

MISHPOKHE
A Study of New York City Jewish Family Clubs

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Mishpokhe
*A Study of New York City
Jewish Family Clubs*

WILLIAM E. MITCHELL

University of Vermont

Foreword by

MARSHALL SKLARE

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TO RHODA MÉTRAUX

Foreword

The paucity of treatments of the American-Jewish family from the perspective of the social sciences stands in sharp contrast to the large number of treatments of the subject by writers of fiction. Doubtless our image of the Jewish family has been strongly affected by works of fiction, particularly by the works of American-Jewish novelists. And if the fictional literature on the Jewish family has impressed itself upon the classes the routines of Jewish comedians appear to have impressed themselves upon the masses. The Jewish comedians have educated Americans about Jewish family relationships, especially in respect to the interaction of family members.

The contribution of novelists and comedians should not be denigrated — their material frequently contains insights unavailable elsewhere. But it is apparent that their work covers a limited range. It concentrates on the relationship between parents and children, the interaction of siblings, and the question of awakening sexuality. Occasionally the relationship of grandparents to grandchildren is discussed. In any case the emphasis is on childhood experience. Even when the protagonists are adult the source of their response is seen as having its origin in childhood.

It appears that both Jewish novelists and Jewish comedians have minimal ties with extended kin. Thus it is not surprising that few of them have had anything to say about the subject of Prof. Mitchell's concern: the family club. If the subject matter of Prof. Mitchell's investigation is rarely treated by humorists or writers of fiction, it also appears to have escaped the notice of scholars. The only study of Jewish family clubs other than Prof. Mitchell's was published in 1939 in Yiddish. The study was the result of a W.P.A. project which included both *landsmanshaftn* (voluntary associations of individuals from the same village or region in Europe) as

well as family clubs. While the project unearthed valuable material it did not have the advantage of being directed by a trained anthropologist. Thus the value of Prof. Mitchell's work is magnified by virtue of the fact that for the first time disciplined scholarship has been brought to bear on the understanding of the important but neglected phenomenon of Jewish family clubs.

Is Mitchell's work a contribution to contemporary Jewish studies or is it primarily a contribution to the study of the family? It is obviously a contribution to both. If we look at it as a contribution to the study of the family it is clear that his work serves as a contribution to the growing literature which seeks to modify the conclusions of an earlier generation of social scientists.

Scholars of an earlier era concentrated upon the view that the family was undergoing a crisis. They highlighted the limited functions of the contemporary family, especially the fact that the family was no longer an economic unit. As they saw it only the nuclear family could persist; social forces would inevitably destroy relationships with extended kin. In their view the extended family was not viable in modern society. How, they asked, could extended kinship relationships survive in a society which was not organized around kinship?

Kinship relationships were, for example, challenged by social mobility. One of the effects of social mobility was that the rate of social mobility would not be uniform among members of an extended family. Thus the extended family would include individuals on different class levels. The same would be true for education — not everyone in the extended family would achieve the same educational level. The end result would be that members of an extended family would come to occupy very different statuses, with the result that it would be difficult if not impossible to maintain family cohesion. The drift away from ties to the extended family was seen as inevitable — modern economic organization was viewed as rewarding individuals who were capable of freeing themselves from the restrictions which come with strong kinship involvement.

If this were not enough it was apparent that the extended family was threatened by geographical mobility. Relatives would no longer live in the same street, neighborhood, or city. Furthermore, given the individuation which occurs in modern society even when relatives were accessible, interaction with them would be supplanted

by the growth of clique groups and the efflorescence of interaction between individuals who shared common interests rather than a common lineage.

All of these developments suggested that traditional bonds of kinship would be replaced by newer bonds centering around congeniality and common interests. Such developments were seen as centered in the city; urbanism as a way of life would inevitably loosen and ultimately destroy kinship networks. As regards the Jews, since the great majority of them had concentrated themselves in a dozen of the nation's largest cities, their traditional relationships with extended kin were seen as particularly vulnerable. The common view, then, was that the kinship principle — namely that the closest bonds and the most fulfilling relationships are those which exist among kin — was seen as a phenomenon which would inevitably wither away.

