Forgotten Soldiers:
Jewish Women and the American Civil War

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by
Rachel B. Gordon

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To my parents, Steve and Michelle,
For their love and support; and for giving me
the chance to follow my dreams

And In Loving Memory of
Grandma, Uncle Richard, and Papa
My three guardian angels

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the life and experiences of Jewish women during the American Civil War. Just as America was divided into North and South, Jews also found themselves on both sides—the Union and the Confederacy. As Jewish men took up arms in order to fight for their home, both North and South, many Jewish women also contributed to the war effort by sewing uniforms, donating food and bandages, and even by nursing the sick and wounded soldiers. Just as Northerners and Southerners had different cultures, politics, and economics, the Jewish experience also differed in the North and South. This thesis will use primary sources, such as memoirs, letters, and newspaper articles in order to understand the experiences of Jewish women during the Civil War, but this thesis argues that the Jewish women should not be analyzed as one homogenous group, but instead should be looked at as Northern Jews and Southern Jews to explore the differences between them and how their individual communities—North and South—influenced the actions that they took during the Civil War.
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Introduction

Women passing accidentally, like myself, would put down their basket or bundle, and ringing at the bell of neighboring houses ask for basin and soap, warm water, and a few soft rags, and going from sufferer to sufferer, try to alleviate with what skill they possessed, the pain of fresh wounds, change the uneasy posture, and allay the thirst. Others would pause and look on, till the labor appearing to require no particular talent, they too would follow the example set them, and occasionally asking a word of advice, do their duty carefully and willingly\(^1\)

Phoebe Yates Levy Pember wrote these words in her memoir *A Southern Woman’s Story*. First published in 1879 it chronicles her experiences as a matron at Chimborazo hospital in Richmond, Virginia during the American Civil War. Like many other Jewish women, Phoebe Pember was a participant in the war. Although she did not fight with guns and bullets for the Confederacy, she was a soldier on the home front. Almost every day for three years Phoebe Pember witnessed death and illness as soldiers were brought from the battlefields to the hospital. When the Union forces invaded Richmond in April 1865 she stayed at the hospital, despite risk to herself, in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of her patients.\(^2\) Phoebe gave up the life she knew as a woman from one of the most well known families in Charleston, South Carolina in order to cook meals, bandage, and even bury men in horrible conditions, with limited supplies,

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and with hostility from the male doctors with whom she worked. Phoebe Pember is only one example of the courageous and patriotic Jewish women of the Civil War years. ³

When women in both the North and South watched their fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers leave home, many of them expected that the war would be quick and decisive. ⁴ Yet as the months carried on and the battles produced more casualties the women who were left to take care of businesses, families, and households took action to support their troops. Women from all religious backgrounds and communities were part of the war effort. Some women dressed as men to serve on the battlefields; others became spies to provide information to their government; still others helped care for the wounded in the various hospitals. ⁵ This thesis will focus specifically on Jewish women, how they were affected by war, and how they contributed on the home front. This is an account of a time when Jewish women on both sides of the conflict put aside many of their Victorian-era ideals of womanhood in order to participate in the war effort. Whether by sewing uniforms, nursing the wounds of soldiers, or providing comfort to their families, Jewish women formed a distinct place for themselves in society that was revolutionary for Jewish women and all women in the nineteenth century.

Women involved in war did not fit into the common conceptions of womanhood of the nineteenth century, a time when the world was divided into two spheres—the

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³ See Pember, *A Southern Woman’s Story* for the complete narrative of Phoebe Yates Pember’s experience as matron of Chimborazo hospital.
⁵ See Lisa Tendrich Frank, ed., *Women in the American Civil War*, vol 1 and vol. 2 (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2008) for biographical sketches of women of all religions and in both the Union and Confederacy who were involved in the Civil War in various capacities.
public and the private. While men were involved in the public aspects of life, such as business and politics, women maintained the private portions of life by caring for their families and domestic responsibilities. Yet the world in which Americans lived had been torn apart. Families were separated by ideals, and brothers fought against each other. It was a time of change as the country that once called itself the United States of America was broken and its future unsure. In this time many Jewish women felt that boundaries had to be crossed. Despite obstacles, they provided their countries and their men with support. These Jewish women became examples of courage and determination for future generations of Jewish women who fought for their beliefs, and a place in American society.

In recent years historians have been intrigued by the topic of Jews and the Civil War and the field has seen a prolific amount of fresh scholarship. Bertram W. Korn’s monumental work *American Jewry and the Civil War*, first published in 1951, set a new foundation for further research in the field. Korn discusses several topics from the issue of slavery in the eyes of prominent American rabbis of the time, discrimination felt by Jews during the Civil War, the home front, and the relationship between Lincoln and the Jews. Robert Rosen’s *The Jewish Confederates* (first edition published in 2000) provides a comprehensive study on Jewish life in the antebellum South, the dedication of Southern Jews during the war, and life in the aftermath of war. Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn’s newly edited anthology *Jews and the Civil War* (2010) provides essays on

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several topics including Jews and slavery, Jewish soldiers, and Ulysses S. Grant’s relationship with the Jews. Laura Cohen Apelbaum and Claire Uziel’s edited volume *Jewish Life in Mr. Lincoln’s City* (2009) is based on an exhibit of the same name that celebrated the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth. Along with numerous photographs, the book also contains essays on Jewish communities in Washington D.C. and Virginia in addition to an essay on Jewish women and the war, and Ulysses S. Grant’s connection with the Jews.

There is a relatively large amount of research on Jewish life in the South that specifically focuses on the Southern way of life and how Jews fit into it. For example, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* edited by Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (2006), the aforementioned *The Jewish Confederates*, and *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* by Eli N. Evans. Comparable historical research has not been done for Jews in the North. While there are several texts that discuss Jews in specific northern cities and states, such as Irving Cutler’s *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* (1996), and Dianne Ashton’s *Jewish Life in Pennsylvania* (1998) an overarching study of Northern Jews during the Civil War does not exist in the same way that it does for Southern Jewish history.

In addition to these secondary sources there are memoirs, diaries, and letters written by both Jewish men and women that provide accounts of daily life during the Civil War years. These include the collection of letters by Marcus Spiegel in *Your True Marcus: The Civil War Letters of a Jewish Colonel*; Phoebe Yates Pember’s *A Southern Woman’s Story*; Septima Levy Collis’ *A Woman’s War Record 1861-1865*; *The Civil War
Diary of Clara Solomon; and the diary of Emma Mordecai. Interestingly, and a topic that will be later discussed, is the fact that there are more primary sources, such as diaries and memoirs, from Southern Jewish women than Northern Jewish women.  

The story of women on the home front during the Civil War has not been ignored. Dianne Ashton’s essay “Shifting Veils: Religion, Politics, and Womanhood in the Civil War Writings of American Jewish Women,” Stanley R. Brav’s essay entitled “The Jewish Woman, 1861-1865,” as well as chapters dedicated to Jewish women in the works mentioned previously all provide significant research and information about Jewish women in the American Civil War. While these histories introduce the narrative, there is still a lot of work to be done. Furthermore, Jewish women are often overlooked or barely mentioned in general studies on women and war. For example, the two-volume collection entitled Women in the American Civil War edited by Lisa Tendrich Frank contains numerous essays about politics, economics, relief organizations, and biographical sketches of many influential women during the Civil War. Yet Jewish women are only mentioned in two pages. As Hasia Diner has stated, “the history of the impact of the Civil War on Jewish women and their families and communities remains to be written.”

The various sources that have been written about Jewish women and their experiences during the Civil War usually combine all Jewish women together—both Northern and Southern. Yet, just as the North and South were divided by politics, the

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7 See Bibliography for complete citations for the texts discussed in this chapter.
Northern and Southern Jewish communities had their differences at the time the Civil War began. These differences influenced the way that Jewish women were involved in war relief efforts. The Jewish communities in the North were more developed than those of the South. Although both the North and the South had Jewish organizations and social clubs, the Northern Jewish women in the antebellum era had already begun a great movement of creating philanthropic organizations for Jews in need. This does not mean that the South did not care about the welfare of the Jewish people, and the fact that there was a larger population of Jews in Northern cities than Southern provides part of the explanation. The desire of many Southern Jews, even those who maintained Jewish traditions in the home, to fit into Southern society often outweighed their Jewish identity when they were in the public sphere. When the Civil War began women in the North tended to organize together in organizations that revolved around Judaism or the synagogue. In contrast, Jewish women in the South did not have the same allegiances to their Jewish communities. Instead of volunteering as groups of Jewish women they more commonly volunteered individually or in groups comprised of Southern women.

Through an examination of memoirs, diaries, letters, and newspaper articles, this thesis aims to highlight the individualities of Jewish women and the Jewish communities in which they came from in order to show how the Jewish communities in the Union and Confederacy influenced the way Jewish women responded when the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.9

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American Politics Leading to the Civil War

As the desire for more land grew, and Americans moved westward, the admission of new states to the country provoked the need to discuss the future of slavery in America. The debate over slavery was not new to American politics; it had been discussed by the founding fathers during the Revolutionary period and when crafting the Constitution. The laws governing slavery from the Revolutionary era were still in effect: slavery had been abolished north of the Mason-Dixon Line and slavery was not allowed in any new states north of the Ohio River. But slavery in the South had flourished. By the Civil War, it was the foundation of the region’s economy and governed culture, politics, and society. In contrast, in the North industry was flourishing and many northerners saw this “peculiar institution” of slavery as contrary to the very ideals upon which America was founded. So began the struggle between those in the South who wanted to see slavery spread through new American states and those in the North who wanted to prevent it from happening.

