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MARYLAND -- The "Free State"

by Marc H. Tarnbaum

Maryland, one of the original thirteen colonies, is often called "America in Miniature". This Middle Atlantic state is "one of the most typical of the 48 states" in that its small territory (10,577 square miles, about the size of Palestine) includes many of the geographical features of the others: an Atlantic Ocean seacoast on its eastern shores, rolling farm lands in central and southern Maryland, and half-mile high Allegheny Mountains forming its western borders. This varied terrain makes it possible for Marylanders to earn their living in fishing, farming, mining, manufacturing, lumbering, shipping, trapping - just about every occupation common to the United States.

Founded in 1634 by Catholic and Protestant settlers who fled religious persecution in Europe, Maryland soon became known as "The Free State". This name was derived from the passage of the famous Toleration Act in 1649 which granted religious freedom to all Christian sects. But the Act denied the same freedom to the Jews (and Unitarians) and this accounted for the very small number of Jews who settled in Maryland during its early days. According to a tradition, in 1658, Dr. Jacob Lumbrozo, the first Jewish physician in the state, publicly denounced this intolerance. He was immediately brought to trial and would have been given the death penalty if Lord Baltimore, proprietor of Maryland, had not intervened to pardon him.

Although a number of Jews were scattered throughout Maryland as traders and inn-keepers during the next 100 years, the history of Maryland's Jews actually began around 1780 when the Etting family of York^Town, Pa., moved to Baltimore, already the largest city in the state. Young Solomon Etting, who quickly^{became} prominent in Baltimore's business and civic life, joined in 1797 with Bernard Gratz, his father-in-law, in petitioning the Maryland General Assembly to repeal Article 35 in the state's constitution which, in the spirit of the Toleration Act, denied

~~Maryland~~ Jews the right to hold public office unless they pledged a Christian oath. Etting and Gratz indicated the role Maryland's fifteen Jewish families had played in the American Revolution, ^{mentioning, among other facts, that} Jacob Hart of Baltimore, Haym Solomon's father-in-law, had helped raise \$10,000 for General Lafayette's soldiers, [Nathaniel Levy had served in the "First Baltimore Cavalry" under Lafayette; Gratz himself was a signer of the "First Declaration of Independence" (the Philadelphia Non*Importation Acts); Etting himself had been appointed ~~xxxx~~ to forward resolutions to George Washington disapproving the Jay treaty with Great Britain; and his brother, Reuben, was captain of the "Independent Blues" ⁵⁵ regiment.] Despite their pleas, the petition for equal right^s was turned down. But in the very next year, Reuben Etting was appointed by President Jefferson as United States Marshal for Maryland. Strangely as it seemed, a Jew could represent his nation, but not his state.

Similar petitions for equal rights were made in 1802, 1803, and 1804, but all were denied. In 1808, a widow, Mrs. Judith Cohen, and her six sons, came to Baltimore from Richmond, Va. Like the Ettings, the Cohens immediately became involved in the Jewish and civic life of the growing shipping center. The eldest son, Jacob I. Cohen, Jr., developed a national reputation as a trusted banker and was elected a director of America's first railroad system, the Baltimore and Ohio, ^{became} and/a founder of the Baltimore public school system. His brothers, Mendes and Philip Cohen, were among the Jewish soldiers who fought the ^{in 1812} British fleet/off Fort McHenry, ~~xxxxxx~~ where Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star Spangled Banner".

In 1818, Jacob Cohen took up the struggle for Jewish rights in Maryland. He rallied the support of Thomas Kennedy, a Scotch Presbyterian in the state legislature, and other non-Jews. Kennedy introduced the "Jew-Bill" which demanded for ^{the Jews} ["the sect of people professing the Jewish religion"] the same rights and privileges that are enjoyed by Christians". Despite Kennedy's dedicated crusade, the "Jew-Bill" was repeatedly defeated. Finally, in 1825, after the nation's

360

newspapers attacked the Maryland Legislature for its "disgraceful" behavior, the "Jew-Bill" was passed. In gratitude to Thomas Kennedy, the Jews of Maryland later created a monument in his honor in Hagerstown, Md.

