

detz, Sunday morning, Sunday School Reception; Jacob Rubinsky, Sunday afternoon, Junior Rally; and Mrs. Israel Bernstein, Sunday Evening, Mother and Daughter Banquet.

<sup>3</sup>In March 1949, Louis Bernstein, then recently appointed by Governor Horace Hildreth of Maine to the post of Recorder of the Municipal Court, was named honorary president of the Jewish Community Center. He is now Judge of the Municipal Court.

Barnett I. Shur has served as Corporation Counsel for the City of Portland since 1946. He is a past president of the Jewish Community Center, served for three years as president of the New England Section, National Jewish Welfare Board, and also as national vice-president of the Jewish Center Division of the National Jewish Welfare Board.

<sup>4</sup>Daily chairmen and events included Mrs. Philip Schilling, Saturday, Center Youth; Rabbi Morris Bekritsky, Sunday, Hear O Israel Radio Program; Dave Astor, Sunday and Monday, Bar Mitzvah Freilach; Harold Karl Halpert, Tuesday, Center Orchestra Concert; Harold J. Potter, Wednesday, Board of Directors Meeting; Leo Golodetz and Abraham Seigal, Thursday, Golden Age Program; Rabbi Ephraim Bennett, Friday, Temple Beth El Service; Saturday, Rabbi Morris Bekritsky, Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue Service; Mr. and Mrs. Irving Rothstein, Saturday, Oneg Shabbat; Miriam Kaatz, Saturday, Young Adult Musical; Harold P. Nelson and Barnett I. Shur, Sunday, Founder's Banquet.

<sup>5</sup>Succeeding presidents of the Center Women's Club were Mesdames Barnett I. Shur, Myer Sacknoff, Harold J. Potter, Julius Elowitch, Henry Pollard, Frank Laben, Arnold Goodman, Edward Rodman, Philip Schilling and Jack Clayman.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE RISE OF THE JEWISH FEDERATION

From its earliest years the Jewish community in Portland expanded in all directions without plan or order. Like Topsy, it "jest growed." Religious, social and cultural organizations continued to produce offspring which existed side by side with their parent bodies, sharing the same interests and often the same programs. This multiplicity was a source of great inconvenience because it resulted in innumerable separate campaigns for funds and enlistment of community support.

An early attempt to coordinate activities of divergent groups was made by the Vaad Hoir in 1929. The primary purpose of the Vaad, as has been noted, was to assure the healthy growth of the orthodox community through avoidance of duplication and to provide financial support for necessary religious functions. Thus a community rabbi was engaged and a single community slaughter house established.

During the earliest years of its operation, when income from the supervision and slaughter of kosher meat and fowl warranted, the Vaad extended its support to such institutions as the Portland Hebrew School, the United Hebrew Charities and the Jewish Home for Aged. Thus it not only provided necessary funds to these worthy institutions but also reduced the demands upon the time, energy and monetary resources of the community.

With the onset of the economic depression in the early thirties, these agencies found themselves in dire distress. Income from all sources diminished and the Vaad could no longer be depended upon to provide substantial support. Some members of the community, led by Abraham S. Levey and motivated by a concern for maintaining community services at a reasonable level, sought a new solution. As they surveyed the chaos and confusion of organizational competition all around them, they concluded that the only answer was a united fund raising campaign which could mobilize the resources of an entire community in behalf of worthwhile community services.

Their initial efforts were directed toward establishment of a central fund raising agency to serve the Jewish Home for Aged,

the Portland Hebrew School, the United Hebrew Charities and the old Community Center on Wilmot Street. To achieve this goal it was necessary to engage in extended negotiations with the affected organizations and to inform all members of the community concerning the need for a more efficient, unified fund raising apparatus.