The question of slavery and its relationship to the future of America entered into American politics with the top lawmakers debating on the issues and possible solutions. Congress attempted to reach an agreement that would satisfy both the Northerners and the Southerners. For example, in 1820 the Louisiana Purchase was split along the latitude 36° 30’. The only state north of this that was a slave state was Missouri. While the Compromise of 1850 “undoubtedly averted a grave crisis…it only postponed the

10 Ibid., 7.
11 Ibid., 6-46.
12 Ibid., 8.
The Democrats, who were the leading party in the South following the demise of the Whigs, believed that slavery was not in the jurisdiction of Congress. But there was conflict within the regions as well. Northerners did not agree over whether slavery should be allowed in the states in which it already existed or should be abolished completely. Southerners debated whether they should secede from America and create their own country. Several antislavery coalitions developed in the North under various names, but in the end they all joined under the Republican Party. Jews, like the rest of society, were found on every side of the political fight. For example two Jewish senators in the South, Judah P. Benjamin and David Yulee, were both pro-slavery. In contrast, two Northerners involved in the debate were Philip J. Joachimsen from New York and Isidor Bush from St. Louis; both were part of the anti-slavery movement.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States in 1860, the southern states panicked, believing that their rights and way of life would be threatened by the new Republican leader. Within three months of Lincoln’s victory the Confederate States of America had organized in Montgomery, Alabama with a Constitution. States seceded from the Union individually; starting with South Carolina on December 20, 1860.

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13 Ibid., 71.
14 Ibid., 118.
15 See McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, for political history and details about the political beliefs of Americans.
16 Ibid., 126.
followed by Mississippi on January 9, 1861; Florida January 10; Alabama on January 11; Georgia on January 19; Louisiana on January 26; and Texas on February 1.\footnote{Ibid., 257.}

The conflict that would start the war between North and South occurred because Fort Sumter needed to be restocked with supplies for the Union troops stationed there. President Lincoln was told that supplies were limited and had to decide what actions he should take. Because of the location of Fort Sumter in the Charleston harbor off the coast of South Carolina, the restocking of the Fort with supplies by the federal government could be seen by the Confederacy as a step towards war. When federal troops did not evacuate from the Fort, the new Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, decided that it was time that the South declared war on the North. The Confederates opened fire at 4:30 a.m. on April 12. After thirty-three hours the Union Fort surrendered. As James McPherson writes, “on April 14 the American flag came down and the Confederate stars and bars rose over Sumter.”\footnote{Ibid., 296.} For the next four years until Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered on April 9, 1865, the North and South fought in a war that not only would affect the future of a nation, but individual citizens within the two opposing sides.

**The Slavery Debate Among American Rabbis**

The issue of slavery was not only debated among politicians, but also rabbis who lived in various parts of the country—some with congregants who owned slaves and others with congregants who detested slavery. Aside from the opinions and beliefs of their congregations, the rabbis had varying opinions based on their own understandings
of the Bible and the institution of slavery. For example, New York’s Rabbi Morris J. Raphall “place[d] Judaism squarely in opposition to the philosophy of abolitionism. He denied that any statement or law in the Bible could be interpreted to prohibit slavery, and insisted that, to the contrary, biblical tradition and law guaranteed the right to own slaves.”

Although he did say in his sermon that the Bible says that slaves should be treated as humans and that the southerners were not following this in their treatment of slaves, his main point was to show that the abolitionists had interpreted the Bible incorrectly. Rabbi David Einhorn, a leader of the Reform movement, and a devoted abolitionist, believed “it was blasphemy…for the proponents of slavery to identify God and the Bible with the cruelty and heartlessness of slavery.”

Rabbi Einhorn also saw a connection between Jews and blacks. He believed that if the rights of one minority group were taken away and they were enslaved, this could happen to the Jews, since they were also a minority. As a result of the fact that his views conflicted with those of the pro-slavery citizens of Baltimore, Maryland, the lives of Einhorn and his family were in danger and they were forced to flee to Philadelphia. Unlike these rabbis who were vocal in their opinions, Issac Mayer Wise did not believe that political debates should be

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22 Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War, 21.

23 Ibid., 24.


formed based on Jewish or other religious views. His opinions about slavery and abolitionism were complex. While morally he was anti-slavery he would have preferred that slavery continue if it would have prevented war. He also objected more strongly to the “warmongers” in the North than to slavery.\textsuperscript{26} Rabbi Isaac Leeser, founder of \textit{The Occident}, did not use his paper to publicize his own personal feelings about slavery. He also believed, as Wise did, that religion should not be used to frame political debates.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Jews in America in the Decades Leading to the Civil War}

Jewish men put on Confederate or Union uniforms in order to show their loyalty and patriotism. Meanwhile, Jewish women developed their own ways to do this. The eagerness that Jewish men and women showed to defend their countries, Union and Confederacy—a continent many had recently emigrated to—was a result of what America offered Jews. Just like other Americans, Jews had homes, jobs, and families. More importantly, America offered something to Jews that no other place had—equality guaranteed by the American Constitution. For those Jewish immigrants who saw America as the land of freedom and opportunity, but who settled in Southern states, it was the place where they established homes that received their loyalty. Therefore, many of these new immigrants were supporters of the Confederate government because while the American Constitution had accepted them, it was in the South where they had created homes, jobs, and relationships. It was therefore obvious to some that it was the South where they would remain and support. There were cases of people who found the

\textsuperscript{26} Korn, \textit{American Jewry and the Civil War}, 30-31.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 29.
decision of their allegiance difficult to make—especially those that were part of the American military, but were from southern states. For example, Captain Alfred Mordecai belonged to a prominent Jewish family in the South, yet he was a respected officer in the U.S. military and was married to a Northern woman. He had pressure from his family to leave the U.S. army and join the Confederacy. While he still felt loyalty to the Union because of his service, he was unable to fight against his home and family. Captain Mordecai decided to resign from the army, decline an offer from Jefferson Davis to join the Confederate army, and with his family he moved and found employment in Philadelphia.  

By the time the Civil War broke out in 1861 Jews had been in America for over two hundred years. In the 1840s and 1850s there had been a surge in immigration of Ashkenazi Jews to the United States from the German lands, Poland, and Hungary due to anti-Jewish legislation, failed political revolutions, and economic depression. Between 1840 and 1860 the Jewish population in America reached 150,000. By the Civil War the “number of organized Jewish communities with at least one established Jewish institution had reached 160, spread over thirty-one states and the District of Columbia.”

Although there was a larger percentage of Jews in urban areas due to the fact that in Europe Jews were often restricted from owning land, these laws did not exist in America and Jews found homes all across the country, including the South where the economy

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32 Ibid., 69.
was based on the plantation system. Yet even in the Southern states Jews often found employment as peddlers, merchants, or storeowners. This did not mean, however, that no Jews were involved in agriculture—in fact, some Jews who could afford to do so owned slaves.

As Jewish immigration increased there was a need for Jewish organizations to provide religious, social, and welfare services. Although the synagogue had been the central place of Jewish life, as a result of the increase in Jewish immigration the synagogue alone could not support all those in need. Consequently, other organizations outside of the synagogue were established that attracted both religious and non-religious Jews. In an effort to organize the Jewish community, an attempt was made to create “centralized, unified Jewish philanthropy” during the 1850s. Jewish foster homes were founded in Philadelphia (1855), New Orleans (1854), and New York (1860). Additionally, Jewish hospitals were established in Cincinnati (1850) and New York (1856). The examination of the cities in which these organizations were initially founded shows where there were large Jewish communities and a need for such institutions. Of all of these places listed here, only New Orleans was part of the Confederacy. Although these institutions were invaluable to the new immigrants as well as the general Jewish community, it was the Civil War that would test the strength of philanthropic establishments and the women who were left at home to run them when war began and the need for supplies and funds increased.

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33 Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War, 2.
34 Ibid., 4.
35 Ibid., 4-5.
Women began to see a change in their role in the Jewish community as the rabbis debated issues arising from the Reform Movement. The Reform movement “went out of its way to accord new roles to womanhood in the religious practices which it advocated.”\(^{36}\) Women now found it possible in some synagogues to sit with their husbands and sons in mixed seating pews, and to be in the choir. According to Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise this was not a threat to Judaism, but rather a way to include women more in the synagogue. As he said, “They [Jewish women] are the religious teachers of their children, the priestesses of the house, and we are morally obligated to attach them closer to the synagogue.”\(^{37}\) The growing need for Jewish immigrant services, coupled with expanding roles for women in the religious arena created a new space for Jewish women to gather and organize relief organizations.

**Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War**

When the fighting began Jews on both sides of the conflict picked up arms, joined the troops, and eagerly waited to be called to defend their homes. For example, Haiman Kaminski was an immigrant from Prussia to Charleston in 1854. Only seven years later the war began and the 22 year old enlisted in the 10\(^{th}\) South Carolina regiment and by the end of the war, he was promoted to sergeant.\(^{38}\) Another Jewish immigrant, Abraham Hart, immigrated to Philadelphia in 1850. He joined the 73\(^{rd}\) Pennsylvania Infantry in

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37 Ibid., 46.
1861 and was eventually promoted to captain. Jews from all parts of society and from all experience levels were part of the military. In the Confederacy, it was not unusual for both superior officers and the subordinate troops to admire and respect the Jewish officers. Upon the death of Lt. Albert Luria, his company expressed their sadness when they wrote “The pride of all his comrades, the bravest of the brave,” on a bombshell that Luria had thrown at Sewell’s Point. Yet, there were no Jewish Confederate generals and only a small number of colonels. As Rosen explains, this was primarily due to the “small number of Jews in the ‘old army’; the lack of a military tradition among most nineteenth-century Jews; the paucity of Jewish West Point, Virginia Military Institute, and South Carolina Military Academy (Citadel) graduates; and the intensely political nature of the appointment of general officers.” It is impossible to know for sure how many Jews fought in the military because records did not include religious affiliation. However, estimates suggest that roughly two thousand Jewish men fought for the Confederacy. Rosen argues that Jews did not form their own companies because of their desire to fit into society and fear of being singled out as a separate or distinct group of people. According to Rosen, there have been some accounts of two Jewish companies in the Confederacy, but there is no definitive proof.

