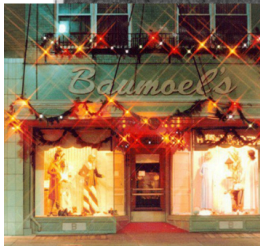


**A History of Jewish Life in Bucyrus**  
**Austin Reid - September 2024**



Top Left: Philip and Rebecca Browarsky in 1941

Top Right: Aaron Strauch pictured in 1891

Center Left: Baumoel's storefront circa 1970

Bottom Left: Jacob Bach in 1914

Bottom Right: Sign from the Englehard Clothing Store

Photos courtesy of the Bucyrus Historical Society and *Telegraph-Forum* archives

## **Introduction: Bucyrus' Early Jewish Residents**

Bucyrus, Ohio, was founded in 1821 and soon Christian communities were formed as settlers established their lives in the new town. By 1830, Christian churches had already begun organizing, with St. Paul's Lutheran Church tracing its roots to 1829. Soon these Christians were joined by another religious community, Jews. While Jews had been living in Ohio since at least the 1810s, and early Jewish congregations had formed by 1848 in cities such as Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus, there is no evidence of a Jewish presence in Crawford County until 1849, when Mathias Buchmann arrived in Bucyrus. Born in Adelsdorf, Bavaria, Mathias immigrated to the United States in 1849 and soon relocated to Bucyrus.<sup>1</sup> By 1859, he started a law practice and reportedly held various local political offices, becoming one of the town's earliest long-term Jewish residents.<sup>2</sup> In 1868, Mathias moved to Cleveland, where he worked selling fire insurance. He also served as the financial secretary of the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum for over 30 years.<sup>3</sup> Another early Jewish resident of Bucyrus was Moses Simon. Moses lived in the town by 1858 and he operated a clothing store that eventually became known as M. Simon & Company. In 1873, Moses moved to Lima, Ohio, where he took over management of the Lima House Hotel. His business in Bucyrus was succeeded by Louis Mantel, a later Jewish immigrant.

While Mathias Buchmann and Moses Simon were the first Jews known to have settled in Bucyrus, the town's Jewish families began to grow during the 1860s. Among these early families were the Emrichs, Goldsmiths, and Mantels. Ferdinand Emrich, the older brother of Moses Emrich, arrived in Bucyrus in the early 1860s, having immigrated to the United States around 1850. He briefly partnered with his brother in a clothing store, Emrich Brothers, before leaving Bucyrus in 1866.<sup>4</sup> Moses Emrich, however, remained in Bucyrus and played a more enduring role in the town. Born in Baden, a region of modern-day Germany, Moses immigrated to the United States at the age of 15 and moved to Bucyrus in 1861.<sup>5</sup> He operated a clothing store until his death in 1900 and was also an investor in Bucyrus's Second National Bank. His wife, Rachel Emrich, whom he married in 1867, was an active community member, serving as a charter member and the first secretary of the local chapter of the Eastern Star, a Masonic-affiliated organization.<sup>6</sup>

Another prominent early Jewish resident was Joseph Goldsmith, who had family ties to Moses Simon through marriage. By 1864, Joseph had settled in Bucyrus, where he worked

alongside Simon at a clothing store before transitioning to working at Sims' House.<sup>7</sup> This hotel was later known as the Deal House. In 1872, Joseph moved to Lima, Ohio, to manage the Lima House Hotel, a significant landmark in Allen County until 1966. The Mantel family also arrived in Bucyrus during the 1860s. Henrietta Rothschild Mantel, originally from Germany, married Louis Mantel in 1864.<sup>8</sup> Louis's early years had taken him through Germany and England before he arrived in the United States in 1861.<sup>9</sup> After working as a sutler, selling provisions to Union soldiers during the Civil War, Louis settled in Bucyrus with Henrietta in 1864.<sup>10</sup> He initially worked in the produce trade and, in 1872, opened a shoe store. He later entered into a brief business partnership with Moses Winter. The Mantel family, along with the Emrichs and Goldsmiths, helped establish Bucyrus's emerging Jewish community.

These early Jewish families were part of a much larger wave of German immigration to the United States in the mid-1800s. German-speaking Jews had particular reasons for leaving Europe, facing significant legal restrictions on marriage, trades, and economic participation. Barred from owning land and excluded from many professional guilds, Jews in German-speaking regions often became itinerant traders, dealing in goods like clothing and livestock. These skills positioned many Jewish immigrants well for life in America, where they began as peddlers, supplying rural areas with goods that were otherwise unavailable. Over time, some peddlers, like Moses Emrich, saved enough money to open stores, securing their economic foothold in towns like Bucyrus.

