for the holidays.<sup>4</sup>

Although no synagogue was built until 1836, Cincinnati was already home, by 1830, to approximately one hundred Jews, the bulk of them, like Jonas, from Britain. The time had come to organize the congregation on a more formal and legal basis. On January 8, 1830, the state awarded the congregation a charter under the name "Kal A Kodesh Beneh Israel (Holy Congregation of Children of Israel)." Within a short time, it would become known as "K.K. Bene Israel," its official name to this day.<sup>5</sup>

In calling Bene Israel a "holy congregation," its leaders had in mind the kind of synagogue that they had known in England (whether they followed the Sephardic Spanish rite, or, as Jonas did, the Ashkenazic German one), and that existed in most American Jewish communities into the first quarter of the nineteenth century. This was the model of the all-embracing "synagogue-community" that both controlled all aspects of Jewish life and commanded allegiance from every Jew dwelling or sojourning within its ambit:

In this phase of Jewish history [Martin Cohen writes], the synagogue reinforced the basic values which . . . perpetuated the optimism, morality, creativity and compassion which traditionally have shaped Jewish life. Socially it was the place where Jews met, commented on events, communicated their needs, planned their charities, adjudicated their disputes, and held their life cycle events. In the synagogue bridegrooms were given recognition, mourners comforted, strangers fed and housed, and the *herem*, or ban of excommunication, pronounced against recalcitrant members.<sup>6</sup>

In New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston, the synagogue-community had, by 1830, begun to break down under pressure from religious dissenters as well as new immigrants who, in the spirit of American religious freedom and voluntarism, spurned communal discipline and formed competing synagogues of their own.<sup>7</sup> But in Cincinnati, where the Jewish community was still relatively small and homogeneous, Bene Israel could still attempt to recreate a traditional Jewish communal structure.

Of course, the congregation could not, as in some European countries, compel all Jews to belong to the synagogue—its state charter specifically restricted membership to those "who may apply and be

accepted." But it could attempt to enforce traditional conceptions of community upon those who did choose to join. Thus, in the event that two members fell into dispute, the congregants were expected to accept the congregation's jurisdiction over the conflict.<sup>8</sup> Fines could also be levied on those who misbehaved or refused to assume congregational office. In return for placing themselves under communal discipline, members enjoyed the satisfaction of knowing that their religious and community needs would be taken care of. Congregational leaders assumed responsibility for overseeing the cemetery, for ensuring the supply of kosher meat and of Passover matzah, for educating the young, tending the sick, burying the dead, providing loans to members, relieving the poor, and most of all for organizing religious services whenever appropriate.

The greatest danger to this "holy community" was precisely what Joseph Jonas had been warned about back East: "In the wilds of America, and entirely among Gentiles, you will forget your religion and your God." Most who came under the umbrella of the Cincinnati congregation were familiar with traditional European Jewish communities, but they had also experienced, in Cincinnati or en route to the Ohio city, life outside the bounds of a traditional community. This experience together with the limited religious resources of those "scattered through the wilderness" resulted in a certain flexibility when it came to observing the strictly mandated practices of domestic and synagogue life. Thus, Joseph Jonas noted two early innovations influenced by Portuguese Jewish custom and the fact that the congregation was composed entirely of "young people": "we . . . introduced considerable choral singing into our worship, in which we were joined by the sweet voices of the fair daughters of Zion," and "our Friday evening service was as well attended for many years as the Sabbath morning." With the arrival of more traditional Jews from Germany, "old customs . . . conquered" and thereafter women seldom sang out with the men. But, according to Jonas, at least a few hymns sung by the entire congregation continued to prevail.

Although the early adherents of Bene Israel struggled to introduce the communal institutions and services that would enable them to worship and live as traditional Jews in a traditional community, their orthodoxy was limited by the realities of their environment. The congregation itself was invested with no particular religious authority. As these new Americans cast about for an authentic basis for their religious structures

and decisions, resolutions generally reflected whatever the group could agree upon. They had to rely upon their own knowledge and experience in making judgments on issues ranging from the propriety of their ritual slaughterer to the conduct of their religious services. Nevertheless, by 1840, many of the institutions necessary to leading an observant Jewish life were in place.

Bene Israel's leaders recognized that one of the greatest dangers of settling in the wilderness was that "many Jews are lost in this country from not being in the neighborhood of a congregation[;] they often marry with Christians, and their posterity lose the true worship of God for ever."<sup>9</sup> Seeking an antidote, they wrote stiff provisions into Bene Israel's constitution denying membership to anyone "united in marriage contrary to the laws and regulations of the Jewish Religion," and warning existing members that anyone "marrying out of the pale of the Jewish Religion" would have his membership summarily canceled. Then, apparently to prevent intermarriages from surreptitiously arranging to be buried in the Bene Israel cemetery, the constitution, in its sternest single provision, directed the cemetery superintendent (the "Gabah Beth Hiam") "not [to] suffer any corpse to be Buried in the congregational Burial Ground without a written order from a majority of the vestry, under a penalty of five hundred dollars and a forfeiture of his membership."<sup>10</sup>

Yet even as the congregation sought to protect Jewish religious identity, members took great pride in their participation in the broader non-Jewish community.<sup>11</sup> Jonas himself boasted that "the Israelites have been much esteemed and highly respected by their fellow citizens, and a general interchange of civilities and friendships has taken place between them." In 1834, the congregation as a whole took obvious pleasure in the fact that "fifty-two gentlemen of the Christian faith, our fellow citizens" donated twenty-five dollars each toward the building of a synagogue. When the synagogue was dedicated, just before Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish new year) in 1836, the crowd of Christians was so great that many had to be turned away; there was only sufficient room for "the clergy and the families of those gentlemen who so liberally had given donations towards the building." From the beginning, then, Bene Israel's leaders faced a tension common to Jews throughout the modern world: they sought to strengthen Jewish religious identity and prevent intermarriage even as they worked to promote closer neighborly relations with the Christian "fellow citizens" among whom they dwelt.

The dedication of the new synagogue building—the first synagogue west of the Allegheny Mountains—marked Bene Israel's coming of age. Jews and Christians joined together to celebrate the occasion, and the ceremony received a great deal of attention.<sup>12</sup> Here was an important indication that Cincinnati had moved beyond frontier status and was becoming a major American metropolis. This sense of emergence, of tradition transplanted, was even symbolized in the synagogue's architecture. Constructed according to ancestral custom, with a woman's gallery, a reader's platform (*taybah*) near the west end of the sanctuary opposite the large frontal ark, and with "two marble painted slabs containing the Decalogue in gold letters," the building evoked memories of Judaism in more established communities, a feeling that was heightened by the structure's "handsome dome" and its five brass chandeliers that had previously hung in the oldest synagogue in America, Shearith Israel's Mill Street synagogue in New York. The only modest innovation introduced into the building was the arrangement of seats. Earlier American synagogues had followed the Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese) practice of seating worshipers along the walls; Bene Israel followed the Ashkenazic (German) practice, soon to become widespread, of seating worshipers across the floor.<sup>13</sup> This was akin to local Christian seating patterns and reflected a growing shift toward Ashkenazic modes of worship, as Sephardic Jews became a diminishing minority of the nation's Jewish population, and their long hegemony over Jewish religious practices in North America came to an end.

With its new edifice in place, Bene Israel hastened to expand its activities. It purchased adjacent land for a new cemetery, established a Hebrew school to provide religious education for young people, and hired its first paid functionaries to serve as *chazan* (reader), *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), and *shamas* (sexton). As another measure of its improving status, the congregation, in 1838, contributed funds to aid Charleston's Beth Elohim congregation, whose synagogue had been destroyed in a fire. In this traditional way, Bene Israel signaled that it had emerged from its period of dependency, when it required aid from other Jews to develop and grow; it now felt secure enough to act like an established congregation, able to extend a helping hand to other Jews in need.<sup>14</sup>

Bene Israel's rapid development took place against a backdrop of unprecedented urban growth. "From the mid-1820s to the mid-1850s," a student of this period writes, "Cincinnati was perhaps the nation's premier boomtown. Its population nearly doubled each decade, its economy grew and diversified, and physically and culturally it was rap-

idly transformed from a rough frontier town into one of the nation's leading and most urbane cities."<sup>15</sup> Jesup W. Scott, writing in Charles Cist's *Cincinnati* in 1841, predicted "that within one hundred years from this time, Cincinnati will be the greatest city in America, and by the year of our Lord two thousand, the greatest city in the world." Jews, recognized as being among the founders of the city, shared in this buoyant mood. Many Jews took full part in Cincinnati's commercial expansion and rose, literally, from rags to riches. As Cincinnati developed into a major destination for German immigrants coming to America, it also became the destination for many German Jews who came as part of an accelerating wave of German immigration to America in the 1840s. The city's Jewish population multiplied tenfold (from 100 to 1,000) between 1830 and 1840, and reached 2,500 just ten years later.<sup>16</sup>

While all of Cincinnati's Jews may not have been members of Bene Israel, the synagogue's leaders could certainly claim that their congregation represented the Jews of Cincinnati and quite naturally equated their synagogue community with the growing Jewish community of Cincinnati. In 1841, the congregation was forced to build new seats for both men and women in the Broadway Street synagogue which they had dedicated only five years previously.<sup>17</sup> According to Joseph Jonas, "a number of the seats were sold for a sum much more considerable than the expense of the alterations." Apparently, the purchase of synagogue seats had become, for some, a form of conspicuous consumption, a socially sanctioned means of demonstrating that one had financially arrived while supporting the synagogue at the same time.

But rapid growth also brought with it a host of problems for the congregation. First, there were inevitable tensions between "old-timers" and "newcomers." Members who had come to Cincinnati in the 1810s and 1820s, primarily English and Dutch Jews, had built Bene Israel and felt a sense of ownership about it; they expected those who came later to show them deference. Second, many of the newcomers were German Jews. They differed both in culture and in language from the old-timers, and the two interacted only with difficulty. Finally, there were significant liturgical differences between the two groups. While they shared basic prayers in common, their forms, formulas, customs, observances, and traditional melodies were quite distinct.<sup>18</sup>

The result—well-nigh inevitable given America's religious pattern—was the creation of a new synagogue: K.K. B'nai Yeshurun, organized informally in 1840 and on a more formal basis, with a constitution, a year later. Most of the new synagogue's founders were German immigrants,

who, if they had been members of Bene Israel at all, had not been active there. What they sought now was a new congregation that followed their ancestral customs and ran on their terms. Separate congregations of German Jews already existed in Philadelphia (1802) and New York (1825), and in both cities the ideal of the unified synagogue-community had soon given way to what might be termed a "community of synagogues." In these cities, communal and organizational ties, rather than a common synagogue, now bound Jews together. In Cincinnati, even before Bene Yeshurun was founded, Bene Israel's monopoly on Jewish life had been partially broken by independent mutual aid and philanthropic organizations created in the 1830s.<sup>19</sup> Many other Jews in the community remained unaffiliated; they opted out of the "holy community" altogether.<sup>20</sup>

The challenge posed by B'nai Yeshurun, however, was much more direct and provocative. Knowing this, the founders of the new congregation began its constitution, dated September 19, 1841, with an elaborate justification:

WHEREAS, The wise and republican laws of this country are based upon universal toleration, giving to every citizen and sojourner the right to worship according to the dictates of his conscience, and WHEREAS, Also the mode of worship in the established synagogue of our beloved brethren, K.K.B.Israel, in this city, is not in accordance with the rites and customs of the said German Jews, Therefore, We, the undersigned, bind ourselves under the name of the congregation, K.K.B.Yeshurun, to use our best exertions to support a synagogue by that name, and to worship therein according to the rites, customs and usages of the German Jews. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Actually, although nobody is known to have mentioned the fact at the time, the constitution was not original. It had been cribbed, almost word for word, from the 1826 constitution of the synagogue's namesake, Congregation B'nai Yeshurun of New York.<sup>22</sup> The success of New York's experiment with multiple synagogues (six of them by 1840) may have persuaded the Cincinnatians that a second synagogue in their own city would do no harm. History proved them correct, for the new congregation effectively put an end to the outdated practice of equating one congregation with the entire organized Jewish community, and set the stage for the formation of additional synagogues. Within a decade two more had been founded: K.K.Ahabeth Achim (1847) and K.K.Shaar Hashomayim (1850).<sup>23</sup>

## Redefining the Community

The resulting move from synagogue-community to a community of synagogues (or, at least, a multisynagogue community) carried profound implications for Bene Israel. The congregation was forced to adjust its self-image and reorient itself to a new religious environment where congregations competed with one another for members and status. Of course, Bene Israel still maintained the prestige that came with being the city's first synagogue. But as Cincinnati synagogues began to organize themselves on a subethnic, "country of origins" basis, primacy turned out to be of little advantage. Owing to the somewhat British cast of Bene Israel's service, Jews from Franconia and Bavaria often preferred to worship at the more Germanic B'nai Yeshurun, where over 90 percent of all members (1840–75) were of German origin. Germans also predominated at Ahabeth Achim located in the solidly German neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine. Polish Jews, meanwhile, worshiped first at Shaar Hashomayim, which dissolved in 1852, and later at Adath Israel.<sup>24</sup> Through all of this, the membership of Bene Israel remained relatively heterogeneous. English and Dutch Jews, while no longer a majority, remained an influential minority, and the growing number of Germans in the congregation continued to respect their authority, even though this meant that many potential members were lost to the competition.<sup>25</sup>

The growing number of religious options for Cincinnati's Jews emphasized anew the voluntary nature of synagogue membership in America. Disgruntled worshipers came to understand that Bene Israel needed them more than they needed it. This was, of course, a necessary corollary of religious freedom. To paraphrase Sidney Mead, what synagogues gave up with religious freedom was coercive power. Resting on the principle of free, uncoerced consent, they became voluntary associations, equal before, but independent of, the civil power and each other.<sup>26</sup> Bene Israel had to learn to adjust to this new situation, and it did so slowly.

Bene Israel's bylaws, for example, continued to assume that the congregation should exercise a certain authority over members' lives, just as synagogues had done traditionally. The belief that Jews should govern themselves was likewise reflected in the requirement that all civil cases between members first be submitted to the board of the congregation and only then be left to the arbitration of civil authorities. Any member who charged a fellow member in civil court without first bringing the case before the vestry was liable to a fine of fifty dollars.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, where cases were brought before the vestry in the 1840s and 1850s, often one party, and sometimes both, questioned the congregation's authority over noncongregational matters—a sign that the traditional understanding of the synagogue's role was already severely strained. In 1844, for example, four years after B'nai Yeshurun's founding, a Bene Israel member was threatened with a fine "for having sued Mr. N. Malzer in court, without having his complaint first brought before the congregation." The defendant, Mr. Solomon Samuel, insisted that the synagogue had no standing in the case, for he explained "that it was his wife who had sued Mr. Malzer, and that his Wife was not bound to our By Laws."<sup>28</sup> Such an excuse would scarcely have been appropriate in a traditional Jewish community where men were responsible for the actions of their wives, and all alike were governed by the authority of the powerful synagogue-community. In voluntaristic Cincinnati, however, it offered synagogue officials a graceful way out. They referred the matter to the congregation, and in all likelihood no fine was ever collected. Disputes over communal authority persisted at Bene Israel, but by the Civil War the whole system of communal control was a dead letter: coercion had given way to persuasion.

