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HOW GERMAN WERE “GERMAN” JEWS IN AMERICA IN THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY? A VIEW FROM BALTIMORE

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Like the historians of most American Jewish communities, historians of the Jews of Baltimore long took for granted the neat division between three waves of Jewish immigration, and particularly between the influx of “German” Jews in the mid-nineteenth century and the later arrival of Eastern European or “Russian” Jews between 1880 and 1924. But beginning with Hasia Diner’s groundbreaking work, *A Time for Gathering* (1992), scholars of American Jewish history have begun to highlight some of the fallacies related to our understanding of the so-called “German” period of American Jewish immigration and settlement.<sup>1</sup>

First, to call the Jewish immigrants of this period “German” raises a definitional problem, because there was no political state called “Germany” during the years in which most of them arrived, and Jews living in the German states thought of themselves culturally, legally, and linguistically as Jews rather than as Germans.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, although the Jewish immigration to the U.S. during these years was perhaps drawn most heavily from German-speaking lands (of Baltimore it is said that Bavaria and Hesse provided the largest number of Jewish immigrants), overall there was a significant number of immigrants arriving from a broader geographical area that stretched beyond the borders of what became Germany in 1870-1871. The history of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation (1830), the first synagogue in Maryland and one of the most

influential in the city throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, reveals that it was founded by Dutch rather than German Jews.<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Benjamin Szold, one of the ideologists of Conservative Judaism in America, father of Zionist leader Henrietta Szold, and spiritual leader of one of the largest “German” Jewish congregations in Baltimore was born in Nemeskirt, Hungary, not Germany.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Michael S. Levy, one of the most prominent nineteenth century hat manufacturers, not only in Baltimore but in the United States, was a native of Posen.<sup>5</sup> In 1852, Baltimore already had enough Jews of Russian and Polish background to form their own congregation, with a second being founded in 1865. By the early 1870s, additional congregations had been founded by Jews from distinct regions of Poland and Lithuania.<sup>6</sup> Thus, by the decade before the onset of mass immigration from Eastern Europe, Baltimore Jewry already included a significant variety of Jews from locations ranging from Western Europe to Russia.

Even if one considers the majority of mid-nineteenth century Jewish immigrants to Baltimore who did come from within the boundaries of what later became Germany, these Jews were themselves a diverse group with, in many cases, only tenuous ties to what we would understand as German culture. While some of these Jews had experienced political emancipation and significant acculturation and integration into non-Jewish, German-speaking society, the great majority of Jews who came to the U.S. from 1830 to 1870, like the majority of Jews in German-speaking lands more broadly, originated in small towns and villages and had not yet experienced thorough acculturation into the surrounding non-Jewish world. According to Steven Lowenstein, the process of modernization of German Jewry occurred much more slowly and incompletely before 1870 than is usually assumed, suggesting that during the heaviest decades of Jewish immigration to American during the 1840s and 1850s, most Jews arriving in Baltimore and other U.S. cities continued to stem mostly from rural rather than urban backgrounds, were more

familiar with Yiddish or Judeo-German than with High German, and were generally more Orthodox than Reform.<sup>7</sup>

If the Baltimore Jewish community reflects the problems of categorization raised by Diner, however, it also presents a picture that suggests Baltimore Jews of this period did have some significant connections to German language, culture, and political identity that cannot be totally dismissed. In a city where, at various points during the nineteenth century, one out of every four residents was German, claiming ties to Germans and Germanness had benefits that made the question of national identity more than simply one of origins.<sup>8</sup> Jews may not have conceived of themselves as “German” in significant ways before migration, but that does not mean that they did not come to think of themselves as Germans once they immigrated, since historians have long accepted that ethnic identities have more to do with invented traditions than historical realities.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, even for Jews who came from outside the later boundaries of Germany—even from Poland and Russia—German was often considered the language of culture and “civilization,” and acculturating or urbanizing Jews, lacking attachment to the local national culture, often embraced German as their own language of modernization and acculturation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while born in a *shtetl* or *dorf* in Hungary or Posen, Jews who went on to become educated in German likely thought of themselves more as Germans than as Hungarians or Poles.

