

# JEWISH COMMUNITIES of LANE COUNTY

**Las Comunidades Judías del Condado de Lane**



Lane County Jewish residents Jesse Cohen, T.J. Nicklin, S.H. Friendly, and A.T. Cockerline pose in front of the S.H. Friendly Store, circa 1893, then located on Willamette Street between 7th and 8th avenues.

Los Residentes judías Jesse Cohen, T.J. Nicklin, S.H. Friendly, A.T. Cockerline posan frente al almacén S.H. Friendly Store c. 1893, ubicado entences en la calle Willamette entre las avenidas 7 y 8.

Jewish-Americans arrived in Eugene within 26 years of the opening of the Oregon Trail. Goodman Bettman opened his mercantile store, located on the southwest corner of 8th Avenue and Willamette Street, in 1869. He was well-liked and highly trusted by Lane County residents. When farmers came to Eugene to do business, they left their money with Bettman because he had a safe. (Bettman's son later reported that his father never slept well on the nights that he was holding farmers' money—the safe had a crack in it.) Bettman was also given the honor of carrying the American flag during the cornerstone laying ceremony for Deady Hall, the first building on the University of Oregon campus, in 1873.

Like most Lane County residents of the time, Bettman and his family raised poultry, grew a garden and maintained orchard trees for food. They experienced all of the challenges of pioneer life. Their son recalled that on January 9th, 1880, there was a violent windstorm, which blew down the Bettmans' chimney and destroyed Mrs. (Bertha) Bettman's baking for the day. It also caused severe damage in the Eugene community, but Mrs. Bettman did not learn that until her husband came home that night. The Bettmans left Eugene and moved to Portland in 1897.

Perhaps the best known Jewish-American resident in the 19th century was Samson H. (Sam) Friendly, for whom Friendly Street in Eugene and Friendly Hall at the University of Oregon were named. A wealthy and very successful merchant, Friendly's name was an excellent fit for this outgoing and charitable man. He served as mayor of Eugene from 1893 to 1895 (2-year terms were common for Eugene mayors at that time), provided extensive funding for buildings at the University of Oregon, and also paid for university educations for a number of local young men.

Sam Friendly's home was a social gathering place for young people, and his family was included in the social circle of the most prominent Lane County families of the time, including that of T. J. Hendricks, who gave Eugene Hendricks Park. Friendly's sister, Sarah, married another Jewish-American merchant, Charles Lauer, who was Sam Friendly's business partner.

This early Jewish community was comprised of a small number of families that emigrated from Germany. Though close-knit, they also socialized extensively with townspeople, particularly other mercantile families, and made a respected place for themselves in the area. They had no synagogue, but gathered together for important holidays such as Yom Kippur. They retained strong ties to the Jewish community in Portland, often traveling north for Jewish services and to visit relatives. When a rabbi's presence was required for weddings, funerals or circumcisions, Rabbi Jacob Bloch of Portland's Congregation Beth Israel would come to Eugene to conduct the ceremonies.

Both Jewish and gentile residents report that Eugene's Jewish residents experienced very little prejudice during this period. Ruby Hendricks Goodrich, who grew up with Henrietta Lauer and Rosalie Friendly, stated that the Jewish families "were of us and with us. They were a fine class of people." (She did remember an incident in which Sam Friendly's wife, Mathilda, was offered a set of quilt pieces in the shape of a cross, which she refused.) Nevertheless, by 1900 or so, most of these families had left the area for bigger cities, probably in search of larger and more established Jewish communities.

The second group of Jewish-Americans to arrive in Eugene came from Eastern Europe. They began arriving in the 1920s-1940s and include names of many of the leading local merchants of the 20th century—Rubenstein, Miller, Brenner, Fine and Fendrich. They established a very close-knit community, and the first synagogue in Eugene and Lane County. Initially, the group met in the home of Hyman Rubenstein at 231 W. 8th Avenue. Services were held on Friday nights and conducted by congregation members. The synagogue, Congregation Beth Israel of Eugene, was formally established on July 24, 1934. Rubenstein's house was remodeled and became an official synagogue facility. The founders were Joe Weinstein, Sol Rosenberg, Esy Rubenstein, and Hyman Pressman, who also served as the congregation's cantor. A larger synagogue was built at 2550 Portland Street in 1952 (Neil Goldschmidt had one of the first bar mitzvahs in the new building), which served the community until 2008, when they opened their newest facility near Harris School.

Although Jewish-Americans have generally experienced acceptance in Eugene, subtle forms of discrimination have occurred. There have also been incidents of overt harassment. One of these occurred in 2002, when several young men from a local "skinhead" group threw rocks through the window of Temple Beth Israel during a Friday evening Shabbat service. The perpetrators were arrested and charged with a hate crime, and many non-Jewish residents of Eugene were horrified by the event and rallied to support the Jewish community.

Lane County's Jewish-American residents have provided intensive support for county social services, cultural programs and education. Maurie Jacobs, owner of Jacobs Furniture, was named one of Eugene's "First Citizens," and a park along the Willamette River was named in his honor. Trude Kaufman and her husband Ludwig escaped Hitler's Germany in 1937 and came to Eugene, successfully establishing several different local department stores. The Kaufmans provided financial support for many Eugene institutions, including the Pearl Buck School and the Eugene YMCA/YWCA. Trude Kaufman also willed her home to the city of Eugene to serve as a center for senior citizens.