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Jews, Sports, Gender, and the Rose City : An Analysis of Jewish Involvement with Athletics in Portland, Oregon, 1900-1940

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Jews, Sports, Gender, and the Rose City:
An Analysis of Jewish Involvement with Athletics in Portland, Oregon
1900-1940

by
Kelli Ann Tusow

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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Abstract

The subject of Jews in sports is often times perceived as an oxymoronic research topic given the ethnic stereotypes that Jews are physically weak, unfit, and more focused on intellectual pursuits. However, Jews have had a long history and in-depth interaction with sports that is important to understand, not only to expand our perception of the Jewish people, but also to realize the important role sports play in social historiography. While the Jewish population of East Coast America and their involvement in athletics has been studied to some extent, the West Coast population, in particular, the Northwest, has been sorely neglected.

This thesis examines the lives of immigrant Jews on the West Coast, specifically Portland, OR and their interaction with sports compared to the experiences of immigrant Jews on the East Coast from 1900 to 1940. An overall examination and comparison of the Jewish immigrant experience in the West is presented along with an evaluation of the establishment of the Portland Jewish community and their coinciding athletic community. The experiences of the Jews in Western America is compared to the immigrants of the East Coast and how these differing involvements shaped the development of Jewish sporting facilities. The thesis then expands on how the Portland Jews grew their athletic facilities and overall involvement in athletics, related to the experience of East Coast Jews. The growth of the Jewish Zionist movement is examined along with how Jewish involvement fit more seamlessly into certain sports than others. The thesis also

takes a closer look at Jewish women and their specific experiences in athletics compared to their East Coast counterparts and the experience of Jewish men in Portland. The role of philanthropic organizations as a means of greater involvement in athletics is assessed, along with how the experiences of Western European versus Eastern European immigrants played into their varying involvements with sports. Finally, the conclusion discusses the importance of scholarly sports inquiry as it plays to the relevance of a greater social history and for immigrants in particular, their assimilation and acculturation into American society.

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Introduction

Speaking of his LA. Dodgers baseball team in the 1960s, pitching great and Jewish American Sandy Koufax noted that, “there is among us a far closer relationship than the purely social one of a fraternal organization because we are bound together not only by a single interest but by a common goal.¹” The opportunity of being part of a sporting community can provide acceptance into a group bound by mutual commitments, traditions, and superstitions as well as dedication and belief in the collective cause. In turn, an individual can find acceptance and a sense of belonging on a team. There is a shared identity when one becomes a member of a sports team, a transformation occurs when people stop thinking of themselves as independent onlookers and become a part of something greater than themselves. Like religion, sports involve a devout faith that can create unity out of diversity. Accordingly, sports history, especially for minority groups in a society like the United States, deserves a comprehensive examination in order to better understand the assimilation process of those who just wanted to be part of a “team,” but in actuality had the potential of shaping the history of their religious or ethnic communities.

The Jewish population has never been touted for exceptional athletic talent. In fact, Jews have been stereotyped as weak, physically unfit, and more bookish than brawny. Yet author Steven Riess in *Sports and the American Jew* (1998) argues that

¹ Sandy Koufax, quoted in Buddy Bell and Neal Vahle, *Smart Baseball: How Professionals Play the Mental Game* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 234.

the athletic experience of immigrant Jews was more a result of their homeland cultures than their inherited physical abilities or religious beliefs. He goes on to say that Jews have contributed greatly to sports at large. They have been professional baseball players, track stars, influential basketball team members, and owners of a number of professional sports organizations.²

Throughout history, Jews have had varied experiences when it comes to physical exertion. Riess sites the Jews of Biblical times who participated in wrestling, weightlifting, and long distance running. Yet in the Hellenistic era, opposition to the Greeks who participated in athletic events in the nude, led to limited encouragement toward sports.³ The disapproval towards gymnasiums can be seen in the Book of Maccabees. Two passages in the text discuss the building of gymnasiums as a distraction from worshiping the holy covenant.⁴ However, Riess also acknowledges the positive references to physical activities such as ball playing and swimming in the Talmud as long as no violence ensued. While rabbis saw a connection between mind and body and believed moderate exercise would promote good health, any physical violence was considered “un-Jewish.” Also unacceptable were sports played on the Sabbath, a practice officially banned in Shulchan Aruch’s rabbinical code of the sixteenth century.⁵

² Steven A. Riess, “An Introduction,” in *Sports and the American Jew* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 2.

³ *Ibid*, 5.

⁴ 2 Maccabees 4: 9-17 (New American Bible Revised Edition).

⁵ Riess, 6.

As Western European Ashkenazi Jews began to immigrate to the United States in substantial numbers in the late nineteenth century, attitudes toward sports evolved slightly. Most of these immigrants came from the modernized nations of England and Germany, where participation in organized athletics was not uncommon. In fact, many successful boxers and gymnasts were products of both countries. English and German Jews moreover, came from nations dominating sports worldwide. In the 1896 Olympic games in Athens, Germany came in third behind Greece and the United States for total metals won, while England came in fifth. German and English Jewish immigrants to the United States made contributions to track, football, and baseball teams in major East Coast cities. Some immigrants also successfully involved themselves in the business side of sports, owning professional baseball teams and participating in horse racing to help improve their social status. At the same time, however, Western European Jews in America were not immune to exclusion and anti-Semitism. While Western European Jews were one of the few ethnic groups admitted to East Coast colleges, they often experienced exclusion from almost all social connections including sports.⁶ East Coast Jews succeeded in counteracting instances of bigotry when denied admission into Christian facilities in metropolitan areas such as New York and Philadelphia by opening their own athletic clubs. This resulted in the formation of organizations like

⁶ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 31.

the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), along with non-religious clubs that offered facilities for people of all faiths.⁷

Although Western European Jews committed themselves to the continuation of physical activity amid growing discrimination, the experience of Eastern European Jews from Russia, the Balkans, and Poland was vastly different. In a scope of almost forty-five years starting in the early 1880s, more than 2.4 million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States seeking job opportunities, freedom from persecution and escape from famine and disease.⁸ Many Eastern European Jews were strictly Orthodox, spoke differently, dressed differently, and given their impoverished *shtetl* upbringing, had little familiarity with sports. This lack of athletic knowledge furthered the un-physically fit stereotypes that Americans began to apply to all Jews. Harvard President Charles W. Eliot for example, told the University's Menorah Society in 1907 that, "Jews are distinctly inferior in stature and physical development . . . to any other race."⁹

The first generation of Eastern European Jews did little to lessen stereotypes since many viewed sports as a waste of time and a gateway to poor morals. Riess has argued that new Eastern European (primarily Russian) Jewish immigrants were focused more on education and Talmudic studies instead of "ridiculous" activities

⁷ Ibid, 6-12.

⁸ Alan M. Kraut, *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2001), 25-26.

⁹ Charles Eliot, quoted in Elliott Horowitz, "'They Fought Because They Were Fighters and They Fought Because They Were Jews': Violence and the Construction of Modern Jewish Identity," in *Jews and Violence: Images, Ideologies, Realities*, ed. Peter Y. Medding (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

such as baseball. Sports like baseball, boxing, and football were viewed by many parents as not only dangerous, but also a “threat to their sons’ ethnic identity.”¹⁰ For most first generation immigrant parents participation in sports meant Jewish children were becoming too Americanized and, therefore, forgetting “Old World” culture and traditions.¹¹

Even if initial Jewish immigrants had viewed athletics more favorably, their lifestyles provided little free time to devote to alternate activities. Social worker Charles Bernheimer offered one view of the Russian Jew when he observed that, “Poor as he is, he strives to live like a civilized man, and the money which another workman perhaps might spend on drink and sport he devotes to the improvement of his home and education of his children.”¹² In many cases, hardworking immigrants lacked the time and money to focus on anything other than making ends meet.

Second generation Eastern European Jews, nonetheless, regarded American sports differently than their immigrant parents. Young boys especially saw sports as a way to gain acceptance and used athletic skills such as boxing as a way to defend themselves from rival ethnic groups. Despite the complaints issued from parents, Jewish youth on the East Coast tended to see athletics as an escape from anti-Semitism and controlling, conservative households. These young Jews felt

¹⁰ Riess, 15-16.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Charles Seligman Bernheimer, *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of Social Conditions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, with a Description of Rural Settlements*, (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1905), 35.

empowered by sports involvement as a way of developing strength, skills, and acceptance into a mainstream way of American life.¹³ First generation Eastern European parents moreover, not only had to face their children's desire of acculturation, but also the promotion of sports by resettlement organizations and schools. East Coast institutions such as the YMHA, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the Public School Athletic League (PSAL) all promoted sports as a feasible means to assimilate into American society.¹⁴

Jewish women on the East Coast, both from Western and Eastern Europe, also participated in athletic organizations. Just as the YMHA existed for Jewish men, the Young Women's Hebrew Association (YWHA) promoted sport as an imperative part of a woman's leisure time. In *Jewish American Women and Sports* (1998) Linda Borish explains that German Jewish women by the 1880s who "became wealthier and oriented to American culture and institutions" sought to assist recent Jewish immigrants in the adoption of American culture and customs.¹⁵ Accordingly, settlement houses and immigrant organizations primarily focused on the assimilation of Eastern European women and started to use athletics as a tool to replace traditional ways of Jewish life with more American habits.

¹³ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter With American Sports*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 52-53.

¹⁴ Alan Owen Patterson, "The Eastern European Jewish Immigrant Experience with Baseball in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 1 (February 2008): 87.

¹⁵ Linda Borish "Jewish American Women, Jewish Organizations, and Sports, 1880-1940," in *Sports and the American Jew*, ed. Steven Riess (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 107.

Prior to establishing their own gymnasiums, women shared limited time at YMHA facilities. By the late nineteenth century, however, Jewish women on the East Coast recognized the need to create independent athletic spaces for themselves and their children. At these facilities, women participated in swimming, gymnastics, calisthenics, and basketball, although administrators only sanctioned sports they thought would “maintain femininity and fitness.”¹⁶ The promotion of sports for women was often geared toward their physical appearance, such as encouraging women to join in order to maintain a “thin frame.” Females who shined in various sports were described in feminine language to downplay any potential masculine characteristics. Basketball rules for women, in turn, disallowed physical contact, demonstrating the desire among Jewish organizations to encourage femininity while still promoting physical fitness.¹⁷

In addition to the work done by Steven Riess, historians such as Jack Kugelmass and Linda Borish have added to the historiography of the Jewish immigrant experience in relation to sports. Most accounts of Jewish sports history in the United States, however, refer to Jews living on the East Coast ignoring the American West Coast, particularly the Northwest. The most likely reason for this lies in the relative prominence of the Jewish population in the East compared to the West. While the Jewish population throughout the United States grew from 15,000 to 250,000 between 1840 and 1877, the Pacific Coast population increased from a

¹⁶ Ibid, 120.

¹⁷ Ibid, 121.

few individuals to only 20,000. Yet the Jews of the West Coast had their own unique experience with sports, therefore, a subject deserving further attention and analysis.

The goal of this thesis is to show that unlike the Jewish communities of the East who used sports primarily as an assimilation tool, West Coast Jews were at the center of the creation and development of athletic communities in their region. The comparison of the athletic experience between the East and the West coasts can offer a great deal of insight into the overall Jewish immigrant experiences as well as a look into the development of athletics in the United States in the early twentieth century.

This essay will focus specifically on the creation of an athletic community among the Jewish population of Portland, Oregon. Portland offers a microcosmic example of the impact sports had on Jewish immigrant communities in the West and presents an opportunity to examine the less studied Northwest Jewish population. Although Portland never claimed the largest Jewish immigrant populace on the West Coast, Jews did have a substantial bearing on the development of the city, particularly in the athletic community. Indeed, Portland established itself as an important hub for Jews along the entire West Coast, offering a mid-way point between the major Jewish center of San Francisco and its satellite communities stretching to Victoria, British Columbia.

Although the Portland Jewish population grew more slowly than San Francisco's, it was the home of the first West Coast Jewish congregation outside of California and increased more rapidly than communities in Washington State during

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1878 and 1910, Portland's Jewish society grew by four thousand and continued to expand by another seven thousand by 1927.¹⁸ Portland, therefore, can serve as a representative of the Jewish population along the West Coast while also being large enough to provide substantial information for a thesis of this kind.

This work will build on the scholarship of Ellen Eisenberg, Eva Kahn, and William Toll whose book *Jews of the Pacific Coast* (2009), plus numerous historical articles on the Jews of Portland and the development of their communities, help to provide a complete picture of the Jewish athletic experience in the Rose City.

In addition to the existing literature on Jewish athletic involvement, the Western frontier, and early Portland society, this study uses archival research on Portland Jewish history. The extensive material on Portland Jews includes documents from athletic clubs, particularly the collection originating from the B'nai B'rith Building (also known as the Jewish Community Center), which contains newsletters of the monthly happenings at the center. Other sources include personal accounts by Jewish individuals recounting athletic participation during their childhood, as well as numerous photographs of early sports teams. Copies of the *Morning Oregonian* newspaper from approximately 1917 to 1922 also describe the competition between both Jewish and non-Jewish sports teams in the Portland area.

