



CHARMS

Jewish Life at Cornell 1865-2005

ELAINE D. ENGST



On his
one, two
and
three, four
etc.

Notice
Gene's
Teeth



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Printed in the U.S.A.
ISBN 978-0-935995-06-0

JEWISH LIFE
AT CORNELL
1865–2005

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ELAINE D. ENGST

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*The Jewish Student Community at Cornell University
is delighted to invite you to*

The Masters in Excellence

Regale

May 6-8, 2005

Cornell University

**Commemorating 350 Years
of Jewish Life in America,
and at Cornell since 1865**

West Entrance, South University, now Morrill Hall circa 1865

2005 Masters in Excellence program

Preface

In early May 2005, Cornell's Jewish Student Community commemorated a major milestone in American history: 350 years of a Jewish presence in the United States and 140 years at Cornell University. Spiritual leaders from the legacy Jewish cities (Charleston, Houston, New York, Newport, Philadelphia, and Savannah) presented histories of their respective congregations as well as the achievements and contributions of Jews in their cities even before our country was formally founded. Additionally, invited representatives of the major Jewish historical societies related how their organizations are keeping alive the stories of these early Jewish communities and making this history relevant for Jews in the United States today.

Scholars, writers, and Cornell's university archivist drew attention to Jewish history at Cornell in research papers detailing the revolutionary steps taken by the institution's founders in establishing a nonsectarian university. Their bold new idea set the stage for an open and vibrant culture that attracted Jewish students and faculty and, more broadly and importantly, established Cornell's reputation for overall academic excellence.

To emphasize the importance of this event, distinguished visitors from abroad joined with dignitaries in the American public sphere in addressing the students, faculty, alumni, administrators, and Ithaca residents during the weekend's proceedings. Cornell's president, Jeffrey Lehman, cordially welcomed the chief rabbi of the State of Israel, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, a representative of the White House, an officer in the U.S. State Department, the chancellor of America's oldest Jewish orthodox university, and the chairpersons of Ithaca's Jewish Federation.

At the event the Jewish Student Community bestowed its Masters in Excellence award to Dr. Irene B. Rosenfeld, a Cornell alumna (B.A. '75, M.S. '77, Ph.D. '80), chair and CEO of Frito-Lay, and a former Cornell trustee. Also honored was Cornell Provost Bidy Martin, who received the organization's Cornell Award. As part of the special event, a group of Cornell alumni provided funding for this publication. Many people assisted in its creation, especially Sally Atwater, Rhea Garen, Carol Kammen, Laura Linke, Peter Martinez, Susette Newberry, Rabbi Ed Rosenthal, Lou Robinson, Steven Siegel, and Norman Turkish.



Andrew Dickson White, ca. 1865

A Nonsectarian University

In the nineteenth century, elite private eastern colleges and universities were all church affiliated, providing a traditional classical education almost exclusively to wealthy white male students or to less privileged white men studying for the ministry. Cornell University, founded in 1865, was a radical departure—an educational experiment. Explicitly nonsectarian and committed to equal educational opportunities for men and women, Cornell University also sought to integrate practical and liberal education, treating both on an equal basis. Its charter specifically stated, “And persons of every religious denomination, or of no religious denomination, shall be equally eligible to all offices and appointments.” The university was to be equally open to all students, whether rural, economically disadvantaged, foreign, immigrant, or of color. It was to be a university where “any person can find instruction in any study.”

Cornell’s founders, Andrew Dickson White and Ezra Cornell, were remarkable men. White had from his youth been opposed to sectarian orthodoxy. Brought up in an Episcopalian family and strongly influenced by his parents’ ideas, he nevertheless



Ezra Cornell, ca. 1865

could not accept his family minister’s statement that infants who died before they were baptized went to hell, or that his grandmother was doomed to damnation because she had joined the “wrong” church. As a result, he refused confirmation, despite his parents’ pleas.

White’s instinctive disapproval of religious dogmatism was reinforced by his educational experience. Although he wanted to attend Yale University, his father insisted that he go to an Episcopalian school, Geneva College. After a thoroughly disappointing first year, he arranged on his own to transfer to Yale, where Congregationalists were predominant. White’s experience convinced him that educational

inquiry could not be conducted freely in a religiously affiliated institution. In a letter of September 1, 1862, to Gerrit Smith, a wealthy reformer and abolitionist from Peterboro, New York, near Syracuse, White proposed to dedicate his own recent inheritance of \$300,000 toward the founding of a university and encouraged Smith to join him in this endeavor. Among the goals of White's "truly great University" would be "to afford an asylum for Science—where truth shall be sought for truth's sake—where it shall not be the main purpose of the Faculty to stretch or cut Science exactly to fit 'Revealed Religion.'" Smith replied that his health was poor and he could not think about such a massive project.

Ezra Cornell, however, shared White's feelings. Raised as a Quaker, he had been excommunicated when he married a non-Quaker. When, in 1864, he endowed a library for Ithaca, he appointed to its board of trustees the clergy of all seven local churches in order to avoid domination by any one. White later reminisced on reading the bill to incorporate the library:

I was struck, not merely by his gift of one hundred thousand dollars to his townsmen, but even more by a certain breadth and largeness in his way of making it. The most striking sign of this was his mode of forming a board of trustees; for, instead of the usual efforts to tie up the organization forever in some sect, party, or clique, he had named the best men of his town—his political opponents as well as his friends; and had added to them the pastors of all the principal churches, Catholic and Protestant. This breadth of mind, even more than his munificence, drew him to me.

The library bill provided the occasion for the first interaction between Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White. Both were New York State senators, and Cornell's bill was referred to White's Commit-

tee on Literature. Cornell was the oldest member of the Senate and White the youngest, but they discovered that their ideas about education had much in common. On February 7, 1865, White introduced into the New York State Senate a bill to establish Cornell University as an institution for "the cultivation of the arts and sciences and of literature, and the instruction in agriculture, the mechanic arts and military tactics, and in all knowledge" and to "appropriate to it the income from the sale of public lands" that had been granted to New York State by the Morrill Land Grant College Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1862.

The new university opened in 1868. Its nonsectarian stance was so controversial that the governor of New York State, who had been scheduled to speak at the inauguration exercises, withdrew at the last moment to avoid criticism. White scribbled on his program, "But Gov. Fenton was afraid of Methodists & Baptists & other sectarian enemies of the University & levanted the night before leaving the duty to Lieut. Gov. Woodford who discharged the duties admirably."

The open atmosphere at Cornell would have seemed especially hospitable to Jewish students. At the laying of the cornerstone of Sage College in 1873, Ezra Cornell wrote a letter in which he expressed his wishes for the new university:

*Ithaca New York
May 15th 1873*

To the Coming man & woman

On the occasion of laying the corner stone of the Sage College for women of Cornell University, I desire to say that the principal danger, and I say almost the only danger I see in the future to be encountered by the friends of education, and by all lovers of true liberty is that which may arise from sectarian strife.

From these halls, sectarianism must be for-

ever excluded, all students must be left free to worship God, as their conscience shall dictate, and all persons of any creed or all creeds must find free and easy access, and a hearty and equal welcome, to the educational facilities possessed by the Cornell University.

Coeducation of the sexes and entire freedom from sectarian or political preferences is the only proper and safe way for providing an education that shall meet the wants of the future and carry out the founders idea of an Institution where "any person can find instruction in any study." I herewith commit this great trust to your care.

Ezra Cornell



Early Jewish Students

In nineteenth-century America, some assimilated Jews, particularly of German heritage, attended American colleges and universities. Because of their very small numbers, they did not form a clearly recognizable or separate element. At least one Jewish student, Walter Mayer Rosenblatt, entered with the first Cornell class in 1868, although he stayed only one year. In 1874, testifying before the New York State Senate about Henry Sage's endowment of Sage Chapel, Andrew Dickson White noted that in accordance with Cornell's charter, preachers at Sage Chapel could be from any religious denomination, Jewish as well as Christian. He continued: "We have several Jewish students in

our institution, and among them some of our very best students, and I would never sanction any thing which would infringe on their privileges, deprive them of their rights, or tend to degrade them in any manner."

Jewish students at Cornell seem to have been well integrated into the university in the nineteenth century. In a diary entry for January 1871, senior Royal Taft wrote, "Had a frat [Phi Kappa Psi] meeting in the evening and initiated Goldsmith, Frankenheimer & [Leopold Gottlieb] Rosenblatt all splendid boys. Each made a few remarks very appropriate for the occasion." The Board of Trustees Executive Committee minutes for November 6, 1884, contains a note in Andrew Dickson White's hand listing Jewish students who were members of fraternities. They include Albert Buchman (Zeta Psi), Otto and Robert Eidlitz (Delta Upsilon), John Frankenheimer (Phi Kappa Psi), and Elias David de Lima (Theta Delta Chi).¹ In 1885 John Frankenheimer wrote to White upon his retirement:

I desire to express the deep sense of my personal obligation to you in establishing a university on a strictly secular basis and in evoking and maintaining during my connection therewith, the spirit of utmost toleration and of the broadest liberalism. At the time I entered college, the spirit of narrow-minded sectarianism prevailed in almost all the colleges of the land, except Cornell. It was this among other influences that brought me to Ithaca. That during my life at Cornell I was never subjected to any of the annoyances and affronts which bigotry and race-prejudice call forth at other colleges, was due, I believe, to the liberalizing influence which you and your teachings exerted upon the students.

