"Jewish Race and German Soul": A Re-Evaluation of Ethnic Identity Among Cincinnati's German Jewish Immigrants, 1830-1880.

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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To the Young family
for their support both emotional and financial
Purpose of Thesis

Though many historians have studied the wave of German Jewish immigration that occurred during the nineteenth century, only a few, including Naomi Cohen and Stanley Nadel, have addressed the impact of German culture in the lives of German Jews. The study by Cohen is concise but much too brief, while the article written by Nadel is far too extreme. Nadel argues that the German Jews were Jewish only by nature, and German at heart. This thesis studies nineteenth-century Cincinnati in an effort to prove that, in reality, German Jews were a delicate mixture of both. Culturally and linguistically they held to their German past, but with regards to business, marriage, and patterns of geographic settlement they formed a distinct Jewish community that crossed the boundaries of national origin.
Following World War II there developed among historians an interest in studying the histories of American ethnic groups. Most of these groups were comprised of immigrants whose nationality was determined by geographic borders, but a few, the Jews being the most prominent were identified as ethnic groups despite the fact that they came from many different nations and could not claim a common native land. The history of Jewish immigration to the United States has traditionally been divided into sections according to the immigrant’s country of origin. Consequently, the period between 1830 and 1880 which was dominated by the immigration of Germans, both Jew and Gentile, to the United States is called the German Period.

The German Period of Jewish-American history has been the subject of many studies since the 1950s, and over the years the subject has developed its own historiography. Only in the past two decades, though, have German Jewish immigrants been portrayed as rounded individuals with human feelings, impulses and motivations. Prior to that time, German Jewish immigrants were studied primarily for the impact they had on American culture and development. Time and again historians answered the question, "How did German Jewish immigrants affect nineteenth-century America?"

Through the 1960s, historians such as Allan Tarshish argued that the Jews had affected the development of the United States in no significant way. They depicted Jewish immigrants as average, middle-class Americans whose experiences in the United States were typical for American immigrants of the time period. Later historians including Lee Friedman, Rudolph Glanz, and Harold Sharfmann acknowledged that Jewish immigrants were atypical in many regards as a result of their common Jewish heritage but still felt a need to defend those differences against negative stereotyping.
Consequently, historians of the 1970s portrayed the Jew as a selfless pioneer, a hero of American history, whose economic instincts, dedication, and hard work opened the western frontier and made possible the rise of American industrialism.¹

Only with the arrival of the 1980s did the Jewish immigrant finally become human in historical studies. Suddenly Jewish immigrants were motivated by many factors, selfish and unselfish, financial and emotional. Historians such as Elliot Ashkenazi and Naomi Cohen began to study the effect of American culture on the lives of Jewish immigrants rather than focusing only on the effect of the Jewish presence in America. Most importantly, they discarded the neat categories, nationalities, and assumptions that had for so long distorted the reality of the lives of German Jews.²

Part of the reality that had previously been distorted concerned the nationality of German Jewish immigrants. Prior to the 1980s, the dual ethnicity of the German Jews had simply been ignored by most historians. Historians of German-American history occasionally mentioned the presence of German Jews in America but typically felt no need to study them in-depth, while historians of Jewish-American history concentrated on their role as Jews and paid little or no attention to their German background.

Finally, in the past two decades, several historians have attempted to correct the oversight.³ Among the first of these was the prominent historian, Naomi Cohen. Her book, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830-1914*, broke new ground and opened the field of Jewish-American history to new possibilities by examining the duality of cultural identity experienced by German Jews. Her study is accurate and concise but unfortunately very brief. She uses only secondary sources and
Jewish publications to study "the German Jewish nexus" and gives only a six-page overview, in a book of nearly 350 pages, to a subject which deserves more.

In response to Cohen's book, another historian, Stanley Nadel, wrote an article entitled, "Jewish Race and German Soul in Nineteenth-Century America." With it, he confronts the insufficiency of Cohen's study by further examining the ties, both social and cultural, between Jewish and German communities in nineteenth-century America. He asserts the belief that German and Jewish immigrant communities were not separate, but rather close-knit and integrated. He writes, "The historical reality was not that of two separate communities capable of analysis in isolation from the other. It was rather a reality of two overlapping communities, which shared both large numbers of individual members and a common culture. They were bound together in an organic unity which lasted for generations."

He supports the idea that the communities were inextricable by demonstrating that the Jewish and German communities shared a common culture, language, and popular culture, and in this argument he is correct. The problem with his study is actually in the error of his logic. That the German Jews spoke German and enjoyed German customs does not really indicate that they were an integrated part of the German-American community. Nor does it demonstrate that German Jews were ethnically or culturally more German than Jewish. In reality, German Jewish immigrants were a unique combination of both German and Jewish characteristics, and though they frequently interacted with German-Americans, they still created their own distinct Jewish community.