¹⁸ Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 79.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine the movement westward by East Coast Jews during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, along with the establishment of their athletic communities in Portland. This chapter asks what drew Jews westward and how did that shape their experience with athletics. In addition, it asks how essential were Jews in the establishment of an athletic community in Portland and how accepting was the immigrant population when it came to sports involvement in the city. The second chapter of the thesis delves further into the established Jewish athletic groups. Specifically, it examines the role athletics played in the lives of Portland Jews and the expansion of their athletic involvement, along with the question of whether anti-Semitism factored into their athletic participation. Finally, the third chapter explores the role of women in the Portland Jewish sporting community and how their experiences compared to their East Coast counterparts and how their involvement compared to Jewish men in Portland.

For the purpose of this study, *East Coast America* refers to the eastern most part of the United States along the Atlantic Ocean, particularly the Northeastern states of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania where most Jewish immigrants settled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. References to *West Coast America* include the states of California, Oregon and Washington. This is not to be confused with the term “moving west” which generally refers to relocating anywhere west of the original thirteen colonies.

Chapter I:

The Move Westward and the Establishment of the Portland Jewish Athletic Community

The question of why Jews were drawn to the American West Coast originally has some bearing on the kind of athletic organizations created by these individuals. Young Jewish men were among many other frontier fortune-seekers looking at the newly acquired territories as a literal gold mine of opportunity. Despite the Gold Rush being the draw to areas like Pike's Peak and the Rockies, Jews eventually found more of a niche in trading with Native Americans and security as merchants in booming western cities. Opening general stores, banks, saloons, and hotels became more prosperous for many Jewish settlers than desperately seeking a fortune in gold.¹

Historian Howard M. Sachar in *History of Jews in America* (1992) claims that the relatively egalitarian characteristics of an emerging society in relation to European ethnics allowed western Jews to be successful economically and later politically. In what had become the most diverse region in the country during the Gold Rush, Jews relied on their mercantile skills and one another in pursuit of affluence.²

¹ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, Inc., 1992), 56-57.

² Sachar, 56.

In *Jews of the Pacific Coast* (2009), Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll suggest that compared to other regions of the United States, the West developed “a civic culture—founded in part by Jews—that was particularly welcoming and attractive to new Jewish arrivals.”³ In other regions, such as the South, as historian Abraham Peck suggests, “Jews could never be certain where they stood.”⁴ “In isolated instances there is no prejudice entertained for the individual,” one southern rabbi explained “but there exists a widespread and deep-seated prejudice against Jews as an entire people.”⁵ The West, however, had less entrenched seeds of racism. The area attracted a wide array of ethnic diversity including immigrants from China, Japan, Mexico, and European countries such as Italy and Ireland, as well as the existing Native American population. With these ethnicities also came a variety of religions. Anglo Americans had to contend with the Catholicism of Mexican Americans, Irish Americans, and Italian Americans along with Mormons and Buddhists.

While the diversity of both race and religion could create instances of tension in the West, historian Patricia Limerick has argued, race relations in the West “could make the turn-of-the-century Northeastern urban confrontation between European

³ Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America’s Edge* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 5.

⁴ Abraham J. Peck, “The Other ‘Peculiar Institution:’ Jews and Judaism in the Nineteenth Century South,” *Modern Judaism* 7, no. 1 (February, 1997), 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*

immigrants and American nativists look like a family reunion.”⁶ In *How Jews Became White Folks*, Karen Brodtkin also notes the different experiences with racism for Jews who lived in the East and Midwest compared to those moving to the West Coast. Brodtkin writes, “Southern and European immigrants and their children faced intense racism . . . in the industrial East and Midwest of the late nineteenth century; but when they migrated to the West they were usually considered fully white.”⁷ According to Brodtkin, Jews were often times lumped in with Irish Catholics as an “inferior” religious culture compared to British Protestants in the East. Anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism then overlapped and connected with long established racial stigmatization in the East and Southern parts of the country.⁸

Likely due to the lack of an established “Protestant mainstream” in the West, most Gentiles saw Jews as not significantly altering the landscape during the nineteenth century. Various groups stood out more as the “other” given their physical characteristics. Westerners placed Native Americans on reservations and created legislation designed to restrict the economic activities of Chinese and South American immigrants, including a foreigner Miner’s License Tax.⁹ In contrast Toll, Eisenberg, and Kahn, suggest that, “By every measure Jews were accepted as white,

⁶ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 27.

⁷ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 54.

⁸ *Ibid*, 54-55.

⁹ John C. Lammers, “The Accommodation of Chinese Immigrants,” *Sociological Perspectives* 31, no. 4 (October, 1988), 451.

though perhaps of a slightly different shade.”¹⁰ The eclectic racial and religious population gave Jews the opportunity to run their own businesses, in a relatively more accepting landscape despite exclusion of Jews from elite social clubs and the targeting of Jewish merchants through Sunday Closing laws.¹¹

As Jewish immigrants found financial success and population numbers grew, an extraordinary network of Jewish businesses developed up and down the West Coast. These extensive social connections allowed Jews to become more than just assimilated into society, but prominent political leaders of developing towns. As early as 1880, Jews had developed well-established philanthropic organizations and held positions in Masonic lodges and local governments.¹² Over twenty West Coast towns of the late nineteenth century even had Jewish mayors.¹³

An ingredient of Jewish success in merging into Western society seemed to be the tendency toward more secular, less Orthodox ideas and lifestyles. Living in rural societies required a “willingness to compromise or abandon traditional practice,” according to Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll.¹⁴ For example, maintaining dietary restrictions and rituals associated with Jewish law became unfeasible in areas with few supportive resources. Families unwilling to forgo these traditions tended to stay on the East Coast.¹⁵ Historian Robert Levinson notes, only in cities with a substantial

¹⁰ Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, 5-7.

¹¹ Ibid, 51.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 56.

¹⁴ Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, 85-86.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Jewish population such as San Francisco and Portland did formal religious organizations exist. Even in these locations, rabbis were hard to come by, making it difficult to establish places of worship. Not until the arrival of Eastern European immigrants less willing to give up their religious observances did exclusive Jewish neighborhoods with synagogues within walking distance begin to develop.¹⁶

The first major hub in the West that facilitated Jewish success and acceptance was San Francisco. By 1865, the city's Jewish population made up approximately four thousand out of 119,000 total residents. The majority of Jews living in San Francisco were traders or business owners. Well-known establishments like Levi Strauss & Co. came out of the San Francisco Jewish community. Some Jews became department store owners while others started businesses importing luxury products like coffee and tea. "The Israelites constitute a numerous and intelligent class of our citizens and conduct themselves with great propriety and decorum," read the *San Francisco Herald* in 1851.¹⁷ With the Jewish population growing steadily in San Francisco during the late nineteenth century, family and fraternal relationships prospered, facilitating a greater source of capital to get Jewish businesses off the ground and running. By the turn of the century, Jews dominated the economy of San Francisco.¹⁸

The initial draw of the Gold Rush did not limit Jews to major cities, however, but led to a dispersal of Jews across the rural West as sources of credit for ranchers

¹⁶ Steven Lowenstein, *The Jews of Oregon 1850-1950* (Portland: Jewish Historical Society of Oregon, 1987), 289.

¹⁷ *San Francisco Herald*, quoted in Sachar, 61.

¹⁸ Sachar, 57-61.

and retail merchants. Jews operated stores in remote areas of central and eastern Oregon such as Burns, Cannon City, and Baker.¹⁹ Yet Jews who viewed religious practices as essential to their lifestyle struggled in smaller towns, particularly families who wanted their sons to focus more on religious studies. Author Polina Olson recounts the experience of Hy Jackson who grew up in Baker, but eventually moved with his family to Portland. After consistently visiting relatives there for holidays, the Jackson family made the permanent move when it came time for young Jackson to study for his Bar Mitzvah.²⁰ Keeping kosher, moreover, was nearly impossible although people like Francis Aiken Wolfe's aunt, who lived in the Eastern Oregon town of Union, attempted it. In some small towns, only one Jewish family might exist, making it not only lonely, but difficult to keep dietary restrictions. Elinor Shank's family existed in this exact situation. "I knew my parents were Jewish," she recalled, "and I had a book of Old Testament Bible stories. At that time, that was the end of my [religious] education."²¹ For many more Jewish families, the ability to practice the traditions of their religion led to a push toward cities like Portland.

The expanding Jewish population in Portland became essential for the development of the city. By 1900, the total population had grown to 90,000 and the city had become a crucial shipping port, sending agricultural and timber products to San Francisco and eventually to international destinations. Portland had become not

¹⁹ Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, 58-59.

²⁰ Polina Olsen, *Stories from Jewish Portland*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 31.

²¹ *Ibid*, 33.

only the largest city in the Northwest, but also the biggest commercial center. Given its key location near the Willamette and Columbia rivers, and its connection to the Northern Pacific Railroad, Portland grew in supremacy over other cities in Oregon and Washington. This burgeoning economy made Portland ideal for Jews already involved in merchandise and retail businesses throughout the West Coast.²²

Portland neighborhoods and boundary lines also grew when the city put the electric streetcar into effect in 1891. The streetcar allowed Portland citizens to access resources throughout the city and helped to spread the prime neighborhoods Jewish immigrants inhabited. Many Jews who had moved to Portland prior to 1900 lived along the streetcar railway on First Street in South Portland. Since so many Portland Jews had mercantile jobs, this location gave them easy access to trade within the city.²³ By 1900, many middle-class Jews chose to establish themselves a little farther from the main business district, settling around north 16th Street.²⁴ Some Eastern European Jews also began to settle in the northeast section of downtown on north Third Street or north Front Street, although many were eventually drawn to the resources already established by the Jews of South Portland. Kosher fish and meat markets, as well as Jewish bakeries and grocers,

²² William Toll, "Ethnicity and Stability: The Italians and Jews of South Portland, 1900-1940," *The Pacific Historical Review* 34, no. 2 (May, 1985), 165-166.

²³ *Ibid*, 169-172.

²⁴ William Toll, "Fraternalism and Community Structure on the Urban Frontier: The Jews of Portland," *The Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (August, 1978), 392.

allowed for ritual food preparation, making the district a key location for many Jews at the onset of the twentieth century.²⁵

Despite living in the same neighborhoods, or relatively close by, two distinct groups of Jews existed in Portland: Germans along with other Western Europeans versus Polish and Russian immigrants.²⁶ The Germans were the first to establish a congregation outside of California. Founded in 1858, Temple Beth Israel was not Orthodox, nor did it attract a permanent ordained rabbi until the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, by 1869, the Portland Jewish population had grown enough to conceive a second congregation, as Beth Israel divided between the German majority and the increasing Polish population.²⁷ Polish and Russian Jews, in fact, would outnumber the German Jewish population in Portland by 1905. This same year, Russian immigrants finally established the first Orthodox synagogue in Portland.²⁸ Although the two groups had their core religious faith in common, the longer-dwelling, more established German community viewed integration into American society as essential for long term acculturation. Many Eastern European Jews, on the other hand, seemed to want to hold on to traditional practices and dress, much to the annoyance of the German Jewish group.²⁹

²⁵ Toll, "Ethnicity and Stability," 172.

²⁶ Toll, "Fraternalism and Community Structure," 372-373.

²⁷ Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, 34.

²⁸ Toll, "Fraternalism and Community Structure," 379-380.

²⁹ Mordechai B. Massart, "A Rabbi in the Progressive Era: Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Ph.D. and the Rise of Social Jewish Progressivism in Portland, OR., 1900-1906," (master's thesis, Portland State University), 20.

One of the first efforts to encourage community interconnection centered on the B'nai B'rith lodge. Originally developed in New York to assist German immigrants, the lodge unified Jews entering the United States and gave them everything from a place to study to access to health and burial insurance. The first Portland lodge started in 1866, less than a decade after its first counterpart on the West Coast was established in San Francisco. Membership numbers in the Portland lodge rarely topped fifty until more Eastern European Jews began to settle in the city by the end of the nineteenth century. Historian William Toll explains that while the synagogues in Portland split because of conflicting ideals between Western and Eastern European Jews, the B'nai B'rith lodges overlooked these differences to continue the mutually beneficial services.³⁰

As more lodges developed in Portland, however, a hierarchy within the Jewish community began to divide the population rather than unite it. While some lodges such as Lodge 416 and the original Lodge 65 had been established by wealthy German business owners and merchants, not all chapters had this level of social status. Lodge 416 included well-known names such as the department store owners Aaron Meier and Julius Frank, along with a number of physicians and attorneys throughout the city. It excluded, however, members of lesser vocations like grocers, tailors, and shoemakers. While Toll argues that these clubs created barriers between groups within the Jewish community, they owed their success to the presence of anti-Semitism and the omission of Jews from Portland Gentile clubs,

³⁰ Toll, "Fraternalism and Community Structure," 380-381.

as well as the desire of Portland Jews to establish their own organizations.³¹

Nevertheless, the rejection of Jewish admissions to private clubs and the separation of German versus Eastern European Jews seemed to be much less extreme in Portland compared to the East Coast.

