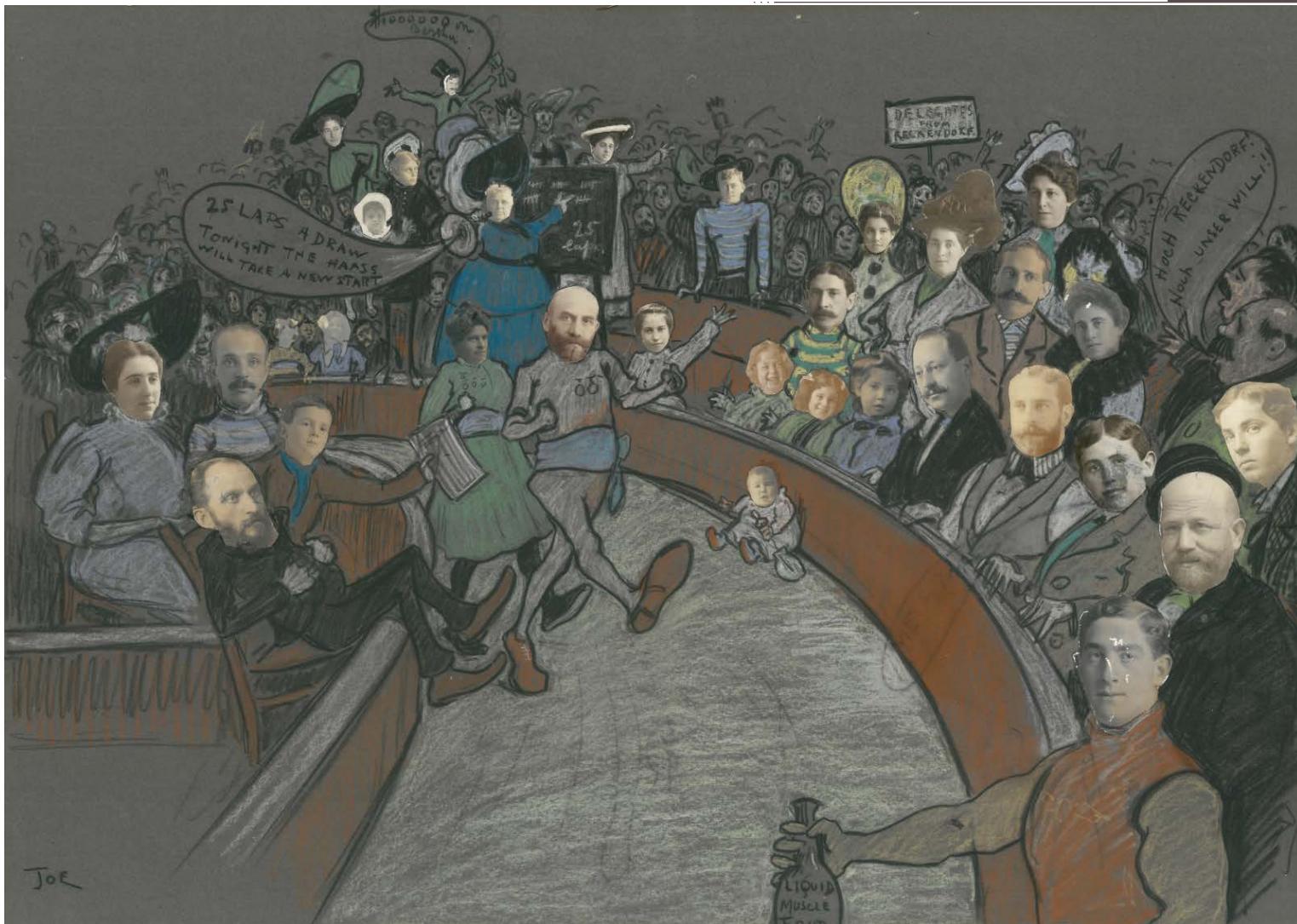




Jewish Americans Religion and Identity at 2007 Franklin Street



Haas family collage, 1905, 25th wedding anniversary of William and Bertha Haas,
pictured center-left, taking a "lap" surrounded by family and friends

Fred Rosenbaum

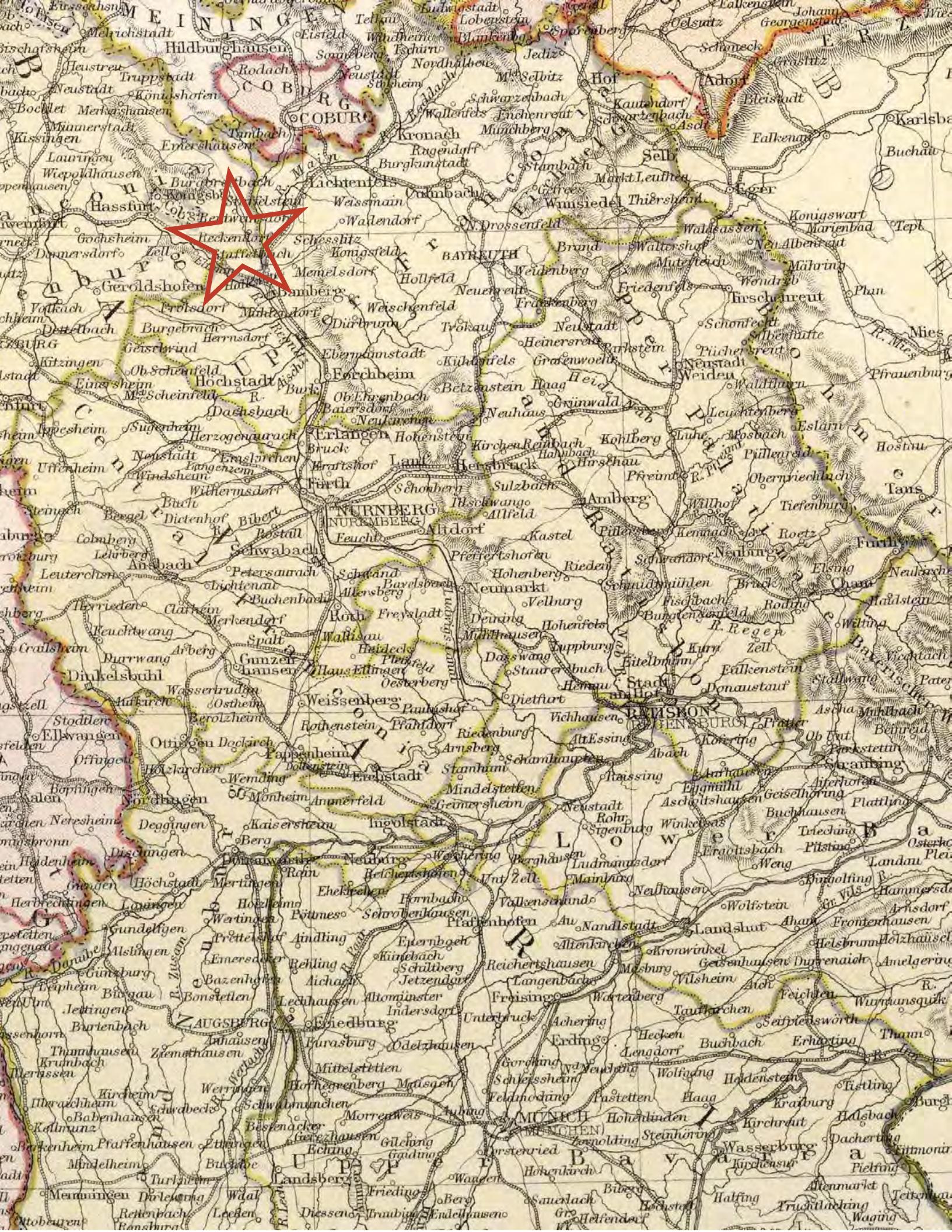
May 2017

The Haas-Lilienthal House,
built in 1886 for William and Bertha Haas,
is an exuberant example of
Queen Anne-style architecture designed by Peter R. Schmidt.

Surviving the 1906 earthquake and fire,
the House remained in the family until 1973
when it was entrusted to San Francisco Heritage
to serve as the organization's headquarters and
as the city's only Gilded Age house museum open to the public.

This San Francisco Landmark
was recognized in 2012 by the
National Trust for Historic Preservation
as one of only 34 National Treasures in America.





1. Between Tradition and Modernity: William Haas's Old-World Origins

William Haas at thirty-seven was a highly successful and respected businessman when in 1886 he built an imposing mansion for his family in San Francisco. He and his tight-knit circle of friends and relatives enjoyed freedom, prosperity, and admiration in the City by the Bay, a world apart from the village of Reckendorf in the Kingdom of Bavaria, where he had been born and raised, and which he had left barely two decades earlier.

Wild geese ran through the dirt roads of Reckendorf, a rural settlement of about a thousand people, perhaps a quarter of whom were Jews.¹ Wolf or Wilhelm Haas, as he was known in his youth, was born in 1849, the youngest of ten children. The patriarch of the family was Koppel Haas, the last name probably derived from the German word *Hase*, meaning *hare*. It was likely chosen by Koppel's father, Kalman, in 1817 when Bavarian authorities allowed Jews to take



Fanny Berg (Mrs. Koppel Haas)



Koppel Haas

surnames.² Koppel's first wife, Nanette Kaufman, bore three children and lost two others due to miscarriages or stillbirths. She died in 1837 and his second wife, Fanny Berg, gave birth to the seven youngest including Wolf.³

Koppel was a weaver, a craft in decline because of the recent mechanization of the textile industry. It is likely that he and his family worked on a loom in their house, weaving skeins of wool into cloth. The family was by no means impoverished, but evidently one of modest means. Historian Frances Dinkelpiel, in a vivid chapter on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Reckendorf, describes the Haas home as "a caramel-colored, low-slung house just a few steps from the synagogue."⁴ A census taken in 1835 (fourteen years before Wolf's birth, but when Koppel was already thirty-four, married, and with two children) reveals his family's net worth as 200 gulden, far less than many of the

other families in Reckendorf, about 20% of whom had over a thousand gulden.⁵ (Koppel's older brother Abraham had a net worth of 450 gulden.) A fifth of the town reportedly had no assets and were listed as "poor," among them was Koppel's father.

In Reckendorf, nestled in the Braunach River Valley of Bavaria's distinctive region of Upper Franconia, with its own German dialect, Jews had been severely persecuted since the late Middle Ages. As in the rest of Central Europe, they were ghettoized, subject to special taxes, and even expelled for long periods. They were victimized by pogroms often incited by the "blood libel," the incendiary accusation that Jews killed Christian children and used their blood for ritual purposes. Expectations for toleration arose during the Napoleonic Wars, but in 1819, when Wolf's father was a young man, these hopes were dashed by a brutal wave of riots against Jews that engulfed the region. The rampage in Franconia subsided in a few months but Bavarian Jews continued to be oppressed by

punitive taxes and by the infamous *Matrikel*, or registry of Jews, strictly limiting their marriages in the kingdom, usually by allowing only the eldest son of the family to marry. A younger son would have to wait to wed until the death of another Jew opened a spot in the registry. There were quotas on Jews entering the professions and even residing in the cities, where there was more economic opportunity. As late as 1852, the number of Jews in Munich, the largest Bavarian city and its capital, was capped by law at only 1,200.⁶ Even Reckendorf's Jewish population was limited to 78 families, although it had only 46 during Wolf's youth.⁷

Such discrimination was clearly the impetus for a tidal wave of Jewish immigration from Bavaria and other German lands to the United States beginning in the 1840s and accelerated by the repression following the failed revolutions of 1848. Over a span of four decades, around 200,000 (including half of Central Europe's Jewish males) would leave for the Golden Land, increasing its Jewish population by a factor of ten. All of Koppel Haas's sons were among them. Joining two older brothers already in the United States, sixteen-year-old Wolf and his eighteen-year-old brother, Abraham, sailed for New York from Hamburg in July 1865. Wolf, accompanied by his father (in the nearby town of Ebern on March 23, 1864), had presented a lengthy application for permission to emigrate. But he would not depart until sixteen months later,



Reckendorf Synagogue in 1911



Reckendorf Synagogue in 1911



William Haas in 1865, age 16, newly arrived in New York City from Reckendorf, Bavaria

perhaps due to a bureaucratic delay in the approval of his request, or simply because of time needed to prepare for his life-changing journey.⁸

What was the impact of Reckendorf on the young Jews it sent into the world at mid-century? Clearly they would remember an economy little changed since medieval times. Although prosperous compared with the rest of Upper Franconia, the large majority of Jews worked as weavers, cattle-dealers, or petty traders in grain, animal skins, or wool. Some were craftsmen, others peddlers.⁹ Although the hamlet was known for its many breweries, few Jews were allowed to participate in that industry.¹⁰

Their Judaism was paramount. The plain sandstone prayer house, built in 1727, was “for

the Jewish community the center of life,” according to Dinkelspiel.¹¹ Remodeled in 1762, it contained a *mikvah*, or ritual bath, in its basement. Like the other Jewish boys, Wolf attended classes in the synagogue three afternoons a week, studying Bible and Talmud with the rabbi. The small Jewish community also operated a kosher slaughterhouse and cemetery.¹²

The relationship to the Catholic (and the few Protestant) neighbors and to governmental authorities was uneasy at best, and often one of suspicion and even fear. Jews who left Reckendorf were indelibly marked by the suffering of their people over the centuries, and the obstacles to integration in their own time.