In addition to flawed logic, Nadel's study is disadvantaged by a narrow selection of sources and a scope too broad to provide depth. In his article, Nadel cites only secondary
sources and Jewish publications, and he studies a wide variety of American cities. Though his study focuses primarily on the communities of New York and Cincinnati, he also cites evidence from cities including Louisville, Detroit, San Francisco, Memphis, Washington, DC, and Danville, Pennsylvania. In doing so, he attempts to show that German Jews were Jewish by race and German at heart throughout the entire United States.

Unfortunately, because his evidence comes from such a wide variety of cities, and because he examines only language and cultural ties, his study fails to present a complete picture of any single Jewish community. The daily lives of German Jewish immigrants were comprised of much more than the language they spoke or cultural festivities they enjoyed in their free time. Important aspects of life, like family and work, are completely overlooked in Nadel’s study. When the picture of Jewish life is enlarged to include these aspects of daily life, and the focus of the study is narrowed and tested in a single city like Cincinnati, Nadel’s theory fails to hold true.

During the nineteenth century, Cincinnati was home to one of the largest German immigrant communities of the western United States. Between 1840 and 1870, nearly half of the city’s population was comprised of foreign-born immigrants, and of these nearly thirty percent were of German origin. Though the vast majority of German immigrants in Cincinnati were Catholic or Protestant, a small percentage were of the Jewish faith. Their numbers bolstered the already existing Jewish community which was comprised mostly of Dutch and English Jews. Consequently, until 1870 Cincinnati was home to the largest Jewish community west of the Allegheny Mountains. The presence
of a sizable German community as well as a large Jewish community in Cincinnati makes the city perfect for the study of German Jewish ethnicity.

The German Jewish community of Cincinnati was in reality a very distinct ethnic group. Though they interacted socially and shared a common language and historical background with German-American immigrants, they still maintained a separate Jewish identity. In areas of every day life, like work and family, German Jews rarely associated with members of German-American society. The autobiographies, biographies, and obituaries of Cincinnati’s German-Jewish businessmen clearly demonstrate the isolation, in terms of marriage, economy, and geography of the Jewish community.

Due to the effects of chain-migration, Cincinnati’s German Jewish businessmen were frequently members of the same family, and those who were not already related when they arrived in Cincinnati often became family through marriage. Because they almost never married outside their faith, Cincinnati’s Jewish community was essentially comprised of several extended families.

In addition, Cincinnati’s Jewish businessmen rarely chose business partners from the Gentile community despite the fact that Sunday closing laws would have made the partnership advantageous. In fact, because of negative Jewish stereotypes, non-Jewish bankers and merchants including German-Americans were reluctant to extend credit to Jewish businessmen, and Jewish merchants were forced to develop their own system of credit. This led to the virtual economic isolation of the Jewish community.

The Jewish community of Cincinnati was also geographically disassociated from German-Americans. While the center of German-American culture and activity was located north of the Miami Canal in the eleventh and twelfth wards of Cincinnati, the
Jewish community chose to live and work in the area to the south of the Miami canal. Even when Jewish businessmen were prompted by prosperity to move to larger quarters, they chose to remain in areas of Jewish concentration rather than moving to the German-American enclave.

Nadel’s study of the German Jewish community of Cincinnati is limited by the sources he uses and the aspects of immigrant life he examines, and his resulting argument is biased by these limitations. For instance, he cites examples from Cincinnati’s two Jewish publications when they relate to culture or language to prove that the Jewish community identified itself as German, but he fails to examine the Jewish content of the newspapers.

For example, he cites the existence of Die Deborah, a supplement to the American Israelite written entirely in German, as evidence of the widespread use of the German language within the Jewish community. He fails to note, however, that Die Deborah contained items of Jewish interest only and wrote on secular subjects only when they pertained to the advancement of Judaism. In the July 5, 1872 issue editor Isaac M. Wise wrote, "We work for light, truth, progress and the elevation of Judaism in the light of our century." In a later issue he wrote, "The Deborah is an American Jewess, who treasures and loves German." Obviously, the German Jews of Cincinnati did not identify themselves as Germans but rather American Jews who felt a deep regard for their German heritage.