A valuable instrument of public enlightenment was the *Portland Jewish Community Guide*, an independent monthly newspaper which appeared regularly between 1934 and 1937. In an editorial appearing in the issue of April 1935, the beginnings of community federation were outlined as follows:

The idea of a federation for our local charitable, educational and character building organizations is still in its formative stage. No definite plans have been formulated. No permanent organization has been formed. The first step, however, has been taken; and that was to sound out those institutions which would naturally form a constituent of the federation. These are: the Jewish Home for the Aged, the United Hebrew Charities, the Talmud Torah and the Community Center. The Board of Directors of each of them has voted to join and participate in such a projected undertaking and has selected delegates to meet with others at the opportune time when ways and means will be adopted.<sup>1</sup>

The editorial stressed the importance of arousing favorable public opinion, of awakening enthusiasm among all the Jewish organizations and of stimulating interest among unaffiliated men and women "in whom courses the rich milk of human kindness". It concluded with a statement that "the temporary organization headed by Abraham S. Levey is ready to present the idea to any organization willing to listen. In the meantime, too, the *Guide* will continue vigorously to encourage and foster the idea of a Jewish Community Chest."

In the same issue, Rabbi Abraham Miller expressed his approval of the idea as "most essential." He invoked religious sanction and precedent by noting that "the greatest acclamation that the youthful King Jehoshaphat of Judah had received from the prophets and the people, and of whom Jewish History speaks with such an elevated tone, is to a great measure due to the fact that he urgently recommended the installation of one national chest near the Temple into which all philanthropic donations of the people might be collected—a matter which had in past years caused considerable

discontent and disorder."

Rabbi Miller concluded his appeal for support of the federation plan as follows:

The high aim of justice is to establish a perfect balance, adjusting not alone the affairs of local philanthropic institutions, but also between groups and nations; a perfect relationship between all parts, so as to glorify the whole. From this principle all the higher aspirations of the nations, as Patriotism, Democracy and others should derive their sanction. This inspiring idea of Unity I claim and advocate not for the benefit of raising the physical and moral status of the Jewish Community of Portland alone, but for all humanity—all nations of the world, so as to develop a genius and a deathless passion for Seeing Life Whole.

Abraham S. Levey added his voice to the growing movement for federation in the same issue of the paper by insisting that

No enterprise can succeed unless it is basically stable. A Community Chest for the Jewish Organizations and Institutions is, in my opinion, a necessity. For many years members of various units have, through one form or another, tried to secure funds necessary for maintenance of institutions which they represented. The people to whom they appealed took only a casual interest in these drives because they were not connected with the certain organizations in need of money. In many cases people were slightly offended because of the constant drain imposed upon them by the many drives. The Jewish Community Chest not only solves these problems, but will provide a splendid outlet for the enthused workers of the Portland Jewry for the support of the many institutions.

Joining in the parade of affirmative expression, Harry Potter, president of the Jewish Home for Aged, concluded his remarks as follows:

Rather than go after a few new workers, it is our belief that we should enlist the entire Jewish community in service to its institutions and associations. If all of our people are working together for all our community needs, there will be no misunderstandings, no competition, no "hard feeling," and no distress. There can only be the friendly,

cooperative and pleasant relationship which comes from a mutual interest and which rightfully belongs to every Jewish organization in the city.

Public opinion having been aroused and a consensus among the organizations of the community in favor of a united campaign having been reached, a meeting of organizational delegates was held and formal approval given. A set of by-laws for the new organization was drawn up. Yet with victory in its grasp, the plan collapsed because some of the institutions withdrew their support at the last moment. Not until six years later when the Jewish Federation of Portland was formed was unity achieved in fund raising for local services.

A precursor to the Jewish Federation was the Portland United Jewish Appeal formed in 1936. The organization antedated its national namesake by three years. Prior to 1936 very small sums were raised in Portland in behalf of the United Palestine Appeal and Joint Distribution Committee which then conducted separate campaigns. However, the rising tide of persecution of Jews in Germany and in other countries following Hitler's assumption of power in 1933, imposed new and grave responsibilities upon the American Jewish community. Portland Jewry rose to the challenge. It merged the efforts of the United Palestine Appeal, Joint Distribution Committee and the newly formed National Refugee Service into a single drive known as the United Jewish Appeal. A cash campaign for \$4500 was undertaken in 1936. Five thousand dollars was raised.