Persuasion, in turn, implied competition. To attract new members and even, in some cases, to hold on to existing ones, Bene Israel had to demonstrate that it was at least as good, if not better, than its B'nai Yeshurun rival. B'nai Yeshurun, of course, faced the same challenge in reverse. (Competition from the smaller synagogues, by contrast, was negligible, owing to their location and the character of their membership.) As a result, the two synagogues alternately emulated and attacked one another. Both sought to attract new dues-paying members, principally German Jews, so earlier disputes, based on country of origin, were muted. Instead, rivalry between the two synagogues largely expressed itself in disputes over matters of piety; each accused the other of being religiously illegitimate. Lay leaders of the two congregations used the national Jewish press to accuse one another of insufficient piety, and of condoning ritual laxity, especially in the sensitive area of *shechitah*, kosher slaughtering.<sup>29</sup> Vituperative charges and countercharges by each congregation against the other's *shochet* filled minute books and kept tempers on edge.

Even as each questioned the other's legitimacy, however, they carefully noted, and sometimes shamelessly copied, the other's successful innovations. In 1842, both came out with similarly worded bylaws.<sup>30</sup> In 1846, B'nai Yeshurun laid the cornerstone for an impressive new build-

ing, and a month later Bene Israel decided that it had better look to move as well. That same year, when B'nai Yeshurun hired Rabbi James K. Gutheim as "lecturer and reader," Bene Israel separately contracted with him to address their congregation on occasion as well. When Gutheim subsequently introduced various aesthetic reforms at B'nai Yeshurun, Bene Israel hurried to approve similar ones.<sup>31</sup>

Aesthetics, indeed, came to play an increasingly important role at Bene Israel, in part because it felt threatened by B'nai Yeshurun's moves in this area, and in part because religious services had hitherto been marked by a raucousness that was now seen as quite out of keeping with developing ideas about what was appropriate to a religious setting. Congregants at midcentury wanted their synagogues to be beautiful, their worship orderly and meaningful, and the behavior of their fellow congregants thoroughly decorous. This development, of course, was not confined to Cincinnati. In nineteenth-century Europe, both Sephardic and German Jews sought to promote synagogue decorum, hoping, thereby, not only to make worship more meaningful but also to improve the image of Jews in the eyes of their neighbors. In America, rules "to promote solemnity and order" were already introduced into the 1805 bylaws of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York. These became far more widespread with the immigration of German Jews, some synagogues issuing full-scale "rules of order." It soon became clear, Leon Jick observes, "that the chaotic, self-governing congregation was to be a training school in propriety."<sup>32</sup>

At Bene Israel, the new proprieties included a precise system for distributing in rotation such synagogue honors as the privilege of being called up before the Torah (rather than at auction, as had sometimes been done before); rules requiring men to wear their prayer shawls during divine services; resolutions designed to keep "poor boys" in "good order," so that they might recite their prayers in "proper order" and not wander into the women's section; and a decision to "put in force" an old decree that "no girl or boy under 5 years old shall be allowed to be in the Shool [synagogue], or any girl in the Shool below." The aim in each case was to minimize potential distractions, like crying babies or violations of sexual spheres, so as to create a "proper" atmosphere for prayer, and "a due respect and reverence for the precepts of our holy religion."<sup>33</sup> Later resolutions asked individuals to recite their prayers "in a low tone of voice, so as not to interfere with the Hazan [reader] or Chorus," and mandated that "no person shall interrupt or correct either the Hazan during the service or reading the Torah."<sup>34</sup>



The tendency of all of these changes was to transform male congregants from active participants in the religious service into passive observers. The growing concern with aesthetics undermined the feeling that the synagogue was an everyday place where one might feel comfortable acting in common, even disreputable ways.<sup>35</sup> New expectations for synagogue behavior defined the sanctuary as a special place marked by a solemn and "proper" atmosphere. The sanctuary needed to be more elegant, more dignified than the common spheres of life. A special code was introduced instructing the reader to wear a special black robe at particular times and to behave in an especially dignified way.<sup>36</sup>

Although in its concern with aesthetics, and in other ways, Bene Israel seemed simply to be aping the modernizing initiatives of B'nai Yeshurun, the emergence of the new congregation also prompted the older synagogue to express anew its fidelity to tradition, as if in contrast to B'nai Yeshurun. Thus, in 1846, the secretary accounted for the recent addition of twenty new members as exhibiting "on the part of our Brethren here a regard for perpetuating in its primitive holiness the tenets and principles of our holy Religion." The secretary, however, hastened to explain that the congregation itself had no intention of backing away from modernity. Instead, the accession of new members would enable it "to conduct its affairs with that liberality which must command the respect and esteem of all men."<sup>37</sup> Two years later, when Bene Israel followed B'nai Yeshurun's lead and resolved to form a choir, the congregation's leaders walked the same thin line. Rather than trumpet the innovation, they made it "clearly understood that no alteration or diminishment shall take place in our present form of Divine Service or Prayers" as a result.<sup>38</sup> Given the diversity of Bene Israel's members and the desire to attract as many new members as possible, this pragmatism is understandable. The congregation sought to be modern and traditional, like B'nai Yeshurun and different from it—all at the same time.

Bene Israel also responded to the B'nai Yeshurun challenge by expanding the role of the synagogue in several traditional areas. In 1847, for example, the trustees learned that the *mikveh* (ritual bath) necessary for the ritual observance of laws of marital purity, which had hitherto been operated by a private establishment in Cincinnati, was closing down. They therefore took it upon themselves to open a new *mikveh* so that they might "supply this requisite convenience, and tend to keep up with strictness the time honored laws of Judaism." They backed up this commitment with an expenditure of more than \$1,000, furnishing a bath to serve the wives of members and nonmembers alike.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in

early 1848, the matzas committee was instructed to oversee the installation of a special oven at the back of the synagogue "for the purpose of baking Matzas for the ensuing Passover."<sup>40</sup> Again, the matzas were sold not just to members but to the community at large. Bene Israel thus attempted to solidify its position by reasserting its traditional communal role. While it could not by such actions recreate the old synagogue-community, it did indicate its continuing sense of responsibility for the community; it would not withdraw into itself.

Yet, for all this, the congregation's priorities did change. As aesthetics and the need to compete with B'nai Yeshurun became paramount, the congregation paid less attention to older concerns, like religious tradition and Jewish learning. While questions dealing with Jewish law and practice continued to arise, their resolution was left to a shrinking number of educated members who were able to read the prayers and guide the congregation along traditional lines. But the knowledge and authority of these few was itself open to question. For example, the Committee on Religious Rules, in 1846, considered the question of whether Joseph Jonas should be "disqualified from reading [i.e., leading] prayers during the year succeeding the demise of his Father." The revealing answer, preserved in the minutes, reads as follows: "That according to the [blank] which is our standing Laws to be guided by, it is strictly forbidden. . . ." Actually, the answer is not correct; the supposedly "strict" prohibition is disputed by several major authorities, and all agree that where another prayer leader is unavailable, the mourner may assume the task.<sup>41</sup> What is even more telling than this error, however, is the "blank" left in the record. The secretary was apparently unfamiliar with the text (presumably the sixteenth-century code of Jewish law known as the *Shulchan Aruch*) that served as the congregation's "standing Laws" and had to check, or find somebody else to fill in the proper words in Hebrew. This was a change from the early days when the congregation's secretary—usually a communal leader on the way up—possessed a traditional Jewish education and inserted Hebrew into the minutes in a familiar and comfortable hand. Now, when Hebrew appeared in the records at all it was written in ornate calligraphy, a sign that ability to write it could not be taken for granted. Indeed, Hebrew literacy had declined to the point where the language could be written out only by experts—and they, significantly, paid special attention to aesthetics.

In many ways, then, Bene Israel by midcentury had become entirely different from the frontier congregation of 1824. Where the founders

naught to transplant tradition and to create a "holy community" in Cincinnati, the synagogue now faced competition and the need to come to terms with American religious norms, by which they felt they were being judged, and according to which, increasingly, they came to judge themselves. Coercion had given way to persuasion, learning to aesthetics, and dignity and decorum had become the watchwords of the day. As a result, the synagogue was becoming ever more rarefied; it took on a special aura that set it apart from the normal tenor of life. Like the Hebrew words in the minute books, it at once became less familiar and more ornate. And sometimes it became a blank that members forgot to fill in at all.

### Reform Comes to Cincinnati

The history of Bene Israel, indeed of Cincinnati Judaism as a whole, changed in 1854 with the appointment of Isaac Mayer Wise as rabbi of B'nai Yeshurun.<sup>42</sup> Born in Steingrub, Bohemia, in 1819 and trained in Germany, Wise immigrated to the United States in 1846 and quickly established himself as a "Reformer." In his first major pulpit, at Congregation Beth El in Albany, he stirred controversy with a series of ritual modifications aimed at improving decorum; he also organized a mixed choir. These innovations helped precipitate his firing, led to a memorable melee on the holiday of Rosh Hashanah when the congregation's president lashed out at him and knocked off his hat, and soon resulted in the founding of a new congregation, Anshe Emeth, which he served as rabbi until being called to Cincinnati. How much B'nai Yeshurun's leaders knew of all this when they appointed him (and agreed to his unprecedented demand for a life contract) is not clear, but they surely realized that they were getting one of the most able young men then serving in the American rabbinate: a leader who combined within himself traditional and modern learning, boundless energy and ambition, facility in both German and English, and remarkable personal charisma.<sup>43</sup>

In accepting the B'nai Yeshurun position, Wise made clear that he shared the vision of those who hired him. He promised to elevate his new synagogue into a "model congregation for the whole West and South," and pledged to "maintain and defend the honor of our sacred faith opposite all religious sects." He was, he pointed out, "a friend of bold plans and bold schemes."<sup>44</sup> In Cincinnati, where bold planners and

grand schemers already envisioned their city becoming the greatest city in America if not the world, Wise felt right at home.

Meanwhile, over at Bene Israel, the future looked bleak. Wise's "synagogue was progressing while ours was fast sinking," one member wrote. He revealed that Bene Israel was hampered by "a burdensome debt . . . and bad government." Part of the blame apparently lay with an earlier decision to spend \$40,000 on a larger synagogue, erected on the same site (plus adjoining lots) of the former one, at Sixth and Broadway. The new synagogue was completed in 1852, but by then many Jews had moved out of this declining downtown area; a \$10,000 debt remained.<sup>45</sup> The more serious threat, however, was Wise himself. In the past, Bene Israel had proudly eschewed appointing a rabbi and relied upon the knowledge and leadership of its own members. They, in turn, had looked upon B'nai Yeshurun's need for a minister (it had seven different "rabbis" in ten years) as evidence of the younger congregation's weakness: "It is true we have only a reader. Yet our Synagogue is daily opened for prayers, and well attended."<sup>46</sup> Now the tables had turned, and B'nai Yeshurun with its new rabbi was steadily attracting former Bene Israel members away, while B'nai Yeshurun adamantly refused to share him even on a co-equal basis. Suddenly, Bene Israel's stalwart and outspoken traditionalists found themselves on the defensive, particularly as Wise with his dynamic plans for reform waved aside the ritual issues that they had always found so important. As membership eroded, Bene Israel was left with but one sensible option: it had to find a rabbi who could compete. Fortunately for the congregation, Rabbi Max Lilienthal accepted the challenge.

Born and educated in Munich, where he received both his doctorate and his ordination, Lilienthal (1814?-1882) was by training and inclination a *modern* rabbi. While still in his twenties, he had played a significant role in Russia's controversial effort to modernize Jewish education, working under S. S. Uvarov, the country's minister of national enlightenment. He resigned under somewhat mysterious circumstances soon after his marriage and immigrated to New York, where he arrived in 1845.<sup>47</sup> There, he served for a time as "chief rabbi" of the city's "United German-Jewish community," and subsequently founded a private Jewish boarding school, which he and his wife led with great success until Bene Israel called him away.<sup>48</sup> On June 5, 1855, thirteen months after Wise's own arrival in the city, Lilienthal assumed his new position.



Lilienthal and Wise had been friends back in New York, and had served together on a short-lived rabbinical court. Whether or not Wise actually recommended Lilienthal for the Cincinnati job, he knew that Lilienthal had grown increasingly sympathetic toward moderate religious reforms.<sup>49</sup> Lilienthal himself confirmed this in his preliminary meeting with the Bene Israel trustees when he told them that, as rabbi, he would seek to abolish the sale of synagogue honors, alter the manner of saying the *misheberach* petitionary prayers, and urge that "some certain prayers now said in many shools [synagogues] . . . be abolished."<sup>50</sup> Once settled, he set in motion a steady process of reforms. The system for distributing synagogue honors was changed, suggestions for "some alterations" in prayers were proposed, and serious efforts were made to institute a choir that would include women. In July, Lilienthal conspicuously absented himself from the traditional Tisha B'Av services which commemorate, with fasting and lamentation, the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem. Such an observance, Lilienthal maintained, mourned what should be celebrated: the dispersion of Jews over the face of the earth, enabling them to carry their message to humanity.<sup>51</sup>

From the start, Lilienthal promised "to go hand in hand, in all matters concerning reform, with his beloved friend Dr. Wise." Together, the two men saw themselves as the harbingers of *American Judaism*, a legitimate heir to the Judaism practiced by different waves of Jewish immigrants. They believed, in other words, that the modernized Judaism that they consciously sought to establish in Cincinnati would in time be recognized as the rite, or *minhag*, of *all* American Jews, displacing the various rites that then divided them. This was a logical Jewish counterpart to the "Cincinnati dream." The city that represented the future of America as a whole, the "gateway to the west," would, they hoped, shape American Jewry's destiny as well.<sup>52</sup>

Not all Bene Israel members bought into this dream. A vocal traditionalist minority that had for some time been fighting efforts to change time-tested practices in the congregation withdrew after losing a close August 1855 congregational vote on reforms, and founded a new and traditional synagogue, aptly named Shearith Israel, the remnant of Israel. Rid of his opponents, Lilienthal continued on his course, recruiting new members and redefining the synagogue along more progressive lines.<sup>53</sup>

In the decades that followed, moving in fits and starts and usually following B'nai Yeshurun's lead, the congregation enacted a whole series

of aesthetic and liturgical reforms, including shorter and more decorous services, vernacular prayers, organ music, mixed seating, limitations on the use of traditional prayer shawls, and, finally, "monitors" to preserve order and "to prevent the egress of all persons during divine services unless in cases of urgent necessity." Congregational leaders quite self-consciously sought both to abolish practices that seemed in "straight contradiction with the present requirements of decorum and morality" and to regulate the disorder caused by the many voices and movements of autonomous worshipers. Other proposals aimed to shorten, translate, or alter those portions of the prayer service which were deemed too long, incomprehensible, or jarring to modern ears.<sup>54</sup> Through these changes, members hoped to create a service that was more understandable, more pleasing, and less in conflict with the beliefs and assumptions that guided the lives of enlightened Americans. At the same time, and as a further indication of its changing sense of its own role, the congregation stopped overseeing kosher food and the *mikveh*. These, it argued, were communal responsibilities that all local congregations should share in.<sup>55</sup>

Yet even as the congregation was abandoning the last vestiges of the old synagogue-community, it refused to abandon its role as representative of the Jewish community, symbolizing Cincinnati Judaism to the outside world. As such, it sought to project as positive an image of the Jew as possible. This explains the bulk of the changes introduced at Bene Israel during the Lilienthal years. It also explains much about Lilienthal's own rabbinate. Reinterpreting the traditional rabbinic role, Lilienthal became the first rabbi in Cincinnati's history, and one of the first anywhere, to take an active role in civic affairs. During the course of his more than two decades of leadership, he served on the city's Board of Education, became a regent of McMicken University, actively participated in local philanthropic, social, and cultural organizations, and reputedly became the first American rabbi to preach in a Christian pulpit.<sup>56</sup> He was, according to Isaac M. Wise, the "mediator" between Jews and Gentiles in the city. While he also worked closely with Wise on behalf of religious reforms, church-state separation, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (founded 1873) and Hebrew Union College (founded 1875), it was usually Wise who focused on the Jewish community's needs and Lilienthal who involved himself with the general community. In this way, as in many others, the two rabbis complemented one another. Their relationship, which did much to advance the

Cincinnati Jewish community's reputation, was captured, in a few phrases, by a contemporary journalist:

What Wise suggested, Lilienthal supported, and what Lilienthal pacified, Wise promoted. What Wise wounded, Lilienthal healed, and what Lilienthal whitewashed, Wise exposed. Where Wise wanted to lead, Lilienthal gracefully followed, and where Lilienthal wisely warned, Wise laudably obeyed.<sup>57</sup>

The esteem in which Lilienthal was held by Cincinnatians was never better demonstrated than in 1868, when he accepted a call to become the rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in New York. His wife had recently died, and he was frustrated, for his congregation had still not delivered on its resolution of five years before, "to build a temple with all the necessary improvements . . . in a more suitable part of the city."<sup>58</sup> The competition, meanwhile, had built an imposing new edifice, B'nai Yeshurun's so-called Plum Street Temple, dedicated in 1866. Use of the word "temple" there was not accident; the new edifice, equipped with an organ, choir loft, and pews for the mixed seating of men and women, symbolized Reform Judaism's break with the past, its renunciation of any hope for redemption, and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> Lilienthal believed that Bene Israel needed a "temple" too. He pointed to the "spirit of the age" as well as to the need "to impress the minds of the rising generation" in seeking to persuade cost-conscious congregants, who knew that Bene Israel still owed money on its 1852 building, to support his proposal.<sup>60</sup> But, as David Philipson later recalled, "after the foundation for the new building had been dug the work dragged along. Subscriptions were slow in coming in, and the hands of the building committee were bound by a resolution of the congregation, prohibiting the building committee from making contracts or proceeding with the work on the temple until the classification on pews had reached seventy-five thousand dollars."<sup>61</sup> Lilienthal eventually lost hope, and when the Emanu-El offer arose, he accepted it.

