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THE SECOND PROMISED LAND

The mission of this paper is to tell something of the Jews

in Hopkinsville, but first we should dwell upon some of the history of this ethnic group of people. There are just a little more than 13 million Jews in the world, comprising less than one fourth of the world's population. So few in number, yet so great in ability. There is no doubt about it, the Jews must have special gifts. They have the gift of survival and are the oldest of any people on earth still around with their national ethnic and cultural heritage intact. The gift of talent in every field of endeavor...and perhaps most important of all, the gift of memory. It is the Jews who gave and have given the world an understanding of the importance of history. The idea of history is a Jewish invention. It is called the Bible. It speaks the language of "remember". Remember what happened here, Remember what your ancestors taught you. Remember what the Lord did for you. Remembering will make you better. Remembering will make you smarter. Remembering will transform you from a people of history to a people of destiny. That was the message Jews took from God and attempted to teach the world.

The past is history and the future is mystery. The time we live in right now is a gift from God--and that is why it is called the present. And to make the most of a present, we

have to try to use the insights gleaned from the past to create a better future.

On July, 20, 1958 the Israeli government declared "Anyone declaring in good faith that he is a Jew and who does not profess any other religion, shall be registered as a Jew...in other words if you say you are Jewish, that is good enough for us.

In 1960, Israel's supreme court tried to clarify for purposes of this law (of Return), that a Jew is someone born to a Jewish mother, or converted (to the Jewish faith) and not a member of another religion. Jews love to argue, to analyze, and to see three sides of every question..So you are a Jew if your mother is Jewish, and how was your mother determined to be Jewish?

The most important denominations of Judahism are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Reform Judahism has within the recent past adopted paternal descent as equally valid for determining Jewish status.

How odd it is for God to choose the Jews. The response comes, "It is not so odd. The Jews chose God". Jews are obligated by law to review the Bible in its entirety every year, dividing it into manageable weekly sections. The widespread custom when a child turned three, was to write the letters of the Hebrew alphabet on a board in honey and have the child learn them as he licked them off, equating their meaning with the taste of sweetness. Jews always wear hats because they never know when they will be forced to

travel. What is not said, but probably is more important is that they always made sure to have something under their hats and inside of their heads...because physical possessions could be taken from them, but what they accumulated in their minds would always remain the greatest "merchandise" one possesses.

The Jews left the promised land but not because they did not believe in the promise. History often decrees that decisions often go against our will. Jews became wanderers over the centuries for many reasons. They did not want to go. A conquered people has no choice. Assyria, Babylonia, Rome ...major empires of the past, constantly sought to displace the Jews from their little parcel of land...Israel. A tiny country consisting of ten thousand square miles...yet its position as a land corridor brings three continents together, Africa, Asia as well as Europe as a whole. This area was unique with a strategic military importance. In their quest for world power, the great nations of antiquity were obliged to deploy their armies through this narrow coastal plain of Palestine in order to invade other lands...The Holy Land for the Jews became the "must have land" for seekers of world power and dominion. And so whether from a political perspective the Jews broke their covenant with God, they were forced to flee by the ever present invaders.

The on going confrontation with Christianity throughout the

ages turned the homeless state of the Jews to a religious

statement. Those who rejected Jesus were condemned to wander over the face of the earth. Whenever Christian countries had the power to do so, they made sure this became true. It is important to stress that in both the Jewish religion and culture that the greatest mitzvah and moral imperative is to ensure their survival. The saving of life, one's own or another's supercedes everything else. So, as important as it may be to live in Israel, if your children cry for food and stomach growls for sustenance one is going to strive to satisfy these longings. Jewish law not only permits but demands that you go where ever you can make a living. Having to choose a place to live that offered a greater chance for survival, where did the Jew go? Wherever he was allowed to enter. The warmer the welcome the greater number of Jews would emigrate there. One country would open its doors and then at other times another. Rulers changed and national policy was altered. A friendly country at one time became a hotbed of anti-semitism. But in all of the great movements necessitated by these changes, the forced wanderings and diaspora years of existence, two great ironies surfaced: Their wanderings brought them into contact with other cultures and this gave them a world view. It allowed them to absorb the wheat and discard the chaff of

others among whom they were forced to live. It taught them to survive in every type of climate, and to prosper. From the seed of their suffering bloomed the potential for great blessings. The Jews were able to have an influence on many

countries. They were meant according to their Biblical teachings to be a Kingdom of Priestly people. (Exodus 19:6) That is the Jewish nation was to be to the rest of the world what the priest is to the Jewish people. The only way they could fulfill that, would be by becoming a part of the larger world. Being forced to mix with others, they in turn served as a powerful moral force, social conscience and a teacher of all mankind. When historians look back at places where Jews have been they have prospered. When Jews were exiled, the lands that forced them to leave soon found themselves impoverished and declining in power.