The number of Jewish students at Cornell in the late nineteenth century was nevertheless small. From 1878 to 1900, in the class statistics sheets com-



Otto M. C. Cohen A.P. 11



Albert S. Cohen B.A. 1887



Robert J. Cohen A.P. 25



John S. Cohen A.P. 17

Cabinet card photographs of early Jewish students

piled by the senior classes, only thirty students out of a total of about forty-five hundred graduating seniors specifically identified themselves as Jewish or Hebrew. Many students, however, left the answer blank or provided a less-than-serious response. In 1895 alumni elected a Jewish alumnus, Henry Ickelheimer '88, as an alumni trustee of the university.

Although the university did not keep official figures, in a 1910 survey by the Cornell University Christian Association, of the 837 respondents, only 18 students identified themselves as Jewish, but significantly, 275 did not answer the question at all. In a letter to a Mr. J. H. Berry written that year, President Jacob Gould Schurman's secretary, Roscoe C. Edlund, stated,

... you can readily understand that the question as to whether a man is a Jew or not has far less importance here than at many other universities. We are a pretty democratic community, and a man is usually taken at his worth, be he Jew or Gentile ...

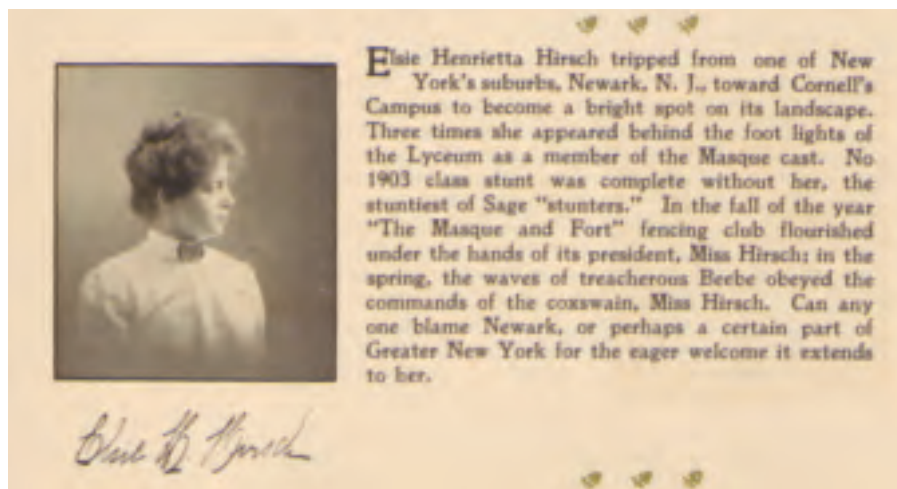
Nevertheless I do not wish you to be misled into a belief that there is absolutely no prejudice against Jews at Cornell. The feeling against Jews in so many parts of the country and especially in our great cities is so strong in many quarters that it is bound to be reflected in a large university community. My point simply is this: —the question is not an important one at Cornell and so the prejudice or feeling that may exist does not often become evident.

The question is perhaps most likely to come up when some fraternity may be considering "rushing" a student whom they suspect to be Jewish, for, as you doubtless know, very few fraternities would consider taking in a Hebrew. I ought to add

that there has recently been established here a Jewish fraternity [probably Zeta Beta Tau, chartered in 1907]. I happen to know also of two instances in which men who were in undergraduate competitions were given to understand that because they were Jews they would probably not be elected even if their work should prove superior to that of other competitors. And yet on the whole, however, I believe that there is as little feeling against Jews at Cornell as you are likely to find anywhere.

The authorities of the University deprecate even the prejudice which exists. No distinction is made by the University between Jew and Gentile—they are equally welcome, as long as they are good students and gentlemen. There are Jews on our instructing staff and they are none the less respected because of their race. President Schurman believes strongly that the University should be as free from race prejudice as from religious intolerance or partisanship, and it is the policy of the University to approach as nearly as possible the ideal of absolute freedom in this as in all other respects.

In her scrapbook, one of the earliest of a Jewish woman at Cornell, Elsie Henrietta Hirsch '03 reveals



Elsie Henrietta Hirsch Class of 1903 entry in Cornell Class Book

that she had primarily Jewish friends, and her book is filled with calling cards from at least fifteen Jewish men. But she was also involved in mainstream Cornell activities, including the Masque, the Sage Dramatic Club, and the Fencing Club. She attended parties sponsored by the Delta Gamma, Kappa Alpha Theta, and Alpha Phi sororities. Other student scrapbooks indicate much the same pattern—friendships with fellow Jews, along with participation in a wide variety of campus activities.

Semitic Languages, Literatures, and History

An 1873 Scribner's article about Cornell noted, "Jews, Catholics, and Protestants are alike entitled to its privileges. Teachers and students come from all the leading sects." As early as 1869, Dr. William Dexter Wilson, "professor of moral and intellectual philosophy," provided instruction in Hebrew at Cornell, and in the 1874–1875 course catalog, "Living Asiatic and Oriental Languages" included courses in Persian, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit, Hebrew, and other Semitic languages. That year, Dr. Felix Adler, the son of a rabbi at New York's Temple Emanuel-El who had studied at Columbia and Berlin and received a Ph.D. degree from Heidelberg, came to Cornell. A New York philanthropist, Joseph Seligman, funded Adler to be a nonresident professor of Hebrew and Oriental literature and history; it was one of the very earliest appointments of a Jewish faculty member at an American university. Adler,



Dr. Felix Adler, ca. 1874

however, did not teach languages but lectured in such topics as the origin and history of religion, philosophy in its relation to religion, and the Jewish religion and literature from a critical standpoint. His lectures were enthusiastically received on campus, although Ithaca's conservative newspaper, the *Daily Democrat*, used his appointment to continue its attacks on the "godless university."

After two years, Adler returned to New York to found the Society for Ethical Culture. Although Seligman had been willing to renew his support of Adler, the Board of Trustees decided that it was unwise to have professors nominated from the outside and would not again accept an endowment if they did not control the choice of the incumbent. In 1896 Henry W. Sage agreed to fund a chair of Semitic Languages and Literatures, and a Swedish professor, Nathaniel Schmidt, came to organize the new

department. The *President's Report* for 1896–1897 describes the department's first year:

... courses have been given in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic languages, in the Old Testament literature, and in oriental history. [Schmidt] outlines the aim of the department as being 1) to furnish adequate opportunities to linguistic students and to those preparing for the Jewish or Christian ministry of acquainting themselves with the Semitic languages and the Egyptian, 2) to present to those not familiar with the Semitic languages the results of scientific study of the Bible and other literary productions of the Semites, and 3) to offer historical students the opportunity of studying the history of the East.

Schmidt continued to teach elementary and advanced language courses as well as courses in the history and literature of the Middle East until his retirement in 1932. Because of the effects of the Great Depression, however, vacancies caused by retirements were not filled, and the department ceased to exist.

The Ithaca Jewish Community

Jews in Ithaca predate the founding of the university, and burial plots in the “Old Jewish Section” of the City Cemetery existed as early as 1856.² When Cornell opened, Ithaca was a small town of about ten thousand inhabitants, with probably no more than ten to twenty Jewish

families, largely German. Jewish residents of rural communities at this time were typically merchants. Ithaca's earliest Jewish families were primarily involved in the clothing trade or as custom tailors, and the founding of the university brought expanded opportunities for such retail businesses. By the mid-



From Milton Weinstein Class of 1914 scrapbook

H. Stern

Beta Samach

Autographs

Antoinette Nienburg '18
Benjamin Pepper '18
Jim Goldstein '18, '21
Mathew Walden '16
Sam Bond '17
Emit Kline '20
Chas. Spickard '11
Wm. Nyckoff '12
Laurie Ross 1915
H. Stern '17

Menu

—
Celery Olives Pickles
Cream of Pea Soup
Roast Veal
Potatoes Tomatoes
Ice Cream Cakes
Mints
Coffee Punch

1870s, these tailors and ready-made clothing dealers had opened small shops. For example, Jacob Rothschild, who had come to the United States from Russian Poland, began as a peddler on the route between Syracuse and Binghamton and then opened a store in Ithaca, where his brothers joined him in 1882. There were too few families to support a synagogue or a rabbi; the community depended upon an out-of-town *mohel* to perform ritual circumcisions. Social and cultural isolation led to a transient population, and few of these early families stayed.

