Congregation Ahawath Chesed, now Central Synagogue, 1872.
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Gary Phillip Zola
FOREWORD

Central Synagogue has its roots in the formative years of our country and our city. From the 1830s on, it has been giving spiritual leadership and comfort to its membership, and it has also been a landmark institution in the overall function of the community. What decisions were made in determining the place of Central Synagogue in both the religious and secular community, and how these decisions were arrived at, can teach us a great deal about how our community and our people functioned and developed. Every generation stands on the shoulders of previous generations. The more we learn from our history, the better we are able to cope with the present and plan for the future. For these reasons, and at the urging of our brother, Rabbi Peter Rubinstein, we have chosen to endow the Rubinstein Family Archival Fund. The purpose of this fund is to provide for research in the Central Synagogue Archives by appropriate scholars resulting in lectures and papers on the congregation’s history. The first award-winning monograph as a result of that fund was by Andrew Dolkart of Columbia University. It was entitled *Central Synagogue In Its Changing Neighborhood* and won a Regional Historical Services Award for Excellence from the Lower Hudson Conference in 2002. The second monograph was entitled *Congregating and Consecrating at Central Synagogue: The Building of a Religious Fellowship and Public Ceremonies* by Elizabeth Blackmar and Arthur A. Goren. It was awarded an Historical Services Award for Excellence from the Lower Hudson Conference in 2004. This monograph is the third in this series.

Robin and Larry Rubinstein
THE AMERICANIZATION
OF THE
JEWISH PRAYER BOOK
and the
Liturical Development of
Congregation Ahawath Chesed
New York City

GARY PHILLIP ZOLA
Divine Service

For the Congregation

Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashamayim

Arranged by
Dr. A. Huesch

Revised by
Isaac S. Moses

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INTRODUCTION

The Jewish prayerbook — the siddur — is more than a collection of prayer texts or a liturgical rubric. It is, as one scholar noted, “the mirror of the spirit of the Jewish people and its development.” Cultural circumstances that various Jewish communities have encountered over the centuries invariably influenced the ways in which these communities worshiped. Numerous manuscripts and printed editions of the siddur testify to this fact. Through an analysis of the siddur’s historical development, we discover much about the spiritual, economic, political, and social history of the Jewish people from ancient times until the present day. The history of the American Jewish prayer book, like the history of Jewish liturgy in general, reflects the distinctive cultural forces and sociological factors that have influenced the course of American Jewish history.¹

From 1761, the year that the first Jewish prayer book was published in America, to the present day, the siddur has been adapted to address the varying needs of American Jewry living in differing locales and historical periods. During the colonial and early national periods, for instance, the Jewish prayer book in America underwent modest changes that were intended to address the distinctive social conditions that confronted a minuscule religious minority struggling to preserve Jewish religious practice in America’s chaotic, unruly and rapidly changing social structure. In contrast to Jewish life in Europe, colonial American Jews increasingly experienced the bifurcation of their social world into two parallel domains: Jewish and secular. In distinct contrast to their European counterparts, colonial and early American synagogues had
little or no authority over their constituents’ behavior in the society at large. American synagogues did not censor what Jews chose to write in general society nor did they punish their members for immoral behavior in their business dealings. The American synagogue as an institution had little or no control over the choices that individual Jews made with regard to personal observance, synagogue attendance and even the religion of spouses. Diversity in religious practice and dominance of personal choice reigned in America. Synagogues would have no choice but to accommodate themselves to these conditions. Eventually, the siddur – like the American synagogue itself – became a bona fide agent of the Americanization process. ²

I. The Prayer Book and Americanization³
Scholars such as Will Herberg, Oscar Handlin, Milton Gordon, as well as many others have emphasized the significant role that religion has played in the acquisition of American identity, particularly among newcomers. The religious traditions that immigrants brought with them to these shores underwent a form of gradual “Americanization” that was fueled by a drive to conform religious practice to the exigencies of the American host culture. Many writers have noted that the Americanization process played a pivotal role in helping immigrants to cope with the emotional upheaval that accompanied their transmigrations even as it enabled newcomers to make a place for themselves in their new home. Others have pointed out that cultural and societal conditions coalesced to create a distinctive environment that influenced the overall development of religious life in America.⁴
Initially, familiar religious rituals and practices from the Old World served as a salve that soothed the pains of immigrant dislocation and disorientation. Slowly, immigrants abandoned their personal identification with the familiar ways of the Old World and began to feel comfortable in their new environment. This transformation gave rise to a desire to adapt Old World religious practices to the American context. This impulse reflected the immigrants’ growing sense of “American” identification.

Sociologists of American religious practice have observed that the “Americanization” of liturgical practices in churches and synagogues founded by immigrants frequently included three common features. First, English increasingly displaced a foreign tongue as the primary language of the prayer service in America. Second, an emphasis on the weekly Sabbath service steadily eclipsed the traditional custom of attending daily worship services. Finally, the laity in America played an increasingly influential role in shaping the content of the prayer service. These basic characteristics may be seen in the historical development of the Jewish prayer book in America. The liturgical history of one New York City congregation, Ahawath Chesed (today known as Central Synagogue) will serve as a case study that sheds light on this “Americanization” process. In order to examine the development of the Jewish prayer book at Ahawath Chesed, it will be useful and informative to briefly review the history of the siddur in America.5
Jews, America and the Prayer Book

An astonishingly large number of prayer books have been published by and for American Jews. Throughout the course of American history, Jews viewed the siddur as a particularly effective tool for helping coreligionists to harmonize their Jewish identities within the larger context of American culture. In short, the Jewish prayer book has always been transformed – to one extent or another – by the exigencies of life in America. A few examples will demonstrate this point.

In 1761 Isaac Pinto, an import/export merchant and a learned Jew living in colonial New York, published the “first Jewish prayer book in America”: *Evening Service of Roshhashanah, and Kippur; or The Beginning of the Year, and the Day of Atonement* – an English-only translation of the traditional text of the Spanish-Portuguese siddur for the High Holy Days. Pinto did not advocate having American Jews pray in English, but he did want them to understand their prayers.6

Pinto noted that most of his contemporaries in the British colonies of North America could read neither Hebrew nor Spanish. Had most of the Jews in New York been able to understand Spanish, they could have made use of Haham Isaac Nieto’s Spanish translation of the entire Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur service, which Nieto published for London’s Bevis Marks congregation in 1740. A Spanish translation of the Hebrew prayer book would be of little use to those who lived “in the British Dominions of America” because, according to Pinto, his peers were already at home in English. In short, colonial American Jewry’s Hebrew deficiency coupled with its general preference for the English language “induced [Pinto] to attempt a translation [of the
Hebrew prayer service] in English.” The publisher of American Jewry’s first liturgical works concluded his preface with the “hope that [his translations would] tend to the improvement of [his] brethren in their devotion.”

More than a half century later, in 1826, the first new Jewish prayer book published in the United States of America appeared: *The Form of Daily Prayers, According to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*. This siddur was the work of a printer named Solomon Henry Jackson (d. 1847), who immigrated to the U.S. from England in the late 1780s. In contrast to Pinto’s work, Jackson’s prayer book contained the traditional Hebrew prayers “carefully Revised and Corrected by E.S. Lazarus” and an English translation “prepared by Jackson and based on the six-volume translation that the English Hebraist David Levi completed over the years 1789-1793.”

In an introductory note to the public, Jackson revealed that he, like Pinto before him, had the liturgical needs of American Jewry in mind when he compiled his new volume: “It was thought best to adapt the [traditional prayer for the government] to our republican institutions. . . Martyrdom having ceased, and the liberality of mankind assuring us it will no more be revived, it was thought best to omit the [martyrology] prayer . . .” Jackson also inserted another innovation, a “Prayer for Peace,” at the end of the siddur which may have been recited during the War of 1812. Clearly, Jackson’s publication was more than a republication of the European versions of the siddur. Although the changes were relatively minor in comparison to innovations that would eventually transpire, Jackson intentionally and
explicitly published the prayer book to address the changing needs of American Jewry.⁹

Only four years later, in 1830, Abraham Moïse of Charleston, South Carolina, published a collection of prayers titled *The Sabbath Service and Miscellaneous Prayers adopted by the Reformed Society of Israelites founded in Charleston, South Carolina, November 21, 1825.*¹⁰ This slim volume constituted the first deliberate effort to modernize the Jewish prayer book in U.S. history, and Moïse’s publication was probably the third oldest Reform prayer service published in modern Jewish history.¹¹ Moïse’s prayer book contained a loose form of the prayer service that had been developed by several members of the Reformed Society of Israelites (RSI) in Charleston, which was the first organized effort to reform Judaism in the United States.¹²

In his editor’s preface, Moïse explained that many “enlightened and pious [American] Israelites felt a need for a Sabbath worship service that was adapted to the feelings, opinions and dispositions of many, who differ from their brethren of the ancient synagogue” (emphasis added). It was Moïse’s hope that a printed edition of the prayers of the RSI would “in great measure supply that deficiency.”¹³

Unquestionably the most significant of the pioneering American Jewish siddurim was Isaac Leeser’s six-volume *Siftei Zaddikim* (“Form of Prayers according to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews”), with English translation.¹⁴ Leeser was one of America’s most outstanding proponents of traditional Jewish practice during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. Like Jackson, Leeser provided an interpretive translation of the traditional prayer
for the government which asked for God’s blessing on the “constituted officers of the [United States] government.” In order to market his prayer book outside of the United States, Leeser also included the traditional translation of the prayer titled “A Prayer for a Royal Government.” Although Leeser may not have deliberately intended to underscore the difference between a monarchy and a republic, the fact that two versions of the prayer appeared in proximity to one another dramatically emphasized that Jews living in America lived in a free society in contrast to “Jews who still lived under kings and queens.”

In summary, the pioneering Jewish prayer books in America reflected common concerns that typified the process of Americanization as it affected liturgy and ritual. These early Jewish prayer books testify to the powerful dominance of the English language in American culture as well as to the social centrality of the weekly or Sabbath worship service. Finally, the first American siddurim attest to the noteworthy absence of a religious hierarchy with the authority either to approve or prohibit the publication of new liturgical rituals. This ultimately meant that in America any Jew who possessed the desire and initiative to publish his own version of a Jewish prayer service was able to do so.
The Quest for an American Jewish Prayer Book

The development of the Jewish prayer book over the course of the nineteenth century exemplifies what historian Leon Jick has called “the American Jewish pattern . . .[viz.,] the quest for authority in pluralist America, the attempts to recreate community out of chaos and to develop institutional patterns in an environment of volunteerism and permissiveness.”16

By the middle of the nineteenth century, increased Jewish immigration, particularly from Central Europe, significantly changed the character of the American Jewish community. American Jewry was no longer a bantam East Coast, synagogue-centered community. A significant number of Jewish immigrants, coming from what is today Germany, Austria, Hungary, Alsace-Lorraine, the Baltic States, and Poland, established Jewish communities throughout the United States. Large urban communities arose in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and San Francisco where a significant number of these Jewish immigrants settled.

American society, too, was undergoing significant cultural change over the course of the nineteenth century, particularly during the last half of the century, when a new national context emerged following the end of the Civil War. Urbanization, industrialization, Western migration, national identity, and new intellectual currents such as Populism, Progressivism, Darwinism, scientific inquiry, and Pragmatism transformed the American landscape. These phenomena profoundly influenced the development of American religion, and Judaism was no exception.
It was specifically during this period that American Jews struggled mightily to find a prayer ritual that suited their needs. During the last half of the nineteenth century, a remarkable flowering of new, Americanized, Jewish prayer books occurred. In part, these prayer books reflected the desire to create a place for Judaism in the American mainstream. Dozens of congregations beseeched their religious leaders to produce a “new” prayer book that would accommodate the changing ritual tastes of their members. Although some have made passing reference to the extraordinary flowering of Jewish prayer book publications during this particular period, there is need for a careful comparative analysis of this fascinating array of American Jewish liturgies.\(^\text{17}\)

The marked proliferation of these congregational liturgies during the last half of the nineteenth century bears witness to the Americanization of Judaism. This individualization of the siddur – a distinctively American phenomenon – eventually gave way to a call for the development of one broad-based American Jewish ritual that would serve the liturgical needs of American Jewry as a whole. Although no one prayer book would achieve such recognition, the propagation of multiple forms of congregational prayer books would eventually culminate in the rise of the denominational prayer books for American Jewry.
From Congregationalism to Denominationalism

In the winter months of 1846, Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), the man who would ultimately become the founder of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) and the organizational architect of American Judaism, began to compile a prayer book for American Jewry. Although Wise had only recently immigrated to America from his native Bohemia, he and three of his rabbinical colleagues had organized themselves into an American bet din, a rabbinical court that traditionally exercised authority over local ritual concerns. Wise and his bet din compatriots originally planned to publish four volumes that would benefit America’s rapidly growing Jewish community: (a) a Jewish history; (b) a catechism for young people; (c) a Hebrew grammar, and (d) a prayer book. Wise eagerly volunteered to compile and edit a Jewish prayer ritual that would serve the spiritual needs of his American coreligionists. It took the young rabbi more than a decade to fulfill his objective. In 1857 Wise published Minhag America — “an American Rite” — with the hope that this prayer book would ultimately become American Jewry’s standard ritual.18