The United Jewish Appeal continued in existence until 1942, under the leadership of Israel Bernstein, aided by his wife, Rebecca Thurman Bernstein. With each succeeding year increasing sums of money were raised. The 1937 cash drive exceeded its goal of \$7500 by one thousand dollars. In 1938 the method of solicitation was changed to permit pledges and returns soared to \$15,000. By 1942, the year in which the last independent campaign of the United Jewish Appeal was held, \$30,000 was raised.

As the United Jewish Appeal demonstrated its effectiveness as a fund raising instrument, its base was broadened to include not only the United Palestine Appeal, Joint Distribution Committee and the National Refugee Service but other national and overseas agencies.<sup>2</sup>

Portland Jewry had indeed manifested growing maturity in meeting its worldwide responsibilities and was on the threshold of important developments which would change the character

of Jewish community life.

The achievements of the Portland United Jewish Appeal Committee, as summed up by Israel Bernstein in his final report as chairman, were far-reaching:

The Portland United Jewish Appeal Committee now completing its sixth year of service, has been more than a fund raising organization, though that effort in itself has been a great accomplishment. Of even deeper significance is the fact that this Committee has been a unifying and broadening force in the life of this Jewish Community. Our vision has been extended far beyond the boundaries of our locale; we have become vital participants in the world-wide movement to minister aid and relief to our stricken brethren wherever they may be; and to rebuild and maintain the logical and natural homeland in Palestine. We have built in this community an *esprit de corps* that insures success for every worth-while movement in our midst. Out of this Portland United Jewish Appeal Committee has come the Jewish Federation of which we shall hear more and more in the years to come.

By 1940 several pressure currents came to a head in Portland. On the one hand, the destruction of Jewish communities abroad compelled the National United Jewish Appeal to campaign for ever-increasing contributions from Jews throughout the country. On the other hand, the many separate appeals for funds by local Jewish groups conflicted with each other and diverted funds and energies from the priority needs of overseas Jewry. In addition, the local Chamber of Commerce was voicing its alarm over the oppressive burden on the community of the many separate Jewish fund raising campaigns. This was also the period when the greatest measure of efficiency in fund raising and coordination of community enterprises in support of the maximum war effort was being planned by the community-at-large, culminating in the formation of the United Community and War Chest in 1942. Thus the organization of a broader federation in Jewish community life became the order of the day.

For several years delegates from the Jewish Community Center had represented Portland at meetings of the New England Region of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. In this manner they were brought into contact with representatives of communities which had already established a unified approach to their collective responsibilities. In April 1940, some of the Jewish

women's clubs considered organization of a federation of women's clubs to avoid duplication of effort, overlapping of programs and multiple drives for funds.

On November 17, 1941, representatives of forty organizations convened at the call of Louis Bernstein, president of the Center. The delegates voted overwhelmingly to establish a Jewish federation and appointed a provisional planning committee, headed by Abraham S. Levey, to draw up a constitution and by-laws.<sup>3</sup>

The January 2, 1942 issue of the *Center Bulletin* published a stirring appeal for support of the federation plan under the banner headline, "Why Portland Jewry Needs a United Organization." After detailing merits of the plan, the article continued:

It is possible, with a little study, for us to estimate how much money is raised in Portland for local welfare needs, as well as for those non-local needs not now included in the UJA campaign. Whatever the total may be, a community-wide, united effort with every organization and individual pulling together for a common purpose, should result in a more dignified and more efficient job, and capacity for greater service. Growing out of the common effort in fund raising, we shall find ourselves thinking of the community as a whole, instead of an assortment of vested interests and organization rivalries. We can plan together in terms of the welfare of the entire Jewish community, improving its existing program, providing for its unmet needs, and in general raising the entire level of Jewish life in Portland. Having established ourselves as a unified, harmonious, minority group, we shall be in a position to estimate our responsibility to the general community and fully meet it, on a level which will bring us the respect and approval of our non-Jewish fellow citizens.