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40 Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 90.
41 Ibid., 91
42 Ibid., 91.
43 Ibid., 162.
44 Ibid., 164.
45 Ibid., 165.
In Chicago a volunteer company called the Concordia Guards was created in 1862 and was composed of Jewish Union soldiers. The regiment consisted of ninety-six men, most of whom were immigrants.\textsuperscript{46} The fact that Jewish men organized themselves into this company and that the Jewish community in Chicago raised funds for it shows that in the North Jews did not consider organizing as Jews a challenge to their status as Americans. It is impossible to assume that all Northern Jews felt this way and would have participated in an all-Jewish company. However, this one example does show that the Jews of Chicago were comfortable identifying as Jews while serving in the Union army.

Jewish and non-Jewish women were left behind with houses, children, and businesses to take care of while their husbands, fathers, and sons went to war. And even though many women stayed at home, they were also crucial to the Civil War. On both sides of the conflict, Jewish women sacrificed their own well-being and comfort in order to aid wounded soldiers, sew uniforms and bandages, and help support families whose loved ones had died defending the side they belonged to—North or South. In order to participate in these activities, some Jewish women, including some of the women that will be discussed in the next chapter, fought against the constraints of the time, including the men who tried to hold them back, in order to show their support for their country and the men in uniform.

Chapter 1: Southern Jewish Women

In April of 1865 the Union Army under General Ulysses S. Grant captured Petersburg, Virginia and Septima M. Collis, only a few miles away from the battlefield, provides an account of the destruction and suffering that took place:

While the people of the North were celebrating with guns and brass bands... the capture of Petersburg and the evacuation of Richmond...City Point [Virginia] became one vast hospital for suffering humanity. As far as the eye could reach from the door-step of my humble home, the plain was dotted with tents which were rapidly filled with wounded men, Northern and Southern, white and black without distinction; army surgeons, and volunteer physicians just arrived, were kept sleeplessly at work; hospital nurses and the good Samaritans of the Sanitary Commission, laden with comforts for the sick and wounded, were passing to and fro, and amidst them all strode the tall gaunt figure of Abraham Lincoln, his moistened eyes even more eloquent than the lips, which had a kindly word of cheer for every sufferer. 47

While Septima’s life during the Civil War as a Southern Jewish woman married to a Northern military officer will be explored later in this chapter, this excerpt demonstrates the kind of experiences that some women had during the war. This chapter examines the lives of three Southern Jewish women: Phoebe Pember, Rosana Dyer Osterman, and Septima Collis. These three women were of Jewish and Southern backgrounds and when the Civil War began they all found themselves close to the war through family relations,

location, and in nursing wounded and sick soldiers. Although these women lived in different towns they shared common beliefs and are connected through their experiences. This chapter groups Southern Jewish women together in order to show the motivations behind their involvement, commonalities between them, the way in which Southern life and the Southern Jewish community influenced them, and ultimately how they differed from Northern Jewish women.

Phoebe Yates Levy Pember is one Jewish woman who defied normative roles of southern womanhood and endured harsh attacks by men in order to help wounded soldiers of the Confederacy. Born in 1823 to Jacob Clavius Levy and Fanny Yates Levy, Phoebe Yates Levy Pember and her family were an aristocratic Jewish family in Charleston, Virginia with important ties to business, politics, and the Jewish community. Phoebe’s father Jacob was involved in the development of the railroads and the insurance industry during the 1830s and the Levy family was also known for the social events they held. Importantly Jacob Levy was a “devout and practicing Jew.”

His father, Moses Levy, had been the president of Beth Elohim, the synagogue that Jacob and his family lived near and prayed. The fact that Jacob was able to lead services when there was no rabbi shows that Jacob was well educated in Jewish rituals and practices. In 1844 Jacob wrote an article called “The Reformed Israelites,” which appeared in the Southern Quarterly Review. Although Phoebe and her siblings’ specific education is unknown they were “undoubtedly raised in the Jewish religion and attended services at Beth

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49 Ibid., 282-283.
Elohim.” It is believed that Phoebe was well educated and it is probable that she attended finishing school in the North because of her family’s high social status.\textsuperscript{50}

In 1856, Phoebe married Thomas Pember and moved to Boston, Massachusetts. Phoebe and her sister Eugenia had different trajectories when it came to their marriages. Eugenia married when she was only sixteen years old to a man named Philip Phillips. Her marriage to Philips meant that she married within the Jewish tradition in which she was raised. Phillips was also an active member at Beth Eloheim, as was his father. In contrast, Phoebe was thirty-three years old when she married Thomas Pember, a non-Jewish man. Their courtship and the circumstances around their marriage are not known, but only a short time after their marriage Thomas became ill with tuberculosis and he died in July of 1861 in South Carolina. Thomas was only thirty-six when he died, which meant that Phoebe was thirty-eight years old when she became a widow. Forced to live with her parents she was quite unhappy with her situation. It is unclear exactly the tensions that existed between Phoebe and her parents, but it seems that there was tension between Phoebe and her father because of his desire to be a writer and her advanced writing abilities.\textsuperscript{51} But perhaps there was also tension because of Phoebe’s choice of a non-Jewish spouse despite her father’s devotion and commitment to Judaism and his attempt to pass this on to his children. It was in a desperate attempt to leave her parents’ house that Phoebe, without much knowledge of what the position entailed, took the job as matron of Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 296.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 296
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 296.
Initially Phoebe may not have known what she would encounter at Chimborazo Hospital, but when she became aware of the hardships, suffering, and death she was able to put aside her aristocratic life in order to help wounded and scared soldiers. This meant fulfilling tasks that she had no previous experience with and creating policies and rules as she encountered new problems and experiences. The fact that Phoebe did not even know what her job required shows the desperate need for help, as well as the lack of training or communication that occurred before Phoebe took her place as matron of the hospital. On Phoebe’s first day at Chimborazo she did not receive any guidance and therefore did the first thing she thought of—she made chicken soup. In the depiction of her first day after meeting with the surgeon in charge she says, “no preparations had been made by him for his female department…just then my mind could hardly grope through the darkness that clouded it, as to what were my special duties, but one mental spectrum always presented itself—chicken soup.”\(^{53}\) The fact that nothing had been arranged for Phoebe’s arrival shows a lack of respect and even a hesitation to allow her to be at the hospital. Clearly, she did not know what her responsibilities were, she did not want to ask, and therefore she did what she knew how to do. But, what is striking is when she says, “for the first time I cut up with averted eyes a raw bird.”\(^{54}\) The chicken she was so disgusted by that she had to avert her eyes would not compare to what she saw when introduced to the wounded soldiers.

One of the great aspects of Phoebe’s memoir is that it provides information about the medical field at the time of the Civil War as well as evidence of how revolutionary it

\(^{53}\) Pember, *A Southern Woman’s Story*, 28-29.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 29.
was that a woman would work among men in a public setting. At first it does not seem unusual that a woman would be used as a caregiver in a hospital because at the time it was normal for women to take care of their sick family members in their homes. Doctors would visit the house and give instructions for the woman to care for the sick and only when the sick did not have someone to care for them did they enter a hospital. Yet, as this memoir shows, caring for strange men was considered very different than a woman caring for her husband and children. Phoebe herself understood that her role as matron of the hospital was revolutionary and she had to show strength and determination in order to get what she wanted, and what she felt the soldiers needed, when the male surgeons had no respect for her and did not take her opinions into consideration.

When the Civil War broke out the medical community was made up mostly of men who tried to keep women from joining their field. Some women such as Elizabeth Blackwell, who traveled between Europe and America to receive her education, and Florence Nightingale, who had been a nurse during the Crimean War, had managed to break through this male dominated field. In 1860 Nightingale published her “Notes On Nursing” which gave women the confidence to act as nurses when the Civil War began a year later. The entrance of women into hospitals was a combination of patriotic duty and response to the desperate need for help. Often times the “nurses” in the military hospitals were injured men who had recovered enough to help, but not enough to be sent

55 Frank R. Freemon, Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care During the American Civil War (Madison, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1998), 51-52.
56 Ibid., 36, 64.
57 See Florence Nightingale, Notes on Nursing; What It Is, And What It Is Not (London: Harrison and Sons, 1860).
back on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{58} But the controversy over women in hospitals in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century revolved around what women would be subject to and what they would see. Victorian-era ideals, which placed great importance and value on women staying within the home and family, did not sanction such public responsibilities. The Civil War allowed women to witness war and unimaginable suffering, from which they had previously been sheltered. It was the responsibility of women in the hospitals to be strong for the men who had witnessed great carnage in the war and were in anguish from their current condition. Since women entered the hospitals out of necessity and patriotism they, like Phoebe Pember, had to learn through experience.

The women were not the only ones without sufficient training. Unfortunately, when the Civil War started the technological advances that led to more sophisticated weapons and gruesome wounds had not been matched with a similar advancement in medicine. Civil War doctors often had limited training and resources in the hospitals and on the battlefields. “By the 1850s the typical medical practitioner had attended one set of lectures for five or six months, perhaps less, and then the following year he heard these same lectures again. He might have worked with a practicing doctor…but he might have had no apprenticeship at all.”\textsuperscript{59} Chloroform was used as an anesthetic for surgeries such as amputations. And there was a growing interest in learning about hygiene and sanitation.\textsuperscript{60} But, for many soldiers nothing could be done to save them and what they needed was a hand to hold, someone to write a letter to their parents, or someone to sit

\textsuperscript{58} Freemon, \textit{Gangrene and Glory} 52.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 37, 48.
with them in their last moments. This was the role that many women, and a few Jewish women, filled with courage and compassion.

