

ABSTRACT

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OF PORTSMOUTH, VA, 1910-1930

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In 1917, Jews came in large numbers to Portsmouth, VA, for the economic opportunity offered by a booming World War I economy and the new market the war workers offered. Between 1907 and 1918 alone, the Jewish population grew by an astonishing 1,042%. The community declined rapidly, however, immediately after the war. The primary reason for the decline of the community was economic. Jews came to Portsmouth, not as laborers, but as retailers and business owners. They therefore relied upon a large, stable, local market which dissipated in the Interwar period. Studying Portsmouth reveals the foundational dynamics between Jewish communities and the local economy. In the period, American Jews relied on specific economic niches such as retail to prosper. When an economy was unfavorable for such businesses, Jewish communities did not thrive.

THE BOOM AND THE BUST: THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF PORTSMOUTH,
VA,
1910-1930

By

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Introduction: The Riddle of Portsmouth and its Place in Jewish America

When brothers Isaac and Asral Goodman owned and operated their grocery store on High Street in Portsmouth, Virginia, in the summer of 1910, the city was peaceful and promising. Prospering businesses surrounded Goodman Brothers Groceries on all sides. Hanger Drug Store was located across the street while the People's Bank and Hughes Restaurant flanked the Goodman's grocery store on either side. The brothers' closest competitor, Friedlin's Groceries, was an impressive enterprise less than a block down, but the Goodmans were successful despite the challenge. Levy and Jacobs, a growing clothing store owned by Nathan Levy and Abraham Jacobs, who financed the venture from Jacobs' residence in Richmond, was located further down High Street. So too was the glittering Orpheum theatre, one of the city's newest and most popular entertainment venues. A short distance from the Orpheum, Isaac Goodman's residence on Washington Street at the sixth block of High Street marked where the Black business district began. There, he lived with his parents, his brother, and a boarder.¹

In 1910, the little city of Portsmouth was poised to thrive economically, gradually becoming a competitor to the growing city of Norfolk across the Elizabeth River, or even with Richmond, the capital of Virginia. Perhaps the Goodman brothers conceived of a city with a growing Jewish community similar to Norfolk's. After all, *Gomley Chesed*, the city's only synagogue, had recently moved into a new building, and Jewish

¹ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910* (Norfolk, VA: Hill Directory Company, Inc., 1910), 829-1114; Sanborn Map Company, *Portsmouth Insurance Maps: Norfolk County, Virginia* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1903).

immigrants trickled into the city on a regular basis. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that the Goodman brothers or other members of Portsmouth's Jewish community in 1910 could have envisioned the vast and rapid expansion of their community that occurred in less than a decade. It was a change that brought wealth and stability to established business owners on High Street, but rearranged racial lines, pushing Blacks out of the neighborhood and their Black businesses away from the most visible parts of the city.

Portsmouth's boom during World War I brought with it new residents, businesses, and unprecedented success for the little city near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.² The federal government constructed the largest naval base in America in Norfolk in 1917 when the United States entered World War I. Production at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, located in Portsmouth despite its name, increased exponentially.³ Portsmouth's Jewish community wholeheartedly welcomed the resulting war time economy along with its influx of war workers, immigrants, soldiers, and sailors.⁴ The cessation of hostilities in Europe in late 1918, however, led to the decline of that economy. Moreover, the changes

² This study focuses on Portsmouth rather than the whole of Hampton Roads or other small cities around it. This is mostly because of the unusual fluctuation in the Jewish population of Portsmouth during the period. Furthermore, local historians have studied Norfolk and its Jewish population, but scholars have yet to explore the significance of Portsmouth's Jewish population.

³ The Yard's name was originally the Gosport Naval Yard. The federal government renamed it the Norfolk Navy Yard in 1862 in order to designate its general location in Hampton Roads while avoiding the name 'Portsmouth Navy Yard' since there was already a navy yard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with the same name. Alf J. Mapp and Ramona H. Mapp, *Portsmouth: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, VA: Donning, 1989), 92.

⁴ Individuals who were war workers, immigrants, and members of the military could be interchangeable or identify as all three categories. In much of this work, I refer to 'war workers' as those who migrated to the area specifically for labor in industry supporting the war effort. It is worthwhile to note that most war workers were not Jewish. Immigrants, including Jews, came to the area for war work as well as other opportunities such as trade, retail, and real estate in response to the large number of war workers requiring goods and services. When I refer to military members, I am referring to individuals enlisted with a branch of the United States military. In Hampton Roads, this largely consisted of naval forces. Military members might have participated in war time production and might have been immigrants as well.

which World War I brought altered the composition of Portsmouth's society and culture as the military became the business on which Hampton Roads depended. After the war, the Jewish community declined significantly and never completely recovered. Nearly one hundred years after the Goodman brothers operated their grocery store on High Street, the last Jewish business in Portsmouth would cease operations, the only remaining synagogue in the city would close, and the Jewish chapter of Portsmouth's history would be all but written.⁵

In 1917, Jews came in large numbers to Portsmouth for the economic opportunity offered by a booming World War I economy. The community dissipated rapidly, however, immediately after the war. The primary reason for the decline of the community was economic. Members of the military were not major customers for most Jewish businesses. During the war, Jews relied on war workers and the Black population of Portsmouth to sustain their businesses. When a substantial number of war workers left the area and the need for shipbuilding declined, Jewish business owners came to rely on the patronage of Portsmouth's Black population, which also suffered financially following the local economy's post-war depression. This population could not sustain the economic security of Jewish business owners. As a result, many Jews migrated elsewhere. The rate at which large numbers of Jews left in such a short period of time reveals the fluidity of

⁵ Sarah Kleiner, "Crockin's Furniture closing after 126 years of business in Portsmouth," *Virginian-Pilot*, November 7, 2015, http://pilotonline.com/business/consumer/crockin-s-furniture-closing-after-years-of-business-in-portsmouth/article_18da84ca-254d-5434-befb-2e5e66bb2979.html; Elizabeth Blachman, "Songs of Past and Present: A Portsmouth Landmark of Jewish History Brings New Life to Old Spaces," June 8, 2015, *VeerMag.com*, <http://veermag.com/2015/06/songs-of-past-and-present-a-portsmouth-landmark-of-jewish-history-brings-new-life-to-old-spaces/>; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Portsmouth, Virginia" <http://www.isjl.org/virginia-portsmouth-encyclopedia.html>; "Ohef Sholom Temple and Temple Sinai join together," *JewishVA.org*, May 25, 2012, <http://www.jewishnewsva.org/ohef-sholom-temple-and-temple-sinai-join-together/>.

the Jewish communal structure in Portsmouth, which had been shaped by economic factors.

The case of the Jewish community in Portsmouth helps us understand of American Jewish and urban ethnic communities because it offers an alternative socio-economic narrative for communal formation and migration patterns. Studying Portsmouth reveals the foundational dynamics between Jewish communities and the local economy. American Jews relied on specific economic niches such as retail to prosper.⁶ When an economy was unfavorable for such businesses, Jewish communities did not thrive.

Moreover, examining the Portsmouth Jewish community's relations with the Black community help us to understand the economic relationship between the two communities, particularly in the South. Immigrant Jews in Southern cities frequently relied on Black patronage for business growth and eventual upward mobility. Blacks benefited from Jewish business as well since Jews provided goods and services to them when other White businesses would not.⁷ Therefore, the economic relationship between the Jewish and Black communities was symbiotic.

Finally, the case of Portsmouth demonstrates that Jewish migration patterns depended on economic opportunity. Since the South struggled to industrialize between the Civil War and World War II, the regional economy was not competitive with the rest of the country. As a result, it was a less appealing area for Jewish as well as non-Jewish

⁶ Rebecca Kobrin, *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Hasia R. Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁷ Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 180-185.

immigrants to settle.⁸ Southern cities transitioning from agriculture and trade to industrialization, such as Portsmouth, provided an inhospitable atmosphere for substantial Jewish communal growth and stability because their economies were quickly changing and often unreliable. Portsmouth's economy was especially unusual because it relied on military production. The decline of Portsmouth's Jewish community demonstrated the insecurity of Jewish communities in unreliable local Southern economies.

Hampton Roads and World War I

It is hard to imagine what Portsmouth, Virginia looked like when it was a bustling hub of industry and trade. Today, a visit to the "Olde Town" portion of the city leaves one with a sense of melancholy rather than inspiration. With a current population of approximately 96,205, Portsmouth's population has steadily declined since 1970. Crime rates continue to go up and swell well above the state and national averages.⁹ The city government and developers have demolished whole areas of Portsmouth and allowed others to fall into complete disrepair. Retailers have vacated downtown where former stores have stood empty for years with nothing but the chipped paint of old advertisements on abandoned buildings. Poverty is prevalent. The economy is declining. Even the city government is corrupt and a persistent joke locally.¹⁰

⁸ Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Southern Urban Development, 1860-1900," in *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South*, Blaine Brownell and David R. Goldfield, ed. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977), 116-117.

⁹ "Crime Rates for Portsmouth, VA," Neighborhood Scout, last modified 2016, accessed August 30, 2016, <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/va/portsmouth/crime/>.

¹⁰ Margaret Kavanagh, "Portsmouth Vice Mayor Calls Drama in City Absurd and Embarrassing," *WTKR 3*, January 15, 2016, Accessed March 3, 2016, <http://wtkr.com/2016/01/15/portsmouth-vice-mayor-calls-drama-in-city-absurd-and-embarrassing/>.

Despite contemporary poverty, Portsmouth once occupied a desirable position within the larger region, known as Hampton Roads or Tidewater (see Map 1). The United States Navigation Data Center defines the Hampton Roads area as located at the southwest corner of Chesapeake Bay and west of the Virginia Capes, a natural roadstead of 25 square miles, formed by the confluence of the James, Nansemond, and Elizabeth Rivers. The port is approximately 187 nautical miles south of Baltimore, Maryland and 30 nautical miles west of the Virginia Capes, the entrance from the Atlantic Ocean to the Chesapeake Bay. The main part of the city of Norfolk is on the east side of the Elizabeth River, north of its Eastern Branch, with Berkley, a subdivision, to the southward between the Eastern and Southern Branches. South of Berkley is the city of Chesapeake. Portsmouth is opposite Norfolk, and its waterfront extends along the west side of the Elizabeth River and its Southern Branch, and both sides of the Western Branch.¹¹

Due south of Hampton Road's center, the Navy Yard in Portsmouth became a key economic force in the area for some time as a federal institution of considerable value (see Map 2).¹² By 1917, Portsmouth was the terminus for no less than eight railroad lines,

¹¹ Continued quote: "The Ports of Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Chesapeake, Virginia are located in the south eastern part of the state, at the southern end of Chesapeake Bay. The harbor area comprises a portion of the southern and eastern shores of Hampton Roads; both sides of the Elizabeth River and its Eastern, Southern, and Western Branches; and the lower limits of Scott Creek. The harbor extends 18.3 miles from the 40-foot contour in Hampton Roads to a point 2,500 feet above the upper Norfolk Southern Railway Co. Bridge over the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River." from Navigation Data Center (U.S.), and Institute for Water Resources (U.S.), *Ports of Hampton Roads and Ports on the James and York Rivers, VA : Norfolk, Newport News, Portsmouth, Richmond, Chesapeake, Yorktown, Hampton, West Point*, Port series, no. 11; NDC, 05-P-4 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2005), 1.

¹² Even during the Civil War, both the Union and Confederacy deemed the Yard of such strategic importance that they burned it on two separate occasions. Norfolk also felt the ramifications both in financial terms and morale when the Union and Confederacy burnt the Yard. Thomas C. Parramore, Peter

including the Southern Railway, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, and the Seaboard Air Line Railway.¹³ Because of its economic significance and advantageous position in Hampton Roads, the main city of Norfolk considered annexing Portsmouth multiple times in the early twentieth century, but those attempts were never successful.¹⁴

Norfolk was the most prominent city in the area, and it played a direct role in Portsmouth's economic development. Portsmouth never matched the size or revenue of Norfolk, but complimented it in the years before and immediately after World War I. Norfolk and Portsmouth were bound together, mutually benefiting from the others' assets. From the American Revolution to the present, Norfolk relied upon Portsmouth's Shipyard for employment and revenue.¹⁵ Like Portsmouth, Norfolk also experienced dramatic growth during the war that changed the economy of the city. As Norfolk historians Thomas C. Parramore, Peter C. Stewart, and Tommy L. Bogger noted, "Norfolk relished the idea of the trade to be generated by so much activity, but did not yet imagine how thoroughly it would be transformed... The human tidal wave implied vast demands on Norfolk to help house, feed, entertain, and otherwise accommodate them, and more immigration to supply multitudes of human services."¹⁶ Because of its vital importance to the Hampton Roads region and its close relationship to Portsmouth, this thesis will deal with Norfolk from time to time, although it is not the focus of the work.

C. Stewart, and Tommy Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 193-223.

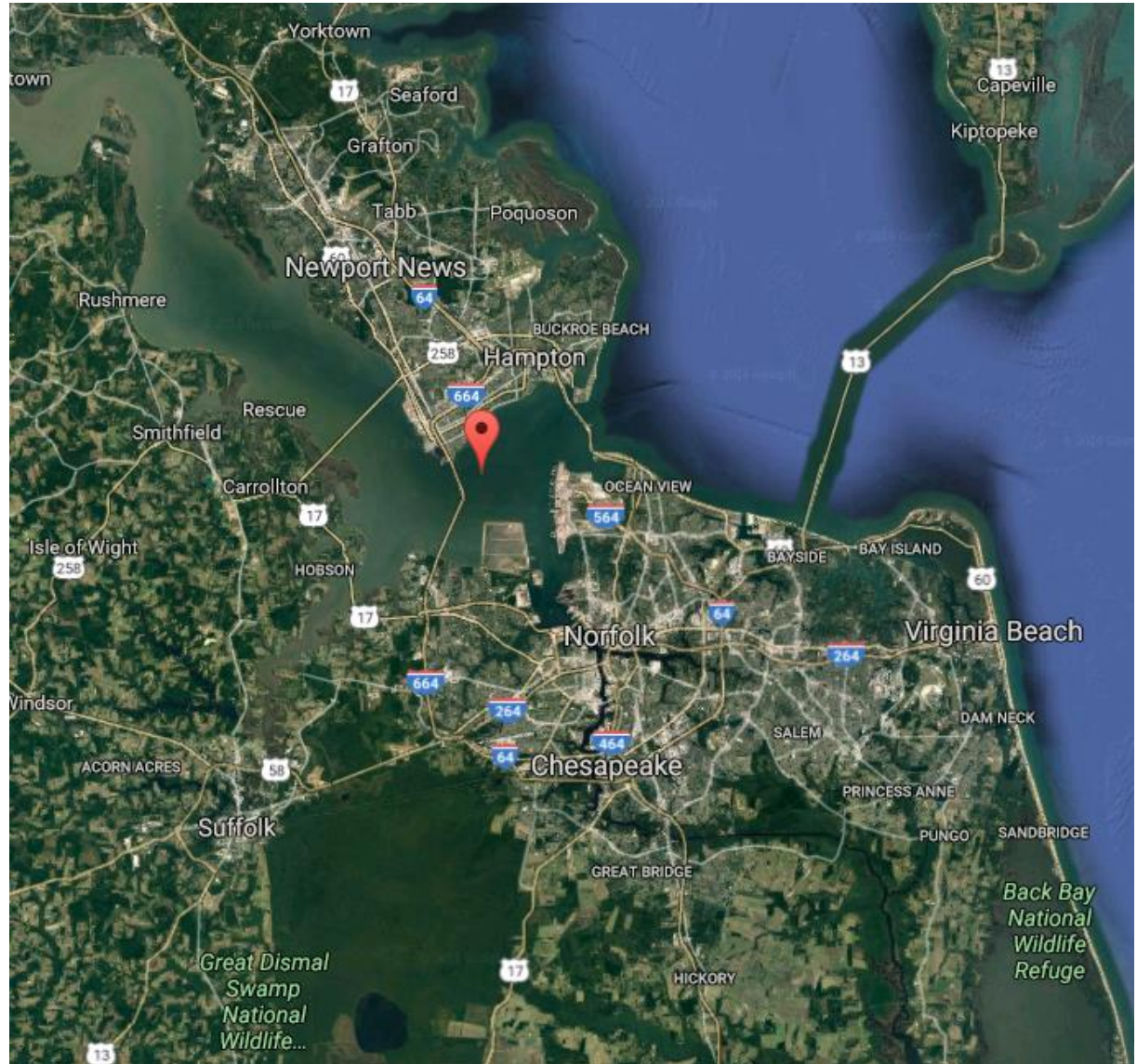
¹³ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1917* (Norfolk, VA: Hill Directory Company, Inc., 1917), 918-920.

¹⁴ Benjamin Banks, "Let's Get Together," *Ledger-Dispatch*, 1914, Old Dominion University Archives, Norfolk, VA; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 271-346.

¹⁵ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 271-346.

¹⁶ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 289, 295.

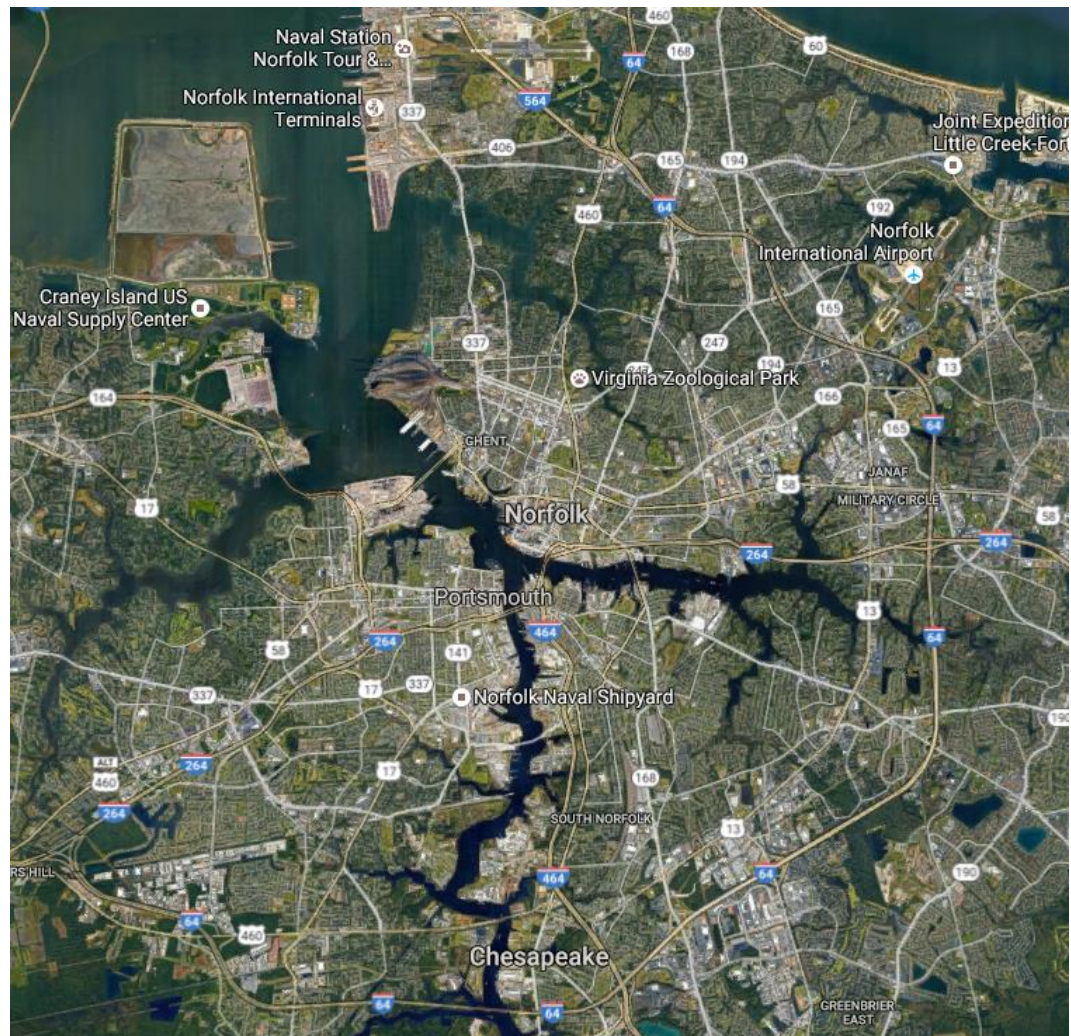
Map 1. Hampton Roads, Virginia 2016



Source: Imagery © 2016 Google, Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO, Map Data © 2016 Google¹⁷

¹⁷ Red pin indicates geographical heart of Hampton Roads. Used in accordance with Google's permissions on the use of maps in print. "Using Google Maps, Google Earth and Street View: Uses in Print," Google, last modified December 17, 2015, accessed September 18, 2016, <https://www.google.com/intl/ALL/permissions/geoguidelines.html#general-guidelines>.