This history of Bucyrus's Jewish community, while extensive, does not provide a comprehensive listing of all Jews who lived in the area. Instead, it aims to capture the stories and contributions of those families and individuals who played significant roles in shaping Bucyrus's Jewish presence, providing insights into the community's development within the context of small-town America.

### **Expansion of the Jewish Community: Families Arriving in Bucyrus Between 1870 and 1880**

As Bucyrus continued to grow throughout the 1870s, the Jewish community expanded with the arrival of several families. These families established businesses, participated in local civic life, and contributed to the town's developing Jewish presence, even in the absence of a formal synagogue. One of the notable new arrivals was Henry Baumoel, a native of Czechoslovakia, who was reported to have moved to Bucyrus in 1878.<sup>11</sup> However, contemporary

sources do not mention Henry until 1887, when he joined his brother Morris in business. Together, the siblings operated Baumel Brothers, a dry goods store that served Bucyrus for over 90 years. Morris had originally founded the store at 116 South Sandusky Avenue in 1882 or 1886. Henry and Morris were later joined by another brother, Mark, in 1892. Although all three brothers left Bucyrus by 1924 to retire in Cleveland, the store they founded continued under new ownership until 1981.<sup>12</sup>

The Rothschild family also made their mark in Bucyrus during this period. Jacob Rothschild, the brother of Henrietta Mantel, opened a butcher shop in Bucyrus in 1878.<sup>13</sup> His brother, Leopold, was also associated with the business, focusing on buying and selling livestock. While Leopold left Bucyrus by 1902, Jacob, who eventually relocated to New Washington, remained in Crawford County for the remainder of his life.<sup>14</sup> Julius Rothschild, another family member, opened the Bucyrus Meat, Poultry, and Fish Market starting in 1881. He later sold this store in 1882 before purchasing his brother Lee's meat market next to the post office. By 1884, Julius left Bucyrus and eventually settled in Omaha. Lee Rothschild, the husband of Josephine Benedict, had been operating the Excelsior Meat Market in Bucyrus since 1878. In 1883, he shifted his focus to the clothing and novelty business and operated a store located at 10 Main Street.<sup>15</sup> The family's movements illustrate the fluid nature of some Jewish residents' business endeavors during this time period.

Morris Emrich, cousin of Moses Emrich, had a shorter tenure in Bucyrus. By 1873, Morris operated the O.K. Hat, Cap, and Clothing Store on the northwest corner of the Public Square. After selling his business to Moses in 1876, Morris left the area, marking a brief presence in the town's Jewish history. Louis Freedman, another early Jewish business owner, ran a dry goods store by 1873 but left Bucyrus in December 1875 following legal disputes related to his business.<sup>16</sup> His departure highlights the transient nature of some early Jewish settlers, who often moved between communities in search of better opportunities. Among the most prominent Jewish families in Bucyrus during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the Herskowitz brothers. Jacob Herskowitz arrived in Bucyrus around 1873 and soon transitioned from peddling to opening a clothing store.<sup>17</sup> By 1889, he was joined in Bucyrus by his brothers, Mose and Sam. Jacob's business steadily grew, and by 1902, he was Bucyrus's oldest dry goods retailer.<sup>18</sup> Although he briefly moved to Galion in 1890, Jacob quickly returned to Bucyrus and reclaimed his store from Max Herskowitz, a relative living in Youngstown. Max later moved to Oklahoma

City, where he funded the construction of one of the city's first skyscrapers, the Herskowitz Building. Jacob retired in 1914 and eventually joined his brothers in Oklahoma City.<sup>19</sup>

Moses Lefkowitz and his wife, Helen, moved to Bucyrus between 1878 and 1880. Originally from Hungary, Moses was known for his skills as an optician and horseman, training and caring for horses in addition to his optical work.<sup>20</sup> When Moses died in 1910, he was remembered in the *Bucyrus Journal* as an "even-tempered, quiet, genial, and honorable man." The editors also praised his commitment to duty and his lasting legacy as a respected citizen.<sup>21</sup> The Nussbaum family became another pillar of Bucyrus's Jewish community. The brothers Benjamin, Isaac, Joseph, and Meyer Nussbaum each made significant contributions to the town. Benjamin operated a tailoring store and later partnered with Meyer under the name Nussbaum Brothers.<sup>22</sup> Isaac Nussbaum became another key figure in Bucyrus's retail industry, and for about ten years he worked alongside his brother, Joseph.<sup>23</sup> Isaac then partnered with Jacob Bach, a later Jewish resident, after Joseph Nussbaum moved to Toledo. Joseph, the elder brother, lived in Bucyrus from 1870 until 1890.<sup>24</sup> Isaac's long-standing business success was reflected in his membership in the Bucyrus' Fifty Year Club.<sup>25</sup> Meyer, the last Nussbaum brother to arrive in Bucyrus, eventually expanded his ventures beyond Crawford County to Marion, continuing the Nussbaum legacy in the region.