Wise, however, was not alone in his desire to create an “American Rite” that would appeal broadly to the religious sensibilities of nineteenth century American Jewry. In 1855, Leo Merzbacher (1810–1856), the first rabbi in New York with a rabbinical ordination diploma,
published a congregational prayer book, *Seder Tefillah*, for Congregation Emanu-El. According to Merzbacher, his new prayer book, though founded on Reform values, remained loyal to the traditional mode of Jewish worship.¹⁹ In the book’s preface, Merzbacher enumerated the reasons why his congregation had urged him to compile a prayer book. First, the traditional prayer service was too long and onerously repetitious. Second, many of the traditional prayers manifested a “dogmatic particularism” (i.e., prayers calling for Jews to be returned to their ancient homeland or prayers that appealed for the restoration of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem) that were no longer relevant to American Jews.²⁰ Third, *Seder Tefillah* addressed the congregation’s longing to comprehend the Hebrew prayer service. Insisting that *Seder Tefillah* had not abandoned “the main-standard of our ancient customs and time-honored usages,” Merzbacher noted that he had merely annexed “instruction in the vernacular [English] tongue” to the “Hebrew part of the Service, in its pure and perfect type, discriminately selected.” Above all, Merzbacher concluded (making no mention of the fact that he had expurgated virtually all traditional references to the “Chosen People”) that his changes in the Hebrew text were inconsequential, and he sincerely hoped most American Jews would be comfortable using it so that “peace and harmony will reign in Israel.”²¹

Interestingly, not all of the nineteenth century congregational prayer books were designed to serve the needs of American Jewry. For instance, Rabbi David Einhorn’s (1809-1879) *Olat Tamid*, published originally for his congregation in 1856 and republished more widely in 1858, embraced a much more radical deviation from the
traditional Jewish liturgy than either Merzbacher’s *Seder Tefillah* or Wise’s *Minhag America*. Einhorn was an ardent German Reformer who came to the United States in 1855 to assume the pulpit of Har Sinai in Baltimore. Although Einhorn’s prayer book was published in America, Einhorn had conceptualized the liturgy in Germany. In contrast to most of the congregational liturgies that burst forth during this period, *Olat Tamid*, essentially a foreign import and a significant Reform liturgy, would itself, over time, undergo Americanization.

*Olat Tamid* contained abbreviated Hebrew prayers together with German translations (sometimes nonliteral) as well as many original liturgical compositions in German. Unlike Merzbacher and Wise, Einhorn had no intention of Americanizing the prayer book. By his own admission, all of the liturgical works that influenced Einhorn’s thinking were European. In contrast to a traditional Hebrew siddur, which read from right to left, *Olat Tamid* opened from left to right – as would a German volume – and the German interpretive prayers clearly reflected the ideology of German Reform Judaism. In his preface, Einhorn made no mention of being interested in serving the needs of his American coreligionists. To the contrary, he explicitly acknowledged his gratitude to German reformers. Again, in contrast to Merzbacher and Wise, both of whom had expressed the hope that their liturgies would benefit American Jewry, Einhorn concluded his introductory remarks with a generalized aspiration that *Olat Tamid* would benefit the religious growth of all Israel and simultaneously prove to be a pleasing offering to the Eternal God. 22

From 1860 forward, dozens of new synagogal liturgies blossomed
throughout the United States. Typically, these congregational prayer books were compiled and edited by dedicated liturgists who earnestly believed their new rituals would invigorate their own synagogue and ultimately revivify American Jewry’s commitment to Jewish prayer.\textsuperscript{23}

The congregational prayer books that appeared between 1855 and 1900 deserve a thoroughgoing analysis that goes beyond the scope of this study. These remarkable liturgies, many of which are stunningly different in both content and style, reflect the diverse modes of worship that co-existed during these years. Rabbi David Philipson, one of the many who published a congregational prayer book during the last half of the nineteenth century, opined that the manifest individualism that characterized the development of the Jewish prayer book in America was “characteristic of every step forward in the history of human progress.” A firm consensus of opinion could only begin to crystallize, Philipson wrote, once “disparate individual views” had manifested themselves.\textsuperscript{24}

It does seem, however, that the efflorescence of congregational prayer books during the last half of the nineteenth century did animate the desire to find a liturgical compromise that would lead to a mutually acceptable American rite. Many rabbis and congregational leaders disapproved of the unbridled publication of congregational liturgies. For example, years before the Civil War Isaac, M. Wise, a man who eventually became one of American Jewry’s most enthusiastic boosters, was far from certain that a bright future awaited America’s Jews. In fact, his initial impressions of America’s chaotic and unruly Jewish community perturbed him:
There were only three men in private life who possessed any Jewish or Talmudical learning... Otherwise, ignorance swayed the scepter [and] darkness ruled. And when I comprehended the real position of affairs, I understood why two physicians had advised me to have nothing to do with the Jews... and I began to waiver in my intentions of pursuing a rabbinical career. 25

Wise particularly lamented the absence of a unifying liturgy for American Jewry. In his estimation, the development of an “American Jewish rite” was a vitally important corrective for American Jewry’s problematic circumstance. He particularly rued the immigrant tendency to maintain fierce attachment to the prayer customs that had come to America from the Old World. Though himself a Bohemian, Wise took a dim view of this Landsmannschaft 26 approach to Jewish prayer: “The German will not give way to the Polish, nor he to the English, nor the latter to the Portuguese Jew.” 27 Wise believed that all of the traditional siddurim needed to give way to the contemporaneous needs of the American Jew.

Even those who unilaterally compiled prayer books to meet the pressing needs of their congregations frequently professed their own personal hope that their congregational liturgy would soon be replaced by an American ritual that would successfully unify and strengthen American Jewry. These liturgists insisted that they would willingly abandon their own prayer books in favor of a standard
American Jewish liturgy if such a prayer book could be found. Despite the earnestness of their call for the creation of one unifying American Jewish ritual, such a development could not have occurred without the establishment of a permanent collaborative organizational structure that served as the crucible in which opposing ideological forces could interact and develop. This structure came into existence in 1889 with the establishment of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the first permanent rabbinical organization in America.

Although various meetings and conferences of American rabbis and religious leaders had taken place on many occasions prior to the founding of the CCAR, these earlier gatherings lacked qualities that were essential for the development and promulgation of a Jewish liturgy that could authoritatively unify a significant proportion of American Jewry. In contrast to all of the previous conferences and conventions wherein various issues and tasks were discussed, those who came together to establish the CCAR had a great deal in common. Many of the association’s founders were alumni of the HUC in Cincinnati which, by 1889, had ordained twenty men. Those who were not HUC alumni were serving in congregations that were affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), established in 1873, to serve as HUC’s patron. This meant that at the time of its founding, the members of the CCAR had already become accustomed to working with one another at “meetings of the Council of the UAHC and [on] other occasions . . .” This longstanding familiarity bred a level of mutual respect and trust that would be pivotally
important in the process of creating a unified prayer service.\textsuperscript{29}

The creation of the CCAR provided its members with a distinctly American professional association. As the rabbis themselves noted, their actions were motivated by a “natural and spontaneous” desire “to organize themselves for mutual co-operation, encouragement and support.”\textsuperscript{30} In contrast to earlier conferences and meetings that had been convened in order to accomplish a task or to achieve a practical objective, the CCAR’s raison d’être was to foster professional cooperation and mutually beneficial endeavors.
The sheer number of those who volunteered to join the CCAR was impressive. Twenty-nine rabbis attended the CCAR’s first annual convention in 1890 and nearly twenty others sent in telegrams apologizing for their absence and expressing their support for the new association. Within a year of its inception in 1889, the CCAR had established itself as the largest rabbinical convocation in U.S. history. By virtue of the number of rabbis who joined its ranks, the decision taken by the majority vote of the CCAR membership in 1890 was unquestionably representative of a large portion of the American rabbinate.\footnote{31}

Isaac M. Wise, unanimously selected to serve as the CCAR’s founding president in 1890, told his colleagues that the establishment of the Conference was genuinely a watershed event in American Jewish history: “With this Conference,” Wise proclaimed, “we enter upon the new phase of American Judaism as \textit{the free messenger of God to a free people}, a kingdom of priests to anoint a holy nation” (emphasis added). As a permanent, representative, American-style rabbinical association, the CCAR was uniquely suited to foster collaboration and issue authoritative decisions that were broadly representative of the American rabbinate at the \textit{fin de siècle}.\footnote{32}

Replacing the divergent congregational rituals with one denominational prayer book became one of the CCAR’s first priorities. At their first annual convention in 1890, the rabbis noted that “a demand for a Standard Union Prayer-book is prevailing everywhere in the reform synagogue of American Israel.” The Conference voted to establish a Ritual Committee that would be responsible for
developing “a uniform ritual for public and domestic service.” With the publication of the first edition of the *Union Prayer Book* in 1892, the CCAR proved itself to be an effective organizational tool for reconciling the competing points of view of an ideologically diverse membership. With the dawn of the denominational siddur, the era of the congregational rite in America began to ebb.33
II. The Liturgical Development of Ahawath Chesed, New York City

The liturgical history of Congregation Ahawath Chesed, one of the two congregational progenitors of what is today called Central Synagogue in New York, sheds much light on the liturgical evolution of the American synagogue during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1875 Ahawath Chesed abandoned the traditional siddur and published its own distinctive congregational ritual. Although this prayer book underwent some significant transformations during the ensuing quarter century, it remained the synagogue’s official liturgical rite until 1904, when the congregation switched to the *Union Prayer Book* (UPB). Three of the four rabbis who served Ahawath Chesed during this period – Adolph Huebsch (1830-1884), Alexander Kohut (1842-1894), and Isaac S. Moses (1847–1926) – played a leading role not only in the formation of the congregation’s own prayer ritual but also in the liturgical history of American Jewry. The fact that three of Ahawath Chesed’s first four rabbis made noteworthy contributions to the development of the Jewish prayer book over the course of this particularly active period in the history of the American Jewish prayer book makes a detailed study of this congregation’s liturgical history an illustrative case study.
Congregation Ahawath Chesed

Ahawath Chesed’s beginnings were typical of many immigrant Jewish congregations that were established in America during the nineteenth century. The congregation began in 1846 as a *Böhmischer Verein* since the majority of the Verein’s members were immigrants from the area of Prague. Some of the members of the Verein began to worship together and, in 1847, they organized a religious congregation incorporated under the name Ahawath Chesed (“Love of Mercy”). The congregation’s original members worshiped in a small hotel room on Ludlow Street on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. After the collapse of the European liberal revolutions in 1849, more Bohemian Jewish immigrants fled to the United States and Ahawath Chesed’s membership grew. The congregation began worshiping in rented rooms located on the second floor of a two-story home on Ridge Street. Although the congregation faced financial difficulties during these formative years, by 1854 Ahawath Chesed was able to acquire its first permanent home on Columbia Street.

Ahawath Chesed continued to flourish and purchased the Eleventh Presbyterian Church building located on the corner of Avenue C and East 4th Street in 1863. A dedication ceremony was held in 1864 upon the completion of the remodeling process. The congregation invited America’s best known Bohemian rabbi, Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati, to serve as the featured speaker. Prior to acquiring its location on Avenue C and East 4th, Ahawath Chesed’s spiritual leadership had come from an eclectic array of cantors, beadles, and knowledgeable lay leaders. Now in possession of a
respectable facility, and undoubtedly with the urging of Isaac M. Wise, Ahawath Chesed began to search for a qualified applicant to serve as its first full-time rabbi.  

Adolph Huebsch: Rabbi of Ahawath Chesed, 1866-1884

Dr. Adolph Huebsch became Ahawath Chesed’s first full-time rabbi in 1866. History has not been particularly kind to Huebsch. Even those who specialize in the field of American Jewish history would be unlikely today to identify him as one of the significant rabbinic figures of the late nineteenth century. Yet upon his death in 1884, grieving Jews throughout the New York metropolitan area insisted that “the cause of American Judaism had stamped [Huebsch’s] name in indelible characters upon its history.”

