



Family photo taken before leaving Lithuania in 1921. Clockwise, Riva Goldberg; Marvin, 2; Meyer, 9; Annette, 7; Bill, 4; and David, 10.  
(Courtesy Hollace Ava Weiner)

## *From Lithuania to Lorain, Ohio: Remembering my Grandfather, “The Sabbath- Observant Jew... Whose Name is Memorialized in a Catholic Hospital”*

HOLLACE AVA WEINER

Zalman Shazar, the journalist and diplomat who became the third president of Israel, marveled that my immigrant grandfather, Shraga Feivel Goldberg, maintained an Orthodox way of life in Lorain, Ohio, a steel town thirty miles west of Cleveland on the shores of Lake Erie.

Every Shabbos, he closed his grocery at sundown and reopened twenty-four hours later, advertising “Sat. Nite Specials” of eggs (twenty-one cents a dozen) and bread (six cents a loaf).<sup>1</sup> Since arriving in the Midwest in 1921, Goldberg, whom I affectionately called Zayde, had subscribed for twenty-nine years to *Der Tog*, the New York Yiddish daily that billed itself as the “newspaper for the Jewish Intelligentsia,” the tabloid that he, his wife, and six children avidly read. When Goldberg died in 1950 at age sixty-three, his eldest son visited *Der Tog*’s office on the Lower East Side to inform them of his father’s death and to renew the subscription in his own name. Shazar, then a freelance writer and Israeli Knesset member, happened to be staffing the editorial desk that

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1 This article is drawn from oral histories, research, and correspondence in a privately printed family history by Hollace Ava Weiner, *From Lithuania to Lorain: A Jewish Journey. The First Generation of Goldbergs in America* (Fort Worth, TX: Gold Press, 2020). The spark leading to that book was a family tree researched in the 1970s by two cousins, Budd Margolis in London and Zalman Gordon in Haifa. “Sat. Nite Specials,” *Lorain Journal* (4 April 1941). “Specials for Sat. Nite,” *Lorain Journal* (18 April 1941).

afternoon. Fascinated to learn about the *shomer* Shabbos grocer in the Rust Belt, he penned a thousand-word column about this longtime subscriber, a Litvak from a small Great Lakes town that barely registered in the *American Jewish Year Book's* annual Statistics of the Jews. "It's very difficult to be a Jew ... and a businessman," Shazar wrote. "You are enticed and pressured by society to mimic everyone around you."<sup>2</sup>

Remarkably, my zayde, who anglicized his name from Feivel to Philip, did not alter his religious priorities. Rather, the multicultural mix he encountered in Lorain normalized the Jewish experience. Jews were but one among a dozen immigrant ethnic groups, each with a specific language or dialect, holiday rituals, foods, and seasonings.<sup>3</sup> Lorain's

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2 Zalman Shazar, "A Jew from Lorain Ohio: The Sabbath-Observant Jew Whose Name is Memorialized in a Catholic Hospital Room," *Der Tog* (18 June 1950): 8. Translated by Rabbi Sidney Zimelman, Fort Worth TX. Shazar, whose given name was Shneur Zalman Rubashov, served as Israel's third president from 1963 to 1973. Born in 1889 in Mir, near Minsk in today's Belarus, he grew up in a Hasidic home, immigrated to British Mandate Palestine in 1924, and was editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Davar* from 1944 to 1949. Elected to the first Knesset in 1949, he was often in New York, camped out at an empty desk at *Der Tog*, using the phone and filing freelance stories about the UN and diplomatic matters pertaining to Israel. He adopted the surname Shazar, an acronym of his birth initials and a Hebrew word that means "standard bearer." He died in 1974 and is buried in Jerusalem on Mount Herzl.

3 Another woman raised in Lorain, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison (1931–2019), was also the daughter of ethnic migrants—from segregated Cartersville, Georgia, and Greenville, Alabama. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, published in 1970, is set in Lorain. Reminiscing about the town, the African American novelist recalled living on a block with Italians, Hispanics, and Blacks. She attended racially integrated schools and worked at the public library (which has a reading room named in her honor). "Lorain was neither plantation nor ghetto," she told interviewers. She experienced discrimination when ushered to a separate section at the movies. At the ice cream parlor, her family stood at the counter, never at a table, while devouring double-scoop cones. Yet when she enrolled at historically Black Howard University, she was disappointed, especially when invited to pledge a sorority for light-skinned women. The campus environment did not have the diversity she was accustomed to, nor the sociological complexities through which she had learned to navigate. Tara L. Conley, "In Toni Morrison's Hometown, the Familiar Has Become Foreign," City Lab, 14 August 2019. <https://www.citylab.com/perspective/2019/08/toni-morrison-home-born-lorain-ohio-elyria/596020/> (accessed 7 November 2019). The Nobel laureate's full name was Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison.

“pluralistic American religious landscape made a place for Jews,” along with Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Hungarian Catholics, African Methodist Episcopal, and Mexican American Catholics.<sup>4</sup> Pluralism led employees and vendors of the Goldberg Grocery markets to host a wedding shower for Zayde’s daughter at Saint Stanislaus Catholic Church. Although the marriage ceremony and reception were at the synagogue, the dinner for 175 guests was prepared nearby at Saints Peter & Paul Eastern Orthodox Slovak church, where a Cleveland *mashgiach* kashered the kitchen and the bride’s brothers plucked the chickens. “The feathers were flying,” one brother recalled.<sup>5</sup>

This experience illustrates how small-town Jews, with their Yiddish cultural identity intact, “often witnessed cooperation across liturgical and social lines,” reaching a level of acceptance and integration unknown to them in Europe, according to Lee Shai Weissbach, the leading scholar of small-town American Jewish communities. In his seminal 2005 book, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History*, Weissbach takes a macro

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4 Noam Pianko, review of Hasia R. Diner’s *How America Met the Jews* in *American Jewish History* 103, no. 3 (July 2019): 378. For discussions of small-town multiculturalism see also Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds. *Jewries at the Frontier* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001); Hal Rothman, “‘Same Horse, New Wagon’: Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865–1930,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83–104; Hollace Ava Weiner, “Tied and Tethered (*Geknippt und Gebinden*): Jews in Early Fort Worth,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (Jan. 2004): 389–414; Hollace Ava Weiner and Lauraine Miller, “Little Synagogues Across Texas,” 180–205, and Kenneth D. Roseman, “Six-Tenths of a Percent of Texas,” 206–211, in *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas*, ed. Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press and Texas Jewish Historical Society, 2007); Deborah Y. Bachrach, “Home on the Mesabi Iron Range: Minnesota’s Jewish Cowboys, an Underexplored Niche in Immigration History,” *Western States Jewish History* 51, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 81–107.