Another entrepreneur, Adolph Steinberg ran a wholesale cigar and liquor store in Bucyrus beginning in 1873.<sup>26</sup> His store, located at the corner of Main and Warren Streets, soon diversified to include ice cream sales and a restaurant. Although Steinberg's time in Bucyrus was brief, his business efforts contributed to the town's growing Jewish commercial presence. An early reference to Jewish religious observance in Bucyrus comes from 1874, when *The Forum* reported that Louis Freedman and Adolph Steinberg closed their businesses for Yom Kippur.<sup>27</sup> The newspaper noted: "We are pleased to say that Messers. Louis Freedman and Adolph Steinberg, two of our Hebrew citizens, kept their places of business closed on the above day. Having no synagogue nor any other place of worship, they celebrated that day as well as they could under the circumstances."<sup>28</sup> This acknowledgment highlights the meaningful Jewish observance in Bucyrus, even in the absence of formal communal structures.

These early Jewish families in Bucyrus provide valuable insight into Jewish life in so many small-towns across America. Many of these individuals arrived with commercial skills developed within families due to generations of economic restrictions in Europe, including a ban

in many areas on owning land, and they applied those skills in Bucyrus by establishing businesses, operating stores, and contributing to the town's overall development. Their presence enriched Bucyrus both culturally and economically, laying the groundwork for future Jewish residents.

### **Community Formation: Jewish Families Arriving in Bucyrus Between 1880 and 1890**

The 1880s marked a pivotal time in the development of Bucyrus's Jewish community. With new families arriving and local Jewish life becoming more organized, Bucyrus saw its Jewish population grow both in numbers and visibility. Not only did these individuals contribute to the town's commercial landscape, but they also began laying the foundations for more formal religious and communal institutions. Among the new arrivals was Jacob Bach, who settled in Bucyrus by 1882 after working in Memphis.<sup>29</sup> He became a key figure in Bucyrus's business community, joining Isaac and Joseph Nussbaum in their clothing business. In 1890, Jacob bought out Joseph and entered into a formal partnership with Isaac Nussbaum.<sup>30</sup> The store was also renamed Nussbaum & Bach. In 1914, Jacob founded his own business, the Jacob Bach Company, a men's clothing store.<sup>31</sup> The store operated out of the Deal House Block and remained a fixture in Bucyrus until it closed in 1932. In addition to his business ventures, Jacob was active in civic organizations, serving as a charter member of the local Rotary Club. He was also a member of the Odd Fellows. His wife, Sarah Bach, originally from Plymouth, Ohio, also played an active role in the community, becoming a charter member of the Current Events Club.<sup>32</sup> She was also a member of the local chapter of the Eastern Star.

Anshel and Ricka Edelstein arrived in Bucyrus from Cleveland in the early 1880s. Anshel, born in Bavaria, became a prominent livestock dealer and was respected for his expertise in judging livestock at county and state fairs.<sup>33</sup> The Edelstein family was well-integrated into Bucyrus's social fabric, with Anshel being a member of organizations such as the Elks and the National Union.<sup>34</sup> Ricka, also from Bavaria, supported her husband and raised their seven children, two of whom remained in Bucyrus as adults.<sup>35</sup> Solomon (Sol) and Caroline Englehard also contributed to the growing Jewish population in Bucyrus. Immigrating from Bavaria in 1881, the Engelhard family quickly established themselves in the town, with Sol working in the livestock trade and Caroline raising their nine children.<sup>36</sup> Solomon retired around 1903, but his and Caroline's impact on the community endured.<sup>37</sup> Caroline was known for her devotion to the

Jewish faith and was remembered by the editors of *The News-Forum* for her kindness and generosity when she passed away in 1916.<sup>38</sup>