Although historians have tended to overlook Huebsch’s considerable achievements, an impressive array of historical records testify to the fact that this immigrant rabbi quickly became the congregation’s beau ideal. Huebsch was venerated during his eighteen-year tenure and, after his death, given full credit for being “the source of the material and spiritual growth of [the] congregation.” Huebsch was an accomplished scholar, an activist with a pragmatic bent, and a spiritual leader endowed with a winning personality. Possessed of a “bright wit and genial disposition,” contemporaries remembered him as a man
who exuded “sunshine . . . wherever he went.” Huebsch was an “extremely kind and courteous” human being who avoided “wounding the feelings of any person he came in contact with.” He quickly galvanized Ahawath Chesed and fostered a congregational community “in which every member was proud to form a part.”42

Huebsch’s educational accomplishments constituted his most impressive professional achievement. He founded Ahawath Chesed’s religious school and he “loved and valued” educational work above all. Huebsch’s interest in “the affairs of the young people was one of his most distinguishing traits.” He knew the name of every one of his students, and his magnetic personality guaranteed the school’s success. Huebsch wrote special hymns and prayers for his religious school students, and these successful innovations spurred the board of Ahawath Chesed to solicit his help in creating a congregational prayer book. Upon its publication, the Huebsch prayer book, like its editor, became a distinctive feature of the congregation. Huebsch unquestionably reformed the traditional worship service, but he simultaneously avoided radical innovation. In this way, the congregation was successfully “welded into a bond of unity.”43

Huebsch was an ideal candidate for Ahawath Chesed. Born in the northern part of Hungary, Huebsch received a traditional Jewish education until he was 14. At that point, he was introduced to secular studies – particularly the study of Oriental languages such as Syriac and Arabic. As a young man, Huebsch was swept up in the fight for Hungarian independence during the liberal revolution of 1848, which temporarily overthrew the Austrian monarchy. During the years
1848-1849, the future rabbi enlisted in the revolutionary forces and became an *Honvéd* (lit. “homeland defender”) in the Hungarian militia that fought for national independence.

During this tumultuous period, Huebsch came under the influence of Rabbi Löw Schwab (1794-1857), who had come to Budapest from Prossnitz, Germany, in 1836 to serve as the community’s spiritual leader. Schwab was known as a rabbinic activist and a religious conciliator. Huebsch may have first encountered his future teacher during the Revolution of 1848, since Schwab was an outspoken supporter of Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894), the Hungarian revolutionary leader who became the country’s governor during that time. After the collapse of the Kossuth government in 1849, Huebsch began to study Judaism with Schwab who quickly became his rabbinic mentor.44

Huebsch attended the rabbinical seminary directed by the noted Hungarian scholar, Joel Ungar (1800-1885) in Paks. Ungar and Schwab both signed Huebsch’s ordination certificate in 1854, and the young rabbi moved to northwest Hungary to take his first pulpit in the small town of Miava in northwest Slovakia. Three years later, in 1861, Huebsch enrolled in the University of Prague where he earned his Ph.D. With these impressive credentials, the 31-year-old rabbi was fully qualified to occupy the important pulpit of the Neu Synagogue in Prague. It is likely that Huebsch’s success in Prague paved the way for his call to America.45

Even before Huebsch’s arrival, Ahawath Chesed, like many of its sister congregations in New York and elsewhere, was struggling to acclimate its traditional worship ritual to the American context. The
congregation’s minute book is filled with interesting examples of ritual controversy. Indecorous behavior began to irk Ahawath Chesed’s board, and they passed resolutions aimed at dignifying their worship services. On July 2, 1865, for instance, the congregation’s board voted to have the secretary post notices in the synagogue’s vestibule admonishing worshipers to maintain quiet and order during services. The following year, the board voted to prohibit 13-year-old bar mitzvah boys from reading the Torah or making a speech. Why? Perhaps the congregation’s leaders had decided to abolish the rite of bar mitzvah altogether or perhaps the vote was an attempt to limit the role of the bar mitzvah boy in response to a series of bungled Torah readings and insufferable speeches.46

The length of worship services was also a contentious issue. In 1866, the board voted to prohibit Sabbath worshipers from walking out of services before the musaf service (a supplemental service that followed the Sabbath morning service) began. Since the traditional mode of worship required a musaf service, the board would not tolerate the American custom that entitled congregants to decide for themselves whether or not they wanted to remain for the repetition! After all, a few months earlier the board voted (perhaps as a concession to those who wanted to abbreviate the worship service) to omit the repetition of the “Amido” (a series of central prayers that are recited while standing) when the Hallel (a special recitation of Psalms read on the major festivals) was recited. Enough was enough!47

It is difficult to know with certainty what worship services were like at Ahawath Chesed before Rabbi Huebsch arrived. Evidently, the
congregation did not yet have an organ, but in 1865 they voted to purchase a melodeon (a small organ often called a harmonium). The congregation used the standard Ashkenazic worship service, but it is clear that board members were losing their patience for traditional rituals that droned on endlessly. Flouting traditional custom, the board voted to disallow the cantor from reading the entire Ketubah (wedding document) aloud during the wedding ceremony. As far as the Ketubah was concerned, the minutes noted dourly, “It just has to be signed.”

The congregation received a number of inquiries from candidates seeking to become its rabbi, but Huebsch’s application won prompt approval and the board voted to offer him a respectable annual salary of $2,500 plus a $1,000 stipend to bring him to the United States. Huebsch began his duties just prior to the High Holy Days in 1866. Tragically, only days after the conclusion of the holiday season, Huebsch’s wife died unexpectedly, and the shocking tragedy evoked a genuine outpouring of sympathy from the members of his new congregation. Despite his devastating loss, Huebsch was an immediate success and quickly became the congregation’s darling. Six months after his arrival, the board noted an impressive increase in membership, which was unquestionably a result of the new rabbi’s labors. The board rewarded their new rabbi by increasing his annual salary by $500.00. The fact that Ahawath Chesed now had 142 members also emboldened the board to consider building a beautiful new synagogue in a more attractive location. “There is hardly a doubt,” the board effusively projected, “that our congregation with our beloved and talented Dr. Hübsch . . . will become one of the largest in New York.”
Evidently, the secret to Huebsch’s remarkable success was due to his winning personality, especially with the younger generation. Huebsch’s life experiences – his role in the Hungarian Revolution, his studies with the charismatic Rabbi Schwab, his scholarly training, and his energetic organizational skills – coalesced to create a formidable rabbinic force. In particular, the board was thrilled with the remarkably successful religious school that their new rabbi organized and directed. Huebsch established a congregational school within months of his arrival and, barely six months later, the school boasted a stunningly successful enrollment of 127 pupils (74 boys and 53 girls). The rabbi and the congregation’s new cantor, Samuel Welsch, constituted the school’s faculty. By the onset of the second year, the school had burgeoned so impressively that the board promptly agreed to hire a third instructor. By 1872 attendance at Ahawath Chesed’s school had more than doubled and, only four years later, the school’s statistics testified to its explosive growth: 478 students and a faculty of 9 — one of whom was Julia Richman (1855-1912), who went on to become the first woman district superintendent of schools in the City of New York.

The congregation’s minutes brim with expressions of delight and pride over the school’s success. The board repeatedly heaped praise on their energetic rabbi who, apparently, was a creative organizer and educator. He composed original songs and hymns for the children.
to sing on Purim and other holidays and, as time went on, continued to expand the school’s curricular offerings. In 1876, he organized the “Young Men Hebrew Association” for the congregation. He continued to develop new venues for religious instruction and means to offer “scientific lectures for spiritual edification.” By 1882 the school’s curriculum included a Sabbath afternoon division wherein the rabbi delivered “religious lectures and conducted regular devotional and prayer exercises in Hebrew.” The congregation’s new cantor, Theodore Guinsburg (1853-1923), taught the students to sing Jewish songs and hymns. Just prior to Huebsch’s unexpected death in 1884, Ahawath Chesed’s school had an enrollment of 525.\textsuperscript{53}

All of these successes enabled Huebsch to quickly unify the congregation behind his spiritual leadership. The board not only deferred to Huebsch, it regularly appealed to him for guidance and direction. The rabbi quickly earned the congregation’s respect, and the community evinced great confidence in his judgment. This status would benefit Huebsch’s work on a congregational prayer book.\textsuperscript{54}

The congregation must have recognized that the divergent views on the future direction of Ahawath Chesed’s prayer ritual needed reconciliation. On December 24, 1867, the congregation’s board voted to place a resolution before the entire membership of the congregation that would invite Dr. Huebsch to unify the congregation through the compilation of a prayer book that would include hymns suitable for the entire liturgical year. In advance of this general meeting, which was held in June of 1867, Huebsch composed a letter to the congregation that outlined his liturgical ideology. He informed the
congregation that if the majority of the members would endorse his ideological approach to the task, then he would agree to edit a new prayer book for Ahawath Chesed.

In his letter to the board, Huebsch reminded the congregation that the traditional prayer service merited “historical rights” because Jews had used the formula for hundreds of years. The only justification for altering the traditional prayers, the rabbi noted, was if “there existed an imperative necessity.” Since prayer was essentially a mode of communication between the human heart and its creator, that which obstructed communication “must be eliminated.” By asserting the historical authority of the traditional prayers and simultaneously insisting on the elimination of “all and everything that disturbs the devotion, disperses the concentration, cools the feeling,” Huebsch, like his mentor Schwab, positioned himself to draw a compromise between those congregants who favored retaining the traditional siddur and those who hoped to adopt one of the new reformed liturgies.

In Huebsch’s opinion, there were essentially two “shortcomings” to the congregation’s worship rite as it was then being conducted. First, the service was too long. The congregation was trying to recite too many prayers in too short a time. Consequently, the recitation was unnaturally hurried. Huebsch urged the congregation to embrace the rabbinic adage tov me-at be-khavvanah (better less, but with sincere devotion). Second, the service was being conducted entirely in the traditional Hebrew, which was no longer understood by the majority of the congregants. Interestingly, Huebsch expressed his concern for the spiritual uplift of men and women when he wrote that “the
continuous praying and reading in a language which is not at all understood by the women, and by many men only imperfectly, cannot have an uplifting and invigorating devotional result.” In addition, Huebsch reminded the congregation that those who sat and listened for hours “without uttering a word” were not likely to experience any spiritual uplift.

To redress these two shortcomings, Huebsch told the congregation that he would provide them with “an appropriate and expert reduction in the volume of prayers.” Hebrew would remain the “language of prayer” for Ahawath Chesed, but he would also provide German translations that would not only make the service comprehensible to those who did not understand Hebrew but would also “motivate heart and soul.” Huebsch also agreed to include a selection of hymns as the congregation had requested. Finally, Huebsch reminded the congregation of an ideological principle which he had repeatedly stressed in his sermons. His prayer book would “respectfully” remember the ancient custom of animal sacrifice, but he would not call for the restitution of animal sacrifice. Huebsch also indicated that he would revise the prayers that called on God to return the Jewish people to Palestine. These appeals had been recited for generations and therefore evoked nostalgic feelings among many congregants. Nevertheless, Huebsch asked the congregation, “Why should we approach our God with the prayer that He may lead us back to a place to which we really do not want to return?” Again, he urged the congregation to consider these ideas as a form of emendation and not elimination. “Should we not . . . beg the Almighty that He may make
whole world His Zion, and all places of worship, where men truthfully represent Him, His Jerusalem?” Huebsch wanted to compile a prayer book that expressed the “deepest conviction of [his] heart”:

…each and everything in the prayer that is not a true and genuine expression of our feelings, that which we speak only with our mouth without feeling it in our hearts, that can not be pleasing and agreeable to the Lord who is a God of truth.

If the congregation came to “a unanimous agreement on these principles in peace and harmony,” then Huebsch would agree to the congregation’s request. Nothing would make him happier, he assured the congregation, than to compile a prayer service that would help his “beloved congregation rise to this new bloom [and to a] devotional liveliness.”

The congregation voted to accept Huebsch’s preconditions but, even before he began to work on the project, Huebsch tried to collaborate on the development of an American Jewish ritual with his rabbinic friend and fellow Bohemian, Isaac Mayer Wise. Huebsch and Wise enjoyed a friendly bond. Upon his arrival at Ahawath Chesed in 1866, Wise wrote Huebsch a warm letter of welcome in which he urged his Bohemian compatriot to remember that “America is larger than New York.” Once his congregation had unanimously embraced his approach to the prayer book, the diplomatic Huebsch promptly wrote to Wise and suggested that the time had come for American rabbis to publish an American Jewish liturgy. Huebsch certainly knew that Wise had long been calling for the creation of an American ritual, and that Wise believed that his prayer book, Minhag America, could
easily be adapted to that purpose. Once Huebsch had expressed his willingness to use *Minhag America* as the starting point for the development of an American Jewish prayer book, Wise’s passion for the idea he had cherished from his earliest days in America was rekindled. Huebsch’s suggestion had come shortly after Wise’s participation in a meeting of 13 reform-minded rabbis that took place in Philadelphia, November 3-6, 1869. The group had called for prayer book reform and now, knowing that Huebsch was willing to work collaboratively toward that goal, Wise eagerly took up the task. He promptly organized a collective effort to develop a standard American Jewish prayer ritual based, ideally, on a revised version of his own congregational liturgy, *Minhag America*.