His Cincinnati congregants, clearly shocked, tried to persuade him to change his mind. They spoke of the loss "which will be felt by the community in general," and promised to renew their efforts to raise necessary funds. At the same time, sixteen of Cincinnati's most prominent non-Jewish leaders, headed by Judge Bellamy Storer, addressed an extraordinary letter to Bene Israel's trustees asking them to persuade their rabbi to withdraw his resignation; they considered him too valuable a citizen for the community to lose. At a meeting convened at Judge Sto-

rer's home, Lilienthal gave in and consented to stay. Presumably as part of the agreement, the cornerstone for Bene Israel's magnificent new Mound Street Temple was laid just ten weeks later. Shortly before the high holidays of 1869 the congregation moved in.<sup>62</sup>

The new temple reinforced the image that Bene Israel sought to project to the wider world. Outside, the building conveyed a positive picture of Jews and Judaism. It made a distinct contribution to the city's skyline, and was an edifice that Jews felt proud to show off to their Christian neighbors. Inside, the worship appeared no less pleasing. It was both aesthetically beautiful and thoroughly decorous. Rabbi Lilienthal, now one of the most respected men in the city, only enhanced the congregation's sense of self-esteem. His message spelled out in words what Bene Israel's new building tried to express in bricks and mortar: the idea that "the public at large will judge our religion according to the decency we display on every public occasion," and the corollary, that "we cannot do enough to improve the order and decorum of all public rituals in our religion."<sup>63</sup> Julius Freiberg, the congregation's president, raised these pronouncements to the level of a religious duty. "Our members," he reported with pride in 1873, "seem to have but one aim before them, that of elevating our beloved Congregation and Judaism in general in the eyes of all men."<sup>64</sup>

How to achieve this lofty aim was not always certain. At the very first congregational meeting held in the new temple, for example, the congregation was asked to consider "the nonobservance by some members of the Congregation of the rule and custom of sitting in the Temple during Divine Service with the head covered."<sup>65</sup> The "nonobservance," of course, was a reform motivated by the Western Protestant idea that heads should be uncovered as a sign of respect. This was further from Jewish tradition than most Bene Israel Jews were prepared to move in 1869, but after several years of discussion and an 1873 resolution by B'nai Yeshurun permitting their members to dispense with headcoverings, a split congregation voted, in 1875, to offer congregants the right to pray bareheaded; traditional headgear would henceforward be required only of the rabbi and the reader.<sup>66</sup>

The compromise is revealing, for it shows that, more and more, Judaism at Bene Israel was becoming a vicarious experience. Worshipers watched and listened but rarely participated themselves. At best, they were passive: sung to, spoken to, told when to stand and when to sit. This yawning gap between pulpit and pew was underscored by new rules, promulgated in 1871, that required paid officers of the

congregation—and only them—to observe the Sabbath. Efforts to enforce congregation-wide Sabbath observance had long since been abandoned.<sup>67</sup> The requirement (later abandoned) that the rabbi and reader maintain their skullcaps, even as congregants discarded them, likewise emphasized the role of the congregation's spiritual leaders as "symbolic exemplars" and guardians of the faith. So long as *they* upheld a modicum of tradition, members felt free to do as they pleased.

By the late 1870s, then, the course of Reform seemed to be running smoothly. With a respected rabbi, a magnificent (non-Jewish) professional choir, a growing membership, and ever more affluent congregants, President Freiberg happily reported that Bene Israel's "social position" had attained an "enviable eminence."<sup>68</sup> Congregants sat decorously and followed along as the rabbi, reader, and choir created a service that was inspiring, impressive, and edifying.

Yet beneath the surface it was apparent that all was not well at the temple. Attendance was down, and not just on weekdays (already in 1865, some people seem to have been paid to attend so that the requisite *minyan* [quorum] for the twice-daily weekday services could be maintained)<sup>69</sup> but also on the Sabbath. As early as 1873, Freiberg bemoaned the fact that sometimes more gentiles were present in the synagogue than Jews.<sup>70</sup> Later, he complained that most of the Jews who did come to synagogue, at least on Saturday morning, were women and children. This phenomenon, a counterpart to the "feminization" that characterized Protestantism of this era, only seemed to emphasize the fact that the temple had become marginal to the lives of its members. "The real old Jewish feeling and devotion which characterized us in former times," Freiberg lamented, "has declined."<sup>71</sup> The question, as Bene Israel entered the closing decades of the nineteenth century, was whether the Judaism that replaced that of "former times" would suffice.

### The Wrong Rabbi

On April 5, 1882, Max Lilienthal died after a short illness. He had served Bene Israel faithfully for twenty-seven years, and now he was widely mourned. "The funeral obsequies," according to David Philipson, "were among the most impressive ever held" in Cincinnati.<sup>72</sup> Finding someone to replace Lilienthal would be difficult, finding someone of equal stature, impossible. America had only just begun to train its own rabbis at this time, and the first Hebrew Union College ordination would not occur until the following year. To be sure, many congregations imported Ger-

man rabbis to fill their pulpits. That, however, was not an option for Bene Israel, for too many of its members were not native German speakers. Instead, the congregation turned to an English-born rabbi named Raphael Benjamin (1846–1906), who was then serving in Melbourne, Australia. They hoped that his relative youth (he was thirty-six), his background in education, and his fine homiletical style would win young people back to the temple.<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, Raphael proved the wrong man for the job. His conception of the rabbinate turned out to be narrowly congregational, rather than broadly communal as Lilienthal's had been, and he never established a firm base of support. The new rabbi did devote a great deal of time to pastoral calls, the religious school, and his weekly sermons. He refused, however, to be drawn into the many outside activities that carried with them the status that Bene Israel's congregants wanted their rabbi to have. He also refused to succeed his predecessor as professor of history at Hebrew Union College, a position of some status, even when assured that the post would bring him honor and likewise do honor "to the congregation he represents." For a congregation that saw itself as a harbinger of what American Judaism should be, and that also had to compete with Isaac M. Wise's Plum Street Temple, this was intolerable. Exasperated lay leaders tried to explain to Benjamin that Bene Israel, "the pioneer of Judaism in the west," had "to stand at the head and take the lead in every good object calculated to advance and elevate our faith among ourselves, as likewise in the eyes of all Nations."<sup>74</sup> But Benjamin, who never understood the role of "symbolic exemplar" that the congregation demanded of him, felt that he carried all that he could handle ministering to the needs of Bene Israel's more than 300 members. When new demands were placed upon him, he complained of lack of time. As a result, in 1888, when his contract was up for renewal, the board voted 13–1 that "a change will be best for the welfare of the congregation."<sup>75</sup> While Benjamin moved on to a new position in New York, the congregation searched for someone who more closely approximated its ideal of what a Bene Israel rabbi should be.

### The Right Rabbi

To replace Benjamin, Bene Israel's leaders turned to a twenty-six-year-old American-born rabbi, raised in Columbus, Ohio, trained at Hebrew Union College, and ordained at its first ordination in 1883. His name was David Philipson, and he would be associated with the congregation

for the next sixty-one years.<sup>76</sup> Philipson had been a great favorite of Max Lilienthal's and believed that the older rabbi, had he not died so suddenly, would have selected him as his successor.<sup>77</sup> When Bene Israel did make its approach, he was already in Baltimore, serving as rabbi of Har Sinai Congregation. Although he was happy in Baltimore, and had turned down several offers from other congregations, he accepted the Cincinnati call. "Cincinnati exerted a spell that I could not withstand," he later explained. He believed that the center of Reform activity, the home of his eminent teacher, Isaac M. Wise, and of Hebrew Union College "would afford him greater scope."<sup>78</sup>

Philipson soon took up where Lilienthal had left off. Modeling his career upon that of his beloved predecessor, he became active in the general community, especially in cultural, philanthropic, and civic affairs. He also taught at Hebrew Union College, offering classes in Semitic languages and homiletics. Most important of all, he, like Lilienthal, advocated and practiced a Judaism that was cultured, respectable, solemn, impressive, and not too demanding of its adherents. Once again congregants could now bask in their rabbi's reflected glory. "Thank God," the president reported in 1888, "the troubles are over and the future is bright."<sup>79</sup>

Philipson moved quickly to establish his authority. He took command of the religious school and, over the objections of the board of trustees, invited a Unitarian minister to address the annual Thanksgiving Day service.<sup>80</sup> He then turned his attention to the more vexing problem of pews that sat empty week in and week out, while their owners spent the Jewish Sabbath at work. Philipson's classmate, Joseph Krauskopf, faced with a similar problem a few months earlier at Congregation Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia, had solved it by inaugurating a series of "Sunday Lectures" that attracted Jews and Gentiles alike. Philipson now proposed a similar idea to the trustees of Bene Israel.

The issue aroused great passions. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise at B'nai Yeshurun had long opposed Sunday services in any form, even when disguised as only a lecture, for being a "violation of Jewish custom." To him, and to many others, the traditional Sabbath was a lasting symbol of Jewish identity, a critical boundary line between Jews and Christians that Reform should not dare to breach. Wise advocated instead an embellished Friday evening service for those who needed to work on the Sabbath day. Yet Philipson, believing that Friday evening services had not succeeded at B'nai Yeshurun, viewed Sunday lectures as a necessary

and pragmatic reform—a counterpart, not a replacement, for traditional Sabbath day services. In his diary, he blasted Wise for "throwing the firebrand of discord into the ranks of my congregation." He was angry at Wise, once his teacher and hero, for trying to thwart him.<sup>81</sup>

But thwarted he was. In 1888, the board of trustees narrowly endorsed Philipson's request to introduce Sunday lectures, but the congregation rejected the move, inviting Philipson instead to choose the "most propitious" time on any day during the week "except Sunday" for his lectures. When, the next year, Philipson tried to assert his authority by beginning a Sunday lecture series without prior congregation approval, the result was a large and chaotic public debate at which "great tumult ensued." A pledge that no "religious services of any kind" would ever be "connected with such lectures" failed to calm the waters. Philipson and the board had no choice but to back down, and the Sunday talks were discontinued. In 1891, when Philipson again asked for permission to speak on Sundays, he was thwarted once more. Reluctantly, he acceded to a board request to deliver the lectures on Friday nights instead.<sup>82</sup>

Many members of Bene Israel continued to feel uncomfortable about Jews gathering for religious activities on Sunday; they saw this as a threat to Judaism's integrity. Much as they sympathized with their rabbi's goal of creating Jewish functions for those who regularly missed services on Saturday, they did not share his vision of how this should be done. Philipson, however, did not give up; he merely bided his time. In 1909, when he once again moved to introduce Sunday lectures, the time was right and they were approved. Ten years later, when he expanded these into Sunday morning services, they were approved too. By then, Philipson's authority within the congregation had expanded to the point that dissenters, if any remained, kept quiet. Yet in the end, Sunday services failed to become a major part of Philipson's program for American Judaism, and failed to become firmly entrenched in his own temple. Sunday services also faced considerable resistance within the Reform movement as a whole. As a result, in 1930, following a congregational referendum on the subject, they were discontinued. Ironically, they were replaced by an embellished late Friday night worship service beginning at 7:45 P.M. (which, depending on the time of the year, was either earlier or later than traditional Sabbath eve services, which are held at sundown).<sup>83</sup>

The Sunday-service controversy pointed up a major change that

had taken place at Bene Israel. The congregation's foremost objectives of achieving financial security, a large membership, and of "elevating our beloved Congregation and Judaism in general in the eyes of all men" had essentially been attained. Now the overriding concern was how to keep Jews connected with their religion and its institutions. Philipson believed that the synagogue was the key to Jewish survival. He was willing to push the limits of Judaism in order to make the synagogue into a comfortable space for Cincinnati's acculturated Jews. To his mind, Sunday services were justifiable if they brought Jews into the synagogue. While some of his congregants, for symbolic reasons, opposed special Sunday devotions, they fully agreed with their rabbi's larger aim. As a result, during Philipson's tenure, Bene Israel took on a wide range of new functions, all of them designed to bring Jews, especially Jewish men, back into the synagogue on a more frequent basis.

Complaints about poor synagogue attendance dogged Philipson from the beginning. Even with modernized services, the congregation's presidents had continually to plead for members' attendance. Julius Freiberg, Bene Israel's president for twenty years, was particularly concerned about the problem, and referred to it in his last annual address to the congregation in 1890:

The attendance of members during the year, with the exception of the great holidays and Shevuoth, has been steadily on the decrease. Of course, we often have a goodly congregation of women and children, and I must confess that I am always delighted to see them, but at the same time, I would have been delighted much more if I had the pleasure of seeing our members in the Temple, if only occasionally.<sup>84</sup>

Recruitment of new and potentially more active members was one possible solution. New members had the additional advantage of helping to offset a growing deficit. But recruitment, as well as regular attendance by current members, was stymied in the 1890s by the accelerating movement of affluent Jews out of Cincinnati's downtown region, into the hilly suburbs around the city. As early as 1894, David Philipson had called attention to this problem, stating that the time had come "for the erection of a house of worship in the new residential section, miles away from the present structure." His president, Philipson later recalled, considered him "*meshugge*" (crazy) for making such a suggestion.<sup>85</sup> But ten

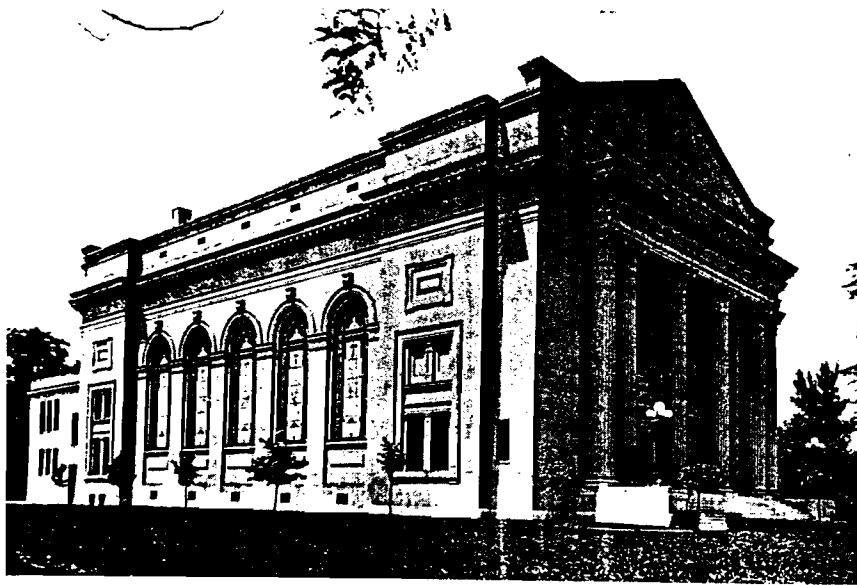
years later, buoyed by hopes that a new location would bring Jews back to the synagogue, the congregation broke ground for a new temple on Rockdale and Harvey Avenues in Avondale, the suburb that had become home to many of Cincinnati's German Jews.