Isaac and Caroline Gerson moved to Bucyrus around 1887.<sup>39</sup> Isaac found work in the scrap iron and hide trade, and he later organized the Bucyrus Fertilizer Factory before moving to Toledo in 1899 to expand his business.<sup>40</sup> At the time of his death in 1917, it was reported that Isaac was a millionaire.<sup>41</sup> While the Gerson family lived in Bucyrus for only a short time, other families had a more enduring presence. For example, the Nussbaum family continued to be prominent residents of Bucyrus into the twentieth century. New family members arrived in town during the 1880s and contributed to local business and communal life. Babette Nussbaum, the matriarch of the family, moved to Bucyrus from Germany following the death of her husband, Benjamin, and she became an influential figure in the local Jewish community.<sup>42</sup> Her sons were Benjamin, Isaac, Joseph, and Meyer, who have already been profiled.<sup>43</sup> Victor Nussbaum, Meyer's son, began working with his father in 1893 at the age of 15, continuing the Nussbaum family's business legacy in Bucyrus until 1959.<sup>44</sup>

Another significant figure in the Jewish community was Aaron Strauch, who moved to Bucyrus from Canton in 1887.<sup>45</sup> Strauch operated the Bee Hive, a dry goods store located on the west side of the Public Square, and later opened the Bazaar Store.<sup>46</sup> Despite his success in retail, Aaron faced health complications, which resulted in significant financial difficulties and he was compelled to retire in 1910.<sup>47</sup> He had played an active role in the community, even running for City Council in 1907, although he later withdrew from the race.<sup>48</sup> Charles and Julia Strauss, who moved to Bucyrus in the early 1880s, also helped shape the town's Jewish community. Charles opened a women's clothing and hat store and took the lead in organizing a Jewish Sunday school in 1885.<sup>49</sup> With 23 students enrolled, this school became an early center of Jewish religious education in Bucyrus.<sup>50</sup> The Strausses later moved to Cincinnati by 1891, but their efforts to organize Jewish life in Bucyrus had a more lasting impact.

By 1885, Bucyrus had a reported 14 Jewish families, and efforts to organize religious services and communal activities were well underway.<sup>51</sup> As previously mentioned, Charles Strauss was instrumental in establishing the town's first Jewish Sunday school, and by 1888, the Jewish community organized Rosh Hashanah services at the Masonic Temple.<sup>52</sup> These services mark the first known High Holiday observance in Bucyrus. Babette Nussbaum played a key role in promoting these religious gatherings, ensuring that the growing Jewish community had

opportunities for communal worship despite the absence of a formal synagogue.<sup>53</sup> A rabbi from Cleveland was brought to Bucyrus to lead the holiday services. The presence of enough families to hold holiday services starting in the late 1880s provided a foundation for the ongoing development of Bucyrus's Jewish community. Through entrepreneurial spirit, a growing interest in religious life, and visible participation in civic activities the Jewish community helped to shape Bucyrus as it developed into the twentieth century. Further, while small, the local Jewish community became increasingly visible and organized as it entered the 1890s.

### **Continued Growth and Community Life: Jewish Families in Bucyrus From 1890 to 1900**

The final decade of the nineteenth century saw the further development of Bucyrus's Jewish community. Several new families arrived, contributing to the town's expanding Jewish population and to its social and religious life. Among the new arrivals were Philip (Phil) and Rebecca Browarsky, who moved to Bucyrus in 1898. Phil, originally from Suwałki, Poland, had lived in multiple cities across the United States before settling in Bucyrus.<sup>54</sup> He established the Bucyrus Iron and Metal Company in 1899.<sup>55</sup> This firm was a successor to the Castle Iron and Metal Company. Bucyrus Iron and Metal continued to operate well into the 20th century and was bought by Sims Brothers Incorporated in 1984.<sup>56</sup> By 1918, Phil also served as a director of the Bucyrus Rubber Company, and he was involved in both the Building Corporation of Bucyrus and the Bucyrus Machine and Tool Company.<sup>57</sup> His civic involvement included membership in several local and national Jewish organizations, including B'nai B'rith, the Elks, and the Masons.<sup>58</sup> He was also a member of both Congregation B'nai Israel and Congregation B'nai Jacob in Toledo.<sup>59</sup> His wife, Rebecca, was equally dedicated to the community and their family, raising four children in Bucyrus. Henry Newman, another newer member of the local Jewish community, moved to Bucyrus after his marriage to Bertha Mantel in 1898.<sup>60</sup> Henry, who had been living in Omaha, Nebraska, took over the management of a shoe store owned by his father-in-law, Louis Mantel.<sup>61</sup> The store, located on South Sandusky Avenue, was known as the Eagle Shoe Store or N. M. & N. Shoe Store. However, Henry and Bertha's time in Bucyrus was short-lived, as they returned to Omaha in 1904.