Map 2: Portsmouth-Norfolk-Chesapeake, Virginia 2016



Source: Imagery © 2016 Google, Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO, Map Data © 2016 Google¹⁸

Construction on the Norfolk Naval Station (see location in top left of Map 2) began in response to the United States' imminent entrance into World War I in 1917, and attracted substantial revenue both from the public and private sectors. The Norfolk Naval

¹⁸ Used in accordance with Google's permissions on the use of maps in print. "Using Google Maps, Google Earth and Street View: Uses in Print," Google, last modified December 17, 2015, accessed September 18, 2016, <https://www.google.com/intl/ALL/permissions/geoguidelines.html#general-guidelines>.

Station would not merely be a location for refueling or supplies, but the headquarters for the Fifth Naval District. According to Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, the development of the base was quick and substantial: “A training center was ready by mid-October, followed by a supply depot, naval aviation lagoon for seaplanes, airfield for planes and dirigibles, thirty-one-vessel (sic) submarine base, storage for medical supplies, oil, mines, nets, torpedoes, and a fleet ground.”¹⁹

The United States invested heavily in naval construction at the Shipyard, ostensibly building the American Naval fleet from Portsmouth’s busy federal Yard and the privately-owned Newport News Shipbuilding yard.²⁰ The subsequent increase in production at the Naval Yard attracted large numbers of men and women looking for employment and opportunity. American born migrants and immigrants, including Jews, poured into the area faster than the cities could construct housing (see Table 1). The total civilian population in Portsmouth increased from 30,000 in 1910 to 57,000 in 1918, while Norfolk’s population rose from 67,000 in 1910 to 130,000 in 1917.²¹ Unlike other migrants, Jews did not come to Portsmouth for industrial labor. The large number of workers at the Yard created opportunities for small business owners since the workers needed daily supplies and services. Likewise, many Jews migrated to the city to capitalize off the boom in small business created by the war workers in Portsmouth.

¹⁹ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 288.

²⁰ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 286-300; William E. Blewett, Jr., “A History of the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company,” *Navy Engineers Journal* 73.2 (May 1961): 277–286.

²¹ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory*, 1910, 826; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory*, 1920-1921, (Norfolk, VA: Hill Directory Company, Inc., 1921), 1101-1102; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 289, 295.

Table 1: Population of Hampton Roads Cities, 1910-1930

City	1910	1920	1930
Chesapeake	11,020	10,040	Not Available
Hampton	5,305	6,138	6,382
Newport News	20,205	35,596	34,417
Norfolk	67,453	115,777	129,710
Portsmouth	33,190	54,387	45,704
Suffolk	7,800	9,123	10,271
Virginia Beach	320	846	Not Available

Sources: Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Population by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions: 1910, 1900, 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 538-545; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: State Compendium: Virginia* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1925); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Abstract* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 21-75.

The Jewish Population of Portsmouth, 1910-1920

Jews arrived in Portsmouth to pursue economic opportunity brought by war time production and markets. The community rapidly declined for many reasons, however, including the transient nature of the population and an evolving economic structure centered around the military. Jews left Portsmouth primarily in response to the decline of the war economy following World War I. When war workers, a substantial proportion of their customer base, left the city, Jewish business suffered. As Jewish business came to rely on the economically depressed Black community for patronage, Jews quickly left the city in search of more stable, lucrative opportunities. While a number of Jews tried to create a Jewish religious, cultural, economic, and social life in Portsmouth, they failed to create a viable, long term Jewish community specifically because the market which had sustained population growth declined quickly.

The arrival and departure of Jews in Portsmouth reveal a far more complex story which differs from the experiences of many Jews in the South. Illuminating this

exception better informs our understanding of communal structures and highlights the possibility for other patterns not handled in the existing historiography. Large and successful Southern Jewish communities existed in many historic cities, such as the ones in Charleston, South Carolina, Richmond, Virginia, and Savannah, Georgia.²² The cities in which most Southern Jews lived were early trading and mercantile centers. Indeed, Jews originally settled in Southern trade centers because of the mercantile economy in which they had long been successful. These old Southern Jewish communities that relied on trade struggled economically during and after the Civil War. The depressed economy caused less Jews to migrate to old Southern cities. Yet, the existing Jewish communities in these old Southern cities did not disappear despite the lagging economy (see Table 2).²³

²² In this study, I have designated Richmond as a Southern city rather than a Mid-Atlantic one despite its geographic location. The reason for this is that throughout American history and into the present, Richmond self-identifies as a Southern city, being situated below the Potomac River. Indeed, its time as the capital of the Confederacy during the American Civil War solidified its Southern identification. Approximately 1,500 Jews resided in Charleston in 1907. However, Charleston witnessed a small decrease in Jewish population between 1912 and 1918, the same time when Portsmouth and its Jewish community was rapidly expanding. Charleston was home to a quasi-organized Jewish population as early as 1700 and one of the largest Jewish communities in the nation by 1820. Its culture was intertwined with that of the non-Jewish citizens rather than with the larger American Jewish community. For example, during the Civil War and Reconstruction, most Jewish Charlestonians identified as White Confederates and opposed abolition and civil rights along with their non-Jewish counterparts. “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Charleston, South Carolina,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, last modified 2014, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.isjl.org/south-carolina-charleston-encyclopedia.html>; Charles Reznikoff and Uriah Zevi Engelman, *The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1950), 3-61.

²³ Charleston’s population did not dramatically decrease over the twentieth century as Portsmouth’s did, but it also did not grow substantially. Nevertheless, it maintained some vestige of its historical Jewish community, and Southern Jewish historians tout it as one of the most important Southern centers in light of its historical importance; “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Charleston, South Carolina,” <http://www.isjl.org/south-carolina-charleston-encyclopedia.html>; Reznikoff and Engelman. *The Jews of Charleston*. Similarly, Richmond boasts the oldest Jewish community in Virginia, although it is younger in comparison to other Southern cities. Following the Civil War, the city and Jewish community briefly experienced decline. However, Richmond grew once more between 1880 and 1924 during Jewish second wave immigration, acquiring substantial Eastern European Jews. Despite internal

In industrializing cities, however, Jews found new economic opportunities.

Atlanta, the most prominent industrialized Southern city, attracted large numbers of Jews who marketed to industrial workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Atlanta's booming economy provided Jews with upward economic mobility. Thus, many Jews became managers or owners of manufacturing businesses.²⁴ Two different

trajectories emerged in Southern Jewish communities: one of stagnation, but stability, and another of rapid growth, upward mobility, and endurance.

Table 2: Approximate Jewish Population in Selected Southern Cities, 1907-1917.

City	1907	1912	1917
Atlanta, GA	3,500	10,000	10,000
Baltimore, MD	40,000	50,000	60,000
Charleston, SC	1,500	2,000	2,000
Norfolk, VA	2,000	1,000	4,000
Portsmouth, VA	700	2,100	8,000
Savannah, GA	3,000	3,000	5,000
Washington, DC	5,000	6,000	8,000

Sources: "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 19 (1917-1918): 413-414; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 20 (1918-1919), 342-344.

riffs, Richmond's Jewish population remained relatively stable through the twentieth century while Portsmouth's dwindled to almost nothing; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Richmond, Virginia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, last modified 2014, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.isjl.org/virginia-richmond-encyclopedia.html>. The GWISL site also cites Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry: Shabbat in Shockroe, 1769-1976* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1979); "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Savannah, Georgia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, last modified 2014, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.isjl.org/georgia-savannah-encyclopedia.html>.

²⁴ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gates*; Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities: Atlanta, Georgia." Accessed March 30, 2015. <http://www.isjl.org/georgia-atlanta-encyclopedia.html>.

Portsmouth's Jewish community, however, differed from these two narratives. Jews established a small community in Portsmouth in the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast to historic Southern Jewish communities, Portsmouth's was young, economically insecure, with a dramatic fluctuation in population. Portsmouth also differed from Jewish communities in prosperous, industrial cities because although it was industrial, the Jewish community did not stabilize after its initial population growth. Different from the two Southern, urban Jewish trajectories, Portsmouth's Jewish community declined significantly and quickly despite a persistent military industrial economy in the city.

The Jewish community of Portsmouth, also shared little with other mid-Atlantic cities despite geographic proximity. This is, in large part, because of the difference in size and the speed of growth. In 1907, Baltimore's Jewish community already numbered 40,000. Also, Baltimore was an immigration port for many Jews resulting in a sizeable Jewish settlement which increased constantly during Jewish second wave immigration.²⁵ While Washington D.C.'s Jewish community grew at a slower pace than Baltimore's Jewish population, the nation's capital city outpaced Portsmouth Jewry after 1917 thanks to its important role in American politics.²⁶ Scholars have devoted little work to the Jews of Washington D.C., but the population numbers point to significant differences between Portsmouth and the capital city.²⁷

²⁵ In this paper, 'second wave immigration' refers to the large number of mostly Eastern European Jewish immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1880 and 1924; Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 71-111.

²⁶ Likewise, Washington D.C. outpaced Portsmouth as well with a population of 5,000 Jews in 1907 which increased to 10,000 by 1918. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 19 (1917-1918): 413-414.

²⁷ *American Jewish Yearbook* figures closest to 1940 were from 1937 local estimates. "Statistics of the Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916), 346-347; "Statistics of the Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926), 386-388; "Statistics of the Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946),

Portsmouth differed from its neighbors in Hampton Roads as well. The Jewish communities surrounding Portsmouth continued to grow even as Portsmouth's Jewish population declined. Norfolk continued along an expected growth trajectory through the period. Certain Jews in Portsmouth had participated in and operated businesses across the water, and some even attended synagogue there even before the 'bust.' The Jewish community of Newport News, also benefiting from the area's growing military industry, began to grow in numbers between 1920 and 1930. The surrounding cities of Hampton, Virginia Beach, and Suffolk also contained small Jewish communities.²⁸ That Portsmouth's Jewish community declined while the Jewish population in the surrounding cities increased indicates the uniqueness of the city's community even in the region.

The general population growth in Portsmouth was far greater than any other neighboring city except Norfolk (see Table 1). The majority of individuals migrating to Portsmouth were war workers in the Shipyard. While many war workers also moved to Norfolk, most did not work in ship production. Large numbers of those that relocated to Norfolk and other Hampton Roads cities were members of the military or early contractors.²⁹

Furthermore, the nature of work in Portsmouth set it apart from its neighboring cities because its long established ship yard generated less revenue after the war than the

646-649; "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961), 57-63; "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1981 Vol. 81, 172-181. "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 2001, Vol. 101, 262-277.

²⁸ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 31 (1929-1930), 303-310; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 645-649.

²⁹ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 295-300.

newly established bases in Norfolk and Newport News.³⁰ Portsmouth's economy relied on a federal ship building yard which thrived in periods of production. When the war ended, production of battle ships stopped abruptly. Newport News Shipbuilding yard, which was privately owned, successfully transitioned into commercial ship building after the war. Though the yard in Newport News built many naval vessels, its production was not dependent on federal requests. Norfolk and Newport News also benefited from new and permanent military installments the federal government built during the war.³¹ While the number of soldiers and sailors present at the bases decreased after the war, the bases remained active. Thus, Norfolk and Newport News enjoyed long lasting benefits from the war, whereas Portsmouth's economy returned to its pre-war status quo.

The population increase and decline in Norfolk's Black community offers a convenient comparison which demonstrates the unusual nature of Portsmouth's Jewish community's population boom and bust. The example also confirms that major population fluctuations were taking place across the region as a result of World War I, and shows key differences between Hampton Roads' Black and Jewish communities. The

³⁰ Naval Station Norfolk opened in July 1917. Fort Eustis, an army base in Newport News, began operations in March 1918. "History of Fort Eustis," Joint Base Langley-Eustis, <http://www.jble.af.mil/About-Us/Fort-Eustis-History>; Accessed 1 October 2016; "History." Commander, Navy Installations Command: Naval Station Norfolk, http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrma/installations/ns_norfolk/about/history.html. Accessed 1 October 2016.

³¹ William E. Blewett Jr. "A History of the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company." *Navy Engineers Journal* 73.2 (May 1961): 277–286; "History." Commander, Navy Installations Command: Naval Station Norfolk, http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrma/installations/ns_norfolk/about/history.html. Accessed 1 October 2016.

Jewish population ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ in Portsmouth mirrored that of the Black community’s population loss and gain in the same era. While during the war, Norfolk’s Black population increased 7.3% annually, the Black population dropped significantly in the following decade.

Historian Earl Lewis believed the decline of the Black community in Norfolk resulted from economic reliance on fluctuations in the market, the increased importance of women working outside of the home, and racism in the work force. While the Jewish population decline was also related to the fluctuating economy, women in the workforce and racism did not contribute to its population bust. Black women worked to close pay gaps in the family economy since Black men earned less than Whites. The rate of Black women in the work force was approximately three times higher than immigrant women in Norfolk. Jewish women, like men, worked in family businesses, though the census records would not have recorded their employment. Nevertheless, Jewish women contributed to the family economy in the home and family business. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Jews in Portsmouth faced substantial racial discrimination. Racism was certainly not an issue in the work place since most Jews worked in family businesses and thus did not have non-Jewish managers.³² While the comparisons between the rise and fall of the two communities confirms that there were multiple significant population shifts in Hampton Roads after the war, the reasons for the decline of Norfolk’s Black population do not adequately explain the decrease of Portsmouth’s Jewish population. It

³² Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 30, 29-65.

does indicate, however, that both communities responded to the declining economy through outward migration.

Studying Portsmouth Jewry's rise and fall is significant for several other reasons as well. Historical exploration of Southern Jewry is sparse. Analyzing Portsmouth will broaden the literature on Southern Jewish history. Moreover, Portsmouth's narrative contributes to our understanding of the nature of Jewish integration in general as Hampton Roads' Jewry encountered little economic or social resistance from the broader population.³³ Furthermore, the area's relationship with the military created a unique dynamic between the citizen and the state. Understanding a Jewish community within this milieu will augment our comprehension of the American Jewish relationship with its government as well.

Portsmouth's Boom and Bust

The Jewish population of Portsmouth underwent substantial fluctuation between 1900 and 1930. 700 Jews resided in Portsmouth in 1907. In 1912, 2,100 Jews lived in Portsmouth, a sizable number, similar to the Jewish population of Charleston, S.C. By 1918, that number had more than tripled to approximately 8,000 Jewish residents, or 14% of Portsmouth's total population (see Table 3). Between 1907 and 1918 alone, the Jewish population grew by an astonishing 1042% (see Table 4).³⁴ During this period, the rate of growth of Jews in Norfolk and Portsmouth exceeded that of growth in the state of

³³ Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk*, 292.

³⁴ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 22 (1920-1921): 370-374.

Virginia as a whole.³⁵ Meanwhile other Virginia cities, such as Richmond, did not experience remarkable Jewish population growth during the same period (see Table 5). In his study of the Jews of Atlanta, Steven Hertzberg noted a similar pattern there between 1870 and 1910, believing that the numbers entering Atlanta could only be accounted for by migration into the city from surrounding rural areas.³⁶ The same movement from rural areas to Norfolk was true for Blacks migrants between 1910 and 1920.³⁷ It is therefore likely that Jews who migrated to Portsmouth in the period came from outside the state as well as from other areas of Virginia.

Table 3: Jewish Population Compared to Total Population in Norfolk, Portsmouth, and the State of Virginia, 1918.

City	Approximate Total Population 1918	Approximate Jewish Population 1918	Jewish Percentage of Total Population 1918
Norfolk	89,612	5,000	5.57%
Portsmouth	57,000	8,000	14%
Virginia	2,234,030	15,403	0.68%

Sources: "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 22 (1920-1921): 370-374. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory*, 1920-1921, 1101-1102.

Table 4: Jewish Population in Norfolk and Portsmouth Compared to Virginia Jewish Population, 1907 and 1918.

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³⁵ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 22 (1920-1921): 370-374.

³⁶ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 139.

³⁷ Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*, 29-65.

City	1907	1918	Net Increase
Norfolk	2,000	5,000	4,000
Portsmouth	700	8,000	7,300
Virginia	10,000	15,403	5,403

Source: "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* (1920-1921): 361-393.

Demographers did not tabulate the Jewish population in Portsmouth again until 1927 at which point, there were only 2,180 estimated Jews in the city (see Table 5).³⁸ Redistricting in Hampton Roads cannot account for such a dramatic loss, as surrounding cities did not gain large numbers of Jews during the same period.³⁹ Jews left Portsmouth because of its economic decline, but most did not relocate to other Hampton Roads cities. There was little room to enter the market of other Hampton Roads cities because those economies became fixed in the interwar period. The Jews who had migrated to Norfolk, Newport News, and other nearby cities before the war continued successful businesses in the stable market. Yet, because the expansion of the economy in these cities slowed, there

³⁸ This made the Jewish presence approximately 3.1% of Portsmouth's total population (69, 224). "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 31 (1929-1930), 255-334.

³⁹ Chesapeake, Suffolk, Hampton, and Virginia Beach were not included in these statistics as their Jewish population must have been under one thousand. Newport News also lost members of its Jewish community at a less dramatic rate, totaling 1,750 (or 3.77% of the population) in 1927. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 31 (1929-1930), 255-334.

was no need for additional Jewish business, which would have crowded the limited market and reduced revenue for Jewish business in general. Therefore, large numbers of Portsmouth’s Jews did not migrate to the surrounding areas, but sought opportunity elsewhere.

Portsmouth’s downward trend never corrected itself. Though the end of World War I brought a brief halt to the region’s industrial boom, Hampton Roads continued to prosper well into the Cold War era thanks to the military presence. As might be expected, there was a decrease in the general population after the war. Norfolk’s numbers climbed to 220,000 in 1919, but shrunk to 115,777 by 1920.⁴⁰ Yet, the Jewish community grew in Norfolk, even as the war workers moved away.⁴¹

Table 5: Portsmouth, VA, Jewish Population, 1907-1927

Years	Jewish Population	+/- Growth by Percentage
1907*	700	--
1912*	2,100	+66.7%
1918*	8,000	+73.8%
1927*	2,180	-72.8%

*Approximation closest to census years according to *American Jewish Yearbook*
 Sources: “Statistics of the Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook 17* (1915-1916), 346-347. “Statistics of the Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook 27* (1925-1926), 386-388. “Statistics of the Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook 32* (1930-1931), 223-224.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, a number of unemployed workers still flocked to Norfolk well after World War I to find employment in the Navy Yard. Caroline Buck Reeves and Stella Stewart, *Impact of World War I on the Hampton Roads Area* (United States Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1944), 11; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk*, 298-299.