Further proof that German Jews were strongly dedicated to their Jewish identity can be seen in their reaction to anti-Semitism. At a time when they could have chosen to blend into German gentile or Native American society by remaining silent in the face of
anti-Semitism, they chose instead to defend their Jewish heritage. The *American Israelite* and *Die Deborah* consistently defend Judaism against anti-Semitic attacks in the United States and Europe. For instance, in 1854, Wise responded to Sunday closing laws with the comment, "We are slaves if we stand this outrage, if we thus allow priest-ridden demagogues to deprive us of our rights." On the topic of anti-Semitism he wrote, "This world had sinned more against the Jew than 100 Christs could atone for on the cross."

As the spokesman for Cincinnati's Jewish community he defended the rights of Jews around the world. Though he urged the Jewish immigrants to become more American and even, as Nadel points out, advised them to buy a German-English dictionary in order to improve their English, he never hesitates in defending Jewish interests.

A prime example of the willingness of the German Jews to defend Judaism is the response of Cincinnati's German Jewish merchants to the Hilton-Seligman affair. In 1877, Judge Henry Hilton of the Grand Union Hotel at Saratoga refused to accommodate the prominent banker Joseph Seligman because he was a Jew. In response, forty-six Jewish businessmen of Cincinnati signed a petition agreeing to boycott A.T. Stewart Company, a national dry goods company that also happened to own the hotel. As a result of the boycott, A.T. Stewart was forced into bankruptcy. The *American Israelite* gave extensive coverage to the affair and received responses from around the United States.

Two letters to the editor in the issue of 6 August 1877 clearly show how torn the Jews felt. In one letter, a Jewish woman from Iola, Kansas argues for patient tolerance. She writes,

To vaunt our commercial and financial prestige is unwise, and calculated to detract from the sympathy which our cause will command in the breasts of all liberal-minded and magnanimous Americans The ultimate extinction of race
prejudice is assured, and will be hurried, if instead of retorting in kind to our
enemies we treat them to a serene smile of pity.
Her letter demonstrates a desire to blend into American society. Though she identifies
herself as Jewish by writing the letter, she urges other Jews to wait patiently for the
elimination of anti-Semitism that will come only with the silence of American Jews. In
contrast, another letter from a Jewish man in Charleston, South Carolina, shows that not
all American Jews were intimidated:

Hilton has committed a most irretrievable blunder and shown himself in this
enlightened age to be a fool and a bigot he will find out to his cost that the Jews of
America are not so easily crushed as this most potent Judge (?) thinks --- a judge in
name only, who is not a competent judge between shoddy Gentiles and respectable
Israelites.¹³

Nineteenth-century American Jews thus demonstrate a feeling of ambivalence toward
anti-Semitism. Torn between the desire to blend into American society and the need to
step forward in defense of their Jewish heritage, they responded to anti-Semitic attacks
by doing both. A Jewish community’s response to anti-Semitism is, therefore, an
indication of the loyalty within that community to Jewish identity. The boycott by
Cincinnati’s Jewish merchants demonstrates a concern for Jewish rights beyond
Cincinnati. The role of the American Israelite as a forum for Jews across the nation is
evidence that Cincinnati’s German Jews readily identified themselves as Israelites in the
face of anti-Semitism. The willingness of Cincinnati’s German Jews to step forward and
be recognized as Jewish demonstrates the presence of powerful Jewish communal ties as
well as strong personal feelings of Jewish identity.

Nadel’s use of the Jewish press is misleading because he only cites evidence to
support his theory that German Jews were a part of the German-American community.
The content of the publications actually demonstrates strong Jewish cultural ties in
addition to German affiliations. His argument that German Jews participated in German cultural activities is well supported and accurate, but it presents only half of the picture. The German Jews of Cincinnati did participate in the social activities of German-Americans; they proudly identified themselves as immigrants of German national origin. However, in other areas of life and culture including family, marriage, economy, and geographic location, German Jews maintained an ethnic community apart from German-American society. In reality, the Jewish and German communities of Cincinnati were not "bound together in an organic unity," but were instead peacefully coexisting and occasionally intermingling.

Nadel's argument is based to a large extent on the participation of German Jews in German activities including productions of the German Theater, lectures on German philosophy, concerts by German composers, Saengerfests (singing festivals), and shooting festivals. Nadel also notes the presence of brewery advertisements as proof that German Jews enjoyed beer as much as other Germans. In all of these cases, Nadel is correct. In fact, Emil Huettenbauer, a Jewish immigrant from Huettenheim, Germany spoke fondly of sitting "on the front stoop in the evenings enjoying a mug of good rich beer carried home in foaming pitchers from the nearest saloon."14 And Jewish immigrant Jacob Elsas wrote in his autobiography that "the great Saengerfest owes him a debt of gratitude that it can never repay" (written in third person).15 But the simple fact that German Jews enjoyed drinking beer, or participating in the German theater or singing festivals is not proof that they were a part of Cincinnati's German-American community. Even Nadel admits that Jews were "heavily represented in the musical professions and German Theater in Germany," and therefore "it should come as no surprise that they were
found in all aspects of ... German Theater." Participation in the cultural events of the German community does indicate that Cincinnati's German Jews retained their German cultural identity, but that does not necessarily mean that they were an inextricable part of the German community.