### A Temple on a Hill and a Synagogue-Center

Completed in 1906 and dedicated amidst considerable fanfare, the new 1,500-seat "Temple on the Hill" was a modern, dignified structure featuring an impressive portico adorned with classical columns and a lofty pediment bearing the universalistic message "My House Shall be a House of Prayer for All Peoples." In its very architecture, as Lance Sussman has observed of synagogue architecture of this era, it expressed the idea "that Judaism was an ancient and integral part of Western Civilization" and "that the Jewish heritage was based on lofty, noble ideals that contributed to the strength and stability of society."<sup>86</sup> Here was an architectural answer to the congregation's twentieth-century problem, a statement in stone explaining why Jews should come back to the synagogue. Formal in every way, it was built on a grand scale that was meant to impress outsiders and to reflect positively on the stature of the congregation within.

The move to Avondale marked a new era in the history of Bene Israel. Two years before, while the move was being planned, the congregation had mourned the death at age ninety-eight of Elinor Moses, wife of Phineas Moses, one of the Bene Israel's 1824 founders. The congregation's leaders recognized the symbolic impact of her demise, for it "removed the one personal link that joined the first days of our Congregation with the present time." The president reassured congregants that Mrs. Moses had been "familiar with the removal which we are about to make to the hill-top." He implied that she was the connection, the legitimating tie, between the old pioneers and the new temple. For all intents and purposes the "single tie" to the "earliest pioneer days" had now been irrevocably severed.<sup>87</sup>

As in its previous incarnations, the new congregation quickly became known by the name of the street upon which it was built. The inauguration of "Rockdale Temple," like the consecration of the Mound Street Temple before it, also led congregants to expect some transformation of their Judaism and its place in their lives. Accordingly, the new temple promulgated a new, modern constitution. It abandoned the old



3.1 Rockdale Temple as it appeared at its dedication in 1906. Photograph courtesy of both the Collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County and the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

finer, several outmoded offices, and, most revealingly, the explicit rules of decorum that were now observed as a matter of course.

As expected, the early years at Rockdale and Harvey Avenues in the hilltops of Avondale were triumphant ones. Although women continued to dominate the Sabbath morning congregation, attendance was deemed to be almost satisfactory. And according to the congregation's presidents, high holy day services were everything that the new majestic environment suggested they should be: solemn, imposing, and marked by a "profound religious spirit."<sup>88</sup> Yet by far the most important change that took place at Rockdale—paralleling a development that transformed many Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform congregations in the early twentieth century—was a process of redefinition. The synagogue was transmuted from a house of worship into a synagogue-center, a focal point for Jewish activities of every sort. This marked the triumph of earlier efforts to promote the synagogue as the central institution of Jewish life. But the result, somewhat unintended, was that home religion declined.

The synagogue responded to this decline by transplanting tradition-

ally domestic rituals into the sanctuary. Home rituals, like candle lighting, now became synagogue rituals. The synagogue also became the favorite place to celebrate the Sabbath, holidays, and life-cycle events, many of which had formerly been celebrated, at least in part, at home. In time, the synagogue, located in the heart of the Cincinnati Jewish community, also accommodated a wide variety of clubs and organizations, some of which it had itself initiated. In short, Rockdale, like many another modern synagogue, now aimed to go beyond "mere" worship to promote a broader sense of Jewish social cohesiveness as a bulwark against assimilation. Like the "institutional church," a parallel development in American Protestantism, it blurred many of the distinctions between the religious and the secular, on the theory that deed was more important than creed. Mordecai Kaplan, who best articulated the synagogue-center ideology, explained the idea this way:

The Jewish milieu provided by the home, basic as it is to Jewish life, cannot suffice. There is need for some additional *locus* where the cultural and social aspects of Jewish civilization might find a far wider scope for expression and enjoyment than is possible in the home. That *locus* should be the synagogue, not the congregational synagogue which exists in American-Jewish life today, but the synagogue reconstructed to meet the new needs which have arisen in Jewish life. . . . It should be a neighborhood center to which all Jews to whom it is accessible should resort for all religious, cultural, social and recreational purposes.<sup>89</sup>

As early as 1906, Rockdale's trustees permitted the local branch of the National Council of Jewish Women to use the temple's schoolrooms. A year later, the temple provided space for a Hebrew Union College lecture series, B'nai B'rith meetings, and the Ladies' Sewing Society. By 1909, temple president J. Walter Freiberg characterized the congregational home as a "center of Jewish communal life." The next president, Alfred M. Cohen, reiterated the point: "the policy of the Trustees," he announced in 1913, "has been to make the school building a Jewish center, and it is such in the widest sense."<sup>90</sup> These activities expanded in the next decade with the establishment of a sisterhood, youth group, men's club, and boy and girl scout troops. There was also a formal Rockdale Temple Center for young people, which in conjunction with a similar group at Wise Temple (the new name adopted by B'nai Yeshurun upon Isaac M. Wise's death) sponsored parties, lectures, and outings. Inevitably, some complained that the congregation had forgotten its



raison d'être, "the worship of God, according to the precepts of Israel."<sup>91</sup> But the new view—that the congregation should work to bring Jews into the synagogue and make them feel a part of it—generally triumphed. And judged by this standard, rather than by attendance at weekly services, Rockdale thrived, for its building bustled with life all week long.

The active role of women was the most salient aspect of the general growth in temple activities which marked the synagogue-center. Despite Reform's attempt to emancipate women from the limited role assigned to them by traditional Judaism, and despite the preponderance of women in the weekly congregation, there had been no distinctive or organized role for women connected with the congregation since the disappearance of the benevolent societies that had been part of the original synagogue-community. Given how thoroughly religion was equated with the "gentler sex" during this era, and given how important female participation had become in many Christian church communities, it seems strange that women at Bene Israel were restricted to the roles of attendee and "member's wife" until the end of the nineteenth century. The problem was that with the sphere of the synagogue reduced to the sanctuary, the only nonreligious activity associated with the congregation was governance, which remained, without apparent objection, firmly in the hands of male officers and trustees. It was only toward the end of the century that the educational and professional advancement of women in other spheres began to make female exclusion from synagogue governance seem outmoded.

The expansion of temple activities that marked the rise of the synagogue-center created opportunities to find places for women within the congregation that went beyond their seats in the sanctuary. In 1900, women were accorded the right to join Bene Israel as full members even if they were not, as had previously been necessary, widows of former male members. "The experience of late years has demonstrated the necessity for reliance upon the women of Israel to fill our pews each Sabbath," the president reminded the congregation. He argued that membership would provide at least "a slight recognition of the obligation" owed by the congregation to these faithful attendees. Yet very few women availed themselves of their new privilege. Most continued to affiliate through their fathers or husbands.<sup>92</sup>

Once women had been certified as potential members in their own

right, the congregation's leadership continued to enlarge the possibilities for women to contribute their energies to the temple in a manner thought to be in keeping with their character and interests. "There are many things in connection with the school," the school committee explained in 1903, "that ladies are particularly apt in doing." They asked for the creation of a ladies' auxiliary to the school committee which would undertake such tasks as "the beautifying of the school-rooms, the arranging of entertainments [holiday parties for the children] . . . and the like."<sup>93</sup> With the move to Rockdale, a Ladies Auxiliary (later Women's House) Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Mrs. J. Walter (Stella Heinsheimer) Freiberg to take responsibility for the "care and supervision" of the temple's interior.<sup>94</sup> While these auxiliaries brought institutional recognition to the few women who were appointed to serve on them, Bene Israel's (male) leadership was not prepared to place women on the congregation's governing committees. Even as the Women's House Committee was being formed, the board of trustees responded to a request from the Cincinnati section of the National Council of Jewish Women by stating that "they did not deem it advisable at this time" to place "a lady member of the Temple" on the Choir Committee.<sup>95</sup> (Therese Strauss, who had been trained as an opera singer, became the first woman appointed to a nonauxiliary congregational committee when she was made a member of the choir committee in 1919.)

In 1913, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), an organization intended to connect the efforts of temple women's organizations throughout the country was founded at a meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Cincinnati. Aware of the imminent emergence of NFTS, David Philipson sponsored the formation of a sisterhood at Rockdale Temple—another indication that change at the temple proceeded from the top down. Rockdale's sisterhood quickly grew into one of the most active contributors to temple activities. Within the developing synagogue-center there was much "within the sphere of women's labor" that could be accomplished, and the sisterhood soon assumed responsibility for temple, school, communal, and Reform movement-wide activities, including fund-raising. Rockdale's president, Alfred M. Cohen, took note of the new status women had won when he began the 1913 congregational meeting with the salutation "Brethren and sisters." Never before had women been officially welcomed.<sup>96</sup>

Within twelve months, the sisterhood had proved its worth, and



drew high praise for serving, in Cohen's words, "delicately and unobtrusively the cause we love so well."<sup>97</sup> By 1925 the sisterhood boasted 745 members (total synagogue membership, including all male heads of households and widows, was 792), and was involved in the full range of activities that the synagogue had taken under its wing—entertainments, holiday observances, the religious school, social and philanthropic work within the community, and more. Sisterhood leaders even participated in leading the services for a special Women's Sabbath which began in 1923 and became an annual event.<sup>98</sup> Rockdale also exercised national leadership in the sisterhood movement, again led by Mrs. J. Walter Freiberg, who served several terms as NFTS president.

After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment (women's suffrage) in 1920, women came to play a greater role in the governance of Rockdale Temple. They were invited to congregational meetings, allowed to serve on major committees, and in 1924 two were elected to the temple's board of trustees. Sisterhood paved the way for this development. It nurtured a cadre of women leaders and marked out distinctive roles for women to play within the expanded world of the synagogue-center.

Men, however, continued to dominate congregational affairs. As lay leaders, they embodied the central values that the congregation as a whole espoused. The most prominent lay leader of Bene Israel during the second half of the nineteenth century was Julius Freiberg, one of Cincinnati's leading citizens. A close ally of Max Lilienthal, he had overseen the transition from "shool" to temple, as well as the consolidation of Reform practice within the worship service. As president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, he also advocated the Lilienthal-Wise version of American Judaism on the national level. Freiberg was by trade a distiller, and he understood that his leadership in the Jewish community was an intrinsic part of his general status within the Cincinnati community. He achieved enviable success in both realms, so much so that the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce and Merchants' Exchange, in eulogizing him, declared that "no merchant, manufacturer or citizen of our beloved Cincinnati has contributed more to its good name, its development, growth and prosperity than did he."<sup>99</sup>

Julius' son, J. Walter Freiberg, followed in his father's footsteps. He too sought to exemplify success in two realms, playing a major role both in Cincinnati civic life and in Jewish religious life. Like his father, he also presided over Bene Israel as well as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (his wife, Stella, meanwhile, presided over Bene Israel's sis-

terhood and the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods). He too was described at his death as an "ideal citizen." As a Jewish lay leader, he exemplified the creed that his congregation preached to all who would listen: "only in religion is the Jew distinctive from his fellow American."<sup>100</sup>

Lay leadership notwithstanding, it was the rabbi, David Philipson, who stood at the center of the temple's activities.<sup>101</sup> He led the worship, he explained what Judaism meant, he showed how Jewish ideals could be put into practice, he defended Judaism to the Gentile community, and he represented Jews in the community at large. With the death of Isaac Mayer Wise in 1900, Philipson assumed Wise's mantle and was recognized as Cincinnati's premier rabbi. For many Rockdale Temple members, he actually personified Judaism. They experienced it vicariously through him.

Philipson had participated in the famed Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference in 1885 that drew up the "Pittsburgh Platform," a statement of Reform Jewish principles. These formed the basis for his conception of Judaism, a variation of what would later be known as Classical Reform Judaism. Every Rockdale congregant knew Philipson's basic credo: "We are Jews in Religion, Americans in Nationality." He elaborated on his beliefs in a 1909 address to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations where he set forth what he later called "the creed of the American Jew" and the essence of his lifelong message:

We repudiate the fiction of a Jewish race but we recognize the obligation of our Jewish birth; we have been born into a great heritage: a heritage of the spirit. We are members of a religious community, a religious people, a *goy kadosh*; we are held together as Jews, not by political, national, or racial ties, but by religious bonds. We are an historic community, molded by historic forces. If solidarity there be among us, it is a religious solidarity, not a national or a racial. Nationally, I feel attached to my American brother of whatever faith or non-faith. Religiously I am bound to my Jewish brother. . . .<sup>102</sup>

Philipson's sermons reiterated these themes and defended them against critics. He particularly lambasted political Zionism: "To my mind," he wrote in his autobiography, "political Zionism and true Americanism have always seemed mutually exclusive. No man can be a

member of two nationalities, a Jewish and an American. . . . There is no middle way." He considered Zionism "fraught with danger to the welfare of Jews in this country."<sup>103</sup>

Whereas the Zionist vision was focused abroad and looked to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Philipson's vision was firmly rooted in American soil. He, like many Cincinnati Jews, cherished a civic ideal, a mission to work for "the public weal." Education, culture, philanthropy, social work, and especially good government stood among the leading causes that he embraced, often in a spirit of civic pride and *noblesse oblige*. Looking back over his career, he boasted that he had given himself "fully and without stint to every upward movement for the welfare of my city and its citizens."<sup>104</sup>

Philipson played a particularly important part in the movement to clean up city government in Cincinnati. As early as 1889, just one year after he assumed his position at Bene Israel, he defended his right to speak out against political corruption:

when . . . purity of purpose and honesty in action have made way for the crookedness of the politician and the wire-pulling of the ringleader, when devotion to the best interests of the people is sacrificed to private ambition and aggrandizement, then it is high time for the pulpit to say its word and to use its influence in the attempt to stay the corruption, for laxity in these things cannot fail to react on the general life of the people.<sup>105</sup>

A few years later, he attacked the political machine of "Boss" George B. Cox from the pulpit, and called on his congregants to vote it out of office. In 1905, along with other local clerics, he worked for good government (and against Cox) through the Honest Elections Committee. In 1909, he publicly supported John W. Peck, the Democratic reform candidate for mayor, against the machine (he explained that he was "speaking as a citizen of Cincinnati and not as a rabbi of the congregation"). Ultimately, his student, congregant, and friend, Murray Seasongood, backed by many Rockdale Temple members and Philipson himself, spearheaded an anticorruption campaign that resulted in the passage of a new city charter in 1924, and Seasongood's own election as the city's first reform mayor two years later. To be sure, some of Philipson's congregants opposed his political involvements and backed other candidates. What is significant, however, and this Seasongood himself recognized, is that Philipson regarded "citizenship and the fearless discharge of civic duty as a religious obligation." Judaism so defined burst

the bounds of the synagogue, and even of the synagogue-center, and entered into the public arena. Politics became one more way of expressing one's Jewish faith.<sup>106</sup>

Patriotism offered still another way. Devotion to America played a central role in Philipson's Judaism, and he made certain that it was prominently reflected in both the worship and the activities of his temple. An American flag stood on his pulpit dais, he regularly preached on patriotic themes, and he invited patriotic organizations to use Rockdale's facilities for their meetings. During and after World War I, when patriotic hysteria was at its height, Philipson became an apostle of Americanism, "called upon continually to speak in the interest of democracy for which the United States and the European allies were fighting." In a lecture distributed nationwide in two hundred thousand copies, he declared America "truly chosen" by God to make the world safe for democracy:

I have the firm conviction that, just as in the prophet's vision, Israel of old was chosen and called for service, so in this latest age of the world's history, this nation has been called for service, this nation has been chosen. I hear the voice of the Lord speaking to America through the prophet even as He spake to ancient Israel: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness and have taken hold of thy hand and kept thee and set thee for a covenant of the peoples, for a light of the nations. . . ."<sup>107</sup>

The experience of World War I did much to solidify Philipson's creed within his congregation. Following their rabbi's lead, Rockdale congregants participated wholeheartedly in the war effort both within the temple and without: sending their sons off to fight, working for the Red Cross, contributing funds, adopting (along with the other Reform congregations of the city) a regiment, raising an American flag and singing patriotic songs. Philipson encouraged Bene Israel's congregants to believe that their patriotic efforts were, in effect, an expression of their Judaism.

