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**RABBI HENRY COHEN AND THE GALVESTON IMMIGRATION
MOVEMENT***
1907-1914

By Ronald A. Axelrod

The role men and women play in history can be viewed from two perspectives. Either men determine history by their actions or history determines the actions of men. At times a combination of the two may take place. The relationship of Rabbi Henry Cohen (1863-1952) of Galveston and the Galveston Immigration Movement, often called the Galveston Plan, was a case of combining these two historical perspectives. The necessity of a nation and a religious group to change its immigration patterns coupled with the extraordinary humanitarian efforts of a great man created the product of an innovative, well-planned program. This paper will examine the workings of the Galveston Plan and the role Henry Cohen played in making that plan a partial success.

The effects of the experience of immigration from Europe has been graphically portrayed in Dr. Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* and Jack Aguerro's *The Immigrant Experience*. Much of this writing reflected close association with Jewish groups who stayed in the New York area. It is sometimes overlooked that after 1890 substantial numbers of Jewish immigrants came to New Orleans and Galveston to find homes in the South and West.

By March, 1908, the total Jewish population in the United States had reached one and one-half million. Eight hundred thousand Jewish immigrants had settled in New York City, and the great influx of the second wave of Eastern European immigrants favored the northeastern United States' ports as their ports of destination. Jews perceived New York City, in particular, as the cure-all for their problems.¹ The thousands who had travelled there before them would welcome new settlers; language barriers would prove non-existent in a city of immigrants; traditional customs could be retained, and jobs could be found with the help of those already settled. From the viewpoint of an individual living the life of the persecuted, America, and consequently New York City, seemed a panacea.

The vast majority of these new Jewish Americans emigrated from fear of an official anti-semitic policy in Eastern Europe, primarily Russia and Rumania. Essentially, the problem was Russian-Jewish because Russia had in its possession "some five million human beings against whom she had set herself the day by day task of destruction, using spiritual and economic means whose ingenuity was one of the world's moral catastrophes."²

Pouring into New York by the thousands, locating in droves on the lower East side, these refugees in America created their own worlds. These Jewish ghettos became burdened by overcrowded housing conditions and ever present disease. While the life these Jews had left was often improved upon, their existence was non-adaptive to an American way of life. Most spoke native tongues and continued to follow their Orthodox Jewish traditions.³

Henry Berman, a leader in the Galveston Movement, reviewed the situation of the Jewish immigrants in New York, stating,

It is now a matter of more than two decades, since racked and harried and driven, Russian Jewish immigrants have been pouring into the

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ports of American immigration entry. And they have in the main, remained, forced to do so by the seeming environmental assurance of economic security as against the uncertainty of venturing into the interior, which to them lay incalculably remote. Whilst it is true that in the great Eastern cities they adapted themselves in part to American conditions, they have, nevertheless, been kept from perfect social fulfillment by the accidents of congestion, where mass pressure has necessarily hampered individual realization and the economic strife vitiated mass development. And the immigrant in congesting is continuing to make adjustment slower and more difficult; and the grave problems which have arisen in consequence touch every point of Eastern great city communal life.⁴

As a result of these "special conditions," the Galveston Immigration Movement was instituted in 1907.⁵ The plan revolved around the theory that by diverting Jewish immigration from the North and Northeast to the South and West, the problems of assimilation associated with the concentration of Jews would be alleviated. Many Jewish leaders felt that the concentration of Jews who were not becoming more rapidly Americanized would lead to an increase in anti-semitic sentiment. The idea for diverting Jewish immigration had been fostered as early as 1901 in a scheme fashioned by the Industrial Removal Office. This office was founded and financed by the Baron de Hirsch Fund with the collaboration of B'nai B'rith. Due to lack of federal financial support the idea had not gained any widespread acceptance and changed immigration patterns.⁶ What was needed for such a plan to prove productive was financial backing and dedicated leadership. These criteria came in the form of two men, Jacob Schiff and Rabbi Henry Cohen, who together provided the incentive to incorporate the ideas and make the settlement of Jews in the South and West a reality.

Jacob Schiff, the New York financier and noted Jewish American philanthropist, donated \$500,000 for the specific purpose of redirecting Jewish immigration.⁷ Familiar with Henry Cohen and the Galveston's Rabbi's reputation, Schiff determined that the port of Galveston should be the entry point, with Rabbi Cohen acting as the spiritual, guiding force behind the operations of the plan.