By 1900 the Jewish population in Ithaca had begun to grow and had become more stable. Services were held in private homes, with meals prepared by the women and prayers read by J. C. Fybush, a milliner. Mrs. Jacob Rothschild and Mrs. J. K. Bernstein created a Ladies Aid Society in the 1890s. Jewish students were frequently invited to homes in the community. The scrapbook of Elsie Hirsch (’03) documents her social connections in the local community: spending Thanksgiving with the family of Isaac Bernstein, a tailor and haberdasher; attending a picnic at the home of Max Gutstadt, the manager of the Lyceum Theatre; and going to parties with the Rothschilds and Bernsteins.

Beginning in 1906, High Holy Day services began to be held in hired halls, with visiting rabbis, and Congregation Chevra Kadisha was established in the home of Isidor Rucker as a “liberal or modern” group. Cornell students staffed Sunday schools with the assistance of Professor Schmidt, who, although not Jewish, dedicated a Sefer Torah brought from New York City by Rucker. A fund was established in 1915 to build a synagogue. President Jacob Gould Schurman wrote to Solomon T. Nevins, an Ithaca merchant³:

I am so glad to learn from your letter that the Jewish residents of Ithaca and the Jewish students in Cornell University are considering the plan

of providing a house of worship in Ithaca.

I suppose the number of persons immediately concerned is smaller than in most places where synagogues have been erected. On the other hand it will be recognized that Jewish students attending the university are entitled to religious instructions in their ancestral faith and make therefore a special appeal to their numbers.

I need scarcely remind you that at Cornell University all religious denominations are on the same footing. All proper means of stimulating moral and religious life are welcomed and encouraged.

World War I interrupted fundraising, however. Agudath Achim, an orthodox congregation, was organized in 1921, but the Ithaca community was too small to support both it and Chevra Kadisha. In 1924 the groups combined as Congregation Beth-El and determined to build a temple. They purchased a plot of land in 1925 and restarted the fundraising drive. Both Jewish and Christian members of the community participated, especially Isidor Rucker, Livingston Farrand, Robert H. Treman, and William A. Boyd. At the same time, the national B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundation decided to organize a chapter at Cornell. Joining forces, the congregation agreed to build a temple large enough to accommodate students, and the Hillel Foundation agreed to sponsor a rabbi who could serve both students and community.

There were some fears on campus that the establishment of Hillel would create an “impression of segregation.” Hillel organizer Morris Sostrin reported in April 1929 that many of the Jewish students

feel that Cornell is giving them every opportunity to make themselves an integral part of the campus community; that there is no discrimination against them and that practically every

שנה טובה מאד Happy New Year

Miss Frances Ginsburg

Hudson, N. Y.

Card of Admission

HIGH HOLYDAY SERVICES
MODERN
TEMPLE BETH-EL

Name _____
NON-TRANSFERABLE

HILLEL JOTTINGS

Published weekly by the Hebrew Department of Temple Beth-El

CELEBRATED BY THE

CELEBRATED HEBREW DEPARTMENT OF TEMPLE BETH-EL
The Hebrew Department of Temple Beth-El, 110 West 12th Street, New York City, is pleased to announce that it will be publishing a weekly journal, "Hillel Jottings," which will contain articles of interest to the Jewish community. The journal will be published every Friday evening, and will be available to all members of the Hebrew Department. The first issue will be published on Friday, April 13, 1930.

THE TORAH
The Holy Scriptures are the foundation of our faith and the source of our inspiration. They are the word of God, and we must strive to understand them and to live by their teachings. The Torah is a gift from God, and we must treasure it and study it daily.

CELEBRATED HEBREW DEPARTMENT
The Hebrew Department of Temple Beth-El is pleased to announce that it will be publishing a weekly journal, "Hillel Jottings," which will contain articles of interest to the Jewish community. The journal will be published every Friday evening, and will be available to all members of the Hebrew Department. The first issue will be published on Friday, April 13, 1930.

THE HEBREW CLASSES
The Hebrew classes at Temple Beth-El are open to all who are interested in learning the Hebrew language. The classes are held every Friday evening, and are conducted by qualified teachers. The curriculum is designed to give students a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew language and its grammar and syntax.

THE HEBREW DEPARTMENT
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EXTENSIVE SERVICES
The Hebrew Department of Temple Beth-El offers a wide range of services to its members. These include Hebrew classes, religious services, and social events. The department is committed to providing a high quality of education and spiritual guidance to all who seek it.

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Temple Beth-El
Ithaca, N. Y.



Dedication Exercises
and
Installation

of
Rabbi Isidor B. Hoffmann

Sunday, July 24, 1929

Sabbath and Passover Service
TEMPLE BETH-EL
Friday Evening, April 13, 1930

8:00 P.M.
Conducted by the members of the First World War
Foundation of Temple Beth-El

ORDER OF SERVICE

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Prayers—George | Shema | Psalm |
| Invocation— | Wishes—Sylvia | |
| Math Texts— | Grace | Prayerbook, Page 2 |
| Responsive Reading—Psalms 124 | | Prayerbook, Page 24 |
| | (Lamentations—Psalms 137, 138 and 139) | |
| Scripture— | Passover and Grace | Prayerbook, Page 22 |
| Shema— | | Prayerbook, Page 24 |
| | (Prayers—Psalms and the Book of Lamentations—Prayer and Responses—Psalms—Kaddish—A Song of Songs—Cantor) | |
| The Commandments— | Grace | Prayerbook, Page 22 |
| Prayer for Peace—(Birkat Hamotzi)— | | Prayerbook, Page 22 |
| Shema— | Communion— | |
| Shema— | Prayerbook, Pages 22-23 | |
| May the World— | Communion—(Singing) | |
| | Grace | |
| Kaddish— | Prayerbook, Page 24 | |
| Reading—Bible Ten Days— | Shema— | |
| | Law of Moses | |
| Anthem—The Great Lord— | J. S. Fuchs | |
| Services—The Statute of Liberty— | Barry S. Kessler | |
| Grace—Prayer for the Lord— | Prayerbook, Page 22 | |
| | Communion—Grace and Grace | |
| Memorial Prayer— | | |
| Moscow's Sabbath— | Prayerbook, Pages 22-23 | |
| Grace—Adon Olam— | Prayerbook, Page 24-25 | |



Halloween Masquerade
November first
from nine until one

Admit one

From Harold I. Saperstein Class of 1931 scrapbook

campus office is open to them. They feel that the lack of prejudice is due to the fact that religion is stressed but very lightly, is entirely interdenominational, and because any denominational work is carried on downtown and off campus.

In a resolution adopted on March 14, 1929, the Jewish Independent Group at Cornell University and a group of Jewish students representing Jewish and nonsectarian fraternities urged the Hillel Foundation to center its activities at Temple Beth-El and to avoid any program that might tend to segregate Jewish students or encourage “prejudice of any sort in the community.”

In 1929, in recognition of its expanded mission, the Cornell University Christian Association changed its name to Cornell United Religious Work.⁴ Temple Beth-El opened, and Isidor Hoffman became its rabbi, as well as director of the Cornell chapter of Hillel and librarian for the CURW library, which was housed in Barnes Hall. Temple Beth-El and Hillel shared a rabbi until 1942. In 1948 Myron Taylor funded the construction of a new center for the Cornell Interfaith program, a “place where all religions may repair for worship ...” Anabel Taylor Hall was dedicated on October 26, 1952, with a chapel designed to be religious but non-denominational. Through the efforts of Hillel Director Morris Goldfarb and Professor Milton Konvitz, the stained-glass windows respected Jewish prohibitions against the use of graven images in a place of worship by illustrating the virtues of an educated man through symbols rather than representational art. In its early years, its chapel also was noted for a revolving altar that included a Jewish side containing the Torah and eight carved panels symbolizing the primary holidays of the Jewish calendar; a Christian side; and a nondenominational side purposely devoid of symbolism.⁵

Admissions and the Cornell Promise

Beginning in the 1880s, the nature of Jewish immigration into the United States changed. Earlier, the Jewish population had been described as “small, inconspicuous, and largely assimilated.” Most Jews were either descendants of early settlers or recent German immigrants. In all, they numbered roughly a quarter of a million in a population of sixty-three million, or just six-tenths of one percent. Given their German origins, these Jews had blended culturally with the American mainstream. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, large numbers of eastern Europeans began coming to the United States, and Jews formed a high proportion of these immigrants. By 1924 there were nearly four million Jews in the United States, concentrated in urban areas, especially New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston. Unlike the early immigrants from western Europe, many of these people were impoverished refugees from persecution and frequently perceived as alien adherents of primitive religious beliefs and customs. Between 1910 and 1920 a climate of intolerance toward minorities and immigrants began to develop, and anti-Semitic propaganda appeared.