The estimated Jewish population in the US in 1790 was 1,400 and in 1840, when the Jews found Hopkinsville, was at 15,000. In 1900, the population in the US rose to 1,058,000 and in the 1930's at four and a quarter million people.

Today we are the most populous country for Jewish living and culture even larger than Israel which is number two.

In just about every European country, one will find that the Jews were there for awhile and that they contributed to the economy of the land, and when they gained enough to gain the

envy of their neighbors, were told they had to get out...and leave all their wealth behind. The Jews were the movers forced to flee constantly from one place to another and they were always terrified when they would receive their next eviction notice.

They were forced into the money lending profession by the Christian Church. A mercantile system was begining in

Western Europe and capitalism was becoming aforce in international relations. According to the medieval Canon Law of the church, Christians were forbidden to lend money at "usury". Yet, society could not function without somebody lending money.

The Jews were locked out of the feudal system of nobles, and serfs. They were not allowed into the guilds, and the union for artisians and craftsmen. So they took on the one occupation that the Christians would not touch and became masters at it. Money lending proved to be a blessing and a curse. Many Jews amassed great wealth in this but it proved to be an ideal way for the church to condemn them. They were labeled "dispicable money lenders" and used this as an excuse to get the governments to cancel all debts owed to them and then to expel them from the country. This scenario repeated itself over and over and they prayed that they could find a place where they could settle peacefully where

the power of the church was not so strong, where they could develop their talents without fear of persecution. For awhile they thought Eastern Europe, and what is today Russia and Poland, as being the answer.

In Kiev and Lithuania the rulers knew that the Jews could help them, so they invited them for the purpose of developing commerce and improving their finances. Catherine I decided in 1727 to solve the problem of the Jews by expelling them from the Russian land, but it took just a year for her to realize how much her kingdom lost from this

expulsion so she offered a compromise: The Jews were permitted to visit temporarily the fairs of Little Russia for commercial purposes, but they were only allowed to sell their goods at wholesale, not retail. Poland, too, welcomed the Jews as they were being expelled by other countries. They imported German Jewish traders and money lenders to help them turn into a strong empire. The name for Poland means "here rest". The Polish King Boleslaw the Plus issued a charter known as the statute of Kalisz, giving equal protection to both Christian and Jews. He forbade the desecration of synagogues, Jewish schools, and cemeteries. Full protection was given to Jews and their possessions. Poland prospered and let the Jews lead their own lives, forced them to pay taxes, and to form their own crafts and

guilds. They developed their own language, Yiddish, which is German with a Jewish accent.

These good times were to end when the Cossacks rebelled against the Poles and took out their wrath upon the Jews. In a year and half, half of the Jews were eliminated, and the rest were used as a scapegoat. In desperation, they survived by turning to their faith to respond to the persecution that they had to endure. It was in these times that the Kabbalah was derived, a form of Jewish mysticism. When their lives were a hell they found solace in the Kabbalah, a tradition that told all about heaven. If you were a beggar or pauper, one could take comfort in knowing you would be reincarnated and perhaps next time, could come back as a rich man. The

Talmud teaches you how to serve God. Kabbalah shows you how you can actually become one with Him, and shares the secrets of the Bible so that you can not only know more about your faith but even be able to predict the future.

Traditionally, the only fundamental requirement for the formation of Jewish public worship has been the presence of a minyan, a quorum of ten adult men. Little is required in order for a group of individuals to organize for public worship. Practice does not require that prayer services be conducted with the participation of a rabbi, or within a synagogue building. Jews in the US have enjoyed an almost

complete freedom to organize their religious lives and their communal institutions. In Kentucky, as in other places where Jews have settled, any assembly of Jews that wished to establish itself formally as a congregation usually has been able to do so with out interference. In Kentucky there have been less than thirty Jewish congregations to come into existence since the 1850's.