After the war this same commitment to patriotic piety justified the temple's efforts to strengthen its synagogue-center activities. Congregants wanted to prove that "the ultimate goal of our faith [is] . . . the making of better men and better citizens."<sup>108</sup> Unable to sustain a real community based around worship, Rockdale, like other synagogues and temples, attempted to provide services and activities—including sewing, music, dance, and drama—that would bring the temple as a

Sabbath services or education, provided members with a sense of belonging and mission. In turn, they made the temple itself seem vibrant and vital.

On January 18, 1924, K.K.Bene Israel/Rockdale Temple celebrated its centennial. There was much to be joyful about. The congregation boasted over 700 members ("of the highest class") and was growing at a rate of more than forty new members a year. It had long before surpassed its competition, which had declined somewhat since Isaac M. Wise's death in 1900, and it now claimed to be "the largest and most influential" congregation "in the entire middle west." Its members included many of the leading Jews and citizens of the city, among them Murray Seasongood and Alfred M. Cohen. David Philipson, the city's premier rabbi, was a towering figure within the Cincinnati community, a leader within the Reform movement in Judaism (whose history he had written), and, in the eyes of many, the "Dean of American rabbis." Rockdale and its rabbi had, indeed, become Cincinnati institutions; they were well established, filled a recognizable niche, and symbolized religious continuity.<sup>109</sup>

Being connected with these "institutions" was for local Jews itself a mark of status. This was symbolized on Yom Kippur eve when "full-dress ushers (in tails and white ties) met the worshipers at the doors." Journalist Alfred Segal, who recalled this scene years later, pointed out that "one of the profane could feel himself to be a gate crasher at an exclusive party."<sup>110</sup> For the elite, however, Rockdale with its magnificent sanctuary represented the perfect synthesis of religion, community responsibility, and cosmopolitan elegance. This was its distinguishing genius, underscored in 1928 when the congregation grandly celebrated Philipson's fortieth anniversary as its rabbi. To mark the occasion, community leaders, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, outdid one another in singing the rabbi's praises and enumerating his many achievements.<sup>111</sup>

Yet even as Philipson was being feted, dark clouds were gathering on Rockdale's horizon. The overwhelming wave of immigration from Eastern Europe that began in the 1880s and ended with the immigration restriction legislation of 1924 had forever changed the face of American Jewry. Millions of these new American Jews took little interest in the denationalized religious expression that Philipson and Bene Israel had championed. Although German Jews remained institutionally, if not

numerically, dominant in Cincinnati, even there the tide was shifting. The growing influence of Zionism and the changing nature of American Jewry and American Judaism served to increasingly isolate a congregation that had celebrated itself in 1924 as "THE AMERICAN CONGREGATION."

In the 1920s, both Wise Temple and the Reading Road Temple, mired in hard times, brought a new generation of Reform rabbis into their pulpits. Their mandate was to chart new directions and programs, to reinvigorate Reform Judaism, and to win young people back into the synagogue. They enjoyed some striking successes. In a direct challenge to David Philipson, both of the new rabbis, James G. Heller and Samuel Wohl, also spoke out strongly on behalf of Zionism. "I stand in proud isolation in my universalistic advocacy of Judaism," Philipson admitted wistfully to his diary in 1927. Not only did the city's other Reform rabbis and Hebrew Union College professors disagree with his anti-Zionist interpretation of Judaism, but he found himself "frequently laughed to scorn."<sup>112</sup>

Although Rockdale flourished through much of the 1920s, these were difficult years for Reform Judaism throughout the United States. The nationwide "religious depression," the growth of secularism and Jewish secularism, the emergence of East European Jewry, the rise of Conservative Judaism, of European and American anti-Semitism—all of these posed significant challenges to the buoyant optimism that had characterized Reform Judaism in the previous era. The nation's economic collapse in 1929 made conditions still more difficult; throughout the country synagogue membership and income declined and the American dream was called into question.<sup>113</sup>

Rockdale was scarcely able to meet these challenges. The easy assumption of prosperity and affluence which the congregation had so conscientiously attempted to express in the temple building and in divine services was quickly undermined by the prevailing economic conditions. Rockdale was hardly immune to the times; at least two members committed suicide. Moreover, both membership and financial receipts declined sharply, forcing the congregation to make do on less and less.<sup>114</sup> The disillusionment of the Depression years, and the looming threat of totalitarianism in Europe could not but deflate the optimistic faith in the future and in the promise of American life that had long marked Bene Israel and its rabbis. In addition, Philipson himself was weakening.

As conditions worsened in the next decade, even some of Philip-

son's most ardent admirers wondered if he was just hanging on. By now into his seventies, the rabbi had lost much of his effectiveness: his sermons became repetitive, sometimes tearful, and frequently out of touch with the times. Rockdale's message, as a result, became increasingly negative—*against* Jewish nationalism, *against* the proposed World Jewish Congress, *against* the Jewish Center movement, *against* allegedly radical trends within the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Emblematic of Rockdale's decline was the victory that Rabbi Eliezer Silver, the dynamic new leader of Cincinnati Orthodox Jewry (mostly East European immigrants) scored against it in 1932. Silver had acquired a lot at Hickory and Burnet Avenues, near Rockdale, for construction of a new community *mikveh*, the same kind of ritual bath that Bene Israel itself had constructed eighty-five years earlier. Neighbors, including many Jews, opposed the new building and challenged it on zoning grounds. In a letter to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Philipson explained that the *mikveh* was "entirely foreign to our modern interpretation of Jewish faith and practice." "The large body of Jews who have given Cincinnati so prominent a position among the Jewish communities of the United States," he claimed, fully agreed with him. Ex-mayor and Bene Israel stalwart Murray Seasongood led the battle to keep the *mikveh* out. But the Orthodox community, claiming to represent 65 percent of the city's Jews, fought back. It questioned Philipson's leadership of the Jewish community, pointed out divisions within the Reform camp, and reminded Philipson that the earliest Jews in the city were Orthodox. More importantly, Rabbi Silver secured the services of Robert A. Taft, himself a skillful politician, to defend the *mikveh* in court. Unwilling to fight the case on these terms, Seasongood dropped it, and the *mikveh* was eventually built.<sup>115</sup> The episode demonstrated how much had changed in Cincinnati Jewish life and heightened Rockdale's sense of embattlement.

In 1938, David Philipson finally retired. He was seventy-six years old, and had served at Rockdale for a full half-century. Pursuit of that milestone, which he believed would constitute a record for rabbinical service, helped to keep him going.<sup>116</sup> Now as Nazism menaced world Jewry, calling into question many of the assumptions upon which Philipson had staked his career, a change was long overdue. Would Rockdale take the opportunity to move back into the mainstream of Reform Judaism? Would it follow other Reform temples and embrace Zionism? Would it even be able to maintain its status with Philipson gone? These were only some of the questions faced by the congregation as it looked forward to its fourth rabbi in 115 years.

### A Tradition of Anti-Traditionalism

Victor Reichert, the man selected as Philipson's successor, was no stranger to Rockdale Temple. He had come to the congregation in 1926, fresh out of Hebrew Union College, when he was appointed to serve as Philipson's assistant. Two years later, he was made associate rabbi. Thereafter, he bided his time and stood in Philipson's shadow, always according the senior rabbi the utmost respect, and garnering praise for his geniality, his accommodating nature, his diligence, and his scholarly sermons. Meanwhile, his own work in the congregation focused on pastoral duties, as well as such themes as social justice, interfaith relations, and especially Jewish education and scholarship where he strove to set a personal example. These remained his priorities when he succeeded Philipson as Rockdale's senior rabbi.

Reichert had been a safe choice for the congregation. He was a known quantity, and there was every reason to expect that he would move in familiar directions. Moreover, with Philipson continuing on as emeritus, a position he held until his death in 1949, a certain deference remained important. Reichert, ever the gentleman, could be depended upon to maintain proprieties. Nobody expected the amiable rabbi to achieve Philipson's stature in the community or in the Reform movement. Nor was he considered likely to return the temple to its former pinnacle of glory among the Reform congregations of the Midwest. But at a time when those who were successfully gaining national reputations in the Reform movement were either proponents of Zionism or of a Judaism that sought to break down the formalism and limitations of Judaism as practiced at places like Rockdale, the congregation was content to be removed from the fray. If not a David Philipson, Reichert was certainly an exemplary pastor: well liked, well respected, eager to lend a sympathetic ear. That, the congregation decided, was just what it needed at this juncture in its history.

Like Philipson and Lilienthal before him, Reichert reached out to the general community. He also seconded Philipson's opposition to Zionism, albeit without the vehemence that characterized his predecessor (or for that matter, his own older brother, Rabbi Irving Reichert, a founder of the American Council for Judaism).<sup>117</sup> Reichert preferred, as much as possible, to maintain a lower-keyed, gentler rabbinate. He was a "spiritual, scholarly, sincere and affable" rabbi,<sup>118</sup> rather than a fiery prophet.

Although nonworship congregational activities would continue to expand at Rockdale, especially in the 1950s, the temple, under Reichert,

no longer saw itself as the bustling synagogue-center for the entire Jewish community that it had been in prior decades. With the mass movement of Jews up to Avondale, an independent Jewish Community Center Association had been formed, and in 1935 it opened up a facility of its own on Reading Road. The new Jewish Community Center absorbed many of the secular and youth activities that Rockdale (and later the Wise-Rockdale Center) had once housed and maintained.<sup>119</sup> Its success also signaled an important shift in the Jewish community's balance of power, one that would, over time, considerably weaken the synagogue to the benefit of communal agencies that embraced all Jews: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and unaffiliated alike.

At Rockdale, this development encouraged a new and far narrower vision of what the congregation should be. No longer did the temple seek to ride the wave of the future. No longer did it see itself as a community center. No longer did it even seek to play a leadership role within the Reform movement as a whole, especially once the Union of American Hebrew Congregations moved from Cincinnati to New York in 1948. Instead, it sought to preserve and perpetuate Reform Judaism according to its own traditions, as preached by Max Lilienthal and David Philipson.

This is not to say that the congregation barred newcomers; to the contrary, they were welcomed. During the 1930s, when many German Jews emigrated to Cincinnati, fleeing from Nazi Germany, Rockdale assisted them. Members whose own families had come from Germany in the nineteenth century believed that Bene Israel would provide the proper religious setting for these new German immigrants as well. Of course, the immigrants themselves, even if they were Reform Jews, found American Reform Judaism as practiced at Rockdale alien and bizarre. Those used to praying with their heads covered, for example, were shocked to discover that they needed to remove their head-coverings or leave.<sup>120</sup> Most joined other more traditional congregations, or founded their own. But some, because of family connections or because they liked it, did join Rockdale and still express lifelong appreciation for the welcoming hospitality and beneficial assistance that it showed to them.

Increasingly, Rockdale also attracted members from East European Jewish backgrounds. This population brought temple membership above 1,000 families in 1948.<sup>121</sup> (The family-centeredness of the synagogue was underscored in this period by grouping members into "family units," a procedure that was also administratively easier now

that both men and women were accepted as full members.) But the new members did not bring about change. Given the numerous other congregational options available in Cincinnati, it was presumed that the Jews who came to Rockdale wanted the elegant and undemanding religious environment that was its hallmark. Newcomers were expected to conform to Rockdale's traditions, not vice versa.

The vehemence with which Rockdale stalwarts defended their ancestral traditions, even when their own record of attendance at weekly services was poor, suggests that "tradition" at the temple had come to symbolize a matter of transcendent importance, something that members considered to be desperately worth preserving and gravely in danger of slipping away. Rockdale tradition represented more than just the memory of the ancestors who had immigrated to Cincinnati in the nineteenth century, rising from rags to riches to give the community its shape, although that was not unimportant. At an even deeper level, "tradition" represented the lofty *vision* of those ancestors, their sense that they were creating "a sort of paradise for the Hebrews," a "promised land," located in what they expected to become America's greatest city. Reform Judaism as it had developed at Rockdale, with its stress on aesthetics, its minimalist ritual, and its emphasis on interfaith relations and civic duty, was part and parcel of that lofty vision. Now the vision stood in danger of collapsing. Cincinnati, in Reichert's day, was neither the urban center that the first immigrants envisaged, nor the model community that their children strove to create; in fact, newcomers saw it as just one more midwestern metropolis. Rockdale's stalwarts, who had grown up believing in the "Cincinnati dream," could not quite face up to this collapse. The fact that their magnificent temple was showing its age and was becoming more and more isolated within an increasingly black urban environment, that Zionism (the antithesis of everything they stood for) was on the rise, that the Reform movement was no longer centered in Cincinnati, and that the majority of the city's Jews were of East European origin and knew nothing of the city's heritage—all this was more than they could absorb. "Tradition" thus became a form of escape. It enacted a symbolic return to days gone by when the congregation was at its height and hopeful dreams abounded.<sup>122</sup>

Reichert was careful to preserve a great deal of Rockdale tradition, and during his first eleven years on the job he regularly called upon the "living symbol" of that tradition, Rabbi-emeritus David Philipson, to deliver prayers and sermons.<sup>123</sup> Temple activities, while less tradition-bound, also moved in well-established patterns. During World War II,

members contributed heavily to the war effort. The Sisterhood women knitted, crocheted, and baked cookies, served as hostesses for the USO, conducted first-aid classes, organized blood banks, sold war bonds, and assisted in the communal effort to resettle Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. Men joined them in several of these activities, and were, in addition, involved in war production, civilian defense, and, of course, the armed forces. After the war, adult education became more of a temple priority. Classes, lectures, study groups, and discussion groups promised to give members "a new outlook on the world we live in." None of them were particularly well attended. Rabbi Reichert, meanwhile, continued his varied pastoral activities, the most characteristic feature of his rabbinate, and also participated in "larger communal activities, Jewish and general." Like his predecessors, he invited congregants to bask in his reflected glory by keeping them well informed of his many speaking engagements, awards, and recognitions.<sup>124</sup>