5 Bill Goldberg, oral history with the author, his daughter Hollace Weiner, 26 Nov. 1982. The *mashgiach* was Rabbi Sheftel Kramer, a Lithuanian Talmudic scholar on the faculty of the Rabbinical Seminary and College of Talmud in Cleveland. He was among three rabbis who officiated at the wedding. “Miss Goldberg Bride in Colorful Nuptial; Weds Chicago Man in Agudath B’nai Israel Temple,” *Lorain Journal* (17 March 1941): “Society,” 6.

look at Jewish communities off the beaten path. He draws into his sample 490 towns with “triple-digit” Jewish populations, meaning 100 to 999 Jews. That demographic proved large enough to support “robust” Jewish communal life yet too small for Jews to segregate among themselves. As Weissbach looks for patterns, he discerns the “role that Jews played in the economic and civic culture of smaller urban centers.” He describes and defines a “classic era” of small-town American Jewry that extended from the 1890s to 1950, decades of major immigration that overlapped the years that my grandfather and his extended family made new lives in Lorain.<sup>6</sup>

While Weissbach’s research analyzes small-town American Jewry statistically, from a macro vantage point, the journalist Shazar uses a micro lens when he zeroes in on my grandfather and eulogizes the death of a longtime subscriber. Shazar’s column, published 18 June 1950 and headlined “A Jew from Lorain, Ohio,” amplifies Weissbach’s analytical conclusions and underscores Lorain’s significance.

In Lorain, for example, whenever Jews were hospitalized, the nuns at St. Joseph’s Hospital recited vespers at their bedside. The earliest Goldberg in the hospital’s care was a child with an emergency appendectomy. Recovery took weeks. Zayde, then a peddler with a horse and wagon, could not pay the bill. With a dose of Talmudic reasoning, he settled up by painting the hospital interior. Decades later, when St. Joseph’s expanded and the Goldbergs had six mom-and-pop markets, the family donated \$3,000 toward a new hospital wing. The board of directors had a bronze tablet inscribed, “Out of gratitude to Philip Goldberg and his noble wife, this room is dedicated.”<sup>7</sup> Shazar, in recounting this,

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6 Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1–10, 61, 212, 236, 312–313, 345. The writer is indebted to Weissbach (1947–2022) for his groundbreaking work that provided a framework for this article. Weissbach, a gentle man and generous scholar, died 29 September 2022.

7 “Contributes \$3,000 in Hospital Drive to Show ‘Appreciation’; Goldberg Family Cited by Son,” *Lorain Journal* (24 February 1947). St. Joseph’s Hospital closed in 1997. The building reopened for several years as a community center but was ultimately abandoned and then demolished in 2015. No one among the Goldberg descendants thought to salvage the plaque with the family name. “The Abandoned St. Joseph Hospital of Lorain Ohio,” *Architectural Afterlife*, <https://architecturalafterlife.com/2019/02/abandoned-st-joseph-hospital-ohio/> (accessed 4 January 2022).

highlights the donation's distinctiveness: "The Sabbath-observant Jew ... is memorialized in a Catholic hospital room."<sup>8</sup>

The multicultural interactions in Lorain are but one theme running through both Shazar's contemporaneous eulogy to the Great Lakes grocer and Weissbach's comprehensive historical analysis. Another theme is the overlooked significance of small-town American Jewish life. Immigrants with family and kinship networks created tight-knit Jewish enclaves in whistle-stop towns. Though largely "invisible" in survey literature of American Jewry, Weissbach statistically charts these backroad towns that "dotted the American landscape." They gave small-town Jews a sense of place in America, "a strong sense of rootedness and intimacy," a livelihood, and secular schools for their offspring. These thriving ethnic communities highlight the "often-ignored diversity of small-town society," Weissbach writes. Jewish families such as the Goldbergs of Lorain provide a "window on the history of small-town America in general."<sup>9</sup> As Shazar writes: "With rare exception, Lorain is typical of many small American cities where Jewish life pulsates."<sup>10</sup>

My zayde's Jewish journey from Lithuania to Lorain began during World War I, when Czar Nicholas II expelled 200,000 Jews from northern Lithuania.<sup>11</sup> Zayde, with his wife Riva, my bubbe, and their three youngsters trekked from the Baltics to the Black Sea port of Rostov-on-Don, where two more children were born. While Zayde davened daily with other refugees in a neighborhood dubbed Har Zion, his wife and his sister, Chaya Shapiro, supported their combined household by

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8 Shazar, "Jew from Lorain, Ohio."

9 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 1–10, 312–13.

10 Shazar, "Jew from Lorain, Ohio."

11 Sources documenting the czar's decree include "RUSSIA'S EXPULSION OF JEWS; Horrors Wrought by a Decree That Forced 200,000 People at Short Notice to Leave War Zone," *New York Times* (15 August 1915): 58; Anatolij Chayesh, "Expulsion of the Jews from Lithuania in the Spring of 1915," LitvakSIG, Feb. 2000, [litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/online-journal/expulsion-of-the-jews-from-lithuania-in-the-spring-of-1915-the](http://litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/online-journal/expulsion-of-the-jews-from-lithuania-in-the-spring-of-1915-the) (accessed 15 Feb. 2019). Jews in villages closer to the Polish border were not part of the expulsion order. For descriptions of the thousands of Jews fleeing after the expulsion, see Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 156–157.



Riva Goldberg, Lithuania, ca. 1910.  
(Courtesy Hollace Ava Weiner)

smuggling Turkish tobacco from the countryside in burlap bags dusted with flour.

