



## Keeping the Faith

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Early Santa Clara Valley residents welcomed a devoted community of Jews--even publicly lynched two murderers of a Jewish youth on its behalf. More than a century later, their descendents lost all traces of their Jewish heritage. Is it possible that life here--with assimilation and intermarriage--has been too good?



*From a turn of the century postcard.*

The '49 Gold Rush quadrupled San Jose's population, and the city of 4,000 rode high through its short-lived glory as California's capital. As legislators toasted the state's impending admission to the union with a thousand drinks, Leopold Hart, a Frenchman from Alsace-Lorraine, boarded a transatlantic steamship to join his half-brother, Lazard Lion, on the new frontier.

The two businessmen were among the early members of the city's tiny Jewish community, which by 1860 numbered 50 and had secured a 10-acre cemetery plot. The following year, 10 men organized a Hebrew society to bury the dead, comfort the ailing and pass Jewish traditions on to the young. They declared 50-cent-a-month dues and named it Bickur Cholim, after the Jewish mitzvah of visiting the sick.

By all accounts, the Israelites, as they were called, were well accepted and quickly became anchors of the city's early civic and commercial life. Lion headed San Jose's Bank of Italy, which grew into the Bank of America; Hart founded what became the largest department store between San Francisco and Los Angeles. For close to a century, Hart's was the retail giant of downtown San Jose, which at the time was the region's unrivaled commerce hub.

While their names may carry less cachet than the Levis and the Strausses, the Steinharts, the Haases and the Sterns in the city to the north, whose legacies are enshrined in the Issac Stern Grove in Golden Gate Park, the SF Museum of Modern Art, the SF Public Library and the Steinhart Aquarium, the South Bay community, equally public-spirited but less highbrow, contributed such enduring enterprises as Kragen Auto Parts, Midas Mufflers, A. Hirsch & Son Jewelers and the Markovits and Fox metal recycling concern. Today, such Silicon Valley superstars as Intel, Hewlett-Packard, 3Com, Oracle and Applied Materials are run, respectively, by Andrew Grove, Lewis Platt, Eric Benhamou, Larry Ellison and Dan Maydan, members of the same small, ancient tribe.

Some helped revitalize downtown San Jose after its decline, building the Fairmont Hotel and Park Center Plaza as well as cultural institutions such as the San Jose Symphony (conductors George Cleve and Leonid Grin). Others have been active in law and government. San Jose Mayor Susan Hammer, while not born Jewish, attends religious services from time to time with husband Phil, a past president of Temple Emanuel, formerly Bickur Cholim.



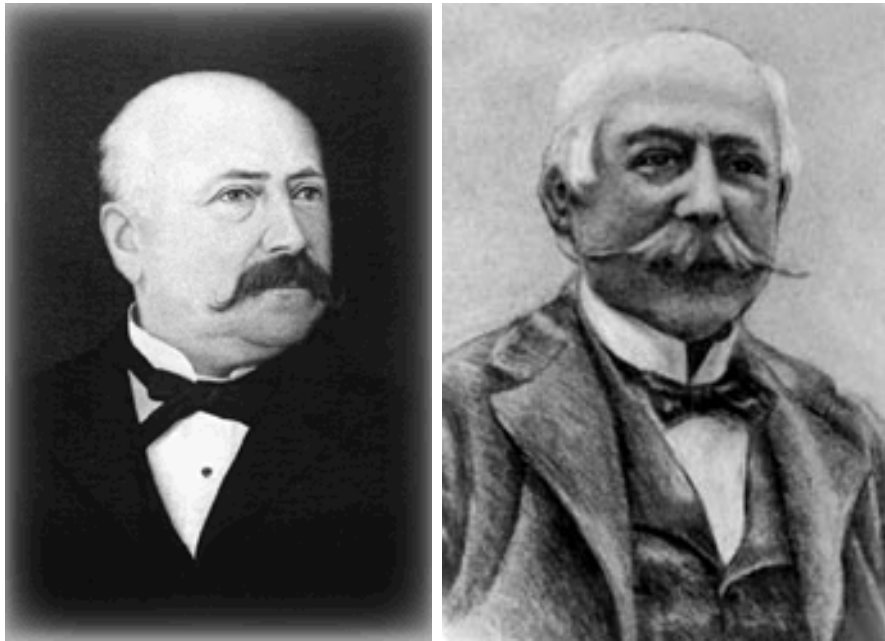
*Rabbi Freund celebrated Jewish traditions with San Jose's future first husband, Phil Hammer, on the right.*

