The History of Jewish Education in Washington, D.C. 1852-1970

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Abstract
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The History of Jewish Education in Washington, D. C. 1852-1970

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PREFACE

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the organizational and administrative development of Jewish education in the Greater Washington area. Foremost consideration will be given to the early administration of congregational schools and its effects on the later trend toward the community administration of Jewish education.

The development of Washington's Jewish education is divided into three general time periods. The first covers the years between 1852 and 1900 when the foundation of Jewish education in the District of Columbia is being laid. In the early years individual congregations establish a trend by organizing their own religious schools without external assistance. Identifying this trend is an important aid in understanding the obstacles facing the later development of a central agency for Jewish education in Washington, D. C.

The second period, 1900-1938, witnessed the great influx of immigrants into the United States. In Washington, D. C., the Jewish population increased from 3500 to 18,350. The immigrants were eager to acculturate into the new, industrialized society, yet were reluctant to alter established traditions. While Jewish education elsewhere

\textsuperscript{1}American Jewish Year Book, 1900 and 1937.
underwent change and developed improved school systems, the Greater
Washington Area experienced an unsuccessful attempt with communal
Jewish education.

The years between 1938 and 1970 include a gradual revival from
the administrative slump in the District of Columbia. As the Jewish
population increased from 18,350 to 100,000, the growth of synagogues
and religious schools in the suburbs made more demands on the quality
of curriculum, teachers, and facilities. The congregational schools,
instead of resisting external influence, began to realize the need for
assistance from a central agency. With the formation of the Board of
Jewish Education in 1964, the congregational schools gradually accepted
the Board's advice on methods of increasing school enrollment and its
suggested standards for teacher training. This period also witnessed
the beginning of a community high school sponsored by the Board of
Jewish Education.

The first chapter focuses on the various existing organizations
in Washington between 1852 and 1970 and establishes the relationship
between school administration and the success or failure of Jewish edu­
cation during the three periods of time.

The second chapter discusses school administration during the
first period, the unsuccessful community school of the second period,
and the individual congregations' gradual acceptance of the Board of
Jewish Education in the third. While finance is important, the fiscal

2American Jewish Year Book, 1968.
aspects of education rested ultimately with administrators of the individual congregational schools.

In order to assess the relative development and progress of the Jewish educational system in Washington, D. C., a comparative study of contemporary developments in other Jewish communities, and especially in neighboring Baltimore, will be made whenever possible.

The history of Jewish education in Washington, D. C., was selected for study because of its historic value to (1) the Jewish community in Greater Washington and (2) Jewish education in the United States.

The following Jewish historians and educators have encouraged me to undertake this task: Dr. Moshe Aberbach, Curator of the Jewish Historical Society of Maryland; Dr. Samuel Glasner, Director of Teacher Recruitment and Certification for the Baltimore Board of Jewish Education; Dr. Louis Kaplan, President Emeritus of the Baltimore Hebrew College; Mr. Robert Shosteck, Assistant Editor of The Record, the publication of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington.

Mrs. Walter Ezekiel, Assistant Director of the Board of Jewish Education in Washington, D. C., until her retirement in 1970, was a valuable source of information. Her period of employment between 1952 and 1970 witnessed the transition from congregational self-determination to the gradual acceptance of administrative assistance from the Board of Jewish Education. Her personal experience and observations provided an insight into the past and present problems of the administration of Jewish education in Washington.
CHAPTER I

ORGANIZATION

1852-1900

Washington, D. C., in 1852 was composed of land ceded by the states of Maryland and Virginia in accordance with the 1790 Act of Congress which designated that land on the "River Potomac at some place between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and Connehoehague"\(^1\) be acquired for the permanent seat of the United States government. Boundaries for this area were Boundary Street (now Florida), the Eastern Branch of the Potomac (now Anacostia River), Rock Creek, and the Potomac.\(^2\)

Within the ten mile square resided 50,000 people of which less than 30 were Jews.\(^3\) Little is known of the Jews' early religious education, but it is conjectured that families traveled to Baltimore forty

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\(^3\) Ibid., p. 4.
miles away for holiday observances and that the children's education took place in the home under the tutelage of parents or a hired tutor. Children may have accompanied their parents to Baltimore where congregations had been in existence since 1829.

Washington Hebrew Congregation

Movement toward the organization of a Jewish congregation in Washington, D. C. was begun in 1852 when twenty-one German-speaking Jews met and each contributed a dollar to pay the cost of incorporation. After a Memorial of the Washington Hebrew Congregation had been signed by President Franklin Pierce on June 2, 1856, the congregation became formally incorporated with the adoption of a Constitution and by-laws in July of 1857. Captain Jonas Levy, a prime mover in the organization, was elected president. By June of 1859, the Congregation was seeking "a Hazan, Shochet and Teacher in Hebrew, and, if possible, in the German language who would be salaried at $400 a year."

Although public education was to make great strides in the 1860's, most education in 1859 was provided by private schools and religious institutions. Because of this responsibility to general education,

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4 Kaganoff, op. cit., p. 8.
6 Nordlinger, op. cit., p. 4.
7 Ibid., pp. 7-10.
9 Occident, June, 1859, quoted in Shosteck, ibid., p. 4.
Washington Hebrew's congregation established a day school, Washington Hebrew Elementary School, in 1861. Reports of school board meetings in 1867 indicate that the Congregational school met daily for six hours. Seventy-five children were in attendance, a fraction of them tuition-paying children of non-members. There were two teachers who taught reading, writing, arithmetic, German, and Hebrew. 10

In addition to the day school, a religious school was established in 1868 11 and attended by the children twice weekly after regular school hours. The religious school was also open on weekends.