Jews of Oregon (1987) author Steven Lowenstein claims that one reason German and Eastern European Jews held a greater understanding amongst each other is because of the efforts of Rabbi Stephen Wise.³² A devoted Zionist and leader of the Jewish Reform Movement, Wise brought his progressive ideas to Portland during the years 1900-1906. The concept of Reform Judaism involved a move away from strict, unchanging rabbinical law, one believing that “customs and ceremonies must change with the varying needs of the different generations.”³³ Liberal Judaism was also included in the Reform Movement and emphasized social justice and modifying traditional Jewish services so the focus and inspiration of its teachings became social betterment.³⁴ Wise’s goals of spreading Zionism coupled with his goals of promoting social reform, minimized traditional ritual observance and introduced Portlanders to more “enlightened” practices.

During his short time as Rabbi for Temple Beth Israel, Wise emphasized the introduction of social reform programs.³⁵ An adamant supporter of child labor laws and improved working conditions, Wise made it his goal to improve the working

³¹ Ibid, 390.

³² Lowenstein, 86.

³³ David Philipson, “The Progress of the Reform Movement in the United States,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 10, no. 1 (Oct. 1897), 52.

³⁴ Massart, 2.

³⁵ Ibid, 7.

environment, particularly for the people of South Portland. He also pushed to eradicate gambling and organized prostitution despite threats to his own life.³⁶ While critical in helping elect reform mayor Harry Lane, Wise never had political ambitions himself. Instead he relied on his talents as orator, giving passionate lectures on both social and religious topics.³⁷

Given Wise's strong personality and popularity as Rabbi of Beth Israel, Portland Jews followed and supported his messages of Zionism and social reform. In 1901, a year after Wise's move to Portland, the Zionist Society of Portland was founded. Feeling sympathy for their European and Russian brethren, both German and Eastern European Jews in Portland held a great affinity for the Zionist ideals Wise brought to the city, uniting the two groups under this common cause.³⁸

The Jews of Portland also bought into Wise's ideas of social reform when it came to new immigrants to the city. Besides the B'nai B'rith lodges, immigrants arriving in western cities relied on local philanthropic organizations, many initiated by Wise, to assist acculturation to their new home. In Portland, Neighborhood House became the organization dedicated to settlement work. In 1904, B'nai B'rith 416 Lodge, with the help of Rabbi Wise and his wife, Louise Waterman Wise, raised five thousand dollars for the project. Run by the Portland section of the National Council for Jewish Women, the settlement house was located in South Portland where it was thought it would provide the most access to the newer immigrant population. Begun

³⁶ Ibid, 51-52.

³⁷ Lowenstein, 87.

³⁸ Ibid, 86.

as a small sewing school, Neighborhood House developed into a center of education, music, and recreational activities. For Jewish children living in South Portland during the early twentieth century, the settlement became a popular destination, providing a multitude of activities.³⁹

From its opening in January 1905, Neighborhood House provided services to all Portland citizens, including the many Italian immigrants residing in South Portland. Eventually it opened one of the first kindergartens in Portland, serving primarily immigrant children. The settlement house also focused on reaching out to Jewish children in the community by providing religious instruction to those who might not otherwise have access to Hebrew schools. It even housed the Portland Hebrew School while it searched for a more permanent location. Historian Emily Zeien-Stuckman points out that while Neighborhood House was inclined to be a secular institution, it strongly highlighted its Jewish roots and values, making it unique compared to other philanthropic organizations started by women in Portland.⁴⁰

Neighborhood house also offered programs for adults such as “Mother’s Meetings” most likely aimed at covering topics such as childbirth and housekeeping to acculturate immigrant women. By assisting both children and mothers, the agency encouraged newcomers to adopt an American mainstream lifestyle, a mission further advanced by English and citizenship classes. Zeien-Stuckman notes

³⁹ Emily Zeien-Stuckman, “Creating New Citizens: The National Council of Jewish Women’s Work at Neighborhood House in Portland, 1896-1912,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 316.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 321-322.

the popularity of these classes and argues that “the adults of the immigrant community were eager to gain the skills and knowledge needed to become successful American citizens.”⁴¹ Unlike many other settlement houses across the nation, Neighborhood House seemed void of adult political clubs and social agitators. While settlements like Jane Addams’s Hull House in Chicago offered lectures and debates on current labor and social issues, Neighborhood House prohibited these types of meetings despite its working-class population. Although the reasoning behind the ban is unclear, it is evident that the focus remained on education and acculturation, not the political goals of those seeking social reform.⁴²

In addition to education, Neighborhood House promoted sports teams, and claimed one of the first gymnasiums in Portland. By 1908, the popular settlement was forced to establish a new building to contain its growing membership. Public schools and private organizations had encouraged athletic involvement even prior to the settlement’s existence. Evidence appears as early as 1903 of a football team established by department store owners Meier and Frank. Local, public schools also offered sports teams Jews could join.⁴³ Failing Public School, located in South Portland, was attended by a large Jewish contingent and run by principal Fannie Porter. Besides encouraging students to play at recess, Porter was a great supporter

⁴¹ Ibid, 324.

⁴² Ibid, 325.

⁴³ “Meier & Frank Football Team,” 1903, *Meier & Frank Collection*, OJM 1370, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland, OR.

of the school's sports teams.⁴⁴ Athletic teams also existed at the high school level. As early as 1907 Portland High School had even created a girl's basketball team.⁴⁵ Through both Neighborhood House and the public school system, Jews in Portland initiated sports clubs that continued to grow in popularity through the first decade of the twentieth century.

Records on early Portland resident Abe Popick show the youth participating in many sports Neighborhood House offered, including the talented South Parkway basketball team⁴⁶ along with city league sports including two local baseball teams, the Waverly and the Kirkpatrick All Stars.⁴⁷ At Neighborhood House basketball seemed to be at the core of the facility's popularity despite meager accommodations. Larry Mudrick, brother of the South Parkway team coach, Bob Mudrick, recalls that, "The Neighborhood House had a basketball court . . . I'm telling you there were no seats—there was no room. If you were watching a game, you stood on the court."⁴⁸ While Jewish education and learning may have been the primary focus at Neighborhood House, the encouragement of Americanization through sport undoubtedly played a role in the agency's mission.

⁴⁴ "Fannie Porter with the Failing School Baseball Team," 1924, *Failing School Collection* OJM 1596, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁵ "Portland High School Women's Basketball Team," 1907, OJM 5080, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁶ "Abe Popick in South Parkway Uniform," ca. 1915, OJM 5699, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁷ "Abe Popick and Girl with Baseball Bat," ca. 1915, OJM 5704, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁸ Bob Murdick, quoted in Olsen, 72-73.

Because of the settlement's increasing athletic activity, the Jewish community saw a need for a center with the purpose of promoting and housing Jewish communal events that could serve a second Portland Jewish neighborhood. In 1910 a notice published in the *Jewish Tribune*, announced plans to build the B'nai B'rith Jewish Community Center on Thirteenth Avenue between Mill and Market streets. This location functioned for those living in the inner Southwest Portland area near Shattuck School, another public school with a Jewish majority. The article claimed the purpose of the center, was to create organized activities,

... for the good of the people, in the interests of education, morality, and good citizenship, every social effort which lends toward the fostering among our people brotherly sentiments, mutual sympathy, kindness, and sense of responsibility; every purpose which lends towards cordial and friendly relationship with all the people of our City, State, and Nation, of all creeds and all conditions and to the general advancement of all physical and spiritual conditions.⁴⁹

The building officially opened in October of 1914, catering to the growing middle class Jewish population in the area.

From the onset, the B'nai B'rith Building, also known as the Jewish Community Center, promoted sports for all Jews living in the area. The center had no affiliation to any one B'nai B'rith Lodge, and received funding from both German and Eastern European Jews, making it one of the few communal locations open to all Portland Jews. Besides meeting rooms and a library, the building included a gym, showers, swimming pool, billiard room, handball court, and clubroom clearly geared

⁴⁹ "Jewish Community Center History," ORG 5, Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum.

toward athletic participation. B'nai B'rith also held dances, and offered space for social gatherings and meetings. Given the existence of the wide variety of activities available at the center, it seems the organization successfully combined physical activity with the promotion of intellectual and cultural events. The job of assimilating immigrants, providing health clinics and citizenship information remained the business of Neighborhood House. In effect the B'nai B'rith Building served the burgeoning Jewish middle class while Neighborhood House dealt with the poorer immigrant population.⁵⁰

The financial divide between attendees of Neighborhood House compared to B'nai B'rith did not go unnoticed by children using both facilities. Harry Mesher noted that B'nai B'rith seemed "ritzier" and the children who went there more affluent, while "the poor kids, they went to Neighborhood House."⁵¹ As South Portlanders began to find their niche in the business community, however, their prosperity grew over time, eventually helping create more of a united front between the two organizations.⁵²

Compared to the East Coast, the push of athletics by both Neighborhood House and B'nai B'rith met with little resistance from parents and members of the religious community. Many accounts exist of first generation Jewish parents on the East Coast describing sports such as boxing and football as "dangerous" and baseball

⁵⁰ Lowenstein, 157-159.

⁵¹ Harry Mesher, quoted in Lowenstein, 159.

⁵² Lowenstein, 159.

as “lacking purpose.”⁵³ Although very few negative accounts of the growing Jewish athletic community in Portland appear, the few that emerged may have been a result of strict religious households. Rachel Fain remembers her rabbi father’s warnings about playing ball: “You don’t do that. You don’t waste your time . . . you’ve got to learn.” Another account from Frieda Gass Cohen recalls her parents dismissive reference to “a-ball-player-a bum,” and description of football as “altogether a terrible thing.” Her parents’ feelings did not seem to prevent her from participating in athletics, however. As Cohen recalls, “We did play outside; we were healthy; we swam; we did all these things, but only as secondary activities.”⁵⁴

Not all students participated in athletics, however. Manly Labby recollects about his childhood: “We didn’t engage in sports,” Manly Labby once recalled. “We didn’t engage in extracurricular activities—there wasn’t the time. We went downtown right after school, sold papers and then came home with whatever few dimes we made there.”⁵⁵ For some Jewish families in Portland, making ends meet remained difficult, requiring parents to rely on their children for extra income. When the B’nai B’rith Building opened, it cost twelve dollars a year to become a member. Neighborhood House also charged \$2.50 per month for Manual Training School combined with the use of the gymnasium.⁵⁶ This type of expense might have been deemed unnecessary by some Jewish parents, not necessarily because they disagreed with participating in athletic activities, but because of the financial

⁵³ Riess, 15.

⁵⁴ Frieda Gass Cohen, quoted in Lowenstein, 114.

⁵⁵ Manly Labby, quoted in Lowenstein, 115.

⁵⁶ Zeien-Stuckman, 321.

burden of such activity and the need for children to be making money during their free time instead of playing games.

The promotion of the use of facilities like the B'nai B'rith Building seemed to indicate leaders of the organizations knew finances could be a deterrent to becoming a member. One advertisement for the B'nai B'rith Building read "Gym Memberships Cheaper Than Doctor's Bill," while another claimed, "Join the Gym and Stay in Trim."⁵⁷ ⁵⁸ Advertisers also played on the Jewish desire for a sense of community. One B'nai B'rith newsletter boasted that "by such a gathering of forces, we materially are making the beginnings of a unified social center, guided by the single spirit of community service . . . We can establish in the minds of the people that this is a center to which they are welcome."⁵⁹ By promoting the positives of membership and participation in athletics, progressive organizations like Neighborhood House and the B'nai B'rith Building most likely hoped those who favored traditionalism or seemed reluctant because of finances would at least give participation a second thought.

Overall, Jewish immigrants moving to Portland tended to find success in their efforts to develop a sporting community. The focus of the first chapter of this essay has sought to expand on the atmosphere surrounding Jewish westward movement

⁵⁷ "Gym Memberships Cheaper Than Doctor's Bill," *B'nai B'rith Bulletin* ORG 1 B'nai B'rith Records Box #5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (September 1925), 2.

⁵⁸ "Join the Gym and Stay in Trim," *B'nai B'rith Bulletin* ORG 1 B'nai B'rith Records Box #5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (April, 1924), 3.

⁵⁹ Louis H. Blumenthal, "Our Community Center," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Building* 1, ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (November 1922), 8.

in the late nineteenth century that eventually led to the establishment of the athletic facilities in Portland. The less traditional, more adventurous Jewish population who sought prosperity in the American West also seemed more accepting of American mainstream culture, making them more likely to set up locations for sporting events. Although encompassing a diverse demographic, the West did appear less anti-Semitic when compared to other regions throughout the United States, conceivably allowing more access to the creation of gymnasiums and involvement in local city teams.

