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CONTENTS

5 GENERATIONS OF LIFE: "MY FAMILY AND THE
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA JEWISH COMMUNITY" 1852-1982
by Margaret Anne Goldsmith Hanaw

page 5

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA



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A real estate appraiser, her current historical interests
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of the South.



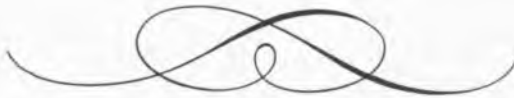
Annie Schiffman and Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Sr. Taken in Huntsville, Alabama, during their courtship (1906-1907).

**5 GENERATIONS OF LIFE:
“MY FAMILY AND THE HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA
JEWISH COMMUNITY“**

1852-1982

by

MARGARET ANNE GOLDSMITH HANAW'



Early histories of Huntsville, Alabama give no indication as to the earliest arrival of Jews to the town. Bertram Wallace Korn in The Jews of Mobile Alabama, 1763-1841, mentions brothers by the name of Andrew who were known to have operated stores in Huntsville and Tuscaloosa from 1829 until 1837 at which time they moved to Mobile. The Andrews were grandsons of Haym Solomon--the well-known Revolutionary patriot and Philadelphia Jewish leader.²

There were five brothers in all: Eliezer Lewis; Joseph I or J.; Hayamm; Zalegman; and Solomon. On April 7, 1829, Zalegman and Joseph purchased a vacant lot and an adjoining house on the south side of the Public Square and began trading under the name of "Andrews and Brothers." The other brothers may or may not have been in Huntsville during this period. During the panic of 1837 the five brothers were forced to close their operation in Huntsville and Tuscaloosa and concentrate their activities in Alabama in the city of Mobile. Solomon had left Northern Alabama several years before his other brothers and was settled in Mobile by 1835. During the panic of 1837 Solomon moved to New Orleans. In 1839 Eliezer moved to Mobile and reorganized the family business there. Neither Bertram Korn's book nor the other documents reviewed have any information on the fifth brother, Joseph I. or J. The last we hear of the Andrews occurs in 1848. On April 22 of that year Eliezer in Mobile and Solomon in New Orleans died in a mutual suicide pact, having succumbed to irreversible business failures.³

The first Jewish settlers known to have come to Huntsville and remain were my two paternal great grandfathers, Morris Bernstein and Robert Herstein. Both were permanent residents of Huntsville by 1859, according to the Huntsville City Directory, which lists them as residents and owners of businesses. The names of Robert Herstein and Morris Bernstein are the only ones that appear in both the Directory and in the

minutes of the organizational meeting on July 30, 1876 of Congregation B'Nai Sholom, the first Jewish religious congregation established in Huntsville.⁴ Among the earliest deaths recorded in the old Jewish section of Maple Hill Cemetery are those of Robert Herstein in 1878, Henrietta Bernstein in 1896, and Morris Bernstein in 1898.⁵

According to family records, Morris Bernstein was born in Hanover, Germany in 1824.. His wife, Henrietta Newman, was born in Bischafsheim, Germany in 1829. ⁶ The Bernsteins immigrated to American in the 1840's and settled in Baltimore.⁷ As a boy, Morris had learned watch-making in Switzerland. Craft guilds excluded Jews in early nineteenth century Germany, which would explain why he apprenticed in Switzerland.⁸ In Baltimore he probably began his career as a clerk or peddler. After several years, Morris traveled south and met Henrietta Newman in Huntsville where they married in 1852.⁹ Although family records record this marriage in Huntsville, it is unknown when the Newmans immigrated or where they first settled. My father recalls distant relatives with the name Newman; however, they did not affiliate with the Jewish Congregation.

Prior to 1859 Morris had accumulated enough cash to purchase a building on the south side of the Public Square (Lot No. 13) where he established a jewelry store and watch repair shop. Henrietta Newman Bernstein operated a ladies' notions and accessories store located on Commercial Row (Lot. No. 14) during the 1860's.¹⁰ The Bernstein's' three daughters; Betty, Sophie, and Lillie were born on the second floor of the watch repair shop where the family had their living quarters. Their eldest daughter, Betty, born in 1859, was the mother of my grandfather, Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Sr.¹¹

Prior to the Civil War, the Bernsteins appear to have adopted the life style of the Huntsville community. A bill of sale perserved by the family states that, "On August 8, 1859, George Everhart of Madison County sells to Morris and Henrietta Bernstein a negro woman of about

forty-five years named Sally for Five Hundred Dollars."¹² Another receipt, this one from D. B. Fisher dated May 11, 1861, records the sale of "an eight year old negro boy named Virgil to Henrietta and Morris Bernstein for three hundred twenty-two dollars and fifty cents."¹³ Slavery was basic to the social milieu of the Old South. The Bernsteins, like other southern Jews of some means, wanted to be part of their environment and to be accepted by their fellow citizens. Likely their attitude toward slavery was the same as most Southerners. It usually was a matter of their financial ability and family status that determined whether they were slave owners.¹⁴

A combination of good business sense in addition to exercising the right to own property, a right denied Jews in Germany for centuries, prompted Morris to acquire several parcels of real estate both prior to the war and during Huntsville's prosperous years after Reconstruction.¹⁵ Several of these properties, including an antebellum home at the corner of Gates and Greene Streets, are still owned by the family.¹⁶