In the late 1860's, Washington Hebrew Elementary School began losing many of its students to the new improved public school system which had benefited from tax revenues provided for by the 1858 Public Education Act. With its comparatively small education fund, Washington Hebrew School could not offer the curriculum or trained teachers of the public schools, and the day school ceased operation in 1870. 12

It should be pointed out at this time that the failure in the Washington Hebrew Elementary School in 1870 was not a situation found only in Washington. Baltimore's congregations experienced similar difficulties in maintaining day schools and often turned them over to private enterprises when enrollment dropped. (For example, Har Sinai was a congregational day school from 1843 until the early 1850's. It closed because of financial difficulties, but reopened in 1857 as the private school of Mr. E. Schoenberg. 13)

12 Kaganoff, op. cit., p. 25.
Congregational day schools across the nation were experiencing the same difficulties in trying to compete with the upgraded public education system. By 1872, all congregational day schools had ceased to exist. 

After the closing of its elementary school, Washington Hebrew's Sabbath School increased attendance requirements from Sundays-only to an additional two afternoons a week. However, by 1900, the Sabbath School discontinued its afternoon classes and reduced its weekend instruction to two and one-half hours on Sundays because of lack of interest in the congregation.

**Adas Israel**

Throughout the development of Washington Hebrew Congregation, various reforms in the traditional worship ceremony, such as prayers ordered in English, were being instituted. In 1869, thirty-five members who would not agree to any serious deviations from traditional hallowed rites, resigned and formed Adas Israel Congregation.

There is evidence of a religious school being maintained at that time, although the establishment of a religious school is not noted in printed sources until 1876.

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17 Kaganoff, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
Adas Israel's early religious education was administered by Joseph A. Cohen, the Hazan, who collected tuition and made major expenditures. The Congregation's School Board "was charged with seeing that the schoolroom was properly heated and ventilated, clean and healthy." 18

The congregation's first active interest in the school's administration appears to have begun in 1873 when a committee was appointed to investigate the religious school. As a result of its inquiry, the committee outlined several proposals for reorganization of the school. One included the shift of financial control from Rabbi Cohen to the School Board Committee. Rabbi Cohen left a year later, because of a controversy over his administrational practices. The school ceased to function soon thereafter. 19

The following twenty years witnessed an ebb and flow in Adas Israel's religious education. There was a period when the school was discontinued following a move to another set of quarters, but for the most part the school's success fluctuated along with the rabbis and teachers who came and went. This ebb and flow was a common feature in the wave of Jewish education in the District of Columbia, and elsewhere across the nation. By 1898, Adas Israel's school enrollment was down to twelve. 20

Mount Sinai

While Washington Hebrew and Adas Israel Congregations were experiencing continual change in their religious schools, Jewish immigration

18 Ibid., p. 43.
19 Ibid., p. 44.
20 Ibid., p. 45.
to the District of Columbia increased and other congregations were being formed. In 1871, Mt. Sinai Congregation in Georgetown was organized and the Mt. Sinai Sabbath School emerged. This school catered to the younger children, below the third grade level. It had no fixed location, but the students met on Sundays in the members' homes. The teachers were volunteers from the congregation's membership. 21

Under such unstable conditions, it is not surprising that the Sabbath School was rather short-lived. Enrollment dropped from thirty in 1873 to twelve in 1878, notwithstanding the fact that the Jewish population rose from 950 to 1508 during that period. By 1881, the congregation had closed the Sabbath School and began holding joint services with Washington Hebrew's growing congregation. 22

Ohev Sholom

While the Northwest communities were expanding, a new community was being formed in the Southwest portion of Washington. The Southwest congregation was formed in 1894 and a Hebrew school was initiated in 1897 and partially supported by taxes imposed on kosher meat. 24 Few records exist of the early organization of the religious school, however.

21 Ibid., p. 27.
22 Ibid., p. 28.
23 While Kaganoff refers to the Congregation as Ohave Sholom, other sources refer to it as Ohev Sholom. The latter spelling will be used in this text.
24 Kaganoff, op. cit., p. 44.
Summary

Thus, the period of 1852-1900 witnessed the organization of four Jewish congregations in the District of Columbia. All congregations considered themselves responsible not only for the maintenance of a synagogue building, and the employment of religious officials, but also for the education of their children.

All Jewish schools were congregational in nature, although Rabbi Cohen's school before 1873 had some characteristics of a private school. The closest Washington came to community support was Ohev Sholom with its income from taxes on kosher meat.

The fluctuation between success and failure of the early attempts at organized Jewish education in Washington were similar to those experienced by Jewish education elsewhere in the United States. Most organizations were beset with grossly inadequate financial support, inefficient methods of management, and poor facilities. With the growing Jewish population across the nation, it was becoming necessary to move away from the insulated congregational organization to the broader community level of organization. How Washington, D. C.'s attempt at communal education fared in comparison with its counterparts across the nation will be dealt with in the following section.

1900-1938

The years between 1900 and 1938 were for Jewish education what Meir Ben-Horin terms "decades of transplantation and transformation -- transplantation of personnel and institutional format from the Old World to the New, transformation of administrative, methodological, and
courses-of-study patterns in response to American experience and American thinking."^{25}

American experience and thinking had matured during the previous fifty years. The growth of technology required a more sophisticated society. To meet this requirement, public education attempted to become "the great equalizer" of the human condition and "the balance wheel" of society.^{26} Public education became more of a community responsibility with the development of the high school, the election of state school boards, and the establishment of "normal schools" to train teachers.^{27}

Jewish education was to make great strides in America despite the constant influx of Jews from Europe. Many of the three million Jewish immigrants who settled in the United States between the years 1881-1920^{28} were quick to adapt to American life by sending their children to public schools where they could get a free education, acculturate rapidly, and succeed in life. However, their progress was hampered by what Howard M. Sachar terms "their unwillingness to abandon their ethnic and cultural inheritance."^{29}


^{28}Ben-Horin, op. cit., p. 54.