While many first generation immigrants on the East Coast made their qualms about athletic participation known to their children, the same level of discontentment was not found in Portland. Adults and children alike participated in activities at Neighborhood House and the B'nai B'rith Building. Possibly influenced by the progressive teachings of Rabbi Wise, and other Reform minded rabbis that followed him, the Portland Jewish community seemed more flexible and open to shedding Jewish traditionalism and embracing the culture of the times. Although German Jews tended to more heartily encourage "Americanization," while Eastern European Jews took a slower pace toward acceptance of American ideals, both groups remained heavily involved in local athletic facilities. The early Jewish community of Portland seemed actively intertwined in the creation and participation of a growing athletic populace for all Portland residents.

Chapter II:
The Expansion of Portland's Jewish Athletic Community
and Rising Anti-Semitism

At the Second Zionist Congress in 1898, Max Nordau called for “the raising up of a new type of proud, athletic, Jew, who would help the Jewish people take a respected place within the modern world.”¹ This moment was part of a larger push within the Zionist movement to transform the world’s image of the Jewish man into a “New Jew,” one of muscularity, brawn, and internal and external strength. This was to be the antithesis of the negative stereotypes of the subservient, weak, and anxiety-ridden Diaspora Jew that had become the norm over thousands of years. “The image of the new muscular Jew exemplified a primeval, tough, passionate type of person who worked the land and was totally familiar with the natural surroundings,” historian Haim Kaufman noted.² Due to this desire for an image makeover and the realization that sports helped create unity, cohesion and spirit amongst a people, athletics were now seen as necessary within many Jewish communities for serving the goal of nationalism.

Although Biblical literature does not celebrate men of strength and muscle, the Zionist push for a change in the Jewish image with athletics at its core would, many believed, help counter anti-Semitism. It was thought that being able to cite the

¹ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter With American Sports*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 32.

² Haim Kaufman, "Jewish Sports in the Diaspora, Yishuv, and Israel: Between Nationalism and Politics," *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 151.

sporting accomplishments of Jews instead of their weaknesses helped dispute accusations of racial degeneracy.³ Yet, most Jews immigrating to the United States struggled to latch on to the push for increased physicality. Within the Jewish community there remained a divide between maintaining traditional orthodox practices and revitalizing the Jewish image to counter racial hatred. On the East Coast, first generation immigrant parents fought against the promotion of athletics. Many criticized the Jewish Community Center movement for not promoting religious involvement and even went so far as to blame athletics for drawing people away from Judaism. While many Jews, determined to see a Zionist reality, used athletics as a tool, they received pushback from those within their own religion who believed that making these changes would sacrifice thousands of years of traditionalism.⁴

The conflict between sports and the observance of the Sabbath was one of the key issues driving this conflict. Since the outlaw of exercise on the Sabbath was established by Rabbi Moses Provencal during the sixteenth century, fundamentalists felt this practice was clearly unacceptable. For some in the German Jewish population, however, exercising on the Sabbath was considered not ideal, but still acceptable as long as they were “lighter exercises”.⁵ Jewish athletes who reached college and professional levels would continue to have to debate this question of

³ Jack Kugelmass, “Why Sports?,” *Jews, Sports, and the Rites of Citizenship*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 3-4.

⁴ Gurock, 105.

⁵ *Ibid*, 38.

playing on the Sabbath even for those who did not claim to be Orthodox or even observant.⁶

While the East Coast Jewish community dealt with an internal struggle between promoting the Zionist image of the “New Jew” and sacrificing their traditional ways, the West Coast seemed to encounter less resistance. By 1917 Portland Jews had established two athletic facilities and competed regularly with Gentile teams in the area. A year later Portland’s Jewish population was approximately 2,500 and comprised many middle-class entrepreneurs, doctors and businessmen.⁷ Many of these foundational members of Portland’s Jewish society continued to promote and enhance the athletic programs established during the earlier part of the century instead of resisting their encroachment. Given leaders like Rabbi Stephen Wise, and the traditionalism already given up during the move westward, the Portland Jewish community as a whole unsurprisingly would have been less resistant to the promotion of athletics. Their embrace of Zionism and reform minded efforts made athletics a more natural fit in their society when compared to the East Coast.

As Portlanders embraced sports and East Coast first generation Jews reluctantly dealt with the growth of athletics amongst their youth, both Eastern and Western American Jews began to establish themselves in specific sports. Some of

⁶ Ibid, 81.

⁷ The Bureau of Jewish Social Research, *American Jewish Year Book*, under “Statistics of Jews,” 374, Table IX, 1920-1921, [http://www.hillel.org/docs/default-source/historical/american-jewish-year-book-\(1920-1921\).pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.hillel.org/docs/default-source/historical/american-jewish-year-book-(1920-1921).pdf?sfvrsn=2), (accessed December 19, 2014).

these sports appeared to fit more easily into Jewish culture and a few even provided a means of upward social mobility. However, despite their efforts to combat anti-Semitism with the promotion of the muscular Jew, most American Jews had to deal with growing racial hatred throughout the nation. While the Jews of Portland had established a strong athletic network, they too were not immune to societal tensions. In an interview with Ted Rubenstein, Hal Saltzman remembers that, “you know in Portland there was anti-Semitism . . . the clubs were restricted.”⁸

The clubs Saltzman refers to include the Gentile country clubs, not just in Portland, but throughout the nation. With the exception of basketball, Jews seemed to excel particularly at individual sports. However, two of the individual sports in the country growing in popularity, tennis and golf, were typically played at country clubs that often times excluded Jews from membership. Due to exclusion from Gentile organizations, German Jews decided to open their own social and athletic clubs. By 1926, fifty-eight predominantly Jewish country clubs existed in twenty states. Historian Peter Levine notes that this high number “demonstrated the existence of wealthy enclaves of Jews throughout the country.”⁹ While most of these clubs were situated in the Northeastern states, a few emerged on the West Coast, including the Tualatin Country Club of Portland.

⁸ Hal Saltzman, interview by Ted Rubenstein, December, 26, 2006, IND 307, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland, OR.

⁹ Peter Levine, “‘Our Crowd’ at Play: The Elite Jewish Country Club in the 1920s,” *Sports and the American Jew*, ed. Steven Riess, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 166.

Ironically the German Jewish clubs typically excluded Eastern European Jews. While not stating this exclusion outright, clubs would cap total membership numbers and create membership fees and annual dues that only affluent German Jews could afford. This segregation served to separate the two groups and as Levine argues, created a hope for German Jews that through upper-class sports, they could “demonstrate that they were no different from their Gentile counterparts, either as Americans or as elites, thus doing away with any logical reason for their exclusion.”¹⁰

German Jews arriving during the late nineteenth century “shared neighborly relations, membership in fraternal orders and strong political and business ties with Portland’s Gentile elite.”¹¹ Despite the significant role Jews played in the Portland political and economic scene, however, places like the Arlington Club never offered access to Jews. Such exclusions left Jewish businessmen out of crucial decision-making and the chance to make important contacts within the city. This led Jewish leaders in Portland to create their own enclaves like the Concordia Club, established in 1878, and eventually, the Tualatin Country Club.¹²

The Tualatin Country Club was established in 1912, becoming one of only four country clubs in the state at that time, but the only one allowing Jewish members. Its creation was largely due to the efforts of Rabbi Jonah Wise. A founder

¹⁰ Ibid, 169.

¹¹ Steven Lowenstein, *The Jews of Oregon 1850-1950* (Portland: Jewish Historical Society of Oregon, 1987), 67.

¹² Ibid, 67-68.

in the Reform Judaism movement, Wise spent time at the Metropole Golf Club in New York and felt Portland should invest in something similar. Passionate about the sport of golf, Wise wanted to increase its popularity in Portland and saw a social athletic club as a way to do this. Similar to the other Jewish country clubs across the nation, the Tualatin Country Club only allowed those of German Jewish descent for many years.¹³ All the men on the board of the club were prominent Portland business and community leaders. Due to its exclusiveness, however, the club remained small and at times struggled with funding. As the Jewish middle-class continued to grow during the prosperous 1920s, the club became more luxurious with a dining porch, lounging rooms for both men and women, as well as small rooms for members to stay overnight.¹⁴

Since Tualatin Country Club limited access based on social stature, most of the Portland Jewish community used the growing inner-city facilities such as Neighborhood House and the B'nai B'rith Building. Once an athletic community had been established, the growing middle class, primarily German Jews, continued to promote and improve sports networks in the city. At the B'nai B'rith Building, major players in the physical education program included Millicent "Mickey" Hirschberg and later Harry "Polly" Policar. Hirschberg joined the B'nai B'rith staff in 1924 and used her swimming expertise to develop a hydrotherapy program, launch Red Cross safety classes, and teach lessons. Hirschberg taught a variety of swimming classes

¹³ Ibid, 162.

¹⁴ O.B. Beckman, ed., *Tualatin Country Club in the Beginning*, (Lake Oswego, OR: Lake Grove Printing Company, 1985).

including those for babies and young children between three and six, as well as therapy classes for children with Polio. In addition to serving as the girls' athletic director at the B'nai B'rith Summer Camp, Hirschberg taught at the community center for over thirty-five years. Kathryn Kahn Blumendfeld remembers Hirschberg as "influence[ing] everyone of our swimming. I don't think there is a person growing up today who didn't have some swimming lessons from Mickey."¹⁵

Policar also dedicated his life to sports and the B'nai B'rith Building as a member of the B'nai B'rith team basketball and one of the founders of the Sphinx Club, which later turned into the Adolph Zadik Adolph boy's club. At the University of Oregon in Eugene, where he studied physical education, he organized a Jewish fraternity, Sigma Alpha Mu, before returning to the community center and eventually becoming the full-time athletic director in 1933. In that post, Policar enhanced the summer camp program and B'nai B'rith sports teams, specifically basketball.¹⁶

Julius Meier, already a strong supporter of athletics through sponsoring local teams, assisted the B'nai B'rith summer camp in Neskowin, Oregon, approximately 100 miles west of Portland. In 1928 Meier donated land near Devil's Lake along the Oregon coast, creating a permanent location for the camp that had started a few years prior. From the onset, the camp allowed both girls and boys to participate in

¹⁵ "Mickey Hirschberg Teaching Swimming Class," ca. 1955, *Jewish Community Center Collection* OJM 486, Oregon Jewish Museum.

¹⁶ "Harry Policar," ca. 1950, *Jewish Community Center Collection* OJM 1611, Oregon Jewish Museum.

athletics, camping and art, while simultaneously promoting the Jewish faith. With both male and female supervisors, children took hikes, put on plays, went swimming, and conducted athletic tournaments, along with religious services and study groups. The camp remains in existence today in the same location, continuing to serve Jewish children and their families.¹⁷

Other key supporters of the development of athletics in the Portland Jewish community included Abe “English” Rosenberg, and his brother Lou Rosenberg. In 1921 Abe helped found the Ramblers, a popular social club at the B’nai B’rith Building. The Ramblers helped organize dances and communal events along with promoting sports and other major happenings at the center in the monthly *Rambler Newsletter*. Similarly, Abe’s brother Lou founded and became president of the South Parkway Club at Neighborhood House.¹⁸ When the settlement added a swimming pool, handball courts, and a boxing and weightlifting room to the new building in 1920, individuals like Lou Rosenberg, helped it develop the same athletic popularity as the B’nai B’rith Building.

Portland Jewish businesses were additional supporters of the athletic community. Among them were Abe Popick and Nate Director, founders of the Portland Outdoor Store.¹⁹ The store helped promote and outfit all Portlanders for

¹⁷ “A Real Vacation for Every Boy and Girl,” *B’nai B’rith Bulletin* 1 no. 16, ORG 1 B’nai B’rith Records Box #5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (May 1, 1926), 2.

¹⁸ “Abe ‘English’ Rosenberg with Two Harlem Globetrotters’ Players at the JCC,” ca 1970, *Jewish Community Center Collection OJM 2002*, Oregon Jewish Museum.

¹⁹ “Portland Outdoor Store,” ca. 1930, *Jewish Business Collection OJM 3311*, Oregon Jewish Museum.

their outdoor activities such as hiking and camping. Another clothing store, White Stag Manufacturing Company, run by the Hirsch family of Portland, sold winter sportswear specifically targeting the growing sport of skiing. Eventually the store grew to a national level and developed women's active wear.²⁰ This combined effort between individuals and businesses within the Portland Jewish community, helped ensure the continuation of physical activities established earlier in the century.