Given these complexities, this paper seeks to explore the connections between Baltimore Jews and Germanness in the areas of associational and cultural life, language and education, and political activism as a means of making greater sense of these connections. It argues that the ties between Jews and Germanness were uneven across the Jewish population and depended greatly on European background and pre-migration experiences of education, emancipation, and

integration. It also argues that ties to the German American community and the embrace of a “German” identity were often phenomena that occurred only after migration, and made sense as the beginning steps in an acculturation process in a city where German culture and associations played a significant role. Finally, it argues that these ties were historically and socially contingent and changed significantly over time, dissipating significantly by the late nineteenth century due to changes both in Europe and the United States.<sup>11</sup>

### **Baltimore Jews in German American Associational Life**

The German population of nineteenth-century Baltimore was diverse in terms of its class structure, religious affiliation, and residential patterns, making it difficult to identify a single, uniform German American culture. One of the ways in which German Americans most clearly set themselves off from their non-German neighbors, however, was through participation in a vast array of associations that represented both the variety among German immigrants and a shared set of priorities and concerns. One of the earliest German American associations in Baltimore was the German Society of Maryland, founded in 1820 to aid needy German immigrants and to advocate for the interests of the growing German American population. Among the early leaders of this organization were the Cohens and the Ettings, Baltimore’s founding Jewish families. Solomon Etting served as one of the German Society’s vice presidents from 1820 to 1840; it was he who in 1834 devised the policy of printing English and German brochures to distribute to German and Swiss immigrants arriving at the port of Baltimore to inform them of the aid available to them. Solomon’s son Samuel also held positions of leadership in the Society during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Benjamin I. Cohen was also a longstanding leader of the German Society of Maryland, holding the position of treasurer from 1825 until his

death in 1845, when his son Israel took over, continuing until his own death in 1875. Thus, according to a history of the Society, “for fifty years were the finances of the Society were entrusted in the custody, care and fidelity” of a member of the Cohen family, who with “painstaking care and efficiency” provided “sound advice as to the management and investment of the funds . . . with solicitous care for the poor beneficiaries, so that not a dollar appears to have been misplaced or lost during their remarkably long years of gratuitous service in their important office of trust and responsibility.”<sup>13</sup>

The Cohens’ and Etings’ involvement in the German Society of Maryland reflects their high social status in Baltimore and their significant level of integration into the surrounding culture. Having arrived in Baltimore in the late eighteenth century before Baltimore had a significant Jewish population and having achieved success as businessmen, civic leaders, and politicians, their role in the German Society simply mirrored their role in countless other organizations and initiatives in the larger, non-Jewish world. After about 1840, however, when the Jewish population of Baltimore began to grow dramatically, the social lines between Jews and non-Jews began to grow more distinct, and interaction between Jews and non-Jews within German American associations occurred with less ease. Despite the continuing prominence of the Cohen and Etting families in the activities of the German Society of Maryland, for example, only about a dozen Jews could be identified among the hundreds of members of the society during the nineteenth century, and only two other Jews served as managers of the society for brief terms—Joseph Friedenwald in 1880 and Jacob Hecht in 1888.<sup>14</sup>

This does not mean that Jews were largely absent or lacking influence in Baltimore’s German American associations. The pattern from the 1840s to the 1880s, however, was one of limited participation, with Jews and other German Americans interacting in very specific sectors

of the German American associational world. There was also great selectivity in terms of which Jews took the most active roles in these organizations; those who did so sometimes held positions of particular importance and influence, and yet they also represented an anomalous position within the Jewish community in terms of their levels of education and their integration into the non-Jewish world.

This trend can be seen by examining the Jewish participation in many of the principle types of German American associations in Baltimore, such as the singing societies and the sporting clubs. In the city's German singing societies one finds that some of the most prominent participants were Jews, including a local dentist, Dr. Bernhard Meyer, and the Democratic politician Hugo Steiner. Jacob Rosewald, born of German Jewish parents in Baltimore in 1842, studied under local German music teachers and in Germany before going on to become a leader in the city's German music scene, directing both the Liederkranz Society and the German Maennerchor. In 1866, he presided over a concert at the Concordia Opera House to benefit the construction of a new St. Martin's Lutheran Church.<sup>15</sup> Leopold Blumenberg, a veteran of the Prussian military who went on to achieve the rank of major in the Union army during the Civil War, was among the most prominent leaders of Baltimore's Schuetzen Gesellschaft (Rifleman's Society). He not only held the title of "king" of the society for many years because of his unparalleled shooting record, but he was also honored by having his portrait hung in a place of honor in the society's clubroom. Finally, another Baltimore Jew, Isidor Loewenthal, was active as a writer and editor for German American publications in Baltimore, and was also a member of a group called Die Funken, composed of graduates of German universities, which assembled for events such as a celebration of Bismarck's 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday in 1897.<sup>16</sup>