Galveston was chosen for a few basic reasons. Rabbi Cohen pointed out that in 1907, Galveston was one of the largest cities in Texas, "contiguous to and in direct railroad communication with the large country West of the Mississippi". As an important center for the cattle and grain trade, Galveston had good railroad connections with Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis and points farther north. For this reason immigrants could easily be distributed throughout the region. The southern and western states also afforded a ready market for labor. "The general scarcity of labor in the South and West under normal conditions would be counteracted if a steady inflow of the ablebodied could be maintained."⁸

As important, though, was that Schiff chose Galveston because the Jewish community there boasted of its leader a man named Henry Cohen.⁹ Already prominent nationally due to his leadership in the rebuilding of Galveston after the 1900 storm, Cohen was well-respected as a spiritual leader, scholar, translator, and writer. President Woodrow Wilson called Cohen "the foremost citizen of Texas," and in 1930, he would be recognized as the only Rabbi on a list of the great religious leaders in America.¹⁰

Dr. Cohen was born in England in 1863 and had come to occupy the pulpit of Galveston's Congregation B'nai Israel in 1888 after having led congregations in the West Indies and Woodville, Mississippi. His devotion to Galveston and Texas was expressed through much of his writing, particularly his studies of "The Settlement of the Jews in Texas," "Henry Castro, Pioneer and Colonist," and the "Jews in Texas." Further, the fact that he would remain the Rabbi of a small congregation even though given offers of more prestigious pulpits was proof of his love for his adopted city. While his work during the aftermath of the Galveston Hurricane, as an influential proponent of prison reform in the state of Texas, and as a prolific writer have earned him praise, his leadership in the Galveston Movement earned him the most outstanding ovations. Without his untiring dedication, the Galveston Plan would not have achieved what it did.¹¹

The general operation of the Galveston Plan was supplied by the Jewish Immigration Information Bureau, established in Galveston in the Spring of 1907 with Morris Waldman its first director. Waldman (1879-1963) directed the Bureau from 1906 until 1908. The Bureau's basic function was the setting into motion the machinery of placing the Jewish immigrants into profitable situations.¹² Its endeavors concerned the coordination of all of the movement's workings. Working directly with the Bureau of Galveston to achieve these goals was a network of field representatives in cities throughout the territory who actually filled in industrial reports and channelled requests to the Bureau for immigrant settlers.¹³

At the same time that the Jewish Immigration Information Bureau was established in Galveston, the movement's leadership contacted the Jewish Territorial Organization's branch in Minsk, Russia, to act as propaganda disseminator in Russia and Roumania. Headed by Israel Zangwill, who had returned to Europe for this purpose and Dr. David Jochelman, director of the Minsk Bureau, the Jewish Territorial Organization educated immigrants on the advisability of settlement in the Southern and Western United States. These organizations, guided by United States immigration policy that made assistance to immigrate illegal, did not initiate immigration. In fact, they often discouraged it. Once the immigrant had decided to leave Europe, the Jewish Territorial Organization tried to divert the Jew from the Northeast to Galveston.¹⁴

The reactions of the Jewish community in the Southwest to this desire to redirect Jewish immigration to this region are interesting. *The Jewish Herald*, a publication devoted to "news concerning Jews" was the only Jewish paper published in the Southwest at the time of the Galveston Plan. Its editorial page acted as the unofficial barometer of Jewish thought. In the period of 1907 to 1914 the editorial opinion concerning immigration swung from a reserved acceptance of the Plan to an overwhelming approval of it. Many Jews felt as did J. B. Werlinsky, representative of the United Woolen Mills in Texas in 1909, that Galveston immigration was a waste of time, money and energy. Since Jews coming to America spoke a common language and practiced common traditions, he felt most of the immigrants would want to live among people of their own kind and would migrate from Galveston eastward. Thus, there was no point in diverting them southward.¹⁵

An editorial of February 20, 1910, tongue in cheek in nature, discussed two speeches made by Jacob Schiff in New York that encouraged immigrants to come South. Edgar Goldberg, the Editor, stated "that if they (meaning the immigrants) had any money, we'd be tempted to ask what land company he (Jacob Schiff) had stock in?"¹⁶ Later that month, Goldberg argued that there

was no Jewish problem and if it was only affecting New York City, why deflect immigration and have an unsolvable problem in other areas.¹⁷ This editorial stance denoted a misunderstanding of the goals of the movement in scattering immigrants so that the concentration and congestion of New York's Jewish Community would not persist. A later editorial of July 6, 1911, discussed the discredit Zionists were pouring on the plan.¹⁸