Postwar, the families optimistically traveled by train and horse-drawn wagon a thousand miles back to Lithuania and their hometown province of Panevezys. The Goldbergs found their farmhouse occupied by squatters. They ousted the squatters but weeks later endured a home invasion when Cossacks on horseback galloped into the farmhouse. The intruders threw a crying baby on the floor, pulled my bubbe's wedding band off her finger, and emptied sacks of flour, sugar, and grain as they searched in vain for valuables.<sup>12</sup> That night of terror, in January 1921, was the impetus for the family to leave Lithuania for America—four months before newly inaugurated President Warren G. Harding signed the Immigration Restriction Act that established the nation's first foreign-entry quotas. The Goldbergs could still have entered the United States under family-reunification provisions in the new law, but that would have entailed further delays, fees, red tape, and a visa from the American consulate in Kaunas. They arrived at Ellis Island just under the wire.<sup>13</sup>

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12 David Goldberg, Meyer Goldberg, Hyman Goldberg, and Annette Goldberg Sohn Hirsch, videotaped oral history with Adrienne Goldberg, Lorain, OH, 5 April 1999. Recording and transcript in possession of author. (Hereafter, Goldberg Siblings Oral History.)

13 President Woodrow Wilson had refused to sign similar restrictive immigration bills. Warren G. Harding called Congress into session specifically to enact the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, which set immigration quotas at 3 percent of the number of residents from each nation living in the United States in 1910. This restricted the number of new-immigrant visas per year to 350,000. Jared Dangelmayr, "The Immigration Act of 1921," [https://prezi.com/-bueoqjlhb\\_c/immigration-act-of-1921/](https://prezi.com/-bueoqjlhb_c/immigration-act-of-1921/) (accessed 13 April 2023). Three years later, the more draconian National Origins Immigration Act "imposed country-by-country quotas set at 2 percent of each nation's contribution to the 1890 population of the United States.... Over the next decade (1925–34), an average of only 8,270 Jews were annually admitted ... less than 7 percent of those welcomed when Jewish immigration stood at its peak.... Even parents, siblings and grown children were compelled to await a scarce quota number." Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 215–216. See also, "The Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act)," Milestones: 1921–1936 - Office of the Historian (state.gov) (accessed 9 November 2021).



The family's destination was Lorain, an industrial port where the Black River empties into Lake Erie, the home of 37,295 people—32 percent of whom were foreign born.<sup>14</sup> Lorain's most distinctive feature was the string of U.S. Steel mills that stretched three miles along the lake's southern shore. The mills produced orange smoke and blue-collar jobs and spawned industries that manufactured everything from toys to ships. Besides industrial jobs, there were ancillary opportunities for fruit peddlers, grocers, clothiers, bookkeepers, and proprietors to service the burgeoning number of industrial, hourly-wage earners.<sup>15</sup> Unlike in America's overcrowded big cities, the Jewish pattern was to become entrepreneurs, not factory or sweat-shop workers.<sup>16</sup>

The magnet pulling the Goldberg family to Lorain was chain migration, which makes their story an American immigrant tale in microcosm. Already in Lorain were Bubbe's two married sisters, whom she had not seen in decades; her husband's cousin, who owned property; and a brother-in-law, whose sisters had married men in Lorain and whose brother was a charter member of the city's oldest synagogue. These families were intertwined by blood, marriage, and ties to Panevezys. Who was the first among them to settle in tiny Lorain (rather than more cosmopolitan Cleveland)? As Jacob Rader Marcus has written, "No Jew is ever the first Jew anywhere. There is always one before him."<sup>17</sup> And many more who follow. Weissbach observes that "the link between economic opportunity and Jewish migration was perhaps most readily apparent" among contingents of related families in small towns.<sup>18</sup>

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14 Lorain Public Library System, "History of Lorain, Ohio: Chronology/Index, Lorain Ohio Sesquicentennial, 1934–1984," Lorain County Memory <https://loraincountymemory.org/items/show/969> (accessed 13 April 2023). By 1929 Lorain's population had grown to 46,580, with foreign-born residents 37.5 percent of the total. The city's proud slogan was "Where Coal and Iron Meet." *Lorain City Directory*, 1929.

15 Black River Historical Society, *Lorain Ohio (Images of America)* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 1999): 2, 7–8,

16 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 95.

17 Jacob Rader Marcus, "Why Study American Jewish History," in *United States Jewry, 1776–1985* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1986), 21.

18 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 60, 127.

When the Goldbergs arrived in Lorain, the city had a Jewish population of three hundred, and by most reckonings these Jews had East European roots. The city had a Jewish cemetery, a Zionist club, three kosher butchers, and two shuls—Agudath Achim for Russian and Polish Jews and Beth Israel for Hungarian Jews.<sup>19</sup> In the aftermath of a 1924 tornado that demolished the downtown and killed seventy-two people, including three Jewish girls, Lorain Jewry pulled together.<sup>20</sup> In 1925, the city's two synagogues merged with a third group, a nascent B'nai B'rith Temple in nearby Elyria.<sup>21</sup> The unified congregation adopted the name Agudath B'nai Israel (ABI). With the merger came the decision to forsake Orthodoxy and adopt Conservative Jewish practices, including mixed seating for men and women and sermons in English, not Yiddish. My zayde and bubbe, whose most precious legacy from Europe was a twenty-volume set of the Gemara printed in Hebrew and Aramaic, could not sanction the shift toward Conservative Judaism.<sup>22</sup> Instead, they splintered off with other secessionists who

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19 Shazar, *Der Tog*. The first Jew settled in Lorain in 1884; the first *minyan* of Lorain men gathered in 1901. Congregation Agudath Achim's first synagogue was constructed in central Lorain in 1905 on 15<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and Reid. Congregation Beth Israel, the Hungarian shul, was constructed in South Lorain in 1914. "Laying the Foundation: Being a History of the Local Jewish Community from Its Beginning to the Present Time," in *Agudath B'nai Israel Temple Dedication Book* (Lorain, Ohio: Agudath B'nai Israel, 1932), 17–22, at Lorain Historical Society.

20 Betsy D'Annibale, *The 1924 Tornado in Lorain & Sandusky: Deadliest in Ohio History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014). Annette Goldberg's classmate, who was attending a children's matinee at the State Theatre, died that day when the building collapsed. Annette had planned to be at the movies with her friend but did not join her because she had to put her brother down for an afternoon nap. Weiner, "The Twister of '24," in *From Lithuania to Lorain*, 32–37.