Morris was a founding father of both the first Jewish Congregation and the local chapter of B'nai B'rith, an important early Jewish men's fraternal and religious organization in the South.¹⁷ I have a small Hebrew Bible printed in Hanover, Germany in 1840, one of the few possessions Morris brought to America. It is an indication to me that he identified with his Jewish heritage, a heritage he wished to continue in his new life in America. Morris died of heart disease at his residence in 1989, outliving his wife, Henrietta, by two years.¹⁸

Robert Hernstein was born in 1831, Grand Duchy of Hesse, Darmstadt, Germany and immigrated to America as a teenager. He settled first in Leesburg, Virginia, where he worked as a clerk in a mercantile business.¹⁹ He moved to Huntsville in 1855 and by 1959 had acquired the resources to become established as a merchant of dry goods.²⁰ In 1859 he married Rosa Blimline of Baltimore, Maryland. A small silver flower basket that belongs to my father bears the inscription, "Presented by the Har Linai Congregation of Baltimore to Miss Rosa

Blimline on the day of her wedding Feb. 23, 1859 as a token of gratitude." Robert and Rosa had seven children. The eldest, Bettie, born in 1860, was the mother of my grandmother, Annie Schiffman Goldsmith.²¹

According to the Huntsville Advocate, Robert was active in city affairs. He was treasurer of the city government for a number of years and a member of the city council from 1877 until his death in 1878.²² During the decade prior to Robert's death, Huntsville experienced the painful disorganization and financial difficulties that accompanied Reconstruction.²³ As treasurer of the city government and member of the city council, he played a part in the city's reorganization. His efforts, undoubtedly, contributed to the prosperity that Huntsville enjoyed following Reconstruction.

In addition to his civic and business duties, Robert was one of the organizers of the local B'nai B'rith chapter and served as its first president. He was also a founding father of Congregation B'nai Sholom. During the High Holidays (the Jewish new year season) in September 1876, he served as Shamas (leader) of the Congregation. This was prior to the time that the regular services of a Rabbi (spiritual leader) had been obtained.²⁴ Robert died, "an untimely death in 1878 at his home on Monte Sano Mountain of pernicious billious fever."²⁵ His wife, Rosa, raised her family alone and continued her husband's business with Henry Lowenthal, "Herstein and Lowenthal", a dry goods and notions store. In the 1890's she operated with Lowenthal, "The Trade Palace", also a dry goods and notions store. Rose Herstein died in 1909.²⁶

The next earliest Jewish Settlers in Huntsville were the Schiffman brothers, Solomon and Daniel, from Hoppstaeden, Germany. The brothers came to this country in 1857 when Solomon was about twenty-two years of age and Daniel sixteen. Solomon Schiffman lived in Cincinnati, Ohio for several years and Daniel in Paris, Kentucky. Both moved to Huntsville before the Civil War and went into the dry goods and clothing business on the north side of the square. They formed a

partnership in 1860. "S. Schiffman and Co.", which continued under that name for forty-five years.²⁷

Daniel served in the Confederate Military forces during the Civil War.²⁸ Shortly after the war he married his first wife, Rosa Wise of Cincinnati, Ohio, and they had four children. After Rosa's death, Daniel married Flora Kahn of Evansville, Indiana and they had three children.²⁹ He was member of the City Council of Huntsville from 1881-1882, and was a charter member of both Congregation B'nai Sholom and B'nai B'rith. Daniel died in 1892.³⁰

Solomon Schiffman married Bertha Stromberg of Cincinnati, Ohio. Solomon was a founding member of both Congregation B'nai Sholom and the local chapter of B'nai B'rith which he served as treasurer. He was an active Mason and when he died in 1894 was buried with "full masonic orders".³¹

To understand the forces that influenced this group of early German Jewish settlers to leave family and cultural roots and with no resources and no knowledge of English come to America, one must examine the history of the Jews of Germany since the Middle Ages.

For centuries Jews had lived in Germany, as early as the days of the Roman Empire.³² It was during the Middle Ages that they were persecuted as a group. Because the Jewish faith differed from the predominant religion, the medieval church which ruled the land together with a string of petty kings, isolated the Jews into ghettos, Jeundengasse or Jewish quarters as they were called. The Jews were forced to wear an identifying dress and a yellow badge. They were not allowed to own or work the land, join craft guilds, hold government office, or join the military. The only avenue of economic endeavor open to them was commerce and when commerce became more restrictive they turned to money lending. It might be noted that the church forbade Christians to act as money lenders, but this restriction did not apply to Jews. The German Jew's alien misunderstood religion,

: The Huntsville Historical Review, Vol. 12, No. 3-4, July 1982



Picture taken in East Huntsville, Alabama, on 5th Street, now Andrew Jackson Way (1982), about 1905. Left to right: unknown, George
Published by OHS, 1982. Leo Cohen, unknown, and Lawrence B. Goldsmith.