Yet by mid-century, the Jews of this Bavarian village were not quite so insular, traditional, or repressed as the above description might suggest. In fact, social change had swept across Central Europe before and during Wolf Haas’s youth. After a half millennium of oppression, even the remote Jewish community of Reckendorf saw considerable progress in secular learning, civil rights, and Judaism itself.

Like his boyhood friends — two of whom, Isaias Wolf Hellman (1842-1920) and Isaac Walter (1844-1925), were also destined to become merchant princes in San Francisco — Wolf attended an all-Jewish primary school for boys and girls in Reckendorf, where he received high marks and obtained a solid general education. Jews had been allowed to attend the public school, but because its curriculum included instruction in Catholicism, the Jewish community petitioned the authorities to construct their own school, and permission was granted in 1828.¹³

After elementary-school graduation at thirteen, Wolf entered the *Vereinigte Landwirtschaftliche und Gewerbeschule*, or Unified Agricultural and Trade School, for boys, in the much larger town of Bamberg, about ten miles away. For the two academic years between 1862 and 1864, he was enrolled in the trade branch of the school of 300, the second largest of its kind in the entire kingdom. (There was also a *Gymnasium* in

Bamberg, a highly advanced preparatory school for the university, but it would accept no Jews until 1890.)

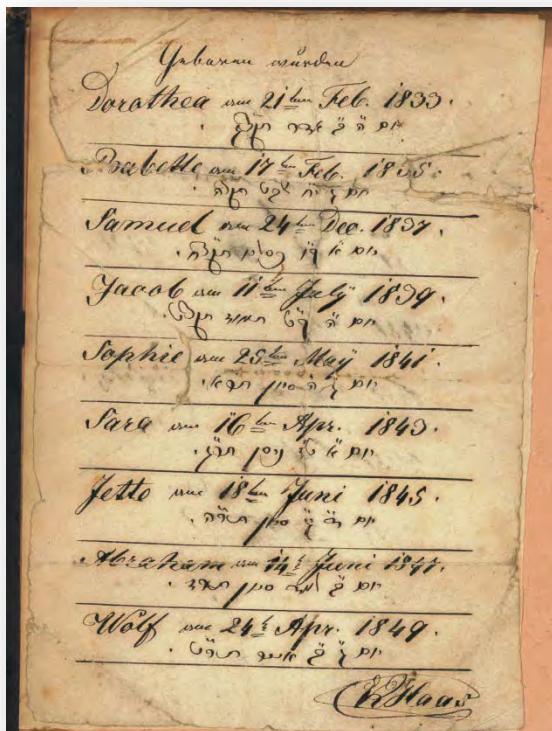
Wolf applied himself assiduously in the study of a wide range of subjects: mercantile disciplines such as bookkeeping, stenography, and business correspondence, of course, but also German, French, geometry, history, geography, natural history, art and calligraphy, and physics.¹⁴ During his second year, he also took classes in English three hours a week. This fine technical school admitted Jews beginning in 1854 and by the time Wolf attended, as one of the first students to be accepted from Reckendorf, it was one-third Jewish.¹⁵ In both his first and second years — he missed the final year of the three-year course of study due to his emigration — his grades were outstanding and he ranked near the very top of his class.¹⁶

This excellent schooling — a high-quality primary education followed by rigorous training in the humanities, math, science, and business — may

help explain how a village like Reckendorf could produce three future corporate titans: Haas, Hellman, and Walter. Of course, these gifted teens also learned much from the small businesses run by their families (perhaps bound together all the more closely due to the discrimination they faced from non-Jews) and would later benefit from relatives who had already immigrated to America. Indeed, the well-being of his large family on both sides of the Atlantic would be uppermost in Haas's mind for his whole life. When he left his hometown as a youth, he took with him a single folded sheet of paper listing the names and the secular and Hebrew birth dates of each of his siblings. Once in the United States, he bought a Bible and pasted the page onto the inside front cover.

The extent to which such educational, mercantile, and familial patterns prevailed in towns and villages across Bavaria in the mid-nineteenth century could be a fruitful topic of future research. Among many examples, Ichenhausen was the hometown of both the illustrious Koshlands and Gerstles of San Francisco, and Levi Strauss was born and raised in Buttenheim, only twenty miles from Reckendorf.

Wolf was also exposed to a different kind of Judaism from that of his ancestors, even as he sat in the same synagogue that had served his family for many generations. For in the mid-eighteenth century, the Berlin philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) had put in motion a movement known as the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, which sought to bring the Jews, who had been a people apart since the Middle Ages, into the world of modern, secular thought. At the same time, Mendelssohn and his followers tried to influence the rulers of the German states to emancipate the Jews, freeing them by law from the yoke of oppression. Both Jewish and non-Jewish Enlightenment thinkers knew, however, that for the Jews to be accepted they would have to make themselves acceptable. This meant contemporary garb, training in new occupations, and command of proper German, replacing *Judendeutsch* (sometimes called Western Yiddish), a language consisting largely of medieval German with the addition of many Hebrew words and



Inside cover of William Haas's Bible, listing the names and secular and Hebrew birth dates of his siblings and himself

expressions and written with Hebrew characters. (Mendelssohn translated the Torah into High German in the 1780s, but at this early stage in the Jewish Enlightenment he felt he still needed to retain Hebrew letters.)

Entering German society also included a major shift in the beliefs and practices of Judaism. Thus, the *Haskalah* went hand in hand with the Reform movement, which began in Lower Saxony in 1810 and later spread to America. In order to make their age-old religion more compatible with modern times and with their Christian surroundings, Reform rabbis typically brought an organ and choir into the synagogue, allowed men and women to sit together, delivered their sermons and led some of the prayers in the vernacular, shortened the liturgy, and observed fewer holidays. Later, more radical reforms would be introduced, such as annulling the Sabbath and kosher laws and even sanctifying intermarriage.¹⁷

Remarkably, this movement took hold not only in the big cities, where secular life was the most pronounced and alluring, but also in many small towns and villages. Bamberg, in the vicinity of Reckendorf, had a progressive rabbi as early as 1826, Samson Wolf Rosenfeld (1780-1862), who initiated the bat mitzvah of twelve-year-old girls as well as many other reforms and published, in German, the first Jewish newsweekly in Central Europe.¹⁸ He served for almost four decades and was at his post through most of Wolf Haas's youth.

In 1860, when Wolf was eleven, a pragmatic Reform rabbi came to Reckendorf's only synagogue. Dr. Hartwig Werner remained until 1862, the year of the boy's bar mitzvah. During his short tenure, he reformed much of the worship service.¹⁹ His work was undone by his Orthodox successor, however, a reversal bewailed in the Reform movement's monthly journal circulating throughout the German states.²⁰ Even in such a small Jewish community, the young Haas witnessed a swing from tradition to modernity and back again. He had to be aware that Judaism was in a state of flux.

During Wolf's youth, the social and political status of Bavarian Jewry was changing as well. In 1861, most of the discriminatory laws targeting Jews, including the hated *Matrikel*, were abolished. Some anti-Semitic decrees were reinstated a few years later, but at the turn of the decade, when Bavaria became part of the new German Empire, Jews were granted full citizenship. Haas was already in America by then, but while still in Bavaria he had seen the goal of emancipation come into view.

There was even the role model of a respected Jewish merchant prince not far from Wolf's hometown. In 1818, the wealthy court banker Jakob Hirsch (1765-1840) was ennobled by a grateful king of Bavaria and became the first Jew in the country to enter the landed aristocracy. A few years earlier, Hirsch had bought a baroque hilltop castle in the town of Gereuth, only eleven miles from Reckendorf. He was now given the grandiloquent title Jakob von Hirsch auf Gereuth and awarded large tracts of land surrounding his palatial home.²¹ He died in 1840, but his son Baron Josef Jakob von Hirsch auf Gereuth (1805-1885) continued the distinguished family's role in finance and philanthropy.

Josef Jakob's son, Baron Maurice de Hirsch (1831-1896), who lived in Paris, would vastly increase the family fortune as a banker and builder of railways, including the Orient Express, and establish charitable foundations for the alleviation of Jewish suffering throughout the world. He was among the leading Jewish philanthropists of his time, helping to facilitate the mass immigration of Russian Jews to the United States, Canada, and South America. In California, Haas doubtless followed Maurice de Hirsch's spectacular career, but even in Upper Franconia the rise of the von Hirsch auf Gereuth family had provided him a striking example of Jewish success. When he left for America, he had not yet experienced the complete integration of Jews into their host society, but he could envision it.

2. Woven into the Fabric: The Bavarian Jewish Elite from the Gold Rush to the Gilded Age



Left to right: Alice, William, Charles, Florine, and Bertha Haas, with nephew Louis Greene, c. 1890

With his brother Abraham, two years his senior, Wolf sailed to New York three months after the Civil War ended and lived briefly in Missouri, Idaho, and Los Angeles before arriving in San Francisco in October 1868, not yet twenty. His rise in the business world over the next decade would be meteoric. He went to work at Haas Brothers, the wholesale-grocery concern headed by his older cousin Kalman, the pathbreaker in the family. Wolf's brothers and several cousins later joined the firm as well, quickly making it one of the largest companies of its kind in the American West. In one decade, William, as Wolf now called himself, ascended from clerk (when he sometimes slept on a shelf in the store), to salesman, and finally to partner.²² By 1870, he owned a modest house, valued at \$1,000; the mansion he would construct in 1886 cost more than eighteen times that amount, not including the land. Abraham Haas, meanwhile, established himself in Los Angeles, then a small city, and rose to great heights there as a businessman and philanthropist.²³

William Haas joined the ranks of a German-Jewish aristocracy, an elite group of several dozen families, the large majority from Bavaria, who had settled in San Francisco in the two decades following the Gold Rush and become wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. They formed a highly

exclusive coterie, socializing in the same clubs, worshiping in the front rows of the same synagogue, leading the same philanthropic Jewish organizations, and partnering with one another in business ventures.²⁴ In the manner of European royalty, they invariably married within their set, and were so inbred that it was not uncommon for two brothers of one family to marry two sisters from another. They also tended to live in close proximity in the neighborhoods now known as Pacific Heights or Lower Pacific Heights, further adding to their insularity. Many of them built ornate Italianate, Eastlake, Neoclassical, and, even more flamboyant, Queen Anne-style residences on Van Ness Avenue, a beautiful boulevard before the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, on sedate Franklin Street one block west, or on the fashionable



ARTISTIC HOMES OF CALIFORNIA
2007 Franklin Street in 1887, the year after its construction

streets that crossed them such as Post, Sutter, Bush, Pine, California, Sacramento, Clay, Washington, Jackson, and Pacific.

William Haas was no exception. In 1880, at thirty-one, he married the American-born Bertha Greenebaum (1861-1927), daughter of the highly successful Bavarian dry-goods merchant Herman Greenebaum, who lived at 1917 Franklin Street, only a block away from the couple's future home. Within the six-year period before moving into the mansion, they had three children, Florine, Charles, and Alice, who grew up in the Haas-Lilenthal House with all of the advantages of an upper-class family in the Gilded Age: a large household staff and a chauffeur, exclusive private schools, a myriad of tutors for every pastime, and luxurious vacations including annual month-long holidays at Lake Tahoe and first-class tours of Europe. When Bertha and William went abroad in 1888, they were accompanied by their six, four, and three-year old, and a governess.

Each of the Haas children would marry into the families of other prominent local Bavarian Jewish businessmen. Florine Haas (1881-1973) would wed Edward Bransten, whose brother Max had founded the huge beverage concern MJB Coffee, and the couple would live three blocks away in a mansion at 1735 Franklin Street, a wedding gift from the bride's parents. Before the Earthquake and Fire, Max lived at 2005 Franklin Street, next door to the Haas-Lilenthal House. Charles Haas (1884-1927) would marry Fannie Marie Stern, grandniece of Levi Strauss, and Alice Haas (1885-1972) would marry Samuel Lilenthal (1884-1957), a son of the founder of Crown Distilleries, the largest wholesale-liquor company in the West.

Alice and Samuel would move into the House after William's death in 1916, to be companions for her widowed mother, Bertha. They would live at 2007 Franklin Street for the rest of their lives.

While William and all his children were each joined in wedlock to a family heading a major corporate concern in pioneer San Francisco, they were also closely related to several other such clans, such as the Koshlands, Slosses, Fleishhackers, and



Alice and Samuel Lilenthal's wedding, 1909 (left-right): Ernest Lilenthal, Alice Haas Lilenthal, Samuel Lilenthal, Bertha and William Haas, Hannah (Bella) Sloss

Walters, and tied to yet others, such as the Hellmans, through business partnerships and lifelong friendships. The Appendix to this essay details the "interlocking directorate" of the Bavarian Jewish oligarchy during three generations of San Francisco history, an intricate web of familial, commercial, and social connections.