Using *Minhag America* as the basis for their work, a small group of rabbis tried to create a prayer book that would enjoy broad appeal. The rabbis met successively in Cleveland (1870), New York (1870) and Cincinnati (1871). Although Huebsch did not attend the Cleveland conference, he was initially eager to support Wise’s effort. In September 1870, Huebsch told Ahawath Chesed’s board about the American Jewish prayer book initiative that was underway. He further informed them that, in his opinion, the ritual would be acceptable to Ahawath Chesed. The congregation promptly voted to support the liturgical preferences of their trusted and much-beloved rabbi.56

Work on the Wise/Huebsch prayer book initiative continued later that same year when the rabbis reconvened in New York City under the auspices of Ahawath Chesed. Six months later, Huebsch traveled to Cincinnati to chair yet another meeting on the development of the
American Jewish prayer book. Shortly after the meeting in Cincinnati, however, Huebsch abandoned the collaborative effort and began work on a congregational prayer book for Ahawath Chesed. It is not completely clear why Huebsch abandoned his collaborative liturgical efforts with Wise. Perhaps the vitriolic opposition of so many of his colleagues in the East concerned the diplomatic Huebsch (Huebsch was the only New Yorker to attend the Cincinnati meeting in 1871). Perhaps the burdensome effort to please many liturgical masters, as well as the attendant compromises, numerous controversies and frustrating delays that such a process engenders, contributed to his decision to withdraw. We do know that by the end of 1871 Ahawath Chesed’s new and spectacular building on the corner of Lexington and 55th in midtown Manhattan was coming to completion. The temple’s leadership was undoubtedly eager to publish a congregational prayer service compiled specifically for the impressive new structure that Huebsch himself labeled “an American Jewish house of worship.”

Ahawath Chesed began using Huebsch’s two volume *Seder Tefillah – Gebete für den öffentlichen Gottesdienst der Tempelgemeinde Ahawath Chesed* in 1872. Even though German supplemented the Hebrew prayers, the new ritual was modern, ennobling, and suited to the contemporary needs of the congregation. The prayers themselves were of a “simple, dignified, yet soulful” style. Huebsch abbreviated the Hebrew prayer service in accordance with his ideology, and the accompanying German “translations” were more akin to a paraphrase. Interspersed throughout the prayer services, one finds a selection of moving poetic couplets or quatrains written
by Huebsch. The prayer book contained some noteworthy features including creative introductory readings for the Sabbath and festivals and a lovely memorial service (*Todtenfeier*) with special meditative passages for those mourning parents, relatives and children. Huebsch also composed prayers for young children to recite when they arose in the morning, when they prepared themselves for bed at night, and when they finished their meals. The Huebsch prayer book also contained a noteworthy prayer on behalf of America:

Eternal Protector of nations, to thy divine safekeeping we commend this great land which we in faithful love call our home. Send blessings upon the diligence of its citizens and prosperity to the wholesome working of its administration. Let right and justice, morality and education, peace and liberty flourish here and everywhere.  

The Huebsch prayer book, which in many ways reflected the genial spirit of its beloved editor, quickly won the affection of the congregation. For the next 50 years, even during periods when the congregation had formally adopted succeeding prayer books, Huebsch’s prayer book remained the authoritative ritual for many members of Ahawath Chesed.  

Adolph Huebsch died suddenly and unexpectedly on Friday, October 10, 1884. Jewish newspapers described the ensuing shock and grief in colorful detail. “Stout hearted men wept,” newspapers reported, “and a gloom of sadness hung like a funeral pall over every Jewish household where his name was known.” Huebsch’s untimely death was described as a wrenching loss not only for Ahawath
Chesed but for the entire Jewish community. The lamented rabbi was compared to the “brightest, costliest gem” that could be “torn from the Diadem of American Judaism.”

In the months after his death, the congregation began searching for a successor who was capable of filling Huebsch’s big shoes. More than three decades after its founding, Ahawath Chesed’s Böhmische Wurzeln – its Bohemian roots – still ran deep, and the leadership sought to find a rabbinic leader who, like Huebsch, was a Landsmann and a figure worthy of succeeding their beloved rabbi. At the time of Huebsch’s death, Ahawath Chesed had become a sizeable, middle class, New York congregation with one of the most magnificent synagogue buildings in all of North America. The search process focused quickly on another distinguished and scholarly rabbi, a man whose background bore remarkable similarity to that of Huebsch.

**Alexander Kohut:**
Rabbi of Ahawath Chesed, 1885-1894

Long before his arrival in New York, Alexander Kohut had earned a distinguished reputation as a rabbi, scholar and orator. Born in the small town of Felegyhaza, Hungary, Kohut belonged to an esteemed family of rabbinic scholars. At the age of eight, young Alexander began his formal education in the city of Kecskemét, located
southeast of Budapest, where he received a Jewish education through private tutorials while simultaneously attending the local gymnasium. Subsequently, he pursued rabbinical studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau. While a student in Breslau, Kohut served a small congregation in Tarnowitz (Tarnowskie), located near the southern border of Poland. He simultaneously began working on a Ph.D. in Semitic languages at the University of Leipzig, which he completed in 1866. In 1867 he received his rabbinical diploma and began serving a congregation in Stuhlweissenburg, located near the Moravian border.63

Early in his career, Kohut distinguished himself by coupling a vast reservoir of Jewish and general learning to a compelling oratorical talent. According to his son, George Alexander, Kohut attracted the attention of József Eötvös, a prominent Hungarian poet, statesman and novelist, while serving in Stuhlweissenburg. Eötvös was one of the primary ideologues in the Hungarian liberal revolution of 1848. He later succeeded in establishing Hungary’s first national system of education. The liberal-minded statesman/poet arranged for Kohut to become the district superintendent of schools in Stuhlweissenburg — a distinction that had rarely, if ever, been conferred on a Jew. In 1872 Kohut left Stuhlweissenburg for the larger community of Pécs (Fünfkirchen) and there, during the next eight years, began work on what would eventually be his magnum opus: The Aruch Completum or Aruk Ha-Shalem (Hebrew) – a massive Dictionary of the Talmud.64 After eight years in Pécs, Kohut assumed a pulpit in the large city of Nagy Varad (Grosswardein) where nearly a quarter of the total population was Jewish. In Nagy Varad the liberal Prime Minister of
Hungary, Kalman Tisza, heard Kohut speak and, impressed by his oratory, arranged for him to represent the Jewish community in the Hungarian Parliament. Kohut’s reputation as an accomplished scholar, experienced rabbi, capable orator, and communal activist commended him as an ideal candidate to succeed Adolph Huebsch at Ahawath Chesed. 65

What induced a man like Kohut to come to New York? The fact that the congregation was prepared to offer him a handsome annual salary of $6,000 may have been an important enticement to a family man who wanted to use as much of his leisure time as possible to complete his scholarly publication. His first wife’s illness – she died prior to his departure for the United States – may have contributed to his willingness to pull up roots and relocate to a new world. Finally, Kohut may have been attracted by the fact that Ahawath Chesed’s pulpit was still well known as the Böhmischer Schul. This fact, combined with the knowledge that the pulpit had belonged to venerable Huebsch, a man who had been a Honvéd and fought for Hungarian national independence, may have convinced Kohut that Ahawath Chesed was the right pulpit at the right time. In any event, when the congregation offered him the post he promptly accepted.

At a special meeting held on February 14, 1885, the president of Ahawath Chesed, Solomon Simm, proudly informed his congregation that the Reverend Dr. Alexander Kohut, “Chief Rabbi” in Grosswardein, Hungary, had accepted their offer to become Ahawath Chesed’s new rabbi. The president stressed that Kohut had come highly recommended by many European rabbis and, most assuredly, this particular rabbi
would be a worthy successor to Dr. Huebsch. Despite the president’s hopeful expectation, Kohut’s tenure at Ahawath Chesed was not as tranquil as that of Huebsch.66

Reporters from The New York Times were among the throngs who came to Ahawath Chesed’s beautiful sanctuary to hear Kohut preach his inaugural sermon on Shabbat morning, May 9, 1885. The new rabbi began by tearfully describing how difficult it was for him to abandon his “old home for a new life in America.”67 In comparing Jewish life in America to Jewish life in his native land, the newly arrived rabbi paid “glowing tribute to American life and institutions”:

The country whence I came is one of many churches, but of spiritual darkness; one in which the Jews have rights, but cannot obtain justice; where so strong an anti-Semitic feeling prevails that a Jew is not looked upon as a fellow-being. I should not consider my departure from my country with thankfulness, but I cannot but feel that I escaped from the hatred, fanaticism, and religious intolerance of the old country to a land where God’s free air is inseparably joined to free spiritual life and development.68

After extolling America’s liberating atmosphere, Kohut addressed himself to his new congregation and laid out his hopes for the future. The relationship between a rabbi and a congregation, he said, must be based on both “humane and religious obligations... for one without the other is only half a contract and could not endure the pressure of time.” Without making specific mention of the words Reform or
Orthodoxy, Kohut subtly outlined his own views about Jewish law and ritual:

Truth in religion is doing God’s will. I consider that to be the truth which is taught by the rabbinical Jewish doctrine, but usages which cannot be based on the teaching of the Talmud I reject. The representations of Jewish faith to the outside world, I believe, have to be delicately treated. *I offer you the old and the new in happy and blended union* (emphasis added).

Was it merely a premonitory intuition that prompted Kohut to predict that “at times you may find that I shall differ from you”? The comment was probably deliberate since it seems reasonable to assume that Kohut already knew that his new congregation was not of one mind regarding its approach to Jewish ritual. In Hungary, Kohut was influenced by Neolog Judaism, an ideological stream that arose during the last third of the nineteenth century, primarily in Hungarian-speaking regions of Europe. Neolog Judaism embraced only the mildest innovations that accommodated a slight modernization of Jewish ritual. Although some members of Ahawath Chesed were comfortable with Neolog Judaism, others undoubtedly hoped the new rabbi would advance the ritual reforms that Huebsch had introduced. Perhaps this is why he implored his new congregation to be patient with him as he settled into his new pulpit. He concluded by assuring them that he intended to be, above all, an “apostle of peace,” though he planned to speak for peace and truth.

Kohut began his tenure at Ahawath Chesed during the counting of
the Omer, the 49 day period that bridges the festivals of Passover and Shavuot. Traditionally, the Mishnaic tractate known as *Pirkei Avot* or *Ethics of the Fathers* is read during the Omer period, and this may explain why Kohut took up this tractate as his text for a series of sermons that elucidated his ideological approach to the adaptation of Judaism to the American context. Some have inaccurately described Kohut’s *Pirkei Avot* sermons as a direct attack on Reform, but Kohut’s primary purpose in delivering these addresses was to stake out his own religious perspective so that the members of Ahawath Chesed would better understand the direction their new rabbi intended to pursue. Kohut declared himself an opponent to both rigid Orthodoxy and radical Reform. “My religious standpoint,” Kohut told his listeners, should properly be referred to as “Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism freshened with the spirit of progress.”

In his very first talk on *Pirkei Avot*, Kohut, a scholar of rabbinic literature who had already spent years of his life compiling a multi-volume dictionary of the Talmud, explained that he could never fathom why some Reformers disdained the writings of the ancient rabbinic sages. He reasoned that American Jews should be able to appreciate both rabbinical law and literature:

Only a Judaism true to itself and its past, only a Judaism which does not disown the character of its worthy antiquity, but is receptive of the ideas of the present, and accepts the good and the beautiful from whatever source it may come; only such a Judaism can command respect and recognition.
Kohut insisted that he was no advocate for the “false Orthodox who are so ready to dispense forcible words [that deny] the Jewish character of everyone who differs from them in opinion . . .” Neither was Kohut an opponent of Reform. In fact, he took pains to point out that Reformers had done “much good” and brought much that was “humane” to Jewish religious life. Nevertheless, those who spurned the ancient rabbinical tradition in its totality had gone too far. “A reform which seeks to progress without the Mosaic-rabbinical tradition. . .” Kohut declared, “is a Deformity.”

Unquestionably, Kohut knew that some members of his congregation would not agree with him. Still, he urged them to be patient and to follow his lead, and use moderation in reforming Judaism:

At all events . . . maintain the healthy golden mean; I do not know whether I have your acquiescence with this. I hope for it; I plead for it; yes, I expect it; spread out your banner of *temperate* progress.