his physical isolation into ghettos and his participation in the unpopular profession of money lending provoked degradation and persecution and at times wholesale murder of entire Jewish Communities.³³ Not until 1871, many years after the French Revolution, were all of Germany's Jews emancipated.³⁴ An edict signed in that year by William I. and Otto Von Bismarck read: "all hitherto existing restrictions of civil and political rights, based on religious differences, are hereby abolished."³⁵

After the French Revolution spread through Germany, the Feudal system was temporarily destroyed. However, after France was defeated in the War of Liberation, all recently won freedoms were withdrawn and the Jews were herded back into ghettos.³⁶ Aware of the new concepts of liberty flowing through Europe and frustrated by unsuccessful attempts at revolt, the younger generation refused to tolerate the old discipline. In addition, economic hardships made it nearly impossible for Jews to exist. Not only were they again restricted from agriculture, craft guilds, military, and government; they now found themselves competing with the Christian community in money lending and peddling, their only means of economic survival. After the Protestant Reformation, the church withdrew from secular affairs and Christians were no longer forbidden to act as money lenders.³⁷ Thus it was a combination of economic restrictions resulting in extreme poverty and unbearable political oppression that drove so many German Jews to leave home during the 1830's, 1840's, and 1850's.³⁸

Based on the above information, I assume that my ancestors; the Bernsteins, Hersteins, and Schiffmans, arrived in this country with little or no resources. Prior to settling in Huntsville, they were clerks and peddlars, carrying packs on their backs as their fathers had done. Due to their hard work and thrift, they were eventually able to replace the pack with a horse and wagon full of goods. Finally they saved enough to settle in Huntsville and establish small stores.

The town during the antebellum years of the 1850's was a thriving community. Although it boasted a class of cosmopolitan wealthy planters, Huntsville was largely populated by slaves and small farmers. Like the rest of the South, there were few merchants, tailors, shoemakers or storekeepers between the genteel aristocrats and the small farmers and backwoodsmen.³⁹ Undoubtedly, Morris, Robert, Solomon, and Daniel, like so many other immigrant Jews, saw the vacuum they could fill, that of commerce and trade.

It is doubtful that many Jews ventured south during the war years; however, after the war during the late 1860's, a number of Jewish families traveled south, and some of them made Huntsville their home. The minutes of the organizational meeting of the first Jewish Congregation, B'nai Sholom, on July 30, 1876 lists eighteen "Israelites" as members.⁴⁰ Many of these males represented family units so that the emerging Jewish Community must have been approximately thirty or more people by that date. Probably before 1876 families had assembled in each other's homes for worship services. In 1876, the newly formed congregation⁴¹ held a meeting in a rented room at the Masonic Lodge. In 1899 the Congregation dedicated their newly built synagogue on the corner of Lincoln and Clinton Streets, the same building being used today.⁴²

At the same time that these early Jewish settlers formed a congregation, they contemplated their community needs and their needs for various life cycle events. In 1873 a portion of Maple Hill Cemetery was set aside as a "Hebrew burial ground", by the city.⁴³ On March 1, 1875 a chapter of B'nai B'rith was formed.⁴⁴ B'nai B'rith is a Jewish Fraternal organization concerned with mutual aid, social services, Jewish education, and philanthropy. Another social organization called the Standard Club was organized. This Club was similar to other German Jewish social clubs formed throughout the South during this time frame in history. Huntsville's Standard Club meeting hall, interestingly enough, was located on the third floor of a building on the Northeast corner of the north side of the Square owned at



Bettie Herstein Schiffman, born March 21, 1860, Huntsville, Alabama; died June 3, 1932, New York City.



Left to right: Irma Schiffman, Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Sr., and Annie Schiffman Goldsmith.

that time by Morris Bernstein and Robert Herstein. The club sponsored social events, parties, and dances, likely organized by the Hebrew Ladies Aid Society of the newly formed congregation.⁴⁵ The Hebrew Ladies Aid Society was the forerunner of the Temple B'nai Sholom Sisterhood. In addition to sponsoring social events, it acted as fund raiser and supportive arm of Congregation B'nai Sholom.

The Jewish settlers who immigrated after the Civil War were accepted by those who had settled earlier. Many had immigrated with their parents at the same time that the earlier Huntsville Jewish settlers came to America, and some were born in this County during the 1840's and 50's shortly after their own parents immigrated. The war likely had delayed these Jews from venturing south earlier. There were still others, recent immigrants who left Germany in the 1860's and 1870's and came directly to the South to join relatives who had settled earlier.

An indication as to how well this group of immigrants was accepted by the Huntsville Jewish Community is evidenced not only by the organization of clubs and religious congregation but also by the number of marriages that followed between the newcomers and the children of the first settlers. Among these marriages were the marriages of my great grandparents; Bettie Herstein to Isaac Schiffman,⁴⁷ and Betty Bernstein to Oscar Goldsmith.

Isaac Schiffman, born in Hoppstaedten, German, in 1856, immigrated to America in 1875 and traveled south to join his uncles, Solomon and Daniel Schiffman. Isaac worked with his uncles in the mercantile business and in 1885 married Bettie Herstein, eldest daughter of Rosa and Robert Herstein. They had three children: Robert, Irma, and Annie, my grandmother. After his uncles died, Isaac remained in the mercantile business until 1905 at which time he became engaged in the investment and cotton business. During the year 1908, his son, Robert, and his son-in-law Lawrence Goldsmith, Sr. joined him in business and a partnership was formed. Isaac died in 1910.

