

Gracie Earnest
The Temple

The following paper was prepared under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Dickey at Kennesaw State University for an Introduction to Public History course.

The Temple, located in Atlanta, Georgia, is a thriving reformed Jewish temple that has been serving the community of Atlanta for the past 150 years. While the Jewish population in Atlanta today is roughly around 119,800, only twenty-six Jews lived there in 1850.ⁱ However, the Jewish population rapidly grew during the era of Reconstruction.ⁱⁱ As the Jewish population increased, it became evident that a congregation was needed for them to celebrate holidays, worship together in public, establish a burial ground, and serve the poor.ⁱⁱⁱ To address these issues, the Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded in 1860.^{iv} Just a few years later in January of 1867, much of the Jewish community in Atlanta gathered to celebrate the wedding of Abraham Rosenfeld and Emilie Baer.^v At this event, Dr. Isaac Leeser, who performed the ceremony, urged them to create a permanent congregation in Atlanta.^{vi} His pleas were heard, and the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation was formed.^{vii}

The Hebrew Benevolent Congregation became officially situated in Atlanta when their first building was erected in 1875.^{viii} In 1931, after outgrowing two buildings, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation ended up in their third house of worship that is still used today.^{ix} The new building was one of the largest synagogues in the South at the time.^x Designed by Philip Shutze, this elaborate building has “ornamental plaster work” inside, and many of its features are meant to highlight different Jewish traditions.^{xi} The current building incorporates pieces from its original building including a red globe that hangs from the ceiling in the main sanctuary.^{xii}

From the start, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation oscillated between traditional and Reform Judaism. It ultimately settled on Reform Judaism under the leadership of David Marx.^{xiii} He was a young man when he started at the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, but it was

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believed that he was “one of the most learned men of his belief in the south.”^{xiv} He faithfully served the congregation and was known for working with “a fervor and zeal that caused the members of his congregation and their Christian neighbors to take notice.”^{xv} Marx brought about an era of change to the congregation not only because he was the first American-born rabbi to serve there, but also because he tried to bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile communities.^{xvi} Marx greatly influenced the growth of Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, and his successor, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild, followed in his footsteps.^{xvii}

Rabbi Rothschild was well known for being outspoken about social justice within the Atlanta community.^{xviii} He not only strove to lead his congregation, but he also desired to connect with the other religious communities in the Atlanta area.^{xix} Rabbi Rothschild’s association with social justice movements naturally created enemies. On October 12, 1958, the Temple was bombed by a group of men from a variety of anti-Semitic hate groups.^{xx} Between 30 and 50 sticks of dynamite blew a twenty-foot hole in the side of the building.^{xxi} This act of violence impacted the city so deeply that Mayor William Hartfield spoke out about the bombing, and he called it “the end result of bigotry and intolerance.”^{xxii}

The community of Atlanta came together after the bombing, and “the reverberations from an aroused public brought confidence and reassurance to the despairing Hebrew Benevolent Congregation.”^{xxiii} Though the bombing was shocking, Janice Rothschild, Rabbi Rothschild’s wife, noted that it had a positive outcome in that “the good people of the South did arise and speak out.”^{xxiv} The *Atlanta Constitution* mentioned that people from different social and economic classes were all “bound by a common bond of revulsion” and wanted to help by donating money, writing sympathy cards, or assisting in rebuilding the synagogue.^{xxv}

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Despite the bombing, the Temple endured. After the death of Rabbi Rothschild in 1973, the community continued to thrive under the leadership of Rabbi Alvin Sugarman.^{xxvi} Not only did the congregation grow, but from 1980 to 2006 the Jewish population in Atlanta grew from 28,000 to 120,000 as well.^{xxvii} Today, its congregation has 4,000 people who all work together to fulfill the Temple's goal of serving their community.^{xxviii} The Temple, from its genesis, has played an important role in the growth of Atlanta's Jewish community and in the fight for social justice. Thus, it is important that the work they have done be remembered.

ⁱ Dave Schechter, "Counting Atlanta's Jews...and More," *Atlanta Jewish Times*, June 8, 2016, <https://atlantajewishtimes.timesofisrael.com/counting-atlantas-jews/>; Mark K. Bauman, "Jewish Community of Atlanta," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities and the University of Georgia Press, 2004-, article published March 15, 2004; last modified October 11, 2016, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/jewish-community-atlanta>.