For all of the emphasis on tradition, however, Rockdale did introduce some innovations during the Reichert years. In part, the new post-war emphasis on Jewish (as opposed to "Rockdale") tradition and the acceleration of temple activities reflected a nationwide return to religion that enlivened both churches and synagogues in the 1950s. The innovations may also have reflected the impact that revelations about the Nazi destruction of European Jewry made upon the congregation, although this is more difficult to gauge. In January 1946, the congregation's president, Alex Frieder, recalled the "cataclysmic, world tottering" year just past, but failed to mention the atrocities and the death camps. He did, however, call upon the congregation to prepare for "the days ahead, so foreboding and ominous," with "a return to God." The following year, echoing Christian calls for a return to the church, he again exhorted congregants to "return to our faith and our synagogues," but this time his call was clearly placed within a Jewish context. He sought to ensure that "the six million Jewish martyrs [will] not have died in vain."<sup>125</sup>

Whether on account of the Holocaust or not, the postwar years did bring about a growing acceptance of symbolic ceremonialism, particularly among those concerned with religious education. Under Lilienthal and Philipson, Bene Israel had succeeded in intellectualizing Judaism and in discarding forms of Jewish expression that Classical Reform Judaism characterized as primitive or odd. Reichert relaxed some of this rigidity. As soon as Philipson retired, he reintroduced the bar mitzvah ceremony for those boys who wanted it. In 1947, Rockdale erected an outdoor *sukkah*, or temporary hut for the fall holiday of *Sukkot* (Taber-

nacles), recalling Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert. Where, under Philipson, the congregation had hung fruits from the ceiling and celebrated an indoor harvest festival, now the outdoor *sukkah*, once rejected as "primitive," was praised as a "beautiful traditional festival symbol."<sup>126</sup>

When Stanley Brav came to Rockdale as associate rabbi in 1948, he sought to encourage more of a return to traditionalism. Over the objection of some congregants, he began to chant the blessing over the wine (*kiddush*) at Friday night services. One of his daughters also became Bene Israel's first bat mitzvah. But these were all relatively minor ceremonial changes that could be justified on the basis of Philipson's own realization that Reform needed to recover "the warmth of religious emotion" which had been too quickly discarded.<sup>127</sup> They did not do serious violence to temple tradition as old-timers understood it. When Brav went further and sought to enforce the temple's stated but neglected requirement that Hebrew language instruction and weekday classes be compulsory for religious-school students, that was different. More than 500 members, an astonishingly large turnout, showed up at a special congregational meeting at which the new requirements were challenged and debated.<sup>128</sup> Following an impassioned speech by Murray Seasongood, who argued that Rockdale had produced thousands of fine Jews and fine Americans who knew no Hebrew whatsoever, the stipulation was abolished.<sup>129</sup> The message was clear. A majority of members, for all the latitude they extended to their rabbis, still expected them to adhere to the limits of "Rockdale tradition." Small-scale changes designed to attract new members or to satisfy younger ones were tolerated. But a serious breach with congregational tradition, as Brav's requirements were perceived to have been, would generate swift and divisive opposition, and would, in the end, fail decisively.

A year later, in 1954, Brav himself left Rockdale, having been informed that he would never succeed Reichert as senior rabbi. He privately blamed the rebuff on members of a "ruling clique," determined to have their own way in the congregation and to carry on as their fathers had done, without change. In fact, as the large turnout against the teaching of Hebrew suggests, opposition was much more widespread; the Lilienthal-Philipson tradition still carried great weight with members. Brav and forty-two like-minded congregants, having failed to reform Rockdale from within, now formed a more ritually-traditional Reform temple, Temple Sholom, located in the northern suburbs of Cincinnati where many Jews were then moving.<sup>130</sup>



in the wake of Drav's departure, both Rockdale's president and the director of its religious school wondered aloud about the congregation's future. "Are we, as members," they asked, "living in the glory of the past?" They warned congregants that "every institution which has a heritage is endangered by inertia, by timidity, by complacency, by a reluctance to keep abreast of progress."<sup>131</sup> The warning, however, fell largely on deaf ears. There seemed at that time little to worry about, for membership and activities increased during the 1950s, fueled by the baby boom, a nationwide religious revival, and the energies of many of Rockdale's women. Social groups within the congregation—the Sisterhood, the Men's Club, and the youth groups—showed particularly large gains. Their meetings drew impressive crowds, frequently larger than those at weekly services. Sparse attendance at Sabbath prayers did arouse some concern, and members were reminded, as part of an interfaith campaign to promote religion in American life, that "the family that prays together stays together."<sup>132</sup> But for the most part, the vitality of Rockdale's organizational life warded off fears that the congregation as a whole was suffering from lethargy.

Moreover, subtle changes were taking place. Increasingly, for example, Rockdale included among its stated goals such items as the need "to perpetuate Judaism as a way of life," "to cultivate a love and understanding of the Jewish heritage," and "to stimulate fellowship with Jews everywhere." Where once it had been enough for the temple to be the locus of religion, now members were expected to "feel" Jewish themselves and to bring the practice of Judaism into their homes. One postwar religious-school class reflected this new mood in its very title: the Joy and Importance of Feeling that I am a Jew."<sup>133</sup>

The young state of Israel helped to shape this new attitude toward Judaism. With the establishment of the state in 1948, and its immediate recognition by the United States government, anti-Zionism faded at home in Israel. The first stirrings of Israel-consciousness began to filter into selected areas of temple life: the youth groups reported how much they enjoyed Israeli dancing; the sisterhood advertised the "lovely Israeli items on display" in their gift shop.<sup>134</sup> Still, there remained a real concern, especially among temple stalwarts, that this change, like the others, should not result in Rockdale's becoming "too Jewish," as Rabbi Drav was perceived to have been. While leaders understood that the glory of the past—the Rockdale tradition—might have to be modified, they insisted that it not be totally compromised.

In 1962 Rabbi Victor Reichert retired. He was sixty-five, had spent

thirty-six years with the temple, and now saw the end of his tenure. The list of those who had decisively shaped Rockdale's path, along with Joseph Jonas, Max Lilienthal, and David Philipson. After 139 years, the congregation could still tell its history in the lives of four great men.

Rockdale had turned inward during the Reichert years, and had lost much of its national prestige. Yet it remained conscious of its distinguished heritage and committed to keeping its noble past alive. Year in and year out, it faithfully preserved its own brand of elegant, non-demanding worship services that stirred memory and evoked past glory. This was Rockdale's tradition, for better or for worse, and a powerful group of temple laymen guarded it closely. The loyalty inspired by tradition was perhaps Rockdale's greatest asset. It would sustain the congregation during the turbulent period that lay ahead.

### Confronting a Changing World

The sixties were difficult years for Rockdale Temple. For a congregation that depended on tradition and rested on its laurels, the challenges of physical and spiritual change posed formidable threats to its identity and very existence. Having had but four senior rabbis in its entire history, the congregation now saw three more in the eight years from 1962 to 1970. By decade's end, the temple's home on Rockdale Avenue, designed to symbolize monumentality, grandeur, and permanence, stood abandoned: its interior in ruins, its stained-glass windows destroyed, its grand exterior boarded up, its grounds "decrepit and untidy."<sup>135</sup> Brought into disturbing conflict with a changing world, the congregation responded by retreating geographically and religiously. It stiffened its resistance against all innovations, especially those that seemed to threaten Rockdale's own venerable traditions.

Following Victor Reichert's retirement, Murray Blackman, who had served as his associate and co-rabbi since 1956, was promoted to senior rabbi. Admired as an eloquent orator, Blackman was well liked by many in the congregation, but a minority dissented. At a congregational meeting to elect Blackman, "a number of members expressed critical disapproval of Rabbi Blackman's discharge of his pastoral duties and adverse criticism of his leadership as a congregational Rabbi." Forty-two of the hundred or so members present indicated in their votes that Blackman did not have their full support.<sup>136</sup>

Stung by this criticism, Blackman struggled in the years that followed to win his critics over. He regularly reported to the board of trustees on



his involvement in community affairs, on his radio appearances, and particularly on the number of pastoral calls that he had made and the time he devoted to pastoral counseling. He tried not to make waves and felt constrained from advocating any large-scale changes that might provoke controversy. Yet dissatisfaction continued. In the area of pastoral care, for example, the role of the rabbi had expanded considerably under Reichert. Prodded and assisted by his wife, Louise, he had been scrupulous about calling on new members, visiting those in hospital, and comforting the bereaved. This was in line with a general twentieth-century trend toward a larger pastoral role for clergy and reflected a belief, evident at Rockdale and in synagogues throughout the country, that earlier rabbis had focused too heavily on the mind and neglected the soul. Blackman carried forward Reichert's initiatives in this area, but with less success. Even his wife came in for criticism, some alleging that she was less interested in congregants' personal needs than her predecessor had been.<sup>137</sup>

Blackman again ran into trouble on the one occasion when he did challenge temple tradition, seeking to abolish the annual congregational Passover seder on the grounds that the holiday was meant to be observed at home with the family. Resistance developed, and the sisterhood proposed, as a compromise, that the congregational seder be moved to the second night of the holiday, giving families the chance to celebrate together on the first night. This seemed to the congregation like a happy means of reconciling temple tradition and family togetherness, and was accepted. Blackman, who feared that the celebration of two seders might be misinterpreted as a return to "Orthodox practice," was overruled, another indication that in the absence of strong rabbinic leadership in congregational affairs authority had begun to shift back to the laity.<sup>138</sup>

Blackman enjoyed no more success in his campaign to promote greater attendance at worship services. Although he appealed to the board of trustees to "set the pace for the rest of the Congregation" by attending services themselves, the message fell on deaf ears.<sup>139</sup> In this case, as in so many others, his priorities turned out to be different from those of the congregation.

The central problem that Rockdale faced during Blackman's tenure was a demographic one. As Jews moved out to the northern suburbs, the congregation's continued existence at the corner of Rockdale and Harvey Streets became less and less tenable. Even in the 1940s it had become evident that the center of Cincinnati's Jewish population was

beginning to shift. This was one of the factors that encouraged Stanley Brav to found Temple Shalom in the new area of Jewish settlement. In 1955, Rockdale itself spent \$95,000 to purchase a site on Dawn Road in Roselawn to hold for "future needs." Plans were announced to open a satellite Sunday and mid-week afternoon Hebrew school on the site, to supplement Rockdale's overcrowded educational facility where every available space "including rest rooms" was being utilized for classrooms. But a fundraising campaign fell far short of expectations and the property was never developed. Ultimately, the idea was abandoned "due to substantial resistance to consider any move from [the] present location."<sup>140</sup>

By the time Murray Blackman became associate rabbi at Rockdale, in 1956, the area for several blocks around the temple was already largely inhabited by black families. Thousands of poorer blacks crowded into the area in the next decade when the predominantly black West End neighborhood of the city (previously the home of Cincinnati's Jews) was torn down to accommodate highway and redevelopment projects. With social and recreational facilities lacking and the racial climate in the area becoming ever more tense, the movement of white Jewish families to the north accelerated. The temple became isolated.

Blackman, now senior rabbi, understood that, unless it moved, "the congregation would diminish in size and in vigor."<sup>141</sup> More and more members were calling for a new building program, complaining that Rockdale had become too inconvenient to get to. Some resigned to join one of the two small Reform congregations established in the northern suburbs already.<sup>142</sup> By the mid 1960s, the Dawn Road site had been abandoned as unsatisfactory, in part because Jews were already moving further north. After an extensive search for a more appropriate site for the temple, the congregation settled upon a property in the village of Amberley, which a member offered to them at a price below market value. Across the street from Brav's congregation and right next door to the site where Isaac M. Wise Temple planned to move, it was "the only feasible site available." Brushing aside concerns that "all three of the major Reform Congregations would be located adjacent to one another," the temple's leaders decided to push ahead.<sup>143</sup> They believed, rightly as it turned out, that historical loyalties, as well as the very real social and ideological differences separating the different Reform temples from one another would allow all three to maintain their distinctive identities and bases of support even as they sat side by side in Amberley.<sup>144</sup>

A massive fund-raising campaign for the projected \$2,480,000

Meanwhile, the temple at Rockdale and Harvey, which had hardly been given a "lick and a promise" since the congregation first thought about moving back in the 1950s, was looking increasingly shabby and membership had plunged into the 700s.<sup>146</sup> This posed a financial crisis, so even while the new building-fund campaign went forward, the congregation's board tried, without much success, to encourage congregants to increase their regular dues voluntarily in order that the operating expenses of the old temple might still be covered.<sup>147</sup>

Ground was broken at the Amberley site in January 1967. Everyone hoped that building would proceed rapidly to effect as smooth a transition as possible. But a series of tumultuous shocks lay ahead. First, in April 1967, Murray Blackman, to everyone's surprise and shortly after his contract had been renewed by the congregation, announced that he was resigning from Rockdale in order to fulfil "long range personal and professional objectives" as the rabbi of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands.<sup>148</sup> Actually, there had been signs before that Blackman was unhappy at Rockdale, and some members were certainly unhappy with him. But for a congregation that had enjoyed almost eight decades of stable rabbinic leadership, and had not seen a senior rabbi leave for another pulpit since Raphael Benjamin departed for New York in 1888, the idea that someone could find a more satisfying position than at Rockdale was almost inconceivable—a sure sign that something was wrong. It was arranged that Victor Reichert would serve as interim rabbi until the congregation could hire a new spiritual leader.

Even before Blackman left town, a second and still more serious crisis arose. Congregants departing a June service in honor of the temple's confirmation class found themselves caught up in the midst of a full-blown urban riot. Fortunately, although a few cars were hit by stones and bricks, no one was seriously hurt. Beyond a few broken windows, there was no significant damage to the temple either, although the confirmation service itself—a service wherein teenage boys and girls publicly declare their adherence to Judaism—had to be shifted to the Jewish Community Center in Roselawn.<sup>149</sup> But the violence, and the tense racial situation that the riot reflected, raised questions about whether it was safe to continue holding any services and activities in Avondale. Meanwhile, the projected completion of the new facility in Amberley was still more than a year away.

The board of trustees wrestled with two factors in deciding what to do, "one being practicality and the other the moral issue." It knew that

many members would not be happy having to come to Avondale for services, much less to bring children there for religious school, but it felt uncomfortable, particularly given the liberal and ethical tenets of Reform Judaism, about fleeing the beloved temple from fear of the surrounding black population. Besides, without a building where would the congregation go? Some members felt, in addition, that it would be difficult to explain to children why the congregation was running away rather than staying and trying to help. In the end, then, and not without serious misgivings, the board decided to continue holding services and religious school in Avondale, "with adequate protection" provided.<sup>150</sup>

One prominent member of the 1967 Rockdale board still recalls the somber mood of the congregation at that time. If ground had not already been broken in Amberley, he believes, the congregation would probably have collapsed altogether, for it could certainly not attract new congregants to Avondale and was having trouble holding on to its existing ones.<sup>151</sup> Weekly worship services in the vast sanctuary attracted no more than forty or fifty individuals. There was no sense of spiritual dynamism, no institutional activity, just a barely concealed feeling of fear at what might happen next as the ghetto seethed on the brink of another explosion.

Into this maelstrom marched Rabbi David Hachen, Blackman's replacement as senior rabbi.<sup>152</sup> The board, in selecting him, made a conscious decision to steer Rockdale in a new direction. "We knew we had to move from the kind of classical Reform we'd had in order to survive," one member of the selection committee recalls.<sup>153</sup> Hachen, who represented the more traditional wing of the Reform movement but who also had ties both to Cincinnati and to Rockdale (his wife was a Cincinnati and his brother served on the Rockdale board) seemed like the ideal person to chart a middle ground between Rockdale tradition and contemporary Reform.