Not every family of the Bavarian Jewish elite was closely linked to the Haas-Linenthal: Steinhart Brothers was one of the leading dry-goods companies in the American West and Ignatz Steinhart later headed the Anglo-California Bank while his son Sigmund made a fortune in mining. The Zellerbach Paper Company, among the largest in the country, was established by Anthony Zellerbach and expanded by his son Jacob. Schwabacher Brothers was a conglomerate of milling, retail, banking, and utilities concerns throughout the Pacific Northwest.

And not every one of the most prominent Jews in the city was Bavarian, a congregant of Emanu-El, or a member of the charmed social circle to which the Haas-Linenthal belonged. Adolph Sutro, the real-estate magnate who was elected mayor in 1894, hailed from Aachen, in North-Rhine Westphalia, northwest of Bavaria. Charles and Michael de Young, founders of the San Francisco Chronicle, were of Dutch origin as was Isaac Magnin, whose upscale women's clothing store led

to a retail empire throughout the West. From the Gold Rush on, there were leading Sephardi and Alsatian Jews in the city as well.

But of all the Jewish sub-groups, the cohesive, high-achieving Bavarians were by far the most influential.²⁵

In 1871, a few years after William Haas had begun his rapid rise to the top, the local newspaper *Morning Call* listed the net worth of the hundred richest men in San Francisco, none with less than \$500,000 in assets.²⁶ Eleven were German Jews, mostly from Bavaria, although a few hailed from Alsace or the Rhineland. This represented almost twice the percentage of the city's Jewish population at the time, especially impressive considering that unlike almost all the non-Jews on the list, men like William Ralston, James Lick, and Leland Stanford, the large majority of the Jewish gentry had neither been born nor educated in the United States.

The leading pioneer Jewish families' great wealth and devotion to the common good can be seen today, six generations after they arrived, in the names of many of the Bay Area's institutions and most popular attractions: Sigmund Stern Recreation Grove (known locally as Stern Grove), Steinhart Aquarium, the de Young Museum, Levi's Stadium, and Julius Kahn Playground. Past generations enjoyed the Sutro Baths and the Fleishhacker Pool and Zoo. Across the Bay at the University of California, Berkeley, one finds the Haas School of Business, the Haas Pavilion, the Goldman School for Public Policy, and Zellerbach Hall for arts performances. The Stanford campus has long been enhanced by the Dinkelspiel Auditorium.

Visiting the city in 1877, America's leading rabbi, Isaac Mayer Wise, commented not only on his fellow Jews who inhabited "princely mansions," but also on the remarkable rise of a wider cross-section of the Jewish population, which in one generation had gone from peddler, to petty shopkeeper, to solid merchant.²⁷ Using quantitative analysis, the contemporary historian Peter Decker concluded that Jews as a group in

San Francisco, "were more successful than the others... For them, at least, the 'American Dream' was a reality."²⁸

The high standing of the Bavarian-Jewish elite was not limited to commerce and can be seen in the professions and the arts as well. The brilliant jurist Marcus C. Sloss served as a justice of the California Supreme Court early in the twentieth century. He was an uncle of William Haas's son-in-law Samuel Lilienthal. Sloss's wife, Sarah Greenebaum Sloss, was Bertha Haas's first cousin. So it was fitting that the justice co-officiated at the wedding of his nephew Samuel to Bertha's daughter Alice in 1909. The accomplished sculptor Edgar Walter, a student of Rodin, created carvings above the Emanu-El courtyard and at the War Memorial Opera House; he was Bertha Haas's nephew.

The achievement of the German Jews, and especially the Bavarians, was unmatched in any other American city, according to the well traveled Wise,²⁹ and a contributing factor was the relative lack of anti-Semitism in Northern California, the most welcoming region for Jews in the country. In striking contrast to the Judeophobia so virulent in Bavaria and other German-speaking lands, and sometimes evident in other parts of the United States especially during the Civil War, San Francisco Jews enjoyed more than mere tolerance; indeed they basked in widespread admiration. Having arrived at the time of the Gold Rush, as a perceptive mid-twentieth century commentator has written, Jews could not be considered "intruders."

There was no aristocracy... only a rag-tag gang of money-hungry pioneers of heterogeneous origins, welded together into a frontier brotherhood community. As the "first families" became encrusted, they became encrusted necessarily in amalgam with the "first families" of the Jewish community.³⁰

Doctrinal or theological conflict, the bane of Europe since medieval times, somehow lost its sharp edge in America and particularly on the West Coast. Race, of course, was determinative — the Latinos, African Americans, and particularly Native

Americans and Chinese were oppressed in early California — but religion counted for far less.

The respect shown Jews was reflected in politics from the beginning. In 1850, among the three justices of the state's first Supreme Court, two were Jews.³¹ San Francisco elected the first Jewish mayor of any big city in the country when Adolph Sutro won in a landslide in 1894. The South German-born Julius Kahn was first elected in 1898 as the city's lone U.S. Congressman. When he died in office after serving twelve terms, he was succeeded by his wife, Florence Prag Kahn, the first Jewish woman in the House of Representatives.

No less important was the high regard for Jews evidenced at public events. Invariably a rabbi would be asked to join a minister and priest in giving the opening prayers at citywide functions such as the inaugural of a public-works project or a major exposition. Consideration was even shown for Jewish holy days. In 1858, Steamer Day (when mail and packages were put aboard ship to the East Coast) fell on Yom Kippur and was therefore postponed out of "deference" to the Jews, as one local newspaper put it, "who have won the respect and esteem of all."³²

Anti-Semitism was not entirely absent during the pioneer period. There were scattered incidents of bigotry ranging from prejudice spewed by the Speaker of the State Assembly in 1858 during the long and contentious debate over Sunday Closing Laws, to holding Jews to higher standards than others seeking commercial loans. But in such instances, a united Jewish community, bridging regional and class differences, fought back forcefully and effectively through legal challenges, newspaper articles, and razor-sharp speeches.

Local Jews also assumed a high profile by coming to the aid of their brethren in beleaguered communities abroad, such as Morocco, Jerusalem, and Bologna (where in 1859 a six-year old Jewish

child, secretly baptized by his nurse, was kidnapped on the order of the Pope and placed in a monastery rather than being returned to his parents). Especially during the city's first decade, the Jews of San Francisco exhibited rock-solid confidence, a rarity in the entire history of the Diaspora.³³

To be sure, intimate social contact between the local Jewish and gentile plutocracies was limited. Leading Jewish families such as the Slosses and the Gerstles (both related to the Haas-Lilienthals, as we have seen) occasionally attended parties thrown by the Hearsts and Crockers, but generally the two wealthy classes socialized with "their own kind." The membership rolls of the early social clubs reflect this separation. While the Bohemian Club, organized in 1872, had more than a dozen Jewish members by 1900, the Pacific and Union Clubs (later to merge) and the Junior League admitted very few Jews (although Phil Lilenthal, Samuel Lilenthal's cousin, was accepted by the PU).³⁴ Two Jewish social clubs drew nearly all of the city's prominent German Jews, the Argonaut and the larger Concordia (also later to merge), which William Haas served as an active board member and treasurer.

The city's first *Elite Directory*, published in 1879, included more than two hundred Jewish households, nearly one fifth of the entire total, but with two exceptions the Jews were recorded on a separate list.³⁵ They were interspersed among the general elite in the *Blue Book* of 1888,³⁶ but this did not increase their attendance at the posh galas of the Christian upper crust.

The author and socialite Gertrude Atherton referred to the German-Jewish elite as "welcome members of the best society" but also "clannish" and "an inner group of their own."³⁷ It accurately described the members of this exclusive clique, fully accepted but with a social life "pleasantly disassociated" from anyone not of their class, religion, or land of origin.³⁸

3. Religion of Reason: Congregation Emanu-El and Classical Reform Judaism



Congregation Emanu-El's Sutter Street Temple, built in 1866

Thus the word “assimilated” does not accurately describe San Francisco’s Jewish merchant princes. They were highly acculturated, adopting almost all of the customs of their beloved new homeland, but did not choose to be indistinguishable from other Americans or even from the wealthiest Americans. In an environment that must have seemed like an alternate reality to the immigrant generation, and whose children and grandchildren thought the traditional Jewish folkways of Bavaria to be superstitious and hidebound, the Haas-Lilienthals and their peers remained Jewish. Not only was intermarriage a rarity until well into the twentieth century, but conversion to Christianity was almost unheard of, even while neither was uncommon among New York’s German-Jewish elite. The residents of 2007 Franklin Street all identified as Jews and all were synagogue members and donors to the major Jewish charitable organizations in town.

But what did it mean for this family, and others like them, to be Jewish in pioneer San Francisco and the century that followed? What rituals did they

observe, what moral precepts did they follow, what spiritual beliefs did they hold?

High Holiday services were held in San Francisco as early as Rosh Hashanah 1849 and from then on multiple strands of Jewish practice and theology developed. The Haas-Lilienthal family and almost everyone else in their rarefied sphere joined the prestigious Reform synagogue Congregation Emanu-El. In 1866 (two years before William Haas’s arrival) it erected a majestic temple in downtown San Francisco that would be a prominent feature of the city’s skyline until its destruction in the Earthquake and Fire forty years later.

From its inception in April 1851, the large majority of Emanu-El’s membership consisted of Bavarian businessmen along with some from other German-speaking states, a handful of Sephardim, and a few Frenchmen mostly from Alsace. Indeed, land of origin distinguished Emanu-El from its sister congregation, Sherith Israel, founded in the same week, which was filled with a rival German-Jewish group from the Prussian province of Posen, a hundred and fifty miles east of Berlin.³⁹ Because Posen had been seized by Prussia from Poland in the late eighteenth century, its Jews were more pious, parochial, and impoverished than elsewhere in the kingdom, and, even at the time of their immigration to America two or three generations later, had an East European as well as German sensibility. Once in the United States they preferred to be thought of as Prussians and not Poles, but the haughty Bavarians referred to the Poseners as “Polacks,” and for almost a century looked down on the *hinter Berliner*, German-speaking Jews to be sure, but from beyond, or east, of Berlin.⁴⁰ The rift stemmed from class as well as regional differences; from the beginning, the Bavarians, more commercially inclined and better educated than the Poseners, enjoyed a higher economic as well as social status.

As the members of Emanu-El quickly adapted to their new home in San Francisco, and considered themselves solid citizens of an emerging American metropolis, they gravitated toward a religious expression that, to their minds, was rational, dignified, and meaningful and would not seem unduly strange to their non-Jewish neighbors with whom they had such close contact. “The new focus of their lives was San Francisco,” writes the social historian Roger Lotchin of the sentiment among almost all the ethnic groups in the instant city,

and no hankering after the past could repel its demands. The narrow streets jumbled people up together; business, pleasure, educational and ceremonial life multiplied their contacts... and the growing use of English gradually wiped out the main European criterion of nationality.⁴¹

By the end of the Gold Rush decade, religious barriers were falling as well. The Jews could not have failed to notice the universal message of the Unitarians, the cultivated estheticism of the Episcopalians, the work on behalf of the poor carried out by the Methodists, and even the Sunday schools of the Baptists.

In 1860, the young lay leaders of Emanu-El engaged Rabbi Elkan Cohn (1820-1889) as their spiritual leader, a man firmly in the camp of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati, the national head of the burgeoning Reform movement, which sought to bring Jewish life more into line with its American surroundings. Cohn, like Wise and many other scholarly Central European rabbis, had come to the United States to develop a liberal, progressive type of Judaism to fit the unprecedented conditions of freedom and opportunity.⁴² He had much in common with his warm friend Thomas Starr King, the Unitarian minister who had assumed his pulpit in San Francisco in the same year. Both preached ethical universalism, both oversaw the construction of magnificent Gothic cathedrals by the same architect, and both were staunch abolitionists.