The more we learn about actual social interaction in modern society (in contrast to theories about such interaction) the clearer it becomes that kinship persists to an extent previously unimagined. And despite the forces which were supposed to undermine the solidarity of the Jewish family, the more we learn about the Jewish family the more we see that bonds with extended kin also persist. Prof. Mitchell's work is especially valuable because its focus is on the unexpected; it emphasizes the prevalence of kinship interaction rather than its absence.

It can be argued that Prof. Mitchell's work, which emphasizes the shift from older informal bonds which served to maintain family cohesion to a newer form which is essentially a voluntary association, is itself testimony to a sharp decline in family loyalty. Along the same line it can be asserted that the family club represents an intermediate stage in the inevitable dissolution of the bonds with extended kin. However, the formation of Jewish family clubs can, with equal cogency, be viewed from the perspective that the extended family is responsive to the threat to its viability and acts to combat the forces which endanger its survival. That the extended family forms itself into a kind of voluntary association can be interpreted as a survival mechanism which demonstrates an abiding desire to continue kinship bonds. Furthermore this desire to continue kinship bonds can be looked upon sympathetically in terms of a justifiable fear of replacing kinship bonds with social relationships which are by their nature highly ephemeral.

If Mitchell's work is a contribution to the understanding of the family in modern society it is at the same time a significant contribution to contemporary Jewish studies. Jewish identity in the Diaspora is closely intertwined with the nature of the Jewish family. Thus Mitchell presents an analysis of an important aspect of the changing Jewish community. To be sure there are any number of other developments in the American Jewish community which can offset the cohesive effect of the family club. They include a low birth rate, the sharp rise in divorce, the escalating rate of intermarriage, the impact of the rise in the level of secular education and the entrance of Jews into new occupations, the movement from Northern cities to the "Sun Belt", and, most recently, the rise of a new feminism which is frequently contemptuous of traditional Jewish family life. The new feminism is complemented in some cases by the desire of Jewish men to remain unencumbered by the obligations of marriage and the rearing of children.

It is by no means clear at the present time how the Jewish family can maintain itself in the face of such changes. Whatever the eventual fate of the Jewish family, Prof. Mitchell's study of family clubs advances our knowledge of a little-known phenomenon. His analysis serves as a corrective to the over-simplifications about the family in modern society which we have inherited from an earlier generation of social scientists. It also serves to alert us to new social arrangements which come into being in order to preserve age-old traditions. In its millennial history the Jewish community has proven to be unusually resilient to challenges which would defeat its desire for continuity and survival. Such resiliency has frequently rested upon the elaboration of innovations necessary to meet challenges unknown in previous generations. Prof. Mitchell is to be commended for the painstaking research which he has undertaken in respect to one such innovation.

Brandeis University
Waltham, Mass.
January, 1978

Marshall Sklare

Author's preface

How can Jewish relatives who range in residence and occupation from a Scarsdale doctor to a Brooklyn butcher and who diverge in religiosity from an Orthodox cantor to a ham-eating atheist maintain close family ties? It is a social truism that families with conflicting life styles scattered over a sprawling urban area fall apart. Even those families with a strong sense of duty to stay together will begin to lose their cohesiveness as members' contacts become increasingly erratic and highly preferential.

This book is about *family circles* and *cousins' clubs*, two remarkable social innovations by New York City Jews of Eastern European background, that attempt to keep relatives, the *mish-pokhe* (Yid.), together even as the indomitable forces of urbanization and industrialization continue to rend them apart.