Hachen's first year was a trying one. Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, rioting broke out in Cincinnati, and fear gripped the community. Thereafter, use of the building by members was severely curtailed, and temporary arrangements were made to use other facilities for most temple functions until the new sanctuary in Amberley could be readied.<sup>154</sup> At the same time, in a move aimed at conciliation, the congregation's leaders invited "highly responsible" black community groups serving the area's youth to utilize what was left of the temple's facilities free of charge. High-minded members felt that in this way the congregation "could make a real contribution to

the community" as well as establish "the possibility of a permanent future use of the building," perhaps at city expense.<sup>155</sup> More cynical members considered the program a cheap way of protecting the congregation against further vandalism and violence. Soon, community groups took over much of the facility, painting the temple's social hall red and black. Security was provided by young, armed black men patrolling the temple grounds. Regular Jewish worship continued to be held in the building each Sabbath and on holidays, but under extremely trying conditions. On one occasion, a bullet was shot through one of the windows during a religious service.<sup>156</sup>

While Rockdale's building, its symbol of tradition and majesty for so many years, was being physically assaulted from without, other symbols of Rockdale traditionalism came under attack from within. Hachen, mindful of his mandate to lead Rockdale into a new era, energetically set about teaching new courses, meeting with members at informal gatherings in private homes, and reintroducing rituals and ceremonies, like *Havdalah*, the brief service separating Sabbath from the work week, that Reform Jews elsewhere had come to find meaningful. He also brought more Hebrew into the worship service and toned down its air of formality. This mixture of personal warmth and greater religious traditionalism seemed to him to be both what the congregation needed at this juncture in its history and what its leaders had asked him to provide.<sup>157</sup> But he, and many members of the board as well, underestimated the pull of Rockdale's own sense of tradition: the austere Judaism expounded by Max Lilienthal, David Philipson, and Victor Reichert. Like the temple building itself, this was part of the congregation's heritage and ethos. It was what made members feel at home at Rockdale, part of their very identity as Jews.

Within four months of Hachen's arrival at Rockdale, he already faced criticism about "certain aspects of rituals and traditions" that made some members feel uncomfortable. Those with "complaints or differences of opinion" were encouraged to meet him face-to-face so he could explain his position.<sup>158</sup> Classical Reform turned out to have more defenders than Hachen had realized. Even more than by his ritual innovations, however, members felt distressed at the rabbi's adamant refusal to perform mixed marriages (without conversion). True, David Philipson had not performed them either, but Victor Reichert did, within limits, and quite a number of members and their children were themselves intermarried. Was the rabbi implying that they were not good Jews? Would he deny members' children who sought to intermarry

the right to be wed by a rabbi? Intermarriage, of course, was a volatile and emotional issue not only at Rockdale but within the Reform movement as a whole, for it cut to the heart of the whole question of Jewish identification, raising such issues as who is a Jew, what are the responsibilities of a Jew, and what distinguishes Jews from other Americans. Rockdale Jews were not used to confronting these kinds of difficult questions, and many reacted angrily to Hachen's view that Judaism sometimes imposed inconvenient burdens; that was not the kind of Judaism that they had traditionally been taught. While Hachen defended his position in a lengthy document distributed to all members and at a public discussion of the question sponsored by the temple's brotherhood (its men's club), the issue continued to simmer. Some members, particularly those with children whose marriages (intermarriages) Hachen had refused to perform, resigned.<sup>159</sup>

The mood of the congregation at this time was captured in a poll of the members on the question of what the new temple in Amberley should be called. Precedent suggested that it be named the Ridge Road Temple after its new location. The congregation might also have gone back to using the name Bene Israel, its official name. But a clear majority of the members elected instead to retain the name "Rockdale Temple," with all that it implied.<sup>160</sup> They thus sought symbolically to maintain the traditions established over the sixty-seven years at that location. In a tumultuous period, they yearned for continuity, a new temple that would remind them of the old, of what they had been and what they stood for. They were not looking for changes, and certainly not for "inconvenient burdens."<sup>161</sup>

David Hachen, of course, had a different agenda, and within a year it was clear that he and the congregation were on a collision course. Given the fragile condition of the congregation, the need to raise substantial funds, and the desire to win back old members once the move to Amberley was accomplished, there was a general desire to avoid the kind of controversy that Hachen engendered. Since reconciliation seemed impossible, the board had little choice but to request the rabbi's resignation. On March 21, 1969, it was announced to the congregation.<sup>162</sup>

Hachen's resignation marked the end of efforts to radically transform Rockdale. Having tasted change and found it bitter, the congregation returned to its own traditions, resolving to carry Rockdale's time-tested ethos out with it to suburbia. With that, the sense of proceeding "from crisis to crisis," seemed to abate.<sup>163</sup> In May, the congregation

moved into its new facility in Amberley. By the fall, it had a new rabbi, Harold Hahn. He effected change much more slowly, and did, on a case by case basis, perform intermarriages. At the same time, his personality and warmth drew members back to the temple and promoted reconciliation.

Problems remained back on Rockdale Avenue where black militant groups demanded that the congregation deed the old temple to them, if not outright then for a symbolic payment of \$400 paid at the rate of \$1 per year for 400 years. To back up their demands, they refused to let anyone from the temple enter the building in order to collect the congregation's historic and religious property.<sup>164</sup> When the congregation stopped paying the building's utility fees, the place fell into a shambles. On September 14, 1970, it was fire-bombed and mostly destroyed amidst continuing unrest in the neighborhood.<sup>165</sup> Today, the temple no longer exists: it was razed by the city and the site was converted into a playing field.

### Conclusion

Having begun in 1824 as an all-embracing synagogue-community, Bene Israel had, over the years, withstood a whole series of changes and challenges. Competition from other synagogues, membership secessions, aesthetic and ritual reforms, ideological innovations, great rabbis, new synagogue buildings, changing attitudes toward women, contraction into a worship-focused congregation, expansion into a synagogue-center, identification with Classical Reform Judaism, confrontations with developments in Cincinnati urban life, encounters with new developments within American Jewish life—all these and more shaped the congregation. They created its unique ethos and tradition.

At the same time, like synagogues across the length and breadth of the United States, Bene Israel also experienced through the years a wide variety of competing pressures and demands. Jewish tradition, American society, various old world customs, the rabbis it hired, the officers it elected, the members it sought to attract and hold, the Reform movement to which it adhered, and in time its own heritage and traditions all pulled it in different, sometimes contradictory, directions. Repeatedly, Bene Israel struggled to reconcile all of these conflicting forces and to find its own path. The history of the congregation, as well as its future, lie in the effort to keep to that path; to move ahead, twisting and turning as conditions do, without losing its way.

## APPENDIX

### K. K. Bene Israel Membership

YEAR	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	COMPOSITION	MILESTONE
1846	108		
1848	126		
1850	138		
1855			Max Lilienthal arrives.
1869	216		Mound Street temple opens.
1871	166		
1872	167	Includes 9 widows	
1873	187	178 men, 9 widows	
1874	197	170 men	
1875	200		
1876	205		
1877	206	190 men, 15 widows	
1878	214	199 men, 15 widows	
1879	236	Includes 18 widows	
1880	228	Includes 20 in arrears	
1882	279	Includes 255 in good standing	Raphael Benjamin arrives.
1883	301		
1884	307		
1886	287	All in good standing (AIGS)	
1888	299	AIGS, includes 30 widows	David Philipson arrives.
1889	302	AIGS, includes 34 widows	
1892	331		
1893	341		
1894	316	Plus 29 in arrears	
1895	317	Plus 26 in arrears	
1896	351		
1897	359	Includes 22 in arrears	
1898	354	Includes 22 in arrears	
1899	363	Includes 28 in arrears	
1900	367	Includes 23 in arrears	Women can become associate members.

K. K. Bene Israel Membership (*continued*)

YEAR	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	COMPOSITION	MILESTONE
1901	396		
1902	395	Includes 371 in good standing	
1903	418	Includes 9 in arrears	
1904	440	420 in good standing	
1905	430	407 in good standing	
1906	475		Rockdale temple opens.
1907	467	455 in good standing	
1912	480		
1917	499		
1918	531		
1919	520		
1920	575		
1921	643		
1922	716	697 members and 19 estates	
1923	678		
1924	767		
1925	792		
1926	823		
1927	930		
1928	950		
1929	940		
1930	942		
1931	889		
1932	819		
1933	782		
1934	750		
1935	721		
1936	716		
1937	704		
1938	731		Victor Reichert becomes senior rabbi.
1939	778	Representing 2,000 people.	

K. K. Bene Israel Membership (*continued*)

YEAR	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	COMPOSITION	MILESTONE
1941	800		
1945	899		Begin to count by families?
1947	961		
1948	1,014		
1950	1,089		
1953	1,083		
1954	1,059	"Families"	
1955	1,062		
1956	1,064		
1957	1,075		
1958	1,057	"Families"	
1959	1,054		
1960	1,054		
1961	1,045		
1962	1,063		Murray Blackman becomes senior rabbi.
1967			David Hachen becomes senior rabbi.
1970	850	"Real membership"	Temple in Amberley opens. Harold Hahn becomes senior rabbi.

## NOTES

1. Joseph Jonas, "The Jews in Ohio" (1843), reprinted in Morris U. Schappes, ed., *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654-1875* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 223-35. This famous memoir, the best primary source on early Cincinnati Jews, was originally printed in the *Occident* 1 (1844), and is also reprinted in Jacob R. Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775-1865* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 203-15. Unattributed quotations below are taken from this work.

2. The cemetery was needed to bury Benjamin Lape, a Jew by birth, who had lived in Cincinnati as a Christian but on his deathbed asked to be buried "according to the rites of the Jewish faith." See David Philipson, *The Oldest Jewish*

Congregation in the West [Bene Israel, Cincinnati] Souvenir of Seventieth Anniversary, 1824-1894 (Cincinnati, 1894), pp. 26-27. Jews frequently established cemeteries prior to synagogues, for worship could always be conducted in a private home.

3. Philipson, *Oldest Jewish Congregation*, p. 3.

4. Letter "To the Elders of the Jewish congregation at Charleston," from J. Joseph, Joseph Jonas, D. J. Johnson, Phineas Moses, July 3, 1825, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Ohio (hereafter: AJA), also reprinted in David Philipson, "The Cincinnati Community in 1825," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 10 (1902), pp. 97-99; reprinted in Schappes, *Documentary History*, pp. 177-179.

5. The original charter is reprinted in *Charter By-Laws and Regulations of Kal A Kodesh Beneh Israel* . . . (Cincinnati, 1859), pp. 3-4. For a variant spelling of the congregation's name, see Joseph Jonas's 1836 consecration address to the congregation, excerpted in Jonathan D. Sarna and Nancy H. Klein, *The Jews of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: Center for the American Jewish Experience, 1989), p. 28.

6. Martin A. Cohen, "Synagogue: History and Tradition," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1987), vol. 14, p. 212.

7. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Evolution of the American Synagogue," in *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, forthcoming, and Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1976), p. 21.

8. "By Laws of Kal A Kodesh Beneh Israel," K. K. Bene Israel Trustee Minutes, 1842, Cincinnati, Ohio (Congregation Bene Israel Records, AJA; all manuscript sources come from the Congregation Bene Israel Collection at the AJA, unless otherwise noted).

9. Philipson, "Cincinnati Community," p. 28.

10. "Congregation Bene Israel, Cincinnati, Ohio Charter an[d] By-Laws, 1842-1843," Article 5, Section 4, in KKBI Trustee Minutes, 1842.

11. See Jonathan D. Sarna, "'A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews': The Lofty Vision of Cincinnati Jews," in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, pp. 1-21.

12. [Samuel Osgood], "First Synagogue in the West," *The Western Messenger* 2 (October 1836): 204.

13. Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), p. 37; for a full description and sketch of the building, see Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 31.

14. As it turned out, the \$119.50 that Bene Israel members sent to Beth Elohim was more than it received from any other American Jewish community outside of South Carolina; see Charles Reznikoff and Uriah Z. Engelman, *The Jews of Charleston* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1950), pp. 137, 294. Doubtless, some at Bene Israel recalled that in 1825 the Charleston congregation had aided them (see above, n. 4).

15. Stephen G. Mostov, "A 'Jerusalem' on the Ohio: The Social and Economic History of Cincinnati's Jewish Community, 1840-1875" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1981), pp. 54, 61.

16. Ibid., pp. 105-41; Maxwell Whiteman, "Notions, Dry Goods, and Clothing: An Introduction to the Study of the Cincinnati Peddler," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 53 (April 1963): 306-21; Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, pp. 4-7, 36-40.

17. K. K. Bene Israel (hereafter: KKBI) Vestry Minutes, February 24, 1841.

18. Joseph Jonas alludes to these differences in his memoir (in Schappes, *Documentary History*, p. 227). See also I. M. Wise's comments on "minhag" reprinted in James G. Heller, *As Yesterday When It Is Past: A History of the Isaac M. Wise Temple—K.K.B'nai Yeshurun—of Cincinnati in Commemoration of the Centenary of Its Founding* (Cincinnati: Isaac M. Wise Temple, 1942), pp. 19-20.

19. Mostov, "A 'Jerusalem' on the Ohio," pp. 147-48.

20. Synagogue membership figures were far smaller than Jewish population estimates might lead one to expect. Even in 1851, when Cincinnati housed four synagogues, an estimated 22 percent of the city's Jews were unaffiliated. See Mostov, "A 'Jerusalem' on the Ohio," p. 150.

21. Reprinted in Heller, *As Yesterday*, pp. 26-27.

22. See the text in Israel Goldstein, *A Century of Judaism in New York* (New York: B'nai Jeshurun, 1930), pp. 55-56. A different section of the B'nai Jeshurun constitution was appropriated by Congregation Covenant of Peace in Easton (1842); see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Consider the Years: The Story of the Jewish Community of Easton, 1752-1942* (Easton: Temple Brith Sholom, 1944), p. 237.

23. Mostov, "A 'Jerusalem' on the Ohio," pp. 151, 155.

24. Ibid., pp. 151-58.

25. The increasing numerical importance of German members at Bene Israel was reflected in the 1859 bylaws, which were printed in both English and German, Bylaws file.

26. Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 113.

27. By Laws of Kal A Kodesh Beneh Israel, 1842-43, Bylaws file.

28. KKBI Vestry Minutes, May 12, 1844.

29. See, for example, *Occident* 10 (1852): 219-21, 311; 11 (1853): 63-71, 162-75, 569-72; and the tendentious account in I. Harold Sharfman, *The First Rabbi: Origins of Conflict between Orthodox and Reform* (Malibu: Joseph Simon/Pan-gloss Press, 1988), pp. 296-300.

30. It is difficult to determine which set of bylaws served as a model for the other, or whether Bene Israel had any bylaws before 1842. It is also possible that both congregations borrowed their bylaws from somewhere else. (See bylaw files in KKBI and K. K. B'nai Yeshurun collections.)

31. Heller, *As Yesterday*, pp. 32-41; KKBI Trustee Minutes, November 15, 1846; May 15, 1846; February 12, 1848; May 9, 1848.

32. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870*, pp. 115-16; Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1968), pp. 105-27. This understanding of the role of aesthetics in Jewish worship has been influenced by Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and*

Community: *The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

33. KKBI Vestry Records, May 8, 1843; KKBI Minutes, esp. Nov. 11, 1846; August 1, 1847; May 9, 1848.

34. KKBI Trustees, February 12, 1848.

35. KKBI Vestry records, June 6, 1843. "Mr. Simon Cohen, Jacob Hilf and Jacob Ayer made quite a noise outside of the Shool . . . during divine service also W J Myer cursed all the Vestry."