⁴¹ “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook 31* (1929-1930), 303-310; “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook 47* (1945-1946), 645-649; Department of Commerce – Bureau of the Census, “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule,” Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions, *Census Records Collection* at Archives.com. Accessed 12 December 2014.

Methodology

To examine the cause of Portsmouth's population fluctuation and its place in Jewish American history, I separated the study into two parts: the boom and the bust. Chapter one will briefly outline the state of Portsmouth's Jewish community in 1910 when the community closely resembled other Southern, small town Jewish communities. The chapter will proceed to illuminate the population boom during the World War I era, providing a snapshot of the community as it existed in 1917 through 1920, at its peak. Chapter two analyzes the population bust, examining the socio-economic state of the community in 1930. Both chapters compare Portsmouth to the growth and decline of other Southern Jewish communities in the era.

In order to reconstruct the community during the period, I utilized census records from 1910 to 1930 in addition to local synagogue records, newspapers, city directories, cemetery records, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, the personal papers of contemporary Norfolk resident Benjamin Banks, and local population estimates provided by the *American Jewish Yearbook (AJY)*.⁴² I also read the local newspapers and analyzed city

⁴² The *AJY* is a far from perfect source because of its reliance on local enumeration. Lee Shai Weissbach detailed the shortcomings of the *AJY* in *Jewish Life in Small Town America*. However, he concluded "Despite the less than perfect nature of the various Jewish population studies conducted over the years, the aggregate data they assembled are tremendously useful. Each of these studies at least tried to be complete and accurate, and, in the absence of statistics gathered with the full resources of the American government, they provide the most reliable information available about America's Jewish population in times past. Ultimately, these studies afford a highly detailed view of the patterns of Jewish settlement in America at several points in time, especially for the period between the 1870s and World War II." Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 23, 13-23. Both Weissbach and Steven Hertzberg utilize the *AJY* figures in their studies. While the exact figure for Jewish population in Portsmouth may have been slightly understated or overstated, the overall pattern in reported numbers demonstrated a significant increase and decrease of the Jewish population. The 1910, 1920, and 1930 census records also reflect this general trend. Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City*, 55; Department of Commerce – Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions, *Census Records Collection* at Archives.com, Accessed 12 December 2014; Department of Commerce – Bureau of the Census, "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions, *Census Records Collection* at

directories between 1910 and 1930. The *AJY* produced population statistics only for 1907, 1917, and 1927, which did not correlate to the census years. The census records examined, however, are close enough to the *AJY* dates that the demographics should be representative of the figures provided. There are limitations to the census records as well. Since the census only enumerated the population every ten years, it did not capture individuals who came and left the city between 1910 and 1920, or between 1920 and 1930. Furthermore, census takers frequently misspelled names, misidentified languages and birthplaces, or incorrectly recorded occupations. Because of the limitations of the census records, the city directories were essential to understand the Portsmouth Jewish community between censuses. Furthermore, the directories often gave more detailed information on Jewish businesses and occupations than census records but, unfortunately, poor Jews are not well represented in this source. However imperfect, the sources capture the general impact of the influx of the population on the Jewish community, its evolution, and the city's transition from a war economy to that of an industrial and military one.

To better understand the composition of the community at each date, I gathered data from census records, so I could specifically analyze occupations, family size, neighborhoods, and migration patterns. I took a sample of every fifth Jewish family determined by Yiddish speech (if so indicated) enumerators noted as the spoken language in the home, as well as common Jewish first and last names to confirm my selection. Additionally, I used individuals listed in synagogue and cemetery records to supplement these groups. As a result, my findings are unavoidably skewed towards the experience of

Archives.com; Accessed 12 December 2014; Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

Eastern European immigrant Jews or those active in the religious and cultural community as these individuals were most easily identified. Given that the Jewish community of Portsmouth in the period *was* indeed predominantly Eastern European, my findings are consistent with the reality of the community despite the shortcomings of sampling techniques.⁴³

In order to assess the composition of Jewish neighborhoods, I compared the residential addresses of Jewish heads of household to their business listings in the city directories for 1910, 1920, and 1930. In analyzing occupations in Portsmouth, I divided jobs listed on the census into several basic groups: independent merchants, small retailers, food retailers, liquor retailers, clothing retailers or repairers, educators, administrators, laborers, loan providers, and military members.⁴⁴ The occupations placed into each category varied based on the job title as well as the ‘industry’ listed on the censuses and in the city directories.

Analyzing Jewish residence and occupations allows a brief glimpse into a little known Jewish community which held the promise of growth and vitality. Portsmouth’s dramatic rise and fall highlights the tenuous nature of Southern Jewish communities as well as the unpredictability of Jewish migration through the country during the “century of immigration.”⁴⁵ The overall pattern of Portsmouth’s Jewish community builds on the

⁴³ In support of this claim, both synagogues in Portsmouth were Eastern European rather than Sephardic or specifically German. If large numbers of Sephardic or German Jews resided in Portsmouth, they left no discernible trace of their presence. This is also why my research largely focuses on Eastern European immigrants and migration patterns rather than Sephardic ones. “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Portsmouth, Virginia” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

⁴⁴ I have designated probable peddlers, street vendors, and hucksters as merchants. Meanwhile, I included those working in a brick and mortar business or shop as retailers.

⁴⁵ Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 71-111.

work of Ewa Morawska who studied the socio-economic basis of Jewish communities in industrial towns like Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in the hope of revealing an ever more complex image of Jewish immigration and community.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Chapter 1: The Boom (1910-1920)

The growth of Portsmouth's population from 1910 to 1920 was directly linked to the construction of the Norfolk Naval Base and to increased production at the Yard because of World War I. During this period, Portsmouth appeared similar to Atlanta and other industrial cities in its economy, growth, and communal structure. Both Atlanta and Portsmouth held promise of financial prosperity and security thanks to their booming industrial economies. The commercial potential of the economy attracted Jews, despite both cities' relative isolation from large Jewish centers that reinforced and facilitated traditional observance of *halakha* by providing resources such as kosher goods. Portsmouth Jews constructed their community along socio-economic and class lines. The Jewish community depended on the general population's reliable and substantial patronage as well as continual prosperity of the local urban economy for its perpetuation.¹

Portsmouth on the Eve of the Boom

In 1910, the Portsmouth Jewish community was small, and drew little notice from the national Jewish community. Prior to the war, Portsmouth seemed to be developing at the steady rate of most other mid-size communities of the era. It had already begun attracting immigrants as workers at the Shipyard and as merchants and retailers to provide service to those workers.² From its position before the war, it seemed that

¹ The quest for Americanization, integration, and the achievement of Whiteness also played key roles in the formation of the community and local Jewish identity which should be examined in future research.

² This included immigrants from many countries and does not exclusively refer to Jews.

Portsmouth's Jewish community might grow at a steady rate comparable to that of its sister city, Norfolk, where at least five Jewish congregations existed by 1917.³

The approximately 700 Jews living in Portsmouth, Virginia, in 1907 constituted only a small portion of the area's population.⁴ While the city did not host a large Jewish population, there were a number of long standing Jewish families who practiced Judaism and maintained a Jewish cultural identity despite their relative isolation from larger Jewish communities. There were encouraging signs of growth in the community. Lithuanian Jews founded Portsmouth's first synagogue, *Gomley Chesed*, around 1890 after there was a large enough group to hire a rabbi and worship in a building of their own.⁵ By 1910, the synagogue had expanded with new immigrant members. The synagogue offered a *cheder*, a Hebrew school which Rabbi A. Chasemen opened between 1899 and 1904, a *mikvah* for ritual purification, a daily *minyan* or service which required a group of ten adult male Jews, and a *shochet*, an individual trained in kosher

³ *Ohef Sholom*, a German Reform congregation presided over by the 'Reverend' Louis Mendoza during World War I, was initially established in 1867 as an orthodox synagogue. Congregation Beth El formed shortly thereafter in 1870 after *Ohef Sholom*'s leadership voted to join the Reform movement. Beth El joined the United Synagogue of America in 1913, later identifying as a Conservative congregation. Eastern European immigrants formed the orthodox synagogues *Mikro Kodesh* in 1889, B'nai Israel in 1897, and *Ahavas Israel* in 1909. Irwin Berent, *Norfolk, Virginia: A Jewish History of the 20th Century* (Norfolk, VA: JewishHistoryUSA.com, 2001).

⁴ *AJY* gathered the 1907 estimate, but did not release another estimate until 1912. Therefore, the data related to the 1907 community outside the population estimate itself comes from the 1910 census as there was no other definitive source for that year. As would be the case for the next hundred years, the Norfolk Jewish community was larger, more visible, and more active than its counterpart across the Elizabeth River. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 19 (1917-1918): 413-414.

⁵ Exact dates on the establishment of the synagogue are unknown as the congregation initially began meeting in private homes. It was not until the late 1890s that the congregation was listed in the city directory. *Gomley Chesed* did not acquire its own building until 1901. "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Portsmouth, Virginia" Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

slaughtering.⁶ The synagogue even boasted a Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society.⁷ All of these features indicated that Portsmouth Jews did not have to rely on other cities, including Norfolk, to continue ritual observance. Therefore, they are signs that the Jewish community of Portsmouth was developing its own active community.

In 1910, Portsmouth Jewish families resembled American Jews elsewhere. The majority of the Jewish workforce was male, though it is likely some of Portsmouth's Jewish women worked within the family business, but were not listed as such in the directories or census.⁸ The average size of the Jewish household was approximately 6.12 individuals, including extended family, boarders, and servants.⁹ For instance, the

⁶ In the period, the *shochet* was also often the local rabbi as was the case in Portsmouth. *Chevra T'helim* also opened a small *cheder* during the 1920s. Irwin Berent, "Portsmouth Virginia's *Chevra T'helim* Synagogue: An Introduction to Its Early History," Norfolk History.com, Last Updated 2013, <http://www.norfolkhistory.com/chevrathelim.htm>.

⁷ "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Portsmouth, Virginia" Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

⁸ 57.7% of my sample group was female while 42.3% were male. Including children, ~87% of the sample females were unemployed versus ~57.3% of the sample males. Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions. In Johnstown, PA, as well as elsewhere, it was common for families, including women, to participate in the operation of the family business. This was often not represented in official records, however. The role of working women in Jewish households is an area for further exploration. Deborah R. Weiner discussed Jewish women working in Appalachian coal field towns. She argued that these women and "their economic contributions allowed their households to survive and prosper within a notoriously unstable local economy, while their concern with creating a Jewish environment for themselves and their families led them to become a driving force behind Jewish communal organization." Weiner added that the instances of women in these uneasy economic positions "demonstrates how women in small-town America ensured the maintenance of Jewish continuity for future generations." Weiner's work is particularly relevant as she examined these patterns from the latter years of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Most of these communities collapsed in the post-World War II period like many of the communities described by Weissbach. Weiner's study of the economic role of women would be greatly useful in the further examination of Portsmouth as well as other Southern and industrial towns. Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 66; Deborah R. Weiner, "Jewish Women in the Central Appalachian Coal Fields, 1890-1960: From Breadwinners to Community Builders," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 144, 143-158.

⁹ For a comparative chart of household composition in small towns, see Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 356-357.

Goodman household included parents Jacob and Annie, their adult children, Isaac and Jerome, a lodger named Louis Hillman, and a niece, Bessie Kreger.¹⁰

In 1910, the majority of Portsmouth's Jewish residents, especially children, were native-born Americans. Of these American born Jews, nearly 70% had been born in Virginia. A number of the community's American born Jews also came from nearby Maryland and New York. While a thorough examination of the census records in the preceding decades could confirm residency, the percentage of native Virginians indicates that many Jews in Portsmouth in 1910 were specifically native to the city. This, however, does not indicate a family's long history in the United States since the overwhelming majority of Jewish individuals in the 1910 Portsmouth census listed their parents as having come from Eastern Europe. Rather, it is more likely that the Jews who immigrated to Portsmouth from Eastern Europe over the previous decade had stayed in the area to establish families large enough to constitute a native-born majority within the Jewish population. Like the Goodman family, Jewish immigrants in Portsmouth hailed almost entirely from Eastern Europe, with only small numbers coming from Western and Central Europe.¹¹

Family composition and marriage patterns also reflected a stable community in 1910. The average age of a given household was approximately 19.32 years, revealing that children were a large portion of the Jewish population. Since the average age of Portsmouth Jews in 1910 demonstrated a young population, it is likely that the residents

¹⁰ Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population."

¹¹ This is consistent with the birthplaces of Norfolk's Jewish population and with that of Southern cities in the period. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, "Introduction: Jewish Roots in Southern Soil," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, ed. (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 1-26; Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population."

were mostly families with small children and that there were few elderly Jews in the community. The 1910 sample did not reveal multiple generations of a family living in the city. Therefore, this indicated that many young residents were likely recent migrants to the city.

Children stayed with their families into early adulthood, often to assist with the management of the family business. Such was the case in Isaac Goodman's home, in which he and his brother Jerome still lived with their family at ages 26 and 22 respectively. Both brothers and the family's boarder, Louis Hillman, worked in the Goodman grocery store to support the family while Mr. and Mrs. Goodman were unemployed or worked within their sons' businesses.¹² Because most children lived with their parents until marriage, the average age of household members also indicated that Jews tended to marry in their late twenties or early thirties.¹³

Jews participated in many sectors of the city's economy, but were most likely to work in peddling, small retail, clothing retail and repair, and the food services which included grocery stores and restaurants (see Figure 1.1).¹⁴ Instead of pursuing managerial

¹² Harry Asral Goodman, their older brother and co-owner of Goodman and Bros. Groceries, had moved out and married by this time. Bureau of the Census. "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population."

¹³ 68.6% of adults over the age of 18 years old within the 1910 sample group were married, with the average age of married Jewish couples being 36.7 years old. Of this, the average age of married individuals between males and females was comparable with 34.9 years being the average age for women and 38.8 years for men. Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population." The age and difference in age between partners varied drastically in small town Jewish communities. Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 142. Hertzberg noted that the average age difference of marital partners amongst Jewish Atlanta was between 6.8 and 8.8 years in 1870-1880. He attributed this to postponement of marriage while Jews sought financial stability and security. Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 38;

¹⁴ This is consistent with new Jewish communities of the period, but different from older Southern communities like Richmond and Charleston where Jewish merchants arrived early in the nation's history and quickly achieved economic stability.

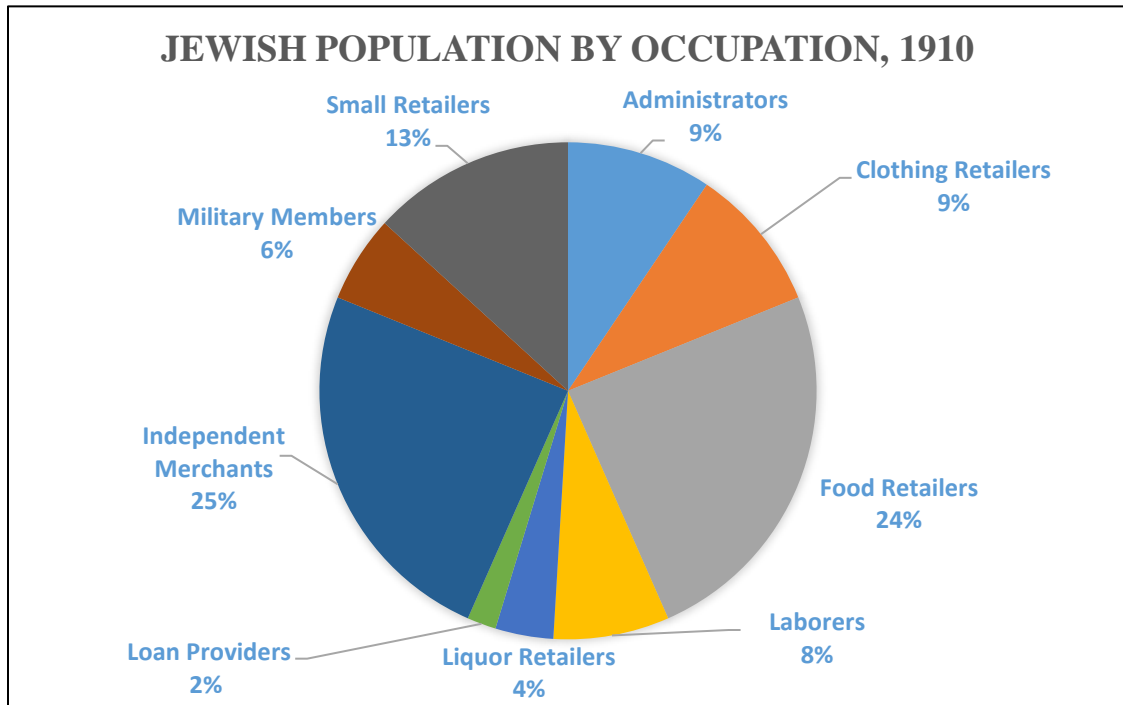
or white collar professions, as many did in older Southern communities that had successfully integrated into the broader society, immigrant communities trended towards jobs that were low risk, low investment ventures, and required no prior education. Historian Hasia Diner has focused on the significance of peddling, marking it as one of the major ways Jewish men integrated into society and climbed the economic ladder, eventually establishing their own retail stores. By and large, it was an immigrant profession, and often characterized as a Jewish one. Contrary to what would be expected given Diner's study, native-born Jews were more likely to peddle than immigrants. The sample data, however, revealed that more Eastern European immigrants were in food retail than native Jews.¹⁵

The propensity of native-born Jews in Portsmouth towards peddling also stands in contrast to the occupation pattern in Norfolk's Jewish community. Jewish lawyers and physicians were somewhat common in Norfolk whereas they were not in Portsmouth. While positions outside of retail were far from the majority in the pre-1917 Norfolk Jewish community according to city directory, their numbers were significant. Jews represented at least 13% of attorneys who advertised and could also be found in dentistry, optometry, and general medicine. Furthermore, Jews were often highly visible in Norfolk. Indeed, Benjamin Banks, a Norfolk lawyer, was the first Jew to serve in the

¹⁵ Jewish men frequently used this method to bring over other male members from Europe, gradually expanding into new areas, acquiring enough money to purchase a store, then opening stores in other locations through the combined efforts of an entire family. Peddling can be difficult to distinguish from small retail. Often times, the census records list an individual as being a merchant or as selling sundry goods. If the individual was not connected to a business or industry on the census record, I included them in the peddling category. The data can therefore be taken as a genuine representation of newly immigrated Jews and that of the native born population in Portsmouth. Diner, *Roads Taken*, 1-154.

Virginia State House of Delegates in 1911. The majority of the most visible and successful Jewish businessmen in Norfolk were American born.¹⁶

Figure 1.1: Jewish Population by Occupation in Portsmouth, VA, 1910



Source: Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910."