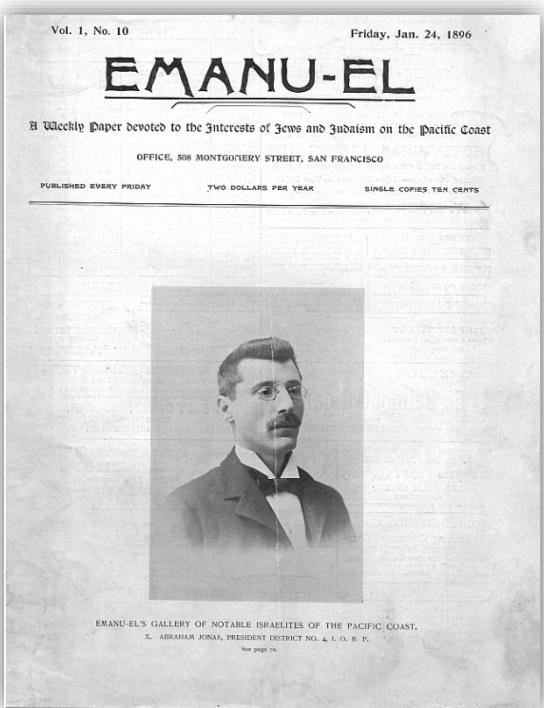
By the time William Haas arrived in the city, eight years after Rabbi Cohn, Emanu-El had already undergone major liturgical changes. It must have



Rabbi Elkan Cohn

seemed even more progressive to him than the liberal Judaism he had witnessed for two years in his small shul in Reckendorf. Men and women were allowed to sit together in the pews. Boys and girls were “confirmed” in a joyous celebration following their graduation from religious school, itself modernized and Americanized.⁴³ As an option for those having to work on Saturday, Friday-evening services were inaugurated, probably the first in the country. Cohn’s choir included many Christians, and in 1863 he ignited a controversy by bringing in a Catholic opera singer for the High Holy Days.⁴⁴ The following year, he introduced a new prayerbook, which abbreviated the Sabbath and holiday services.⁴⁵

But the most striking difference from the worship experience of Haas’s youth had to have been the synagogue itself, considered by many the most impressive building on the Pacific Coast. Located on Sutter Street near Powell (today the site of the 450 Sutter medical building), its facade contained several Jewish symbols, such as a prominent Star of David in its enormous, circular stained glass window above the portal, and stone Tablets of the Law above the central gable. But the temple was designed by William Patton, who had grown up among Norman churches in Durham and York, and



Emanu-El newsweekly, 1896

its architectural style was unmistakably that of a Gothic cathedral.⁴⁶ The two elegant, octagonal towers were topped by prominent bronze-plated domes, themselves topped by gold-tipped spires, 165 feet high. They were sighted by ships sailing through the Golden Gate; they could be seen by hikers across the Bay in the Berkeley hills.⁴⁷ The interior of the sanctuary, fifty feet high, was also grandiose. In its pews of gleaming black walnut, twelve hundred people could be seated.

At the staggering cost of \$200,000, the Sutter Street Temple was one of the most expensive houses of worship in the country (although it was far exceeded two years later by New York's Temple Emanu-El).⁴⁸ The towering synagogue in the heart of San Francisco made a dramatic statement about the Bavarian Jewish elite, inchoate barely a decade and a half earlier. It was about much more than new wealth and extravagance. On display for all to see was the proud Jewish heritage of these pioneers, and also their almost seamless integration into San Francisco.

Once ensconced in his new “temple on a hill,” Rabbi Cohn made even more radical reforms in the ritual.⁴⁹ He no longer donned the *tallit* (prayer shawl) and in 1881 actually barred members from wearing the *kippah* (skullcap) at services, a rule strictly enforced. The ram’s horn, or *shofar*, blown in almost every synagogue in the world on the High Holidays, was replaced by a cornet played by a member of the San Francisco Symphony. Late in Cohn’s tenure, while retaining regular Saturday worship, he moved the Friday evening services to Sunday morning, when he delivered the week’s sermon. Although this experiment lasted only a year, it reflected the extent to which Emanu-El would go in the interest of conformity with the churches in the city.

Not surprisingly, there was a decidedly negative reaction among many of his congregants and, as early as 1864, a breakaway faction founded its own synagogue, Ohabai Shalome. Other Jews, locally and nationally, were also aghast at the far-reaching reforms on Sutter Street. Even many non-Orthodox — rabbis, journalists, and laypeople — ridiculed the sweeping changes as a crass attempt to throw a three-thousand-year-old tradition overboard. Emanu-El members were often regarded simply as lapsed Jews diluting the religion to the point of becoming unrecognizable.⁵⁰

It fell to Rabbi Cohn’s successor, the forceful Jacob Voorsanger (1852-1908) of Holland, to make the case for ultra-reform or Classical Reform Judaism as it came to be known, as a distinct strand of Judaism with its own theology and practice. Serving from 1886 until his death, he went even beyond his predecessor in that he felt unbound by any Sabbath or dietary laws, performed intermarriage, and adopted the revolutionary *Union Prayer Book*, which rendered almost the entire liturgy into English.⁵¹

Even more important was his vigorous advocacy of Classical Reform, through incisive sermons and trenchant opinion pieces, for he was also the founder and editor of the West Coast’s most influential Jewish newsweekly, *Emanu-El*. Despite its title, the lengthy publication was not a congregational newsletter but rather a respected

journal of local, national, and world affairs. Few Jews in San Francisco were unaware of the views of this powerful writer and speaker, who also played a leading role in the crises engulfing the city as a whole, most notably the Earthquake and Fire, after which he worked tirelessly toward the reconstruction of his own synagogue and other Jewish institutions.

The erudite Reverend Voorsanger (who usually did not use the title Rabbi) espoused a “religion of reason,” replacing supernatural revelation with Darwinian evolution. A founder of the Semitics Department at the University of California where he taught once a week, he approached the Hebrew Bible with the complete freedom of a literary critic.⁵²

The Jewish public, though, was more familiar with his caustic critique of Orthodoxy, which he scorned as “legalism,” “rabbinism,” or “orientalism.”⁵³ When asked to confront the possibility that the Reform movement would soon decline, he agreed to ponder that prospect:

The ladies would be relegated to the galleries, in the charge of wardens who would ask them indecent questions (because of the prohibition of a menstruating woman entering a synagogue)... We would once more sit on the earth on the Ninth of Ab, and pray to return to a country that affords us neither home nor living, we would go unwashed to the synagogue that day. We would sacrifice the barber, have our faces cleansed with lye, as green as grass. We would permit our beards to grow for thirty days in time of mourning and surely would wear the peyes (earlocks), which look so interesting. We would recite a hundred benedictions every day, turn our homes topsy turvy before the Passover, appoint *Shomerim* — stewards — who would superintend our meat shops, bakeries, butteries, dairies, and vineyards, and level a tax on all victualers or else pronounce their goods to be *treyfah* (unkosher). We would reinstate the old prayers, thank God that we were not born women, read unctuously on the Talmudic chapter of the composition of incense, and on Sabbath pray for the continued prosperity of



Reverend Jacob Voorsanger

Babylonian universities, which went out of existence eight hundred years ago.⁵⁴

Some of his congregants may have felt their spiritual leader’s tone too shrill, but no doubt the membership as a whole agreed with his complete rejection of traditional Judaism for the time and place in which they lived. Moreover, Voorsanger and his flock believed that they still retained the core of the Jewish religion. Unlike some even more radical Reform synagogues across the country, Voorsanger never suggested a rapprochement with Christianity that would embrace Jesus, nor did he remove the Torah scroll from the ark and donate it to a university as was done at Chicago’s Sinai Congregation.⁵⁵ Still, Jewish observance at Emanu-El and in the homes of its congregants must be considered bare-bones at best in the Gilded Age. And for more than two decades, this “progressive, rational Judaism” was thunderously justified by a towering intellect and skilled communicator.

Although Voorsanger was their spiritual leader at the turn of the century, another nationally known Reform rabbi, albeit not so extreme and far less



Rabbi Max Lilienthal, 1876

combative, was related to the Haas-Lilienthals and doubtless affected their religiosity as well. Max Lilienthal (1814-1882) of Cincinnati, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise's closest collaborator, was the great uncle of Samuel Lilienthal, who lived in the House with his wife, Alice, for over forty years. Rabbi Lilienthal died in 1882, two years before Samuel was born, but Max had exerted an enormous influence on his nephew Ernest (1851-1922), Samuel's father, who frequently spoke to his children about the rabbi's remarkable life.⁵⁶

Born in 1815, Max was very close to his brother Samuel (for whom his grand-nephew would be named in 1884), a pioneer in homeopathic medicine. The brothers Samuel and Max married a pair of sisters, Caroline and Pepi Nettre, and the eleven children of the two families were a "brotherhood of cousins," calling themselves brother and sister their whole lives. They were so tightly bound that all the male cousins signed the "Lilenthal Family Pact," which put their savings and properties into a common fund to ensure that in the event of financial reverses suffered by any one of them in the future, all of the Lilenthals and their offspring would continue to live comfortably.⁵⁷

Among the rabbi's seven children, born and raised in New York and Cincinnati, four eventually moved to San Francisco and married into prominent German-Jewish families — his dapper son Phil, a banker and philanthropist, was especially admired — so Max visited the city on multiple occasions. He was known among the entire Jewish elite and on one visit he delivered guest sermons both at Emanu-El and the First Unitarian Church, which was fitting given his ecumenicism.⁵⁸ Rabbi Lilienthal co-officiated at the wedding of his nephew Ernest (to Bella Sloss), a resplendent event held under a tent on the lawn of the bride's parents at 1500 Van Ness.⁵⁹ Uncle Max also guided the ambitious Ernest in his educational pursuits and, by guaranteeing his line of credit, helped him launch his wholesale-liquor business, which would be a tremendous success.⁶⁰

Max Lilienthal had an extraordinary career, and recent scholarship credits him with an essential role in advancing Reform Judaism in America, in many respects equaling or even exceeding that of the more famous Isaac Mayer Wise, who often overshadowed him.⁶¹ After earning a doctorate from the University of Munich, the Lilenthals' ancestral city, and having been influenced by German Reform thinkers, Max went to Riga, then in Russia, with the aim of introducing liberal Judaism and secular studies to local Jews and eventually creating a network of progressive Jewish schools for the entire Czarist Empire. He was hired by Count Sergei Uvarov, Minister of Education, and for six years traveled throughout the Pale of Settlement (the area in western Russia where Jewish residency was legally permitted). In the end, he terminated his mission due to fierce opposition from Orthodox Jews and his belated realization that the plan was actually a scheme by the Russian government to convert Jews to Christianity.⁶²

He immigrated to the United States in 1845, and although he held rather traditional views during his first few years in New York, by 1849, "having become more aware of American conditions," as a contemporary historian has explained, and "concerned with the growing irrelevance of rabbinic texts to many Jews," he once again became a spokesman for progressive Judaism,

arguing that “life and science... have changed the old forms and opened our minds.”⁶³ Reform, he hoped, would “remove every humbug and every self-deceit from the arena of the Jewish religion.”⁶⁴

After a decade in New York, Lilienthal assumed the pulpit of Cincinnati’s Congregation Bene Israel, where he instituted sweeping and lasting reforms of the liturgy until his death twenty-seven years later. Like San Francisco, the Queen City was booming at mid-century and an influential German-Jewish elite had quickly developed there, too. The merchant princes revered their rabbi, who modernized the service, presided over the construction of a magnificent synagogue that graced the Cincinnati skyline in 1869 (only three years after Emanu-El’s), and worked tirelessly as a civic leader in the areas of public education and human rights.⁶⁵

Foundational for the thought of learned Reform rabbis such as Lilienthal, Cohn, and Voorsanger were the great philosophers of the French and German Enlightenment, who valued human reason and questioned religious dogma of all kinds, who advanced ideas of tolerance and liberty, and who advocated the separation of church and state. In the Haas-Lilenthal House, we find nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions of many of their books, including the complete works, in the original German, of such liberal thinkers as Friedrich Schiller, Ludwig Boerne, and Heinrich Heine, the latter two of Jewish origin. Perhaps most significant is a five-volume set (also in German) of the writings of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the celebrated Berlin philosopher, art critic, and dramatist who befriended and wrote a play about the founder of the Jewish Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn.

4. Eden on the Pacific: The Challenges to Judaism at the Turn of the Century

It is difficult in hindsight to determine the influence of philosophy and theology on the minds of the leading Jewish businessmen of San Francisco and their families, well read though most of them were. Indeed, the faint practice of the religion probably owes more to the temptations and distractions of the city itself, particularly for the second, American-born generation of the German-Jewish elite, which, unlike their immigrant parents (such as William Haas) had barely any knowledge of traditional Judaism.

As San Francisco came into maturity in the last third of the nineteenth century, young people were beckoned by the opera and symphony, theater and ballet, museums and art galleries, social clubs and fine cuisine, tennis and horseback riding, and of course the great California “out-of-doors.” Golden Gate Park, opened in 1870, was especially inviting, and Congregation Emanu-El found that whatever day it held Sabbath services, its members usually preferred a stroll in the park to a sermon in the temple.⁶⁶ For the Haas-Lilienthals, the opera house was far more stirring than the house of worship.

Organized religion in general was in decline in these decades, and even for those who were spiritually inclined, many other belief systems competed with the established faiths: Ethical Culture, astrology, theosophy, and, above all, Christian Science. Of Emanu-El’s three hundred members by 1900, the average age was 53 (higher than the life expectancy of Americans in this era) and only one in seven heads of households was under 40.⁶⁷ Even though the Jewish population of the city had more than doubled since the opening of the awe-inspiring Sutter Street Temple in 1866, the last third of the nineteenth century saw no growth at all in Emanu-El’s membership.⁶⁸

It was, rather, high culture that loomed large in the lives of the German-Jewish elite. In 1894, Bertha Haas joined nine other Jewish women in her social circle to found the Philomath Club, which held



Palace Hotel, San Francisco, pre-1906. (credit: George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress).

twice-monthly gatherings at the lavish Palace Hotel, and counted about two hundred members by World War I, including Bertha’s daughters, Florine and Alice. The women usually performed for one another: piano, violin, vocal solos, poetry readings, dance, and dramatic sketches. Once a year, the Club rented a large hall and presented an elaborate theatrical production with a cast entirely of its members. Speakers on civic issues were also invited, but it was the arts performances that were best received.⁶⁹

Like others in their circle, the esthetic tastes of the Haas-Lilienthals gravitated toward the grandeur of the *Ancien Régime* and the exoticism of Imperial China, neither of which, like the presentations at

the Philomath Club, had the slightest Jewish connection.