Evidently, Kohut’s outspokenness attracted the attention of New York’s Jewish community, particularly the ardent proponents of radical Reform. Dr. Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), the rabbi of Congregation Beth El, disagreed so vigorously with Kohut’s position that he began to use his weekly sermon to rebut Kohut’s assertions. By June 1885, *The New York Times* had taken note of the Kohut/Kohler “controversy.” The newspaper’s correspondent, inaccurately describing Kohut as “a strong advocate of orthodox Judaism,” noted that members of his new congregation were already disgruntled because he wanted to abandon the trail that was blazed by his venerated predecessor,
Adolph Huebsch. Dr. Gustav Gottheil (1827-1903), the rabbi of Congregation Emanu-El, was quoted as saying “now that Huebsch is dead he is already forgotten and the congregation over which Dr. Kohut presides is depreciated.” Understandably, Gottheil’s harsh comment distressed Kohut who told the paper that such a remark was “not at all nice of a brother rabbi.” Kohut stressed that the sermons he had been delivering were for the benefit of his congregants and not aimed at the community at large. He bluntly suggested that Kohler and Gottheil attend to the welfare of their own congregations and leave him to serve Ahawath Chesed.76

The public rift between Kohut and Kohler had additional implications when, several months later, Ahawath Chesed’s board was notified that their rabbi had decided to lend his support to the establishment of a new seminary (viz., the Jewish Theological Seminary) whose ideological approach to Judaism would be more in line with his own views. The congregation was invited to support the new seminary, but the minutes reflect the board’s obvious ambivalence. After all, Isaac Mayer Wise had enjoyed a special relationship with Ahawath Chesed, and their late and lamented rabbi, Adolph Huebsch, had unquestionably been a Wise loyalist. Kohut, too, maintained cordial relations with Wise, who respected Kohut’s erudition and his moderate approach to religious reform. Wise assured Kohut that he did not necessarily agree with Kohler’s radical perspective. So despite Kohut’s personal interest in the new seminary and the influential role he played in determining the new school’s curriculum, he did not break communication with Wise. To the contrary, Kohut’s
congregation remained a loyal member of Wise’s UAHC. 77

The board’s reaction to Kohut’s expressed interest in founding a new and more traditional rabbinical seminary is, in certain respects, emblematic of the congregation’s relationship with its new rabbi. Clearly, the congregation admired and respected its new rabbi. Although most of Kohut’s congregants agreed with their rabbi’s call for “temperate progress” and moderate reform, they were far less enthusiastic when he told them that they should adhere to the dictates of rabbinic law. The members of Ahawath Chesed were continuing to Americanize, and the congregation’s ritual would need to accommodate these American sensibilities. Despite Kohut’s personal proclivities, the members of the congregation wanted Ahawath Chesed’s ritual to adapt to the needs of the time, and the board did not hesitate to enlist Kohut’s support in the process.

One important indicator of the Americanization process that was influencing the religious development of Ahawath Chesed during this period was the growing preference for English over German. During the last half of the nineteenth century, the mass arrival of German-speaking immigrants had made that language a widely spoken tongue in America. Although a precipitous fall off in the use of the German language would take place in America as a result of the nation’s fierce patriotism during World War I, a modest decline in German language newspapers, schools and literary publications began to occur in the final decades of the nineteenth century. It was at this time that the demographics of second and third generation German-Americans began to overwhelm the number of newly arriving German-speaking
immigrants. English ruled for American-born children. This demo-
graphic transformation meant that fewer German-American families
were using German in their homes. Moreover, in large urban centers
the pressure to integrate into the general American culture was keen,
and the dominance of the English language in urban centers of com-
merce and industry was powerful. These two factors – viz., the decline
in the number of German-speaking families and the predominance of
English in the general urban culture – slowly eroded the support base
for the use of the German language throughout America in the final
decades of the nineteenth century. Particularly in the large American
cities, the “preference for English became unstoppable.”

The linguistic history of Ahawath Chesed sheds light on this phe-
nomenon as it unfolded. With Kohut’s arrival, the clamoring for more
English at Ahawath Chesed accelerated. The perennial problem of a
disaffected younger generation that seemed alienated by the religious
practices of the established generation became increasingly evident.
By 1887, for example, enrollment in the congregation’s vaunted
religious school dropped to 350. The synagogue’s board fretted over
the decrease in religious school enrollment, and it similarly worried
about a decline in the size of the congregation’s Confirmation Class.
The board members were particularly interested in reinvigorating the
Confirmation program, which they considered to be “the most beautiful
ceremony in our synagogue’s rites.” They averred that one way
to address these concerns was by introducing more English into
Ahawath Chesed’s religious activities. In 1890, for example, the
board decided that all religious school classes would henceforth be
conducted in English. As we will see, Kohut did speak in English on special occasions, but the congregation wanted to hear more sermons delivered in the English language. In 1892 the board politely instructed Kohut to preach a bit more regularly in English. The most significant indication of the congregation’s growing preference for English was the board’s decision to commission an English translation of the Huebsch prayer book. 79

Although many Ahawath Chesed old-timers adored the Huebsch prayer book with its familiar German translations, the congregation’s leadership recognized that many younger members of the congregation no longer understood the German text. The board hoped that an English translation of the Huebsch prayer service would make weekly worship services more comprehensible and, concomitantly, more appealing. 80

In 1888, when Kohut began translating Huebsch’s prayer service, he had only been in America for three years, yet he had already become proficient in English. In fact, he wrote and delivered his first English sermon on the Shabbat following Thanksgiving Day, 1887 – little more than a year after his arrival in the United States. Kohut began his first English sermon by explaining that there could be no more appropriate way for him to express his gratitude for “this glorious country . . . my new fatherland” than by making a “first attempt in English.” The sermon is a fascinating document, filled with praise for a resource-rich America that was “built by the genius and industry of our people.” Condemning “those lands of barbarism” in a world where “narrowness and tyranny [are] exercised” toward the Jew, Kohut exulted in “the blessings of the country” where “all men are
created equal” and “in which a man is worth what he is and not what he has.” The United States, Kohut declared, was American Jewry’s “promised land . . . the land of milk and honey . . . [a] wonderful country . . . [and a] modern-Palestine.” Those who heard their rabbi laud America on that Sabbath after Thanksgiving Day would undoubtedly have been moved by Kohut’s passionate love for his adopted homeland and impressed by the quality of his English tribute. 81

One wonders how Kohut managed to master English in so short a time. Perhaps he had studied English while studying for his doctorate in Europe, or perhaps his obvious intellectual abilities included a remarkable talent for language acquisition. It is also possible that Kohut’s English prowess may be attributed to his new wife, Rebekah Bettelheim Kohut (1864-1951) who, having been raised in America from the time she was a small child, was completely proficient in English. 82 In any event, the congregation’s board minutes leave little doubt that Ahawath Chesed’s leadership was bent on using more English in the synagogue’s school and in its worship services, and Kohut was expected to accommodate the board’s policy.

The fact that a fluid and remarkably idiomatic translation of the Huebsch prayer book (services for the Sabbath, Festivals and Weekdays) was completed in less than a year testifies to Kohut’s remarkable linguistic skill – mastering English in such a short period of time – as well as to his prodigious energy level. Even the pagination of the Kohut translation coincided with Huebsch’s prayer book and, in this way, whether one used the German or the English volume, each congregant would, nevertheless, be reading on the same page.
The board rewarded their rabbi by agreeing to fund the publication of volume 6 of Kohut’s Lexicon — the scholarly project that was unquestionably most dear to his heart. By selling Kohut’s English translation to congregations that had been using Huebsch’s German version, the congregation anticipated recouping its funds. The following year Kohut also completed an instructional guide (a “syllabus”) that was used for teaching liturgy to the congregation’s religious school. The board voted to require each pupil in the second through the fifth grades to purchase a copy of the Kohut volume.⁸³

Interestingly, despite Kohut’s expressed loyalty to rabbinic law and practice, he nevertheless made explicit note of his willingness to reform the traditional siddur. Not only was Kohut comfortable using Huebsch’s modernized prayer book (which, by the time he assumed Ahawath Chesed’s pulpit, had become an enshrined liturgy for many congregants), but also – as Huebsch before him and many of his rabbinic contemporaries – he strongly favored the creation of an American Jewish prayer book. In one of the last sermons he delivered in his controversial series based on Pirkei Avot in 1885, Kohut offered some remarkably progressive views regarding the need for Jewish prayer book reform in America:

If we could develop a Siddur, which should appeal to modern taste, upon the lines and in the language of the old Siddur, made acceptable to, and be adopted by all the congregations, then we could make concessions to adjust the olden spirit with the modern consciousness, doing homage to the Talmudic principle ‘Whether more or less, that only his purpose and motive be good.’⁸⁴
If a “uniform prayer book” could successfully end the religious controversies and internecine strife that predominated Jewish life in America, then Kohut was willing to exchange “a number of pieces in the olden Siddur for peace and unity.” Corroborating his perspective with an authoritative quote from the rabbis, Kohut concluded, “God found no vessel that could contain more blessing for Israel than Peace, for it is said, when God granted strength to his people, then he blessed his people with peace.” In other words, if a reformation of the traditional prayer service fostered peace, good will and unity within the American Jewish community, then according to Kohut, all Jews should be amenable to the liturgical compromises that prayer book reform would necessitate. 85

It is interesting to note just a few months prior to Kohut’s unanticipated death on May 25, 1894, Ahawath Chesed’s future merger partner, Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, proposed the idea of having the two congregations become one. This was not the first time that Shaar Hashomayim expressed its interest in collaborating with Ahawath Chesed. Only months after the conclusion of the Civil War, the board of Ahawath Chesed declined Shaar Hashomayim’s suggestion that the two congregations share one preacher. Now, 30 years later, talks between these two same congregations began anew. Although these initial merger negotiations broke down after only a few weeks, the seeds for a future marriage were planted at this time. The leaders of Shaar Hashomayim seem to have been impressed with Kohut’s English translation of the Huebsch prayer book. Even though the merger talks were tabled, Shaar Hashomayim’s leaders purchased
Aha wa th Chesed’s English prayer book and adopted it as their liturgy. The Kohut prayer book helped to pave a way for these two congregations to become one — liturgically speaking. 86

Kohut’s death compelled Aha wa th Chesed to begin searching for a new rabbi, and the congregation’s leaders began to identify the qualifications that Aha wath Chesed’s next spiritual leader would be required to possess. The new rabbi, they concluded, would need to possess the linguistic ability to serve both elements of Aha wath Chesed’s community: German and English. 87

David Davidson: 
Rabbi of Aha wath Chesed, 1896-1900

Electing a successor to Kohut proved to be a much more prolonged and complicated process than had taken place a decade earlier in the aftermath of Huebsch’s death. The search for Aha wath Chesed’s new rabbi took nearly two years, in part because the congregation refused to consider any applicant who was not fluent in both German and English. This prerequisite, of course, was symptomatic of larger religious factions that were at play during this period. The wildly diverse spectrum of rabbinic candidates that the congregation evaluated as it searched for Kohut’s successor underscored the inchoate nature of the congregation’s religious ideology. Would Aha wath Chesed elect its first Americanized rabbi and subsequently embrace additional religious reforms, or would it engage a more moderate religious leader, a rabbi more like Huebsch or Kohut, who was willing to maintain the status quo?
Undoubtedly, the aging Isaac M. Wise, Ahawath Chesed’s mentor and advisor for many decades, was consulted during this process. The congregation interviewed many of Wise’s students, all of whom were young, religiously liberal, Americanized alumni of the HUC in Cincinnati. At the same time, the congregation also considered approaching the more seasoned and moderate reformers.88

The pulpit was first offered to a 27-year-old HUC graduate, Alexander H. Geismar (1868-1939), who immediately declined the offer. Next, the congregation offered the position to another young (only 28 years old) HUC alumnus, Rudolph Grossman (1867-1927). Contract negotiations led the religiously liberal Grossman to turn down the offer because the congregation wanted to impose too many ritual conditions. In a revealing letter to Ahawath Chesed’s board, Grossman explained why both he, and perhaps Geismar too, refused to assume the congregation’s distinguished pulpit. The congregation’s conditions convinced Grossman that Ahawath Chesed wanted to be a “conservative reform congregation.”89

After more than a year and a half of searching and after offering its pulpit to at least two HUC alumni, Ahawath Chesed elected David Davidson (1848-1933) as its rabbi. In some respects, Davidson must have appeared to be an ideal candidate for an ideologically conflicted Ahawath Chesed. Born in Lauterberg, Germany, and educated at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, Davidson immigrated to the United States in 1880 to become the rabbi of B’nai Jeshurun in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1885 Davidson relocated to Cincinnati, where he served as the rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel. While in
Cincinnati, Davidson taught at the HUC. He subsequently served Congregation Kaal Montgomery in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1893. With his conservative rabbinic training, his familiarity with Isaac M. Wise and HUC, and his breadth of American congregational experience in places like Des Moines, Cincinnati and Montgomery, Davidson appeared to be the perfect rabbi for an ideologically conflicted congregation like Ahawath Chesed. The congregation’s Trustees were relieved to find Davidson. The board minutes leave no doubt that the leadership understood how important it was for them to select the right man for the job:

To make the right choice of a Rabbi, and therewith spiritual leader and guide, especially as successor of the deceased Huebsch and Kohut, was for the congregation a question of existence, and thus no easy task. Your Trustees are of the opinion that the congregation’s choice of Dr. Davidson was a fortunate one, as he is not only generally recognized as a scholar, but also completely fulfills the congregation’s requests regarding various respects, such as preaching from the pulpit in English and German.90