When the community erected its first synagogue in 1870, gentiles ponied up as well, an irony not lost on the French, who wrote in Paris' *Archives Israelites*: "Showing the peculiarity of Christians and Jews in America, a society composed essentially of non-Israelites wanted to contribute 2,000 francs (\$400) for the construction of a new temple."

The community dedicated a temple that August at S. Third and San Antonio streets. Families as far away as San Francisco and San Juan Bautista traveled by wagon to attend services in the \$5,000 building that the local press had promised would be "highly ornamented and really beautiful."

With doors open, Bickur Cholim hired its first rabbi for \$100 a month. Little is known about Rabbi Henry Lowenthal, except that he didn't work out and was discharged a year later for "misconduct in office and violation of contracts." After an interim replacement, the congregation hired its first ordained rabbi in 1873. The board was more cautious this time. They hired Myer Sol Levy on a month-to-month basis after motions for year-long and half-year contracts failed to clear the board.

In May 1874, 10 teenage girls dressed in white with flower sprigs in their hair marched into Bickur Cholim's pulpit to be confirmed. Six months later, 13-year-old Jesse Levy became the congregation's first Bar Mitzvah.



*Leopold Hart founded a retail dynasty.*

Though they represented less than 1 percent of the city's population, the pioneers left a legacy still visible today. Their family names can be spotted on the Lion Building's façade at Second and San Fernando, on the brick wall of the old Hart's warehouse along the railroad tracks behind the Arena and on the storefronts of Stern's Luggage at Valley Fair and Oakridge shopping centers. Clay Stern, great-great-grandson of Bickur Cholim vice president Marcus Stern, will be the fifth-generation operator of the county's oldest family-owned business.

Marcus Stern ran a saddle and harness business that diversified into horse blankets, steamer trunks and fire hoses. His son, Fred Stern, served on both the San Jose City Council and the county Board of Supervisors and attended temple along with his wife, Hattie. Son Harold intermarried, and subsequent generations were raised as Protestants, according to family members.

The Stern story mirrors those of the other descendants of the original Jewish families, who are more likely to take communion or decorate a Christmas tree than pin a mezuzah to their door frame. Absent the persecution that Jews faced in Europe and some parts of the U.S., the valley's Jews never constituted a distinct community. There was never a valley equivalent of L.A.'s Fairfax Avenue or New York's Lower East Side. Indeed the tolerant residents of the fertile valley, with its sunny climate, easy prosperity and tradition of assimilating immigrants of diverse origins, mixed so well with the people of the book that were it not for successive waves of newcomers, the community would have simply melted like French butter into the valley's ethnic stew.

Paul Lion, Lazard's great-grandson, says his forebear married an Episcopalian and his grandfather was raised that way. "The family home was at Second and St. John, right across from the Episcopal Church," Lion says. "My great-grandfather had the minister over for

dinner every Thursday night. It was supposedly a bribe so the church wouldn't ring the bells before 10 on Sunday."



*Hortense Cahen married Leopold Hart.*

Leopold Hart's family kept the faith a generation longer. The patriarch journeyed to France in 1863 and wed 17-year-old Hortense Cahen the next year. They had six daughters and one son, Alexander, who was active in the temple and took over the family business when Leopold died in 1904.

Perhaps no family better exemplified the assimilation of San Jose's Jews into the dominant culture than the Harts. Leopold supplied the single tuxedo that the members of the San Jose Orchestral Society, known later as the San Jose Symphony, passed among themselves for individual portraits, which were then meticulously spliced into a group portrait.