Meanwhile Portland Jewry waited in anticipation for the response from organizations which were voting on participation in the proposed federation. On January 19, 1942, representatives of sixteen organizations voted in favor of the proposed Jewish Federation.<sup>4</sup> Three voted against and ten reported that no action had yet been taken by their governing bodies.

On March 24, 1942, the first meeting of the Jewish Federation was held in the Center.<sup>5</sup> Thirty directors were elected to guide the new organization.<sup>6</sup> Abraham S. Levey, chairman of the provisional planning committee, hailed the achievement of a united community in the following words:

In this Federation we have found the solution to the problems which confront us all, and the demands of the hour have brought us all closer together in understanding our obligations and duties as Americans and Jews. It is not enough to develop unity through united planning, but we must continue and enlarge our efforts. We are engaged in a war, fought to preserve those values which are equally American and Jewish. Only by strengthening the internal fabric of our own community can we render the great good that is within us to contribute to the attainment of victory and peace.

Federation directors set to work at once in laying the foundation and defining the scope of the new organization. Article III of the by-laws listed these objectives:

To establish and maintain a central Jewish fund raising organization.

To coordinate the Jewish philanthropic, benevolent, educational and communal activities of Portland.

To foster, develop, and encourage such agencies as will best promote the welfare of this community.

To cooperate with all non-Jewish groups engaged in a similar effort to the end that the happiness, well-being and cultural life of the entire community may be enriched.

To create and continue permanently a fund to be collected co-operatively through voluntary subscriptions, as well as by gifts, bequests, and other legal means, which fund shall be periodically disbursed by the organization, pursuant to its by-laws, for the maintenance of separate member organizations.

Abraham S. Levey was elected first president of the Jewish Federation on April 13, 1942. His co-officers were Morris Cox, first vice-president; Mrs. Israel Bernstein, second vice-president; William Goodman, treasurer; and Norman I. Godfrey, executive secretary.

On July 15, 1942 the Federation voted to participate in the United Community and War Chest campaign to be held in the fall.<sup>7</sup> It also voted to affiliate with the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, the national Jewish agency in the field of planning and coordination of welfare services.

The first great test for the new Federation was its fund raising campaign in 1943. Would the hopes and expectations of its

founders be realized? Could the Federation at one and the same time eliminate multiple drives, yet enable the Jewish community to meet its many responsibilities?

The immediate task was to establish an over-all community budget in cooperation with all the participating organizations, then to set a campaign goal and finally to raise the money.

Sidney W. Wernick, as chairman of the Budget Committee, directed the initial operation. After a difficult period of negotiating with all groups, adjusting requirements to realities and encouraging the beneficiary groups to cooperate through compromise, the Budget Committee set a goal of \$47,500. Compared with its later campaigns, this drive appeared somewhat modest. But in its time it was a most daring venture.

In an impassioned appeal to the Jewish community for support of the Federation's budgetary requirements, Mr. Wernick stated that ". . . the task of establishing one drive to replace many and of creating a balance and a plan in our charitable giving to replace chaotic, undirected and haphazard contributing cannot be minimized. We can only repeat that the experiment is great. But that it is lofty and noble we cannot doubt. Indeed, it is the inspiration of the magnitude of the work to be done that will sustain our hopes and our optimism."<sup>8</sup>

Under Israel Bernstein's leadership, the result of the Federation's first campaign more than justified its validity. Portland Jewry exceeded its quota and raised \$55,438. The Federation was here to stay.

In August 1943, the Jewish Federation and President Abraham S. Levey were honored by Mr. Levey's appointment to the Executive Committee of the United Community and War Chest of Greater Portland. And in September, 1943 Mr. Levey was reelected president of the Jewish Federation with Mrs. Israel Bernstein, first vice-president; Barnett I. Shur, second vice-president; William Goodman, treasurer; Jacob Sapiro, chairman of the Finance Committee; and Norman I. Godfrey, executive secretary.