Despite the high expectations, Davidson’s brief tenure at Ahawath Chesed was filled with dissension – most of it concerning the ongoing struggle over the future character of the congregation’s ritual. Tensions between the religious preferences of the congregation’s stalwarts and the younger generation intensified. Shortly after Davidson assumed the pulpit in the fall of 1895, the congregation introduced an 8:00 P.M. Sabbath service on Friday evenings. It was hoped that this step would
“attract the young people, sons and daughters of the congregation’s members. . .” Unfortunately, this innovation did not meet with universal acclaim. The late Friday night service attracted large attendances, but some board members wanted to abandon the innovation because hardly any of those who attended Friday evening returned to pray with the congregation on the Sabbath morn! Others opposed the new late service because the rabbi preached exclusively in English. In order to strike a compromise, the board temporarily suspended the late night service in April of 1896 but, as a quid pro quo, Davidson was asked to deliver English and German sermons during alternating Sabbath morning services.91

The congregation struggled mightily to show fair treatment to both the proponents of English and German. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the English language advocates began to have the upper hand. In 1897 the board suggested that Davidson deliver an English prayer on behalf of the Bar Mitzvah boys before and after the reading of the Torah during the worship service. Despite the ascendancy of English at Ahawath Chesed, the congregation elected to preserve some of its traditional customs. For instance, in 1897 some of the board members suggested that the membership be permitted to worship without a head covering, but the motion was soundly defeated with only nine of the 46 voting members in favor of removing their hats. In 1899 the board minutes began to be recorded in English. Slowly and tendentiously, Ahawath Chesed had adopted English as its “official” tongue.92

Davidson’s tenure at Ahawath Chesed was brief and tepid. In
sharp contrast to its practice with Huebsch and Kohut, the board began deliberating over whether or not to renew Davidson’s contract only a year and a half after his arrival. His contract was renewed – but again in contrast to his predecessors – on a year-to-year basis. In the fall of 1898, around the time that Ahawath Chesed renewed its merger talks with Shaar Hashomayim, the board minutes indicate that Davidson planned to resign his position. Four years after the death of Kohut and less than three years after Davidson began, Ahawath Chesed was once again in need of a new rabbi.93

Isaac S. Moses: Rabbi of Ahawath Chesed, 1901-1918

The search process that culminated in the election of Isaac S. Moses (1846-1926) was protracted and full of intrigue. Ahawath Chesed’s pulpit was a highly coveted post. Once it had been vacated, the congregation began to invite prospective candidates to visit the congregation, conduct services and deliver a sermon. For more than a year, from November 1899 through November 1900, the board considered a large number of applicants, many of whom were graduates of the HUC in Cincinnati.94

Some of the applicants were men of considerable distinction, like the distinguished British scholar, Israel Abrahams (1858-1925), whom Julia Richman nominated for the post, and HUC professor of history,
Dr. Gotthard Deutsch (1859-1921), who came to the congregation for a trial weekend in 1900. Two other rabbinic applicants swept the congregation off its feet: William Rosenau (1865-1943) of Baltimore and Samuel Sale (1854-1937) of St. Louis. Both candidates ultimately declined Ahawath Chesed’s offer. Toward the end of November 1900, nearly two years after it became clear that Davidson would be leaving, the board formally offered Ahawath Chesed’s pulpit to Isaac S. Moses of Chicago. By January 1901 Moses had moved his family to New York, where he would live for the remaining 25 years of his life.

In giving Moses the nod, Ahawath Chesed had selected a 53-year-old rabbi who differed from his predecessors. He had none of the scholarly attainments of men like Huebsch, Kohut or even Davidson, and he was certainly not nearly as prominent a figure as many of the rabbis who had competed for the post. Yet Moses was unquestionably one of the period’s most experienced and influential American Jewish liturgists and more than any other man, it was Moses who was entitled to call himself the father of the first American Jewish standardized prayer ritual, the *Union Prayer Book*.

Isaac S. Moses was born in Santomichel, Posen, where his father, Israel Baruch Moses, was the rabbi and teacher of a small congregation. His brother, Adolph, and his nephew Alfred Geiger, were American rabbis. Although Moses claimed he had received his rabbinic ordination from both Rabbi Salomon Rosenthal in Jarocin, Poland, and the distinguished German-American reformer, Dr. Bernhard Felsenthal (1822-1908), one of his contemporaries insisted that “he did not finish his studies at any gymnasium, university, or
In spite of the fact that Moses may have been a bit of an autodidact, he was unquestionably a knowledgeable Jew who was endowed with “a retentive memory and a comprehensive philosophical mind . . .” Contemporaries described Moses as a man who possessed “a strong physique, abundant energy, a warm impulsive heart, a happy, genial, jovial disposition, a fine sense of humor, a love of nature, music, and poetry, and a yearning to worship [God] through word and song . . .”

Moses came to America in the early 1870s and began his career as a religious school teacher in St. Louis. His first rabbinic post was in Quincy, Illinois (1876), and he went on to hold pulpits successively in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1879), Nashville, Tennessee (1888), and Chicago, Illinois (where in 1888 he began serving Kehilath Anshe Ma’arav and, subsequently, moved to the nearby Temple Israel) before coming to New York.

In many respects, Moses possessed ideal qualifications to assume Ahawath Chesed’s pulpit at the dawn of the twentieth century. Early in his career Moses had been a devotee of David Einhorn’s radical ideology. As he gained experience in the American rabbinate, he increasingly aligned himself with Isaac M. Wise’s more practical approach to change. Like Wise, Moses cherished the hope that most American Jewish congregations could be liturgically unified by means of religious compromise and concession. The board of Ahawath Chesed viewed Moses’s ability to sermonize effortlessly in both English and German to be one of his most compelling qualifications for the pulpit. His extensive experience in the field of American Jewish liturgy and the leading role he played in creating America’s
first denominational prayer book would prove to be an additional benefit for a congregation in transition.\textsuperscript{102}

Moses was unquestionably one of the most active, creative and significant liturgists of his era. He began editing prayer books early in his career, and he never stopped publishing new prayer books, hymnals and liturgical curricula for his congregations and religious school students. He published his first Americanized prayer book in 1884 while serving Congregation Emanu-El of Milwaukee. The title of the prayer book, \textit{Tefillah L’Mosheh - Order of Prayers and Responsive Readings for Jewish Worship}, constituted a clever allusion to Moses himself – thereby identifying himself as the prayer book’s editor.\textsuperscript{103}

In his preface to \textit{Tefillah L’Mosheh}, Moses explained that, like most American Jewish congregations, his congregation – particularly the younger generation – was in urgent need of Jewish prayer in the English language:

\begin{quote}
Whatever may be said in favor of the Hebrew language, as the language of our fathers, the sacred language of our holy scriptures, the language of prayer for all the scattered tribes of Israel: for the great mass born in this country Hebrew has ceased to be a language of the heart, and to use it as a vehicle of the holiest emotions, is to make prayer a lifeless and meaningless repetition of words.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}
Moses made special note of the fact that Tefillah L’Mosheh was “by no means intended to supersede at once the prayer book that was currently in use at his congregation.” His prayer book – “although complete in itself” – was primarily compiled to help congregants follow along with the Hebrew prayers and simultaneously garner their meaning. Moses unabashedly noted that he had “simply compiled, arranged, and rendered into English the ancient forms of our prayers, making free use of existing prayer books, especially that of the late Dr. Einhorn, of Dr. Jastrow’s and Dr. Landsberg’s Ritual . . . .” The slim volume also contained Moses’s own translation of the Psalms, rendered as responsive readings, which constituted Moses’s most original contribution to Tefillah L’Mosheh. He also included a “Service for Mourners” and a brief selection of “Children’s Prayers.” Tefillah L’Mosheh was a radically abbreviated English prayer service, and it is difficult to imagine how one could use it effectively as an accompaniment to a Hebrew prayer service. It was, however, an Americanized volume that launched Moses’s career as a compiler, editor and arranger of American Jewish prayer rituals.

Evidently, Tefillah L’Mosheh’s liturgical ambitions quickly proved to be inadequate for Milwaukee’s Emanu-El congregation. Moses noted with regret that the congregants who loyally attended worship services wanted more Hebrew than Tefillah L’Mosheh provided. Frustratingly, “those for whom the English ritual was intended” remained distant from the synagogue. In 1887 Moses published a new prayer book for his congregation, Tefillat Yisrael, which sought to “satisfy the demands of both, the old and the young generation.”
The overall approach that Moses admittedly followed in compiling *Tefillah L’Mosheh* was unmistakably influenced by Rabbi Max Landsberg’s congregational prayer book, *Ritual for Jewish Worship*, which contained only a very few Hebrew phrases and a radically abbreviated English prayer service. Although *Tefillat Yisrael* retained some of the characteristics of Landsberg’s prayer book, Moses also borrowed freely from more moderately reformed rituals, including Bernhard Felsenthal’s English rendition of Einhorn’s *Olat Tamid* and Marcus Jastrow’s English version of *Avodat Yisrael*, which was a translation of Benjamin Szold and Henry Hochheimer’s prayer book by the same name.\(^{105}\)

*Tefillat Yisrael* was a much different prayer book from *Tefillah L’Mosheh*. According to Moses, the book was an unabashed return to tradition. “The merit of this book,” he declared, “is its lack of originality. I have simply compiled, arranged, and rendered into English the ancient forms of prayers, making free use of the English portion of existing prayer-books . . .” In certain respects this is an accurate assessment, though Moses modestly omitted mention of his own contributions to the compilation, a rendition of the Psalms stylistically prefacing the book’s various worship services. Above all, Moses’s *Tefillat Yisrael* constitutes a landmark effort to cobble together components of Landsberg’s and Einhorn’s reformed liturgy with material borrowed from Jastrow’s more conservative prayer book. The change in name from *Tefillah L’Mosheh* to *Tefillat Yisrael* suggested that Moses himself was aware that his focus had shifted from a congregational liturgy to a prayer book that aspired to serve a broader
audience. By demonstrating that one prayer book could simultaneously embrace both liberal and conservative liturgical trends, Moses had hit upon a formula of compromise that would ultimately make the publication of a denominational prayer book a feasible objective.106

In 1891, only a few years after the publication of Tefillat Yisrael, Moses, now a rabbi in Chicago, began work on another prayer service for his new congregation, Temple Israel. The Chicago draft was clearly based on Tefillat Yisrael. The timing of Moses’s liturgical efforts on behalf of his Chicago congregation proved serendipitous. The prayer book draft provided him with an opportunity to place himself at the center of a historic new effort that would culminate in the publication of an entirely new phenomenon in the history of the American Jewish prayer service – the first successful standardized Jewish prayer service, the Union Prayer Book.107

On July 14, 1890, the first annual convention of the CCAR assembled in Cleveland, Ohio. The delegates of the recently established rabbinical association were considering three alternative motions that would obligate the new Conference to publish a uniform prayer book for use in their congregations. Before that first convention ended, the CCAR had voted to publish a “Union Prayer Book” that theoretically “would serve as a powerful magnet to draw together the varying and disparate religious views and sentiments of American Reform Judaism, and serve as an expression of its noblest aspirations. . . .” A Ritual Committee of ten was appointed to undertake this task and report back on its progress.108

The following year (1891), the chairman of the original Ritual
Committee, Solomon H. Sonneschein (1839-1908), had been expected “to submit to [the] conference material for a Union Prayer Book.” Sonneschein did not attend the convention, so one of the members of the Ritual Committee, Rabbi David Philipson, presented the delegates with a liturgical outline that the committee had developed. The delegates then began to assign various tasks relating to the development of the prayer book to specific individuals. In the midst of this process, Isaac Moses raised his hand and “called the attention of the Conference to the fact that he had prepared a sketch Prayer-book which he was ready to submit to the Conference with its ample material for a Union Prayer-book.” The “sketch Prayer-book” to which Moses referred was presumably the draft version of three worship services that he compiled for Temple Israel in Chicago: Sabbath evening, Sabbath morning, and Festival morning services. Moses’s offer immediately changed the direction of the debate. The CCAR voted to discharge the original committee and replace it with a new committee consisting of five rabbis. The new committee would “take into consideration as an intelligent working basis the sketch-book of prayers furnished by Dr. I. S. Moses.”