The first shipload of Jewish immigrants arrived in Galveston on July 1, 1907.¹⁹ Rabbi Cohen noted that "as Zangwill bade godspeed to the European immigrants, I was privileged to welcome them to the land of opportunity".²⁰ Thus began a seven year period that would find Rabbi Cohen welcoming every shipload of Jewish immigrants. These people were transported to Galveston on the North German Lloyd Steamers line that sailed from Bremen. The journey, twenty-three days in steerage, was considerably longer than the ten to fifteen days the voyage to New York and Ellis Island entailed. Jacob Schiff felt that the fact that the emigrants must travel on this one steamship line placed the "immigrants at the mercy of the company", adding to their already difficult journey.²¹

By publication time of the *Galveston News* on July 2, 1907, all but eight of the eighty-six Jews aboard the first ship the *Cassel*, were well on their way to destinations assigned by the Bureau.²² The remaining eight were leaving that day. The newspaper praised Rabbi Cohen's work on the day of the first shipload stating that he "was indefatigable in his efforts from the time of the arrival of the ship early in the morning until the last of those leaving yesterday had departed"²³ to planned destinations.

The *News* reiterated a point expressed by all of those involved in the Galveston Plan, namely that the Bureau was not designed to act as an initiator of immigration to Galveston, "but merely to assist those who decide to come in anyway they can".²⁴

Every ship, like the first, was met by Rabbi Cohen and his assistants who "went ahead with all vigor in their task of placing the strangers happily, and assuring happiness in many quarters."²⁵ Often the Rabbi would board the ship and converse with the immigrants to make them feel welcome to their new land.

Ships generally arrived at two to three week intervals; the *Cassel* arriving July 1, 1907, followed by the *Frankfurt* on July 14, the *Hanover*, August 6, *Chemnitz*, August 24, etc. In the first year the number of arrivals per ship ranged from nine to one hundred eighty-four.²⁶

The basic format of the Bureau's operations upon a ship's arrival was the same each time. Once the ship was in port, each immigrant was examined by the Port Marine Surgeon. In June, 1908, Cohen wrote: "In accordance with the laws of the United States there are good and sufficient reasons for occasional deportations."²⁷ Twelve cases of deportation in the first year of the Plan's operations were reported, five for "trachoma", four for "poor physique", and three for tuberculosis. Though this number was small, by 1914 a greater percentage of Jewish immigrants would be deported from the Galveston port than from Ellis Island, a situation contributing to the subsequent failure of the Galveston Plan.²⁸

After having been examined, those who passed their physical examinations were interrogated by the Immigration Inspector while the Customhouse officers inspected their baggage. These bags were then loaded from the docks onto large wagons to be transported to the Bureau's headquarters, a distance of one-half mile.²⁹

The Bureau's headquarters would be the stopping point for the immigrants on their road to new homes. Here they could collect their thoughts, find some security after a tiring voyage, and replenish their bodies with needed rest and sustenance. The first step on arrival at the Bureau, though, was the distribution of mail, followed by "a refreshing bath and a wholesome and generous meal".³⁰

After the meal, the Bureau distributed literature that provided a sense of security for the newly arrived immigrants. The Immigration Publication Society was organized to meet a definite need for literature for the different nationalities arriving in the United States in the early part of the century.³¹ The Jewish immigrant was given not only Yiddish papers published since his embarkation, but also some practical Yiddish leaflets prepared in simplified form giving a few rules of conduct important to be observed in the new land. These pamphlets contained lessons in civics and the basic tenets of the United States *Constitution*.

The Immigration Publication Society and Rabbi Cohen as a contributing member felt that the immigrant must learn English, but that the immigrant must first be met in a "friendly and democratic way". Rabbi Cohen used this approach in meeting immigrants upon arrival, speaking in their own language. Being met in this manner, the immigrant would feel more comfortable in his new land. In aiding the immigrant to assimilate more quickly to his new culture, the ability to speak English would alleviate many of the new citizen's problems. Thus, "the work of the I.P.S. was essentially preventive for in helping the immigrant with the elements of American education, a great amount of costly and difficult charitable work" would be unnecessary at a later date.³²