Neighborhood distribution in 1910 Portsmouth demonstrated that Jews lived in small clusters and in racially mixed neighborhoods. The largest group of Jewish residents lived in Portsmouth's Third Ward and clustered on County, Chestnut, High, and

¹⁶ Of the twenty-three identifiable Jewish attorneys and physicians in the Norfolk city directories, fifteen were American born. Six of these men were Southern. A large portion of Norfolk's retail store owners were also American born. Norfolk residents Aaron Seldner, Adolph Arenheim, Edgar J. Hecht, Harry Beerman, Harry Harrison, and Myer Abrams all listed a southern state as place of birth in US census records, 1900-1930. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directories, 1917-1919*; United States Census Records, 1900-1930; Berent, *Norfolk, Virginia: A Jewish History*.

Effingham Streets, thoroughfares that were central to Portsmouth business. As in Atlanta's early Jewish community, Jews lived close together, although their numbers were never large enough to constitute a specifically Jewish section of town. In Atlanta, the failure to create distinctly Jewish neighborhoods was directly linked to a desire for acceptance by the general population, and such was also likely the case in Portsmouth given the community's size and distribution.¹⁷ As was common in other communities, many Portsmouth Jews operated their businesses out of their homes or within the same building, eliminating the separation between work and private life. Unlike most Portsmouth Jews, the Goodmans lived several blocks away from the family's business.

In 1910, Portsmouth Jews not only lived and worked in the same place, they were doing both in neighborhoods where few other Whites dwelled. County Street was a bustling business and residential strip, and was one of the main thoroughfares in the city. Some streets were strictly residential or business, but other nearby blocks combined both residences and businesses. The racial composition of the neighborhoods on County Street varied widely from block to block. Many blocks were racially segregated between Blacks and Whites, though Jews lived in both White and Black neighborhoods.¹⁸

In some cases, however, blocks were racially mixed without any discernible pattern. The city's only synagogue, *Gomley Chesed*, was located at 519 County.¹⁹ From the 100 to 300 blocks of County, Jewish businesses and residences were interlaced with Black ones, almost perfectly alternating down the street with Blacks tending to operate

¹⁷ Herzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 48-49.

¹⁸ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 1062-1065.

¹⁹ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 1068.

more restaurants and Jews running small retail shops. The same trend was present once more between the 800 to 1000 blocks. This area was more residential than the earlier set of blocks, but the intermingling of Blacks and Jews remained the same.²⁰ Effingham Street represented a more general mix of ethnic and racial groups rather than a concentration of Blacks and Jews alone.²¹

The same was not necessarily true across the city, however. While there were considerable numbers of Jews and Blacks overlapping on Chestnut Street, the two communities formed more distinct, cohesive blocks along racial lines there than in other areas of Portsmouth.²² High Street, however, described as “the principle business street,” presented a much different image of racial dispersion. Whites, Jews included, and Blacks operated businesses in distinct pockets along the busy street. Black stores and restaurants were confined to the 600, 800 to 1600, and the 2700 to 3000 blocks. There was virtually no intermingling outside of these blocks.²³ Instead, neatly drawn lines kept races separated on the street which served as the outward face of Portsmouth.

Portsmouth’s Jewry on the eve of the boom was a promising, stable example of a Southern American Jewish community. Though Jews were a small proportion of Portsmouth’s population, the community showed signs of growth. Young families

²⁰ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 1062-1065.

²¹ The names listed on the street appear to indicate a mixture of individuals with birthplaces in Western and Central Europe. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 1070-1072.

²² *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 1057-1059.

²³ There were a few occasions where Jews operated businesses within the borders of the neighborhoods mentioned. However, they were negligible given the size of the area and the Black population. Additionally, they were almost entirely on the edge of the block rather than within the row of Black businesses. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 1081-1085.

constituted the majority of the Jewish population, and the city continued to attract a steady flow of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Portsmouth's Jews created Jewish institutions and mechanisms for Jewish observance prior to the boom of the population, indicating that these families intended to build lives in the city. Portsmouth Jews' occupations revealed a less affluent population than that of Jews in nearby Norfolk. Reliant on peddling and retail, Portsmouth's Jews had not yet pursued professional careers. Instead, most worked and lived in the same building and the entire family contributed to the operation of the family business and household income. Portsmouth Jews could also cross racial lines in 1910, working and residing next to Blacks as well as Whites.

World War I and Portsmouth's Boomtown

On April 16, 1917, the United States Congress declared war on Germany. The federal government quickly moved to expand the military. Prior to the war, the Navy was adequate to protect a nation at peace. However, as the United States moved towards intervention, the Naval force required vast expansion. Almost immediately, the government selected Norfolk as the home to the nation's largest Naval base. Newly enlisted sailors arrived in Hampton Roads within weeks.²⁴ Norfolk was not the only city immediately affected by the Naval expansion. In 1910, Portsmouth reported 3,000 workers at the Naval Shipyard.²⁵ By the end of World War I, the Shipyard employed an estimated 11,234 individuals.²⁶ This swift rise in employment reflected the enormous

²⁴ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 286-300.

²⁵ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 826.

²⁶ Mapp and Mapp, *Portsmouth: A Pictorial History*, 135.

growth in production at the Shipyard due to the war. It also indicated the United States' investment in Hampton Roads as one of the foremost military centers in the world.

War workers, or individuals who migrated to Portsmouth to work in war time production, constituted a large portion of the new employees at the Shipyard.

Portsmouth's population dramatically rose from approximately 30,000 in 1910 to 51,000 by 1918.²⁷ At the same time, the city's Jewish population also soared, as Jews arrived to provide goods and services for the war workers. By 1918, the Jewish community tripled from 2,100 in 1912 to approximately 8,000 Jews.²⁸

While the number of Jews grew, the percentage of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the city rose only slightly from 1910. Eastern European Jewish immigrants comprised 40% of the Jewish population while native-born Jews accounted for 59%. Because of the large population increase and the national rise in Eastern European Jewish immigrants, one would expect that the numbers of these Jewish immigrants to have risen greatly, overtaking the number of native-born Jews. One possible reason that the census data does not reflect this is that these immigrants might not have been totally captured in the census enumeration since many of the immigrant Jews that had arrived in Portsmouth

²⁷ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1910*, 826; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1917*, 926; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1918*, 1222.

²⁸ These numbers represented a 1,042% growth from 1907's figures; Surveyors counted 2,000 Jews in the adjacent city of Newport News in 1918 where there had previously been less than 1,000. Subsequently, Jews accounted for nearly 10% of the total population there. As the *AJY* only reported on Jewish communities over 1,000 in number, there is no way to tabulate the exact growth of this community. It is evident, however, that there was a rapid expansion in the Newport News Jewish population in the same period as the booms in Norfolk and Portsmouth. Like the two cities examined here, Newport News also benefited from growing military presence. Camp Eustis was established there in 1917 while the United States also reinvigorated Fort Monroe. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 20 (1918-1919): 342-344; John V. Quarstein, *World War I on the Virginia Peninsula* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 1998).

during the war years had already begun leaving the area by the 1920 census taking.²⁹ Nevertheless, the numbers represent that a high proportion of Jews in Portsmouth were still native-born Americans, a likely factor in their financial ability to own stores and economic stability. Meanwhile, the large percentage of Jewish immigrants in the area demonstrated growth consistent with the war time population boom.

Jewish religious life in the city expanded along with the influx.³⁰ *Gomley Chesed* continued to thrive during this period, maintaining much of its traditionalism and vitality. The Hebrew school continued to operate, and Portsmouth Jews built a Jewish community center to accommodate more members, the school, and social functions. According to local memory, the synagogue grew to approximately 300 members between 1920 to 1921, though the number of attendees was likely much higher.³¹ The Goodmans themselves attended *Gomley Chesed*, though it is unclear when they started attending.

²⁹ Demonstrating the shifting immigrant population, the age of Eastern European immigrants in 1920 was fairly evenly distributed between 0 and 65, with a slight increase between 15 and 25 years old. However, in 1910, immigrants were more likely to have been between the ages of 20 and 45 years old, indicating that the immigrant families captured within both sample groups are not likely to be the same individuals. Given the relatively small size of the sample group, this suggests immigrant movement both in and out of the city rather than the same few immigrant families setting down roots in the community. Bureau of the Census, “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population,” Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions; Department of Commerce – Bureau of the Census, “Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 – Population,” Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

³⁰ For more on the early Jewish community of Hampton Roads, see Berent *Norfolk, Virginia: A Jewish History*, 2-4; “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities: Norfolk, Virginia,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.isjl.org/virginia-norfolk-encyclopedia.html>.

³¹ “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities: Portsmouth, Virginia,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. This number could not be verified by the existing *Gomley Chesed* records. *Gomley Chesed Synagogue, Membership Ledger, 1906-1907* (Jewish Museum and Cultural Center Archives, Portsmouth, VA); *Gomley Chesed Synagogue, Seat Record, 1903-1921* (Jewish Museum and Cultural Center Archives, Portsmouth, VA).

Gomley Chesed's ledger revealed Goodmans paying dues as early as 1906, but the initials of the Goodman family did not match with the family members examined in this work. It is possible that the Goodmans were one of the many families who could not afford membership in the early years of the twentieth century.³²

Some Jews in Portsmouth founded a separate congregation around 1916. Reasons for the split from *Gomley Chesed* are unclear, but it does not appear that the separation was entirely due to lack of space. Instead, it is more likely that recent immigrants brought regional practices with them to Portsmouth, and preferred to worship in the style to which they were accustomed. The congregants who formed *Chevra T'helim* began meeting in 1916 in a shoe store. However, the influx of Eastern Europeans continually added to their numbers, and the congregation soon sought a permanent structure. On December 26, 1918, the trustees of *Chevra T'helim* paid Asral and Mollie Goodman \$4,000 for an extra lot the Goodmans owned near the family business. This was soon the site of the new synagogue.³³ The members of the second synagogue also purchased land for a cemetery and began utilizing the synagogue's yard for kosher slaughtering on a small scale.³⁴

Jewish communal organizations were highly visible and active in Portsmouth at the time. By 1920, there were a number of popular Jewish organizations in the area, including the Ladies' Hebrew Aid Society and the Frolics Hebrew Association.³⁵

³² "*Gomley Chesed* Cemetery," Portsmouth Public Library Online, Last updated 2013, <http://www.portsmouth-va-public-library.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Gomley-Chesed-Cemetery.pdf>; *Gomley Chesed* Synagogue, *Membership Ledger, 1906-1907*.

³³ Berent, "Portsmouth Virginia's *Chevra T'helim* Synagogue." There is no indication that brothers Asral, Isaac, or Jerome Goodman belonged to *Chevra T'helim*.

³⁴ "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities: Portsmouth, Virginia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

Additionally, members of the Judah Benjamin Lodge met in the Workman's Circle Hall, perhaps as an outgrowth of the Workman's Circle itself.³⁶ The Workman's Circle (*Der Arbiter Ring*) was a Jewish socialist fraternal order, mostly for lower income Eastern European immigrants who could not afford synagogue membership or who were disengaged from religious practice. The organization was closely associated with the labor movement, with a heavy emphasis on Yiddish programs to facilitate eventual Americanization. Through a variety of programs, both recreational and practical, it created Jewish community apart from religious practice.³⁷

By 1920, the family and household composition of Portsmouth's Jewish community had changed little despite the influx of immigrants. The average age of marriage indicated a generally young Jewish population.³⁸ Meanwhile, the average Jewish household size had shrunk just slightly since 1910 to 5.2 people. This number either indicated that Jewish families were smaller, that Jews moved out from their family home earlier, or that Jews were now able to take advantage of the city's increased housing availability following the real estate boom during the war. The latter two scenarios would also indicate increased upward economic mobility.

³⁵ The Frolics even put together a baseball team that played against other Jewish organizations and their baseball teams in the area. Berent *Norfolk, Virginia*, 105.

³⁶ This juxtaposition of groups is particularly interesting when speculating on the identity of Portsmouth's Jews. Judah Benjamin was the Confederate Secretary of State during the Civil War and was one of many Southern Jews who aligned themselves with the Southern cause. Since the Workmen's Circle was a Jewish socialist fraternal order that often used Yiddish in its publications, one can only speculate as to what this meant for members of the lodge and the Circle. Unfortunately, the existence and location of these membership ledgers is unknown. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1465.

³⁷ Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 148-149.

³⁸ The average age of married Jews in 1920 was approximately 37 years old. 66.2% of adults over 18 years old were married. The gender distribution between immigrant and native-born Jews was almost equal.

If Portsmouth's Jews were indeed advancing in economic status, it would have been consistent with the reason for the boom in the Jewish population as well as a major indicator of the prosperity of the war time economy. Newly arrived Jews came to the city for economic opportunity. They sought to capitalize on the swelling population and their daily needs. The war laborers, their families, as well as the newly arrived military men all required food, clothing, and sundries. As the prosperity of the region increased, so too did the spending ability and expectations of the population.³⁹ Jews therefore came to sell goods to the expanding population.

Despite the change in the size and composition of the community, Jewish occupations remained largely static.⁴⁰ Long settled Jews had already established successful businesses. Jews who arrived during the area's boom after 1917 adopted the same local marketing techniques and opened businesses of their own. These '1917 influx' Jews enhanced not just Portsmouth Jewry's numbers, but their economic presence as well. The exact number of Jews and their occupations in the city is unknown since not every Jew was listed in censuses or necessarily identifiable, and not all Jews were wealthy enough to advertise their businesses in directories. Subsequently, the number of

³⁹ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk*, 286-300.

⁴⁰ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1917*, 75-150, 923-942; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 277; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1917-1919*. Aaron Seldner, Adolph Arenheim, Edgar J. Hecht, Harry Beerman, Harry Harrison, and Myer Abrams all listed a southern state as place of birth in US census records, 1900-1930. Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions; Bureau of the Census, "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions; Bureau of the Census, "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

individual Jewish directory listings did not come close to representing the Jewish population boom.

Joint ventures and family businesses could account for some of the underrepresentation of Jewish businesses in the directories. Hasia Diner's theory on chain migration could also account for incongruity between the number of Jews and the number represented in the business directories. Diner argued that Jews often settled in America through chains of family relations. One Jew would establish himself in a chosen location, start a business, and send for family members to join him to further advance the business as it grew. This could also explain the apparent invisibility of Jewish immigrants in this era as city directories would not necessarily have included the names of employees.

Despite some invisibility in the directories, the number of Jews listed is still impressive.⁴¹

Both men and women participated in the economic boom, but, men were more likely to be in the workforce than women.⁴² Unsurprisingly, single women over 18 were far more likely to be in the workforce than their married counterparts, with 77% of single

⁴¹ Diner *The Jews of the United States*, 84. Daniel Soyer also notes that Eastern European Jewish immigrants frequently worked for Jews already established in business when they first arrived in the United States. Soyer explores the role of the Jewish contractor in garment manufacturing and sweatshops. Because of Norfolk-Portsmouth's economic structure, sweatshops were a rarity. Thus, Jews did not manufacture clothing. With the economy focused on military related industry and service jobs, clothing manufacturing which was so important for Jews elsewhere, was insignificant for Hampton Roads' Jewry. See Daniel Soyer, *A Coat of Many Colors: Immigration, Globalism, and Reform in the New York City Garment Industry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 7, 91-113; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 291. Lewis also argued that Blacks used chain migration to relocate to Norfolk. However, Lewis theorized that Black chain migration to Norfolk was mostly residential. Black family members facilitated the migration of their Black family members into Norfolk by providing a place for their relatives to stay while working in war production. Therefore, the difference between Jewish chain migration to Portsmouth and Black chain migration to Norfolk was that Jews facilitated their family members' migration into Portsmouth by integrating them into the family business while providing room and board. Blacks assisted their family members' migration to Norfolk by providing food and shelter while the family member worked in war production outside the home. Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*, 30-31.

⁴² Jewish Men worked proportionately higher with 41% of the male population employed and 30% of Jewish women employed.

women over 18 working while 35% of married women were listed as having an occupation. Meanwhile, adult men were just as likely to be working regardless of their marital status.⁴³

Many of Portsmouth's Jews worked in food supply and service with 31% of Jews operating grocery stores, stands, and restaurants. Jews, however, were more prominent in clothing retail and pawn brokerage than any other ethnic or racial group. In 1916, Jews owned 40% of all clothing stores advertised in Portsmouth's directory.⁴⁴ This percentage rose to 52.5% by 1919. Jews also represented at least 80% of all advertised pawnbrokers in the 1918 directory.⁴⁵ Jews were an impressive portion of the Portsmouth economy even in sectors that did not see substantial Jewish growth. For example, Jews composed just over 61% of general merchandise retailers by 1919.⁴⁶ The number of Jewish grocers actually decreased slightly between 1917 and 1918, but still represented 27% of the total

⁴³ Bureau of the Census, "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 – Population," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

⁴⁴ This also included tailors and seamstresses.

⁴⁵ The directory categories used to tabulate this percentage were clothing, department stores, ladies' garments, men's furnishings, and tailoring. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1917*, 926, 927, 936, 938, 941; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1918*, 1225-1126, 1234, 1236, 1239; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1919*, 1083-1084, 1091, 1093, 1095.

⁴⁶*Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1919*, 1087.

number of grocers who advertised (see Table 1.1).⁴⁷ In both Portsmouth and Norfolk, Jews supplied sailors with ready-made uniforms and sundries.⁴⁸

Table 1.1. Percentage of Jews in Advertised Retail and Manufacturing Enterprise, Portsmouth 1916-1918.

Category	1916	1917	1918
Butchering and Meat	9% (1 Jew/11 Total)	14% (2 Jews/14 Total)	23% (3 Jews/13 Total)
Clothing	46.6% (7/15)	53.8% (7/13)	56% (9/16)
Department Stores	100% (1/1)	100% (1/1)	66.6% (2/3)
Dry Goods and Notions	37.5% (6/16)	36.8% (7/19)	59% (13/22)
Furniture Retail	23.5% (4/17)	26.6% (4/15)	10% (2/20)
General Merchandise	80% (4/5)	85.7% (6/7)	61.5% (8/13)
Groceries	67% (65/97)	32.6% (67/205)	27% (65/239)
Jewelry	33% (1/3)	0% (0/2)	25% (1/4)
Ladies' Garments	75% (3/4)	75% (3/4)	75% (6/8)
Men's Furnishings	50% (4/8)	57% (4/7)	44% (4/9)
Naval Supplies	50% (1/2)	100% (2/2)	--
Pawn Brokerage	66.6% (2/3)	75% (3/4)	80% (4/5)
Shoe Dealing	12.5% (1/8)	28.5% (2/7)	18% (2/11)
Shoemaking	6.5% (3/46)	6% (3/47)	9.7% (4/41)
Tailoring	22.7% (5/22)	30.7% (8/26)	36% (9/25)
Watch and Jewelry Making	33% (2/6)	28.5% (2/7)	20% (1/5)

Source: *Norfolk and Portsmouth City Directories, 1917-1919*.

⁴⁷*Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1918*, 1229-1231.

⁴⁸*Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1919*, 171; Phyllis Dillon and Andrew Godley, "The Evolution of the Jewish Garment Industry, 1980-1940" in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, edited by Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 38-39.

One of the most interesting and consistent features of Jewish business in Portsmouth during the early twentieth century was its ability to market to its target audience. Most Jewish retailers marketed broadly, especially to the new war workers, whose pockets were now flush with cash from their labor. Jewish business owners understood how to appeal to their customers. As Dillon and Godley noted, “the idea that styles change rapidly and that consumers have to be kept informed were intrinsic to the traditions of artisan dressmaking and logically became part of the ready-made industry as it developed.”⁴⁹ Jewish adaptability to the market remained consistent throughout the period, changing only to further customize their marketing to the local population. Jewish peddlers had long understood how to sell their products to their American audience.⁵⁰ Likewise, Portsmouth’s Jews demonstrated an understanding of the area’s culture and desires (see Figure 1.2). They advertised effectively, further demonstrating their ability to navigate the economy despite migrating to a new location.