Yet unlike Meyer, Steiner, Rosewald, Blumenberg, and Loewenthal, the overwhelming

majority of Baltimore Jews had not spent time in German universities, were not intellectuals or professional men and women, and were not politicians for whom connections to the non-Jewish world had to be nourished. For most Baltimore Jews, participation in German American societies was never more than a minor activity that supplemented their more active participation in a wide range of Jewish associations and charities, many of which paralleled organizations in the German American community. Thus, while many German American societies enrolled a small number of Jews as members, Jews generally attended the balls and social gatherings of the Harmony Circle (a Jewish social club), the Hebrew Benevolent Society, and the Young Men's Hebrew Literary Society over those of the Liederkrantz or the Germania Club.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the lines that divided Jewish and German American associations, there is evidence that a kind of civic respect and cooperation existed between them. For example, at the dedication ceremonies and annual celebrations of the German Orphans' Asylum, delegations from the Hebrew Orphans' Asylum were invited to participate and sit with representatives of other civic organizations and with government officials, and the Hebrew Orphans' Asylum reciprocated, inviting the leaders of their German American counterpart to their events. Similar gestures of respect were made by the leading benevolent societies and lodges of the German American and Jewish communities.<sup>18</sup> Still, despite this ongoing diplomacy that suggests that in some small way, these organizations saw themselves as each taking part in a larger German-speaking community, Jews and non-Jewish Germans each had a set of parallel institutions to which each group was primarily loyal, albeit with a small degree of overlap.

The institution that followed a somewhat different pattern, and which facilitated the most significant degree of interaction between "German" Jews and German Americans in Baltimore, was the Concordia Society. Founded in 1847 to promote cultural and literary events for local

German-speaking immigrants, the society emerged in a significant way on the Baltimore scene in 1865 with the construction of a grand opera house on the west side of the city, where not only operas, but dramatic presentations, concerts, balls, and assemblies of all sorts were held on at least a weekly basis. The Concordia facilitated Jewish participation and interaction between German Americans and Jews because, in practice, it was less an association and more a venue for public amusement, where social mingling could be kept within certain bounds. Upwardly mobile Jews, many of whom were benefiting from their success in the local clothing and dry goods businesses, began attending theater and opera at the Concordia enthusiastically as a sign of their increasing social status. As one newspaper report explained, “the Concordia Society numbers over six hundred members, including many of the most refined and wealthy of our German fellow citizens.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to serving as a space where German Americans and Jews could attend cultural performances without necessarily interacting on an intimate basis, it also provided spaces where each of these groups could hold annual dances and charitable events for their separate associations while still placing themselves under a loose “German” umbrella. Thus, the Concordia became a regular venue for the masquerade balls of the German American Arion Singing Society and of the Liederkranz Society as well as for the masquerade ball of the Baltimore Purim Association and the annual fair to benefit the Hebrew Hospital.<sup>20</sup>

### **Germans, Jews, and Politics**

Another arena that reflected both a degree of commonality and interaction between German Americans and Jews in Baltimore, but also signified the limits of these relationships, was politics. As immigrant groups with similar geographical origins and at least some shared cultural sensibilities, German Americans and Jews often had similar interests regarding political

questions of the day. In addition, both groups faced shared hostility from native-born white Protestants that sometimes required joint action. Yet like their patterns of associational life, these commonalities emerged only in specific situations and the key individuals who forged political ties between the German American and Jewish groups were often somewhat unusual when compared to the larger populations which they represented.

The most conspicuous collaboration between Jews and German Americans in the political realm was among the liberals, some of whom had been participants in the Revolution of 1848, who channeled their activism in the United States toward the abolitionist cause. Major Leopold Blumenberg, the “king” of the Baltimore Schuetzen Gesellschaft, was among those labeled “Black Republicans” for his anti-slavery views. During the campaign of 1860, he led the members of the Baltimore Turnverein in participating in a procession of the local chapter of the “Wide-Awakes,” a paramilitary organization created to keep order at Republican political rallies. According to one account, as the group marched in support of Lincoln’s candidacy, “their progress [was] frequently retarded by an insulting mob, which hurled missiles and imprecations . . . at the men who were determined to rally around their idol.”<sup>21</sup> Another fierce Baltimore abolitionist was David Einhorn, rabbi of the Har Sinai Verein, a pioneering congregation of Reform Judaism in the United States. Einhorn published his antislavery views in his own German-language periodical, *Sinai*, although his editorial line followed closely that of Baltimore’s liberal German daily, *Der Wecker*, which published favorable reviews of the rabbi’s articles. When proslavery mobs rioted in Baltimore in 1861, the presses of both *Sinai* and *Der Wecker* were destroyed by the hostile crowd.<sup>22</sup>

Just like the Jews who held visible posts in German American associations in Baltimore, those who joined with liberal Germans in abolitionist activities were a small minority among the

city's Jews. Most Jews, like most non-Jewish Germans, supported the Democratic majority and its proslavery stance, which was given voice by the most popular German daily, *Der Deutscher Correspondent*. But since most Baltimoreans of all backgrounds supported the status quo on slavery, there was nothing particularly "German" about this stance, especially when compared with the way in which the small group of German and Jewish abolitionists often carried on their activism within German associations and linked their views to the ideals of the revolution of 1848.