The family circle first appears on the New York City Jewish scene in the early 1900's as an adaptive response to preserve, both in principle and action, the social integrity of the immigrant Jewish family. It consists of a group of relatives with common ancestors organized like a lodge or club with elected officers, dues, regular meetings, and committees. But as the younger members became more Americanized than their immigrant parents and grandparents, the generation gap widened. By the 1930's a new type of family club was invented. The cousins' club excludes the older generations from membership, although they are included in some of the club's social activities. Today family circles and cousins' clubs continue to exist as important variant types of family structure in contemporary New York Jewish society. One out of five married couples in our questionnaire survey belongs to a family club.

The principal data on which this book is based are the product

of the social science research project, "Studies in Family Interaction", directed by Hope Jensen Leichter and sponsored under the joint auspices of the Jewish Family Service of New York City and the Russell Sage Foundation. The project's first volume, *Kinship and Casework* (Leichter and Mitchell, 1967), reports on the kinship patterns of New York Jews and on the role caseworkers play in altering or redefining contacts with relatives.

When the research team began its study of the Jewish family, we had no prior knowledge of the existence of family circles and cousins' clubs. But as we interviewed families about their ties to relatives, spontaneous references to family clubs frequently were made. Then, as we began to ask more about them, we became increasingly intrigued. Here was a form of the American family — a family club — that was not reported in the social science literature. To understand urban Jewish kinship patterns, it was obvious we would have to know much more about these family clubs as social systems and their place in Jewish culture. This book is one outcome of our research.

The origins of most types of kin groups studied by anthropologists are lost in time. The fact that we can closely approximate the temporal beginning of Jewish family clubs is very unusual. And whereas the historic origins of specific clans found in tribal societies are usually unknown or explained by myth, a Jewish family club may present one with the minutes of its organizing meeting.

In this and many other ways, the family circle and cousins' club are more closely related to the "formal organizations" characteristic of an urban-industrial society than to the traditional types of kin groups found among less technologically developed societies of the world. Still, by using a rule of descent as a primary structuring principle, the family circle and cousins' club are corporate kin groups. So, from a strictly typological perspective, these family clubs do not fit neatly into the established conceptual schemes of social organization and their existence raises a number of theoretical questions. Consequently, my analysis of these family clubs is not of a conventional tidiness. In order to understand the ethnographic facts about the family circle and cousins' club, I have used a range of relevant concepts derived from studies about descent groups, voluntary associations, and formal organizations. My own notions about how best to classify these typologically maverick groups are discussed in Chapter eight.

The basic research data for this study were collected between 1960 and 1962. According to informants with whom I maintain contact and students' papers on Jewish family clubs sent to me by colleagues teaching in the New York City area, no important changes in the structure of family circles and cousins' clubs have occurred since that time. However, when I began this study the idea that large corporate kin groups could exist in New York City seemed preposterous to many social scientists. Some with whom I corresponded or talked were initially adamant that the family circle and cousins' club were not kin groups at all but urban associations with kinship an incidental or even accidental matter. Their skepticism is understandable when considered within the context of the then prevailing social science theories about the nature of kinship in urban-industrialized societies discussed by Professor Sklare in the Foreword.

One basic assumption was that large-scale kin groups were structurally and functionally incompatible with the occupational requirements of an urban-industrial society. It was further assumed that the existence of descent groups of any kind was incompatible with the social and geographic mobility required of a population in a highly urbanized and industrialized society. There were no ethnographic examples to contradict these assumptions, and they appeared to be valid. For example, in those instances where industrialization and descent groups did coexist, the descent groups were breaking up under the pressures of a rapidly advancing process of urbanization and industrialization (cf. Goode 1963b: 369). Certainly no one would have argued with Zelditch's (1955: 340) statement that "... in our society the nuclear family is a clearly stronger solidarity than any other kinship-based group, and no corporate descent group exists". But the "discovery" of the Jewish family circle and cousins' club has provided new data that modify these earlier assumptions as Zelditch (1964a:712-728) among others, has noted.

