

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Jewish Texans

Judaism is a religion and also a way of life pervasive enough to create an identity as powerful as any other national, cultural, or ethnic group in the state. Judaism's earlier connection to a particular geography—and then for centuries to a lack of homeland—helped establish and maintain a worldwide cultural group.

The first Jews coming to Texas were notable individuals—and few. But by the mid-19th century, Jewish immigration followed typical patterns along trade and transportation routes and, generally, remained urban and involved families.

Certainly the first Jewish individuals came out of a sense of adventure, or fled hardships and oppression, or moved with a loved one, and the earliest did not always practice their faith openly. Later arrivals came as settlers seeking a new life in a congenial homeland.

Jews have, at times, been targets of oppression from Western Europe to Russia. In Texas, in most years, they found comparative freedom to practice their religion, follow their way of life, and seek opportunity for economic advancement.

Here Jews established a mercantile pattern in which individuals would arrive at a port or urban center and journey along well-established roads selling what they could. Finding a satisfactory business location, they would settle and, preserving their links to sources of supply, would provide a nucleus for others—a chain pattern.

Sanger, Marcus, Zale, Levy, and Sakowitz are only a few of the very well-known names that have defined the entrepreneurial spirit. And individuals have distinguished themselves in art, banking, ranching, law, medicine, and government.

In the largest numbers, Texas's Jewish population lives in cities and always has. An urban Jewish community would



Rabbi Henry Cohen (here at age 79) achieved a national reputation for philanthropic and humanitarian endeavor in his 62 years in Texas.



Sukkot meal in a sukkah at a Laredo Sunday School, c. 1935—Sukkot is the fall harvest festival held in memory of the ancestors who dwelt in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt. Jewish families build sukkahs (temporary huts) with roofs of green branches. At least once a day for eight days, families and friends share meals in the sukkah.

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develop from a collection of families. A Jewish cemetery usually was established, then benevolent societies, then a synagogue with a community center.

Some individuals arrived with considerable resources, some with only the clothes on their backs; most of them became productive citizens.

Known for their defense of individual social justice, Texas Jews have involved themselves in the changes of modern life while maintaining some of the oldest cultural customs in the world.