21 Ibid. The merger combined the names of the three existing congregations to establish Agudath B'nai Israel. Per Arthur Goodman in Lorain, telephone conversations with the author, 2016–2018.

22 The family's Gemara, a twenty-volume set referred to in Yiddish as a *shas*, was printed by Romm Publishing House of Vilna in 1884 and incorporates the Vilna and Zhitomir editions of 1863. The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, "Romm Family," [https://yivo-encyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Romm\\_Family](https://yivo-encyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Romm_Family) (accessed 4 Jan. 2022). The set was a wedding gift from Riva Goldberg's parents and is inscribed with the Hebrew date of her marriage, the 23rd of Av 5669. On the Western calendar, the date was 20 Aug. 1908. A great-grandson who studied at yeshivot in Israel and the United States has the *shas* in his personal collection.

formed a minyan house at the home of Latvian immigrant Abraham Milner. As membership grew, they rented a two-story brick house at 222 Thirteenth Street. They named their immigrant shul Zichrain Chaim Yankov Congregation, in memory of a college student who had died.<sup>23</sup> It was not unusual in small towns for shuls to splinter along ethnic lines and ritual practices (then to merge in later years due to attrition, acculturation, and economics).<sup>24</sup> The breakaway congregation grew to around one hundred men, women, and children. Optimistic of continued growth, in 1927 the members recruited a rabbi, Jacob Richman, a recent Russian immigrant whose family moved into the dwelling's ground floor. Upstairs, the second floor housed a daily minyan, Shabbos services, and a religious school. Because my zayde, a graduate of Slabodka's Knesseth Israel Yeshiva, was on a scholarly par with the rabbi, he led discourses on Torah and Talmud—in Yiddish, of course. Because of the cream-colored mare that pulled his peddler's cart, the rabbi dubbed him the *Meshiekh af a vays ferd*—the Messiah on a white horse.<sup>25</sup>

“He knew how to understand a page of Talmud,” Shazar writes. “He had also read literature of the Enlightenment.... His own example guaranteed that [his children] would ... daven the Jewish prayers, that they would learn Jewish history and be proud that they were Jews and would accept responsibility for other people.”<sup>26</sup>

At the little immigrant shul, the Goldberg children, fluent in Yiddish

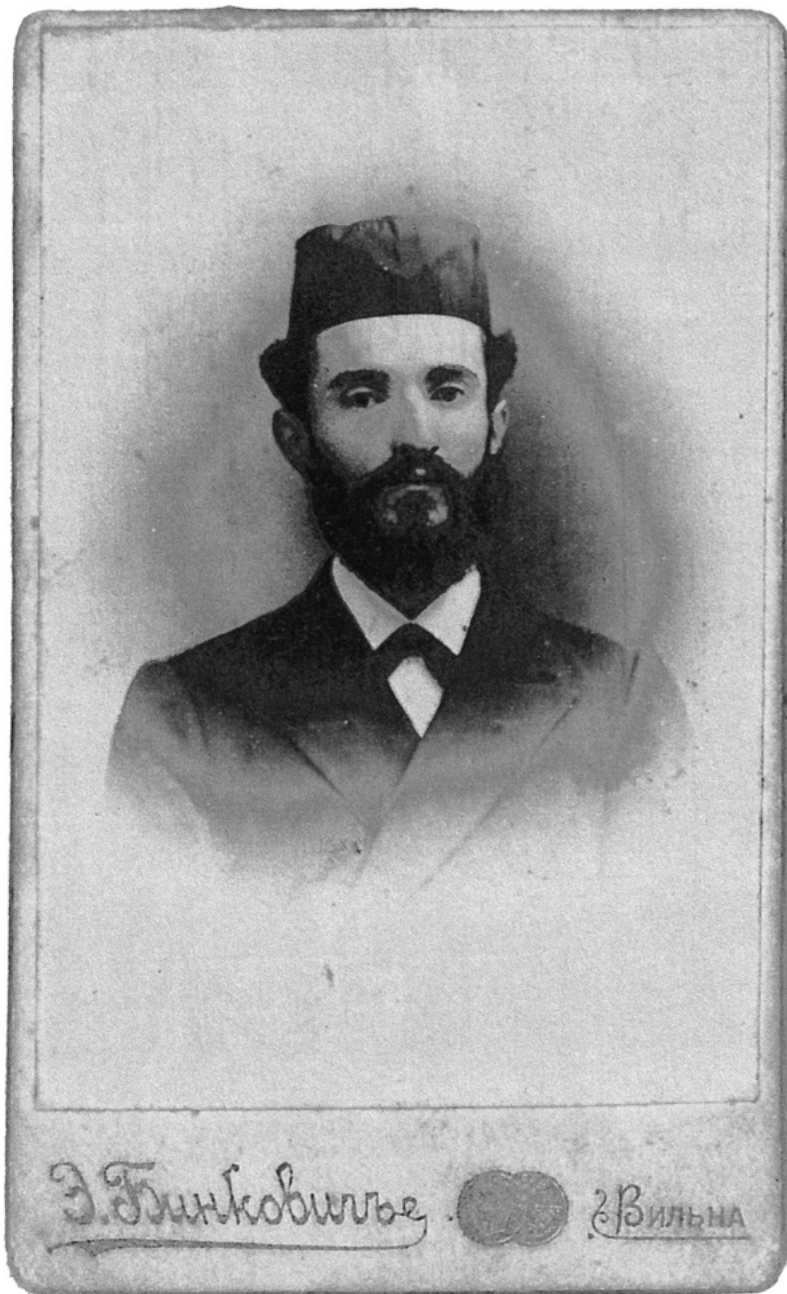
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23 Goldberg Siblings Oral History, 1999. The Yiddish shul's name, which means “a memorial to Chayim Yankov,” was spelled several ways when transliterated into English. On the congregation's invoices, it is printed “Zichrain Chaim Yankov.” On a 1941 bar mitzvah invitation, it is spelled “Zichrain Hiam Youkav.” In city directories from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the name variously appears as “Zichras Achin Yankov” and “Zichran Chaim Yankov.” The Hebrew translation is Zichron Chayim Ya'akov.