⁴⁹ Dillon and Godley, “The Evolution of the Jewish Garment Industry,” 45.

⁵⁰ Diner, *Roads Taken*, 200-212.

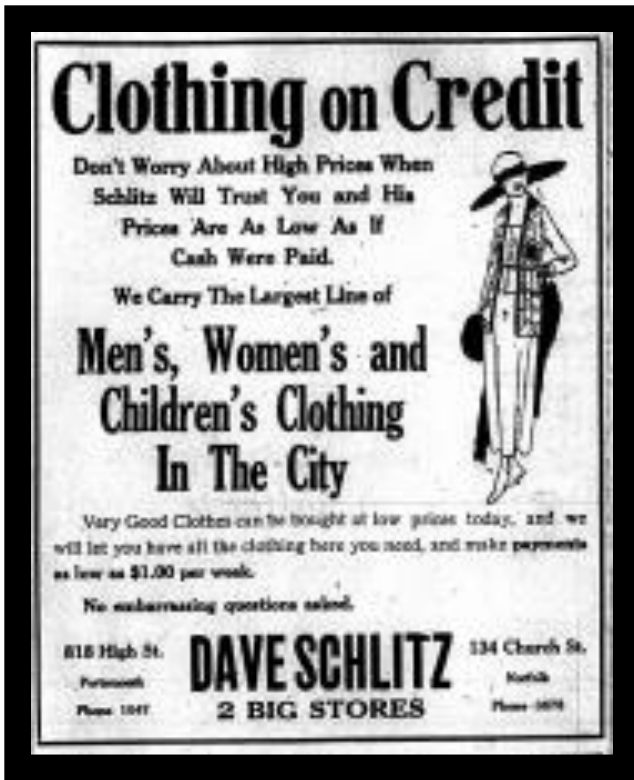


Figure 1.2: Dave Schlitz Advertisement, *Virginian-Pilot and The Norfolk Landmark*, 2 November 1919



Figure 1.3: Crockin's Columbia Grafonolas and Records Advertisement, *Portsmouth Star*, 2 March 1919

Some Jewish businesses began to specifically target the servicemen themselves (see Figure 1.3). G. Weinberg, Inc. announced itself as the leading naval outfitters in August 1917 as it relocated half a block from the main entrance of the Shipyard in Portsmouth. Not only did Weinberg offer uniforms, shoulder straps, and badges, the store also provided four hundred storage lockers as well as showers specifically for sailors.⁵¹ Harry Hofheimer's men's apparel store began selling C.P.O. and warrant officer's naval uniforms in addition to its usual stock of men's suits. A longtime presence in Portsmouth with locations in Norfolk as well, Hofheimer succeeded by selling to servicemen. By February of 1918, he actually began separate advertising

⁵¹ G. Weinberg, Inc. Advertisement, *Virginian-Pilot*, 5 August 1917.

campaigns, one specifically addressing navy men and the other continuing to market clothing to civilians.⁵² Whereas the citizens of Portsmouth in general struggled to adjust to the often rowdy hordes of military men arriving in town, Jewish businesses welcomed them and their patronage.⁵³

Even with their expanding market base, Jews remained in many of the same neighborhoods that they had lived in prior to the population boom, although the area of Jewish settlement grew. County and High streets still hosted the greatest number of Jewish residents. London and South Streets also became home to a substantial number of Jews while the size of Jewish neighborhoods in Chestnut and Effingham Streets did not grow. The racial composition of neighborhoods, however, had changed from the previous decade. Residential segregation probably resulted from a state sanctioned Portsmouth ordinance instituted sometime between 1910 and 1917 which barred Blacks and Whites from living together in areas designated by the city council.⁵⁴ County Street, where in 1910 Jews and Blacks operated their businesses in close proximity, looked like a different neighborhood altogether. Many of the same Jewish businesses remained in the same locations, and *Gomley Chesed* synagogue was still at 519 County. The Black occupants, however, had left the neighborhood. Instead of conducting business side by

⁵² Harry Hofheimer Advertisements, *Virginian-Pilot*, 15 July 1917, and 1 February 1918.

⁵³ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 286-300.

⁵⁴ Given the limited scope of this study, I was unable to obtain a city map which clearly delineated which neighborhoods, blocks, or areas of the city the council determined to be Black or White. Furthermore, I was unable to ascertain the degree to which or the methods by which local officials enforced this ordinance. The ordinance itself can be found in "The charter of the city of Portsmouth, Va., as amended by acts of the General Assembly of Virginia to March 27th, 1914.," sec. 510, "An Act to Provide for Designation by Cities and Town of Segregation Districts for Residence by White and Colored Person;" C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 100.

side, Blacks lived in tight groupings from the 900 block to the 1600, then again from the 2300 to the 3000. Some mingling of ethnic and immigrant minorities could still be seen in the 800 block as it had been a decade earlier, but the rest of the street had become strictly segregated.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, High Street, which was still the primary commercial artery of Portsmouth, also reflected greater residential segregation. With only a handful of exceptions, High Street was entirely White from the 100 block to the 1000 block. Conversely, the 1000 to the 1600 blocks and the 2600 to the 3100 blocks were solidly Black. Jews as well as other ethnic minorities with light skin tones were categorized as White and thus operated their businesses on the main commercial strips away from Black businesses.⁵⁶ This was merely an extension of what had already been a trend on the main thoroughfare of Portsmouth in 1910. Yet, it contributed to the overall separation between Whites and Blacks, while demonstrating the integration of Jews as members of White America. New popular neighborhoods for Jews on London and South Streets were similarly sectioned off according to race, though not with the same precision.⁵⁷

Chestnut Street, previously one of the most popular Jewish areas, was still home to a number of Jews. Blacks still lived in close proximity, although this area was also starting to separate. Blacks primarily resided in blocks together and beyond the 800 block of Chestnut Street. Almost all of the Jews living on the street lived in the 700 block

⁵⁵ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1392-1395.

⁵⁶ The header for the street in the directory is incorrectly labelled "Henry." However, the text inside the document confirms the listings as representative of High Street. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1418-1417; Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 25-26.

⁵⁷ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1423-1424, 1439-1440.

where the Jewish community constructed *Chevra T'helim* in 1922.⁵⁸ Similarly, Jews remained on Effingham Street, but large swaths of the road had been reconfigured as a Black neighborhood.⁵⁹ Eastern European Jewish immigrants were more likely to live on County, Green, and South Streets. Green Street had become a majority Black area. Jews residing on the street were often surrounded entirely by Black neighbors.⁶⁰ South Street, however, appeared to be neatly divided, with Jews occupying entire blocks of their own and Blacks residing on Black streets.⁶¹ Many native-born Jews were also found on County and Green. However, the largest numbers of the native-born members lived on High and London Streets.

An additional reason for the continued growth of the Jewish community was that there was little violence directed towards Jews in Portsmouth. The same was not true everywhere in the South, however. On August 16, 1915, 25 White men kidnapped a Northern Jewish businessman named Leo Frank from his prison cell in the night and lynched him in the morning near Atlanta, Georgia. This lynching followed a lengthy trial in which the jury convicted Frank of the murder of a young White girl instead of convicting a Black man who was at the murder scene. The Jewish population at the time and many historians thereafter pointed to the event as a clear example of anti-Semitism in the South.⁶² The specter of Southern anti-Semitism in the Leo Frank case in Atlanta,

⁵⁸ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1388-1389.

⁵⁹ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1399-1401.

⁶⁰ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1409-1411.

⁶¹ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1439-1440.

⁶² Herzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 202-215; Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

however, did not appear to hamper Jewish integration in the Tidewater region. Instead, the opposite was the case. Jews could live openly traditional and religious lives or integrate freely into the larger population or both.⁶³ Many members of the Jewish community, including Reverend Louis D. Mendoza of Norfolk's *Ohef Shalom*, were prominent figures in local society.⁶⁴ Jews faced no visible economic discrimination and their businesses flourished in both cities. Even Norfolk resident Benjamin Banks, a contemporary figure who wrote prolifically on Jews and politics, focused on Klan activity elsewhere in the nation rather than in the region.⁶⁵

One possible reason that the presence of the KKK seemed to matter little to Portsmouth Jews was that by 1920 and the revival of the Klan, Jewish businesses and homes were mostly outside of Black neighborhoods which were the primary target of the Klan in Hampton Roads.⁶⁶ In his biography of Norfolk native, Louis Jaffe, an integrated Jew who converted to Episcopalianism and was the editor of the *Virginian Pilot* during the period, Alexander S. Leidholdt noted that there were a handful of Klan related

⁶³ "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities: Norfolk, Virginia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life; Alexander Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice: The Life of Louis I. Jaffe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ In addition to his involvement with the White community of Hampton Roads, Mendoza also reached out to the Black community. In March 1924, Mendoza delivered a sermon at the St. John A.M.E., an historically Black church, in Norfolk. His sermon focused on the depravity of discrimination against Blacks. During his address, Mendoza identified himself as Jewish, but also as a member of the larger White community. "Dr. Mendoza Scores Intolerance in a Stirring Address," *New Journal and Guide*, 15 March 1924; Berent, *Norfolk, Virginia: A Jewish History of the 20th Century*; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 276-277, 286.

⁶⁵ Old Dominion University, "The Papers of Benjamin Banks."

⁶⁶ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger argue that those Whites who participated in racial violence directed their cruelty towards Hampton Roads' Black population. There were even lynchings of Black individuals in Princess Anne and Nansemond counties as late as 1906. While this particularly affected the psyche of Norfolk's Black population, it could not have been far from the minds of those in Portsmouth as well. Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 276.

incidents during the early 1920s. None of these incidents appeared to target Jews, although Jaffe believed he might have received more negative letters from Klansmen because he was of Jewish origin. Leidholdt did not chronicle any Klan activity in Portsmouth itself.⁶⁷ In reality, there was far less evidence of discrimination against Jews than Blacks. In contrast to the Black community of Portsmouth, it appears officials rarely charged Jews with crimes or even reported them as being Jewish in court records. The few cases discovered between 1910 and 1930, such as the dismissal of charges against Thomas Weisman for violating the city's health code by selling second hand shoes, portray a tolerant relationship between the local authorities and the Jewish community.⁶⁸

Portsmouth Patterns in Perspective

In many ways, Portsmouth was a typical small town Jewish community before 1917.⁶⁹ Portsmouth's Jewish population's boom directly correlated to the rapid expansion of the city. Like other small towns, Portsmouth's Jewish community grew alongside the city itself.⁷⁰ In Portsmouth as in many other small towns, the arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants occurred between 1910 and 1920. Portsmouth initially drew its small Jewish population in the mid-to-late nineteenth century thanks to its location as a port market center.⁷¹ In this way, Portsmouth resembled other small port towns like

⁶⁷ Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice*, 137-200.

⁶⁸ "Cobbler Charged with Violation Dismissed," *Virginian Pilot*, February 6, 1910, 24.

⁶⁹ At the start of the twentieth century, Portsmouth fell into Weissbach's "small town" category, holding a population of under 1,000 Jews in 1907 with the typical economic profile of such communities. Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 1-33. Weissbach begins his study with the 1927 data from the *American Jewish Yearbook*. Portsmouth's expansion occurred earlier.

⁷⁰ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 34-35.

Wilmington, North Carolina, and Mobile, Alabama.⁷² The genesis of small town Jewish communities generally came about through ‘circuitous migration,’ a pattern of movement in which immigrants arrived at other immigration points and moved around within the country gathering English language skills and an understanding of American culture and economy before settling in small communities.⁷³ Such was the case in Portsmouth, a city that was never an immigration port. Weissbach and Morawska emphasize the role of the economy for the sudden influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in small to mid-size communities, especially in coal, steel, and resort towns.⁷⁴ Furthermore, towns serving as the terminus of railroads were also extremely popular settlement sites for Jews in the period of the second wave of Eastern European Jewish immigration between 1880 and 1924.⁷⁵

The Portsmouth Jewish community’s economic profile also closely resembled small towns between 1910 and 1920. Whereas larger cities harbored an industrial Jewish working class in the nineteen-teens, small communities contained a distinct Jewish middle-class where “just about every head of household was involved in business, usually as a retailer, a wholesaler, or a skilled artisan meeting the basic consumer needs of small-town society.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, small town Jewish business relied heavily on

⁷¹ While Portsmouth slowly acquired Eastern European immigrants in the first decade of the twentieth century, their numbers were very small compared to the number that arrived in response to the war economy. Jews appeared in small towns occurred much later than in large urban centers specifically because of their gradual migration from immigration ports to smaller trade centers with open markets. Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 56-57.

⁷² Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 38-39.

⁷³ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 40.

⁷⁴ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 60-61; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*.

⁷⁵ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 62-63.

⁷⁶ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 95.

supplying relatively universal needs “such as clothing, and other dry goods, shoes, furniture, and hardware.”⁷⁷ The Goodman brothers- a furniture retailer, a clothing entrepreneur, and previous wholesale grocers were typical small town Jews of the period. Indeed, the census data reveals that most Jews in Portsmouth were small business owners.

Portsmouth’s Jewish community contrasted with other mid-Atlantic cities, however, in class division and occupation. For example, the Baltimore Jewish population was larger and more delineated along class lines than Portsmouth.⁷⁸ Unlike the case in Portsmouth, Eastern European Jews immigrated directly to Baltimore through the early twentieth century. As they arrived, a clear class stratification between German and Eastern European Jews formed, with large numbers of German Jews residing in more affluent areas while the lower income Eastern European Jewish immigrants concentrated downtown, this class distinction did not exist in Portsmouth.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Baltimore Jews tended to form tightly knit neighborhoods organized along class lines. They resided in large clusters rather than intermingling with other ethnic or racial groups.⁸⁰ Portsmouth Jewry’s small numbers prevented the formation of distinct Jewish neighborhoods, but there was also little indication that Portsmouth’s Jews resisted living among the Black

⁷⁷ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 99.

⁷⁸ Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 102. Baltimore’s Jewish community began early, with mostly German Jews arriving in the area between the 1780s and 1830s. By 1920, Baltimore contained large numbers of Eastern European immigrant Jews, most of whom worked in the local clothing industry. In conjunction with New York and Philadelphia, the three cities hosted one fourth of all Jews in America.

⁷⁹ Gilbert Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore: A Family Album* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press in association with the Jewish Museum of Maryland, 2000), 3-9.

⁸⁰ Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 8.

community. Additionally, a significant number of Baltimore's Jews worked in industrial garment manufacturing, expanding a highly visible working class which further exacerbated the divide between the working and middle class Jewish community.⁸¹ No such division existed in Portsmouth's Jewish community.

The growth of Portsmouth's Jewish community resembled many Southern Jewish hubs in terms of population size. Charleston and Savannah had long supported communities that relied on trade and mercantilism for economic stability. By 1912, for example, Portsmouth had the same number of Jews as Charleston, but the Charleston community had existed much longer with far less impressive population fluctuation.⁸² Although it lost its dominance to Northern cities, Charleston continued to draw Eastern European Jews between 1880 and 1924. By 1917, approximately 2,000 Jews resided in Charleston, most of whom engaged in retail enterprise.⁸³

⁸¹ Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 108. "Statistics of the Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916), 346-347. "Statistics of the Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926), 386-388; *American Jewish Yearbook* figures closest to 1940 were from 1937 local estimates. "Statistics of the Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 646-649; "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961), 57-63; "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook* 81 (1981), 172-181. "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook* 101 (2001), 262-277.

⁸² In the early nineteenth century, Charleston had America's largest number of Jews. In 1820, approximately 400 Jews made the Southern port city their home. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, cities such as New York had far surpassed Charleston's economic capacity as well as its Jewish population. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916), 346-347; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926): 386-388; *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 646-649; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961): 57-63; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 81 (1981): 172-181; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 101 (2001) 262-277; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Charleston, South Carolina," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Jews resided in the city as early as 1700, but grew to a viable, active community by 1749. Reznikoff and Engleman, *The Jews of Charleston*, 1-33.

⁸³ Reznikoff and Engleman, *The Jews of Charleston*, 196. Similarly, Savannah developed a Jewish community early in American history and grew at a steady rate which was out of sync with Portsmouth both in size and chronology. A number of English Jews arrived in Savannah in the mid-eighteenth century. Though Savannah's Jewish population fluctuated during the Early Republic, the general population trend was one of growth rather than decline through the nineteenth century. The community grew substantially

Of all Southern Jewish communities, Portsmouth most closely Atlanta in its initial growth and economic patterns.⁸⁴ The promise of a thriving industrialized economy drew Jews to Atlanta. Atlanta Jews migrated to an industrial city, not for jobs as laborers in the manufacturing industry, but as retailers and traders.⁸⁵ Like Portsmouth, Atlanta was not an immigration center. Jews arriving in Atlanta had previously lived in other American cities where they had acquired some sense of New World culture and the English language.⁸⁶ Atlanta's Jewish community grew enormously following the Civil War as workers flooded to Atlanta to rebuild the city and its railroads. As in Portsmouth later, Jews mostly came to provide goods and services to these laborers.⁸⁷ Both Atlanta and Portsmouth gained substantial numbers of Jews during the late years of second wave Jewish immigration, and maintained a predominately Jewish business owning, middle class in an urban, industrial atmosphere.⁸⁸ Early neighborhood patterns in Atlanta were largely based on class rather than national origin or even ethnicity. Jews occupied neighborhoods that included both Whites and Blacks, Jews and non-Jews, based on their level of affluence. While the construction of synagogues tended to attract a larger number

beginning in the 1880s as a result of the Eastern European influx, benefiting from the same immigration trend that Portsmouth had. "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Charleston, South Carolina," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Savannah, Georgia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

⁸⁴ Jews arrived in the Gate City around 1845. Their numbers, however, were not substantial until after the Civil War when Atlanta experienced an economic boom thanks to its burgeoning industrial capabilities; Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 7.

⁸⁵ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 39-41. This is not to suggest that Jews were not in manufacturing and industry at all in Atlanta. Hertzberg pointed to a number of Jews in the manufacturing sector, comprising 9% of the city's total Jewish population by 1880.

⁸⁶ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 36.

⁸⁷ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 34-35.

⁸⁸ Hertzberg noted that by 1910, Eastern European Jews accounted for one third of Atlanta's foreign-born population. Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 84.

of Jews to live in close proximity, it did not necessarily dictate this settlement.⁸⁹

Portsmouth displayed similar patterns.

A key difference between Jews in Atlanta and Portsmouth, however, is that Hertzberg discovered that the early wave of Jewish settlers to Atlanta were mostly German whereas Portsmouth's 'boom' Jewish population was Eastern European. These German Jews were more inclined towards assimilation whereas the Eastern Europeans were more likely to cling to their religious and cultural traditions, but Diner shows that Jews in both Jewish waves of immigration resembled each other in terms of integration and Jewish identity.⁹⁰

The most important similarity between Jews in Atlanta and Portsmouth was the economic relationship between Jews and Blacks. Atlanta's Jews, like Portsmouth's, marketed to a Black customer base from an early period. When the German Jews gained enough capital, they moved out of selling to a marginalized and low profit market in order to serve an affluent, White customer base. Then, the less wealthy Eastern European Jews who arrived in Atlanta at the turn of the twentieth century began marketing specifically to Atlanta's Blacks because the market was open and easily accessible with very little financial investment.⁹¹ Similarly, in Portsmouth, this system also depended on Jews' ability to advance their economic standing. In Atlanta, Jews eventually reached

⁸⁹ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 46-48, 97.

⁹⁰ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 46-48, 97; Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 71-111.