With the coaching efforts of people like Hirschberg and Policar, Portland Jews began to find notable success in specific sports. A similarity between Jews living on the East and West coasts was that they tended to flock to the same types of athletic activities. Basketball was arguably the most popular game for American Jews. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jewish children on the East Coast learned basketball primarily at settlement houses. Children would attach themselves to their coaches at these houses, where they could embrace American culture and deny their Jewish traditions. Their parents did not know much about basketball, but most considered it a more acceptable sport than boxing or football where physical violence was a key component. The ability to "sell" basketball to Jewish parents as a tolerable activity played a major role in its popularity. The lack of space needed to play the sport also helped given that most Jews on the East Coast lived in crowded inner cities. Jews from the East Coast would go on to play against

²⁰ "White Stage," ca. 1925, *Jewish Business Collection* OJM 3355, Oregon Jewish Museum.

teams like the Harlem Globetrotters and compete at the highest levels, including the Berlin Olympics.²¹

In *Jews, Sports, and the Rites of Citizenship* (2007), Jack Kugelmass addresses the question of why Jews in America were drawn to and excelled so greatly at basketball. He acknowledges that the environmental aspect of basketball being an urban game, made the sport easily accessible to many Jews living in cities on the East Coast. He also agrees that the influence of settlement houses channeled immigrants into particular sports. Kugelmass additionally recognizes the speculation about why various ethnicities gained excellence in particular sports. In the early twentieth century those believing in Jewish stereotypes thought Jews possessed a talent for basketball because the game needed flashy tricks and an aptitude for dodging that coincided with “the Hebrew and his oriental background.”²² Others felt Jewish body types were unsuited for other games like baseball. “Flatfootedness” was believed to be a common trait amongst Jews, making them unable to run bases well.²³ More positive accounts explaining Jewish talents at basketball also existed. Jews themselves supported the idea that “the characteristics inherent in the Jew . . . mental agility, perception . . . imagination and subtlety . . . If the Jew had set out deliberately to invent a game which incorporated those traits

²¹ David Vyorst, *The First Basket*, DVD (Laemmle/Zeller Films, 2008).

²² Kugelmass, 22.

²³ Ibid, 22-23.

indigenous in him . . . he could not have had a happier inspiration than basketball.”²⁴ According to Kugelmass, both Jews and non-Jews saw basketball as fitting the stereotypical traits of the Jewish people.

Jews living in Portland found basketball just as desirable as those living on the East Coast. The most famous Portland Jewish basketball team came from the South Parkway Club at Neighborhood House. Founded by ex-news boys, the team got its start in 1916 when the settlement moved to its new location featuring a basketball court. After completing this move, and with more stable funding post World War I, Neighborhood House became more of a community center, rather than a settlement house.²⁵ By 1920, the South Parkway team began to experience major success in its new building.

With star player Abe Popick as center, the team became the Portland Basketball Association’s intercity champions during the 1920-1921 season. They repeated this victory again in 1935.²⁶ South Parkway even played nationally, traveling to Denver after winning the 1935 Portland championship. One University of Oregon star player described the South Parkway team as some of the best at, “ball-handling, dribbling, passing and all-round cleverness,” adding, “. . . those were

²⁴ Edward Shapiro, “The Shame of the City: CCNY Basketball, 1950-51,” *Jews, Sports, and the Rites of Citizenship*, ed. Jack Kugelmass (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 178.

²⁵ Lowenstein, 143.

²⁶ Polina Olsen, *Stories from Jewish Portland*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 75.

the greatest basketball teams ever produced in Oregon.”²⁷ Former South Parkway star Isaac (Ike) Donin, even received an athletic scholarship to play at the University of Oregon, where he played both basketball and baseball while rooming with Bill Bowerman, co-founder of Nike, Inc.²⁸

The B’nai B’rith center also heavily favored involvement in basketball. Given evidence from the *Sunday Oregonian* in March of 1918, it seemed the two Jewish teams, B’nai B’rith and South Parkway, were the best in the Portland area that year. On March 20, 1918 they played in the city league championship against each other sparked by what the *Oregonian* described as a “spirit of intense rivalry.”²⁹ After several years of struggling, however, B’nai B’rith felt compelled to promise the *B’nai B’rith Bulletin* that the building’s team would rebound in 1925.³⁰ Yet even in slack times, basketball never swayed in popularity at the center. House basketball tournaments were heavily attended and standout players like Harry Policar, seemed determined to increase the competitive level of B’nai B’rith. Indeed, the Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) organization housed at the B’nai B’rith Building found basketball success in the 1930s. Defeating teams in San Francisco and Seattle, the AZA team even competed at the national tournament in St. Louis in February 1931.³¹

²⁷ Quoted in *Jews of Oregon* 142

²⁸ Olsen, 76.

²⁹ “Fast Fives to Play,” *The Sunday Oregonian*, March 17, 1918 .

³⁰ “B.B.A.A.C. Basketball Team to be Formed Soon,” *B’nai B’rith Bulletin* 1 no. 4, ORG 1 B’nai B’rith Records Box #5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (October 31, 1925), 3.

³¹ “Basketball Review,” *B’nai B’rith Bulletin* 7 no. 19, ORG 1 B’nai B’rith Records Box #5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (February 9, 1931), 3.

While the Jewish community in the United States found a great deal of success in basketball, the “true American” game of baseball, proved somewhat more difficult to access. Despite standout Jewish names in baseball like Sandy Koufax and Hank Greenberg, it was not as easy of a fit as basketball for most Jewish immigrants. Eastern European Jewish parents especially seemed more concerned about their children’s involvement in baseball compared to basketball because they believed it “Americanized children at the cost of traditional culture.”³² While parents called the game of baseball “crazy” and described it as adults “running like children after a leather ball,” Jewish children on the East Coast often admired the sport.³³ Yet, the space required as well as the number of people needed to play a real game held many Jewish children back from regular participation. Parents also rarely took their children to baseball games, giving them limited exposure to a professional arena.³⁴ Another factor working against Jewish baseball involvement was that no similar sport had existed in Europe, making it more difficult for Jewish immigrants to relate to the game.³⁵ Yet young Jewish boys saw participation as a way to become a “proper” American citizen. Opportunities at settlement houses, the YMHA centers,

³² Steven A. Riess, “An Introduction,” *Sports and the American Jew* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 36-37.

³³ Alan Owen Patterson, “The Eastern European Jewish Immigrant Experience with Baseball in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 1 (February 2008): 86.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 85.

and prospects of Americanization all started to push more Jewish boys toward the sport.³⁶

Jewish children choosing to involve themselves in America's pastime on the East Coast typically did so at the expense of condemnation by their parents and often times their community. When Jewish immigrant Joseph Gilbert began to consider playing baseball, his father told him, "Joe, ballplayers are bums. If you want to play ball, go ahead. But you'll have to move out of the house. You can't live here anymore."³⁷ Given the lack of support, few Jewish ball players made it to the major leagues in the early twentieth century.

Those that did make their way into professional baseball on the East Coast experienced extreme discrimination and anti-Semitic encounters from all facets of the game. Numerous players decided to change their surnames and play under pseudonyms to protect themselves from harsh treatment. Fellow teammates, fans, and owners all participated in methods of discrimination while the press described Jewish players as "long-nosed rooters" and "strong smelling gamblers."³⁸ The 1919 World Series Fix would really bring anti-Semitism in baseball to a head. The public already held the opinion that Jews were heavily involved in baseball gambling. When Jewish featherweight boxing champion Abe Attell was indicted on charges of fixing the series and New York gambler Arnold Rothstein also appeared to have ties to the fix, this left little doubt in the public's mind that Jews were at the center of the

³⁶ Ibid, 87.

³⁷ Joseph Gilbert, quoted in Patterson, 90.

³⁸ Riess, "An Introduction," 41.

scandal.³⁹ In 1921, Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* newsletter fueled growing distrust toward Jews. With articles titled "Jewish Gamblers Corrupt American Baseball," and "The Jewish Degradation of American Baseball," Ford claimed that "American baseball can be saved if a clean sweep is made of the Jewish influence."⁴⁰ Although news of the World Series scandal did make it to Portland by way of reports in *The Oregonian* newspaper, no evidence could be found mentioning specific Jewish involvement.

In Portland, negative attitudes toward Jewish involvement in baseball did not seem as strong. However, the popularity of the sport was in no way as strong as the love for basketball on the West Coast. Limited mention of baseball in *Rambler* newsletters included a plan in 1931 to create an indoor baseball team at the B'nai B'rith Building.⁴¹ The only other account found of baseball being played in connection to B'nai B'rith seemed to be at the summer camp on the Oregon coast.⁴² According to historian Steven Lowenstein, baseball did exist through the South Parkway club at Neighborhood House, but received much less attention compared to their famed basketball team.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁰ "Jewish Gamblers Corrupt American Baseball," *The Dearborn Independent* 3 (September 1921), http://www.jrbooksonline.com/Intl_Jew_full_version/ij45.htm (accessed August 13, 2014).

⁴¹ "Falcon News," *B'nai B'rith Bulletin* 7 no. 23, ORG 1 B'nai B'rith Records Box #5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (April 22, 1931), 3.

⁴² "Baseball Game at B.B. Camp in Nescowin, OR," ca. 1925, *B'nai B'rith Collection* OJM 5651, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴³ Lowenstein, 142.

For the most part, if Jews in Portland desired involvement in baseball, they had to sign up for a city league or a team through the public school system. As early as 1915, Abe Popick began playing baseball for two intercity teams, Waverly and the Kirkpatrick All Stars. In 1924 Principal Fannie Porter was pictured attending games for the Failing School Baseball Team. Both Maurice Sussman and Alan Lippman played baseball at Lincoln High School and then went on to play at the University of Oregon.⁴⁴ After college, Lippman tried out for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1942, but ended up serving in the military during War II.⁴⁵ Another Jewish player, Hal Saltzman, grew up playing softball pick-up games in Lair Hill Park in South Portland and went on to play baseball at the University of Oregon following the war.⁴⁶ He also signed on with the minor league Beavers team in Portland around 1949.⁴⁷ Despite the extreme anti-Semitism in baseball on the East Coast, it seemed that within Portland, Jews were accepted members of public teams at all levels.

Other popular sports among Portland Jews included boxing, wrestling, handball, and swimming. Due to the violence of sports like boxing and wrestling, they were often not condoned by Jewish parents on the East Coast. However, the sports remained quite popular among Jewish youth. Eastern European Jewish immigrants in cities like New York regularly had to deal with conflicts between

⁴⁴ "Maurice Sussman Catching for University of Oregon," c. 1930, OJM 5785, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁵ "Alan Lippman Playing Baseball for Lincoln High School," ca. 1942, OJM 5619, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁶ "Hal Saltzman Batting for University of Oregon," ca. 1946, OJM 5854, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴⁷ Olson, 62-65.

themselves and the young Irish population. In order to stick up for themselves, Jewish boys in these neighborhoods often learned to fight out of necessity. For some like Abe Attel, this eventually led to financial success in the professional boxing world. Similar to baseball, Jewish fighters would take pseudonym last names, but mostly in order to avoid their parent's disapproval should they see their name in a newspaper. During the Great Depression on the East Coast, prize fighting grew even more in popularity as a way to earn money during difficult economic times. Jews also left a lasting mark on the business side of boxing. Sol Levinson from San Francisco is credited for inventing the modern boxing glove and the boxing company giant Everlast, was founded and operated by Russian Jews.⁴⁸

As influential boxers emerged from San Francisco, boxing achieved considerable popularity among Portland Jews. The B'nai B'rith Building executive director Louis H. Blumenthal boasted of the center's superior facilities with the promise that members had "at their disposal one of the best equipped gymnasiums in the country, furnished generously with a basketball court, indoor baseball court, boxing ring, [and] wrestling room . . ."⁴⁹ In 1922 the B'nai B'rith *Rambler Newsletter* noted the erection of a boxing ring and plans to install a boxing room and equipment. The *Rambler* also pointed to the hiring of boxing instructor Ralph Gruman, who it heralded as the former Pacific Coast lightweight champion and

⁴⁸ Steven A. Riess, "Tough Jews: The Jewish American Boxing Experience, 1890-1950," in *Sports and the American Jew*

⁴⁹ Louis H. Blumenthal, "Our Community Center," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Building* 1, ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (November 1922), 1.

leading contender for the world's crown . . . regarded as one of the cleverest lightweights that ever wore a boxing glove.⁵⁰

In 1922 the only two amateur boxing clubs representing Portland in competitions were the Multnomah Club and B'nai B'rith Building.⁵¹ By the following year, B'nai B'rith had appointed a chairman specifically for the sports of boxing and wrestling. The announcement of hire Simon Cohen explained that he was a proponent of "clean boxing" and brought "a spirit of perseverance" exemplifying the standards and mindset of the community center.⁵² Calling it the art of self-defense, B'nai B'rith promoted boxing for all its male members including "all tired business men and undeveloped young men," explaining that the sport "is considered to be one of the greatest fundamentals in the building of the human body."⁵³ This endorsement of the sport contrasts with the views of first generation parents on the East Coast who disliked boxing because of its violent tendencies considered counterintuitive to the promotion of peace from the Jewish faith. "From the moment the timekeeper clangs the gong," the *Rambler* noted of boxing classes, "friendship is forgotten and the boys are out slamming away at each other in a manner that is both amusing and thrilling."⁵⁴ The more accepting attitude toward boxing in Portland is

⁵⁰ "Amateur Boxing Soon to Reopen," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Building* 1 ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (December 1922), 4.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Joe Blank, "Do You Remember?," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Community House* 2, ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (January 1923), 3.