Charles Trounstein also made an impact on Bucyrus's commercial life during the 1890s. Having managed a store in nearby Nevada, Ohio, for Moses Emrich, Charles moved to Bucyrus by 1890. Over the next decade, Charles's business ventures also took him to Shelby and



Norwalk, before he eventually settled in Cleveland in 1907 to work for the May Company.<sup>62</sup> Another new arrival during the 1890s was Samuel Wolfstein, who moved to Bucyrus in 1890 from Cincinnati.<sup>63</sup> Samuel's business, Wolfstein & Company, specialized in selling furs and hides. Despite his relatively short stay in Bucyrus, which ended in 1892, Samuel's business contributed to the growing network of stores in Bucyrus. Samuel passed away in 1895 in Fostoria, where his daughter was living.<sup>64</sup>

Marriage continued to play an essential role in shaping the Jewish population of Bucyrus during the 1890s. While Henry Newman moved to Bucyrus following his marriage to Bertha Mantel, it was more common for Jews, especially women, to leave Bucyrus after marrying. Moses and Rachel Emrich's daughters, Blanche and Selma, both left Bucyrus for Cleveland after their respective weddings in 1896 and 1891. This trend continued into the early 20th century, with individuals such as Clara Edelstein and Mary Nussbaum leaving Bucyrus after their marriages. However, while some younger Jews left Bucyrus, others stayed and continued to shape their town's commercial and civic life. For example, several members of the Englehard family remained in Bucyrus and made notable contributions to local business. George Englehard was actively involved in the livestock trade by 1901 and was remembered for his involvement within the local Republican Party.<sup>65</sup> His brothers, Louis and Meyer Englehard, worked in clothing retail operating the Englehard Clothing Store on North Sandusky Avenue. Both Louis and Meyer were deeply engaged in the local community, and had memberships in organizations like the Elks, Masons, and the YMCA.

The Jewish community also became more active in civic and social life. In 1896, the Ladies' Aid Society of Bucyrus, a new organization for Jewish women, organized a well-attended dance at the Knights of Pythias Hall.<sup>66</sup> The event drew participants from as far away as Fostoria, New York, and Tiffin, highlighting the broader regional and even national connections within Crawford County's Jewish community. Rosh Hashanah services continued to be held during the decade, with services hosted at various venues, including the Masonic Temple, Mader's Hall, the Grand Armory Hall, and the Memorial Hall. By 1898, these services were being held at the Grand Army of the Republic Hall, with Jews from nearby towns attending as well.<sup>67</sup>

By 1897, Bucyrus's Jewish Sunday School was also well established, with 17 students attending classes at the Grand Army of the Republic Hall.<sup>68</sup> Cecelia Nussbaum and Esther Nussbaum served as teachers.<sup>69</sup> As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Jewish community

in Bucyrus had grown not only in numbers but also developed in its organization. Through business ventures, community involvement, and religious observance, Jewish families helped to shape the town's commercial, social, and religious landscape. While some individuals moved on to larger cities, those who remained continued to contribute to Bucyrus's development, ensuring that Jewish life would remain a visible part of the town's social fabric as it entered the 20th century.

### **Further Development and Congregational Life: Bucyrus's Jewish Community Between 1900 and 1917**

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw continued growth and changes in Bucyrus's Jewish population, with new families arriving and increased efforts to organize local Jewish religious life taking shape. Among the arrivals during this time was Thomas Caplin, who moved to Bucyrus from Toledo around 1903. Caplin worked in the scrap business but moved to Ashland in 1908 before returning to Bucyrus with his family shortly thereafter.<sup>70</sup> Another notable family was Rachel and William Geiger. Rachel, born in Cleveland, moved to Bucyrus with her husband in 1900 after living in Marion. She quickly became an active member of the Bucyrus community, serving as president of the Jewish Ladies Aid Society. She was also active in the Current Events Club. Tragically, Rachel passed away from appendicitis in 1922.<sup>71</sup> Her husband, William, operated a men's clothing store located on the northeast corner of the Public Square.<sup>72</sup> In 1919, William's son Sydney joined him as a partner, and the business was renamed W.J. Geiger & Son.<sup>73</sup> By 1925, however, both Sydney and William had moved away from Bucyrus.