As the events of the Civil War period indicate, few Baltimore Jews had the kind of formative pre-immigration experiences with revolutionary or liberal activism that might have propelled them into alliances with German liberals in America like the ones forged by Blumenberg and Einhorn. But this did not mean that at key moments, Baltimore Jews did not take part in celebrations of German republicanism. In 1848, just as the revolutions of that year were occurring in Europe, several prominent Jews took part in a mass meeting held to celebrate. Organized largely by local Germans, the meeting was presented as a city-wide event and drew the participation of government officials, including Baltimore's mayor, Col. Jacob G. Davies, and the U.S. Senator from Maryland, Reverdy Johnson. For the Jews serving on the organizing committee (Lewis Lauer, J. I. Cohen, and Marcus Wolf) as well as for those in attendance, the event's German framework gave them a significant role in the kind of city-wide meeting in which they might otherwise not have been able to participate. It also provided an unusual opportunity to identify themselves publicly with themes of American citizenship and democracy, since the participants cast themselves as "a free people . . . in convention on one side of the Atlantic, to do honor to those, newborn to freedom, on the other."<sup>23</sup> Similar pageantry accompanied the victory of Prussian forces over the army of Napoleon III in 1870, when

Solomon Hess, the Jewish president of the Concordia Association, ordered the Concordia Opera Hall to be elaborately decorated with lights and German flags, and the Jewish musician, Prof. Jacob H. Rosewald, directed a celebratory concert in the association's garden. As with the celebrations of 1848, those of 1870 were wrapped in the themes of freedom and democracy, described as they were as marking the "triumph of free principles over imperial despotism."<sup>24</sup> In this way, participation in German political and national celebrations was a step for Jews toward claiming their place in a democratic society.

It is impossible to know how many Baltimore Jews were in the audiences that gathered for German celebrations such as those that occurred in 1848 or 1870. It is easier to gauge, however, the more significant collaboration between Jews and German Americans on a number of related political issues on which they tended to share similar perspectives, irrespective of party loyalty. In the early years of Jewish immigration to Baltimore during the 1840s and 1850s, the city was under control of the nativist American Party (the "Know-Nothings"), who had a general disregard for foreigners and sought to erode the boundaries between church and state that prevented the United States from being defined narrowly as a Protestant country. During the 1850s in particular, clubs of rowdies who supported the Know-Nothings engaged in a series of brutal riots in which both Germans and Jews were attacked. While members of neither group identified exclusively as Democratic or Republican, their experiences with the Know-Nothings instilled in them a suspicion of Anglo-Protestant intolerance that influenced their views across the political spectrum.<sup>25</sup>

Temperance, for example, was a major cause among native-born American Protestants during the nineteenth century, but was generally opposed by Jews and Germans of varying political allegiances for cultural and economic reasons. Both groups saw the Temperance

movement's proposals for the prohibition of alcohol as a reactionary "Puritanism," which was intolerant of the more moderate drinking cultures of central Europeans. They also perceived it as an economic threat, since both Jews and Germans made up a significant share of the city's saloonkeepers and liquor merchants. To protect their interests, they organized several saloonkeepers' organizations that lobbied government officials and held public meetings to express their views.<sup>26</sup>

Temperance, in turn, was linked to another controversial political issue of interest to both Jews and Germans: Sunday laws. This issue came to a head in Baltimore in 1879, when an overzealous police force commandeered a chartered pleasure boat, the *Cockade City*, and forced the passengers to cease what the officers charged was illegal engagement in commercial amusement (possibly including alcohol consumption) on Sunday. Germans who voiced support for reform of the Sunday laws often highlighted the way in which they interfered with the ability of workingmen to recreate on their one day off, and the tendency of Germans to socialize over beer and other alcoholic drinks made the prohibition particularly galling. For Jews, the Sunday laws were a challenge to their freedom of religion and an improper establishment of Christianity. Despite their somewhat different interests, however, Germans and Jews also cooperated on this issue, forming organizations like the Society of Law and Rights (composed of saloon keepers) and the Sunday Law Modification Union, which brought together prominent German American leaders like Frederick Raine, Louis Hennighausen, and W. Schnauffer with Jewish leaders such as Rabbi Henry Hochheimer and Dr. Abraham B. Arnold. While taking up the plight of the German workingman who was denied his leisure activities, these associations also decried the Sunday laws as "antagonistic to the liberty of religion as regards the Israelite and unconstitutional in this country of freedom."<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, while a small elite of Germans and Jews united in political action regarding issues that they linked to German liberal ideals, the majority of Jews and Germans in Baltimore found practical reasons to work together in politics. Cooperation in responding to Anglo-Protestant dominance by opposing Temperance legislation and Sunday Laws, for example, may have underscored some similarities and shared interests between the groups, but they most directly pointed to the desire of each of them to adapt quickly and successfully to American society.