Expanding immigration combined with traditional Jewish attitudes toward education had



Rabbi Morris Goldfarb in front of the revolving altar in the Anabel Taylor Hall Chapel, 1952

a dramatic effect on American higher education. Colleges and universities were growing rapidly: between 1890 and 1925 enrollments rose nearly five times faster than the population. More and more American universities began adopting the model already in place at Cornell of merging liberal and practical education, teaching modern languages and literature, and emphasizing the theoretical and applied sciences alongside the traditional classical curriculum. These greater opportunities, along with the Jewish traditions of reverence for books and aspirations for upward social and economic mobility in America, led Jews to send their children to the public schools in large numbers and then on to colleges and universities.⁶ By 1920 Jewish students constituted seventy-nine percent of the enrollment at City College, forty-eight percent at New York University, and thirty-nine percent at Hunter College. Columbia was twenty-one percent Jewish, and even Harvard was ten percent. Since Cornell was not in an urban area, the numbers were smaller, but Jews still accounted for about nine percent of the student population.⁷

University administrators began to feel threatened by those large numbers. College presidents spoke of a “Jewish problem” and responded—officially and unofficially. Attempts were made to limit the number of Jewish students through explicit quotas, established first at Columbia and then at Harvard. More commonly, admissions became more “selective” and new criteria were established: appearance, background, extracurricular achievements, and character, all judged by largely Gentile admissions personnel and alumni. Although Cornell never established a quota system for Jewish students, a 1925 *President’s Report* by Livingston Farrand described the beginnings of an admissions system:

After careful consideration of all the factors involved and upon recommendation of the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Trustees

voted to limit the number of admissions to the freshman class of that College to five hundred.... A committee of the Faculty was appointed, which committee makes a careful study of the credentials of each applicant. While the evidence as to scholastic standing and capacity is given leading consideration, careful inquiry is made in each case as to the character, personality, and general promise of useful service and citizenship. The information so gathered is being carefully scrutinized and from such information a selection will be made of those individuals who, in the judgment of the committee, seem to offer the most promise of future worth.

Two years later, in a letter to Harold Riegelman ’14, Farrand further expressed his ambivalence. Riegelman had returned to campus for the Princeton-Cornell game in the fall of 1927 and visited Zeta Beta Tau, his fraternity. He was told the rumor that there had been a dramatic drop in the number of Jewish freshmen for that year, and that a “definite restriction has been made.” He queried Farrand, who replied,

I am not able to write in a definite and satisfactory way about the problem you raise, namely that of the number of Jewish matriculants in the University. Certainly Cornell has not adopted any general anti-Semitic rule nor, I trust, will it ever do so.

On the other hand, it has been evident for some time that in certain of our colleges, and notably during the last five years in the College of Arts and Sciences, there has been a disquieting increase in the number of Jewish students of a not altogether desirable type and the problem so presented has been the subject of careful consideration.

When the number of applicants for admission to the College of Arts and Sciences increased about three years ago to a point calling

for definite limitation we organized a system of scrutiny and selection which has taken into consideration all the qualities ascertainable of the candidates. In other words, the basis of selection took up personal qualities, character, public spirit, etc., as well as the basic consideration of scholastic standing. When this standard was applied it is perfectly true that a considerable number of Jewish students failed to qualify along with a large number of non-Jewish students. In other words, discrimination was not on a racial basis, although from certain angles it might seem to bear that relation. It is of course true that the net result was a reduction in the number of Jewish students admitted.

There has not been a formulation of a definite number of Jewish students who will be taken in and I do not anticipate that such formulation will be necessary, although it would be idle to deny that theoretically such a proposition might come up for discussion in the future.

... I am writing to you in a personal way, of course, and not for publication but I shall be very glad to talk the matter over with you at any time that you may find it convenient to be in Ithaca. One cannot go into a subject with as many ramifications as this by correspondence and it is one where I would greatly like to have your own point of view given to me in personal conversation.

President Farrand further discussed the “problem” in a letter to Conrad Hoffman, Jr., of the International Missionary Council in November of 1933:

I have your letter of November 24th regarding the Jewish student problem and find it difficult to reply in any satisfactory way by correspondence as to our experience at Cornell. The problem is certainly here but it presents itself in different aspects and to different degrees in the

eight colleges which make up Cornell University. For example, it is a real problem in the College of Arts and Sciences and in the professional schools of Medicine and Law but it is less serious in certain of our other colleges and negligible in some, such as Engineering and Agriculture.

In general, we have not adopted any formal limit to the number of Jewish students in any one of the colleges but are forced to take the problem into consideration in certain of them.

For example, in the College of Arts and Sciences we have been able to avoid any numerical limitation because of the fact that the number of admissions is limited to 500 freshman each year and the number of applications for admission is two to three times as many as can be admitted. In determining the qualifications for admission we take into consideration, in addition to scholastic excellence, qualities of personality and general promise of successful college work and development. In that particular College the number of Jews admitted has run slightly over 20 per cent the last year or two and the pressure increases.

In the Medical School we have eight to ten times as many applicants as can be admitted and only outstanding candidates are seriously considered. There are always a fair number of Jews who come in. I cannot state the exact proportion.

In other words, we have not formulated a definite policy [or] procedure but are dealing with the problem as best we may.

As to your second question, regarding an ultimate solution, I cannot reply. I am sure that a university like Cornell cannot permit itself to be so flooded by Jewish students as to kill non-Jewish attendance, but how to limit the situation I am still in doubt.

The issue continued through the 1930s and 1940s and seems to have been particularly troubling at the Medical School, which even became the subject of an

investigation by a special committee of the New York City Council in 1946. After those hearings, Trustee Arthur Dean suggested to President Edmund Ezra Day that the university review its entire admissions process, from applications to postadmission forms, instructions, and procedures. Dean wrote,

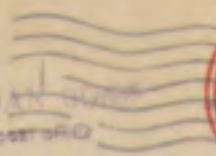
The University's records and procedures should be investigated closely in order to determine whether or not any quota system, informal or otherwise, exists, and if so, what sort of quota system.... Any correspondence relating to the rejection of applications or to the explanation of the grounds for rejecting applications should be reviewed to see whether or not it refers, directly or indirectly, to or implies the existence of any quota system or basis of discrimination.

In a 1947 letter, President Day reaffirmed Cornell's ideals:

Cornell has never abandoned the ideals in which it was founded, and to which it has been dedicated throughout the eighty-two years since the Charter was granted. We do not inquire of candidates for admission as to their race or religion, nor do we keep personnel records which would be revealing on this point. As administrative head of the University, I should not tolerate it, nor would the faculty countenance it. The Cornell tradition of liberalism has always been a force which springs from within the University.



Ruth Sylvia Bamberger Class of 1929, Cornell Women's Mandolin Club photograph



PAID AT ANY BANK OR POST OFFICE

Mr. Howard Stern
North Wales
Pa.



Thanksgiving at Bernshires 1901

STEPHENS' HALL, 141 S. AURORA ST.
ADMISSION 15 CENTS
STUNTS

The Ithaca Hebrew S
Will give a Purim Play on
on the evening
Tuesday, March 9, 191
at the Royal Opera
136 E. State St
You are cordially invited

Mr. David

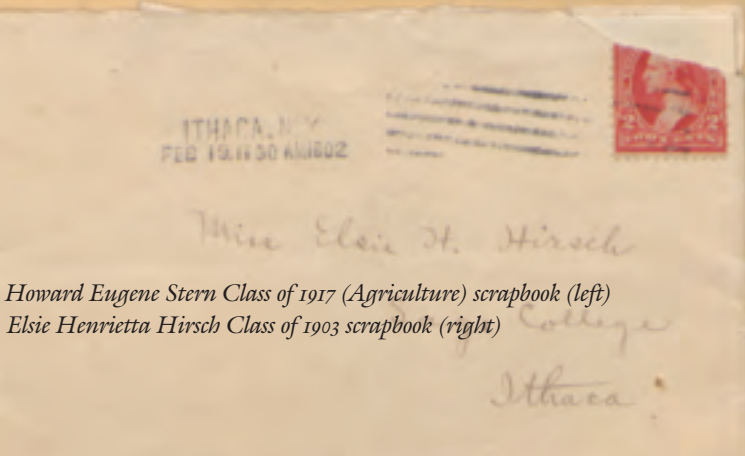


E. H.

Mr. J. H. Stern



BENEFIT OF
NDAY SCHOOL
ECEMBER 16, 1915
5 P. M.