⁵³ "Boxing," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Community House* 1, ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (January 1923), 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

quite possibly a representation of the more progressive ideals held by Portland Jews in the early twentieth century. Boxing in particular shows the impact liberal ideas like the Reform movement and Zionism probably had on the Portland Jewish community's overall attitude toward sports involvement.

Compared to boxing, wrestling and baseball, the sports of handball and swimming seemed to fit more easily into traditional Jewish culture. Evidence of Jews participating in swimming exists since the Talmudic era and continued into the Middle Ages. Used as a way to cool off in the heat or as a way to keep a level of physical fitness, the sport even appealed to Orthodox Jews as a life skill important to teach their children.⁵⁵ Similarly, a version of handball was deemed acceptable, even on the Sabbath by Rabbi Provencal, who claimed the sport was "for the benefit of the multitude."⁵⁶ Steven Riess notes that on the East Coast, most swimming and handball activities were done at settlement houses and Jewish community centers. While handball seemed free from the anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century, Jews sometimes had to deal with rival youth groups at public pools, particularly Irish Catholics.⁵⁷

With Hirschberg's development of the swimming program at the B'nai B'rith Building and the pool available at the new Neighborhood House site, swimming easily became popular amongst Jews in Portland. In 1922, the B'nai B'rith Building claimed that "Our swimming pool is one of our biggest attractions . . . equipped with

⁵⁵ Gurock, 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 24-25.

⁵⁷ Riess, "An Introduction," 21-22.

a spring-board and platform for diving.”⁵⁸ Not only did B’nai B’rith give basic swim lessons, but at a more competitive level, Hirschberg instructed swimming pageants, diving, and swimming meets. Often times the center competed in meets against local Young Men’s Christian Associations. By the 1930s, the swimming program had grown large enough to break off into multiple levels and include a water polo team.⁵⁹

Handball also drew many Jewish participants at the B’nai B’rith center. Numerous handball tournaments are discussed in the *Rambler* Newsletters, including information about the different divisions and prizes. As many as fifty boys would sign up for these tournaments, but Rudy Weiss seemed to be the standout champion, winning multiple contests during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Weiss even went on to play at the Washington’s Athletic Club in Seattle.⁶⁰ While handball was popular around Portland, some on the East Coast felt this was an “ethnic” game.⁶¹ Handball was one of the few sports that inner city youth on the East Coast could play at city parks in their own neighborhoods without concerns of spatial or anti-Semitic problems.⁶²

As this chapter has demonstrated, local coaches and businesses helped the Jews of Portland grow their athletic community in the 1920s and 30s with

⁵⁸ Blumenthal, “Our Community Center,” 1.

⁵⁹ “Aquatics,” *B’nai B’rith Building*, 8 no. 8, ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (April 10, 1932), 3.

⁶⁰ “B’nai B’rith Handball Champs Victorious,” *B’nai B’rith Building*, 7 no. 23, ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (March 9, 1931), 3.

⁶¹ Gurock, 110.

⁶² Riess, “An Introduction,” 17.

seemingly little pushback from conservative counterparts worried about the loss of Jewish tradition. Likely because of their embrace of Zionism and Reform Judaism, Portland Jews felt more open to participating in athletics. Instead of adults lamenting sports like we see in the East Coast Jewish communities, Portland Jewish leaders promoted and encouraged sports involvement leading to dominant teams like South Parkway from Neighborhood House and the A.Z.A. team out of the B'nai B'rith Building. Jews seemed drawn to the same types of athletic activities on both coasts, particularly basketball, the most popular sport among Jewish citizens. While Portland Jews found their niche in basketball they had many other successes in individual sports like swimming and handball as well.

While not as many Jews may have been drawn to baseball compared to basketball, Portland Jews seemed to experience less tension when they showed interest in a sport whose East Coast players felt compelled to change their last names and hide their participation from parents. Although the two main Jewish athletic facilities in Portland did not appear to offer many baseball opportunities, Jews in Portland had little trouble joining local city leagues, and a few experienced enough success to eventually play at the college and professional level.

Portland Jews did experience that some individual sports like golf and tennis had become more exclusive. The nation's country clubs clearly show some of the barriers Jews still faced. Even in Portland where anti-Semitism was not as prominent compared to the rest of the country, Jews found themselves restricted from the social and athletic clubs of local Gentiles. In response, Jews opened their

own clubs like the Tualatin Country Club. Although this allowed a location for affluent and middle-class German Jews to play golf and tennis, it also served to divide the German Jews from the Eastern European immigrants who were often times denied access. Accordingly, the history of Jewish athletic clubs points to discriminatory practices from within and from outside the Jewish community and the use of sports as a way of negotiating a route around such obstacles.

Chapter III:

The Role of Jewish Women in Portland Athletics

By 1920 Mickey Hirschberg was already an essential staff member, directing swimming at the B'nai B'rith Community Center. However, the dedication and involvement of Hirschberg in the Jewish sporting world was the exception not the norm. The more limited opportunities for sports involvement on both American coasts spoke to the expectations for a woman's role in society. While sporting activities helped to promote assimilation just as it did for many male counterparts, athletics for women also emphasized modern day stereotypes about women. Accordingly, they upheld separate male and female social spheres just as separation between social classes and ethnicities accompanied the introduction of Jewish country clubs mentioned in the previous chapter.

Despite attempts to maintain the traditional role for a Jewish woman established during Talmudic times, Jewish female immigrants tried to adapt to life in America and forced their societal positions and jobs to adapt as well. Historian Linda Borish has found that for these women sports at times provided a means of assimilation into American society, but in some cases could also generate discord concerning gender roles and social class positions.¹ This chapter will examine not

¹ Linda J. Borish, "Sports in the United States," Jewish Women's Archive, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sports-in-united-states> (accessed March 25, 2015).

only the changing role of women within the country and how sports played a part in these changes, but will compare the experience of Jewish women's involvement in sports on the East and West coasts to discover how athletics fit into these two varied communities.

Women have long had to fulfill particular roles in society and Jewish women were no exception. Starting in the Talmudic era, as long as a woman followed her designated course in life, and was modest, humble and pious she was accorded respect and admiration. This role primarily focused on attending to the needs of the family. Consequently, Jewish women had very few religious responsibilities since it was expected she should be engaged in at-home tasks. Rabbinic Law instituted a category that enabled such a situation in which woman were exempt from "Time Bound Mitzvot."²

Like many societies during the same time period, women were deemed as inferior to men, exemplified in Judaism by the limited position women played in the synagogue and daily religious life. Though women were obligated to pray, they were very limited by their domestic roles and expectations. While they certainly could attend synagogue, their voices were not allowed to be heard in public prayer and thus were not permitted to lead religious services. The Pharisees/Rabbis placed more emphasis on home rituals for women such as candle lighting rituals on the eve of the Sabbath and "Tekhinot," prayers said by the wife on behalf of her

² Charlotte Koren, *Forsaken: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 2.

family. They could visit the synagogue, but could not participate as equals, being forced to pray in a curtained off area reserved for females only. While the rabbis privileged the concept of feminine virtue and piety, women were often viewed as frivolous and ignorant. To Jewish men, Jewish women seemed incapable of studying the complicated texts of the Torah and rabbis cautioned against teaching one's daughter Torah since it led to "lewdness." Women were limited in their opportunity to become a Jewish scholar, the most revered position within Jewish society.³ Famous women teachers such as Beruriah are depicted as meeting difficult ends, or as deviants.⁴

Additional inequalities between men and women in ancient times could be seen within the confines of marriage and sexual relations. Typically women had only a silent role within the marriage ceremony, thereby fulfilling the position of the ideal passive bride. Similarly, only men had the ability to initiate divorce proceedings. Not until the Middle Ages did women receive some measure of power when it was deemed Jewish men could no longer divorce their wives against their will. However, unlike Christian religions, Judaism did recognize the sexual nature and needs of a woman. Still, women were portrayed as a temptress for men who needed to be focused on their relationship with God.

³ Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: New American Library Inc. 1975), 4-5.

⁴ Charlotte Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) chap. 1.

The biological functions of women also induced superstition. Blood was often seen to possess unexplainable magical powers, leading to a belief in Jewish society that blood should be shunned. Therefore, a menstruating woman was denied any physical contact with a man, including her husband. Only after ritual purification seven days post menstruation could contact be resumed. Many of these rules differentiating men and women remain within Orthodox Jewish communities. Not until the movement of Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century, did women start to experience gains in being treated equally in religious services and practices.⁵

Despite the secondary status Jewish women endured, Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel, the authors of *The Jewish Woman in America* (1975), argue they were spared the “macho mystique” that developed among men in other European cultures. Often denied certain rights such as the right to bear arms and political independence, Jewish men focused on intellectual and spiritual pursuits instead of physical abilities. This lack of emphasis on brute strength and military accomplishments led to a lesser degree of physical oppression of Jewish women by their husbands and fathers. Within Jewish culture, it was for example, acceptable for a man to show gentility and emotion toward women while women could exhibit the strength and determination required to run a household.⁶

Although the role of a Jewish woman had to alter slightly as families immigrated to the United States, many tasks from their homeland remained. What

⁵ Ibid, 7-9.

⁶ Ibid, 14.

did emerge, was the significant divide between the much more assimilated German Jewish middle-class women, and poorer, more traditional Eastern European women. The detailed research Karen Brodtkin has done in *How Jews Became White Folks: What That Says About Race in America* (1998) gives important insight into the development of the Jewish communities in the Northeast and the daily lives of Jewish women in particular. Brodtkin explains that Jews from Western Europe usually did not form ethnic communities and were able to blend in as “white” more easily compared to their Eastern European counterparts. Just like Christian middle-class women, most Jews from France, Great Britain, and Germany domesticated and became the guardian of their home and religious identity. Therefore, in contrast to Eastern European Jewish women, Western European Jewish identity appeared to be based more on religion than ethnicity.⁷

Despite growing exclusion from colleges and negative associations with socialist and communist ideologies in the early twentieth century, Western European Jews seemed to escape some of the intense racism felt by Southern and Eastern European immigrants. In contrast, working-class Eastern European women “were increasingly associated with ignorance, backwardness, and low evolutionary development and frequently portrayed as ‘loose women, poor housekeepers, and

⁷ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 106. More about Jewish identity being based on religion rather than ethnicity can be seen in Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

bad mothers,” according to historian Ardis Cameron.⁸ These “not-quite-white” women often times had to work in factories near men, which added to their reputation as sexually promiscuous.⁹

Eastern European Jewish women had limited options when it came to supporting their households, an essential role for them in the United States. According to Brodtkin, the financial contribution of Jewish females living in the Lower East Side of New York City in the early twentieth century depended on their stage of life. Most unmarried Jewish females, especially daughters, earned wages, typically supporting many members of their family as the primary breadwinner. Young women most often found work in the garment industry, where factories more readily hired females because they could pay them cheaper wages. In the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in 1911, where over a hundred young women lost their lives, the number of Jewish and Italian families who relied primarily on the wages of these girls became shockingly evident.¹⁰

While within Jewish culture it was acceptable, not to mention necessary, for single women to work outside the home, that was not the case for married Jewish women. Once a woman wed, she was believed to be sexually wise and, therefore, capable of attracting the attentions of other men. To curb her seductive behavior married Jewish women were required to either shave their hair or cover their heads

⁸ Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 172.

⁹ Brodtkin, 87.

¹⁰ Ibid, 114-115.

and confine their labor inside the home. Home-based income usually meant taking in boarders or running a laundry business or both. For widows, especially, these jobs were essential to survival.¹¹ Although household management was the main job of a married Jewish woman, she could also be a key economic contributor, selling products in the marketplace or helping to manage a family business. Unlike German Jewish women, Eastern Europeans typically managed the money and the economy of the household.¹²

While many of these jobs for married women existed in the Old World as well, historian Reena Sigmund Friedman notes the difficulties Eastern European women could encounter when moving West that shaped their role in society. A combination of varying rates of acceptance toward assimilation, along with long separations during the journey to the New World, could create discord and upheaval within the family unit. Many cultural changes meant women often times had to focus less on Old World traditions and instead on cultural assimilation, new social roles, and altered family life. This led to increased divorce rates and male desertion in some Jewish immigrant families. The most common reasons for male desertion included male infidelity, lack of work, and the demoralizing living conditions. As a

¹¹ Ibid, 115.

