

### The Jewish Texans



*Rabbi Henry Cohen (here at age 79) achieved a national reputation for philanthropic and humanitarian endeavor in his 62 years in Texas.*

Adolphus Sterne, born in Germany, moved to Nacogdoches in 1826, already a friend of Sam Houston. Although he came to America to avoid military service, he sided with the Fredonian Revolution of 1826 and was soon smuggling guns in dry goods crates and gunpowder in coffee containers. In spite of this activity, Sterne served in public office under the Mexican government and later in both houses of the Texas state legislature.

Dr. Albert Levy became a surgeon to revolutionary Texan forces in 1835, participated in the capture of Béxar, and joined the Texas Navy the next year. Shortly after the Texas Revolution, in 1839, Rosanna Osterman became well known as a leader in Galveston's Jewish community.

She remained in the city during the Federal capture of the port during the Civil War, acted as nurse to the wounded of both sides, then turned Confederate spy, carrying intelligence about the Federal occupation which helped southern forces retake the city. At her death she bequeathed a fortune to various charities throughout the United States.

Certainly the first Jewish individuals came out of a sense of adventure, or fled hardships and oppression, or moved with a loved one, and the earliest did not always practice their faith openly. Later arrivals came as settlers seeking a new life in a congenial homeland.

Judaism is a religion and also a way of life pervasive enough to create an identity as powerful as any national, cultural, or ethnic group in the state. Judaism's earlier connection to a particular geography—and then for centuries to a lack of homeland—helped establish and maintain a worldwide cultural group.

The first Jews coming to Texas were notable individuals—and few. But by the mid-19th century, Jewish immigration followed typical patterns along trade and transportation routes and, generally, remained urban and involved families.

Spanish Texas did not welcome easily identifiable Jews, but they came in any case. Jao de la Porta was with Jean Laffite at Galveston in 1816, and Maurice Henry was in Velasco in the late 1820s. Jews fought in the armies of the Texas Revolution of 1836, some with Fannin at Goliad, others at San Jacinto.



*Wedding of Bessie Antweil and Labe H. Golden in Ft. Worth, December 1924*



*Front of Temple B'nai Israel in Galveston, which Henry Cohen was invited to lead in 1888*

Jews have, at times, been targets of oppression from Western Europe to Russia. In Texas, in most years, they found comparative freedom to practice their religion, follow their way of life, and seek opportunity for economic advancement.

Here Jews established a mercantile pattern in which individuals would arrive at a port or urban center and journey along well-established roads selling what they could. Finding a satisfactory business location, they would settle and, preserving their links to sources of supply, would provide a nucleus for others—a chain pattern.

Sanger, Marcus, Zale, Levy, and Sakowitz are only a few of the very well-known names that have defined the entrepreneurial spirit. And individuals have distinguished themselves in art, banking, ranching, law, medicine, and government.

In the largest numbers, Texas's Jewish population lives in cities and always has. An urban Jewish community would develop from a

collection of families. A Jewish cemetery usually was established, then benevolent societies, then a synagogue with a community center.

Some individuals arrived with considerable resources, some with only the clothes on their backs; most of them became productive citizens.

Known for their defense of individual social justice, Texas Jews have involved themselves in the changes of modern life while maintaining some of the oldest cultural customs in the world.



*Sukkot meal in a sukkah at a Laredo Sunday School, c. 1935 – Sukkot is the fall harvest festival held in memory of the ancestors who dwelt in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt. Jewish families build sukkahs (temporary huts) with roofs of green branches. At least once a day for eight days, families and friends share meals in the sukkah.*



*Joshua Furman reading the Torah at his bar mitzvah, San Antonio, May 1994*




# The Jewish Texans

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_


The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives push them to leave, and things in a new place pull them.

Instructions: Decide what social factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.



**Social Push Factors**

**Social Pull Factors**



**WORD BANK**

Religious Persecution	Close to Family
Religious Freedom	Lack of School
Education Available	Far From Family

## Jewish Settlers in Texas

Jewish Texans came from many countries, not just one. Most early Jewish settlers in the late 1800s and early 1900s came from Germany and eastern European countries, such as Russia, Poland, Lithuania, and Austria-Hungary. A few came from countries like Spain, Mexico and Syria. They all spoke different languages.

Although they came from different places, the Jewish people are alike in many ways. They share a history and religion passed down from an ancient group of people who lived in Canaan, now Israel. Their holy book, the Torah, is written in Hebrew, a language of those people from Canaan.

Almost 2,000 years ago, the Jews had to leave their homeland. They settled in many different parts of the world and took their customs with them. In some countries they were not allowed to practice their religion. Many Jews who wished to keep their Jewish customs and traditions came to Texas.

Why are Jewish settlers in Texas so diverse?

---



---

What did Jewish settlers in Texas have in common?

---



---

Why did many Jewish settlers come to Texas?

---



---

## Digging Deeper

Using Texans One and All: The Jewish Texans, answer the following questions about why Jewish immigrants moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state

Early Jewish immigrants that came to Texas followed what two kinds of routes?

---

---

---

How were Jewish immigrants involved in the Texas Revolution?

---

---

---

---

Many Jews immigrated to Texas for social reasons. Describe three reasons why the first Jewish settlers came to Texas.

---

---

---

---

Jews have, at times, been targets of oppression, or harsh treatment, from people and governments in Western Europe and Russia. What did Jewish immigrants hope to find when they moved to Texas?

---

---

---

---

Family is important in Jewish culture. The photos on page 29 depict two religious celebrations that involve family. What are they?

---

---

What is Sukkot and how is it celebrated?

---

---

---

How is Sukkot similar to a cultural or religious tradition in your family? How does it differ?

---

---

---

### Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Jewish Texans and social push and pull factors.

---

---

---