36. KKBI Trustees, September 26, 1847.

37. Ibid., November 1, 1846.

38. Ibid., February 12, 1848.

39. Ibid., April 7, 1847, January 30, 1848.

40. Ibid., January 30, 1848. The Bene Israel matzas committee usually worked together with a similar committee from B'nai Yeshurun in overseeing matzah production.

41. Ibid., July 25, 1846. See the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), Yoreh Deah, 376.14 and especially the commentary of Y. M. Epstein, *Aruch HaShulchan*, who reviews the various opinions.

42. The two paragraphs that follow are taken, with slight revisions, from Sarna, "'A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews,'" in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 14.

43. Isaac M. Wise, *Reminiscences* (1901; 2d ed., New York: Central Synagogue of New York, 1945); James G. Heller, *Isaac M. Wise: His Life, Work and Thought* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), pp. 124-83; Naphtali J. Rubinger, "Dismissal in Albany," *American Jewish Archives* 24 (November 1972): 161-62; Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870*, pp. 115, 121-29, 154-55.

44. Quoted in Mostov, "A 'Jerusalem' on the Ohio," p. 170.

45. Samuel Bruel, "Affairs in Cincinnati," *Occident* 13 (December 1855): 458-64.

46. Dr. Mayer and N. Malzer, "Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, Cincinnati," *Occident* 11 (June 1853): 162-75.

47. On this chapter in Lilienthal's life, see Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), pp. 69-96.

48. David Philipson, *Max Lilienthal: His Life and Writings* (New York, 1915); Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654-1860* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945); Morton J. Merowitz, "Max Lilienthal (1814-1882)—Jewish Educator in Nineteenth-Century America," *Yivo Annual* 15 (1974): 46-65.

49. While several sources claim that Lilienthal was hired upon Wise's recommendation, David Philipson, in his biography of Lilienthal, says that the recommendation came from "prominent Jewish families" whose sons attended Lilienthal's New York boarding school (*Max Lilienthal*, p. 59).

50. KKBI Board of Trustees Minutes, June 5, 1855; see I. M. Wise's reminiscence of Lilienthal in *The Hebrew Review* 2 (1881-82): 184-90.

51. KKBI Trustees, August 1, 1855; *Occident* 13 (December 1855): 460.

52. *Occident* 13 (December 1855): 459; Sarna, "A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews," in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 14.

53. *Occident* 13 (December 1855): 462-64; KKBI Trustees, September 9, 1855; September 16, 1855.

54. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 28, 1865; November 10, 1867.

55. KKBI Trustees, November 5, 1854 ("scheta" [ritual slaughter] committee is omitted in appointment of new congregational committees), May 17, 1857; October 25, 1857.

56. See L. Hearn, "Cincinnati Saints," quoted in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 50.

57. *St. Louis Jewish Tribune* (1883), reprinted in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 86.

58. KKBI Trustees, April 8, 1863.

59. See Heller, *Isaac M. Wise*, pp. 377-79.

60. KKBI Trustees, April 8, 1863.

61. Philipson, *Oldest Jewish Congregation*, pp. 53-54.

62. KKBI Trustees, March 24, 1868; Congregational Minutes, April 2, 1868; Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 56.

63. KKBI Trustees, October 14, 1877.

64. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 19, 1873.

65. Ibid., September 4, 1869.

66. For head-covering discussion, see *ibid.*, September 4, 1869; October 11, 1874; February 28, 1875; September 5, 1875; September 26, 1875; October 31, 1875.

67. Ibid., October 19, 1873.

68. Ibid., November 5, 1876.

69. KKBI Trustees, April 9, 1865; May 21, 1865. The tradition of paying old or idle men to make a *minyan* was brought over from Europe; see *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972), vol. 12, col. 67, s.v. "minyan."

70. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 19, 1873.

71. Ibid., October 29, 1884.

72. Philipson, *Oldest Jewish Congregation*, p. 65.

73. For a sketch of Benjamin's career, see *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (1948), vol. 2, p. 185.

74. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 28, 1883.

75. Letter from Raphael Benjamin to Board of Trustees, December 27, 1883, in KKBI Congregational Minutes; KKBI Trustees, June 11, 1888.

76. On Philipson, see Douglas Kohn, "The Dean of American Rabbis: A Critical Study of the Life, Career and Significance of David Philipson, as Re-



reflected in his writings (Kabbidic Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1987); and David Philipson's autobiography, *My Life As An American Jew* (Cincinnati: 1941). Philipson was the congregation's first rabbi to be ordained in America. Lilienthal had been ordained in Germany and Benjamin in England.

77. Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 8, 57.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 57; KKBI Congregational Minutes, June 17, 1888.
79. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 14, 1888.
80. Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 61–63.
81. See Kerry M. Olitzky, "The Sunday-Sabbath Movement in American Reform Judaism: Strategy or Evolution," *American Jewish Archives* 34 (April 1982): 79; Philipson's diary (with valuable annotations) as reproduced in Stanley F. Chyet, "Isaac Mayer Wise: Portraits by David Philipson," in Bertram W. Korn, *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus* (Waltham, 1976), esp. pp. 85–88.
82. KKBI Congregational Minutes, November 25, 1888; December 15, 1889.
83. *Ibid.*, October 29, 1911; October 31, 1915; October 27, 1922; 1930 *Yearbook*. In 1913, Bene Yeshurun also introduced "short talks . . . and also some musical numbers" on Sunday morning; see Heller, *As Yesterday*, p. 177. For the larger Sunday debate in Reform Judaism, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 290–92; Sidney L. Regner, "The Rise and Decline of the Sunday Service," *Journal of Reform Judaism* (Fall 1980): 30–38; and Kerry M. Olitzky's articles in *American Jewish Archives* 34 (1982): 75–82; *Journal of Reform Judaism* (Summer 1984), pp. 66–71; and *American Jewish History* 74 (1985): 356–68.
84. KKBI Congregational Minutes, November 6, 1890.
85. Philipson, *My Life*, p. 95.
86. Lance Sussman, "The Suburbanization of American Judaism as Reflected in Synagogue Building and Architecture, 1945–1975," *American Jewish History* 75 (September 1985): 32.
87. KKBI Congregational Minutes, "President's Report," October 16, 1904.
88. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1909; October 27, 1912; October 25, 1908.
89. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: Schocken, 1967; orig. ed., 1934), p. 425; Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1972; orig. ed., 1955), pp. 129–45; Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 123–47. Sklare (p. 305) points out that Kaplan and his followers were not themselves leaders of the synagogue-center movement "but in reality their role was confined chiefly to reflecting some of the contemporary developments." For discussions of Orthodox synagogue-centers, see Aaron I. Reichel, *The Maverick Rabbi* (Norfolk: Donning, 1984), pp. 87–327, and Leo Jung, *The Path of a Pioneer* (New York: Soncino, 1980), pp. 63–92. For a general discussion of the American synagogue-center, see David Kaufman, "'Shul with a Pool': The Synagogue-Center in American Jewish Life, 1875–1925" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1993).

90. KKBI Congregational Minutes, "President's Report," October 28, 1906; KKBI Trustees Minutes, October 27, 1907; October 31, 1909; October 26, 1913.

91. KKBI 1930 *Yearbook*, "President's Report."
92. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 28, 1900; Trustees Minutes, October 16, 1904.
93. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 25, 1903.
94. KKBI Letterbook, letter of KKBI secretary to Mrs. J. Walter Freiberg, November 2, 1906.
95. *Ibid.*, letter from secretary of KKBI to Mrs. Stella S. Rosenberg, secretary, Cincinnati Section, Council of Jewish Women, November 2, 1906.
96. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 26, 1913.
97. *Ibid.*, October 25, 1914.
98. KKBI 1925 *Yearbook*, "Annual Report of the President," "Report of the Rockdale Avenue Temple Sisterhood"; KKBI Trustees Minutes, April 5, 1923.
99. "Memorials in Honor of Julius Freiberg," 1906, AJA.
100. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 20, 1921; KKBI Trustees Minutes, May 5, 1921.
101. Until 1914, Philipson was joined on the pulpit by a cantor. Morris Goldstein—cantor, composer, and artist—had preceded Philipson at Bene Israel; he served the congregation until his death in 1906. When his successor, Joseph Mandelberg, resigned in 1914, Philipson himself began to read the prayers, joined only by the choir (KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 25, 1914). From this time on, all spiritual activities at the temple were consolidated within the rabbi's sphere.
102. Philipson, *My Life*, 203.
103. *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 277; see Kohn, "The Dean of American Rabbis," pp. 159–202.
104. Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 72, 169–70; see Sarna, "'A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews,'" in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 9.
105. *American Israelite*, November 17, 1889, reprinted in Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 72–73.
106. Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 67–68; Zane Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 134, 269; Sarna, "'A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews,'" in Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 12.
107. Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 270–75.
108. KKBI Congregational Minutes, October 31, 1920; October 20, 1921.
109. The proceedings of the "Centennial Pageant" are reprinted in the 1924 edition of Philipson, *The Oldest Jewish Congregation*.
110. Alfred Segal, quoted in Philipson, *My Life*, p. 497.
111. For the 1928 festivities, see *Addresses and Testimonials on the Occasion of Rev. Dr. David Philipson's Fortieth Anniversary with Congregation Bene Israel, Cincinnati, Ohio, November 3, 1928* (Cincinnati, 1928).
112. Quoted in Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 361–62.

113. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 296–98; 303–7. For the larger setting, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 895–931; Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925–1935," *Church History* 29 (1960): 3–16.

114. Interview with Victor and Louise Reichert, November 1988.

115. "Voices from the People," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 6, 1932, and May 7, 1932 (clippings at American Jewish Archives). See also Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Silver Era: Rabbi Eliezer Silver and His Generation* (New York: Feldheim, 1981), pp. 82–87.

116. See Kohn, "Dean of American Rabbis," p. 137: "He had considered retiring earlier, but he decided to keep going to round out a half century in one congregation: 'This will stand as the record in this country. For that reason and that reason alone I am continuing.'"

117. See Fred Rosenbaum, *Architects of Reform* (Berkeley: Magnes Museum, 1980), pp. 125–46.

118. KKBI 1939 *Yearbook*, p. 10.

119. Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 141.

120. Gunther Plaut, one of five German seminary students who were brought out of Germany to study at Hebrew Union College, recalls his first Sabbath service in America at Rockdale Temple, for which they dressed as they would have in Germany. After the service he and his friends were greeted by Philipson, who wrathfully informed them: "If you ever appear here again with those things [hats] on your heads I will have you physically removed." Gunther Plaut, *Unfinished Business, an Autobiography* (Toronto, 1981), p. 55.

121. 1948 *Yearbook*, "President's Report."

122. See Sarna, "'A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews,'" passim.

123. After World War II, Reichert did privately advocate some changes in Rockdale tradition, including the introduction of daily religious services conducted by lay members and "greater warmth and participation in our Sabbath service through singing and new ceremonials." There is no evidence that these proposals were ever formally presented to the temple board. See Victor E. Reichert to Ira Abrahamson (December 12, 1945 and n.d. [1945/46]), Rockdale Temple Papers (uncatalogued, loose archival material found at Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio; hereafter: RTP).

124. KKBI 1942, 1947, 1949, *Yearbook*.

125. KKBI 1945 *Yearbook*, pp. 5–6; 1946 *Yearbook*, pp. 5–6.

126. KKBI 1947 *Yearbook*, pp. 5, 7.

127. Philipson, *My Life*, pp. 325–27.

128. Some of the requirements actually dated back to 1940, but they were apparently not strenuously enforced; see KKBI 1940 *Yearbook*, p. 26.

129. KKBI 1953 *Yearbook*, p. 9; interview with Stanley Brav, June 1989; interview with Victor and Louise Reichert, June 1989.

130. Stanley R. Brav, *Dawn of Reckoning: Self Portrait of a Liberal Rabbi* (Cin-

cinnati, 1971), pp. 195–197; interview with Brav, June 1989; and KKBI 1954 *Yearbook*.

131. 1954 *Yearbook*, pp. 9–10.

132. KKBI 1949 *Yearbook*, "President's Report."

133. KKBI By-Laws, 1951; KKBI 1946 *Yearbook*, p. 9.

134. KKBI 1953 *Yearbook*, p. 34; 1956 *Yearbook*, p. 31; 1957 *Yearbook*, p. 28.

135. KKBI Trustees Minutes, October 9, 1969. Trustee minutes after February 11, 1960, are found in Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio.

136. Congregational Meeting, March 13, 1962, RTP.

137. KKBI Board of Trustees, November 15, 1962; January 9, 1964, in which Blackman reports that he visited 300 hospitalized congregants over the last year; interviews with Victor and Louise Reichert, June 1989, and Elizabeth Trager, June 1989.

138. For Passover seder discussion, see KKBI Trustees Minutes, February 14, 1963; April 11, 1963; May 9, 1963; and June 13, 1963.

139. KKBI Board of Trustees, September 10, 1964; interview with Victor and Louise Reichert, June 1989.

140. 1955 *Yearbook*, p. 6; 1956 *Yearbook*, p. 7; 1957 *Yearbook*, p. 11; December 11, 1966, letter to the congregation, RTP.

141. KKBI Trustees, "Minutes of Board of Governors," November 10, 1963.

142. See, for example, "President's Report to the Congregation," April 20, 1964, RTP; KKBI Trustees, October 11, 1962; February 14, 1963.

143. Board of Governors meeting, November 10, 1963; congregational meeting minutes, June 30, 1965, RTP.

144. The high school religious education for all of Cincinnati's Reform temples is combined within Cincinnati's Reform Jewish High School.

145. KKBI Trustees, December 11, 1966.

146. Ibid., November 13, 1963.

147. Congregational meeting, December 18, 1966, RTP.

148. Letter, Murray Blackman to Henry Hersch, April 13, 1967, RTP.

149. Sarna and Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati*, p. 173.

150. KKBI Trustees, August 29, 1967.

151. Interview with Philip Cohen, June 1989.

152. KKBI Trustees, August 29, 1967.

153. Philip Cohen interview.

154. See KKBI Trustees, April 1968, and following.

155. KKBI Trustees, April 11, 1968; April 24, 1968.

156. Interviews with Philip Cohen, David Hachen, Marcia Lowenstein, June 1989.

157. Letter from Hachen to congregation, January 15, 1968, RTP; interview with David Hachen, June 1989.

159. Letter from Henry Hersch to congregation, November 5, 1968, RTP; letter from David Hachen to congregation, November 5, 1968, RTP; KKBI Trustees, October 10, 1968; February 13, 1969; interview with Roslyn and Albert Freiberg, September 1988.

160. Letter from Philip S. Cohen to Board of Rockdale Temple, January 16, 1969, RTP.

161. When a member requested that the rabbi officiate at the b'ris of his grandson on the third day after birth, the man could not understand why Hachen would maintain that the circumcision, to be in accordance with Jewish law, had to be on the eighth day. Hachen interview.

162. Letter from Val Friedman to congregation, March 21, 1969. One hundred and thirteen families (and perhaps 400 signatures) responded with a petition questioning why he had resigned and the apparently undemocratic way in which the whole matter was handled by the board of trustees. KKBI Trustees, April 10, 1969.

163. "President's Message—1968," RTP.

164. Letter, Henry Hersch to Rev. W. E. Crumes, July 1, 1969, RTP; KKBI Trustees, January 8, 1970.

165. "Once-proud Rockdale Temple now prey of vandals," *Cincinnati Post*, December 26, 1972, Near Print file, AJA.