Following a short period of reading time, immigrants were questioned concerning their desires for occupation placement and location. This information was placed on a Consignee's Record Card. Interior agents had on file specific requests for occupational needs. These requests were gathered in individual cities often with the help of local Jewish businessmen. Bureau workers would match these job opportunities with the immigrant's requests as closely as possible. When decisions had been reached concerning specific destinations, railroad tickets were purchased. The immigrant then ate supper, was given food to last the length of his journey and longer, and was then placed in his compartment for departure on the night train. Generally, the entire process lasted from twelve to twenty-four hours. The incoming immigrants had nearly always departed the Bureau by the morning after the arrival.³³

Most easily placed were mechanics, while the merchant or peddler without English speaking ability was the most difficult placement to make.³⁴ The leaders of the plan realized that Jews already settled and established in cities throughout the United States west of the Mississippi would through necessity have to be an integral working link if the plan would succeed. Henry Berman spoke of this needed co-operation in an address to the District Seven B'nai B'rith Grand Lodge:

I am not unmindful of the invaluable services you have rendered the Galveston cause, and the manner in which you have made futures for so many of your Galveston protegees. Your larger cities, passing through the period of federation of communal activities have, as a rule, kept the interest of the Galveston work to the fore. Nor must our large debt to the smaller communities be overlooked, which though not equipped for social work in the manner of their sister cities of greater growth, have done admirably well by the immigrants they have accepted.³⁵

Berman, in his praise, though, was quick to expose the lack of support from many communities, stating that Jewish communities throughout the South and Southwest were "the final term in the immigrant movement."³⁶ The Bureau was ready to grant to individual communities the financial aid required for the care of the newcomer, and needed only for individual communities to express the desire to accept the Jewish immigrants. Some communities were not as enthusiastic about accepting immigrants as were others, but by and large, the local Jewish communities worked diligently to welcome Jewish immigrants.³⁷

Requests to the Bureau for Jewish immigrants were received from over one hundred fifty towns from Corpus Christi, Texas to Duluth, Minnesota to Atlanta, Georgia to San Francisco, California.³⁸ Of the ten thousand Jewish immigrants who entered Galveston by the Galveston Immigration Movement the following numbers went to each of these southern and western states:³⁹

Arkansas	155	Missouri	1099
Colorado	284	Mississippi	35
Illinois	283	Nebraska	611
Iowa	1225	North Dakota	35
Kansas	208	Oklahoma	245
Louisiana	296	Tennessee	191
Minnesota	997	Texas	2134
		Wisconsin	48

In big cities and small towns throughout these states, Jews located and they or their families still live there today.

While it would be impossible to stereotype the qualities possessed by these Jewish immigrants as a group, the men and women who embarked upon a new life in Galveston were definitely more the pioneer type than their counterparts who settled on the East coast.⁴⁰ The Jewish immigrant who came to Galveston knew he would not be afforded the comforts of community he could share with fellow immigrant Jews. Often, the immigrant would be the only one of his kind in the town when placed by the Bureau. That very few of these people emigrated towards the East, as some opponents and skeptics of the plan feared, was testimony not only to their prosperity but also to their perseverance.⁴¹

Besides fear of the unknown, Jewish immigrants were faced with one major obstacle upon placement. This obstacle was described by Henry Berman as the "Miracle of the Wage".⁴² To overcome this obstacle, the immigrant must earn enough money to support himself and his family if they came with him, for others back home to survive, and finally for transportation expenses to unite all relatives in one location. Aiding the immigrants in overcoming this prime obstacle, the Bureau found jobs for immigrants in a wide variety of occupations. The following chart lists the immigrant's occupation, the total number placed in that position by 1914, and in some cases the weekly amount earned. Salary figures were not available for all occupations.

Immigrant's Occupational Placement — July 1907 to July 1914⁴³

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number Placed</i>	<i>Weekly Salary</i>
Bakers	143	
Blacksmiths	120	\$15
Butchers	202	
Carpenters	418	\$12-25
Clerks	537	
Dressmakers	343	
Laborers	332	\$9
Locksmiths	183	\$12
Merchants	422	
Painters	146	\$15
Shoemakers	463	\$10
Shoe Upperers	166	\$12
Tailors	600	
Tanners	132	
Tinners	124	
Unskilled Workers	765	

These salaries were received with great pride by immigrants who had made only a few dollars a month in Russia, and allowed Jews to live satisfactorily without charity. A case in point was Kansas City, Missouri where ten percent of the first one thousand immigrants who arrived through Galveston were placed. H. S. Haskell, writing for the *Kansas City Star* in 1908, noted that rarely did the United Jewish Charities have to provide for the Jewish newcomers. Rather only six men out of one hundred were out of work at any one time.⁴⁴ This phenomenon in Kansas City was repeated throughout the territory. It should be noted that in a relatively short time the wages listed were comparable to those received by Americans generally.