Alexander married a Catholic girl from Baltimore in 1910, and the kids were raised in a secular home at which both the local rabbi and local priests dropped by. Some Hart children accompanied Alex Sr. to temple as well as attending the Jesuit-run Bellarmine school. Son Alex Jr. says, "There was never any discussion [of religion] in the home. My father enjoyed the holy days and would attend temple. My mother enjoyed Easter and Christmas."

Alex Sr. built Hart's into a prosperous enterprise. He lived in what was "considered by many to be the loveliest residence in San Jose," author Harry Farrell writes in *Swift Justice*, and, "in San Jose's mercantile hierarchy he moved on a special plane of respect as an honest dealer, community leader and philanthropist."

Hart was a member of San Jose's exclusive men's club, the Sainte Claire Club, and a president of the Chamber of Commerce. Tragedy struck the Hart family when Alex Sr.'s 22-year-old son, Brooke, who was being groomed to manage the department store, was kidnapped for ransom in 1933. It was the same year that San Jose's small B'nai Brith chapter resolved "that a committee be appointed to get signatures to a petition to the President of the United States against the mistreatment of Jewish people by the Hitler regime in Germany," which had come to power earlier in the year and instituted a boycott of Jewish shops, banks and department stores.



*Paul Lion holds a portrait of his great-great-grandfather, Lazard. Photo by Christopher Gardner.*

San Jose was a far cry from Germany, or even Atlanta, Ga., where pencil factory owner Leo Frank in 1913 was falsely convicted of murdering a 13-year-old girl after a prosecutor inflamed local passions with innuendo about Jewish men seeking gentile girls for their pleasure. The crowds outside the courtroom screamed "Hang the Jew" as the jury selection transpired inside. Following the presentation of the state's flimsy case, the jury took but four hours to convict Frank, though the state's governor subsequently recognized the sham and commuted Frank's sentence. Nonetheless, in 1915, a crowd of well-known local citizens stormed the prison farm where Frank was held and hanged him from an oak tree in Marietta, Ga. A postcard of the lynching was sold throughout the South.

Antisemitism in America rose to its highest historical levels during the 1930s, fueled by the Great Depression, Hitler's ascension to power and the rise of fascism elsewhere in Europe. Employment and housing discrimination and anti-Jewish education quotas surfaced in many parts

of the country, and American demagogues targeted Jews in their political rhetoric.

San Jose, however, couldn't have been more different. In picking Brooke Hart, Farrell writes, his kidnapers "could have chosen no victim whose popularity and place in the community would more surely guarantee the violent retribution that followed."

When the brother of a local church organist and his sidekick were arrested and confessed to tossing the beaten and bound young man off the San Mateo bridge, San Jose's citizenry was enraged. After Brooke Hart's crab-eaten corpse was found by fishermen in the bay's shallow waters more than a week later, an ugly mob gathered outside the steps of San Jose's jail. With a wink from California Gov. "Sonny Jim" Rolph, nearly 40 men rammed the doors and stormed the jail, threw ropes around the killers' necks and dragged them across the street to St. James Park, where they were beaten and lynched as thousands watched.

Thirteen-year-old Alex Hart Jr. had seen the naked bodies of his brother's confessed murderers dangling from the trees in the park. Fifty-five years later, the soft-spoken retired merchant, now 77, sat in the living room of his Los Gatos apartment and volunteered some thoughts about "that horrendous time in our family's life," which the Harts left undiscussed for nearly half a century, until journalist Farrell coaxed two Hart siblings into breaking their silence.



*The Oakland Post Enquirer published photos of the hung kidnappers, which other Bay Area dailies thought better of.*

With his father's foot-long meerschaum pipe framed in a glass case behind him, Hart is dressed in all blue, including a blue pinkie ring. The Harts, he confirms, were perceived generally as a Jewish family, even though the children attended Catholic schools and Father Collins often dropped by the house to play poker.

Hart believes that the mob violence was "absolutely" a statement of support for his family. "It was an expression of how the community felt about my family and about my brother. He was loved."

Of the vigilantism, he is careful to say, "It wasn't the right thing to do." And after a pause, he adds, "But they got what they deserved, if you want to know my personal opinion."