### **The Language Question**

While Jews arriving in Baltimore in the mid-nineteenth century came from a variety of geographical locations stretching from Western to Eastern Europe, with few exceptions the use of the German language was a unifying factor that helped create the notion that the community was one of German Jews. Until the appearance of an English-language Jewish newspaper in the 1870s, the city's Jews relied on the general German press in Baltimore, including both the Democratic *Deutscher Correspondent* as well as the more liberal *Der Wecker*. As we have seen, there was a short-lived Jewish press in German in the form of David Einhorn's *Sinai*. As Moses Aberbach has written, most of the major Jewish organizations and congregations kept their minutes in German before the Civil War, and sermons, eulogies, and public addresses were often given in German through the 1870s.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the widespread use of German in Baltimore's Jewish community by the mid-nineteenth century, however, it was not the only language used by Jewish immigrants. Having come from traditional, small town and unacculturated backgrounds, most Jews in Baltimore had spoken Yiddish (or Judeo-German) in their homelands, and many continued to use this dialect,

based on medieval German and written in Hebrew letters, after their migration as a means of communicating with family back home and with one another, as well as in personal and private writings.<sup>29</sup> Many Yiddish letters written by Baltimore immigrants survive in various archives and collections, including one from 1849 preserved in the American Jewish Archives from Meyer Hexter, a Baltimore peddler, to his son-in-law Bernhardt Weill, a clothier in Annapolis, Maryland.<sup>30</sup> Simon (nee Sussel) Halle, a Baltimore clothier and dry goods merchant, was writing letters in Yiddish to his family in Bavaria in 1858.<sup>31</sup> Joseph Bergman, a horse dealer and the owner of the National Stables on West Baltimore Street, wrote to his family in 1887 in beautiful German script, though he interspersed Yiddish handwriting when using Jewish terminology that could not be easily rendered in High German.<sup>32</sup>

Part of the language question, particularly in regard to letters to family members, had to do with the ongoing acculturation of Jews on the other side of the Atlantic. Immigrant Jews in Baltimore shifted from Yiddish to German in certain arenas as they encountered German institutions and publications, and as their rabbis began to deliver sermons in German. But because these immigrant Jews were also adapting to English, and because German emerged mainly as a supplementary language, Jews who remained in Germany after 1870 may have given up Yiddish more quickly and completely than their relatives in Baltimore. Halle, for example, was still using Yiddish notations in his business ledgers, interspersed with English, as late as 1890.<sup>33</sup>

Those Baltimore Jews that spoke High German most consistently and enthusiastically were the highly educated and politically active. A child of '48ers recalled that this group had a particular fondness for German language, because it was linked to the political ideals of the revolution and seen as a superior vehicle for secular education and enlightenment that they

understood as central to their identities as modern individuals. They gave their children names like Louis and Augusta and German was spoken in the home.<sup>34</sup> This value placed on German by an elite group of educated, enlightened Jews was also, ironically, the source of increasing German usage in the synagogue, where one might have expected a more traditional pattern to reign. But with rabbis like Einhorn, Szold, and Hochheimer, all of whom subscribed wholeheartedly to German linguistic acculturation and, according to one memoirist, even accorded a kind of “sacredness” to German, the American synagogue became instead a vehicle for the Germanization of Yiddish-speaking immigrants.<sup>35</sup>

This emphasis on German as an instrument of culture, enlightenment, and spirituality also influenced Jewish educational efforts. From the early 1840s, several Jewish schools were founded by local rabbis who taught in German, English and Hebrew.<sup>36</sup> When Baltimore rabbis attempted to create a united school system in 1867, they published a brochure explaining the centrality of German to effective religious training.<sup>37</sup> In addition, many of the most upwardly mobile Jews sent their children to private, nonsectarian German schools such as Knapp’s Institute or the school run by Rev. Henry Scheib of Zion Church.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, from the first years in America, Jewish immigrants increasingly entered an English speaking world that competed with their use of both German and Yiddish. Like the use of German and Yiddish, there was a range of how quickly and enthusiastically immigrants embraced English as their primary language and as the dominant language of Jewish affairs. Naturally, the young embraced English most quickly, as evidenced by the fact that in 1853, the Young Men’s Hebrew Literary Society was already keeping its minutes in English.<sup>39</sup> Some older Jews also advocated a quick transition to English from the earliest years. Unlike his more liberal colleagues who embraced German as the language of the synagogue, Baltimore Hebrew

Congregation's traditionalist rabbi, Abraham Rice, was downright hostile to German, which he saw not as a language of enlightenment but of assimilation and destructive reform. "As long as German is in power here," he wrote in 1849 to his Philadelphia colleague, Rev. Isaac Leeser, "I know only too well that our children will not learn religion, for firstly, the children have no taste for German. Secondly, no German newspaper will last that spreads true fear of God. They want nothing more than to destroy the words of our sages." He therefore urged Leeser to publish an English bible.<sup>40</sup>