The major part of the book describes how these intimate, spirited, and often contentious family clubs are organized and how they function. The two concluding chapters deal with the challenging problems of how Jewish family clubs happened to emerge in American society and their theoretical implications for contemporary kinship studies. The research methods used in the study — a combination of intensive informant interviews, participant

observation, and respondent questionnaires – and problems of doing field-oriented research in an urban setting, are presented in Appendix A. Questionnaire items, examples of club documents, and genealogies appear in successive appendices.

All of the names of family clubs and members appearing in these pages are fictitious as confidentiality of identifying data was promised to my informants as a condition of their cooperation in the study. Exceptions are the names of those family clubs and their members quoted from or cited in published sources; these appear unaltered.

The standard authority for the romanization of Yiddish terms is Uriel Weinreich's *English-Yiddish Yiddish-English dictionary* and is the source for the transliterations used throughout the text. See Weinreich (1968:xiii xxxix) for a discussion of this system.

The data gathering stage for the research was supported by the Jewish Family Service of New York City and the Russell Sage Foundation and the analysis and write-up stages by the Hope Foundation and the University of Vermont. My project colleagues were Fred Davis, Hope Jensen Leichter, Judith Lieb, Candace Rogers, Alice Liu Szema and Diana Tandler. All enthusiastically shared with me their materials and ideas on the family clubs.

I am especially grateful to Hope Leichter for working with me on the theoretical implications of these unusual groups, to Max Wall for translating from the Yiddish the historically crucial WPA study on the New York City Jewish family, and to Joyce Slayton Mitchell for her special reports on family club meetings. Marshall Sklare, the acknowledged expert on the sociology of American Jewry, has been an encouraging colleague and graciously contributed the Foreword. Other friends and colleagues who offered advice or assistance at strategic phases of the research include May Ebihara, Raymond Firth, Marvin Gelfand, Walter Karp, Fred Lief, Roger Peranio, David Schneider and Claire Taschdjian. It is with sadness that I cannot thank Nathan Ackerman, Millicent Ayoub, Maurice Freedman and Natalie Joffe; I can only acknowledge their memory. The book is dedicated to Rhoda Métraux who as fellow anthropologist, wise mentor and friend has facilitated in countless ways my field work studies from the streets of New York to the jungles of New Guinea.

Three of my Columbia University professors had an important influence on the study. Margaret Mead, whose writings originally

helped lead me into anthropology from philosophy, closely followed my research on the family clubs and made detailed comments on an early manuscript draft. Morton Fried, whose lectures first excited my curiosity about the complexities of kinship behavior, offered many helpful suggestions as did Conrad Arensberg whose emphasis on the multiple determinants of behavior is reflected in Chapter Seven.

The initial draft of this monograph titled *Cognatic Descent Groups in an Urban Industrial Society* was submitted in 1969 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree from Columbia University. In 1970, I went to Papua New Guinea on a three-year grant to study culturally contrasting therapeutic systems and upon its completion began to revise the manuscript for publication. Those helping in the technical preparation of the manuscript include Kathy Greer, Peggy Derby, Laura Tonseth, Jeanne Thibault and Marjory Walton.

Although it is my informants who provided the principal material for this book, they must remain nameless here. Their intelligent responsiveness and unencumbered immediacy were gratifying stimulants to my work. They humored me, fed me, challenged me, and praised me. But my greatest acknowledgement is to their trust in me, for without this precious ingredient there can be no ethnography nor the ultimate attainment of an encompassing science of human behavior.

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1. The Jews of New York City

Who invented the idea of Jewish family clubs? We simply don't know. But a lot is known about the New York City Jewish community during the years of immigration and settlement when the clubs were first formed. It is important information not only as cultural background data for this study but directly pertains to later discussions about how these clubs came into existence and the models within the Jewish community on which they are based.