⁹¹ Specifically, Hertzberg said, "Having arrived in Atlanta substantially poorer than had their now prosperous German co-religionists, they were able to enter the overcrowded retail market only at the lowest and most stigmatized level." Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 185. Hertzberg argued "(t)he economic mobility, assimilation, and social status of Atlanta's Jews were strongly affected by the city's large black population. Jews, in turn, provided Negroes with useful services and what appeared to be a viable model for group advancement." Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 181.

new White markets since Black patronage sustained Jewish capital growth over time.⁹²
This would not be universally true in Portsmouth.

At the height of its growth, Portsmouth mirrored the mighty rise of Atlanta. With a revitalized, post-war industrial economy, both cities attracted Jews based on the promise of commercial success despite possible religious and ethnic isolation. Subsequently, Jews in Atlanta and Portsmouth relied heavily upon the local economy for survival. Americanization promised freedom from the ethnic and religious ties that bound society in the Old World. Instead, their identity nested inside socio-economic class structure which allowed for upward mobility. However, Portsmouth's trajectory and that of Atlanta would diverge in the years after World War I. While Atlanta's Jewish community would continue to thrive, Portsmouth's Jewish community would decline in the depressed local economy. When the Portsmouth economy could no longer support a stable, secure, and upwardly mobile Jewish life, there was little left to root the community in place.

⁹² Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 183-184.

Chapter 2: The Bust (1920-1930)

The 1920s were a prosperous period for the Goodman brothers. Isaac and Belle welcomed another daughter, Zelma, in 1923, and Isaac's successful department store, "The Famous," continued to thrive. Asral and Jerome had left the furniture business and taken up other enterprises. Exchanging furniture for foot wear, Asral opened the Central Shoe Store between 1921 and 1922.¹ Meanwhile, Jerome relocated to the first floor of the spacious New Robertson building and established the Jerome Goodman Department Store. There, Jerome sold everything from furniture to art to clothing for the whole family. All three brothers' businesses were within two blocks of each other on High Street, the busy center of Portsmouth commerce.² By 1930, the Goodmans exemplified middle class stability and immigrant integration into the American economy.

Despite the brothers' success, the Jewish community as a whole had declined over the 1920s. With the declaration of peace, production at the Shipyard substantially slowed. It is unknown exactly how many war workers left the area in the years immediately following the war in search of better opportunities, but the decline was substantial. At the height of Portsmouth's war production in 1918, there were approximately 57,000 people in the city. By 1930, the overall population had dropped to 45,745, a 20% loss from 1918. (see Table 2.1).³

¹ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1922*, 1116.

² *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1930*, 1062-1065.

³ *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1920-1921*, 1101-1102. AJY, 1925-26, 325. Mapp, *Portsmouth Pictorial History*, 135. This decline took place despite a large area annexation in 1919 which included Pinner's Point. The annexation itself could have added around 20,000 people to Portsmouth proper. Many of those included in the annexation were war workers. Nevertheless, the 1918 population estimates did not include the numbers gained through the 1919 annexation whereas the 1930 Census figure

Table 2.1: Portsmouth, VA, Population, 1918-1930

Year	Population
1918	57,000
1920*	54,387
1930	45,704

*Denotes census calculation following Portsmouth's annexation of Port Norfolk, Pinners Point, Piedmont Heights, Brighton, Prentis Park, Lincoln Park, and Truxton from Norfolk County in 1919.

Sources: "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990". "Statistics of Jews." *American Jewish Yearbook 27*

(1925-1926), 386-388; *Norfolk County Common Law Order Book 27*, page 141.

As a result of this population decline, Portsmouth's Jews, most of whom relied on the war workers to buy their merchandise, lost the customers who had stimulated the economy and inspired a real estate boom. In the wake of this sudden economic reversal, Jews too left the Portsmouth area. Like the general population, Jewish numbers dropped substantially, sinking 72.8% from 8,000 in 1918 to 2,100 in 1927 (See Table 2.2).⁴ Jews left the area in larger numbers and at a faster rate than the general population. The displacement of war workers from the area following the war cannot fully account for the Jewish decline. Many factors related to the economy and the inability of the customer base to support Jewish business precipitated the rapid decline of the community. These factors included problems internal to the community such as the shortage of marriage partners, as well as external factors to the community like the changing socio-economic structure of the city, threats from anti-communist activists, the KKK, and the growing military presence.

includes the population figures gained from that annexation. One of the most striking things in the 1930 directory is the number of vacant buildings in the city. This further indicates population decline despite annexation.

⁴ *American Jewish Yearbook 17*, 1915-1916, 346-347; *American Jewish Yearbook 27*, 1925-1926, 386-388; *American Jewish Yearbook 32*, 1930-1931, 223-224; *American Jewish Yearbook 47*, 1945-1946, 646-649.

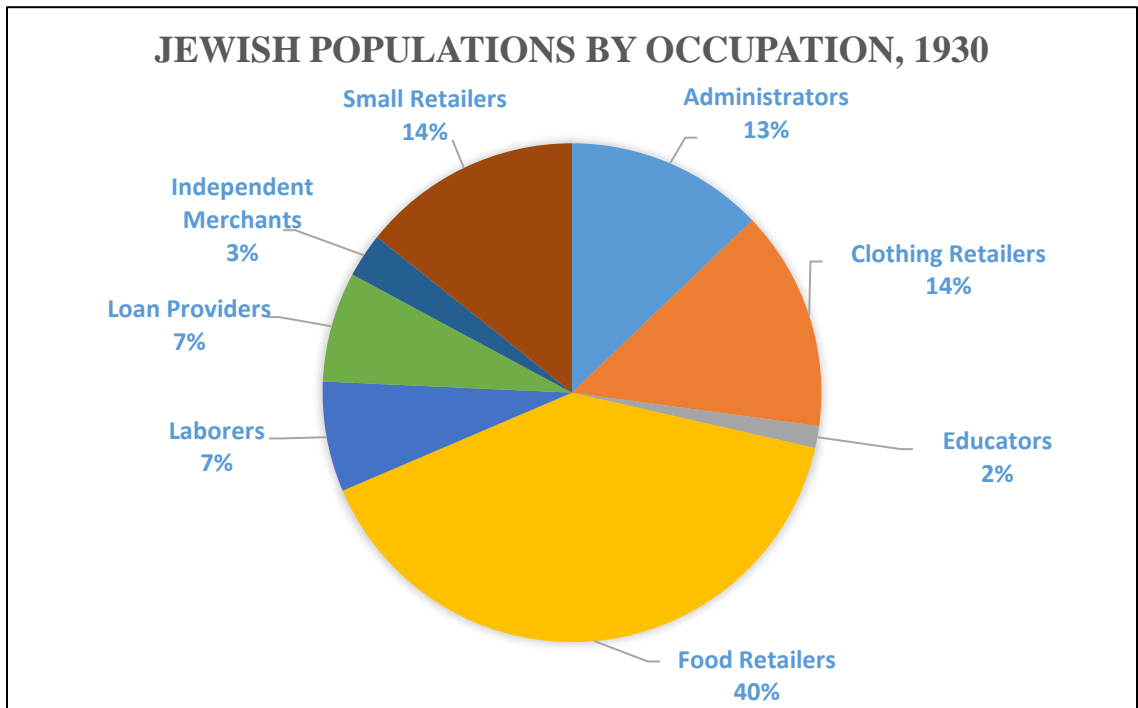
Table 2.2: Portsmouth, VA Jewish Population, 1912-1937

Years	Jewish Population	+/- Growth by Percentage
1907*	700	--
1912*	2,100	+66.7%
1918*	8,000	+73.8%
1927*	2,180	-72.8%
1937*	1,875	-14%

*Approximation closest to census years according to *American Jewish Yearbook*

Sources: "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916): 346-347. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926): 386-388; "Statistics of Jews." *American Jewish Yearbook* 31 (1929-1930): 255-334; "Statistics of Jews." *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946): 634-658.

Figure 2.1: Jewish Population by Occupation in Portsmouth, VA, 1930



Source: Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule."

The Jewish Community After the Bust

The patterns in Portsmouth's native-born American and Eastern European Jewish populations are key to understanding the community after the bust. The demographics suggest that there was continuity between the 1910 and 1930 Jewish community. Jews who migrated to Portsmouth between 1917 and 1920 were the same Jews who left after the war economy declined. The Jews that remained in Portsmouth were generally the same Jews who settled in the city prior to the major population growth. The data from 1930 demonstrates this continuity.

Very few immigrants came to the United States during World War I, in part because of restrictions on passenger shipping. Afterwards, the 1924 National Origins Act restricted immigration in general, and especially from Eastern and Southern Europe by imposing a strict quota which effectively eliminated Jewish Eastern European immigration to the United States.⁵ It comes as no surprise then, that by 1930, the proportion of immigrants to native-born Jews had shrunk from its 1920 peak when 40% of Portsmouth's Jewish population were Eastern European immigrants. In 1930, 35% of the Portsmouth Jewish community were Eastern European immigrants while the remainder of the Jewish community was mostly native-born.

As was the case in 1910, most Jewish children in Portsmouth were native-born Americans. In fact, there were no Eastern European immigrants under 19 years old in the sample group, a significant change from the previous censuses, indicating that immigrant Jews were no longer migrating into the city. Portsmouth's Eastern European immigrants

⁵ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 179-219.

were also more likely to be over 45 years old.⁶ Individuals born in the United States and under 25 years old often resided in the same household as middle aged Eastern European immigrants. This likely meant young adult children still lived with their immigrant parents.⁷ This overall pattern suggests that the young families who settled down in Portsmouth before 1910 stayed after the Jewish population declined, and raised their children in the community. Families that had settled in Portsmouth earlier continued to reside in the city while those who had migrated to Portsmouth for the war economy left.

In 1930, clear patterns in occupation, birthplace, and residential location suggest continuity between the 1910 and 1930 groups. The occupation patterns also suggested upward mobility for the children of Jewish immigrants in Portsmouth. The majority of Jews working in the food industry, whether as grocers, butchers, or restaurateurs, easily outweighed those in other occupations (see Figure 2.1). Jewish immigrants were far more likely to sell food in stores and restaurants than native-born Jews. Indeed, Jews dominated food retail in the city as 51% of Eastern European Jewish immigrants accounted for 71.4% of advertised food retailers in Portsmouth. Clerical work, however, including work as stenographers, secretaries, and office clerks, became as common for Portsmouth Jews as work in clothing retail.⁸ Native-born Jews were more likely to work in an array of professions, an increasing number of which were in administrative work.⁹

⁶ The majority of these Eastern European Jewish immigrants were adult men. However, the ratio of men and women was almost equal in Portsmouth's American born Jewish population. Eastern European Jewish immigrants usually married other Jewish immigrants, but they married native-born Jews as well.

⁷ Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

⁸ Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

⁹ Native-born Jews accounted for 89% of all Portsmouth Jews in administrative work.

Furthermore, young men and women worked in clerical jobs in equal numbers.¹⁰ This is significant for several reasons. Immigrant Jews who came to Portsmouth prior to the population boom quickly established small businesses, many of which were grocery stores and small retail shops. That Jewish immigrants in Portsmouth were both middle aged and operating similar businesses as young Jewish immigrants were in 1910 suggests that the immigrants sampled in 1930 were the same individuals seen in Portsmouth's 1910 patterns. That an increasing number of young, American born Jews worked in administrative or professional jobs by 1930 indicated that these Jews spoke English well and had access to better jobs and economic opportunity than their immigrant parents. The data suggests that the young American Jews working in administrative positions in 1930 were the children sampled in 1910.

Family and household economies in 1930 differed from those in 1910 and 1920, but indicated increased upward economic mobility. In 1930, the average household size dropped to 4.68 individuals which may have reflected the substantial drop in population as well as the ability for children to move out because of upward economic mobility. It also likely represented smaller family sizes, a possible sign that Portsmouth Jews were becoming middle class. The average age of married individuals was approximately 40 years old, demonstrating a slightly older population. As in 1910 and 1920, women were less likely to work outside of the home than their male counterparts. However, 66.6% of single women over 18 were employed, mostly in administrative positions. The number of single women working in administrative positions accounted for the majority of the

¹⁰ Jewish women were proportionately more likely to work in clerical positions than Jewish men. Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule.," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

female workforce. In contrast to 1920, married men accounted for 46.4% of the working Jewish population, a higher proportion than that of single men.¹¹ The discrepancy between married and single men working likely reflected the depressed economy and insufficient number of jobs.

By 1930, Jews were more likely to live close together in concentrated neighborhoods than earlier Jews regardless of their birth place. Most Jews lived on High, Dinwiddie, Court, and County Streets.¹² Since many of the American-born Jews on the 1930 census were children residing with their immigrant parents, it would make sense that American born and immigrant Jews lived in the same neighborhoods. That the 1930 Jewish community in Portsmouth lived close together suggests a more cohesive community than in previous years when their residences were spread apart in the city.

Although Jews lived closer together in 1930, they clustered with other White groups. This was a significant change from neighborhood patterns in previous years. The racial composition of the city's neighborhoods signaled the whitening of Portsmouth's Jewish population and the increased segregation of the city's Blacks. By 1930, there was little intermingling of Jewish and Black residences in neighborhoods, although such was not necessarily the case concerning businesses. There were almost no Black businesses or residences recorded on Dinwiddie, Court, and 4th Streets.

¹¹ 72% of women over the age of 18 did not work, with the majority of those women being married.

¹² The Eastern European Jewish immigrants congregated on High, Court, and Washington Streets. Native-born Jews generally resided on High, Dinwiddie, County, Court, and 4th Streets. Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule," Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

High and County Streets, however, offered a very different picture. On High Street, many of the blocks that were historically Black remained so, with only an occasional Jewish business, such as Morris Isenstot's pharmacy at 2770 in the Black section of High from the 2600 block to the 3100. A little further up the street, White businesses pushed Black commerce further back from the water, taking back three blocks from the 1000 to 1600 blocks in which Blacks operated businesses and resided in 1920. However, the opposite trend appeared on County Street. The Black neighborhoods on County now stretched from the 700 to 1600 blocks whereas they had begun at the 900 block in 1920. Jewish businesses such as Silverstein's bicycles on 820 ½ County and Eli Kaplan's pharmacy at 844 operated in neighborhoods which had been White in the previous decade.¹³

Explaining the Bust

The rise of the Portsmouth Jewish community between 1910 and 1920 is easily explained by the construction of the Norfolk Naval Base, the increased industrial production in the Hampton Roads area due to World War I, and the subsequent influx of war workers in need of goods and services. The sharp decline of the Jewish population between 1920 and 1930 is harder to explain. Between 1918 and 1927, approximately 5,820 Jews left Portsmouth. This represented a 72.8% decline in the Jewish population.¹⁴

¹³ Blacks also operated businesses and resided on the 2600th to 3000th blocks of County Street, just as they previously had in 1920. *Norfolk and Portsmouth Virginia Directory, 1930*, 1034-1094.

¹⁴ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 31 (1929-1930), 303-310.

It is nearly impossible to track where the Jews Portsmouth went after leaving the area, leaving us to speculate about their subsequent locations and why they relocated there.

One aspect of the disbursement of the community that should not be ignored is that the communities surrounding Portsmouth continued to grow even as Portsmouth's declined. Norfolk continued along an expected growth trajectory through the period. Additionally, the Jewish community of Newport News, also benefiting from the area's growing military industry, began to grow between 1920 and 1930. The surrounding cities of Hampton, Virginia Beach, and Suffolk were also home to small Jewish communities. As these cities grew both in general and Jewish population, it is possible that Jews from Portsmouth moved into these fledgling communities. However, the population increases in all of the cities combined cannot account for the dramatic decline Portsmouth's population. While the relocation of Jews from Portsmouth across Hampton Roads was a contributing factor to the decline of the city's Jewish population, it cannot fully explain the dramatic shift.¹⁵

The most obvious reason for the decline in Portsmouth's Jewish population following World War I is that military industrial production dropped off significantly after the war economy faded. Many of the workers who had so enthusiastically moved into the Hampton Roads area suddenly packed up and moved elsewhere for more economic opportunity. The sudden reversal in the local economy was even seen in the real estate bust as construction intended for the new migrants slowed to a trickle by

¹⁵ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 31 (1929-1930), 303-310; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 645-649.

February 1920.¹⁶ Simple economics dictated that if Jewish business owners lost a substantial portion of their customers, their businesses suffered. Just as the Jews of Portsmouth had followed the war workers into the city on the heels of the war, they followed them out once peace prevailed.

Of the 8,000 Jews who were present by the 1918 population assessment, the majority held no particular ties to the area other than that it provided economic opportunity. Their permanent settlement in Portsmouth was never certain as it depended on a continually successful economy. Census schedules and cemeteries demonstrate this communal fluidity. The Jewish families who were present on the 1910 census were the vast majority of those found on the 1930 rolls. The same family names who were present in 1910 are the ones still found on the tombstones in Portsmouth's lone Jewish cemetery. The Jews that made Portsmouth their home were already in the area when the boom occurred in 1917-1920. However, without ties to the area and sustained economic prosperity, those that arrived en masse during Portsmouth's brief boom left quickly when the market declined.

Beyond the end of the war economy, there are other possible internal and external contributing factors to the decline of the Portsmouth Jewish community. One possibility is that Jews left in order to reside in a more cohesive Jewish community. With its two synagogues for a few thousand Jews, Portsmouth was just a tiny enclave in comparison to the size and vitality of the Jewish communities in other East coast cities such as New York, Boston, and Baltimore. As impressive in numbers and activity as the Portsmouth

¹⁶ *Virginian-Pilot*, March 7, 1920.

community was during and immediately following World War I, by the mid-20s, it did not sufficiently sustain major pillars of Jewish life.

The limited opportunities for Portsmouth's Jewish community was especially true concerning marriage prospects. Marrying outside the Hampton Roads region became a trend for Jews into the 1920s and 1930s. Between 1921 and 1929, approximately 27% of Jewish marriage partners had resided outside of the region. Of the 34 marriages performed by a rabbi between 1930 and 1935 in Portsmouth, 38% involved one partner who resided outside the Hampton Roads region. This movement outside of Hampton Roads comes as no surprise. Matches were likely made from communities with which the families were already familiar. More importantly, these communities were ones which contained large numbers of Jews with thriving religious centers, Jewish institutions, and kosher food. Between 1930 and 1935, Hampton Roads' Jews most commonly married partners from Baltimore and North Carolina.¹⁷

The gradual decline of traditional Jewish practice in Portsmouth was both a symptom of the community's dwindling numbers and a contributing factor to its inability

¹⁷ "Marriages of Portsmouth, Virginia, 1921-1925." Portsmouth Virginia Public Library. Last updated 2010. <http://www.portsmouth-va-public-library.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Marrages1921-25.pdf>. Accessed 18 August 2016; "Marriages of Portsmouth, Virginia, 1926-1929." Portsmouth Virginia Public Library. Last updated 2013 <http://www.portsmouth-va-public-library.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/1926-1929marriages-MH.pdf>. Accessed 18 August 2016; One military member serving on the *U.S.S. Wisconsin* was married in a Jewish ceremony between 1926-1929, but was left out of these calculations since it is given that he was not from the area. "Marriages of Portsmouth, Virginia, 1931-1935," Portsmouth Virginia Public Library, Last updated 2013. <http://www.portsmouth-va-public-library.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/1930-1935-marriages-MH.pdf>. Accessed 18 August 2016. Herzberg and others have noted that marriage was a large contributing factor in the decline or shift of a Jewish community. Herzberg's argument in the context of Atlanta was particularly interesting to apply to Portsmouth because he postulated that the exit of young single men in search of eligible young women perpetuated the middle-class status of Atlanta Jews in the late nineteenth century since young, single men were usually the least financially secure. This is particularly relevant to Portsmouth since the majority of Jews that remained after the population bust were middle-class families. Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 141.

to sustain a large community. One tangible example of the decline of the Portsmouth Jewish traditional community involved the community *mikvah*. During the boom of the Jewish population, *Gomley Chesed* provided the sole *mikvah* in the city. Therefore, congregants from *Chevra T'helim* also relied on it to continue to observe *halakah*. The *Gomley Chesed* congregation began to drift from orthodox practice during the 1920s. As a result, its *mikvah* fell into disrepair and was no longer utilized by the end of the decade. Thus, observant Jewish women from *Gomley Chesed* and *Chevra T'helim* had to travel either to Norfolk or Newport News on a regular basis.¹⁸

Yet another factor that could have influenced the decline in the Jewish population was sensitivity to the Red Scare, a post-World War I national phenomenon which reflected fear of communism.¹⁹ On November 26, 1919, Federal officers raided a small store in Portsmouth and reportedly found much communist propaganda associated with the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), a radicalized labor organization which aligned itself with the socialist movement.²⁰ R.V. Goldblatt and H. Smith were both arrested and held on \$10,000 bond. The police proclaimed they had seized hefty I.W.W. membership ledgers, and the *New York Times* ran the story of a big raid in a little city.²¹

Palmer raids, such as the one that took place in Portsmouth, were far from unique in the era. The Goldblatt and Smith raid was one of many that took place across the

¹⁸ Berent, "Portsmouth Virginia's *Chevra T'helim* Synagogue."