Even for Jews fully acculturated to an English setting, German could still hold attraction in a city like Baltimore, where knowledge of German was an important tool for nurturing social and business connections in the non-Jewish world. M.B. Greensfelder wrote in 1870 to his future wife Carrie Levi, a native-born American, to urge her to learn German in preparation for their marriage.<sup>41</sup> German was important in the curriculum of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum as late as 1895, when a \$10 prize was still being given for excellence in the study of the language.<sup>42</sup> But long before the 1890s, English had already claimed its place as the dominant language of the "German" Jewish community. As early as 1867, the same year as Baltimore rabbis emphasized the role of German as a language of religious instruction, the ceremonies accompanying the laying of the cornerstone of the new Baltimore Asylum for Israelites were conducted mostly in English, except for the two sermons by Rabbi Henry Hochheimer and Solomon Deutsch, which were delivered in German.<sup>43</sup> By 1875, the city's first Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish Chronicle*, was being published in English, and increasingly, even the synagogue service and special events such as confirmations increasingly shifted to English. By 1882, Szold's congregation demanded that he give sermons every other week in English.<sup>44</sup> Thus, while High German was an important language for Baltimore Jews between the 1840s and 1880s, it was never their sole language and

its usage varied according to various social factors and constantly competed with Yiddish and English.

### **How “German” were “German” Jews?**

Between 1870 and 1900, several changes in the Jewish and German American communities altered the terms of Jewish participation in German associational life and the ties of Jewish to German language and culture. First, with the rise of a new, English-speaking generation of Baltimore Jews, ties to the German commitments of the older generation naturally faded. But equally as significant was a shift in the definition of Germanness itself. To the extent that pre-1870 understandings of Germanness in America were rooted in liberal notions of culture and enlightenment, after the unification of the German states, a narrower nationalistic sense of Germanness became dominant that was less open to Jewish inclusion. Jews in the United States, for their part, became less embracing of a German identity as they became increasingly aware of the rising tide of antisemitism in Germany and other areas of Central Europe toward the end of the nineteenth century, and as they saw some of the echoes of this phenomenon among German Americans. Jews increasingly felt less welcome in German American associations and expressed less interest in participating.

A different but related trend occurred at the Concordia Association, which had been the institution with the most significant interaction between Germans and Jews. Started in 1847 as a largely non-Jewish German cultural association with a few prominent Jews, after 1870 the clientele increasingly changed to include more and more Jews and fewer and fewer Germans. The change was so dramatic by 1889 that when the Concordia Association gave a banquet marking the centennial of George Washington’s inauguration, the organization was referred to in

the local English-language press as being “composed largely of prominent Hebrews.”<sup>45</sup> When the Concordia Opera House burned down in 1891, the club was not reestablished, but was replaced by exclusively Jewish clubs like the Clover Club and the Phoenix Club. Thus, the era of German-Jewish “concord” was over.<sup>46</sup>

Political ties between Germans and Jews endured longer than social ties, since Jews and Germans continued to agree on a range of political questions and collaboration and cooperation did not present the problems of social mixing that associational life did. Political cooperation was also a more elite phenomenon. Thus, Hugo Steiner and George Strauss addressed the German American Democrats as late as 1899 along with other speakers addressing the audience in both English and German and decrying the threat of “negro domination.”<sup>47</sup> By the end of the century, the civil cordiality between Jewish and German institutions still survived as well, but it had diminished significantly. In 1897, representatives of the German Orphan Asylum still appeared as guests at the Hebrew Benevolent Society’s banquet, but it was now in fewer numbers and the delegation formed a much less significant part of a larger group of non-Jewish dignitaries of all backgrounds.<sup>48</sup>

By the 1890s, English now exclusively conveyed the social status and respectability that German once did. When Benjamin Szold arrived to Oheb Shalom in 1859, his Breslau training and his command of German culture were a central aspect of the attraction of a somewhat uncouth group of clothing merchants trying to raise their stock in Baltimore society. But by 1893, his congregation was looking to an English-speaking rabbi to project their social respectability, and Szold, like most other Baltimore rabbis of his generation, could not speak English as fluently and eloquently as German, and his English sermons faltered. To address their fears of seeming too foreign and outmoded, the members of Oheb Shalom replaced the eminent

Szold with a young English speaking rabbi, William Rosenau.<sup>49</sup>

Ironically, precisely at the time when Baltimore's Jews were losing their significant ties to German Americans and to a German identity, they began to increasingly describe themselves as "German" Jews. This primarily had to do with the increasing arrival after 1880 of Eastern European Jews, from whom the older immigrants were anxious to distinguish themselves. One of the first local uses of the designation "German Jews" was in a 1905 sketch of the "German Jews of Baltimore" by Oheb Shalom cantor Alois Kaiser, who started his article by explaining that Baltimore Jewry was composed of 35,000 people, "one-third of which is of German origin, and the rest of which is composed of Russians, Poles, Galicians and Rumanians."<sup>50</sup> This neat division, as we have seen, was not entirely accurate; some of the earlier immigrants came from exactly the same places as the newer ones.