In 1826, Jacob Cohen and Solomon Etting were elected to the city council of Baltimore. Cohen later became president of its First Branch. Two Baltimore streets still bear the names of Cohen and Etting. Having won their civil rights, Baltimore's 150 Jews now organized themselves as a community. In 1829, they founded their first synagogue, ~~MDX~~ "Nidche Israel" (the "Scattered of Israel") which later became known as the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. Their religious services were orthodox and were held in a single room over a grocery. (Today, the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation is reformed and boasts one of the largest and most modern Temples in the state). The arrival of large numbers of German Jewish immigrants during this time, and the breaking away of some members from the parent synagogue led to the formation ^{of some new synagogues and congregations. Today there are 50 synagogues in Baltimore, the most of them Orthodox.} in 1842 of the radical reform congregation, Har Sinai (with such famous reform rabbis as David Einhorn, Emil G. Hirsch, and David Philipson) which introduced Sunday morning services. In 1853, the more conservative Cheb Shalom (Eutaw Place Temple) was formed, pioneering in confirmation services. The three Orthodox congregations which followed were Bikur Cholim, in 1865; Chizuk Emunah, in 1871, now conservative; and Shearith Israel, 1878. One group of Jews organized an "Irish" synagogue which soon disbanded.

To help care for the poor, sick, aged, and orphans among the 300 Jews living in Baltimore around 1840, a series of relief, medical, settlement, loan, and recreational institutions were organized and ^{many} continue to function today under the direction of the Associated Jewish Charities. Sunday schools, congregational schools, and a Hebrew Education Society were also created.

When the Civil War broke out, Maryland, which rests on the Mason-Dixon Line, found its Jews joining both the Confederate and Union armies. Leopold Blumberg of Baltimore was appointed by President Lincoln to be Provost Marshall, and later by President ^{Andrew} Johnson, Brevet Brigadier-General of the ^{Maryland} Md. Infantry. Dr. Benjamin Szold, rabbi of Cheb Shalom congregation and father of Henrietta Szold, interceded with Lincoln to save the life of a Jewish deserter. Rabbi David

Einhorn was forced to flee Baltimore because he preached the abolition of slavery.

The Russian pogroms of the 1880's brought Baltimore its first Russian Jewish immigrants (the city's first Jewish settlers having been Dutch and German, and later Polish and Lithuanian). In 1889, Henrietta Szold, who was born in Baltimore in 1860 and who became the foremost Jewish woman of our time, organized ^{the first} a night school ^{in the U.S.} for the new immigrants, to teach them English, American history, and their rights and duties as citizens. The city itself took over the night school in 1897, and soon found the project was being copied all over the country. Henrietta Szold's greatest contribution was made, however, in 1912 when she founded in Baltimore what was to become the largest women's Zionist organization in the world, Hadassah.

In 1900, Baltimore, which now numbered some 40,000 Jews, became the site of the first American Zionist Convention. Dr. Harry Friedenwald, a distinguished Baltimore eye doctor, was the first president of the Zionist Organization.

During the next fifty years, the Jewish population more than doubled. Of Maryland's 100,000 Jews, some 80,000 live in Baltimore, a few thousand live in Annapolis, the state's capital which houses the U.S. Naval Academy, and the remainder are scattered throughout the "Free State's" 23 counties. The Jews have played a vital role in the business and industrial growth of Maryland, and an equally important part in the professional, educational, and cultural growth of the 300-year-old state. Johns Hopkins University with its famous hospital, both located in Baltimore, the University of Maryland in College Park, St. Johns University in Annapolis, among the other educational institutions in Maryland, have counted distinguished Baltimore Jews among their professors and students.

Maryland, and especially its courteous, conservative "Monumental City" of Baltimore (whose trademark is red-brick houses with white marble steps) have deeply affected and have been equally affected by the rich and varied growth of one of the great Jewish communities of this country.