Phoebe understood that one of her responsibilities was to be a nurturer because the doctors were either too busy or incapable of fulfilling this need. But what that meant is that Phoebe got attached to her patients as she spent a lot of time with them and grew to learn about them. While the doctors were there to perform surgeries, she was often the one to give bad news or be the last person to whom they spoke. Phoebe also believed that as a woman she had the compassion that the doctors did not have. One of the experiences described in detail in her memoir shows the type of suffering that she saw and how it affected her. The following excerpt describes a case of a young wounded soldier under Pember’s care and is only one example of the excruciating pain and anguish that Pember saw everyday and the lack of knowledge and resources that were available to keep men alive.

He had remained through all his trials, stout, fresh and hearty, interesting in appearance, and so gentle-mannered and uncomplaining that we all loved him. Supported on his crutches he had walked up and down his ward for the first time since he was wounded, and seemed almost restored. That same night he turned over and uttered an exclamation of pain…turning down the covering, a small jet of blood spurted up…I instantly put my finger on the little orifice and awaited the surgeon…The explanation was easy; the artery was imbedded in the fleshy part of the thigh and could not be taken up. No earthly power could save him…and long I sat by the boy, unconscious himself that any serious trouble was apprehended. The hardest trial of my duty was laid upon me; the necessity of telling a man in the prime of life, and fullness of strength that there was no hope for him. It was done at last, and the verdict received patiently and courageously, some directions given by which his mother would be informed of his death, and then he turned his questioning eyes upon my face. ‘How long can I live?’ ‘Only as long as I keep my finger upon this artery.’ He broke the silence at last. ‘You can let go—’ But I could not. Not if my own life had trembled in the balance. Hot tears rushed to my eyes, a surging sound to my ears, and a deathly coldness to my lips. The
pang of obeying him was spared me, and for the first and last time during the trials that surrounded me for four years, I fainted away.\textsuperscript{61}

With the knowledge that Phoebe came from a well-known and educated Jewish family the lack of Judaism and Jewish tradition present in Phoebe’s life as an adult seems rather strange. When she has time, Phoebe does socialize with friends and attend parties. The people that she associated with were high-ranking military officials and women from aristocratic families. It is clear that her social group revolved around the high Southern society that she had been born into and had maintained as an adult. There was no discussion of attending synagogue or congregating with other Jewish women in her community—something that will be a common occurrence in the Northern states. Her father and grandfather had been established in the Jewish community of Beth Elohim in Charleston, why did Phoebe have a very different experience? Perhaps one of the explanations for this is that Phoebe did not have access to a social group for Jewish women where she lived. Another explanation is that Phoebe was more interested and had more in common with the people of her social status. Despite the fact that she worked in a hospital and saw death and suffering every day, she was an aristocratic Southern woman. And therefore in this social circle that she belonged to, outside her daily duties as matron, perhaps her Jewish identity was not compatible. Privately, and with her family, perhaps she was able to show more of her Jewish heritage and express pride in it.

In a letter written to her sister Eugenia, Phoebe clearly identifies as a Jew, but the language that she uses to distinguish the principles of Judaism compared to Christianity

\textsuperscript{61} Pember, \textit{A Southern Woman’s Story}, 67-68.
display an understanding of Judaism that is somewhat puzzling. On September 13, 1863 Phoebe told her sister:

I lifted my voice and congratulated myself at being born of a nation, and religion that did not enjoin forgiveness on its enemies, that enjoyed the blessed privilege of praying for an eye for an eye, and a life for a life, and was not one of those for whom Christ died in vain, considering the present state of feeling. I proposed that till the war was over they should all join the Jewish Church, let forgiveness and peace and good will alone and put their trust in the sword of the Lord and Gideon.⁶²

Therefore she clearly identifies as a Jew, in fact at this point she seems grateful for that fact, yet the words that she used to describe Judaism are often times used by Christians against Jews. Again, this could be a result of the people that Phoebe socialized with and the conversations that she encountered, which may have included anti-Jewish attitudes.

It is important to remember that Phoebe Pember’s memoirs were published in 1879, about fourteen years after the Civil War ended, and it is believed that she wrote about her experiences sometime between 1865 and 1879.⁶³ It is significant that this is a memoir, written after the events took place, and not a diary because it is impossible to know what was omitted, added, or changed by Phoebe either because of fading memoires or intentional purposes. Despite this, Phoebe Pember’s memoirs provide an important as well as riveting account of what life was like for a woman in a hospital during the Civil War. Whether or not specific conversations and events occurred in the way that Phoebe writes them, the overall themes and experiences that Phoebe shares in her memoir are invaluable to the study of women in the Civil War.

⁶² Ibid., 168.
⁶³ Ibid., 16.
Another Southern Jewish woman who became a nurse as a result of the Civil War was Rosanna Dyer Osterman. Unlike Phoebe Pember, Rosanna was an immigrant to America but adopted the South as her home and proved her loyalty to the Confederacy. Rosanna was born in Germany on February 26, 1809 and when she was sixteen, on February 23, 1825, she moved to Baltimore, Maryland. Rosanna married Joseph Osterman, who was born in Amsterdam, in 1830. Seven years after their marriage, and following the advise of his new brother-in-law, Joseph left his wife to set up a business in Galveston, Texas. A year later, in 1838 Rosanna was able to join her husband and together they worked selling supplies such as coffins, wine, rum, sugar, and revolvers. Together, Rosanna and Joseph were pioneers in Galveston, Texas. When Joseph first arrived in Galveston he only had a tent and a hammock, but with his success in business and the growth of the town he was able to build a two-story house with the first level his store and the second the living area. Their monetary achievements led to social gatherings where they hosted such important figures as Sam Houston and it also allowed them to become philanthropists and donate to causes and organizations that they felt were important. For example, about nine years before the Civil War, in 1852, Joseph Osterman donated land in Galveston for a Jewish burial ground called the Hebrew Benevolent Cemetery.

64 Natalie Ornish, Pioneer Jewish Texans: Their Impact on Texas and American History for Four Hundred Years 1590-1990 (Dallas, Texas: Texas Heritage Press, 1989), 173.
65 Ibid., 173.
66 See Ornish, Pioneer Jewish Texans 173 for details about Joseph Osterman and his early business in Galveston, Texas and 246-247 for biographical information on Rosanna Dyer Osterman.
Previous to the Civil War, Rosanna’s family had shown their loyalty to their adoptive country. Her brother was Major Leon Dyer and was responsible for escorting Santa Anna to Washington in 1836 after his capture. But when the Civil War began the Osterman family had to decide who they were loyal to—the North or the South. Rosanna had been living in the South for thirty-six years when the war began and, as previously discussed, despite the fact that she was an immigrant to America, she became loyal to the Confederacy because it was the southern states, in her case Maryland and Texas, where she had made her home.

Rosanna faced tragedy during the Civil War, but despite this she dedicated herself to helping the wounded soldiers and assisting the Confederacy. Many people in Galveston left when the Civil War began because of the blockade by military forces that prevented businesses from operating. Yet, Rosanna and her husband stayed behind in Galveston and tragically Joseph was accidentally shot on August 19, 1861 and died a few days later. Left a widow, Rosanna continued to aid wounded soldiers, both from the Confederacy and the Union. When Union soldiers overtook Galveston, Rosanna continued to act as nurse to those in need. She also was able to provide valuable information for the Confederacy by reporting to Confederate officials what she heard from the Union soldiers.”

In fact, the information that Rosanna was able to pass along

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to Confederate authorities in Houston helped in the Confederate takeover of Galveston on January 1, 1863.69

Rosanna’s life ended in 1866, at fifty-seven years of age, when she drowned as a result of a steamboat explosion on the Mississippi River. Yet her contributions to society did not end with her death as she had made several provisions in her will for charitable donations. She left money to Jewish hospitals in New York, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. She also left money to form the Hebrew Benevolent Society in Galveston, which “fed, clothed, and sheltered the impoverished, nursed the sick, and performed merciful deeds for all faiths.”70 Other gifts left by Rosanna included: monetary support for the Philadelphia Jewish Foster Home, money to begin a nondenominational Widow’s and Orphan’s Home in Galveston, $5,000 for the building of a synagogue in Galveston, $2,500 to build a synagogue in Houston, money to other charities in New Orleans and Philadelphia and $1,000 to the Galveston Sailors Home.71

Although the extent of Rosanna’s Jewish observances is unknown, a lot can be deduced from the organizations to which she donated. It seems that perhaps while Rosanna desired and hoped for a large Jewish community in which she could be involved, one did not exist at the time she lived in Galveston. Just like Phoebe Pember, Rosanna socialized with the elite class of Texas, yet unlike Phoebe, it seems that Rosanna felt that a Jewish community was missing. And as a result, she and her husband made

69 Ornish, Pioneer Jewish Texans, 247.
70 Ibid., 247
71 Ibid., 247
sure that their money would help establish a Jewish community in Galveston as well as support other Jewish communities around the country.