24 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 178–197.

25 Frances Richman Lubens, Palm Desert, CA, telephone interview with author, 6 January 2015. After seven years in Lorain, Rabbi Jacob Richman (1889–1962) moved to pulpits elsewhere, officiating in Dayton, Ohio; Bellingham, Washington; and Ottumwa and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He is buried at Eben Israel Cemetery in Cedar Rapids alongside his wife, Sonia (Barishansky) Richman (1900–1961).

26 Shazar, *Der Tog*.



Shraga Feivel Goldberg as yeshiva student in Lithuania.  
(David Goldberg Papers)

and English, were among the officers: twelve-year-old Annette was appointed secretary because of her fine English spelling and penmanship; David, fifteen and adept at tallying grocery bills in his head, was the permanent treasurer.<sup>27</sup> Although Zichrain Chaim Yankov Congregation was never listed in the *American Jewish Year Book's* roster of local Jewish institutions, the receipts, donation slips, and bar mitzvah invitations in David's family archive verify the shul's existence through World War II, as do Lorain directories from the 1920s into the early 1940s.<sup>28</sup> The fledgling congregation couldn't pay much of a salary to its rabbi, so the Goldbergs helped Richman patch together a livelihood by recommending him as a *shochet*. Many of Lorain's Conservative Jews raised chickens in backyard coops. They were delighted to bring their fowl to the *shochet*. On Fridays, housewives and children lined up in Richman's backyard holding squawking birds. Typically, the *shochet* was paid ten cents for slaughtering a chicken and twenty-five cents for slaughtering a turkey or a goose.<sup>29</sup>

Sacramental wine, dispensed during Prohibition from 1921 to 1933, was another source of income for the rabbi. The Volstead Act, which delineated regulations enforcing Prohibition, permitted clergy to receive a quota of wine to distribute to church and synagogue goers. With guidance from the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, the Internal Revenue Service issued regulations allowing rabbis to allot five to ten gallons of sacramental wine per year to each Jewish adult within their worship community. The law barred clergy from making direct sales of alcohol, for each man of the cloth was deemed an "intermediary," not a dispensary. Recipients, however, were encouraged to make monetary donations to a religious institution in lieu of payment for wine. And they did. Demonstrating

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27 Goldberg Siblings Oral History.

28 Donation receipts and a bar mitzvah invitation with the name of the immigrant shul are in the David Goldberg Papers, privately held by the family. For recollections of the shul, see Goldberg Siblings Oral History, 1999. Also, Oral History [Hy and Fran Goldberg]: 7 Dec. 2009, Lorain County Sacred Landmarks Initiative. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w53CxPzvVKU&t=41s> (accessed 9 Feb. 2023). See also, Oran Zweiter, "Turning a Church into a Synagogue," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 71, no. 1 (2019): 10–17.

29 Goldberg Siblings Oral History.

“social connectedness,” the Goldberg siblings drew up a list of Lorain Jews who qualified for wine and included every post-bar-mitzvah boy.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, at Lorain’s Congregation Agudath B’nai Israel, the rabbi was not as interested in fermented products. The Conservative branch of Judaism had issued a responsa endorsing the substitution of grape juice for wine, a stand the Orthodox rabbinate rejected. Therefore, scores of Conservative families from ABI eagerly added their names to Richman’s temperance quota—supplementing the rabbi’s income.<sup>31</sup>

Securely anchored in Lorain, comfortable at a shul where the family davened in Hebrew and discoursed in Yiddish, Zayde and Bubbe’s next quest for their children was higher education, a theme common among first-generation immigrants. Weissbach writes about the ongoing tension between sending the next generation to college or insisting they remain at home to run the family business.<sup>32</sup> Because the Goldbergs lived above the grocery, they paid their expenses out of the cash register. To save for tuition, they opened additional neighborhood markets—one-aisle stores stocked with fresh produce, canned goods, and, during Prohibition, ingredients for home brew, such as the private-label Goldberg’s Malt Syrup. Each sibling managed a store while the family together saved for college for the next in line. In 1930, two years after his graduation from Lorain High, David, the eldest son, enrolled at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, where he boarded with an aunt. Two years later

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30 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 24.

31 Hannah Sprecher, “‘Let Them Drink and Forget Our Poverty’: Orthodox Rabbis React to Prohibition,” *American Jewish Archives* 43, no. 2 (1991):135–179. Yaacov S. Weinstein, “Grape Juice: The Solution to Prohibition,” *Tradition* 48, no. 1 (2015): 19–32. The quota of wine per person is unclear, depending on the source. The ten-gallon annual quota was mentioned in a National Public Radio interview in May 2010 with Daniel Okrent, author of *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (Scribner), 2010. [npr.org/2011/06/10/137077599/prohibition-speakeasies-loopholes-and-politics](http://npr.org/2011/06/10/137077599/prohibition-speakeasies-loopholes-and-politics) (accessed 10 Feb. 2023). See also David Golinkin, *Responsa of Professor Louis Ginzberg* (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1996), 111–133 [English Section].

32 “Because economic circumstances were sometimes precarious and because so many small-town Jewish businesses were family affairs, there was ... a certain tension between sending the children to college and taking advantage of their labor.” Weissbach, *Jewish Lives*, 138.

Meyer matriculated. The next three boys—Bill, Marvin, and Hy—in like succession enrolled at The Ohio State University. On weekends, they alternated taking the train from Columbus to Lorain to help their father in the store and to bring home their soiled laundry. (Dutifully, their mother returned the laundry by mail with a chub of salami tucked among the boys' starched and folded shirts.)