It's a tragic irony that in the year Hitler opened his first concentration camp for Jewish prisoners, San Jose demonstrated its brotherhood with a violent expression of grief and sympathy for the city's best-known Jewish family. In other places, Jews were being killed. San Jose gained notoriety by executing the Jew-killers.

In another park, three blocks to the south, another defining moment came for San Jose's Jews when in 1994 board members of the Christmas in the Park organization elected to transfer a religious nativity scene off of public land to the front lawn of St. Joseph Cathedral across the street. The move came in response to suggestions from several individuals, this writer included, who believed that church-state separation was constitutionally correct.

Inflamed by a front-page *Mercury News* article that suggested that exhibit organizers had "exiled the baby Jesus" from Plaza de Cesar Chavez because of Jewish community pressure, callers jammed phone lines at City Hall and Christmas in the Park offices. Several influential members of the Jewish community sought to distance local Jews from the crèche separation.

"I deeply regret that the issue was raised," said Lil Silberstein, executive director of the local office of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. She expressed relief when the crèche was moved back to the public park a few days later. "I just didn't want the controversy to continue," she added.



*Retired department store executive Alex Hart Jr. says the lynching of his brother's killers "was an expression of how the community felt about my family and about my brother." Photo by Dan Pulcrano.*

Ugly postings began to show up on the *Mercury's* posting area on America Online. A "GMGraves" wrote: "To ... all of the Jews who feel hurt by having to view this scene, I have this to say: My heart really bleeds for you. You comprise less than 5 percent of the population of a predominantly historically Christian nation. If you do not like the icons of the predominant religion in this country, then I say to you that there are two simple alternatives: either don't look, or leave. I know a country where your religion dominates and where Christian icons are rarely, if ever, seen. A country where religious and ethnic freedom is suppressed to the point of violence. But that shouldn't worry you. You are Jews, God's chosen people; your point of view prevails there. The place is called Israel. Go there. If you Jews are offended by my religious icons, I'm even more offended by yours. If I never see another Star of David, or another menorah (sic) again, it would be too soon."

"Jrduke" added, "Our nation was founded with Christianity in mind. By definition, one of the common threads which holds any nation together, is a common religion. ... It should be clear to all that America was founded upon Christian heritage and that it is alright for our government, albeit in non-demonstrative ways, to place a Christian symbol in a public place. GOD BLESS AMERICA."

And at the Plaza, a man who identified himself as a Willow Glen appliance repairman carried a placard urging the sacrifice of liberal Jews. "Cut their hearts out," he amplified.

Suddenly San Jose was no longer the tolerant bastion of religious harmony it once appeared to be, as the virtual lynch mob shouted

down any opportunity for intelligent discussion. The unwritten compact for prosperity and community acceptance of a religious minority had been its tacit agreement to not make waves. When they had fit in, assimilated, intermarried and went along with the conventional wisdom of the majority culture, things went swimmingly. As members of the greater community Jews were well accepted into the social circles and institutions of the valley's elite. But any attempt to assert rights on a controversial subject could bring about a biblical wrath.

In general, San Jose has been relatively free of antisemitism, although some longtime residents can cite an example of discrimination or an antisemitic remark. Yeshiva kids in the late 1970s were sprayed with fire extinguishers by a motorist, and all the tombstones in the Home of Peace Jewish cemetery were once knocked over.

Of Silicon Valley's 1.7 million residents, only 35,000 or so--about 2 percent--identify themselves as Jews, according to the Jewish Federation of Greater San Jose. Fifteen percent--about 5,000--are affiliated with a temple or other Jewish organization. By comparison, Jews in San Francisco represent almost 12 percent of the population. San Francisco has 28 congregations within the city limits; the entire South Bay, with more than double the population, has 21.



*Hart supplied a single suit to the San Jose Orchestral Society, which members passed around to create a composite photo.*

At the local level, political activism by the Jewish community avoids controversy and is frequently limited to taking defensive positions, such as protesting newspaper editorials critical of Israel. There is no large Chanukah menorah in a central park, as there is in San Francisco's Union Square. Jewish organizations here have less funding and fewer members than in many comparable cities, and few historical materials about the valley's Jewish community exist in the public arena. This article is one of the first pieces in the general press to examine the

Jewish community's local impact and role.

