Life on the Frontier: The Jews of Alaska

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Brandeis University
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PREFACE

Why Alaska?

What led me to decide to undertake a Research Project of Alaskan Jews?

In these introductory comments I will seek to answer that question and outline some of the challenges which confront Jews who have chosen to live in Alaska.

I am a professor at Brandeis University whose research and teaching interests are focused on the contemporary Jewish community. My personal experience with Jewish life has come from the three cities in which I have lived: New York, Chicago and Boston, each a major urban center with a large Jewish population and well organized Jewish community. Similarly, most of my research, both in North America and in other diaspora Jewish communities has concentrated on studying Jews in the large cities, such as Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Sydney, London, or São Paulo. After all, this is where most of the Jews, and certainly the intellectual and cultural leaders of the Jewish community, live. My sense is that this urban-centeredness of Jews, at least in North America, is beginning to change. Third and fourth generation American Jews are sufficiently acculturated and comfortable in America that they are increasingly ready to leave the security of their familiar urban environment and pursue new and interesting opportunities on the frontier. This might be in small towns or rural areas in places such as Vermont, Montana, North Dakota and even Alaska. Or, it might be in what Daniel Elazar refers to as “rurban” settlements—areas beyond the suburban rim and quite distant from the nearby urban center.

From an historical perspective, that Jews are settling in small towns with few or no other Jews, is not a new phenomenon. But there are at least two key differences with this new centrifugal settlement pattern of American Jews, compared to earlier migrations. First, for today’s Jews the move is mostly by free choice and not fleeing an inhospitable area and heading for the only port to which the available boat would take them. Second, to turn to the massive migration of East European Jews at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, most of those Jews were reared in organic Jewish communities and were at least knowledgeable about Jewish customs and values. If they were to be the first Jews in Texas or New Hampshire, they could manage to pursue a Jewish life style or to create a Jewish communal infrastructure. Their end of the 20th century counterparts have less Jewish competence. Moreover, today’s frontier settlers also include a higher proportion of Jewish marginals, especially Jews who have intermarried or those who have been less involved in Jewish life.

But there is a more basic similarity between the earlier and the new wave of frontier set-
The Action/Research Project of Alaskan Jews has benefited from the ideas and support of many people, to whom I wish to express my deep appreciation. Professor Elaine S. Reisman, of Lesley College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who also happens to be my wife of 44 years, has been my partner in many research and educational projects over the years. She was actively involved in the two month-long field visits in Alaska, in May-June 1993 and 1994, conducting interviews and co-leading the group workshops. Having a very compatible travel companion adds much to the joys and discoveries of the journey and minimizes the frustrations. I look forward to collaborating with her on many more creative and productive trips.

I'm equally pleased to acknowledge another family collaborator, my co-author, and son, Joel I. Reisman. Joel is an exceptional statistical analyst whose work has mainly been in medical research. I have benefited for many years from his wisdom and skills in my research on different aspects of contemporary Jewish life. Joel assumed the major responsibility for analyzing the data generated by the Survey of Alaskan Jews. He also shared in the writing of this monograph and did much to assure clarity of expression and paring down of jargon.

Research and writing can be very exciting and gratifying; they are even more so when you are able to have as primary colleagues your wife and son.

Alaskans tend to be independent and private people, who view outsiders—especially ones who come prying—with skepticism. I was fortunate to have met and earned the trust of several leaders of the Alaskan Jewish community, who helped me meet and obtain the cooperation of Jews throughout the State. It was Robert Gottstein of Anchorage who first stepped forward to endorse the Project, and he has provided invaluable support to this day. An endorsement from a member of the Gottstein family, one of the most respected families in the State, provided credibility. No less important, as someone who was born and grew up in Alaska, Robert had much important information to share with me. We communicated regularly by phone and fax and operated as partners in this Project. We formed an Advisory Committee of influential leaders from the major cities in which Jews lived. They offered much helpful advice and support in designing and launching the Project. Members of the Committee were:

Anchorage: Robert Gottstein, Perry Green, Dr. Leon Janis, Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld, and Beck Shambarg
Fairbanks: Judge Richard Savell
Juneau: Mary-Claire Bernstein
Ketchikan: Paula Bute
Sitka: Libby Stortz
Kotzebue: David Calechman
Ketchikan: Linda Brownstein

In recent months Robert Gottstein has been meeting with other leaders of the Anchorage Jewish community, in addition to the original Advisory Committee, to establish an Alaskan State Jewish Coordinating Council to foster cooperation among the several Jewish communities in the State. I view the State Council as a very important initiative to help strengthen Jewish life in Alaska. Among the new people involved in developing the Council are the following individuals, all from Anchorage: Kayla Epstein, Rabbi Yosef Greenberg, Robert Klein, and Mitchel J. Schapira.

A project of this scope could never happen without financial support. I acknowledge my deep gratitude to the following individuals, not only for their vital financial help, but for the confidence they demonstrated in me and the idea of studying Jews in far off Alaska:

Paul Berger, Washington DC; Mandell Berman, Detroit, MI; Eugene Grant, New York City, NY; Esther Leah Ritz, Milwaukee, WI; Russell F. Robinson and Martin F. Stein of the Network of Independent Communities of the United Jewish Appeal, Sherman Oaks, CA; and Mary and Louis Zoretsky, St. Louis, MO.

The folks from Alaska who helped with the costs of the Action/Research Project were: Robert Gottstein, B.J. Gottstein, Perry Green, Arctic Circle Enterprises Inc., Erling Christensen, Brock Shamburg, David Rustin, Jeff Feldman, Bonnie Godfrey, Russ Nogg, Phil Cohen, Peter Gruenstein, Joe Josephson, Diane Kaplan, Robert Klein, Jim Gottstein, Anchorage; and Judge Richard Savell, Congregation Or Hatzafon, Fairbanks.

Finally, I am grateful to two people who helped me appreciate the early history of the Jewish settlers in Alaska. The first is
Professor Michael Krauss of the University of Alaska who not only was a source of much historical and contemporary information about Alaska, but who also introduced me to the most knowledgeable resource about Jewish life in Alaska in the early decades of the 20th century, Meta Bloom. Meta's father, Robert, was one of the first settlers in the Fairbanks area in 1897, and she was one of the first Jewish children born in the State in 1912. The Bloom family archive at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks in memory of Robert and his wife Jessie is a wonderful resource.

The Technical Consultants

I am not a demographer, but I know the best of them, and was fortunate to benefit from their help. Professor Sidney Goldstein of Brown University, the "dean" of American demographers, heads the list. He has been most supportive, both in encouraging the idea of a Survey of Alaskan Jews, and in providing guidance in the design of the questionnaire and especially in ways of comparing the findings of the Survey of Alaskan Jews with the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). Similarly, I received important guidance from Professor Steven M. Cohen of Queens College and Hebrew University. Professor Calvin Goldscheider of Brown University, helped in shaping the research design. Professor Vivian Klaff of the University of Delaware enabled to understand more clearly the NJPS intermarriage statistics. Jeff Scheckner and Dr. Barry Kosmin of the Council of Jewish Federations shared key information about the NJPS on many occasions. Demographic information about Alaskans was graciously provided by Laura Walters, Research Analyst of the Alaskan Department of Community and Regional Affairs, in Juneau.

My Brandeis colleagues in the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies were always available as needed. Professor Gary Tobin, Director of the Center played a pivotal role in helping generate early financial support for the Project and arranging for the publication of this monograph at his San Francisco-based, Institute for Community and Religion, Associate Director, Professor Larry Sternberg, helped in many phases of the Project, as did Dr. Amy Sales, Dr. Gabriel Berger and Dr. Mordechai Rimor. Another Brandeis colleague, Earl Raab has been available on many occasions with wise counsel. Marshall Kendziorak, of Juneau, AK, designed several of the graphic charts. I also received help from many of my graduate students in the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University. Special recognition is due Michael Kagan, who was the primary administrative coordinator of the Survey questionnaire and David Chiro who helped in the creative design of statistical tables.

A very valuable colleague at every stage of this Research Project has been Naomi Bass, a veteran staff member of the Brandeis University Hornstein Program. She carried the responsibility for organizing and typing all the Research materials and correspondence. Virtually everything—from the first draft of the questionnaire to the "final" draft of the monograph, had multiple revisions. Naomi bore up with equanimity and never wavered in her commitment to quality. I am grateful to her for her loyal and capable work. She appropriately shares a sense of pride in the outcome.

Finally, thanks to all the folks in Alaska who responded to the questionnaire, attended one of the workshops or shared their thoughts with us in one of the interviews.

I hope you find this material interesting and helpful. I and my co-author Joel I. Reisman, would welcome your reactions.

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INTRODUCTION

Jewish Life in a Frontier Society

This Project was launched in July 1993 with the objective of learning more about Jews and Jewish communal life in the State of Alaska. The basic question underlying the Project is what happens to Jews when they live in a "frontier society," such as Alaska. Alaska is a classic frontier society in that its population density is quite low—dramatically so for Jews who are less than half of 1% of the general population; the vast majority of the Alaskan population has settled in the State within the past fifty years; (Jews within the past twenty years); Alaska is predominately an underdeveloped area, both in terms of its rugged natural environment and its economic and employment structures; and Alaska is very distant from the cities and family networks in "the Lower 48," from which its settlers have emigrated. Moreover, since Jews traditionally have settled in urban areas, or at least in areas where there are enough Jews to maintain an organized Jewish community, there is the further question of the extent to which Jewish life in Alaska can be sustained without the availability of such communal resources as synagogues and Jewish schools.

The motto of the State of Alaska is, "The Last Frontier." The people who live in Alaska are proud of their motto, and most of them chose to live in Alaska because it is "the last frontier." Alaska has more areas of natural, undeveloped—and quite beautiful—forests, rivers, lakes, and mountains than any other part of North America. And, Alaskans are very committed to protecting that pristine environment. At the same time there are natural features of Alaska which have kept people from settling there, such as its very cold winters and the accompanying long periods of darkness.

The folks who choose to live in Alaska do so in part because they find the natural beauty sufficiently compelling to offset the cold and dark winter. But even more compelling for most settlers is the lure of the frontier. This is not meant in the literal sense of exploring or discovering new physical areas, but rather in a more symbolic sense of seeking a different life-style. away from large masses of people, traffic, crime, and hectic pace and with fewer boundaries and constraints. Alaska is an open society with many opportunities to explore in terms of work, leisure and relationships. Yet, the reality is that very few people have chosen to live in Alaska. This applies no less to Jews, of whom there are less than 3,000, spread throughout the State, and comprising less than one-half of one percent of the population.

One other basic characteristic about Alaska which explains who comes to live in the State, and the challenge of adapting to life there, is that it is far away. Virtually all Alaskans come from "the Lower 48" (the term
Alaskans use to remind visitors that their State is one of the states in the United States. Yet, Alaska is very large (one-fifth the size of the Lower 48), and very far from the Lower 48. A jet flight from New York City to Anchorage takes 13 hours, complicated by a four hour time difference.

The implication of this size and distance is that living in Alaska is almost like living in a foreign country, as it relates to visits back home to see family, or the other way around. In effect, choosing to live in Alaska means having less direct involvement with family and other loved ones who have been important in one's early life. For some, (as the Survey of Alaskan Jews indicates, only a small minority), the move to Alaska is seen as getting away from family. For most Alaskan Jews, distance from family is viewed as one of the major adaptive challenges of life in Alaska: finding some type of family surrogate.

On a broader level, the questions raised about Alaskan Jews pertain to current trends emerging with Jews living in the rest of the United States. Increasingly, as American Jews have become more acculturated they have tended to become more mobile. In greater numbers they are leaving urban areas of high Jewish density and choosing to live in areas of lower Jewish density. Typically these moves result in less contact with extended families and established Jewish neighborhoods. Also, there tends to be a high proportion of people who are part of mixed marriages living in small towns or frontier communities.

The same question pertains: what are the effects on the Jewish identity of this growing population of Lower 48 Jews living away from family, with fewer Jews in their area, and little if any Jewish infrastructure? While Alaska may be an extreme case because of its isolation and severe weather conditions, these extremes may more sharply focus the challenges to Jewish continuity likely to confront an expanding segment of American Jewry.

**Goals of the Alaskan Project**

This overview of the unique nature of the Alaskan Jewish community leads to defining two goals for this study: research and action.

**Research**

The objectives of the research begin with estimating how many Jews live in Alaska and where they live, their demographic composition and their Jewish and general background and behaviors. Such information will provide a starting point for planning efforts of Alaskan Jewish leaders and baseline data for future Jewish demographic/sociological studies. Further, there is the need to assess the opportunities and challenges to Jewish identity in Alaska and the community initiatives that seek to sustain Jewish life there. In a broader sense, the research on Alaskan Jews should also provide insights about life in frontier communities.

**Action**

A second goal of the Project is community organization: convening Alaskan Jews living in the several cities and towns to explore shared interests and needs and to review their informal or formal Jewish community network. In light of the minimal Jewish professional resources available in Alaska, it was presumed that community organization initiatives by the researchers could be helpful to local community leaders in mobilizing their communities to be more responsive to their shared interests. At the same time it was recognized that the community workshops and interviews would generate important qualitative information about Jewish life to complement the quantitative data produced by the demographic survey.

The action/research strategy is in the spirit of the work of the mid-20th century social psychologist, Kurt Lewin. Lewin recognized that change in human groups requires active involvement of the people themselves. From a research perspective Lewin also recognized that in the process of convening people to consider changes, either in their individual or collective lives, the action/researcher comes to understand better the values which are important to them.1

The actual operation of the Alaskan Project confirms that the concurrent pursuit of the two goals of action and research are indeed mutually reinforcing. The specifics of how that research strategy was implemented are addressed in the ensuing section on methodology.

The remainder of this report is divided into two sections. The Profile of Alaskan Jews presents and analyzes the responses of the 820 Alaskan individuals who completed and returned the Survey of Alaskan Jews questionnaire. Much information is provided about Alaskan Jews and their families.

The Conclusion summarizes the findings about Alaskan Jews and presents implications of these findings for the Alaskan and broader North American Jewish communities.
METHODOLOGY

A key methodological issue addressed is the comparison of data from the Survey of Alaskan Jews with the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) undertaken by the Council of Jewish Federations. Since most of the conclusions about Alaskan Jews are based on comparing their responses with the responses to the same question asked of Lower 48 Jews, it is necessary to review thoroughly the research procedures of the two surveys.

The Demographic Survey

The major means of obtaining information about Alaskan Jews and Jewish households was a demographic survey. In January 1994 questionnaires were sent to 1,050 identified Jewish households in which there were believed to be at least one adult who identifies as a Jew. In several instances questionnaires were returned from households in which there was no Jewish adult. These responses were not included in the survey. By June 1994, completed questionnaires were received from 542 households, representing 500 respondents.