¹⁹ William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 1-10.

²⁰ Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, 46-50.

²¹ "Arrest Two Virginia Reds: R.V. Goldblatt and H. Smith Are Held in _," *New York Times* (1887-1922); Nov 27, 1919; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index pg. 3.

county in November 1919 and January 1920.²² Portsmouth had long been a ‘working’ town given the presence of the Shipyard. The influx of industrial workers during the war also brought more unions and labor organizations which the government widely suspected to be extensions of the socialist movement.²³ Indeed, after the war and the subsequent economic stress brought on by the sudden unemployment of skilled laborers in the area, many large strikes broke out in Hampton Roads.²⁴

The records do not indicate if the Portsmouth Jewish community lived under constant threat of anti-communist activity. The red paranoia affected Jews more in cities like New York, where a dense concentration of identifiable Jews active in labor unions made them an easier target.²⁵ It is unclear how significantly the Red Scare and the threat of Palmer Raids affected Jews in Portsmouth, but the Goldblatt-Smith raid would certainly have been a major event in the Jewish community.

In addition to the nationwide hysteria over communism, the renewed presence of the Ku Klux Klan signaled peril for many ethnic, racial, and religious minority groups,

²² Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, 1-2. The Palmer Raids were a tool for deporting immigrants. Subsequent press coverage did not reveal the fate of Goldblatt and Smith. The outcome of the raid is a point for further research given that Goldblatt and Smith’s possible deportation would almost certainly have a much more dramatic effect on the psyche of the Portsmouth Jewish populace than the raid alone. It is also interesting to note that the *Virginian-Pilot* did not report on the story, though the raid surely would have been a well-known incident in the area. Leidholdt argued that *Virginian-Pilot* editor, Louis Jaffe, was especially sensitive to the Red Scare and subsequent Palmer Raids because he feared discrimination against immigrants. If true, it is likely that these concerns influenced Jaffe’s decision to omit reports on the raid. Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice*, 122-124. The *Portsmouth Star* reported the story, using the press release of the *New York Times*.

²³ Associated Press, “Portsmouth Union Plans for Six Months’ Battle.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (1850 – Present), January, 19, 1922, 8; Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice*, 116; Philip Sheldon Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International, 1947), 197.

²⁴ Parramore, Stewart, Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 295-299.

²⁵ Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2, 254.

including Jews. This was especially true in the South where the Klan became more violent.²⁶ Hampton Roads contained a number of KKK members. Norfolk experienced a growing KKK presence throughout the 1920s. In addition to advertised gatherings, Norfolk also played host to a KKK sponsored festival which included a musical production as well as a parade featuring members in classic hooded attire.²⁷ The KKK presence in Norfolk was responsible for multiple crimes motivated by racial and religious prejudice, including one episode in which a suspected Klansman severely beat a Catholic patron in the middle of a crowded store. Perhaps the most dramatic episode involved the kidnapping of a Black Catholic priest, who was returned unharmed with the grim warning that the man was not to establish any kind of religious school for Blacks in the Hampton Roads area.²⁸ Dramatic as these incidents were, they were not common. Furthermore, there is no evidence to indicate that Jews were a prime target for the Klan in Hampton Roads. Indeed, Klan aggression in the area was almost exclusively directed towards Blacks. While incidents occurred near or even inside Jewish businesses and neighborhoods, it appears that Jews in Portsmouth experienced little of the KKK's

²⁶ Historian Thomas R. Pegram argued that popular memory associates the Klan most closely with the South because of the dramatic and violent incidents that occurred there specifically claimed by the KKK. However, Pegram discovered that the Klan established an “invisible empire” during the 1920s that stretched across the country, but especially clustered in the Midwest. Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 3-20.

²⁷ Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice*, 137-138, 180-182.

²⁸ Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice*, 190-200.

wrath.²⁹ Furthermore, the Klan seemed to focus its efforts on other cities in Hampton Roads, in particular Norfolk and Hampton, rather than Portsmouth.

It is likely that Jews experienced mounting anxiety about the KKK's efforts in the Hampton Roads region. Benjamin Banks repeatedly expressed concern over the spread of the KKK throughout the South, despite the fact that KKK violence never touched him personally.³⁰ Louis Jaffe, then editor of the *Virginian-Pilot*, actively denounced the KKK and its suspected local leadership. Both of these men resided in Norfolk, which witnessed far more KKK activity than Portsmouth. Even without incidents in Portsmouth, however, it would be reasonable to assume that the community did feel some sense of concern about Klan activity in the region. Such was the case in Jewish communities across the South during the period, as the Klan often advertised its hostility towards Jews, especially recent immigrants. The specter of the KKK certainly deterred Jewish Eastern European immigrants from settling further South.³¹

Another possible explanation for the Jewish migration out of Portsmouth might have been the Jewish economic relationship with the military. As Portsmouth evolved into a city whose economy and culture became dominated by the military presence after World War I, it is unclear how successful the economic relationship between Jewish proprietors and sailors and soldiers was. Young enlistees might have had extra cash, but they would likely not spend much of it in clothing or houseware shops and general stores.

²⁹ In reviewing documents from the Hampton Roads area, Portsmouth, and the Jewish community within the region, I have yet to find a single document which indicated that the KKK ever attacked members of the Hampton Roads Jewish community.

³⁰ Old Dominion University, "The Papers of Benjamin Banks."

³¹ Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 209; Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 53-54; Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 217-218.

Additionally, members of the military could have purchased foods and other essential items at the base's commissary store at a lower price. According to the local press, their sudden settlement also resulted in increased rowdy behavior and petty crime.³² The shift from a war time economy which brought workers to a military economy which brought mostly servicemen changed the ways in which Jews marketed and operated their businesses. It is possible that Jews, though economically flexible, no longer found Portsmouth to be a desirable market not merely because of decreased size, but also because of the change in patronage.

The inability of the economically depressed Black community to support Jewish businesses alone was also a significant reason for the decline of the Jewish population. Before the Jewish influx to Portsmouth, the city had been home to a large Black population. The war brought even more Blacks to the area as they also sought economic opportunity as workers in the war industry. The federal government facilitated the growth of the Black population in Portsmouth as they constructed 250 Black residences and 750 homes for White war workers in Portsmouth.³³ In both Portsmouth and Norfolk, Jews lived in or near Black neighborhoods and provided business services to Blacks in an era

³² Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 286-300; Leidholdt also suggested that the newly arrived military members might have participated in White supremacist activities in Hampton Roads. These allegations, however, are far from proven. See Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice*, 138.

³³The government did not build Black war worker houses in Norfolk. In Portsmouth, the Black residential area built for war workers in this period became the neighborhood of Truxton while the White section became Cradock. United States Housing Corporation. War Emergency Construction (housing War Workers) *Volume 2 of War Emergency Construction (housing War Workers): Report of the United States Housing Corporation*, United States. Bureau of Industrial Housing and Transportation. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1920. 372. Robert Brooke Albertson, *Portsmouth Virginia* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2002), 69.

when most White business owners refused black patronage.³⁴ Jewish economic relations with Blacks were not necessarily an indication of Jewish benevolence or enlightenment. Rather, many Jews saw Blacks, shut out by White commercial discrimination, as an economic opportunity. Thus, Portsmouth's large Black population was advantageous for Jewish business owners who had opened their business doors and extended credit to Blacks.

Despite the cooperative economic relationship between the two minority communities, it is possible that rampant crime and poverty in the Black community influenced the Jewish decision to migrate elsewhere. In nearly every issue of the *Virginian-Pilot* and the *Portsmouth Star* there were accounts of Blacks, mostly males, in conflict with society and the law. The press and White society publicized these allegations whether or not they were actually true. There were also reports of Black violence against Jews, such as when two unknown Black assailants attempted to rob a gun from Samuel Bord's pawn shop on the corner of Green and High Streets. When Bord tried to stop the theft, one of the men badly slashed Bord with a razor.³⁵ Violent interactions between Jews and Blacks appear to have been rare and occurred in the context of business transactions, not as racially motivated crime. It was clear, however, that the authorities held Blacks responsible for most petty crime. The media also failed to genuinely report their stories, instead preferring a narrative of the Black individual as an exotic beast. Meanwhile, because of Jim Crow, White society shut them out from

³⁴ For examples in Atlanta, see Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 181-201.

³⁵ Samuel Bord recovered from his wound, requiring only a few stitches in the arm. *Virginian-Pilot and Norfolk Landmark*, March 4, 1920, 12.

restaurants and community gatherings. Most White businesses refused them service. These external pressures precipitated a decline in economic opportunity as well as a higher rate of crime. The cycle continued to perpetuate itself because upward mobility was impossible for Blacks.

Still, it is unlikely that Jews left Portsmouth because of swelling Black violence and crime. The relationship between the Jewish and Black communities in Portsmouth was amicable, though distant. Jews did not appear to be fearful of interactions with Blacks, and Portsmouth's Black community welcomed the Jewish presence in the city. In 1921, the Black Norfolk newspaper *New Journal and Guide* published an article imploring Black citizens to mimic the Jews, a minority which, it argued, had pulled itself up both financially and socially through hard work and cooperation with Whites.³⁶ In addition, the editors used the narrative of the Jews under Pharaoh in Egypt to demonstrate common ground between Jews and Blacks. The message was that if the Jews could endure such turmoil and succeed in America, then so too could the Blacks. This message appeared in various iterations in the *New Journal and Guide* during the period, but it represented a larger national conversation in Black communities.³⁷ While the *New Journal and Guide* tells us little about the personal relationships between Jews and Blacks, this idealization of the Jews does indicate that there was no outright hostility between the two minority groups. Instead, there was at least a tacit relationship between the communities which, for a time, lived and worked closely together.

³⁶ "The Secret to the Jews' Success in Business," *New Journal and Guide*, March 5, 1921.

³⁷ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 181-201.

What would have been more influential to the Jewish decision to move away would have been a rise in Black patrons defaulting on Jewish credit. This was a concern of Jews in the credit extension business across the country.³⁸ Because Jews extended credit to Blacks where other businesses would not, Blacks frequented Jewish stores and utilized the credit extended to them. However, as the war time economy subsided and Portsmouth's market faltered, financial opportunities for Blacks decreased sharply alongside that of the general population. It is likely that Blacks began to falter on credit payments owed to Jewish business owners. Blacks were in no way the only customers who would have defaulted on Jewish owned credit. There were civil cases against Portsmouth citizens for defaulting on credit extended by Jews long before the community's decline.³⁹ However, as a Black consumer base was a substantial part of the Jewish market strategy, when the decline of the war time economy adversely affected Portsmouth, the decline of an already depressed portion of the customer population would have adversely affected Jewish creditors.⁴⁰ For many business owners, there would be no recovery of the credit extended to those affected most profoundly by the economic decline. The ramifications on Jewish businesses would have been severe, and accelerated the drive to find better opportunities elsewhere.

The relocation or closure of Jewish businesses and residences from Black neighborhoods is important for understanding the significance of Black patronage for Jewish business and the economic relationship between the two communities. It also

³⁸ Diner, *Roads Taken*, 67-68;

³⁹ *Virginian-Pilot*, March 13, 1910, 26.

⁴⁰ Wendy A. Woloson, *In Hock: Pawning in America from Independence through the Great Depression*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

demonstrates Jewish movement in and out of the city. I identified a small sample group of forty-five Jews either residing in or operating businesses that were completely surrounded by Black businesses and homes between 1910 and 1930.⁴¹ Of these forty-five individuals, twenty either relocated their homes and businesses from Black neighborhoods, or moved away from the city altogether between 1920 and 1930.⁴² A total of fourteen individuals, or 31% of the total sample group and 70% of the individuals who left between these years, could not be accounted for, and were likely to have left the city, though it is not clear where they relocated. An additional six individuals closed or relocated their businesses and residences outside of these neighborhoods, but still within Portsmouth.

The timing of their relocation is particularly significant as it underscores the effect of the shifting economy and increased reliance on Black patronage.⁴³ Of the twenty

⁴¹ I collected this sample group only using the streets on which the most Jews lived for each year as I could not examine the entire city given the constraints of this study. For instance, for 1910, I collected samples from County, Chestnut, High, and Effingham Streets. In 1917 and 1920, I gathered individuals from County, Green, and South Streets. For my sample in 1930, I examined High, Dinwiddie, Court, and County Streets. It is relevant to note that I only found Jews in Black neighborhoods on High Street in 1930. The criterion for collecting members within the sample group was that their business and/or residence had to be completely located within a Black neighborhood. In other words, I did not include Jewish individuals who operated a business or resided on a street corner across from a Black neighborhood. I identified these individuals as Jewish based on census records, cemetery records, and common Jewish surnames. Jewish businesses and homes were often one and the same in this period. I found several examples where this was not the case, and the directory also listed a residential address for a given individual. However, this did not appear to be the case for most members of the sample group. Nevertheless, I could not determine the amount of locations included in the sample that were commercial, residential, or both given the constraints of this study. As with every aspect of this study, I could only gather individuals listed in the directory and who were obviously Jewish. There were likely many Jews that did not list their businesses in the directory, did not operate their business from a brick and mortar location, or did not readily identify as Jewish in the records. Therefore, the sample group cannot produce widespread conclusions about every member of the community. It can, however, provide an example of general patterns within the community. Future areas of research on this topic would be an examination of the business and residential transactions as Jews purchased or sold these locations as well as a precise evaluation of business and residential locations.

⁴² This number does not reflect individuals who died during this period. In order to ascertain if an individual had died and therefore was not listed in the directories, I searched their names in the census records for 1920 and 1930, cemetery records for *Gomley Chesed*, *Chevra T'helim*, and the Norfolk Hebrew Cemetery.

Jewish homes and businesses that left Black neighborhoods between 1910 and 1930, only three left in the years between 1910 and 1917.⁴⁴ However, seven businesses left between 1917 and 1920.⁴⁵ The largest shift occurred between 1920 and 1930 with ten businesses in the sample group relocating or closing. This accounts for 37% of the sample group businesses that were operating in 1920. While these numbers may be small given the size of the sample group, the statistics reveal a general trend away from the Black neighborhoods. This could be a result of the Jewish population's integration with White culture and identity, the severe economic depression within the Black community which subsequently did not generate satisfactory revenue, or a combination of both factors.⁴⁶

The most significant implication from these numbers, however, is that the largest portion of Jews who no longer lived or worked in Black neighborhoods had likely left the city altogether. This is significant specifically because these numbers address the relationship between migration, the continuity of the community, and the reliance on Black patronage following the exodus of the war workers. Of the fourteen individuals who vacated the city between 1910 and 1930, eight of these left between 1920 and

⁴³ That there were any Jews located in Black neighborhoods at all between 1920-1930 indicates that their movement away from these neighborhoods was not solely a response to residential segregation codes. In other words, they were not expressly prohibited from operating within Black neighborhoods, at least in practice.

⁴⁴ This is 30% of businesses in the sample group that were operating in 1910.

⁴⁵ This is 28% of businesses in the sample group that were operating in 1917.

⁴⁶ Between 1920 and 1930, Blacks also left the Portsmouth area faster than from other Virginia cities with a 16% decline in the community. Other urban areas in the state actually grew during the same period. The reason for this decline within the Black community was related to the instability of Portsmouth's economy as well. There were more men in the community than women. As men were more likely than women to rely on the Shipyard for employment, Black family economies suffered more when Shipyard production declined; Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Mae Breckinridge-Haywood, and African American Historical Society of Portsmouth (Va.), *Portsmouth Virginia*, Black America series (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), 29.

1930.⁴⁷ These eight individuals who completely left Portsmouth also accounted for 80% of the businesses and residences that left the Black neighborhoods between 1920 and 1930.⁴⁸ When the war workers left, many Portsmouth Jews relied on Black patronage for business because of the open market and low capital required for providing goods and services to the underprivileged and marginalized minority. This population, however, could not support the Jews who had come to Portsmouth for economic opportunity. These same Jews therefore left the community altogether when the war economy evaporated and the Black population proved to be a low profit venture.

Portsmouth Decline Patterns in Perspective

Teasing out Portsmouth in American Jewish history is essential for understanding communities which deviate from the traditional narrative. While the city shared much in common with small to mid-size, Southern, and industrial communities, its sharp decline reveals its significant difference from these communities. In particular, the sizable and rapid decline of Portsmouth's Jewish population set it apart from historic Southern communities and industrial Southern cities like Atlanta where the Jewish population stabilized or expanded.

In contrast to Portsmouth, other mid-Atlantic Jewish communities grew during the interwar period (see Table 2.3). Baltimore's Jewish population continued to grow, even after the 1924 immigration law which implemented strict limitations on immigration

⁴⁷ This is 57% of the total number of individuals in the sample group that left Portsmouth between 1910-1930.

⁴⁸ Only two businesses or residences in the sample group left Black neighborhoods to operate or reside elsewhere in the community.

to America.⁴⁹ Similarly, Washington D.C. experienced a Jewish population rise in the latter half of the twentieth century. The population within the District proper decreased as the century ended, but the numbers in the Greater Washington Metropolitan area swelled.

⁴⁹ Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 42-47. Despite the growth in Baltimore's Jewish community, the National Origins Act certainly limited the number of immigrants arriving to the port.

Table 2.3: Jewish Population in Baltimore, MD, and Washington D.C., 1900-2000

Year	Baltimore, MD	Washington, D.C.
1907*	40,000	5,000
1920	60,00	10,000
1937**	73,00	18, 350
1960†	80,000	40,300 (80,900)
1980	92,000	40,000 (160,000)
2000	94,500	25,500 (165, 100)

*Source: *American Jewish Yearbook* in the twentieth century begin in 1907. American "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916): 346-347; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926): 386-388.

** *American Jewish Yearbook* figures closest to 1940 were from 1937 local estimates; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946): 634-658.

†"Statistics of Jews." *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961): 57-63.