Zayde welcomed his sons' help, for he was especially busy Saturday nights and Sundays, when other groceries were shuttered. As Shazar writes in *Der Tog*, "His customers would wait until the stars began to shine on Saturday night, until after he made the evening Havdalah prayers.... Operating a successful business [was compatible] with the delight of the Sabbath.... The few hours that he opened on Saturday night brought more than enough profit to compensate for the day that was lost.... The prosperity he realized from his business was way beyond his expectations."<sup>33</sup>

Annette, the only Goldberg daughter, graduated *cum laude* from Lorain High in 1932. Cleveland's *Jewish Independent* wrote up her accomplishments: participation in fifteen clubs, top grades, and special assistant to both the librarian and the principal.<sup>34</sup> Yet Annette attended college for only one semester, commuting by bus to Cleveland College. Gender expectations dissuaded her from continuing toward a degree or living with relatives out of town. Annette's role model was her own mother, my bubbe, the omnipresent face of the grocery store who stationed herself at the cash register of the family's flagship market. Bubbe knew all the customers—whether they worked at the steel mill, the shipyards, or the Ford assembly plant—and when they got paid. She greeted them in broken English or in Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, or Yiddish. She was fluent in all four "and could count to twenty in Italian." She gave ginger snaps, vanilla wafers, or fig bars to the kids. One little girl called her "Mrs. Cookieberg."<sup>35</sup> Although census lists

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33 Shazar, *Der Tog*.

34 "Wins Honors in Lorain High," *Jewish [Cleveland] Independent* (5 February 1932): 3.

35 "At Christmas time the front windows of the store were sprayed with fake snow and adorned with a 'Season's Greetings' sign.... Even though we were Jewish, the customers sent us Christmas cards.... Some of the cards showed Jesus and crosses which made me feel

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Mr. R. Goldberg Announces the Opening of a Modern Kosher Jewish Meat Market at 1246 Broadway. We Carry a Complete Line of Quality Meats as Veal, Beef, Lamb, Lunch meats, Corned Beef, etc. at Reasonable Prices. A Trial Will Convince You.

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<p>KOSHER LEAN BOILING BEEF OR SHORT RIB:  <b>Soup Meat</b> 18<sup>¢</sup><sub>lb</sub>  <small>MIRACLE WHIP—Qt. 37c</small></p> <p>KOSHER LEAN AND TENDER  <b>Rib Steak</b> 28<sup>¢</sup><sub>lb</sub>  <small>CRISCO or SPRY—3-lb. can 51c</small></p> <p>KOSHER GENUINE SPRING  <b>LAMB CHOPS</b> 29<sup>¢</sup><sub>lb</sub>  <small>WHEATIES—Pkg. 10c</small></p> <p>KOSHER—FINE FOR STEWING OR ROASTING  <b>VEAL BREAST</b> 18<sup>¢</sup><sub>lb</sub>  <small>KOSHER—MILK FED—NOT MUCH BONE</small></p> <p><b>Veal Chops</b> 28<sup>¢</sup><sub>lb</sub></p>	<p>Fairmount's Sweet—93 Score—Round Half Pounds  <b>Butter</b> 32<sup>¢</sup><sub>lb</sub>  <small>RINSO or OXYDOL—2 Lg. Pkgs. 39c</small></p> <p>GOLD MEDAL KITCHEN TESTED 24½-lb. bag  <b>FLOUR</b> 77<sup>¢</sup>  <small>MAXWELL HOUSE COFFEE—lb 25c</small></p> <p><b>SUGAR</b> Pure Cane 5 lbs 23<sup>¢</sup>  <small>JELLO—All Flavors—3 pkgs. 14c</small></p> <p>PURE ARGO QUART CAN  <b>MAZOLA OIL</b> qt. 40<sup>¢</sup>  <small>MAZOLA OIL—Per Gal. \$1.15</small></p> <p>DEL MONTE WHITE CREAM STYLE No. 2 CAN  <b>CORN</b> Reg. 17<sup>¢</sup> Seller 10<sup>¢</sup>  <small>WE REDEEM ALL P. &amp; G. COUPONS</small></p>

Goldberg's Food Store circular, 1938.  
 (Courtesy Howard Goldberg)



often classified wives and single daughters as unemployed homemakers, Weissbach notes that “many small-town Jewish businesses were quite literally ‘mom and pop’ operations. Families worked as teams, and wives were partners.... Businesses were family affairs.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite the heterogeneous landscape in Lorain, or perhaps because of it, all six Goldberg offspring married under the *chuppah*. Without traditional matchmakers to arrange their marriages, the Goldberg kids, as well as their first and second cousins, gravitated to new social networks such as B’nai B’rith’s AZA youth group for boys, Junior Hadassah for girls, Hillel on college campuses, and Alpha Zeta Omega, the Jewish pharmacy fraternity at Western Reserve. Two of the Goldberg boys met their life partners at Camp Anisfield, an overnight camp in Vermilion, Ohio, which held week-long sessions for working Jewish singles.<sup>37</sup> By the fall of 1941, two of the Goldberg siblings were married and two more were courting future mates, thanks to camp, college, and AZA connections.

The pattern of their lives changed abruptly on 7 December 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II. Of the five Goldberg sons, three served in the armed forces; a fourth worked for the federal government in Washington, DC; the fifth son received a draft-board exemption to remain in Lorain to mind the store. Sister Annette, a recent bride living in Chicago, volunteered with Hadassah, demonstrating the Zionist ideals her family had long embraced. Participation in the war effort, Weissbach writes, reinforced each Jewish family’s sense of American identity, while concern

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funny and reminded me that the Jews might have killed him.” Sharon Goldberg, “Grandma’s Grocery Store,” *Under the Sun* 14, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 221–231.

36 Weissbach, *Jewish Lives*, 134, 148.

37 Camp Anisfield was named for philanthropist John Anisfield (1860–1929), an Austrian immigrant and Cleveland clothing manufacturer, real estate executive, and civic leader. Officially named the Jewish Boys and Girls Vacation Club, the camp was for young, working Jewish adults. Each weeklong session cost participants around \$12. “Anisfield, John,” *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, Case Western Reserve University, [case.edu/ech/articles/a/anisfield-john](http://case.edu/ech/articles/a/anisfield-john) (accessed 4 November 2018). Both Marvin and Bill Goldberg met their future wives, Helen Greenberg and Dora Labson, respectively, at the camp. Both women, daughters of poor émigrés, were from Cleveland. Two of Dora’s sisters met their future husbands at Camp Anisfield.

for relatives left in Europe “reinforced their identification with the fate of the Jewish people everywhere.”<sup>38</sup>