Nonetheless, it's clear that Jews have been prominent in shaping the valley in which we live, from its early settler days, through its periods of hypergrowth, to the bustling Silicon Valley we know today. Temple Emanu-El historian Jane Schwartz attributes the absence of ethnic conflict to the fact that everyone came to the valley together with nothing, determined to make something of themselves. "They had no baggage," she says.

To some eyes, the local organized Jewish community could appear ingratiating, assimilationist and meek. To others, it has been a small price to pay for the harmony and prosperity that the area's Jewish citizens have for 150 years enjoyed.

**More Local Jewish History:**

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Article by [Dan Pulcrano](#)

*Metro wishes to express its appreciation to the following individuals and organizations who shared information and photographs: Temple Emanu-El, Temple Beth David, Stephen Kinsey, Clyde Arbuckle's History of San Jose, Alex Hart Jr., Memorabilia of San Jose, Leonard McKay and Harry Farrell.*

*Cecily Barnes contributed portions of this article.*

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[The Rabbis](#) 

From the March 12-18, 1998 issue of [Metro](#).



## Keeping the Faith

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### Rabbi Gitin: A 91-year-old rabbi who still makes house calls



*Lithuanian-born Rabbi Iser Freund still worries about Jewish survival at the age of 101. Photo by Christopher Gardner.*

Rabbi Joe Gitin, 91, wears navy slacks pulled above his waist and a tucked-in button-down shirt. A white handkerchief peers from his breast pocket, with a perfect crease beneath the flap. His wife, Rosalie, sits girlishly, throwing in compliments about her husband and successfully usurping the entire conversation at times. Rosalie's favorite topic this afternoon is her years as a religious teacher at Emanu-El.

"I would teach the children, God gave us a mind to think and a heart to love and he gave us this beautiful world, and it was up to us to make it stay beautiful," she gleams.

Gitin snaps the conversation back by pointing to a portrait of a young woman hanging on the mantle above Rosalie's head. "Who do you think that is?" Gitin twinkles.

"Rosalie?" I guess.

"That's right," he laughs. She laughs too, and looks over her shoulder at the painting of her in her 20s.

Rosalie won't reveal her age.

"A woman never tells," she says definitively.

Rabbi Joe Gitin has been loved and adored by his congregation for 26 years and counting. While I was researching this series of articles, nearly every person I spoke with mentioned Rabbi Gitin, "that wonderful man."

Now retired, the rabbi still gets called upon to visit the sick, perform a marriage or attend a social engagement. During his time as rabbi, the temple grew from 150 members in 1950 to over 1,000 in 1976.

"Whenever I spoke, I always emphasized the essence of Judaism, which is to be good. I taught that if you want to show your love to God, there's only one way to do it: Love your fellow man. That was the essence of my teaching, and that is the essence also of Judaism."

Rosalie looks on at her husband proudly. "He was honored by the mayor, you know." She points to a framed certificate next to the couch.

### **Rabbi Freund: Centenarian worries about interfaith marriages**

Rabbi Iser Freund wears a navy, patchwork blanket across his lap, not for any religious purposes, but because he is an old, old man of 101 years. His thinning white hair is a little wild today, standing on end in certain spots. A glass of cola with a thin, bent straw sits nearby. As I take a seat, the rabbi takes hold of my hand and does not let go for a few minutes.

"He likes to hold hands," his nurse says.

Iser Freund was born and raised in Lithuania until age 11, when he and his mother, sister and brother landed at Ellis Island. The Freunds left Lithuania in a hurry when it was clear that the eldest boys would be forced to join the Army.

Once in America, the family moved to Cincinnati, where Freund and his siblings spent one year in immigrant school, learning the English language. Although the family had been orthodox in the old country, their Judaism gradually reformed in America. Iser and his brother both went on to be rabbis. Freund graduated from Cincinnati's Hebrew Union

College in 1916. He arrived in San Jose just before World War II, in 1939. Before he even had a chance to completely set up his new office at Bickur Cholim, a fire consumed the temple.