His wife, Bettie, continued the business with Robert and Lawrence until her death in 1932.⁴⁸ In 1933 the firm was incorporated under the name "I. Schiffman & Co., Inc." Headquarters for the company have remained in the same location for the past fifty years, in a building purchased by Isaac in 1905 on⁴⁹ the Southeast corner of the East Side of the Square.

In addition to his business activities, Isaac was chairman of the building committee of Temple B'Nae Sholom when the Congregation erected its own sanctuary in 1898, and served as President of the Congregation at the turn of the century.⁵⁰

Oscar Goldsmith, affectionately referred to as "Papa Oscar," was born in New York City in 1849. His parents met and married in New York soon after they immigrated to America. Oscar's father, David Goldsmith, was born in Klein Hiebach, Germany, in 1805; his mother, Henrietta Henline, was born in Albersweiller, Germany, in 1811. They lived in New York continuously until their last years when they moved to Huntsville. They first lived where the Russel Erskine Hotel is located today, and then later moved in with their son, Oscar, at 204 Gates St. It is not known when Oscar permanently moved to Huntsville. As a young man, he traveled out of New York for a jewelry concern. During visits to Huntsville, he met Betty Berstein, born in 1859, daughter of Morris and Henrietta Bernstein. Oscar may have had business dealings with Morris since both were in the jewelry business. Perhaps through their relationship, he met Betty. Oscar and Betty were married in 1879; they had⁵² two children Theresa and Lawrence, my grandfather.

Oscar Goldsmith began his career in Huntsville in the dry goods business and later had a men's clothing store. He was instrumental in the location of Dallas Mill in Huntsville during the 1890's. In addition to being a major stockholder, he⁵³ served as treasurer of the mill until his death in 1937.



Henrietta Henline Goldsmith, born 1811—Albersweiller, Germany; died August 8, 1890, Huntsville, Alabama.



**Morris Bernstein, born 1824—Hanover, Germany;
married 1852—Huntsville, Alabama; died October 5, 1898,
Huntsville, Alabama.**

During the 1890's Huntsville's population expanded to 8,000. The town experienced the expanding industrialism spreading throughout the South. Northern capitalists joined local investors to stimulate that growth. A number of wholesale nurseries, factories, manufacturing companies, and mills were located in Huntsville at the same time as Dallas Mills.⁵⁴ During Oscar's term as Treasurer of Dallas Mill, he was also President of the Huntsville Land Company, incorporated in 1892. The purpose of the Company was to buy land and construct cottages for the mill workers. The village that was built became known as Dallas Village.⁵⁵

In civic affairs, Oscar was on the executive committee of the Huntsville Board of Trade formed in 1892 and later served as Secretary. He was an Elk and a Shriner; served on the original board of trustees of the Huntsville Infirmary; and was active in Temple B'nai Sholom, serving as treasurer of the Congregation in 1907. Oscar Gold⁵⁶smith died in 1937, nine years after his wife, Betty.

Betty Bernstein Goldsmith, fondly remembered by grandchildren and community as "Mama Betty" and "Miss Betty" grew up during the Civil War and the years of reconstruction. Because of inadequacy of local education during those years and because they wanted their daughters to spend time in Germany, the Bernsteins sent their daughters Betty and Sophie, to school there for several years during their early teens. We have a charming letter written by Betty to her parents while in school in which she says, "work and study is my principal occupation." She describes a ball her dancing master gave as follows, "my first impression spread such a spell over my imagination that I shall be well contented if all the balls which it shall be my lot to assist will satisfy me as that first." She closes as: "Your dutiful and affectionate child, Betty".⁵⁷

Betty was one of the early ladies in Huntsville to expand her role beyond that of wife and mother to volunteer work in the community. She was on the original board of control of the Huntsville Infirmary until her

death in 1928. She helped organize The United Charities of Huntsville, incorporated August 12, 1895, "at a meeting at the Jewish Synagogue". The purpose of the organization was to help the sick and needy. She served as President in 1914.⁵⁸

Many nineteenth century German Jewish immigrants settled in the Northern Cities of their port of entry; however, a great many like the Bernsteins, Hersteins, Schiffmans and Goldsmiths filtered South both before and after the Civil War. They left Northern Cities where clusters of Jews had established communities and congregations and came to the rural South, outside the mainstream of Jewish life in America. They came because of economic incentives and their cultural background. They were able to leave because of the religion, Reform Judaism.

The eastern seaboard could support only so many peddlers and shopkeepers. With waves of new Jewish immigrants continuing to pour into the Country, all ill-equipped because of lack of education or experience to do little else than be peddlers, competition increased. The South with its lack of traders and storekeepers offered untapped markets and so it was natural for these Jewish immigrants seeing the overcrowded situation in the North to seek a better living for themselves in the South.