A story associated with the success of the movement took place in Kansas City. A capmaker who in Russia had earned only a few dollars a month when he could get work started in Kansas City at ten dollars per week. This amount was soon raised to twelve dollars. For him that was opulence and he lived with the joy of a millionaire until he made a discovery. With his knowledge he went with this grievance to Mr. Billikopf, the Kansas City director for Jewish placements.

"What's the matter?" inquired the supervisor. "Aren't you getting on . . .?"

"Yes", was the reply. "Only I have heard that Cohen who isn't any better capmaker than I is getting eighteen dollars. When shall I be getting eighteen dollars?"

Haskell of the *Kansas City Star* viewed this discontent as evidence of the Russian capmaker's Americanization, one of the fruits of the Galveston movement.⁴⁵

This outward success of the immigrants placed in towns throughout the Bureau's territory was mirrored in the shift in *The Jewish Herald's* editorial opinion. By October, 1912, Editor Goldberg and his new associate Ruppin had changed directions by stating that "United States regions of the South and West have room for the pushful energy of the Jew". They praised Jacob Schiff for his outstanding contributions to the success of the plan.⁴⁶ With the closing of the Bureau in 1914, the *Herald* found the event "regrettable".⁴⁷

The goal of the Jewish Immigration Movement had originally been to redirect at least twenty thousand Jews from the Northeastern ports to the port of Galveston and then to the waiting communities of the South and West. After accomplishing this, the leaders felt immigration would naturally turn south and westward.⁴⁸ By October 1, 1914 when the Bureau was closed, approximately ten thousand immigrants had been placed in gainful occupation at a cost of three hundred thousand dollars.⁴⁹ From the arrival of the *Cassel* in 1907 to July 1, 1914, the following numbers of Jewish immigrants arrived in Galveston by year:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Number Distributed</i>
1907	866
1908	135
1909	418
1910	1193
1911	1355
1912	1522
1913	2918
1914 (to July 1)	925
Total	9332 ⁵⁰

These figures denoted "the financial crisis of 1908-1909 [that] interrupted the general immigration to the United States, and although every vessel from Bremen to Galveston during those months brought a score of our coreligionists to this port the movement was affected".⁵¹

The approximate ten thousand figure, while not the total expected, was nevertheless the result of tremendous time and energy on the part of many dedicated people, in particular Henry Cohen. Often work by men like him should be judged by intangible evaluations. As the motivating spirit behind the plan, the inspiration of his leadership kept the plan going. Galveston community leaders respected him to such a great extent that often rather than donating money to charity they would permit Rabbi Cohen to distribute it. His ability as an organizer and efficient leader earned him the respect and praise of all those associated with the Galveston Movement.

He was often singled out for his work with the Bureau. On the Silver Anniversary of his ministry at Congregation B'nai Israel, Edgar Goldberg wrote in *The Herald*: "Of special value has been his work in connection with the Jewish Immigration Information Bureau; and perhaps every immigrant coming through Galveston under its auspices remembers some kind act and some encouraging word from him".⁵² Even as early as 1909, the *Herald* editor had extolled Cohen's efforts in having created the "sanest Jewish community in America".⁵³ In a 1912 editorial condemning many Jews for their lack of support for the Bureau, Goldberg wrote that "with the ever thoughtful Rabbi Cohen on guard working with might and main for our people, it should be the shame of Texas Jewry to remain dormant when great amounts of work but awaits their willingness to perform it."⁵⁴

D. H. White, editor of the *Jewish Herald Voice* in 1937, wrote of Dr. Cohen:

One of the outstanding contributions in his long career is his work in aiding immigrants to homes during the early part of this century. He was the guiding light in the Jewish Immigration Information Bureau

and settled many families in the various towns and hamlets in Texas and throughout the South. It was through his endeavors that many families were guided inland and away from the crowded slum sections of the large Eastern cities. He took a personal interest in giving a start to families in need who had little of the worldly goods to set up their homes. He worked night and day to find employment for the incoming men and women. He acted as their advisor, their banker, their friend.⁵⁵