In fact, a close look at the autobiographies of German Jews shows that their strongest and most frequent affiliations were Jewish. In his autobiography, Jacob Elsas counted as his greatest accomplishments not only "the great Saengerfest" but also his presidencies at the Jewish Hospital and the Hebrew Relief Association. He also considered himself "one of the most active members of the Building Committee of the Jewish Temple on Plum Street." 

Similarly, Jewish immigrant Jacob Seasongood participated in several civic, religious, and social associations for which he wished to be remembered. In his autobiography, he listed seven civic and business posts, including the Director of the Board of Trade of Cincinnati and the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, and five religious associations, including the Young Men's Hebrew Association and the Executive Board of the Union of Hebrew Congregations. He only lists two social activities. One of them, a Literary Society called "Philomathic," he formed in the hopes of keeping young men from joining "social clubs where gambling at cards formed the principal amusement." The other was the Phoenix Club, an association formed by forty-three German Jewish businessmen who shared a common interest in German culture. The activities of the club varied from card playing to literature to theater. In 1883, the authors of Picturesque Cincinnati wrote,

The Phoenix Club, the Largest and Most Fashionable of the Israelite Clubs.
It occupies a fine building on the north-east corner of Court Street and Central Avenue. It contains besides a large hall for balls and parties, 12 social rooms, a restaurant, supper-room, billiard room, library and reading-room, the whole elegantly furnished. There are 240 members.\(^{19}\)

The very formation of such a club is clear evidence of the ambivalent feelings of German Jews about their own ethnicity. German Jews were barred from most gentile social clubs during the nineteenth century. German-Americans had likewise been excluded from Anglo-Saxon clubs, though not to the degree that the Jews were blackballed. As a result, German-Americans formed their own social clubs, and most of them allowed Jewish membership.\(^{20}\) Despite their ability to join German-American social clubs, Cincinnati's German Jews still felt a need to establish their own social organizations, including a German cultural society with exclusive Jewish membership. This clearly demonstrates that even cultural identity among Cincinnati's German Jews was not entirely German. In reality, the cultural identity of German Jews was a combination of both German and Jewish affiliations.

In addition, cultural and social activities such as these were only a small part of life for most nineteenth-century American immigrants. Only the wealthy could afford to spend time on leisure activities.\(^{21}\) In the reality of day to day life, the routine of work and family, the lives of the German Jews of Cincinnati were quite separate from those of other German-Americans. This separation can be seen in the lives of Cincinnati's German Jewish businessmen and the choices they made, both in poverty and prosperity.

The first point to be stressed is the isolation and unity of the Jewish community in terms of family. Though the first Jews chose to settle in Cincinnati only because of its attractiveness as a rapidly growing western city, previously established friends and family
drew the subsequent Jewish immigration specifically to Cincinnati. As a result, nearly 60% of Cincinnati's Jews came from the Bavarian region of Germany, and blood or marriage related many. Historian Steven Mostov, in his study "A Jerusalem on the Ohio," notes that,

One group of twelve small villages along a thirty mile stretch of the upper Main River was home to at least eighty Jewish men and women who settled in Cincinnati. The village of Demmelsdorf, in particular, is indicative of the extremes to which chain-migration could be carried. In 1811, Demmelsdorf had a total Jewish population of only 136. But between 1830 and 1865 at least twenty-eight men and two women moved to Cincinnati.

Jewish families typically sent one son to try for prosperity in the New World. After a long and expensive journey, he usually arrived in the United States with little or no money. Out of necessity, most Jewish immigrants obtained a small selection of goods and peddled wares in the countryside until they had earned enough money to establish a small business. Once an immigrant was settled and economically secure, news of his success spread through his native village and many of his neighbors and relatives would follow. In this way, Cincinnati's Jewish population grew through chain-migration from only a few hundred in 1830 to about 13,000 in 1880.