Miss Elsie H. Hirsch

Howard Eugene Stern Class of 1917 (Agriculture) scrapbook (left)
Elsie Henrietta Hirsch Class of 1903 scrapbook (right)

Ithaca



Jewish Fraternal Societies and Campus Groups

During the first half of the twentieth century, discrimination had become commonplace in housing and social life at American universities. In response, Jewish students (as well as Catholic and African American students) established parallel systems. In 1895 an explicitly nonsectarian group open to all faiths, Pi Lambda Phi, was established at Yale, although all of its founders and most of its members until World War II were Jewish. The first specifically Jewish fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau, founded in 1898 at Jewish Theological Seminary, emphasized Zionist ideals and, until 1954, restricted membership to Jewish men. The second Jewish fraternity, Phi Epsilon Pi, acknowledged Jewish membership and activity while maintaining a nonsectarian constitution.

The establishment of Jewish fraternities at Cornell, as elsewhere, indicates that Jewish students were being deliberately excluded from the existing fraternities by those organizations' national charters, felt uncomfortable in attempting to join them, or preferred associating with other Jewish students. A chapter of Pi Lambda Phi was established at Cornell as early as 1896, although it soon folded, to be reestablished later. Zeta Beta Tau began at Cornell in 1907, with the help of leaders from Ithaca's Jew-

ish community. Isaac K. Bernstein and Abraham W. Feinberg served as directors of ZBT, helping to purchase, finance, and expand the fraternity house on Summit Avenue, and Bernstein became an honorary member. M. H. Millman, M. M. Millman, Nathaniel E. Koenig, and Lester G. Krohn founded Beta Sigma Rho at Cornell in 1910 as Beta Samach, "the Greek Beta and the Hebrew Samach suggesting the application of the Greek society idea to the social and cultural life of the Jewish undergraduate." In 1911 chapters of Phi Epsilon Pi and Sigma Alpha Mu (the first fraternity founded by the children or grandchildren of "Russian" or east European Jews) were established, and in 1912 Joseph Seidlin, James Castelle, Jack Grossman, Benjamin Brickman, Nat Hiren, Jules Jokel, and Abraham Haibloom founded Omicron Alpha Tau at Cornell.

The *Cornell Freshman Handbook*, originally published by the Christian Association, makes no mention of a Jewish presence on campus until 1919, when the Menorah Society is listed as a "non-sectarian club for the study of Judaism." Elsewhere, such societies were established as early as 1908; the Cornell Menorah Society came into existence in 1912 and became a constituent member of the Intercollegiate Menorah Association in 1913. In November 1913 President Jacob Gould Schurman addressed the group:

I am glad to welcome the Menorah Society in Cornell, not alone because it makes us conscious of the great contribution of Judaism to civilization but it is particularly fitting in this university. We would be false to our ideals if we allowed ourselves to become victims of particularism.

That is the comprehensive note of the University. We are glad with this comprehensive spirit to have this society to remind us what Judaism has contributed to the world and to teach the younger generation the great ideals which have played such a great and wonderful part in the history of the world.⁸

SIGMA DELTA TAU

Sister Carol



Dinner
Place Card
after Pledging
Oct. 9, 1933

CAROL



Carol Cline

Xm

SILENCE

To be strictly enforced!
Friday and Sat., March 16, 17.

INVITATION
TO FLEDGE
Σ Δ Τ

Autographs

I'm glad my threat
materialized -

Love, Betty

See to - car, meantime

to a perfectly good frock -

Love

name



SORORITIES

Thirteen national sororities, two of which are Jewish, have chapters at Cornell.

Inter-sorority matters are regulated by a Pan-Hellenic Council consisting of two representatives from each house.

Each group maintains a chapter house and entertains there during an organized pledging season.

About one-third of the entering girls join sororities at the close of this period; others may be invited to join later during their college course.

The average initiation fee is between \$50 and \$75.

Entering women are invited to attend a formal party given by the Pan-Hellenic Council on September 26th, from 9 to 12 Old Armory. Punctual attendance is required.

RUSHING AGREEMENT

The undersigned sororities of Cornell University, in order to bring about and perpetuate fraternal spirit and to limit the evils of rushing, do hereby promise to observe the following rules from the time of arrival in Ithaca until 6:00 P.M. on the day of pledging.

Pledge day shall be Monday, October 16, 1933. Rushing rules shall go into effect immediately upon arrival in Ithaca. No entering girl shall be pledged before pledge day.

Sorority Pledges

Alpha Epsilon Phi: Rena Alpert, Edith Bergstein, Thelma Block, Phyllis Florin, Joan Flutscher, Phyllis Gronich, Grace Miller, Natalie Moss, Gertrude Kusliski, Rena Schoenberg, Irma Jane Seidler, Marjorie Stein, Mae Zuckermann.

Alpha Omicron Pi: Mary Bull, Sarah Campbell, Virginia Goff, Mar-

Delta Gamma: Marjorie Bruner, Janet Conlidge, Mary Couch, Arlene Coryell, Geraldine Fritz, Grace G... Grace Jones, Rachel Munn, Elsie Myers, Marion Patterson, Joseph Bloughter, Jean Thompson, Henrietta Wells, Mary Elizabeth Young, I... veig Wald '16, Dorothy Miller '15.
Kappa Alpha Theta: Dorothea B... ley, Margaret Douglas, Alice G... mann, Mary Laumann, Mary Mar... Katherine Skehan, Frances W... Eleanor Elate '16, Janet Humph... grad.
Kappa Delta: Lucia Angell, M...

your identity in the...
and many other...
and woman...
... May

From Carol Cline Class of 1937 scrapbook

Sigma Delta Tau became the first Jewish sorority at Cornell in 1917 and held its first initiation at the home of Mrs. Isaac Bernstein. Founding members were Inez Ross, Amy Apfel, Regene Freund, Marian Gerber, Dora Bloom, Leonora Rubinow, and Grace Srenco. A chapter of Alpha Epsilon Phi was established in 1920 as the second Jewish sorority on campus. The *Freshman Handbooks* from 1921 to 1927 specifically identified the two groups as “Jewish sororities,” but no fraternities were so designated. The *Handbook* dropped that identification after 1927, instead stating, “Fourteen national sororities, two of which are Jewish, have chapters at Cornell.”

Jewish students also belonged to political groups. In July 1925 Marie Syrkin ’19, M.A. ’23, who would become a well-known educator, labor leader, and Zionist, attended the organizing meeting of Avukah (“the torch”), the American Student Zionist Federation, which was affiliated with the Zionist Organization of America and “created for the purpose of mobilizing the Jewish academic youth of America for the cause of the development of Palestine as the national Jewish homeland”; she was chosen to serve on its executive committee.⁹

By 1930 there were ten Jewish fraternities in addition to the two Jewish sororities on campus. But the Depression years were particularly hard on the Jewish fraternities, most of which were young, small, and inadequately funded. Chapters were forced to close or to combine with other fraternities. Tau Delta Phi, for example, absorbed Cornell’s Omicron Alpha Tau chapter. With their small memberships, the Jewish sororities remained highly competitive. Most Jewish students, in any case, did not join fraternities or sororities, remaining independent and participating in other university activities.



Integration and Discrimination

In “Jewish Students on the Cornell Campus,” published in the December 19, 1930, issue of *The American Hebrew*, Saul R. Kelson ’30 reviewed the current state of Jewish participation on campus, finding it generally very favorable. The *Cornell Daily Sun* counted eight Jews among its twenty-six members; at the *Cornellian*, the editor-in-chief and a proportional number of the staff were Jewish, as had been two recent editors-in-chief of the *Law Quarterly* and two editors-in-chief, five board members, and the last four business managers of the literary magazine, *The Columns*. The student humor magazine, however, did discriminate against “Jews, foreign students, and some independents,”¹⁰ he found, and some of *The Widow’s* jokes and cartoons were “unmistakably anti-Semitic.” Because of few applicants, Jewish students were not represented on the *Cornell Countryman* (agriculture), the *Sibley Journal* (engineering), or the *Cornell Civil Engineer*. “The Dramatic Club,” Kelson wrote, “is altogether impartial. For many years, Jews have been among its leading actors, with a present membership of fifteen out of sixty,” and debating “virtually presented the situation of a Jewish monopoly.” There may have been some discrimination in the Glee Club, but the literary clubs like the Manuscript Club and Book and Bowl had always had Jewish members. He believed that the “honorary activity societies are, on the whole, fair to Jews.”