The *Galveston Tribune* praised him by referring to him as the "brains" of the Galveston Plan and by further stating that "thousands were thankful for having escaped the narrow confines of the large city ghettos through his thoughts and efforts".⁵⁶ Rabbi David Lefkowitz of Temple Emanu El in Dallas, Texas, believed Cohen operated out of "a clear social vision."⁵⁷ The *Houston Press* expressed their feelings towards his work in a title, "Rabbi Cohen, Galveston Beloved Man of God Hasn't Got Time for Becoming a Living Legend."⁵⁸

Nevertheless, his name is associated with legends. In reviewing Cohen's biography *The Man Who Stayed In Texas* written by his son and daughter-in-law, the *New York Herald Tribune's* book editor described Cohen's life in terms of a Texas legend.⁵⁹

One story concerned the immigrants on board the first ship that brought Jews to Galveston. The city of Galveston had "unanimously" approved of the innovative Galveston Plan. Mayor H. A. Landes joined Rabbi Cohen in greeting the new citizens with words of charge concerning the responsibility of American citizenship. The Mayor's speech was translated by a Yiddish interpreter, after which the Mayor shook hands with all of the immigrants.

Upon the spur of the moment a young man, whose hand was still tingling from the hearty greeting, stepped forward and in halting though grammatical English, thanked the Mayor for his courtesy. 'In our country, Russia', he said, 'this scene could not be possible! The mayors of our cities would take absolutely no notice of us or of any people of our stations. You have welcomed us, Mr. Mayor, and we are grateful. There may be a time when the American people will need us and then we shall serve them with our blood!'⁶⁰

Even though the emotions of this immigrant surely came through in the words he spoke, the irony of the story was not fully realized until 1917. At that time Rabbi Cohen worked outside an Army post as an unofficial Jewish chaplain. After telling this story to a group of Jewish recruits, a man from the back of the group who had just enlisted yelled to Rabbi Cohen that he had been that immigrant ten years earlier who had spoken to Mayor Landes.⁶¹

Perhaps the most entertaining of the stories involving Rabbi Cohen and the Galveston Plan was the most revealing of his character. A Russian revolutionary named Ivan Lemchuk stowed away on a steamer bound for Galveston. Upon arrival, immigration authorities asked for his papers and when Lemchuk was unable to produce them, he was immediately listed and held for deportation. Fellow immigrants beseeched Rabbi Cohen to intercede for the man for the immigrants realized the man's plight were he to be sent back to Russia. The Rabbi tried in vain to convince local immigration officials to permit the man to enter the country, and when his failure in Galveston seemed inevitable, the Rabbi borrowed one hundred dollars from a local congregant, called his wife to inform her of his leaving town, and boarded a train for Washington, D. C.

Caught in the throes of bureaucratic red tape, he conversed with numerous governmental officials who might secure passage into this country for the Russian emigrant. Unsuccessful in many interviews he was told that the only person who could change the order of the Galveston officials was President William Howard Taft. Arranging such a meeting with the President through his congressman, Rabbi Cohen was told by Taft that he felt it unfair for him to intercede against the express wishes of the law embodied in the Immigration Statutes. He did feel that it was wonderful the manner in which Jews looked out for one another. Upon this statement Rabbi Cohen informed the President that Lemchuk was not a Jew but rather a Greek Orthodox. Taft, amazed that a Jewish Rabbi would travel to such great lengths to gain passage for someone not of his own faith, granted permission for Lemchuk to remain in the United States.⁶² Why Taft was not so generous to the man if an immigrant Jew is important, but the story remains as a tribute to the kindness of the Rabbi from Galveston.

The *Galveston News* reported the closing of the Jewish Immigration Information Bureau in its October 20, 1914 edition stating that from that date all immigrant Jews would be directed to "suitable locations" through the central immigration bureau in New York City.⁶³ In June, *The Jewish Herald* had editorialized on the closing of the Galveston Bureau and its failure to achieve its original goal. In analyzing the reasons for the closing of the port, the editors ascribed three reasons. First, the longer steorage to Galveston than to New York left immigrants weaker physically. In this longer voyage they were more apt to "develop infirmities". Second, inspectors at the port had more time to detect causes for exclusion because there were fewer immigrants arriving. Third, there were fewer immigrants arriving because the propaganda that was to entice Jewish immigrants to Galveston was unsuccessful.⁶⁴