The Survey questionnaire was designed with three considerations in mind. First, because of both the great distance between the researcher's home base and Alaska, and the modest financial resources available for the Project, it was decided that the means of obtaining data would be a self-completed, mailed Survey. Second, to enable comparing Alaskan Jews to Jews living in the Lower 48 states, wherever possible, the questions included in the Alaskan Survey questionnaire were similar to those used in the NJPS.2 Third, Survey questions were designed to obtain information about the unique characteristics of Jews living in a frontier society.

The questionnaire sought information on such issues as:

- size of population—numbers of individuals and households
- basic demographic characteristics—age, gender, education, income, political interests, vocation, marital status
- ties to extended family networks
- patterns of residence and migration
- reasons for moving to Alaska and levels of satisfaction with life in Alaska
- Jewish identity, religious background and current levels of observance of Jewish practices
- involvement in synagogue and other Jewish communal organizations

A first draft of a survey questionnaire was completed in early Fall 1993. It was reviewed and modified to incorporate ideas provided by a group of experienced demographers of
American Jews. A pre-test was conducted with a small sample of Alaskan Jews living in different areas of the state in December 1993. A final, revised version of the questionnaire, based on the pre-test, was printed and mailed out in January 1994 to Jewish households which had been identified up to that time.

Identifying the Population

Locating Jewish households and then eliciting their cooperation is complicated by the wide dispersion of Alaskan Jews, the limited Jewish communal infrastructure in the State, and a general skepticism among people who live in Alaska about any organized initiative which is perceived to intrude on their privacy. The complementary nature of the research and action components of the Project played a significant part in overcoming these obstacles. The researchers began by seeking out key leaders of Alaskan Jewry and establishing credibility with them. The initial sample lists which the leaders provided set into motion a "snowball effect" where one name led to another—starting in Anchorage, the largest and most organized of the Jewish communities, and moving on to the other cities and towns where Jews were living.

Early in this process of establishing contacts, an Advisory Committee for the Action/Research Project was organized. It was composed of seven individuals, each of whom was a recognized leader of their local community, and each was supportive of the Project. The Committee was vital, not only in eliciting the participation of the people in their communities and in providing access to their mailing lists, but at many points in the design of the Project they helped the researchers better understand the values and perspectives of the Alaskan Jews.

A good example of this practical wisdom arose at one of the early meetings of the Committee. The Committee members were uniformly skeptical that people in Alaska would respond to the mailed Survey questionnaire. One of the committee members suggested that a drawing be held with prizes offered to people who returned questionnaires. The chief researcher was uncomfortable with this approach, which seemed inappropriate for a university-sponsored research study. But he deferred to the unanimous support for the idea from the Committee. Subsequently, during the workshops in Alaska, a significant proportion of the respondents confirmed that the offer of prizes was the incentive that led them to complete the questionnaire.

Communication with the Advisory Committee was by means of phone—conference and individual calls, plus mail and fax.

The basic research strategy for the demographic survey was to seek to reach as many Alaskan Jews as possible, in effect to try to conduct a full census of Alaskan Jews, rather than to select a sample to be interviewed. It was recognized that while universal coverage was not realistic, it was feasible to obtain a broad enough rate of response to assure the reliability of the results. Moreover, the alternative research strategy used in demographic studies of large, established communities, namely selecting a representative sample of Alaskan Jews, seemed more problematic because of the limited information about the universe of the Jewish population of Alaska.

Six sources were pursued to obtain names and addresses of Alaskan Jewish households to whom questionnaires were mailed. These sources are listed below according to the proportion of the mailing list that each contributed.

- Lists of households provided by the three synagogues in Alaska: the Reform and Lubavitch synagogues in Anchorage, and the Reform Temple in Fairbanks. These are lists which include both members and people who made an inquiry of the synagogue in recent years (58%)
- Lists provided by the informal networks of Jews existing in Juneau and eleven other smaller cities and towns (20%)
- Names submitted by Survey respondents to a request noted on the Survey questionnaire seeking names and addresses of "Jews who might not be on the lists of Jewish organizations" (9%)
- Individuals who responded to news stories about the Survey which appeared in several Alaskan general newspapers (5%)
- Lists obtained by the researchers in the course of their visits and interviews in Alaska in 1993 and 1994 (8%)
- Lists provided by two national organizations, the United Jewish Appeal and Hadassah. They account for a small proportion of Alaskan names, because these organizations have had limited success in attracting members and most of their names were included on the community lists above (3%)
As noted in Table 1, these six sources produced an initial list of 1,050 households, to which questionnaires were mailed. Two questionnaires were mailed to each household with the expectation that two adults (if two were present) would respond. Eighty-five of the households were inaccessible, either because the person moved and there was no Alaskan forwarding address or it was a wrong address. Another 23 households responded but were not included in the study population either because the respondent was under age 18 and there was no reference to other adults, or there was no Jew in the household. Beyond the minimum age of 18, the other criteria for inclusion in the Survey was that at least one adult living in the household considered him/herself as Jewish. Completed questionnaires were received from 542 different households, representing a 58% rate of return, which is quite high for mailed, self-completed questionnaires. The total number of individuals who returned questionnaires was 820.

Among the full group of respondents were the following different adult constellations within households:

- 65% were married couples where both members returned questionnaires
- 9% were married individuals where only one partner returned a questionnaire. Of the 55 mixed marriages in this category, the individual who responded was the Jewish mate 93% of the time
- 23% were single adults in a household with no other adult
- 3% were single adults living with a married couple

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<th>NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS THAT RECEIVED AND RETURNED QUESTIONNAIRES</th>
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<td>Number of households to which questionnaires were mailed</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong address; questionnaires not delivered</td>
<td>-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid responses:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Individuals under 18 years of age</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No Jew in household</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Total: Invalid or inaccessible households</td>
<td>-108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households which actually received questionnaires</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households which returned questionnaires</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of return by household</td>
<td>58%</td>
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Defining Individual and Collective Agendas

Workshops devoted to assessing Jewish communal life and future planning were conducted in eight cities and towns (Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Sitka, Kotzebue, Ketchikan, Haines and Kenai). The sessions lasted three to four hours and attendance ranged from 15-94 people. Special workshops for children were conducted concurrently. There were two objectives for the children's workshops: first, to seek to understand how the next generation, the majority of whom are children of mixed marriages, think about their religious identity; and second, given that the two workshops were occurring at the same time, to share the children's issues/perspectives with the adults.

In six of the larger cities a second workshop was held with the people identified as 'leaders' of the community. In the course of these deliberations much important qualitative research information was gleaned about the diversity of Alaskan Jews and their shared and conflicting individual and collective agendas.

The workshops proved to be a valuable opportunity for people to talk together about their own Jewish issues and dilemmas and to recognize that in coming together they could be helpful to each other. It was often a Jewish consciousness-raising experience. In one of the smaller towns, where there was no formal Jewish community group, one of the participants commented at the end of the workshop: 'This was the first time we have ever come together as Jews—and it won't be the last.'

Exploring issues associated with being mixed married households (which in the smaller towns ranges from 70% to 90%) was a dominant motif in the workshops. Clearly this is the key challenge to determining the future religious identity of Alaskan Jews, as it is for Jews in the Lower 48. Because of the exceptionally large proportion of mixed married households in the Alaskan population, many valuable insights about this phenomenon have emerged in the course of the study. The statistical highlights of mixed marriage in Alaska will be presented in this report; a more qualitative analysis of the phenomenon and implications for the Jewish community in Alaska and the rest of the United States, will be presented in a special monograph focusing on this subject.

The response of the children to their separate workshop provided an interesting perspective. While some of the parents were uncertain or ambivalent about the workshop, the children were consistently positive about these gatherings. They spoke favorably about being with the other families and about enjoying the Jewish holiday celebrations—the most typical activity of the community groups. The vast majority of the children wanted to have more frequent meetings of the Jewish community group. A possible explanation is that the children view the adults and children they meet in the commu-
nity group as a surrogate extended family—an experience with which most Alaskan Jews otherwise have limited access.

In sum, the community workshops afforded the researchers access to the personal stories of Alaskan Jews and, as a result, the opportunity to sharpen and extend their research hypotheses and better understand the quantitative data from the Survey. Further, the workshops gave the researchers credibility with the folk and made it possible to set up individual interviews. Ninety-two interviews, with individuals or couples, were conducted in the eight workshop communities and in three other towns (Palmer, Homer, and Seward). These were valuable opportunities for fleshing out quantitative data obtained from the demographic study and better understanding the subtleties and the diversity of the Jews living in Alaska.

Conducting a Census

Since biblical times communities and governments have been conducting censuses. The objective is to help community leaders learn more about their communities so as to better serve them and to assure that the citizens assume their responsibility for the governance and financing of their community.

The initial idea of conducting a census of Alaskan Jews was to locate enough Jews to conduct a viable demographic study. As the Project unfolded, and the people responded positively to the Survey and the workshops, the concept of the census took on an additional momentum. With community interest aroused, the idea of a fuller census was viewed, especially by leaders of the several local Jewish communities, as an opportunity for outreach and strengthening their community. With their cooperation, some 250 additional Jewish households were located in the post-Survey period, which from a research perspective provided a more thorough description of the size and distribution of the Jewish population of Alaska. From a community organization perspective it resulted in the first comprehensive, state-wide mailing list (with over 1,135 household names and addresses). This mailing list has been made available to the newly established State Jewish Council.

Introduction to the National Jewish Population Survey

Prior to describing the research findings of the Survey of Alaskan Jews, it is appropriate to identify some of the methodological strategies used to obtain and to present the data.

The Alaskan demographic Survey was designed to be readily compared to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. This comparison is important for determining if Jews living in the "frontier society" of Alaska are significantly different from Jews living in the more traditional Jewish communities of the Lower 48 States. Accordingly, some basic information about the research design of the National Jewish Population Survey is necessary to understand some problems which arise in comparing data from two different surveys.

The findings of NJPS are reported for various definitions of Jews. Since the definitions differ along a continuum of degree of Jewish identity, selecting the appropriate definition is critical for ensuring an accurate comparison with the Alaska Survey results.

The NJPS obtained its survey population by means of a systematic random sampling of Lower 48 Jews. Random selection was utilized to assure that the sample represents the full demographic and ideological diversity of American Jews. The actual NJPS survey sample yielded 2,441 households.5

The households were carefully screened based on information obtained in two rounds of preliminary phone calls. The full questionnaire was administered during a third round of calls with a randomly selected adult member of the household who identified as Jewish. The results obtained from the sample population were weighted, based on current estimates of the demographic characteristics obtained from prior studies, to reflect the total Jewish population.6

Because of the great diversity of the contemporary American Jewish community, determining who is a Jew is a complicated issue. The directors of NJPS decided "to spread the widest possible net," including any house-

hold in which at least one member meets at least one of the following four criteria of being Jewish:

- is currently Jewish by religion
- considers him/herself Jewish
- was raised Jewish
- has or had a Jewish parent

Given the different types of Jews that were included in the 1990 Survey, the question arose as to how the data should be reported so as to account for the several sub-populations and their distinctive demographic and Jewish identity patterns.

The results of the NJPS were aggregated into several constellations of ethnicity and religion. The two most salient constellations are as follows: 1) the Core Jews includes both born Jews, who now define themselves as either religious or secular, and Jews by choice. Core Jews account for 5.5 million Jews. 2) The Total Population is the most inclusive—a total of 8.1 million, including Core Jews plus over 2.5 million individuals, belonging to the Non-core Population. These are persons who now identify as being part of a religion other than Jewish, but either were born or raised Jewish and later chose another religion, or are non-Jews who live in a household with a Jewish person.8
The key question, relevant to reporting on the data from the Survey of Alaskan Jews, is to which of these constellations should the Jewish population of Alaska be compared?

**Comparing Survey Populations: National Jewish Population Survey and Survey of Alaskan Jews**

An examination of the religious character of households in the Survey of Alaskan Jews (SAJ) indicates the diversity of the population. This is a central motif in understanding the nature of the Alaskan Jewish community today, and more important, in assessing its prospects for the future. As noted in Table 2, only about half of the Alaskan Jewish households define themselves as Jewish, about a quarter as mixed, and most of the rest as non-religious. Figures for the religious character of all households in NJPS (Total Population) reveal an equal amount of diversity. There is a somewhat higher proportion of Jewishly identified households (58%) and a different distribution among the other non-Jewish options. However, it is the high proportion of non-Jews included in these two research populations which suggests that comparisons between them would be most useful.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Character of Household</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=766)</th>
<th>NJPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Religious</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Total NJPS Population figures on measures of Jewish identity are consistently lower than the figures for the NJPS Core Population, as noted in Table 3. These differences undoubtedly reflect the lower scores of the approximately 30% of Non-Core Jews included in the Total Population figures. Based on the consistent differences in scores on measures of Jewish identity between NJPS Core Jews and Total Population (Table 3), and the similarities between the religious identity of the households in the Alaskan population and the NJPS Total Population (Table 2), it seems judicious to compare the Alaskan survey findings with those from the NJPS Total Population.

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Always/Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NJPS Core</td>
<td>NJPS Total</td>
<td>NJPS Core</td>
<td>NJPS Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Sabbath Candles</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Seder</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Hanukkah Candles</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Christmas Tree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percent Yes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>NJPS Core</th>
<th>NJPS Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast on Yom Kippur</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been to Israel</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Synagogue Members</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Representativeness of the Findings of the Survey of Alaskan Jews

In regard to assessing the reliability of the Alaskan data, there remains one other issue to examine, that is the representativeness of the survey population of Alaskan Jews: how well do these data speak for the full population of Jews living in the State?

In the more typical Jewish demographic surveys, such as NJPS, the issue of representativeness of the survey population is addressed in the systematic design of the random sample and the use of phone interviews—which are expected to elicit a higher rate of response than mailed questionnaires. The SAJ research strategy was to conduct a census (see pp. 10-12).

The first question to explore is whether there is any bias in the Alaskan Survey because of the heavy reliance on synagogue lists in determining the people who were sent the questionnaires. The Alaskan Survey population was compiled from several sources (see p. 11). The predominant sources of names were lists provided by the State’s three synagogues: Congregation Beth Sholom, the Reform Temple in Anchorage, Shomrei Ohr, the Chabad Synagogue in Anchorage, and Or Hatzafon, the Reform Temple in Fairbanks. Their unduplicated lists accounted for 58% of the names used for distributing the questionnaires. Lower 48 demographers studying

Jewish populations have confirmed that synagogue lists tend to under-represent minimally identified Jews. This tendency might be somewhat less in Alaska, where the synagogue is essentially the only Jewish organization in the area. Accordingly, it takes on the task of reaching out to unconnected Jews and is the place to which inquiries about Jewish life are directed. Thus the lists from the three synagogues are not solely lists of members but rather an accumulation of inquiries, including some curious non-Jews. In fact, 54% of the names from the three combined synagogue lists are not current synagogue members.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that Jews in Alaska with limited Jewish interests would be unlikely to get on one of the synagogue lists. By contrast, these Jews had as much likelihood of being reached by the random sampling of NJPS as would a highly committed Jew. Therefore, it would be prudent to recognize that the Alaskan Jewish Survey population may have under-represented minimally identified Alaskan Jews.