The Koshland family, for example, relatives and business associates of the Haas-Lilienthals, as we have noted, built a replica of the Petit Trianon in San Francisco, the prime California example of Beaux-Arts architecture. While the architecture of the Haas-Lilenthal House is American, in many other respects its residents turned to France when it came to matters of style and culture. Alice Haas was fluent in French and a devotee of French literature who could read Molière, Balzac, Voltaire, and Dumas in the original, works that still grace the bookshelves in the sitting room off the master bedroom. Her children studied French at the exclusive Katherine Delmar Burke School, and every Saturday morning a French tutor came to the Haas-Lilenthal House for additional instruction. The House contained furniture in the style of rococo revival, drawing from the mode of Louis XIV at Versailles.

The women shopped mostly at Magnin's and other well known Jewish-owned retailers such as Livingston's and Liebes department stores, and Roos Brothers for men's wear. But they also patronized the City of Paris, the department store on Union Square that maintained a connection with French culture through its grandiose decor as well as its choice merchandise.⁷⁰ And they bought the finest French lace and linen at the White House from Raphael Weill, a prominent French Jew who was welcome in their coterie. William and Bertha made multiple long trips to Europe and Alice's niece Frances Bransten Rothmann (1914-

1984) recalls the stylish children's clothing her grandmother brought her from Paris. Francophilia is evidenced even more in the family's third generation. Due to their Swiss-French nurse, Madeleine and Billy Haas, Alice's orphaned niece and nephew, who lived in an annex to the House beginning in 1927, became fluent in the language as small children. Her relatives pronounced her name in the French style: Mad-layne. As a young woman, she spent a year and a half in Paris as a graduate student boarding with a French family.⁷¹

Samuel and Alice Lilenthal were enchanted with the Far East, likely enticed by Abraham Gump, a distinguished Jew of South German origin and an Emanu-El congregant, who operated an emporium on Union Square that sold exquisite Asian objects d'art. A pair of Chinese vases sits on the living-room mantel; there is also an opium box believed to be from Canton, China, and a Fukien Chinese chest. Frances Rothmann writes of her Aunt Alice's and her mother Florine's trip (albeit in old age) to Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, and Singapore, and their great shopping spree, which included clothing and jewelry.⁷² Florine once gave her sister two Chinese dolls that are in the display case in the upstairs hall of the Haas-Lilenthal House.

In the third generation, we find a fascination with the Orient as well. Alice's daughter Elizabeth (1913-2007) and her husband, James Gerstley, were among the co-founders of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and helped it secure the vast Avery Brundage collection. Madeleine Haas Russell served for years on the board of the Asia Foundation.

5. Jewish Life in the Haas-Lilienthal House

It appears that for three generations the cultured, cosmopolitan family at 2007 Franklin Street practiced no Jewish rites in the home. They conducted no Passover seder (the most commonly observed holiday feast among Jews throughout the world, even of many otherwise unobservant Jews) yet held an elaborate Easter-egg hunt every spring.⁷³ Christmas was celebrated as the high point of every year in the Haas-Lilienthal House, with a sumptuous dinner party for fifty to sixty relatives. The Nativity was not featured in the festivities, but just about every other Yuletide custom was on display, including Santa Claus, who came down the stairs with sleigh bells ringing, bearing gifts for the many enthralled children. Other presents were stuffed into Christmas stockings. Sometimes a winter wonderland was simulated, complete with a North Pole and trees made of pine-cones decorated with popcorn and ornaments. The Christmas tree, reaching almost to the lofty ceiling, was “heavily weighted with heirloom ornaments, ropes of shining tinsel, and blinking multitudes of lights,” recalls Frances Rothmann, who devotes almost four full pages of her slim memoir to this extravaganza, which took three months to plan.⁷⁴ Bavaria has long been known for elaborately decorated Christmas trees, and William likely remembered how his non-Jewish neighbors in Reckendorf adorned them. In San Francisco, his daughter and son-in-law Florine and Edward Bransten once won the award for the best Christmas tree in the city.⁷⁵

It is highly unlikely that a mezuzah was ever affixed to the doorpost of the Haas-Lilienthal House. Only one Jewish ritual object has ever been found there, an elegant nineteenth-century brass Sabbath oil lamp, which hung from a side of the dining-room ceiling. A family heirloom, it may have been brought to the House from Reckendorf in the course of one of William and Bertha’s trips back to his hometown. According to Frances Lilienthal Stein, Alice’s daughter who lived in the House until the age of thirty-four, the lamp was lit only once or



Easter-egg hunt at 2007 Franklin Street, 1908, with Alice Haas helping young ones in foreground

twice.⁷⁶ Even then, it was certainly not used for the religious purpose intended: providing light during the Sabbath without the need to kindle during the prohibition-of-work period.

The family’s sole Jewish practice consisted of attending services at Congregation Emanu-El two days a year, Rosh Hashanah and the Yizkor (memorial) service on Yom Kippur afternoon, followed by a visit to the cemetery, and Stein states that her mother “never” attended services except for those two High Holy Days.⁷⁷ Her father, Samuel, skipped even that. To be sure, the children attended religious school at the Temple for two hours about half the Sundays of the year, but the quality of the education they received was woefully inadequate. “Just horrible” was the assessment of the school by the respected educator and community leader Marshall Kuhn, a student, teacher, and principal there in the interwar period.⁷⁸ Only half of the Temple’s children attended, and he added that older girls who came Sunday morning wore the gardenias or orchids their boyfriends had given them Saturday night. “I’m not sure it was religious fervor that



Christmas Parties at 2007 Franklin Street, 1960s

brought them...it was rather to talk over what had happened the night before.”⁷⁹

Brit milah, the circumcision of a baby boy eight days after birth, a ritual mandated in the Torah and ubiquitous among world Jewry, was given up by William Haas’s descendants by the third generation, if not before. The male newborns were indeed circumcised, not by a mohel, a ritual circumciser, but by a physician, without any rite. Shiva, the weeklong period of mourning a family member, was not observed, and many of the deceased in the family were cremated, another major breach of Jewish law and custom.

Among the Haas-Lilienthals, by the second generation there appears to be not only a paucity of knowledge about Judaism but also the absence of common Hebrew or Yiddish terms that are known even in most secular Jewish households. Frances Rothmann, who grew up nearby in a stately Edwardian home at 1735 Franklin Street, and whose mother, Florine, was in contact with her sister, Alice, several times a day, writes that her mother and aunt

knew little about Jewish rites. We might dine on gorgeously glazed hams but only fish was served on Fridays out of consideration for the Catholic Irish maid. As bacon sizzled in the kitchen, Mother worried endlessly about our Catholic nurse’s lenten diet... Of course [Florine and Alice] had heard of

old Jewish traditions that were thought to be part of a different world, a world of old Tantes (aunts) living in backward Bavarian villages. Mother spoke to me about one... who refused to light her fire against the bitter cold because of the Sabbath. Her account sounded foreign and fascinating, as though she were speaking of unknown customs.

As a child I never heard my aunt or mother use such words as *yahrzeit*, *shiva*, *mikvah*, or *chuppah*.⁸⁰

When a nurse asked Frances Rothmann, soon after she gave birth, when the *bris* (the widespread term for *brit milah* among Jews of Central or East European origin) would occur, the new mother did not grasp what she meant. She thought the nurse had inquired about breast-feeding.⁸¹



Haas-Lilenthal House dining room, 1972, with Sabbath lamp hanging near window

6. The Common Good: Benevolence as the Cornerstone of Jewish Practice and Identity



Hellman Building at Scott and Post Streets, Mt. Zion Hospital in 1918

It is fair to say that the residents of the Haas-Lilienthal House barely observed traditional Judaism and shed virtually all of its folkways. Yet there was no question in their minds, or in the minds of others, that they were Jewish. What then, was the basis of their Jewish identity?

Above all, they felt a moral obligation to improve the world around them, and the German-Jewish elite was the most philanthropic group during the city's first century. They took care of their own, aiding disadvantaged Jews in a myriad of ways, but also worked to better the lot of all. The Hebrew term *Tikkun Olam*, healing or repairing the world, would not be in widespread use among American Jews until the 1970s, but the concept of social justice became a mainstay of Reform Judaism from the time it was founded. Rabbis Cohn, Voorsanger, and Lilienthal pleaded not only for the reform of Judaism, but also for the reform of society. Urgent and eloquent appeals for human rights from outside the synagogue were heeded as well, and by the new century most of San Francisco's German-Jewish businessmen were sympathetic to the Progressive movement, which sought to relieve the glaring inequities of the free market in California and end corruption in

government. For Jews as well as many Protestants in this era, politics and religion went hand in hand.

To be sure, the Progressives and the Reform rabbis were hardly willing to overturn the social order. They were essentially conservative reformers with no small amount of elitism and paternalism. Nor did they seek to alleviate the most blatant injustice on the West Coast, the abominable treatment of the Chinese; in fact, Voorsanger and many of his leading congregants, along with prominent non-Jews at this time, fought hard to end further immigration from Asia and to maintain the segregation of Chinese already in California.⁸²

Yet overall, the benevolent work of the German-Jewish elite was prodigious and immensely beneficial. A prime example is the Mount Zion Hospital Association, established in 1887, in which William Haas was deeply involved. Present at the founding meeting of this vital institution, he was its president from 1899 to 1907.⁸³ His was an eventful tenure, presiding over the opening of the first hospital (at Sutter and Divisadero Streets) in his inaugural year, and enduring the Earthquake and Fire near the end of his presidency, when the fifty-bed facility, damaged somewhat but spared in the conflagration, treated countless critically injured people.⁸⁴

Haas was active in Mount Zion until his death, in 1916, after which his son, Charles, and both of his sons-in-law, Samuel Lilienthal and Edward Bransten, served long terms on the board of directors of a much larger Mount Zion Hospital on the corner of Post and Scott Streets.⁸⁵ Bertha Haas was a charter member of the Ladies' Auxiliary and headed its Membership Committee.⁸⁶

In keeping with William's strong sense of civic responsibility, the hospital was non-sectarian; it served Jew and non-Jew alike. In his annual reports, Haas defended the difficult decision, due to the limited capacity of the hospital, not to admit

incurable cases. But he was pleased that the majority of Mount Zion's patients were treated free of charge.⁸⁷ This policy was especially needed at the turn of the century when thousands of Russian Jews settled in the city, many of them indigent. Living "South of the Slot," as the drab, densely populated neighborhood south of Market Street was then known, the immigrant community was vulnerable to tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. Often uncomfortable dealing with non-Jews, and still struggling with English, many of the Yiddish-speakers were deeply grateful for a hospital with "a Jewish atmosphere and understanding," according to its historians, Barbara Rogers and Stephen Dobbs.⁸⁸

Mount Zion was one of the original beneficiaries of the Federation of Jewish Charities, established in 1910, and William Haas was a major contributor to this umbrella organization, which collected funds from the community and made allocations to its member agencies. Among the early recipients were the Hebrew Home for Aged Disabled (later the Jewish Home of San Francisco), housed in an imposing facility on Silver Avenue still in operation today, the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Society, the Free Burial Society, and the Eureka Benevolent Society, forerunner of today's Jewish Family and Children's Services.⁸⁹

Haas, ever concerned about his extended family members still in Germany, helped many of his relatives come to America by donating money and sponsoring their applications. At the turn of the century, he and Bertha provided lodging for about a year in the Haas-Lilienthal House for his nephew Joseph Triest, son of his sister Sara who remained in Reckendorf. Other nephews and cousins were put up at the House for shorter periods; several were given jobs at Haas Brothers.⁹⁰ William and Bertha even helped some of them find spouses.

But Haas's philanthropy went well beyond his family and Jewish causes. He served on the Board of Directors of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, for example, and in May 1916 was treasurer of the German Relief Bazaar.⁹¹ This was a weeklong fundraising effort to aid needy widows, orphans, and other civilians in Germany in

the midst of World War I, illustrating Haas's warm feelings toward the inhabitants of his country of birth. He died suddenly only few days later, but of course would not have continued this effort once American public opinion turned against the Central Powers. (Haas was spared the unease many of his peers felt when the United States entered the war against Germany, in 1917. His daughter and son-in-law Florine and Edward Brandenstein changed their last name to Bransten and began addressing their German-born nanny as Mademoiselle instead of Fraülein.)