The excerpt at the beginning of this chapter was taken from *A Woman’s War Record, 1861-1865*, and provides another account of the experiences of a Southern Jewish woman in the Civil War. Septima Maria Levy Collis, like Phoebe Pember, wrote and published her memoir after the war, in this case in 1889. While a lot is known of the backgrounds of Phoebe Pember and Rosanna Dyer Osterman, the same is not true for Septima M. Collis. Despite this, Septima’s story as a Southern Jewish woman who acted as a nurse during the Civil War links these three women together. A significant difference between these three women is that Septima married a Northern Union officer and left her Southern home to support her husband and his efforts in the war. The circumstances surrounding Septima’s courtship with Colonel Collis, their marriage, and her transplantation to the Union is unknown. In fact, although Septima acknowledges that these events were peculiar she believes that the reader of her memoir would be more interested in the events that occurred as a result of this marriage.72 While Septima lived among Northerners, she is part of this chapter on the group of Southern Jewish women because despite her marriage, she still considered herself a Southerner and her characteristics and experiences are more similar to the Jewish women of the South than those of the North.

One of Septima’s characteristics that stands out in her memoir, and links her to the other two women in this chapter, particularly Phoebe, is her determination to do what

she wanted even when others, specifically men, tried to keep her from particular
devotees. Just like Phoebe, Septima did not let men who thought of her as a weak and
unknowing woman get in her way. When her husband was very sick with pneumonia at a
camp near Culpepper, Virginia she did not let an order that restricted the travel of women
to the front lines stop her, and she also did not let men in Alexandria, Virginia succeed in
detaining her. ⁷³ Septima recalls the experience and says, “Little did they [the male
officials] know the woman they were dealing with.” ⁷⁴ And, like Phoebe, she was aware
of the inadequacy of the doctors who were supposed to be the experts. As a result, she
also became a nurse. When Septima reached her husband at the camp in Culpepper she
found that she needed to do more than comfort him as his wife—she needed to be his
nurse as well. As Septima states, “For the second time in twelve months I became an
army nurse, but it took all my skill and watching to counteract the blunders of the so-
called army surgeons.” ⁷⁵ Although she does not say what the doctors thought of her
involvement in her husband’s medical treatment, knowing what the structure of medicine
was like at the time as well as Phoebe’s problems with the surgeons, Septima was
probably disliked by the doctors.

Despite Septima’s determination she was unable to do what she really wanted—
which was to fight. On one occasion when her husband and his troops left for battle
Septima comments, “the army of which my husband and his hundred zouaves [name of
his company] were a part, crossed the Potomac River at Harper’s Ferry, and we poor

⁷³ Collis, A Woman’s War Record, 1861-1865, 23-26.
⁷⁵ Ibid., 27.
women, who would willingly have followed, were ordered home.”76 Whether all women considered themselves as “poor women” because they were unable to be in the battles is something that cannot be known, but what this does show is that the role of women was set and despite the desire to take up arms it was not allowed or deemed appropriate for women to be part of war. Yet, Septima acknowledges the other ways that women were involved in the war effort. She points to the fact that “The Girard House had, for the time being, been converted from a fashionable hotel into a vast workshop, where the jingle of the sewing-machine and the chatter of the sewing girl, daytime, nighttime, and Sundays gave evidence that the government was in earnest. Every woman who could use her needle found employment, and those who did not need compensation worked almost as assiduously.”77

Despite Septima’s claims that she became a Northerner when she married her husband, it was hard for some to believe that she had really given up her country of origin at a time when brothers were fighting against brothers. Septima discusses meeting General Ewell, a Confederate army general, and that he “could not understand how a Southern woman could espouse the Northern cause simply because she had married a Northerner…I told him that I had only followed the example of many other Southrons [sic]—I had ‘gone with my State,’ mine being the state of matrimony.”78 Despite her claim that she became a Northerner when she married as well as her devotion to her husband, she still seems to consider herself a Southern woman. The internal struggle

76 Ibid., 11.
77 Ibid., 12-13.
78 Ibid., 73.
Septima must have gone through at this time can only be imagined, but she provides a glimpse of this when she says “I never fully realized the fratricidal character of the conflict until I lost my idolized brother Dave [David Cardoza Levy] of the Southern army one day, and was nursing my Northern husband back to life the next.”

Another moment when this tension between being a Southerner and a wife of a Union soldier is expressed is when Septima learns about President Lincoln’s death. Septima was able to meet President Lincoln on more than one occasion and when recalling the news of his death and her relationship to the fallen President, Septima says,

I had learned to love Mr. Lincoln then, as younger people to-day love to read about him. I had seen him weep, had heard him laugh, had been gladdened by his wit and saddened by his pathos. I had looked up to him as one inspired. How glad I was afterwards to know that his untimely death was the act of a mad fanatic, and that my people who had fought a desperate but unreasonable war had no hand in it.

This excerpt is remarkable because within it she both praises the assassinated president, claims that she is a Southerner, and says that the war was “unreasonable.” It seems that Septima’s situation had led her to have a conflict of identities. One of the most significant statements that she makes in this passage is when she refers to the Southerners as “my people.” Clearly, despite her marriage and move to the Northern side of the conflict she continued to think of herself as a Southerner.

Septima’s connection with Judaism seems to be similar to that of Phoebe’s. In particular, Septima was also surrounded by a specific group of people—the elite of society. Although they were the Northern elite, Septima seemed to fit in among this

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79 Ibid., 18-19.
80 Ibid., 75.
crowd and make friends with people such as Mrs. Grant. Without knowledge of Septima’s background and how she grew up it is difficult to comment on whether Judaism was important to her parents. Perhaps, like Phoebe, she was raised in a Jewish house but as an adult did not live in a well-developed Jewish community with Jewish women’s social gatherings and welfare organizations. The fact that Septima lived on military bases during the Civil War may also have affected her commitment to Judaism. It is clear from her memoir that Septima did not have, or maintain, Jewish connections and friendships. And when the Civil War started she began her duty as the wife of a soldier, which included nurse, cook, single-parent, and controller of the finances. Whether it was a lack of time, desire, or the fact that no Jewish societies existed where she lived, she did not participate in any of the specific Jewish relief organizations.

All three of these women—Phoebe Pember, Rosanna Osterman, and Septima Collis considered themselves Southern women. And they sacrificed comfort in order to nurse wounded soldiers. As Phoebe Pember said:

> In the midst of suffering and death, hoping with those almost beyond hope in this world; praying by the bedside of the lonely and heart-stricken; closing the eyes of boys hardly old enough to realize man’s sorrows, much less suffer by man’s fierce hate, a woman must soar beyond the conventional modesty considered correct under different circumstances.⁸¹

And there is no doubt that these women did just this—overcome obstacles, stood up against the men who tried to keep them away, and witnessed the suffering and deaths of young men. While these experiences connect these women, religion did as well. All of these women were Jewish—yet none of them were involved in Jewish relief

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⁸¹ Ibid., 146.
organizations that had quickly been formed and funded at the start of the war. All of them may have had different reasons for this, and Rosanna may have been involved in a Jewish community if such organizations existed where she lived, but none of them offered their help to specifically Jewish organizations during the Civil War. As the next chapter will show the experiences of Northern Jewish women were quite different.
Chapter 2: Northern Jewish Women

Many Northern Jewish women had different experiences than their counterparts in the South during the Civil War. Part of the reason for this can be explained by the geographical differences between the North and the South and also by the proximity of the battlefields to the Southern Jewish women. Another explanation seems to revolve around the Jewish communities of each region. As seen in the previous chapter, Southern Jewish women, according to the examples presented, were either not interested or unable to find Jewish women’s welfare organizations in their communities. In contrast, this chapter will show how Northern Jewish women rallied together in order to sew, raise funds and provide supplies for the troops. The difference can also be a result of the fact that there were more Jews in the North during the Civil War than in the South, which could, in fact, have led to more Northern Jewish organizations. This chapter though, will show that it was not simply a matter of a greater population that brought Jewish women together in the North, but the fact that there was already a well-established network of Jewish welfare agencies in the North prior to the Civil War. As Pamela Nadel says, “with larger numbers of Jewish women in the North, they sometimes [organized] in distinctively Jewish groups in the tradition of the benevolent societies, which were by now a well-established part of Jewish communal life.”

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82 Pamela S. Nadell, “‘Giving Our All To The Poor Soldiers:’ Jewish Women in the Civil War.” in Jewish Life in Mr. Lincoln’s City, ed. Laura Cohen Apelbaum and Claire Uziel
role in the differences between the Northern and Southern Jewish communities, but it was this “tradition” of benevolent societies in the Northern Jewish communities that were already a part of daily life that affected the roles that women played during the war. Despite the fact that there were more Jews living in the North than in the South in the antebellum and Civil War years there were more records, memoirs and diaries, left by Jewish women in the South than in the North. Perhaps these Southern women felt isolated in worn-torn communities, where often times their friends and families were forced to move away to find employment or safer living conditions. And therefore diaries acted as “friends” to these women. Even with a small selection of sources left behind it is still possible to learn about the Jewish women in the North and the Jewish communities in which they lived by looking at sources such as newspaper articles and meeting records. By doing so it will become possible to understand what motivated Northern Jewish women to take action and the kinds of relief efforts in which they were involved.  