The city numbers for Washington, D.C. are inflated because the AJY specified, "greater Washington includes urbanized portions of Montgomery and Prince Georges counties, Md.; Arlington county, Fairfax county (urbanized portion); Falls Church; Alexandria, Va." Therefore, in the 1960, 1980, and 2000 estimates, I have included the district estimate and the metropolitan estimate in parentheses. "Statistics of Jews." *American Jewish Yearbook* 81 (1981): 172-181; "Statistics of Jews." *American Jewish Yearbook* 101 (2001): 262-277.

In Baltimore, several factors which Portsmouth did not have contributed to its population stability and growth. Baltimore remained an immigration port until the onset of World War I. The Jewish immigrant community which formed in the entry point attracted relatives who entered the country in other ports.⁵⁰ Additionally, despite initial divisions between German and Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Baltimore's Jewish population united into cohesive neighborhoods and communities during the 1920s which reinforced communal strength.⁵¹ Thus, the Baltimore Jewish community had size, vitality, and unity. Portsmouth's Jewish community lacked all three features.

The older Southern Jewish communities such as Charleston, Savannah, and Richmond almost collapsed a number of times, but they successfully stabilized in the

⁵⁰ William Connery, "Point of Entry," *World & I* 14.4 (April 1999): 218.

⁵¹ Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 1-9; Washington D.C., though not as large or well organized as Baltimore, followed a similar growth pattern, benefitting from its proximity to Baltimore and its role as the capital of the United States.

twentieth century (see Table 2.4).⁵² Indeed, by the end of the twentieth century, these communities showed growth, benefiting from Southern urban revival. Overall, the three cities remained stable over time, neither dwindling as small towns in the post-World War II era, nor radically expanding like mid-Atlantic hubs.⁵³ In contrast to Portsmouth, these historic Southern cities were able to achieve stability because of their well-established communities and their predictable economies. The Jewish communities of Charleston, Richmond, and Savannah were all established well before 1800. The Civil War adversely affected all three communities, but each was able to recover by the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁴

⁵² *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916), 346-347. *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926), 386-388. *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 646-649. *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961), 57-63; *American Jewish Yearbook* 81 (1981), 172-181. *American Jewish Yearbook* 101 (2001), 262-277.

⁵³ Of the three cities, Richmond's population numbers are difficult to interpret. At some point in the century, the *AJY* began including the county (or counties) surrounding the city. However, the *AJY* did not specify the date of this calculation change. The size of the new area makes interpretation of the estimate even more difficult given that the current Greater Richmond Region is approximately 5,700 square miles in size with 1.3 million inhabitants. However, Jewish activity in the region over the twentieth century demonstrated stability rather than rapid growth. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the synagogues in the area split apart and consolidated numerous times, mostly over ideological concerns rather than population increases. Further underscoring consistency within Richmond's Jewish community, two of the three oldest of Richmond's congregations, *Beth Ahabah* and *Kenesth Israel*, still remain active. "Where is Greater Richmond?" Greater Richmond Partnership, <http://www.grpva.com/doing-business/where-is-greater-richmond/>, Accessed 19 September 2016; Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*; *Beth Shalome*, the oldest congregation in Richmond, joined with *Beth Ahabah* in 1898. "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities: Richmond, Virginia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

⁵⁴ The date of establishment is based on the formation of a defined congregation, not merely the settlement of Jews in the area.

Table 2.4: Jewish Population in Charleston, SC, Richmond, VA, and Savannah, GA, 1900-2000

Year	Charleston, SC	Richmond, VA	Savannah, GA
1907*	1,500	3,000	3,000
1920	1,900	4,000	5,000
1937**	2,540	7,500	3,900
1960	2,400	8,750†	3,800
1980	3,200	10,000	2,600
2000	5,000	15,000	3,000

*Figures for Jewish population from *American Jewish Yearbook* in the twentieth century begin in 1907.

** *American Jewish Yearbook* figures closest to 1940 were from 1937 local estimates.

†AJY began including the numbers for the entire county in which Richmond was located by this calculation. It is possible, though not noted, that this also occurred in the 1937 estimate. This would explain the large jump in population between 1920 and 1937. Nevertheless, the estimates for 1960, 1980, and 2000 appear to include increasingly larger swaths of land than the city itself. By the 2000 estimate, the figure “includes Richmond City, Henrico County, and Chesterfield County.”

Sources: “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916): 346-347. “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 27 (1925-1926): 386-388; “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946): 634-658; “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961): 57-63; “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 81 (1981): 172-181; “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 101 (2001): 262-277.

A major reason for the sustainability of these Jewish communities was the reliability of the retail-based economy thanks to population stability. The original members of the community arrived for commercial opportunity rather than manufacturing. Like Portsmouth, Charleston and Savannah began as major deep water ports and were ideal for trading and retail business.⁵⁵ Richmond attracted Jews due to its status as Virginia’s capital and the major economic center in the state.⁵⁶ Although the

⁵⁵ Brownell and Goldfield, *The City in Southern History*, 12-15. “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Savannah, Georgia,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life; “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Charleston, South Carolina,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

⁵⁶ Unlike many Southern cities, Richmond hosted a healthy manufacturing sector in the nineteenth century. However, Richmond’s Jews gravitated heavily towards commerce and retail. Like Portsmouth, a large Jewish middle class far outnumbered a Jewish working class that would have relied on industrial laboring. “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Richmond, Virginia,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life; Brownell and Goldfield, *The City in Southern History*, 12-15.

Civil War adversely affected all three cities, the economies of each city remained consistent because they did not industrialize until later in the twentieth century. They remained commercial centers that facilitated the growth of Northern manufacturing centers.⁵⁷ In contrast to Portsmouth's economic rise and fall, these historic communities thrived on a market which was independent of military industrial waxing and waning. The population did not decrease in response to external pressures such as wartime or federal demand as dramatically as Portsmouth.

Portsmouth's Jewish community most resembled Atlanta during its period of boom, but deviated from the Atlanta model when the Jewish population decreased. Although the two cities shared much in common in the early twentieth century, Atlanta quickly outpaced Portsmouth following World War I (see Table 2.5). The key to understanding this disparity rests in the economic diversity and vitality of Atlanta versus the inherent instability of Portsmouth's economy. Immediately following the Civil War, the Jews of Atlanta relied mostly on trade, though some Jews owned or managed manufacturing companies. Approximately 80% of Jewish men owned businesses in Atlanta in the early twentieth century. Even many low income Jews in Atlanta owned businesses.⁵⁸ Jews were wealthier than non-Jews in Atlanta by the mid-twentieth century as Jews continued to prosper in a growing economy which was always requiring more

⁵⁷ Brownell and Goldfield, *The City in Southern History*, 12-15.

⁵⁸ Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, these Jews supported Americanization, favoring integration into Atlanta's society rather than investing in the Zionist movement. As in Portsmouth, a branch the fraternal and labor organization, *Der Arbeiter Ring*, sprung up and prospered in Atlanta, drawing many working Jews towards a more secular identity based on the tenants of socialism. This was unusual in Portsmouth since most of its Jews were retailers rather than industrial workers. Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 73-98.

retail, manufacturing, and construction. Because Jews had successfully positioned themselves in Atlanta’s economy, they continued to prosper.

Table 2.5: Jewish Population in Atlanta, GA, 1900-2000

Year	Atlanta, GA
1907*	3,500
1920	10,000
1937**	12,000
1960†	14,500
1980	27,500
2000†	85,900

*Figures for Jewish population from *American Jewish Yearbook* in the twentieth century begin in 1907.

** *American Jewish Yearbook* figures closest to 1940 were from 1937 local estimates.

†Per AJY, Vol. 62, “estimate covers an area greater than county in which place name is located.” In 2001, Vol. 101, the area is referred to as “Atlanta Metro Area,” but does not indicate total land surveyed.

Sources: “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 17 (1915-1916): 346-347. “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish*

Yearbook 27 (1925-1926): 386-388; “Statistics of Jews.” *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946): 634-658;

“Statistics of Jews.” *American Jewish Yearbook* 62 (1961): 57-63; “Statistics of Jews.” *American Jewish Yearbook* 81 (1981): 172-181;

“Jewish Population in the United States, 2000.” *American Jewish Yearbook* 101 (2001): 262-277.

In contrast, Portsmouth’s economy remained undiversified. Whereas the economy relied on retail, trade, and ship manufacturing before the war, military manufacturing dominated the market afterwards. Hampton Roads failed to attract new industry and commerce as the military dwarfed all other sectors of the economy. While the majority of Portsmouth’s Jews arrived in response to the burgeoning military presence and increased manufacturing, they soon found the market undesirable. Military members and their families were not regular customers of Jewish business, and the poverty of the area grew as the market remained inert. The economic contrast between Atlanta and Portsmouth is

both stark and revealing as it denotes the success of one Southern industrialized city and the collapse of another.

The 'bust' of Portsmouth's Jewish community occurred for many reasons, but the central cause was economic. Like Atlanta, Portsmouth's Jews relied on retail businesses. Whereas major immigration ports such as New York, Boston, and Baltimore hosted Jewish ethnic and religious communities that were continually reinvigorated by new arrivals, Atlanta and Portsmouth attracted new Jewish immigrants solely based on the vitality of their economy. Both Atlanta and Portsmouth first gained notable Jewish populations in the years following the Civil War as the cities industrialized. These cities continued to draw Jewish immigrants through the early twentieth century because of the thriving economies. In contrast to Atlanta, however, Portsmouth's industrialization specifically relied on ship production, dictated by the federal government's needs. With the decline of the war time economy and the uncertain future of the area, the glue which held the Portsmouth Jewish community together loosened. Subsequently, the Jews that remained following the 'bust' were mostly the Jews that had invested in Portsmouth's community well before the 'boom.'

Conclusion: Beyond the Bust

In 1946, Isaac and Belle Goodman retired and handed over ownership of The Famous to their daughter, Zelma, and her husband, Bernard Rivin. When Isaac passed away in 1970, the store was still a favorite of women across the area, especially among Blacks who remembered a time when The Famous was the only department store that welcomed their patronage. The Portsmouth economy, however, continued to decline in the latter half of the twentieth century as most of High Street businesses closed and crime rose. When Rivin closed the doors to The Famous for the last time on January 19, 1991, he asked reporters to put their cameras away as it was not “appropriate to take pictures at a funeral.” The store had survived for 75 years under Jewish ownership. Even when Rivin died in 2012, his obituary prominently featured fond remanences of the store, harkening back to the promising era of Portsmouth’s boom.¹ The Famous was only one of the many Jewish businesses that closed in Portsmouth. The final blow came when Crockin’s Furniture store, the last Jewish business on High Street, finally closed in November 2015 after 126 years of operation.²

The population decline and the formation of the city’s military economy set the stage for a continual decline of Portsmouth’s Jewish community in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Portsmouth’s Jewish population declined through the 1930s,

¹ Carolyn Shapiro, “Famous Owner’s Customers Got Royal Treatment,” *Virginian-Pilot*, April 6, 2012, <http://hamptonroads.com/2012/04/obit-famous-owners-customers-got-royal-treatment>.

² Kleiner, “Crockin’s Furniture closing after 126 years of business in Portsmouth.”

with 1,875 estimated Jews.³ In contrast, Norfolk continued to grow for a time. By 1937, the Jewish population had grown to 8,500.⁴ Local historians have suggested that the area's Jewish community experienced a period of growth and renewal during World War II. Yet, the Portsmouth community underwent significant change in the post war era.⁵ In the 1950s, Jewish population in Portsmouth and Norfolk dropped to 1,600 and 7,500 respectively.⁶ It became difficult to precisely track Portsmouth's Jewish population in the latter years of the century because the *AJY* began including Portsmouth with other Hampton Roads cities when enumerating the Jewish population. The community hovered between 1,600-2,000 for some time before undergoing another dramatic shift in the 1970s when *AJY* began tallying Portsmouth's population along with the nearby city of Suffolk, Virginia.⁷ Combined, the total number of Jewish residents in the two cities only amounted to 1,100.⁸ Similarly, *AJY* began including Chesapeake in their Portsmouth figures in the 1990s. The Jewish populations of these three cities consisted of 1,900 Jewish residents.⁹ The Jewish community of Portsmouth never rebounded from its population bust of the 1920s.

³ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 648.

⁴ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 47 (1945-1946), 648.

⁵ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 296.

⁶ Virginia Beach, later a popular residential area for Jews, was not yet listed in *AJY*'s directory of Jewish populations over 100. "Socio-Economic Data," *American Jewish Yearbook* 56 (1955-1956), 181.

⁷ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 60 (1959), 17. "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 71 (1970), 352; Weissbach also noted the trend towards calculating cities and regions together in the era, arguing that this was a sign of growing regionalism and the expansion of metropolitan areas. Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America*, 301.

⁸ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 75 (1974-1975), 311; "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 79 (1980), 169.

Local historians have also pointed to the construction of the Downtown Tunnel, which connects Portsmouth to Norfolk underneath the Elizabeth River, as a contributing factor in the decline of the Jewish population in the latter half of the century. Opened in 1952, the tunnel allowed for the cheap and easy movement of travelers from one city to the other. The process of constructing the tunnel displaced several of Portsmouth's neighborhoods, including at least one heavily populated by Jews. More significantly, however, the tunnel facilitated an easy commute from the suburbs to the cities and industrial zones in an era where suburbanization was highly desirable. Because of such convenient travel, many Jews relocated to more remote and upscale areas such as Virginia Beach after the construction of the Downtown Tunnel. Furthermore, Portsmouth's citizens became less reliant on the city's businesses as they now had easy access to the larger metropolitan commercial sector in Norfolk. These factors led to the decline of Portsmouth between 1950 and 1990.¹⁰

As of 2001, the *AJY* found that only 1,400 Jews remained in Chesapeake, Portsmouth, and Suffolk.¹¹ While descendants of Portsmouth's Jews revitalized *Chevra T'helim's* structure as a Jewish cultural museum in 2008, the synagogue closed its doors for worship in 1985. Temple Sinai, a Reform synagogue established in Portsmouth in the 1950s, also declined and was incorporated into Norfolk's large Reform congregation,

⁹ Meanwhile, the population of Norfolk and Virginia Beach combined was approximately 16,100. "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook* 90 (1990), 291.

¹⁰ "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Portsmouth, Virginia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

¹¹ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 108 (2008), 213. Norfolk's Jewish population tallied at 3,500 while Virginia Beach was home to 6,000 Jews, in part due to its Jewish retirement facilities.

Ohef Sholom, in June 2012.¹² *Gomley Chesed* went through many permutations, relocating to a more attractive, suburban area of Portsmouth and eventually associating with the Conservative movement. Even the oldest and most durable synagogue in Portsmouth, however, eventually could not support a *minyan* and closed in 2015.¹³

The decline of the Jewish population in Portsmouth reflects the situation in the city more generally. Portsmouth has become a shadow of its former self. Poverty continues to plague the area as does violent crime. The city's homicide rate doubled in 2015, and it is continually listed on popular ratings sites as one of the most dangerous places to visit in Virginia.¹⁴ Furthermore, the government has wrestled with major corruption over the past few years which incapacitates efforts to address the problems which undermine the city's health.¹⁵ No comprehensive study of Portsmouth exists thus far.

Further academic study of Jewish communities in the American South and in military hubs is required in order for scholars to truly understand the nature of American Jewish migratory patterns and socio-economic structures. A wide array of popular and personal accounts of Southern Jewry exist, but serious scholarship is lacking. Without it, scholars do not have a context for communities such as Portsmouth. Micro-studies such

¹² "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Portsmouth, Virginia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life; "Ohef Sholom Temple and Temple Sinai join together," JewishVA.org.

¹³ Elizabeth Blachman, "Songs of Past and Present: A Portsmouth Landmark of Jewish History Brings New Life to Old Spaces."

¹⁴ Johanna Somers, "Portsmouth Homicides More than Double This Year," December 29, 2015, *The Virginian-Pilot Online*, http://pilotonline.com/news/local/crime/portsmouth-homicides-more-than-double-this-year/article_2dacc9a5-413d-5229-b1a7-6a00db7a7a54.html; <https://www.roadsnacks.net/most-dangerous-places-in-virginia/>; Anna Strock, "Here Are the Ten Most Dangerous Places to Live in Virginia," August 8, 2015, *OnlyInYourState.com*, <http://www.onlyinyourstate.com/virginia/most-dangerous-va/>.

¹⁵ Kavanagh, "Portsmouth Vice Mayor Calls Drama in City Absurd and Embarrassing."

as this take on greater significance when considering that 21.5% (1,394,055 individuals) of American Jews resided in the South as of 2008.¹⁶ While the Portsmouth Jewish community's rise was comparable with smaller towns and post-Civil War industrial towns such as Atlanta, it differed from mid-Atlantic cities and old Southern trading centers which drew very different Jewish residents at an earlier time than Portsmouth. Furthermore, the decline of Portsmouth does not match any other model described, including Atlanta which demonstrated the potential Portsmouth could have reached. Given that much scholarly attention focused on Northern Jewish centers in the twentieth century, it is now time to explore other regions of the nation with different economies, communal structures, and social compositions. It is also imperative that scholars further interrogate the relationship between the Jewish community and the military both as a unified entity and an arm of the state. Perhaps with further exploration, we will discover that there are many other Portsmouths, or other complex, alternative narratives in Jewish communities across the nation.

In studying Portsmouth, we better understand the relationship between a Jewish community's continuation and the local economy. When the local economy and market was no longer favorable to common Jewish occupations, such as retail, Jews moved on to other opportunities rather than attempt to maintain a community in an untenable economy. Furthermore, the history of Portsmouth's Jewish community highlights the positive and negative aspects of the symbiotic economic relationship between Jews and Blacks, particularly in the South. While Jews relied on Blacks for patronage and eventual economic upward mobility, Blacks also benefited from access to Jewish goods and

¹⁶ "Statistics of Jews," *American Jewish Yearbook* 108 (2008), 178.

services. When either community could no longer support the other, however, the relationship deteriorated. In the case of Portsmouth, the Jews moved away once the Black community could not support the size of Jewish business without the patronage of the war workers. Furthermore, Portsmouth's Jewish community reveals how Jewish migration patterns across the South were dependent on economic opportunity. As the Southern economy struggled to compete with the rest of the nation, industrializing local economies in the region proved to be unstable. Since economies such as Portsmouth's could not sustain long term growth despite industrialization, Jewish communities could not maintain growth. The case of Portsmouth provides a glimpse into the opportunity Southern industrialization offered American Jewry as well as a window into the severe communal decline when that same economy could not sustain its promise.

The Goodman brothers live on in Portsmouth, although the pedestrians that stroll down High Street may not know it.¹⁷ The massive building which once housed Isaac Goodman's famed department store is now a visual art center for the community college. The Bier Garden, a local favorite of Portsmouth, now thrives on the spot where Jerome Goodman opened his first business after leaving his brother's furniture store. The lot where Asral's furniture store once stood is now bare, but the Jewish Museum and Cultural Center is directly across the street on the lot Asral sold to the trustees of *Chevra T'helim* in December 1918. The energetic economy that once bolstered the brothers'

¹⁷ Both Asral and Isaac are interred across the city in *Gomley Chesed's* cemetery while I could not find Jerome or his wife's final resting place, but they still resided in the city at the time of the 1940 census. Department of Commerce – Bureau of the Census. "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 – Population Schedule." Norfolk and Portsmouth Jurisdictions.

success may have faded in the wake of World War I, but the brothers continued to operate in a complex socio-economic atmosphere that reshaped Portsmouth forever. Their story of success and community gives us just a glimmer of what Portsmouth once was as its Shipyard roared and the Jewish community boomed.

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