An excellent example of this chain-migration can be seen in the Seasongood family from Bergkundstadt, Bavaria. Jacob Seasongood, the first of the family to emigrate, did so in 1837. After a voyage of ten weeks he landed in New York on July 21, with a capital of seventy-five dollars. He invested this amount in a stock of goods which he peddled in the city. After two months he decided, because of his ability to speak English, to go West to Cincinnati. He established himself there with another Jew, Phillip
Heidelbach, in a business peddling wares to area residents. Finally in 1840 they succeeded in opening a clothing store. In 1850 and 1860 respectively, Jacob was joined in Cincinnati by his nephews Lewis and Alfred. Both young men subsequently became partners in the firm, Heidelbach & Seasongood.26

Because of this chain-migration, much of Cincinnati's Jewish population was related by blood, and those who were not, often became family through marriage. This meant that most of Cincinnati's Jewish families, even of different nationalities, were related in some way, and this inter-relationship laid the foundation for a very close-knit community. For example, the marriage of Amelia Kuhn, from Duerkheim, Germany, and Jacob Netter from Alsace, France, joined their two families. The marriage of Adolph Seasongood and one of Jacob Netter's daughters, connected the Netter family to the Seasongoods, and the marriage of Alfred Seasongood to Emily Fechheimer, attached yet another family to the tree.27 Jewish liquor distiller, Julius Freiberg married Duffie Workum, whose Jewish family was originally Dutch.28 The fact that these men chose, without exception, to marry within the Jewish community without regard to German nationality, is clear evidence of a distinct Jewish community present in Cincinnati during the nineteenth century.

According to historian Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, intermarriage was most common among Jewish immigrants in the absence of a strong Jewish community. For example, from the colonial period through 1840, when German Jewish immigrants began to arrive in large numbers, intermarriage was quite common. Due to the relatively small Jewish population in the United States during this time period, intermarriage was often a necessity. Genealogist Malcolm Stern estimates that prior to 1840, fifteen percent
of Jews married outside their faith.

After 1840, however, the rate of intermarriage decreased dramatically throughout the United States. Though there are no statistics for Cincinnati, historian Allan Tarshish estimates that the rate was four percent in Charleston at mid-century. For the end of the century, the rate of intermarriage in New York City is estimated at less than one percent.29 Considering the size of Cincinnati's Jewish community, one can reasonably infer that the rate of intermarriage in Cincinnati was comparably low to that of other sizable American cities during this time period. The tendency of Cincinnati's German Jewish businessmen to marry within the Jewish faith was, evidently, representative of a general trend within nineteenth-century Jewish communities.

German Jewish businessmen chose not only their partners in life, but also their partners in business, by religious or familial affiliation. Many Jewish business partners were related by family. According to Steven Mostov, between 1850 and 1860, sixty-eight percent of Jewish firms were comprised of partners who were all related either by family or marriage. In another fifteen percent of Jewish firms, some but not all of the partners were related. Only seventeen percent of Jewish businesses were formed by partners who were completely unrelated by family.30

However, even in companies where none of the partners were related by family, the members often shared a common Jewish heritage. For example, when Jacob Seasongood arrived in Cincinnati, he was the first of his family to emigrate. He was new to the city and was related to no one, yet he chose for his business partner Phillip Heidelbach, a Jew.31 Emil Pollak joined his uncle Benjamin in Cincinnati in 1865, and they associated themselves in first a crockery business and then a scrap iron business with a man named
Joseph Block. He was a Jew. Julius Freiberg arrived in Cincinnati in 1852 and started selling Kentucky Bourbon from a small store on Sycamore Street. In 1855 he formed a partnership with Levi J. Workum, a Dutch Jew, and his future brother-in-law.

These partnerships generally lasted through most of the century and grew to include the family members of the original partners. Brothers and sons were taken into the family business as it expanded to include multiple offices, sometimes in several cities. The association of Philip Heidelbach and Jacob Seasonsood lasted thirty years, and the business expanded to include two stores and four brothers. Emil Pollack stayed in business with Joseph Block until 1911, when he and his sons sold the Chicago interest of the company to Joseph and Isaac Block, and renamed the Cincinnati interest the Pollack Steel Company. Freiberg & Workum exported whiskey throughout the United States, and in Australia, South America, Canada, and the Sandwich Islands. Upon the death of his partner in 1883, Julius Freiberg took his two sons and the sons of Mr. Workum into the business, and it continued until 1918 when law prohibited the manufacture of liquor.