There cannot be a discussion of Jewish women and philanthropy in the Northern states without mention of Rebecca Gratz. Although she was eighty years old when the Civil War began, her philanthropic efforts in the decades before the war gave precedent to the actions by Northern Jewish women when their soldiers needed them. She once said that, “I [Rebecca] am too old to do any good, but feel deep interest in all this and

pray for better times.”\textsuperscript{84} But she did take action as her power and importance in the Jewish community allowed her to call upon the Jewish women of the community to aid the troops. In 1861 she appealed to the Philadelphia Female Hebrew Benevolent Society to recognize the vast amount of “husbands and fathers who have been obliged to seek occupation at a distance, or enlist as soldiers in the service of the country, leaving helpless families unprovided for the coming winter, and wholly dependent on the benevolence of their fellow citizens.”\textsuperscript{85}

Born in 1781 to Michael Gratz and Miriam Simon Gratz, Rebecca was part of an elite Jewish family in Philadelphia. Her father earned his wealth as an entrepreneur along with his brother in their firm B. & M. Gratz. Some of their business adventures included the purchase of land in western Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio, construction of a warehouse where they sold supplies to merchants, as well as the import and export of goods.\textsuperscript{86} While Rebecca’s education is not certain it is believed that she attended a finishing school and perhaps also the Young Ladies Academy, which began in 1787. It is known that Rebecca’s older brother and sister attended Franklin College and in fact, Richea Gratz was the first woman educated there.\textsuperscript{87} Clearly Michael and Miriam Gratz placed a high importance on education for their sons and daughters. Rebecca grew up in

\textsuperscript{85} Korn, \textit{American Jewry and the Civil War}, 127.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 38.
a religious household where they kept the dietary laws and she and her mother attended synagogue on a regular basis.⁸⁸

Rebecca began working to help those in need when she was twenty years old and from there she became an important figure and role model for Jewish communities. The first group that she helped create was the Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances. In 1801 Rebecca, her mother, and sister as well as twenty other women created this nonsectarian group “designed to aid elite women whose families had lost their wealth.”⁸⁹ This desire to help those in need seemed to be Rebecca’s passion and while she never married or had any children of her own she made it her life’s work to take care of others. Rebecca was concerned for the welfare of the Jewish community in two ways: the financial success of Jews as well as the promotion of religious beliefs and traditions in the American Jewish community. Therefore while she helped to create relief societies to help those in financial distress, she also created the Hebrew Sunday school program to provide Jewish education and promote Jewish identity, which she felt would help in the midst of a growing evangelism in the United States.⁹⁰ As a result of the work done by Rebecca Gratz, the Jewish community in Philadelphia by the time the Civil War began had the infrastructure to organize together to provide aid to the war effort.

Although Rebecca was unable to contribute to the war effort because of her age and health she wrote about the war and her feelings of anxiety over the fact that members

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⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.
⁸⁹ Ibid., 61.
⁹⁰ Ibid., 61-64; 121.
of her family were on both sides of the conflict. For example, in a letter dated January 21, 1861, only a few months before the war commenced Rebecca Gratz wrote to her brother Benjamin Gratz, who lived in Kentucky, “I pray fervently that Kentucky will be firm in the Union—the seceders [sic] are bringing ruin on their own heads as well as the deepest distress on the whole country… I believe most of the southern states would gladly reconsider their hasty movements, and leave S [South] Carolina to her evil counsels.”

The fact that her brother lived in Kentucky, a slave-holding state, was obviously of great concern to Rebecca. Her niece Miriam who had moved to the South continued to write to Rebecca about the situation there. In a letter from Rebecca to her sister-in-law, Rebecca recounts that Miriam told her there was “not a young man at home in all their large connection—of course they have all gone to fight against us!” As Rebecca maintained connections with her family in the South, her nephew Cary Gratz, a Union soldier, was killed in battle. Rebecca hoped that the family would “recover his dear remains—and trust[ed] his good brother Bernard may have the consolation of bringing to his bereaved Father the privilege of depositing them in holy ground.”

Even in war, when many were buried without proper burial it was imperative for Rebecca that her nephew be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

When the Civil War began Jewish women in the North continued in the tradition that Rebecca Gratz had taught them—to join together as a community in order to provide help to those in need. In 1863 Mary Rose Smith, head of the Visiting Committee of the

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91 Rebecca Gratz to Benjamin Gratz, 1861, in *Letters of Rebecca Gratz*, 419.
92 Rebecca Gratz to Ann Boswell Gratz, 1861, 423-424.
93 Rebecca Gratz to Ann Boswell Gratz, 1861, 426.
Women’s Branch of the United States Sanitary Commission, contacted chazzan Sabato Morais in the hopes that women congregants at Philadelphia’s Mikveh Israel would be part of the Sanitary Commission by appointing a female representative to represent the Jewish community of Mikveh Israel to the Commission. The United States Sanitary Commission was established on June 9, 1861 by President Lincoln to be “A civilian relief operation that coordinated local supply efforts, provided battlefield relief, and offered medical advice to the U.S. Army during the Civil War.”94 Not only did the Jewish women of Mikveh Israel respond with the appointment of Matilda Cohen as representative of Mikveh Israel to the Commission, but they also formed The Ladies Hebrew Association for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Union Soldiers and appointed Celia Myers as president of the organization. Annual dues of fifty cents, by men and women, would make them a member of an organization, which aimed “to obviate the sufferings of the brave soldiers, by providing them with delicacies and clothing while they lie in the army hospitals.”95 This organization gave aid to Jews and non-Jews in the form stationary for soldiers in hospitals to write to their loved ones and luxuries such as tobacco.96 This group had 250 women members by the end of its first month in existence

and between its creation and the end of the war this group had provided ten crates of supplies to the Sanitary Commission.\textsuperscript{97}

Some of the relief societies were already in existence before the Civil War began, and while they continued to serve the community that they had been created for, they also added relief aid to the troops and their families. For example, The Ladies’ Hebrew Relief Sewing Association of Philadelphia was formally created on December 25, 1860 in order to provide clothing to families in need. With the start of the Civil War less than a year after its creation the Association was able to continue making clothing for families, but also started to make bandages and lint, which was made by scraping fabric with knives in order to produce a significant amount of lint that would be used for packing wounds.\textsuperscript{98}

The first annual report of this organization, written by its secretary Isaac M. Long says:

“This year which has just ended is without parallel in the history of want and suffering, and the worst of calamities, a civil war, pervades our land; it has thrown distress and want in our midst, and we have experienced a wide field in which to spread the welcome hand of aid and comfort…Patriotism has also found its way among us. Having kind remembrances for those brave ones who have sacrificed all for their country’s honor, extra meetings have been held and a large quantity of lint and bandages manufactured for the sick and sounded of those regiments which have been the recipients of the same…even persons not of our persuasion, have received what aid we found it in our power to bestow. The Association, under the supervision of your Board of Directors, have distributed the following to the deserving poor of the city: 856 finished Garments, 150 pairs of Shoes, 75 pairs of Hose, 20 heavy Blankets, 2,283 yards of Calico, Flannel &c., and 12 entire suits of Boys’ Clothes…The receipts of regular dues have reached the amount of $551…The amount of Donations received in cash was $455, besides a large amount of Merchandise…Our members at present number three hundred and nine.”\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{97} Hyman and Dash Moore, ed., \textit{Jewish Women in America}, 231.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 244.
Jewish women in the North were not against joining the larger Union community to help support the troops. Beginning in the fall of 1863 sanitary fairs began to be organized as a way for men and women to donate goods and money. Fairs had been common in both Jewish and non-Jewish communities before the Civil War as a way to raise funds for specific organizations. At these events Jewish women assembled with non-Jewish women in an effort to help the war effort. The 1863 Sanitary Fair in Cincinnati had four stands set up by the Jewish community. Each table was represented by a different group: the Broadway Synagogue, the Independent Ladies, the Phoenix, and the Allemania Club, and together these four Jewish groups raised $5,402.58.  

In 1864 New York held a Metropolitan Fair that “included Jewish representatives on all its organizing committees.” Similarly, the Hebrew Society’s Table at the Washington D.C. Sanitary Fair in 1864 raised $756.95, which was “almost one-tenth of the total receipts for the day.” Nine Jewish women in Philadelphia contributed to a fair when they organized together as the Alert club to create embroidery and needlework that would be sold to raise funds.

Although these women were dedicated to supplying necessities for soldiers and their families they also enjoyed the time with their community and their friends. In fact, the girls from Alert, discussed above, found that they could only sew for three hours before their eyes and fingers became tired. Instead of ending each session after the few hours of sewing, they had their gentleman friends join them for dancing. One of the

100 Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War, 122-123.
101 Nadell, “Giving Our All To The Poor Soldiers:” 93.
102 Hyman and Dash Moore, ed., Jewish Women in America 231.
gentleman even joked that he was the secretary of the group because he was always there.\textsuperscript{103} These groups of Jewish women came together to help those in need, but they did so among their friends. These were not strangers that they were sewing with—they were the women they sat next to at synagogue or at Hebrew Benevolent Society Meetings, even before the war.

An example of a relief organization where women used their connections within the Jewish community to aid the soldiers was the Hebrew Ladies’ Soldiers’ Aid Society in Pittsburg, which was also involved with the larger United States Sanitary Commission. These women met every Thursday during the war in order to “sew garments, wrap bandages, and pack food cartons.”\textsuperscript{104} On December 9, 1863 this group held an event to help raise funds for the Commission, but they did so in a way to celebrate the achievements and contributions of the Jewish community to the war effort. While their goal was to raise money for those in need, there was also a sense of community pride at the accomplishments made by the Jewish women. In fact, a band played, people danced, there was singing, rabbis spoke, and there were toasts made to womanhood. The evening was a success as $700 was raised through the sale of refreshments and admission. In attendance that evening was Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise from Cincinnati, who said the evening was “‘one of the most liberal and pleasant entertainments which it had been our good fortune to attend.’”\textsuperscript{105} This demonstrates the friendships and associations that had been formed in Philadelphia by the Jewish community. The fact that Rabbi Wise was in

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\textsuperscript{103} Korn, \textit{American Jewry and the Civil War}, 122.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 121.
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attendance also shows the connections that this group in Philadelphia had with Jews outside of their city as well.