"The fire started in the yard in a garbage can and went through the wall all the way to the front of the building. I don't know how it started. Maybe a janitor smoked," Freund said. "Across the street there was a stadium where some Jewish people worked, and they ran over and took the torah out."

Fifty-eight years later, the story of Kurt Opper rescuing the torah has become legend at Temple Emanu-El.

When the war ended, Freund and congregation members began efforts to rebuild a temple. When the structure was complete, Freund changed its name from Bickur Cholim [visiting the sick] to Temple Emanu-El [God is with us].

"What does a temple have to do with visiting the sick?" Freund asks, raising his voice slightly. "Visiting the sick is a good organization for men and women, women particularly. But a temple does much more than that."

Today Freund doesn't go to temple anymore. It's all he can do to make it from the chair to his bed every day. But like any good rabbi should, he still worries about the Jews. His biggest worry, the centenarian says, is interfaith marriages and assimilation.

"Intermarriage is a big problem for the rabbi," he says. "In most cases it's a Christian man marrying a Jewish girl. In most cases they eventually became Christian. Whenever someone in the congregation visited me, I would talk with them about that problem and try to get their daughter to stay Jewish.

"Too much intermarriage," he concludes. "A rabbi worries."

by *Cecily Barnes*

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History

## Keeping the Faith

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### Early Jewish immigrants staked their claims downtown



*A sign by the railroad tracks is all that remains of the once mighty Hart's retailing empire. Photo by Christopher Gardner.*

"Those who were more prosperous stayed in San Francisco because, to expand their businesses, they needed access to the ports," recalls San Jose Jewish historian Steve Kinsey. "The Jews that came here came for different reasons. It was a totally different environment that didn't lend itself to contribution. You wouldn't have found the kind of culture here that was in San Francisco. We just didn't have those types of things."

Instead of building museums, libraries, schools and opera houses, San Jose's earliest Jews constructed a simple and sturdy business community. Market and Santa Clara Street became lined with Jewish merchants, all of whom knew each another from business and the temple.

Hyman Rich, Bickur Cholim's first rabbi, ran a clothing shop with his friend Max Blumenthal. Up the way on Market Street, the tailor shop was owned by Hyman's brother, Jacob Rich, and his friend, Hyman Levy. Down two streets on the corner of Santa Clara and San Pedro, Lazard Lion ran his general merchandise store. Lion later acquired the San Jose Glove Factory, opened a carpet shop across from the Music

Hall building on Knox Block and directed the Commercial and Savings Bank on First and Santa Clara. He, too, had a relative working up the street, his half-brother Leopold Hart, who owned a drugstore that later became Hart's Department Store. Mayer and Jacob Levy set up the Levy Brothers on First and Santa Clara streets. Jacob Atlas started Atlas Auto Wreckers, the South Bay's first automobile dismantling business. The Fox family started the recyclery, Markovits and Fox. Marcus Stern ran his saddle shop downtown. Out of all these businesses, only Stern's, Markovitz and Fox and Atlas Auto Wrecking remain.



*Photo by Dan Pulcrano.*

Hart's Department Store left downtown for the Westgate shopping center in the late 1960s. "Retail went where the customers were," 77-year-old Alex Hart Jr. says. It was later bought out by a regional chain and closed in 1982. Hart remains convinced that had Macy's selected downtown over Valley Fair, downtown "would have remained a wonderful, viable, important shopping district." He debunks rumors that merchants didn't want competition and attributes the loss of Macy's to the store's failure to reach agreement with a landowner over the amount of rental payments on a lease.

Directly across from Millers Outpost in the Oakridge Mall, Stern's luggage shop looks like any other chain retail establishment except that in the cluttered back office, framed photos of Marcus, Fred, Harold and Howard trace the store's legacy back to 1854. Clayton Stern, whose picture hasn't been mounted yet, will take control of the store when his mother, Gloria, retires. He will be the fifth-generation Stern to run what is the oldest family business in Silicon Valley.