^{29}Ibid.
This resistance was softened by the efforts of Dr. Samson Benderly who may be termed The Father of Modern Jewish Education in America. Dr. Benderly came to his post as Director of the Bureau of Education of New York Kehilla in 1910. Previously, he was principal of Baltimore's communal Hebrew Education Society. Benderly's efforts on behalf of Jewish education in New York during the next thirty-one years set precedents for the rest of the country. During these years, Benderly proposed contracts for teachers, student progress reports, various educational aids in the classroom, among other things. It was Benderly who, recognizing the need to prepare Jewish youth for a more sophisticated society, stated "as the great public school system is the rock bottom upon which this country is rearing its institutions, so we Jews must evolve here a system of Jewish education that shall be complementary to and harmonious with the public school system."

Dr. Benderly's influence was felt across the country during these "decades of transformation and transplantation" as improved methods of transportation and communication.

Washington's Hebrew Free School

Jewish education by 1900 in Washington, D. C., was sporadic at best. The Jewish day-school was an institution of the past. Enrollment in the afternoon and Sabbath schools fluctuated with changes in congregational administration and financial condition.

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30 Bloom, op. cit., p. 117.
31 Ben-Horin, op. cit., p. 74.
32 Ibid., p. 54.
By 1900 Mt. Sinai Congregation merged with Washington Hebrew Congregation for religious services. Washington Hebrew Congregation dropped regular Hebrew studies in 1879, and by 1900 the weekday classes had ceased; weekend studies were limited to three hours on Saturday.\textsuperscript{33} Adas Israel's religious education, having experienced twenty years of intermittent success, was beginning to build upon the twelve student enrollment of 1898 with the election of Rabbi Mandel. Ohev Sholom's school, supported by taxes on kosher meat, was small but termed "very good" by the congregation's school committee.\textsuperscript{34}

By 1910, the Jewish education situation had improved little. Recognizing the lack of administrative and financial resources of each congregation, the Orthodox Jewish community established a city-wide committee on education. Representatives from Adas Israel, Ohev Sholom, and Southwest Talmud Torah (established shortly before 1900) met during that year to establish a tuition-free community supported Talmud Torah.

After receiving pledges and subscriptions of $5,000 from the community, the Hebrew Free School opened in June of 1910 with Barnett Cohen as president.\textsuperscript{35} Since it was summer vacation for the public schools, weekday classes were held three hours daily in the morning. The content of study material focused on studies of the Bible, Hebrew, and Pentateuch. Classes were conducted in English.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Kaganoff, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 45-57.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}
Although the Hebrew Free School was situated in the Northwest, where a majority of the Jewish population resided, it soon established an auxiliary school in the Southwest at the Southwest Talmud Torah building. 37

This community approach to supplemental Jewish education was short-lived, however, when pledges were not paid. Soon the Hebrew Free School ran into financial difficulties and was forced to move its operation into the Ohev Sholom synagogue. The Southwest branch was soon closed. Enrollment dropped by two-thirds when public schools reopened in September, and by spring of 1911 the school ceased operation entirely. 38

The Hebrew Free School's failure at a time of mass immigration is all the more remarkable in view of the successful growth of Jewish schools, and of Talmud Torahs in particular, both in New York, where a community Talmud Torah was operated since 1881, 39 and in provincial communities such as Baltimore, where the Hebrew Free School Society had increased its enrollment from 270 in 1898 to 1000 in 1909. 40 Kaganoff attributes Washington's failure to lack of adequate publicity concerning the importance of communal support. He states:

It seems to have attracted a relatively fine response from the community insofar as the enrollment of children is concerned. Its chief failure lay in not proving to the community at large the need for its existence, and

37 Ibid., p. 50.
38 Ibid.
39 Ben-Horin, op. cit., p. 57.
not securing the support of the wealthier elements
in the city.41

Meanwhile, Washington Hebrew Congregation continued its school. enrollment grew, and the curriculum included more courses. Other new congregations emerged as Washington's Jewish population grew. The Southwest community, centered around 4 1/2 Street (now Fourth Street), included many newly-organized congregations. It is not clear which of these congregations supported a religious school, although one resident remembers "the synagogue (Southwest Talmud Torah) was the basis for youth activities in the Southwest."42 Others state that religious education in the Southwest was complete for the elementary age group, while older children travelled to the Northwest for secular secondary education or to "Eighth and H Streets to the Temple (Washington Hebrew) . . . (and) Ohev Sholom at Fifth and I Streets."43

Evidence of interest in community affairs was apparent in other activities besides schooling, however. During this period there was a gradual interrelationship between members of various synagogues. In 1912 a Young Men's Hebrew Association was formed to provide an outlet for the youth of Washington, D. C., "based on the teachings of Judaism . . . (but) free in its deliberations from everything dogmatic and doctrinal."44 Its sister organization was formed a year later, and together

41 Kaganoff, op. cit., p. 50.
42 Evelyn L. Greenberg, ed., "Life in the Old Southwest," The Record, 3:2, p. 5.
43 Ibid.
they participated in "musicales, concerts, dances and debates ...". Another community organization was formed to "assist in relief of needy Hebrews" and eventually became known as the Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA) in 1933. Other community organizations included the Washington Branch of the National Council of Jewish Women (1895) and Hadassah (1916).

Summary

Thus, as Meir Ben-Horin states, the period between 1900 and 1938 was the period of "transformation and transplantation" for the Jewish population in Washington, D.C., as well as the rest of the United States. From the first development of the Hebrew Free School (1910-1911) we see the beginnings of wider interest in religious education on the community level.

The lack of community cohesiveness regarding the Hebrew Free School cannot be blamed on the flood of immigrants, the depression, or the reluctance of new-comers to acculturate; for other cities experienced this. The sole reason may rest with the transitory nature of the population in the nation's Capitol. The period preceding and during World War I would give rise to a great fluctuation in the population, although there are no figures to substantiate the flux of Jewish population during this period.