Even in businesses that frequently changed partnerships, the partners were consistently Jewish. This was the case with the firm Kuhn, Loeb, and Co. In 1850, the company was opened by Abraham Kuhn, Adolph Rindskopf, Louis Rosenthaler, and Jacob Netter under the firm name Kuhn, Rindskopf & Co. During the following twenty years the firm name changed three times, and the ownership changed seven times, and the firm included nine different men. However, regardless of the firm name or the individuals involved, the partners were always Jewish.
The separation of the German and German-Jewish communities in terms of business partnerships is particularly interesting considering the problem of Sunday closing laws. Both communities were opposed to Sunday laws, which required all businesses to close on Sundays in honor of the Christian Sabbath. The Jewish community opposed the law for ideological and economic reasons. Ideologically, the laws were a violation of the separation of church and state. In addition, they were an economic disadvantage to Jewish businessmen. Since the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, Jewish businessmen who wanted to observe the Jewish Sabbath were forced to close their stores two days of every week thus losing a great deal of business. Jews fought the Sunday closing laws in court and won a minor victory in the form of Jewish exemptions. By the end of the nineteenth century, twenty states permitted Jews, who observed the Jewish Sabbath, to work on Sunday. Though the exemptions were an improvement, Jewish businessmen were still disadvantaged because business on Sundays was typically slow.\textsuperscript{38}

The German-American community objected to Sunday Laws for cultural reasons. German immigrants typically viewed Sundays as a time for pleasure and entertainment, not "the rest of the tomb."\textsuperscript{39} German beer gardens and saloons were the accustomed gathering places for socialization. Germans met to drink beer, play cards and sing together as they had in Germany. The fact that beer halls and German theaters were forced to close on Sundays proved a hindrance to German recreation.\textsuperscript{40}

Given the Jewish exemption to Sunday laws, it would have been an economic advantage to members of both the German and the Jewish communities to form business partnerships. The owners of German beer halls and theaters could have formed partnerships with Jewish businessmen who were legally permitted to keep the
establishment open on Sundays for German recreation. The Jewish businessmen would then have been able to observe the Jewish Sabbath without losing business on Saturday. However, since only five firms in Cincinnati between 1840 and 1865 included both Jewish and non-Jewish partners, it is obvious that few if any businessmen took advantage of this mutually beneficial arrangement.\textsuperscript{41}

One reason for the consistency of exclusively Jewish business partnerships was the non-availability of credit to Jewish businessmen. Though there were almost no incidences of outright anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Cincinnati, Jews were still subject to commonly accepted Jewish stereotypes which were both good and bad. On the one hand, Jews were thought to be skilled, hard-working businessmen. Unfortunately, they were also thought to be shrewd, dishonest, and untrustworthy. By the 1840s the word "Jew" had become a verb commonly used in American slang. The term "Jew" became synonymous with cheating, dishonest cunning, or shrewdness, and the word itself encompassed everything negative about the Jewish image.\textsuperscript{42}

As a result of negative stereotyping, credit was difficult to for Jews to obtain. The reports of R.G. Dun and Co. reflect prevalent attitudes which prevented Jews from obtaining credit from non-Jewish sources. In 1863, R.G. Dun describes Cincinnati businessman Moses Bloom as a "very sharp Israelite bound to have the best of a bargain if possible and to be dealt with cautiously." In 1866, they wrote that the Heller brothers of Cincinnati were "considered mean grasping, but close hardworking Israelites."\textsuperscript{43} Comments like these were by no means isolated or uncommon. The reports rather reflect the general attitude of the time period.
For a Jew, newly arrived in Cincinnati, credit was very difficult to obtain from any non-Jewish source. The combined handicaps of being unknown and being Jewish were more than most Gentile bankers or merchants could overlook. In order to build capital, Jewish businessmen were forced to pool their resources by forming partnerships, and eventually this led to the development of a Jewish system of credit. Jewish businessmen who had achieved some degree of prosperity or security were more likely than non-Jewish merchants to loan credit to a newly arrived Jewish immigrant. As a result, R.G. Dun listed two credit ratings for Jews. The first was the rating among Jews. The second was a rating among Gentiles. For instance, of the Hoffheimer Brothers it was written that they "stand better with Jews than gentiles those of their faith in the same trade say they have made considerable money." Similarly, of peddler Marcus Goldsmith, R.G. Dun wrote that "his brethren say he owes but little and recommend him-though gentiles do not."

Not until a business was established and prosperous could the owners hope to receive credit from Gentiles. However, even in the case of successful firms like Wertheimer, Marks, and Co., R.G. Dun reported that the company was "believed to be prospering but we must say no Gentile could satisfy themselves about an Israelite unless notoriously bad or undoubtedly good."

Considering the reluctance of gentile bankers to loan credit or merchandise to Jewish immigrants, new or established, it is not surprising that Jewish merchants remained a tight-knit group and eventually developed a credit system of their own. Because the Jewish community was so inter-related by family and hometown ties, Jewish
merchants were often well acquainted with those to whom they gave credit, and they used their acquaintances to make informed decisions. Consequently, men who had no formal education in finance became very successful bankers almost accidentally.