This particular group of immigrants found it easy to leave the mainstream of Jewish life in the northern cities because of their religious background, Reform Judaism. The Reform Movement began early in the Nineteenth Century in Germany, a break from the Orthodoxy of the past to a more liberal form of worship. German prayers were added to the previously all Hebrew service, and both organ music and sermons were incorporated. Strict dietary rules and compulsory rituals as to worship and every day life were relaxed. Although the movement weakened in Germany later in the 19th Century, it flowered in America through the bedrock support of these rural German immigrants. Freed of dietary



Isaac Schiffman, born 1856—Hoppstaeden, Germany; immigrated to America 1873; died June 12, 1910, Huntsville, Alabama.



David Goldsmith, born 1804—Klein Helbach, Germany; died November 8, 1898, Huntsville, Alabama.

restrictions and requirements as to daily rituals and worship, these pioneer Jews were free to move into areas where they would be unable to continue traditional religious observance. The leaders of the Reform movement in America were Rabbi David Einhorn of Baltimore and Rabbi Isaac M. Wise of Cincinnati, who eventually organized the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. The work of these two men was an attempt to create a liberal Judaism from the roots of the Reform Movement in Germany that would be adaptable to the lifestyle of these Nineteenth Century German Jewish Immigrants. Evidence of the influence of these Reform leaders on the Jews of Huntsville is a prayer book by Isaac M. Wise that I have which has Isaac Schiffman's name engraved on the front cover. The prayer book, which was printed in 1891 in a combination of German, English, and Hebrew, was published by the Block Publishing and Printing Co., of Cincinnati and Chicago.

In addition to economic incentives, the second most important reason that these immigrants drifted South was because of their cultural backgrounds. For the most part they were from towns and villages in rural Germany. With the exception of Morris Bernstein, who was from Hanover, Germany, all my relatives were from small villages that do not even appear on most maps. In short, these Jews were "provincial, small town." They were attracted to the South because it was like the areas they had left in Germany, away from the bustling, crowded, intellectual centers of Berlin, Cologne, and Frankford. They knew that in the South they would feel at home and they did.⁶⁰

Although many of the second generation offspring of Huntsville's earliest Jewish settlers married and moved to other parts of the country during the early years of the Twentieth Century, my own family remained in Huntsville. Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Sr. son of Betty and Oscar Goldsmith, grandson of Henrietta and Morris Bernstein, married Annie Schiffman, daughter of Bettie and Isaac Schiffman, granddaughter of Rosa and Robert Herstein. Their wedding took place at Temple B'nai Sholom in 1908. They had one son, Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Jr., my father.⁶¹

Lawrence B. Goldsmith, Sr., was born in 1883 and was educated at Weingarts, a prep school in New York City. After graduation, he went to a business school in Cincinnati, Ohio. He began his career in partnership⁶² with his brother-in-law, Edward Grosser. For eight years the two operated a men's clothing store by the name of "Goldsmith and Grosser Co." In 1909 Lawrence joined his father-in-law, Isaac Schiffman, in the investment and cotton business. The business was incorporated years later in 1933 at "I. Schiffman & Co., Inc." Lawrence served as president from 1936 until his death in 1972. His activities at I. Schiffman ranged from operating one of the oldest automobile dealerships in Huntsville for more than forty years to selling and leasing commercial property in town, and overseeing farm property throughout Madison County.

His business career which spanned sixty-four years witnessed Huntsville's growth from a city of seven thousand people to twenty times that size and expansion of economic base from that⁶³ of agriculture and cotton milling to space age industry. The following is Lawrence's own account of his role in the expansion, described in a letter from him to James Record dated July 26, 1971. "In 1938 the Federal Government was considering Huntsville along with several other sites in the Tennessee Valley region in which to locate a large munitions and storage complex. Another businessman and I were appointed by the Chamber of Commerce to escort Jim Center of the N.C. 7 St. Louis Railroad and several Government officials through the lower district of Madison County to the Tennessee River for inspection of possible sites. After a ten-day inspection by Jim Center, Col. [Paul X.] English and his group [Major] General [William N.] Porter [Chief, Chemical Warfare Service] came to Huntsville for further inspection. Soon afterward Huntsville was chosen as the site for the Munitions Complex. General Porter suggested the name "Redstone" after the red stone that was on location. The complex was later named Redstone Arsenal.⁶⁴ This was undoubtedly the single most important event determining Huntsville's future development.



Left to right: Morris Bernstein, Betty Bernstein Goldsmith, and Henrietta Newman Bernstein. Late 1860's, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lawrence Goldsmith was responsible for organizing a group of businessmen in town to finance the construction of the Russel Erskine Hotel in 1930. He was treasurer of the Huntsville Industrial Expansion Center, on the Board of Education, and a member of the first Board of Huntsville Utilities. Lawrence was a thirty-second-degree Mason, and a member of both the Elks and Kiwanis clubs. He was an active supporter of the Boy Scouts and served as treasurer of the local council from 1927 until 1937. His contribution to this group is evidenced by the commendation they gave him, the "Silver Beaver."⁶⁵

Politically, Lawrence was a Democrat and served on Governor Frank Dixon's staff (1939-1943). Often he would recall the day Roosevelt was inaugurated as he was there. He was an active sportsman, and went hunting every season even to his last years. Lawrence was affectionately called "Big Daddy" by his family and friends, a name I gave him as a child to distinguish between him and my father. It was a name that aptly described his openness and his generosity. He died in 1972 at the age of eight⁶⁶-eight, outliving his wife, Annie, by thirteen years.