Like her husband, Bertha Haas came to the aid of East European Jewish immigrants. In 1894, at the invitation of her rabbi, Jacob Voorsanger, she became one of the charter members of the Emanuel Sisterhood for Personal Service, which found employment for hundreds of newcomers. Several years later, emulating the settlement houses of New York, the Sisterhood opened a building on Folsom Street in the immigrant quarter, which provided classrooms, a kindergarten, and a gymnasium.⁹² The Sisterhood also ran a boarding-house for single, working Jewish women, which offered classes in stenography and typing, sewing and dressmaking. In 1922, the young working women moved into an inviting three-storey brick building on Page and Laguna designed by Julia Morgan (and in recent decades serving as the San Francisco Zen Center). But most ambitious by far was its busy medical clinic at 7th Street between Folsom and Howard in the South of Market Jewish district, staffed by twelve physicians and headed by Voorsanger's son William, a specialist in tuberculosis. The clinic was soon absorbed by Mount Zion Hospital, where the prominent German-trained Dr. Voorsanger became the Co-Chief of Medicine.⁹³

Bertha was also active in the San Francisco Section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), founded in 1900, with a membership of a thousand within a decade and a half that reached beyond the German-Jewish elite to include Jewish women from other backgrounds.⁹⁴ The NCJW opened its own settlement house on San Bruno Avenue amidst a new immigrant quarter emerging on the outskirts of the city.⁹⁵

Although limited to the traditional domain of education, health, and child safety, the voluntarism of Bertha Haas and her peers broke new ground in defining women's roles outside the home in this period before females even had the right to vote. While still greatly constrained by gender, the high-powered "women's clubs" of the turn of the century required much more in the way of organizational and leadership skills than the "ladies' societies" of the mid-nineteenth century. At Mount Zion Hospital, for example, in response to their ultimatum, women were included in fundraising drives beginning in 1903 and appointed to board committees a few years later.⁹⁶

The high priority which the Haas family gave to relieving the suffering of the Yiddish-speaking arrivals is especially noteworthy given that Reverend Voorsanger and many of his leading congregants fought to restrict the immigration of East European Jews to the United States. The strident opposition to the "invasion from the East," as the rabbi put it, was based on his belief that their traditional religious practices would make Judaism look "undignified" in the eyes of his own congregants and the general public.⁹⁷ He also feared that the immigrants' tendency to "herd together" would cause "social and economic problems" for their long-settled Americanized co-religionists whom the public would confuse with the "Yiddish-mumblers."⁹⁸ Voorsanger supported a plan backed by eighteen prominent local Jews to lessen the concentration of East European Jews in San Francisco by settling large numbers of them in the desolate Mexican territory of Baja California, six hundred miles away.⁹⁹ It is not known to what extent the Haas family shared such angst and felt such animosity toward the *Ostjuden*, as they were called, but clearly any bias mattered not at all

when they came face to face with East European Jews in overwhelming need.

The House's second generation, although less connected to Jewish life and more drawn to the pleasures and privileges of San Francisco's upper class, also played an active role in benevolent causes, albeit not as extensive as William and Bertha had. Alice and Samuel too felt a strong commitment to the Jewish people at home and abroad. Samuel served as president of the wide-ranging Federation of Jewish Charities, and was a founder and treasurer of the Jewish Community Bulletin, the newsweekly succeeding the Emanu-El in 1945 and currently known as *j*.¹⁰⁰ He was also treasurer of the local Jewish Community Relations Council, the postwar agency representing a broad cross-section of Jewish organizations working for tolerance and civic betterment.¹⁰¹ Alice was a board member of the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum. Her daughter Frances Stein (1921-2005) carried into the third generation the family's tradition of helping to provide care for the unwell. She was active in the Little Jim Club, founded as a women's organization in 1895 (and now part of the California Pacific Medical Center), which helps disabled and critically ill children.¹⁰² For almost her entire adult life, she volunteered at the information desk at California Pacific Medical Center's California Street Campus.¹⁰³ Alice and Samuel's son, Ernest (1910-1993), was president and a longtime board member of Homewood Terrace, the Jewish orphanage, and also board president of the Jewish Educational Society (a forerunner of today's Jewish LearningWorks) and in the 1960s, he chaired the local chapter of the American Technion Society, benefiting Israel's leading university for science and technology.¹⁰⁴

7. Cataclysms: Responses to the Holocaust and Zionism

Alice and Samuel Lilienthal turned their attention to the horrific plight of German Jewry during the Third Reich. They sent funds, wrote affidavits, and sought employment in San Francisco for Jews desperate to emigrate; nonetheless, some of their relatives did perish in the Holocaust.¹⁰⁵ Such altruism was strongly encouraged by Irving Reichert (1895-1968), a leading proponent of Classical Reform Judaism and their rabbi at Emanu-El during the tumultuous 1930s and 40s. Having made two fact-finding trips to Nazi Germany before the war, his voice was one of the strongest in the American West warning of the dangers posed by Hitler and urging help both for the Jews trapped there and those who had fled to America.¹⁰⁶

But most Jews today would feel that one cause advanced by Rabbi Reichert, which Samuel and Alice fully embraced, was terribly misguided: fierce antipathy to Zionism during the Holocaust and Israel's War of Independence. Opposition to the creation of a Jewish state had been asserted by Rabbi Voorsanger the generation before. As he wrote in 1896, "California is a gorgeous edition *de luxe* of Palestine of old... Our holy land, our promised land is this golden spot..."¹⁰⁷ San Francisco was his Jerusalem, not some "Turk-ridden land on the edge of civilization."¹⁰⁸ That the Golden State was considered the new Zion at the turn of the century is vividly seen to this day at Congregation Sherith Israel's stately Pacific Heights synagogue erected in 1905. A large stained-glass window depicts Moses holding the Ten Commandments—not at Mount Sinai, however, but rather in Yosemite Valley, with Half-Dome in the background.

At the turn of the century, the modern Zionist movement in Europe and America was in its infancy and the Ottoman Empire showed no interest in relinquishing sovereignty over the Holy Land, leading many Jews, locally and nationally, to concur with Voorsanger that Jewish statehood was "the wildest of all wild dreams."¹⁰⁹ But much



Stained-glass window at Congregation Sherith Israel

changed in the interwar period when the Jewish population in Palestine, under a welcoming British Mandate, increased almost seven-fold and emerged as a viable and vibrant community of 400,000. Of course, the advent of Hitler further boosted the case for Jewish nationalism throughout the Diaspora.

Yet for Reichert, the fear of American Jews being accused of "dual loyalties," a nation embedded in a nation, far outweighed all other considerations. While the large majority of Reform rabbis (and almost all other Jewish spiritual leaders) endorsed Zionism by the early 1940s, a breakaway group of 91 mostly Classical Reform rabbis, as well as several prominent laypeople, established the American Council for Judaism (ACJ), dedicated to combating Jewish nationalism through sermons and speeches, advertisements and lobbying.¹¹⁰ Reichert became national vice-president and official spokesman of the ACJ in the West.¹¹¹ In his Kol Nidre (Yom Kippur eve) sermon of 1943, during the darkest period in all of Jewish history, the rabbi excoriated Zionism, deeming it the most serious threat facing the Jewish people.¹¹²

Many of his congregants, particularly those with pioneer roots, agreed with him. At its height in 1945, the San Francisco chapter of the ACJ boasted 1,400 members, a third of its national enrollment, and supplied almost a third of the

THINK IT OVER!

WE ARE FOR:

1. A virile American Judaism, for the fullest realization of our great spiritual heritage.
2. Maximum participation by Americans of Jewish faith in the development of the American democratic way of life.
3. Wholehearted philanthropic aid to our co-religionists and to suffering humanity everywhere.

WE ARE AGAINST:

1. The theory that religious devotion to Judaism must be synonymous with national ties to Israel.
2. Any idea that there is a voice—any voice in America—speaking for all Jews, either as a political, religious, economic or social entity.
3. Domination of American Jewish institutions, philanthropic or otherwise, by zealots for Jewish political nationalism.

If you agree with these principles, join

The American Council for Judaism

593 Market Street, San Francisco 5 • GARfield 1-6536

American Council for Judaism Advertisement, 1940s

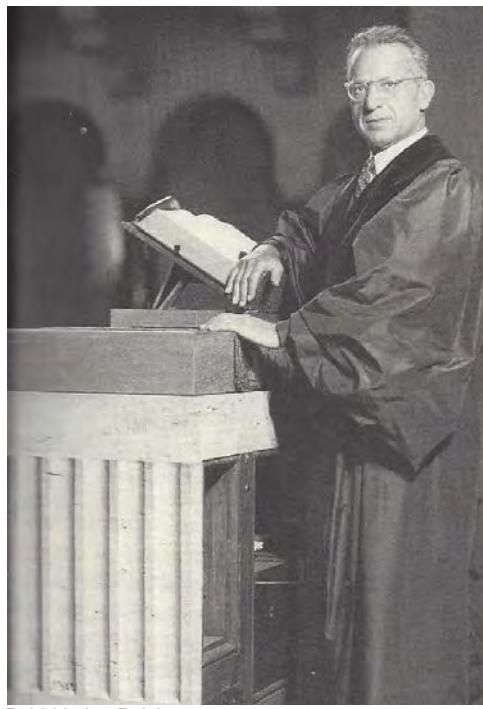
operating budget.¹¹³ Not surprisingly, Reichert and the ACJ were assailed by almost every other Jewish organization in the city, isolating him and Congregation Emanu-El and resulting in a period of rancor unparalleled in San Francisco Jewish history.

Samuel and Alice Lilienthal joined the American Council for Judaism along with most of their friends and relatives. For some of them, peer pressure likely played a role in the decision. Florine Bransten, for example, was simultaneously a member of Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America. "First of all, they're both philanthropic," she later said, "and I didn't want to offend anybody."¹¹⁴ But Frances Rothmann recalls her Aunt Alice and Uncle Sam as deeply committed to the cause, "ardent" anti-Zionists. "I remember their motto: 'We're Americans first. To be Jewish is our religion and has nothing to do with our nationality.'"¹¹⁵ The Lilienthals continued to be members of the American Council for Judaism even after the United Nations Partition Plan of November 29, 1947, recommending the creation of Jewish and Arab states in Palestine.¹¹⁶

On the same day, Congregation Emanu-El, realizing that its rabbi's militant anti-Zionist position was now hopelessly at odds with almost all of world Jewry, removed Reichert from his post. With undiminished fervor, he soon became the full-time director of the Council's Western Region, a position

he would hold for almost a decade, even as Israel came into existence, was recognized by the United States and admitted to the United Nations, absorbed about a million Jewish refugees, and flourished. Samuel and Alice's daughter Frances was Reichert's employee at the ACJ's San Francisco office until her marriage in 1955.¹¹⁷

As Reichert's successor, Emanu-El chose the staunch Zionist Alvin Fine, a rabbi whom the Lilienthals admired even while they continued to support the ACJ, an organization increasingly considered outdated and abhorrent. In addition to Reichert, the family heard incisive arguments against Israel from Samuel's distant cousin Alfred M. Lilienthal (1913-2008), legal counsel for the ACJ and arguably the foremost and most virulent anti-Zionist in the country. He came from Washington to San Francisco often and was a frequent dinner guest at the House, or at the home of Alice's sister, Florine. His opposition to Jewish nationalism was far more extreme than that of the Haas-Lilienthals; he was a friend of Yasser Arafat and spoke at anti-Israel rallies in Arab countries.¹¹⁸ But as Alice's grandnephew John Rothmann recalled in 2008, "a cousin was a cousin and embraced immediately...Alfred was always welcome."¹¹⁹



Rabbi Irving Reichert

8. The Turn: Madeleine Haas Russell and the Invigoration of Jewish Life

One resident of the House whose name was conspicuously absent from the ACJ rolls was Madeleine Haas Russell (1915-1999), destined to lead her family, and the German-Jewish elite as a whole, in forging a new Jewish identity in the second half of the twentieth century, one more inclusive and more in line with the rest of American Jewry. She would also become one of the leading philanthropists in the city's history.

She was the daughter of William and Bertha's son, Charles, who became president of Haas Brothers after his father's retirement, but who died when Madeleine was twelve. Her mother, Fannie Marie Stern, Levi Strauss's grandniece and one of his two main heirs, had died when Madeleine was only five. So, entering their teens, she and her brother, Billy, moved from their opulent home on Washington Street to a spacious annex built for them on the grounds of the Haas-Lilienthal House, where their Aunt Alice and Uncle Sam became their guardians. The two orphans joined their three cousins, aunt, and uncle for family meals in the main House. Tragically, Billy, like his parents, would die at a young age, succumbing to a heart infection at twenty-seven. Young Madeleine would be the sole survivor of her family of four.

She was very close to her maternal grandfather, the avid pianist and art collector Jacob Stern, who instilled in her a love of art and music. She and her cousins, Alice's daughters Frances and Elizabeth Lilienthal, went to college, the first generation of Haas-Lilienthal women to do so. Madeleine spent four formative years at Smith, in Northhampton, Massachusetts, during the Depression, where for the first time she met and socialized with those from far less privileged families. "I'd never met people before who really had to be careful of what they were spending and had to work."¹²⁰ And she met girls "much more outspoken and interested in their own Jewish identities and their own Jewish social events than I was."¹²¹ At Smith, Madeleine



Madeleine Haas, c. 1930s

was also exposed to the heated political debates of the mid-1930s, including strikes, demonstrations, and fiery speeches; she gravitated toward pacifism and socialism.¹²² After graduating Phi Beta Kappa, she further broadened her horizons by living in Paris for eighteen months during the fateful years 1938-39, boarding with a French family and attending the highly selective Paris Institute of Political Studies (commonly known as Sciences Po).¹²³ In her late 20's she worked for the United States Office of War Information as a French translator.