Moreover, even those Jews who had migrated from what became Germany were, upon their arrival, in many ways very similar to the post 1880-immigrants in terms of language, culture, political status, education, and religious orientation. All this suggests that we must understand the "Germanness" of "German" Jewish immigrants to America in the nineteenth century as an identity that has more to do with their experiences in the United States—with the pressures, opportunities, and associations they could pursue in the American environment, as well as with the images and associations they wished to avoid—than with their experiences in Europe.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). The classic treatment of Baltimore Jewry is Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971). On the “tripartite division” of American Jewish history into “Sephardic,” “German,” and “Russian” periods, see Jacob Rader Marcus, “The Periodization of American Jewish History,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47 (March 1958): 125-33. In addition to Diner, the other standard treatments of German Jews in America are Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830-1914* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984); and Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> On the slow pace of German Jewish acculturation and integration before 1870, see Steven Lowenstein, *The Mechanics of Change: Essays in the Social History of German Jewry* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Ira Rosenwaike, “The Jews of Baltimore: 1820 to 1830,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 67 (1978): 246-59; Robert P. Swierenga, *The Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), chap. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandra Lee Levin, *The Szolds of Lombard Street: A Baltimore Family, 1859-1909* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> On Levy, see Jessica Elfenbein, “Uptown and Traditional: A New Take on Baltimore’s German Jewish Community,” *Southern Jewish History* 9 (2006): 69-102.

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<sup>6</sup> See Earl Pruce, *Synagogues, Temples, and Congregations of Maryland* (Baltimore: Jewish Historical Society of Maryland, 1992), entries for Bikur Cholim, Mikro Kodesh, and B'nai Israel.

<sup>7</sup> Lowenstein, *The Mechanics of Change*, esp. chaps. 1 and 5.

<sup>8</sup> The standard, if now somewhat dated, treatment of Germans in Baltimore and in Maryland more generally is Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948). See also Sherry H. Olson, *Baltimore: The Building of An American City* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 179-83.

<sup>9</sup> See Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.," in *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (Fall 1992): 3-41.

<sup>10</sup> This point is made by Moses Aberbach in "The Early German Jews of Baltimore," *Society for the History of Germans in Maryland* 35 (1972): 1. See also Hillel Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in Czech Lands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> My approach is meant as a corrective to some earlier studies that overstated the involvement of Jews in German American associational life, or the identification among Jews with Germanness more broadly. See, for example, Rudolph Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), 173-76, 203-55; Michael A. Meyer, "German-Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, ed. Jacob Katz (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 247-67; and Stanley Nadel. For a more recent study whose findings mirror those of my own, see Tobias Brinkmann, "Jews, Germans, or Americans? German-Jewish Immigrants in the Nineteenth Century United States,"

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in *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*, ed. Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 111-40.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Paul Hennighausen, *History of the German Society of Maryland* (Baltimore: Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, 1909), 99-100. On the Ettings, see Aaron Baroway, "Solomon Etting, 1764-1847," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 15 (March 1920): 1-20.

<sup>13</sup> Georg Treu, *Das Buch der Auswanderung* (Bamberg: Fraenkischen Merkur, 1848), 107; Hennighausen, *History of the German Society of Maryland*, 98-99, 115-17, 119. Benjamin I. Cohen also served as secretary of the Society in 1824 and Joshua I. Cohen as physician from 1826 to 1830. See Hennighausen, *History of the German Society of Maryland*, 175-76. On the Cohens, see Aaron Baroway, "The Cohens of Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 18 (Dec. 1923): 355-75; 19 (Mar. 1924): 54-71; and W. Ray Luce, "The Cohen Brothers of Baltimore: From Lotteries to Banking," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 68 (Fall 1973): 288-308.

<sup>14</sup> Hennighausen, *History of the German Society of Maryland*, 177.

<sup>15</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 28 1895, p. 7; Jan. 6, 1866, p. 3. Also crucial to the German musical scene was Otto Sutro, whose family came from Aachen to Baltimore in 1851, though Sutro's influence extended far outside the German American community. See John C. French, "Otto Sutro and Music in Baltimore," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 47 (1952): 260-62.

<sup>16</sup> *Sun*, Apr. 2, 1897, 10.

<sup>17</sup> This finding is based on a detailed search for the names of Jews associated with German associations.

<sup>18</sup> *Sun*, Jun. 23, 1873, 1; Dec. 16, 1886, 2 (supplement).