My father, Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Jr., born in 1909, was educated at Webb School in Bell Buckle, Tennessee and at the University of Alabama. He worked in the cotton business for Mr. Shelby Fletcher, a cotton "shipper", for a number of years and in 1936 became affiliated with "I. Schiffman and Co. Inc." His activities there included overseeing the farming operation and later the subdivision and real estate development of some of the farm property. He has served as President of the firm since 1972, prior to that time he was Secretary-Treasurer for thirty-six years.

Lawrence married Marguerite Newton in 1940, and I was born the next year. Their marriage ended in 1945 and in 1953 he married Jewell Shelton of Florence, Alabama. Although they had no children, Jewell became a second

mother to me. Like Marguerite, she too was not Jewish. Jewell recognized the importance of family unity regarding religion and so she chose to be supportive to my father's tradition. She saw to my religious education and became active in Temple B'nai Sholom and in the Temple Sisterhood.

Jewell's activities in the Huntsville Community have revolved around the Red Cross. She began work with the blood mobile in 1955 and some twelve years later received an award for her work as Chairman of the Blood Program at Huntsville Hospital. For her outstanding work as a volunteer she received the highest honor of the Red Cross-- The Clara Barton award. It is interesting to observe the parallel between Jewell's community involvement and that of Betty Bernstein Goldsmith three quarters of a century earlier.

The story of the fourth generation is my own personal story. After my parents' separation in 1942 I lived with my father who received custody of me. We lived with my grandparents until 1953 when my father married Jewell. I attended religious school at Temple B'nai Sholom and the public schools in Huntsville, Alabama. In 1957 I left Huntsville to attend Mount Vernon Seminary of Washington, D.C., graduating from that institution in 1959. I then entered Sophie Newcomb College of Tulane University, graduating in 1963. In October 1963 I married John Jerome Hanaw of New Orleans. This was the first wedding ceremony that had taken place at Temple B'nai Sholom in over a decade. My husband is engaged in the coffee importing business in New Orleans and is an officer in the firm of International Coffee corp. We have three children; John, Jr., Barbara Esther, and Laurie Anne. John was confirmed (signifying the end of formal religious instruction) at Temple Sinai of New Orleans and Barbara will be confirmed in 1984. Laurie is studying for her Bas-Mitzvah (signifying the coming of age in the Jewish community) also scheduled for 1984.

The example of my own family history so intertwined with the history of the Huntsville Jewish Community can



Betty Bernstein Goldsmith, born September 25, 1859,
Huntsville, Alabama; died November 29, 1928, Huntsville,
Alabama.

to a limited degree be viewed as a microcosm of the small town Jewish experience in the South. Many southern Jews have moved from the small towns to larger urban centers and identified with the growing Jewish communities there. As the small town Jewish communities dwindled, for those who remained the experience has often been one of intermarriage and eventual assimilation. The end result of assimilation when carried to completion is the loss of individuals, families, and even entire communities to the point that they become indistinguishable in their ideology and characteristics.

The forces aiding or reversing the process of assimilation are numerous; however, in examining the process in my own family and in the Huntsville Jewish community before World War II three forces are evident. They are: the acceptance of Jews by the prevailing community; their need to conform and blend in with everyone else; and the influence of the local Jewish community on its members as its strength increased and decreased over the years.

Ever since my ancestors, the first permanent Jewish settlers, came to Huntsville, they began to drop the cultural traditions of their former home and the religious traditions of their ancestors. At the same time they began to adopt the prevailing habits of the southern Protestant community in which they found themselves.

The South, unlike the melting pot of the Northeast, was relatively homogeneous during the nineteenth century. It was Protestant and conservative. In spite of the South's genuine hospitality, it is less flexible than the North when it comes to socially absorbing newcomers with alien habits. So for my ancestors, the pressures of the larger community combined with their own personal needs as human beings to be "accepted" and to blend in with the rest of the prevailing community led to the beginning of their assimilation.

A third force affecting assimilation has been a positive one. Positive in that it has aided the reversal of the trend. This force is the relative influence of the Jewish community on the identity of its individual

members. In periods of strength it has aided in reversing individual and community assimilation, in times of weakness it has been ineffective. This can be illustrated as we trace the Huntsville Jewish community from 1850 to the present.

Huntsville's first Jewish settlers faced a life of religious isolation like Jewish settlers throughout the South living in small towns and rural areas. It was more than twenty-five years after Morris Bernstein settled that a Jewish congregation was organized.⁷⁰ The original settlers, still close to their heritage, formed the first congregation with the new immigrants of the late nineteenth century. As for their offspring, the first generation who had not known the ghettos of Europe and had been isolated from a Jewish community experience, their identity was less than that of their parents.

After the congregation and various social groups were formed om 1875 and 1876, the Huntsville Jewish Community blossomed. The Community continued to be vital throughout the nineteenth century as more immigrant Jews filtered South after fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe, and Huntsville's industrial growth brought Jewish settlers from other parts of the Country.