A second issue to assess is whether there is any bias in regard to the people who received questionnaires but did not respond. The logical direction of that bias would be that less committed and assimilated Jews might not have been fully represented.

As noted in Table 4, of the 942 Jewish households that were sent survey questionnaires, responses were received from 542 households—a 58% rate of response. There were 1,766 adults living in the survey population households, of whom 820 responded—a 46% rate of response. Subsequent to completing the Survey research in May 1994, the researchers conducted a census of all Jewish households in Alaska. The census located a total of 1,240 Jewish households (an additional 298), and a total adult population of 2,205 individuals (an additional 439). The rate of response from the larger census population of households was 44%, and of individuals was 37%. Thus, 56% of all Jewish households in Alaska and 63% of all the adults are, in effect, not directly represented in the survey responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD RESPONSE RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Survey Population which received questionnaires</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Alaska—Total</td>
<td>1,240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Methodology |

One initiative to test for differences between Survey respondents and non-respondents was possible in the six small cities where interviews and workshops were conducted. The number of Jewish households in these towns was small enough (ranging from 10-25 households) for the researchers to observe directly demographic and Jewish characteristics of respondents and non-respondents. These comparisons were also informed by the views of the researcher’s local liaison (usually the key leaders in the Jewish community) who know, with a high rate of certainty, the people in their area who have any type of Jewish background, including those individuals who no longer identify as Jews. This is true despite the fact that in these smaller communities the rate of mixed marriages ranges from 70 to 90%, and the Jewishness of these households typically is not a prominent feature of their lives.
Typical of the awareness in small towns of
anybody Jewish—even uncertain or "passing"
Jews—is the following story. The
researcher was interviewing one of the
Jewish residents and asked her to review his
list of Jews living in that town to see if there
might be other people with some Jewish
background who were not listed. After a
while she came up with the name of a fairly
recent settler in the town, who was the new
owner of a fast food store and who she
thought might be Jewish. She stated that
either Linda or Harry, the two oldest Jewish
residents in the town could confirm this.
"They would know," she added with confi-
dence, "They are always on the lookout for
new Jews in town." The researcher called
Linda and Harry and each responded with
essentially the same information. Each had
told the man "looked Jewish" and "decided
to check it out," and each reported the
same information: The new resident
explained that people thought he might be
Jewish because of his name, but he was quite
clear that he and his wife had been
Methodists for generations.

In sum, the comparisons between those Jews
living in the several small towns who
responded to the questionnaire and those
who didn't were fairly consistent: both share
the same high rate of intermarriage and there
are no significant differences in their Jewish
behaviors or the salience of their Jewishness.
This information was confirmed by follow-
up phone interviews of non-respondents by
local liaisons, in which they asked several of
the key questions from the mailed Survey
questionnaire.

A second initiative was conducted in the
three large cities, Anchorage, Fairbanks and
Juneau (which encompass 80% of the State's
Jewish population), to test for differences
between respondents and non-respondents.
This was done using a telephone survey of
158 people with "distinctive Jewish names," DJNs (chosen from the phone books) who
did not return questionnaires. These phone
interviews give some qualitative assess-
ment as to whether nonrespondents repre-
sent a less committed Jewish population than
the respondent population. (The question-
naire used in calling the DJNs is included in the Appendix.)

This research provides three suggestive
findings. First, making contact with DJNs in
Alaska proved to be a difficult task. In some
cases this was a function of the listed phone
numbers not being correct. In many other
cases, one or more phone messages were left
but not returned, which is not unusual for
calls from a not known person. Second, people
with DJNs comprise a smaller proportion of
the Jewish population of Alaska than is
the case in the Lower 48. In the demographic
research conducted in the Lower 48, DJNs comprise approximately 18% of the total
population.* In Alaska, DJNs comprise only
9% of the State's Jewish population, and, as
will be noted, not many of these prove to be
Jewish.

Finally, there is the important question of
what proportion of DJNs in Alaska are
Jewish? In urban centers in the Lower 48
(where most Jews live) up to 90% of DJNs
are Jewish. In outlying areas of the Lower 48,
where Jews don't typically reside, the propor-
tion of DJNs who are Jewish drops to
approximately 50%.10 The proportion in
Alaska is even lower. Based on the complet-
ed interviews, only 13% of the Alaskan DJNs
identified themselves as currently Jewish.
28% said they were Christian or another
religion, and the majority, 53% described them-
selves as having no religion. More than half
of the 'no religion' group (30%) have no
Jewish parents. Combining this group with
those DJNs currently identified with another
religion indicates that at least 58% of the
DJNs have no Jewish ties. What can be con-
cluded about this large element of the DJNs?
Either they may have had an earlier Jewish
ancestor they didn't know about, or, as many
of those interviewed stated, they are gentiles
who happen to have a Jewish family name.

These responses from DJNs who did not
respond to the Survey questionnaire and
who were not otherwise known to the
Alaskan Jewish community, indicate they are
a much less Jewishly committed population
than the Jews who responded to the Survey
questionnaire. The implication is that, at least
in the three large cities in Alaska—
Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau—there is
an element of Jews who are assimilated or
drifting away from any Jewish identity.

Given the previous consistent efforts, first by
the organized Jewish group in each of the
cities to find Jews in their area (defined in
very inclusive terms), and then the follow-up
initiatives of the Alaskan Survey researchers,
the conjecture is that this not previously
identified and minimally Jewish element
may be relatively small, perhaps 10-15% of
the total Jewish population.*

What then, can be said about the representa-
tiveness of the results of the Survey of
Alaskan Jews? How well do they describe
the full population of Jews living in Alaska?
Four findings can be gleaned from the pre-
ceeding methodological analysis.

1. The 542 households which responded to
the questionnaire represent 44% of all the
estimated Jewish households in the State.
What do we know about the 56% of
Jewish households who were not reached
by the Survey? Are they similar or dissim-
lar to this respondent group? The next

* Use of distinctive Jewish names is a promising methodology for obtaining a sample with a high propor-
tion of Jews. However, conclusions about use of this methodology in the context of the Alaskan
Survey should take into account that 25% of the households on the list of distinctive Jewish names
responded to the Survey questionnaire and thus were not included in the telephone survey. It is reason-
able to assume, by virtue of their being on the mailing list of those who received questionnaires, and
then took the time to complete the questionnaire, that this element of the DJNs are more Jewishly identi-
fied than the DJNs reported on based on the phone interviews.
three findings offer some general description of the Jewish identification of the non-respondents.

2. Direct contact with non-respondents in small towns indicates that they are not very different from the respondents. It is reasonable to conclude that the Jewish population of small cities is well accounted for by those individuals from small cities who completed questionnaires. Jews living outside the three large Alaskan cities comprise 20% of the State's Jewish population. Since about half of all households returned questionnaires, this category accounts for 10% of all non-respondents.

3. The rate of non-response among households that received questionnaires was 42%, which is quite low for mailed questionnaires. Non-response could be explained by factors such as suspicion of the unsolicited questionnaire, general desire to protect privacy, or specific reluctance to avoid admitting to being Jewish, as well as factors relating to inertia.

4. The telephone survey of distinctive Jewish names in the three large cities sought to identify another category of non-respondents. The survey of 158 DJN households suggests that most of them are non-identified or assimilated. Some members of this "Jewish" population are literally Jewish only in name and have drifted out of the Jewish community. While outreach to some elements of this population will continue to be important, there is a significant element which has become so fringe that they cannot be considered part of the Jewish population.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Survey mailing list included a high proportion of the estimated total Jewish population, and the rate of those responding was relatively high. The reliance on synagogue lists suggests that the Survey population has under-represented minimally identified Jews; this is confirmed to a degree by the telephone interviews with Alaskans who have distinctive Jewish names. It is not possible to define precisely the extent of the presumed under-representation. One guideline emerged from the follow-up interviews of people with distinctive Jews names who did not respond to the questionnaire: Those interviews uncovered an assimilated or minimally Jewish element of between 10-15% of that specific group. However, it should be noted that this fringe population was itself drawn from another Jewishly fringe population—Alaskan Jews who did not respond to the questionnaire.

Respondents to the Survey are representative of the vast majority of Alaskan Jews. The Survey population encompasses a wide range of Jewish identities and employs an inclusive definition of being Jewish. The Survey may speak insufficiently for a small number of minimalistic Jews, those whose view of their Jewishness would range from being irrelevant to negative. The results of the Survey are based on that population which is most likely to constitute the Jewish community for the years to come.

The next section provides a complete review of the demographics and Jewish background, behaviors and attitudes of Alaskan Jews. Analysis will focus on outlining and explaining differences between Alaska and the Lower 48.
This section of the monograph will report on
the major findings of the demographic sur-
vey of Alaskan Jews conducted in 1994. The
findings will be presented in nine sections:

**ALASKAN POPULATION:
JEWISH AND GENERAL**

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

**SECULAR EDUCATION**

**OCCUPATION AND
HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

**RESIDENCE PATTERNS AND MIGRATION**

**MOTIVATIONS AND ATTITUDES
ABOUT LIFE IN ALASKA**

**RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND BEHAVIOR**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
ALASKAN JEWS LIVING IN LARGE
AND SMALL CITIES**

**DIFFERENCES IN JEWISH
IDENTITY BY AGE**

Previous reports of the Alaskan Jewish popu-
lation were estimates based primarily on the
membership lists of the three synagogues
and the informal Jewish networks in the
smaller towns. Little effort was made to con-
trol for duplication of listings or to include
Jews not known to the Jewish organizations.

The population estimate for Alaska that
emerges from the census conducted by the
Action/Research Project is 2,040 individuals.
As defined in the Methodology section of
this report, the Jewish population includes all
members of households where at least one
adult is Jewish. In all, households accounting
for 2,705 individuals were actually enumerat-
ed by the Project; in those households at least
one Jewish adult household member was
identified by name. The number of individu-
als overlooked in the enumeration (235) was
arrived at by determining the likely propor-
tion of undercounting. Proportions specific to
each city or town were determined in con-
junction with local leaders and took into
account the presumed comprehensiveness of
the lists of Jewish households. The propor-
tions added to the identified populations
ranged from 3% in smaller towns to 9% in
the three large cities. The rationale for this
graded range based on city size is that there
is a greater likelihood of missing people as
the size of the city gets larger.

The population figures presented in Tables 5
and 6 represent the first systematic effort at
conducting a census of Alaskan Jews.
The three largest cities (Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau) account for over 80% of the State's Jewish population. Anchorage alone comprises more than half. In the general population, these cities comprise 55% of the population. It appears that in Alaska, as in the Lower 48, Jews prefer to live in urban areas.

| TABLE 5 | 1995 ALASKAN POPULATION ESTIMATES: GENERAL AND JEWISH POPULATION |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                | Total General Population | Total Jewish Population | Percent of Jews to General Population |
| Anchorage**    | 245,296            | 1,572             | 0.6%                                       |
| Fairbanks**     | 51,447             | 537               | 1.0%                                       |
| Juneau***       | 29,078             | 285               | 1.0%                                       |
| Sitka           | 9,052              | 70                | 0.8%                                       |
| Homer           | 3,846              | 48                | 1.3%                                       |
| Ketchikan       | 8,846              | 54                | 0.6%                                       |
| Soldotna        | 3,869              | 48                | 1.3%                                       |
| Kenai           | 6,813              | 32                | 0.4%                                       |
| Haines (borough)| 2,469              | 30                | 1.2%                                       |
| Bethel          | 5,009              | 29                | 0.6%                                       |
| Other Towns     | 230,478            | 229               | 0.1%                                       |
| Totals          | 599,200            | 2,940             | 0.5%                                       |

* Includes Anchorage and suburbs: Aniak, Chugiak, Eagle River, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Ft. Richardson, Girdwood, Houston, Indian, Palmer, Talkeetna and Wasilla

** Includes Fairbanks and suburbs: College, Eielson Air Force Base, Ft. Wainwright and North Pole

*** Includes Juneau and suburbs: Auke Bay and Douglas

Sources: Total General Population from Alaskan Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Juneau, 1994; Total Jewish Population from 1994 Reichman Survey

Figure 1: Ten Cities with the Largest Jewish Populations

- Bethel 29
- Haines 30
- Kenai 32
- Soldotna 48
- Ketchikan 54
- Homer 55
- Sitka 70
- Juneau 285
- Fairbanks 537
- Anchorage 1572
Jewish holiday observance or celebration, and thus they may be properly thought of as Jewish communities. As shown in Table 6, Jews are also present in many smaller towns.

### Table 6: Alaskan Towns with Small Jewish Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Number of Individuals</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Number of Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angoon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>McKinley Park</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nenana</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickaloon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nikiski</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper Landing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nulato</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordova</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nome</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Petersburg</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta Junction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Point Hope</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denali National Park</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seldovia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dillingham</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Seward</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fritz Creek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shagelick</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halibut Cove</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sterling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tanana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tanacooe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiana</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tok</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodiak</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tripper Creek</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotzebue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unalakleet</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Whittier</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Towns which are considered suburbs of Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau are included on Table 5.

Jews constitute one-half of one percent of the total Alaskan population. In comparison, Jews in the Lower 48, using the Total Jewish Population of NJPS, are 3.3% (2.2% using the NJPS Core Population) of the Lower 48 total population. The lower proportion of Jews in Alaska increases the interaction they are likely to have with non-Jews in the course of their day-to-day activities and thus increases the assimilatory influence to which they are exposed. In a similar vein, that Jews only account for 0.5% of the Alaskan population, coupled with their relatively low level of organization (as compared to Jews of the Lower 48), means that their collective issues and concerns will less likely be attended to than the issues and concerns of larger, better organized sub-communities in the State. This pertains to matters such as state or local programs and services such as public schools and their curriculum and schedules; sensitivity to anti-Semitism and the growing activity of Fundamental Christians; Christmas/ Hanukkah; and newspaper coverage of activities of the local Jewish community as well as "Jewish new," i.e. Israel and other Jewish issues.

In the course of analyzing the demographic and Jewish characteristics of Alaskan Jews, comparisons will be made with other Jews who live in areas of low Jewish population density specifically, the 20 states (including Alaska) which have the smallest Jewish populations. The intent of this analysis is to seek to determine if the characteristics of Alaskan Jews are similar or different from Jews living in the states which have small numbers of Jews. Is the key variable in seeking to understand the unique characteristics of Jews of Alaska the fact that they live in an area in which there are small numbers of Jews?

Viewing the data of the states with small Jewish populations (Table 7) makes clear that Alaska, at least in terms of Jewish population density, is not unique. The proportion of Jews in Alaska is 0.5%; for Jews living in the Lower 48 small states the average proportion is 0.3% (one-third of one percent). Alaska's Jewish population size and density place them around the middle of the 20 small states. There are eight states with smaller Jewish populations than Alaska's 2,940 Jews and fifteen states whose proportion of Jews to the general population is less than Alaskan Jews 0.5%.