Kelson found little evidence of a problem in athletics and believed that coaches wanted to pick the best athletes: “Jews have been very well represented on the basketball, soccer, and fencing teams. Football, baseball, and track regularly have at least one or two outstanding Jewish athletes.” Managers of sports teams always came from the big fraternities, but “discrimination is aimed at the Jew no more than at the independent, the foreign student, and the member of a lesser fraternity.” Perhaps surprisingly, Kelson reported discrimination in the advanced R.O.T.C. course, with very few Jewish students obtaining officer ranks. The same was true for employment, which he attributed to the “expressed preference of certain employers for non-Jewish help.” Jewish students distinguished themselves academically, winning a large number of debating and literary prizes, and “Jewish students have won academic recognition far out of proportion to their numbers.... Twenty-four of the seventy-one admitted to Phi Beta Kappa in the last election are Jews.” Kelson served as the Jewish representative to the newly established CURW. He described it as follows: “The Cornell United Religious Work brings together clergymen of the Catholic and Jewish and various Protestant faiths and unites in a student Cabinet representatives of all religious groups.” He believed that the Hillel Foundation had promoted better relations between Christians and Jews in Ithaca and at Cornell. But, Kelson concluded,



Saul R. Kelson
Class of 1930 Cornellian photo

In general, one finds that Jewish students themselves have little loyalty to Judaism. The C.U.R.W. has the support of only a few students.... But in this atmosphere, mingling together indifference, anti-sectarianism, and liberalism, it is certain that whatever anti-Semitism there is has no religious basis....

The essence of Cornell is its cosmopolitanism. A diversity of foreign students, Chinese and Japanese and Russians, rub elbows with indigenous farmers' sons and bankers' sons.... Cornell is all things to all men, and is big enough for them all. In a tolerant atmosphere like this we should expect no great anti-Semitic feeling.... Cornell would be exceptional indeed if there weren't among its collection of 650 Jewish students, those who impress other Jews and Gentiles alike as being objectionable.... We mention the problem of anti-Semitism among the Jews themselves.... For some of us, the problem has not been acute. Our friends are equally divided among Jews and non-Jews. We are neither extremely proud nor at all ashamed of our Jewishness; we merely accept it.

James B. Gitlitz³⁰ tells a slightly different story in his 1995 memoir, *Memos for My Children: An Autobiography*. Gitlitz arrived in Ithaca from Binghamton in the fall of 1926. “Armed with a list of approved rooms in private homes, furnished by the University, I made the rounds. At about a half dozen places I was met with refusal because I was obviously Jewish and was told to my face that they did not rent to Jews.” He finally obtained a room for about \$7 a week in a private home on Williams Street with about a dozen other freshmen and only one bathroom. Later, he recalled, “I was invited to join one of the ten Jewish

That Dinner

and afterwards



All present - except for one
Well, I'll be
Captain Lind



Everybody happy!

Dinner May 20, 1926
 at the Waldorf Astor

Herb Edelstein '27
 Bender Hoffman '27
 Maria Edelstein '26
 Dave Popway '25
 Jess. Jones '26
 Jack Schmidt '27
 Arthur Roscoe February '28
 Simon Rosenberg '29
 [unclear] '27



Following the Swallow!



Street!



James B. Gitlitz Class of 1930

fraternities—Alpha Epsilon Pi—which had a house on Cascadilla Park, just off Stewart Avenue, along Cascadilla Gorge. Sam Pearis, a Binghamton lawyer and former member, had the boys look me up. I told them that I couldn't afford it, but they offered me special considerations which finally persuaded me, a step I never regretted." His friends were primarily Jewish: "in my entire undergraduate and law school years at Cornell I don't recall ever setting foot in any of the non-Jewish fraternity houses (except my few days' dishwashing experience as a freshman)... There may have been some Jews in the non-Jewish fraternities but I never met or heard of any. If so, perhaps they hid their Jewish identity."

Gitlitz wrote for the literary magazine, *The Columns*, becoming its poetry editor, and in his sophomore year, he won the Morrison Poetry Prize. Martin Wright Sampson, then chairman of the English Department, had the greatest influence on his career.

Gitlitz wrote, "Professor Sampson also inducted me into membership in the Manuscript Club which met at his home. This was a group of student 'literati' who, especially on winter evenings, sat before a roaring fire in his great fireplace and read original poems, essays or stories which were a requirement of membership." Sampson also gave him a job grading papers. "I never actually encountered any overt anti-Semitism at Cornell such as I encountered among Ithaca townspeople when I looked for a room my first week. But, nevertheless, it pervaded many traditional college organizations as shown by the almost total absence of Jewish names in the various so-called honorary societies such as Sphinx Head, Quill and Dagger, and the various clubs." And when he discussed with Sampson his goal of pursuing graduate study in English with the purpose of teaching, "to my surprise he did his best to discourage me saying that English literature was a most conservative field and one in which a Jew would have a very difficult chance of getting anywhere beyond an instructorship." Gitlitz then turned to the legal profession; though admitted to Yale, he earned his degree at the Cornell Law School, which offered a full-tuition scholarship.

Gitlitz's experience was not unusual. Another Jewish student, Harry Caplan '16 received a letter signed by four of his professors, which read,

I want to second Professor Bristol's advice and urge you to get into secondary teaching. There is a demand for teachers at the present time at good salaries. You are well equipped by natural ability, taste, and attainments for such work. On the other hand the opportunities for college positions, never too many, are at present few and likely to be fewer. I can encourage no one to look forward to securing a college post.

There is, moreover, a very real prejudice against the Jew. Personally I do not share this, and I am sure the same is true of all our staff

here. But we have seen so many well equipped Jews fail to secure appointments that this fact has been forced upon us...

I feel it wrong to encourage any one to devote himself to the higher walks of learning to whom the path is barred by an undeniable racial prejudice.

Caplan ignored the advice. After receiving his M.A. in 1916 and Ph.D. in 1921, also from Cornell, he taught in the Department of Public Speaking from 1919 to 1923. He joined the Classics Department in 1924 and was one of Cornell's most beloved professors. Throughout his long career (he retired in 1980), he was known for his friendship and support of generations of Cornell students, especially many Jewish students. Caplan and Wallie Abraham Hurwitz, who came to Cornell in 1910 and taught mathematics until his retirement in 1954, were among Cornell's earliest Jewish professors.

After World War II, attitudes on campus began to change. Milton Konvitz, who had received a Ph.D. in philosophy in 1933, joined the first faculty in the newly formed School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell. Konvitz became deeply involved in the Cornell Hillel Foundation and represented National Hillel in the search for a new director. In 1948 Rabbi Morris Goldfarb assumed the Hillel directorship, a position he held until his retirement in 1980. Konvitz continued to be active, representing Hillel and Jewish interests on the CURW board and on the national governing board of the Hillel Foundation. When Rabbi Goldfarb came, Friday night services were held in the auditorium in Barnes Hall, with about a hundred students. Orthodox students conducted a separate service in a small chapel in Barnes. When Anabel Taylor Hall opened, the services were moved to the new building. During his tenure, Rabbi Goldfarb expanded Jewish High Holy Day services from one service to three—for Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish students. Gold-



Harry Caplan Class of 1916

farb also brought major Jewish speakers to Cornell, encouraged Cornell faculty to participate in Jewish activities, and strengthened ties to other religious groups on campus and in the community.

The diary of David S. Kogan '50, published after his untimely death in 1951, provides a good account of the life of a Jewish student at Cornell in the late 1940s. Many of Kogan's friends were people he knew from his home in Yonkers, New York. A Reconstructionist Jew, Kogan regularly attended Hillel services as well as other Hillel-sponsored social events, and served as president of the Hillel Foundation. Most of the women he dated were Jewish, and he continued to be interested in Jewish subjects. He described Jewish students at Cornell:

I've been studying the Jews here on the campus. Of the approximately fifteen hundred, about one hundred are truly tied to Jewish values and traditions in the modern sense of the term. There are about sixty who are Orthodox and do not have anything to do with Conservative Hillel House. Another one or two hundred enjoy going to services and are sympathetic to Jewish traditions. A factor almost unknown among Yonkers youth are the three hundred-odd radicals who work for the P.A.C. and the Negroes and Russia, but have nothing to do with anything Jewish, even refusing to come to Hillel House for social activities. Nevertheless they hang together at the "Universal" meetings where Jews predominate. The remaining nine hundred are in between; some come to occasional services; most going to Hillel House, but not at all really concerned with Jews or Judaism.

Kogan also joined the Big Red Band and the Debate Club, and he tried out for crew. He commented on the founding of the State of Israel: "I am thrilled about the formation of the Jewish State. Last night the beautiful Cornell chimes played the songs of modern Jewish Palestine for a full half hour." He discussed fraternities in a letter to his parents:



*From Herbert E. Edelstein Class of 1927
(Engineering) scrapbook*

Then, picking the right fraternity has been anguish. Just critically studying the various houses has helped me to formulate philosophies of life. For instance, some houses have representatives of the best families, but they are snobs; still others are careful to be just like the Gentiles; none of this satisfies me. This leaves two groups: Tau Delta Phi with Melvin Grey, and Phi Sigma Delta with Nat Neuhaus of Yonkers, where I seem to discern echoes of my varied interests. Since this is Melvin's last term, I have finally decided to join the latter.