Along with the cities within Pennsylvania, Chicago was also a city that had an active Jewish community that was mobilized when the Civil War began. Chicago had a Jewish population of 1,500 out of a total population of 112,000 by 1860. Synagogues, organizations, and social groups were created to fulfill the needs of the Jews in this community. And in 1859 the first central Jewish relief organization was created in Chicago called the United Hebrew Relief Association. Fifteen organizations soon affiliated with this umbrella organization including a Hebrew Benevolent Society, Young Ladies’ Hebrew Benevolent Association, and a Ladies Sewing Circle.  

As seen above the organizations created by and supported by Jewish women in these Northern cities were great contributors to the war effort. Unfortunately, details about the individual women that were part of these organizations have not been studied or written about in great depth. It seems, as previously stated, that Northern Jewish women did not leave behind the same records of their experiences in the Civil War as Southern Jewish women. Therefore while it is possible to understand the experiences of Northern Jewish women through the study of these organizations and the contributions they made, it is difficult to study many of the influential women that made these organizations so successful. It is clear from looking at the numerous Jewish organizations in the Northern communities that women were greatly involved in welfare and relief charities during the Civil War. It is also important to remember that Northern Jewish women were also the

recipients of the aid and support provided by these organizations when their husbands
and sons were killed in battle. The two women that will now be discussed are Northern
Jewish women who lost loved ones in the Civil War, but found support among the Jewish
community and left legacies through what they contributed to the Jewish communities
that helped them.

Caroline Hamlin Spiegel was not born Jewish, but embraced Judaism after her
marriage to a Jewish man and her conversion. Caroline was born on July 27, 1833 and
was the daughter of Stephen and Elizabeth Hamlin, a Quaker family in Ohio. The
husband, Marcus M. Spiegel was born in Abenheim, Germany on December 8, 1829 and
fled to New York in 1849 after he participated in the failed revolution to overthrow the
Prussian dynasty. Shortly after his arrival in America, he moved to Chicago and
became a peddler in the Ohio territory with help from his family. It was while selling
goods that he met Stephen Hamlin—the father of Caroline. When Marcus told his family
in Chicago that he was going to marry a Quaker they were less than pleased and one of
Marcus’ cousins was sent to Ohio to try to prevent the marriage. But he reported back to
the family that if “[Marcus] Spiegel did not marry her, he would try to win Caroline for
himself.” After this report, Marcus’ family accepted the marriage between him and
Caroline. Marcus and Caroline were married in Ohio on August 7, 1853 in a civil

107 See Marcus M. Spiegel, *Your True Marcus: The Civil War Letters of a Jewish
Colonel*, ed. Frank L. Byrne and Jean Powers Soman (Ohio: The Kent State University
Press, 1985), 5 for information about Caroline and her parents, footnote 12 lists her date
and place of birth.
108 See Spiegel, *Your True Marcus*, 1-4 for information about Marcus’ life in Germany
and early years in America.
ceremony. Soon after they moved to Chicago where they would start their lives together, Caroline would convert to Judaism, and they would become members of the Chicago Jewish community.110

Caroline Spiegel’s conversion was one of the first known conversion ceremonies with a rabbinical board to take place in this city.111 While she may have converted because of her marriage to Marcus and his devotion to Judaism, Caroline seemed to embrace her new religion, her new Jewish community, and devoted herself to raising Jewish children. Newly married Caroline had to learn to speak German because her husband’s family only spoke this language. Her new relatives also taught her how to cook German-Jewish food. Later in their marriage when Marcus was fighting as a Union soldier in the Civil War and Caroline was living in Ohio with their children, she maintained a Jewish household and she even sent him a box with some of his favorite foods, which she had learned to make, such as sugar cookies.112 The fact that Caroline converted shows that Judaism was important to Marcus and together they were active in the Jewish community of Chicago until they moved back to Ohio because of Marcus’ business endeavors. Marcus was the president as well as founder of the Hebrew Benevolent Society in Chicago and he was also a member of one of the Reform synagogues in Chicago.113 While Marcus served his country he attended synagogue services whenever possible and continued to remind Caroline of various traditions and

110 See Spiegel, Your True Marcus, 1-5 for more information about Marcus’ employment in America and his early relationship to Caroline.
112 Nadell, “‘Giving Our All To The Poor Soldiers:’ Jewish Women in the Civil War,” 94.
practices such as keeping their children home from school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and observing Passover.\textsuperscript{114}

When the Union called for more soldiers Marcus responded out of patriotic and economic needs. Being a soldier, and he hoped to be an officer, would provide his family with a steady paycheck at a time when he was having financial difficulties. His other motivation for joining the military was that “as a German-Jewish immigrant, he felt it was his duty to preserve the American Union for his children.”\textsuperscript{115} The burdens that his wife had at home such as the children and finances while he was away did not go unnoticed. In a letter to Caroline, Marcus address his letter to his “abused Wife” and clarifies that the reason why she is abused is because of the fact that she is left alone pregnant and with children to take care of by herself. Although he says he hopes that he will be able to take a leave for the birth of their fourth child, he gives directions in case he is unable to do so, including his desire for her to spend the fifty dollars “for [her] own benefit and comfort” that he would have spent in order to visit. He also advises her to get someone to stay with her at this time to help with the children. He also says that if the new baby is a boy, then he should be named George McClellan Spiegel. He finishes the letter with: “Buy everything you want to be happy and just console yourself. Yet it seems to me as though such a thing could not be possible without me being there. I would gladly walk 600 miles to see you if they would only say go. God bless you my

\textsuperscript{114} Spiegel, \textit{Your True Marcus}, 6.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 14.
love, my sweet, my all; may the blessings of heaven rest upon you. Ever your true and loving Marcus.”

On May 4, 1864 Marcus Spiegel died after he was shot in the stomach a day earlier and taken as a prisoner when Confederates attacked a Union steamboat. Knowing that his injury was probably fatal he said to the doctor “This is the last of the husband and father, what will become of my poor family.” At thirty years old, pregnant, and with four young children Caroline Spiegel became a widow. The fifth child of Marcus and Caroline was a girl, and although Marcus had wanted this child to be named after General Sherman, the child was named Clara Marcus in honor of her father and her father’s sister who had died. Benjamin Cohn, one of Marcus’ friends, took care of the small estate that Marcus at left behind. Simon Wolf, a politician and prominent figure in the American Jewish society helped Caroline obtain a military pension. Although Caroline and her children had lived in Ohio while Marcus was away, Caroline moved back to Chicago with her five children in order to be close to her husband’s family. Perhaps it was out of the desire to maintain a Jewish home and Jewish children that led Caroline to seek help from her Jewish relatives instead of her own non-Jewish family. She maintained contact with her mother and sister, but it was Marcus’ family that provided her with everyday support. In fact, the Spiegel family bought her a two-family

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116 Ibid., 107-108.
117 Ibid., 336.
house. This way she could rent out half of the house as well as sew in order to make money that would be in addition to the pension she received.\textsuperscript{119}

Caroline Spiegel’s story is significant for the study of Jewish women in the Civil War because it is an account of what many women—Jewish and non-Jewish—went through during the war while husbands were away in battles and sometimes never came home. Her story is quite different from the women previously discussed. She did not act as nurse to wounded soldiers and she did not accompany her husband on military bases. This does not mean that her experiences are insignificant to the history of the Civil War. Both Caroline and her husband were involved in the Jewish community of Chicago. And it was this community that she turned to when her husband died serving his country. The fact that she moved away from her mother in order to raise her children near her husband’s family in Chicago shows that she was committed to raising her children in the Jewish faith. It was previously discussed how the Jewish women of Chicago had established several welfare agencies to help the soldiers and their families—Caroline Spiegel was one of these families. After her house was damaged in a fire, Caroline and her children moved back to Ohio. But the Jewish community in Akron did not suit her needs. As she told a relative in Chicago, “‘we have no [religious] servis here [I] was only in the Shule [synagogue] once and that was on the occasion of a wedding.’”\textsuperscript{120} She returned to Chicago where she was active in the reform Temple Sinai where many of her relatives were members.\textsuperscript{121} Despite the fact that Caroline converted to Judaism because

\textsuperscript{119} Spiegel, \textit{Your True Marcus}, 338.  
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 338.  
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 339
of her marriage to Marcus, she did not forget about Judaism when her husband was killed. It was important to Marcus to have a Jewish family, and it also became important to Caroline. She may not have had the time or ability to help the war effort as she herself was suffering as a result of it, but she taught her children the importance of Judaism, Jewish community, and helping others. This example of involvement that Marcus and Caroline tried to demonstrate for their children was followed, at least by some of their children. One of their children became a cofounder of the National Council for Jewish Women and another was the first president of the Jewish Manual Training School of Chicago.\textsuperscript{122}

Another significant Northern Jewish woman was Rebekah Hyneman. Similarly to Caroline Spiegel, Rebekah also converted to Judaism and maintained a strong Jewish identity and connections. Unfortunately little is known about the life of Rebekah Gumpert Hyneman, but what is known is that she overcame great sorrow, was dedicated to Judaism, and became a distinguished writer and poet. Rebekah Gumpert was born on September 8, 1812 in Philadelphia to a Jewish father and a Christian mother. Without formal education Rebekah was able to learn German French, and Hebrew on her own. In 1835 she married Benjamin Hyneman who was a Jewish jewelry salesman. Their first son, Elias was born in 1837 and while pregnant with their second son Barton, Benjamin went on a business trip and never returned. It is believed that he was killed or died during the trip and Rebekah never remarried. In 1845, after the disappearance of her husband, Rebekah converted to Judaism. Rebekah, like Caroline Spiegel, also

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 339.
experienced the death of a loved one during the Civil War. Rebekah’s eldest son, Elias, was a Union soldier who was captured by Confederates and died in Andersonville Prison. Rebekah’s life was filled with suffering—the disappearance of her husband, the death of her son Barton to disease, the death of her other son Elias in the Civil War, and her own ill health. It seems that she looked to Judaism for support and turned her attention to writing about her faith.