47 Ibid., p. 42.
1938-1970

The years following World War II brought about a religious revival in all denominations. It is not known whether this was brought about because of "greater faith or conviction or as a result of the religious aura which prevailed in the land during and immediately following the war." At any rate, Jews who had been eager to assimilate into American culture began instead to focus their attention on the religious needs of the community, especially the youth. As Dr. Judah Pilch states:

Lay and professional leaders began to plan for the future of Jewish group life not only by fighting bigotry, improving Jewish-Gentile relations, extending the scope of their philanthropy to include larger expenditures for overseas but also through communication in the fields of Jewish culture and education.

Further interest in the Jewish culture was generated by the establishment of Israel in 1948.

In education, community federations gave way to city-wide central agencies of education. A national organization, The American Association for Jewish Education, in existence since 1939, began to emphasize the need for cooperation between school systems.

The synagogue assumed a role heretofore ascribed to the family: that of being the center for social activities and the teacher of Jewish tradition and folklore.

48 Judah Pilch, "From the Early Forties to the Mid-Sixties," Judah Pilch, ed., History of Jewish Education in the United States (AAJE, 1969), p. 120.

49 Ibid., p. 121.
Across the nation religious school enrollment grew steadily from 1937 with its 300,000 national total to 239,000 in 1948, until in 1959, 553,600, or 80 per cent of the Jewish children, were receiving some sort of formal religious education.\(^{50}\) Like the public schools before them, Jewish schools became concerned with the quality of education, teacher training, and teacher welfare. It also became concerned with higher education and the need to continue religious education past the age of Bar Mitzvah. It was concerned with the need for more, better-trained teachers that would be necessary in the higher grades.

The national growth in Jewish education was reflected in Washington's educational system, though to a lesser extent. Whereas Baltimore had a central Bureau of Jewish Education by 1921, Washington's Board of Jewish Education did not become effective until 1964. Also, Baltimore had a board of licenses by 1922, a teachers' training college by 1919, adult education by 1933, and a high school by 1944.\(^{51}\) Washington did not establish teacher workshops until 1952, a high school until the 1950's, or a form of adult education until 1942.

**Washington's Central Agency**

Washington's first central agency was the Jewish Community Council, which was formed in 1938 to coordinate the relief activities of various community organizations. Once assembled, representatives from each of the organizations found a common ground on which to discuss


\(^{51}\) *Bloom, op. cit.*, pp. 204-265.
education and other issues vital to the community. It was, in fact, "a forum to ascertain community opinion and work together, and not (as) a governing body."52

Jewish Education Committee

In 1941, a committee on Jewish Education, composed of rabbis and heads of congregations, was formed by the JCC. Its inactivity in the following years led to a reorganization on May 31, 1945. This time the committee included a steering committee from the Council and representatives from school-sponsoring congregations. Israel Mendelson was appointed chairman.53 Participating congregations were: Adas Israel, Agudath Achim, Beth Israel, B'nai Jacob Temple, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Beth Sholom, B'nai Israel, Ezras Israel, Kesher Israel, Ohev Sholom, Southeast Hebrew Congregation, Silver Spring Sunday School, Tifereth Israel, and Washington Hebrew.54

The prime purpose of the Jewish Education Committee was to study education so that the Community Council:

- could serve as a coordinating influence, enable the schools to assist each other through mutual aid, serve as a clearing house for the community and stimulate greater interest in the community in Jewish education, which could result in greater enrollment.55


53 Sarah Ezekiel (Mrs. Walter), Notes for Dr. Engelman (Unpublished report, BJE files, June 18, 1958).

54 Minutes, Jewish Education Committee (BJE files, Washington, D. C., April 14, 1947).

55 Jewish Education Committee Report, November 11, 1946.
To begin this study, the JEC surveyed ten of the twenty schools in the area in the Fall of 1945. It found (1) of the 1141 children in these ten schools, little more than half of the students were children of congregation members, (2) the schools hired a total of fifty-nine teachers (sixteen in Hebrew studies and forty-three in the Sunday schools), (3) total annual expenditures for the schools were $44,550.\footnote{Ibid.}

Following the survey, the committee drew up a list of suggestions to the schools regarding education requirements for Bar Mitzvah (a minimum of three years instruction) and sent it to the schools. Few schools regarded the JEC's suggestion at that time. This may be attributed to each school's reluctance to recognize its own shortcomings or acknowledge any faults indicated by an external observer.

The need for a city-wide improvement of schools was further indicated by a JEC sub-committee headed by Rabbi Samuel Penner in 1947. This sub-committee found (1) meeting hours differed in each of the nine elementary schools surveyed, (2) there was no systematic instruction or uniformity of standards, (3) textbooks ranged from adequate to insufficient and outdated, and (4) the wide divergence in administrative procedure included a scarcity of trained personnel.\footnote{Report Submitted at a Meeting of Combined Boards of Educations of the Hebrew Schools in Washington, April 14, 1947.}

Further movement toward the improvement of Jewish education in the District was evident in 1949 when Rabbi Isadore Breslau became president of the JCC.\footnote{Mrs. Walter Ezekiel was also elected to the Executive Council of the JCC at this time.} In December of that year the Jewish Education...
Committee met with Dr. Judah Pilch of the American Association for Jewish Education to determine the means to achieve better education in the District. One outgrowth of the meeting was the formation of the Pedagogic Council. Dr. Pilch also suggested the formation of a central bureau, but it was decided that the community needed more time to gain trust in the community-sponsored JEC before the movement toward a more formal agency was made. 59

Pedagogic Council

The Pedagogic Council was formed in 1950 and consisted of Rabbis, Principals, and Chairmen of School Boards. Rabbi H. J. Waldman was elected chairman; Sholom J. Pomrenze became vice-chairman. 60

From the beginning the Pedagogic Council was concerned with school enrollment. After a campaign of publicity through radio announcements, newspaper articles, and printed leaflets, enrollment increased from 4954 to 5933. 61 By 1952, enrollment had increased to 8350 and five new schools were organized. 62

Educators Council

The Pedagogic Council was reorganized as the Educator's Council in March of 1952 and was comprised solely of Rabbis, principals, Hebrew

