

MRS. BENJAMIN A. DAVIS

5557 Raleigh Street

(Received December 16, 1965)

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15217

Dr. Jacob Marcus
American Jewish Archives
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your kind letter and for the return of the paper. I am quite conscious of my religion and of the early facts of Uniontown, Pennsylvania - some related to me by my mother and others remembered by me.

My father, Barney Cohen, son of Ziskind Alexander Cohen and his wife Deborah came to Uniontown in 1881 from New York City. He had lived and married there by a Rabbi of the many year extinct Rivington Synagogue. His Hebrew first name was Dov Baer. My mother, a native of Sualka, Poland, was named Fraida Resencofsky.

My father had one child in New York when he decided after owning a small manufacture of men's clothing to go West

By coincidence he met a young man coming from Nirrestead, Poland, in the Pennsylvania Railroad Station and, recognizing they were both Jews, struck up an acquaintance which led to my father eventually coming to Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

The gentleman, G. M. Silverman, said he was enroute to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to stay with an Uncle Charles Feldstein who owned a peddler supply store and he received my father well. Started him out with a pack on his back with seasonal merchandise, including red flannel underwear and other things which he quickly disposed of. After a very successful business, he suggested to my father that he go to Uniontown, Pennsylvania, which had a small but very good Jewish community.

My father prospered and soon owned a home and wagon and he travelled to Farmington, Chalk Hill, and Marklesyburg, where he met a fine non-Jewish farmer storekeeper and he decided to go into business in Uniontown for a couple of years to see if he liked it. So, the firm of Thomas & Cohen was born. It prospered but Mr. Thomas decided to go back to his small store and farm -- and they parted dividing everything equally and having a sale. Our friendship with Thomas and family continued for many years after and till he passed away.

Before that my father lived with a non-Jewish family by the name of Crawford who treated him very well. By that time he accumulated enough to buy a home on Stewart Avenue, so he sent for my mother and brother in New York.

When my mother arrived, the Jewish population which consisted of about nine families and many bachelor Jews, welcomed her family warmly. These families were all German Jews, had been in Uniontown some for twenty years or so, but never had any Jewish services. My father's mother was of Sephardic extraction. His only sister Shana and her husband had died and sent their three sons to the Hague where their family had originated from. Their name was Mendelsohn -- but the Nazis eliminated them.

The families who lived in Uniontown that I remember were:
Mr. and Mrs. Max B um and family, who were quite prosperous

Mr. and Mrs. Sol. J. Rosenbaum
Mr. and Mrs. Epstein and family
Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Fell and family
Mr. and Mrs. Alex Miller
Mr. and Mrs. Hirsch, daughter of Max Baum
Mr. and Mrs. Hyams
Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Davis
Mr. and Mrs. I. Stern
Mr. and Mrs. Joe Rosenbaum
G. M. Silverman
Mr. and Mrs. Goldstein
Mr. and Mrs. Rosenberg
Isaac Scheman
Mr. and Mrs. Harris Cohen
Mr. and Mrs. Elias Goodstein
Mr. and Mrs. Lou Meyers
Mr. Aaron and Emil Levinson

Some of these were bachelors and later married and reared their families in Uniontown, but there were only about nine or so families when Sol J. Rosenbaum and my father talked about forming a service for Holiday and other getting together in the name of Judaism.

They decided to have Reform services, as Dr. Wise was active in America with Reform services and his ideas about religion for our people was right.

My father was more concerned with having Jewish services even though he was reared traditionally and was more concerned about being informed. So a Torah was installed in our parlor, and Mr. Epstein, from Alsace Lorraine, took charge of it and the services. I remember my mother saying they met a Mr. and Mrs. Meyer Miller for three months but they moved to Chicago -- so the first services and first Holy Holiday services was held in our home.

But I was born on Yom Kippur even, at Kol Nidre time, on September 18, 1885, so it was moved to my Uncle Harris Cohen, who had come from New York with his brother-in-law, Lou Meyers and family the year previous.

There was no name given to the organization -- just they worshipped together and bought a Torah and the books required.

The families increased, so they moved downtown to a room and they held Sunday School there -- they called it Sunday School then. The older men taught the children, which numbered about fifteen. Then we moved to a room above a store on Main Street, and then to the Club the Jewish people formed called the Standard Club.

I started when I was four years old and well do I remember catachism and the pictures of religious aspect that was taught and given to us.

Well do I remember when the Orthodox people came in numbers about 1899. One woman taught me to read and write Yiddish - up to that time I only understood English. Then she taught me prayerbook He brew, and am I happy because now I read my Hebrew prayers in our Temple.

By 1899. Mr. Aaron Feldstein and family - a relative of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Feldsteins, came from Europe. The Friedberg family came too. My father aided them to get settled and they started an Orthodox synagogue also in their home - that didn't take form until Mr. and Mrs. Ziff also came at this time. Mr. Sol Cohen, of Cohen Furniture, moved to Uniontown and he bought a small building for worship of the Orthodox there.

In 1908, I married to Mr. Davis, brother of Jacob Davis, and moved from New York to Uniontown and joined the Temple and was active. My two sons were confirmed there and my daughter, Janet Anne, was confirmed by Dr. Joshua Stern, of Montreal Temple. He spent five years as Rabbi of our Temple in Uniontown and was well beloved and I've seen him since. I was active in our Temple. Was President of the Council of Jewish Women. Was President of the American Legion Auxilliary of Uniontown. Was charter member after the First World War, in which I lost two brothers. Was founder of Hadassah, with Mrs. Elias Goodstein, there. Was active in Red Cross in War I, and very active in Pittsburgh in War 2 where we moved about thirty years ago.