Rebekah’s devotion to Judaism and the Jewish community manifested in the numerous poems and short stories that she wrote and published including in the *Occident.* Like Caroline, Rebekah was unable to devote her own time and energy to the war effort because of her own burdens and struggles. Her story shows that Jewish women were able to find support from their faith and comfort from their fellow Jews in their communities when they faced disaster. Rebekah remained committed to the Jewish community and left behind her poems that showed that “her Jewish faith sustained her through loneliness and tragedy.”

The numerous Jewish organizations that were created, run, and supported by Northern Jewish women during the Civil War present a different picture than the Jewish experience of Southern women at the same time. Women such as Matilda Cohen, Celia Meyers, the young girls in Alert, along with the others showed a deep commitment not only to the war and the Union, but also to their Jewish community. Rebecca Gratz and others paved the way so that when the war began Jewish women knew where to go to

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123 Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman*, 45.
help those in need—they went to their local Jewish agencies. The possible explanations for the differences between the Northern and Southern Jewish communities along with the differences among the women will be further explored in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: The Jewish Communities; North and South

Throughout this paper it has been argued that the Jewish communities influenced the way Jewish women were involved in the Civil War. Specifically, the Northern Jewish communities had a strong women’s support infrastructure already in place at the time of the war, which led them to volunteer in these organizations. In contrast, Southern Jewish societies, even those with large Jewish communities, did not have the same network of female organizations and therefore the Jewish women in the South looked elsewhere for their involvement in the war effort. This chapter will examine the Jewish communities, North and South, to identify the similarities and differences and expand on how they influenced the Jewish women who came from them.

Although the number of Jews in the South was less than that of the North, this does not provide a complete answer for why Southern Jewish women were not as involved in Jewish activities as the Northern Jewish women. In fact, many Southern Jewish communities were of significant size by the time the Civil War began. For example, Charleston had a Jewish population of 700 in 1820, while New York had only 550 Jews in the same year. Also in 1820, South Caroline had one of the biggest Jewish populations in the country.\(^{125}\) When the war began Louisiana had five congregations and Charleston

\(^{125}\) Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 15.
had three. So there were Jews in the South and it seems that synagogues were flourishing, yet there still seemed to be a lack of involvement from female congregants in specifically Jewish organizations.

Although Southern Jews may have attended synagogue on Shabbat and Jewish holidays, their lives were largely integrated with the larger non-Jewish community and these interactions may have affected the social groups and welfare organizations that Jewish women joined. And despite this integration there were still incidences of anti-Jewish occurrences and this may have made Jewish women weary of congregating as Jews. One example of this is Clara Solomon who came from a religious family in New Orleans. Clara’s sister attended synagogue every week and Clara was not allowed to attend school on the Sabbath, despite the fact that she herself rarely attended synagogue. The Solomon family had Jewish and non-Jewish friends as Clara describes in her diary. One of her entries in her diary is about the fact that a non-Jewish friend of hers was upset because she was infatuated with a young man, but he was a Jew. Although Clara seemed to keep her feelings to herself and did not respond to her friend, she was able to use her diary as a way to cope with such comments. If this girl who was supposedly Clara’s friend, had problems with Jewish people, it is no wonder that Clara would try to keep her Jewish identity within her home where it was accepted.

These anti-Jewish sentiments were further exacerbated by Southern culture during the Civil War. Many people in the South believed that to win the war they would have to

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126 Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 17.
win God’s favor. And Southern cultural traditions placed a big emphasis on piety. People in the South who were not seen as helping to gain God’s favor through their devotion to Christ were sometimes suspected of being anti-Confederate or even helping the Union.\textsuperscript{128} And often the Confederacy faced “Defeats, shortages, inflation, and a resultant lowering of morale [which] fostered a climate of opinion within the city in which some Southerners sought to alleviate their frustration by selecting as a scapegoat a vulnerable minority.”\textsuperscript{129} Although Jews and non-Jews had lived together in the South, intermarried, and been business partners, when war began and problems arose people sought to blame others and “Jews were available victims.”\textsuperscript{130} Perhaps the significant integration between Jews and non-Jews in the South combined with these anti-Jewish sentiments that sometimes manifested to affect the desire of Jewish women to be a community in public spaces.

While the North also had instances of anti-Jewish incidences, there seemed to be a greater willingness on the part of the Jewish community, and Jewish women, to organize as Jews and publicize their community. It seems that Jewish men and women in the North were more comfortable with their Jewish identity than those in the South. When Jews involved in a Jewish social club in Chicago organized to create a volunteer company called the Concordia Guards (previously discussed) the Jewish community, a total of fifteen hundred, helped to finance the company’s expenses by raising $11,000 in two

\textsuperscript{128} Dianne Ashton, “Shifting Veils,” 82.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 185.
This is in contrast to the Jews of the South did not want to be grouped together as Jews within the military.

The Jews in the North were also willing and able to share these stories of Jewish community with the larger community. In fact, in response to the Concordia Guards in Chicago, *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, on Thursday August 21, 1862 had a section that read “The Jews of Chicago are forming a company. The[y]…have subscribed $7,500, and the ladies have raised $15 to pay for a banner. ‘To your tents, O Israel.’” Newspapers in various Northern cities also openly shared news about Jewish social events and even meetings that were held. On Thursday November 14, 1861 *The Daily Cleveland Herald* had a posting that read: “Hebrew Benevolent Society: The Anniversary of the Hebrew Benevolent Society will take place on November 19th. The Society is in a flourishing condition and deserves the patronage of the public at their annual Festival.” The fact that they are “flourishing” demonstrates that women, and men as well, were active in this organization.

Washington D.C. was an example of a Northern Jewish community that proved that despite being relatively small compared to other cities, it had the commitment and the organization to make a difference in the Civil War. The Washington D.C. community was so small that they had trouble affording a place of worship and a religious leader. The Washington Hebrew Congregation was only organized on April 25, 1852, less than

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ten years before the start of the Civil War, with about twenty members. Initially the congregation did not have a building, but met in a member’s house. Because it was continuing to grow, in 1859 a new building was acquired, along with a hazzan. Only a few years later, in 1863 the congregation moved again to a larger building. Despite its small congregation it organized various clubs and parties as well as The Washington Hebrew Elementary School.134 During the Civil War “Washington’s small Jewish community shared with their fellow citizens the humanitarian impulse to give succor to these war sufferers. They gave generously of their time and money, both as individuals and through their congregation.”135 Simon Wolf commented on the success of the Jewish community of Washington D.C. to raise significant funds at the Washington Sanitary Fair:

In the report just published of the Fair lately held here in aid of the Sanitary Commission, I observe that the Hebrew Society’s table is credited for $756.95; and when I tell you the entire receipts were only $10,661.47, you will readily perceive how large a proportion of the amount realized is due to the Hebrew congregation. The ladies had the matter in charge and were beaten by only one other table, that of the Treasury Department. All honor to our fair Jewesses!136

Simon Wolf specific credits the Jewish women of the community for their hard work as a group to the Union relief efforts. The fact that the community was small did hinder its advancements, specifically, the building of a Jewish hospital for Jewish wounded soldiers

135 Ibid., 140.
136 Shosteck, “The Jewish Community of Washington, D.C., During the Civil War,” 142.
that was never realized despite the wishes of Simon Wolf.\footnote{Ibid., 141.} Washington D.C. is only one example, and therefore it cannot be generalized to all Jewish communities, but what it demonstrates is that the size of the communities was not the only explanation for the Southern cities lack of Jewish community.

There were tensions between the Jewish communities in the North and South that transcended the subject of war. In a letter from Sarah Moses to her aunt Rebecca Gratz she says, “‘The Southern Jews say that the Northern Jews will not believe that they can have any religion because they do not adhere to all the forms prescribed by the rabbis while the Southern Jews insist that the Northern and Conforming Jews lose all spirituality in blind adherence to what their fathers did before them.’”\footnote{Ashton, “Shifting Veils,” 98.} The Jewish communities of the South seemed to be of great concern to Rebecca Gratz, who had dedicated her life to the Jewish community of Philadelphia. In a letter from Richea to her sister Rebecca, she tries to ease Rebecca’s concerns about the state of Judaism among young Jews in the South. And Rosa, Rebecca’s niece who lived in Richmond, even adds that she declined an invitation for a party because it was on a Jewish holiday. Rebecca was horrified when the daughters of a well-known Southern Jewish family had converted to Christianity.\footnote{Ashton, “Shifting Veils,” 95-96.}

\section*{Conclusion}

The story about Jewish women during the Civil War is not complete. As Korn said, “Only a few, notably those determined women who imposed their conceptions of
cursing upon reluctant government officials, received any acclaim, but all achieved that high sense of satisfaction which comes to those who give of themselves to relieve pain.” While this paper only discusses a select group of Jewish women, it proves that Northern and Southern Jewish women need to be understood in the context of the communities in which they lived. The Jewish communities, North and South, had different cultures and societies that shaped the people who were a part of them. The women explored in these chapters, Phoebe Pember; Rosanna Osterman; Septima Collis; Rebecca Gratz; Caroline Speigel; and Rebecca Hyneman are only some of the women who were affected by this great event in American history. While they do not speak for all women of the time, they do provide significant information about the experiences and hardships they had as well as the ways they contributed to their communities. As more research is completed on the American Jewish woman during the Civil War there will be further discoveries of how these women endured. It is clear that Jewish women, North and South, left a great legacy of volunteerism, philanthropy, and faith for future generations.

140 Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War, 117.
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