This newly appointed Ritual Committee promptly moved ahead and, by the time the CCAR met for its third annual convention in 1892, a “complete book of service for Sabbath and holidays” — based on Moses’s draft — was placed before the Conference. Moses was serving as the secretary of the CCAR Ritual committee that had proposed this first draft of what would soon become the Union Prayer Book. Initially, opposing factions attempted to derail or, at the very least, delay work on the Moses draft.
Kaufman Kohler spoke for those who believed that a Union Prayer Book that was based on Moses’s liturgy would not serve the staunchly reforming objectives that his father-in-law, David Einhorn, had incorporated in his highly regarded prayer book, *Olat Tamid*. During the opening session, Kohler informed his colleagues that he himself could not support this “action of the Conference on the adoption of the Manual Prayer Book for Public Worship.” Oscar J. Cohen of Mobile, Alabama, moved that the plan be abandoned altogether. Cohen’s motion was subsequently withdrawn in favor of a motion offered by Rabbis Max Schlesinger and Moses Gries to postpone consideration on adopting the Moses prayer book until the next conference so that all of the members would have a chance to submit their revisions. The delegates rejected Schlesinger and Gries’s amendment, and Rabbi Sigmund Hecht of Milwaukee, speaking for the majority opinion, declared that “the prayer book in its present arrangement, will meet the demands of the present time and present congregations.” The opposition, still determined to scrap the Moses prayer book draft, failed in a motion to adjourn the meeting altogether. Finally, after Henry Berkowitz and Maurice Eisenberg delivered their “eloquent appeal” on behalf of the liturgical draft as it was submitted by the Ritual Committee, the motion passed. Isaac Moses’s sketch-book of prayers was destined to become the first collectively produced liturgy in American Jewish history.110

Yet controversy and dissension over Moses’s draft continued. Six months later, in December of 1892, the CCAR reconvened for a mid-winter meeting in Washington, D.C. In his report to the
delegates, the chair of the Ritual Committee, Moses Mielziner, informed his colleagues that “the first part of the Union Prayer Book, containing the Sabbath, the Three Festivals, and the Daily Prayers, [had] been published.” However, the new prayer book had not been published in strict accordance with the Ritual Committee’s directives since it contained some appendices with rituals for Confirmation, Marriage and the Passover meal “which [I. S. Moses] had not [previously] submitted to the Ritual Committee” for approval. If the Conference preferred to remove these rituals from the prayer book, Mielziner explained, this would need to be done the next time the book was reprinted. The CCAR then voted to endorse the volume as it had been published, but “in all future editions of Part I . . . [these aforementioned rituals should be] eliminated and published in separate form.”

In addition to the problem of the appendices, calls for textual revisions of the new UPB (increasingly referred to by the Ritual Committee as “Part I”) began to be heard as soon as the book appeared in print. The most important reason for revision arose when several “very important congregations in the East” let it be known that if the CCAR revised “Part I” in accordance with their own liturgical tastes, they would agree to adopt the UPB. This was an enticing offer, and the CCAR leadership was eager to accommodate. After considerable discussion, the CCAR voted to revise “Part I,” which had only been in print for a few months. In order to insure that the revisions suited the needs of the Eastern congregations, Rabbis Kaufmann Kohler, Gustav Gottheil and Maurice H. Harris — all prominent New Yorkers — joined the Ritual Committee together with
three members from the original committee: Moses Mielziner, chair, Henry Berkowitz and Isaac S. Moses.\(^{112}\)

By the time the CCAR convened in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for its fifth annual convention in July 1894, Mielziner happily informed the members of the conference that the Ritual Committee had completed its task. A new UPB High Holy Day ritual had been adopted with the “unanimous approbation” of the committee and was ready to go to press so that it would be available for use during the Holy Days later that same year. The committee had also completed its revisions on “Part I.” The published records of the CCAR leave no hint of any ill-will on Moses’s part as a result of the revisions. To the contrary, Moses displayed very little pride of authorship and worked collaboratively with the other members of the Ritual Committee throughout the excruciatingly complicated process of revision. In fact, at the conclusion of his remarks Mielziner pointed out that a “conciliatory spirit” now prevailed among the committee members and a “better understanding of each other . . . [had] been attained by the frequent discussions of liturgical points . . . .” As the convention itself came to an end, the 50 colleagues in attendance voted unanimously to record their earnest thanks to Rabbi I. S. Moses “for his bringing to a successful issue the work of the Ritual Committee as presented in the Union Prayer Book.”\(^{113}\)

A decade would pass between the time that Isaac Moses began adapting his prayer book draft to the needs of the CCAR and his becoming rabbi of the newly merged Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim Congregation in New York. During those years, the UPB
became the official liturgy of dozens of American Jewish congregations including some that were not members of the Reform movement’s congregational association, the UAHC. By 1912 the UPB was being used by more than 300 congregations and more than 100,000 copies had been sold. The prayer book that owed its very existence to Isaac Moses’s initiative had quickly become the most popular prayer book in America. As for Moses, the role he played in spurring, compiling and galvanizing the first denominational prayer book made him something of a liturgical laureate during the 1890s. On August 27, 1893, when the Jewish Denominational Congress opened in the Palace of Fine Arts in conjunction with the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, it was Isaac S. Moses who was chosen from among the stellar assembly of Jewish speakers to lecture on “The Function of Prayer according to Jewish Doctrine.”

Resolving the internecine debate over the future direction of the prayer ritual at Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim was one of the first challenges Isaac Moses faced upon arriving in New York. In his inaugural sermon delivered January 11, 1901, Moses left no doubt that he was well aware of the fact that the board expected English to be the congregation’s official language:

I cannot overestimate the difficulty of the task awaiting me in this place. Foreign-born, and not Dowered with glibness of speech, I am to speak the language of this land to those who have received the blessings of American birth and American accent. Language is more than an outward vestment, in which we robe for different functions, and which may be exchanged
for another at the behest of fashion. Language is the intellect’s native soul, the natural medium. We may acquire a foreign tongue by dint of study or association, yet it will never cease to be a foreign tongue to us.115

In April 1902, the board was informed that the German versions of the Huebsch prayer book had been entirely sold out. Should the congregation republish the liturgy, or should it depend on Kohut’s English version? Initially, the board considered the idea of combining the Huebsch and Kohut prayer books into one polyglot liturgy. Instead, the new rabbi urged his congregation to consider a different solution altogether. In 1904 Moses convinced Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim to adopt the UPB and, in so doing, lend its support to the concept of a standardized American Jewish liturgy. Although the congregation continued to use the Huebsch prayer book over the coming decade – particularly on the High Holy Days – the UPB linked the congregation to the many others that were using this liturgy by the end of the 1920s. With the UPB in its pews, Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim had demonstrated its support for the concept of a genuinely American Jewish prayer book.116

Moses continued to produce new liturgical contributions throughout his tenure at Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim. In 1903 he published a new collection of hymns and anthems that was based on his earlier work, Sabbath School Hymnal, a collection of liturgical songs and services written in English with accompanying Hebrew transliterations for Temple Israel in Chicago. During the next two and a half decades, Moses would publish more than a dozen editions of
his hymnal for use in the worship service, in religious school settings, and in the home. In 1916 he published an English version of the Huebsch High Holy Day prayer book, which the congregation preferred to the UPB’s High Holy Day liturgy. At the beginning of his rabbinic career in America, Moses discovered that “if our public worship is not to lose every hold on the affection of the Jewish people, and especially of the younger generation,” the prayer service must be more than “a lifeless and meaningless repetition of words.” Through his contributions to the production of the UPB and his many other liturgical innovations, Isaac Moses persistently sought “to awaken new interest in . . . divine worship and kindle in the hearts of worshippers the spirit of true devotion.”
III. Conclusion

The liturgical history of New York’s Congregation Ahawath Chesed sheds light on the important role the Jewish prayer book played in the ongoing process of Americanization that took place in synagogues throughout the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century. Very few American congregations, if any, can lay claim to having had three rabbinic leaders who, in close succession, contributed so significantly to the development of the Jewish prayer book in America. By virtue of this fact, Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim constitutes an interesting microcosm of the Americanization of Jewish prayer services. The congregation’s liturgical development, which began with a traditional siddur, proceeded to successive versions of its own prayer service designed to meet the specific and rapidly changing needs of its own community. Ultimately, with the Americanization process completed, the congregation was able to adopt a “standardized” prayer service that enabled its members to associate themselves with hundreds of sister congregations that shared the same American Jewish religious ritual.

In the fall of 2007, the UPB’s latest successor, Mishkan T’filah (MT) was published. Many, if not most of the Reform congregations in America — including Central Synagogue — will adopt MT and, if the past is an indicator, even some non-Reform congregations will make use of this newest contribution to the history of the Jewish prayer book in America. The first impressions of this new liturgy are so wildly divergent that one wonders if the critics have been examining the same publication. One reviewer asserts that “contrary to its
predecessors, the new prayer book looks more like a traditional prayer book.” Since MT presents worshipers with four versions of each prayer laid out on a two-page spread (Hebrew text, English translation, and two modern, interpretive readings) one wonders which “traditional” siddur the reviewer had in mind when making this observation! One of MT’s compilers noted that the new prayer book marks “a significant change in terms of re-embracing ritual” while another editor insisted that the volume’s traditional source material provides Reform Jews with the “‘resources’ from which something new is created.” MT seems to possess an impressive protean character in its tendency to assume a multiplicity of forms and meanings in the eyes of various beholders. 118

In some respects, MT constitutes a cumulative inheritance of all the Jewish prayer books that have preceded it in that, as one newspaper article aptly noted, it is only the most recent attempt “to revive a worship experience that many [American] Jews avoid.” Or, as an editor of MT insightfully observed, Jewish prayer rituals have “to be suited to the spirit of the times and the place of the worshipers.” This ambition has always been the driving force behind the development of the Jewish prayer book in America. Those who worked so diligently for more than two decades to produce MT were, no doubt, motivated by the very same hope that inspired Isaac Pinto to cast convention aside and publish English translations of the traditional prayers that would “tend to the improvement” of American Jewry’s spiritual life.119
ENDNOTES


3. “Americanization” is a key concept for historians of the American Jewish experience. Historians, sociologists and anthropologists offer variant definitions of the term. To what degree the notion of “Americanization” overlaps with related concepts such as “assimilation” and “acculturation” is a matter of scholarly debate. Originally, the term was used almost exclusively in relation to the study of immigration and the process of immigrant adjustment to life in America. Over the past several decades, the concept of Americanization has been applied even more broadly, and can even refer to the ways in which American culture imposes itself around the globe. For the purposes of this study, however, the term refers to a series of characteristics or behaviors that lead to “an acquired sense of identity with the ‘American’ people.”


6. Though Pinto’s name does not appear on the volume, the fact that Pinto is clearly identified as the translator of a publication (Prayers for the Sabbath, Rosh Hashanah, and Kippur, or the Sabbath, the Beginning [sic] of the Year, and the day of Atonements: with the Amidah and Musaph of the Moadim, or solemn seasons: according to the order of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews), which appeared five years later, has led many scholars to insist that Pinto compiled both works. On the Pinto prayer books, see Yosef Goldman, Hebrew Printing in America, 1735-1926: A History and Annotated Bibliography, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, New York: YG Books, 2006): 35-36, and Wachs, American Jewish Liturgies, 39.


Although the original publication of *The Sabbath Service and Miscellaneous Prayers adopted by the Reformed Society of Israelites founded in Charleston, South Carolina, November 21, 1825* (Charleston, South Carolina: J.S. Burges, 1830) leaves the names of its editor(s) unmentioned, Barnett A. Elzas suggests in his Editor’s Preface to his 1916 reprinted version that the prayer book was compiled by Isaac Harby, Abraham Moïse and David Nunes Carvalho. It has since been demonstrated that the editor of the 1830 prayer book was Abraham Moïse. See Gary Phillip Zola, “The First Reform Prayer Book in America: The Liturgy of the Reformed Society of Israelites,” *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Press, 2002): 99-118. The RSI’s organizational meeting took place on November 21, 1824, so Moïse’s dating in the title of this prayer book is perplexing.


18. The others who had joined Wise in this effort were Herman Felsenheld, Herman Kohlmayer and Max Lilienthal, who was to be the Av Bet Din — the head of the rabbinical tribunal. See Sefton D. Temkin, *Isaac Mayer Wise: Shaping American Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 51-52.


20. Ibid., 8-9.

21. Ibid., 9-12.


23. On the flowering of prayer books during this period, see Friedland, “Were Our Mouths Filled with Song,” and Friedland, “The Historical and Theological Development of the Non-Orthodox Prayerbooks in the United States.”


26. A *Landsmannschaft* is a society of immigrants from the same town or region.

27. See Eric L. Friedland, “Historical and Theological Development,” 68.


30. Ibid., 3-4.

31. Ibid., 21-22, 25.

32. Ibid., 21.

33. Ibid., 29. The advent of the *Union Prayer Book* did not eliminate the publication of congregational prayer books altogether, as the various bibliographies of American Jewish liturgies demonstrate.

34. The congregation’s Hebrew name is alternatively rendered as “Ahabat Chesed” and “Ahavath Chesed.”

35. In 1898, Congregation Shaarey Hashomayim (alternatively called Shaar Hashomayim and Shaar Hashamayim), established in 1839 by German immigrants – many of whom had broken away from Congregation Anshe Chesed – formally merged with Ahawath Chesed. In 1918, Ahawath Chesed Shaar

36. It is not clear precisely which edition of the Ashkenazic siddur the congregation had been using up to that point in time.