The youngest Goldberg brother, Hy, born in Lorain in 1921, was a private with the Army’s 318<sup>th</sup> Signal Service Battalion. He served state-side at Fort Benjamin Harrison near Indianapolis and in Hawaii with a mobile field battery near Hilo. Often the only Jew in his unit, Hy volunteered to work on Christmas and Easter. In a letter home he described how he avoided non-kosher meat—which “wasn’t easy”—yet put on muscle and gained eight pounds during his first year in uniform. He also served as Jewish lay leader—a comfortable role, for he lived with the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. At Hanukkah, he lit candles alongside his bunk bed. As Passover approached, he wrote home asking for a book with the “Exodus story” and a “partially-aged” salami, because it would ship better than a fresh one. On Purim he wrote his parents, “Let’s hope and pray that the next Purim holiday will find us all at home together in a world at peace, observing not only the destruction of the Haman of old, but also the final annihilation of the modern Hamans of today namely Hitler and Tojo.”<sup>39</sup>

Another letter home described a gentile sergeant who confessed that he “had a very low opinion of Jewish people” until working with Hy. The sergeant told him, “In my lifetime I have heard bad things about Jewish people. I’d never met them. You’re the first Jew that I’ve met.... I think you are a wonderful person!”<sup>40</sup> Raised in multicultural Lorain, Hy was familiar with the canard that the Jews killed Jesus, and he understood the need to set an upstanding example to dispel antisemitism.

Wherever he was stationed, Hy looked for Jewish life off post. At

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38 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 155.

39 Letter from Hy Goldberg in Hilo, Hawaii, to “Mom, Dad, and [brother] David” in Lorain, 27 February 1945. The collection consists of twenty-seven handwritten and type-written letters from Private Hy Goldberg. Thirteen letters were written in 1945 to “Dear Mom, Dad, and David” and addressed to his home in Lorain; fourteen letters from 1942 and 1943 are to his brother and sister-in-law, Bill and Dora Goldberg, in Washington, DC. The collection is held by the soldier’s daughter, Sharon Goldberg, in Seattle. When Hy was stationed in the continental United States, he telephoned his parents in Lorain once a week.

40 Letter from Hy Goldberg at Fort Harrison, Indiana, to Bill and Dora Goldberg, 14 January 1943.

Fort Harrison, he took the bus to Indianapolis's Kirschbaum Jewish Center, which served soldiers a kosher Sunday supper and gave out tickets to football games, hockey matches, Sonja Henie's Ice Review, and a performance of the Indianapolis Symphony—Hy's first classical music concert.<sup>41</sup> The small-town Jew realized that he was part of a large Jewish hospitality network.

One Sunday on the bus, Hy spotted his Lorain AZA debate-team partner, George Jacoby. They exchanged letters during the rest of the war. Hy also corresponded with his second cousin, Private Joshua Merves, a medic on the European front with General George Patton's Third Army, 21<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. Tragically, German sniper fire killed Merves on 29 April 1945, eight days before the war in Europe ended. At his funeral, the flag that draped his coffin was presented to his bride of two years, a young woman from Canton, Ohio, whom he had met at an AZA dance.<sup>42</sup> When Hy learned of his cousin's death, he was in the Pacific. Subsequently, when the Jewish Welfare Board in Honolulu hosted an AZA reunion, he shared the mournful news. Merves is among seven casualties of World War II buried in Lorain's Salem Jewish Cemetery; another was distantly related to the Goldbergs by marriage. A granite memorial inscribed with each soldier's name has a line from the World War I poem "For the Fallen." It reads: "At the going down of the sun and in the morning/we shall remember them."<sup>43</sup> The names still resonate,

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41 Ibid., 23 November 1943.

42 "German Bullet Kills Lorain Man Helping Wounded: Medical Corpsman Shot; Two Others Reported Wounded," *Lorain Journal* (24 May 1945): 2. "Killed: Pfc. Joshua Merves," *Canton Repository* (24 May 1945): 3. "On Mercy Mission, Killed by Sniper," *The Shofar* (Sept. 1945): 3. *The Shofar*, the national BBYO monthly, reported that Joshua Merves of Lorain's AZA Chapter 267 served as *aleph sopher*, *aleph kohen godol*, *aleph masker*, and twice as *aleph godol*. He was chair and associate chair of two Eastern Ohio Council tournaments and served as a *sopher*, *masker*, and *godol* of the Eastern Ohio Council. He was elected chapter delegate to two district and two national conventions and held the Shield of David award for leadership and activity. His widow, Miriam Spector (1925–2008), married a veteran in 1947 and moved to the West Coast. In addition, the local USO brought in comedian Bob Hope and vocalist Frances Langford. Letter from Hy Goldberg at Fort Harrison, Indiana, to Dora and Bill Goldberg, Washington, DC, 23 November 1943.

43 "For the Fallen," Robert Laurence Binyon, 1914. Sergeant Frank Rogowin, one of

for in a cohesive, small-town Jewish community, most every family is acquainted if not related.<sup>44</sup>

By January 1946, when Hy was discharged and returned home to Lorain, it was evident that Zayde had advancing Parkinson's disease, which led to his death in 1950. However, the immediate postwar focus was the fate of relatives lost in the Holocaust. Previously, during the interwar years, many aunts, uncles, and cousins from Lithuania had sent greetings twice a year, at the High Holidays and at Passover. After Hitler marched into the Sudetenland in 1938, the holiday letters grew somber and further apart. The last piece of correspondence from Lithuania, dated 30 January 1941, was a desperate postcard from Great-Uncle Abraham Druskovitz, a former dean at the Volozhin Yeshiva.<sup>45</sup> He had sent a shipment of his latest books to relatives in New York and beseeched everyone to buy copies to underwrite his family's journey out of Europe. In the years between 1930 and 1937, he had traveled back and forth from the Baltics to Brooklyn, marketing his scholarly books and raising money for his yeshiva. During the years when he might have easily emigrated, he had disparaged the United States as a *treif* country. By the time his last piece of correspondence arrived in Lorain, he was trapped in the Kovno ghetto. He had missed the chance to exit alive.<sup>46</sup>

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Lorain's World War II casualties, was the brother of Gertrude Rogowin Merowitz, who had married a Goldberg cousin.