Today in New York City there is no "Jewish community" in the sense that it is represented in the larger community by a single organization as its spokesman. The Jews of New York are not a unified group but are heterogeneous both culturally and physically and have a multitude of often competing political, social, economic, and religious organizations.¹ There are also some Jews who, although maintaining a Jewish identity, are less interested in things "Jewish" and have affiliated with community associations that are not based on Jewish ethnicity. The only "Jewish" factor that all New York City Jews have in common today is that they are descendants of individuals called "Jews" and by a rule of descent are also "Jews". But it was not always this way.²

From the middle of the seventeenth century until the nineteenth, the Congregation Shearith Israel was New York's only synagogue and the accepted spokesman for a united Jewish community. But the unity was broken beyond repair with the establishment of a rival synagogue, the Congregation Bnai Jeshurun, in 1825, and a subsequent rash of other new synagogues established by successionist groups. Since this date no single organization has been able to speak with unanimity and authority for all New York Jews. As the cultural diversity among them became more marked and their numbers within the city increased,

so did the number and types of organizations increase to meet their changing social and economic needs in a rapidly changing urban society. The family circle and cousins' club are but two of the more recently established organizations to meet these needs.

NEW YORK'S FIRST JEWS: THE SEPHARDIM AND ASHKENAZIM

The Jews of New York City have a long and often rousing history. The first Jew to settle in New York, then the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, was Jacob Barsimon, an Ashkenazic Jew who arrived in 1654. He was followed later in the same year by 23 Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Dutch colony of Pernambuco in Brazil when it was retaken by the Portuguese. A few Jews arrived from London and the West Indies soon after England took over the colony in 1664, and a few French Jews are reported to have immigrated by way of England in 1696. But the bulk of the early population, although small was comprised mainly of the descendants of the Sephardic Jews (sometimes referred to as "Portuguese" or "Spanish" Jews) who had earlier lived in Portugal and Spain, and the descendants of the commonly named Ashkenazic Jews who had earlier lived in Germany. However, most of the early Ashkenazic Jews who settled in New York came from Holland and England.

The Ashkenazim and Sephardim are two important subcultures of international Jewry and joined together to make New York's first Jewish community. It was an unusual union for the Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities were rigidly separate in the contemporary European cities. For one thing the Sephardim considered themselves to be the Jewish aristocracy and encouraged endogamy. But the two groups were different in other ways, too; they differed in language (the Sephardim spoke Portuguese, the Ashkenazim German), pronunciation of Hebrew, synagogue customs, and in their style of dress and food preferences.

For the first 50 years of New York Jewish history the Sephardim were the more numerous and the acknowledged leaders of the Jewish community. During this period New York was little more than an overgrown trading post and the Jewish community was not yet a hundred strong. Shearith Israel, the only synagogue and Sephardic in ritual, was the place of worship for Sephardim

and Ashkenazim alike. By 1695 the Jewish population had finally reached 100 in a city of about 4,000 (See Table 1). By this time the Jews were fairly evenly divided between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, but by 1729 the Ashkenazim were in the majority, a majority that would continue to grow until they, in turn, were outnumbered by the great migration of Eastern European Jews to New York's Lower East Side in the late nineteenth century.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the Jewish population of New York remained relatively small. Although only a hundred Jews lived in New York in 1695, 100 years later there were only 350 although the city had become the largest in the United States with 33,000 inhabitants. It took until 1825 for the population to reach an even 500.

The Jews who immigrated to New York during the colonial era appear to have been poor. Grinstein (1945:24) writes:

The Ashkenazim from Germany, Poland, and Holland came to America, for the most part, because they wanted to raise their standard of living. It was the lower rather than the upper classes among the Jews who joined the immigrant group. Few of the Jews of early New York knew Hebrew; a Jewish scholar was a rarity. Most of the immigrants seem to have been poor, many actually penniless. Save for the Marranos, who may have possessed some wealth, no rich Jews came or seemed to want to come to America.

There are also indications that these early Jewish immigrants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came alone and that the tradition of families immigrating together did not develop until the nineteenth century.