60 Letter from Sarah Ezekiel to Dr. Uriah Engleman, June 18, 1958, p. 5., Ezekiel files.
61 Ibid.
teachers, and JEC members. Mr. Isadore Turover became chairman. 63

**Board of Jewish Education**

The Educators Council of the JEC continued for the next eight years until the Board of Jewish Education was established. Established in 1964, the Board of Jewish Education became an autonomous organization of the Jewish Community Council which would act in an advisory capacity to all Jewish schools seeking such advice. The officers of the BJE were appointed by the executive committee of the JCC. Membership included up to sixty members, consisting of at least six Rabbis, seven principals, and six school board chairmen. Representatives included two rabbis each from Reform, Conservative and Orthodox schools. 64 Although the school board chairmen were from specific congregations, their role was to act as concerned individuals of the Jewish community. Its services, other than teacher training, adult education, and the community high school, will be covered in the following chapter.

**Educational Organizations**

**Adult Studies** - Adult studies were instituted by Adas Israel during World War II. Its success during the war years could be attributed to the influx of servicemen and their previous religious education in other cities. 65 However, its popularity declined following the war.

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63 Sarah Ezekiel, Taped Interview, May, 1971.
64 Letter, Mrs. Ezekiel to Litov, May 29, 1971.
65 Sarah Ezekiel, Taped Interview, May, 1971.
In later years adult education courses were instituted by various congregations. By 1969, eighteen congregations in the area were offering Sunday morning and weekday evening courses to adults. Various colleges also began offering courses in Hebrew.

Teacher Training - A teacher training school began in 1952 and rose out of the community's need of:

- retaining in the Jewish religious school post-Bar Mitzvah and post-Confirmation students so that they may receive a more intensive Jewish education...
- (and) meeting the requirements of many Jewish schools for qualified teachers for their Primary Departments.

Originally, the Teacher Training Institute was conducted by the congregational schools of B'nai Israel, Shaare Tefila, and Adas Israel. The Institute's attention was equally divided between the studies of Jewish academic subjects and methods of classroom presentation.

The actual success and history of this training project is unknown. In 1962, the Board of Jewish Education saw the need for establishing its own Jewish Teachers Institute (JTI) for the purpose of training Sunday School primary teachers.

During this time the Educators Council of the JCC was also running a three-week Teacher Workshop during the summer months to allow teachers to share techniques and ideas. Also, the Washington Branch of

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66 The Jewish Week, January 9, 1969.
67 The Jewish Week, January 16, 1969.
68 Preamble to the Teacher Training Institute, BJE Files.
69 Ibid.
70 Taped Interview, Mrs. Ezekiel, May, 1971.
the Baltimore Hebrew College was opened in 1962 to enable teachers to fulfill academic requirements for teaching diplomas. 71

**Community High School** - The Midrasha Community Hebrew High School was established in 1958 in order to afford continued religious education past the age of Bar Mitzvah. It was essential that such a school be conducted at a community level because few congregations had the facilities or sufficient numbers of older children to support a high school. Currently sponsored by the Board of Jewish Education, Midrasha offers two courses of study. The A program is available to graduates of the Hebrew Academy’s junior high school and to those who pass a qualifying exam. The curriculum includes the intensive study of Hebrew. The B program offers a more basic curriculum in both Hebrew and English. Graduation requirements are six credits below what they are for the A program. A third, or C, program was being discussed in 1970. 72

Classes at Midrasha are held on Sunday mornings for four hours, and three afternoons a week for two hours. 73

**Day Schools** - The 1960’s marked the re-emergence of Jewish Day schools in the Washington, D. C. area. The Yeshiva High School of Greater Washington was developed in 1966. It offers ultra-orthodox studies; boys and girls are kept separate and follow different courses of study.

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71 Ibid.
72 The Jewish Week, September 1, 1966.
73 Taped Interview, Mrs. Ezekiel, May, 1971.
The Solomon Schechter Day School was established in 1966 and is a Conservative elementary school. It operates branches at Or Kodesh Congregation and Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase.\textsuperscript{74}

The Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington operates in the Northwest area of the District. It offers instruction for children through the junior high school level. In the mid-1950's, the Hebrew Academy attempted to maintain a high school but failed because of inadequate laboratory facilities.\textsuperscript{75}

Before the advent of Yeshiva High and Midrasha High, concerned parents sent their high school age children away to school in Baltimore or Israel.\textsuperscript{76}

Summary

Washington, D. C., between 1938 and 1970, was beginning to make a comeback from the slump it had experienced between 1900 and 1938. Although it was still behind its sister organizations in other cities, the relatively young Board of Jewish Education was beginning to make headway in organizing the means to enable interested congregations to educate members effectively, train their teachers, and standardize their curricula.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.
CHAPTER II

ADMINISTRATION

1852-1900

The success or failure of a congregational school depends upon its administration. This is witnessed by the history of Adas Israel's school which flourished under Rabbi Cohen, but ceased functioning effectively after his departure in 1873. The following twenty years of intermittent success was due to the constant flux of teachers and administrators. It was not until after 1898 that Rabbi Mandel's effective leadership increased enrollment from twelve to eighty within two years.77

Each of the four congregations in Washington used different methods of administering their religious schools. There is little information available concerning the exact administrative policies (tuition rate, pupil-teacher ratio, hours of operation, et cetera) of early religious schools, and nothing of the available information suggests that any congregation followed the methods of others.

This lack of communication between congregations is not unusual, for B. I. Nordlinger states, "Each congregation in America is

77 Kaganoff, op. cit., p. 45.
historically autonomous. Judaism is congregational in its policy and ritual." 78

Most religious schools in Washington, D.C. were administered by a committee elected by the congregation. In Washington Hebrew Congregation, the school committee was established by an amendment to the constitution in 1865. 79 It consisted of five congregation members who established and enforced rules for the school's operation. In 1867, by ruling of the committee, teachers were required to "teach six hours per day and to make out quarterly reports on the progress of the school and general behavior of the scholars," as well as to suggest plans for improvement. 80 The school committee also acted as a sounding board between the parents of the seventy-five students and two teachers. Complaints about the school and conduct of the teachers were discussed there.