This was the case with the firm Kuhn, Loeb, and Co. which eventually became one of the largest international banking houses of the twentieth-century. Originally a wholesale dry goods and clothing business, the firm partners decided in 1868 to expand into banking. Their idea was to establish one bank in New York and another in Cincinnati. The institutions were intended to work together to provide Cincinnati clothing manufacturers with credit on more favorable terms than they could obtain from other Cincinnati banks. Years later, Samuel Kuhn's grandson wrote,

> Of course, neither my grandfather nor his brother nor his brother-in-law had ever had anything that could properly be called financial training. They relied entirely on an abundant native shrewdness and an intimate knowledge of the real situation; that is to say: they were so well informed as to the character, reputation and family connections of most of their would-be clients that they were rarely misled into making bad loans. Otherwise their qualifications as bankers were nil.47

The men who created Kuhn, Loeb, and Co. relied upon an intimate familiarity with the lives and reputations of Cincinnati’s German Jews, and their success is further evidence of the close-knit nature and virtual economic isolation of the Jewish community.

Had the German Jews of Cincinnati been an integrated part of the German-American community, the Jews would surely have been able to consistently obtain credit from their Gentile acquaintances among that group, and a separate Jewish credit system would not have been necessary. This is especially true since the German immigrants established their own mutual savings societies and credit unions which met weekly in the taverns and beer gardens of the German "Over-the-Rhein" district of Cincinnati. Many German
immigrants made a shrewd business of loaning money at an interest to promising entrepreneurs, but the evidence indicates that they rarely extended their services to German Jews.  

In fact, German Jews were isolated in many ways from the German immigrant community, and their exclusion in the area of finance is only one indication that the Jews were not an integrated part of the German "Over-the-Rhein" district. "Over-the-Rhein" was the nickname given to the predominantly Catholic German area of Cincinnati bordered to the south and west by the Miami Canal and to the east by Sycamore Street. North of Liberty Street the district extended west across the canal to Coleman Street (see map 1).

The census of 1850 indicates that the eleventh ward, the area to the North of Liberty Street and east of the canal, was nearly sixty percent German. By 1860, the growth of the population in the eleventh ward made expansion necessary, and the twelfth ward of Cincinnati was established to the west of the canal north of Liberty Street. The 1860 census indicates that the German population of the eleventh ward had dropped to 42.8 percent, but in the new twelfth ward Germans made up another 40.4 percent.

In the "Over-the-Rhein" district, German immigrants recreated a portion of their native land. The immigrants built their houses side-by-side and flush against the sidewalk and enclosed their gardened backyards with latticework fences. They organized Turner Halls, Saengerbunds, and literary clubs, and frequently attended the German theater. Families often spent their evenings playing cards and listening to familiar German songs at the many beer gardens and taverns in the district.
The "Over-the-Rhein" region was not merely a hub of German entertainment, however. The German district was the center for all aspects of German life including family and work. Many German businessmen including furniture makers, merchants, and brewers chose the "Over-the-Rhein" district for the location of their businesses. For example Jacob Diehl, a German cabinetmaker who arrived in Cincinnati in 1834 at the age of 22, established himself in business at the corner of Walnut and 13th Streets in the heart of the German ward. Similarly, German immigrant Christian Moerlein chose a location on the east side of Elm at the corner Henry Street for his brewery which was the most successful in Cincinnati. In close competition, however, was the Lion Brewery, owned in partnership by two German immigrants, Gottlieb Muhlhauser and Conrad Windisch. They were located on the Miami Canal between Liberty and Wade Streets.

Thus, the words "Over-the-Rhein" came to symbolize the essence of German life in Cincinnati, and that included everything from participating in the Saengerfest to finalizing a business deal over schnapps at the local tavern.

The "Over-the-Rhein" district of Cincinnati, while home to German business and entertainment, was not, however, home to Cincinnati's German Jews. An extremely high percentage of Cincinnati's German Jewish immigrants chose to live and work in the area to the south of the Miami Canal. According to a sample taken by historian Steven Mostov, in 1853 only eleven percent of Cincinnati's Jews lived in the "Over-the-Rhein" district, while over eighty percent lived in the area to the south of the German district.