One other interesting population characteristic to examine is the extent to which Jews who live in states with small Jewish populations tend to concentrate in their state's largest city. The data indicate that this is the pattern. The proportion of Jews who live in the state's largest city ranges from 38% to 94%, with the average 58%. Alaska's Jews are near the middle—Jews living in Anchorage comprise 53% of the total Jewish population. In an earlier discussion of the population distribution of Alaskan Jews it was noted that 80% of Alaskan Jews live in the State's three largest cities: Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. The population distribution of Jews in the 20 small states confirms that those Jews similarly cluster in the large city rather than in small towns or rural areas.

The comparison between Alaskan Jews and Lower 48 Jews who live in the states with small Jewish populations is important in light of the growing trend of American Jews to move away from urban centers and to settle in non-metropolitan areas. Over the past 23 years the total number of Jews living in the 20 states with the smallest numbers of Jews has increased by 2.3%, from 84,560 in 1969 to 86,990 in 1994.
TABLE 7  LOWER 48 STATES WITH JEWISH POPULATIONS UNDER 10,000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total Jewish Population</th>
<th>Percent Jews to General Population</th>
<th>Percent Jewish Population Largest City to State Jewish Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. Dakota</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>&lt;0.1%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>&lt;0.1%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>&lt;0.1%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>2940</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>5500</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>5500</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals/Average</td>
<td>4,329</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1994 American Jewish Year Book

Reviewing demographic studies over the past 60 years, Brown University demographer Sidney Goldstein notes two trends: greater dispersion of Jews throughout the United States and away from the Northeast, and movement away from metropolitan centers. Goldstein highlights: "...the extent to which Jews have participated in movement to smaller locations. Such dispersion, especially when it involves movement to communities with few Jewish inhabitants, has particular relevance for the strength of individual ties to the Jewish community...Much more research is needed on how the 'Jewish environment,' as indicated by density of Jewish population and facilities, affects individual Jewish identity and the vitality of the community." The research findings about Alaskan Jews, to be reported in the ensuing Sections, and the comparable data about Jews living in the states with small Jewish populations, will help explain the nature of Jewish life in these areas of low Jewish density.
DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

The two most distinctive characteristics of the age distribution of Alaskan Jews, as compared to Jews of the Lower 48 are: a) a lower proportion of elderly Jews, age 65 and over (the difference is minor between Alaskan Jews and other Alaskans); and b) a high proportion of middle-age Alaskan Jews, ages 25-64 (see Table 8). Both of these population proportions are, to some extent explained by the fact that most Alaskans now living in the State (other than the Natives who comprise 16% of the population) came to Alaska within the past 20 years. Oil was discovered in Alaska in 1968 and construction of the pipeline began in 1973. Sixty-nine percent of Alaskan Jews moved to Alaska since 1973. Their average age on arriving in Alaska was 27 years, and 90% of them were under age 40. So, the individual who came to Alaska in 1980 (the median year of arrival) at age 27 would be 42 years old today.

This pattern of migration would help explain the "middle-age bulge" in the age distribution of Alaskan Jews. Focusing on the age distribution of adults only (Table 9), the "middle-age bulge" of Alaskan Jews is prominent. Combining the two middle-age categories, 25-44 and 45-64, accounts for 91% of all Alaskan Jews. This compares to 79% of other Alaskans, 70% of all Lower 48 Jews, and 69% of Jews living in the 20 states with small Jewish populations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=955)</th>
<th>Alaskans General</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews **</th>
<th>Jews in Small States**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (years)</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1990 U.S. Census
**NJPS, 1990

The age 65 and over population figures noted in Table 6 reveal similarities between Alaskan Jews, the general Alaskan population, and the Jews living in the 20 small states. The similarities between the two Alaskan populations would be explained mainly by the severe winter weather conditions. The tendency to out-migrate is true to a somewhat lesser extent with the people 65 and older living in the states with small populations. They and the older Alaskans are likely to move to states with warmer winters, such as Florida, California, Arizona and Hawaii. It may also be that at this stage of their lives, the over-65ers prefer a more traditional and settled lifestyle and better access to more specialized health services.
**Household Composition**

Although most Jews settled in Alaska recently, and many came as single individuals, the household composition is quite similar to that among Lower 48 Jews (Table 10). The typical Alaskan Jewish household consists of an average of 2.5 individuals, which is virtually the same size as in the Lower 48. Twenty-eight percent of households are comprised of one adult, meaning that in the remainder of households, there is at least one other person present—either one or more children, a spouse or partner, or other adults (grandparent, other relative or friend).

### TABLE 10  AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE: ALASKAN AND LOWER 48 JEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Individuals</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews N=542 households</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews N=2,439 households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adults* (N=909)</td>
<td>Total in Household (N=1,351)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children** (N=443)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Age 18 and older
** Under age 18

As many as 44% of households have children. As noted earlier in Table 8, the proportion of children under age 18 among Jews (31%) is 9% higher than in the Lower 48. That children of Alaskan Jews tend to be younger and are still living at home is to be explained by the relatively recent surge in the number of Jews settling in Alaska, most since 1975. Only 6% of adult Jews were born in Alaska. The Alaskan Jews who have generated most of the state’s Jewish children is that cohort of people who arrived since 1975. Today the average age of that cohort is in the 40s and most of their children are under 18 years.

### TABLE 11  MARITAL STATUS [AGE 18 AND OLDER]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=859)</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews</th>
<th>Jews in Small States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marital Status

An unusually high proportion of Alaskan Jews, 73%, are married (Table 11). The percent of married is 58% for the total population of lower 48 Jews, and only 37% for Jews living in the 20 small states. How is this difference to be explained?

The high proportion of married people among Alaskan Jews is a function of its unique age distribution. This has two dimensions: one, low proportions of Alaskan Jews in ages with typically low rates of married people (under age 35 and 55+), and two, high proportions in ages with typically high rates (ages 35-54). In the former category: 25% of Alaskan Jews are under age 35 and only 9% are over 55 (Table 12).

One other possible explanation of the high marriage rate is that there may be some greater incentive for people who live in Alaska to want to be married. The great distance from family networks and the challenge of living on the frontier may incline people to want the presence of an assured partner.

### TABLE 12  AGE OF ALASKAN JEWISH ADULTS (IN 10-YEAR INTERVALS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N=953)
Gender

Typically, frontier communities, from the Old West to Alaska, have had difficulty in attracting women to live there. The Alaskan Jewish community appears to go against this pattern. Over 53% of Alaskan Jews are women—a figure only slightly lower than Lower 48 Jews, but higher than Jews living in the states with low Jewish populations. How is this variance to be explained? The reputation of Alaska as having a high proportion of males might be an incentive for some women seeking a spouse. Also, Jews tend to be over-represented in non-traditional roles and ideologies, and some greater number of non-traditional women may be attracted by the openness of the Alaskan frontier. Alaska is particularly welcoming of newcomers and tolerant of diversity. Women may especially sense the spirit of equality and opportunity Alaska offers them. It is also possible that Jews moving to Alaska, as compared to non-Jews, might be more inclined to come with spouses, which would in-crease the proportion of Jewish women.

| TABLE 13 GENDER |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total Alaskan Jews Population* | Alaskan Jews Jews (N=820) | Lower 48 Jews—Total | Jews in Small States |
| Male | 52.7% | 46.8% | 45.6% | 54.3% |
| Female | 47.3 | 53.2 | 54.4 | 45.7 |
| *1990 U.S. Census |

Political Views

American Jews tend to be politically liberal and Alaskan Jews are somewhat more so. A comparison of the political views of Alaskan Jews with those of the two Lower 48 populations of Jews (Table 14), indicates Alaskan Jews are more liberal: 53% of Alaskan Jews are Very Liberal or Liberal as compared to 44% of all Lower 48 Jews and only 26% of the Jews living in small states. The latter population are largely “middle of the road,” which would characterize the political and general ethos of most of the states with low populations. The small state Jews, as Jews have done historically; take on many of the values and perspectives of the non-Jewish people among whom they live. While we have no comparable data on the political views of Alaskans, an interesting conjecture is whether Alaskan Jews share similar political views as the majority of their non-Jewish neighbors?

| TABLE 14 POLITICAL VIEWS |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Alaskan Jews Jews (N=803) | Lower 48 Jews | Jews in Small States |
| Very Liberal | 15% | 11% | 0 |
| Liberal | 38 | 33 | 26 |
| Middle of the Road | 31 | 31 | 50 |
| Conservative | 16 | 18 | 14 |
| Very Conservative | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 0 | 6 | 0 |
SECULAR EDUCATION

A distinctive characteristic of the Alaskan Jewish community—one that was not anticipated—is their unusually high level of general education. Alaskan Jews have had significantly more education than the rest of Alaskans, Lower 48 Jews, and much more than the general U.S. White population. These differences can be seen in detail in Table 15 and graphically in Figure 2, by examining the two extremes on level of education for each of the four populations. Four percent of Alaskan Jews received a high school degree or less. This compares to 42% of all Alaskans, 30% of other American Jews, and 62% of all U.S. Whites. At the other extreme, 54% of Alaskan Jews received some graduate education beyond a bachelor’s degree. The proportion of the other populations that received this level of education are: all Alaskans-8%, Lower 48 Jews-25%, and Total U.S. Whites-9%.

TABLE 15  SECULAR EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Alaskan Population*</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=819)</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews</th>
<th>Total U.S. White Population**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School diploma</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School graduate</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college degree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate or professional schooling</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:
*Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs, 1980
**U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988

FIGURE 2  SECULAR EDUCATION

- 40%
- 28%
- 22%
- 20%
- 17%
- 12%
- 9%
- 8%
- 62%
- 54%

- Alaskan Jews
- Total Alaskan Population
- NJPS
- Total U.S. White Population
The population which comes closest to the Alaskan Jews in their high level of general education is the Jews who live in the states with small Jewish populations (not shown). Sixteen percent of these Jews received a high school degree or less and 24% had some post B.A. schooling.

Clearly, the Jews who have chosen to come to Alaska represent an unusually highly educated segment of American Jews. This may be a function of the high proportion of Jews who have been attracted to Alaska by professional job opportunities. Typically, professionals have high levels of secular education. Perhaps the high level of education also provides an indication of the requisites which at least Jews today consider as vital to adapting to a challenging society, such as Alaska. In an earlier era, the requisites for life on the frontier would have been in the physical realm—strength, stamina and some craft or manual skills. These contemporary adventurers count on their wits and their education to help them adapt to the Alaskan frontier.

**OCCUPATION AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

**Occupation**

Almost four out of five Alaskan Jews work as either professionals (58%) or as managers (20%) (Table 16). This vocational concentration (78%) is more than twice the proportion of professionals and managers among the general U.S. White population (31%) and 29% more than Jews of the Lower 48 (49%). That so many Alaskan Jews are professionals and managers helps explain their high level of general education (see Table 15). To some extent the high proportion of Alaskan Jewish professionals also reflects the fact that more Alaskan Jewish women than their Lower 48 counterparts are professionals or managers.

Equally noteworthy are the small numbers of Alaskan Jews, even to a more limited degree than Lower 48 Jews, who work in service or blue collar jobs. Combining the four blue collar/service categories in Table 16—Crafts, Operatives, Service and Naturalist, the total for Alaskan Jews is 12%, as compared to 41% of the U.S. White population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 16</th>
<th>Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaskan Jews (N=805)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical/Sales</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operatives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalist</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: U.S. Department of Labor, January 1991
** Includes managers of private business and government
*** Primarily agriculture
The nature of the professions in which Alaskan Jews work is diverse (Table 17). Twenty-six percent are educators who work in pre-schools, elementary schools and high schools. Fifteen percent each are attorneys/judges and therapists and another 15% are physicians, dentists, and other medical personnel.

Following up on the point made earlier about the high proportion of women who are professionals or managers, while there are as many women as men in the broad categories, their distributions within the professions differ. Men predominate in the categories of doctor and lawyer/judge and women predominate in the categories of school teacher and social worker/therapist. One other interesting sidelight on professions: one-fifth of Alaska’s judges are Jews.

### Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=420)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/No answer</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high proportion—76%—of all Alaskan adults work: 64% full-time and 14% part-time (Table 18). Only 6% are homemakers, 2% each are unemployed or disabled, and the balance are divided between students and retired.

### Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Profession</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorneys/Judges</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers/Therapists</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Medical Professionals</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors (University)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists/Broadcasters</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Professional*</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes accountants, librarians, technicians.

### Household Income

The distribution of the household income of Alaskan Jews resembles a bell curve, fairly evenly divided among ten income categories (Table 19). There is more of a skew on the lower income categories for the general population of Lower 48 Jews, and on the higher income categories for the Jews of small states. Two considerations about the income data of Alaskan Jews should be noted in comparing these figures with those of the two Lower 48 Jewish populations. First, the Alaskan incomes are for the year 1993, the Lower 48 incomes, are from 1989. Thus there is the need to adjust for four years of inflation. Second, the cost of living in Alaska is higher than the cost of living in the Lower 48. Accounting for these two factors would require an upward adjustment of between 12 to 15% in the income of the two Lower 48 populations for equitable comparisons with the Alaskan income figures. Despite such an adjustment the income of Alaskan Jews would remain approximately 20% higher than that of the general Lower 48 Jewish population. However, that adjustment would essentially equalize the levels of income of Alaskan Jews and the Jews living in states with small Jewish populations. This suggests a higher level of income for Jews who live in areas away from major urban settlements, such as Jews of Alaska and the states with small Jewish populations.

The income level of Alaskan Jews is also considerably higher than other Alaskans. The 1993 median income of Alaskan Jews is $71,000, while the 1989 median income of all Alaskans is $41,408, ($49,007 in 1993 dollars). Perhaps a higher level of income serves as an added incentive to attract and sustain Jews in locations which have low Jewish population density. Or perhaps their higher incomes are primarily a reflection of the combination of their higher levels of education and involvement in professional and managerial occupations.
TABLE 19  HOUSEHOLD INCOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-29,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-39,999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-49,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-59,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-79,999</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000-124,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$125,000-149,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-199,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 and over</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know/Refused</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income</td>
<td>$71,000</td>
<td>$44,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESIDENCE PATTERNS AND MIGRATION

The dominant motif of the migration of Jews to Alaska follows the adage, "Go west, young man." Although, as noted in the discussion of gender, young Jewish women also take seriously Grecely's advice. Examining three stages of residence of Alaskan Jews — where they were born, where they lived just before moving to Alaska, and where they would move if they were to leave Alaska — the westward thrust is clear.

Six percent of Alaskan Jews were born outside the United States, with Israel being the most common country.

Another finding worth noting is the relatively high percentage of Alaskan Jews who met their spouses in the West (22%) or Alaska itself (44%). While only 26% of Alaskan Jews were born in those areas, 66% met their spouses there.