Although the school committee was responsible for the running of the school, it was the president and Board of Managers that had ultimate control over the committee's expenditures. The president also had the power to suspend classes as necessary. When the Hebrew Elementary School closed early in the 1870-1871 school year because of financial problems, it was the Board's decision to do so.

Washington Hebrew's Sunday School also fell under the jurisdiction of the school committee.

78 Nordlinger, op. cit., p. 19.
80 Ibid.
Adas Israel's religious school followed administrative procedures similar to those of Washington Hebrew's, although there is no indication that it was modeled after Washington Hebrew's. Adas Israel's committee was appointed by the congregation and was charged with the maintenance of the school building, the acquisition of textbooks, and teacher reports.

Administration under private enterprise was short-lived in Washington, D.C. Adas Israel's Board of Managers took away Rabbi Cohen's free administrative rein when parents protested the students' lack of progress. Prior to that, Rabbi Cohen collected tuition, determined the curriculum, and made the financial decisions. The congregation's sole responsibility was the maintenance of the school building. 81

Communal administration had its start in the District with Ohev Sholom's school. Since most of the income for the school came from taxes on kosher meat, the congregational community probably had influence on the methods and curriculum used in the school. It was Rabbi Robert Graffman's duty to implement these decisions. 82

Teacher-Student Ratio

The ratio of teacher to student was not necessarily dictated by any decision-making body of the Washington congregations. It was determined by the qualifications of the rabbi. In Washington Hebrew Elementary School, the additional teacher was hired because of his

81 Ibid., p. 43.
82 Ibid.
proficiency in German or Hebrew. In the Sunday School, the ratio of 20-1\textsuperscript{83} was probably dictated by the educational levels and ages of the children in attendance.

**School Facilities**

Little is recorded concerning the physical facilities of the congregational schools. Prior to 1863, Washington Hebrew's Elementary School met in rented spaces, but later moved into a building on Eighth between H and Eye Streets, which had been purchased by the Congregation.\textsuperscript{84} The students of Mt. Sinai Sabbath School met in members' homes, so maintenance was not a liability.

**School Operation**

Operation schedules differed from congregation to congregation. Washington Hebrew was the only congregation to provide daily religious instruction when the Elementary School was in session. When the school closed, it increased its supplemental study from Sunday to an additional two days during the week.\textsuperscript{85} There is no information concerning Ohev Sholom's hours of operation, but it may have been similar to Mt. Sinai's school, which met only two hours per week on a Sunday.\textsuperscript{86}

**Summary**

Each congregation in Washington, D. C., was a separate entity and

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 27.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 23.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 27.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 47.
each administered its religious school in a different manner. One common trait they all had, however, was in the relationship between the enthusiasm and qualification of the rabbi and the enrollment in the school. This is noted in Adas Israel's intermittent success after Rabbi Cohen's departure.

This relationship between the rabbi and the school enrollment was noted in Baltimore also. "In fact," Bloom states, "when one reads the records of the early synagogues it is possible to parallel the rise and fall of a school with the appointment and resignation of the Rabbi." The parallel was no doubt seen in the rest of the country as well.

Thus, although there is a lack of specific records for each operation, it is apparent that most congregations tended to shy away from the private enterprise encouraged in the New York congregations.

Washington, D.C., then, retained a characteristic of most Jewish congregations: that of retaining its autonomous nature.

1900-1938

Communal Administration

The communal concept of administration was employed in Washington during this period. The school board committee of the Hebrew Free School (1910-1911) was composed of representatives from Adas Israel, Ohev Sholom, and Southwest Talmud Torah congregations. The committee was charged with fund-raising, curriculum changes, and teacher welfare. It was also responsible for dealing with problem children, meeting

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87 Bloom, op. cit., p. 16.
with the school staff to discuss problems, and checking on classroom procedures. 88

The Hebrew Free School staff included one advanced teacher and two other teachers who taught Hebrew, the Pentateuch, and the study of blessings and benedictions. School hours totaled fifteen per week. During its peak enrollment, there were sixty children divided into three separate classes according to ability. 89

Although girls were not excluded from attending the Hebrew Free School, there were only male students in the school.

Congregational Administration

Few details are available concerning administrative procedures prevalent in the existent and newly-formed schools in the District. The lack of information suggests that administration was similar to that of the previous period.

Summary

The District was beginning to see a gradual interest in communal support and administration of area schools. Though small, it will serve as a stepping stone from local to city-wide administration.

1938-1970

The administration of Jewish Education during this period falls into two categories: (1) the central agency's administration and

88 Kaganoff, op. cit., p. 48.
89 Ibid., p. 49.
(2) the changes in administration of individual schools affiliated with the central agency.

In order to evaluate the advantages of the community influence on education, it is necessary to examine the administrative techniques of the early Jewish Education Committee of the Jewish Community Council along with the development of the services of the Board of Jewish Education. By juxtaposing this development with the advances in teacher training, administrative standards, and enrollment growth of the schools, we can assess the accomplishments of the community interest in Jewish education.

**Jewish Community Council**

When Rabbi Metz became president of the newly-formed Council in 1939, the council applied for, and received membership in the National Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds. The Council's objectives, like the other twenty-three national members, were:

- to avoid duplication; to do away with costly and unnecessary competition; to coordinate various groups; to create a healthy and more progressive Jewish life; to have one voice to speak for the Jewish Community when necessary.90

**Jewish Education Committee (JEC)**

In order to implement these objectives, a committee on Jewish education was formed in 1941. Its concern was to encourage all members

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90 Gichener Report, op. cit., p. 5.
of the Jewish community to enrich their religious life by joining a congregation.