The location of German Jewish businesses is further evidence of this geographic division. For example, Heidelbach & Seasongood opened their first store on the corners of Front and Sycamore Streets, and Block & Pollack started along the Ohio River on
Water Street. The first distillery of Freiberg & Workum was located at no. 20 Sycamore Street. Kuhn, Rindskopf & Co. opened at no. 37 Pearl Street, and peddler Jacob Elsas opened his first wholesale boot and shoe business on the west side of Walnut Street near Pearl. 58

Of course, place of residence is not always a choice. Frequently, economic conditions are the determining factor of where one can or cannot live. However, from the time these Jewish immigrants opened their businesses to the time they retired, both in poverty and prosperity, they chose to live and work in an area of Cincinnati that was predominantly Jewish. Even when growth and prosperity required that the business be moved to larger quarters, Jewish businessmen chose to remain south of the Miami Canal. For instance, Heidelbach & Seasongood moved five times during their thirty years of business but never left a nine-block section of the city. Kuhn, Netter, & Co. moved from no.37 Pearl to no.38 Pearl to no.34 Pearl before settling finally on the northeast corner of Third and Vine. Finally, Jacob Elsas and Samuel Kuhn both chose to demonstrate success by building magnificent homes on West Fourth Street, an area of Cincinnati that was not even near the German "Over-the-Rhein" district. 59

If, as Stanley Nadel argues, these men had been an integrated part of the German community, if the two communities had truly been "bound together in organic unity," surely they would have chosen to live and work in the same general geographic area. The fact that they did not clearly indicates the presence of two distinct immigrant communities.

A study of nineteenth-century Cincinnati proves Nadel’s argument to be neither correct nor incorrect. The German Jews of Cincinnati were active in the cultural and
social organizations of the German-American community. They did proudly identify themselves as Germans. Even Cincinnati's Jewish Rabbi Isaac M. Wise claimed German nationality despite the fact that he was originally from Bohemia.\textsuperscript{60} They spoke German and drank German beer and even attended German festivals, but none of these examples are evidence that German Jews were an integrated part of the German-American community. Nor do they prove that German Jews perceived themselves as entirely German.

In fact, the loyalty of German Jews toward Jewish heritage can easily be seen in the everyday lives of Cincinnati's German Jewish businessmen. The fact that they married within their faith without regard to nationality, the fact that they chose to live both in poverty and prosperity among other Jewish immigrants, the fact that they were willing to loudly defend themselves against anti-Semitism, all of these are evidence of a strong feeling of Jewish identity.

In reality, the German Jewish immigrants of Cincinnati were a delicate combination of both German and Jewish immigrant cultures. Socially and linguistically, they identified with the German-American community, while economically and geographically they remained distinctly Jewish. The question is essentially one of identity, and the answer is many faceted. German Jewish immigrants were not entirely German as Nadel would suggest. Nor were they simply Jewish as other historians have approached them. German Jewish immigrants in America were German immigrants striving to become American who held resolutely to their Jewish faith.
NOTES


15. Jacob Elsas, Autobiography, p. 4, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.


21. Ibid., 169-86.


23. Ibid., 80-81.


26. Jacob Seasongood, Biography, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; Alfred Seasongood, Autobiography, 4-5.
27. In Memoriam, Cincinnati 1881, Eulogies at Music Hall, p. 224-26, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; Alfred Seasongood, Autobiography, 5.


29. Marcus, United States Jewry, 396-400.


31. Jacob Seasongood, Biography.


33. Julius Freiberg, lifetime chronology, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

34. Jacob Seasongood, Biography.


36. Julius Freiberg, chronology; Julius Freiberg, obituary, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

37 Frances Forman to Jacob R. Marcus, Cincinnati, Ohio, 18 September 1974, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; John J. Rowe, Cincinnati, Ohio to John M. Schiff, New York, 5 December 1946, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

38. Cohen, Christian America, 58-64.


44. Ibid., 120.

45. Ibid., 119-25.

46. Ibid., 121.

47. Samuel Kuhn, Biography, p. 2, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.


56. Maxwell Preston Wiesen, “The Economic Life of Cincinnati Jewry, 1875-1876” (Term paper, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1974); Janyce Katz, “Economic Activity and the Location of Cincinnati’s Jews in the Period 1876-1877” (Term paper, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1974), 5-6.

58. Jacob Seasongood, Biography, 1; *Pollack 100*, 8; “Fifty Years, 1855-1905,” *A history of Freiburg & Workum*, p. 4, Special Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; Francis Forman to Jacob R. Marcus, 18 September 1974; Jacob Elsas, Autobiography, 2.

59. Jacob Seasongood, Biography, 1; Francis Forman to Jacob R. Marcus, 18 September 1974; Jacob Elsas, Autobiography, 3; John J. Rowe to John M. Schiff, 5 December 1946.

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