Abraham Lubisky arrived in Bucyrus in 1902 to work at the Great Western Clothing Company.<sup>74</sup> Four years later, he became the sole owner of the store, which continued to operate under Lubisky's management until it was succeeded by the New York Underselling Company in 1919. Samuel Mitchell, who married Esther Nussbaum in 1904, also established himself in Bucyrus during this period.<sup>75</sup> After living in Marquette, Michigan, by 1907 Esther and Mitchell moved to Bucyrus after Mitchell decided to open a jewelry store on the Public Square. The family remained in Bucyrus for a number of years before relocating to Toledo by 1922. Other families, such as Dora and Samuel Mostov, briefly made Bucyrus their home.<sup>76</sup> Samuel Mostov worked in the scrap business for two years before the family moved back to Toledo. Maurice Morgenstern, another new resident, was associated with The Fair store, which sold women's and

children's clothing. Despite initial success, Morgenstern declared bankruptcy in 1916 and was no longer mentioned in local sources after 1918.<sup>77</sup>

The early 1900s also marked the first known efforts to formally organize a congregation to serve Bucyrus's Jewish community. While holiday services, religious education classes, and social activities were previously organized to support the local Jewish community, there was no known effort to create a permanent religious organization. Rabbi George Zepin from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati facilitated these early efforts starting in 1903, which included a community organizing meeting held in a local Lutheran church.<sup>78</sup> At the time, it was estimated that Bucyrus had about 16 Jewish families, and a formal leadership structure for the congregation was established with Louis Mantel as president, Jacob Bach as vice president, Jack Myers as secretary, and M. Baumel as treasurer.<sup>79</sup> Trustees included Anshel Edelstein, Meyer Nussbaum, and A. Mantel.<sup>80</sup> Plans were also discussed by the congregation to build a synagogue and hold regular religious services in Bucyrus but a local synagogue was never dedicated.<sup>81</sup>

By February 1904, however, bi-weekly services began, initially led by Rabbi Charles Freund of Toledo, and then by Mr. Gottschall, a student from Hebrew Union College.<sup>82</sup> The first services were held in Fisher Hall, and a Sunday school was continued with approximately 20 students.<sup>83</sup> Jewish families from nearby towns such as Galion attended these religious services in Bucyrus as well.<sup>84</sup> In 1905, Rabbi David Klein of Columbus began visiting Bucyrus twice a month to lead religious services, with Sunday school held weekly.<sup>85</sup> Services were moved to the assembly room at the local Y.M.C.A., and the Jewish community in Bucyrus continued to grow.<sup>86</sup> By 1914, Rosh Hashanah services were being held in Rowse Hall, and a rabbi from Cincinnati was brought in to officiate Yom Kippur services.<sup>87</sup>

However, the Jewish congregation in Bucyrus faced challenges in maintaining itself. By 1911, it appears that several members of the local Jewish congregation began to travel to Marion for religious services. This trend continued into 1915, when a significant portion of Bucyrus's Jewish population attended High Holiday services in Marion, though some local observances, including services for Yom Kippur, were still organized in Bucyrus.<sup>88</sup> It is possible that efforts to develop a local congregation were hindered by religious differences among members of the Jewish community with some individuals holding more Orthodox views than others. These disagreements and the small size of the Jewish community in Bucyrus contributed to the decline of organized Jewish life in Crawford County by the late 1920s.

## **World War I and the 1920s: Service, Community Engagement, and Evolving Jewish Life in Bucyrus.**

The years spanning World War I and the 1920s brought both challenges and positive developments within Bucyrus's Jewish community. During the war, several individuals contributed to both military service and home front efforts. Among those who served was Maurice Browarsky, son of Philip and Rebecca Browarsky. Born in Toledo, Maurice served in France and Germany and later continued the family business in Bucyrus as vice president of the Bucyrus Iron and Metal Company.<sup>89</sup> Another serviceman, Sydney Geiger, the son of Rachel and William Geiger, joined the U.S. Army and rose to the rank of Corporal, although he did not serve abroad.<sup>90</sup> After the war, Sydney returned to Bucyrus to work with his father at the family's clothing store and soon became a partner in the business.<sup>91</sup> Sydney wed Bertha Jacobs, a kindergarten teacher from Jacksonville, Florida, in 1921.<sup>92</sup> Bertha met Sydney while he was stationed at Camp Joseph E. Johnston during the war. The couple moved to Florida in 1925.