By 1949 fraternity and sorority discrimination on campus was becoming an issue. In February, the *Cornell Daily Sun* editorialized against restrictive clauses:



Fraternities and sororities should have the power to determine their own membership, but where restrictive clauses are present this right and duty is negated.... It is not accurate to infer that all or most houses

have clauses and rules which require racial and religious discrimination; but their existence in any fraternity or sorority is a blot on the record of the whole system.... Membership in a house should be on the basis of individual merit. When the system makes sure that this is the guiding and universally accepted practice, the place of fraternities and sororities in the modern educational system will become much stronger. (*Cornell Daily Sun*, February 7, 1949)

The *Sun* particularly encouraged the Pan-Hellenic Council to end the practice of segregated rushing:

Through Pan-Hell, the sororities can do away with the most obvious blot on their reputations: the segregated rushing system. As long as this system continues in practice, each house, by endorsement of it, declared itself in favor of racial and religious discrimination.... With an unsegregated rushing system, those chapters without restrictions could pledge according to their own convictions rather than according to the selection implicit in the current segregated system. (*Cornell Daily Sun*, February 8, 1949)

At its meeting the next day, the Pan-Hellenic Council voted overwhelmingly to “replace the segregated rushing system with a more democratic

substitute and to do it this year.” The administration responded cautiously, trying to balance tolerance with freedom of association. Provost Cornelius W. de Kiewiet wrote to the *Sun*:

There are at Cornell over 250 clubs and associations which result from student initiative. These include fraternities, sororities, religious clubs, political clubs, honor societies and many other organizations. Some have wider acceptance than others, but all exist in the spirit of tolerance and diversity.

Cornell University as a corporate body was founded in the spirit of tolerance. Groups within this University are, therefore, free to constitute, reconstitute and conduct themselves



From 1949 Cornellian; David Kogan served as Hillel president

in keeping with their own preferences so long as their existence does not corrupt the spirit of the University's existence.

Trustee Mary Donlon responded to de Kiewiet:

...Cornell is an educational institution, and I assume that guidance in the extra curricular aspects of university life is almost equally as important as guidance in the academic life. What we seek to educate is the whole man or woman.

That being so, I still cherish the hope that opportunity will be found to make plain that the freedom of choice implicit in a democracy should not be exercised in a discriminatory fashion. I use "discrimination" here, not in its normal and proper sense, but rather in the sense to which we have lately become accustomed, namely, the unfair distinctions drawn because of racial, religious or other characteristics over which an individual has no control and which have no effect on his worth as an individual.

Throughout the 1950s the Interfraternity Council took a stand against national fraternity clauses and attempted to get the National Interfraternity Conference to actively support the effort. In 1951 the council's "Stand on Discrimination" held as follows: "In keeping with its stand opposing discriminatory clauses with respect to race, religion, or national origin, the Interfraternity Council requires that all members which have discriminatory clauses make a sincere and continuous effort to eliminate the same. Since the clauses are embodied within the rules of the national fraternities, it is recognized that it is a very difficult task to remove them. However, it is expected that Cornell chapters will continuously strive toward the removal of such clauses." In 1954 the Student Council presented a resolution to the Faculty Committee on Student Activities asking that no new organizations with restrictive clauses be recog-

nized. The Faculty Committee returned the request for further consideration, but in 1955 the committee passed the recommendation and referred it to the university. President Deane W. Malott constituted a President's Committee on Discrimination, chaired by Stephen H. Weiss '37 of Beta Sigma Rho. The group continued the policy of gradualism: "The committee believes its policy of consultation, investigation, and advising is preferable to any attempt to 'legislate democracy' into Cornell fraternities.... The immediate goal must be to help all Cornell Chapters of national fraternities to free themselves from outside restrictions ..." In 1964 the Interfraternity Council passed a resolution stating, "Membership selection practices of member houses shall in no way be discriminatory by virtue of race, religion, or national origin." By 1966 the Board of Trustees saw the need to take a more active stand and established a



From Herbert Shear Class of 1940 (DVM) scrapbook

Commission on Residential Environment, chaired by Alfred M. Saperston '19, "to see that no student suffers discrimination in the University?" At its June 1967 meeting the trustees approved the report of the commission, which explicitly stated:

5. Since discrimination with respect to race, color, creed, or place of birth is totally inconsistent with the fundamental nature and purpose of the University:

A. No Cornell residential unit should discriminate on any one of these bases in the selection of its members, in its operation, or in any of its other procedures. If at any time there is a question as to whether the operation or procedure of any residential unit results in such discrimination, the University may require complete disclosure of the constitution, by-laws, ritual, and any other relevant documentation or any oral arrangement or understandings of the unit involved.

By the late 1960s, however, the fraternity system was in serious trouble for other reasons. The wave of antiestablishment feeling sweeping American universities weakened fraternal societies. By the 1980s many of the formerly "Jewish" fraternities on campus had folded. With the end of restrictive clauses, Jewish students could join any group. The political activism of the 1960s also had an effect. The B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations estimated that nationwide, Jewish students represented about one-third of students involved in campus protests, although they accounted for only about ten percent of the total college and university population. Sociologist Nathan Glazer noted that these students did not see the combination of their political activities and their Jewish identity as threatening, in the way that earlier Jewish students would have.

But separate activities continued to be important: "paradoxically, now, when the acculturation



Kolenu vol. 1, no. 1, Nissan 5733, April 1973

is almost complete, many young Jews are trying to come to understand their Jewishness.”¹¹ In 1957 the National Council of Young Israel opened at Cornell what the *New York Times* referred to as “the first kosher fraternity house.” (In fact, Hillel had earlier sponsored a kosher dining co-op in its building on Stewart Avenue, and then in a restaurant on College Avenue.) Intended to maintain the ideals of traditional Judaism and be a model for other campuses, the facility served three kosher meals daily and included a chapel. The *Freshman Desk Book* described it: “The house offers the opportunity of integrating Jewish religious observance and spiritual ideals with a full intellectual, cultural, and social program. Kosher dining facilities are maintained. Freshman men and women are invited to participate in the pro-

Kosher Dining Hall — Young Israel Complex



Center for Jewish Living, artist's rendition

gram.” Milton Konvitz served as Young Israel’s faculty adviser for many years. In 1973 a movement creating Jewish communes began on college campuses. At Cornell, twelve students established Chavurah (“fellowship”); they rented a house, shared living expenses and household tasks, and provided study groups on aspects of Judaism. Hillel continued to be important, and in 1973 the foundation started *Kolenu* (*Our Voice*), a newsletter intended for the entire Cornell community and funded by the Student Assembly Finance Commission and a member of the Jewish Press Service. The first issue of *Kolenu* contains its Statement of Purpose:

Within that vast populous [sic] known as the Cornell Community, there is a smaller, yet still substantial group, sometimes referred to as the “Cornell Jewish Community.” This group is somewhat diffuse and nebulous, although its potential for achievement is periodically demonstrated. Each fall, during the first few weeks of the semester, members of the community come out in droves to “observe” the High Holidays. The past few years have also witnessed impressive turnouts for Hillel’s annual Chanukah party. And just this past semester, hundreds appeared en masse to express their horror over the tragedy

at Munich. However, with the exception of these periodic displays of solidarity, the Jewish community at Cornell is a fractured, non-knit (as opposed to loose or close-knit) conglomeration of individuals. True, within this conglomeration, there are groups of individuals who have joined together in some sort of Jewish union. However, on the whole, we have really not yet “gotten it together.”

We feel that one of the reasons for this seeming lack of unity is that there has been no vehicle for the expression of ideas and for interaction between the members of our community. We feel that, on this point, Kolenu can help, aiding intra-community communication by providing members of the Jewish community with information as to what others are thinking, doing and attempting to do. It will also enable you to express yourselves on matters concerning us all.¹²

Starting in late 1985, the two Young Israel residence houses were extensively renovated. The entire one-acre site was transformed by the building of a new 250-seat kosher dining facility, with three kitchens designed by professors in Cornell’s Hotel School. A dedicated chapel with wooden pews and stained-glass windows was added, making Jewish worship and meditation available to the Cornell community at all times. An art gallery and Judaica library were included. A rock garden, provided by the same donor who had previously presented two others on the Engineering campus, was installed, and an English garden added. The complex, renamed the Center for Jewish Living, opened in the fall of 1988 and was officially dedicated in April 1989. In 2001 full kosher dining options became available at dining halls across campus, as well as at the Kosher Dining Hall, under the Cornell meal plan.