TABLE 20  MIGRATION AND REGION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West (not AK)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside U.S.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 3  MIGRATION

The first Jews migrated to Alaska in the 1890's. However, few of their descendants remained in Alaska. A more significant migration of Jews to Alaska began around 1970 and grew steadily from that point. Migration was encouraged by the development and economic growth which surrounded the Alaskan pipeline, which was completed in the mid-1970s.

The median year for moving to Alaska was 1980, meaning that at the time the survey was conducted (1994), the average Jewish adult had lived in the State for 14 years (Table 21).

TABLE 21  YEAR ALASKAN JEWS MOVED TO ALASKA (N=818)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower 48 States Alaska Jews May Move To

Prior to moving to Alaska 50% of the population had lived in the West. Twenty percent had lived in the Northeast. Comparison with location of birth illustrates a trend of people moving west before making the move to Alaska. It is as though one of the Western states serves as a staging area for the "big move."

The westward trend and concomitant decline in the Northeast as a population source for Alaskan Jews are further reflected in responses to the question of where people would live if they were to leave Alaska. Sixty-five percent would choose one of the Western states, while only 11% would choose a Northeastern state.

The pattern of migration from the Northeast to the West is visually evident in Figure 4, which shows opposing trends in the Northeast and the West over the three successive stages. Thirty-five percent of Alaskan Jews were born in the Northeast; the number drops to 21% who were in the Northeast just before moving to Alaska; and only 11% said they would move to the Northeast from Alaska. Comparable migration figures for the Western states are: 20% born, 50% lived just before, and 65% would choose to live in the future, if they were to leave Alaska.
The uniqueness of the Alaskan Jews’ migration pattern is seen by examining the current residential distributions of Lower 48 Jews and the general population (Table 22). The proportion of American Jews who live in the Northeast (44%) is more than twice the proportion of Alaskan Jews who lived in the Northeast just before moving to Alaska (21%). At the same time, about half as many American Jews live in the West (24%) as Alaskan Jews who reported living in the West just before moving (50%). The general U.S. population is fairly evenly distributed among the four regions. Jews are somewhat more likely than the general population to live in the West.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 22 CURRENT REGION OF RESIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower 48 Jews*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower 48 Total Population: 1990 U.S. Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West (not AK)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ninety-four percent of Alaskan Jews were born outside Alaska. How likely is it that they will remain in Alaska, and for how long? Table 23 shows that almost three-quarters of the population say they will stay in Alaska for at least five years. That proportion drops to one-half after ten years and to just over one-quarter for those who will live the rest of their lives in Alaska. There is a good deal of uncertainty about living in Alaska ten years from now (41% "maybe") and the rest of a person’s life (56% "maybe"). For many people, while Alaska currently seems a good place to live, there is uncertainty as to how well they can manage life in this frontier society as they and their children grow older.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 23 FUTURE RESIDENTIAL PLANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years from now (N=794)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years from now (N=785)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of my life (N=793)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar question was asked in the NJPS: "What is the likelihood of your moving in the next three years?" Fifty-five percent of Lower 48 Jews said they would not move or would not be likely to do so. By contrast, 74% of Alaskan Jews indicated they would remain in Alaska over an even longer time interval, five years. Contrary to the image of Alaskans as adventurers and transients, these results suggest that Alaskan Jews have greater residential stability or are more satisfied with where they live than their Lower 48 counterparts.
The specific responses of Alaskan Jews to the question of where they might move if they were to leave Alaska provide a logical sense of closure in the typical course of migration of the current generation. The cycle begins with a move from the Northeast, largely to the West Coast, with a concentration in California. There follows a northerly flow up the coast to Oregon and Washington and finally to Alaska. Table 24 lists the 10 most frequently identified areas to which Alaskan Jews would move—if they were to leave Alaska. In fact, a significant group of people (41%) chose not to answer the question, suggesting that, at this point in their lives, a move out of Alaska is not being considered. Recall that 28% of Alaskan Jews expected to live in Alaska the rest of their lives and 56% said “maybe” (see Table 23).

Selection of the top three most frequent future areas of residence, Washington, Oregon and California suggests that Alaskan expatriates would like to stay close to Alaska; perhaps they would maintain a “snow bird” connection. The next most frequent locations, Israel, Hawaii, New Mexico and Arizona, offer an incentive of warmer weather. It seems that the top locations were chosen for their inherent amenities rather than for the sake of family ties or, with the exception of Israel, for Jewish ambiance.

### TABLE 24 INTENDED DESTINATION OF MOVERS (10 most frequently identified locations) N=694

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someplace in U.S.</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MOTIVATIONS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN ALASKA

Why have Jews chosen to live in Alaska? What do they find most satisfying or troubling about their lives? Tables 25, 26, and 27 summarize people’s first and second choices on these questions.

Employment opportunity is the most common reason for moving to Alaska. The following scenario (with variations noted) typifies the situation of those who moved to Alaska for employment:

I was two years out of law school (or graduate school in education, social work, journalism, etc.) working for a large firm in Boston (or Los Angeles, Philadelphia, etc.) when I realized that I wasn’t going to advance very fast. I happened to see an advertisement about an interesting job in my field that was in Alaska. The position offered a much higher salary and better prospects for advancement. My wife and I figured we were still young and had few responsibilities that would tie us down. So the idea of going to Alaska for several years sounded like an adventure that was worth trying.

Almost three out of five respondents cited “a job” as a reason for deciding to come to Alaska (Table 25). Half mentioned “natural environment” and “lifestyle,” mostly as the second choice.

### TABLE 25 WHY DO ALASKAN JEWS LIVE IN ALASKA? (1st & 2nd Choices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1st Choice (N=818)</th>
<th>2nd Choice (N=697)</th>
<th>Combined 1st &amp; 2nd choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural environment</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flee family</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always lived in Alaska</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The two motivating factors, natural environment and lifestyle, appear also at the top of the list of most satisfying aspects of life in Alaska. A related aspect, "safe and less hectic," referring to the rising rate of urban violence in the Lower 48, is third (Table 26). In Alaska news media and general conversation much attention is given to the importance of hunting and fishing. These activities are of much less importance to Alaskan Jews. Only 2% identified hunting and fishing as the most satisfying, and another 6% identified them as second most satisfying. Career opportunity, which initially attracted many people to Alaska, is not an important source of satisfaction and 18% consider limited career prospects a troubling aspect of life in Alaska (Table 27).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 26</th>
<th>WHAT IS MOST SATISFYING ABOUT LIVING IN ALASKA? (1st &amp; 2nd Choices)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Choice (N=819)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive lifestyle</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural environment</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe—less hectic</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good career opportunity</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet interesting people</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish/hunt</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 27</th>
<th>WHAT IS MOST TROUBLING ABOUT LIVING IN ALASKA? (1st &amp; 2nd Choices)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Choice (N=763)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too far from family</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather—winter</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited social opportunities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Jewish services</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited career prospects</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two inherent characteristics of the State head the list of troubling aspects. The most troubling aspect is "too far from family," mentioned by 61% as either most or second most troubling. Next most troubling is the winter weather (49%).

Over time, the salience of career is replaced by other realities of life on "The Last Frontier," notably distance from family and the weather.

Also mentioned is "limited social opportunities"—apparently loss of family contact is not offset by alternative social networks. Finally, one out of five people is troubled by "inadequate Jewish services."
Two questions on the questionnaire were directed to parents. The intent was to assess how parents viewed Alaska as a place to rear children and to get a sense of whether the next generation would remain in Alaska. Regarding whether children would live in Alaska as adults, the predominant response was one of uncertainty—35% answered "maybe" and 32% answered "don't know." Only one out of five parents answered "yes" (Table 28). The extent to which this result was an expression of preferences of the children is not known. Nonetheless, if the parents have a commitment to the Jewish identity of their children, their response to a question about Alaska as a place for rearing their children (Table 29) offers a strong clue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 29</th>
<th>ALASKA AS A PLACE FOR REARING CHILDREN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children (General) (N=803)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On balance, the evidence in Tables 28 and 29 is not encouraging for the prospect of a next generation which might have the Jewish background and commitment to sustain a vibrant Alaskan Jewish community.

Table 29 presents a comparison of parents' views of Alaska as a place to rear children, in general, and Jewish children. Alaska is considered a fine place to rear children. Responses were 50% excellent and 41% good. For rearing children Jewishly, ratings are concentrated at the low end of the scale. Responses were 48% fair and 22% poor.

**Religious Identity and Behavior**

The previous section concluded with concerns of parents that their Jewish children, growing up in Alaska, might not have a positively reinforcing experience. The focus now shifts to the Jewish identity of parents, which is important in its own right, and also as it sheds light on the question of the Jewish identity of the next generation. This section provides information about the Jewish background, attitudes and behaviors of adults, with comparisons to the full population of Lower 48 Jews and, in several instances, to Jews living in the 20 states with small Jewish populations.

**Jewish Education**

The proportion of Alaskan Jews who received some Jewish education in childhood (61%) is slightly greater than the Lower 48 Jewish Population (59%) or the Small States (57%) (Table 30). Hebrew School is the most common type of education, followed by Sunday School (Table 31). The distribution of type of education is similar in all three populations, with a somewhat higher proportion of Lower 48 children receiving a Day School education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 30</th>
<th>EVER RECEIVED JEWISH EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaskan Jews (N=811)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 31</th>
<th>TYPE OF JEWISH EDUCATION (For those who received Jewish education)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaskan Jews (N=505)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew school</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day school</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private tutor</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of years of Jewish education is somewhat greater for Alaskan Jews than in the Lower 48. People with seven or more years of education comprise 43% of the Alaskan population and 36% of the Total Jewish Population of Lower 48 Jews (Table 32).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 32</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YEARS OF JEWISH EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaskan Jews (N=474)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 6 years</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 9 years</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 12 years</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 16 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religious Background and Current Identity

A potentially significant finding emerges from a review of the religious identity of Alaskan and Lower 48 Jews at two points in their lives: 1) the religion in which they were reared; and 2) their current religion. The general assumption these days is that across these life stages the Jewish population is likely to decline. The data in Table 33 confirm a decline for Jews in the Lower 48, but indicate an increase for Alaskan Jews. The analysis will first focus on Alaskan Jews, then comparisons will be made with the Lower 48 Jews.

Sixty-six percent of Alaskan Jews were raised Jewish, but 77% currently identify as Jewish—an increase of 11%. Twenty-five percent were raised Christian (9% Catholic and 16% Protestant). In contrast to the pattern with the Jews, Christians experienced a decline of 17% from raised to current. Catholics dropped from 9% to 3%, and Protestants dropped from 16% to 5%. The "Other" category, which primarily includes people who define themselves as "not religious," increased 6% from raised to current, 9% to 15%.

In seeking to understand the religious identity of Alaskan Jews it is helpful to contrast the identity of individuals with the religious character of their households (see Table 2 on page 18). Fifty-one percent of the households are described as Jewish, 26% as mixed, 19% as not religious, and 4% as Christian or another religion. What seems discrepant is that 77% of Alaskan Jews currently consider themselves Jewish, while only 51% describe their household as Jewish and 26% of the households are described as mixed. In mixed households there is at least one person, most typically a spouse, who was reared as a non-Jew. The data suggest that most of these non-Jewish household members individually now define themselves as Jewish.

This explanation emerges from the findings about changes in religious identity (Table 33). There was a 17% decline in Christians (Catholic and Protestant) between raised and current identity, and increases of 11% and 6% in Jewish and "Other" identity, respectively. It is reasonable to suggest that the increases resulted from former Christians who now consider themselves Jewish or non-religious. Indeed, an analysis of the religion in which current "Others" were raised indicates that 52% were Christian, 17% Jewish, and 30% "Other."
The prevailing wisdom derived from NJPS and many demographic studies of Lower 48 cities is that intermarriage results in a net loss of Jewish population. Indeed, religious identity data from NJPS comparable to the data discussed above does show such attrition (Table 33). Using the additional information of respondent’s religion at birth, the decline in percentage Jewish is seen as follows: 72% Jewish at birth, 68% raised Jewish, and 65% currently Jewish. The extent of decline is 3% between raised and current, and 7% between born and current. The Catholic and Protestant populations remain essentially unchanged. Increases are found in the “Other” category—7% between raised and current, and 11% between born and current. Presumably, more of the intermarried Jews, as well as some of their spouses, choose “Other,” usually defined as “non-religious,” as their current religious identity.

Given the recent surge in rates of intermarriage and the accompanying decline in Jewish population, it is of great importance for the American Jewish community to learn how Alaskan Jews have been able to buck the trend. Two possible explanations for the Alaskan difference have been presented. First, a higher percentage of non-Jewish spouses in Alaskan mixed marriages define themselves as Jewish than in the Lower 48. Second, the majority (56%) of the Jewish partners in the Alaskan mixed marriages are women. Since mothers exert greater influence over the religious identity of children than do fathers, it is likely that more of the mixed Alaskan households become Jewish households.

The next section explores more fully the issue of intermarriage among the Jews of Alaska.

---

**TABLE 33 RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alaskan Jews</th>
<th></th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raised (N=791)</td>
<td>Current (N=795)</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>Raised</td>
<td>Current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/None</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question arises as to how many of these former non-Jews went through formal conversion. Through questions routinely asked by the researcher in interviews and the workshops, it was possible to determine an upper limit. While there was no question in the Survey that asked if non-Jews who became Jewish had a formal conversion, this question was asked routinely in the interviews and workshops. An estimate is that no more than 20% of the Alaskan “Jews by choice” went through a formal conversion. The large majority seem to have acquiesced to their spouse’s Jewish initiatives, through practices such as introducing Jewish customs in the home, rearing children as Jews, or becoming part of the synagogue (in Anchorage or Fairbanks) or the Jewish community group in Juneau and in smaller cities.

The typical dynamic in these mixed marriages is that one partner has a positive attitude toward their religion while the other partner has a negative or neutral attitude. So, when the Jewish partner indicates that she wishes to take Jewish initiatives, the other partner “goes along.” In many cases the non-Jewish member finds his spouse’s positive attitude a pleasing contrast to his own attitude. He views the initiative with favorable curiosity or the expectation that it will offer him, and their children, such benefits as a sense of community, meaningful traditions, and moral guidance. Of course, the process of choosing one spouse’s religion as the primary religion of the household, could lead to a mixed couple identifying as non-Jewish. The majority of mixed marrieds encountered in the Alaskan Jews study defined themselves as Jews. Since mixed married couples in which the non-Jewish spouse prevailed have drifted out of the Jewish community, it is unlikely that they would have been reached by the SAJ.

* In 56% of mixed couples the Jewish partner is the woman.
Interrmarriage

An accurate measure of the rate of intermarriage is important for ascertaining the future viability and identity of the Alaskan Jewish population.

Several methodological issues shape the process of defining intermarriage. First, the population base for the analysis consists of households where there is a married couple. The analysis is based on information contained on the household form; thus it reflects all households in the sample, whether or not both members of the couple completed the individual questionnaire. The household questionnaire (completed by one adult in each household) has information about the marital status and religion of each household member. Households in which there are two adults, but not married are not included. (Ninety percent of all couples in the survey are married.)