44 Given the "intense interconnectedness" among Lorain Jewry, these "tragic war deaths ... were felt throughout the entire community.... Everyone was likely to be known to everyone else." Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 155.

45 Postcard from Rabbi A. Druskovitz in Slobodka, LSSR, to Mr. F. Goldberg in Lorain, 30 January 1931. Weiner, *From Lithuania to Lorain*, 188, 208–209. The collection of Yiddish correspondence, translated by Rabbi Sidney Zimelman of Fort Worth, includes eighteen letters and one postcard from Lithuania and fourteen letters from Latvia mailed between 1933 and 1941. Enclosed in these envelopes were four engraved wedding invitations and one Rosh Hashanah card. In addition, Druskovitz wrote two letters from the Bronx, New York. Some correspondence begins with an opening paragraph in Hebrew. The collection is translated and annotated in Weiner, *From Lithuania to Lorain*, 190–230. The Yiddish letters are among the David Goldberg Papers, held by family members. Lithuania's Volozhin Yeshiva, dubbed the Harvard of Yeshivas, trained generations of scholars and leaders. See [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Volozhin\\_Yeshiva\\_of](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Volozhin_Yeshiva_of) (accessed 4 January 2022).

46 Ephraim Oshry, *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry [Churbin Lita]*, translated by Y.



Goldberg family photo, Lorain, 1946.  
(Courtesy Hollace Ava Weiner)

My grandfather, unlike his esteemed great uncle, had been confident about practicing Judaism in America and passing the ancient traditions to his offspring. In Panevezys, he had maintained a scholarly Jewish life and worked as a grain merchant. As an immigrant in a small Midwest town, he subscribed for decades to *Der Tog*, which kept him abreast of news and opinion in his new country and connected him with the larger

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Leiman (Brooklyn: Judaica Press, 1995), 2. A reference to Abraham Druskovitz, transliterated in the book, reads: "Rav Avrohom Drushkovich, an elderly man and former *mashgiach* of the Voloshin Yeshiva, one of the greatest Lithuanian yeshivos, came in to join us. From what he told us he had seen happening on the streets of Slobodka and had heard what was going on in Kovno, it became clear that the Germans and Lithuanians seemed intent on killing all the Jews. What were we to do? Could we devise some sort of plan? That was the issue that wearied us that night while Jews were dying in the streets of Slobodka." Rabbi Abraham Druskovitz perished in the Kovno Ghetto in 1944.



Shraga and Riva Goldberg at her father's tombstone, Minsk, 1920.  
(Courtesy Howard Goldberg)

Jewish world.<sup>47</sup> Small-town Lorain proved compatible enough with my zayde's upbringing. Lorain's Jews had Eastern European (rather than German) roots and were familiar with traditional Ashkenazic Jewish practices. Regardless of how observant they were, they had an attachment to Zionism and a sense of ethnic solidarity. Yiddish was their *lingua franca*.<sup>48</sup>

It was not to remain quite that way. As Weissbach observes, "With the ascendancy of a younger leadership ... Orthodoxy fades."<sup>49</sup> By the close of World War II, Lorain's little immigrant congregation had disappeared. Its founders had aged, and their children, even as teenagers, had spent more time worshipping and socializing at ABI, Lorain's burgeoning Conservative congregation. In 1957 membership at ABI grew to a peak of 350 families—close to a thousand Jews. The vibrancy of Lorain's Jewish community mirrored the growth and energy of the city at large. The steel mills, shipyards, and Ford Motor Plant were operating at full throttle. The 1970 census reported that the city's population had reached a high of 78,000. Then, with changes in manufacturing, international trade, and technology, Lorain experienced gradual decline, deindustrialization, and urban decay. When the Goldberg grandchildren left for college, only one returned to raise a family in Lorain. Then he retired to Arizona.

Today only one of Shraga Feivel Goldberg's descendants lives in Lorain, a grandson and namesake who spent his career in Nashville and moved home to care for his century-old mother. After she died in 2018, he took over her longtime role writing a column for the *ABI Jewish Community News*. He is the last Goldberg in Lorain, but not the last Jew.

Agudath B'nai Israel has thirty-five to forty-five congregants, mostly widows and widowers. On the staff is a lay leader—a retired educator and former shul president, who leads services, conducts funerals and unveilings, visits shut-ins, and is licensed to perform Ohio weddings. He leads a Saturday morning minyan that attracts between twelve and

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47 Shazar, *Der Tog*.

48 East Europeans "set the tone" in most triple-digit Jewish communities. Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 244–248.

49 *Ibid.*, 178.

sixteen worshippers, some remotely via Zoom. The synagogue kitchen, which was glatt kosher until 2013, has become “kosher style,” because no one supervises the separation of utensils for milk and meat. “Things started getting mixed up,” said ABI’s longtime office manager, Sheila Evenchik. Furthermore, a nonsectarian school that rents the synagogue’s ten classrooms brings in nonkosher chicken and ground beef. Although there is occasional talk of ABI merging with a synagogue in Elyria or another in West Cleveland, consolidation is doubtful, because both of those congregations are Reform. ABI’s financial health is relatively strong; out-of-town donations arrive every week from former congregants. In 2010, the ABI cemetery board oversaw construction of a memorial chapel on the grounds of Salem Hebrew Cemetery for funerals and “unveiling luncheons,” Evenchik said. Annually on Holocaust Remembrance Day, congregants speak in local schools and hold a public memorial.<sup>50</sup>

The congregation president is Arnold Milner, a retired podiatrist. Fittingly, it was his immigrant grandfather, Abraham Milner, who in 1925 turned his home into the minyan house that grew into Zichrain Chaim Yankov, the erstwhile Orthodox shul. Milner’s current leadership reinforces memories of the vibrant community that welcomed his grandparents to Lorain more than a century ago. That celebrated era of small-town Jewish life has become the stuff of nostalgia. As Weissbach writes, “This classic era ended soon after World War II when the immigrant experience ceased to have a pervasive influence on American Jewry and when the nature of small-town life changed dramatically.” The slow downward trajectory continues.

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50 Sheila Evenchik telephone interview from Lorain with the author, 7 November 2021. “Agudath B’nai Israel Synagogue,” [www.abitemplelorain.com](http://www.abitemplelorain.com) (accessed 7 November 2021).