Jewish communities have established themselves generally in the river towns of Owensboro, Henderson, and Paducah, here in Western Kentucky and Louisville, Covington and Newport in the Northern sections, but in the interior there have been communities in Lexington and Hopkinsville blessed with a Synagogue.

The Jewish Communities have divided into three principal denominations. The Orthodox which is primarily conducted in

Hebrew and unaccompanied by musical instruments, and they are conducted exclusively by males. In the Reform congregations families sit together and heads may be bare. Services often are accompanied by an organ and choir, and frequently translated into English. In Conservative and traditional congregations, much of the orthodox liturgy is retained and there is no organ, but families sit together. The Reform congregations tend to hold their main Sabbath

service is on Friday evening. This is mainly because Reform Judaism has dropped the age old prohibition of labor on Sabbath and has recognized that for most American Jews, Saturday is no longer a day of rest reserved for prayer and study and relaxation.

In larger cities there have been over the years several synagogues, due to the fact that those settlers will bring the customs from the countries from which they came...thus the Polish Jews and the German Jews brought their loyalties to worship and disdain others from other ethnic derivation. One of the best known jokes on this theme is the one about a Jewish survivor of a shipwreck who spent several years on an uninhabited island. When he was discovered, the marooned Jew offered to take his rescuers on a tour so they could see how he had been living while waiting to be found. He had erected several rude structures out of materials available on the island. A dwelling, a workshop, a storehouse, a cabana by the beach, and two huts to serve as a synagogue. "Why two synagogues?" he was asked. "All of these years you have

been alone." "Well," he answered, pointing to one of the huts, "this is the synagogue I go to, and the other is the one I would not set foot in." Thus it was even in Hopkinsville. Most went to Adath Israel Synagogue on Sixth Street when it was constructed in 1925 but then other Jews

went to Nashville for Reform services or to Evansville for Orthodox services. Twenty per cent of those of Jewish heritage like the Roseboroughs did not practice their Judahism at all.

In Kentucky, the height of the population of Jewish peoples was 19,553 in 1927 and has declined since. In Hopkinsville, we had a population of 81 in 1878 to a maximum of 140 in 1947. It since has decreased to about 5 today.

It appears that the Oppenhiemers were one of the earlier families here. There is a record in Carroll Parish, Louisiana where they applied for naturalization relinquishing loyalties to Ernest Augustus King of Hanover; this in 1847. Recorded is a letter of recommendation at Christian County Courthouse in the indenture bonds for a recommendation for Israel Oppenheimer in case he opened a mercantile establishment. I found a transaction, September 1854, where Henry Oppenhiemer & Brunetta, his wife & Samuel Hirsch, trustee for said Brunetta Oppenhiemer, along with John and Thomas Brown of the town of Hopkinsville, for a note of \$100 sell a house and lot known as Lot #7 in the original plan of Hopkinsville being the same location later as the Bank of Hopkinsville now known as Ben Fletcher's law office.

Then Jan 1st 1857 came Louis Elb of the town of Batesville, County of Independance, State of Arkansas, on the one part,

and Babot Oppenheimer, late widow and relict of Bernard Oppenheimer, as the said Louis and Babot are about to be united in wedlock and that Louis is desirous that Babot should have a singular interest in the buildings and merchantile business.

Louis and Babot, upon their marriage lived, across the street in a building that they bought, located south of Bridge Street, now west 7th, and bounded by the Glass property from William Western and wife, of Memphis. Thus to this union was born Moses L. Elb in 1869. Now Moses or Mose, as we called him, married Fannie Moayan, whose family was in business at the location on 9th Street at the property occupied by Tom Wade and Clayton's Jewelry. John Moayan moved this business to consolidate his store in a space between 9th and 10th, which included the store building of Carl's and Mildred-Sue Shop. John Moayan was born in 1833 in Amsterdam and imigrated to this country at age 18. He began his career working for Louis Elb & Co When he saved enough money he went into business for him self with M Lipstine. They called them selves "Poor old Lip" and "Honest John" . Later when the disolved partnership he called himself, "The Farmers friend". He provided his farmer friends with a haven in his store and often fed them while they were in town selling their dark fired tobacco crop. His obituary calls him Hopkinsville's wealthiest