Perhaps both of these factors helped Jews to assimilate quickly to the pattern of the broader community while maintaining a Jewish religious identity. According to the statement of a German officer at the time of the Revolutionary War, (Glanz 1947:20) New York Jews were indistinguishable from other citizens and this probably applies equally to an even earlier date. And Weinryb (1958:9) has documented how the early Jews, at least linguistically, were moving away from their traditional languages to the exclusive adoption of English:

In this connection it is significant to note that the minutes of Congregation Shearith Israel of New York City are written in Portuguese up to 1741, and later in a mixture of that language

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and English. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, English is employed exclusively. In 1757 the Congregation demands a cantor "who will be able to teach the children Hebrew with translation into English and Spanish", but five years later only Hebrew and English are required. Furthermore, the leadership was rapidly losing all contact with Hebrew. In 1728, of the 17 people signing the regulations of Shearith Israel, only three (all having Ashkenazic names) employed Hebrew script. By 1746 it was only one out of 47. In 1761 the first English translation of the holiday prayer book (*machzor*) was published in America. In the preface to the 1766 edition it is stated that many understand very little Hebrew, others none at all. . . . In short, American Jews of the second half of the eighteenth century seem to have had much in common with the non-Jews with whom they frequently congregated and with whom they did business.

During the period of Dutch rule in New York the Jews were required by law to live in a separate section of the city, but

Table 1. *The early Jewish population of New York City**

Year	Number of Jews in New York City	General population of New York City	Percentage
1695	100	4,000	2.5
1750	300	13,000	2.3
1794	350	33,000	1.1
1809	450	96,000	0.5
1815	350
1820	450	123,000	0.4
1825	500	166,000	0.3
1836	2,000	270,000	0.7
1840	7,000	312,000	2.2
1842	10,000
1846	12,000	371,000	3.2
1850	16,000	515,000	3.1
1855	30,000	629,000	4.7

* From Grinstein (1945:469). These Jewish population estimates are based variously on the number of seats in the synagogues, the consumption of matzoh, and other data. The general population figures for New York City are given in round numbers. For a discussion of the problems inherent in Jewish demography, see Seligman (1958).

Grinstein (1945:30) indicates that the law was never really enforced. He does say, however, that "the earliest Jewish neighborhood was on Whitehall Street, probably near the tip of Manhattan Island". When the British took the colony in 1664, the Jewish ghetto law was not reinstituted and the Jews of New York have never been forced to live in legalized ghettos. They have tended, however, just as other large ethnic groups in New York have done, to group themselves in separate neighborhoods. During the colonial period of New York, the Jews clustered in close proximity to their synagogue on Mill Street. In the eighteenth century as the city grew in population and economic strength, its boundaries expanded and some Jews began moving "uptown". But even as late as 1818 when the old synagogue was rebuilt, its location was unchanged, for the center of the Jewish population was still in the Mill Street neighborhood.

The Sephardim of New York were able to maintain firm control of Shearith Israel throughout the eighteenth century, but because of their small numbers it was inevitable that they should intermarry with the Ashkenazim who continued to immigrate to the city. The choice was often that of marrying either a Christian or a *Tedesco*, the Sephardic pejorative term for an Ashkenazic Jew. As Grinstein (1945:167) has noted, "One after another chose the latter alternative, and thus family after family of Sephardim became associated with Ashkenazim until there were virtually no real Portuguese left". By the beginning of the nineteenth century most of the earlier Sephardic families were assimilated through intermarriage. The resulting population was a highly Americanized mixture of Polish, German, and Sephardic Jews sometimes referred to as neo-Portuguese. They considered themselves as a native American group and superior to the new immigrants.