Marcus Stern moved to San Jose in 1852 and founded his business two years later. When his son Fred took over the leather shop, it was with

little passion--Fred was more enamored with politics and Judaism. Besides being extremely active with Bickur Cholim, Fred Stern served on the City Council and county Board of Supervisors, says his great-granddaughter-in-law, Gloria Stern. Fred's son Harold, however, was all business. Quiet and focused, he had a distaste for both politics and religion. He would chastise his father for being too involved with politics, and when he inherited the business, a ledger of unpaid debts came with it.

"People would come into the store, and Fred would just write down their name and tell them to pay later. But he wouldn't always know who they were, so he would write things like, 'the man in the gray hat,' " says Gloria Stern, who married Harold's son, Howard. "When he died, there were all sorts of debts, and they didn't know who to collect them from."

When Gloria's husband took over the business, he could juggle both the shop and an interest in community service and politics. Gloria and Howard's son Clay, Gloria tells, is solid business--just like his Grandpa Harold.

"Sometimes we still have people come in and say, 'Oh we remember your store on First Street,' or tell us they knew Harold," Gloria says. "But it happens less and less now. Most of the time they don't leave their name. Sometimes they'll just talk to one of the girls out front, who don't know much about the history."

by *Cecily Barnes*

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Pioneer Meyer Bloom 

From the March 12-18, 1998 issue of Metro.



## Keeping the Faith

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### Sweeping materializations of a pioneer who kept the faith

The descendent of pioneers, Max Bloom at 81 years old still brokers stocks at Prudential Securities in downtown San Jose. His grandfather, Meyer Bloom, left Poland at age 16 in 1863 to evade military service and landed in San Jose four years later with a wagon full of brooms.

"His brother had a factory of brooms in San Francisco," says Max Bloom Jr. from his downtown San Jose office. "He took a bunch of brooms and a wagon and came to San Jose, and apparently slept in the wagon. It must have been an Indian summer. He was selling brooms-- Bloom's brooms."

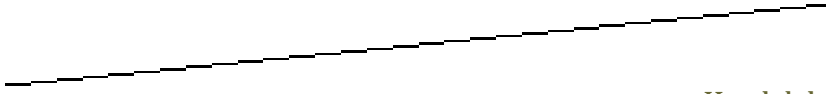
Once in San Jose, Meyer Bloom became active with Bickur Cholim, married his wife, Lottie, and started up a men's clothing store on S. First Street. In 1904, Mayer and Lottie's three sons replaced the clothing shop with a shoe store. Two of the brothers left San Jose soon after, and Max Bloom Sr. remained to expand the shoe business. He, too, was active in the temple and passed the shoe business down to his son, stockbroker Max Bloom Jr., who later sold it. Like his father and grandfather, Max Bloom Jr. is a member of San Jose Rotary and temple Emanu-El.

"As the downtown died and San Jose went through an entire change from agriculture to first industrial and then high-tech, a new population became the business leadership," says Mayor Susan Hammer's husband, Phil, whose family came to San Jose in 1925. "A number of us, however, like Max Bloom and myself, have remained very active in the cultural community."

But the businesses that matter today are not the ones owned by old Jewish families. They are those created by people who moved to the area in the last 20 to 50 years.

"They weren't major movers and shakers in this valley. They just came here to live and establish their roots in a new land," historian Stephen Kinsey says. "But they helped in general to make the roots of this valley--they helped in general to make it grow and mature into what it is today."

by *Cecily Barnes*



Havdalah & History 

From the March 12-18, 1998 issue of Metro.



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### First-ever public event to celebrate Jewish heritage

A few weeks ago, a Willow Glen woman called Councilman Frank Fiscalini to complain about an art sculpture in Wallenberg Park. Why, the woman demanded, was a 7-foot sculpture of a menorah planted in her park? Fiscalini's aide explained that the sculpture was not of a menorah, but of a tree. The caller was appeased, but some members of the Jewish community are not. For years they have looked the other way as the dominant religion erected public displays at holiday time.