The lack of activity of the early committee suggests that it, too, lacked proper administration. The reorganized committee of 1945 seemed better able to carry out its objectives. An enrollment sub-committee of the JEC carried out an extensive campaign in the Jewish community to encourage parents to enroll their children in some form of religious education. Their efforts in the form of personally addressed letters, newspaper advertisements, and radio announcements were seen in the doubling of school enrollments.

The Pedagogic Council and Educator's Council were also sub-committees of the JEC. They were directly responsible to the JEC under the Jewish Community Council.

Administration then was a branch-like system with many people directly or indirectly linked with Jewish education in the area. This form of administration is quite different from the school administration which concerned only a select few from each congregation.

Board of Jewish Education (BJE)

Community Readiness - Early indications from the congregations suggest that they treasured their autonomy and did not want any external agency advising them on school administration. This was especially evident in the schools' reluctance to follow early suggestions of the JEC on Bar Mitzvah requirements. This was also seen when only ten of

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91 Ibid., p. 2.
the twenty schools in the District responded to a 1946 survey of enrollment and financial procedures.

It was for this reason that the formation of a Washington Board of Jewish Education was not pushed too heavily, although the need for such a bureau had been realized as early as 1949 when Dr. Judah Pilch of the American Association for Jewish Education met with the JEC members in an advisory capacity.

1959 Survey

It was not until 1959 that the Washington community expressed interest in a central bureau of education. A survey conducted by personal interviews with representatives of each congregational school revealed that most schools were in favor of standardization of procedures and other services that would be made available through a central bureau.

It is interesting to note that, while all schools were in favor of standardization, no school expressed willingness to modify its own curriculum to meet standards. Also, many schools had relied upon word-of-mouth reports of the validity of services performed by the existing sub-committees of the Jewish Education Council. 93

Thus, although there was a certain wariness toward change expressed by the congregational schools, the survey indicated an encouraging readiness for a central bureau.

93 Letter, Mrs. Ezekiel to Litov, May 19, 1971.
Early Administration - Funds for a central bureau of education were allocated by the Jewish Community Council in 1964 and the administrative structure of the Board of Jewish Education was established soon thereafter. Rabbi Noah Golinkin was hired as Director and Sarah Ezekiel became assistant director. 94

Code of Practice - Following a study of central agencies in fourteen communities and interviews with AAJE executives, the BJE wrote its Code of Practice. The Code states the purpose of the Board of Education as that of developing a "spiritual and cultural future for the American Jewish Community" through education. The Board should be a community effort and "constitute an effective source for counsel, evaluation and service and the instrument for cooperative planning for specific school and general community needs." 95

Board Affiliation - In order to become affiliated with the Board of Jewish Education a school must have seven or more members on its board and be governed by a set of by-laws. The school must have seven or more members on its board and be governed by a set of by-laws. The school must employ standing recommendations of the BJE on school and personnel matters:

1. Educational facilities for both boys and girls between the ages of five and thirteen.

2. Class levels should be similar to those used in the public schools.

3. Hebrew instruction must be offered by the third grade.

94 Ibid.
95 Preamble, Code of Practice, BJE Files.
The recommendations also include curriculum and study requirements for junior high school programs.

School Boards, according to BJE recommendations, must provide pension programs for their teachers. They must also adhere to BJE recommendations for teacher salaries, sick leave benefits and teacher licensing. 96

Thus, by following specific recommendations of the BJE for affiliation, each school board demonstrates its willingness to cooperate with the Board of Jewish Education.

**BJE Administration** - The Board of Jewish Education's main body is the Executive Committee. It includes officers of the Board, chairmen of the affiliated school boards, standing committees, and members of the professional council. The lay, or operating boards of the BJE includes community representatives appointed by the JCC: two representatives of the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform rabbinates, six Jewish educators, and a representative from each city-wide youth organization. 97

The consulting organ for the BJE are professional administrators of schools who belong to the Association of Directors of Jewish Religious Schools. Standing committees, directly answerable to the BJE Executive Board, are the working branches of the Board. It is through their specialized attention that BJE policies and recommendations are studied and formulated.

**Educational Policy Committee** - This committee is responsible

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96 *Code of Practice*, BJE, Appendix #1, BJE Files.
for setting curriculum and entrance requirements for Midrasha, the BJE sponsored high school. It maintains attendance records and considers student interests.98

This committee also makes recommendations on salary scales and, in 1970, was in the process of outlining for Board approval a Code of Practice for Principals.99

Adult Education Committee - With a ratio of three lay board members to one professional member, the adult education committee focuses its attention on enriching the spiritual life of adults through the study of the Bible, Jewish tradition and discussions pertaining to religious interests. In 1970, a nine-week pilot course was begun in elementary conversational Hebrew. With success, it is anticipated that graduates of the course will continue as teachers within their own congregations.100

Curriculum Committee - Throughout its existence, the curriculum committee had upgraded and standardized the curriculum of Hebrew afternoon schools and Sunday Schools. Its recent concern has been with the increased emphasis on Hebrew study. A relatively new course of study in Soviet Jewry has also been instituted.101

Other Administrative Aids - The Washington Board of Jewish Education renders several services to affiliated schools. Such services

99 Taped Interview, Mrs. Ezekiel to Litov, May, 1971.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
are a speaker service, teacher referral, and the maintenance of an Audio-Visual library. Services extend beyond the immediate community also. The Board cooperates with the AAJA in pilot programs which are important to the development of national Jewish education. It also maintains a liaison between teachers' training programs and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Thus, by moving to the community level of Education, schools in their affiliation with the Board of Education receive the benefit of the experience and research of the Board's many working sub-committees. The gradual acceptance of this form of administration will be seen in the administration of affiliated schools.

School Administration

1945-1947 - Since the early function of the Jewish Education Committee was enrollment growth, early surveys are concerned with that aspect of Jewish education. There were twenty-two schools in the Greater Washington area, of which seven were in the suburbs. Of the 2682 children enrolled in formal religious education, 732 children attended school in the suburbs.