¹² Ibid, 125.

result, Jewish women were sometimes forced to provide for the household and raise children on their own.¹³

These women relied on the support networks of ethnic neighborhoods such as New York's Lower East Side. These neighborhoods were quite often self-contained worlds, but charities and social settlements offered an important connection for mainstream cultural contact.¹⁴ Often times excluded from government welfare programs focused on assisting white women, ethnic Jewish women relied on their middle-class German counterparts as the ticket to a more conformist American culture.¹⁵ These bourgeois German Jewish women had often been accorded more opportunities for education in both secular and religious pursuits. In embracing the new culture and abandoning traditional practices, they frequently found more freedom and prospects than they had in Western Europe.¹⁶

Still not allowed the same economic and political freedoms as men, however, some upper and middle-class Jewish women began looking toward providing a greater purpose to regular social gatherings. This included involvement in philanthropic organizations. Charity work was not solely the work of Jewish women, but part of a broader movement within the country. Jane Addams, who started the most well-known philanthropic social agency, Chicago's Hull House, felt the

¹³ Reena Sigman Friedman, "'Send Me My Husband Who Is in New York City': Husband Desertion in the American Jewish Immigrant Community 1900-1926," *Jewish Social Studies* 44 (Winter, 1982): 6-7.

¹⁴ Brodtkin, 124.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Baum, Hyman, and Michel, 46.

constraints of being a woman during this era, similar to many Jewish middle-class women. Addams believed women had to choose marriage or a career because men “did not want . . . to marry women of the new type.”¹⁷ Consequently, many middle and upper-class women found it acceptable to participate in charity work while still playing the traditional role of wife and mother.

Although many of these German Jewish women felt a mixture of embarrassment and benevolence toward their Eastern European counterparts, “their programs sought to make Jewish women more respectable and refined, and to make Jewish men more manly, more athletic, and brave.”¹⁸ One example of a growing philanthropic organization among Jewish women was the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). Just like many Gentile clubs, the NCJW was a combination of a nineteenth-century woman’s club combined with efforts for Progressive social reform. The NCJW also supplied a way for Jewish immigrants to Americanize without feeling as though they were sacrificing their Jewish identity. It provided a place where all facets of a Jewish woman’s identity could acceptably intersect.¹⁹

While the participation in the NCJW gave Jewish women a “semi-public voice,” it also expanded their ability to provide settlements for immigrant women and children. Although their primary focus was often providing education, healthcare, and helping to find employment, at settlements like Neighborhood

¹⁷ Louise W. Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 124.

¹⁸ Brodtkin, 124.

¹⁹ Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 2.

House in Portland, athletics became woven into the facilities as well. Linda Borish, the author of the article “Jewish American Women, Jewish Organizations, and Sports, 1880-1940” (1998), notes that Progressive era reformers believed athletic activities provided “a better use of immigrants’ leisure time than street activities and the commercial lure of big cities such as Chicago and New York.”²⁰ The NCJW even saw athletics as a method of distracting girls from sexual promiscuity.²¹ For many Jewish immigrant women, the first exposure to American sports came at settlements and immigrant aid societies. In the late nineteenth century most of these women were Eastern European Jews being assisted by wealthier, more adapted German Jewish women just as organizations like the Young Men’s Hebrew Association (YMHA) and the Young Women’s Hebrew Association (YWHA) chose to promote assimilation to American society and culture in lieu of fostering ethnic identities and religious traditionalism.

The encouragement of women’s involvement in sports at the settlement houses on the East Coast often mirrored efforts to heighten male involvement. According to New York City’s Educational Alliance, physical activity was just as essential for women as it was for men. The section on “Physical Work” in *The Souvenir Book of the Fair of the Educational Alliance and Hebrew Technical Institute* mentions that “the usefulness of the gymnasium has been extended. Competent

²⁰ Linda Borish, “Jewish American Women, Jewish Organization, and Sports, 1880-1940,” *Sports and the American Jew*, ed. Steven Riess (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 108.

²¹ Rogow, 147.

instructors have been engaged both for the male and female classes, and now both young men and young women and children receive the benefits of well-regulated physical exercise.”²² YWHA leaders also highly encouraged the involvement of Jewish women in athletic activities by posting bulletins claiming sports to be a valuable use of leisure time. The encouragement of immigrant women to Americanize through organized sports programs mirrored the appeal to men even though women often had to deal with conflict over their participation from the more conservative older generation.²³

Indeed, the overall experience for Jewish women in East Coast sports differed from that of male counterparts in several ways. Men had a wider variety of activities to choose from and more access to sporting facilities that rarely allowed co-ed participation. Not until the Hebrew Ladies of Harlem donated money to the local YMHA gymnasium, were women allowed to share the facilities at that location. Even so, designated use times had to be organized for men, boys, women, and girls. According to Borish, for the most part, “men dominated the use of gymnasiums and sports equipment.”²⁴ Not until the increase of German Jewish women’s involvement in Jewish settlement house programs near the turn of the century, did women start to have their own facilities and programs.

²² “Official Souvenir Book of the Fair,” *In Aid of the Educational Alliance and the Hebrew Technical Institute*, (New York: Columbia University, 1895): 23, https://ia601007.us.archive.org/11/items/ldpd_5684829_000/ldpd_5684829_000.pdf (accessed March 26, 2015).

²³ Borish, “Jewish American Women,” 106-107.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

Women, too, had restrictions on the types of sports and activities deemed acceptable. The Irene Kaufmann Settlement Girls Clubs, for instance, promoted volleyball, gym class, and swimming as preferred activities for women. Calisthenics and gymnastics also offered an appropriate recreational outlet for women. Swimming, however, was probably the most popular form of exercise for Jewish women. The YWHA's 110th Avenue location in New York City boasted a superior swimming facility that held both recreational classes and competitive swimming opportunities as well as a multi-use gym for basketball, fencing, and tennis classes.²⁵

Although men and women shared a goal of American assimilation with athletic involvement, men were encouraged to join a sporting team as a competitive outlet while for women a secondary goal seemed to be maintaining fitness and good looks. Thus sports like tennis and swimming were emphasized to maintain not only physical health, but femininity and a shapely figure as well. "Every girl may be as slender as the fashion demands," the newsletter of the Irene Kaufman Girls Club reported.²⁶ Another IKS article encouraging older women and mothers to participate in swimming, claiming that, "this keeps them in good form and—here's a secret—thin also."²⁷ Tennis commentary especially, focused on the looks of women on the court. An article in the *American Hebrew* on tennis player Clara Greenspan saluted her for her "fine complexion that comes with a healthy outdoor lifestyle,"

²⁵ Ibid, 119-120.

²⁶ *I.K.S. Neighbors* (1923), quoted in Borish, "Jewish American Women," 120.

²⁷ "Girls, Use the Shower Baths and Swimming Pool," *I.K.S. Neighbors* (1925), quoted in Borish, "Jewish American Women, 121.

going on to say she would be “equally as attractive on the court or in the ballroom.”²⁸

Jewish men and women did share a love for the sport of basketball, which some Jewish organizations did promote for women. Yet, the game for women differed from the men’s game. Afraid of basketball being too physically rough for women and girls, organizations often adapted rules to avoid physical contact and promote teamwork and cooperation instead of focusing on competition and wins. Despite these alternate rules, women participating in basketball were still viewed by traditionalists as “some of the roughest girls in . . . the neighborhood.”²⁹

Although fewer women participated in basketball than men in the early twentieth century, Jewish women held an essential place in promoting the sport of basketball just as Jewish men had. Senda Berenson (born Senda Valvrojenski), started teaching at Smith College at the age of twenty-three. Constantly battling health issues through her childhood, Berenson participated in gymnastics to improve her strength and stamina. After being hired at Smith, Berenson happened to see the newly invented game of basketball being played at a YMCA. Women were yet to be allowed to participate in team sports, but after speaking with basketball founder Dr. James Naismith, Berenson was inspired to start a team for women. On March 22, 1883, Berenson directed the first women’s basketball game at Smith College with sophomores versus freshmen. In the following two years, hundreds of

²⁸ Borish, “Sports in the United States.”

²⁹ Borish, “Jewish American Women,” 121.

women's teams began to spring up around the country. Not only did Berenson create an opportunity for women's involvement in basketball, but it also allowed for the spread of other team sports women could participate in. Berenson went on to create the official rulebook for women's collegiate basketball while also writing a number of articles promoting the sport. Her accomplishments enabled her to become the first woman inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame.³⁰

With the encouragement of women like Berenson, basketball gained more acceptability and women began to be encouraged to play more often. Outdoor summer camps were another opportunity where women could play team sports like baseball, typically not considered acceptable for women. Although these camps remained gender specific, they multiplied across the East Coast during the 1920s. The popularity of sports teams at these venues prompted the YWHA Ray Hill Camp in New York, to add more flat ground "to include an outdoor baseball diamond, a handball court, [and] a hockey field" by 1928.³¹ Undoubtedly, women's team sports in East Coast Jewish communities during the 1920s were growing increasingly popular.

For the upper and middle-class communities, tennis and golf, deemed as more elite sports, could be played at the local Jewish country clubs. For both affluent male and female German Jews of the early twentieth century, participation in these

³⁰ Ruth Gursky, "Senda Berenson," Jewish Women's Archive, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/berenson-senda>, (date accessed March 25, 2015).

³¹ Borish, "Jewish American Women," 124.

sports showed off wealth and status yet, the description of women's successes in these endeavors was shaped by stereotypical female roles. Even the most talented female golfer in the United States, Elaine Rosenthal Reinhart, for example, was asked more about her husband's golf game and her role as wife and mother than her own successes by the American Jewish press of the early 1920s.³²

Just as on the East Coast, women on the West Coast sought communal involvement and were more likely to access sports through Jewish organizations than through country clubs. While there are many similarities when comparing women on the two coasts, the authors of *Jews of the Pacific Coast* (2009) argue that western women often led the move for more leadership roles in their communities. Just like Jewish men of the West Coast, women did not have to deal with the extreme breakaway from Jewish tradition and the Old World that many were forced to experience as new immigrants on the East Coast. Women in the West were not forced into immigrant neighborhoods and the less industrial conditions diminished the stereotyping that came with factory work.³³ Instead of having to "transform" their roles, western women fit easily into community philanthropic work and professionalism since their move westward had already created a necessity for them to do so. By 1909, San Francisco, for example, had almost as many social service associations run by Jewish women as did New York. Instead of ideas of

³² Borish, "Sports in the United States."

³³ Brodtkin, 56-57.

communal, political, and social involvement spreading to the West Coast, western women arguably assumed leadership of this movement.³⁴

Jewish benevolent societies provided some of the first forms of philanthropy in this area. As early as 1849, when men were establishing organizations in San Francisco, women often followed with parallel societies. These benevolent groups regulated care for the sick and needy while also providing women an extension of the domestic sphere. Later in the nineteenth century, benevolent societies began to be run out of fraternal organizations such as B'nai B'rith, while women participated in sisterhood groups such as the National Council of Jewish Women. As basic handouts gave way to regular aid in settlement houses led by Jane Addams and Lillian Wald, Jewish women became a part of the Progressive movement's efforts to fundamentally change the way society treated the poor and the sick. In Jewish communities such as the one in Portland, this aid was geared primarily toward assisting immigrants and simultaneously encouraged them to adopt modern American Jewish ideals.³⁵

The Portland Section of the NCJW, established in 1896, was comprised mainly of middle-to upper-class women of German-American Jewish descent. Although most of its early meetings consisted of Bible study groups, Jewish history lectures, musical entertainment, and poetry readings, involvement soon expanded

³⁴ Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 118-119.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 117-119.

to philanthropy. The Portland NCJW chapter worked closely with Rabbi Stephen Wise and his wife Louise. Zeien-Stuckman writes that “perhaps through her influence, or perhaps because Wise saw the council as an ideal vehicle through which he could enact reform in Portland’s Jewish community, Wise began working far more closely with the group than his predecessor.”³⁶ Most of this work included helping Jewish children in South Portland, particularly the large influx of poorer Eastern European and Italian immigrants.

Unlike men’s fraternal organizations, women’s groups on the West Coast did not put any focus on athletic participation during their onset. Their main role was to take care of the needy and to promote American assimilation and education to “Americanize” new immigrants and make newcomers more acceptable to the already assimilated German Jewish community. During Rabbi Stephen Wise’s stay in Portland, however, the women of Neighborhood House began to implement more than just sewing classes. Director Ida Lowenberg and Rabbi Wise saw that the one way to keep the settlement popular among young immigrants was through athletic activities. Additions to the new Neighborhood House in 1910 included a swimming pool and handball courts as well as boxing, wrestling and weightlifting rooms.³⁷

While the *Rambler* newsletter from the new B’nai B’rith building focused primarily on the sports available for boys and men, girls and women also had access

³⁶ Emily Zeien-Stuckman, “Creating New Citizens: The National Council of Jewish Women’s Work at Neighborhood House in Portland,” *The Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 318.

³⁷ Steven Lowenstein, *The Jews of Oregon 1850-1950* (Portland: Jewish Historical Society of Oregon, 1987), 141.

to the facilities and particular athletic competitions. Just as on the East Coast, swimming and basketball were two of the most popular sports at B'nai B'rith where numerous swimming tournaments and basketball games were held. The center also offered a variety of athletics for all ages, including a Business Women's class, High School Girl's class, and Junior Girl's class. Other athletic tournaments for women included broad jumping, rope climbs, a basketball throw, and "chinning," more commonly referred to today as pull-ups. The goal with these general athletic tournaments for both men and women was typically to find athletes who could represent the building in inter-club meets.³⁸

While the *Rambler* promoted the competition aspect of these sports for men, an advertisement for women's sports promoted more traditional women's social activities along with the option of sports on the side. Advertisements for the Business Women's class mentioned the basketball and hiking activities a woman could participate in, but also Saturday night fireplace parties. In addition, the High School Girl's Gymnasium Class held open-house tea parties, with violin performances followed by a basketball game. Advertisements for the Business Women's class promised that their activities "makes thin girls fat, and fat girls thin, but most of all, it makes everybody happy."³⁹

³⁸ "General Athletic Tournament," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Building* 1 ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (December 1922), 3.