The year after she returned home, she and her brother, both still in their mid-twenties, created Columbia Foundation, one of the earliest family foundations in Northern California and among the most progressive and ambitious. She later succinctly expressed their goal: "civil rights and people's welfare. We wanted to make the world better for other people."¹²⁴

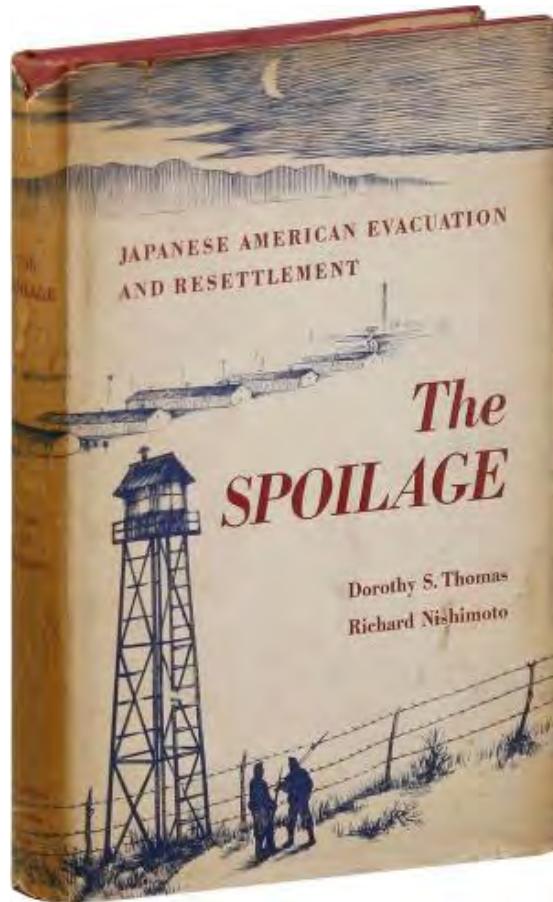
With the advice of Madeleine's discerning older cousins Walter Haas (1889-1979) and Daniel Koshland (1892-1972), who were almost like



Wartime Civil Control Administration Station, 2020 Van Ness Avenue, three blocks from 2007 Franklin Street, c. 1942 (credit: Dorothea Lange)

uncles to her, the foundation's grants were innovative from the outset. In the early and mid-1940s, she and Billy supported such projects as the distribution of contraceptives to immigrant women, scholarships at American universities for promising Latin American students, and a chain of psychiatric clinics.¹²⁵ Madeleine also provided the initial endowment for Koshland's creative San Francisco Foundation, destined to be one of the largest community foundations in the country and to make a deep impact on the Bay Area through its support of the arts and neighborhood improvement.

Columbia Foundation's largest and most audacious grant in this period (in partnership with the Rockefeller and Giannini Foundations) funded a study of the Japanese internment. The extensive inquiry began in May 1942, only three months after the executive order that led to the removal and incarceration of almost 122,000 people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast.¹²⁶ For five years, the sociologist and demographer Dorothy Thomas led a team of fourteen University of California researchers investigating this shameful



The Spoilage, published in 1946, one of a series of books resulting from the Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study, funded by Columbia Foundation

chapter of American history. Including daily journals, field reports, and life histories, the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study proved an invaluable source for later researchers. In 1987, four decades after Dorothy Thomas's report was submitted, a follow-up conference on her work was held at the University of California, and Columbia Foundation funded that as well.¹²⁷

The foundation also supported the Japanese American Student Relocation Council, making it possible for students forced to relocate during World War II to continue their studies at U.S. universities.¹²⁸

From the beginning, Madeleine had been adamantly opposed to the internment, "a terrible thing to do."¹²⁹ In Paris, the daughters of two Japanese diplomats had been her housemates and friends.¹³⁰ But most disturbing to her was the lot of the three Japanese servants who lived in the

Haas-Lilienthal House: Kenji Mukoyama, Sani Kasunoki, and Nagra Momosuki. With scant notice, they were sent off to a camp and allowed to bring only what they could carry by hand, a “simply awful” ordeal she recalled.¹³¹ The local Wartime Civil Control Administration station, where those of Japanese origin waited with their suitcases on the sidewalk for buses to evacuate them to the camps, was located at 2020 Van Ness Avenue, only three blocks from the Haas-Lilienthal House.

Madeleine’s outrage was shared by Rabbi Reichert, a longtime leader of the Northern California ACLU, who less than a week after the attack on Pearl Harbor delivered a sermon protesting “the unpardonable attacks and outrages upon American citizens of Japanese parentage whose loyalty to our country is as unyielding and assumed as that of President Roosevelt himself...We Jews ought to be among the very first to cry down the unjust persecution of the foreign-born in our midst whose patriotism is equal to ours.”¹³²



Russell House in 1952, designed by German-Jewish refugee Erich Mendelsohn on the site of her Stern grandparents' Georgian house, torn down in the late 1940's (credit: Charles Cushman)

While Madeleine could not accept his anti-Zionism, she no doubt appreciated his strong advocacy for Japanese Americans throughout the entire war, including help for their reentry into society.

He was the most prominent Jewish leader in the country to take that position, and he and Madeleine were members of a tiny minority of Jews and non-Jews for whom the suffering of the Japanese Americans was a high priority. Every one of the myriad of Jewish organizations in the state responded to the internment with silence.¹³³

For almost three quarters of a century, the visionary Columbia Foundation (which closed in 2013, fourteen years after Madeleine’s death) made thousands of grants in the areas of civil rights, higher education, the arts, environmentalism, scientific research, and much more. In addition, Madeleine entered the political arena, actively supporting progressive Democratic candidates in California such as Helen Gahagan Douglas (in her losing bid for the Senate against Richard Nixon in 1950) as well as the presidential campaigns of Adlai Stevenson, Eugene McCarthy, and George McGovern.¹³⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt, a kindred spirit, visited Madeleine at her home in 1962.¹³⁵ For the next seven years she worked for the regional U.S. State Department’s Reception Center as the head of its Leaders and Specialists program. In that official capacity she hosted dignitaries from all over the world, sometimes putting them up in her lavish home in the city or her sumptuous estate in Atherton, but also making sure that they interacted not only with the Bay Area’s elite but also with a representative cross-section of the diverse region’s population. In the following decade she served as a member of the Democratic National Committee.

While the philanthropy of her grandparents William and Bertha Haas and her aunt and uncle Samuel and Alice Lilienthal focused primarily on the ill and needy, Madeleine’s notion of bettering the world was much more extensive. The nature of her Jewish philanthropy was also vastly different. She made major grants in support of Jewish culture, education, and spirituality in America. She

furthered science, technology, and social justice in Israel.¹³⁶

As early as 1942, six years before statehood, she supported the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which over the decades would receive about three-quarters of a million dollars from her foundation. She endowed its Chair in Soil and Water Sciences and was also a founder of its Harry S Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace. She toured Israel many times and in 1975 Golda Meir visited Madeleine in her striking modernist home on Washington Street (a controversial residence designed by the eminent German-Jewish refugee Erich Mendelsohn in 1951, and yet another example of her independent streak).¹³⁷ Near the end of her life, her generosity helped found Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, which strives for inclusiveness achieved through a network of integrated, bilingual schools for Jewish and Arab children.

Contributing almost two million dollars to Brandeis University, on whose board of trustees she served, she endowed the Madeleine H. Russell Visiting Professorship of Non-Western and Comparative Studies. Closer to home, she endowed the William Haas Professorship in Chinese Politics at Stanford University, in memory of her late brother. Her foundation's major gift helped make possible the construction of The Contemporary Jewish Museum, Daniel Libeskind's daring addition to Willis Polk's landmark Jessie Street Substation, originally built in 1907. Columbia Foundation endowed the Madeleine Haas Russell Night at the Opera, a full dress rehearsal of a main-stage opera performed in the evening for high-school students. She was an avid supporter of public television; KQED's headquarters building is named in her honor.

In 1973, Madeleine and her cousin Walter Haas and his wife, Elise, made a gift to their synagogue that has inspired worshippers ever since: they donated two enormous, brilliantly colored stained-glass windows for the sanctuary, replacing the deteriorating amber glass that had been part of the unembellished design of the Lake Street Temple since its construction in Presidio Heights in 1926. Some congregants initially objected to

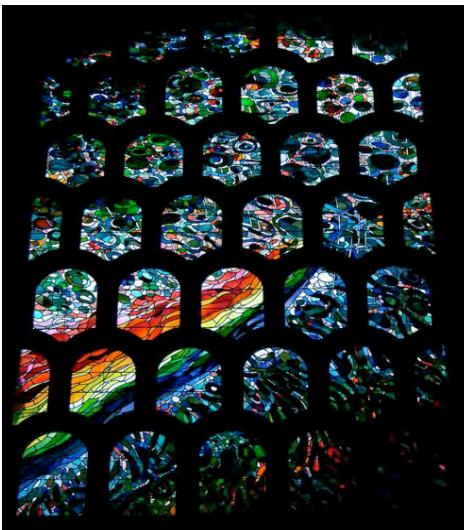
any decoration that might mar the austerity of the vast domed chamber, intended to enhance the contemplative aspect of prayer. But once installed, virtually everyone was inspired by the vivid hues "that dance across the sanctuary, adding warmth and enchantment."¹³⁸

Originally, Marc Chagall was offered the commission but his advanced age prevented him from undertaking it.¹³⁹ The local artist Mark Adams was chosen, a student of the Bavarian-born abstract expressionist painter Hans Hoffman. A master of the art of tapestry as well as stained glass, Adams would later render a magnificent window for Grace Episcopal Cathedral on Nob Hill. Devoting two years to the Emanu-El project, he created two radiant, abstract interpretations, "Water" and "Fire," for the east and west balconies respectively, each made with over two thousand pieces of glass and more than two hundred different colors. As Adams' biographers have written of the temple windows, "It is perhaps his response to religious mysticism that makes it possible for him to create the awesome spaces so charged with meaning."¹⁴⁰

In 2000, Columbia Foundation posthumously endowed the Madeleine Haas Russell Institute for Jewish Learning at Congregation Emanu-El.

Madeleine Haas Russell's own spiritual life was a private matter but at least on one occasion she embraced a joyful, age-old Jewish folk custom for

all to see. At the bar mitzvah of her grandson Ben Russell-Schlesinger at Emanu-El in 1998, she was carried aloft in a chair, with friends and relatives singing and dancing around her.¹⁴¹



Fire stained glass installation at Congregation Emanu-El completed by Mark Adams in 1975

9. Epilogue: The Descendants' Jewish Paths

Madeleine, who continued to have a tall Christmas tree and Yuletide decorations in her home, nevertheless led a more international Jewish life than the first and second generations of her family to live in the House. Many of William and Bertha Haas's great-grandchildren, fourth-generation San Franciscans, have gone much further in terms of prayer and observance, Zionism, and Jewish learning.

For two of Frances Bransten Rothmann's children, Susan (Abrami) Seeley (b. 1938) and John Rothmann (b. 1949), who visited their great-aunt Alice and great-uncle Sam at the House countless times in their youth, Judaism and the Jewish people became the primary focus of their adult lives.¹⁴² Susan's first marriage was to Rabbi Leo Abrami, a Holocaust survivor who has been a Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox spiritual leader during his long career. John, a noted author, local radio talk-show host, political analyst, and Jewish educator, is one of the leading Jewish activists on the West Coast. For decades he was president of the Northern California chapter of the Zionist Organization of America and has been one of the region's most vocal defenders of Israel. From the mid-1970s to the early 90s, he was an active board member, and for several years president, of the Bay Area Council for Soviet Jewry, one of the most effective organizations in the country in pressuring the Soviet Union to allow more than one and a half million Jews to emigrate. Rothmann was also a founder of the Holocaust Center of Northern California (today the Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center) and chaired the annual community-wide Yom HaShoah commemoration for more than a quarter century. He and his wife, Ellen, a past president of the local chapter of Hadassah, regularly attend Congregation Emanu-El, a synagogue still striving for social justice as in the days of Rabbi Reichert but now far more open to Jewish tradition. Their son Samuel made aliyah (moved to Israel and became a citizen of the Jewish state) and served in the Israel Defense Forces.¹⁴³

The philanthropy of the Haas-Lilienthal descendants has continued in the generous mode of William Haas and the wide-reaching, visionary manner of Madeleine Haas Russell, embracing Jewish and non-sectarian causes. Her three children, Alice Russell-Shapiro (b. 1947), Charles P. Russell (b. 1948), and Christine H. Russell (b. 1950), and Alice's daughter Maddy Russell-Shapiro (b. 1977), named for her grandmother, became the trustees of Columbia Foundation after her death, in 1999, and made grants in the same spirit as their mother.¹⁴⁴ They continued their mother's aid to groups opposing the death penalty and preserving the environment; they took to the next stage her pioneering work supporting civil rights to include the LGBTQ community, with millions of dollars for public education to fight prejudice and legalize same-sex marriage.