A 1946 report revealed the following information on ten schools studied: (1) Sunday school enrollment was double that of Hebrew school enrollment, (2) 70 per cent of the schools offered Hebrew Instruction, (3) Hebrew class sessions were offered between three and ten hours per week in one or two hour sessions, and (4) one-third of the children

102 Although there are no previous enrollment records available, the 1945-1947 survey will serve as a basis for comparison with later years.
attended both Hebrew and Sunday School. 103

This report is helpful as a basis for comparison with the curriculum, hours of attendance, and enrollment before and after the establishment of the Board of Jewish Education.

1953 - Another survey was conducted under the auspices of the Educators Council of the JEC. Population movement from the District to the Maryland and Virginia suburbs produced several interesting facts: (1) new schools were being established at a fast rate; in 1952, five new schools had begun receiving students for instruction, and (2) the population in the suburbs was a young one whose earning power had not yet reached its peak. As a result, synagogue construction was slow, and services were often conducted in public school buildings or rented temporary quarters. 104

The study also revealed: (1) a total of 4954 students were enrolled in religious education, (2) most of the twenty-six schools offered afternoon Hebrew Education two to five times a week, (3) one all-day school offered an intensive curriculum in Hebrew studies, while also offering a program comparable to studies in the public schools.

Thus, the period between 1946 and 1953 witnessed a doubling in school enrollment. Most of the increase can be attributed to the efforts of the Educators Council and their annual enrollment campaigns. It is also the result of the general growth of population and the maturation of "war babies." 105

103 Information Study, BJE Files, August 28, 1946.
104 JCC report to Rabbis, School Board Chairmen, August 25, 1953.
105 Taped Interview, Mrs. Ezekiel, May, 1971.
It is during this survey that a certain self-consciousness on the part of the schools became evident: several schools had acknowledged administration problems. Foremost was the problem of acquiring adequately trained teachers and retaining them with the low wages the school boards could afford.106

1959 - It was in 1959 that another study was conducted to determine the community's readiness for a central bureau.107 Previous experiences demonstrated that the congregational school boards were wary of external advisory boards. The report of 1953 revealed that the schools were gradually becoming concerned with various administrative problems they had.

The study, conducted by the JEC, included personal interviews with administrative personnel of the thirteen District schools, and seventeen suburb schools. The JEC found:

1. Enrollment had almost doubled in the previous six years.
2. Of the 8738 students, one-third was enrolled in weekday Hebrew studies.
3. Children were beginning instruction below the first-grade level, an indication of the growing interest in broadening religious education.
4. Enrollment in the suburbs had increased.

107 Another study was published by Dr. Uriah Z. Engelman, Director of the National Study of Jewish Education. However, since this paper is concerned with administrative development through community self-appraisal, and since most of the information discussed by Dr. Engelman was supplied by the JEC, this report will focus on the 1959 study of the JEC. BJE Files.
5. Schools admitted they needed assistance in the areas of teacher training, pedagogic methods, salary standards, and testing methods.

Thus, the 1959 survey revealed a growing awareness of administrative problems which were common to all schools. The willingness of the individual schools to discuss their problems with the Jewish Education Committee indicated that the time was ripe for the development of an area-wide bureau where educators, school board representatives and members of the community could meet on a common ground and arrive at methods of upgrading the quality of Jewish education in the community.

Late Sixties - The 1959 survey was the last comprehensive survey conducted in the Greater Washington Schools. Enrollment grew in the late sixties to an all-time high of 12,000. However, soon a drop in enrollment took place, perhaps attributed to the gap between generations with children of school age.

During this period, in spite of the drop in enrollment, twelve schools were established and became affiliated with the Board of Jewish Education. More important than the growth of enrollment perhaps is the growth in cooperation between the affiliated schools and the Board of Jewish Education. Schools were beginning to modify their administrative techniques according to standards established by the Board:

1. Joint graduation for junior high schools. Joint graduations met an all-time high of eight in the late sixties, although many junior

high schools continued to hold their own.

2. Schools were gradually beginning to take advantage of teacher training courses and many were requiring licenses for their Hebrew teachers.

3. Students' progress was being measured by standardized Hebrew tests prepared by the AAJE. Overall results for a ten-year period showed a vast improvement in students' achievement.\(^{109}\)

4. Schools wishing to retain their affiliation with the Board of Jewish Education cooperated in areas of curriculum, principal and teacher welfare, and education requirements for Bar Mitzvah.

Thus, while progress may have been slow in some areas, the religious community was beginning to accept administrative standards recommended by the centralized agency. Although individual schools may still be at the mercy of their governing school boards and changing administrations, definite improvements in standards and requirements have been made.

**Summary**

Between 1938 and 1970 Jewish Education was to feel a surge of growth in numbers as well as quality. The growth in enrollment was similar to that experienced elsewhere in the United States and could be attributed to the post-war return to religion which was common to all religions. The community of Greater Washington was beginning to upgrade the quality of education through the Board of Jewish Education's administration of teacher training facilities, adult education, and

\(^{109}\) Ibid.
standard for teacher welfare. That Washington had produced this out of what Mrs. Ezekiel termed "a history and a psychology of failure" is laudable. 110

110 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

Although Jewish Education in Washington, D. C. had what Mrs. Ezekiel termed, "a history and psychology of failure," during the first two periods examined, by 1970 the individual congregations were beginning to see improvement in their administrative methods. This improvement arose from the advisory capacity of the central Board of Jewish Education which offered aids for developing effective administration in the schools.

In view of the fact that the Board of Jewish Education is less than ten years old, it is not surprising that Washington's Jewish Education is not on the same level as Jewish Education elsewhere in the United States: transition from individual administration to total community support is slow. In time, the effects of the central Board will be more apparent.

In the future, if expectations of the Board of Jewish Education are realized, Washington may see a standardized Hebrew curriculum, a code of practices for Principals, and a community junior high school system.
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