In fact, for nearly 20 years, the city of San Jose has pitched in up to \$200,000 annually to remake Plaza de Cesar Chavez into a Christmas wonderland, complete with a nativity scene. Rabbi Leslie Alexander of Saratoga's Congregation Beth David says it's high time the community learned about the city's Jewish history, too.

On March 28, Beth David members will convert the San Jose Historical Museum into a gala of games and information about the history of Jews in San Jose and California. The event, a first for the community, will be called "Havdalah & History."

People should dress in 18th-century attire, come with an empty stomach and wear their dancing shoes. Loads of crafts projects and games will be organized to keep kids busy, and hopefully teach them something about Jewish history in the process.

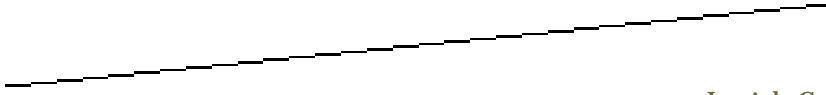
"The goal of this event is to allow people in the Jewish community to experience a special religious event along with a large number of people in their community," Alexander says, "and to inform the community about their history and to create a sense of joy and pride."

Beth David will underwrite the event. Docents and participants will volunteer their time, and the temple will charge an entrance fee of \$18 for adults and \$9 for children.

"We are a private institution renting this facility," Alexander says. "And we're using no city funds."

Alexander says the event will be a havdalah, the conclusion of the day of rest and awakening of the senses. "We'll begin with a Jewish ceremony to end the Sabbath, with sensory imagery, smells and tastes. It will be sensual."

by *Cecily Barnes*



Jewish Cemetery 

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### Strolling down memory lane with Wayne Rose

Wayne Rose moves inconspicuously, his footsteps muffled in the thick carpet. He has puffy cheeks and thinning hair. An overcoat drapes over his arm, and he clutches a fedora hat. We stride toward a black Cadillac with a red interior and drive to Home of Peace, a private cemetery with palms and perfectly trimmed olive trees. The bodies of 1,824 Jews rest beneath the dirt, he says.

There are no foxhole atheists, and usually the first order of business for a frontier community was finding a place to bury their dead. In March 1857, San Jose's Jews purchased graveyard space from what was then called the San Jose Common Council for \$1. It was a timely transaction. Just days after the purchase, 7-month-old Joseph Brownshield died an untimely death, filling the oldest known grave at Home of Peace.

With expert knowledge of the grounds, Rose leaps rocks, sidesteps holes and lands dead-center before a mini mausoleum that reads, B-L-O-O-M. "This is the only private family mausoleum in the whole cemetery," he says. A few feet away, he pays respects to Eugene Rosenthal, who died in 1935. "He was a judge in San Jose," Rose says. "And this guy over here, Leon Jacobs, he had a clothing store in downtown."

At the freestanding mausoleum at the edge of the cemetery, Rose points to another stone, this time with a little jest in his voice. "Does that name sound familiar to you?" he asks, referring to a stone with the name Hirsch printed on it. I think for a moment. "Ever heard of A. Hirsch & Son Jewelers?"

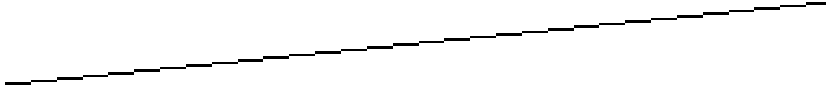
The game goes on for nearly an hour. Rose grows thoughtful, remembering the names, stories and businesses. Louis Lacker had been a doctor. Harry Jacobs owned a camera shop. Albert Kragen founded Kragen Auto Parts. Rose moves quickly and stops to shake his index finger for nearly 10 seconds before speaking.

"Nathan Treister," he pauses. "If it were possible to be a Jewish Santa Claus, it would have been him. He was just a wonderful guy, always

wanting to help somebody. Every Friday night, without fail, he and his wife Bertha were at temple."

Then Rose falls quiet; the game seems to have stopped. "I buried most of them in here," he says. "I knew most of them, too."

by *Cecily Barnes*



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