<sup>19</sup> *Sun*, Jul. 27, 1865, 1.

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<sup>20</sup> *Sun*, Feb. 22, 1871, 1; Feb. 21, 1868, 3. See also the report of the masquerade ball of the Germania Maennerchor Singing Society in *Sun*, Feb. 18, 1887, 2 (supplement). By this date note the anti-Semitic costume of “Uncle Isaac” with “a nose that reached from the upper story of the lip to the shoulder socket.”

<sup>21</sup> *Sun*, Nov. 2, 1860; *Baltimore American*, Mar. 24, 1912.

<sup>22</sup> See Isaac M. Fein, “Baltimore Rabbis During the Civil War,” in Sarna and Mendelsohn, *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 181-96.

<sup>23</sup> *Sun*, May 4, 1848, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Sun*, Sep. 5, 1870, 4.

<sup>25</sup> On the German American political mobilization in response to the Know Nothings, see Louis P. Hennighausen, “Reminiscences of the Political Life of the German-Americans in Baltimore During the Years 1850-1860,” *Society for the History of Germans in Maryland* 7 (1892-1893): 51-60; 11-12 (1897-1898): 3-18. The son of the prominent Jewish merchant Simon Frank was severely wounded during a street riot in 1856 when he was shot in the knee as the family was walking home from synagogue on Yom Kippur. See the *Sun*, Oct. 9, 1856, 1. For the national context, see also Bertram W. Korn, “The Know Nothing Movement and the Jews,” in *Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth Century American Jewish History* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1954), 58-78.

<sup>26</sup> On anti-prohibition activities in Baltimore, which included both Jews and German Americans, see the *Sun*, Feb. 10, 1886, 3; June 2, 1886, 2 (supplement); May 20, 1887, 2 (supplement). On German involvement in the liquor trade, see Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 356. On German and Jewish cooperation in the fight against prohibition nationally, see Marni Davis,

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*Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> *Sun*, Jun. 6, 1879, 4; Jan. 23, 1880; Feb. 11, 1880.

<sup>28</sup> Aberbach, “The Early German Jews of Baltimore,” 32.

<sup>29</sup> On the use of Yiddish/Judeo-German among Jews in Germany before 1870, see Lowenstein, *Mechanics of Change*, chap. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Small Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Sussel Halle to his nephew, Simon Halle papers, MS 67, Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore (hereafter cited as JMM).

<sup>32</sup> Bergman to brother Meier Lob et al., Dec. 20, 1887, Bergman Papers, JMM.

<sup>33</sup> See daybook, Simon Halle Papers, JMM.

<sup>34</sup> Unsigned memoir received by JMM from the archivist of Zion Lutheran Church, vertical file, JMM.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Sun*, April 11, 1849, 2; July 26, 1849, 2; Feb. 20, 1855, 3; Aug. 26, 1856, 2.

<sup>37</sup> S[olomon]. Deutsch, “An der Verwaltungs-Rath der Hebrew Educational Association of Baltimore,” in *An die Israeliten Baltimore’s* (n.p: [Baltimore?]: n.d. [c. 1867]), 1993.141.1, JMM.

<sup>38</sup> See Klaus G. Wust, *Zion in Baltimore, 1755-1955* (Baltimore: Zion Church, 1955), 76. On English-German schools more generally, see Ernest J. Becker, “History of the English-German Schools in Baltimore,” *Society for the History of Germans in Maryland* 25 (1942): 13-17.

<sup>39</sup> Young Men’s Hebrew Literary Society minutes, 1853, JMM.

<sup>40</sup> Abraham Rice to Isaac Leeser, May 1849, JMM vertical file under “Rice, Abraham.”

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<sup>41</sup> B.M. Greensfelder to Carrie Levi, Apr. 26, 1870, Greensfelder Papers, JMM.

<sup>42</sup> *Sun*, May 20, 1895, 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Laying of the Cornerstone for the Baltimore Asylum of Israelites* (Baltimore: Winkler and Leucht, 1867).

<sup>44</sup> Marsha L. Rozenblit, "Choosing a Synagogue: The Social Composition of Two German Congregations in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore," in Jack Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 327-62.

<sup>45</sup> *Sun*, May 4, 1889, 4.

<sup>46</sup> See *Sun*, Nov. 19, 1895, 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Sun*, Apr. 27, 1899, 10.

<sup>48</sup> *Sun*, Dec. 17, 1897, 10.

<sup>49</sup> See Aberbach, "Early German Jews," 11; Rozenblit, "Choosing a Synagogue," 327-62.

<sup>50</sup> Alois Kaiser, "Die Deutsche Juden von Baltimore," in *Das Neue Baltimore, mit besonderer Beruecksichtigung der deutsch Amerikaner im Geschaeftsleben* (Baltimore: German Publishing Company, 1905), 61-65.