Mortimer Nussbaum, son of Meyer and Mina Nussbaum, also served in France and Germany during World War I.<sup>93</sup> Upon his return, he joined his father in the family business, M. Nussbaum & Son, and by 1949, he became president of the Swan Rubber Company. Other members of the Jewish community contributed to home front efforts. For example, Maurice Morgenstern supported the Liberty Loan drives, while Edna Baumuel sang to raise funds for the Allied War Fund.<sup>94</sup> The Englehard family, including Moses, Louis, and Sophia, contributed to the Red Cross's work.<sup>95</sup>

Following the war, the Jewish community in Bucyrus continued to evolve, with new undertakings and contributions. Hattie Edelstein, the daughter of Anshel and Ricka Edelstein, was a notable female entrepreneur. In 1920, she opened the Posie Shoppe flower store in partnership with Nellie Spearman.<sup>96</sup> She later sold her interest in the business in 1928. Hattie went on to operate the Royal Cafeteria, part of the Royal Hotel, becoming its sole owner in 1928.<sup>97</sup> She was also active in community organizations, including the American Legion Auxiliary, Bucyrus Garden Club, and the City Federation of Women's Clubs. Hattie's brother, Myron Edelstein, owned the Jolly Newsstand and later managed the Bucyrus Recreation Parlor, which included billiard tables and a bowling alley.<sup>98</sup> Nathan Edelstein, another sibling, worked as

a livestock buyer and operated the Recreation Parlor with Myron until 1938, before moving to Toledo.

The Jewish community in Bucyrus remained engaged in an organized way to support social welfare and civic activities into the 1920s. In 1919, local residents participated in efforts organized by the American Jewish Relief Fund to support Jews facing impoverishment and persecution abroad. Notably, non-Jews also contributed to these efforts, with organizations like the Junior Order of United American Mechanics providing donations.<sup>99</sup> In 1920, members of the Jewish community continued to play key roles in relief efforts for Eastern Europe, raising over \$5,000, including funds from auctioning pigs in the Public Square.<sup>100</sup> Lester Bach and Louis Englehard were two volunteer leaders who supported these fundraising efforts.

The decade also saw renewed attempts to formalize Jewish religious life in Bucyrus. In 1922, it was reported in *The American Israelite* that a Jewish congregation was formed with about 20 members.<sup>101</sup> A religious school, led by Selma Geiger, was established, serving around 16 students, primarily aged five and six.<sup>102</sup> The congregation was affiliated with the Reform movement and was supported by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations through the movement's Department of Synagogue and School Extension, which worked to support Jewish communities in small cities and towns.<sup>103</sup> In 1923, Rosh Hashanah services were held in the home of Anshel Edelstein.<sup>104</sup> The observance of Jewish holidays remained an important aspect of community life, and in 1925, three stores in Bucyrus closed to observe Rosh Hashanah: the Boston Store, Englehard Clothing Store, and Nussbaum & Son Clothing Store.<sup>105</sup>

The Jewish Ladies' Aid Society played a crucial role in the community's charitable efforts during and after the war. During World War I, the society supported the Red Cross and contributed to local health initiatives.<sup>106</sup> In 1919, the Jewish Ladies' Aid Society was accepted into the City Federation of Women's Clubs and had about 15 active members.<sup>107</sup> The society continued its philanthropic work, donating to the Salvation Army in 1920 and supporting relief efforts after the devastating Lorain tornado in 1924.<sup>108</sup> The organization also expanded its network by collaborating with similar groups in nearby towns, including Crestline, Galion, Kenton, Lima, Mansfield, and Marion, through the District Sisterhood.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the ongoing efforts to maintain a cohesive Jewish community locally, the Jewish population of Bucyrus remained small and unable to provide the same kinds of services offered in larger Jewish communities. Many Jews in Bucyrus ultimately chose to support larger Jewish

congregations in Mansfield and Marion, by the end of the 1920s rather than maintain more local organizations. This shift, along with the movement of individuals to larger cities, signaled a change in the Jewish community's presence in Bucyrus as the town moved into the 1930s.

### **The Final Years: Jewish Life in Bucyrus After 1923**

After 1923, references to an organized Jewish community in Bucyrus become increasingly scarce. Despite this, a few Jewish individuals and families who moved to the area after 1923 made notable contributions to Bucyrus's business and civic life. One such individual was Milton Bryer, who arrived from Cleveland in 1934 to manage the State Theater.<sup>110</sup> Initially purchasing the theater from Charles Settos, Milton continued to serve as its manager when the Schine Corporation bought and renovated it in 1935.<sup>111</sup> In 1936, the theater was renamed Schine's State, and Milton also became associated with the Bucyrus Theater.<sup>112</sup> He remained a prominent figure in Bucyrus's entertainment scene until he moved back to Cleveland in 1943 or 1944. During his time in Bucyrus, Milton was also a member of the local Rotary Club.