merchant. He made it all in 33 years of business here in Hopkinsville. Louis Elb, the father of my friend Moses Elb came from Hanover, Germany and to Hopkinsville by the way of Batesville, Arkansas. These families may not have been the first into our city but were followed by many others. Last summer I walked the Jewish Cemetery on Hope Street. In the courthouse I found the following deed in book 43 page 61: where Evelina Sharp executor of the estate of Fidelio C. Sharpe conveyed to Louis Elb, Henry Oppenheimer, Bernard Rosenstein and to other members of the Israelitish Church, now living at Hopkinsville, for 130 dollars, one quarter acre of land laid off by W.M. Bell, the county surveyor, to have and to hold forever for the benefit of the Jewish People to be held for a Burying Ground. The earliest burial there was a child Rebecca, daughter of B and B Oppenhiemer, who died at age of seven months, being buried July 9th 1854. Whether she was buried on this land or moved to this place, I do not know. The last burial in this plot was Jake Meyer who was born in 1875 and died July 21st 1947. In checking Anne Meador's burial record we find that 34 are buried here. From the obituaries in the New Era we found one that was buried there without a headstone, that of Joe Metz a clothing merchant of Trenton, Ky. It is not likely there will be any more burials here, as many of the Jewish people who lived here are buried elsewhere...The Sabels and Gellers use Mt Carmel Cemetery in Evansville; The Bohns, the Orthodox Cemetery for Polish in Nashville; the present day

Myers, in Memphis, and the Franklin's were buried in Louisville.

The will of Henry Bohn is interesting dated Jan 18th 1923 as it reads that his remains, are to be taken to the Jewish cemetery of Polish Orthodox Jews at Nashville; and a guard to be placed over my grave for a period of 30 days, day and night. A monument to be engraved in the Hebrew language at my grave translated to say Henry Son of Isac Bohn, Hopkinsville, Ky., birthday 1863. (this translated in 1943 by S.Klien for W.E. Rogers, Jr.) If no synagogue is erected in Hopkinsville by the time of his death a gift to the Orthodox Jewish Church, not reformed church, of \$5,000 paid upon completion of plans and a contract let, and that his son in-law, Sam Klein, be the leader; and weekly meetings be held Friday night and Saturday mornings and every Jewish Holiday and provided "H. Bohn" be set in stone over the door. To Lozday Poland, the city of my birth, \$100 for a Jewish Synagogue. To the Mayor of Balnesse, Palistine, The Holy Land, \$100 to be used to keep up a meeting place of my soul for the 1st 12 months, every morning and every evening after my death, and then to be used for same purpose once every year, on date of my death.

Then comes Wolf Geller who came from a small town near Kiev, Russia. Wolf was enrolled into the Russian Army for six years, had a wife and child there. He was stationed in Warsaw and there became enthralled with the symphonic music

which remained with him all his life. He opted to go to

America above his parents objections as he was an only son. He struck out alone by rail going to Hamburg and then to New York. Upon his arrival he sought the Jewish community and was not enamored with it, for it was so different than the small town of his birth, Sokolifkow. He moved south, first coming to Evansville, and looked up the Jewish community there and got a job. When he made enough money he send for his wife and child(Jennie). He then heard of a store in Hopkinsville that was for sale and came down and bought it. This being from the estate of Peter Postell which is a story in itself-- He rented the building and opened up a mercantile business. He lived on 6th Street east of the Episcopal Church. His home was one of music as they played the music he loved each night. This home was near the soon to be constructed Adath Israel Synagogue which he drew plans and patterned after, as well as named after, the one he knew in Evansville. (This being 1925). The Synagogue was a center for Jewish Culture in this area of Kentucky, as on holy days people from the surrounding area would come for celebration and worship. The synagogue disolved circa 1977 after the male population had dwindled where services were not performed. A heavy snow weakened the roof, and then in the fall a heavy rain came and the roof fell but not before the

local Historian removed the pulpit or lecturn from the building.