Jewish Studies

Although Hebrew had not been taught at Cornell since 1932, in 1957, at the request of Professor Milton Konvitz, the Hebrew Culture Foundation provided a grant to Cornell for the creation of a professorship in Biblical and Hebrew Studies, to be housed in the Classics Department. Isaac Rabinowitz was appointed to the position. In 1965 the university established a new Department of Semitic Languages and Literatures “to provide instruction in Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, to prepare undergrads for graduate study in Biblical, Semitic, Ancient and Modern Near Eastern Studies, and to enable graduate students to earn advanced degrees in the field.” In 1968 more than a thousand students petitioned the university for a Jewish studies program, and in 1969 nearly one hundred members of the Arts College faculty sent a similar petition to the college’s Educational Policy Committee. Konvitz provided an introduction and rationale for the program:

The interest in such studies is not limited to Jewish students.... Such courses should have an honorable place in any intellectual republic, for they will not narrow the student’s vision; on the contrary, they will broaden his horizon and deepen his understanding of himself and of others ...

For Cornell to introduce courses in Judaic studies would mean, not a grudging concession to a student petition, but rather an overdue rec-

ognition of a legitimate and highly significant subject of study that is bound to strengthen our humanities curriculum.

The committee agreed, and the program began with courses in modern Hebrew in 1970. In 1971 Benzion Netanyahu (whose son would later become the Israeli prime minister) was named as professor of Judaic studies and department chair. The next year, he helped to develop a separate Program in Jewish Studies, which attained the status of an intercollegiate program in 1976. Now a broadly based interdisciplinary program in the Department of Near Eastern Studies, it brings together faculty from various Cornell departments and colleges. In 1977, when the name was changed, the course catalog described it as follows:

The scope of the Jewish Studies curriculum covers Jewish civilization from its ancient Near Eastern origins through its contemporary history and culture in Israel and the Diaspora communities around the world. It is a secular, academic program, the interests of which are diverse and cross-cultural. The program recognizes its special relationship to teaching and research in classical Judaica and Hebraica pursued by the members of the Department of Near Eastern Studies.

It presently enables students to obtain basic instruction and specialization in the fields of Semitic languages; the Hebrew Bible; medieval and modern Hebrew literature; ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish history; and Holocaust studies.... on both graduate and undergraduate levels.

In 1993 Thomas '64 and Diann '66 Mann provided the first endowed professorship in Modern Jewish Studies (currently held by Vicki Caron); in 1998 Cornell dedicated three additional endowed

positions, including the Bernard and Jane Schapiro Professorship in Ancient Near Eastern and Judaic Studies (currently held by David I. Owen) and the Milton R. Konvitz Professor of Judeo-Islamic Studies (currently held by Ross Brann).

Although library collections of Judaica were already substantial, the new initiatives required greater collecting efforts. In the late 1940s Milton Konvitz had acquired funding for a typewriter with Hebrew characters so that library catalog cards for Hebrew and Yiddish books would no longer have to be handwritten. In 1964 Stephen McCarthy offered to provide a special book fund, initially of \$5,000. The Cornell University Library has continued to develop its Jewish Studies collection with the appointment of dedicated bibliographers, first Yoram Szekely in 1983 and currently Patrick Stevens. Book funds and endowments now total more than \$144,000. The collection "endeavors to strengthen library holdings portraying all aspects of the Jewish experience: Judaism as a system of belief and practice; the Jewish people as a diaspora of communities bound by ethnicity, language, and religion; the modern state of Israel with Jerusalem as its national and spiritual capital." To enhance the collection, in 1988 the library purchased Isaac Rabinowitz's personal library of 137 printed volumes and 25 manuscripts constituting landmarks in Jewish intellectual history in Hebrew and Latin from the mid-sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries.





At the Start of the Twenty-first Century

In 2005 about thirty-five hundred Jewish students attend Cornell, constituting twenty-two percent of the student body. Under the umbrella of Cornell United Religious Work, Cornell Hillel is based in the Yudowitz Center for Jewish Campus Life, dedicated in 1998. Reform, Conservative/Egalitarian, and Orthodox services are held in Anabel Taylor Hall. Hillel Foundation describes the aims of the Jewish Student Union as follows:

to provide positive and purposeful Jewish experiences ... in a pluralistic environment which affirms the authenticity and validity of each individual's personal Jewish identity. Cornell Hillel is the main gateway for Cornell students to get involved in the many facets of Jewish life on campus. With our students, faculty and staff we continuously strive to create a broadly defined Jewish campus culture which is intrinsically intertwined with the culture of Cornell University.

The Jewish Campus Service Corps provides staff for outreach activities. Nearly thirty Jewish student organizations, ranging from cultural to political to social groups, sponsor more than four hundred events and activities a year. Kedma (Orthodox), Koach (Conservative), and Keshet (Reform) groups belong to their national organizations; Chabad House at Ithaca is part of the national Chabad Lubavitch movement. In the late 1980s alumni and friends renovated the former Young Israel House as the Center for Jewish Living. Since 1992 the center has been a completely independent student organization, and students run the residence hall as an observant living unit. In 2000 Cornell Dining and the Cornell Jewish Life Fund partnered with the Orthodox Union and the Jewish Learning Initiative to run 104 West!, which offers kosher dining for Jewish students and others with special dietary requirements; a rabbi serves as the *machgiach* (supervisor or inspector) for kosher dining. The center includes an Orthodox synagogue and the Jewish Learning Center. Cornell's eleventh president, Jeffrey Lehman, was Jewish, as are many faculty members, who help support and take part in Jewish campus events. Current students take pride and interest in their Jewish heritage while fully participating in Cornell's academic, cultural, and social life.



Notes

1. “The following Jews have been members of fraternities at Cornell.

S. E. Levy, Buffalo [possibly Louis Elcazer Levi?, 1880–1882]

Albert Buchman, Ovid [’79 Architecture, Zeta Psi]

Ernest Lowenbein, New York [1876–1878, Delta Beta Phi]

O.M. Eidlitz, New York [Otto Marc, ’81, Delta Upsilon]

B. R. Cahn, Chicago [Benjamin Robert, 1878–1880, Beta Theta Pi]

H. F. Ehrman, Decatur, Ill. [Harry Friedman, ’83, Beta Theta Pi]

John Frankenheimer, New York [’73, Phi Kappa Psi]

“There are here at present

R. J. Eidlitz, New York [Robert James, ’85, Delta Upsilon]

E. D. A. De Lima, New York [Elias David Abinun, ’86, Theta Delta Chi; this student was originally from Curacao]”

2. There are no records to substantiate how the cemetery plot, sometimes referred to as the “Old Jewish Section” or the “Jewish Addition,” was obtained. Morris Lubliner was buried there in April 1856, and Caroline Cohen and her infant son in December 1856. In 1930s the burial ground and additional lots in the City Cemetery and Lake View Cemetery were deeded to Temple Beth-El.

3. When fundraising began in earnest for the building of Temple Beth-El, Schurman’s 1915 letter was quoted in an April 26, 1925, *New York Times* article.

4. At the same time, Catholics were also included in CURW, which continued to be housed in Barnes Hall.

5. A fire of unknown cause in the Anabel Taylor Hall chapel destroyed the altar in April 1968.

6. Although most Jewish students came from urban environments and would not have been interested in studying agriculture, beginning in 1908, the Jewish Agricultural Society of New York provided an unlimited number of scholarships to enable the children of “Jewish farmers living and working on the farms of their parents” to attend the six-week winter short courses in agriculture that Cornell provided. Applicants had to write an essay on an agricultural topic. The scholarships were available until at least 1924.

7. The Bureau of Jewish Social Research surveyed 106 colleges and universities in 1918–1919. To compile numbers, they examined lists of students and classified names as “Jewish, non-Jewish, and doubtful.” The survey found that of the institutions surveyed, the Jewish enrollment was 9.7 percent. The ratio of Jewish women to total Jewish registration was one in five.



From Herbert Shear Class of 1940 (DVM) scrapbook

The results were seen as conservative estimates. At Cornell, the survey estimated 317 Jewish students (9.6 percent male, 5.9 percent female) out of total enrollment of 3,505. “Professional Tendencies among Jewish Students in Colleges, Universities and Professional Schools” (Memoir of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research), *American Jewish Year Book* 5681 22 (September 13, 1920, to October 2, 1921).

8. Menorah Society pamphlet: “From an address at a meeting of the Cornell Menorah Society, November 24, 1913, Reprinted from the ‘Cornell Sun.’”

9. “The objects of Avukah, as stated in the Constitution...include the following:

“To promote the Basle program...; to study the life and literature of our people from the positive, creative Jewish national standpoint; to arouse the Jewish national consciousness of our youth; to establish contact with the spirit and work of the Chaluzim (“pioneers”) of Palestine, to aid in the development of the Hebrew University of Palestine, and to cooperate with student Zionist bodies throughout the world in carrying out the aforesaid purposes.” *New York Times*, July 8, 1925. The group held meetings and lectures at Cornell until at least 1942.

10. Based in a few fraternities, *The Widow* frequently also targeted women.

11. *Hilleluyah*, November 1968.

12. *Kolenu* 1(1), Nissan 5733, April 1973.

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Albert Leskowitz

MR. BERNARD WEITZER

Mr. Charles Robert

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