The exclusiveness of the Americanized group forced the immigrant Ashkenazim in each period to form a temporary coterie which was socially outside the pale of the native group. The immigrant Jew in New York had to undergo a long process of Americanization before he was admitted to the so-called Portuguese and neo-Portuguese group (Grinstein 1945:167). By 1825, when a group of recently-arrived Ashkenazim broke away from Shearith Israel to found their own synagogue, the neo-Portuguese Jews were an established Jewish sub-culture and they remained the elite of New York Jewry throughout the nineteenth

century. They constituted an exclusive group of cultured American Jews marrying among themselves and with their own religious, educational, and social organizations. According to Grinstein (1945:169) they "lived a self-contained life, with many non-Jewish friends and contacts, but with few social contacts among the German, Polish, or Russian Jews".

CULTURAL PLURALISM: THE 1800'S

In 1825 the Jewish community was still small and accounted for only .3 per cent of the total New York population. But looking at Table 1, the 500 Jews of 1825 increased to 2,000 by 1836 and in 1855 to 30,000, or 4.7 per cent of the city's total population. By 1859 the Jews further increased to approximately 40,000 (Grinstein 1945:29). This amazingly fast growth in the immigration rates of Jews during the first part of the nineteenth century was due primarily to the influx of Ashkenazim from England, Holland, Poland, and Germany.

The Ashkenazic English Jews were a small group compared with the German and Polish Jews. They immigrated to New York early in the 1800's, speaking both Yiddish and English, and adapted easily to the life of the city. In terms of group status they ranked just below the native American neo-Portuguese group. The English Jews had their closest social contacts with the small group of Dutch Jews, and the two groups made up the body of the Hebrew Mutual Benefit Society.

A much larger group were the Polish Jews, who by 1860 comprised one-third of the New York Jews. Most of the earlier immigrants came from the province of Posen, originally a Polish province that was incorporated into Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century. They had their own mutual aid societies but joined with the English and Dutch Jews on communal projects. They apparently had not acculturated to the Prussian culture before immigration and had little in common with the German Jews of New York. But when hundred of thousands of low status Eastern European Jews poured into New York in the 1880's and later, these earlier Polish Jews were careful to distinguish themselves from the new Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia.

The largest of the four groups were the Jews from Germany,

who accounted for almost half of the New York Jews in 1860. The first of these immigrants arrived as the country was expanding and became peddlers in the cities and the countryside. They were generally poor and ignorant in comparison with the native Jews who were firmly established in the mercantile class. But immediately after the unsuccessful German Revolution of 1848 – a revolution with both nationalistic and liberal goals – there was a rush of German Jewish intellectuals and persons of wealth to New York. Weinryb (1958:13) writes that:

These people were steeped in German culture and thought. They served as intermediaries here between the Germans and the German-Jewish Group, “representing” the latter in German clubs and associations, voicing their sympathy with Germany and German culture, and celebrating the founding of the Reich at the beginning of the 1870’s.

At this time Americans had great respect for German learning and culture, and scholars and scientists travelled to the prestigious German universities for their training.

The educated German Jews brought with them a belief in Reform Judaism, which had its greatest impetus in Germany. Supporters of Reform Judaism as a movement within Judaism were trying to modernize Judaism by emphasizing its religious spirit instead of its behaviorally confining laws. The laws and customs of Orthodox Jewry demanded rigid behavioral conformity to ritual ordinances that went far beyond the Western concepts of morality and good citizenship. Reform Jewish leaders also looked upon the traditional Ashkenazic service as an incongruous anachronism in the modern world. As Glazer (1957:27) has noted:

“Reform” Judaism began [in Germany] as a movement of Jews of high social status who wished to dignify Jewish religious services and make them decorous. They did not like the idea that the traditional Jewish service was . . . a rather cacophonous Hebrew outpouring by the congregation, dressed in hats and prayer shawls led by a cantor . . . using a decidedly un-Western and un-Germanic mode of singing, or rather chanting. And then too there was nothing that might be understood as edification in this service, for there was no sermon; twice a year the [visiting] rabbi . . . would deliver a barely intelligible discussion of some Talmudic problem.

But even before the German revolution of 1848, an interest in