Another significant business with ties to the local Jewish community was Romanoff Jewelers. This store was founded by Harold Romanoff, a Toledo native who purchased Lord's Jewelers in 1952.<sup>113</sup> In 1960, Harold moved the business across the street and renamed it Romanoff Jewelers.<sup>114</sup> The store remained in this location at 132 South Sandusky Avenue until 2013, making it a mainstay of the Bucyrus business community for over 60 years. Before moving to Bucyrus, Harold served in World War II and he spent 16 months as prisoner of war in Germany.<sup>115</sup> He was also an active volunteer with local organizations such as the Salvation Army and the YMCA. Harold was also a member of Temple Israel in Marion and the local American Legion, Kiwanis, Elks, and Moose organizations.<sup>116</sup> Mary, Harold's wife, assisted with the Romanoff business.<sup>117</sup> After Harold's retirement in the early 1990s, Michael Romanoff, the son of Harold and Mary, continued the business. Michael had become a partner in 1980.<sup>118</sup> In addition to Romanoff Jewelers, Michael co-owned Val Casting, a jewelry-making business that operated out of the same location on South Sandusky Avenue.<sup>119</sup> Michael retired in 2013, closing Romanoff Jewelers after decades of service to the community.

The Bucyrus Iron & Metal Company was another enduring Jewish-owned business. Founded at the turn of the century by Philip Browarsky, this scrap business remained under the family's ownership until 1984, when it was acquired by Sims Brothers Incorporated.<sup>120</sup> After

Philip's death in 1947, his son Newman Browarsky took over the firm, serving as its president and general manager until his retirement in 1958.<sup>121</sup> Newman had moved to Marion in 1925 but continued to be associated with the company. Newman was also a noted violinist who performed frequently in Bucyrus and surrounding communities. He was entirely self-taught. The legacy of the Browarsky family in the scrap business continued through Newman's daughter, Edith Browarsky Lenavitt. Alongside her husband, Ben Lenavitt, Edith joined the company in 1955 and served as its treasurer by 1978. Their son, Joel Lenavitt, represented the fourth generation to be involved with the business, becoming the executive vice president and general manager in 1979. Although the company was eventually sold in 1984, the Browarsky and Lenavitt families' impact on Bucyrus's industrial landscape persisted for nearly a century. Beyond business, these individuals were active in the community. Edith volunteered as a Gray Lady at Bucyrus Community Hospital, while Joel supported local sports programs, serving as an announcer and volunteer for football and wrestling programs in the area.<sup>122</sup>

The limited information on Jewish community life in Bucyrus after the 1920s indicates a gradual decline in organized religious and social activities locally. In 1935, two Jewish-owned stores closed in observance of Rosh Hashanah.<sup>123</sup> The stores were owned by Meyer Englehard and Isaac Nussbaum.<sup>124</sup> A few years later, in 1938, it was reported that a small group of Jewish families met most Sunday evenings for social events that also served to raise funds for charitable causes.<sup>125</sup> These gatherings suggest that even without a formal congregation, Jewish residents continued to maintain cultural and communal bonds locally until at least the late 1930s.

## **Conclusion**

The history of Bucyrus's Jewish community reflects in many ways the broader experiences of Jewish communities in small-town America. From the arrival of the first Jewish settlers in the mid-1800s to the establishment of businesses and social organizations, the Jewish community contributed significantly to the town's economic and cultural life. During its peak in the early 1900s, efforts were made to organize a local congregation, hold religious services, and provide social support through the Jewish Ladies' Aid Society. However, the community's small size and the draw of larger cities with more robust Jewish institutions led many individuals and families to relocate over time.

By the 1920s, Bucyrus's Jewish community had become more dispersed, with many supporting congregations in nearby towns like Mansfield and Marion. While formal religious life in Bucyrus declined, Jewish-owned businesses and the contributions of individuals, such as the Browarsky and Edelstein families, continued to play an important role in the town's landscape. Despite the gradual decline in Jewish communal activities, the legacy of Bucyrus's Jewish residents endures through their economic, cultural, and charitable contributions, which left a lasting mark on the town's history.

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