In 2013, they divided the assets of Columbia Foundation into three separate family foundations. Christine's husband, Mark Schlesinger, serves half-time as CEO and Managing Director of Gaia Fund.



The Contemporary Jewish Museum fuses the 1907 Jessie Street Power Substation, designed by Willis Polk, with a projecting addition by Daniel Libeskind, completed in 2008 (credit: Jeremy Blakeslee)

It supports dozens of organizations devoted to education, the arts, Jewish life, the protection of nature, and sustainable food and farming.¹⁴⁵ Schlesinger has also been president of Congregation Emanu-El as well as the Contemporary Jewish Museum.

Alice Russell-Shapiro has furthered the family's civic involvement through her family's Yerba Buena Fund, supporting a wide variety of causes ranging from prison reform and child-abuse prevention to the San Francisco Opera and Stanford University. She co-founded and spearheaded the movement to create the National AIDS Memorial Grove in a serene ten-acre dell in Golden Gate Park.¹⁴⁶ The AIDS Grove, as it is known, was officially designated by President Clinton and Congress as the nation's AIDS memorial, in 1996. Alice also helped start San Francisco Friends of the Urban Forest, which has planted street trees for over three decades. Her husband, William, has been president of the regional American Technion Society and Vice-President of the American Jewish Committee. Alice and Christine's brother, Charles Russell, has long resided in London. He has been active in charitable work there through his foundation, Cockayne, focusing on performance, literary, and visual arts.¹⁴⁷

One cause has been especially dear to the Haas-Lilienthal descendants in the past two generations: preserving their illustrious family's heritage, so deeply intertwined with the history of the city. Following Alice Lilenthal's death in 1972, after having lived at 2007 Franklin Street all but seven years since the time of its construction 86 years earlier, her children, Frances Stein, Elizabeth Gerstley, and Ernest Lilenthal, gifted the House to the fledgling historic-preservation organization Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage (now San Francisco Heritage), which was founded the year before. Madeleine Haas Russell, her niece, supplied the initial endowment for the House.

Its Queen Anne exterior and variety of architectural styles inside make it one of the best examples in the city of a home from the Gilded Age and the only one open to the public as a house museum, the

family's main goal in donating the House, which in 2012 was named one of thirty-four inaugural "national treasures" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The designation emphasized both the architectural and cultural significance of the House, with National Trust president Stephanie Meeks highlighting its "tremendous potential to tell the story of the significant contributions of the Jewish American community in San Francisco to a national audience." One of the most successful educational programs has been Heritage Hikes for third-graders, which includes classroom presentations, a tour of the House led by docents, and a teacher-led architectural treasure hunt of the neighborhood. Established in 1982, the Heritage Hikes program currently serves



The restored and repainted Haas-Lilienthal House, 2007 Franklin Street, 2016 (credit: Jim Simmons)

approximately 1,500 students from up to 30 local elementary schools each year.

In 2015, the \$4.3 million *Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House* was launched, to preserve and improve the deteriorating mansion and, with the collaboration of the National Trust, greatly enhance its value as an educational and interpretive resource. In addition to a \$300,000 seed grant from Columbia Foundation, Madeleine Haas Russell's three children collectively contributed the one-million-dollar lead gift. Alice Russell-Shapiro is campaign co-chair and John Rothmann, who still has a set of keys to his great-grandfather's house, is a member of the campaign cabinet. Each of the eighteen living great-grandchildren of William and Bertha Haas has made a donation toward restoring the House.¹⁴⁸ Campaign fundraising concluded in 2017, with accessibility, seismic, fire/life safety, landscape, and other improvements completed that year.

When Alice Haas's children donated the House, in 1973, they retained the right of the family to continue to hold a party there on Christmas Eve, a cherished annual event since the mansion was built over one hundred and thirty years ago. To this day, they have continued the tradition, coordinating family reunions for upwards of 50 people, but "none of the trappings of Christmas remain," according to Rothmann, not even Santa Claus.¹⁴⁹ (San Francisco Heritage does place a Christmas tree in the House during the season to give visitors a sense of the decor when it was occupied by the Haas-Lilenthals.) In contemporary

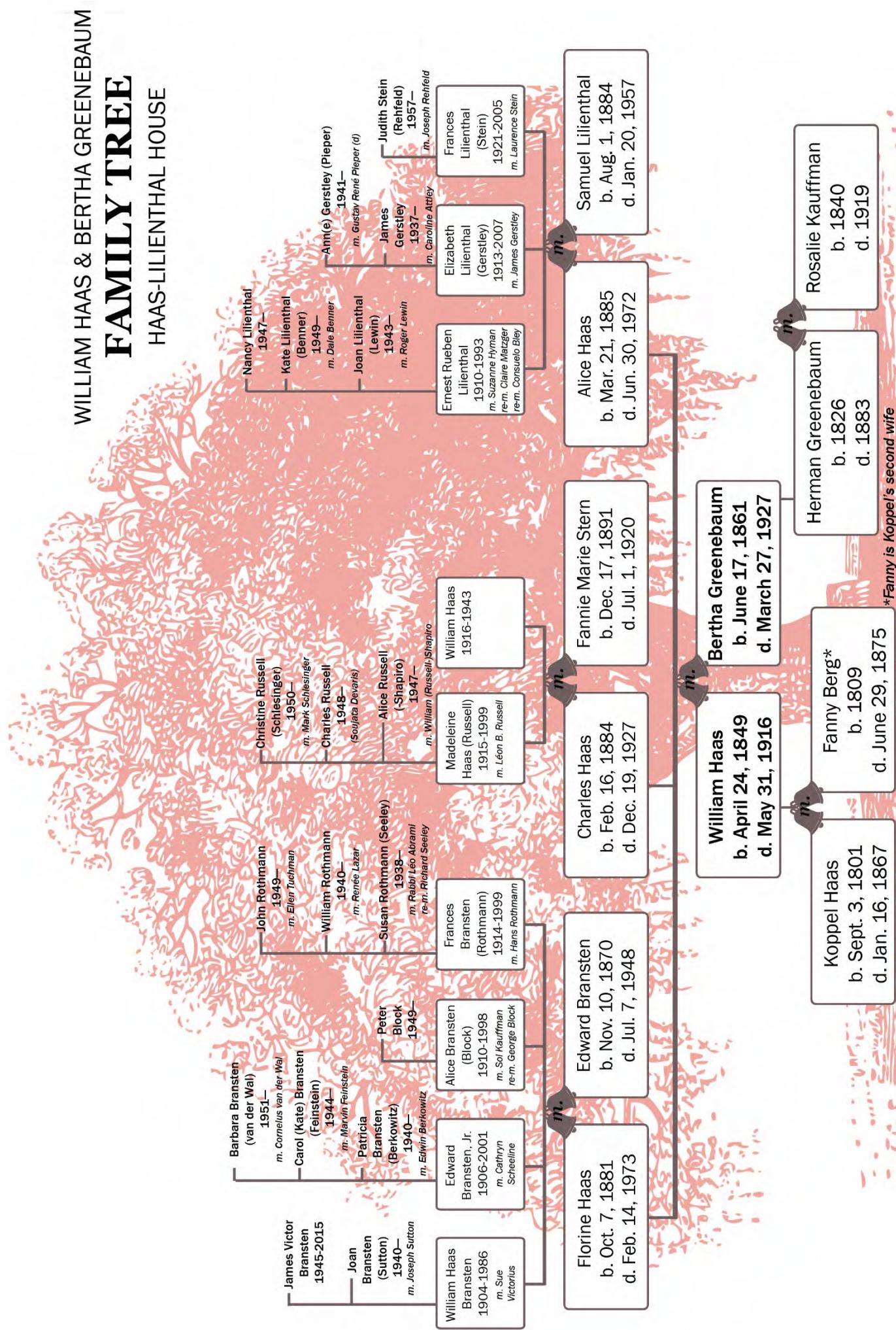
times, when December 24 falls on a Friday, as it did in 2010, the descendants usher in the Sabbath with two loaves of challah on the table, ritual candle-lighting, and traditional blessings.¹⁵⁰ When Christmas Eve is also one of the eight days of Hanukkah, Rothmann proudly says, "we light the candles, eat potato latkes, and spin the dreidel."¹⁵¹

The Haas-Lilienthal House illuminates many of the themes that have shaped San Francisco Jewish life from the pioneer generation to the present. Its grandeur is a testament to the business acumen and refined taste of the Bavarian-Jewish elite whose civic involvement and cultural engagement were essential in transforming a coarse boomtown into a world-class metropolis. Even beyond the presence of several Chinese artifacts, the House reveals itself as a microcosm of Asian-Jewish relations: early on, Chinese laundrymen were employed and later three Japanese domestic servants were victims of the wartime internment, but a resident of the House was one of the few opponents of that directive and worked vigorously to alleviate the hardship it caused. The House welcomed German-Jewish immigrants at the turn of the century, sheltered refugees from Nazism, and was also the venue for many a lively discussion on the merits of Zionism. Finally, the Haas-Lilienthal House reflects a highly Americanized expression of Judaism developed in the nineteenth century, in which philanthropy nearly eclipsed observance. This particular strand of the faith has greatly diminished since the 1940s, but in its time it fostered Jewish continuity and was flexible enough to yield to a broader and deeper Jewish experience in later generations.

Appendix A: The Haas-Lilienthals and the Network of Early San Francisco's Leading Bavarian Jewish Families

- Levi Strauss & Company, begun as early as 1853, manufactured a product that became the best known symbol of the Wild West. William and Bertha's son, Charles, married Fannie Marie Stern, daughter of Jacob Stern, the second president of the company. Abraham Haas's son Walter married Fannie's cousin Elise Stern, daughter of Jacob's brother Sigmund, the company's third president. Levi Strauss & Company remains a family-owned business.
- The D. N. and E. Walter furniture and carpet chain, with branches throughout the West Coast and in New York, was co-founded in 1858 by Isaac Walter, Bertha Haas's brother-in-law and William's close friend since their boyhoods together in Reckendorf.
- The Alaska Commercial Company, begun in 1868, virtually monopolized the fur-seal trade, and was one of the largest corporations in the United States. Bertha Haas was the niece of co-founder Lewis Gerstle. Her son-in-law Samuel Lilienthal was a grandson of the other co-founder, Louis Sloss. In the following generation, Alice and Samuel's daughter Elizabeth married James Gerstley, from the English branch of the family, who became president of the Borax Company, and was a descendant of Lewis Gerstle on both sides of his family.
- Lilenthal and Company, established in 1871, later to become Crown Distilleries, was the largest wholesale-liquor company in the West, and William and Bertha's son-in-law, Samuel, who worked at the firm until 1917, was the son of its founder, Ernest R. Lilenthal. Family descendants still own and manage Haas Brothers as a world-class wine and spirit distributor.
- MJB Coffee was an enormous beverage concern operating in the West and beyond, and the Haases' daughter Florine married Edward Brandenstein (after World War I, Bransten), who headed the firm founded by his brother Max Joseph Brandenstein in 1881. The couple lived in a mansion at 1735 Franklin Street, only three blocks away, and Florine and her sister, Alice, would be inseparable the rest of their long lives. MJB Coffee was purchased by Nestlé in 1985.
- The Wells Fargo Nevada National Bank was founded by Isaias W. Hellman (also a magnate in the fields of oil, transportation, water, and wine); William Haas became a Director of this institution as well as an investor in other lucrative Hellman ventures. Although the Haas and Hellman families were not related by blood, Isaias, also born and raised in Reckendorf, was William's lifelong friend.
- Koshland and Sons, the leading wool company in America, was founded in the mid-1860s by the Bavarian Simon Koshland, whose daughter Carrie married Bertha Haas's brother Emil. Bertha's nephew, Simon's son Daniel E. Koshland, co-headed Levi Strauss and Company with his brother-in-law Walter Haas, who was William Haas's nephew. Dan Koshland and Walter Haas would be among the most respected philanthropists in twentieth-century San Francisco.
- Fleishhacker and Sons, the giant paper-box company, was founded in 1892 by Aaron Fleishhacker, whose sons Mortimer and Herbert expanded the family's holdings into a vast empire including manufacturing, utilities, and banking. Their Anglo and London Paris National Bank became the largest in the city. They became linked to the Haas-Lilenthal clan in 1925 when Samuel Lilenthal's first cousin, Leon Sloss, Jr., married Mortimer and Bella Fleishhacker's daughter, Eleanor.

Appendix B: Readers' guide to family members mentioned in the narrative



Notes

1. Frances Dinkelspiel, *Towers of Gold: How One Jewish Immigrant Named Isaías Hellman Created California* (New York, 2008), 16.
2. Dinkelspiel, 12, 14.
3. Family tree lent to San Francisco Heritage by Lynn Bunim.
4. Dinkelspiel, 17.
5. Verzeichnis der Juden in Jahr 1835, (Census of the Jews in the Year 1835) in *Chronik Reckendorf*, Chapter 9, provided by archivist Adelheid Waschka
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