ⁱⁱ Mark K. Bauman, "Jewish Community of Atlanta," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities and the University of Georgia Press, 2004-, article published March 15, 2004; last modified October 11, 2016, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/jewish-community-atlanta>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Janice Rothschild, *As but a Day: The First Hundred Years 1867-1967* (Atlanta: Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, 1966), 1-2.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 2.

^v *Ibid.*, 2.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 2.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 2.

^{viii} Mark K. Bauman, "Jewish Community of Atlanta," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities and the University of Georgia Press, 2004-, article published March 15, 2004; last modified October 11, 2016, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/jewish-community-atlanta>.

^{ix} "The Temple," National Park Service, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/tem.htm>.

^x "Architectural Plans Approved and Contract Awarded for Beautiful New Jewish Synagogue on Peachtree," *The Constitution*, March 2, 1930, <https://login.proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/docview/500863780?accountid=11824>.

^{xi} "Architectural Plans Approved and Contract Awarded for Beautiful New Jewish Synagogue on Peachtree," *The Constitution*, March 2, 1930, <https://login.proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/docview/500863780?accountid=11824>; "The Temple," National Park Service, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/tem.htm>.

^{xii} "The Temple," National Park Service, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/tem.htm>.

^{xiii} Mark K. Bauman, "Jewish Community of Atlanta," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities and the University of Georgia Press, 2004-, article published March 15, 2004; last modified October 11, 2016, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/jewish-community-atlanta>.

^{xiv} "His First Address: Rabbi David Marx to Deliver His Inaugural Friday Night at the Synagogue," *The Constitution*, September 4, 1895, 7, <https://login.proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/docview/495284860?accountid=11824>.

^{xv} Nathan Cohen, "Dr. David Marx Observes 50th Anniversary as Rabbi of Hebrew Benevolent Congregation," *The Southern Israelite*, September 21, 1945, 2, <http://israelite.galileo.usg.edu/israelite/view?docId=bookreader/asi/asi1945/asi1945-0491.mets.xml#page/n0/mode/1up>

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- ^{xvi} Janice Rothschild, *As but a Day: The First Hundred Years 1867-1967* (Atlanta: Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, 1966), 44; “History,” The Temple, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.the-temple.org/history>.
- ^{xvii} “Rabbi Jacob Rothschild,” The Temple, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.the-temple.org/rabbi-jacob-rothschild>.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} Edward A. Hatfield, “Temple Bombing,” in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities and the University of Georgia Press, 2004-, article published June 1, 2007; last modified October 25, 2018, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/jewish-community-atlanta>.
- ^{xxi} Adolph Rosenburg, “The Blast at Atlanta’s Temple,” *The Southern Israelite*, October 17, 1958, 1, <http://israelite.galileo.usg.edu/israelite/view?docId=bookreader/asi/asi1958/asi1958-0762.mets.xml#page/1/mode/1up>.
- ^{xxii} “WSB-TV newsfilm clip of mayor William Hartsfield speaking about violence against African Americans after the Temple Bombing,” video, *WSB-TV*, October 1958, accessed November 9, 2018, 0:50-0:53, <http://crdl.usg.edu/cgi/crdl?action=retrieve;rset=002;recno=4;format= video>.
- ^{xxiii} Adolph Rosenburg, “The Blast at Atlanta’s Temple,” *The Southern Israelite*, October 17, 1958, 4, <http://israelite.galileo.usg.edu/israelite/view?docId=bookreader/asi/asi1958/asi1958-0765.mets.xml#page/n0/mode/1up>.
- ^{xxiv} Janice Rothschild, *As but a Day: The First Hundred Years 1867-1967* (Atlanta: Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, 1966), 107.
- ^{xxv} Harold Martin, “Bombing of Temple Hurt Atlanta’s Pride,” *The Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1958, 13E., <https://login.proxy.kennesaw.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/docview/1632634907?accountid=11824>.
- ^{xxvi} “History,” The Temple, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.the-temple.org/history>.
- ^{xxvii} Ibid.
- ^{xxviii} “Welcome to the Temple,” The Temple, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.the-temple.org/about-us>.

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