Numerous people involved in the movement expounded theories as to why the Galveston Plan was abandoned earlier than originally intended. David Bressler blamed the government's failure to support or encourage the plan as the reason for its demise. He emphatically stated that "though the Plan had not succeeded in attaining its goal, it was not a failure of those involved in the planning." Citing the long voyage as a contributor to the Plan's problems, Bressler believed that the Plan had accomplished much that was worthwhile.⁶⁵

Henry Berman felt that the indirect problems encountered by the Plan were the causes for its decline. In 1910 the Russian government had banned the work of the Jewish Territorial Organization. This organization's work was vital in disseminating information that would entice immigrants to Galveston. When the vital flow of information was discontinued, many immigrants were unaware of the opportunities in a different part of the United States. Berman also felt that the Panic of 1907 and the ensuing decline in the labor market had frightened many immigrants to unknown territory. But Berman placed the greatest share of the blame on the Department of Labor and Commerce. This government agency, he felt, was responsible for holding up numerous boatloads of immigrants, deporting, often unfairly, a greater percentage of immigrants than from Ellis Island, and generally for lending no support to the Plan. With such actions by the Department coupled with the other reasons mentioned, Galveston came to symbolize a site of uncertainty for many immigrants.⁶⁶ These people thought there was no point in risking deportation in Galveston when entry would be permitted in New York. Though this was often merely a perception, the feeling persisted.

Jacob Schiff echoed many of Berman's thoughts concerning restrictive federal immigration laws and the unsympathetic attitude of the federal government. He felt this attitude created a situation in which it was "useless to continue for the original purposes". Believing that most immigrants had found "dignified existences and happy homes", Schiff felt the Galveston Movement would "ultimately work out silently". Men and women from the East would hear of the benefits of the South and West and would migrate in that direction. And the ten thousand who had entered the United States through the port of Galveston would propagandize the opportunities in that part of the country.⁶⁷

Rabbi Cohen's sentiments on the termination of the Plan basically concurred with the thoughts of Bressler, Berman, and Schiff. Believing that federal regulations and rigid enforcement of immigration laws at the port of Galveston were undermining the workings of the Bureau, Cohen agreed that closing the Bureau was a wise decision.⁶⁸

It must be understood, however, that the outbreak of World War I terminated any possibility of continuing the program for several years.

The closing of the Bureau was not viewed in terms of the failure of the movement. Rather what had been accomplished was viewed with much pride. When David Bressler and Dr. David Jochelmann, a leader of the Jewish Territorial Organization, interviewed some six hundred immigrants in the Bureau's territory they found that a vast majority were happy with their situations. All but ten of the six hundred were in gainful occupations earning from ten to thirty dollars per week. Some were engaged in small businesses and some owned their own homes.⁶⁹ The two interviewers would report that no matter how many people had been settled, the Jewish Immigration Movement through Galveston had been a success.

As Bressler and Jochelmann concluded, the merits of the Galveston Plan could not necessarily be evaluated by figures alone. On that note it was actually a failure, never truly diverting twenty thousand immigrants away from the Eastern ports. The plan did remove some ten thousand people who might have become a part of the congestion of Jewish immigrants in New York. More important though, the plan, as an aid to those who did come to Galveston, established many Jewish citizens in comfortable positions. As a result, many Jews were able to earn enough money to bring their families from Europe.

The work of the Galveston Movement also had a direct influence on local Jewish communities throughout the South and West. By creating a common goal of aiding and supporting the Jewish immigrant, local Jewish communities were solidified into organizations of co-operation.

The Galveston Immigration Movement was largely a success in its combining the talents of a great man, Henry Cohen with the unselfish energies of hundreds of people involved in its day-to-day activities. This inward success of organization and humanitarian zeal allowed forgotten people to feel wanted and frightened people to feel secure. In creating homes for ten thousand Jewish immigrants, the Galveston Plan was a creative attempt at re-directing Jewish immigration in the United States.

FOOTNOTES

¹Cohen, Henry, "The Galveston Immigration Movement", *The Federation Review*, March, 1908, 1.

²Berman, Henry, "The Galveston Movement for the Distribution of Jewish Immigrants", *The American Hebrew*, 2.

³Agueros, Jack and others, "America, The Thief", *The Immigrant Experience in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 151-178.

⁴Berman, Henry, "The Galveston Movement for the Distribution of Jewish Immigrants", 3.

⁵Cohen, Henry, "The Galveston Immigration Movement", 1.

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