A significant project of the Federation during the early period should be given brief notice here, before considering the organization's further growth. That project was the War Records Survey.

In 1943 the Bureau of War Records of the National Jewish Welfare Board urged all Jewish communities to cooperate with it by inaugurating studies of their Jewish population. The immediate aim was to accumulate accurate statistics of Jewish participation in the armed forces, but there was a secondary purpose of equal importance. This was the establishment of an accurate register

of Jewish families to serve as a basis for community planning. Under the direction of the Jewish Federation of Portland, women volunteers called "Survettes" did the canvassing. The result, as reported in November, 1943, revealed that Portland had eight hundred and thirty-eight Jewish families.

#### REFERENCES IN CHAPTER XII

<sup>1</sup>Portland Jewish Community Guide, Vol. 2, No. 4, April 1935. Israel Bernstein was editor. Associate editors were Myer Citrin, Ethel Feldman, Alice E. Modes, Edward C. Palmer, and Ruth S. Tabachnick. Saul G. Chason and Abraham S. Levey served on the business staff. Publication ceased in 1937, and only two issues of the Guide are now extant.

<sup>2</sup>The 1942 campaign listed the following additional beneficiaries; American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, Council of Jewish Women, Ezras Torah, Hebrew University, Hias, Histadruth, Jewish Welfare Board, Junior Hadassah, Ort, Pioneer Women and Senior Hadassah.

<sup>3</sup>Other members of the committee included Mrs. Samuel Seiger, Harry Potter, Morris Cox, Morris Sacknoff, Charles Cohen, Jules Greenstein, Mrs. Barnett I. Shur, Mrs. Sidney W. Wernick, Harold Bromfield, David Ebenstein, George I. Lewis, Max W. Simonds, Irving Rothstein, Barnett I. Shur and Israel Bernstein.

<sup>4</sup>They were the United Jewish Appeal, Junior Hadassah, Council of Jewish Women, Portland Hebrew School, United Hebrew Charities, Business Girls, Jewish War Veterans, Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary B'nai B'rith, B'nai B'rith Auxiliary, Y.M.H.A., Portland Zionist District, Degel Zion Camp, Vaad Hoir, Pioneer Women, Poale Zion, Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue and Shaarey Tphiloh Sisterhood.

<sup>5</sup>The following additional organizations were represented at the meeting; Anshe Sfard Sisterhood, Jewish Community Center and Center Women's Club.

<sup>6</sup>They were Philip Abrahamson, Edward J. Berman, Jacob H. Berman, Joseph Brenner, Benjamin Bernstein, Israel Bernstein, Mrs. Israel Bernstein, Louis Bernstein, Harold Bromfield, Dr. David Brownstone, Charles Cox, Morris Cox, Aaron Davidson, Sidney A. Davidson, Molly Finkelman, Hyman Jacobson, Joseph W. Larkin, Abraham S. Levey, Mrs. Myer Levitan, George I. Lewis, Hyman Mersky, Oscar Modes, Samuel Nelson, Mrs. Ada Palmer, Jacob Potter, Jacob E. Rubinsky, Jesse Rosenberg, Irving Rothstein, Morris Sacknoff, Jacob Sapiro, Mrs. Samuel Seiger, Barnett I. Shur, Mrs. Barnett I. Shur, Joseph Shur, Max W. Simonds, Anna Swonkin, Sidney W. Wernick, Nathan Weinman, Joe Wigon, Mrs. Carl Zolov.

<sup>7</sup>The Jewish agencies represented in the War Chest drive by the Jewish Federation were the Jewish Community Center, United Hebrew Charities and Council of Jewish Women Social Welfare Committee.

<sup>8</sup>Center Bulletin, Vol. 5, No. 29, March 26, 1943.