Second, the Alaskan survey sample only includes couples having some degree of Jewish affiliation. Mixed couples in which the Jewish member adopted the religion of the non-Jewish mate would not have been included in the sample. Thus, the sample is biased in favor of households where the Jewish member of the couple prevailed, or at least retained her or his identity.

Third, ambiguity in how to interpret a response of "Other" or "Unknown" religious identity poses the question of when such a respondent could be counted as a Jew. Some proportion of respondents who list their religious identity as "Other" or "Unknown" will be Jews by birth or cultural identity. To address this issue, the 93 write-in responses to the religious identity question were tallied. One third of the respondents gave a response of "not religious." They were not necessarily denying being Jewish. Analysis of the items on religion in which respondent was raised and religion of parents showed that 30% of "Other" responders had Jewish origins—at least one Jewish parent.

Out of the 608 individuals who were part of a married couple, 70 gave their religious identity as "Other" and 39 as "Unknown." For purposes of assessing religious identity of the couple, it is assumed that 30% of these individuals are Jewish. This adjustment is a correction for the undercounting that would result from classifying all such responses as non-Jewish. (Twenty couples in which both members gave their identity as "Other" or "Unknown" are excluded from the calculation.)

Under a literal definition of religious identity, i.e. where a person is considered Jewish only if they explicitly identify themselves as such, 60% of marriages include at least one non-Jew (Table 34). This figure includes 7% of marriages in which neither member identifies as Jewish. When the adjustment is applied, 30% of "Jewish-Other/Unknown" marriages (26 couples) are reclassified as "both Jewish." Applying the adjustment gives an overall rate of intermarriage of 48%.

The comparable intermarriage rate for Lower 48 Jews is 31%.16 These two rates are based on the total number of mixed marriages for all married couples, young and old. Since the rate of intermarriage has increased significantly across the past several decades, the inclusion of the older married couples depresses the current rate.

To put into perspective the overall 48% Alaskan rate and the Lower 48 31% rate, these percentages should be compared to the highly publicized NJPS intermarriage rate of 52%, which applies only to those marriages which took place in the five years prior to the 1990 Survey.17 It is known that a higher proportion of younger Alaskan Jews are involved in mixed marriages than are older Jews, but since the date of marriage was not asked of married couples, a precise current rate of those intermarrying is not available.

In sum, the extent of intermarriage among all Alaskan Jews (48%) is 55% higher than for all Jews in the Lower 48 (31%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 34</th>
<th>INTERMARRIAGE RATE OF ALASKAN JEWS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literal Definition (N=304 couples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Jewish</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Non-Jewish</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

62

63
Jewish Denomination

Sixty-one percent of Alaskan Jews include themselves as part of one of the four major Jewish religious denominations, with the largest concentration (42%) identified as Reform (Table 35 and Figure 5). The remainder are Just Jewish, Secular or Other—which is mainly non-religious. Compared to the general Lower 48 Jews, Alaskan Jews are more liberal in their denominational identification (Figure 5). There is greater similarity between the Alaskan Jews and the Jews living in the 20 states with small Jewish populations. It is not surprising that the Jews who choose to live in Alaska, as well as in the states with small numbers of Jews, are less traditional in their Jewish denominational identification. It is reasonable to assume that more traditionally observant Jews would not be inclined to move to an area where there is uncertain availability of the Jewish resources and services needed for a traditional life style. On the other hand, it is likely that a frontier society would attract those Jews who value independence and autonomy, and would shun denominations, or be inclined either to liberal denominations or designations like “Just Jewish,” which they sense would be less restrictive. For example, 80% of Lower 48 Jews align with one of the four major denominations compared to 61% of Alaskan Jews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 35 DENOMINATION</th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=641)</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews (NJPS)</th>
<th>Jews in Small States (NJPS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructionist</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Jewish</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 5 DENOMINATION

- Orthodox 6%
- Conservative 35%
- Reform 38%
- Reconstructionist 1%
- Secular 2%
- Just Jewish 30%
- Other 4%

Alaska Jews ■ Lower 48 (NJPS)
Member of Synagogue

The liberal orientation of Alaskan Jews is reflected in the synagogues which have been developed in Alaska. There are three synagogues in the State:

- Beth Sholom, a Reform synagogue in Anchorage, with a building, and a full-time rabbi, Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld;
- Or Hatzafon, a Reform synagogue in Fairbanks with a building and a visiting rabbinical student in the summer;
- Shomrei Ohr, a Chabad synagogue in Anchorage with a building and a full-time rabbi, Rabbi Yosif Greenberg.

Beth Sholom is the largest synagogue with a membership of 170 households, and Or Hatzafon has 77 member households. The Chabad synagogue does not have formal members, but Shomrei Ohr regularly serves some 30 households in Anchorage and Rabbi Greenberg does outreach work throughout the State.

An unusually high proportion of Alaskan Jews, 42% are synagogue members (Table 36). (In part, this may be explained by the high reliance on synagogue lists for the Alaskan survey mailing.) This compares to 27% of all Lower 48 Jews and 32% of Jews living in the states with small populations. Some respondents in Juneau, where there is no synagogue but an active Jewish community group, are included among the yes respondents. Most of the synagogue members live in the three large cities, Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau, but as many as 21% of the people living in the small cities in Alaska are also synagogue members. Given the dearth of organized Jewish activity in Alaska, the synagogues and local Jewish community groups in the smaller cities and towns are the only source of a Jewish connection in Alaska. Many people move to Alaska, who in a more traditional urban setting would not be inclined to join a synagogue. In Alaska, with lower proportions of Jews and great distance from family networks, people become more aware of their lack of any primary network and more conscious of themselves as Jews. It is largely that element of non-typical synagogue members, who become involved in Alaska, which explains the much higher rate of synagogue affiliation in Alaska.

As noted in Table 37, Alaskan Jews are more likely to attend religious services than Jews in the Lower 48. Only 36% of Alaskan Jews as compared to 45% of Lower 48 Jews and 55% of the small states never attend or attend only once or twice a year. The relatively much higher rate of synagogue membership of Alaskan Jews, as compared to Lower 48 Jews, does not carry over into frequency of attendance. The levels of regular attendance at services are quite similar. This discrepancy may support the idea that the special appeal of synagogue membership in Alaska is primarily for the sense of community and belonging.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 37</th>
<th>SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaskan Jews (N=797)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special occasions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major holidays</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month/less times a year</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a month</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week or more</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Alaskan non-synagogue members were asked why they were not synagogue members, the top three responses in order of importance were: "no synagogue near where I live," "I'm not sufficiently religious," and "it is too expensive."

Satisfaction with the Synagogue

Synagogue members were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with nine different synagogue functions. The responses provide helpful information for both the research and action objectives of the Project with Alaskan Jews. In terms of research, the members' evaluations indicate which synagogue services are important to them, and may thus point out personal and family needs. In terms of action, the data on differential levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction provide guidelines for synagogue and Jewish community leaders on the types of programs and services which need strengthening.
Table 38 documents the members' levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the several synagogue functions. The members' evaluations can be expressing two sets of information: first, how well or poorly they feel their synagogue carries out the functions; and second, the extent of importance the members attach to the functions. Both are valuable sets of information.

Four categories of synagogue functions stand out as most highly regarded: the first is helping create a sense of community. As noted in Table 38, the sense of community received the highest proportion of very satisfied ratings—39%. However, this function also receives a relatively high level of dissatisfied ratings—19%. This mixed review highlights the dual message of the evaluations of satisfaction. It is quite likely that the dissatisfied respondents, no less than the very satisfied respondents, consider a sense of community a highly important synagogue function. But, their dissatisfaction may well be a statement that they want the synagogue to give greater emphasis to creating a sense of community.

The second highly rated synagogue function is life cycle events, one of which, bar/bat mitzvah, is listed separately and is one of the top ranked functions. Other life cycle events implied in this category would include the brit—ritual circumcision, weddings and funerals.

Strengthening family life is a third highly regarded synagogue function. Much of this objective would be accomplished by bringing family units together, as part of building the sense of community and also in celebrating life cycle events. Providing Jewish education for children, as it contributes to enhancing the Jewish commitment of children, also makes it more likely that the family can share in the Jewish cultural events which in turn also help strengthen families.

Finally, there is the basic synagogue function of religious services, which in addition to convening the community and family units, responds to people's spiritual needs and interests.

Synagogue leaders should note, as well, functions with which members are least satisfied. At individual synagogues, leaders may wish to assess those functions that are handled poorly or are insufficiently available.

One final observation concerns the last item on Table 38, which asks members for their overall evaluation of their synagogue. Their response is quite positive. On balance, 85% are satisfied and only 15% dissatisfied with their synagogue. This evaluation suggests the Alaskan synagogues have achieved a level of credibility among their constituencies, which is particularly important given that synagogues are the only Jewish communal organization in the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 38</th>
<th>SATISFACTION WITH SYNAGOGUE FUNCTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life cycle events</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen family life</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar/Bat Mitzvah</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious services</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish education for children</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal counseling</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish education for adults</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall satisfaction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elements that Shape Jewish Identity

In the traditional society of pre-modern times, Jewish identity was essentially a prescribed status with few options. In the open society of contemporary America, choices abound, from choosing to cease being a Jew to choosing among a wide range of definitions of Jewish identity. It is reasonable to assume that the frontier society of Alaska, where individualism and freedom are encouraged, attracts more than its share of Jewish "free spirits." These are folks who don't easily fit into pre-determined categories. They prefer to review the choices and put together the elements of Jewish identity which feel right for them.

The questionnaire sent to the Alaskan Jews included a question which asked respondents to rank four elements of Jewish identity in order of importance.

The Jewish identity elements are:

- Religion (God, prayer, spirituality),
- Ethnicity/Culture (shared values, traditions, customs),
- Jewish Peoplehood (concern and support for Israel),
- Minority Status (concern about anti-semitism and prejudice).

The choices of Alaskan Jews in defining their Jewish identity are noted in Table 39 and Figure 6. Ethnicity/Culture is the major shaping force of the Jewish identity of Alaskan Jews. It is the first choice of 61% and the combined first and second choice of 90% of the people. Religion achieves the next highest rank with 57% selecting it as first or second. Jewish peoplehood and minority status are the lowest ranked elements, with almost three-quarters of the respondents considering these options as either their third or fourth choices.

TABLE 39 RANKING OF FOUR ELEMENTS THAT SHAPE JEWISH IDENTITY (N=684)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Culture</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Peoplehood</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority status</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Four Elements that Shape the Jewish Identity of Alaskan Jews

Elements of Jewish Identity

- First
- Second
A similar question was asked of Lower 48 Jews in the NJPS; there, the elements of Culture and Ethnicity are offered as separate choices, and nationality is used instead of Jewish peoplehood. In the NJPS question, respondents were asked whether or not the elements were part of what it means to be a Jew in America. The responses of the Lower 48 Jews are quite similar to those of the Alaskan Jews (Table 40). To flesh out this overview of the Jewish identity of Alaskan Jews, the subsequent analysis presents more specific evidence of how the attitudes and behaviors of Alaskan Jews reflect the four elements of Jewish identity.

### TABLE 40: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEW IN AMERICA
(Responses of Lower 48 Jews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural group</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic group</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious group</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Minority Status—Antisemitism

A significant majority of Alaskan Jews, 90%, and a slightly lower proportion of Lower 48 Jews, 79%, agree that antisemitism is a serious problem. A much lower proportion of Alaskan Jews, 60%, agree that antisemitism is a serious problem in Alaska (Table 41). In a separate question only 37% of Alaskan Jews reported that they had personally experienced antisemitism in Alaska. During the workshops and interviews many Alaskan Jews attributed the lower level of antisemitism experienced in Alaska to the fact that Alaska attracts people from diverse backgrounds—ideological as well as personality—and accordingly, Alaskan society affords high value to accepting differences among its people.

### TABLE 41: ANTI-SEMITISM A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN ALASKA (N=794)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 42: ANTI-SEMITISM A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN LOWER 48

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alaskan Jews (N=814)
Jewish Peoplehood—Israel

A recent study comparing attitudes of Jews living in the West region to the other geographic regions of the Lower 48 concludes that, "Attachment to Israel is lower in the Western region than any other part of the United States." A similar result might have been expected for Alaskan Jews, but this is not the case. Alaskan Jews have visited Israel with somewhat greater frequency than Lower 48 Jews, both the full population and the Jews living in states with few Jews, and are somewhat more attached than Lower 48 Jews, especially those living in the small communities (Tables 43 & 44).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 43 VISITS TO ISRAEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 44 EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO ISRAEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not attached</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity

Four measures of respondents' involvement with social and cultural aspects of Jewish life and concern for Jewish continuity are available from the questionnaire: the number of Jewish friends, whether they receive Jewish periodicals; their attitudes to intermarriage by one of their children; and their pattern of charitable contributions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 45 NUMBER OF JEWISH FRIENDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alaskan Jews would be somewhat more accepting of an intermarriage by one of their children than is true of all Lower 48 Jews and of Jews living in the small States (Table 46). Furthermore, conversion of a prospective spouse would have a greater effect on the attitude of Alaskan Jews. Forty percent of Alaskan Jews would support intermarriage without conversion, compared to 35% of Lower 48 Jews. However, if there were to be a conversion, 66% of Alaskan Jews would be supportive compared to 54% of Lower 48 Jews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If Child Considered Marrying Non-Jew</th>
<th>If Child's Future Spouse Converted to Judaism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaskan Jews <em>N=791</em></td>
<td>Lower 48 Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly support</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/neutral</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose/Strongly oppose</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaskan Jews <em>N=779</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower 48 Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly support</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/neutral</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose/Strongly oppose</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there is no Jewish newspaper published in Alaska, more Alaskan Jews report subscribing to Jewish periodicals than Jews living in the Lower 48 States or Jews living in the small States. Thirty percent of Alaskan Jews subscribe to a Jewish periodical as compared to 20% of all Lower 48 Jews and 15% of Jews living in the small States (Table 47).

Prior to examining patterns of charitable giving by Alaskan Jews, it is well to explore two popular assumptions about charitable giving by American Jews. First, it is assumed that American Jews are more likely to contribute to Jewish charities than secular charities, and second that they are likely to be more generous in their giving to Jewish charities than to secular charities. Recent research on patterns of American Jewish philanthropy indicate that neither of these two assumptions are totally correct. With respect to Alaskan Jews, the data confirm that more Alaskan Jews (69%) give to general secular charities than give to Jewish charities (54%) (Table 48). The same pattern occurs with the general Lower 48 Jews: 64% give to Secular Charities and 45% to Jewish Charities, and also with the States with small Jewish populations: 62% give to Secular Charities and 44% to Jewish Charities. Note the higher proportion of Alaskan Jews who are contributors to both Jewish organizations and secular organizations as compared to Lower 48 Jews.19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 46 ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERMARRIAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If Child Considered Marrying Non-Jew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaskan Jews <em>N=791</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose/Strongly oppose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower 48 Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Child's Future Spouse Converted to Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaskan Jews <em>N=779</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower 48 Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose/Strongly oppose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 48 CONTRIBUTION TO JEWISH AND SECULAR [NON-JEWISH] CHARITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Percent responding &quot;Yes&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaskan Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower 48 Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews in Small States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish charities and organizations <em>N=760</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular charities <em>N=724</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 47 SUBSCRIBE TO JEWISH PERIODICALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaskan Jews <em>N=820</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower 48 Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews in Small States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of amount of giving to Jewish and Secular charities, data are available only for comparisons between Alaskan Jews and Lower 48 Jews. The median contribution of Alaskan Jews for secular organizations is $400, as compared to $250 for Jewish organizations (Table 49). The level of giving by Jews in the Lower 48 to Jewish organizations and Secular organizations is almost identical, a median contribution of $200 to Jewish organizations and of $130 to the Secular organizations.