37. A *Verein* refers to a union, association, or society.


40. Huebsch’s name is alternatively written Adolphus Hübsch.


43. Ibid., 323, 336.
Löw Schwab was a charismatic rabbinic leader and a master communal organizer. He played a dominant role in the Paks Rabbinic Conference of 1844, a meeting that led to the establishment of a Great Synod that would direct the religious life of the entire Hungarian Jewish community. Religiously, Schwab assumed a middle ground between the ardent traditionalists and the radical reformers. At the Paks Conference he successfully brokered a compromise between the two groups. As noted above, Schwab was also a political activist who aligned himself with Kossuth’s liberal ideology. It is worth bearing in mind that Kossuth and many of his compatriots spent time in the United States where they were received as national heroes after their defeat and exile in 1849. After the war, Schwab played a pivotal role in the building of what today is called the Doheny Synagogue in Budapest. Ahawath Chesed’s magnificent building bears a striking resemblance to Budapest’s Doheny Synagogue that, no doubt, is a consequence of Huebsch’s relationship with Schwab and the Doheny Synagogue. He also established a rabbinical seminary where Huebsch became a student. Huebsch’s rabbinic interests and spiritual values were clearly aligned with those of his teacher.

Huebsch asked Schwab to add his name and his own personal rabbinic endorsement to the ordination diploma he received from the distinguished Hungarian scholar, Joel Ungar. See Huebsch’s ordination certificate, Adolph Huebsch Papers, Ms. #469, Box 3, Folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio. On Schwab, see Gotthard Deutsch and Eduard Neumann, “Paks Conference” in *Jewish Encyclopedia* vol. 9: 466 and Stanley Mann, “Budapest” on the *Hagshama* page of the World Zionist Organization’s website: http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1229.

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Board of Ahawath Chesed (hereafter “Minutes”), July 2, 1865 & March 27, 1866, in Central Synagogue Archives, New York, New York (hereafter CSA).

“Minutes,” September 25, 1865 & April 15, 1866, CSA.

“Minutes,” October 15, 1865 & March 27, 1866, CSA.

“Minutes,” October 9, 1866, CSA.
Very few details about Samuel Welsch’s life and career have survived, though he seems to have been a highly regarded cantor and a capable musician. We do know that he collaborated with the pioneering American cantor Alois Kaiser (1840-1908) and Moritz Goldstein in the publication of *Zimrat Yah* (1871-1886), a four-volume collection of liturgical music for the synagogue. His interest in Jewish liturgical reform may also be seen in his few surviving musical compositions: “2 Lieder vor und nach der Confirmation” (1874) and “Der Herr ist König ... Psalm 93 in Musik gesetzt” (1869?)


In March and April of 1867, the minutes of the congregation describe a controversy that erupted over the continuation of reciting a “Misheborach” prayer (a prayer for healing) during the services for purposes of fund-raising. The minutes indicate that Huebsch wanted to abolish the practice altogether. Initially, the board – fearful of the financial loss that might come with the abolition of this practice – voted to limit the number of recitations to only two or three individuals per service. However, Huebsch quickly won the battle and, on June 10, 1867, at the General Meeting of the congregation, the custom of raising funds through the use of the “Misheborach” prayer was unanimously abolished. A system of annual dues was instituted in its stead.

Huebsch’s entire letter was entered into the “Minutes” of the congregation’s General Meeting, June 28, 1868, in CSA.


60. In 1916 Isaac S. Moses published a new English translation of Huebsch’s prayer service for the High Holy Days. In his introduction, Moses noted that “all efforts to introduce the *Union Prayer Book for New Year and Day of Atonement* failed” and therefore he felt compelled to translate the Huebsch prayer book anew since “his congregation was without a suitable English ritual for the high holidays.” See Moses, *Divine Service for the Congregation Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashamayim*, iii-vii.


62. Despite Isaac M. Wise’s high standing with Ahawath Chesed, the congregation’s board seems to have given no thought to inviting any of the first four graduates of Hebrew Union College to interview for the position.
Kohut’s dissertation was a study on Jewish angelology and demonology titled *Ueber die jüdische Angelologie und Daemonologie in ihrer Abhängigkeit vom Parsismus* (Leipzig: Kraus, 1866).

While in Fünfkirchen, Kohut also published a prayer memorializing the death of Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria. See *Avne Zikaron* (Fünfkirchen, 1875).

For the most detailed biography on Kohut, see George Alexander Kohut, “Alexander Kohut” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* vol. 7: 538.

“Minutes,” February 14, 1885, CSA.

Kohut’s tears were undoubtedly prompted by thoughts of his first wife who died unexpectedly just prior to his departure for America. See “Minutes,” May 2, 1886, CSA.


Ibid.


Ibid.

74. Ibid., 12.

75. Ibid., 15. Eric Friedland’s term for those who, like Kohut, advocated a “temperate” approach to religion was “proto-conservative.” See Friedland, “Were Our Mouths Filled with Song” and “The Historical and Theological Development,” passim.


77. Ahawath Chesed’s minutes read as follows: “Several local rabbis, including Dr. Alex Kohut, and many non-resident ones, are in the process of establishing a Jewish seminary, and it is up to the congregation, and how you want to take part in it.” There does not appear to be any additional mention of the fledgling Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in Ahawath Chesed’s records. See “Minutes,” May 2, 1886, CSA. Kohut has been credited for successfully persuading Sabato Morais, the founding president of the JTS, to abandon his plan to base the curriculum on the Orthodox “yeshivah” model. Kohut urged Morais to expose JTS students to both secular and Jewish studies as was done at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. See Pamela S. Nadell’s “Sabato Morais,” Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook, ed. Pamela S. Nadell (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988):193. With regard to the cordial relationship between Kohut and Wise, see Isaac M. Wise to Alexander Kohut, 18 October 1892 in Isaac Mayer Wise Papers, Microfilm #2827, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio. Wise concluded his letter to Kohut by referring to himself as “Ihr treuer Freund.”

78. See online text of Willi Paul Adams, La Vern J. Rippley and Eberhard Reichman The German-Americans: An Ethnic Experience (Indianapolis: Max Kade German-American Center, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, 1993): http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/kade/adams/chap7.html. See also, John A. Hawgood, The Tragedy of German-America: The Germans in the United States of America during the Nineteenth Century – and After (New York: Arno Press, 1970); and Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, America and the Germans:

79. “Minutes,” April 17, 1887, April 13, 1890, & April 24, 1892, & June 24, 1894, CSA.

80. “Minutes,” April 8, 1888, CSA. In 1872, David Einhorn – with the assistance of Bernard Felsenthal in Chicago — similarly published an English translation of his Olat Tamid. In a prefatory note, Einhorn expressed his hope that an English rendition of Olat Tamid would “contribute, in its new garb, to the edification of my English-speaking brethren in faith, and meet with as friendly a reception as was accorded it in the old!” See, Einhorn, Book of Prayers for Israelitish Congregations (New York: Deutsch & Golderman, 1872).

81. Kohut’s “Thanksgiving Sermon” is housed at the AJA (Philip Cowen Collection, Ms. #477, Box 1).


83. “Minutes,” April 13, 1890, CSA. The minutes from April 8, 1888, note that Kohut had acquired funds from Jacob Schiff to publish volume 5 and that he planned to solicit 10 friends who would agree to publish the last volume.

84. Kohut, Ethics, 168-169. The quotation comes from Berachot 17a. Kohut’s receptivity to prayer book and ritual reform aligns with the viewpoint of fellow moderates such as Sabato Morais. See Nadell, “Sabato Morais,” 193.

85. Ibid. The quotation comes from Mishna Uktzin 3:12.

86. “Minutes,” November 1, 1865 and April 29, 1894, CSA.

87. Kohut’s health had been declining for a year prior to his unexpected death. See Obituary, The New York Times (27 May 1894), and “Minutes,” June 24, 1894, CSA.
The following HUC alumni were considered during the rabbinic search process: Moses P. Jacobson (1864-1945), Alexander H. Geismar (1868-1939) and Rudolph Grossman (1867-1927). The congregation also considered interviewing the more seasoned and moderate reformer, Frederick de Sola Mendes (1850-1927).

“Minutes,” April 21, 1895, CSA. Jacobson was ordained by HUC in 1886, Grossman in 1889 and Geismar in 1890. It is interesting to note, however, that in 1897 Grossman became the rabbi of New York’s Rodeph Shalom, which used the proto-Conservative prayer book, Shalhevet-Yah, which had been compiled by Aaron Wise (Stephen’s father). The congregation’s minutes also mentioned that a “Rabbi Charles J. Levy of Cincinnati” applied, and this may actually refer to Rabbi Clifton H. Levy (1867-1962) who was also ordained in 1890.


“Minutes,” April 12, 1896, CSA.

Ibid.

“Minutes,” April 17, 1898, & June 20, 1898, CSA. Elizabeth Blackmarn indicated, on the authority of Malcolm Stern, that Davidson’s departure was due to his being opposed to the merger. I found no clear linkage either in Stern’s writings or in the minutes of the congregation. See Goren and Blackmarn, Congregating and Consecrating at Central Synagogue, 15. See also, Malcolm H. Stern, “The Story of Central Synagogue,” 11.

The list of HUC alumni who wanted to replace Davidson included Rabbi Max Wertheimer (1889), Rabbi Herman J. Elkin (1889), Rabbi Abraham J. Messing (1896), Moses P. Jacobson (1886), Rabbi Joseph S. Kornfeld (1898), Rabbi Isadore Rosenthal (1894), Rabbi Max Heller (1884), Rabbi Leo Franklin (1892), Rabbi Edward N. Calisch (1887), and Rabbi Joseph Stolz (1884). The congregation also received applications from candidates in England (L. Levin and George Belasco). See “Minutes,” August 2, September 6, and December 6, 1899, CSA.
95. Even before Davidson’s formal departure in January of 1900, Julia Richman notified the board that she was planning a trip to continental Europe, and she would be happy to make some unofficial inquiries regarding prospective rabbinic candidates.

96. The board minutes provide rich detail about the congregation’s infatuation with William Rosenau. See “Minutes,” January 14 and February 21, 1900, CSA. Evidently, Rosenau was such an appealing applicant that the congregation leaked news of its offer to him and an article appeared in The New York Times (12 May 1900): 1. A delegation from Ahawath Chesed went to Baltimore to hear Rosenau, and their detailed report on his personality and appearance constitutes a remarkable historical document. See “Minutes,” February 21, 1900, CSA.

97. Once Rosenau declined the post, the congregation began to pursue Samuel Sale. Although not explicitly stated, the congregation’s minutes imply that Rosenau and Sale received appealing counteroffers that induced them to remain in their present positions. See “Minutes,” June 6 and August 15, 1900, CSA.

98. The board minutes also preserve a fascinating summary of the impressions that many of the rabbinic applicants made on the congregation. See “Minutes,” April 4, 1900, CSA. According to Eric L. Friedland, the noted scholar of non-Orthodox prayer books in America, “It was Isaac S. Moses more than anyone else who was responsible for combining the best features of the existing prayer books . . . in a single union prayer book.” See Friedland, Historical and Theological Development, 115.

Moses’s claim that he studied with Rabbi Salomon Rosenthal of Poland is difficult to confirm since the noted Hungarian scholar by the same name died in 1845 – two years before Moses was born.


Stolz, “Issac Moses.”

Isaac S. Moses, Tefillah L’Mosheh - Order of Prayers and Responsive Readings for Jewish Worship (Milwaukee, 1884).

Ibid., Preface.

Isaac S. Moses, Tifillat Yisrael – Order of Prayers and Responsive Readings for Jewish Worship (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Congregation Emanu-El, 1887). For more information on Avodat Yisrael, see Wachs, American Jewish Liturgies and Goldman, Hebrew Printing in America (s.v. Szold, Hochheimer, and Jastrow).


110 CCAR Yearbook 3 (1892): 20-23. With the adoption of the Moses draft a fait accompli, Sigmund Hecht and other colleagues moved that the CCAR appoint a new Ritual Committee with Moses as its chair. However, the conference’s president, Isaac Wise, resolved that matter by fiat; the CCAR’s Ritual Committee would remain as it was. Michael A. Meyer calls the UPB the “first collectively produced liturgy of American Reform Judaism.” See Meyer, Response to Modernity, 279.

111 Ibid., 23; CCAR Yearbook 4 (1892): 8.

112 Ibid., 33-34. Gottheil was at Emanu-El. Kohler was at Beth El. Harris (1859-1930), Gottheil’s student and disciple, led Temple Israel in Manhattan for nearly 50 years. The CCAR also required the Ritual Committee to receive and consider “suggestions from all members of the conference . . . .”

113 Ibid., 84-85, 94-95, 99.

115. “The Historical Meaning of Judaism” – original manuscript of the inaugural sermon delivered before Congregation Ahawath Chesed S.H., New York, January 11, 1901, in Isaac S. Moses Papers, Ms #122, Box 1, folder 8, AJA.

116. “Minutes,” April 21, 1902, CSA.

117. See Hymns and Anthems for Jewish Services (New York: 1903); Order of Children’s Service for Jewish Sabbath School (Milwaukee, 1884); Sabbath School Hymnal: A Collection of Songs, Services, and Responses for Jewish Schools and Homes (Chicago: 1894); and Divine Service for the Congregation Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashamayim (New York: 1916). For a listing of this hymnal’s many revisions, s.v. Moses, Isaac S. in Wachs, American Jewish Liturgies. For quotations, see Isaac S. Moses, Tefillah L’Mosheh, Preface.


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