Henry Bohn who came from Losdial, Poland was the first of his family to come to this country, coming in 1883. He also

enticed the Franklins to come, as they were related. The Franklin's original name was Karanewiski and came from the northern Polish town of Druskieniki near the Niemen River an area today a part of Lithuania. Ben Franklin married Lottie Lapechinsky, also from Poland, and their parents sold cheese and butter in a resort/spa town called Seray also in Poland. Mose Bohn says that his father Sam was born in Vilno Gharen in Russia. They spoke Polish as well as Yiddish. Sam next married Mary Franklin a niece of Lotties in 1916. They had four children, Mose, Hyman David, Ester and Jerry. Sam started working in Henry Bohn's store and eventually took it over and called it "Sam Bohn" He sold items ranging from tobacco canvas to clothing, paint, and oil cloth. This store was on 6th Street, and the family at first lived above it until they moved to 122N. Main. H.D. and Mose bought out Sam and opened the "Factory Outlet" at 7th and Main; but Sam decided he did not want to retire, so he kept his store open therefore competing with his sons. Sam closed his business in 1960 and Factory Outlet closed with the death of H.D. in the 1970's.

Henry Bohn brought over many of his relatives and sponsored them in the store until they could master the language and the methods of trade; then they would go into the surrounding towns to open their own store. It has been said that the Jewish Community would back these immigrant business men up to three times in an effort for them to

establish themselves, but if they failed after the third attempt, then they cut them off.

A niece of Henry Bohn was Lela, coming in 1909. She was born in Germany, as were her parents. She married Frank Gordon and moved to Crofton where Frank ran a store there as his brother Ben did.

Max Myers was born in Germany and came here in 1875 where he opened a meat market at 9th and Clay. He died at age 86 as the result of a fall in his meat market. His phone number was #1 for his business when the Cumberland Telephone Co opened. He was buried in the Jewish Cemetery which was also called Cedar Grove in the early years.

Jake Sabel came to this country at the age of 9 from Odessa on the Black Sea. He came to join his older brothers, Max and Abe, who were in business here. Their business was on 9th near the L&N depot, and then they moved nearer the downtown area in the building next to the then post office on

the corner of Virginia and 9th Streets. When Abe came back from France in 1918 their disagreement was such it was best for them to split and Abe moved to 6th and Virginia and Max began to travel. Jake had already begun a Salvage or Junk yard on Bethel and 8th. Jake married Jennie Geller and Mose Bohn married her sister Dorothy.

William Lewis Bamberger was a fine business man working in the John Moayon; store begining there when he was 15 where he was general manager and buyer. He was adopted in the

family and died at the home of Moses L. Elb at age 39, and was known as Colonel Bamberger.

Solomon Sacks came here from Seattle and had a business of buying furs and herbs. A sign exposed by the removal of the Central Hotel revealed his advertisement on the wall as one who buys gensing, furs, wool and feathers from the local gatherers of these things. It was from the obituary of his wife in the Friday September 30th 1898 edition of the Hopkinsville Kentuckian, we find that she was buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery, otherwise known as Adath Israel as well as Jewish Cemetery.

The Frankels came from Bamburg, Bavaria by the way of Shelbyville, Indiana in 1862 and established a dry goods business; this being Mose Frankel. He went to Cincinnati

in 1883, leaving his sons to continue the business here. They were Henry M., Joseph M, and Sam who were successful in their business. Joseph moved to Atlanta where he was a carpet merchant. Later the family went into the tobacco business, as Malcolm, son of Henry, was vice president of the Hancock Warehouse Co. as well as director of one of the local banks. Sam continued Frankels' Busy Store until 1921 when he closed the store to take care of other business ventures. He gave a farewell party at Hotel Latham for all of the employees who worked for him in the store. Of recent years the Myers family came to Hopkinsville in 1935, from Holly Springs Mississippi, having originated in Russia near Kiev. JD had the Vanity store in Mayfield and

Arnold and Frances came first, to be joined by I.C. and later Sarah, to form Arnolds. This was a store unique for this town, as customers from Nashville and surrounding towns depended upon them for the latest fashions. It is sorely missed by the ladies here.

This is an over view of many of the families that found Hopkinsville as a haven from persecution and exile. As the Jews came into the port cities on the East Coast, many of them that migrated to the south and found a haven in the small towns. They were more like the villages from whence they came from in Europe. This to them was a new Promised

land as they made a contribution to the history and welfare of this city. This is an era that is soon passing with the moving of Howard Myers to Lexington this fall, and Dorothy Klein being 93, the remnent of the Jewish community will be Leo.