As the years of the Twentieth Century unfolded many second generation offspring moved away from Huntsville and the Jewish community began to contract. My father recalls his years growing up from 1909-1930, that there were too few Jewish children to have organized religious school and that after 1913 the Congregation was too small to support a full time Rabbi. There were few young Jewish people of marriagable age in the community and so many third generation Jews in Huntsville and similar towns throughout the South married out of the faith. The situation was inevitable considering these third generation Jews had had little or no formal religious education and little identification in their families with the traditions of their religious heritage.⁷¹

At this point the process of assimilation in a number of families in Huntsville would likely have been



Henrietta Newman Bernstein, born 1829—Bishofsheim, Germany; married 1852—Huntsville, Alabama; died March 20, 1896, Huntsville, Alabama.

carried to completion. It was for some; however, for my immediate family it was not. The turning point in the trend occurred after Redstone Arsenal located in Huntsville in 1938.⁷² The arsenal was followed by space age industry and as Huntsville began to expand so did the Jewish community. During the decades after 1938 the town's population grew rapidly. New Jewish families came from all over the Country. And again there were new immigrants; Jews fleeing Nazi Germany.⁷³

To meet the needs of the expanded Jewish community the religious school at Temple B'nai Sholom was reorganized. I was among the first students. Eventually the Congregation was able to employ a student Rabbi on a bi-monthly basis. The children were able to receive formal religious education and with their families attend religious services conducted by a Rabbi. And so the trend of assimilation for many was reversed. In 1963 the congregation hired a full time Rabbi, Rabbi Sherman Stein. It was the first time the Temple had had a Rabbi since 1913.⁷⁴

Today, 1982, Temple B'nai Sholom has a membership of 120 families. In addition there is a small conservative congregation; Etz Chayim. So the Huntsville Jewish community is again a vibrant vital group. With two congregations whose membership represent a diversity of backgrounds, the community is enjoying a period of growth and development. Most important there is every reason now for hope that the strength of the community will continue to develop.⁷⁵

It is with a sense of pride that I look back over the years and see that my family has played a continuous role over the last century in both the Jewish Community and the larger Huntsville community, contributing to their growth and prosperity. In tracing my family for four generations I have increased my own understanding of the southern Jewish experience and at the same time come to a greater appreciation of my own identity.

The Jewish people trace the beginning of their history to Abraham over five thousand years ago. In

that perspective the history of a family and a community of even one hundred years duration of Jews in the South is but a small link in a long tradition. In such a tradition changes like those that occurred in the South are inevitable; attrition through conversion, intermarriage, and assimilation counter-balanced by growth and increased identity. One need only look back through history to see that although the trappings of Judasim have varied from place to place and from generation to generation, the eternal values transcend and a people and a religious tradition continued.



Oscar Goldsmith, born October 6, 1849, New York City; died October 11, 1937, Huntsville, Alabama.

FOOTNOTES

¹I had always intended to write a paper tracing my family history in Huntsville, Alabama from pre-civil war days to the present. My grandfather, Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, S., carefully recorded all that he could remember about our family and I felt a responsibility to compile his information to pass on to my three children. In addition it was important for me to communicate to them the pride that I have in my family, my ancestors, and my Jewish heritage in a form that could be preserved.

²Betram Wallace Korn, Jews of Mobile Alabama, 1763-1841, (Hebrew Union College Press: Cincinnati, 1970), pp. 43-44.

³Deed Record Book Q, pp. 150-151: Korn, Jews of Mobile: (Huntsville) Southern Advocate; Jan. 15, May 23, Aug 21 & 28, and Sept. 11, 1830; July 9, 1831; Nov. 3, 1832; July 2, 1833; Aug. 9, 1834; April 21, 1835; Jan. 12, March 29, April 5, 12, & 19; June 7, 14, 21, and 28, and Dec. 13, 1836: Madison County, Ala., Circuit Minutes, 1834-1835, No. 23, pp. 8, 342-4: Execution Docket 1826-1836 Circuit Court, no pagination; Direct Index, Trial-Docket, Civil-Cases, 1820-1849, pp. 2-3: Mobile City Directories for 1837 and 1839.

⁴1859 Huntsville City Directory, (Reprinted, The Strode Publishers: Huntsville, Ala. 1972) and "Congregation B'nai Sholom," Minute Book I, July 30, 1876.

⁵Ron Haffberg, student, The Jewish Theological Seminary, and Student Rabbi, Etz Chayin Congregation, "The Jewish Community of Huntsville, Alabama: The Early Years", unpublished paper, 1973, Huntsville Madison County Public Library.

⁶Family records.

⁷The (Huntsville) Democrat, Oct. 12, 1898.

⁸Marvin Lowenthal, The Jews In Germany (The Jewish Publication Society of America: Philadelphia, 1936), p. 210.

⁹Family records.

¹⁰The (Huntsville) Advocate, Jan. 1 & Oct. 1, 1867.

¹¹The (Huntsville) Democrat, Oct. 12, 1898, and Family records.

¹²"Slave sale receipt", August 8, 1859, Huntsville-Madison Public Library, and Family record.

¹³"Slave sale receipt", May 11, 1861, Huntsville-Madison Public Library, and Family records.

¹⁴Rose and Abe Dinnerstein and Gerald Pallsson, Jews of the South (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1973), p. 96.