My husband was first Zionist President of Uniontown and also President of B'nai B'rith. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and is buried in Temple Sinai cemetery eleven years ago. His parents came here in 1875. He was president of Shaare Torah Synagogue and brought Rabbi Sivitz here.

I remember Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Welss, who came to Uniontown from Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1898. They were fine people.

My father-in-law, Mr. Hyman Davis, of 1321 Fifth Avenue, had a furniture store in Homestead about 1890.

I am a member of Temple Sinai for about twenty years - a charter member. Rabbi Levinson was our first Rabbi. Our dear Rabbi Aaron Ilson is in office since 1955. I am Honorary Trustee of our Auxilliary and am very active. I attended a sixty-year old anniversary of our Temple at the Smmit, in Uniontown, last summer. They are not interested in what happened before they built the Temple, but Rabbi Broudy there was interested, but they need youth and new people to progress.

I have written much more than I intended, but I hope I've given some light on the early Temple as I lived it. I just noticed when I was rereading Memoirs of American Jews, 1775-1885, that you are the author. It gave me pleasure.

Thanking you for your interest, I am, most humbly,

(Mrs. Benjamin A.) Dora C. Davis

Mrs. Benjamin A. Davis
5557 Raleigh Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217

The following was copied from History of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, by James Hadden (1913).

The Beth Israel congregation was organized August, 1904, and held its first meeting in the Standard Club Rooms with Rabbi Isadore Reichert, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, as rabbi being called here July 8, 1904.

This congregation erected a neat brick synagogue on East Lafayette Street, at a cost of \$25,000.

After serving the congregation three and one-half years, Rabbi Reichert resigned this charge and preached his farewell sermon January 10, 1908.

The congregation now numbering 100 pew holders. On January 10, 1908, William Baum presented to the church a fine perpetual light for over the altar, in memory of his late mother, Mrs. Max Baum, this going just nine months since her death.

Rabbi Dobrin, for the past three years pastor of a C eveland congregation, assumed charge of this congregation Friday night, September 11, 1908.

Services were opened by Sol J. Rosenbaum, who read the regular Friday night services.

Rabbi Dobrin resigned this charge April 30, 1909.

Rabbi William Sonenberg, of Philadelphia, was extended a call to this congregation October 28, 1910.

The officers of this congregation are Max Baum, president; Lee Stern, secretary, and Sol J. and Joseph Rosenbaum, Isadore Frank, G. M. Silverman, and D. Goldstein, trustees.

According to the old History of Uniontown, the following also was printed:

The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith 471. This fraternal organization of the Jewish people of the town was organized with thirty-one members May 19, 1898, with the following officers:

President	Solomon J. Rosenbaum
Vice President	G. M. Silverman
Secretary	Lee Stern
Treasurer	Aaron Levinson
Inside Guard	Daniel Cohen
Outside Guard	Alex Miller

Jacob Davis, Isaac Silverman, Barney Cohen were trustees.

The institution of this lodge was celebrated at a grand banquet in the Standard Club, at which the following visiting officers of the Pittsburgh, Pa., lodge were present:

Josiah Cohen, Past Grand Pres.	
O. H. Rosenbaum, 2nd Vice President	Joseph Mayer
Charles H. Joseph	D. H. Goldman
David Hollander	
Abram E. Abram	
Solomon Kaufman	
Henry Jackson	
Charles Van Ullem	
Revered D. L. Mayer	
J. A. Peley	

MRS. BENJAMIN A. DAVIS
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MARK

March 28/1966

Dr. Jacob R. Marcus
American Jewish Archives

Dear Sir:

I am very happy
that I could have been of help
to you in any way and consequently
didn't answer sooner.

My husband was not related to
Barnet Davis but ~~his~~^{his} father was
a friend of his.

Mr. Barnet Davis brother Charles
Davis lived on the Bluff when Duquesne
University is now located and he worshipped
at the home of his ^{grand} uncle Baer Jacobs
his mother's brother who settled in Pgh
about 1870 and purchased a private
home on the Bluff where he

conducted Orthodox services for the people
who lived in the vicinity of Sebban & Holladay.
He was a private citizen, in business
but religious.

Also William Davis founder of the
First B'nai B'rith Auxiliary wife of Simon
Davis also in the purely business has a
dear friend of the ^{son} Davis family and often
came to Uniontown to participate in
Happy and sad occasions.

William Davis preceded my brother-in-
law Harold I think in the conduct
of the East Broadway Educational
alliance in N.Y. He married a
non-Jew girl I had one child and
died at a very early age.

Mrs. Burnett Davis was my guest in
Uniontown to participate in Hadassah
affairs for a day.

She was a very remarkable woman.

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and secretary in civic affairs and
the B'nai B'rith congregation

She had one daughter
Mrs Theodore Abrams who is active
in public affairs and in the B'nai B'rith
Congregation

I am looking forward to going to
Uniontown Pa. April 12 with the president
of the Sunday School of our congregation who
is to speak there. She also was born
in Uniontown Pa. also will go to
Greensburg Pa. to a regional conference
on April 20th of our congregation under
Pres. Mrs. Julia Diamondstone.

I am glad that at the age of eighty
I am alert and able to participate in
local and congregation affairs

Thank you very much for your interest
I am cordially
Dora L. Davis