³⁹ "Hear From the Business Women's Gym Class: The Peppiest Group in the B.B. Building—36 Strong and Still Growing!" *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Building* 1 ORG 14 Box #1, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (December 1922), 1.

While most female involvement at B'nai B'rith seemed to combine traditional female social activities with the more modern addition of athletics squeezed in, Millicent "Mickey" Hirschberg seemed to change the role of women at the community center when she joined its staff in 1924. Hirschberg ran the entire aquatic program at B'nai B'rith for forty-nine years, making a lasting leadership impression for women in Portland athletics. By developing a hydro-therapy program and Red Cross classes, Hirschberg maintained the socially acceptable role as female philanthropist, while simultaneously making herself a crucial component of the not-so-typical female head of an entire athletics program. Outside of the swimming facilities, Hirschberg also became the Neskowin Athletic Director for the girl's camp by 1926 and later a badminton instructor at the center.⁴⁰ While Hirschberg primarily taught only women and girls during the 1920s and 30s, as co-ed classes became more acceptable during the 40s and 50s, her teachings expanded to both genders. Whether she was teaching boys or girls, or both, Hirschberg remained one of the only consistent female athletic instructors at any Jewish facility making a lasting impact on the sporting community.

By 1923, one hundred and eighty-two women were participating in various sports activities at the B'nai B'rith Building. In this same year, the community center organized a Women's Athletic Association that all female members were automatically included in. In addition to the elected officers, the association was run

⁴⁰ "A Real Vacation for Every Girl and Boy," *B'nai B'rith Bulletin* 1 no. 16, ORG 1 Box 5, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (May 1, 1926), 2.

by Louis H. Blumenthal, a renowned track athlete and University of Chicago graduate. The association's goal was to "unify the women of the house, . . . to further the interest and participation of all women in athletics, and last but not least, to develop good fellowship and good sportsmanship."⁴¹

With the creation of the Women's Athletic Association, sporting opportunities increased for women and girls at the community center. In addition to the swimming races, swimming pageants, and diving contests, girls could also participate in basketball, volleyball, badminton, tennis, tap and dancing classes, as well as general athletic competitions. Just as on the East Coast, all of these sports seemed to have been deemed acceptable for female participation. On both coasts baseball is mentioned as a sport girls participated in at summer camps, but in Portland, girls seemed to participate during any opportunities offered at the B'nai B'rith Building as well.⁴² By 1948, Portland Jewish women had their own Constructors Baseball Club at the community center sponsored by the Ramblers Club, the men's social club at B'nai B'rith in charge of publishing the *Rambler Newsletter*.⁴³

Overall, baseball on the West Coast, seemed more popular and probably more acceptable for Jewish women to participate in compared to the East Coast. At

⁴¹ "Women's Athletic Association Organized," *The Rambler of the B'nai B'rith Community House 2*, Oregon Jewish Museum, Portland (January 1923), 7.

⁴² "Baseball Game at B.B. Camp in Nescowin, OR," ca. 1925, *B'nai B'rith Collection* OJM 5651, Oregon Jewish Museum.

⁴³ "Ruth Siegel Playing for the Constructors Ball Club," *Jewish Community Center Collection* OJM 5663, Oregon Jewish Museum.

Failing School in South Portland, principal Fannie Porter, known for her love of baseball, never missed a game. Remembered fondly as a “second mother,” Porter successfully helped acculturate her many foreign born students. By using methods such as participation in American sports, Porter, assisted in harmoniously breaching the divide between Portland immigrant children and their new American lifestyles.⁴⁴ Between the support of a female principal in Fannie Porter at Failing School, and the close proximity of Mickey Hirschberg at B’nai B’rith, Jewish girls had not only the opportunity to take part in athletics, but also two strong role models to encourage sports in their lives.

As sports in the Portland Jewish community developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women across the country, both Jewish and non-Jewish, used athletic participation to expand their roles beyond wife, mother, and homemaker. Compared to the East Coast, however, women on the West Coast seemed to fit athletics seamlessly into their daily lives, perhaps because they were met with less resistance. Arguably, East Coast Jewish women had a greater amount of traditionalism to overcome. In the East, Jewish women had to press for their own facilities or shared time in male gymnasiums in the settlements and athletics centers designed to encourage assimilation. On the West Coast, however, athletic participation for girls and women at places like Neighborhood House and the B’nai B’rith building seemed to be integrated very early on if not at the initial opening of these facilities.

⁴⁴ Lowenstein, 116.

Traditional Jewish and gender roles in the West had already been altered before the introduction of sports because the move out west often forced women to take on more progressive responsibilities. That combined with the Reform movement's influences, particularly those of Rabbi Stephen Wise and his wife Louise Watterman Wise, enabled Portland women to have an easier time integrating athletics, specifically non-traditional female sports like baseball, into daily lives. Author Elizabeth Herr noted that the "newness" of this emerging society "loosened the constraints under which women lived in more established areas and offered them a variety of opportunities."⁴⁵

As Linda Borish points out, sports often separated social classes for women on the East Coast to an extent that was not seen in Portland. While there most certainly existed a divide between the city's German Jewish population and the Eastern European immigrants who arrived later, the smaller size of the population did not separate the social class spheres as much as seen on the East Coast. In Portland, the sole Jewish country club also kept this separation to a minimum. While Neighborhood House had a stronger immigrant concentration given its status as a settlement, the B'nai B'rith building was accessed by Jews of both German and Eastern European descent. Overall, the extreme gender and ethnic divide within sports as seen in the East Coast Jewish communities, while not totally absent on the West Coast, was certainly less severe.

⁴⁵ Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, 118.

Despite these differences, women on both the East and West Coasts seemed to involve themselves in sports through similar methods. Philanthropy opened up the world of athletics to the female Jewish community. Although, German Jewish middle-class women on the East Coast had more access to country clubs sports such as tennis and golf than counterparts on the West Coast, the majority still accessed community centers and settlements to meet their athletic needs. Through a nationwide movement, women of the Progressive era both Gentile and Jewish, gained a certain freedom from traditional duties and received more opportunities in everything from voting rights to the ability to access a gymnasium.

Conclusion

By the time the United States was propelled into World War II, the Jews of Portland, Oregon had established a strong sporting community that had been integrated into the culture of both the city's Jews and non-Jews. Since their move westward, Jews had been a vital part of the development of the Pacific Northwest. Their role in the creation of a sporting community within Portland was no different.

Initially drawn west by the Gold Rush, Jews found a niche in the merchant and trading industries. Given less entrenched racism toward European ethnics within West Coast culture, Jews met with less anti-Semitism when compared to other areas of the country. The diverse population of immigrants also caused Jews to appear "more white" than Chinese immigrants and the already existing Native American population. While not completely immune from targeted racial hatred, Jews in the West did not seem to alter the landscape enough to become the brunt of major racial concerns in the mid nineteenth century.

Most Jews moving westward demonstrated a willingness to give up Orthodox traditions and lifestyles since the West did not have the resources to support the maintenance of strict dietary restrictions. Most families unwilling to give up religious practices stayed in the East. Many synagogues even struggled to find rabbis able to run their place of worship. Not until the development of major Jewish hubs like San Francisco and the increase of more traditional Eastern European

immigrants in the late nineteenth century, did towns in the West begin to develop enough resources to help their Jewish community members maintain some religious orthodoxy.

The ability to adequately practice their religion pushed many Jews to cities like Portland. Not only did Portland offer more diversity and resources than rural towns, it also had become the largest commercial center in the Northwest by 1900. For Jews already involved in major commercial prospects throughout the West, Portland became a natural fit. Once Jews established themselves in South Portland, and elsewhere, the city quickly developed all the essential grocers and meat markets needed to keep Kosher. Despite the desire to maintain some traditional practices, however, Portland Jews, specifically those from Western Europe, for the most part sought to integrate into American culture.

As the Portland Jewish population grew, however, so did the divide between German and Eastern European immigrants. While the latter was more determined to retain fundamentalist practices, efforts by the longer established German Jews, sought to acculturate their cohorts into American society. Although the B'nai B'rith lodge system was originally created to help bridge the gap between German and Eastern European Jews, not until the efforts of Rabbi Stephen Wise and the implementation of Jewish organizations like Neighborhood House, did the two groups have more united social interaction.

With the start of Neighborhood House and later the B'nai B'rith Building, the Jews of Portland readily implemented athletics into their society. Unlike the

discontent many East Coast first generation parents felt about the growth of sports in the Jewish community, Portlanders showed less resistance. Perhaps because of their already flexible attitudes toward traditionalism, the Jews of Portland seemed to embrace athletics and used it as a way to not only assimilate, but to establish themselves within the greater Gentile community.

While some worldwide Jews were calling for a Zionist state, the goal for a new image of the Jewish man, a more muscular, powerful, “New Jew” became connected to the push for nationalism. With the spread of the Zionist movement in Portland by Rabbi Stephen Wise, the Jews of the city seemed to embrace the image of the “New Jew” by encouraging the growth of their sporting community. Supported by key community leaders, Neighborhood House and the B’nai B’rith Building continued to build on their establishments throughout the early twentieth century. Even sports viewed less acceptable on the East Coast, such as boxing, achieved a level of popularity among more liberal Portland Jews. Developing some of the most formidable basketball teams in the Northwest and encouraging individual sports like swimming, Jews in Portland were at the forefront of sports expansion in the city.

Nevertheless, Portland Jews were not completely immune to obstacles. Exclusion from Gentile country clubs pointed to the tenacity of anti-Semitism. Even with the start of its own Tualatin Country Club, the Jewish community ended up segregating its own kind between the German upper class and poorer Eastern

Europeans. Still, the sporting community in Portland faced fewer obstacles and less anti-Semitism when compared to the East Coast.

The opportunities offered to Jewish women were significantly less than those available to their male counterparts. However, Jewish women held a critical place in the development of sport both in Portland and across the country. When access to facilities was either non-existent or restricted, women made their own openings by using their work in benevolent organizations. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Progressive Era women were already attempting to expand beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother by developing philanthropy groups. For German Jewish women, these typically aided Orthodox Eastern European Jewish immigrants and helped them acculturate into American society. While both men and women used settlement organizations to Americanize Jewish immigrants, women were at the core of the development of this work. Through their exposure to sports at settlements and YWHAs, women like Senda Berenson brought sports to a much higher levels of competition for Jewish and non-Jewish women alike.

In Portland the NCJW established Neighborhood House, revered as having one of the first gymnasiums in the city. Women in Portland seemed to have had access to sporting opportunities right from the onset of places like Neighborhood House and B'nai B'rith, unlike East Coast women who struggled to gain entrance to such facilities. While many women on the East Coast also grappled with giving up traditionalism in favor of athletic participation, most Jewish women in Portland had

already overcome some level of conservatism during their move westward and later more liberal support of the Reform movement.

As Steven Riess argues, sport has only recently been appreciated as an appropriate subject for scholarly inquiry, causing much neglect in this topic.¹ Although Jewish social history has been studied extensively, the Jewish involvement in sports history has been virtually non-existent until the last decade. In the five-volume series *Jewish People in America* (1992) by Henry Feingold for instance, the topic is almost completely neglected according to Riess.² What has been written about Jewish sports in recent years has almost exclusively been done about the Jews of the East Coast, creating an incomplete picture by leaving a significant Jewish population on the West Coast out of most studies.

This thesis has endeavored to shine a light on the sports involvement of the West Coast Jews. Given the lack of scholarly study on the topic of Jewish sports on the West Coast, many questions still remain. This thesis has hoped to answer some of those questions while attempting to show the significant involvement of Jews in the Portland community and the differences in their development compared to the experiences of Jews on the American East Coast. By studying sports in the Jewish community, we better understand the Jewish American social experience and the efforts of immigrant populations to fit into a new environment. As Jews across the country continued to establish themselves in the sporting world, they moved higher

¹ Steven Riess, "An Introduction," *Sports and the American Jew* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 2.

² *Ibid*, 1.

up the social ladder and increased team ownership over sport participation. Yet this thesis has sought to answer what the Jewish experience on the West Coast was like prior to their ability for upward social mobilization. Athletics within the Portland Jewish community undoubtedly played a critical role in shaping the lives of young Jewish immigrants. However, unlike the East Coast, Portland Jews were at the heart of the development of athletics in the “Rose City” and as they used sports to assimilate into American society, both Jewish men and women were key in initiating Portland’s athletic culture.

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