¹⁵The (Huntsville) Democrat, Oct. 12, 1898 and Lowenthal, p. 210.

¹⁶Family records.

¹⁷"Congregation B'Nai Sholom", Minute Book I. July 30, 1876 and B'nai B'rith Independent Order Esora Lodge No. 236" Ledger 1875-1900.

¹⁸Family records.

¹⁹Student Rabbi Hoffberg: The (Huntsville) Advocate, Sept. 25, 1878; 1859 Huntsville City Directory; and Family records.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Family records.

²²The (Huntsville) Advocate, Sept. 25, 1878.



Picture taken at H. J. Lowenthal's residence, corner of Franklin and Williams Streets. The occasion, Robert D. Lowenthal's 21st birthday—about 1906.

23

Huntsville Alabama Sesquicentennial Commemorative Album 1805-1955 (publisher not known: Nashville, TN, Aug. & Sept. 1955), pp. 10-11.

24

"B'nai B'rith, Independent Order Esora Lodge No. 236". Ledger 1875-1900 and "Congregation B'nai Sholom" Minute Book I.

25

The (Huntsville) Advocate, Sept. 25, 1878.

26

Ala State Gazette and Business Directory 1887-1888; The (Huntsville) Evening Banner, Jan. 4, 1907; The (Huntsville) Tribune, Jan. 11, 1898; Tombstone inscription; and Family records.

27

The (Huntsville) Mercury, March 21, 1892; The (Huntsville) Democrat, May 18, 1892; and Family records.

28

The (Huntsville) Democrat, May 18, 1892.

29

Family records.

30

The (Huntsville) Democrat, May 18, 1892 and "Congregation B'nai Sholom", Minute Book I, July 30, 1876.

31

Elizabeth H. Chapman, Changing Huntsville 1890-1899, (Ma. Thesis Columbia Univ., 1932), p. 171; The (Huntsville) Mercury, March 21, 1895; "Congregation B'nai Sholom" Minute Book I, July 30, 1876; "B'nai B'rith, Independent Order Esora Lodge No. 236" Ledger 1875-1900; and Family records.

32

Lowenthal, p. 3.

33

Ibid., pp. 36-139.

34

Ibid., p. 220.

35

Ibid., p. 262.

36

Ibid., p. 229.

³⁷Ibid., p. 245.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 245-250; Milton Meltzer, Remember The Days "A Short History of the Jewish American" (Zenith Books Doubleday & C.: Garden City, NY 1974), pp. 17-25 and Paul Masserman and Max Baker, The Jews Come To America (Bloch Publishing Co., New York, 1932), pp. 133-149.

³⁹Eli N. Evans, The Provincials, "A Personal History of Jews in the South," (H. Wolf: NY, 1973), p. 41.

⁴⁰"Congregation B'nai Sholom", Minute Book I.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Twickenham Woman's Club, "Maple Hill Cemetery" - a pamphlet - Huntsville, AL, no date).

⁴⁴"B'nai B'rith Independent Order Esora Lodge No. 236", Ledger 1875-1900.

⁴⁵Family records.

⁴⁶Mrs. Joseph Kirshtein and Henry Marks, "In Retrospect", (unpublished typed paper, May 1976), Huntsville-Madison Co. Public Library.

⁴⁷Family records.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰"Congregation B'nai Sholom", Minute Book I

⁵¹Family records.

⁵²Ibid.



⁵³The American Jewish Yearbook, 1907-1908 (Jewish Publication Society of America) and Family records.

⁵⁴Huntsville Sesquicentennial Commemorative Album, pp. 12-14.

⁵⁵Chapman, p. 13; and Family records.

⁵⁶"Congregation B'nai Sholom" Minute Book I; American Jewish Yearbook 1907-1908, p. 125; Chapman, p. 13 and Family records.

⁵⁷Letter from Betty Bernstein to her parents, Morris and Henrietta Bernstein, written while at school in Germany during the early 1870's, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, and Family records.

⁵⁸The (Huntsville) Times, Oct. 1, 1914 and Chapman, pp. 78-81.

⁵⁹Lowenthal, pp. 242-244.

⁶⁰Evans, pp. 45-57.

⁶¹Family records.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Sesquicentennial Commemorative Album, pp. 19-25.

⁶⁴Letter from Lawrence B. Goldsmith to James Record, July 26, 1971, Huntsville-Madison Co. Public Library, Family records, and Helen Brants Joiner, The Redstone Arsenal Complex In the Pre-Missile Era, Redstone Arsenal, 1966.

⁶⁵Family records.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Family interviews.

⁶⁹Evans, p. 40.

⁷⁰"Congregation B'nai Sholom", Minute Book I.

⁷¹Family interviews.

⁷²Sesquicentennial Commemorative Album, pp. 19-25.

⁷³Family interviews.

⁷⁴Kirstein-Marks.

⁷⁵Henry Marks, interview 6/15/82.



Goldsmith-Grosser Company (Men's-Ready-To-Wear) located on "The Square", Huntsville, Alabama. Owners: Lawrence Bernstein Goldsmith, Sr., and Edward H. Grosser, Sr. (brothers-in-law).