Dr. Gabriel Berger, in his comparative study of Jewish philanthropic giving, notes that in 1989 the median level of giving to secular charities by American Jews was $222, while the median level of charitable giving (including to churches) that year for all Americans was $335.20

**Table 49: Amount of Contributions to Jewish and Secular Organizations (Donors Only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish Organizations (N=313)</td>
<td>Secular Organizations (N=421)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish Organizations</td>
<td>Secular Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Contributors</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $100</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100-999</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000-4,999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000-9,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know/Refused</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median contribution</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Religion**

The most noteworthy differences in measures of Jewish identity appear in comparing levels of observance of religious customs between Alaskan Jews and Lower 48 Jews. On all the major Jewish customs: light Friday night candles, attend Passover seder, light Hanukkah candles and fast on Yom Kippur, Alaskan Jewish observance is at a significantly higher level than Lower 48 Jews (Table 50). Two other customs show a different pattern. First, Alaskan Jews use Kosher meat less frequently. This is explained by two factors: one, only 2% of Alaskan Jews are Orthodox, and two, the nearest source of Kosher meat for Alaskan Jews is Seattle, Washington. Second, Alaskan Jews have a Christmas tree with about the same level of frequency as do Lower 48 Jews. This variation might be explained by two factors: first, the easy availability of evergreen trees; and second, the long periods of darkness in winter in Alaska and the special appeal of lights at that time of the year for all Alaskans.

**Table 50: Ritual Observance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alaskan Jews All the time/ Usually Sometimes Never</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews (NJPS) All the time/ Usually Sometimes Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light Friday night candles</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Passover seder</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Hanukkah candles</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Kosher meat</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast on Yom Kippur</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Christmas tree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two exceptions do not diminish the importance of the higher levels of observance of Jewish religious customs by Alaskan Jews. This pattern of Alaskan Jews scoring higher on traditional measures of Jewish identity than Lower 48 Jews was foreshadowed in virtually all of the other measures of Jewish identity which have been examined: religious identity, synagogue membership, frequency of synagogue attendance, level of Jewish education, involvement with Israel, and charitable contributions. Do these findings indicate that Alaskan Jews are more Jewishly committed than Lower 48 Jews? One other question from the Alaskan Survey offers information which is relevant and supportive...
of an affirmative answer. The question seeks to ascertain the salience being Jewish has for Alaskan Jews by asking: "How important would you say that being Jewish is in your life?"

The data on Table 51 indicate that more Alaskan Jews (45%) consider being Jewish as very important than either all Lower 48 Jews (37%) or Jews in the small States (39%). The difference is accentuated in comparing the combined responses of Very and Somewhat Important of Alaskan Jews (81%) with Lower 48 Jews (71%). The pattern reverses somewhat in the small States, where 93% of the respondents consider being Jewish as Very or Somewhat Important. This variation indicates that Jews living in Alaska and in the small States view being Jewish as more important than all Jews living in the Lower 48, and may offer a rationale for the difference. The rationale implied is that Jews living in areas where they are more aware of themselves as a minority, such as in Alaska and in the small States, are likely to be more conscious of their Jewishness and to attach more importance to that status, than Jews living in the more typical communities of the Lower 48 states.

Perhaps this greater salience of Jewishness for Jews on the frontier and in small towns provides an explanation for their inclination to join the synagogue and for their consistently higher levels of observance of Jewish customs and of their higher scores on other measures of Jewish identity.

**TABLE 51  IMPORTANCE OF BEING JEWISH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alaskan Jews (N=773)</th>
<th>Lower 48 Jews</th>
<th>Jews in Small States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One final note of caution on the matter of Jewish salience. While the Alaskan Jews' responses indicate a high level of importance to their being Jewish, their sense is that being Jewish is less important for their children. As indicated in Table 52, 31% of the parents think being Jewish is Very Important for their children, which is 14% less than their own rating, and 27% think Jewishness is Not Important for their children as compared to 20% for themselves. Is this to be interpreted as a declining interest in Jewishness of the second generation of Alaskan Jews? Or, is this difference well within the boundaries of the ubiquitous concern of every generation, that their children are not as likely as the parents to sustain their traditions?

**TABLE 52  IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN BEING JEWISH (N=635)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ALASKAN JEWS LIVING IN LARGE AND SMALL CITIES

The primary research objectives of the Survey of Alaskan Jews are to seek to understand the types of Jews who choose to settle in this frontier society and the nature of their Jewish communal life. The preliminary assumptions were that frontier areas, with small numbers of Jews, little or no Jewish communal organizations, and limited access to family networks are likely to attract minimalist Jews, Jews with low levels of Jewish interests and commitments. Further, it was assumed such Jews would be unlikely to develop any type of strong Jewish community.

Beyond the basic data from the Alaskan Survey, data from two other research populations were generated to provide alternative perspectives for examining different types of frontier communities. The first of these other related populations is the sub-set of the NIPS, the 20 states with the smallest numbers of Jews, Jews in these states live in small cities or towns which are frontier-type settings: low Jewish population density and distance from major Jewish population centers. The comparisons between the Jews living in Alaska and the Jews living in the small cities and towns in the Lower 48 indicate more similarities between these two types of frontier societies than between Alaskan Jews and the more mainstream Lower 48 Jewish population.

A second, related research analysis was undertaken by comparing two sub-sets of the Alaskan Survey: Jews living in the three big cities—Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau—and Jews living in all the other smaller cities and towns in the State. The assumption here is that the Alaskan Jews who choose to live in the smaller cities and towns are attracted to an even more frontier-type life style than their Alaskan Jewish compatriots who have chosen to live in the “big cities.” If such a distinction is accurate it should shed light on the “frontier effect;” what is it that attracts and satisfies those Jews who live in frontier communities?
TABLE 53  COMPARING DEMOGRAPHICS AND JEWISH BEHAVIORS OF JEWS IN THREE LARGE ALASKAN CITIES AND SMALL ALASKAN TOWNS/CITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Large Cities</th>
<th>Small Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=587</td>
<td>N=223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate school or more</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Alaska Rest of Life?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Children Live in Alaska as Adults?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Friday Night Candles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time/Usually</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast on Yom Kippur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time/Usually</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Christmas Tree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time/Usually</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been to Israel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more times</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Attachment to Israel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely/Very/Somewhat</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some/Most or All</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Being Jewish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute Money to Jewish Organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute Money to General Organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Income</td>
<td>$82,029</td>
<td>$67,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Annual Jewish Charity Contributions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,472</td>
<td>$919</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Years of Jewish Education</td>
<td>4.1 years</td>
<td>3.3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis begins by noting three basic demographic differences between large-city and small-city Alaskan Jews (Table 53). The first of these differences is that compared to the state-wide distribution, there is a higher proportion of Jewish men and lower proportion of Jewish women in the small cities: 49% men as compared to 46% men in the larger Alaskan cities, which indicates the small city gender distribution gets closer to that of the general Alaskan population—53% males. It appears that men more so than women are prepared to settle in the more frontier-style areas.

Small city Alaskan Jews are not as highly educated as large city Alaskan Jews: 48% as compared to 58% have had some graduate school or more education. Only 8% of all Alaskans have reached this level of education. The income of small city Jews is less (mean—$67,805) than Jews in the large cities (mean—$682,029). Both of these demographic findings appear to be related to vocation. It is known that people with higher levels of education are likely to work as professionals or managers—careers which tend to be more concentrated in urban rather than rural areas. Also, there is a correlation between level of education and level of income.

Two survey questions asked about the likelihood of Alaskan Jews living in Alaska in the future. Only 26% of the large city adults expect to remain in Alaska for the rest of their lives compared to 35% of small city adults. A similar pattern pertains to the parents' expectations for their children: only 19% of large city children, compared to 25% of small city children are expected to live in Alaska as adults. These data suggest that the small city folk may be more at home with the frontier environment, whereas the urban settlers may view Alaska as more of a time-limited adventure.

In terms of current religion, there are more non-Jews in the small cities—29% versus 20% in the large cities. On all the measures of Jewish identity the small city Jews have lower rates of observance than Jews in the large cities: light Friday night candles, light Hanukkah candles and fast on Yom Kippur. It is consistent, with their lesser levels of Jewish observance, that more of the small city Jews usually have a Christmas tree. Also, fewer small city Jews have been to Israel and they report less emotional attachment to Israel than large city Jews.

Small city Jews have fewer Jewish friends and fewer of them report that being Jewish is important for them. Finally, small city Jews have less Jewish education, contribute less frequently and less money to Jewish organizations.

What has been learned from the comparison of the Jews who choose to live in the small and large Alaskan cities? There are consistent differences between the two populations. The differences will be highlighted in terms of the...
Jews who live in the small cities, since those cities have more of the characteristics of a frontier community. Compared to Jews living in the larger cities, small city Alaskan Jews:

- have lower proportions of women
- have lower levels of general education
- have lower levels of Jewish background, commitment, observance of Jewish customs, and attach less importance to being Jewish
- expect they and their children will remain longer in Alaska

Some further insight is provided on the differences between the small and large city Alaskan Jews by examining the motives which brought the two populations to Alaska and what they find satisfying about life in Alaska (see Tables 25, 26, and 27). Three elements emerge as reflecting different life priorities between small and large city Jews.

The primary reason for all Alaskan Jews choosing to come to Alaska is employment. This reason is cited as either the first or second most important reason by 60% of Jews in large cities and by 56% of small city Jews).

Similarly, in assessing what is most satisfying about life in Alaska, 34% of large city residents said their career was most satisfying as compared to 26% of small city residents.

Second, the natural environment means a good deal more to small city Jews—57% list it as either their first or second reason for coming to Alaska, while only 45% of large city Jews consider that reason as their first or second choice. That difference is also reflected in the choice of most satisfying aspects of living in Alaska—46% of small city Jews list natural environment as most satisfying compared to 40% of large city Jews.

The third difference is seen in regard to different ties to family: 19% of small city Jews selected “live from family” as a reason for their coming to live in Alaska as compared to 15% of large city Jews. When asked what is most troubling about life in Alaska fewer small city Jews (49%) chose “too far from family” as compared to 55% of large city Jews.

In sum, work and career have somewhat higher importance for large city Jews, and that motivation would likely be better fulfilled by living in one of the large cities. The natural environment has greater salience for the small city Jews, and that objective would likely be better fulfilled by living in one of the small cities. Maintaining close ties to family appears to be less important to small city Jews. More of them see getting away from family as a reason for coming to Alaska and, in evaluating life in Alaska, less of them are troubled, compared to large city Jews, about being far from family.

One final issue to explore is whether there are any significant differences in the Jewish attitudes and behaviors of Alaskan Jews that might be explained by age. The prevailing belief, in the wake of the findings of the NJPS, particularly the high rate of intermarriage among young Jews, is that the Jewish interests and identity of young people have been declining. Given the even higher rate of intermarriage among Alaskan Jews, it would be reasonable to surmise that younger Alaskan Jews are less Jewishly identified than their elders.

The analysis of the Alaskan data based on age reveals the opposite tendency, namely, that younger Alaskan Jews are quite consistently more Jewishly identified: they observe more customs and attach more importance to being Jewish than do older Jews.

The Alaskan data are instructive on two counts. First, they support, in an even more consistent manner, the finding that younger Jews observe Jewish customs and attach more importance to being Jewish than do older Jews. As noted in Table 54 this pattern holds up on all seven measures of Jewish identity, with only minor exceptions. The youngest cohort, ages 18-34, is most observant and positive about their Jewishness, the next oldest cohort, 35-44 is next most observant and positive, and the oldest cohort, 45+ scores lowest. This finding is especially noteworthy since the rates of intermarriage are similarly statistically associated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 54</th>
<th>MEASURES OF JEWISH IDENTITY BY AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(All the time/Usually observe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-34 (N=158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Friday night candles</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Passover seder</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Hanukkah candles</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast on Yom Kippur</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Kosher meat</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Services (once a month +)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance Being Jewish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Very/Somewhat Important)</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 55  INTERMARRIAGE RATE OF ALASKAN JEWS BY AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-34 (N=46 couples)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 (N=141 couples)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+ (N=114 couples)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This finding runs counter to the prevailing wisdom, that intermarriage is primarily a function of low Jewish interest and involvement. Therefore, the expectation is that intermarriage will continue to increase because it is assumed that young Jews have diminishing Jewish interest. This is not the case with young Jews of Alaska, who are intermarrying but who are also demonstrating that they take their Jewishness seriously. This finding, if it is not unique to Alaska, has important implications for the strategies defined by leaders of the broader Jewish community for responding to intermarriage.

A second finding emerging from comparing the Jewish identity and interests of young and older Alaskan Jews is that there appear to be differences between them in their values and how they express their Jewishness. These differences become clear in examining their involvement in Jewish organizations. As seen in Table 56, younger Jews, with consistency across the three cohorts, and for each of the three measures of organizational involvement, are less likely to belong to a synagogue, participate in Jewish organizations, or subscribe to Jewish periodicals. Some of this difference is to be explained by family status—older Jews more often have children and get involved in the synagogue or Jewish organizations “for the children.” But a more telling explanation may be found in the skepticism of the younger generation with regard to authority and to “establishment” organizations, which are viewed as unresponsive and restrictive of people’s individuality. A comment heard with great frequency in interviews and workshops in Alaska, and most often from younger people, is: “I don’t belong to the synagogue because I’m turned off by ‘organized religion’ and the synagogue, but I’m a very spiritual Jew.”

This distinction between Jewish practice and Jewish organizational involvement is reflected in the fact that while fewer young Jews belong to the synagogue they actually attend religious services with greater frequency.

TABLE 56  JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL INVOLVEMENTS BY AGE

(Percent responding “Yes”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Belong to synagogue</th>
<th>Participate Jewish organizations</th>
<th>Subscribe to Jewish periodicals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-34 (N=158)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 (N=348)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+ (N=314)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is suggested by these different patterns of involvement is that younger Jews are likely to be more attracted to Jewish essence—observance of basic rituals and customs—while older Jews appear to be more attracted to the ancillary activities associated with being part of a Jewish organization.

Bruce Greer and Wade Clark Roof, scholars of contemporary religion, reported a newly emerging phenomenon in the religious identity of young Americans—the separation of personal belief and practice from affiliation with religious institutions. They describe this phenomenon as “believing without belonging.” This description seems to aptly characterize the religious interests and behaviors of young Alaskan Jews.
CONCLUSION

The available knowledge about Alaskan Jewry is as much of a frontier as are conditions of life in the State itself. The present study is the first systematic examination of this population.

The goals of this project were twofold: first, a research component which sought to learn about the general phenomenon of a "frontier society," and, in particular, about the Jews who chose to live in such a society; and second, an action component which sought to provide Alaskan Jewish leaders with practical knowledge of their communities and to facilitate their efforts at maintaining their communities as viable and distinctive.

Instrumental to pursuit of these goals has been the study of basic questions about the Jewish population: how many Jews are there, where do they live, and who are they in terms of general demographic characteristics, and what are the patterns of Jewish identification? The first step in the process involved a community organization initiative to meet key leaders of Jewish communities around the State, elicit support for the action/research project, and obtain expert advice in defining the project's parameters.

As the project got underway, the leadership of the Advisory Committee shifted their energies to build on the Jewish consciousness raised by the survey and the community and leadership workshops, and is now creating a Jewish State Coordinating Council. The Council plans to establish a state-wide Jewish newspaper to foster communication between the several Jewish community groups throughout the State, to share Jewish program resources and to coordinate social, educational and outreach activities.

The census of Alaskan Jews identified a State population of 2,940 Jews representing 1,240 Jewish households. The availability of a centralized and thorough listing of Jewish households contributes to the feasibility of the emerging plans of the State Jewish Council.

What has been learned about the background and characteristics of the Alaskan Jews? Most of them have come to Alaska since the late 1970s. The median year of arrival in Alaska was 1980, and the median age is 41 years.

On arriving in the State, a typical Alaskan would have been in his/her mid- or late 20's. Almost half of the population came to Alaska single and met and married a spouse in the State.

This major wave of Jewish settlers grew up during the Vietnam War, and that reality, in part, explains the values and priorities that led them to Alaska. As with others of that generation, they were skeptical about authority and established ways of doing things. They valued their independence and were in quest of a life style which would afford them the opportunity to "do their own thing." The
frontier of Alaska, and its natural and unconventional life style was appealing.

The route to Alaska often involved two moves: a person would start by departing from their home community, often in the Northeast, and moving to the West Coast. Some years later, the person would move on to Alaska. Most of the young settlers had high levels of education and were in the early years of a professional career. The availability of a good job opportunity typically was the catalyst for the move to Alaska. Four out of five of these Jewish settlers found professional or managerial jobs in one of the three big cities, Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. A smaller segment of the settlers were attracted to the beauty of the natural environment and chose to live in rural small towns. So, while the frontier flavor of Alaska was appealing to all these Jewish settlers, most of them chose the urban rather than the rural option.

Considerations of Jewish life had little to do with the decision to move to Alaska. Indeed for some, perhaps the majority, being Jewish was one of those restrictive or irrelevant aspects of their life in the Lower 48 which they were ready to leave behind. In a similar vein, at least implicitly, was the awareness that the move to Alaska meant giving up close and regular involvement with family. As with religion, there was the sense by many of those Alaskan settlers, that getting away from family was more liberating than problematic.

As time passed, the dark, long winters and harshness of the environment tempered the joys of the northern frontier environment. Children were born and started growing up. Some of the early emphasis on individualism and privacy and distance from family began to generate a sense of longing for connection. Their Alaskan neighbors seemed to be finding comfortable niches for themselves among others of similar religious background. Somehow the Jews in town, not necessarily with that intent, seemed to be finding each other with increasing frequency because they shared common interests and met one another at the meeting of the school board, or of the local conservation organization. Or, the occasion of Jewish holidays, which in the early years passed with little or no attention, now increasingly seemed to stir up feelings of nostalgia and a desire to acknowledge these special occasions with kindred souls.

Maybe it was some growing sense of spirituality, or at least Jewish consciousness, or maybe it was a desire to feel a special connection with others of similar values and background. Such thoughts were mentioned again and again in the interviews with the researchers. From such thoughts came the decision to join the synagogue or the local Jewish community group (or to help create the group), or to increase the Jewish atmosphere of the household—to light Sabbath candles, to have or to attend a Passover seder, or to do something to acknowledge the Jewish High Holy Days. Where there were children, especially in the case of mixed marriages, this was the time to come to some decision about their religious identity.

This Jewish consciousness-raising dynamic, and the corollary desire for community—in a psychological sense a surrogate extended family—can help explain two major, and unexpected, findings about Alaskan Jews. The first is the high level of Jewish observances and expressions of importance of Jewishness by Alaskan Jews. The second finding, and clearly related to the first, is the frequency with which the non-Jewish spouse acquires to the household being considered as Jewish and that children will be reared as Jews. In a good number of cases, the non-Jewish spouse considers him or herself as Jewish. In some instances, estimated as under 20%, this results in a formal conversion.

While these developments are important for the future of the Alaskan Jewish community, they also have relevance for Jewish communities elsewhere. The vital question is whether the Alaskan findings are transferable to the mainstream Jewish population of the Lower 48 states? There is certainly also a high rate of intermarriage in the Lower 48, and a growing tendency of urban Jews to move further away from Jewish neighborhoods with large concentrations of Jews and Jewish support services. However, the demographic surveys of Lower 48 Jews generally present a much bleaker prognosis, with evidences of decreasing rates of observance and increasing intermarriage and assimilation.

Is Alaska unique or is it a harbinger of a more hopeful response to the forces of assimilation? Or, are the Alaskan data less promising? It is well to recall two caveats identified earlier about the findings of the Survey of Alaskan Jews. The first is that the Alaskan data did not sufficiently account for minimal- ist or assimilated Jews. If this is so, the high levels of Jewish identity would be scaled down, perhaps closer to the levels of Jewish identity of the Lower 48 Jews. Second, there is in the Alaskan data some evidence to suggest that the Alaskan Jewish vitality, may be a one-generation phenomenon. That is, that the high levels of Jewish identity may be restricted to this generation of Alaskan Jews and may be a function of their idiosyncratic adaptation to the challenges of frontier life.

The question implicit in this discussion is, what is the nature of the Jewish shaping experience of the children of this adult generation? Are the relatively positive Jewish attitudes and levels of Jewish behaviors of the parents enough to build a strong sense of Jewish identity in their children? On the several questions in the Survey which asked parents to assess the current and future Jewish interest and identity of their children, the parents were guarded in their estimates. Further, in a more objective assessment, it is clear that even in the three big Alaskan cities, where there are somewhat larger populations of Jews, and accordingly some Jewish organizational structure, the reality is that there are very limited Jewish educational and social opportunities for nurturing the Jewish identi-
as an older cohort, those ages 55-64. As noted in the age comparisons of Alaskan Jews, the levels of Jewish behaviors of younger Jews consistently surpass those of the older cohort.

The differences between young and older Alaskan Jews offer an insight with important implications for Jewish policy strategies. Clearly, the future of Jewish life rests with how well the Jewish community is able to reach and engage the next generation. The clue offered by the Alaskan young people themselves is the importance of the essence of the Jewish experience—the customs and religious precepts, and especially a sense of spirituality. While the Survey data offer little help in understanding what is meant by "spirituality," the frequent comments offered on the questionnaires and in the interviews and workshops, do offer further ideas. These can only be presented in summary form in this report, but will be further developed in a future publication.

Spirituality implies a search for meaning and purpose in life, and help in rising above one's ego and personal and material gratifications. Also, there is the expectation that in seeking a spiritual link, people will be helped to lead a more moral and principled life. Clearly, spirituality is a primary motivation attracting young Jews to their Jewishness.

In addition to the importance of the young generation for Jewish continuity, a second vital population are the intermarrieds. The Alaskan Survey established that many of the non-Jewish spouses were choosing to be Jews. Their explanations of what attracted them are similar to the expressions of Jewish interest and priority of the young Jews. In addition, they attach importance to the family and the way Jewish customs and values contribute to a stronger family for themselves and their children. Similarly, belonging to the Jewish community, in a sense, provides a surrogate extended family. In a place where there is scant access to aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents, it is important to have some folks who can be counted on to provide a sense of connection and love, and who also are available in case of an emergency. This is what Alaskan Jews hope to find when they turn to the Jewish community.

Perhaps the most surprising and significant finding to highlight from the Study of Alaskan Jews is the importance they attach to being Jewish. This, in part, may be attributed to their living on the frontier, where the difficult environment presents a greater adaptive challenge, in psychological and spiritual terms no less than physically. The suggested implication is that the process of coping with such challenges raised their Jewish consciousness. Instinctively, they sensed that in connecting with other Jews and with the wisdom inherent in their religious/cultural heritage, they could cope more effectively with their environment.

The physicist Roger Levin, in his recent book Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos, writes that all species have "an inexorable drive toward greater complexity and a commensurate need for "ever greater information processing" to adapt to new challenges." Species "bring themselves to the edge of chaos" because here there is "optimization of computational ability" to aid the species in learning to develop "order out of chaos."

The bold Alaskan Jewish adventurers may have been "lured to the edge of chaos" and perhaps they have perceived more sharply the challenges which confront the contemporary Jew. A key insight which they seem to have evolved is that their Jewish religious/cultural heritage is an important resource in adapting to their environment. Maybe their experience and vision may have utility for the Jewish folks living in the prosaic mainstream.
NOTES


3. Colleagues whose views were sought in planning the research methodology of the Alaskan study included: Prof. Sidney Goldstein and Prof. Calvin Goldscheider of Brown University; Prof. Gary Tobin, Prof. Lawrence Sternberg, Dr. Amy Sales and Dr. Gabriel Berger of Brandeis University; Dr. Barry A. Kosmin and Jeffrey Scheckner of the Council of Jewish Federations; and Prof. Steven M. Cohen of Queens College and Hebrew University.

Requests for information about the questionnaire can be directed to Professor Bernard Reisman, Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 02254-9110.

4. Members of the Advisory Committee of the Action/Research Project of Alaskan Jews are: *Anchorage*: Robert Gottstein, Chairman, Dr. Leon Janis, Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld, Brock Shamberg; *Fairbanks*: Judge Richard Savell, Janice: Mary-Claire Bernstein; and Kenai: Paula Bute. Subsequently, key liaisons to the Project were established in each of the following towns: *Ketchikan*: Linda Brownstein; *Sitka*: Libby Stortz and Lynn Chaisin Kelly; *Kotzebue*: David Calechman.


10. Steven M. Cohen in his work on the New Haven Jewish Population has identified a lower proportion of Jews among DJNs living in areas where Jews do not typically live. Ira Sheskin, in his demographic studies in Florida and in Harrisburg, PA and Richmond, VA confirms that 90 to 95% of distinctive Jewish names are Jewish in areas where there are high proportions of Jewish people, such as in South Florida. In areas where there are small proportions of Jews, he also reports that the same DJN lists are only Jewish in about 50% of the cases.


13. Ibid, pp. 117,118.


15. The states included in each of the four geographic regions, both by the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Jewish Population Survey, are as follows:


Midwest: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas

South: Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas


23. Ibid, p. 54.

24. Ibid, pp. 54, 56.


APPENDIX: GUIDELINES FOR PHONE CALLS TO PEOPLE WITH
"DISTINCTIVE JEWISH NAMES"
NOVEMBER, 1994

(seek to speak with an adult in the household)

"Hello, I am working with Professor Bernard Reisman of Brandeis University in Massachusetts on a study of the religious identity of households in Alaska. Did you or another adult in your household receive and return the questionnaire sent out by Professor Reisman this past winter?"

___ Yes ___ No

(If yes, thank the person and indicate you have several questions you would like to ask and proceed with rest of questions.)

If no or yes, continue: "May I ask you a few very brief questions, which will take less than 3 minutes of your time."

1. How many adults (over age 20) live in your household? ___

2. What is your current marital status?
   ___ Married  ___ Divorced/Separated
   ___ Never Married  ___ Widowed
   ___ Living with a partner—not married

3. What is your age? ___

4. If married, what is your wife’s/husband’s age? ___
   (circle whether the spouse is wife or husband)
5. Do you have children? __ Yes __ No

If yes, how many under age 20? __ How many over age 20? __
How many of these children live at home? __

6. What is the religion in which you were reared as a child?...

___ Catholic ___ No religion
___ Protestant ___ Other, which ______
___ Jewish

7. What is your current religion?

___ Catholic ___ No religion
___ Protestant ___ Other, which ______
___ Jewish

8. What is the religion in which your wife/husband was reared? (circle whether spouse is wife or husband)

___ Catholic ___ No religion
___ Protestant ___ Other, which ______
___ Jewish

9. What is your wife's/husband's current religion? (circle whether spouse is wife or husband)

___ Catholic ___ No religion
___ Protestant ___ Other, which ______
___ Jewish

10. Did you (or your spouse) have any Jewish parents?

    respondent    spouse
    ____________________
    ___ ___ no Jewish parents ___ ___
    ___ ___ one Jewish parent ___ ___
    ___ ___ two Jewish parents ___ ___

11. (If there are children) What is the religion of your child (children)? (Note if different children in the household are being reared in different religions.)

___ Catholic ___ No religion
___ Protestant ___ Other, which ______
___ Jewish

12. What would you say is the religious character of your household? (check one)

___ It is a Christian household ___ It is a mixed religious household
___ It is a Jewish household ___ It is a non-religious household

13. (If neither respondent nor other adults in household are Jewish, end the interview.)
If the respondent or the spouse or both are Jewish, ask:

a. How important is being Jewish in your life?

___ Very important ___ Not very important
___ Somewhat important ___ Not at all important

b. How important would you say being Jewish is in your wife's/husband's life? (circle whether spouse is wife or husband)

___ Very important ___ Not very important
___ Somewhat important ___ Not at all important

Thanks for participating in this survey. If you would like to receive future mailings from a newly formed Alaskan Jewish State Coordinating Council, I would be pleased to take your address.
MEET THE AUTHORS

BERNARD REISMAN is the Klutznick Professor in Contemporary Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. He has been teaching at Brandeis since 1970. He is the Founding Director of the Benjamin S. Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, a graduate program which has educated over 400 students, most of whom serve as professionals in Jewish communal organizations in North America and diaspora communities around the world. Dr. Reisman has written several books and many articles on subjects related to contemporary Jewish life and leadership of Jewish communal organizations. He has been a visiting professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and served as a consultant to Jewish communities and organizations in Europe, North America, Latin America, Australia, and South Africa.

JOEL I. REISMAN has been providing technical support in social science research for over 20 years. His contributions have included computer programming and statistical analysis as well as technical writing. He has worked on projects in marketing research, special education and public health. Mr. Reisman holds a B.A. from Harvard College in Applied Mathematics in Social Science and has taken graduate courses in statistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Brandeis University.